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Blazing a trail

Young member and new rep Beth Winter-Page is a recreation craftsperson at Alice Holt Forest in Surrey. She's part of the first all-female craftsperson team in Forestry England and, thanks to Beth's efforts to promote the benefits of union membership, they are all now in PCS.

What does your job involve?

It's mostly different types of tree work and ground works. We survey the trees and remove ones that are dangerous or dying, as well as branch removal and trail clearance. We also do thinning to improve the variety of the woodland. We install forest furniture and can also create some play installations. We have a lot of visitors, so it's about maintaining the forest so it is safe for the public and ecologically valuable too. The public safety part involves things like first aid or missing children.

In the morning we drive around in our all-terrain vehicle (ATV), checking the trails, ensuring no trees have come down, and that there's no litter. Then we move on to the work programme for the day.

How did you get into this?

I studied animal conservation science at university. I've always wanted to work in the outdoor sector. I previously came from National Trust then came here two and a half years ago. I started out at the visitor centre then eventually got onto this team.

When I got here, I was so impressed with the opportunities. I was put on more than 10 training courses – like health and safety, safeguarding, tree surveying, and then the chainsaw and different machinery courses.

What's good, and not so good?

I absolutely love my job. I've always wanted to be able to fell trees in a professional capacity. Getting my chainsaw certificate was probably one of my proudest moments. It's just really fun.

I've always enjoyed being outside. When it's really windy and rainy, it's not ideal, but when you're absolutely covered in mud and you come back and have a cup of tea at the end of the job, that's really quite satisfying.

But it can be quite physically demanding. It's sometimes tricky to go straight from this to playing with my daughter or going to the gym with my partner.

The tree work carries a risk of injury or even fatality - we need to be on top form whenever we're picking up tools.

And sometimes we have to deal with quite difficult situations, or traumatic first aid incidents.

How does it feel to be in the first all-female team?

It's great. Forestry has always been quite male dominated. I like coming home and telling my family about my job. My daughter is four, and I was so proud when she told me she wants to go into forestry or tree felling. She's even got her own toy chainsaw!

When we drive around with our ATV I really enjoy it when lots of children wave at us. I hope that seeing a bunch of female craftspeople is an inspiration for them. I'm not sure 20 or 30 years ago that this kind of job would have been on the radar of young girls in particular.

Does the Efra 4-day week campaign strike a chord?

I joined PCS 18 months ago and became a rep in the Efra Forestry Commission branch in January.

The four-day week is something we talk about quite a lot. Being in a physically demanding job, we would have a lot more energy and productivity if we had that additional day of rest. I've experimented with condensed hours because I wanted another day with my daughter. But working like that was too physically demanding. If there was any way to ensure we could have a four-day week, that would be incredible for everyone.

As long as we ensured staff coverage for visitor safety, I think it could be massively successful. I don't mind saying that recently everything got a bit much and I had a few weeks off sick. I actively believe that having that additional rest would have prevented me taking that stress leave.