

WWOOF NEWS

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WWOOF NEWS provides communication between Hosts and WWOOFers and keeps members up-to-date with items of interest from WWOOF Headquarters.

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GENERAL NEWS AND VIEWS

Hi from Andrew and Jane at WWOOF Headquarters. This newsletter contains a range of topics from general interest stories to feedback from members to some issues that are important for WWOOFers and hosts to be aware of. Please take time to read it through as there will be items that will help to make your experiences as a WWOOF member more worthwhile.

The latest edition of the WWOOF book has a slightly different look as the picture on the cover is now on a white background surrounded by green. It is still essentially THE GREEN BOOK though. The WWOOF book is currently updated twice a year.

Much of the interest in WWOOF is from overseas and the internet has proved to be ideally suited to WWOOF's communication needs. As well as email being regularly used, a WWOOF Web Site has been set up and is at:

<http://canterbury.cyberplace.org.nz/environment/woof/woofpage.html>

This is a bit of a mouthful but it is complementary courtesy of Cyberplace. If you are online copy the above URL into your browser and you can read all about WWOOF.

To make joining a little quicker there are a number of agents around NZ where people can join WWOOF. These agents provide information about how WWOOF operates etc. so hopefully new WWOOFers are aware of their responsibilities. While the idea is not to have WWOOF as an off-the-shelf item, restricting membership availability is no proven method for ensuring good quality WWOOFers. The agents are: The Kaitia Community Business and Environment Centre - (09) 4081092, Adventure Cycles, 1 Fort Lane, Auckland - (09) 3094211, Common Sense Organics, Wellington, The Organic Green Grocer, Nelson - (03) 5483650, The Christchurch Environment Centre - (03) 3792257, The Dunedin Environment Centre - (03) 4774938. The next idea is should there be agents in say Germany, England, Canada etc to help with joining from overseas? Your feedback on this would be helpful.

In the last few months we have had an incredible number of calls from various Korean Travel Agents wanting to have WWOOF books. They are very keen to have books to pass on to their clients and are very pushy. We have said a definite no to them. Why? Well, basically they seem to be using WWOOF as a cheap source of farmstays for their clients who seem to be mainly language students. While some hosts are happy to have these students, many hosts have said that they find it incompatible with the WWOOFing system. Another aspect to this is that many hosts are being contacted directly by Korean Travel Agents to arrange visits for their clients. Hosts have contacted us about this and the conclusion is that it is totally unacceptable, and it is up to hosts to stop it! Please, make sure when someone phones, that you are talking to the person who is actually going to be coming to stay with you. Make sure they are a genuine member - with a WWOOF Book with their name and membership number in it. Refer to the Visitors Book topic in the newsletter for info about genuine WWOOF members. As you can tell, this issue does concern us, we have even heard a rumour about a WWOOF book printed in Korean! I suspect that the WWOOF book is also being used by some companies as a reference of free farmstays. This is illegal as it is a breach of the Fair Trading Act and probably copyright laws. To solve these problems all hosts need to do is **ensure that their guest is a genuine member of WWOOF.**

Comments from a recent WWOOFer were,

"It may be of interest to you that we have met several people who are 'WWOOFing' but are not members. We have never been asked for our membership number by any of our previous five hosts and feel that it is grossly unfair on genuine WWOOFers who are desperately trying to find places which have been usurped by more unscrupulous people". Of all the problems hosts have encountered with their guests in the past ten years, by far the majority have been by people who have not been genuine members. While joining isn't the be all to end all, it is a basic statement that the traveller is coming to learn organic farming and participate in a fair exchange. Also, we do keep all membership details such as ID and contact addresses and phone numbers on file. WWOOFers, please help us on this one. If you meet someone who wants to go WWOOFing, say that they need to be a member - even for the simple fact that a host won't accept them if they are not. Also, being a member bestows upon you great status in the travelling world, you get to carry the famous green book with your own name in it! Seriously, the book is your membership document and passport to many wonderful properties all over this great land. It is also a souvenir, usually with interesting notes about your visits written in it.

It is a credit to WWOOF members that thousands of WWOOF exchanges take place each year with relatively few problems.

If you have any ideas or feedback on the above issues or anything else then please write to us at WWOOF Headquarters. Any feedback about your experiences with WWOOF is of vital importance to us. If you experience any problems then we can only help if we hear from you. We need to keep in touch to ensure WWOOF continues to maintain the service it provides, especially as it grows and demands on it increase.

Yours WWOOFingly,

Andrew and Jane Strange.

INJURIES ON WWOOF FARMS

Earlier this year a host and WWOOFer found themselves in a difficult situation. The WWOOFer's difficult situation was that he had hurt his finger when moving a rock. The host's difficult situation was that the WWOOFer held them responsible for the injury. So who's right and who's wrong? Well, as usual, this falls into a grey area. Generally the responsibility rests on both the host and the WWOOFer. Hosts must ensure their properties are, as far as possible, safe places to be. For the obvious hazards such as tractors, chainsaws, holes, outside electrical tools etc. the strong suggestion is don't let other people near them. At all times WWOOFers **must be made clearly aware** of potential hazards on the farm (the Occupational Safety and Health Act require you to do this). It is difficult to think of every possible hazard so even talking to your WWOOFer generally (as well as specifically) about dangers will increase their awareness. WWOOFers also need to be responsible for their own actions. This means that if you want to go horse riding be prepared to accept the risks associated with it. If you think that what you are doing is unsafe then don't do it.

WORK PERMITS

There has been some discussion with the Immigration Department about whether or not overseas WWOOFers require work permits. Their interpretation is that WWOOFers are working so require work permits, however they are looking at coming to some arrangement with WWOOF so negotiations will continue. From the WWOOF point of view work permits are not appropriate for a number of reasons: WWOOFers are guests of their hosts who help out with chores associated with their stay like dishes, washing etc. WWOOFers come to learn organic farming techniques and immerse themselves in the rural Kiwi lifestyle. For many travellers WWOOFing is only part of their experience while in NZ. Also, a work permit in this case would be expensive and difficult to get - especially when it is just for collecting the eggs, feeding the animals and turning the compost!

HINT FROM A HOST

One night during the stay have an "International Night" where the WWOOFer cooks a dish which is traditional from their country. Hosts learn some customs/traditions from another country. It's a great opportunity for the children to learn more about other cultures.

REFLECTING ON WWOOFing IN NEW ZEALAND

"We are two German WWOOFers and WWOOFed around NZ for 3 months. Generally we found it really good and enjoyed staying with the hosts. We had been at 12 different places, twice we visited our hosts for two different times, learned a lot about composting, got introduced in permaculture and even learned how to make soap. Some hosts showed us around glowworms, caves, tracks and beaches. Most of them gave us good food to eat, pleasant working times and subjects. Only one place we felt abused. They only gave us woodchopping/stacking and weeding jobs. Because of this, it was raining most of the time and we had to work out in the rain. Even in Germany, where I'm working as a gardener, I never (or almost never) have to work outside in the rain, and I get paid for it. There must have been indoor jobs as well, windows can be cleaned. The food was meat everyday. Cooked cabbage mainly, never any salad. It was our fault as well, we could have left after one day or so, but it was Christmas time and were worried about finding another place at this time. That's no fair exchange, we think. But that was the only bad thing that happened to us - most of the places were just great - especially a place near Palmerston North, we enjoyed it. We had lots of good talks, made soap and learned lots about bio-dynamics. The host was lending out permaculture videos for us and gave us heaps of interesting books to read, all in all, it was our best place we stayed at. Generally we stayed 1 week at hosts, that seems to be a good time for us - we can start and finish projects and get familiar with the place and the people. Here's some advice for WWOOFers coming to NZ: Bring some recipes from home with you, it's a great thing when you can bake a really German cake or French cookies for your hosts. We will highly recommend WWOOFing as the best form of travelling and learning and making contact to people - we at least made some friends here! Actually I want to join the German list as a host - I keep on thinking of the jobs I can give to my WWOOFers! Good luck with the WWOOF organisation, wish you lots of good workers and hosts - so far, you did a great job in organising and compiling. All the best, Maija and Stephan".

WWOOFing ALL OVER THE WORLD

Having recently returned from my birth-land of England Via America I felt it would be a great opportunity to share my experiences and enthusiasm for WWOOFing on three continents.

One of the things that has struck me the most is the similarities between countries. Though my sample of countries are all English speaking (of sorts!) it is always a joy to meet people who work on the land. Having been raised on the outskirts of London, and with the experience of both city and country dwellers, the thing that intrigues me is how down to earth country folk are, particularly those with environmental awareness. Maybe the regular contact with mother earth helps ground us farming folks in a way that city slickers do not get through their concrete and tarmac.

Maybe this down to earth mentality has something to do with the fact that I have yet to have a bad WWOOFing experience. Virtually all the people I have WWOOFed for are now friends and many are good friends, even those with whom a rapport did not build, mutual respect, a concern for the land and Gaia was always there.

Though organic farmers share common interests across the globe, there is a large difference in WWOOFing on the three continents. England has quite a different system to New Zealand. They have an apprentice stage called Weekend Workers On Organic Farms, which are organised weekend events that allow the hosts to check potential WWOOFers out before they are given a full list of hosts called the "fix it yourself list". The list is similar to New Zealand WWOOF book but there are much fewer hosts and for most of them the farm is the main or only income compared to New Zealand where a lot of hosts have small lifestyle blocks and off farm income.

America does not have a single WWOOF system but has local organisations oriented towards apprentices rather than informal visitors. However it is easy to get lists of producers from the various certifying agencies and pick out farms that are likely to take WWOOFers and reach an agreement with the farmer. There were plenty of farmers who were more than happy with this arrangement, many had knowledge of WWOOFing. One of the vivid differences that struck me between the western states of the US compared to England is that there are very few farmers with livestock. Most farms are involved with plant production, predominantly veges rather than cereals and meat.

On the Kiwi front I have had the pleasure of being a host and WWOOFer. I worked at Weleda in Hawkes Bay for a year and a half, a place that is unfortunately no longer taking WWOOFers. It was an amazing chance to meet a great number of international travellers of diverse interests, many who had no experience of the land at all. One English chap was asked to get a wheelbarrow from the shed only to come back a few minutes later to ask what a wheelbarrow was! The small percentage of people who were WWOOFing to gain organic/biodynamic experience was quite a surprise. Even those with little or no experience of the land, organics and biodynamics were enthusiastic to learn and experience life on the farm, even if they had a few aches and pains from the physical work, often the only physical work they had ever done.

All in all I have benefited a great deal from WWOOFing, both while WWOOFing myself and as a host. I think it is a wonderful system that has many benefits and few short comings. Long may it last.

Merf (A.K.A. Charles Merfield).

KIWI HOSTS IN FRANCE

Kerikeri hosts Fran and David welcome WWOOFers at their new project in central France. The 3/4 acre property has many old fruit and nut trees and a modest agricultural stone dwelling, 2 down and one up, with large attached barn and outbuildings. The plan is to break through into the barn to increase the living areas. There is a well with excellent water in garden.

Background Two years ago David spent four months cycling around France, camping and doing some WWOOFing. He made valuable contacts which resulted in us both returning for six months last year. We house-sat in Aude, SW France for a blissful two months. Then we returned to central France to an organic retreat, Le Ble en Herbe. David had built them a hexagonal greenhouse in the gardens in 1976 and this time he began work on four compost loos or "quadro plops" as they became known. Whilst there we meet a local French family who invited us to stay in an empty house they owned, La Petite Maison, unlivd in for 10 years. In exchange we did some small renovations and helped them with hay-making, gardening etc. During this period we were welcomed into the extended family, taken out to local fêtes and festivals in their horsedrawn wagons every weekend, and generally immersed ourselves in the local village life.

The abundance of old deserted houses had become very apparent to us whilst we were in Aude. Eventually we bought our 'La Perelle' after looking at many houses and ruins. We had not come to France with the intention of buying but when the opportunity presented itself we knew it was meant to be. The owner kindly allowed us access to the property a month before settlement, which was only a few weeks before we were due to leave for NZ. This enabled us to complete the enormous task of emptying the house and barn of all its contents (it had been unlivd in for 15 years and the previous owners had left the house completely furnished - even down to toothpaste and toothbrushes in the alcove behind the kitchen sink). We cleared everything outside and sorted into piles.

During the following weeks we fixed a leak in the roof, reinstated an outside drain around the rear of the house, scraped plaster off the inside walls and fireplace to expose the stone, stained and painted the windows and shutters, made compost and planted grapevines. We also prepared the inside of an outbuilding in readiness for setting up a wash house and shower for our return.

Any hardworking, cheerful WWOOF Hosts or WWOOFers who would like to stay with us (own tent etc at this stage) and help with renovations would be very welcome. Wonderful walking tracks (randonees) abound in the area as do colourful markets in quaint villages and horse and wagon rides can be arranged. Le Ble en Herbe hold interesting summer workshops etc. Contact us at Wiroa Road, RD3 Kerikeri or Phone/Fax (09) 4079410 for further information.

WWOOF and THE CULTURAL EXCHANGE

You will notice that there is a separate list of hosts called THE CULTURAL EXCHANGE (currently in the back of the WWOOF book). This list has been set up for people who wish to host travellers but can not provide an educational experience in organics. If you are currently a host in the WWOOF book who feels that you are more suited to THE CULTURAL EXCHANGE then please let us know.

KENYA INSTITUTE OF ORGANIC FARMING (KIOF)

PO Box 34972

Tel: 254-2 583194

Nairobi

Kenya

Fax: 254-2 583383

Email: kiof@elci.gn.apc.org



Willing Workers On Organic Farms of Kenya

We are an African organisation. For ten years we have been training grassroots farmer's groups on organic farming methods and encourage sustainable farming methods. We normally reach 1000-1500 farmers each year. It's often difficult to maintain the contact with trained groups over several years. However, through a community based organic farming promoter extension program, we are able to maintain contact for at least 2 growing seasons during which time the farmers are able to put into practice the organic methods they have learned.

There are a few members of our institute who are involved in farmer's training and extension who would be willing to participate as WWOOF members in your country. They are ready to work on organic farms and biodynamic farms in exchange for room and board for a period between 3 months and 6 months during this coming spring and summer. They hope to learn a lot by becoming practically involved in organic agriculture. We kindly request if you could arrange for them farms where they could work and be attached. Some will be able to cover their own travel budget but a few others may find difficulties in getting funds for travelling costs, do you have any ideas who we could approach for funding? For travel expenses?

Remain hoping to receive a favourable reply.

Yours sincerely, John Wanjau Njoroge.

If you are able to assist John please contact:

Holger Kahl

Christchurch Polytechnic

PO Box 22-095

Christchurch

THE WWOOF VISITOR'S BOOK

Hosts now have the option of having a WWOOF Visitor's Book. The VISITOR'S BOOK is a result of suggestions from hosts who have used a visitor's book with their WWOOFers and found them to be well worthwhile. A Visitor's book provides the host with a personal record of the visit for sentimental reasons as well as providing complements for the host, and also allowing the WWOOFer to provide some creative suggestions. The book belongs to the host and is for them to ask their guest to fill out. It is also a friendly check for hosts that their guest is a genuine member as the book asks for the membership number to be entered from the WWOOFers own WWOOF Book.

WWOOF -SHIRTS

WWOOF T-Shirts make ideal momentos of your WWOOFing experiences in NZ. They are high quality shirts printed both sides with the WWOOF logo and are made from natural organic cotton. If you wish to have one then write to WWOOF headquarters with the size (either medium or large) and the cost of \$20.

A FAIR EXCHANGE?

Upon arriving at a host's farm a WWOOFer found that a full days help was expected. As the WWOOFer was not made aware of this before coming it was seen as unfair. Please remember that WWOOF is based on half a days help. The suggestion to hosts is not to expect your guests to do more than this. If a host needs that much work to be done then they really need to employ someone. Unfortunately WWOOF can not supply "employees", if it did then WWOOFers would need to pay income tax and would definitely need work permits. Our hands are tied on this.

As all hosts will be aware, there has always been the WWOOFer who comes and expects to be waited on hand and foot and finds even half a days help is too much. WWOOFers, please be aware that WWOOF is an exchange and you are expected to fulfil your part of the bargain.

WWOOF in many ways is unique in that it relies very much on the goodwill and honesty of its members, there are not endless pages of rules and regulations to obey. Members are expected though to fulfil their end of the bargain. If they are not prepared to do that then they should not be members.