

HANDS-ON STRAWBALE WORKSHOPS

AUGUST-OCTOBER 2005

Design Basics
Wall Build
Pole Framing
Roof & Windows
Lime Finishes
Food & Free
Camping

As part of an ongoing project, a demonstration strawbale home/workshop is currently being built here in the Southern Uplands of Scotland. The finished building is designed to be low maintenance and completely off-grid with regard to water supply, energy, effluent disposal etc. It is also designed to be a working example of low-cost, low-impact technology, the kind of home that could be built by anyone willing to learn a few basic DIY skills, and with access to £500 to £5000 in capital, depending on how much effort and time they can dedicate to sourcing recycled and reclaimed materials or winning them directly from the environment. This is practical and affordable entry-level housing for all those seeking to make a home for self or family in the countryside.

It is an experimental design, as very few examples of straw bale construction exist in Scotland, particularly on the mild and wet West coast. There is some debate as to whether straw bale is even suitable for such a climate, and it is hoped this building will go some way towards providing experiential evidence as to the sustainability or otherwise of this form of construction in the west of Scotland (under current climactic conditions at least!).

This design is load-bearing, i.e. the straw bales carry the weight of the roof with no other support or framing. The walls are built directly onto a free draining drystone plinth (*right*) which raises the straw off the ground and allows free drainage of any condensed moisture within the walls, likewise no metal fixings are used within the walls to minimise condensation related problems. The shell-shaped roof is formed from local larch poles and spruce planks, with a cantilevered tensegrity porch, mimicking the internal construction of living cells. The shallow-sloped south-facing roof will be planted with edible species and has step-out access from the sleeping loft.

This unique project has a relatively informal structure with bursts of more intense activity. It is possible to visit for a day or stay for longer (details below). The winter barley for the walls will be onsite at the beginning of August. Opportunities exist to learn all aspects of straw bale home construction, site preparation, small-scale timber extraction, green woodworking skills, log & pole joinery, drystone



dyking, clay and lime render working, stove and reed bed construction, small-scale hydro and wind power, plumbing, low voltage electrics, tool sharpening and maintenance etc. etc. Work and tuition available varies as the project progresses with occasional specialist tutors available. It is best to contact us first to discuss what is currently happening and where your interests lie.

All you need is a willingness to learn in a friendly, non-competitive environment, what we provide are all meals (veggy, mostly organic), facilities (compost toilets, showers etc.) and camping. Mainstream facilities are limited here, so please contact us first to confirm current activities and available places *before* finalising any arrangements. Please note that although we take health & safety seriously, this is not a fee-paying course, we are not insured and all participation is at your own risk.

This area is an ancient tribal gathering place, this settlement a sacred centre of healing and resolution since people first walked these hills. It is sanctuary in its truest sense, a living refuge nestling in the Southern Uplands of Galloway. If you are interested in taking part in any of the above, please contact us for location and current activities. Phone/Text Steve on 0773 800 9150, or email info@envisioneer.net. We'll be in touch and look forward to meeting you!

