



Farm Conservation Officer, Geraint Jones, uses the Rapid Euro 4 pedestrian tractor with front-mounted flail to help clear an area of land ready for the re-introduction of grazing horses, helping restore and conserve a semi-natural habitat along with its traditional flora and fauna.

**A fleet of Rapid two-wheeled pedestrian tractors with matching attachments is helping the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority manage, conserve and maintain a wide variety of semi-natural landscapes. AME visited one specific project.**

Covering around 240 square miles, the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park is the only National Park in the United Kingdom which is designated primarily for its coastal landscape, with no part of the Park being

more than 10 miles from the sea.

The diversity of the landscape makes Pembrokeshire a popular destination for holiday makers, archaeologists, geologists, historians and those seeking peace or inspiration from the area's many beaches,



Park ranger, Tim Jones, takes the controls of the Rapid tractor while volunteers rake up cut vegetation ready for removal and composting.



**Parc Cenedlaethol Arfordir Penfro  
Pembrokeshire Coast National Park**

dunes, hinterland, ancient woodland, farmland and 186 mile Coast Path.

With less than two per cent of the Park's area owned by the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (PCNPA), a major responsibility of the Authority's wardens, rangers and other field staff involves working closely and in co-operation with farmers, landowners and others to conserve and enhance the special qualities of the National Park.

Having been with the PCNPA for more than 30 years, first as a ranger and latterly as Farm Conservation Officer, Geraint Jones is well experienced in the ways and means of managing the land while striving to maintaining a balance with those who earn a living from it and use it for recreation or vacations.

A little over 10 years ago, the PCNPA introduced its 'Conserving the Park' scheme which sought to re-introduce traditional management practises across the area, supported by grant aid and practical assistance for farmers and landowners.

"I describe it as positive management of the landscape," explained Geraint. "Under the scheme, we have prioritised the restoration and conservation of the National Park's many semi-natural habitats, areas which may have been used over the centuries by man and his animals but have suffered from neglect in more recent times as agriculture has become more intensive, concentrating its activities on better and more easily accessible land."

Key to the restoration of many of these semi-natural habitats, says Geraint, is the re-introduction of grazing, primarily by horses and sheep but also by cattle and other farm animals, where appropriate.

By promoting and adopting traditional farming practices, the PCNPA is confident that habitats that have been neglected and become overgrown over the years can be managed effectively, restoring and conserving both the habitats themselves and the flora and fauna that depend on them for survival.

A knock-on benefit is that species of plant and wildlife that co-existed previously with man and his animals are starting to re-appear and flourish under the new regime due mainly to the controlled and sympathetic management practises being pursued by the PCNPA, its field staff and volunteers.

One such example is at Manorbier, a coastal settlement with a striking Norman castle and church. The beach is a popular holiday destination and is crossed also by the long-distance Coast Path, making Manorbier very busy during the peak summer season and in the months either side.

To accommodate all of the visitors, a large, well-groomed car park has been established at the foot of the valley leading down to the beach, flanked by the castle and church at the top of the slope on either side.

Geraint explained that the valley-side beneath the church would have been grazed in the past by horses and possibly sheep, helping maintain an area of around 1,000 sq metres that had since become over-grown and virtually inaccessible to man or beast.

"The rough grazing would have encouraged the growth of many species of plant that are no longer readily evident," he said. "Such plants would have included purple broomrape, a parasitic plant that feeds off yarrow. We are hoping that both plants will re-appear as we re-introduce positive management to the land and look after the habitats in a similar way to our ancestors, simultaneously creating the optimum conditions for as many species as possible to flourish."

However, before any animals can be re-introduced to the area, the undergrowth,



Equipped with its power rake attachment, the Rapid Euro 4 shifts cut grass from an ancient hay meadow in a bid to encourage traditional plant species to re-establish themselves, restoring the meadow to its former productive and attractive state.

scrub and long, coarse grasses have to be brought under control, a task allocated on this particular site to one of the PCNPA's nine Rapid Euro 4 two-wheeled pedestrian tractors complete with a front-mounted flail mower, one of a range of specialist attachments purchased with the machine.

In addition to flail, drum or cutter bar mowing, alternative methods used by the PCNPA to "modify" unruly or neglected vegetation are controlled burning and spraying, the specific method being selected according to site location, type of plant and associated environmental factors.

Owned and used by the Authority since 2000, the Rapid tractors replaced engine-powered equipment towed by four-wheeled quad bikes which were deemed unsuitable for the many steep, undulating and awkward areas which the PCNPA had begun to actively manage and conserve.

"We looked at a number of contenders when selecting suitable machinery for the job," explained Geraint. "Having been developed for Alpine pasture management, the Rapid two-wheel tractor fitted the bill perfectly, was liked by everyone who trialled it and has lived up to all expectations over the past 11 years."

Negotiating comfortably the sloping and uneven ground lying between Manorbier's public car park and the church, the Rapid tractor showed itself to be a willing workhorse, its hydrostatic drive making it easy to steer and control while its 1m flail head decimated everything in its path, allowing air, sunlight and warmth to freely

reach ground that had been hidden beneath undergrowth for years.

The PCNPA actively encourages volunteers to get involved in the conservation of the Park and the management of its footpaths and bridleways. Within minutes of the Rapid Euro 4 going to work, a group of suitably-attired volunteers descended on the site to rake up the vegetation before piling it into heaps ready for composting.

"The land is not overly steep, so the Rapid tractor can be used safely equipped with its standard wheels and cleated tyres," explained Geraint.

"Other areas are more challenging so, following full risk assessment, we have the capacity to fit up to two sets of cage wheels to the tractor, providing exceptional stability."

Other than the cage wheels and three types of mower, the PCNPA's Rapid tractor fleet can be fitted with a bracken roller, mini baler, transport barrow and a power rake which sweeps cut grass sideways enabling more level areas to be cleared quickly and effectively to encourage new growth to emerge.

The power rake's abilities were demonstrated by Geraint in an ancient hay meadow within Manorbier village which is being restored with the help of the PCNPA, which works actively with landowners to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park.

- [www.rapidtractors.co.uk](http://www.rapidtractors.co.uk)
- [www.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk](http://www.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk)