

Plant profile 1

Pine

■ by Thomas Schorr-Kon, Trackways

Many of us consider pine to be a blot on the landscape. In the past in this country the Forestry Commission have been responsible for covering vast areas of land with plantations of various conifers including pine. Pine only supports a handful of other species compared with



Oak that supports over three hundred and fifty. Pine wood, though good for starting fires, burns quickly; it does burn brightly, creating more light

than heat, it seems. For these reasons pine tends to have a rather bad reputation. Yet, to the student of the wild, pine means survival. For any plant to provide food, medicine, good utilitarian properties and to be so widespread as to be found



Stone pine

in most locations, means that any study of this plant will bear fruit, though in the case of pine it is the seeds that provide us with the best nutrition. They contain 18 out of the 22 amino acids, making them almost a complete protein.

While in France this summer, we were at some Pyrenean hot springs and I noticed the pine trees there had cones that looked like they could have a good-sized seed; most of the species in the U.K. do not bear seeds large enough to bother with. On our second visit a local man began to climb the small pines to throw down the cones. I went to investigate and, as I suspected, they were collecting them for the seeds. We were given some and proceeded to open them and eat them. Then I set off with my son to harvest some more, putting

him on my shoulders so that he could reach the lower branches of the nearby trees, climb up and throw them down. We gathered a bunch and opened and ate them too. A little later my son caught a beautiful river trout that we had for our supper.

There are several other edible parts; the young cones in the spring can be steamed and eaten and they produce pollen for one to two weeks in March and, by placing a bag over the new cones and shaking them, we can harvest the pollen. This is good for soup and stew thickening and is very nutritious. Also, if we are in a genuine survival situation, we can eat the inner bark, chewing it fresh or boiling it, drying it and then grinding it to make a survival flour.

It is always several degrees warmer under pines; the carpet of pine needles that inhibits the growth of understorey plants also provides us with a layer of insulation. The sap provides us with one part of the best survival epoxy resin there is. It is also antiseptic as it has this action to protect the tree. It is also nutritious, though the hour or so it takes to lick it off your teeth can either be an annoyance or can keep your mind off the hunger pangs you might otherwise be feeling.

The needles, as mentioned in a previous article, contain an antioxidant fifty times stronger than vitamin C, and a palm full of diced up needles with boiling water poured on to them and left to sit for five minutes is great for winter colds. If you have a cough and want an expectorant, i.e. something to clear the phlegm from your chest, then boiling up the diced needles can give you a stronger brew. Also, oil exudes from the needles and floats on the water surface so if you have ever wondered why disinfectants are sometimes pine-scented it is because Pine oil is a natural disinfectant.



