

In the Beginning

Some archers have been in the game so long that they've forgotten what it's like to start out! If you're new in though, don't worry, as **Andrew Smith** starts a series taking you through the basics of archery

Over the next eight issues we'll look at every aspect of archery from a beginner's point of view, so by the end of the year not only will you have 12 months shooting experience, but also a solid understanding of shooting form and equipment set up.

In archery there are many opinions; even at the highest level nobody agrees on absolutely everything, so I am sure that what I write will at some point be controversial, but all of it will be based on practical experience and questions asked by archers new to archery. I hasten to add this is not just a re-write of some books you can buy, which in the past have been interpreted incorrectly.

The two most common questions I get asked are: How can I get started and what equipment do I need? The second question is a full article in itself, and will be covered later on, so in this issue we will look at how you can get into archery. I am often amazed how hard and frustrating it can be just to get yourself on a training course to become a member of a club, but most of this frustration is due to lack of clear direction so hopefully this article will help you to cut some corners.

Archery is a total inclusion sport and I have yet to meet anyone who cannot participate at some level – whether you are young, old, male, female, disabled, whatever, there is a pathway and support to allow you to enjoy archery.

In the UK there are over 1,270 clubs meeting a number of times each week, some even have access to their shooting grounds 24/7, and for anyone with competitive aspirations there are competitions on weekends throughout the year – most people are surprised to learn they often live within 20 miles of an open tournament.

Archery has a lot to offer everyone. Worldwide there are two main archery disciplines - Target Archery and Field Archery, and the three most popular bow disciplines are Recurve (Olympic bow), Compound and Traditional, which includes the British Longbow. In the USA and many parts of the world hunting with a bow is very popular, however in the UK it is, without exception, illegal. When starting out you don't have to



decide immediately which discipline or bow type you would like to shoot, the important thing is to be taught the basics correctly and then you can choose one or as many different styles as you have time for.

Most people, however, will find that the first bow they pick up and learn to shoot with will

be an Olympic Recurve type of bow, simply because most clubs offer this type of training and it forms a good, solid base to shoot all other disciplines in the future.

Archery clubs provide the majority of the formal training and the coaches and helpers are all volunteers – they are not paid and →



the majority have spent their own money on becoming qualified. Most archery pro shops also have facilities to run courses, and properly trained staff run courses at holiday camps where, for many, these sessions are often their first exposure to organised archery. In a club there are not many archers who initially join up with the intention of gaining coaching qualifications or a position on a committee, and because everyone in a club is a volunteer, time and cost restraints dictate that most clubs only run one or two courses a year. This lack of regular beginner's courses can be a source of irritation, especially if you have just missed one and have been told the next one is six months away! However, most archery pro shops have the ability to run courses all year round, which can be run on either a group or one-to-one basis. Some shops also have arrangements with clubs to run courses on their behalf, so that people do not get fed up waiting and can be fast-tracked into joining a

club, so it's always worth checking out the pro shops in your area and making enquiries.

The cost of a course can vary, but a club-run group course usually ranges from £30 to £50 per person for a 3-6 week course, totalling about six hours of tuition. Commercial courses will be more expensive, because employees have to be paid and the Chancellor insists on his 20%. Courses generally cover range safety, how to safely shoot a bow, retrieve your arrows, and look after your equipment. Most will also include something about different types of equipment, and either an overview or practical experience of other shooting disciplines. Details of courses run by clubs are not held centrally so to find one local to you, you will have to do some research.

Most clubs are registered with their county and regional archery associations, as well as the national governing body and will have their own website. The majority of clubs affiliate to Archery GB (Grand National Archery Association). When it comes to Field archery there are two main national bodies in the UK - NFAS & EFAS (IFAA worldwide). I've included the website addresses at the end of this article, and they're good places to start.

There are also many people practicing archery outside of the club system, and the more formal of these are in universities, the Armed Forces including Cadet Forces, schools, and Guide & Scouting organisations (some do affiliate to Archery GB). Another group of archers are those that shoot for fun on private ground and in back gardens.

There are no laws stopping you from shooting in your back garden, but great care must be exercised to ensure nobody is injured or worse, as even the most basic of starter bows can cause serious injury, and the simplest of equipment will shoot arrows a lot further than people think. Wooden fences, bushes and nets do not stop arrows, so it is worth talking to a local Pro shop if you are unsure about safety. Archery is at its safest, and you will progress much further much faster, in a club environment.

As mentioned earlier, the UK is well served by clubs both for Target and Field archery, and you are not restricted to being a member of just one club. Club facilities vary greatly so before joining a club it is worth making sure that the facilities are available to suit you. All clubs are run by like-minded volunteers so everybody is expected to pull their weight, from helping to put out and pack

Archery clubs provide the majority of the formal training and the coaches and helpers are all volunteers

away targets, attend maintenance days, and even sign up to be a committee member. One complaint I hear often is that clubs can be slow to respond to requests for details about training courses and becoming a member, which leads to assumptions about the club's attitude. Response times vary from club to club, it can be frustrating, but remember even the membership officer is a volunteer, and delays in responding to you will not be intentional.

When it comes to equipment costs, archery is probably on a par with other equipment-heavy sports like golf. A basic kit costs around £180.00, and something that will enable you to get classification and handicap scores and progress to competitions would be around £350.00. Obviously you can spend a lot more, but at the beginner stage, it's really not necessary. Club membership fees and tournament entry fees differ depending on the facilities on offer, but overall are much cheaper than most other sports. When it comes to buying equipment, especially the bow and arrows, don't be too eager to splash the cash – it's advisable to at least wait to the end of your beginner's course so you have an idea of the kind of bow you want to shoot, and things like the length and weight you need it to be. Whilst second-hand kit can look like a bargain, if it's not right for you then it will be money down the drain. There will be more on equipment in the next issue, but a club coach or your local pro shop will be more than happy to help you if you have enquiries in the meantime. ☺

Some useful contact details:

World Wide Governing Body FITA – www.archery.org
UK's National Governing Body - Archery GB www.archerygb.org
National Field Archery Society www.nfas.net
English Field Archery Association www.efafieldarcher.com
British Wheelchair Archery Association www.british-wheelchair-archery.org.uk
Parasport www.parasport.org.uk
British Blind Sport www.bbsarchery.org.uk

Regional Associations, with links to counties and individual clubs.

East Midlands Archery Society www.emasarchery.co.uk
Grand Western Archery Society www.gwas.co.uk
Northern Counties Archery Society www.ncas.co.uk
Northern Ireland Archery Society www.niarchery.co.uk
Scottish Archery Association www.scottisharchery.org.uk
Southern Counties Archery Society www.scasarchery.org.uk
Welsh Archery Association www.welsharcheryassociation.co.uk
West Midlands Archery Society www.wmas.org.uk