

Technical Information on Contract Sawmilling

When considering using contract sawmilling services there are a number of things to you should know:

1. Log Quality, Conversion, Specification and Grading

The logs will be sawn to your specification, so its important to make sure that you know what you want. If youre unsure about your specification, talk to the sawmiller.

Hardwood logs vary in quality. Generally, hardwood in Scotland is classified as First Grade (veneer and planking quality), Second Grade (fencing and poorer quality planking), Beam Logs (straight oak or elm more than 3 metres long and reasonably free of knots) and Chockwood (everything else).

Know Your Logs - the Forestry Commission has produced a guide to hardwood timber grading. Its called Technical Note 1/97, Scottish Hardwood Timber Grading: A Brief Guide, and is downloadable from their website www.forestry.gov.uk.

Hardwood logs, depending on their quality, can be converted into:

- Beams - for house building and other types of construction;
- Planking - for interior joinery, furniture making or woodworking;
- Cladding and sarking - for covering roofs and exterior walls on all types of building; and
- Fencing etc. - for, generally, agricultural, heavy engineering and domestic work.

Make sure, if you plan to use the wood for structural purposes, that you have consulted a structural engineer, as well as relevant British Standards and Building Regulations.

If your engineer stipulates that your logs must be a certain grade, e.g., TH1, you will have to hire the services of a hardwood grader. This is not cheap, and there are not very many qualified hardwood graders around.

2. Sawmill or Mobile Saw?

Some ASHS members have mills with static saws, with you responsible for transport of the logs to the mill, and others have mobile sawmills that they will bring to your site.

If you have logs that you need sawn, the first thing to consider is whether you have sufficient volume to justify the costs of haulage to a mill. This will generally only be economical if you have enough logs for one lorry load - around 20-25 tons for hardwood butts.

Static mills generally will have one or more bandsaws and saws for cross cutting to length. They may also be willing to stack and air dry your timber, and some may offer kilning and machining services.

Hiring a mobile sawmill may be a better way of maximizing the returns for a smaller quantity of sawlogs.

There are several types of mobile sawmill. The Woodmizer is one of the most popular; both Bechtel On-Site Sawmilling and Woodschool have this type of mobile saw. (You'll find more information on mobile sawmilling at Highland Birchwoods).

3. Costs

Costs will vary and you'll have to contact your local mill for details. The maximum size - length and diameter - of log that each mill can cut will also vary. See the ASHS Member Directory for organisations which either do contract milling at their mills or have mobile mills for hire.