

# so there you are

## buying power

I just want to mention a few things about this subject without getting too heavy. We all have buying power, the strength of which is dependent on how we look at the purchase of goods. For instance we could reduce the ridiculous practice of air-freighting perishable goods around the world if enough people simply refused to buy them. This action, along with changing your electrical energy supplier to one which supplies 100 per cent renewable energy, reducing your road miles, and buying only locally-produced goods, could have a greater effect on your carbon footprint than fitting a combined wind and solar generation system. However, as part of an overall footprint reduction strategy, a home-generation system can make a significant contribution. As I said in my book *Heating with Wood* when talking about low-impact living, all of this positive reduction can be wiped out by the act of going on a holiday that involves a long haul flight.

## global trading

Another aspect of buying power is something that I have not really got to grips with, but it is about using your buying power in relation to where in the world goods are manufactured, and what environmental restraints are put on the manufacturer. Another consideration is whether you want to help support corrupt or world-damaging regimes through the act of trade? The answer for most of us is clearly no, but with the global economy as it is today it is often difficult to tell where goods are actually made. Many goods are made in areas of the world with exploitative employment practices and little or no environmental controls, and then simply re-labelled to suit the West.

I haven't any answers to that, but it worries me. I work in forestry and in forestry we have long memories and long futures and I find it hard not to remember actions like the French government blowing up the Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior* because it intended to protest about their nuclear tests, so I avoid buying things from certain countries if it is at all possible – although if you take this policy to its logical conclusion you would trade with no one because all countries/companies/

individuals have, at some point, shown a tendency to behave in what I would consider a corrupt fashion. It might seem unreasonable to hold countries to our personal ransom for their actions in the past and that's up to you to decide for yourself but we should definitely use our buying power as much as possible to help stop governments and corporations doing things that we don't agree with.

## **in reality**

Having read all this, what's really required now is to sit on the porch in the sun or shade depending how you're feeling and mull it all over, letting the mind wander, but not too far. There is a whole heap of stuff to consider and weigh to try to get to the gist of what's required for building your own system and how you are going to fit all those bits.

There is, however, another important message in that you don't have to do it all at once. There is no point being purist about things and getting all uptight like some fundamentalist religious sect. That way leads to madness, frustration and downright unsociable thoughts. You can enjoy the process, and if initially you install a system that powers the lights for most of the year, then, hey, that's an improvement. It's also a system that can be improved and extended as your experience and confidence grows. I tell you, that after twenty-five years of involvement with what used to be called alternative energy, I still find myself wondering at the success of our system. It has in actual fact been more reliable than the mains over the last year, because we have had at least three mains power cuts in that period. There may have been more because as most of the house is run on home-generated power, there could have been others that we were not even aware of. For instance, a few weeks ago the washing machine had apparently packed up. I checked the fuse and all that, and I was just about to take the top off to delve into its innermost workings, when a question flitted across my mind and, behold, there was a mains power cut – the washing machine is run from the mains power. This is how it is, our home power is so reliable that it is taken for granted, and everything else was working except the washing machine.

The most important secrets of success with any home-generation system, especially one that is entirely 'off-grid', are that:

1. the power generated needs to be balanced with the power consumed, and
2. the only way to get a reliable system is to fit quality equipment

As a goal to aspire to, the system needs to be larger than you actually require so that on a good proportion of the days you are actually wasting power through some form of charge controller.

## **and finally**

So, if you are still keen to install your own home-generation system after reading all this, then I wish you well and remember – don't rush things and so avoid that attack of 'fireitupitis'. Here's to success.