

SCOTTISH WOODLAND HISTORY
DISCUSSION GROUP

NOTES XII



TWELTH MEETING

THURSDAY 1st NOVEMBER 2007

**SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE CENTRE
BATTLEBY, PERTH**

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The Scottish Woodland Discussion Group is managed by a committee composed of Chris Smout, Peter Quelch, Jonathan Wordsworth and Mairi Stewart.

Front cover photograph: Veteran trees – a unique heritage and habitat. (Ian Rotherham)

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INTRODUCTION

Chris Smout

About 60 people signed up for the meeting of the Scottish Woodland History Discussion Group on 1 November 2007 at the SNH Countryside Centre at Battleby. This excellent turn out was rewarded by excellent papers. First was Ian Rotherham from Sheffield Hallam University talking on the “Cultural Forest”. His message was that we cannot understand old woods under labels such as “semi-natural ancient woodlands” alone: they were part of multi-functional landscapes of working trees, and it is important to understand thoroughly the cultural and historical context of that economic world. To interpret a wood needs the skills of an archaeologist and historian just as much as that of an ecologist.

Using mainly the Sheffield area as an example, he took us on a tour of charcoal hearths, potash hearths, white coal ‘Q’ pits used in lead smelting, packhorse routes, mining pits and quarries: and that was just the archaeology in the wood. The archaeology of the wood concerned the many ways that trees show how they have been used: coppice stools, old pollards, plantations, parkland trees and so on. Only a multi-disciplinary approach can do justice to the complexity of an old wood and the landscape of which it is part. Why, for instance, are some of the woods round Sheffield that are richest in archaeology also poorest botanically? The answer lies in the way that turf was stripped to cover the charcoal stances: if that happens often enough, the original flora will suffer. But that does not mean such a wood is uninteresting – on the contrary, for cultural history it is extremely rich.

This paper raised a theme that was to recur repeatedly during the day: how do we preserve such places from obliteration? They often do not qualify as SSSIs: they generally fall short of being scheduled monuments, and if the interest is in the archaeology of the trees (rather than archaeology among the trees) they probably get no protection at all. Tree preservation orders are seldom placed on old coppice or ancient pollards, though it has happened in places in the south of England.

Robin Turner explained the place of woodland history in the Heritage Lottery funded project, ‘Scotland’s Rural Past’. He showed us how integral was the place of trees in the history of important historical sites, ranging from Drum, with its woodland of fine oaks adjacent to the castle, to Crathes, with the extraordinary yew hedges in the garden itself, to Ben Lawers, where a larch is always placed beside an improved farmstead for reasons that are obscure – but both represented modernity around 1800. He showed how at Threave efforts are being made to understand the old wooded enclosure, using Roy’s map and archaeological investigation on the ground. Of all the schemes ongoing, the work of the group at Sunart is outstanding in its determination to integrate what you can see on the ground with the shape and character of the oaks themselves – what Ian Rotherham called archaeology in the wood with archaeology of the wood.

There was a change of gear when David Jones told us about the history of using Scottish-grown wood for furniture, an entirely new topic for the group. Centring his talk on the work of Robert Lorimer, architect and furniture designer of the arts-and-crafts movement in Scotland, he showed how deep and long-standing was the appreciation of the qualities of Scottish wood. Chairs of distinctive high-back design using oak and pine (‘fir’ as the wrights called it) went back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Timber was squared, not turned as often in England, and in the eighteenth century wych elm was favoured over oak. Birch, sycamore and ash were all used, as well as gean and whitebeam. Many of us were surprised to hear about ‘Scots laburnum’ (*L. alpinum*) used since the seventeenth century for bagpipes, and planted and coppiced for furniture making in eastern Scotland from Kincardineshire and Atholl to Fife and the Lothians. It was put out of business in the nineteenth century by imported tropical hardwoods, and has passed from the memory of foresters.

After lunch we had a pair of papers by Ruth Tittensor and Hugo Manson on the oral history projects at Whitelee (Ayrshire) and in the Highlands (mid-Argyll and the Fort Augustus area as a pilot for a larger venture). Both are projects designed to capture the experience of the great Sitka planting years. Both emphasised the care that had to be taken in recording and preserving oral testimony, not a venture to be lightly undertaken, but also the rewards in capturing the voices of the seldom heard – the men who put in the trees, the women who worked in the office, the farmers who sold or lost the land. There was an interesting difference in technique – Ruth had decided to transcribe all her recordings, Hugo to forego transcription and instead produce a summary. There is no doubt that transcription is time-consuming and expensive, the expertise to do it to the required standard being scarce. But it provides another layer of accessibility and security for the testimony. Both projects are described in recent Scottish Forestry journal articles.

After a tea break, Donald Rodger introduced the veteran trees of Scotland, taking us from the Forthingall yew to the Argyll hawthorn wishing tree, now collapsed, via many other splendid trees, oaks, yews, sweet chestnuts, beech and ash. One should be cautious of accepting all the stories associated with trees, or one would believe Mary Queen of Scots spent much of her time planting trees. The earliest record that I have of a distinguished person being asked to plant a tree is that of Benjamin Franklin in the late eighteenth century in Paris Botanic Garden. I fancy that most, if not all, these stories are Victorian inventions, and Queen Mary's thorn in St Andrews in Oliver Rackhams judgement is no older than the eighteenth century. But in a sense that is irrelevant – ancient trees gather stories around them because they are amazing and awe-inspiring, and they need the kind of protection an ancient building would obtain. An attempt to lobby the Scottish Parliament to extend such protection as is routine in some other countries (Czech Republic and Poland) unfortunately failed; vandalism has recently destroyed an 800 year oak, and 'mistakes' by a developer a 300 year beech.

The final paper of the day was from Peter Quelch on the culturally modified trees of Loch Katrine, where the Forestry Commission is taking over the land from Scottish Water and has ambitious plans to revive the native woodland. Peter's argument was that such plans should take proper account of the surprising wealth of old pollards and coppice that he located during survey. These often took the form of hazel, alder and birch in the vicinity of settlements that had disappeared by the early nineteenth century, and marked the passing of pre-clearance farming. They are, indeed, the most visible link with the people who once lived there, and deserve respect.

In the ensuing discussion, the problem of how best to respect and perpetuate this sort of historical tree, 'culturally modified trees' as Peter calls them, was raised again. There is no simple solution, as trees, unlike the remains of buildings, will not survive indefinitely simply by being carefully protected. But that is no excuse for not protecting them at all, and organisations like the Forestry Commission in Loch Katrine and the Woodland Trust in adjacent Glen Finglas need to guard against promoting regeneration so vigorously that the hillsides turn into just another Highland birchwood. They are the custodians of a rich cultural heritage, and need to preserve those vestiges of a mosaic of shieling, working wood and lightly grazed regeneration that was there until recently. To assert this is to return to the topics to which Ian Rotherham introduced us in the first lecture.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: TUESDAY, 28TH OCTOBER 2008, BATTLEBY.

THE CULTURAL FOREST - IMPLICATIONS OF A MISUNDERSTOOD ICON

Ian Rotherham

Introduction

Woodlands reflect the landscapes of the time and place of their origins and often the changes in economic function and ecology over a long lifespan. The ecologies of these landscapes were driven by uses in a multi-functional system of economic utilisation. In order to better understand woods, forests and related landscapes, we need to consider the relations between them and other wooded features such as ancient parks or wooded commons. It is argued by Frans Vera that ancient parklands originating in medieval or earlier times provide links and insights into once great primeval savannahs across much of north-western Europe. If this is the case, then these areas become even more exciting to the environmental historian.

Palimpsests and Lineage

The remarkable and distinctive biodiversities associated with these landscapes provide evidence of lineage. These are palimpsests of ecology and archaeology reflecting economically-driven origins over 400-1,500 years or more. Ecology and archaeology inter-relate and reflect history. This begs the questions of 'what is the archaeology in ancient woods?' We can consider this in two parts:

1. *Archaeology in the woods*
2. *Archaeology of the woods*

However, there have been serious problems of a lack of recognition and limited interpretation.

Archaeology in the woods

This includes evidence of non-woodland phases and / or of pre-woodland phases and examples include evidence of non-woodland industries. Most mineral working and mining come into this category, but so do aspects of agricultural utilisation.

Archaeology of the woods

This includes evidence of woodland uses, crafts and management, although the separation is not always clear cut. Examples include Q-pits, charcoal hearths, 'working' trees and 'indicator' species.

Typical Woodland and Forest Activities and Products

Firstly there are products directly harvested such as timber, wood (coppice), fuel wood, brash and ramel, leaf litter / compost, fruit, herbs, fungi, leaf fodder, grazing (launds / warrens, cattle, deer, small game), turf, pannage (beech mast / acorns), pigs, and others. Then there are products transformed like bark for tanning, charcoal, whitecoal, tar, potash, and coke. Finally there are products extracted that include mineral coal, ironstone, and quarried stone (limestone, sandstone, ganister).

With this level of complexity, the study of woods, forests and parks needs to be multi-disciplinary, and there is a wealth of literature on a diversity of aspects of ancient woods and medieval parks: woodland wild flowers, veteran trees, invertebrate ecologies, fungi, rare lichens and bryophytes, deer, fishponds, provision of food and other resources for commoners and for landowners, provision of power and resources for industry, politics of fashion and taste, and the provision of sport and entertainment for an affluent elite. There is much more than this paper can cover. Inside the woods there were traditional woodland crafts and products. Outside the woods were processes such as bark stripping for tanning and the work of cartwrights and of sawmills. The impacts and evidence are there to be seen: harvesting or extraction; processing / transformation or use; storage; transport, and also living and working. Some features such as potash manufacture sites and charcoal kilns are often within a wood, but may be outside it.

Woodland Ecologies

Wood-pasture is well documented for over a thousand years; *Domesday Book* (1086) recording a landscape dominated by the practice. It was an ancient management system developed multi-functional landscapes of plentiful woodland and little need for formal coppice. It was once the most abundant wooded landscape in north-western Europe. Coppice on the other hand is more intensive and rigorously managed to ensure vital supplies of wood and timber in resource-limited landscapes. Pasture-woodland is an older and in many ways more 'natural' system, and significantly, most livestock, wild or domesticated, take leaf fodder or browse, if offered, in preference to grazing. Medieval woods were part of a suite of landscape types mixing trees and grazing or browsing mammals. Coppice woods, parks and other 'pasture-woodland' were related to forests, heaths, and moors, wooded commons, with grazing animals and variable tree cover. An exciting question is to what extent these are relicts of prehistoric wooded

savannah and hence to what degree are they primeval or ‘natural’ in origin. Enclosure and control of grazing necessary for both coppice woods and parks; and following the Norman Conquest, enclosed parks in England increased dramatically to perhaps 3,000, with possibly fifty in Wales and eighty in Scotland. From the early thirteenth century a royal licence was technically necessary to create a park in areas of royal forest. However, in both England and Scotland baronial parks were created without licence.



Park boundary at Prideaux Place Park (Ian Rotherham)

Surviving documents provide insight into a now vanished age, landscape and ecology. Studies raise issues such as the size or extent of wooded landscapes. In the case of parks, they could be substantial and run beyond one individual site. In 1512, the Earls of Northumberland had a total of 5,571 deer in twenty-one parks spread across Northumberland, Cumberland, and Yorkshire. Similarly, individual ‘woods’ could be very large.

Another issue is that of the place of the tree in the wooded landscape. Some trees are ‘natural’, some ornamental, and others are managed ‘working’ trees; with fundamental differences in species and structures associated with these different functions.

In some cases, management has allowed parts of an ancient ecology to survive. There may have been periods of positive management with specific ends and outcomes, and also times of abandonment or changed use. Each phase preserved, modified, or removed earlier ecology of working landscapes. Today’s ecology reflects changes through 1) management and 2) neglect. Often only a fragment of the earlier landscape is visible today and sometimes these fragments remain unrecognised. Even with continuity to earlier periods, management today differs from the past. To further complicate matters, the former ecology or the management that maintained it may not be fully understood, but we do know that the two were inextricably linked. Today’s ecology reflects part continuum and part palimpsest; woodland and park management, the wider landscape, and specific features within it, have all fluxed greatly over a long history. It is informative to recognise the uses and functions of medieval woods and parks. They were important features in the landscape; different in character from modern woods and parks with their images of abandoned or industrial woods or of leisure landscapes.

Woods and parks were often on the edge of settlements, often enclosed and their uses were carefully regulated. They were rough, uncultivated landscape, usually wooded, and frequently on the edge of manors away from cultivation. This begins to give a vision of working woods and parks in landscapes of open field, waste, heath, and royal forest; their ecologies inexorably linked. They provided hunting, foodstuffs, and wood and timber for building and fuel. With deer, medieval parks contained wild boar, hares, rabbits (reintroduced to Britain by the Normans and kept in warrens), game birds, fish in fish ponds, and grazing cattle and sheep parks and woods provided pannage (feeding pigs on acorns) and revenue in rents. Parks and commons had large areas of heath or grassland (launds or plains) dotted with trees, along with woods (called holts or coppices, and if for holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) hollins). Launds and coppices provided food for animals in summer, and hollins, through the winter months; along with fuel *etc.* Parks held and maintained deer (fallow and red) for the table and the hunt.

With socio-economic changes, the fashions for woods and park fluctuated. Wood, forest, park and common interacted and fluxed over centuries. Parks generally declined following the Black Death; boundaries moved, small parks enlarged, or replaced by new creations. Woods, parks and their relationship to great houses or to villages changed with time and fashion.

Woodland and Park Ecology

A small number retain medieval character and some functions to the present day, and the ecology of working parks and woods reflected the above. What survives today mirrors these events and pressures. Park landscapes had unimproved grassland across much of the grazed area, species and communities varying with grazing intensity. Woods included more open and wet, grass and heath areas. 'Natural' wooded landscapes keystone species were mammals like boar, deer, wild ox, and beaver with other grazing mammals of varying domestication. Some of these remained important in medieval park and chases.

The Importance of Old Trees and Dead Wood

Many of the associated species need habitat continuity over time. Because of this, presence or absence of key species gives information on site management and on significant breaks in woodland or parkland regimes. There are also issues of range and climate that affect the distributions of key invertebrates. Some invertebrates are reliable indicators of habitat continuity at the periphery of their range but occur more widely (in hedgerow trees or gardens) at the core of their distribution. In some cases records may be associated with unrecognised remnants. The most dramatic clusters of records are at famous sites like Moccas Park, Sherwood Forest, and Windsor Park, but many records are outside known parkland sites.

When reading the landscape it is useful to understand the concept of '*acquired antiquity*'. Some sites lack indicators of continuity of say ancient deer park but have those of medieval woodlands, commons, hedgerows, and perhaps veteran pollard trees. This gives '*acquired antiquity*' with landscapes having elements normally associated with genuinely ancient sites, acquired or 'borrowed' from fragments of older features. These are rich cultural landscapes and can be considered as living archaeology. Often through limited disturbance and disruption they have preserved historic features as archaeology in their landscapes. It is for all these reasons that these cultural landscapes require multi-disciplinary studies. Much has been overlooked by ecologists who don't see archaeology, and archaeologists who have little knowledge of ecology.

Decline or Survival

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries many estates, houses, parks and gardens were subject to neglect or became financial liabilities. Huge numbers of parks and woods were removed and working trees lost or abandoned to gradually decay. In the 1950s, even famous and now highly-valued locations like Chatsworth Park in Derbyshire were seriously considered for demolition; that would have been followed by intensive agriculture. Many archaeological remains were unrecognised, unprotected and lost; Oliver Rackham regarding the loss of Ongar Great Park, Essex, and a Saxon survival in 1945, as the worst loss of a visible Anglo-Saxon antiquity in the twentieth century. The losses and severance of the landscape lineage is beyond calculation, but at last there are moves to recognise and to safeguard what we can; albeit rather little and rather late.

Ancient Trees: a unique resource

Despite their lineage and uniqueness, the ancient trees have only recently been recognised for conservation protection in their own right. Nineteenth-century clergyman and diarist, Revd Francis Kilvert described ancient oaks of Moccas Park, Herefordshire as '*.....grey, gnarled, low-browed, knock-kneed, bowed, bent, huge, strange, long-armed, deformed, hunchbacked, misshapen, oakmen with both feet in the grave yet tiring down and seeing out generation after generation.*' These are perhaps the most evocative features of most medieval parks.

Woods, parks and great trees may 'survive' in new landscapes, housing or agriculture but most are erased from land and memory. Even if working trees survive there is no means to replace them as time and nature run their course. The remaining sites when recognised are conservation icons, but often isolated in time and space. They possess a unique resource of ecology: lichens, bryophytes, insects, spiders and more, enmeshed with a cultural lineage from the great forests of north-western Europe. Many are still unrecognised and uncared for. Some like Ecclesall Deer Park in Sheffield survive in part in the extensive area of Ecclesall Woods; but key features such as the park pale have only recently been recognised. In Scotland there must be large numbers still to find. Wherever they are the problems of cultural severance are serious because their lineage and management are not merely ecological. Our solutions to future conservation must recognise and address the cultural dimension too. When you walk through the ancient wood or across the plain of a medieval park you tread in the footsteps of the ghosts of the woodmen and parkers past. We need to recognise and respond to this.

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WOODLAND HISTORY AND SCOTLAND'S RURAL PAST

Robin Turner

Introduction

Woodlands have been a critical component of people's lives in Scotland since the recession of the ice over 10,000 years ago, yet because of the organic nature of wood precious few artefacts or timbers survive. But whenever we are able to glance at the evidence of the exploitation of forestry our received wisdom is often tested and sometimes shown to be wrong. While some of this evidence can only be studied by scientists in the lab, other traces of woodland history can be detected by those trained to observe them. In the same way as the Scotland's Rural Past project (www.scotlandsruralpast.org.uk) is transferring technical recording skills to amateur archaeologists and historians, perhaps similarly enthusiastic local people could be given the chance to acquire the skills to understand the 'cultural modifications' of their woodlands, thereby adding to our understanding of how people interacted with them in the past?

Rewriting woodland history

Wood was precious in the past, so why was it that it was almost exploited to extinction in the Scottish Highlands? This is the question we asked at West Affric, leading to a major palaeoenvironmental research project with Stirling University which found that the truth was probably quite different from our received wisdom. Rather than being a result of over-exploitation by people, it appears, in that glen at least, that climate change had more to do with the demise of woodland. This is not surprising: only in extreme conditions, or through outside influences, do indigenous people tend to exploit their renewable natural resources to near extinction.



Richard Tipping taking a pollen core at West Affric. (Photo: Robin Turner, NTS)

From a glen where people were blamed for erasing woodland, to one where a relic of the precious Caledonian Pinewood had been protected and had survived; or had it? Palaeoenvironmental work at Mar Lodge Estate, combined with documentary evidence, indicates a substantial woodland decline from more than 2000 years ago, with the Scots pine woodlands we've inherited probably being *planted* from around AD1600. The Mar Lodge woodlands are no less beautiful for this, but we should thank people rather than nature for their existence. They are a cultural item in a cultural landscape related to timber production on a massive scale, so we need to value the woodlands for their cultural significance as well as their natural values. This has the potential to fundamentally change our management approach.



Caledonian pine forest on the Mar Lodge Estate. (Photo: NTS)

Looking for physical evidence

In some parts of Scotland, as at Cragganester on North Lochnagside, the sight of a cluster of trees or a single larch in a field is a sure sign of a post-medieval settlement; a sign of ‘home’ for the inhabitants. At the other end of the spectrum is the industrial-scale exploitation of woodlands, for timber production and sawmilling at Mar Lodge Estate, or for feeding the insatiable appetites of the bloomeries on the foothills of Ben Lomond. Direct or indirect evidence of all these activities remains in the trees and in the ground – legible to those who know what to look for.

The recent major cutting back of the famous yew topiary at Crathes Castle exposed the ‘living archaeology’ of the hedge. Evidence was observed of the planting and inter-planting of yews, showing a different and less dense original scheme of the early 1700s. By careful observation of the living trees we now have a much better understanding of their history, which turns out to be much less static than previously suspected.

Myths and magic

Even today trees are not always seen in a good light, and age-old superstitions are still heeded. It is difficult or impossible to get Conservation Volunteers to remove rowans from archaeological sites, like the house remains near the marble quarry on Iona, presumably for fear of repercussions by witches. Similarly, the Lady of Lawers' predictions about cutting down trees in the House of Lawers has probably been a factor in the resumption of this Scheduled Ancient Monument by natural processes – the archaeological remains slowly melting back into the ground; the trees are winning. In some ways it seems a shame to dispel this folklore; the beautiful, gnarled Spanish chestnut in the grounds of Balmerino Abbey is slightly less magical when we realise through dendrochronology that it is ‘only’ about 450 years old, and therefore couldn’t, as legend has it, have been planted by Queen Ermengarde to mark the foundation of the Abbey in 1229.

Seeking out the evidence

The Old Wood of Drum is a Site of Special Scientific Interest on account of its semi-natural oak woodlands, but how natural is this? The wood is part of the old Royal Forest of Drum, a hunting forest established by William the Lion in 1170. A trained observer walking through the wood will immediately see that many of the trees have not grown up without significant human intervention. Twin-stemmed oaks are not uncommon for instance,

and once you know what to look for there are many other features which indicate different cutting regimes as well as showing evidence of past grazing practices. The Royal Forest of Drum Project, devised by the Trust's East Archaeologist Dr Shannon Fraser, aims to combine this physical evidence with documentary and map-based analysis, dendrochronology, palaeoenvironmental and place-name studies, to reveal the 'biography' of the woods. Initial tree-ring dating shows that some of the older-looking trees are much younger than had been thought, dating from around 1760, when Mary Irvine was active in making the most of the estate, and we expect much more exciting evidence to be revealed as the project proceeds. The SSSI is no less important in terms of being a habitat, but we now know that the wood survives *because* of people rather than despite them.



Twin-stemmed oak at the Old Wood of Drum. (Photo: Robin Turner, NTS)

A much more mundane-looking piece of woodland at Meikle Wood, Threave, is of much less interest in terms of natural history, but has been found to contain an equal amount of evidence of 'cultural modification'. A quick look at the Roy map of around 1750 is the first evidence that this is an old piece of woodland, worthy of examination. Different patterns of planting can be seen in some of the stumps or existing trees; boundary trees with multiple stems, and woodland boundaries with former hedges are all indications of what went on in the woodlands in the past, and show that we should be careful in managing change in the woods. Current thinning and felling will be undertaken with sensitivity, and extraction will be by horse rather than tractor, in order to minimise associated damage. This is a woodland ripe for detailed recording and study.

Training volunteers

Extracting this sort of evidence is not entirely new in Scotland, nor is it restricted to professional archaeologists and ecologists. The outstanding and exemplary work of the Sunart Oakwoods Research Group is one of the best examples of wide-ranging historical and archaeological work that goes beyond the traditional recording of built features. Opportunities to be trained in some of the techniques of recording and analysing embedded history of trees are also now available through the Woodland History Discussion Group. So how much of a step would it be to raise our game in this sort of training, along the lines of the Scotland's Rural Past (SRP) project?

SRP is a 5-year project, hosted by RCAHMS, to train and empower local people to learn about, record, understand, interpret and care for historic rural settlements in Scotland – from the last 1000 years, but mostly the ubiquitous deserted remains of the 17th-19th centuries. A team of four project staff are using a variety of techniques to equip non-professionals to learn about and care for these sites, which in turn gives us all a better understanding of them, but perhaps more importantly has the potential to re-engage people with their local cultural landscapes. Experience has shown that people are just as eager to learn how to use the documentary records as they are to learn survey and recording techniques. Given the strong relationship between people and their woodland resources, there is every reason to expect that there will be an equal interest in learning how to understand the cultural modifications begging to be recorded in relict historic woodlands.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Scotland's Rural Past website. At the top, there is a red header with the organization's logo (a stylized stone archway) and the text "Scotland's Rural Past". To the right of the logo is a search bar with the word "Search" in it. Below the header is a navigation menu with links: Home, About us, Doing, Learning, What's on, Photographs, Projects, Message Board, Contact Us, and Recording. A secondary link for "Accessibility Layout" is located on the right side of the menu.

The main content area is divided into several sections:

- Ways to get involved:** A list of links including "What's on", "Forthcoming training", "Learning", and "Message boards".
- Doing:** A section titled "How to take part" with links for "Getting going", "Doing research", "Doing field work", "Raising awareness", and "Evaluation".
- Quick links:** A list of links for "Newsletter", "Evaluation", and "Photo competition".
- Photo competition:** A section with a photograph of a rural landscape and text encouraging users to get their photos seen by entering a competition, with a link to "clicking here".
- Main text box:** A large text box with a background image of a group of people in a field. The text reads: "Scotland's Rural Past is an exciting new project that will improve our understanding and appreciation of our rural heritage." Below this, it says: "Welcome to the Scotland's Rural Past website. We are working with local communities to research, record and promote the vanishing settlements and landscapes of Scotland's rural past. Here you will find all the information you need to get involved and discover the stories behind historic rural settlements across the country. You can find out what our volunteer groups are doing, add your comments and photographs and learn more about the rural heritage in your area. [Click here](#) to find out more about Scotland's Rural Past."

At the bottom of the page, there are several logos for partner organizations: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Heritage Lottery Funded, HIE (Highlands and Islands Enterprise), the National Trust for Scotland, and Historic Rural Settlement Trust.

At a time when there are so many threats to our historic woodlands – from neglect, from well-meaning reforestation, from the effects of climate change, and from the inevitable ageing and decline of the trees themselves – time is running out to record these fragmentary documents of the past. Perhaps with this wealth of evidence – far more than could be recorded by professional bodies – local people around Scotland could be trained to record, understand, appreciate and value this living archaeology? The clock is ticking.

THE WHITELEE FOREST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Ruth Tittensor

INTRODUCTION

When land *devoid of trees* for a long time is planted with sufficient trees for a forest to grow and mature, it is called *Afforestation*. In Britain large-scale afforestation was a peculiarly 20th century phenomenon. Successive governments, from the second decade onwards, encouraged afforestation (particularly in the uplands) through the statutory Forestry Commission and incentives for private landowners. This was because after centuries of misuse, overuse and then two World Wars, Britain badly needed a strategic reserve of timber, material for a home timber industry and jobs for rural unemployed people.

Forester Richard Toleman and Historiographer Christopher Smout noted that there have been many studies on the politics and background to this phenomenon of 20th century afforestation. However, a study of what took place at the ‘factory-floor’ had never been carried out, at least in Scotland, where afforestation increased woodland cover from 5-6% at the start of the 20th century to nearly 17% at the end.

They made the important point that social, land-use and ecological changes connected with afforestation could be comparable in scale and historical importance with the Clearances and Agricultural Revolution in Scotland. They suggested that ‘factory-floor afforestation’ should be studied using oral methods, while the people who had been involved were still alive. I took up their proposal and, in cooperation with Professor Smout, prepared a research project outline for consideration by possible sponsors. We were successful in obtaining finance for the proposed research from the Forestry Commission, to start in 2004.

In 2002-2003, an oral history project on 20th century afforestation in Wales (‘Hanes y Goedwig’) studied six forest areas. Our intention, however, was to concentrate on one forest: to discuss the processes and results of afforestation with a variety of people involved in its planning, preparation, planting and long-term management, as well as seeking the views of local people watching it happen. Although Professor Smout carried out some archive research to provide a background to the area, oral sources were to be paramount. The Forestry Commission requested that the research should also analyse how productive and verifiable oral sources would be for afforestation studies.

WHAT IS ORAL HISTORY?

Oral Sources are spoken words providing information on a subject. *Oral History* is concerned with *past* situations within living memory. Data is gathered by recording people who are speaking about the past. Oral History could be used to study *any one rural area, a change which occurred nationwide or the story of a person or people caught up in a situation.*

The Whitelee Forest Oral History Project looked at all three situations. We analysed how a nationwide change took place in one locality, how individuals were involved or affected, their attitudes and feelings about the change and the environmental processes taking place.

People involved in an event or situation can *recount* what they observed, *clarify* what happened from their angle, give of their *knowledge*, *explain* how they were affected by an event or change, *reminisce* about their feelings at the time and *describe* what their attitudes to it are now.

Because the data produced comes from people speaking, oral history abides by a strong set of ethics to ensure that Contributors and their data are treated responsibly. It is also important to ensure no laws are transgressed.

THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF ORAL HISTORY

Every oral history project has a cultural context. For instance, the afforestation of Easter Island would have a very different cultural context to afforestation in Wales or Scotland. Discussing GM crops would have a very different context in England to the USA. The questions asked and discussed during an oral history recording-session are asked within the context of the researcher’s life experiences and social culture, that is, his or her world-view. What is replied and discussed by the Contributor is said within the context of his or her life experiences and social culture.

An oral history recording-session should ideally be a joint activity, with active participation between the individuals who are ‘interviewing’ and being ‘interviewed’ (the researcher and Contributor). I like it if the spoken relationship becomes a ‘conversational narrative’, which goes somewhere, a back-and-forth of question, answer, discussion and comment.

A recorded conversation, indeed any conversation, is more than just knowledge, memories and feelings being imparted. It has several overlapping contents. The anatomy and physiology of the language spoken and the use (or not) of dialect, form the *linguistic* content. The *psychological* content contains different levels of meaning, feelings, criticism or subtle hints. There is an *emotional* content in the relationship during recording, for instance when the Contributor tells of something he or she has not told anyone else before. The information imparted during the recording is the *knowledge* and *memory* content of the conversation.

In the case of Whitelee Forest, some Contributors were native Scots speakers, some were native English speakers, one was a native Welsh speaker but spoke in English, and there were no Gaelic speakers.

WHY USE ORAL HISTORY?



Mr & Mrs William Barr in 1998. Willie Barr farmed the moorland Shieldhill farm close to the Whitelee Plateau, starting in 1927 aged 14. At age 94, he still helps with the sheep at Lochgoin farm adjoining Whitelee Forest.

There are several good reasons for using oral history for tracking landscape change and its effects on people.

First, it can provide information which is not otherwise available (as it is not written down). The people involved may have assumed that their knowledge and feelings were and are unimportant as they have never been asked for them. Many groups of people have been ignored by official accounts, politicians and journalists in the past. Those in management or power may think, or may have thought, that these people’s knowledge or feelings were unimportant, or they may not even have considered their views. It is also possible that the people now taking part in an oral history project did not wish to give their views in the past or for whom writing was not part of their normal activities.

Second, people who were specifically excluded from events are now included by giving them the opportunity of their own contribution or view of history and society. Women, those with mental-illness or ‘factory-floor’ workers come into this category.

Third, oral history allows alternative interpretations of events from the official accounts. It reveals participants’ own part in a story, their and others’ attitudes, how what happened affected their lives and the situations of the moment which were not in their control.

Fourth, it gives a community the chance to tell its own story, giving empowerment to those involved. For instance, the residents around Whitelee Forest had never been asked what they knew or felt about afforestation: it was done because it was government policy.

Fifth, oral history reveals unknown events and sheds new light on known situations. For instance, at Whitelee Forest, we discovered how the land was used prior to afforestation, why over 20 farmers sold land to the Forestry Commission and what actually happened up on the hill while the head forester was busy in his office!

THE CHOICE OF WHITELEE FOREST

Whitelee Forest was chosen as the study area as it is a large, state, coniferous forest in one more or less discrete unit. When the project started, the social structure of the locality made it possible to find contributors: there was still great population stability in the vicinity, with little inward or outward migration, several generations of families remaining in the area all their lives. There were still people of an age to remember the beginning of the Forest in the 1960s and its subsequent development and an exceptional number of elderly people aged 70 to 100 who had lived in the locality all their lives. There were a limited number of communities to contact and as I live in the area, making contacts and finding Contributors was likely to be straightforward.

It turned out that Whitelee Forest was a good choice because there were more than sufficient Contributors from a variety of backgrounds. It turned out to have an interesting afforestation scenario. How typical it was will not be known until other studies have been carried out.

DESCRIPTION OF WHITELEE FOREST

Whitelee Forest is about 30km south of Glasgow, in the triangle between the towns of Eaglesham, Kilmarnock and Strathaven (the counties of Renfrewshire, Ayrshire and Lanarkshire). It is about 17km from east to west and 10km from north to south. It totals almost 6000 hectares. The Forest grows on the isolated Whitelee Plateau up to 376m altitude. There are deep ravines cutting through the Plateau and 90 small waterways leave it in all directions.

Whitelee Plateau and Forest are open to 360° with no other hills nearby to give shelter. There are wonderful views to Ben Lomond, the Isle of Arran, Ailsa Craig, the Southern Uplands, Pentland Hills and Tinto Hill.

Weather-wise it is exposed from all directions, including from the Firth of Clyde 23km to the west. It is extremely windy and wet, with 1727mm of rain annually. There are sudden mists, it can be hot in summer and in the past there was long snow-lie in winter and spring.

The bedrock of the Whitelee Plateau consists of basaltic igneous lavas, with glacial till overlying all of it except a few knowes. About 80% of the till is covered with a layer of post-glacial peat up to 7m deep and there are a few recent alluvial sediments along waterways. The peat 'soil' is wet, quaking and unstable.

Afforestation started in 1961 and finished in the early-1990s. Trees were planted on open heather moorland, bog and marsh. The Forest is now 99% Sitka spruce with some Norway spruce, European larch & Lodgepole pine. Broadleaves such as Ash, Oak, Rowan and Willows were planted later in the afforestation programme.

AIMS OF THE PROJECT

The aims of the Whitelee Forest Oral History Project were to use oral sources to describe and elucidate: 1. Farming and Resource Use; 2. Ecology and Landscape; 3. Forestry and Technology - *Before and After Afforestation*. How the new Forest *Affected Local People and the Economy* was also assessed. The Forestry Commission requested that the project should produce results which were analytical as well as anecdotal.

SETTING ABOUT THE PROJECT

The first item on the agenda was to *Publicise the Project* and *Seek Contributors*. With the help of a graphic designer, a bilingual *Colour Brochure* outlining the project and giving contact details was prepared. This was left in surgeries and libraries, taken to meetings, and sent out by post. It was useful for handing to people when discussing their possible participation. I also wrote an article in a Forestry Commission newsletter and organised a meeting for early contributors to meet those running the project. Although some oral history projects have web sites for keeping people up to date, there was not the time or finance in this case, so I wrote letters (many Contributors, being elderly, did not have facilities to look at a web site). The most useful way of engaging with potential Contributors was by word of mouth.

Organising large amounts of necessary paperwork was second on the agenda. Information was stored under the Data Protection Licence of the University of St Andrews. More paperwork was needed to fulfil the ethical requirements of an oral history study. Contributors were told in writing and verbally about their rights regarding recording, storing and using their information. Letters were needed, for instance, to follow up telephone calls concerning date of recording. Explanatory sheets were needed for example to describe transcripts and explain procedures.

RECORDING AND TRANSCRIBING

Carrying out the actual recording-sessions was next. Electronic recording equipment was used, so that recordings could be transferred directly to the hard drive of a computer and copied when necessary. External hardware was also needed to ensure back-up of all material; additional software was needed to transfer recordings to computer and CDs and to play and transcribe recordings. Although recordings are the primary and most important form of data, transcription of recordings was vital so that recordings could be understood more fully, especially as Whitelee Forest is a bilingual locality.

Transcribing is very time-consuming, needs professional transcribers (in this case in Scots and English) and is very worthwhile. Listening to the recordings and reading the transcript together can help more fully comprehend what was said and intended.

Transcripts allow Contributors to check before giving consent for use of their data to ensure that people interpreting their recording later on, do so correctly. Posterity will get much more from the recordings, especially because language changes over time. Any English person listening to Scots recordings (and *vice versa*) and people in the future listening to what will become old-fashioned languages will understand more fully what was said if a transcript is available. We owed it to the contributors to give them a transcript as a 'thank-you' for their personal accounts.

THE RESPONSE

People recorded 42; people whose contribution was written by them, or by me as they spoke 17 (this was for people hesitant about being recorded); 20 more Contributors donated photographs or objects and helped the project in many ways. There were more Contributors wishing to participate but who could not be accommodated due to lack of time and finance.

Of the 42 people recorded, 9 were recorded by Pauline Cairns (a native Scots speaker) in Scots, while 33 were recorded by me in Scots, English or a mixture.

Contributors were aged from about 30 to 94 but those with the most accurate memories and knowledge were aged about 50 to 75 and had always lived in the locality. Squad workers and country sportsmen were able to give the most information about the locality itself.

The main categories of Contributors were: 1. Farmers, farm families and farm workers. 2. Forestry Commission employees: acquisitions officers, tractor driver, trapper and rangers, squad workers, foresters of several grades, district officers and a conservator/commissioner. 3. Forestry contractors and machinery manufacturers. 4. Local residents: nearby town-dwellers, country sportsmen, forest-edge residents, walkers in the forest, horse-rider in the forest. 5. Specialists: a naturalist, archaeologist, meteorologists and historian. The categories which were unfortunately missed were: forest engineer, ganger, helicopter pilot (who sprayed trees), secretary in the forest office, local vet, young person. Few women wished to participate even though some women were involved in the managerial levels and as wives of tenants of Forest Workers' Holdings. I spoke to farmers who sold land to the Forestry Commission, to private forestry companies and who sold no land for afforestation.

RESULTS

For Archiving and Future Use:

Audio CDs of 42 Contributors' recordings; data CDs of their Transcripts; paper copies of their Transcripts; paper copies of Written Contributions bound into attractive reports.

Sites for Archiving:

All Items:-

1. 'Scottish Life Archive' of the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh

2. Somewhere Local to Whitelee Forest
3. Local Forestry Commission office at Carluke, Lanarkshire (Scottish Lowlands District Office)
4. Contributors received a copy of their recording, transcript or written contribution.

Written Contributions only:-

A library local to Whitelee Forest

Recordings only:-

The hard drive of an institution's computer.

For Publication:

A popular book of 25,000 words to be published by the Forestry Commission for sale to the general public

A Scholarly Monograph of 100,000 words for commercial publication

A Research Leaflet on Oral History Methods in Rural Research to be published by the Forestry Commission

Articles for publication in specialist journals

Articles in Forestry Commission staff newsletters.

WHAT WAS DISCOVERED

The 420ha of Whiteleehill farm and steading were the first block of the Whitelee Plateau to be sold to the Forestry Commission, in summer 1961. Dan Blair, the first tractor driver, started ploughing soon after, changing the wet moorland into long black ribbons of ridge, furrow and drains. Over 20 more farmers on the Whitelee Plateau sold some or all their land to the Forestry Commission or a private forestry firm during the next 25 years. At a time when, with such very poor land and climate, they could not compete with farmers in more favourable areas, they were tempted to sell their worst ground. The intricacies of negotiations with farmers were described by Forestry Commission acquisitions officers at the front line, and by farmers themselves.

The first two squad members were hired in January 1962 and one of them stayed until all the Forest had been planted over 30 years later. The first tree was planted by first forester George Caird in March 1962. At times of peak plantings, the squad consisted of 12 men with a head forester and forester in management.

Ploughing and draining were exceedingly difficult on the quaking peat. Tractors and ploughs often sunk right in and there are many stories, photographs and a video film of the huge task of 'deblogging' them. Many types of tractor and plough were tried over the years, in order to make the ploughing more efficient. Trees were planted by the squad at the rate of about 1500 per day and at a density of about 1700 per ha, lower than the Forestry Commission national guidelines. This was due to the difficult conditions and the lack of access roads, meaning the squad might have to walk for one hour to reach a day's planting site.

The detail of daily and seasonal tasks and routines for the squad were given, along with information on their tools, the weather and how different tree-species grew or were blown over.

They planted about 10 million trees on just under 6000 hectares, with up to 10% of the land unplanted along waterways and on rocky knowes. There was no difficulty with species choice: Sitka spruce predominantly, though the wrong provenance was sometimes supplied. Broadleaved trees for amenity were planted later on, which cheered up some of the squad.

The Forestry Commission saw Whitelee Forest as a situation where 'tree-farming' could take place due to the monotonous nature of the ground, lack of topographical variation and apparent lack of amenity, archaeological and ecological constraints. It was to be a 'cellulose factory' providing timber for west coast sawmills.

Because of the extreme exposure, quaking peat ground and prospect of severe windblow, a 'No-Thin' silvicultural management regime was decided on. Local residents were bemused at the lack of activity in the growing Forest! 'No-Thin' led, unfortunately, to a gap of about a decade when planting had finished but the first plantings of 1962 were not ready for harvesting and there were no intermediate thinnings to be extracted. Despite many attempts by managers at the Straiton district office to solve this problem and find other work, the remaining four squad members were made redundant in the early 1990s.

There were Forest Workers' Holdings of 40 to 50ha of very poor ground (the inbye of the previous farms). In running their holdings, the tenants (who worked full-time in the squad) needed the assistance of their wives and families. One family of tenants had four adult men working in the squad.

A first-class trapper was brought in at the start of planting in 1962 to clear the Whiteleehill ground of brown and mountain hares (they were extremely common) and rabbits. Subsequently, foxes were the only vermin culled, mainly as a way of promoting neighbourliness with adjoining farmers. Roe deer soon entered the Forest and increased to such numbers that both rangers and shooting tenants culled them on a regular basis. Eventually there was an end to fox culling, while the hares and moorland game birds had disappeared.

When the moorland of the Whitelee Plateau was ploughed and planted with trees, local people were unable to use the area for their many purposes of the pre-Forest era. However, towards the end of the 20th century, with harvesting in view and forest fires not just a possibility but an actuality, an access road was built through Whitelee Forest. People from the still-expanding East Kilbride started using it for walking, cycling and dumping litter.

At the end of the 20th century, Whitelee Forest was placed in the newly-formed Scottish Lowlands Forest District of the Forestry Commission. This District was set up to bring back into management and public consciousness a group of forests which had been on the disposals list in the 1980s when the Forestry Commission was charged by governments with making more of its financial possibilities.

A changing attitude on the part of the Forestry Commission from *vermin control* to *wildlife management* was also in progress, so the role of rangers changed. During their visits to Whitelee Forest at the end of the century for wildlife surveys and deer culling, they met and spoke to members of the public who were now using the quiet forest road for recreation.

Harvesting started in 2001 and continued at the rate of about 10,000 tonnes annually in the early years of the 21st century. However, additional and early harvesting has taken place since 2006 to provide access and space for wind-turbines. Whitelee Forest is soon to contain the largest wind-farm in Europe with between 140 and 210 turbines in and adjacent to it. However, this oral history project has considered the wind-farm only briefly: it is a project for someone else!

Contributors gave much information about farming, resource use and other ways they used the Whitelee Plateau moorland before 1960 and how these changed after afforestation. The changing landscape, weather and ecology were also discussed in detail by some Contributors. They mentioned the effects of afforestation on their lives, the local economy and, for instance, how shepherds and keepers became redundant. Whitelee Forest did not become an important employer in the locality, as the Forestry Commission might have hoped. Many nearby textile factories and East Kilbride provided most of the employment that was needed. However, it did give some young people, who had no wish to work in factories, the chance of an outdoor life. Contributors representing many backgrounds described what they felt and feel now about the initiation and development of Whitelee Forest, its effects on their lives and on the local economy: how it felt for their moorland peat bog to be changed into a forest.

CONCLUSIONS

Contributors hold a huge pool of valuable and interesting information, much of which can be verified because different individuals often talked about the same events. Those Contributors who have always lived in the Whitelee Plateau locality have memories uncluttered by material from elsewhere.

Contributors were and are not just elderly residents looking through rose-tinted spectacles and harping on about the past. Many aspects of the Whitelee Plateau environment, such as weather, soil, flora and fauna, cultural and archaeological sites, were and are important to them in various ways. So they know and remember them in intimate detail. Their locality, in all its connotations, was utterly changed in a very short time by afforestation. Contributors noticed and noted what happened to the flora, fauna, soil, archaeological and cultural sites when afforestation started and progressed. Even now, people observe what is happening to those species and sites which they can access.

Whitelee Forest, on very difficult ground, was made possible by the new machinery being developed by Scottish manufacturers or imported from North America. The men of the squad also made it possible by their extraordinarily hard work in awful conditions, aided by their wives and family if they ran a Holding too. Many of the squad, as well as the less-emotionally involved foresters and district officers (who were moved on regularly), were very motivated and looked upon their making of Whitelee Forest with pride.

The change in land ownership from many farming families to a single, far-away, institutional landowner had far-reaching effects on the use of Whitelee Plateau by local people. This was exacerbated when the Forestry Commission's system of resident local forester and squad to every forest was abandoned. Communicating with people local to a forest is nowadays is extra difficult as there is no link between specific Forestry Commission staff and an individual forest.

However, it is vital to keep the channels of communication open because of the pool of knowledge and interest held by locals. The Whitelee Forest site was Contributors' own land or back-yard - and it still is their backyard. They naturally wish their knowledge to be used when decisions are made on how it develops. Local families have a strong emotional attachment to their environment. For instance, on the Whitelee Plateau there are at least four graves whose occupants come from local families, as well as the grave of a wartime pilot whose plane was ploughed up by one of the tractor-driver-Contributors. These, and other sites important to the locality, became inaccessible at afforestation due to both ploughing and tree-planting and this was a loss to local people.

The present arises from the past and continues into the future. What happened in the past helps explain the ecological and social processes of the present. It also determines the constraints within which future silvicultural, ecological and social management can be carried out.

FINALLY

I thank Professor Christopher Smout for his constant support and interest during this project. I acknowledge gratefully the interest and assistance from the staff of the local Forestry Commission Scottish Lowlands District Office.

A huge thank-you to all Contributors and the many individuals who helped the project come to fruition.

COLLECTING THE VOICES OF THE FORESTS

Hugo Manson

The Mid-Argyll Pilot Oral History Project was carried out in 2006-7. The aim of the project was to create an archival record of some of the people whose working lives had been spent in various aspects of the forestry industry during the past several decades.

Our first realisation when we began the project for the Forestry Commission was that the decision to start with a pilot was a good one. It soon became clear that this was going to be a big story. It was not going to be simply the story of a small group of forestry personnel, valuable as those are. Rather, in recounting their own life-histories they would be describing the evolution of something bigger. They would be giving a new understanding of Scottish community life particularly in the countryside, of the economic development of the period and of the national social and political changes that were affecting them and the rest of the population.

Through the project we were able to identify some of the human energy behind this archetypal energy industry. We were able to hear, through the voices of the interviewees, what it was that brought their energies together at a time when timber in its various forms was a greatly needed commodity. It still is a vital commodity of course but since the formation of the Forestry Commission the nature of the need has changed since the days when it was required as a strategic and military resource in time of war.

The project enabled us to record the changing attitudes to what was important about forestry in Scotland from the days when supply and quantity of timber were the predominant needs to more recent times when the nature, and public use, of the forests themselves have become key aspects of the industry.

The Mid-Argyll had two aspects to it. Firstly, a number of men and women were interviewed by the writer in order to create an archival base. Secondly, a number of current or former forestry personnel attended workshops where they were trained in the skills of oral history recording. They then set about recording interviews themselves to add to the collection.

More than twenty people were interviewed resulting in nearly thirty-five hours of archival recordings. The interviews took the form of life-histories and were less like media interviews than structured conversations in which each interviewee told of their family backgrounds, their childhood and growing up years, their entry into forestry and the different stages of their careers. In these thoughtful and exploratory interchanges, the interviewees recalled both significant events and the less newsworthy, but no less important, details of their lives in their communities and in forestry. In these conversations they explained the intimate interlocking that was to be found between forestry and the communities around which it developed.

All of the interviews were recorded in audio form on a confidential basis with the understanding that material would be used from the recordings only with their permission. The original recordings were archived unedited as a raw resource for historians and researchers now and in the future. The project, and its successor projects, will be housed in the new Highland Council archive in Inverness at present under construction. In the meantime, they are being looked after by the Special Libraries and Archives at the University of Aberdeen.

A follow-on project has been carried out in the Fort Augustus area and it is hoped that a larger, national, oral history forestry project will be started soon.

In their diversity the interviews recorded for the Mid-Argyll pilot project give a taste of the breadth of subject matter covered in the interviews. For such an archival project, the oral history interview is the ideal vehicle. It allows people to talk in an un-pressured way with an interested interviewer about aspects of their lives and work that would not normally be recorded.

Here are some brief quotes from the interviews.

Alexander Bell on wages:

Well they were that strict. When I started first it was Donnie McCaskill. You used to have to wait. You know, you got paid on a Thursday. At Pay Parade you'd always stand up in your order...I was number seventeen. You were generally as smart like an Army parade...*You had to stand to attention?* ...Aye it was terrible.

Bob Dunsmore on his first day:

When I arrived by bus in this sleepy little town. There was a hostel and there was about five of us and the chap who turned out to be the ganger said to me, have you had your tea, and I said no. He said, well look, do you want to go and get some fish and chips for all of us, so they took all their orders being very friendly and happy, and got my list and went along to the village. And in the middle of the village all there was was one post office which was open from about eight till five every day. That was my introduction. They all thought this was hilarious.

Buddy Gillies on his first days:

The first day it was absolutely lashing with rain. In these days you get decent oilskins. I had nothing but a pair of jeans and a pair of wellingtons and I was weeding with a heuch, or a sickle...the first job I got...you cut the bracken off the trees so it doesnae damage...In a good day you cut an acre of bracken with a heuch. But what used to annoy me was that you had the same work as the older people but you had...but they'd maybe be getting four pounds a day say and I would get two for the same work...you were never on the full wage till you were 21.

Charlie Greenlees on a matter of discipline:

I remember one incident. I don't know what this chap did but he was forest worker, they called them then...and he had done something that was quite...serious and I had to go to Jimmy Reid about it. And the guy could have got the sack for it. I remember that. And I said to Jimmy, what do we do about this? He was very, he was always quite understanding, specially with me, and he was with the squad you know, discipline was good but he was understanding. He said, well he's nae a bad loon. He was from Aberdeen. He's nae a bad loon. He's just a bitty on the stupid side. So what do I do, I said. Oh, boot his arse and tell him nae to do it again.

George Ivison on a forest fire:

I had a big one above Ardrishaig once started by schoolboys, starting gorse fires during their dinner break. We were up there till nearly midnight fighting that because up on the hill there, there's a loch and I'd got the men on both sides of the loch and we stopped the fire virtually, we'd actually got it out more or less. But what I hadn't realised was there was molinia grass up there and molinia is the worst thing you can get in a fire area because once it, it gets in balls, once it gets alight it's so light that it lifts in the air and goes over you, it goes with the wind because fire always goes with the wind anyway. And this loch was frozen. And before I realised it these balls of burnt molinia blew across the surface of the loch and set fire to the other side and started it off again. And that was about six o'clock in the evening then and we were there till practically midnight. *That's an extraordinary image isn't it, of these rolling balls of flame.* Well, even when you're fighting a fire in molinia, they can lift off and go over your head and start behind you. Not pleasant at all.

Sandy MacLure on weeding – and the rain

All summer we were on our hands and knees weeding the seedbeds because there were thousands and thousands, millions of trees produced and they all had to be weeded by hand and that's what we did for nearly all summer...*So what was the routine doing the weeding?* You had a box. You were on your hands and knees and you had a box in front of you, and you pushed this box along the row...the beds were three feet wide and you picked along these things and you chattered all the way and generally carried on. *And you'd have to do so many rows a day?* No, no, no piecework. None of that...There was never any sort of carry-on. The only carry-on was when it started to rain. (It) was quite a dry place so the rain didn't come very often. *Not often enough?* Not often enough. So if it was going to rain, the gaffer, we had a gaffer Jim Monroe, he use to stand there with a cigarette paper in his hand and count the number of spots in a minute to decide whether or not it was raining! Oh dear!

Peter Quelch on the generic old woodman:

They had a pocket watch but in a tin...Old John, he came from Caithness and he had the same habits, he wore a boiler suit, and they were well protected by clothing. You couldn't see any skin on them apart from the neck which was normally brown as a berry, and their face and their hands, and that would be it, mainly to keep insects. So he never showed any skin really. Not like builders who would work with their top off. You'd never see that in the forest. There's too many scratchy things or insects. And so in the top pocket of this boiler suit, old John, if you asked him the time, and he was slow anyway, he'd slowly unbutton the thing, this would take about three minutes, unbutton the pocket, take out the tin, open the tin, take off various padding inside that, find the pocket watch, open the lid perhaps of the pocket watch, read the time, tell you, and then reverse all of that, put it back, every single time you asked the time. So you didn't ask very often in the end. And I can even remember his voice because he had a sort of, I suppose a naturally Gaelic-speaking voice, Och, the time is nine thirrrty...And he didn't speak much unless he had to. But the funny thing is southern woodmen were similar. They would slowly get a pocket watch out to tell you the time. They were sticklers for time.

Tommy Stewart on Dalavich:

You know, it was a very busy place this...good God it was terrific. We had a van every day of the week except Sunday. In these days vans were cheap to run, you know, you couldn't do it now. Oh it was great. They were even coming here from Glasgow at night, big firms selling rolls and cakes. It was unreal. It was a great place...*Were there any shops?* No there was none but eventually a forestry worker's wife set up a garage...as you go to my gate, there's a wee bit of green grass there, just there. And she worked with the shop and it was a very successful shop. *Who was that?* A Mrs McLean. Her husband was a horseman, Hughie. He was a Navy man actually but he gave up the Navy and came home and worked a horse. And that was the first shop. Then a few years later there was a wee post office built in front of the existing shop...so, but oh, it was good, it was good these days...I think with the children there was two hundred and eight of us in this village at one time. It's nothing like that now.

Betsy Walling on a job interview and getting to work for the first time

They were looking for what they called a clerkess...and I started there under the guidance of the woman who'd...done twenty-six years with the Forestry Commission. And when she started she said she thought she would just stay six months. It was that kind of a job when she went into it...and she'd been there twenty six years. *And you've now bettered that...*I was interviewed by two men and one was the Chief Forester, Alastair Crawford...and the Head Forester was Dougie McInnes and they interviewed me for this job. I think they told me *at* the interview that I'd got the job, which was quite unusual. And they said to me I was to go to the bus stop on whatever Monday morning it was and I would get a lift in a Forestry van...Not a formal arrangement. You just turn up at the bus stop and a Forestry van will stop for you. *Sounds quite cosy and family.* Yes. And I went to this bus stop and, you know, it's not until you buy a particular brand of car and you become aware of how many of the same brand there are on the road. Well it was the same with Forestry vehicles and there were all these Forestry vehicles going past and I thought I was supposed to go out there and stop one of them. And I just had no idea of what I was supposed to do. But one of them finally did stop because it turned out there were other men that were getting picked up as well.

Such excerpts give only a taste of what the archive contains. As well as anecdotes such as these, there is much social, economic, political and personal information – evidence – of this key industry.

Further information about the project can be obtained from Hugo Manson (h.manson@abdn.ac.uk) or Mairi Stewart (mairi.stewart@uhi.ac.uk).

SCOTLAND'S HERITAGE TREES - SECURING THEIR FUTURE

Donald Rodger

Heritage Tree Legacy

Scotland is blessed with a rich legacy of 'heritage trees'. These are trees which are notable for their historical, cultural or botanical significance, or simply stand out as remarkable and important specimens. Often, they are veterans of considerable age and size; they are invariably full of character and impressive beauty, and many have historical associations and interesting stories to tell. These arboricultural treasures are living evidence of Scotland's great tradition of tree collectors, planters, foresters and arboriculturalists. 'Heritage trees' are living milestones of our natural and cultural heritage, a valuable heirloom to be handed onto future generations.

Until recently, many of Scotland's great trees were overlooked and taken for-granted. Little appeared to be known about them, let alone where they were or what condition they were in. Some were sorely neglected and at risk, whilst others have been lost altogether through ignorance and vandalism. However, the tide is turning, and interest in these senior citizens of the tree world is increasing. While various individuals with an interest in old trees have been compiling and recording information on an *ad hoc* basis for many years, it was not until relatively recently that a concerted effort was made to seek out and catalogue Scotland's heritage tree resource.

Forestry Commission Scotland, through their Treefest 2002 campaign, commissioned an inventory of Scotland's premier heritage trees. For the first time in many years this brought together a range of information on Scotland's most remarkable and exceptional specimens, and provided a valuable snapshot in time of this resource. The project culminated with the production of an illustrated book 'Heritage Trees of Scotland', which presents portraits of 140 of our most exceptional and important trees.

However, the record of our heritage tree resource is by no means comprehensive or complete, the data currently available probably only representing the tip of the iceberg. There are many more great trees still to be discovered, recognised and recorded. The Woodland Trust's recently launched 'Ancient Tree Hunt' promises to be an exciting project and which will further build on our knowledge. By directly involving the wider public in recording notable trees, this will hopefully unearth some hidden arboricultural gems.



The Kilravock Beech (Photo: D Rodger)

Threats

Heritage trees, which have existed in harmonious balance with their environment for centuries, are particularly vulnerable to changes in their surroundings or the damaging impact of man. An ancient tree which may have borne silent witness to significant events in Scotland's history can literally be destroyed in a matter of hours. Wonderful old trees continue to be lost every year. Ignorance is the greatest threat of all.

One of the biggest threats which heritage trees currently face is that of built development. With an ever-increasing demand for new housing, road construction and retail outlets, trees are coming under immense pressure. Trees can be lost completely or seriously damaged due to construction work unless special care is taken to safeguard them at the very outset. It is essential that heritage trees are identified at an early stage and afforded due recognition and protection in the planning process.

Regrettably, heritage trees also suffer from wanton vandalism, such as fire raising, bark damage and the removal of limbs, especially where there is uncontrolled public access. Hollow trees in particular seem to be highly vulnerable. At the least, this can result in cosmetic disfigurement and at worst can cause irreparable injury and reduce the life expectancy of the trees concerned.

The vulnerability of our important and ancient trees was recently brought to light in the case of the Strathleven House Oak, on the outskirts of Alexandria in Dunbartonshire. This fine veteran was only recently re-discovered, having been lost amidst a plantation of conifers for over 30 years. It turned out to be a tree of great significance and was one of the largest-girthed and oldest broadleaved trees in Scotland. However, without any proactive care or management, the mighty oak fell victim to vandals. A fire was set in the hollow interior of the trunk which weakened the ancient structure until the entire tree collapsed. The burned out shell now lies prostrate and lifeless – an ignominious end for one of Scotland's foremost heritage trees.



The Strathleven House Oak (Photo: D Rodger)

As heritage trees become more widely known, 'people pressure' can bring its own problems. The repeated trampling of feet on the sensitive root systems of some of the more popular trees can result in ground compaction, root death and decline in tree health. Public access around well-visited trees needs to be carefully managed to minimise long-term problems to tree health, while allowing optimum public viewing in a safe environment. Serious damage can also be caused by the uncontrolled trampling and grazing of livestock, as can repeated deep ploughing in the vicinity of tree root systems. Heritage trees, particularly those in rural situations, are increasingly subject to a range of pressures associated with intensive agricultural practices.

Much well-intended but very damaging work has been carried out to many heritage trees in the past, with the misguided hope of prolonging their life. This includes filling cavities with concrete, bracing with chains, propping with iron poles and excessive and unnecessary pruning. Such antiquated practices are invariably damaging to tree health, and detract from the trees' aesthetics. Modern advances in tree care now permit more

sensitive management practices which put tree health at the forefront. Carefully and thoughtfully executed, timely arboricultural intervention can prolong the life of a tree, while respecting its natural character and ‘dignity’.

The Future

Heritage trees are priceless. They are unique and irreplaceable living organisms with a value which cannot meaningfully be measured in pounds sterling. Collectively, their value to botany, culture, history and wildlife is immense. Some are as important as our stately homes and castles, yet, remarkably, there is no special protection for trees of historic significance. Any protection that does exist, such as Tree Preservation Orders, is largely coincidental and not always applicable. There is currently no system in place which recognises the value of heritage trees or affords owners with proper advice on their care and management. Scotland, with arguably the richest resource of heritage trees in Europe, has done little to record and safeguard this aspect of its living heritage.

It is only through the caring efforts of individuals, past and present, that we can enjoy these special trees today. While the majority may remain in benevolent ownership, it is not enough to assume that this will always be so. It takes only one person or incident in the life of a tree to mutilate or destroy it. It remains an anomaly that while our historical built heritage receives considerable protection, ancient heritage trees are largely unprotected and unrecognised.

The Tree Council, along with like-minded bodies such as the Ancient Tree Forum, The Woodland Trust and the Arboricultural Association, is advocating a system that will safeguard these heritage trees for future generations, as well as providing support and advice to the owners on their care. This seeks to compile a national register of trees of outstanding significance and to designate important heritage trees as ‘green monuments’. This will afford them statutory legal protection, while providing owners access to professional advice on their sensitive management.

Lobbying of the Scottish Parliament on this issue has been helpful in raising awareness and has largely met with a sympathetic response. However, the political will still appears to be lacking to take the bold step to officially recognise this aspect of the nation’s heritage and enshrine it in planning legislation.

The principle is not as extraordinary as it may seem. The value of important trees is already recognised in other European countries, such as the Czech Republic and Poland, where all heritage trees are listed on a database and accorded special legal protection and status. In addition, they are managed in a sympathetic and sensitive manner for the benefit of future generations; a small plaque located at the side of each tree identifies it as a tree of importance.

Donald Rodger is an independent arboricultural consultant. He is a Chartered Forester, a Chartered Biologist, a Chartered Environmentalist and a Fellow and Registered Consultant of the Arboricultural Association. Based in East Lothian, he works for a broad range of private and public sector clients throughout Scotland. He has a particular interest in heritage trees and is the co-author of two books on this subject: *‘Heritage Trees of Scotland’* and *‘The Heritage Trees of Britain and Northern Ireland’*.

LOCH KATRINE WOOD PASTURE SURVEY: CULTURALLY-MODIFIED TREES LINKED TO PAST SETTLEMENT IN THE LOCH KATRINE CATCHMENT

Peter Quelch

Introduction

During spring 2007 I carried out a ten-day field survey of the wood pastures and native woodlands around Loch Katrine in the heart of the Trossachs, on behalf of the Cowal and Trossachs Forest District of Forestry Commission (Scotland), who are the new managers of the site. First an overview was formed of all the woodland types around Loch Katrine, then selected areas of wood pasture were walked through to assess their character and to record features, particularly veteran trees and related archaeology. The previously coppiced and managed stands of mainly oak on the north-east shores of the loch were not covered by the survey as the intention was to focus on the widely spaced wood pastures, which occur along most of the southern shores and the north-west of the loch, including extensions westwards into Glen Gyle, and above Loch Arklet.

My report to FCS examines the ecology and history of the wood pastures, including the links to remains of past settlement and agriculture in these areas. Options for management are discussed and some recommendations are made. The report also discusses the issues of veteran tree conservation and recommends selecting a number of ‘monument’ trees for special treatment and exploring the opportunities for interpretation and public recreation. Finally, in view of the national importance of the heritage value of the wood pastures found in Loch Katrine the report makes recommendations for aspects of research and survey requiring further study.

In this talk to SWHDG I will give an overview of the type of woodlands and the features within them encountered during this survey. In particular I will concentrate on the link between the ancient wood pastures with veteran trees, many of which show signs of having once been ‘working trees’¹, and the archaeology of past settlement and farming.

Bruach wood pasture

My survey began with the Bruach wood pasture above the east end of Loch Arklet close to Stronachlachar. Immediately it became obvious that the characteristic ancient wood pastures on this site are closely linked to old settlements and man-made features, both recorded and un-recorded. There have been two archaeology surveys covering between them the whole area now managed by FCS, though I still found some smaller ruins of shieling huts and field enclosure boundaries not always recorded in those surveys. As is normal in current archaeology surveying those surveys did not record the presence of veteran worked trees, hence the need for my survey work.

Bruach has good examples of veteran worked trees in a wood pasture setting. For example there were many alder pollards, cut both low at 1m and high at about 2m. Many of these alder pollards are of massive girth (one alder at Bruach was of 4.2m girth), often with epiphytic ‘air’ trees of rowan or other species of tree growing in their hollow centres. None have been cut in recent years – the pattern over the whole catchment is that of active working of the trees having ended at least 50 years ago, though without tree-ring counts of the pollard re-growth it is not possible to be precise about when they were last cut.

Other types of veteran tree at Bruach include massive old downy birch, which display a range of typical shapes and stem forms resulting it appears from early pollarding. However in the case of birch it is clearly a very long time since they were cut, and with a lack of ageing studies to give evidence of branch or stem ages, we can say little about when, how or why they were cut. However we can record how the trees look today, note their position in the overall landscape, and compare their current forms with veteran birches on other sites.

¹ During the past year I have used the phrase ‘culturally modified trees’ to describe trees which show signs of having been actively pollarded or coppiced in the past. However since this SWHDG talk I have discussed this nomenclature with archaeologists and others and have now decided to use the term ‘working tree’ or ‘worked tree’ to describe them. The term ‘culturally modified tree’ is best reserved for carved, inscribed or decorated trees carried out for sacred, ceremonial or other traditional reasons. ‘Working tree’ is the preferred term in woodland archaeology for trees cut in traditional ways to yield useful woody products, including fuelwood, resin, bark, leaf fodder etc.

Classification of veteran trees

One of the recording techniques used in the survey was to select good example veteran trees of their type, and to measure girth, tree form type, height of any pollarding and to assign a 'Pollard Score'. Each selected tree (or sometimes group of trees) was GPS positioned, photographed and assigned a number so that it is identifiable in future. Trees were not physically tagged however. A database of 97 selected trees covering the whole range of types was presented as an appendix to the report.

The Pollard Score is an index of probability of past pollarding, being a score of from 1 to 10, with a score for example of 7 being strong evidence of past pollarding but with a long period of lapsing since active working. A score of 5 or less would be weak evidence for pollarding, also often combined with a long lapse in time. A score of 10 would be an incontrovertible pollard, probably recently carried out, and this is rarely seen in rural pollards in Scotland.

There has been a long lapse since cutting, and with a weak or non-existent folk memory of the practice, combined with poor documentary evidence², there is bound to be doubt about the reasons for cutting, or any certainty that a particular tree was indeed cut, hence the probability score. There are numerous criteria for helping recognise past working of trees, and also neutral features and counter-features which all need fair recording and weighting in coming to an assessment. The observations of veteran tree forms seen at Loch Katrine and elsewhere have helped the author create a draft classification of veteran trees, both those which have been worked and also a range of natural variants³.

Bruach wood pasture was remarkable for several unique features including the largest (girth 2.5m) single-stem hazel pollard yet seen by the author, and a derelict hazel hedge close to the unrecorded remains of an old shieling high up the slope. Another feature were the high numbers of a type of candelabra-shaped presumably pollarded birch on the slopes just above a distinct ancient enclosure of rig cultivation, which itself is adjacent to the old 'military' road from Stronachlachar to Inversnaid.



The lower edge of Bruach east wood pasture showing location of many birch pollards on the slopes above the old field system with rig, enclosing dyke, ruined buildings and old track which later became the military road to Inversnaid Garrison

² There is some documentary evidence however, and the author would like to collate every reference to rural pollarding in Scotland that can be found. The author invites readers to send him any such reference from old journals, reports of agriculture etc that they come across. In this way a pattern may emerge. Since we are dealing with a very dated and also often disparaged folk custom, pollarding and livestock fodder cutting from trees is not written about in 19th text books for agriculture. It is exactly the kind of practice that the agricultural improvers were trying to steer away from.

³ The Pollard Score as part of a Classification of worked tree form-types is being worked up by the author following this and other surveys, notably also a Historic Woodland Survey of the Old Wood of Drum carried out for NTS in autumn 2007. The draft Classification and accompanying Glossary of terms will be trialled and assessed with SWHDG members at the Woodland Archaeology Workshop at Kinlochewe in April 2008.

Bruach wood pasture is also interesting because it merges into natural woodlands on extremely rocky terrain with crags, and the obviously worked trees penetrate a little into that woodland but stop abruptly when the terrain is too difficult to access on foot. This effect has been seen elsewhere, and points to the logical conclusion that worked trees had to be accessible to pony and man. That means however physically accessible in terms of terrain, but high elevation above the glen floor was not a problem to our fit farming ancestors, neither was distance from the nearest road. Clearly much of the land around Loch Katrine, especially the southern shore, has been accessible in the past by boat rather than road.

Stonachlachar to The Dhu

Extensive open birchwoods occupy the steep south-western slopes of Loch Katrine and continue along Glen Gyle, though with large unwooded gaps near The Dhu farmhouse. Much of this area has only scattered birch and is generally declining as the older trees blow over. Indeed evidence of both past and recent windthrow was seen in the form of extensive pit and mound formations from past tree-throws⁴. These formations have probably been caused at Katrine by extensive windthrow of tall birch, rather than windthrow of pollards which tend to have a much lower centre of gravity. It is hard to say when this windthrow occurred and it would not have been all at one time. Indeed there was some severe windthrow in the birchwoods west of Stronachlachar in winter 2006/7, leaving pits of very similar dimension to the old ones.

There are also surviving fallen birches which continue to grow if their root-plate is in contact with the ground and the branches grow vertically as new trees, giving the so-called 'phoenix tree' effect. There are probably thousands of phoenix trees around Loch Katrine, many of them remarkable examples, mainly in birch but also commonly in alder, rowan, and oak.

There are many veteran birch with a high probability of having been previously pollarded, but they are scattered or clumped and do not form a characteristic wood pasture, as is found in North Glengyle for example. However a few small patches of typical birch wood pasture with pollards do exist within the larger area, usually on better soils and in sheltered flushed areas in small corries below the crags. Archaeology is not so obvious in these north-facing steep and wet slopes, but there are signs of old access tracks and occasional dykes. At least one croft site in this section of shore is now underwater, as many ruined settlement buildings were flooded when the level of Loch Katrine was raised to create a water supply for Glasgow in 1859.

North Glen Gyle to Boathouse wood pasture



View over Boathouse wood pastures looking east

⁴ The likelihood that tree-throws would probably be found in Scottish native woods was predicted in my paper to the SWHDG in 2004 (Notes IX pp 27-28), which describes pit and mound features in terms of woodland archaeology, and notes that other authors consider these a good indicator of very natural origin woodlands.

The north side of Glen Gyle is a rich wood pasture in terms of the number of veteran worked trees, the extent and scenic effect of that habitat, and the associated archaeology. In contrast to the north-facing birchwoods described above, the wood pastures on the south-facing side of Glen Gyle extending along the western half of Loch Katrine, are predominantly of alder with scattered hazel, ash, rowan and birch, with occasional oak. There are the remains of more than one settlement along this line of wood pastures and some enclosures are visible, also ruined buildings. The veteran worked trees extend high up the slopes, indeed they are alongside some high altitude meadows still in good condition, which must have been important for past farmers. The clearance cairns of these steeply sloping high pastures are still visible, indeed some have alder pollards growing on them.

One of the last trees in north-west Glengyle is a huge alder pollard (girth 4.7m) which stands beside a ruined shieling hut and an old track, well above the current farm access track. Clearly this tree is in a special position in relation to the old land use and settlements.

Similar positioning in relation to possible old settlements and enclosure dykes is evident at several other places on this section. Overall this section of wood pasture, as far as the oakwoods at Portnellan, though patchy and dispersed, contains some amazing veteran trees, many at high elevation (for example an alder pollard of 5.5m girth high in the wood pastures above the Boathouse). Some trees are truly awesome in that they seemed to predate the 'normal' type of single-stemmed alder pollard, for example one massive alder in Boathouse wood pasture (alder F7) seems to be the remains of an old coppice stool of 8.4m circumference with each cluster of stems having been pollarded. If so this would be defined as a 'coppard'⁵.

Another feature of this area is the complex network of old enclosure dykes which are not always shown on the 1st Ed OS map, nor on Roy's 1750 map. These areas would make fascinating detailed surveys of both archaeology and veteran trees. Of course better documentary evidence of previous land-use would also be invaluable in explaining where the old settlements were and how they were used. In view of the importance of Loch Katrine to the National Park in which it lies I would hope that such surveys and documentary research would receive priority funding.

South Loch Katrine

There is a scatter of native woodlands and wood pastures more or less the whole south side of the loch from Stronachlachar to the Pass of Achray. Access is poor over most of this area, the eastern part being completely un-roaded, yet containing fascinating remnants of previous crofts and farms of several ages. The centre of the area is marked on maps as the old Coille Mhor, now very open woodland in poor condition and with only occasional groups of worked veteran trees.

West of Coille Mhor near the old settlement of Culligart are some fine old pollards of alder but also oak, birch, holly, rowan and other species. There is a concentration of pollards close to an old crofting track which disappears under water near Rubha Saonach. These would be very accessible for an interpretive trail.

Interestingly the woodlands in this area have been excluded from livestock in the past and have regenerated strongly with young birch around the old pollards. They form a good example of how the character of wood pastures is lost during the regeneration phase to a more dense (yet more sustainable) woodland. This is the dilemma facing all wood pastures. The old pollards are still visible at this site, yet have lost their open wood pasture setting. Perhaps that is what must happen in many of these areas if they are to survive as woodland at all into the future? At least the old pollards are still providing a prolific source of seed.

Finally, the wooded area east of the ruined farm of Glasahoile, centrally sited on the south shore of Loch Katrine, is the most remote section yet contains some of the most fascinating woodland archaeology. Again there are several remains of old farms and field systems with the woodlands fitting into a pattern around them. The details are still to be worked out as my survey in this area was no more than a reconnaissance.

However some wonderful old trees and more oak were found in this section: low oak pollards with a strong pollard score east of the old settlement of Crantullich; magnificent open-grown mature oaks east of Rubha nam Muc, along with a most remarkable low birch pollard of 3.0m girth.

⁵ It was heartening to hear one participant during the British Ecological Society visit to Boathouse wood pastures on 14 Sept 2007 describe this tree as the most amazing he had ever seen!



Two of a group of oak pollards (I 14) close to an old settlement at Rubha nam Muc, on the south shore of Loch Katrine, east of Glasahoile Farm.

Along the very craggy land of Coire na Uruisgean were widely scattered pollards and open-grown trees of many species including crab apples, a number of hollow veteran ash with a strong pollard score, and some isolated birch pollards below the crags. The veteran ash continue into the corrie east of the Bealach nam Bo. Between the Bealach and the Pass of Achray lies another old enclosure with rig cultivation and a long-abandoned farm steading with disused access track.

The scope for further detailed survey in this area is enormous. My report flags up the presence of these veteran trees to the FCS and other stakeholders for the first time, along with suggestions for the management of this perhaps unexpectedly rich biocultural heritage. I hope one of the recommendations which will be followed up is simply that of making this heritage, both the cultural and living aspects, accessible and understandable to many of the visitors to this historic part of Scotland.

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