

Community Woodlands Project 2010

An extract from the newsletter of the Botanical Society of Scotland No.96 March 2011.

The field season of 2010 was the last opportunity to complete the fieldwork for the Community Woodlands Project, a collaborative project between the BSS and members of the [Community Woodlands Association](#) (CWA), which has been in progress since 2006. The aims of the project were set out in BSS News No. 90 and can be viewed [here](#). Four woodlands were visited in this final season, as summarised below.

Taliesin Woodland, near Castle Douglas, Kircudbrightshire (approx. centroid: NX790557)

This site is a roughly rectangular area (9.3 ha) enclosed by walls and orientated NW-SE on the SW side of the road from Castle Douglas to Auchencairn, just over 2 miles SE of Gelston village. The road separates the enclosure from mixed Forestry Commission plantations on Potterland Hill. There are coniferous plantations on the opposite hill (Screel Hill) and against the SE wall of the community woodland. Taliesin is managed by the [South West Community Woodlands Trust](#).

Inside the enclosure the low-lying ground beside the road is a former cattle meadow and is still predominantly an open area, with occasional plantings of young trees, including Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*), Gean (*Prunus avium*), Apple (*Malus domestica*), Osier (*Salix viminalis*) and a Purple Willow (*Salix purpurea*). Mixed meadow grasses, Brambles (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.), Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) and Hemlock Water Dropwort (*Oenanthe crocata*) abound in this damp meadow. A newly created pond at the SE end has some disturbed bare ground around it, in which a few plants have found footholds, including Changing Forget-me-not (*Myosotis discolor*), Common Hemp-nettle (*Galeopsis tetrahit*) and Persicaria (*Persicaria maculosa*).

The Potterland Burn separates the meadow area from the rest of the site, which rises up a slope to the SW boundary wall and forms a hillock at the NW end. Although there is historical evidence of woodland at Taliesin, especially at the NW end, much of the current woodland on the slope and the hillock is fairly recent and consists largely of mixed broad-leaved species, including Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*), Gean (*Prunus avium*), Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), Goat Willow (*Salix caprea*), Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), Wych Elm (*Ulmus glabra*), Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*). The trees have grown since the cessation of grazing in 1996/7, partly planted and partly natural. The slope is crossed diagonally by another burn which joins the Potterland Burn about halfway down the site. Established willows line both burns, especially the subspecies of the Grey Willow known as the Rusty Willow (*Salix cinerea* ssp. *oleifolia*), and in the boggy ground near the burns are extensive areas of Bog Myrtle (*Myrica gale*).

Above the upper burn the ground flora includes heathers, moorland grasses and Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), not yet in flower on the date of our visit (23rd May). A pre-existing pond near the wooden buildings at the hub of the site contains a variety of water plants including water-lilies, Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*) and Bulrush (*Typha latifolia*). A few Osiers have been planted in this area for basket-making.

Tyndrum Community Woodland, Tyndrum, Perthshire (approx. centroid: NN335292)

This extensive site (92.2 ha) stretches SE from Tyndrum to Dalrigh and lies SW of the main road (A82), which forms the hypotenuse of a very large triangle. The western boundary of the site lies next to the railway and the southern boundary is beside the rivers, R. Cononish and R. Fillan. The ground is hummocky owing to gravelly moraine features left by a retreating glacier at the end of the Ice Age and since covered by grass. The area is crossed, NW-S, by the West Highland Way and the Crom Allt. The latter joins the R. Cononish to form the R. Fillan. Much of the site used to be covered with conifers planted by the Forestry Commission but a fire destroyed the conifer plantation and, later, the land was acquired by the community. [Strathfillan Community Development Trust](#) is attempting to restore the kind of diverse native woodland that might have grown wild in Strathfillan originally. Locally obtained seed from mixed broad-leaved and coniferous species were planted around the time of the millennium. As the site is so large and was recorded in detail in 2001, we decided to focus on four sample areas for the BSS study on 2nd July. The largest of these is a roughly rectangular area sloping up from the railway to the West Highland Way and containing some of the millennium plantings. They include Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*), Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), oaks and willows, which are mostly at pole stage (or less) at present. The plantings are quite widely spaced and should have plenty of room to grow. Bog Myrtle (*Myrica gale*) grows here too. The ground flora contains moorland and bog species, e.g. Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*) and Hare's-tail Cotton-grass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*). Beside the West Highland Way are a few small plants of Slender Eyebright (*Euphrasia micrantha*). This type of ground flora extends across the West Highland Way into another of our selected sample areas, the annular area round Kettle Hole Lochan. This area is mostly open damp ground but Bog Myrtle abounds and there is a small plantation of tall larches and spruces crowded closely together at the SE edge, part of the former forestry plantation.

The two remaining sample areas selected for study are the linear area beside the road leading from the Dalrigh Car Park to the bridge over the R. Fillan and the linear riverside area between this bridge and the inflow from the Crom Allt. Both the roadside and the riverside are partly lined by established trees, mainly willows and birches. The Eared Willow (*Salix aurita*) is the commonest tree along the roadside, but the Downy Birch is commoner by the river. Shrubs include Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) and Bog Myrtle. The ground flora by the road includes wayside, grassland and moorland species, e.g. Cow Parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*), Yorkshire Fog (*Holcus lanatus*), Field Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*), Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and Lemon-scented Fern (*Oreopteris limbosperma*). By the river further moorland species, e.g. Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), are joined by woodland and wetland species, e.g. Hairy Woodrush (*Luzula pilosa*), Great Woodrush (*Luzula sylvatica*), Cuckoo Flower (*Cardamine pratensis*), Kingcup (*Caltha palustris*) and sedges. Goldenrod (*Solidago virgaurea*) grows on rocks in the river. West of the wooded part of the riverside is a more open, damp, grassy riverside area with Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) and Marsh Ragwort (*Senecio aquaticus*), which then gives way to river shingle near the inflow from the Crom Allt. Growing in the shingle there are scattered saplings of Tea-leaved Willow (*Salix phylicifolia*).

Corpach Woods, Corpach, near Fort William, Inverness-shire

The two woods comprising Corpach Woods are situated at each end of Corpach village on steeply sloping ground rising up from the Fort William-to-Mallaig road (A830) on its north side. These woods may originally have been planted many centuries ago and their interesting oral history is recounted by Donald B. MacCulloch in his book: *Romantic Lochaber, Arisaig and Morar* (Lines Publishing, Spean Bridge, 1996). The woods are currently managed by [Kilmallie Community Company](#).

Tom Giubhais (Pine Hillock, approx. centroid: NN095770)

This compact pinewood (1.92 ha), at the eastern end of Corpach, appears from a distance to be entirely composed of Scots Pines (*Pinus sylvestris*) because these trees are impressively tall and have spreading canopies, which obscure the view of anything else. However, on entering the wood, as we did on 4th July, the understorey becomes apparent. The understorey trees look younger than the Scots Pines and are mostly broad-leaved, including Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*), Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*), Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*), Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) and Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*). They are represented by several age classes from seedlings upwards. In contrast, the Scots Pines are almost all trees and mature trees and there is little evidence of regeneration. Shrubs include Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*). Ivy (*Hedera helix*), Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*) and brambles scramble amongst the understorey species. The ground flora includes woodland and acid moorland species, such as Broad Buckler Fern (*Dryopteris dilatata*), Pignut (*Conopodium majus*), Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*), Bilberry (Blaeberry, *Vaccinium myrtillus*), Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*) and Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*). There are a few garden escapes near the lower entrance to the wood, e.g. Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*) and the variegated cultivar of Yellow Archangel (*Lamium galeobdolon* ssp. *argenteum*).

Cnoc nam Faobh (Hillock of the Spoil, approx. centroid: NN085769)

This oakwood (3.75 ha), at the western end of Corpach, may once have been a pinewood. The pines are said to have been chopped down during the First World War, when there was a great need for timber to line trenches. The oaks may have been planted to replace them. Although the Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*) is regarded as the characteristic native oak in the north and west of Britain, the Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*) is the species more often planted. This may explain why the oaks here are mostly Pedunculate Oaks, a finding that surprised us at first. They are mostly trees (occasionally mature) and younger age classes are scarce. These oaks form the main body of the wood and are mostly on and around a knoll from which the wood may get its name. Other species of tree in this area are less frequent and include Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), Goat Willow (*Salix caprea*) and Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*). Shrubs include Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*), with Bog Myrtle (*Myrica gale*) on the lower damper ground. The ground flora includes woodland and acid moorland species such as Broad Buckler Fern (*Dryopteris dilatata*), Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), Chickweed Wintergreen (*Trientalis europaea*), Bilberry (Blaeberry, *Vaccinium myrtillus*) and tussocks of Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), the latter especially on the NW side of the knoll.

This large, well-wooded area curves round an open boggy, tussocky area with few trees, which lends variety to the whole woodland. The few, widely scattered trees present include Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) and Pedunculate Oak, at pole stage or younger. Shrubs are represented by Bog Myrtle (*Myrica gale*). The ground flora includes Heather (*Calluna*

vulgaris), Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Heath Spotted Orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata*), Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*) and many tussocks of Purple Moor-grass.

The top (N) end of the site is wooded but looks younger and more mixed than the main body of the wood. Trees include Ash, Downy Birch, Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*), Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), Pedunculate Oak, Sessile Oak and Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*). Shrubs include Holly and Bog Myrtle. The ground flora includes wayside, woodland, acid moorland and wetland species, such as Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), Wood Sorrel, Broad Buckler Fern, Lemon-scented Fern (*Oreopteris limbosperma*), Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*) and Marsh Violet (*Viola palustris*). At the top entrance to the wood there are a few garden escapes, e.g. Montbretia (*Crocasmia x crocosmiflora*) and the variegated cultivar of Yellow Archangel (*Lamiastrum galeobdolon* ssp. *argentatum*).

Comments

At the conclusion of the 5-year project we have learnt, from the sample of woodlands we have visited, that community woodlands are very diverse and provide rich habitats for nurturing and increasing biodiversity. Furthermore, they are being managed by enthusiastic people who care for their future. The signs are good. The disappointing aspect of the project is that so few BSS members took part. The non-participants missed a great opportunity and a treat.

Plans for publication

Once we have completed the data processing we propose to write up the project in two ways, for popular and scientific readers. Please watch this website for further information.

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