



Souter's Shop

DURING THE AUTUMN, major progress was made in cataloguing the contents of the Ballogie Souter's Shop – built in 1896 by local shoe-maker James Merchant and largely untouched since his death in the 1940s, with boxes of shoes still in the front shop and tools and materials in the back workshop. While some work on the building was held up by the bad weather, other important tasks were completed including the restoration of the souter's fine Victorian chair and a transcript of the main shop ledger.

School Wood

FURTHER PLANTING was carried out in October by pupils at the School Wood that BCT manages with Finzean Primary School.

The site incorporates Finzean's original School Wood dating from "Plant a Tree in '73" and in November, over 70 people attended an event bringing together those involved in the original and current School Wood projects, strengthening the links resulting from one third of the current pupils being children of the children who planted the trees in 1973.



From left: Rome Barclay & Sheila Harper, the teachers at Finzean in 1973 & Maureen Vernal, the current head teacher, at the School Wood in November.

Finzean Community Woods

OVER THE SUMMER, BCT completed a wide range of improvements in Finzean Community Woods – the 30 acres of native woodlands and mile of path around Finzean village that are managed by the Trust. In September, during the annual walk around the Woods to consult local residents, a list of further improvements was drawn up. As part of this, BCT is investigating the suggestion of creating a wildlife pond in the Knowes Wood.

Wildlife Projects

BCT HAS A RESPONSIBILITY to try and ensure that it conserves and enhances the wildlife and natural heritage interest of the sites that the Trust is involved in managing, while its charitable objectives also require it to encourage an interest in, and the conservation of, the parish's natural heritage more generally.

To help with this, BCT has set up a natural heritage group of over a dozen local residents with a particular interest in wildlife. The group is currently discussing the surveys and other wildlife projects that the Trust will do in 2001. If you would like to be involved, please contact: Paul Chapman, Myreside, Finzean (tel.01330.850645).



One of the pairs of Stonechats that nested in the Forest of Birse Community in 2000.

Photos by Owen Elias APFS

FE Partnership

Balfour Wood

The Scottish Executive Deputy Rural Affairs Minister, John Home Robertson MSP, visited Birse in August to sign the Balfour Wood Declaration on behalf of Scottish Ministers as owners of the 240 hectare Wood.

The Declaration endorses the 25 year Management Agreement signed by FE (Forest Enterprise) and BCT over Balfour Wood and commends it as providing a new benchmark for the type of agreements that communities can reach over FE managed woodlands.

Speaking at the occasion, the Minister said: "Birse Community Trust is to be congratulated on its innovative and imaginative approach. The Agreement will ensure Balfour Wood is managed jointly by the Trust and Forest Enterprise to maximise the economic, social and environmental benefits for the people of Birse."

In the months since and following wide local consultation, BCT and FE have agreed an Interim Management Plan for the Wood and started work on a range of tasks. The most dramatic of these has been clear felling 6 hectares of dense non-native conifers as part of improving the environment up the sides of the Burn of Allansack.



Photo by Donald Stewart

From left: Hugh Insley (FE Director, North of Scotland), Robin Callander (BCT Manager), John Home Robertson MSP (Deputy Minister of Rural Affairs) and Kevin Peace (FE Forest District Manager) during the Minister's visit in August.

Slewdrum Forest

In the late autumn, FE and BCT also agreed that the only other woodlands managed by FE in Birse parish, Slewdrum Forest (155 ha), should also be jointly managed under the same terms as Balfour Wood. The Forest has a fascinating and unusual history as a local Crown Common until the 1950s and the Trust believes there is a strong case for Slewdrum coming into local community ownership through BCT. This proposal was raised with FE's Chief Executive, Bob McIntosh, during very constructive discussions when he visited BCT in December.



Photo by Anke Addy

The forest harvester working beside the Burn of Allansack.