



BCT UPDATE

Birse Community Trust

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Slewdrum Forest

BCT has only been able to make limited progress with its management of Slewdrum Forest since becoming owner last December, because the government's forestry grant scheme remains suspended while it is being revised.

However, BCT has made progress on other fronts. As readers may recall, the plan has been for BCT to use a BCT owned subsidiary company to carry out the commercial felling in the Forest. This new company has now been established and is called the Birse Trading Company.

The terms under which BCT will lease the Forest to the Trading Company have also recently been agreed. As a result, the first felling operations are expected to take place over the winter. This will not involve the clearing felling of any areas, only the thinning of some stands.

Great North Road

Over the past months, BCT has also been inspecting and surveying the Forest to learn more about it. One of the most interesting discoveries has been a length of old military road that dates from over 200 years ago and runs through the Forest for nearly a kilometre.

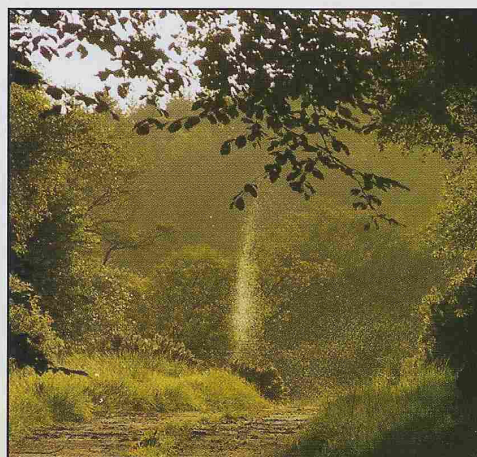
This impressive feature has a carriageway 6.5 metres wide and cambered to banks along either side. When the Forestry Commission took over the Forest from the Crown 50 years ago, they planted right over the road and no-one seems to have recognised it until recently because of the density of trees and rough terrain.

Both this length of old road and the history of Slewdrum as a Crown Common reflect the historical importance of the Shooting Greens road. It runs between the river crossings at the Feughside and Potarch Inns, both of which still have their former grazing stances beside them. This route was part of what was known as the Great North Road until well through the 19th century, as the most direct main road between Edinburgh and Inverness.

This route was marched by many armies over the centuries and Slewdrum was a strategic Crown Common on the hill between the Cairn o' Mount and River Dee crossing, as either or both of them could be impassable at times.

The Shooting Greens road therefore dates as a military road from before the 'General Wade Roads' in the first half of the 18th century. While the length of old road in Slewdrum might have been constructed in the 17th century, it went out of use in the years around 1800. At that time, this surviving length was by-passed by the sweeping curve up the hill at Coulnacraig and the level run across the top of the hill to the slope down towards the Feugh.

Work is on-going to survey the old road in more detail and trees will be carefully cleared from it during the planned thinning. It is expected that the old road will become part of the path network which BCT plans to develop in the Forest.



A swarm of Mayflies over the River Dee at Slewdrum in June.

Photo © John Forster

BCT

BCT exists "to promote the common good of the inhabitants of Birse parish and deliver wider public benefits".

Everyone on the Electoral Registers for the parish is a member of BCT and responsible for electing the Trustees who run BCT on behalf of the community.

The Trust has been in operation since 1999 and undertakes a wide range of projects on behalf of the local community. BCT's role in developing and implementing projects as a community business complements the roles of the local Community Associations and Community Councils that cover the parish.

Birse Community Trust is a company limited by guarantee and a Scottish charity (SC28220) having its Registered Office at 51 Atholl Road, Pitlochry, PH16 5BU. It is a government approved Local Rural Partnership.

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