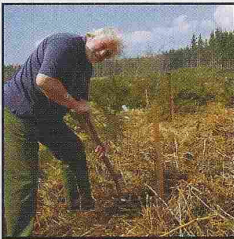


The Three Forests of Birse Parish

BCT Updates always have pictures of trees! This is a reflection of the importance of forests to both the cultural heritage of Birse parish and the origins and development of BCT.

Birse has had a history of shared or common forests since at least medieval times and for centuries they played a vital role in the life of the parish. In the First Statistical Account of the parish two hundred years ago, it was noted that four forests belonged to the parish "in property or at least by servitude". These were the Forest of Birse Commonty, the Commonty of Lendrum or Slewdrum, Glencat and Glen Aven.

This long tradition is carried forward by BCT which holds the ancient shared rights over the Forest of Birse Commonty and owns Slewdrum Forest. BCT also has the long term management agreement with Scottish Ministers over Balfour Wood, which has its own local history of common ownership and use.



Slewdrum Forest: BCT Trustee Brian Page planting a native Forest of Birse oak seedling in Slewdrum. Some other improvements are on-going at Slewdrum, but BCT is still waiting for the contract papers from FC Scotland to be able to start consulting locally on a long term Management Plan for the Forest.

BCT is therefore involved in managing three forests, one in each of the parish's three communities. BCT's aim since it started has been to reach the position where it can improve the habitat quality of each forest as native woodland, while also managing the three forests together to provide a sustainable income from timber sales to help support other sites that BCT looks after on behalf of the local community. These other sites include the unique water powered wood mills in Finzean, each over 150 years old and another major part of the parish's continuing forest heritage.

This strategic vision of the parish's three community forests supporting other important sites and local community development more generally, will only be secured if BCT can become the owner of Balfour Wood. BCT had hoped to achieve that this spring, but this has been prevented by the lack of Lottery funding. While that has been a setback, BCT remains determined to find another way to acquire the Wood. In setting off on that quest, Trustees were able to recall that it took nearly four years to secure the ancient rights over the Forest of Birse Commonty and over six years for BCT to be able to buy Slewdrum!



Commonty Pinewoods: A recent survey has shown that the area of native pine woodland in the Commonty has increased by 15% since BCT's first survey ten years ago. The expansion has all taken place by a gradual process of natural regeneration as illustrated by the photo. The woodland would have expanded by over 25% if it had not been for the destruction caused by the major wildfire in 2003. During the last ten years, BCT has supplemented the natural regeneration of the pine by planting over 15,000 native broadleaves to restore these species as part of the pinewood.



Balfour Wood: During the winter, BCT cleared the windblown sitka spruce trees beside the Church Road in Balfour. BCT and FC Scotland are now planning to improve the condition of this important path at that location.

Associate Membership

Anyone who lives outside Birse parish can support BCT by becoming an Associate Member. The subscription is £20 within the UK and £25 overseas. Membership runs for 12 months from the date of joining. Members receive BCT's newsletters, other mailings, special discounts on BCT's publications and other benefits. Please support BCT and send your subscription to BCT's office.

Donations

BCT greatly appreciates donations to support its projects. Please send donations to BCT's Office. BCT can provide a Gift Aid Declaration form for donors who are UK taxpayers. Signing the form will increase the value of the donation to the Trust. Please consider leaving the Trust a legacy in your Will.

Acknowledgements

BCT is very grateful to all who have supported the Trust's work with donations and other assistance during the last twelve months, including the following for grants: Aberdeenshire Council, Big Lottery Fund (Investing in Ideas), Cairngorms National Park Authority and Forestry Commission Scotland.

Data Protection Act. 1998

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