

THE GEARRCHOILLE

NEWSLETTER OF GEARRCHOILLE COMMUNITY WOOD ARDGAY



Issue 2

spring 2008

Has the Gearrhoille “clicked” with you?

This semi-natural woodland is beautiful - whatever the season of the year. Do you have the photo(s) that prove it?

If so, now is your chance to show the world. We are now running a photographic competition open to everyone, except professional photographers.

The aim is to find the 12 photos that best show the diversity of this community woodland throughout the year. These photos will then become the 2010 GCWA Calendar. Profits from the calendar sales will go directly into caring for the wood.

Full completion rules can be found on

www.gearrhoillecommunitywoodardgay.org.uk

Or by post from: Photo Competition,

GCWA, Balchrinch, Ardgay, IV24 3BP

Closing date: 1st March 2009



Pollarded Oak in the Gearrhoille woods

Woodland Pasture Event

In Oct 2007, Peter Quelch, former native woodland advisor for Forestry Commission Scotland, led a training event ‘Ancient Wood Pastures in Sutherland’ for the North Highland Forest Trust. One of the six sites visited was the Gearrhoille. The purpose of the event was to identify features and locations of typical previous wood pasture in the area, hopefully to be followed up by more formal surveying at a late date.

The Gearrhoille has been free from stock grazing for several decades so is woodland rather than a wood pasture, but trees still retain the structure formed by past events. Of particular note were trees (oaks and birch) growing on the earth banks of the drove road and the old dykes which run through the wood. There are stools of downy birch, a ‘very authentic oak pollard’ and the remains of a hazel hedge, which probably runs along an old field boundary.

Peter’s complete diary will be available on our website.

Also in this issue:

- Environmental Audit update
- 2007 Fun Day report

Fun Day – November 2007

Halloween tales, music from wood, dyes & yarns from plants and painted lanterns were all ingredients of our last Fun Day, which took place in November. The day started with Henry Fossbrooke, from Milton Community Wood setting up his 10ft xylophone in the hall in Ardgay. He was ably accompanied by his son Corin on the guitar and joined by others who were delighted by the tuneful sounds that could be made banging bits of wood together! Mairi Munro organised a lantern competition, where children were invited to paint a glass jar to hold a burning tealight; and we again had our 'Tree of ideas', which this time was a fallen branch of beech, where ideas for future events or features in the Gearrhoille could be attached.

Martin Watsman was our storyteller, bringing his skills to bear on some spine-chilling Hallowe'en tales. Lunch was soup & rolls served up with great panache by Margaret Ross, Heatherlea (where does she get so many yummy recipes?). Frank van Duivenbode led us on a walk through the Gearrhoille, stopping to examine some of the many interesting specimens in the wood. As usual, there was much discussion about the possible age and past management of the oak trees.



Henry & co. playing

On our return to the hall, Sandie Beck had set up her exhibition of dye samples and gave a short talk about the use of plants to provide both material for yarns & dyes to colour these. The focus was on plants, which could be grown locally, but included some richer hues from more exotic climes. There was particular interest shown in the fibre produced from nettles, which was wonderfully soft.

The day was a great success, however numbers attending were not as great as we had hoped, especially considering the quality of the events.

If you have any suggestions for activities for the 2008 Fun Day why not email us at: -

gewardgay@btinternet.com

Can we help you - by you helping us?

Visitors to the Gearrhoille Wood come in all shapes and sizes, young and old; male and female; local resident and from further afield. All of these people are your potential customers if you run a business in the Highland area.

Many of these visitors come to the woodland by car which, of course, they leave in the car park. This is an ideal opportunity for us to bring your business to their attention with your well-designed advert on a strategically placed notice board.

It is far from the GCWA directors' intentions for the car park to be overwhelmed with notices, but financial pressures dictate a pragmatic approach to fundraising and it is felt that one or two, of good quality, would not be detrimental to the ambiance of the woodland.

So if the prospect of us helping you promote your business interests you, and you would like to show some financial support to your community wood, please contact any director, email us or write to The GCWA, Balchrinch, Ardgay, IV24 3BP and let's talk.

The Environmental Audit is now complete

The work was co-ordinated by John Parrott of Scottish Native Woods with Awards for All grant monies. He had these very encouraging words to say about the overall 'health' of the woodland.

“Gearrhoille is a highly valuable site for biodiversity and amenity.

Given its relatively small size, this native woodland remnant has a remarkable variety of habitats. The abundance of aspen is especially important for the contribution it makes to biodiversity and landscape.

The historic features of the site, such as the drove road, curling pond and oak pollards, are evidence of a rich and varied cultural past worthy of further study.

The site's diversity, together with the access facilities which have been developed, provide a high quality environment for public recreation.”

Some of the work of the audit was contracted out to Piers Voysey, David McAllister and Ruth Maier.

David did a survey of the groundwater & the amphibians, which will enable us to monitor the effect of the planned wildlife pond. We have always thought of the Gearrhoille as a fairly wet sort of place, but this was not what was found in Spring 2007, when there was only one small area of standing water, and that was a blocked drain that we were going to clear!

Ruth Maier did an NVC survey of the whole area and produced a species list for the flora present in the Gearrhoille.

Piers gathered further available information about the wood and its environs and John collated all the strands, resulting in suggestions for the future management of the wood

The aim of future management of the wood was summarised as follows :-

To conserve and enhance the biodiversity, cultural and recreational values of Gearrhoille Community Wood

To this end, several suggestions were put forward, which together form the Management Plan for the next few years, these include:

- Plan and implement path improvements
- Record the curling pond
- With a suitably experienced contractor, plan, peg out and implement pond excavation
- Investigate further surveying and biological recording.
- Assess current provision of nest-boxes, and consider erecting further boxes.
- Use tree shelters to protect 20 saplings each year to protect from grazing animals
- Seek advice on management of pollards.
- Thin a total area of 0.4ha of birch thicket over a 3 year period.
- Remove birch trees to release shaded juniper.
- Commission field surveys of archaeology and woodland management heritage

If you would like to read the complete Environmental Audit & Management Plan, together with Ruth Maier's NVC survey, David McAllister's Amphibian survey & all the maps they are available on our website at: -

www.gearrhoillecommunitywoodardgay.org.uk

History of the Gerrarchoille as a Community Wood

1988 - Group set up by Community Council to lease area of woodland from Balnagowan estates for 20 years. Path marked out, bridges and stiles constructed. Problems with area of lease. Lease lapsed.

2001/2 - Community council again express an interest in leasing the wood. Discussions with Balnagowan Estates result in the woodland being gifted to the community. Open day in the wood. Public opinion canvassed. People invited to register an interest in being involved in further developments regarding the wood.

Spring 2003 - Public Meetings held in the hall. A steering committee recruited to take forward the process of forming a charitable company limited by guarantee to take ownership of

the woodland from Balnagowan.

Autumn 2003 - All abilities path constructed as far as the curling pond. Ground beyond that too boggy to construct path at that spec.

Spring 2004 - Formal Incorporation of company

Summer 2004 - kissing gates replace stiles on access path across the Oakwood Place field.

Spring 2005 - car park constructed at the start of the All Abilities path. Company's Charitable status confirmed.

Summer 2005 - suggestion sheets circulated. With collection boxes in the village. It was decided to be delay action on other proposals until an environmental audit was completed.

Spring 2008 - Management plan now under discussion.

A WALK WITH HOOCH

I love walking in the woods with Hooch my Granny and Grandpa's dog, my sister called Natalie and mum Brenda. It is so much fun in the woods when I go there walking. Last time I went it was really muddy.

I like the nature and the birds that sing. I love the way they tweet.

My favourite is the way the trees sway in the breeze.

Katherine age 7

I love walking in the wood near my Granny & Grandpa's house. We go there when we come up to visit them in Ardgay. It is so much fun because it has lots of interesting trees, bridges and animals. The woods are enjoyable. Hooch enjoys walking in them too.

Natalie age 9

Membership details

Adult member with full voting rights	£2
Family membership (2 votes)	£4
Junior membership (non-voting)	50p
Associate (non-voting)	£1
[persons residing outside The Highland Council area]	
Group membership	£5

There is a membership form enclosed with this newsletter.

Membership runs for a year from the AGM.

AGM 2008

May 29th in Ardgay Hall

At 7pm

The guest speaker

Will be

Mr. David McAllister

Everyone welcome



The Gerrarchoille Community Wood Ardgay is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. It was set up to take ownership of the 33 acres of Gerrarchoille woodland, on the south side of Ardgay, which was gifted to the Community by Balnagowan Estates. There are still some legal formalities in progress, but we wish to thank the Estate for their continuing support.