

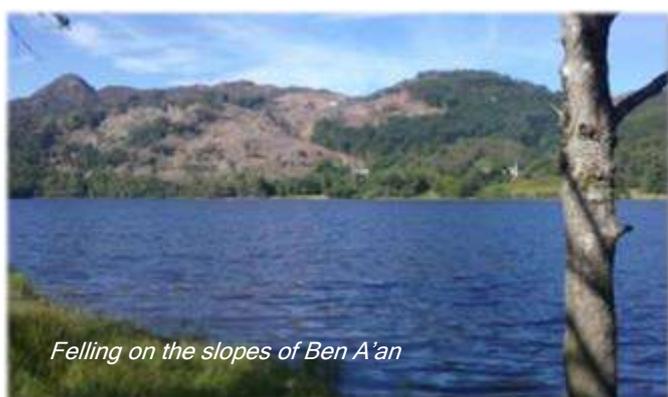
The Great Trossachs Forest National Nature Reserve in 2016

The Great Trossachs Forest National Nature Reserve is one of the most significant woodland regeneration projects to take place in the UK for a generation. It covers 16,500 hectares, an area the size of Glasgow, between Loch Lomond and Callander in the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park. The Great Trossachs Forest is a partnership project between BP, Forestry Commission Scotland, RSPB Scotland and The Woodland Trust Scotland.

The following outlines a summary of the work undertaken by partners during 2016 to help deliver the aims and vision of The Great Trossachs Forest National Nature Reserve.

1) Habitat Management

To create a forest landscape large enough to support a dynamic and functional ecosystem which expands and contracts over time allowing as many habitats and species as possible to adapt and move in response to climate change.



During 2016 the current phase of felling the conifers on the slopes of Ben A'an was completed and the hill path was re-opened to the public. Planting of a new native woodland on this slope will start in early 2017 as will planting alongside The Great Trossachs Path at Milton. This year, where required, top up and replacement planting has also continued across the National Nature Reserve including the planting of shrubby plants at south Loch Katrine. These plants including hawthorn, will ultimately help to improve biodiversity and the structure of our connected woodlands.

This year a new habitat has also been created by a small army of volunteers and partners. In conjunction with Highland Birchwoods, as part of their Mountain Woodland Project, 8,000 montane specialist trees were planted on the high ground between Primrose Hill, Loch Katrine and the Groddach, Glen Finglas. Montane woodlands are the shrubby plants on hill sides in between lower ground woodlands and open hill/ moorland habitats. Predominant species found are usually dwarf birch and a range of shrub willows which all grow into small shrubs less than 2 metres in height.

Volunteers have also been out at one of our three sites which is managed for the Pearl-bordered Fritillary butterfly. Birch seedlings were removed in order for the glade of wild flowers to continue to develop with the hope of a positive sighting of the butterfly next year.



In the early summer a group of lichenologists and willing volunteers got together to hunt for an exceedingly rare lichen, *Pseudocyphellaria lacerata* (Inversnaid is one of two sites in the UK where it has been found). It was not found but we did find a number of other rare species including *Pseudocyphellaria intricata* and *Norvegica*.

As ever, non-native removal continues as does our conservation grazing and habitat improvement works. Loch Lomond and the Trossachs Countryside Trust continue to remove *Rhododendron ponticum* around Stronachlachar and surveys are being undertaken in the wider area to assess the extent of this invasive.

The conservation grazing work being undertaken at Loch Katrine featured on the Radio 4 show 'On your farm' in November this year.

2) People Engagement

To become a renowned focal point offering a high quality visitor experience within the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park and a key destination attracting visitors from the UK and overseas benefiting local communities both socially and economically

The two visitor gateways hosted a range of very diverse events during 2016 including the annual Easter egg assault course and autumn Lantern event at Glen Finglas and a sound artist installation at Inversnaid. Taking inspiration from the woodlands at Inversnaid, sound artist Luca installed a sound trail along the upland trail to inspire and provoke thought and discussion amongst attendees.

We also hosted a wide range of on-site tours including delegates from China, the Glasgow Tree Lovers and Natural History Society, Royal Biological Society, National Trust for Scotland, SNH and the Royal Scottish Forestry Society. 2016 marked the 20th year of Woodland Trust ownership of Glen Finglas and this anniversary was celebrated with two events for supporters of the Woodland Trust.



Stop, look & listen



Searching for Rob Roy at Inversnaid

In October we hosted an archaeology day at Inversnaid led by a local, and very knowledgeable, archaeologist. The event highlighted that there is a lot more to discover on-site, and thanks to the Garrison and military maps we have a unique opportunity to map a landscape. Discussions have now started with Clan Gregor and archaeological charity Northlight Heritage to plan a funded project for the future.

The archaeological event had the largest number of attendees for any event held at Inversnaid. It is just one example of what staff are now regularly observing- a changing profile of visitors. Long distance walkers, young families, people with

special interests are all visiting parts of The Great Trossachs Forest NNR and the new facilities are helping us interact with them and they have a more rewarding experience. In recognition of this, overflow parking facilities were built at the Lendrick Hill car park to meet increase demand as a result of the natural play trail, path network and the Glen Finglas Visitor Gateway.

Some paths in the National Nature Reserve have had an upgrade thanks to the lottery funded Mountain and the People project. The storm battered art and literature panels have been replaced and volunteers who have never visited the area before were out- not getting lost- along The Great Trossachs Path ensuring that all our waymarking is sufficient.

Our facilities and work were shortlisted for two awards during 2016- National Lottery Awards and the Nature of Scotland Awards -Innovation category (for The Great Trossachs App and Virtual Tour of the Trossachs). We unfortunately did not win this time. However work continues to develop our digital products to make them even better for 2017.

3) Life-long learning

To involve schools, universities, research institutes and volunteers providing opportunities for people to learn about cultural and historical landscapes, forest ecosystems, sustainable land management, climate change, biodiversity and wildlife.

More 300 days of volunteering have been carried out within The Great Trossachs Forest NNR this year. This enormous achievement includes those who have helped us plant our new montane habitat, helped out at the Visitor Gateway or at events, or undertook some conservation volunteering. Conservation volunteers have pulled out bracken, maintained paths, cut back invasives, repaired boat houses and cleared vegetation back from archaeological sites. Volunteers have also been surveying by helping to survey the tree regeneration at Glen Finglas, the path network, or our visitors (to calibrate our people counters) or helped us hunt for some of our rarer wildlife. This programme of volunteering is set to continue in 2017.



Volunteers pulling out bracken



Results of the efforts

This year we also continued to support outdoor learning as part of the National 4's and 5's Curriculum for Excellence. Schools were out conducting river and glaciation studies. Pupils from McLaren High School were also out on-site as part of their rural skills subject or as part of the National Park led Junior Rangers programme. The annual Woodland Discovery Days around Little Druim Wood were well attended and really enjoyed by local primary school children. One school enjoyed it so much they sent in a wealth of thank you letters.

This year we had two interns helping us deliver aspects of The Gateways HLF project. Jenifer, a marketing graduate, helped us with some of the promotional aspects of The Great Trossachs Path and Kim created some fantastic sound pieces for our sound store along the natural play and sculpture trail- worth a visit!

Talks about The Great Trossachs Forest NNR have also been given to interest groups in the wider area. These talks are a great opportunity for people to find out more, ask specific questions and give us feedback.

A number of PhD projects are being undertaken across the NNR with a growing number at Glen Finglas using the plots created by the James Hutton Institute. We are getting increasing numbers of requests for people to study aspects of The Great Trossachs Forest as part of their academic studies- from school work, university dissertations and even authors. Many of the university requests have been from European universities.



Kim testing out the sound store

4) Partnership Working

To be a flagship partner project setting an example and encouraging other land managers to work across boundaries to benefit wildlife and people

This year we were fortunate to be shortlisted for two awards: the National Lottery Awards (environment category) and the Nature of Scotland Awards (innovation category). Whilst we were unsuccessful, both awards resulted in some fantastic publicity for various aspects of our work. The Nature of Scotland Awards also enabled us to thank our app volunteer at the awards dinner.



Enjoying the Nature of Scotland Awards

2017 marks the final year of our HLF funded project- The Gateways Project. During 2016 and into 2017, the Steering Group continues to discuss the legacy of The Great Trossachs Forest- what we have achieved so far and what we would still like to achieve. A full evaluation of the first 10 years of The Great Trossachs Forest will be published late next year along with plans for the future and plans for a celebration party!



Learning about the new byelaws

This year's partner outing focussed on the forthcoming camping byelaws. A range of partner staff had a very informative afternoon visiting two sites which will form part of the byelaw area when they come into force in March 2017.

The positive promotion associated with becoming a National Nature Reserve continues in relation to magazine articles, on-site tours and national recognition. This year, The Great Trossachs Path has featured as a recommended walk in national newspapers and magazines continue to promote aspects of our work.

Thanks to Dave Anderson's work with golden eagles, The Great Trossachs Forest featured on this year's Springwatch (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03x4yst>). We received lots of positive comments about the feature via social media and a great boost on our website.

- website www.thegreattrossachsforest.co.uk
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The new hosts of Springwatch???