

Friends of the **Ochils**

January 2021 Newsletter



Chair's report by Stuart Dean

After a considerable period of time, I am delighted that we are now able to publish another edition of the Friends of the Ochils (FOTO) Newsletter. I am extremely grateful to all those who have contributed articles and to Committee member, Chris Bowness for the work he has undertaken as editor. I trust that you find the articles both interesting and informative.

They illustrate many aspects of the Ochils from the issues that FOTO continually has addressed in order to ensure that the hill range is protected from developments which detract from the attractiveness of the landscape, through to dealing with developments such as footpath erosion which results from the welcomed increase in the number of visitors to the Ochils.

David Scott writes about the significant work undertaken on Beauly Denny mitigation, in particular, the path improvements on Dumyat and around the Cocksburn Reservoir

whilst Drew Jamieson focusses on the problems associated with the somewhat fractured approach to the management of the Ochils by the various authorities and organisations that are involved with the hill range.

Alistair Godfrey brings his professional expertise to bear on the impact of increased tree planting in the Ochils, particularly that of Sitka Spruce, whilst Malcolm Best illustrates just what can be achieved when a local community comes together to tackle a significant engineering problem.

And, of course, we all have our own memories of the Ochils, some which go back many years. Ken Lawson's piece shows just what changes have taken place in mountain rescue with his account of a rescue in 1965.

I trust that you enjoy reading the Newsletter. Please feel free to get back to any of the Committee if there are matters that you would want to discuss further, perhaps to the point where you might want to contribute to future editions of the Newsletter.

In this edition:

- BD Mitigation update
- Working together for the hills
- New Book published
- The Disappearing Ochils
- Glendevon Footbridge
- Dramatic 1965 Rescue
- From our Facebook page
- FOTO information

BD Mitigation Update by David Scott

It is now five years since the Beauly-Denny (B-D) powerline was energised (2015), and some two years since the visual mitigation works were completed (2018). Measures that particularly concerned the Friends of the Ochils (FOTO) included the improvement of the paths around Cocksburn reservoir and on Dumyat, restoration of the drystane walling along the Sheriffmuir Road, and the planting of specimen trees in specific locations along the same road. This is a short commentary on the status, in particular, of the paths some 2 years after completion.

With regard to the design of the paths, FOTO originally argued for a “light touch” approach, with relatively narrow paths using large stones put in place mainly by hand to minimise erosion, as is more commonly seen in upland areas. The design eventually adopted was up to 2m wide and constructed largely by machine using imported aggregates laid on a membrane. However, last minute consultations with the user community resulted in some of the sections being modified or left alone.

In one important respect the paths have had a great impact: the number of people using them has increased dramatically, both around the reservoir and on the hill. This was evident in 2019 after the paths were completed and even more so during 2020 when the pandemic encouraged greater outdoor activity. Anyone who has braved the summit of Dumyat on a Sunday afternoon even during inclement weather will often find numerous parties enjoying a picnic. The hill path is well used by individuals, family groups, dog walkers, and mountain bikers (Figures 1-5).

A survey carried out before the B-D line was installed estimated that the number of people visiting Dumyat was in the region of 40,000 per year. It is surely well in excess of this now, with significant implications for the maintenance of the path in the future.



Fig 1. On busy days, both car parks are full and verges are used.



Fig 2. The hill path attracts a variety of users.



Fig 3. Erosion caused by heavy usage has been reduced.



Fig 4. Dog walkers on a stretch of stone pitching on a steeper section. Note biker’s path to right

Given the concerns of FOTO regarding the design of the paths, it is a moot point whether the relatively wide path actually constructed has contributed to the greater numbers of people using it or whether they would have done so anyway and the wider path has simply helped to accommodate them.

As well as the number of people using the paths, the other major factor affecting them has been the weather - in particular, heavy rainfall during November 2018 shortly after construction. On the hill, a number of the water bars have filled in with surface aggregate washed down by the rainwater (Fig 6), and in places the surface has been washed away to reveal the membrane used during path construction (Fig 7).

On those parts of the hill not subject to a new path, issues with braiding i.e. the creation of multiple parallel paths, still remain (Fig 8). However, most of the previously boggy sections have successfully been crossed and the culverts installed are operating effectively. Where stone pitching has been adopted on steeper sections towards the beginning of the path, these have been well used although new paths have evolved alongside made by mountain bikes seeking to avoid the pitching.

With regard to the paths around Cocksburn reservoir, arguably these have been more successful than those on the hill, being less subject to erosion. One exception was a mini cloudburst in 2019 close to the reservoir resulting in the bridge over the inlet burn being washed away. It is now languishing close to the dam, and the burn which was once crossed by a plank now requires an agile leap! The path is very well used, particularly by dog walkers, with access taken both from the Dumyat car park and the Pendreich road. Easier access is a mixed blessing, with increased litter and dog fouling, including discarded poo bags, an ongoing issue. Disturbance of wildlife should also be mentioned.



Fig 5. A family enjoying a picnic on Dumyat summit.



Fig 6. A water bar blocked with surface aggregate after heavy rain.



Fig 7. Path surface washed away to reveal underlying membrane.



Fig 8. Braiding of path on an untouched section.

In contrast to the hill paths, the reservoir paths have “grown in” significantly at the edges since construction. Where the originally constructed paths were up to 2m wide, they now appear in certain seasons to be 1m or less due to overhanging grasses, which could easily pass for so-called “prairie planting” in a garden context (Fig 9).

The other visual mitigation measures of concern to FOTO included the drystane walling along the Sheriffmuir road and the planting of specimen trees in strategic locations (Fig 10). These appear to have been completed to a good standard and do help to draw the eye away from the visual intrusion of the pylons.

Given the heavy footfall on both the Dumyat and Cocksburn paths, and the impact of heavy rainfall on the hill paths especially, there is clearly a need for a long-term maintenance plan. This has always been argued for by FOTO throughout the various consultations. The Dumyat path and part of the Cocksburn path are designated core paths but although Stirling Council has certain powers to influence the management of such paths, this does not extend to the funding of maintenance especially on land not owned by the Council.

One option for the long-term maintenance of the path could involve volunteers being trained in path maintenance techniques. FOTO has raised the issue of maintenance and the need to replace the bridge with the Council.



Fig 9. Cocksburn path showing how vegetation can grow in to soften path verges.



Fig 10. In the foreground, restored drystane walling. The specimen trees behind will in due course grow up to provide a distraction from the pylons.

Stop Press: Ochils Peat Restoration project

As you will see in the Annual Report 2019-20, FOTO is very much involved in on-going efforts to secure an agreement for a peatland restoration project in the Ochils. It is very much hoped that such a project will be finalised and large areas of dried out and degraded peat can be restored. Not only does restored peat help to remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere but it improves water quality, reduces flood risk and provides important habitats. More detail will be provided in due course but information on peat restoration is obtainable, for example, on the NatureScot website (www.nature.scot) and on the FOTO Facebook page.

Working together for the Ochil Hills

by Drew Jamieson

Throughout its existence, Friends of the Ochils has been frustrated by the difficulty of dealing with multiple authorities and agencies in its aim of “protecting, conserving and promoting the natural beauty of the entire Ochils”.

Since June 2019, Friends of the Ochils has been participating in discussions, together with Scottish Natural Heritage and others, about the future of the upland areas of Central Scotland and how best to promote their conservation, economy and resilience to climate change.

Five main hill-ranges can be identified in and around Scotland’s Central Belt. Parts of three of them - Pentland Hills, Lomond Hills and Renfrew Heights - are designated as Regional Parks. The two others - Ochil Hills and Campsie Fells - have no formal unifying mechanism.

Since their foundation in the 1980s, the Regional Parks have lost funding and staffing and are becoming unsustainable. Over recent years all the uplands have faced new challenges of climate change, unsustainable hill-farming, flood risk and loss of biodiversity. Questions are now being asked whether there is a future for Regional Parks - or whether there is some other mechanism which better addresses the current challenges of the uplands.

A number of other options for achieving better coordination across the uplands include:

- **Local Landscape Areas**

Local planning authorities can designate Local Landscape Areas to:

- safeguard and enhance the character and quality of landscapes which are important or particularly valued locally or regionally, or
- promote understanding and awareness of the distinctive character and special qualities of local landscapes, or

- safeguard and promote important settings for outdoor recreation and tourism locally.

All three local authorities have already designated most of the Ochils as Local Landscape Areas but there is no common set of actions to implement them.

- **Non-Statutory Forums (or Fora?)**

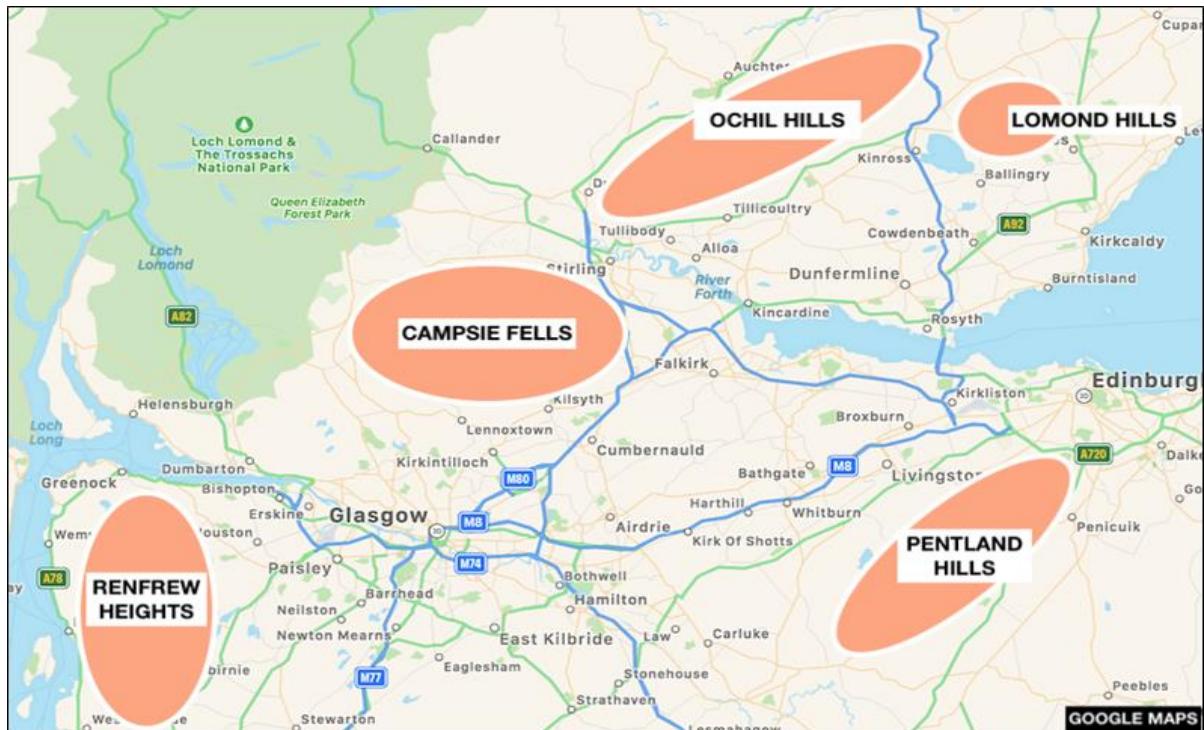
A number of areas of Scotland have already developed landscape-scale partnerships or forums - voluntary groupings of agencies and landowners working together to achieve common objectives and funding. The Tweed Forum comprises a broad membership of both statutory and non-statutory bodies, organisations and individuals with an interest in the sustainable management of the Tweed catchment. A considerable number of environmental projects have been initiated and completed.

- **Regional Land Use Partnerships.**

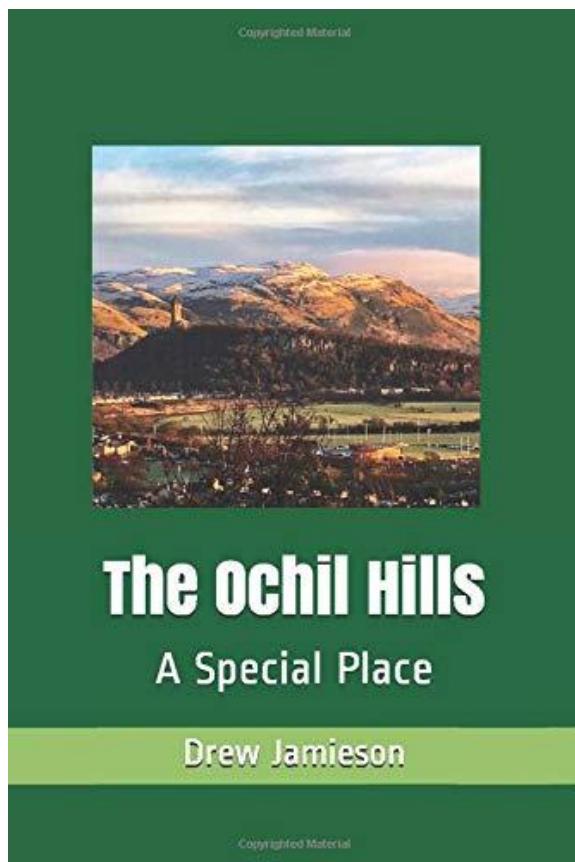
The second Scottish Land Use Strategy (2016-2021) contains policies for Regional Land Use Partnerships and Regional Land Use Frameworks - as well as a proposal for a ‘Strategic Vision for the Uplands’. These are new and developing areas, not making much progress at present, but all three proposals could help to achieve better coordination in planning and management of the uplands.

“The Hills of Home”

All five main upland areas of Central Scotland - Pentlands, Lomonds, Ochils, Campsies and Renfrew Heights - “The Hills of Home” - share similar challenges and opportunities for conservation and management. There may not be one common structure which fits all of them but there could be many benefits in having some mechanism to achieve some common vision for the uplands of Central Scotland - including the Ochil Hills.



The Uplands of Central Scotland - “The Hills of Home”



New book on the Ochil Hills

The Ochil Hills are a “Special Place”. They dominate the northern horizon of the Central Belt of Scotland and provide a scenic gateway into Perth and Kinross. They stand proud above the surrounding lowlands reaching the highest point in Central Scotland - Ben Cleuch. Why are the Ochils a “Special Place”? In a series of detailed chapters, this book draws on authoritative research to describe the many facets of this much-loved landscape.

The Ochils are “The High Place” of the distant Celts. They are also - An Ancient Place; A Place for Nature; A Place for Work; A Place of History; A Place to Enjoy; An Inspiring Place; A Place of Communities. But the Ochils are also a Place of Change. This book highlights some of the challenges and suggests some opportunities for the numerous agencies and stakeholders to work together to create a special vision for this “Special Place”.

Available on [Amazon](#)

The disappearing Ochils by Alistair Godfrey

The Ochils have long provided access to travellers; from Highlands drovers driving their cattle on drove roads through the glens to the Falkirk Tryst, to ramblers and walkers who have criss-crossed open countryside and enjoyed magnificent views from the tops. One drove route mentioned by A. R. B. Haldane is Coulhill in the introduction to his book *The Drove Roads of Scotland* (1952/1997). Coulhill and its burns occupy a chapter in the reminiscence of his youthful fishing haunts, beautifully described and illustrated in *The Path By The Water* (1944).

The Ochils are also an area of economic activity, an area of hill farming for centuries, providing pastures for sheep mostly, but also for cattle.

The OS One Inch Popular series, *Sheet 63 - Perth & Strath Earn*, surveyed 1924-26 with later corrections and published in 1946 and the equivalent *Sheet 67 - Stirling & Dunfermline* show no tree cover on the Ochils except in parts of some glens. These maps are on the National Library of Scotland website; [<https://maps.nls.uk/view/91527191>] and [<https://maps.nls.uk/view/91527242>]

Sheet 55 - Perth and Alloa in the One-inch to the mile 7th Series published 11 years later shows little change, except for the establishment of Glen Devon Forest north of Glendevon [<https://maps.nls.uk/view/91553694>].

Almost 50% of the Ochils east of the B943 Dunning to Yetts o' Muckhart road is now plantation, mostly Sitka Spruce (*Picea sitchensis*). In contrast, some older broadleaves have been retained and there is an inspiring design of recent planting west and south of Struie Hill, unlike the unrelenting rows of Sitka.

Plantations are established off the main axis of Glen Devon, the largest at Glen Sherup. Glen Devon Forest has expanded and all are closely spaced conifer except for the woodlands of the Woodland Trust.

The Trust has provided an inspiring planting around Ben Shee that includes conifers and its new woodlands cover part of Glen Quey and Geordie's Wood below Auchlinsky Hill. The contrast between the forest designs could not be greater.

Recent expansion has taken place on the west side of the Ochils at Glen Tye and to the south, the 1,005ha establishment on Jerah, from Menstrie up to the lower slopes of Blairdenon Hill. Details of these and other plantings are provided in the table on the next page. The figures for Jerah are derived from a Tilhill Forestry information leaflet. Sitka comprises 61% of the productive conifer.

The reasons for these changes are driven by economic, demographic, climatic and political pressures, as land changes have been for millennia. Change is inevitable, but is this current change for better or for worse?

J. A. Symon describes the vicissitudes of hill farming in *Scottish Farming Past And Present* (1959). Farmers had been faced with depressed prices for sheep and wool prior to the introduction of subsidies in 1941. Despite the provision of subsidies over following decades, hill farming provided only a marginal living. This has led to a trend in the Ochils for farms to be sold and turned over to forestry or farms converted from animal rearing to forestry. The majority planting has been Sitka and remains the dominant species in new plantings.

Forestry is now driven by Scottish Ministers and the *Scotland's Forestry Strategy » 2019–2029* [<https://forestry.gov.scot/forestry-strategy>] largely for economic benefit, but also promoted for helping to combat climate change, for biodiversity and health benefits. Funding support is provided under the Forest Grant Scheme [<https://forestry.gov.scot/support-regulations/forestry-grants>] which continues to provide diverse benefits and is currently administered by Scottish Forestry. The Woodland Creation scheme that is part of this

funding arrangement is the fundamental driver for change in the Ochils at present. This scheme is subsidised considerably by the taxpayer.

The following data have been drawn from pages on the website of Scottish Forestry, excluding Jerah. These are woodland creation schemes within the Ochils which have been approved in the last three years. Jerah was approved a little earlier.

Area measurements provided by Scottish Forestry are only for conifer; broadleaf in mixed conifer cover is not provided, the extent of broadleaf cover is only provided where shown separately. These reflect the data on the website.

The majority of the planting is Sitka Spruce. Measurements for conifers where more than one species has been included in a planting are not provided separately.

Distribution of broadleaves tend to be around the fringes of the larger conifer blocks and are much smaller in proportion to the areas of conifer. In terms of design, the addition of broadleaves appears to be more of an afterthought than part of an integrated design, demonstrating little progress in the last 40 years.

There is an obvious strategy in linking new conifer blocks to existing ones, which is particularly noticeable, but not exclusively, to the east of the B943 Dunning to Yetts o' Muckhart road. The vista east of the road is dominated by unrelenting conifer, most of which is Sitka Spruce.

Current concern is the lack of any apparent strategic plan based on a study and assessment of different types of land use to identify the capacity and locations for new planting to provide a balance that will incorporate the needs of all land uses.

Woodland Type	Ha	Location	Grid ref.
Spruces, Douglas Fir, Scots Pine	693.45	Jerah	NS838992
Native and other broadleaves	211.05	Jerah	NS838992
Unplanted open ground	100.50	Jerah	NS838992
Spruces, Sc. Pine & native broadleaves	306.99	Carim	NN854053
Sitka Spruce & Scots Pine	45.65	Linns Woodland (Glen Tye)	NN814010
Native broadleaves	9.95	Linns Woodland (Glen Tye)	NN814010
Sitka Spruce & Scots Pine	83.79	Frandy	NN928029
Native broadleaves	30.73	Frandy	NN928029
Spruces, Sc. Pine & native broadleaves	19.71	Keltie Estate	NO004124
Conifer	426.49	Keltie & Knowes	NO007107
Norway & Sitka Spruce	9.19	Knowehead	NO034095
Conifer	40.57	Glenearn	NO101148
Sitka Spruce, Larch & native broadleaves	50.00	Wester Gatherleys	NO042117
Sitka Spruce & native broadleaves	97.42	Tillyrie	NO099084
Conifer	62.47	Lower Warroch	NO057048
Norway Spruce & Scots Pine	55.16	White Creich Hill	NN994060
Native broadleaves	12.59	White Creich Hill	NN994060
Sitka Spruce, Sc. Pine & native broadleaves	216.95	Earnieside (Mellock Hill)	NO021058
Sitka Sp., mixed conifers & native broadleaves	142.61	Fossoway (Lendrick) Hill	NO013033
Conifer	56.20	Arndean, Muckhart	NS994992
Broadleaf	0.48	Arndean, Muckhart	NS994992
Total planting	2,571.45		

Table: recent woodland creation schemes in the Ochil Hills

Economic opportunities are the present driver without any widely recognised plan or selection procedure as to which land is deemed the most suitable to satisfy the widest range of criteria. Perth And Kinross Council's updated its *Forest & Woodland Strategy 2014-2024* [<https://www.pkc.gov.uk/lkp2trees>] which aims to "provide a strategic framework for the development of forestry in Perth and Kinross." The Strategy does not indicate actual areas where new forestry would be appropriate or inappropriate, instead it refers to guidance from Scottish Forestry and the UK Forestry Standard. In relation to *Guiding the Location of New Woodlands* the Strategy states: *Research by Forest Research and the James Hutton Institute indicates that 128,818 hectares (around 25% of the land area) in Perth and Kinross are potentially suitable for woodland taking into account biological and land use constraints (such as non-woodland designated sites, blanket bogs, priority areas for heathlands, landscape sensitive areas and archaeologically sensitive areas).* The material from this research is not identified, not provided, nor mapped specifically. There is some clarity, but overall, there are no strategic directions.

Perth and Kinross Council has updated supplementary guidance on Landscape [<https://www.pkc.gov.uk/lkp2landscape>] 5.10 *Ochil Hills* is one of the eleven special areas mentioned on its website with reference to the guidance. "It also provides further advice on the implementation of Local Development Plan Policy 39: Landscape within the 11 Special Landscape Areas and will help to bring forward land management initiatives to protect and enhance these areas." The guidance lists the *Special Qualities* of the area. Anyone expecting these two strategies to be linked to provide a coherent delivery will be disappointed. Both sets of guidance are currently with Scottish Ministers for scrutiny as part of the supplementary guidance procedure.

Scottish Forestry must decide if an Environmental Impact Assessment is required through a screening process. This progresses to a scoping process if an EIA is considered necessary. The contents for an EIA Report must assess; population, human health, biodiversity, land, soil, water, air, climate, material assets, cultural heritage, landscape and the interactions between them. Schedule 2 and Schedule 1 of the Regulations respectively set out *Selection Criteria for Screening Forestry Projects and Thresholds for the Identification of Projects Likely to Have Significant Effects on the Environment*.

Moving on to the practice of forestry in the Ochils. The reliance on large-scale, single species stands of conifer, their effects on the landscape and its users, is a debate that has ranged across different parts of Scotland for decades. New woodland creation blocks prevent use of statutory rights of access provided by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

In the conclusion to his masterly two volumes *A History of Scottish Forestry* (1967) Professor Mark Anderson wrote: "By far the greater proportion of tree-species now being planted consists of introduced conifers, especially conifers. A good deal of pine is planted in the north and north-east, but leaf-trees are very rarely used. Much of the planting is in fact experimental and the mistake is perhaps being made of ignoring entirely the experience of the past, which has been described in some detail in earlier chapters. Time will tell."

These words will be read differently depending on the point of view. Only by bringing together opposing views can an informed discussion on the future of the Ochils begin.

More recently, Scott McG Wilson picks up where Professor Anderson leaves off: *The Native Woodland of Scotland; Ecology, Conservation and Management* (2015).

In his observation on uniform upland conifer plantations he remarks: "The emphasis was now on preparing sites to meet the needs of favoured tree species, rather than on matching species to the sites. As a result, the process of detailed 'site matching', and the resulting varied species composition found in earlier plantation forests, were no longer pursued."

The author goes on to explore "the 'clearfell and replant' system" and offers a range of alternative kinds of management in their place. 'Clearfell and replant' remains the preferred management in the Ochils; a stand may be thinned, but ultimately the whole lot is cut down, irrespective of what may have depended on it. The practice is little different to farming cereals, the only difference is the crop is larger and the rotation longer.

At the turn of this century, forestry was examining alternative methods of forestry, such as continuous cover and greater use of broadleaves. However, that now appears to be history and 'clearfell and replant' is the only practice observable. While this may provide standard timber for standard designs for standard appliances, alternative timbers can provide specialised products with unique values that mechanisation cannot reproduce.

Scotland's Forestry Strategy states "over the second half of the 20th century, it became clear that the industrial, intensive, single purpose forestry that dominated the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s was not sustainable, and an approach was required to embrace environmental and wider societal interests." In reality, timber production has not changed.

The Strategy has set ambitious annual planting targets for Scotland, from 10,000ha per year to 12,000ha from 2020/21, increasing by 2,000 in the following two years and a further 1,000 in the two years after that. The aim is to "increase forest and woodland cover to 21% of the total area of Scotland by 2032." Where these trees are to be planted given constraints and requirements for other land uses raises interesting questions.

One of the aims of the planting is to sequester carbon to reduce the impacts of climate change. This depends on the use made of post-production timber and the ability of soils to support subsequent rotations. Many conifer plantations are established on carbon rich soils and while the equivalent carbon content of the soil may be substituted or increased in the timber, the soils are likely to be subject to oxidation of exposed peat following ground preparation, especially by ploughing, to release carbon dioxide. Once released, a typical molecule of carbon dioxide remains active for over 100 years. Therefore, a greenhouse gas is released before sufficient growth is established to sequester carbon.

One of the largest, most recent plantings is in the area of Black Hill of Kippen. This is the Keltie & Knowes site included in the table on page 2. A large area of naturally regenerating heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) has been ploughed and planted with Sitka Spruce.

Sitka is particularly vulnerable to root competition from heather for nitrogen required for growth. The practice is to open up the soil and make nitrogen in the soil available to the young trees. This may need to be supplemented with fertiliser.

Professor Charles Gimingham described this process in *Ecology of Heathlands* (1972). "This condition can be avoided or removed by destruction of the *Calluna* stand."

Heather has not been destroyed completely on the Knowes and Keltie site, as shown in these photographs, but it has been sufficiently damaged to result in loss of the habitat.



Knowes and Keltie planting (1) 19.1.20



Knowes and Keltie planting (2) 19.1.20

Carbon-rich soil has been exposed and soil erosion has taken place in the drills at the bottom of slopes where peat has been washed out.

Heather moors have good biodiversity, which cannot be said of Sitka Spruce plantations. The closely planted trees eventually shade out most of the ground cover and while they may add some biodiversity, it is limited and any ecological value is poor.

Woodland is the climax vegetation of most of Britain. Very few remains of former woodland cover have been found in peat in the Ochils. This suggests that most of any former woodland cover was removed several millennia ago. The mix of habitats which are present support fewer common species, including birds of open range like Curlew (*Numenius arquata*). This species is listed as Near Threatened on the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The breeding population declined by 55% in Scotland between 1995 and 2012. Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*) Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) and Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) are also present. Short-eared Owl and Skylark are threatened species and while there is less concern for Golden Plover it is often a scarce breeder. (Data used has been abstracted from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds website.)

There are 968 different kinds of vascular plants in the Ochils above 100 metres.

Of these, 87 native species are notable for their distribution within Britain and Ireland, reflecting the Ochils' geology, geomorphology and climate. Six are Nationally Rare species, occurring in 15 or fewer 10km x 10km grid squares in Great Britain and 11 are Nationally Scarce, occurring in 16-100 10km x 10km grid squares in GB. Many of the hill tops have blanket bog, which is often extensive, where carbon is locked away in hundreds of thousands of tonnes of peat.

There is no single point of reference where this kind of data is drawn together in order to be more specific about where planting may or may not be suitable. Scottish Forestry's website has information on the suitability of planting different species in mapping format. If this were overlaid with mapping of other data, a more informed consensus on a strategic approach to forestry in the Ochils would be possible.

One of the difficulties in reaching strategic common ground over the Ochils is different coverage by organisations. Scottish Forestry covers all of the Ochils from its Upper Battleby office. Three local authorities cover the Ochils; Clackmannanshire Council, Perth & Kinross Council and Stirling Council. Scottish Natural Heritage is covered from offices in Battleby and Stirling; the Scottish Environment Protection Agency is covered from Perth and Stirling. However, these organisational divisions should not prevent these and all other interests coming together to discuss a genuine sustainable land use for the future of the Ochils.

Returning to Coulhill, preparation for a forest creation application is underway for the Coulhill/Corb ownership. This is now owned by Central Networks Nominee Co. Ltd. The planting proposal covers 1,033ha. Much use has been made by travellers heading from Coulhill through Corb Glen and Borland Glen over the centuries. There are many sensitive habitats in this area.

There is much at stake in this application. Public consultation meetings were organised by the owner's agents. In February and March 2020.

A Community comes together by Malcolm Best

Glendevon, nestled in the Ochils on the A823 between Gleneagles and Yetts O'Muckhart, is named – *not surprisingly* – after the River Devon on which it is located. In Glendevon the river is crossed by the Bracklinn road bridge and a footbridge. The footbridge is on a Core Path and is much used and highly valued by the community of Glendevon and visitors to the area.

The severe storms of earlier this year pushed the river Devon to its highest level for many years, possibly its highest level on record. The river got in behind the reinforced banking upstream of the footbridge and attacked the foundations on the southern end. This damage resulted in the footbridge being rendered unsafe and at risk of being destroyed. It was not known who owns the footbridge and while Perth & Kinross Council had carried out repairs to the footbridge in the past, they were not prepared to undertake these repairs.

The Community of Glendevon came together to save the footbridge!

Glendevon Footbridge Ltd (*a company limited by guarantee*) was formed in June 2020, a consulting engineer identified and a quote obtained. Funding for phase 1 of the project was granted by the Glendevon Community Trust.

Phase 1 included designing a solution, obtaining the relevant SEPA licence, obtaining approval from Perth & Kinross Council Structures who were the Technical Approval Authority, preparation and issue of tender documents, review of bids received and contract negotiation. Funding for Phase 2 was then applied for and was again duly granted by the Glendevon Community Trust. A contract was then signed with the chosen bidder, Bigcat, and construction work could begin!

As can be seen from the photographs the solution involved the creation of a steel reinforced wall across the face of the bridge foundations, the installation on the upstream riverbank of a non-biodegradable textile membrane that was then over laid with 200 tons of rock armour. Each rock weighed between 1 and 3 tons, was delivered to the Castlehill layby and shipped in on a 9-ton dumper and positioned using a 22-ton digger.

Despite the use of ground protecting mats the very wet weather meant that some rutting of the ground could not be avoided. Bigcat have generously left some mats in situ to provide a dry walking route to and from the bridge. These mats will be removed in the spring when the ruts will be filled in and the patches of bare earth will be re-seeded.

This was a significant project for the Community of Glendevon and shows what can be achieved when a Community works together – ***well done Glendevon!***





Dramatic Rescue on Ochils by Ken Lawson

This headline was how the Alloa Journal chose to report an incident in their Friday 10th December 1965 edition. However, before I explain my role in this rescue I should outline a bit about my love affair with the Ochils which spans over 50 years.

In 1958 I was fortunate enough to move to the top of the town in Tillicoultry near the Glen Entrance. We had immediate access to the hills and for the next 50 years or so whether as a schoolboy or latterly on visits to my elderly mother I enjoyed this freedom to roam the Ochils to the full. There were few parts of the hills I didn't get to know and even now I meet up with a couple of old school friends and spend the day enjoying all that the Ochils can offer. However, it was in the winter of 1965 that this knowledge and expertise was tested to the full. But now let the Alloa Journal take up the story...

CHILDREN'S TERRIFYING EXPERIENCE

A fearful night in the darkness of the snow covered Ochils was spent by a party of seven boys and girls who were brought back to safety at Tillicoultry on Saturday.

About nine o'clock that night Mr David Thornber, Headmaster of Lendrick Muir School near Rumbling Bridge, called at Ladywell House Tillicoultry and asked if he might use the phone to contact the police. He said that seven children aged between twelve and sixteen years were on the hills and that one of the girls had strained a muscle in her thigh and could not walk. He appealed for assistance to get the party off the hills.

SNOWSTORM

Police Sergeant Weir and Constable Robertson contacted Mr John Lawson of 'Ashbank' who has an extensive knowledge of the hills and he, along with his two sons

Graham (19) and Kenneth (15) with their dog formed the "mountain rescue" party.

It appears that Mr Thornber and the pupils had left the school about 11.30 in the forenoon to climb King's Seat (2000 feet) which lies between Dollar and Tillicoultry. Their route was via the Burn of Sorrow in Dollar Glen. Then across King's Seat down to the Gannel Burn above Tillicoultry and back to the valley by the Hill Road.

About one o'clock it started to snow and the storm continued for four or five hours making conditions extremely difficult for the young hillclimbers. Darkness fell and the party was still on the hills. The youngsters were beginning to show signs of fear and on descending to the Gannel Burn one of the girls slipped and found she could go no further.

It was then that Mr Thornber decided to go for help. The youngsters built a snow wall to give them some protection and were told not to move away. The master climbed over the shoulder of the Law Hill to the Daiglen Burn and made his way to Tillicoultry by the Quarry Road. He saw the lights of Ladywell House and soon contacted the police. Mr Thornber went along with the rescue squad as guide. As they climbed higher the two boys went ahead with the dog but in the darkness both groups missed the children. Then Mr Lawson heard a faint shout from somewhere below and this led them to the young people.

HUDDLED TOGETHER

They were huddled together in the shelter of the snow wall at a point about half a mile above the Big Dam. The youngsters were cold and frightened but soon revived after a drink of hot coffee which the rescue squad had brought.

Mr Lawson said afterwards "One of the girls had strained a muscle in her thigh

and had to be carried pick-a-back fashion by my son Graham. Another girl had slipped more than 20 feet and was too terrified to move. The youngsters' morale was very low and it took a lot of cajoling before we could get them to start down".

Ultimately Tillicoultry was reached via the Hill Road. Kenneth had gone on ahead and when the party arrived at 'Ashbank' there was a supply of hot soup awaiting them and a roaring fire.

NOT READILY FORGET

In due course Mr Thornber and the children returned to Lendrick Muir in the school's Land Rover which had been summoned. They will not readily forget their experience of twelve hours on the Ochils in mid-winter.

Mr Lawson who served a term on Tillicoultry Town Council is Deputy Head of the NCB Miners' Training Centre at Sauchie. He is in charge of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award training and over the past years has made a point of getting to know the hills so that he can safely send the boys up for their training. His enthusiasm for hill climbing is shared by his sons and had it not been for their knowledge of this area this school trip might have ended in disaster.

This incident was also reported in several National papers at the time, but it is the Journal, perhaps unsurprisingly, that makes the most factually accurate report. The Scottish Daily Express also showed a picture of my Dad, my brother and me. It is little surprise that when there is potential for such incidents that the Ochils Mountain Rescue team was formally set up later.



Community Flooding Volunteers wanted

Volunteers are required in Clackmannanshire to monitor flooding 'hotspots' in the Upper Alva and Tillicoultry Glens. This is a partnership project between TCV and Clackmannanshire Council. Free training, equipment and support is available. To express an interest or to find out more, please contact claire.bailly@tcv.org.uk

From our Facebook Page



The curious White Stone of Tam Baird lies on the southern slopes of King's Seat Hill at NS 94135 99110. It is shown on the OS Explorer map. An unusually smooth and rounded quartzite rock, it is little more than a metre in length. There was a tradition that it was placed to commemorate a battle between Wallace and the English, and another that it is "druidical". More likely It was left by a retreating glacier.

It can be reached from Harviestoun but it is probably easier to go from the path up King's Seat Hill from Dollar Glen, contouring West from a suitable spot. It lies due South of the Spitfire Memorial higher up the path. A peaceful spot on a sunny day. You may need GPS to find it! More info at <https://megalithix.wordpress.com/2012/10/05/white-stane-of-tam-baird/>



FOTO Information

How to Join:

Help us to protect, conserve and promote the Ochils by joining us as a member. We welcome individual, family, and corporate membership. Just fill in our FOTO membership form and email or post it to our Membership Secretary David Scott (details on the form):

<https://www.friendsoftheochils.org.uk/join-us/>

When you become a member, you will receive our newsletter 'hot off the press' and invitations to events and our AGM. You may also subscribe to our FOTO email updates, for the latest campaign and other news.

Membership – annual fees

Individual - £5.00 Family - £7.50 Concession (unwaged) - £3.00 Life membership - £100.00 (one-off contribution) Corporate supporter (voluntary, community council) - £15.00 Corporate supporter (commercial organisation) - £50.00 Donations - Please get in touch

Contact Us:

<https://www.friendsoftheochils.org.uk/>

<https://www.facebook.com/Friendsoftheochils>



Forth Naturalist & Historian Annual Conference update

The FNH Trustees have regrettably had to cancel the 2020 Annual Conference.

This is now planned for **Saturday, 6th November 2021** all being well. The theme will (still) be **Coasts & Waters of the Forth**.

Volume 43 of the Journal of the Forth Naturalist is now available. If you would like to purchase your copy please let us know (fnh@stir.ac.uk).

Here is a preview of the contents:

Report on the Forth Naturalist and Historian Conference, 2019, Natives, Incomers and Invaders - Tipping, R.

Naturalist Papers

The Vegetation on Stirling's Castle Rock: Three Centuries of Change, Part 2, Gowan Hill - Sexton, R.

Upper Forth Bird Report, 2019 - Bielby, N.

Ringing Report - Bielby, N.

Marsh Harrier Breeding in the Upper Forth, 2019 - Orr-Ewing, D.

Status of Cattle egret, Little egret and Great white egret in the Upper Forth Bird Recording Area - Pendlebury, C.

Dunblane and Kirkton Weather Report - Bielby, N. and Holland, J.

Historical Papers The Western Ochils: c. 1450 to c. 2000 - Harrison, J.G.
Stirling Church Life in the Early 19th Century - Scott, K.B.

World War II Military Activity at Sherrifmuir - Smith, J.A.

Stirling 'Statuemania' and Robert Burns - Whatley, C.A.