

NATIVE WOODLANDS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

~ restoring the pine forest through unique partnerships ~

ARKAIG COMMUNITY FOREST



COMMUNITY WOODLANDS

Build community wealth



- Increase confidence
- Enable innovative partnerships
- Bring diversification

Enable access



- Improve health and wellbeing
- Increase learning and skills
- Bring nature connection

Empower local stewardship



- Ensure communication
- Consult and engage with all
- Find creative solutions

Utilise natural capital



- Generate and sustain jobs
- Attract funding
- Create circular economies

Scotland's native woods - where over half of the dominant tree species naturally occur in Scotland



Community Woodlands Association has researched the social and economic benefits of native woodlands under community management through focussing on four community woodlands located within the area identified as home to Scotland's rainforest.

The results are:

- highlighted in four case studies
- showcased in a series of films

In 2016, Arkaig Community Forest (ACF) purchased 1,045ha of neglected Caledonian pinewood and immediately passed 95% to Woodland Trust Scotland. They now co-manage the Forest together. The community has subsequently purchased 6ha of ancient oakwood and are investigating further land acquisition.



Community
Woodlands
Association



ARKAIG
Community Forest



Local population - 60



Woods managed in partnership - 1,045 ha

DIVERSE FORESTS



Woods wholly community owned - 60 ha

Loch Arkaig Pine Forest (1,045 ha) lies on the south side of Loch Arkaig to the west of the small communities of Achnacarry, Bunarkaig and Clunes in Lochaber.

The forest has a mix of veteran Scots pine and younger downy birch with a number of other native woodland species. There are significant areas of non-native trees which will be harvested through the restoration programme.

The rich and diverse habitat hosts black grouse, sea and golden eagles, chequered skipper butterflies, wood ants and Northern emerald dragonflies, plus protected species such as otters and bats and the famous Loch Arkaig ospreys who are watched around the world via their webcam.

The long term community vision, gathered from extensive and ongoing consultation, is to restore native woodland habitats, re-connect local people with the management and stewardship of the site and to use the woodlands to underpin rural development, attracting young people to the area.

Arkaig Community Forest (ACF) was established as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) in 2014. Two years later the community purchased 1,045ha of Forest from Forestry and Land Scotland through a community asset transfer.

Immediately after the acquisition, Woodland Trust Scotland took ownership of 95% under a unique partnership agreement.

The remaining 5% (54ha) remains wholly community owned and is located at Glen Mallie and Ardnois in the Gusach.

Glen Mallie woodland is a mix of broad-leaf and pine trees with many mature Scots pine on the site along with a pulse of regeneration from restoration works in the mid 1990s. A small track runs through the site leading to a highseat for deer stalking. Rare lichens can be found on hazel on the Allt Coire Bhoitrais which borders the site.

Ardnois woodland is accessed by boat. Within the wood is a ruined settlement of four black houses leading to a hollow way path, most likely created by driving cattle onto the hill.



Over the period of the partnership
confidence has grown
for both partners
and is supported through a wider,
independent Advisory Board

CO-MANAGEMENT

To buy Arkaig Pine Forest the local community used the Community Asset Transfer process to drive forward and facilitate the purchase and Woodland Trust Scotland (WTS) used their strengths to raise the funds required. Without either partner, there would be no community ownership, forest restoration or local jobs.

Arkaig Community Forest (ACF) and WTS manage the Forest together, under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

Woodland management plans are in place:

- Community owned areas, 2018 - 2028
- Woodland Trust Scotland, 2019 - 2024

The MoU plus management plans support the partnership strength and ensures the restoration work at Loch Arkaig Pine Forest supports the aims of both organisations.

ACF board are volunteers with people who can come and go within the community and therefore the organisation. WTS is part of a national organisation with 600+ staff and significant resources available to use.

Engagement and communication processes are key, keeping everyone informed of progress without the need to take every small change to the wider community. This ensures work to restore the Forest can continue with everyone confident that the process ensures a resilient and accountable project management system.

This pioneering partnership is different to arrangements the Woodland Trust has with other communities throughout the UK. It is very significant demonstrating a different approach. This model is being considered for how the Trust might work with other UK communities in the future.

Building on their knowledge and experience of acquiring the Loch Arkaig Pine Forest, the community has since purchased the disused forest school building and Tom an Eireannaich Woodland at Clunes from Forestry and Land Scotland.

The 6ha of ancient, semi-natural, upland oak woodland contains many mature oak trees and some exceptionally large diameter oak trees from past coppicing. There is also a woodland garden on the floodplain of the Allt Bhan with a willow coppice and orchard.

The building now provides two office spaces, welfare facilities and the surrounding land has space to create income generating projects including the deer larder and tree nursery.



ECONOMIC BENEFITS

INVESTMENT

The community ambition for the pine forest arose from their capacity, skills, knowledge of the ecology, business innovation and ability to work hard to achieve their aims. The community invests significant volunteer time managing the project and contributing to the partnership. Their knowledge and skills compliment the expertise and resources of Woodland Trust Scotland.

Acquisition cost of £450k was mostly secured from the People's Postcode Lottery. In 2015, WTS raised £4.5m, by public appeal for the restoration work. Cost to date is close to £4m, with the total cost of restoration estimated to be around £10m.



Arkaig Community Forest 2020-2022

Grants - £184k



Other - £9.5k

Volunteer investment equivalent - £60k

We now have a brand new deer larder giving us something to work with to create an income stream, selling local venison



EMPLOYMENT

Arkaig Community Forest earn income from renting office space to Woodland Trust Scotland. They have also been successful in raising the funding to employ their own staff.

Mid 2022, ACF recruited a full time Tree Nursery Manager to involve more local people and work towards generating an income stream from sales of saplings. Seed is collected from the woodland by volunteers and grown on to provide future planting.

In November 2022, Arkaig appointed a Development Officer. Their remit is to develop the deer larder project which will produce and sell venison locally. Other projects in the Arkaig business plan will be taken forward through the close working of the Tree Nursery Manager and WTS Project Development Manager.

The Trust has created 4 jobs. Directly employed are the Site Manager and Project Development Manager, both of whom live in the area and 2 full time equivalents through engagement of contractors - usually local people. They undertake ongoing practical work such as fencing, felling operations, Rhododendron control, fence surveys and repairs, surveys of wild boar, peatland, botanical, ants and other entomological species and other discrete contracts.

Harvesting over 80,000t of non-native tree species (Sitka spruce, lodgepole pine, and larch) is planned as part of the restoration ensuring ongoing work.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

SKILLS & TRAINING

Locals trained and secured All Terrain Vehicle and chainsaw certificates and can now take on contracts in the woodland.

WTS contracted a local business to deliver a Level 1 Deer Stalking course for 6 local people. This has encouraged some to undertake their Level 2 which will support the Deer Larder project.

Access to the community owned area of the Gusach is only accessible by boat. Volunteers now have Powerboat 2 qualification and use the Trust owned boat to take ACF members out for woodland management activities.

Educational bodies are using the forest for future employment skills courses for young people including:

- Lochaber High School John Muir Trust Junior Ranger - wildlife and ecology
- West Highland College Countryside Skills and Ranger Training NVQ which include chainsaw and other forest management skills

The University of Highlands & Islands (UHI) bring students for site visits covering ecology, geology and geomorphology



TOURISM

Economic benefits and jobs are created through other local businesses use of the forest. Accommodation businesses use the forest as an attraction.

A local ecology tour business regularly use the forest, particularly if guests are interested in native woodland restoration.

The neighbouring estate regularly transports paying guests to the hill behind the pine forest for stalking and tours.

One local young person and another with a young family have developed businesses in order to contract with the Trust.

In 2017/18 the Trust set up the osprey webcam with the help of locals, who now maintain the equipment. The cam is hosted by Lochaber based community broadband social enterprise, Locheilnet.



Forest Related Work

Jobs - 5.6 full time equivalent



Long term volunteers - 20



SOCIAL BENEFITS

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

There are a variety of ways people can get involved - sharing their time and skills, meeting others and having fun.

Practical conservation work

- woodland working groups
- removal of invasive species including Rhododendron and non native trees
- improving and maintaining access
- tree nursery seed collecting

Social community activities

- orchard and community garden maintenance
- mid winter wood fuel initiative donating bags of firewood to older people in the community

Governance

- board membership which includes developing projects, liaising with WTS and engaging with wider community

Survey work and learning about the ecology and history

- field surveys of flora and fauna including the raptors
- archaeology at the abandoned settlement Ard Nois

Raising awareness of survey findings, encourages more local and visiting botanists and wildlife enthusiasts into the woods, generating further interest and excitement.

There is something tangible about collecting native tree seeds and in doing this together, it brings an additional sense of collective contribution

Being in the woods gives me improved physical and mental wellbeing, a sense of community and a better understanding of the natural world

HEALTH & WELLBEING

Volunteering and access to wildlife is well known to improve mental and physical wellbeing, increase social connectivity and help people to work together to a common goal.

Improved access has enabled people to walk and cycle within the forest encouraging physical activity and getting out into nature.

Before 2016 the only access was via a rough track to the bothy, access into the forest was cut off by deer fencing on the mainly conifer plantation. Between 2021 and 2026 as part of the restoration of the pine forest non-native species will be felled. The White Bridge entrance and Glen Mallie track have been upgraded to facilitate timber operations but will also be used by walkers, cyclists and campers.

ARTS & CULTURE

New paths are also encouraging people off the road and into the trees. An art and sculpture trail along a 6km trail entices people up into the forest prompting discussion and bringing connection between people and the woodland itself.

Boat only access to the Gusach allows the area to remain relatively undisturbed with interesting species being found through a number of ecological surveys.

SOCIAL BENEFITS



COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

The purchase of the forest brought people together who live scattered throughout the area many of whom hadn't met each other. People got to know each other much better as a result of working together to overcome challenges and work towards the community vision.

The work required to achieve the purchase of the forest increased local skills and confidence and created new partnerships between the local community; a large environmental charity and nearby private estates.

Organised community events give people a reason to come to the woods and include:

- moth mornings
- sensitive harvesting demonstrations
- horse logging
- small scale foraging
- BBQ's
- arts and crafts

Recent focus on developing income generation projects and the impact of the pandemic has meant volunteers had limited capacity to organise community activity.

The new ACF Development Officer enables capacity to arrange events, re-engage with the wider community and provide new opportunities for socialising, volunteering and restoring the forest.

A VIBRANT FUTURE

ACF has plans to build workshop spaces near Clunes to encourage new businesses.

Recent funding success will improve the infrastructure at the deer larder and tree nursery including extending the tree nursery manager post beyond one year and creating a deer larder manager position. Which will in turn will further develop income streams.

A locally based new business is in the planning stages, to enable people to experience the woods from up in the canopy.

Both partners are working up plans and funding applications for a roundhouse to provide an education hub within the forest. The build will be undertaken by volunteers to create a destination, a place to shelter and host community events.

A woodlot is a parcel of woodland or forest for small-scale production. Creating and leasing woodlots will bring people into the woods to ensure longevity and diversity of the woodland.

The partnership broadens and strengthens links between other local land owners and managers and the Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest is now proposing a large landscape scale restoration project.

ACFs experience of networking, partnerships and community asset transfer has increased capacity and confidence. They recently registered interest in another area of land with a view to acquisition. The 150ha proposed would be wholly community owned and could have multi-purpose uses including forest restoration, woodland plots, housing and recreation.



NATIVE WOODLANDS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

~ a symbiotic partnership ~

ARKAIG COMMUNITY FOREST



COMMUNITY WOODLANDS

on an individual basis may seem small
- collectively they offer a strategic landscape scale role

are frequently undervalued
- the work they undertake is of local, national and often global significance but goes under the radar

rely on local volunteers risking burn out, loss of intellectual property and experience
- are a network of organisations run by busy people

funding is often short term, small amounts and paperwork intensive
- use their diverse skills sets, enthusiasm and adversity to bring creative solutions

benefit from long term staff
- hindered by lack of funding / housing / people / long term opportunities

It is a really great example of how a large environmental NGO and the local community can work together for combined benefit



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