

NATIVE WOODLANDS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

~preserving their Scottish Rainforest for future generations ~
CORMONACHAN COMMUNITY WOODLANDS



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:

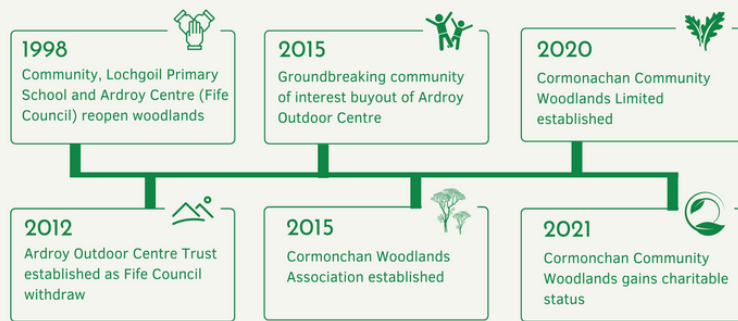
- highlighted in four case studies
- showcased in a series of films

Cormonachan Community Woodlands has been working with local partners Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre to manage the woodlands for access and nature connection since 1998. Their activities to restore, preserve and open up their unique habitat deliver a wide range of outcomes.



Community
Woodlands
Association

Cormonachan Woodlands



Total woodlands - 63.9ha



Planted ancient woodland - 8.9ha



Exotic conifer plantation - 6.9ha



Local population - 400

THE RAINFOREST

Cormonachan Woodlands are situated along the hillside on the west shore of Loch Goil between the villages of Lochgoilhead and Carrick Castle.

Cormonachan Community Woodlands Ltd (CCW) has the following agreements:

- 20 year lease from Forestry and Land Scotland (2021)
- 20 year car park lease from private landowner (2017)
- 10 year Memorandum of Understanding with Ardroy (AOEC Limited, 2022)

CCW are currently working to a business plan developed in 2021 and implementing their Scottish Forestry Woodlands Management Plan which runs 2017-2027.

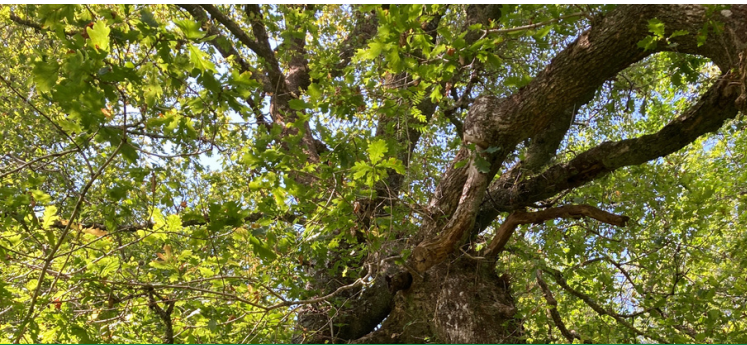
The woodlands give me a sense of peace

These woodlands consist of ancient Atlantic oak and hazel, with many examples of rare sticky glue fungus, a potentially 500 year old oak and a 150 year old birch tree. There is a small area of commercial plantation and much of the woodlands are threatened by self seeded Sitka spruce and Rhododendron ponticum.

This rainforest is home to the stunning tiered Cormonachan Falls; remains of a medieval settlement, red squirrels and a plethora of lichens and bryophytes.

Infrastructure within the woodland includes 2 small car parks, 4.5km path network, squirrel hide, contemplation shelter, labyrinth, tool shed, resource hut and a 36 foot diameter oak tree circle - planted in respect of the historical mentions of a monastery - traces of which have long since disappeared under commercial forestry.





780
native trees
planted by volunteers
over 2 years

CONNECTIVITY

Cormonachan Woodlands is part of area wide initiatives including:

- Scotland's Rainforest
- Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park
- Argyll Forest Park
- Argyll's Secret Coast
- The Pilgrims Way walking route

HERITAGE

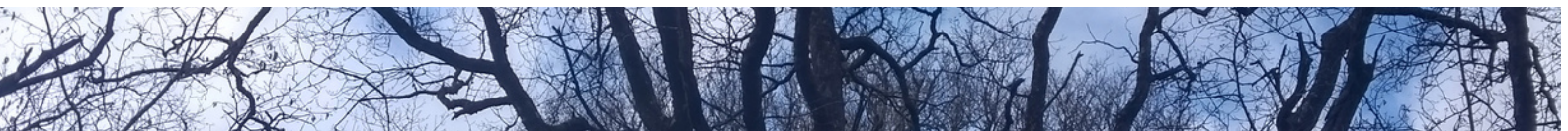
The aim to connect the path network to the medieval settlement and waterfall began in 2007 and in 2022 the group achieved their goal - raising a massive £0.25m; undertaking several surveys, securing all permissions and overcoming hurdles including a global pandemic, rising costs and last minute changes to contractors.

As well as opening access for the community and visitors, the project will enable CCW to employ staff via Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre to deliver history walks and related educational activities. Ardroy will now also be able to access the woodlands all year round.

RAINFOREST MANAGEMENT

Woodlands management is an important part of any community woodlands group and current objectives include:

- maintain and enhance the age class diversity of the woodlands
- reduce invasive non native species
- locate, map, age and improve the habitat of the veteran oaks and hazel groves for the benefit of lichens and mosses and the red squirrel population
- identify areas of historic woodland pasture and manage to best practice
- provide learning resources
- provide training for members to support woodlands management and develop local business skills
- build a vibrant group of volunteers to improve physical and mental health
- create a local/tourist destination through interactive sculptures, hides, shelters and increased path network



ECONOMIC BENEFITS

INVESTMENT

CCW Ltd has accessed significant funding over the years to achieve their outcomes thereby drawing income into the community. All finance raised is through grants, donations and membership.

Their lease prohibits them undertaking business development and they focus on being a volunteer run organisation.



Total financial investment into the woodlands
1998 - 2008 : £84k (Ardroy)
2015 - 2022 : £360k (CCW)

Demonstrating the importance of the relationship of the woodlands and Ardroy, the 2009 - 2014 gap was due to uncertainty of the future of the centre

EMPLOYMENT

Although creating and sustaining employment is not a specific objective for CCW, their activities support local businesses - both through direct short term contracts and indirectly through ensuring the woodlands are a safe, accessible venue.

The woodlands enable me to introduce the community to nature connection which in turn pays me a wage

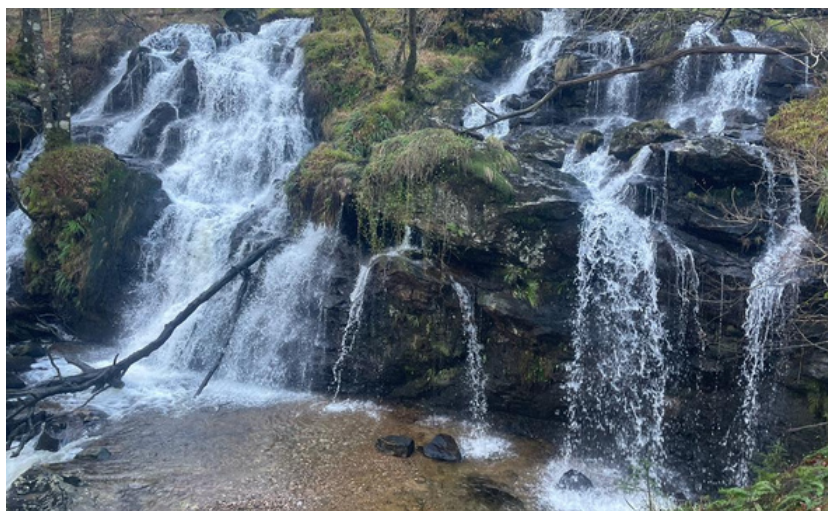


Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre - 12 full time equivalent
The Heritage Project - 0.2 full time equivalent

SKILLS & TRAINING

CCW run training for their volunteers and staff at Ardroy in tools and woodlands management including chainsaw, brushcutter, strimming, invasive species management and first aid. Some of these are time limited qualifications and CCW continually has to seek funding, new volunteers and partners to assist with certified work.

The Heritage Project will train 12 volunteers to be able to run archaeology and history tours in the woodlands.



ECONOMIC & SOCIAL BENEFITS

TOURISM

The local area relies heavily on tourism and many of the accommodation providers highlight the beautiful woodlands and their history in their promotional material.

The new paths will also link to the neighbouring estate continuing to expand walking opportunities.



woodlands visitor numbers

2021 - 10,045

2022 - 10,456

The woodlands provide an attraction for visitors and tourists supporting hospitality businesses and the community

Local businesses benefit from visitors to the woodlands through more people using their services - holiday accommodation, shops and cafés. Adventure and outdoor tourism is on the increase making Loch Goil a sought after destination with initiatives such as The Pilgrims Way passing through the woodlands and the Cowal Way and Wild About Argyll bike packing route passing on either side.

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

With being a completely volunteer run organisation CCW rely on a significant amount of 'in kind' contribution to deliver their outcomes and these 'in kind' contributions include:

- the Board who oversee, develop and deliver overall management
- the woodlands management and maintenance group who meet twice a month
- Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park volunteers join once a month for woodlands management
- Fife Conservation Volunteers have been coming 2 weekends a year for the last 20 years to manage invasive conifers

3 year total (2020 - 2022)



Full time job equivalent - 5



Hours - 8,361



Financial worth - £70,230

Being involved with Cormonachan Woodlands empowers people to:

- manage projects and network with partners; build partnerships and a broader community
- develop their practical skills and care for their environment
- create a sense of custodianship, a huge sense of team spirit, pride and connection to the area
- witness the difference they make



SOCIAL BENEFITS

LEARNING & EDUCATION



Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre is a social enterprise delivering residential outdoor activities for children.

Originally established by Fife Council, they became an independent Trust in 2012 and fully 'community of interest' owned after a ground breaking buy out in 2015 prior to the Community Asset Transfer legislation of 2017.



Their main clients continue to be Fife primary schools although they also undertake transition and support work with Children First and Action for Children plus some outreach work with Argyll & Bute secondary schools.

The Centre:

- hosts woodland activities with Children 1st's Bide Oot project for families - delivering a transformational aspect of a long term project enabling better relationships, building confidence and empowering people to get involved with their own communities
- maintains and uses their resource centre, Jan's Hideaway which provides a safe, warm and dry shelter to use as a base with groups
- provides accommodation for volunteers working in the woodlands as well as their own temporary and freelance staff

Ardroy take children into the woodlands to:

- practise outdoor and bushcraft skills
- explore on guided walks and adventures
- learn about plants, trees, wildlife and ecosystems
- undertake practical woodlands maintenance including Rhododendron removal
- gain John Muir awards
- exercise and be healthy
- increase understanding of nature
- build confidence and team skills

1,000 children access the woodlands for outdoor education every year



The children and young people:

- learn bushcraft and safe use of fire
- learn to cope with changing weather and the importance of preparation
- build an understanding as to why the woodlands are special in comparison to plantation forests
- build enquiry and identification skills
- give back to nature and care for their environment - every child spends 40 minutes of their day in the woodlands helping to care by removing invasive plants, tidying up etc
- gain knowledge of the environment



SOCIAL BENEFITS

GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

CCW play an important part in raising awareness of the Scottish rainforest through:

- hosting COP26 tropical rainforest community representatives with around 100-150 people at each of the 2 visits
- the award winning "The Ghost Rainforest" film made as part of COP26
- featuring in an episode of the BBC TV series Loggerheads episode 5 (2021) and on the BBC One Show (2022)
- hosting Raleigh International groups



Great woodland to use as a route for our ramble group
Whether just looking around or joining up with other routes we use in the area

HEALTH & WELLBEING

The importance and role of being active in the outdoors to support our mental and physical health is well documented - in a recent survey of CCW members people said they benefited from:

- enjoying a different place to walk - especially one that offers shelter in bad weather
- gaining feelings of calm, joy and relaxation plus a sense of wellbeing
- exercise
- observing the changing seasons - improving their nature connection
- personal development
- creative inspiration
- companionship

ARTS & CULTURE

In order to encourage use of the woodlands as a social and cultural venue; CCW secure funding through grants and donations enabling partners to deliver events including:

- 2 theatre events (1 for adults and 1 for children) by Argyll Arts Collective, 2022
- arts and crafts projects with schools and other groups throughout the year eg Labyrinth Project

Other organisations collaborate with CCW and use the woodlands for their events - for example:

- Cove Park visual arts project with Argyll Coast & Countryside Trust & Hermitage Academy (Helensburgh), 2022
- for the last 3 years, Argyll Arts Collective have run an annual arts trail in October each year increasing the number of people in the woodlands during these events



Free innovative theatre aimed at all ages enables family and friendship group experiences.

Sculpture and arts trails are widely publicised and attract wider audiences and people from outwith the immediate area.

Events build a wide range of skills as well as enabling outdoor connection and an understanding of nature.

NATIVE WOODLANDS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

~ a symbiotic partnership ~

CORMONACHAN COMMUNITY WOODLANDS



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

Having been here over a period of time, it's really good to see that you are actually making a difference - with the will and determination, it can be done




Cormonachan Woodlands

 cormonachan-woodlands.co.uk

  @cormonachan

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COMMUNITY WOODLANDS ASSOCIATION

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COMMUNITY WOODLANDS ASSOCIATION NATIVE WOODS PROJECT
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Future Woodlands Scotland

