

Sixty-second Annual Study Tour Scotland 19-23 September 2005

The Annual Study Tour took place 19-23rd September 2005 to SW Scotland. Twenty five persons took part with participants based in the North West Castle Hotel, Stranraer. It proved to be an interesting and informative tour covering private estates, Forestry Commission and community forests. There were also visits to Port Logan Botanical Gardens, Glenlee Estate – magnificent tall trees – and a small local sawmill producing garden goods. Recurring forestry themes were: forest multi-functionality, community involvement in forestry management, wood energy and poor timber prices.

The problems of estate management in Scotland were summed up in a recent quote *despite connections and esteemed history, no estate is exempt from the challenges of modern day management and must continually look to alternative services of revenue to keep the ship afloat.*

Blairquhan Estate

About 610 ha, including 400 ha woodland. Main activities included beef production, forestry, fishing, shooting, holiday chalets, and corporate entertainment. The forest management plan included fishing and shooting inputs with an overall aim of Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF) incorporating selection felling and control of the grey squirrel problem.

Graiglaw Estate

It comprised about 2,500 ha including 120 ha woodland. Most of the farmland – 2,000 ha – was leased to neighbouring farms with timber production and game management the mainstay of the forest management plan. Since 1994 the family house has had its heating provided by a woodchip boiler, utilising chips from small roundwood thinnings, passed through a mobile wood chipper and. Some clearfelling of mature Sitka spruce/pine had taken place and the owner was of a mind not to replant considering the current poor timber prices - £12-15 (€18-22)/tonne, standing.

Forrest Estate

Extended to some 3,000 ha forest and 1,000 ha open ground. High elevation Sitka spruce forest mainly on peat and peaty gley, with an average yield class of 16. The estate was self-contained with own forest staff, harvesting and road construction crew, and an estate sawmill. All Sitka spruce crops were thinned; clearfells were sold standing. The sawmill serviced the estate and local fencing needs. No preventive measures were taken against fomes (*Heterobasidion annosum*) at thinning or clearfell stage, the rationale being that with a damp climate (1,750-2,500 mm annual rainfall) and acid soils, there is a very low risk of infection. A feature of the forest

was a 40 ha lake which powers a small 500 kv electric turbine which feeds the national grid. In economic terms, electricity was reckoned to be as valuable as timber!

Graigengillen Estate

It stretched to some 1,250 ha, with 275 ha of it woodland, and beautifully located in a sheltered fold in the hills of the southern uplands. Work on the estate includes organic sheep production, fishing, horse-riding stables and the restoration of the woodlands, which have suffered from severe neglect. Riparian areas, alongside fishing streams have been planted, add to the woodland area. Landscape values are a constraint on the practice of agriculture and forestry. A feature of the estate forest management is its involvement with the local community, itself an unemployment blackspot, in a sense of “shared ownership”, together with provision of public access and recreational amenities. We left the estate via a pleasant riverside walk Lough Doon Hydro Electric Station.

Glenlee Park

The specimen conifers on view at Glenlee owe much of their reputation to the late Alan Mitchell of the Forestry Commission who measured the trees on various occasions over a 30-year period and wrote about them in *Scottish Forestry* (1979). Specimens included:

- A European larch at 47.2 m (155 ft), and recorded as the tallest European larch in Great Britain or Ireland,
- Douglas fir - several fine specimens with the tallest at 50.9 m (167 ft),
- A Wellingtonia at 46.6 m (153 ft) - its leader was lost some years ago.

There are also specimens of Low's fir (*Abies concolor*), western hemlock and some fine old oaks. The Glenlee woods overall are a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Logan Botanic Gardens

Logan is a Regional Garden of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh. Located at the southwest tip of Scotland, with the warming influence of the Gulf Stream, the gardens have a remarkable collection of plants from the world's warmer climes. Nearly half of the species were collected from the wild, with most are from the southern hemisphere. The garden shows the majority of antipodean tree forms and gum trees, massive gunnera, fragrant rhododendrons, together with the vivid colours of South African flowers.

Galloway Forest Park

Located in SW Scotland, it is owned by Forestry Commission Scotland and is some 96,000 ha in extent. The Forest Park, with some 56,000 ha of commercial forest, is managed to SFM principles and multi-functionality. Visitors are catered for in three main visitor centres – Glentroot, Clatteringshaws and Kirroughtree. Forest visitor facilities include forest drives, walking, hill-climbing, cycling (including mountain

track cycling), horse-riding, fishing, wildlife viewing and simple family fun. Also of interest is the Cree Valley Community Woodlands Trust Forest. It is 60 ha site, part of which is ancient semi-natural woodland, which links in with the RSPB Wood of Cree Reserve and the riparian woodlands at Brigton. The wood is managed by the community, for the local people and visitors alike, and is an excellent example of a community forest.

The commercial forest, predominantly conifer and Sitka spruce, performs a clear multi-functional role in the Park. Up to 40 forest landscape design plans are in position to deal with clearfell and restocking, and while clearfell coupe size may be up to 100 ha on occasion, 15/20 ha is the average. Restocking incorporates broadleaf groups, open space with set-backs from roads, rivers, streams and lakes, long-term retentions, Scots pine, larch, birch, and rowan planting for landscape colour, commercial Sitka spruce planting and deer management/control. Regeneration of commercial species is encouraged and managed.

The Tour Director and organisers wish to record their appreciation of the generosity and hospitality of our hosts and tour guide in making the tour informative, enjoyable and sociable.

Tony Mannion
Tour Director