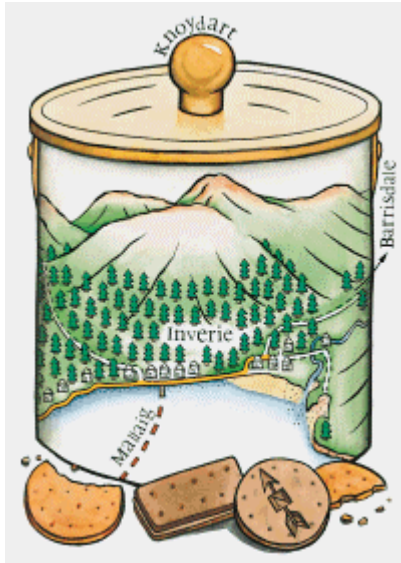


KNOYDART



Summary

- The Knoydart Forest Trust project area covers the west of the Knoydart peninsula.
- The woodland area extends to 500 ha mixed conifer plantation and 100 ha native broadleaved woodland in 10 different ownerships, the largest of whom is the Knoydart Foundation.
- The Knoydart Forest Trust runs the project.
- The Trust manages the Knoydart Foundation's woodlands through a management agreement.
- The Trust is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status.
- The key aim is to help strengthen the local economy.
- Work started in the woodlands in the summer of 1999.

Why? The community of Knoydart is one of the most remote in Scotland. Access is by boat or 'the long walk in'. In many ways it is more remote than many of the islands despite being a peninsula. There is a troubled history of land use and qualities of self-reliance are required to live there. The project was started in order to enable the local people to manage one of the natural resources, the Knoydart woodlands, in a way that would deliver benefits in terms of stable local employment, returns to the local economy and improvements in wildlife diversity. This aspiration was obvious in the wake of a succession of landowners with short term interests, resulting in a rapid turnover of people and trees. The future now looks more secure and prosperous.

Who? The project is for the resident community who will benefit through employment and a strengthened local economy and for the wider public who will enjoy a better managed natural environment and improved access.

The community might be described as everyone with a commitment to the place and its people. The Trust was established as a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. The core members of the Trust are resident members. Membership is open and the resident members elect the directors/trustees annually on a rotational basis.

The directors/trustees manage the Trust directly and employ Grant Holroyd as the Community Forester. His time is split between administration/management/supervision and forestry work.

What? The project area extends to about 11 000ha of mostly open hill with 3 main conifer plantations and scattered remnants of native woodland:-

1. 250ha 20 year old “failed commercial” lodgepole pine /Sitka spruce on the hill.
2. 250ha mixed conifer & native broadleaves around the main village of Inverie. This includes some quality timber and ancient semi-natural woodland as well as prolific *Rhododendron ponticum*. The conifer plantation is 25-60+ years old and has been under-managed for the past 25 years.
3. 100ha outlying native woodland remnants, which are generally not regenerating due to grazing pressure.

The woodlands cover 10 landholdings. The main one is now owned by the Knoydart Foundation (a partnership of Knoydart Community Association, Highland Council, John Muir Trust, Chris Brasher Trust, Kilchoan Estate and Highlands & Islands Enterprise).

The objectives for the woodlands are to:

- secure, expand and maintain the genetic integrity of the existing native woodland remnants
- re-structure the failed commercial plantations to increase their landscape and habitat value
- bring into management the mixed woodlands around Inverie village to provide locally useful quality timber, habitat diversity and public access.

Vision ? The vision of the project is ‘to deliver quality woodland management through an integrated long term management plan that will realise the potential of our environment and community.’

The management plan brings together the different landholdings and attempts to redress the neglect and loss of woodlands in the past by harnessing local commitment and enthusiasm.

The specific objectives are to:

- produce a long term plan (achieved)
- secure a management agreement with Knoydart Foundation (achieved)
- secure management agreements with other relevant landholders(underway)
- provide training as required (ongoing)
- secure funding (ongoing)
- implement the various components of the plan (started).

How? Funding allowed a consultant to be employed to help with the first management and business plans (at that time the community didn’t actually know who owned Knoydart Estate which included the main woodland area). After much debachle and a few surprises, in March 1999 the Knoydart Foundation managed to buy Knoydart Estate from the receivers with

money from a public appeal, John Muir Trust (JMT), Chris Brasher Trust, HIE, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Cameron Mackintosh and an anonymous donor. By this time the Forest Trust had been established and the woodland plan was ready to be implemented. The Forest Trust now manages the Foundation's woodland through a management agreement based on the management plan. The other landholders within the project area have been encouraging and discussions regarding future woodland management are ongoing.

The **milestones** have been:

1. Funding for management and business plans was secured in January 1998.
2. An acceptable management plan was produced in August 1998.
3. The Rural Challenge Fund application was applied for in October 1998.
4. The application was assessed in January 1999.
5. The application was notified as unsuccessful in April 1999.
6. Objective One funding with co-funding from SNH, Lochaber Limited, Highland Council and JMT secured the public access component of the plan in June 1999.
7. Woodland Grant Scheme was applied for in October 1999.
8. A management agreement with the Knoydart Foundation was completed in Dec 1999.
9. The public access component of the plan- clearing rhododendrons, removing redundant fencing and pathwork was started in November 1999

The **challenges** have taken the form of a constant barrage of hoops, usually provided by government agencies, which require not only jumping through but somersaults and backflips in the form of business plans, forest design plans, woodland management plans, training plans, consultation, scoping, interviews, networking, coffee & biscuits....etc.

The **solution** is to keep jumping, ignore the ones that are out of reach and never turn down a cup of coffee. The biggest headache is running several funders side by side, all of whom have different needs, procedures and methods of claiming biscuits.

Sources of help and advice ? Within the local group there are 2 ex-estate foresters, a retired submariner, a sheep farmer, a social worker and several enthusiastic volunteers. The Trust has had the help of Andrew Campbell (JMT Woodland Manager) and a very patient business adviser who has given his time voluntarily. The Trust employed a forestry consultant Iain MacLennan to help with the initial management & business plans. He still helps out when asked and deserves a special mention for his patience and help. An accountant and a lawyer are also employed as required.

Individuals within the Forestry Commission and other agencies have been of great help. Whilst ultimately their support has been invaluable, the bureaucracy and slow pace of response of the Scottish Office /Executive Highlands & Islands Partnership Programme and the Forestry Commission have been both frustrating and debilitating.

The main funders so far are EAGGF (Objective One), JMT, SNH, HIE, Lochaber Limited and Highland Council. Often several funders have had to be applied to for the same piece of work which represents a huge administrative effort for a small largely voluntary organisation. The Trust has suggested that a Scoping Meeting of the main funders could be used to allocate funds for a project and lead to a single application. Other funds and resources have come from private individuals, volunteers and timber sales. It is hoped that funds generated by the project will gradually replace funds from outside.

There is a training plan and the Community Forester has been studying at the Scottish School of Forestry since September 1999. A training course at Knoydart is planned to take place in March 2000.

Future Activities ? Activities fall into several areas. On the practical front, there will be seed collection and the establishment of a small tree nursery, fencing, planting and regeneration of native woodland, management of the existing woodlands, restructuring of the plantations and the development of value added products using the felled timber. To support this will be training in chainsaws, machine operation and first aid. A necessary evil is the paperwork- funding applications, grant claim forms and cashflow projections.

The project will continue as long as people make use of the woodlands. The optimal level of activity depends on what the woodlands and the community can sustain. This remains to be determined.

Lessons for Others ? Many lessons have already been learned. These include:

- Be open and transparent with your community. Make a point of identifying the thorny issues early on.
- If you use consultants make sure they understand what you are asking them to do. Agree a brief before you take them on and hold them to it. Don't be afraid to get comparative quotes (you don't have to choose the cheapest). If you expect work to be done by a certain individual, make sure this is clear and stated in the brief.
- Don't allow consultants, agencies or professionals to take over. Remember they work for you. Don't let them discuss your business amongst themselves without referring back to you.
- Avoid 100% funding from one source.
- Use your own time as co-funding - this helps you to retain ownership of the project as well as showing a true account of costs.
- The more unrestricted/ private cash you can find the better (£1 cash is worth a lot more than £1 of grant).
- Beware of complications - don't be afraid to turn down potential funding offers if you don't like the terms, or if their claim procedures are too cumbersome. Remember funders get paid to give you money. It should be noted that the Objective One application process is easier than the subsequent technicalities and claim procedure.
- Lack of capital to get started and funding for management costs at the outset can be a real problem.
- It always takes longer than you think - but keep at it and maintain focus and determination.

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