

FORESTRY COMMISSION - SCOTLAND

PRESS TOUR - 3rd MAY, 1960

RANNOCH FOREST

OUR NATIVE SCOTS PINE



Cruaidh mar am fraoch,
buan mar an giuthas -

Hard as the heather,
lasting as the pine

RANNOCH FOREST

A Location

Rannoch Forest, which is approximately 21 miles from Aberfeldy, occupies part of the basin surrounding Loch Rannoch in Central Perthshire.

B Acquisitions

The various blocks of land forming the Forest came into Forestry Commission ownership at different times. The original block - which includes the well-known Black Wood of Rannoch, one of the remnants of the old Caledonian Forest - was acquired in 1947. Subsequent acquisitions brought in the outlying areas and in 1958 the large blocks of the Barracks and Dall Estates were added and made Rannoch Forest the biggest in East Conservancy.

C Area and utilisation of land

The total area of the forest is now 45,667 acres of which 742 acres are plantations acquired with the land, 3,730 acres have been planted by the Commission, and 13,358 acres remain to be planted. The balance of the land is in agricultural use and on deer forest.

D Planting programme and policy

In order to retain the character of the forest and to perpetuate the race of native Scots pine it is the Commission's policy that where Scots pine is planted it shall be of Rannoch origin only. The sole source of this seed is the Black Wood and collections are made there annually in an effort to produce a sufficient stock of young plants for each planting year. This year 410 acres will be planted, but by 1962 it is hoped to plant 750 acres.

The forest has been zoned for planting purposes. In the Black Wood the only species to be planted will be Scots pine of Rannoch origin. In a second zone, around the Black Wood, from

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the east march to the burn at Camghouran, every effort will be made to plant with Scots pine which will, of course, be of Rannoch origin, but a limited use may be made of larch and spruce. Over the remainder of the forest the species to be used will depend upon the ground being dealt with, but again where Scots pine is planted it will be of Rannoch origin. In this way the perpetuation of the native Rannoch Scots pine will be ensured.

E. Production

Trees will grow slowly at Rannoch because of the nature of the soil and the shortness of the growing season and it will be many years before there is any large-scale production. By 1980 it is estimated that the forest will be producing approximately 50,000 hoppus feet per year (about 1600 tons of timber). At the present time the production of timber is on a very limited scale and restricted to the thinning of the few acquired plantations and to the removal of individual trees which are of poor form or which are over-mature. The selection of those old trees is done with great care and due attention is paid to the amenity requirements of the district.

F. Labour and Housing

There are 31 workers employed at the forest under the supervision of a Forester and two Assistant Foresters. Twelve houses, situated at the east end of the loch, were erected by the Commission in 1952.

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THE BLACK WOOD OF RANNOCH

The survival of this fragment of the old Caledonian Pine Forest of Scotland is possibly due to its remoteness and to the fact that in early times it had earned a sinister reputation as a refuge for bands of freebooters.

Very little is known of its history before the 18th century, though it is recorded that the Black Wood passed into the hands of the Robertsons of Struan in 1398 and remained the property of this clan until sold to the Wentworth family in 1857.

After the rising of 1745, the estate was forfeited and taken over by the Commissioners of Forfeited Estates, and not returned to the original owners until 1784.

From the middle of the 18th century, the records of the forest are reasonably complete and we read that in 1765 much of the Black Wood was enclosed to prevent unrestricted grazing. This far-sighted measure must have done a great deal to ensure the survival of the wood.

The history of the Black Wood is mainly one of exploitation, and at the beginning of the 19th century a company from the south bought it from the Robertsons and started felling operations.

To offset transport difficulties, an elaborate system of canals was dug through the wood and the timber floated down to Dundee.

In 1895 the Black Wood was again enclosed, but this time with the object of sheltering deer. The present lack of young trees is probably the result of this second enclosure.

Exploitation was accelerated by the building of the West Highland Railway and continued until the last war when the Canadian Forestry Corps removed the best of the big trees.

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As a result of ^{the} ~~this~~ exploitation, although 670 acres of the unit have been designated the Black Wood and set aside for special management, this area is by no means fully stocked. Over most of it only scattered groups of the old trees remain, and natural regeneration is very limited and localised. In order therefore to perpetuate the wood it is necessary to fill up the gaps by planting with Scots pine plants raised from seed collected from the best trees in the old stand. For this purpose the wood has been divided into five blocks and the intention is to plant 20 acres per annum in each block, on rotation, i.e. the planting cycle will be five years. The largest open gaps will be dealt with first and eventually the wood will have that irregular appearance which probably characterised the Caledonian Forest of former times.

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OUR NATIVE SCOTS PINE

Forestry, both State and Private, has now a firm place in our Scottish economy and there are few people who are not familiar with the new forests which now cover the hillsides of many Scottish glens.

Criticism is often levelled at the tree planters of today on the grounds that the new forests which they are creating lack interest, they are generally coniferous, often lack colour variation and frequently consist of fast-growing exotic species. The majority of the new forests in Scotland are, it is true, planted with coniferous or softwood trees rather than deciduous or hardwood trees largely because of the conditions of soil and climate. These conifers are of many kinds and there is no doubt that fast-growing exotic conifers play a big part in modern afforestation schemes, though Scots pine, our only native tree of value, is extensively planted and indeed in 1959 some 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ thousand acres of State forests were planted with this species.

Distribution

Scots pine is the most widely distributed species in the world. Its range extends from the Atlantic seaboard in the west to the Pacific Coast in the east and from the Arctic Circle to the Mediterranean Sea. It is found high up on the mountains as well as on the sea coast.

The outstanding characteristic of Scots pine is that it will grow on a wide range of sites and is one of the few trees which will tolerate the poor acid conditions which prevail over much of the Scottish Highlands. This is no doubt the reason why it covered so much of Scotland north of the Forth and Clyde Valleys in the early stages of our forest history.

Exploitation

Large natural forests of Scots pine remained reasonably intact until the end of the 16th century when commercial exploitation began. The destruction of our native pinewoods continued

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through the 17th and 18th centuries, and probably reached its peak by the middle of the 19th century. Normally the extensive clearing of the pinewoods would have been followed by natural regeneration so that young trees would have grown up to replace those which had been removed. Unfortunately the time of greatest exploitation of the natural woodlands coincided with the development of extensive sheep farming and with the creation of deer forests. The searching muzzles of the sheep and deer made it impossible for seedling pines to survive. Any which did escape from browsing generally fell victims to the muirburning which became standard practice in sheep farm management.

The Far-sighted Lairds

The history of forestry in Scotland is not entirely one of destruction and from the 17th century onwards some far-sighted lairds made praiseworthy efforts to replace the devastated natural forests by quite extensive tree planting. Even at that time the value of the natural Scots pine was appreciated and it is recorded that in the 17th and 18th centuries there was a regular trade in Scots pine seed from the Highlands to other parts of the country.

Importation of Seed and Stock

By the 19th century the sensible practice of using native pine seed gave way to the reprehensible one of importing Scots pine seed and plants from Europe, principally from Germany. The result was that considerable pine forests of foreign origin grew up all over Scotland. This has always been regarded with disfavour by some Scottish foresters, but it was not until the present century that there was a general revival of interest in our native Scots pine by which time the remnants of the true native forests were few and limited to the steeper and remoter parts of the country.

Surviving Native Pinewoods

A recent survey of the surviving native pinewoods^{*} carried out under the direction of Professor H.M. Steven of Aberdeen University has shown that 35 stands remain. Most of these are in

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^{*} The Native Pinewoods of Scotland by Professor H.M. Steven and Dr. A. Carlisle (Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh, 1959)

private ownership, though nine of them are on land belonging to the Forestry Commission. The most southerly is in Glen Falloch, the most easterly on Deeside and the most northerly at Glen Einig in Wester Ross.

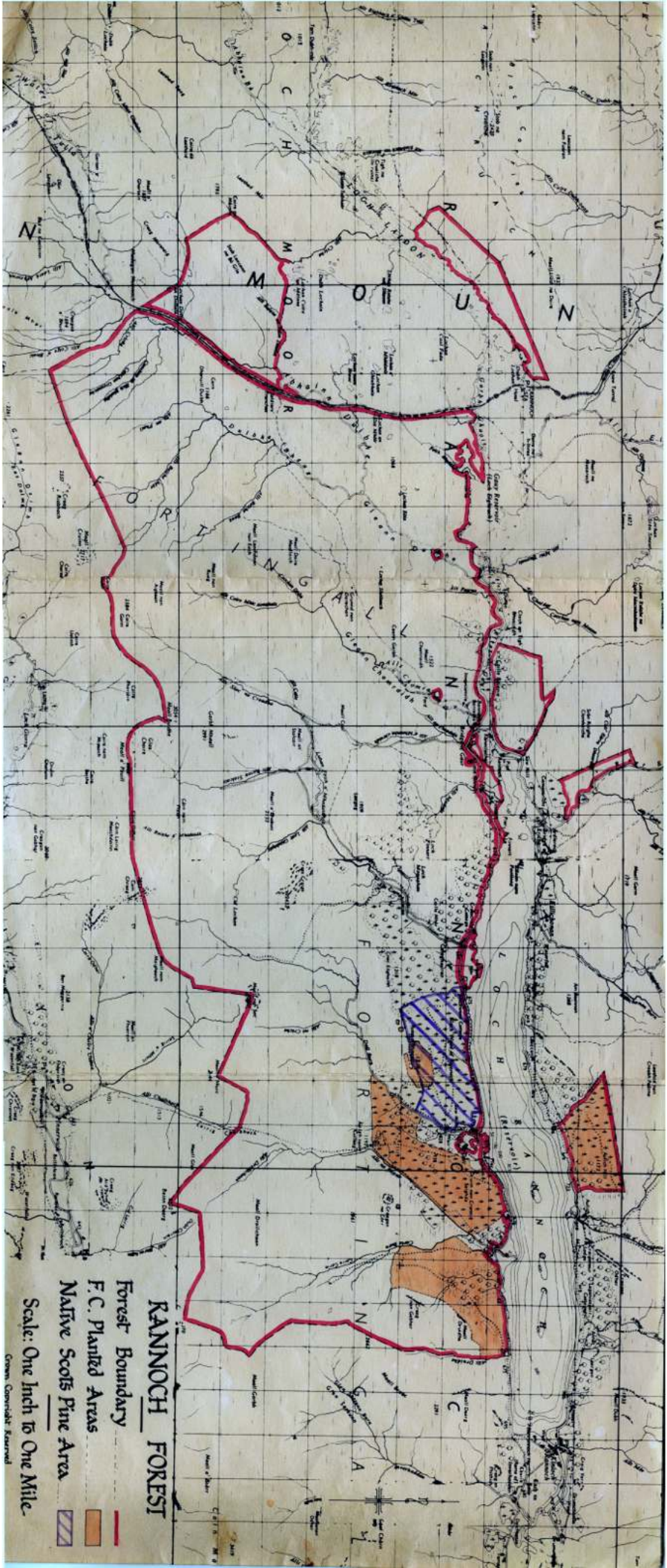
The Forestry Commission's Work

From its early days the Forestry Commission has recognised the importance of our Native Scots pine and has taken steps to conserve those ancient pinewoods which from time to time come under its control. By the early 1930's investigations had been started in Glenmore, Glengarry, Glenloy and in the Black Wood of Rannoch to find the best methods of treating the native woodlands to ensure that they would be perpetuated. These investigations are continuing and in addition, steps have been taken to create large forest reserves at Glen Affric and at Rannoch where the only Scots pine planted will be of local origin. This should ensure the continuance of our native Scots pine free from all possible contamination over some 18,000 acres.

The Importance of the Native Scots Pine

It may be asked why is it necessary to go to so much trouble to preserve these native pines when foresters now have at their disposal a wide range of species from other countries which grow rapidly and to a great size under the climatic soil conditions in Scotland. Is it purely for sentimental reasons that foresters are so anxious to conserve these ancient relics? These pinewoods are an interesting survival of our native vegetation which, if completely destroyed, can never be replaced: they have their own distinctive flora and fauna and are in every sense important national monuments. Furthermore within the surviving stands there are strains of pine which have evolved over the millennia and which are ideally suited for our Scottish conditions. If, as we believe, we are on the threshold of extensive forestry development in this country, it is imperative that we perpetuate these silviculturally desirable strains.

Most of our remaining stands of native Scots pine have deteriorated to such an extent that their preservation and regeneration is no easy matter, but this work is receiving the attention of Forest Research workers in Scotland, and there is little doubt that, in due course, answers will be found to most of the problems.



RANNOCH FOREST

Forest Boundary

F.C. Planted Areas

Native Scots Pine Area

Scale: One Inch to One Mile.

Green Corrie & Kinnell