

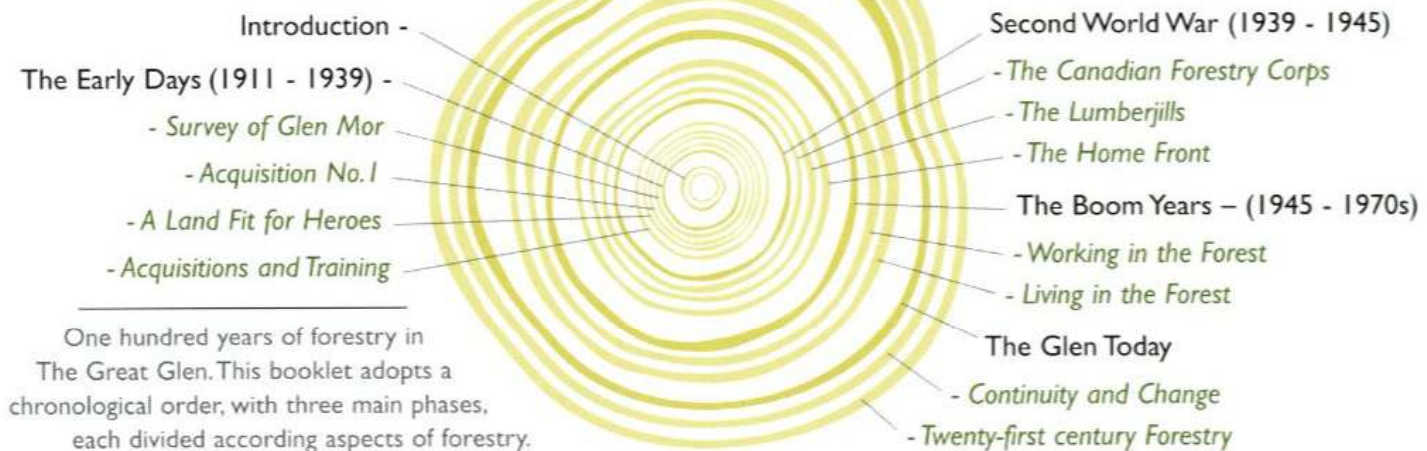
*'The forest is
a beautiful place to be'*



The story of forestry in The Great Glen in the 20th Century



Fort Augustus workers, 1946. **Hughie Macdonald**, front far right



foreword

Forestry is an act of faith. Trees are planted in the hope that when they mature into forests 50 to 70 years later, the reasons why they were planted will still be of relevance to society or that new and valued products and services will have emerged in the intervening period.

It took men of vision to begin the process of reforesting Scotland after centuries of man-induced deforestation but even they could not have envisaged that the trees which they planted to ensure that Britain had a strategic reserve of timber in the event of another major war would develop into forests delivering a wide range of social, economic and environmental benefits.

Their part in the delivery of this major change in land use in the Scottish uplands has been recognised and many words have been written about the development of forestry policy in Scotland but no history of forestry in Scotland would be complete without an insight into the contribution made by the people on the ground who created these forests and without an appreciation of the impact of this afforestation programme on local communities.

This latest publication from the Touchwood Oral History project provides a fascinating insight into the history of state forestry in the Great Glen as seen by local people who were involved in, or affected by, this dramatic change in land use over a relatively short time. As modern foresters attempt to re-create linkages between communities and their local forests this publication is a timely reminder of the need to recognise, value and develop a culture which positions state owned woodlands as valuable local and national assets in which people feel they have a stake and from which they derive a range of benefits.

Bob McIntosh

Photo: John MacTavish

A magnificent Douglas fir



Simon Fraser, 16th Baron Lovat, **First Chairman of FC**

Introduction

'I yield to no man in my belief in a well-thought-out scheme of afforestation as a check to rural depopulation.' - Lord Lovat, 1909

Two women sit in the Invergarry home of one of them, Heather Boyd, talking about the impact of forestry on their lives, their families and their locality. Both women have worked for the Forestry Commission for many years, as have others in their families. Heather comments, *'The Forestry Commission when I was young was looked on as not just an employer but a major force in the Highlands'*. Heather's father, Jack Cairns, was cook in two Commission workers' hostels in the 1950s, at Farr to the south of Loch Ness, where she was born, and latterly Port Clair, between Fort Augustus and Invermoriston. Heather herself worked for the Commission for twenty-one years, which she describes as thoroughly enjoyable.

The Commission was a force in the Great Glen throughout the twentieth century, starting in the early 1920s, just after its inception, when two of the earliest Commission forests – Inchnacardoch and Port Clair – were acquired here. Today, although the jobs in forestry have greatly diminished, the forested landscape that Lord Lovat envisaged – if perhaps not the mix of tree species – is testimony to the dogged determination of this local landowner and aristocrat. Simon Fraser, sixteenth Baron Lovat, used his influence within early twentieth century Government circles to lobby for a national forest. His legacy, clearly visible in the landscape, is also indelibly etched in the memory of the many men and women touched by the Commission's presence.

'It was the Forestry Commission, it was a family.' comments Catherine Cameron as she sits with Heather, discussing the contribution of forestry to Highland life. Catherine today works in the Fort Augustus office of the Forestry Commission. Her husband Ewen went into the forestry as a 16 year old and stuck it for 34 years, until an accident in the forest, which he was lucky to survive, prematurely ended his forestry career. But for all that, he says, *'I would do it again.'*



Catherine and Ewen Cameron

Photo: Neil McFarlane

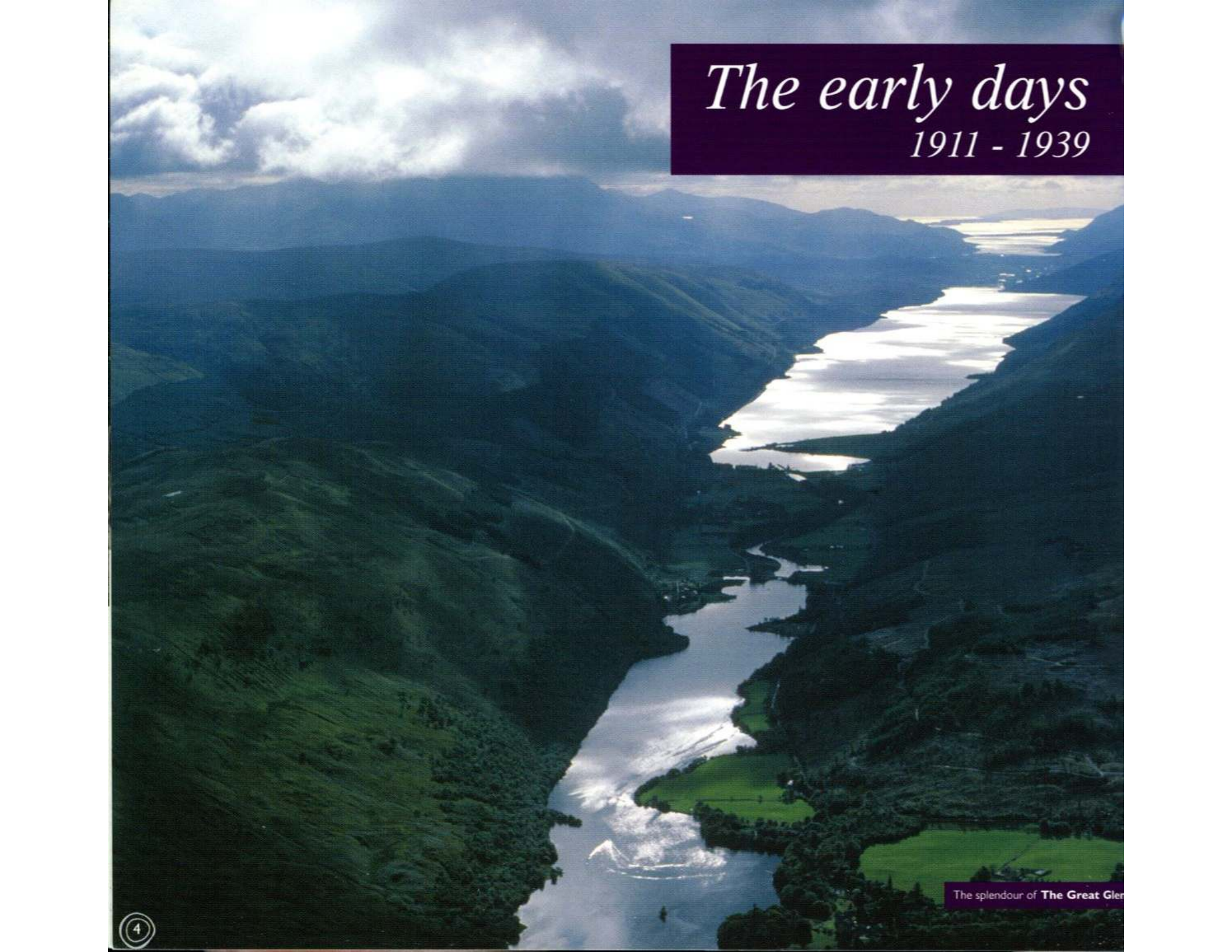
Forestry is built upon foundations laid down by powerful men like Lord Lovat, who, a century ago, believed that large-scale afforestation would turn what was then perceived as wasteland into productive forest and help stem the flow of people from rural areas to British cities and beyond. The First World War had torn through efforts by private estates to create a timber industry, making state intervention even more imperative in the minds of the instigators of state forestry. They are lauded for their efforts. But without men and women like Ewen and Catherine Cameron, Heather Boyd and her father, Jack Cairns, each of whom in their own way helped to build that timber reserve into today's 1,129,247 acres of Scottish state forest, the noble ideals of the Commission's founding fathers would not have been realised.

This is the story of forestry in and around the Great Glen, knitted together from the personal recollections of those who worked in 'the forestry'. These people invested their lives and labour in forestry, and (without, it might be said, much remuneration) created communities in remote and depopulated places, lived their lives, brought up their children and helped bring about one of the most significant changes in the Scottish landscape in many centuries.

'Gleann Mòr'

The Great Glen is inextricably linked with the Highland clan system, not least as a heartland of Jacobite support for the Stuart kings of Scotland, in the days before the Duke of Cumberland crushed those hopes at Culloden in 1746. The great Highland families most associated with the Jacobite risings of the eighteenth century had their strongholds along the Great Glen – clans such as the Camerons of Locheil, Clan Donald, and of course the Lovat Frasers. It is no coincidence that many of those involved in forestry in the twentieth century in these parts still bear these famous names – Tommy and Ewen Cameron, Allan and Hughie Macdonald, Eddie Fraser. These are men brought up in this area, whose ancestors may well have fought for their chief at Culloden.

From the dawn of state forestry, men and women whose family roots lie in this forestry heartland took their forestry know-how and skills to other parts of Scotland and the UK. Tommy Cameron was a Fort Augustus lad who went on to manage the mechanical engineering workshop at Torlundy just outside Fort William. Davie Coutts followed in his father's footsteps as a research forester, both men helping to pioneer forest research at the Lon Mor research station near Fort Augustus and, together, putting in half a century in forest research in the Great Glen and beyond. Jimmy Dargie worked on the massive forest road building programme in the Highlands that was required as timber matured and needed to be extracted. George Mackenzie and Ewen Cameron took their early forestry experience into the private sector and worked throughout Scotland – from the Trossachs to Sunart and Morayshire.

An aerial photograph of a wide river valley. The river winds through the center of the valley, reflecting the sky. The surrounding hills are covered in lush green vegetation. In the distance, more hills and a body of water are visible under a cloudy sky.

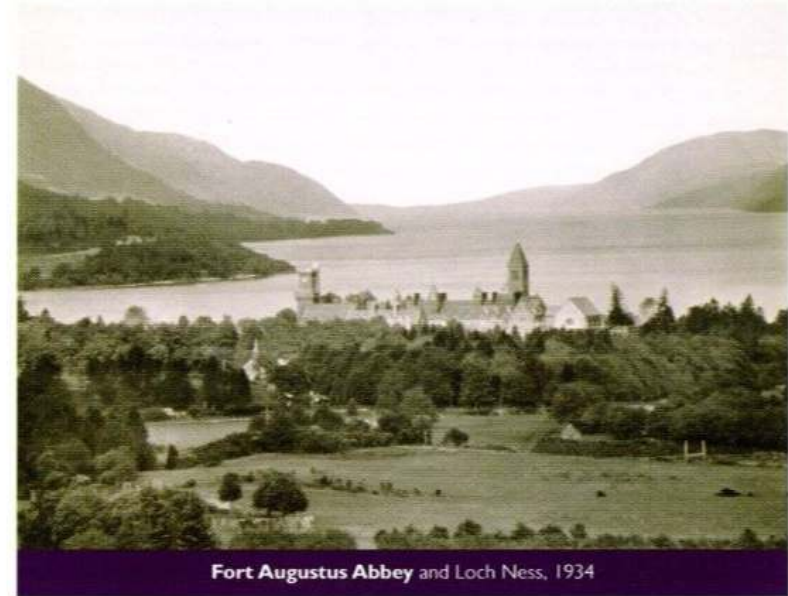
The early days

1911 - 1939

The splendour of **The Great Glen**

Survey of Glen Mor

Many Highland landowners were increasingly crippled with debt by the beginning of the twentieth century. The land had been losing its agricultural value since the hill sheep farming boom of the mid-nineteenth century and the heyday of the sporting estate, by the 1920s, was essentially in the past. The emergence in 1919 of a Government body, the Forestry Commission, with a remit to promote state-aided afforestation must have seemed like manna from heaven for many Highland landowners, who did not have the financial means to support either their ancestral homes or their thousands of acres. Lairds consequently welcomed the chance to off-load burdensome landholdings onto the Commission, which could then go about the expensive and long-term business of growing timber on Great Glen hillsides.



Fort Augustus Abbey and Loch Ness, 1934

©SCRAN / University of St Andrews

Glenmoristoun is a very profitable and fertill little glen ... plenteous of corne and abundance of butter, cheese and milk, and great long woods of firr trees doth grow in that countrey. And the river doeth transport big Jests and Cutts of timber to the fresh water Loghnes ... and theris an little parish Church of timber in this countrey. (Early 17th century)

In a sense, this twentieth-century development was a revival of the timber industry rather than an entirely new phenomenon. After all, the Great Glen has a long history of commercial forestry. As far back as the seventeenth century, timber from places like Glen Moriston was sold and floated down Loch Ness. This was a history that Lord Lovat would have been well aware of, and in which his forefathers were heavily involved. Woodland management was an activity that Lovat pursued with vigour on his own estate. So when, in 1911, Lovat and his brother-in-law, Captain Archibald Stirling of Keir (brother of Sir John Stirling Maxwell, another of the founding fathers of the Forestry Commission) embarked upon a survey of the Great Glen (or Glen Mor, as Lord Lovat called it) with a view to establishing a model for the future afforestation of Scotland, there already existed woods and

plantations in the district. Of the 60,000 acres of land deemed plantable in the survey area (which extended from Loch Eil in the west to the outskirts of Inverness), some 17,500 acres already supported native woodland, mainly birch, and there were 14,500 acres of existing conifer woodland, which would have included the then extensive areas of ancient Caledonian pinewoods to be found by Loch Arkaig, in Glen Garry and in Glen Moriston. There was something to build on, then, and within the local estates a workforce, which, although largely employed in agriculture or game management, nevertheless included those with some experience of working with trees. The Commission also needed gamekeepers to control deer and rabbit numbers, and horsemen to plough and prepare nurseries and eventually to drag out the timber. Hard physical toil was the norm for estate and agricultural workers. It was the same in forestry.

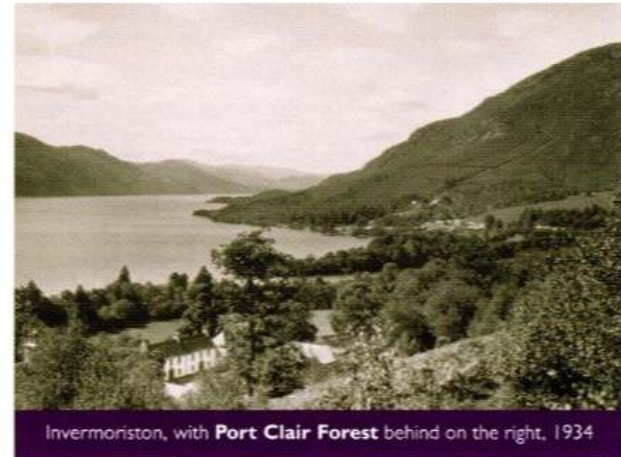
Acquisition No.1

Rubha Ban, a section of forest on the steep-sided banks of Loch Ness near Invermoriston, is nowadays known rather prosaically amongst local forestry folk as 'Acquisition No.1'. This is not, however where the first tree was planted by the Commission. That was in Dorset and resulted from a wager between two of the newly-appointed Commissioners, Lords Lovat and Clinton, who raced through a December night in 1919 to see who could be first to do it. Lovat lost the bet, but still planted a tree at Monaughty in Morayshire – another candidate for claiming to be the Commission's first Scottish acquisition. Nonetheless, Acquisition No 1 on Loch Ness-side, which is part of Port Clair Forest, was undoubtedly one of the first areas of land acquired by the Commission, after it came into being on 1 September 1919.

But forestry meant more to Lovat than mere one-upmanship or indeed the creation of vast swathes of state-owned forests. He was passionate about the role that forestry could play in stemming the flow of people from rural areas, particularly the Highlands, to British cities and beyond. Highland landowners during the late nineteenth century had received a bad press because of their alleged ill-treatment of their tenants. Lovat himself had been in the thick of the defence of the role of sporting estates – which were widely accused of bringing about depopulation. Hence the attraction to him of State-sponsored afforestation. And in 1919, the Government, confronted with a depleted timber reserve, a depressed agricultural sector and armies of homecoming soldiers in need of work and a roof over their heads, finally acted on Lovat's advice.



The first employees at Inchnacardoch Forest, when acquired by FC in 1919



Invermoriston, with Port Clair Forest behind on the right, 1934

©SCRAN / University of St Andrews

The Glen's Douglas fir

Sandy McLure, a retired forester, stands in a grove of 80-year old Douglas fir in Port Clair Forest. The trees around him are tall – some 40 metres – though not of the original 1920 planting. Most, if not all, of the original trees have long since been harvested, the timber too good for the trees to be allowed to mature to the end of their natural life of several hundred years. These tall, straight trees stand testament to the success of this conifer brought from its native homeland in the American Pacific Northwest temperate rainforests by Scots plant hunter, David Douglas, in the 1820s. Some of the fastest growing and tallest conifers in Britain can be found in these Great Glen forests, and trees like those which Sandy is admiring are much sought after by specialist timber merchants, to be used for ships' masts and the like. The 40-foot masts of the refurbished sailing ship *Discovery*, of Antarctic fame, now a floating museum at Dundee, originated in just these stands.

'You can see what a proper forest looks like, when it has been given a chance, a proper thinning, looked after.' Sandy is fond of this place. He first came to Clunes Forest by Loch Lochy, some twenty miles down the Glen to the west, in 1968 as a young assistant forester. In those days forest squads were large and the trees were still being thinned and brashed to create the kind of forest that he's standing in today. Sandy also ended his Commission career in the Great Glen thirty years later, by which time forestry had greatly changed. Growing stands of eighty-year old trees like these giant, great girthed Douglas firs is not what twenty-first century forestry is about – nowadays most commercially grown conifers are lucky to reach forty years. Today's markets demand large quantities of fast-grown, small-dimensioned conifers fit for processing into pulp and chip, as well as sawlogs. It's a sophisticated industry using expensive, computerised machinery and employing far fewer people. Indeed, more are now involved in timber processing than



RRS Discovery,
fitted with masts made from Great Glen timber

work for the Commission in the forests. And many current jobs are filled by contractors, who are rarely based in the Glen. For Sandy, who feels immense pride in the role he played in the creation of Scotland's forests, there is a tinge of regret that this is the way that forestry has gone. He is clearly very fond of trees and is concerned that the Commission should continue to focus on producing forests of the quality of Acquisition No 1. Fond though he may be of the grand old 'Douglas' he's admiring, Sandy laughingly affirms to his interviewer *'I'm not hugging it yet!'* Like many who work in forestry, he is a pragmatist not a sentimentalist.

A Land Fit for Heroes

*'What is our task? To make Britain
a fit country for heroes to live in.'*

David Lloyd George, November, 1918

With a state forest service established, the blueprint for the afforestation of the Great Glen, which Lovat had masterminded in 1911, could be quickly brought into play. A world war had intervened between its conception and the opportunity afforded by the newly founded Forestry Commission. However, it was still a well-founded plan, and one which, if replicated throughout the land, could address the seriously depleted state of the nation's forest reserve. The plan had gone into considerable detail. Afforestation of the central Fort Augustus block had been fully costed and the division of the land and a timetable for planting was outlined. Even the quantity and type of crofts and houses to be created and the numbers of foresters, forest workers and trappers to be engaged, right down to the number of boys to be employed, was identified. Whether the plan for Inchnacardoch and Port Clair, as laid out in the 1911 survey, was followed exactly to the letter is unclear, but the Commission undoubtedly adhered to the spirit of what had been proposed. Not least, a new forest community was created – Auchterawe – probably the first in Britain. This had previously been a grazing farm on the low ground of the 9,000 acre Inchnacardoch deer forest owned by Lovat himself. The cluster of farm buildings became the nucleus for new workers' houses and holdings. In all eight holdings were created. They included four crofts of around eight acres and four much smaller poultry holdings, or chicken runs, as they were known.

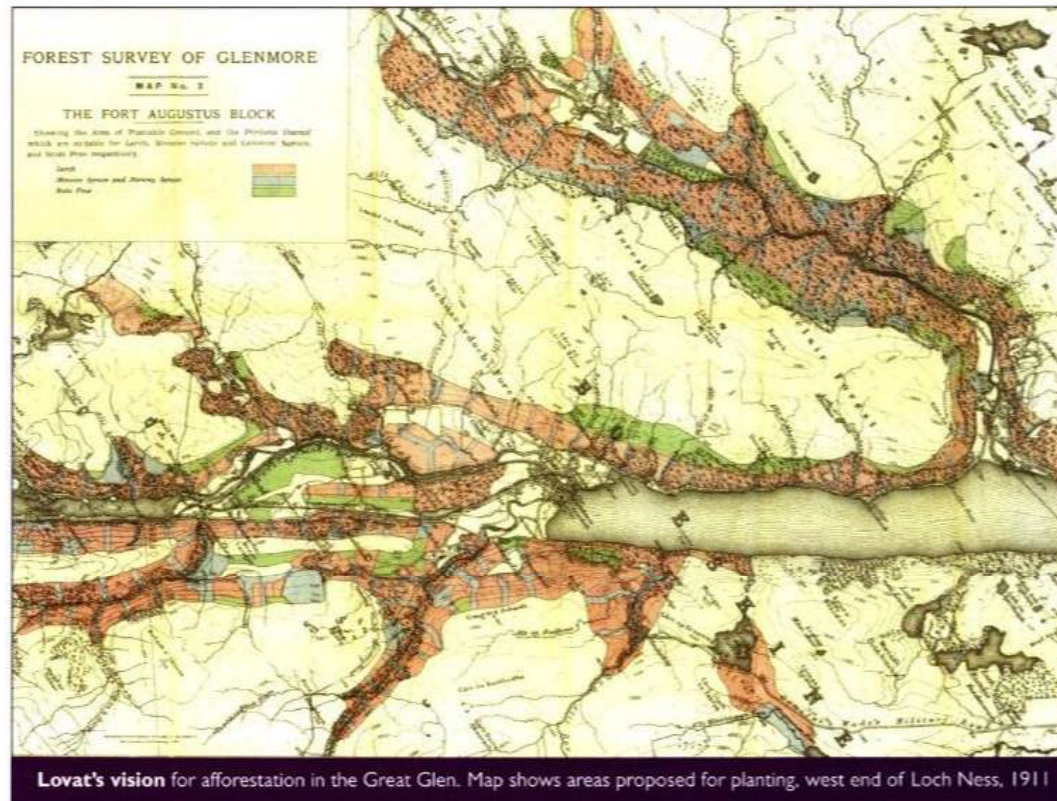


Photo: Hugo Morrison

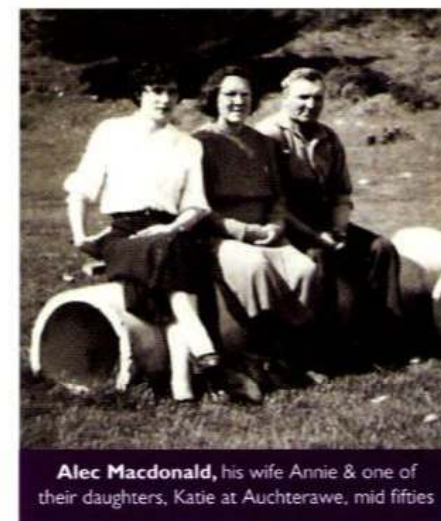
Many of the newly employed workforce, both forester and forest worker, were men recently home from the trenches. They had survived the unspeakable horror of the battlefields of the Great War. Forest work meant hard physical graft, digging ditches and planting trees on wet and windy, steep Highland hillsides, but this was surely infinitely preferable to rat infested trenches reeking of the stench of death. One can hardly imagine what it felt like to be home and working on the land. Most did not speak of their wartime experiences on their return. Hard work, a labourer's wage, a scrap of land to croft and poor housing conditions by all accounts, but alive, physically intact and working in a new rural industry – bringing life back to the Glen. They were the lucky ones. Many of their school friends and neighbours did not return, as witnessed by the war memorial in Fort Augustus.

One of the returning soldiers who found a job and a home at Auchterawe was Alexander Macdonald. Today his son, Allan, recalls his father's early days in forestry. 'My father arrived at Fort Augustus in 1921. My father was in the trenches. ... There is a wee place there called Auchterawe - it was made especially for the soldiers coming back after the war. All these houses at Auchterawe were being built at the time. When father got the job, he had to wait for the house to be built. [He first] got another corrugated iron house down the road, which he got for about a year before the house was built. ... Number 2 holding Auchterawe.' 'Alec Auchterawe', as he was known, spent the rest of his working life – some 37 years – as horseman with the Commission, working his small croft and bringing up, with his wife Annie, a family of eleven, most of whom at one time or another worked in the forestry. Together Allan, the youngest, and his father put in 75 years with the Commission.

Such combined family service and continuity was not uncommon. Hughie Macdonald, a retired Commission ranger with 44 years service, also followed in his father's footsteps. Duncan Macdonald, another Great War veteran, was already employed as a gamekeeper on Port Clair deer forest when it was sold to the Commission by the Grants of Glen Moriston in 1919. He stayed on in the same house and worked for the Commission until 1940 when he retired. After a spell on the squad and national service, Hughie stepped into his father's boots in 1956 as Commission keeper – or 'trapper', as the job was then designated – on the Port Clair beat, and living in the same house until after he retired in 1986.



Courtesy: Royal Scottish Forestry Society



Courtesy: Allan Macdonald

Acquisitions and Training

Following the establishment of the Commission, the priority was buying land suitable for afforestation. Scotland was split into four divisions with offices in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Inverness. The Divisional Officer for the North was Frank Scott, an able forester by all accounts. Scott was particularly successful in acquiring land in the early years and planting was soon underway. By the end of 1920, the Commission owned Inchnacardoch and Port Clair in the Great Glen, and Achnashellach in Wester Ross, in total 34,700 acres.

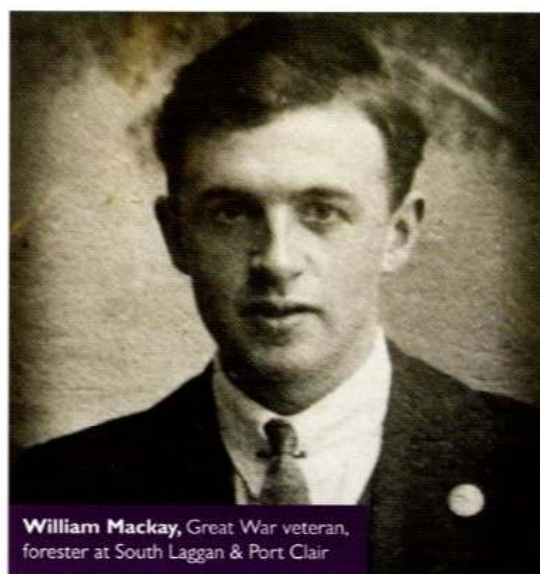
Experienced foresters were needed to implement the plans for these new forests, and to recruit and supervise the workforce. Today John McEwen is remembered as author of 'Who Owns Scotland'. Published in 1977, the book was a comprehensive critique of landownership in Scotland. A staunch socialist and life-long (all 106 years) critic of landlordism, McEwen was also one of the first foresters to be employed by the Commission in Scotland, at Monaughty in Morayshire. Like Scott, he trained at the Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh and his background was in the home timber trade, working for the likes of saw millers James Jones of Larbert. However, such trained foresters were few and far between. Men had to be encouraged to enter this new career and training schools were established to furnish recruits.

William Mackay had come back from the Great War and was successful in applying to the Edinburgh police, but the appointment letter to his home in Skerray on the north coast of Scotland went astray, so he opted instead for the newly-fledged Forestry Commission. He worked initially at Borgie Forest in Sutherland and then as trainee forester at Inchnacardoch.

William's son, Billy, recalls that his grandfather, a crofter in Skerray had warned his son, '*the Forestry Commission would never last because they pay too high wages.*' This is borne out by John McEwen, who later wrote that, after pressure on the Commission from estate owners, who couldn't match the Commission's labourer wage rate (some 45 shillings a week), he was told to reduce this to 40 shillings. Needless to say John McEwen refused. He was later instrumental in introducing trades unions to the Commission. It should also be remembered that the first ten years of the organisation's existence were marked by uncertainty, when Lovat and his fellow



Frank Scott, first divisional officer for North Scotland, 1919



William Mackay, Great War veteran, forester at South Laggan & Port Clair

Courtesy: Billy Mackay

Commissioners had to fight not only swingeing budget cuts but also calls for the organisation's abolition. However, the Commission survived, and the Great Glen began to be transformed. Billy followed in his father's footsteps in 1952 as a mechanic on the Black Isle. As he says today, *'In the event, despite all the politicians of various colours, the Forestry Commission has lasted. You need to be blind not to recognise the achievements of it.'*

By 1921 the Commission had tackled the training issue with the opening of a forestry apprentice school at Beaufort – Lovat's ancestral home – near Kiltarlity. This was designed to turn out twelve men a year after a two-year course. Lord Lovat had provided ground for a nursery, a wood, where the trainees would learn thinning techniques, and land in Glen Urquhart for fencing and planting practice. One graduate of this school was David Coutts. He was a Glasgow orphan who had been placed with a family in Kiltarlity. Beaufort was therefore an ideal start for him. He went on to work for the Commission at Fort Augustus in the 1930s, by which time Lovat had died and the Beaufort school had closed. Another opened in its place at Benmore on the Cowal peninsula in Argyll. By the time that David Coutts started work in the 1930s, Inchnacardoch and Port Clair had been developing for ten years and the workforce had risen from a handful in 1920 to around eighty. Two large nurseries had also been established at Strathoich, near where the Commission offices are today, and a couple of miles up the road at Auchterawe, where, by 1930, 50 acres were given over to tree growing, supplying millions of young trees to the entire district. By then, the Commission had also set up an experimental station, known as the Lon Mor after an area of deep peat in the hills above Fort Augustus, where much experimental work took place. David Coutts got a job there in the early 1950s and spent the rest of his Commission days as a research forester in Fort Augustus. His son, Davie, followed him, working both at Inchnacardoch and at another Commission research station, Grizedale in England.



Beaufort Castle, Lovat's ancestral home, & location of early forester training school

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'In the event, despite all the politicians of various colours, the Forestry Commission has lasted. You need to be blind not to recognise the achievements of it.' - Billy Mackay

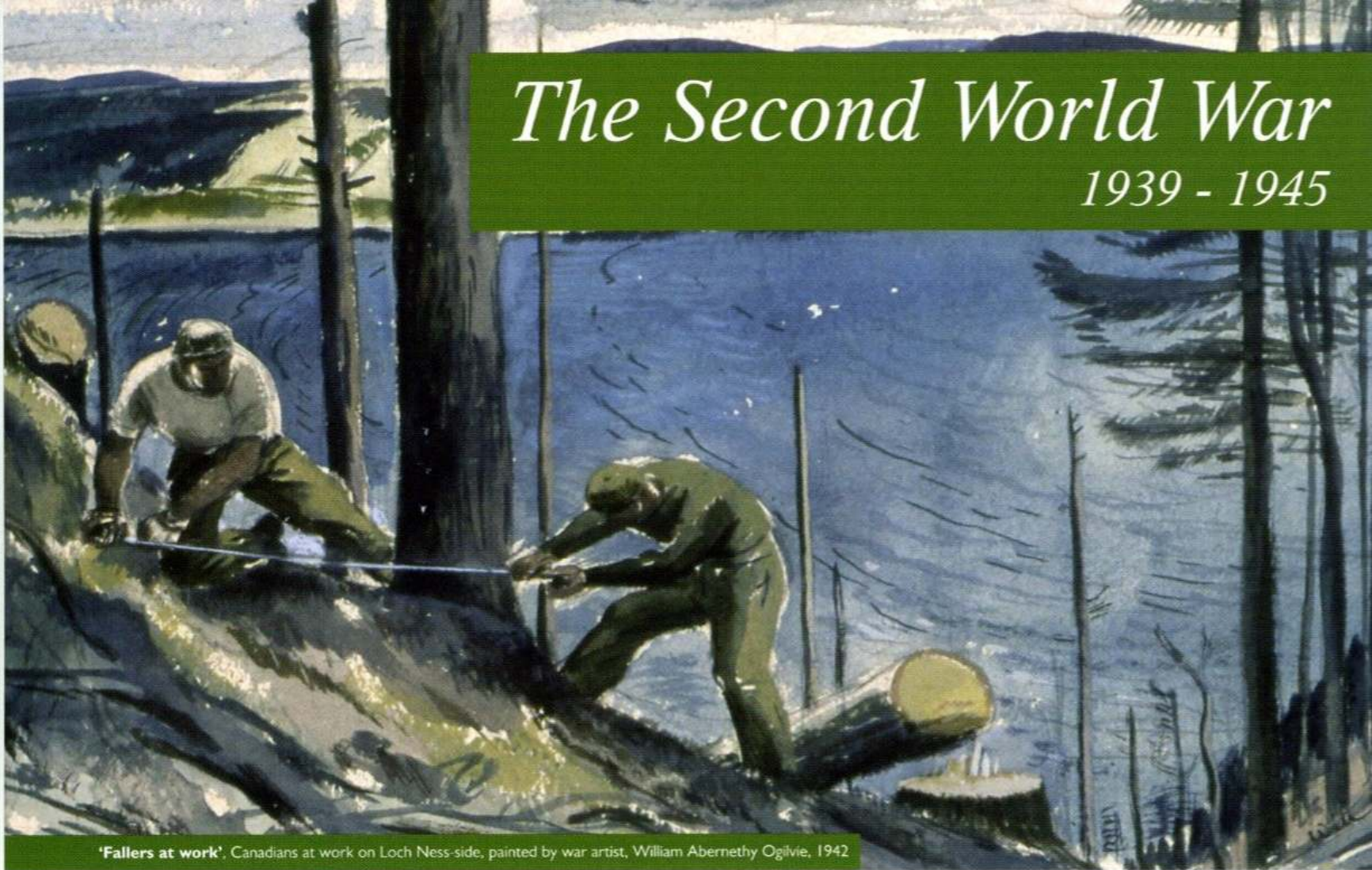


The original Inchnacardoch research office, now Great Glen Way rangers' office

Photo: Mairi Stewart

The Second World War

1939 - 1945



'Fallers at work', Canadians at work on Loch Ness-side, painted by war artist, William Abernethy Ogilvie, 1942

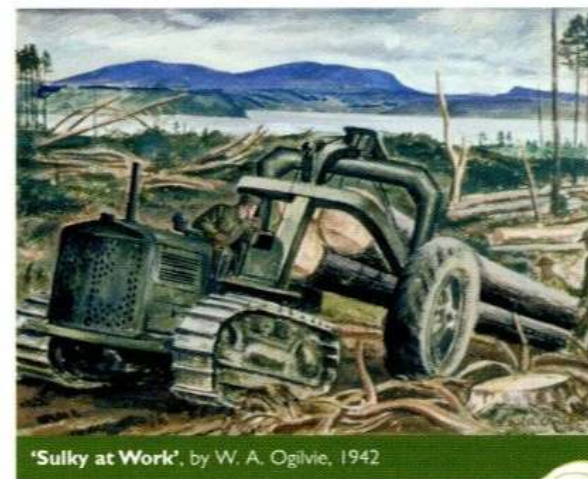
'At the time of writing, the third of October, 1943, it might be of interest to note that the weather for the past three months has been fairly dry, but the sound of rain on the roofs tonight brings back to our minds that once more we must face a winter of rain, rain and more rain, with heavy semi-liquid mud slowly and relentlessly moving down the hill sides behind the tractors, laboriously chugging with loaded sulkies.' - Lieutenant Hubbard of No 15 Company

Wartime contingency planning was already well underway before 1939 and, once again, timber would play a critical role in maintaining the British military machine in the face of the German U-boat blockade. By the time war broke out, the Commission had acquired some 1,444,000 acres of land in the UK and had planted 434,000 acres. In the Great Glen, the Commission owned eleven forests covering over 100,000 acres, although under a quarter of this acreage was actually planted and only the earliest plantings at Port Clair and Inchnacardoch were even approaching a harvestable age. Hughie Macdonald, who started on the Inchnacardoch squad in 1942, recalls some thinning taking place in the forest and the timber going for pitprops, but little else was touched.

Private estate forests would again bear almost the entire brunt of wartime felling and provide the necessary raw material for coal mines, munitions factories and shipyards. It has been estimated that over 90% of timber felled during the Second World War came from private estates. On Great Glen estates such as Lovat, Dochfour, Corrimony, Lochail and Balmacaan, the rasp of the saw, shouts of 'Timber!' and crash of falling trees were heard almost daily, even in some ancient Caledonian pinewoods. Some 29,000 acres were felled in Inverness-shire alone. This required labour. With most of the able-bodied local men fighting on the battlefields of Europe, North Africa and the Far East, the Glen became home – if only for a few months or years – to a procession of forest workers, male and female, who were strangers to its environs.

The Canadian Forestry Corps

The Canadian Forestry Corps (CFC) arrived at Boblainy Wood, near Kiltarlity on the Lovat estate on 20 April 1941. Phoinéas House, just south of Beaulieu would later become their Scottish headquarters. The Canadians (and Newfoundlanders) were a highly popular addition to the locality, providing willing dancing partners, firewood for the needy and the odd extra ration for friends in nearby villages. They even had their own band, which Nanny Marshall, a fourteen-year old Lewiston girl in 1939, recalls. 'Over at Kiltarlity was headquarters, and they had a huge band. They used to broadcast from London. They were a very prestigious band.' In all there were 33 CFC camps in Scotland, mainly in the Highlands, as well as several **Newfoundland** Forestry Unit camps scattered around the north of Scotland. Eventually there would be five CFC camps on the Lovat estate alone and another at Lochend on Dochfour estate. The Canadians had an immediate rapport with the locals, which is not really surprising since



'Sulky at Work', by W. A. Ogilvie, 1942

Beaverbrook Collection of War Art,
© Canadian War Museum: 19710261-4786

*Newfoundland did not join the
Canadian confederation until 1949*

many of them had Scottish ancestry. They were welcomed and showered with invitations to dances, whist drives, concerts and into folks' homes. In return, the locals were invited to the camps for various entertainments. Nanny recalls, 'We used to have lovely evenings. Beautiful variety shows they would put on at Lochend.' She adds, 'They all had nicknames from where they came from. There were ones they called the 'herring chokers' and they were from New Brunswick.'

Of course, it was not all pleasure and an important job had to be done – in all weathers. One Canadian officer, Lieutenant Hubbard of No 15 Company, based at Boblainy, wrote in his journal: 'At the time of writing, the third of October, 1943, it might be of interest to note that the weather for the past three months has been fairly dry, but the sound of rain on the roofs tonight brings back to our minds that once more we must face a winter of rain, rain and more rain, with heavy semi-liquid mud slowly and relentlessly moving down the hill sides behind the tractors, laboriously chugging with loaded sulkies on to the landings.' But despite the conditions, the Canadians and 'Newfies', as the Newfoundland men were widely known, did a phenomenal job. The CFC cleared approximately 230,000 forest acres in Scotland during their stay. They would be remembered for a long time in the Glen, not least because many married local girls, who moved to their husband's homeland as war brides. A notable tribute to the CFC was paid by Laura, Lady Lovat, when she stated, 'you Canadians may be cutting the Scots firs of the Highlands, but in Highland hearts you are planting something far more lasting'.

The Canadians and Newfoundlanders also brought with them tools and techniques which were new to British forestry, such as TD9 caterpillars, lorries, bulldozers and diesel saw-mills. All these would later be adopted and adapted for use in Scottish forests, in the post-war drive for increasing efficiency and mechanisation.

Snedding involves the removal of branches from the felled tree. Also referred to as 'cleaning', it was originally done using an axe.



The wartime wedding at the CFC Camp, Kiltarlity, of Karl Kaiser, No. 19 Company to local girl, Violet McDougall

Courtesy: Isobel Stork, on behalf of Violet Cranko

The Lumberjills

The Canadians were not the only incomers to the Glen during the war. The Women's Timber Corp (WTC), its members affectionately known as 'lumberjills', was a section of the better-known Women's Land Army set up in early 1942. These young women – many from the city and unused to manual labour – were involved in every aspect of timber production, including felling with axe and saw, **snedding** dragging the logs down from the forest with horses and working in nearby saw-mills. Nanny Marshall recalls that a WTC contingent was based near Invermoriston and others were billeted at Cannich. The girls at Invermoriston were involved mainly in the Commission's tree nursery, but the WTC, like the Canadians, mostly worked on private estates. Some were sent out to measure timber as part of the Acquisitions team. Years later, one of

those girls, Chris Turner, gave an account of her time measuring the ancient 'granny' pines on the estate of Cameron of Locheil. Initially, she and five or six other girls were billeted in a 'rat-infested bothy' above the stables at Achnacarry, where she recalls taking baths in a two-foot long zinc bath and singing as loudly as she could to keep the rats away. Their work was in the old Caledonian pinewoods of Loch Arkaig and Glen Mallie, which proved a long trek by foot and boat and was difficult ground to cover. The Commandos, who famously trained at Achnacarry, had accidentally set fire to the wood, so the girls would return from their day's work as filthy as chimney sweeps. Not only that, their boss, Affleck Gray, the Acquisitions Officer, who later compiled the story of the WTC in Scotland, recalls that they *'were occasionally alarmed by live bullets thudding into trees quite near us and then the thump and roar of mortars so near that we had to lie flat on the ground and cover our ears.'* He added, *'It was not unusual to find a Commando appear as if from thin air.'*



Courtesy: Margaret Angus

The Home Front

'If there was a dance at the weekend, which there nearly always was, then you had to keep your curlers in.' - Nanny Marshall

Of course, it was not only strangers to the Glen that worked in its woods. Those too old or unfit for active service and the young ones, not old enough to be called up, remained. For them, it was business as usual. Local girls like Nanny Marshall, who was fourteen when war broke out, found work in the woods, although not in the official WTC. Nanny left school and was working in the local grocer's shop in Drumnadrochit, but the pay was none too good, most of it going to her widowed mother for her keep. So in 1942, she got a job - working for a timber firm, Montague L Mayer of Forres, which had bought the woods of nearby Balmacaan estate. At a shilling an hour, this was far better than the one pound two shillings and sixpence that was Nanny's



Courtesy: Nanny Marshall

weekly shop wage, and much more enjoyable. Her day started at eight, after a long walk to get to the starting point. She would be dressed in her brother's hand-me-downs, and a head-square tied in a turban on her head, *'To keep my hair under wraps from the sawdust flying about.'* Not only that, she adds, *'If there was a dance at the weekend, which there nearly always was, then you had to keep your curlers in.'* Curlers! Yes, curlers. There were no hard hats in those days.

Once in the wood, Nanny turned her hand to everything, from cross-cutting logs, snedding, preparing the drags for the horses to pull, burning brash and even, if necessary, felling. She recalls, *'They gave us a lighter axe – four pound instead of six pound. I had great muscles, I did.'* They had a ten-minute tea break in the morning and afternoon and would finish at six. A long day and very hard work, but, says Nanny today, *'I enjoyed every minute of it. I just loved the open air, even in the awful weather. To me, it was one long amusement, working in the wood.'* It was rough work for a girl, but Nanny was strong. You had to be in those days living in the country. But she genuinely enjoyed it and even losing a finger in the company sawmill did not dampen her spirit. Today, it is easy to see why – Nanny is still a feisty, spirited lady. At 83, the joie de vivre, the sense of fun, is still plain to see. Nanny got married in



Courtesy: Hughie Macdonald

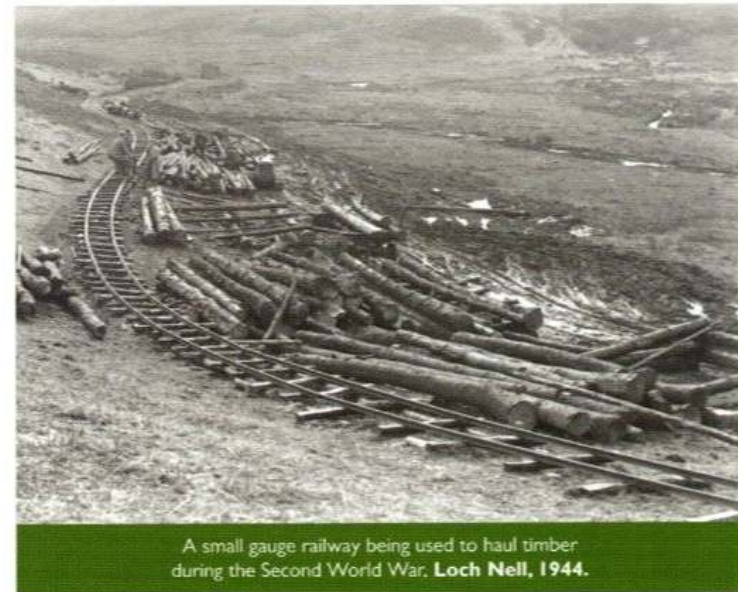
1946 to her wartime sweetheart, Charlie, and that was the end of her short, but memorable, forestry career. She adds, *'I just enjoyed it so it was no hardship to me. I'd rather cut trees than work in a house.'*

While the timber merchants and Canadians stripped the Glen of its fine old trees – many planted in the eighteenth century by farsighted Grant and Fraser lairds – the business of growing and tending trees continued in the Commission's immature forests. Hughie Macdonald was destined, like his brothers, to follow his father into the Commission. By the time he joined the squad full-time in 1942, aged 14, he already had several summer holidays working in the nursery under his belt. He recalls his first day at work. *'[I] was weeding the seedbeds, sitting [on a bag] in the alleys.'* Not too strenuous for a young lad, but he also recalls that there would be days when the midges stopped the work. The Auchterawe squad at that time, Hughie says, *'must have been between 60 and 70, men, women and boys.'* The nurseries were large, but there was other work to be done in the forest – brashing, planting and weeding

the young trees. In the nursery, Alex Macdonald, then in his forties, continued to work his horse as before. His youngest child, Allan, born in 1940, was a toddler at the time. One of his earliest memories is of Saturday mornings, accompanying his father on the cart down to the Fort Augustus railway station to pick up horse feed. In these days there was a branch line from Spean Bridge, by then only carrying goods such as timber and feed.

Davie Coutts was only a lad during the war, but recalls one event at Inchnacardoch that is still vivid in his memory over 60 years later. That was the day that, as he stood watching the squad weeding in the nursery, there appeared on the horizon the distinctive silhouette of the now legendary Spitfire fighter plane. To the complete surprise of all, as Davie describes today, *'It came across and nearly took the leaders off the top of the trees.'* Not surprisingly, everyone hit the deck. However, this was no out-of-control fighter, but a young pilot, who regularly by-passed the postal system and dropped parcels for his mother in the village!

Tommy Cameron might well have been at Inchnacardoch the day the Spitfire buzzed the squad. Though only fourteen, he was already old enough to work full-time on the day when war broke out. The Commission had been split into two divisions in 1939: the Forest Management Department which dealt with normal activities; and the Timber Production Department, dealing with war needs and coming under the Ministry of Supply from 1941. In 1940, Tommy moved over to the Timber Production Department and was shifted to a forest near Buckie in Banffshire, where, still only fifteen, he was put to work in a sawmill. Tommy would certainly have been called-up when he eventually turned eighteen in 1943, but for an accident in the sawmill. *'On the thirteenth of November 1942, I took off my fingers on the saw. And it was a Friday!'* Bad luck indeed. Tommy was not back at work until the following June; the remainder of his war would be spent in the forestry. He worked with lumberjills *'sharpening their saws'*, and on extraction at Dallas and in the Culbin Forest, where timber was taken from the forest to the nearby sawmill via a small gauge railway, using an engine known as a *'puggie'* – capable of pulling two bogies full of timber. It was during this time that his talent for fixing engines emerged. The puggies and tractors were forever breaking down and he was the one who managed to get them up and running again. After the war Tommy would be a Commission mechanic for the rest of his working life – over 50 years in all.



Courtesy: University of St Andrews

*'On the 13 of November 1942,
I took off my fingers on the saw.
And it was a Friday!'* - Tommy Cameron

The Boom Years

1945 - 1970s



Horse logging, South Laggan Forest, 196

'The summers were the best we'd get our shirts off and show our muscles. The old boys sitting having their tea and laughing at us, enjoying life. Like spring lambs.' - Allan Macdonald

Working in the Forest

War over, 'the nippers' – as the youngsters on the squad were known – who at the outbreak of hostilities in 1939 were no more than teenagers, emerged as young men ready to set out on their adult working lives. They would readily find work as forestry got back into full swing. There was much to do, all the thinning largely left undone, and acre upon acre of devastated land to be reforested. Much of this work would fall to the Commission which continued to acquire land – including, in 1951, the magnificent pinewoods of Glen Affric. Some young men, like Tommy Cameron, who had left Fort Augustus during the war, returned and had no difficulty getting back on the squad. The 'old boys' like Alex and Duncan Macdonald, who had been with the Commission from its earliest days, began to think of retirement; their sons ready to take over the reins. There was work aplenty, and not just for local people.

The Commission embarked on a recruitment campaign with newspaper adverts and articles, aimed at attracting men into this growing industry with the promise of a good job, a house with a garden and modern amenities like an indoor WC and bath. A job for life with a pension at the end of it provided further appeal. George Mackenzie was six when his father, Edgar, uprooted his family from Cambuslang in 1952, leaving a good job as an ambulance driver to become a forest worker at Inchnacardoch. It was a decision he probably never regretted. Six months after Edgar arrived, he applied for and was granted a vacant croft in Auchterawe. He readily took to the job and the lifestyle. However, some from the cities soon left, not bargaining for the sheer physical graft of forestry work, the relative isolation, the lack of services...and the midgie! Looking back, Allan Macdonald comments, *'In these olden days you had to be really strong. If not, you could go away home.'* It was not a job for the faint-hearted; forestry was driven by sheer brawn and the indispensable horse.

Forestry was also attracting young men with ambitions to become professional foresters. Before long university forestry departments and forester training schools were quickly filled to capacity. Finlay Macrae was a young Skye man who had ended his war as a POW in Germany when his glider was shot down on the Rhine crossing. He returned home intending to do medicine, but he changed his mind. Today, after a lifetime in forestry, Finlay, an octogenarian, and a man with considerable presence, recalls, *'Forestry presented itself as a new beginning.'* After a year on the squad at Glen Brittle Forest in Skye, he enrolled at Aberdeen University, graduating in 1951, and was delighted to be posted to the North Conservancy as an assistant district officer. Finlay recalls his thoughts, *'I hope I can get to the North Conservancy where I can feel at home.'* Finlay embarked on a long career in forestry with many highlights, not least becoming District Officer responsible for the great Caledonian pinewoods of Glen Affric – in Finlay's words, *'the jewel in the crown.'* He was also able to pursue his life-long passion – playing the Highland bagpipe.



Edgar (Eddie) Mackenzie at Auchterawe, 1959

Courtesy: George Mackenzie

The Nursery Squad

At Inchnacardoch, the two nurseries got back into full swing. In those days, the workforce was divided into two squads; the hill squad, which undertook felling and planting, and the nursery squad, which was split between the upper nursery at Auchterawe and the lower Strathoch nursery near the forest office.

The nursery squad always included a large contingent of women, all working full-time. Both Hughie and Allan Macdonald were the youngest in large families, most of whom at one time or another worked for the Commission. Hughie's sister, Betty, worked during the war at Inchnacardoch and also at Buckie. Forestry, in these days, really was a family affair. Tommy Cameron's wife, Nessie, whose father had the job of extracting seeds from cones for the South Laggan nursery, did her stint in the forestry, including nursery work and thinning. She recalls there were around 30 girls working at South Laggan Forest near Invergarry. She only stayed a year and didn't like it much, but not because she wasn't up for the work. Her father was a widower, so she had to keep the house, which didn't suit the Commission's long hours.

The nursery was a busy place and almost all work was done manually. The women and boys, with nimble hands, were usually allocated seedbed weeding duties, while the older boys and young men might be weeding the lines of older plants. The horsemen, Alex Macdonald and Peter Cameron, along with the more experienced men, would be involved in lining out the young transplants moved from the seedbeds. Allan Macdonald explains, *'With lining out, [we] had boards about six to eight foot long with chalks along the board and the horse and plough came and ploughed the soil onto the roots of the plant and that would give you a line.'* Another task for the horseman was to sow out a green crop – as manure – which would then be ploughed in



Duncan and Mary Macdonald with their nine children - all but two of whom worked in forestry

Courtesy: Hughie Macdonald



Women & children working in a nursery: sitting to weed the seedbeds, 1952

and the soil made ready to receive the seeds. Nursery activities, like most other forestry work, were dictated by the seasons, with sowing and lining out a winter and springtime occupation.

Tommy Cameron was ten years old when he began working as a 'nipper' during the summer holidays at the lower Inchnacardoch nursery. That was in 1935 and he returned every summer until he left school at fourteen and joined the squad full-time. He remembers working with seven or eight other boys and, he says, 'one older person to keep us right'. Tommy laughs at the memory of one well kent supervisor, Jackie Paterson. It was Jackie's rule that if any of the kids used bad language then they would be put in a planting bag. One day, Jackie Paterson himself uttered an oath and the boys duly administered the required punishment. Just then the forester, Mr Anderson, arrived and had to cut him out. After that, Tommy says, word soon went round, 'Did you hear what the nippers did to Jackie Paterson, they put him in a bag.'



Tractor replaced horse for **lining-out the transplants**.
Here seen ploughing soil onto lining out boards, 1957

'Did you hear what the nippers did to Jackie Paterson, they put him in a bag.'

Tommy Cameron



Forestry students, **Norman Davidson & John Povall** placing seedlings in lining-out board, Uig Nursery, Argyll, 1964

Perhaps it is the repetitive, monotonous and backbreaking nature of the work that brings out so much humour in forestry folk. Young Davie Coutts started out on the nursery squad around 1950, fresh from the Inverness Technical School. At this time, he believes there were as many as 130 working for the Commission, between Inchnacardoch and Port Clair. The place was a hive of activity; the fields around Auchterawe tilled and growing crops, a few cattle and sheep belonging to the Commission crofters on the nearby grazings, and the nurseries buzzing with activity. Davie has good memories, like the time when a big Clydesdale horse, Peggy, made a bid for freedom and, as he says, 'these two horsemen coming down the road chasing after ... to stop [the horse] getting into the nurseries – with bags of feed trying to catch [her] Quite comical.' Davie is unusual in that he worked at Inchnacardoch both as a worker and again as an assistant forester for a year after he completed his training at the Faskally forestry school in Perthshire. He returned to Inchnacardoch, in the early seventies, to work as a research forester in the fields of genetics and silviculture, and remained in that job until his retirement in 1987.

The Hill Squad

Only the women and boys would remain in the nursery squad. The men might switch between the nursery and hill squads. The work on the hill would also follow the seasons. With summer over and the vegetation dying back, it was time to prepare for springtime planting the following year. In these days, much of the land earmarked for planting was 'bare ground' – rough hill grazing which had never been planted before and was usually undrained. Drains would be cut, often by hand, to draw off water from the sodden, peaty soils. Draining was sheer drudgery; a pick and a rutter spade the only tools before mechanisation completely revolutionised this essential operation in the wet and peaty North Conservancy. Until then it was a labour intensive task, one that ensured that squad numbers remained high. Hughie Macdonald, who in his time turned his hand to most of the manual forestry tasks, explains the difference the introduction of mechanical draining made: *'A caterpillar and plough could do more drains in a day than [we] could ... in a whole winter with a pick, shovel and rutter spade.'* The first plantings were close to the existing roads and Commission offices, because of the sheer effort that would be involved in moving men and plants onto the hill, where there were only a few hill tracks. But gradually, the forests began to creep upwards. Until road building got underway with the establishment of the roads squad at Fort Augustus in the late 1940s, forestry was largely confined to the distance that horse and man could easily cover. Once the roads came, they opened the forest up for felling and allowed planting up to 1,000 feet. Even then there was some rough and difficult ground to fence and plant in the Glen, not least at South Laggan, where the planting squad must have sometimes felt that they were hanging off the edge of the world, high above Loch Oich.

One of Hughie Macdonald's first jobs when he returned from National Service in 1949 was planting the area that was burnt in 1942. It was, he recalls, quite difficult work, *'You had to root through the burnt trees.'* The trees that Hughie planted are now long since harvested. Bob Dunsmore, currently Conservator for the Commission's Highland area



Jock Macrae fencing above Loch Oich, 1941

Courtesy: John Macrae

(former North Conservancy), recalls the sheer drudgery and monotony of this task in his early days as a forest worker in Argyll. The emotions felt at the end of a wet day of planting are still raw. Nearly 30 years later, he remembers, *'You just try to think of things to keep you going, set yourself targets.'* Bob's own targets were a certain number of trees to be planted by a certain time, up to 2,000 trees a day, often climbing steep hillsides with a hundred or so saplings in a bag slung over his back. His year-and-a-half with the squad instilled in him a respect for, and empathy with, the people that he would later supervise,

including those in Fort Augustus district, where he was assistant district officer between 1981 and 1986. For Hughie Macdonald, this was the kind of work that he did season after season, in the squad and then as forest ranger, for much of his 44 years at Inchnacardoch and Port Clair Forests.

With many of the early plantings at Inchnacardoch and Port Clair ready to be thinned by the 1940s, harvesting could commence. Although the hill squad was involved in thinning operations, much of the timber at that time was sold standing and harvesting was therefore undertaken by contractors, who in turn were linked with numerous sawmills, many of which were portable and based within the forests.

When Allan Macdonald followed his father into forestry in 1956, the old ways were still to the fore. Allan's first job was with a contracting outfit, working at a sawmill at Allt na Criche in Inchnacardoch Forest. He was one of a squad of five men – a horseman, a sawmiller and three labourers – who would be felling with the cross cut saw, snedding with an axe and dragging the logs (using a horse) to the sawmill, where the logs would be converted into mining timber.



Loading a lorry with pit-props. 1962

'They were hardy boys too because they were out in all weathers.' - Allan Macdonald

Allan's early days working in the forestry industry coincided with the end of the era of the cross-cut and horse. When Allan is asked today if he enjoyed his work in those far off days, over 50 years ago, he replies without hesitation, in his gentle Highland way, 'Aw yes, *that was my life, I enjoyed that, manual labour.*' He was a fit young man, who revelled in hard work, starting at 8am and working through until 5pm, punctuated only by two short breaks and lunch, five and a half days a week. After work on a Saturday, Allan, like many of his contemporaries, would be off playing shinty – the ancient Highland game, requiring skill, courage and stamina. Allan had been captain of his school team, Bunoich, winning the Aitcheson Cup (1953 and 1954) and then played for Inveroch, the local junior shinty team. Forest workers in those days undoubtedly attained a level of fitness that few of us possess nowadays. Allan comments, *'They were hardy boys too because they were out in all weathers.'* True enough, but there would be times when the elements would force them into places like the old laundry at Inchnacardoch Lodge, which had been one of Lovat's shooting lodges. Hughie Macdonald recalls, *'If a shower of rain came on then it would be, "Come on, boys, its time for the laundry."*'

New Ways in the Glen

But change was on the way. In 1952 at Dalcataig in Glen Moriston, the Swiss-made 'Lasso' cableway was tested. This was a fixed overhead cable, akin to the **blondin tackle** that the Canadians had introduced during the war. It was powered by a stationary Fordson tractor with a drum winch from which a continuous cable was run through the forest on pulleys attached to trees. Logs were hooked on from ramps without stopping the cable, thereby enabling considerably more timber to be extracted than was possible by horse. At Dalcataig, there was around 300 metres of bare land from the forest edge to the road, where the off-loading platform was situated. Horses were still used to haul the logs to the ramps at which they could be attached to the cable, but the cableway extended the scope for timber extraction by substituting machine power for horse- and man-power. It was not without its problems, however, as Davie Coutts and Hughie Macdonald, can confirm. It was sometimes called an endless cable, and as Davie Coutts recalls, 'It didn't stop until something went wrong.' And that was quite often. One day Davie looked up at the cable and said to his workmate – 'Gee I think that pulley is in the wrong way round.' Not long after there was a massive crash as it jammed, uprooting the tree to which it was attached. 'So we got a day's rest,' says Davie gleefully.



Blondin tackle wire ropeway being used by Canadians on Loch Etive, 1944

Blondin Tackle was a cable ropeway used during the Second World War, which carried timber in bundles from felling to loading points.

'Gee I think that pulley is in the wrong way round.' - Davie Coutts

The lasso or blondin tackle was not entirely successful. It wasn't until the early 1960s, when the Isachsen winch was first used in the district, that mechanical extraction became the norm. Until then, horses were still used. George Mackenzie's father had initially joined the squad when he first came to Auchterawe in 1952, but soon after he became one of the horsemen, alongside Alex Macdonald. Apart from the pleasure of working with these big affable creatures, the horsemen were able to work them on their crofts, which was a good perk, if not entirely official. But the horses' days were numbered. Alex Macdonald, known to many as 'the carter', became a tractor driver in the

Courtesy: University of St Andrews

fifties, doing the same job as he had done for 30 years, except that he was sitting on a machine instead of leading his faithful Clydesdale. Edgar Mackenzie was also transferred to the less genial tractor by the end of the 1950s; the steading, which had stabled the horses, becoming instead a tractor garage.

When Tommy Cameron arrived back at Inchnacardoch in 1948 after his wartime service with the Timber Production Department, he was put to work planting, but it wasn't long before his wartime experience driving tractors resulted in a shift to a ploughing tractor with the Commission. In those early pioneering days of forestry ploughing technology, this was a specialist job and he travelled to several forests in the North; first to the gentle terrain of the Black Isle, and then to Torlundy, the Lochaber district headquarters for the west end of the Great Glen and extending to Loch Sheil, Sunart, Morvern and Mull to the west and Corrour to the east. He was put to work ploughing the steep hillsides of Leannachan and Glen Loy. It was a hazardous business, not only with the risk of getting bogged in the peat. With tractors still merely adaptations of the agricultural sort and therefore less than ideal for steep ground, there was a



Cuthbertson plough being pulled by TD9 tractor, Fetteresso, 1952 - tractors driven by Jim & Bob Connell

Courtesy: The family of Davy Anderson

'the tractor took off, with me too' - Tommy Cameron

danger of coupling. Tommy relates that he nearly ended up in an 80 to 100 feet gully in Glen Loy, when *'the tractor took off, with me too'*. Tommy recalls his reaction to that near miss; *'So I thought to myself, it's time I was going on holiday.'* About this time, a mechanic, Duncan Mackenzie, was employed by the Commission at Torlundy. Tommy was ever willing to help Duncan at night after work with machinery repairs, *'free of charge!'* he laughingly recalls. Tommy had no formal training, but he had been repairing an assortment of machines during the war. *'I usually got them going'*, he says today. Impressed with Tommy's mechanical flair, Duncan Mackenzie put in a request to bring him officially onto the mechanical engineering team at Torlundy – that made two of them. Tommy had found his niche and gave nearly 40 years service at the Torlundy workshop, latterly as workshop manager, until he retired in 1990.

'The First Revolution'

'The whole world changed ... in the fifties and sixties. Everything advanced then at a tremendous rate. Even the felling of the trees and the extracting of the trees. The chainsaw was the greatest thing on earth.'

Allan Macdonald

Allan Macdonald is describing one of the landmark innovations in modern British forestry. As he says, 'The first revolution' was when the powersaw replaced the cross-cut saw. In the Great Glen, this was in the early 1960s. In those days, felling took place at one time in the year, the actual cutting being assigned to one skilled feller. George Mackenzie, who started with the Commission at Inchnacardoch in 1961, recalls 'It was Dunci Portclair, who had the Danarm.' That was Hughie Macdonald's older brother, Duncan. The Danarm that he refers to was one of the earliest powersaws to be used by the Commission. It was a big heavy saw, the engine of which, George remembers, had to be turned round to keep the petrol above the gravity feed and therefore enable the saw to continue to run. Allan recollects the effort needed to work one of these brutes. 'Some of them were difficult to start and had great kickbacks – they would break your arm or fingers. Very heavy to work.' Allan remembers that there was one contractor that he worked with, who, if the Danarm failed to start in the morning, threw it aside and got back to the cross-cut. 'Much to my disgust,' Allan adds. He was very much in favour of new technologies, which revolutionised felling and massively increased productivity.

By 1963, felling by powersaw was no longer a one-man specialist job at Inchnacardoch; instead, several of the men became chainsaw fellers, including George Mackenzie, who recalls the bitterly cold day in

The work of a lifetime

FELLING trees which he once saw planted is Duncan Allan Macdonald, who has worked for the Forestry Commission since 1935.



Hughie Macdonald's brother, **Dunci Portclair**, first Inchnacardoch chainsaw operator, 1977

Courtesy: Hughie Macdonald

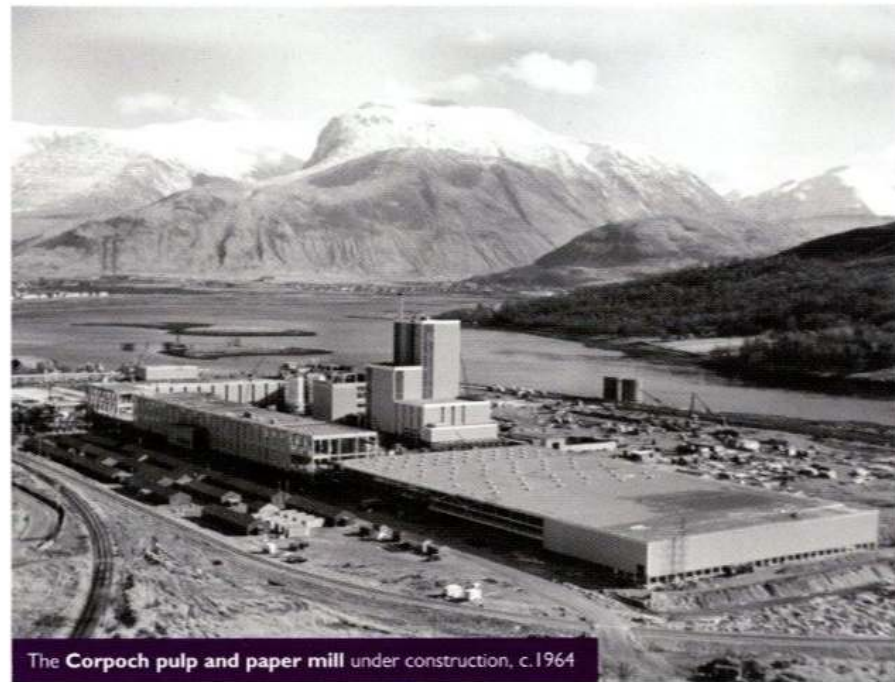
November 1963 that they were put onto a training course. He says, 'I remember going on a little course and shown how to sharpen the saw, but not how to operate it.' By this time, the lighter but still temperamental pioneer powersaw had been introduced. In these days, concern about health and safety was not as we know it today, and workers would be kitted out with their own casual clothes. For Allan Macdonald it was sports jacket, 'and they got chucked off', light trousers, maybe wellie boots. No gloves and no hats. And yet, serious accidents were few and far between.

Turning Points - The Corpach Pulp Mill

For many working in forestry in the Highlands, not least in the Great Glen, the opening in 1964 of the Wiggins Teape pulp and paper mill complex at Corpach in Lochaber was a turning point – as was its closure in 1980. The mill was officially opened by HRH Princess Margaret, who then travelled up the Glen to Inchnacardoch, where she planted a commemorative tree – a Scots pine, which still stands near the Commission office. George Mackenzie remembers the day well. He was featured in a newspaper article about this new industrial-scale wood processing plant, which would have major implications for the way that the forestry industry, and the Commission in particular, operated. The article followed the 'stump to dump' process and featured Dunci Portclair felling a tree and George winching it to the roadside, where it was loaded onto a lorry and then off to the pulpmill. It was a big day for Fort Augustus, and for the Scottish forest industry. And Allan, who was living in the Jenkins Park forestry houses, adds, 'we got our road tarred.'

The market for pulp had been developing rapidly, a market which could utilise the small diameter, short-length timber from the thinnings then being produced from the Great Glen forests planted before and during the Second World War. Timber for the mining industry was still being harvested, but pulp and chipboard were seen as the future, keeping the industry buoyant at a time when these forests were producing large amounts of the low-quality timber required for the wood-pulp process.

Around this time, the *raison d'être* of state forestry – which, since 1919, had been to provide Britain with a strategic timber reserve for any future wartime emergency – changed fundamentally as the nuclear bomb marked the end, it was believed, of conventional warfare. Now economic and social objectives came to the fore. With timber finding a ready market in Britain's new and established wood-using industries, harvesting and marketing became an important part of the Commission's work. This had far reaching consequences – the shortening of the harvesting cycle to produce material suitable for pulp and chip processors, ever increasing technological developments to improve efficiency and, for the worker in the forest, piecework, as Allan Macdonald recalls, was 'a big incentive.'



The Corpach pulp and paper mill under construction, c. 1964

Courtesy: The late Alec Pyper

The 1960s were years of mechanical revolution. There was a gradual shift in forestry workers' skills range. Most would learn to handle a chainsaw and many, such as Ewen Cameron, who started in forestry in 1966, became skilled wood-cutters. Others, like Allan Macdonald and George Mackenzie, began operating machinery like winches or the increasingly efficient hydraulic road making machines. Around the time that the Corpach pulpmill was opened, the Isachsen winch was introduced in the Glen. George Mackenzie, still a teenager at the time, but full-time on the squad, recalls that Allan Macdonald's older brother, Charlie, was persuaded by the then forester, Jack Frater, 'to go on the winch' with George as his chokerman. Charlie, however, wasn't keen and soon went back to the tractor, the job his father, Alex, had done for so long before him. George explains, 'So I took over the winch and Alex Johnston came as chokerman.' It was a tough job for a young lad, but he admits today, 'I loved it because it was [a] machine. It was ... really good because it was a pioneering project in them days.'

Allan Macdonald was also persuaded to work with the Isachsen winch in 1966. He spent the next 15 years in this job and today regards it as one of the most enjoyable periods in his life. He says, 'The winch was my favourite. Hard work, but I was young and fit.' It was, he says, 'still manual labour because you had to set the whole thing up with the double drum winches. Running up and down the hill pulling these wires.' These were heavy steel wires that had to be lugged up or down sometimes extremely steep hillsides and then attached to the spar tree and anchored. This was the job for the chokerman, while a partner would operate the winch from the tractor. Allan explains, '[We] depended a lot [on] one another. It was a team of two. If lucky enough to have a good mate, you did alright.' Allan worked for 15 years with his partner – Hughie Greig. He recalls their partnership with a smile, 'A wee bit noted for us having arguments and falling out. We had a good few fights in the forest. If you did something stupid in the forest then from the winch end you knew what he was going to shout to you. "OK! OK!"' To begin with there were no radios to communicate between winchman and chokerman



Cable crane winch training day at Glengarry Forest, 1971.
Adam Thom chief forester & son Hugh by the winch

Courtesy: Norman Davidson

The first winches could only reach about 120 metres, so communication was achieved by hand signals, though legend has it that Allan and Hughie could easily be located in the forest during one of their 'arguments'. If Jackie Paterson had been around, it is easy to imagine that this particular winch team would probably have had frequent spells in a planting bag!

By this time, the Commission had brought an end to Saturday working and had introduced piecework. The latter could result in quite a bit of haggling between forester and pieceworker. Allan recalls that there were always plenty of arguments about the price they would get for 'the piece'. He says, 'There was always a wee bit drumming on the desk, but everybody came out

of that alright. It was good fun.' It was a good time to be in forestry and squads were still large. But soon, with growing mechanisation and work – especially harvesting – increasingly contracted out, the number of Commission employees began to fall. In 1960 there were over 12,000 forest workers, but by 1970 there were just fewer than 7,500.

Opening the Forest

The Commission's ability to meet the timber requirements of the Corpoch pulpmill could only be achieved by embarking on a massive forest road building programme. This allowed access to maturing timber within forests that had previously been difficult to harvest. The road squad – more precisely the civil engineering department – had been in operation in the Great Glen since the late 1940s, but its progress with 'roading' was always limited by the equipment available for the job. As mechanisation progressed and in particular with the development of hydraulics, the possibilities of opening up more forests for harvesting became feasible.

Jimmy Dargie fought in the Second World War and, on demobilisation, found work as Inspector of Public Works on the hydro-electric dam building operations in and around Pitlochry. At the time, hydro-electric generation schemes were being developed at



The road squad at work in the Glen

Courtesy: The late Jim Allingham

'I had my niche there because I loved the machines' - Allan Macdonald

full tilt in the Highlands. It was a good source of employment, attracting men from all over Scotland and beyond. Many also came from Ireland and Poland. Jimmy met and married his wife, Hilda, while working on the Faskally dam at Pitlochry. With the Tummel-Garry schemes near completion, Jimmy noticed an advert in the newspaper, looking for men to join the Commission's civil engineering department. He applied and was accepted; his first posting in 1959, was Dingwall, but soon after he was working in Glen Nevis as Superintendent of Works. His job, as he describes it today, was essentially to ensure that the squad 'were getting there on time and they weren't risking their machines.' He also had to make sure that all equipment and materials were on site. It was a job which found him working all over the North Conservancy – from Mull in the west to Dornoch in the east and southward as far as Aviemore – and one which he enjoyed and stuck with for the rest of his working life, 22 years.

In the sixties, both Allan Macdonald and George Mackenzie had spells with the roads squad. Allan spent five years working mainly at Fuinary Forest near Lochaline and Polloch in Sunart. *'I had my niche there because I loved the machines'*, Allan explains. He was given training and the opportunity to work on the big excavators – *'I enjoyed that immensely'* – working with a ten to fifteen-strong squad during the summer and back to Inchnacardoch Forest from October to March. Allan married a Lochaline girl, Mairi, and, with a baby on the way in 1966, decided it wasn't the life for a family man and so moved back to Fort Augustus, where he would later get back on the machines he loved so much. George took over from Allan but, being young and in need of some adventure, he left after a year and signed up with the RAF, though he eventually came back to private forestry work in the eighties.

'Hard, hard men.' That is how George Mackenzie describes the men of the road squad in those days. He also refers to them as *'gypsy-like'*, meaning that they were itinerant in style, unlike the other squads which were usually rooted to one forest. These were men who worked hard, often living in caravans in isolated forests for part of the year at least, with few amusements, but who undoubtedly enjoyed themselves, both on and off duty. To Jimmy Dargie, they were a steady bunch, who worked their separate machines and got on with the job, starting at 8 am and working through until 5 pm. He says, *'Later sometimes. Another hour would do, you would do it.'* When asked if there were any characters in the squad,



The Road squad, including **Jimmy Dargie** second from the right

Courtesy: The late Jim Allingham

he says playfully, *'Well it didn't show'*. He adds *'They were very quiet when I got there'*. Somewhere between these two characterisations – hard men or quiet men – lies the essence of the renowned road squad. To a young lad like George Mackenzie, they were heroes and their antics were legendary. To the boss, Jimmy Dargie, they were a good solid workforce, and any antics would not be played out in front of him.

George Mackenzie looks back on the roads squad in the sixties and seventies and is full of admiration for their achievements, which he describes today as *'a feat of engineering.'* He explains, *'Forestry roads were literally going through the sides of mountains.'* George particularly recalls the work of the Glengarry road squad. One forest road, which they constructed in the 1970s up Ben Ti, high in the Glengarry hills, George describes as an *'engineering marvel'*, particularly in the way the road was built over some pretty difficult boggy ground. Although the road team had timber mats, which they constantly moved ahead of them for the machines to drive onto, there were bound to be mishaps. One that Jimmy Dargie recalls occurred while he was working in Leannachan Forest, which flanks the northern slopes Ben Nevis. They had been digging a track over



Courtesy: Norman Davidson

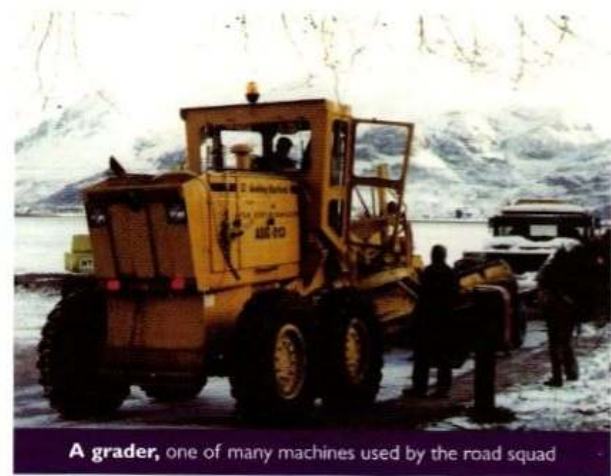
‘Once the pulp mill started if a harvesting machine broke down, if we thought we could get it going by the morning, we could work all night on it’ - Tommy Cameron

peaty ground and the digger was left in situ at the end of the week. When they returned on Monday, all that could be seen of it was the top half of the cab. Jimmy says matter-of-factly, ‘The thing was sunk!’ Indeed, and the process of extracting the machine – known in Commission parlance as ‘de-bogging’ – would take some time and require quite a bit of ingenuity.

De-bogging operations were not uncommon in the North Conservancy and often required one of the mechanics to be brought out to help extricate the machine and get it running again. Billy Mackay became a mechanic with the Commission in 1952 at a time when the Blackstand workshop on the Black Isle, where he served his apprenticeship, was the only mechanical engineering base in the North (Torlundy would open for business soon after). He eventually became a mobile

mechanic, travelling all over the north of Scotland, repairing Commission machines and equipment. In Billy's words, *'the best job in the Forestry Commission.'* He recalls one memorable tractor de-bogging at Rumster Forest on the north coast, where it took four weeks to get the tractor out. Billy looks back with some amusement at the incident, which brought the head engineer, Bill Anderson, out of his Edinburgh office and even made the newspapers. *'Vehicles stopping on a regular basis to see what was doing.'* In hindsight, he believes, *'Cheaper to leave it lying in there.'* But it was a matter of pride and Billy asserts, *'In 38 years, [I] never left one tractor in a bog.'*

There was a close association between the road squad, with their ever more sophisticated arsenal of machinery, and the mechanical engineering branch. When Tommy Cameron started as mechanic at Torlundy around 1952, there was just himself and another mechanic covering the west Highland forests and the islands from Skye to Mull and as far east as Ceannacroc in Glen Moriston and Foyers on south Loch Ness-side. All that changed with the opening up of forests to feed the pulpmill. By then, he says *'there were three or four lads in the garage, three mobiles, an inspector, a stores person and a clerkess, so [we] went from two to twelve or thirteen personnel.'* From a few lorries, tractors and motorbikes in the early 1950s, the sundry road building, ploughing and draining apparatus for the business of forestry had grown to many thousands of pounds worth of highly mechanised equipment in the space of fifteen years or so. Tommy recalls that the road building operation in the forests along the remote shores of Loch Sheil required three boats to convey the equipment onto the site – including five diggers, plus 'dozers' and JCBs, not to mention men. Tommy and his crew had to keep this considerable array of equipment – including the boats – running and in good repair. He recollects, *'Once the pulp mill started if a harvesting machine broke down, if we thought we could get it going by the morning, we could work all night on it.'* Today, George Mackenzie describes the Torlundy fitters and mechanics as having *'legendary engineering capabilities ... second to none'*. And in overall charge of the workshop he adds, *'the legendary Tommy Cameron.'*



Courtesy: The late Jim Allingham

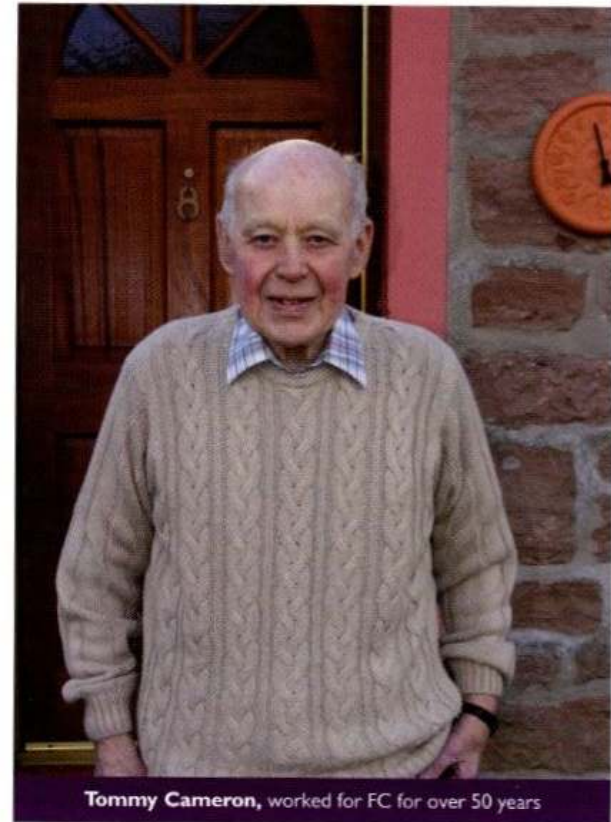


Photo: Neil McFarlane

'the legendary Tommy Cameron.'
George Mackenzie

The Trapper

'A very responsible job and big ambassadors for the Commission.' - Peter Quelch

Working in the forest was generally a sociable occupation. If not always working side by side, the squad would often come together for breaks. Ewen Cameron, who started in the Glengarry Forest squad in 1968 says, 'We were a squad and we had a laugh, everybody helped everybody out.' This was in complete contrast to the job of the forest ranger, or trapper, as he was known in the early days. There can be few jobs more solitary, working alone on the hill or in the forest, checking fences, stalking deer, snaring rabbits, often while most Commission employees are still tucked up in their beds. It is a way of life suited to a few, like Hughie Macdonald and Eddie Fraser, who between them clocked up 70 years as forest rangers. It is also often one that is followed from father to son, as with both Hughie and Eddie.

Gamekeeping skills were among the first required by the Commission on their newly acquired holdings, especially those which had previously been deer forest. In giving evidence to an official enquiry in 1919, John Sutherland, top Commission official in Scotland, reported that, when Inchnacardoch and Port Clair deer forests were purchased, there were two full-time stalkers and three part-time gillies employed there. One of these men was Hughie's father, Duncan Macdonald. He had started with the Grants of Glen Moriston as gamekeeper in 1908. He was given a small croft on the Port Clair beat, which would become the Macdonald family home for the next 83 years, until Hughie eventually had to give it up in 1991. After serving in the First World War, Duncan returned to his job and the following year, when Port Clair became the Commission's first Scottish acquisition, he was kept on. Of course, job requirements altered with this new employer. Maintaining deer and grouse numbers for sport shooting was no longer a priority, although taking out shooting parties of paying guests continued on most Commission forests.



John Sutherland, top Commission official from 1919

Some game species are inimical to trees and so the first task was to fence them out and clear the ground of such species as rabbits, black game and even goats. The latter, the worst offenders for eating trees, were to be found in considerable numbers on the Port Clair hill and were soon despatched. Initially, the areas to be planted on Port Clair were individually enclosed, but, by 1924, a deer fence ringed all of the forest except the lochshore. Those deer that could not be driven out were shot. Thereafter one of the key jobs for the trapper was to ensure that the fence remained intact and deer did not regain access. That is quite a length of fence to patrol and some fairly rough terrain to cover. And there were no quad bikes or argocats in those days.

Forest rangering is the job that has probably changed least among Commission activities. Though today's rangers are more likely to be involved in wildlife conservation projects, a ranger still has to have a keen eye and be an expert shot. Eddie Fraser, the son of a gamekeeper, who settled in Whitebridge in Stratherrick in 1949, followed his father into gamekeeping on private estates. When Knockie estate was bought by the Commission in 1966, Eddie was working for neighbouring Dell estate, which had previously held the sporting rights to Knockie. Eddie, recently retired from the Commission, says today, *'I was working on the ground; I suppose it was in their interests to*



Duncan Macdonald, one of the Commission's first employees

Courtesy: Hughie Macdonald

take someone on [who knew] the ground.' Over forty years, Eddie saw Knockie Forest go through a complete rotation. Even in 1967, rangering required only a few essential items of equipment, as Eddie describes: *'Rifle, binos and a piece of rope four feet long, and that was it.'* Gun and binoculars remain indispensable; the rope used to drag the deer off the hill is still useful today, and a certain amount of manhandling of the deer is still required, though the ATV and four-wheeled drive pick-up have taken much of the strain out of transporting the deer to the larder.

Hughie, who in 1956 took over the Port Clair beat that his father had covered for 32 years, recalls his first form of transport in the job. *'I got two pence a mile for using the push bike.'* He then graduated to a motorbike, a BSA Bantam, owned by the Commission and, Hughie adds, *'they supplied the fuel.'* Not much good for dragging deer off the hill, but, in those days, the dead animals were left where they fell for the ravens and eagles. Hughie explains, *'They [the Commission] couldn't get money for it. Not popular after the war.'* In the sixties, however, venison became more popular and deer,

once shot, were dragged off the hill by the ranger with some help, as far as the roadside where they would be picked up by a forestry lorry. 'Some long drags' says Hughie, who is not big in stature, but like other hardy hill men, must have been powerfully strong to be able to pull a big stag – up to 15 stones of dead weight – off the hill.

In buying deer forests, the Commission took on large swathes of unplantable hill ground. These were the 'high tops', where deer might continue to be managed on a more traditional herd management system. The Commission could let this ground to neighbouring sporting estates or allow private, often foreign, sportsmen to stalk deer, assisted by the forest ranger. This provided additional income for the Commission and was a popular part of the ranger's job; acting as stalker to the paying guests (mainly German), who invariably tipped well. Peter Quelch, who was an assistant District Officer in Lochaber district in the mid-seventies, comments: 'Traditionally they [the rangers] have not always been treated that well. They have been given a forest worker's rate of pay and entrusted with firearms, shooting deer, working out of hours, ... dealing with game-dealers, to the value of many thousands of pounds ... dealing with foreign guests.' These are sentiments that forest rangers across the Commission would undoubtedly concur with. When Hughie Macdonald switched from the squad to rangering in 1956 he received the princely weekly sum of seven pounds and ten shillings. By the time he retired in 1986, he says 'I still hadn't got £100 per week.' No regrets though. 'If I did not like it I would have left.'

'They have been given a forest worker's rate of pay and entrusted with firearms, shooting deer, working out of hours' - Peter Quelch



Duncan Macdonald, left, with shooting guests

Courtesy: Heritage North



Wildlife Ranger **Kenny Mackintosh**
after culling a Red Deer Stag

Photo: David Bain



Living in the Forest

‘The driving power of forestry which would make an appeal to the people of the country was that it was the cheapest way of settling more people on the land.’

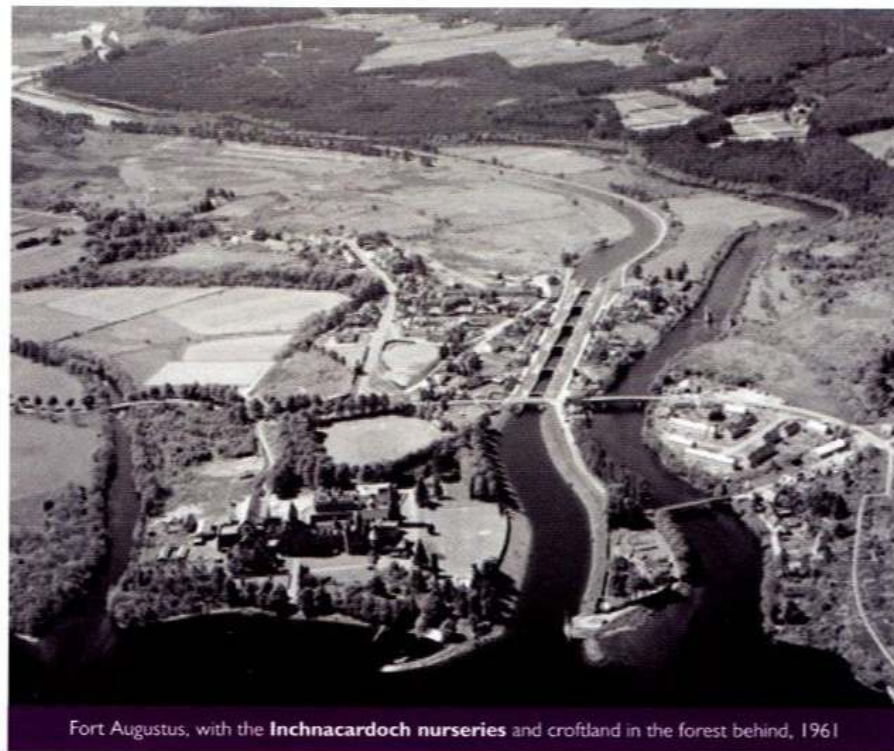
Lord Lovat, 1917

Right from the beginning, the Commission’s founding fathers wanted to retain population in rural areas, particularly the Highlands, where out-migration remained a problem. Lovat’s aspiration was pursued initially through retaining some agriculture within recently purchased landholdings – partly through the creation of small farm holdings, or crofts. These were let to forest workers, who were allowed time off (unpaid) to work their crofts, particularly at key times such as harvest. Auchterawe, which prior to Commission ownership had been a grazing farm, was earmarked by Lovat as early as 1911 for this purpose, and, by 1924, the first holdings had been created there. On taking up employment at Inchnacardoch Forest in the early twenties, Alex Macdonald had been housed with his young family in a corrugated iron building. He was then allocated one of the eight crofts created along the Auchterawe road – in a layout not unlike crofting townships elsewhere in the north-west Highlands.

Each Auchterawe croft supported two or three cows and their calves – and potatoes were grown on the few acres of arable land. George Mackenzie's father sold his potatoes to the monks at Fort Augustus Abbey, which helped supplement his forestry income. Allan Macdonald grew up on a holding – No 2 Auchterawe – which his father, Alex, was given around 1924. Everyone mucked in with crofting chores, Allan, the youngest of eleven, recalls. *'I was the milk boy.'* His job was to take ten metal pails down to the village on the handlebars of his bike in the morning after milking. He remembers that his mother Annie's work-rate was far superior to even his father's. *'She could milk two cows to his one.'*

The Bothies

Lovat's ambition (unfulfilled as it turned out) of creating up to thirty crofts on the farm at Auchterawe was always going to take some time to realise, and in the meantime he proposed the use of a hostel as a stopgap. Known locally as 'the bothy', this hostel was used to house single workers and foresters. As it turned out, the 'bothy period' continued for many years, not just in the Great Glen, but throughout Britain as changing circumstances resulted in fewer crofts being established. In the aftermath of the First World War, many of the ex-servicemen who first came to Inchnacardoch and Port Clair for work were quartered in hostels. Hughie Macdonald believes that the first bothy was built close to the first plantings that were made around Inchnacardoch Lodge in the early twenties.



Fort Augustus, with the **Inchnacardoch nurseries** and croftland in the forest behind, 1961

©SCRAN / The Scotsman

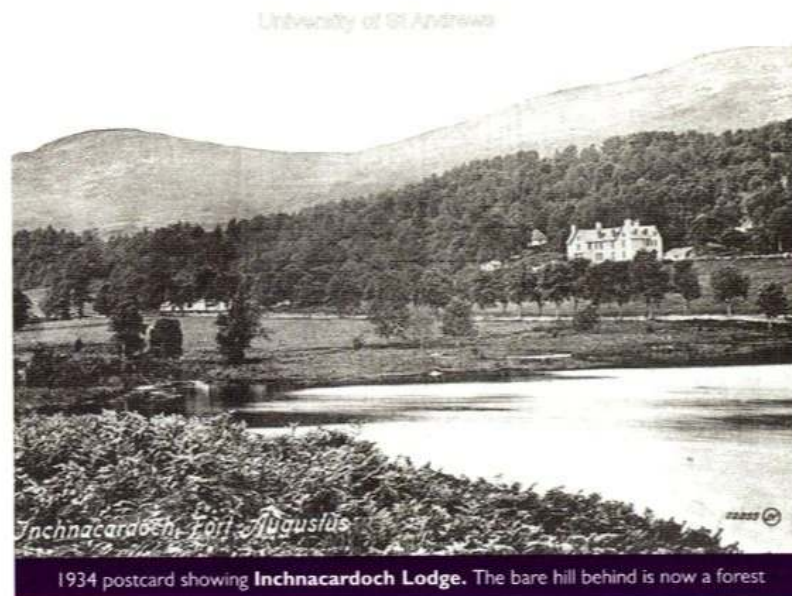
'The "bothy period" should not be unduly extended.' - Lord Lovat, 1911

The Auchterawe bothy, which replaced the very earliest one near Inchnacardoch Lodge, became something of an institution in the area, housing as many as 30 men in its heyday. It closed during the war years, when it became a youth hostel, re-opening soon after the end of hostilities. First opened in the early twenties, two corrugated iron huts quartered the men. There was a cookhouse and dining room and nearby a field for shinty and football. Across a fence there was a recreation hall, used by all in

Auchterawe for whist drives, dances, darts matches and the like. The Auchterawe bothy and crofts together, Allan Macdonald says, created 'a wee community of its own', quite distinct from the village of Fort Augustus. Allan has great memories of playing football and shinty 'with the boys in the bothy.'

Auchterawe was a busy place and, come five o'clock, there might be thirty or forty people heading home on their bikes along the road. And, though there would be some who didn't bide long and others who liked a few too many drams, both Allan and George remember the bothy as a valued element of their crofting community. George recalls, 'In them days [a] lot of people [were] living in Auchterawe because of the bothy. [There] could be 37 men – I never remember any discord.'

After the Second World War, hostels were also to be found at Port Clair, Farr, South Laggan and Torlundy. Tommy Cameron stayed at the Torlundy hostel in the early 1950s. It had been an RAF camp during the war. Tommy explains, 'There was a huge field in the forest and during the war they had it laid out with a dummy factory. If [the Germans] was coming to bomb the Aluminium factory they would get this instead. In fact above [it] there's a huge bomb crater. They actually tried to bomb it.' Tommy recalls several stories about life in the Torlundy hostel, like the time the cook was caught putting butter through the order book, yet it was an item which never appeared on the hostel's dining table. Needless to say, this particular cook was sacked and the recipients of the butter, allegedly living in or near Invergarry, lost their supply. The cook was an important person in bothy life. As Hughie Macdonald remembers, 'They ruled their kitchen.'



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'The guys who stayed in the camp were big brothers to me' - Heather Boyd

Heather Boyd's father, Jack Cairns was a hostel cook for over ten years at both Farr on the south side of Loch Ness and Port Clair. His family had emigrated to Canada from Glasgow when he was six months old, but he returned for war service with the Army's Catering Corps and saw service at El Alamein in North Africa and Monte Cassino in Italy. On demobilisation, he decided to remain in Britain, working initially in Stirling, but then moving with his family in 1949 to Farr, where Heather was born. Heather, afterwards a clerkess in the Commission office at Fort Augustus, has fond memories of her childhood spent in and around the Commission hostels. She says 'The guys who stayed in the camp were big brothers to me. They played with me, they told me things, they read me stories. It was wonderful because it was all completely family based.'

Heather describes how as a child she had the run of the place, wandering in and out of the hostel, even though this was not strictly allowed. One day, however, her wanderings got Port Clair ranger, Hughie Macdonald, into a bit of bother with his superiors. She was playing by the kitchen where her father was working, at the edge of a field which bordered the cookhouse. She looked up and saw a deer grazing, about 200 yards away in the tree nursery. Next thing she heard a bang and the deer was down. Hughie had shot the deer. She recalls, *'I roared and bawled "the poor little deer". Hughie got a row, but it wasn't his fault.'* Her brother Michael was not so lucky. She remembers her mother, Nellie used to tell a story of the time when they were still at Farr. The Duke of Gloucester was out shooting on a nearby estate. Heather recounts the story, *'The Duke peppered my brother's backside with shot, thinking he was a rabbit, while he played in his sandpit. He [the duke] was heard to say "Oh you'd better go and see what damage I've done now."'* Ouch! Michael survived, and later had a spell in the forestry before going to university.

Housing the Workforce

'It was quite a special, unique society'

George Mackenzie

With afforestation in full swing after the war, the demand for labour grew. The increased workforce created an unprecedented demand for additional housing. But there wasn't enough land to give everybody a croft, and the hostels were unsuitable for families. The Commission needed to provide modern and permanent living accommodation with a view to encouraging stability – forestry was, after all, a long-term commitment. In those days, when each forest was separately managed and Highland roads still fairly primitive, the Commission preferred to have its workforce close at hand, not least for fire duty. The solution was to build clusters of houses intended solely for its workforce.



Hughie Macdonald with a Commission horse

Courtesy: Hughie Macdonald



Motorbike trials at Inchnacardoch Forest, a popular event in the sixties

Courtesy: George Mackenzie

In some remote places, like Polloch in Sunart, these houses were literally 'planted' in the forest, often in the middle of nowhere. In the Great Glen, where there was a string of existing towns and villages, groups of forestry houses were built near existing settlements, but usually closer to the forest, at Torlundy, Laggan and Inverfarigaig.

When Catherine and Ewen Cameron married in 1974, they were given a Commission croft at South Laggan, where Catherine recalls that there were eleven other forestry crofts. South Laggan forest had been an early Commission acquisition in 1921 and included some low ground along the canal suitable for agriculture. After the war with the developing forests of South Laggan, Clunes and Glengarry, there was plenty of work and more housing was needed. The Commission therefore built ten houses at South Laggan and another ten on the opposite side of the Caledonian Canal at North Laggan, all occupied by its employees.

Jenkins Park was probably the most substantial housing development constructed by the Commission in the Glen. It was built on part of what had been the Auchterawe common grazing, not far from the Commission office and about a mile from Fort Augustus. In all 19 houses were built for both workers and foresters – with the more substantial head forester's house being located slightly apart.



'The social life was tremendous in these days. Everybody turned out if there were whist drives on, or dances.' - Allan Macdonald

George Mackenzie, who moved there on giving up his forestry croft in 1966, comments, 'It was quite a special, unique society.' He explains, 'at work everybody had their position but at night it was a very sociable place. People from all walks of life were there. Everybody had a story to tell.' His sentiments are echoed by others who experienced life in one of these forestry communities. Allan Macdonald, who spent many years in Auchterawe, eventually moving to Jenkins Park, says, 'The social life was tremendous in these days. Everybody turned out if there were whist drives on, or dances.' These tight-knit communities were completely dominated by, and dependent on, the Commission. Catherine Cameron, who worked in the Invergarry Forest office in the 1970s comments, 'If somebody needed

help and they came to the office, you would help them.' She recalls the contribution the Commission made to events such as the Garry Games, when everyone was delegated a job to do and did it within their work time. She says, 'I used to go down and decorate the dancing platform. It made everyone one big family as you would say, a Forestry Commission family.' Indeed, the local tug of war team was almost entirely composed of Commission employees.

'If somebody needed help and they came to the office, you would help them.'

Catherine Cameron



The Garry Games tug of war, 1970s

Courtesy: Dorothy Jewett, nee Cameron



Invergarry tug of war team, mostly Commission workers including Ewen Cameron, front row second right, and Alasdair Cameron, front row centre

Courtesy: Dorothy Jewett, nee Cameron

The lumberkids

If it was a convivial life for the adults, then for the kids – the lumberkids – it was one big adventure playground. No need to go off to Centre Parcs or the like in those days – it was all just outside their backdoor. George Mackenzie has good memories of his childhood, from age five, growing up in Auchterawe. 'As a boy it was just pure adventure. ... it was the most fantastic upbringing ... I can ever think of, growing up in a place like that, in Auchterawe. On the croft we had the horse, everything, and all those acres of Forestry Commission ground. There was no limit.' Heather Boyd agrees entirely. She says enthusiastically, 'I didn't have all the things that kids in towns have, I didn't have the libraries ... museums ... playparks, but the forest was my playpark. I used to be like Roy Rodgers riding to the rescue on Trigger which was, of course a fallen tree, or occasionally, old Pride, the forestry horse. You could be anything you wanted in a forest by yourself or with your friends. The canvas shelters that used to go on the backs of the lorries ... they made fantastic 'housies' and no-one ever worried that you were in there playing.'

'I had an idyllic childhood and most of that was because my father worked for the Forestry Commission'

Heather Boyd

The Glen Today



A forested landscape – the Great Glen from above Fort Augustus

'It's a way of life ... [The forest's] not just there to make money. It's there to leave something behind.' - Jason Smith

Continuity and Change

High above Loch Ness on a cold March day, snow lying not far above, Allan Macdonald, a retired forest worker, walks along a forest track. The surrounding trees are nearing the end of a rotation of about 30-35 years. Below, somewhere in the forest, a massive state-of-the-art harvesting machine is at work, the noise from it clearly audible.

'I don't think you're part of the forest now at all', Allan says thoughtfully. 'That boy sitting in that machine. He's just looking onto the crop, it must be mesmerising for him because he sees nothing all day except that crop in front of him. He picks up a tree, and he grabs it, cuts it, sneds it, and stacks it. It must be very boring to do that.'

That said, Allan, who started working in the forestry over fifty years ago, when the cross-cut saw, axe and horse were the usual means of felling and extracting timber, would jump at the chance to be back working for the Commission in one of these high-tech precision harvesters. Allan's whole life has been spent in forestry. The son of a forest worker, he grew up on a forest croft at Auchterawe, working as a schoolboy in the nursery and then spending his whole adult working life among the trees. He has witnessed extraordinary change during that time, from the pioneering days of British



Allan Macdonald stands proudly on his Commission forwarder, Knockie Forest, 2001

Courtesy: Allan Macdonald

'You wondered how the devil they managed it, two old cronies with a cross-cut saw and then dragging it out. When the winches and forwarders came they cleared it such a tremendous rate.' - Allan Macdonald

forestry, when muscles and horses powered most forest operations, to the sophisticated forest armoury of precision equipment of today, where one man can do it all – felling, snedding, stacking – from the comfort of his air-conditioned, soundproof cab, listening to Tchaikovsky's 1812 overture, if he wishes. Alan has not only witnessed these changes, he's handled almost all the equipment that has been employed over the years, starting with a horse and ending with the ever more advanced machines that took the horse's place.

Allan comments, 'You wondered how the devil they managed it, two old cronies with a cross-cut saw and then dragging it out. When the winches and forwarders came they cleared it such a tremendous rate.'

In a Commission forest near Balmacara in Lochalsh, a harvesting machine is clearfelling a section of mature forest. Inside the cab of this state-of-the-art John Deere 1460D harvester – at 30 tonnes and worth £250,000 it is the largest around – the operator Jason Smith has four computers to help him do the job. The main computer is very sophisticated and can record what is being cut, the species, lengths, volumes and so on. It can be programmed to cut to set lengths for each species. It even asks the operator what he is doing if it is stopped for 15 minutes. No chance of skiving with this machine! Jason comments, 'It's not as easy as it looks.' Although the cutting and snedding operation are programmed, Jason has to keep an eye out for anomalies, when he might override the computer and operate the cutter manually. Jason, originally from Henley-on-Thames, started as a chainsaw operator in Buckinghamshire when he was seventeen. He enjoys his job, working four days on and four off, living in a caravan in the forest while at work, which might involve a twelve-hour day. His only company is his dog, Chalky, and an occasional visit from the forester. He comments, 'It's a way of life.' He adds, '[The forest's] not just there to make



Jason Smith and Chalky in a state-of-the-art harvester, Balmacara, 2008

Photo: Mairi Stewart

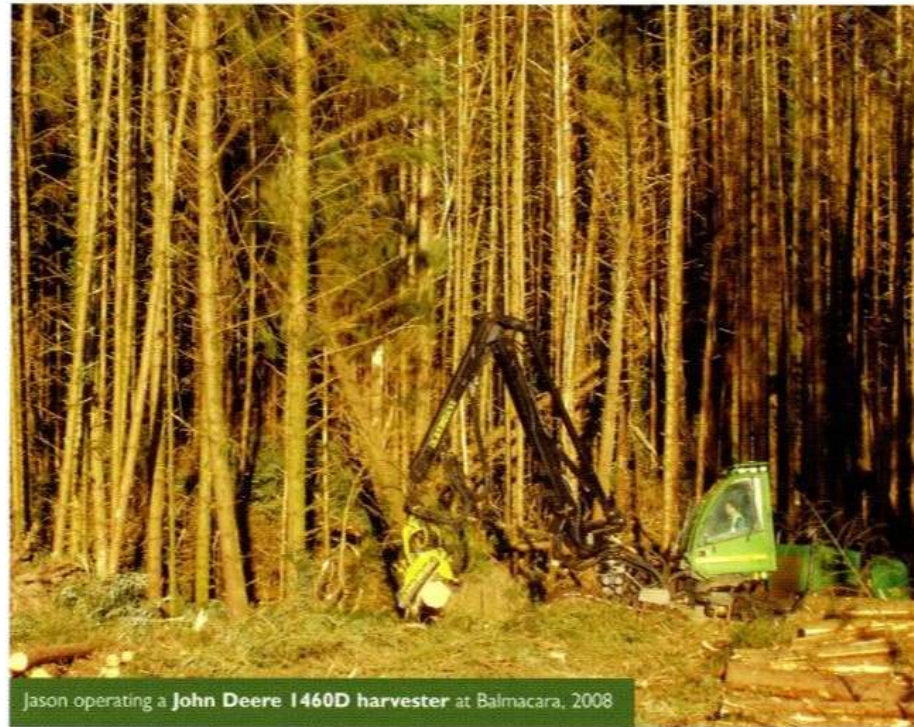
'It's not as easy as it looks.' - Jason Smith

money. It's there to leave something behind.' This is a philosophy that one senses is common among forestry folk and one that Allan Macdonald would agree with.

Twenty-first century Forestry

If forestry was a force in the Highlands in the twentieth century, then it was because of those men and women who invested their lives and labour, created communities in remote and depopulated places, brought up their children and helped alter the landscape forever. Some of those people were deeply rooted in the Glen. Others came from elsewhere. All of them made the Great Glen what it is today.

Nowadays, most people cannot really conceive how physically arduous forestry work was before mechanisation. We spend more and more time sitting at a desk, our gaze fixed at a computer screen, and in the case of modern foresters, seated in their vans travelling large distances around their now vast districts. Are we looking through rose-tinted glasses in admiring these people, who laboured from dawn till dusk for five and six days each week, with few holidays? Of course there was bad behaviour, drunkenness, brawling after a Saturday night dance, skiving on the job, pulling a fast one over the forester or ganger, philandering, even malicious acts such as fire-raising. It is still whispered today that the 1942 fire at Inchnacardoch was set deliberately by a disgruntled employee. But that aside, it is



Jason operating a John Deere 1460D harvester at Balmacara, 2008

Photo: Mairi Stewart

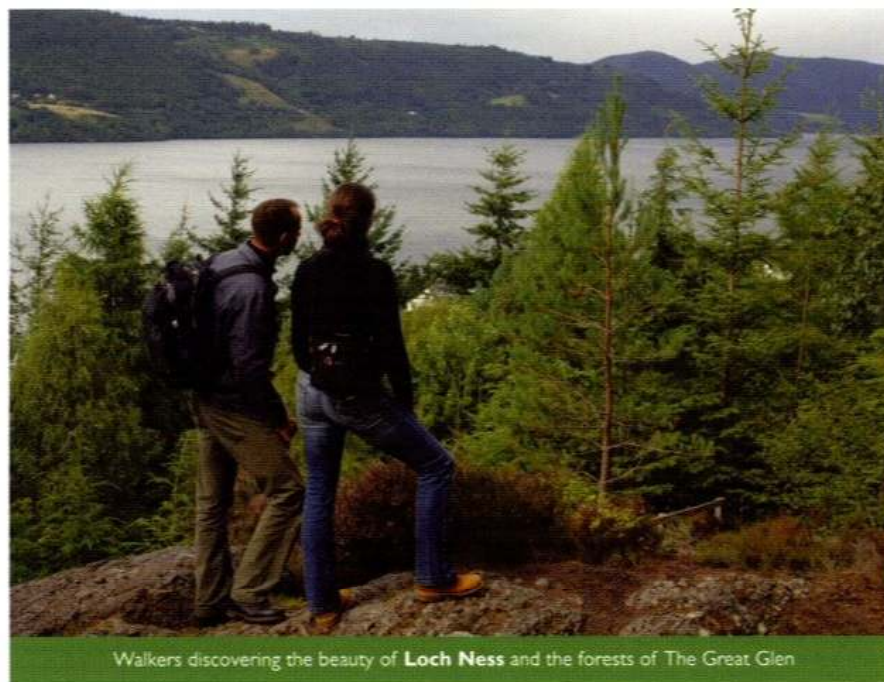
hard not to respect these men and women who helped make forestry a vital part of life in the Glen with wonderful equanimity and humour and sheer love of life. Bob Dunsmore, who experienced life as both a worker and a forester, sums it up, *'It was all about living life, there wasn't an obsession with the job. The job was part of life. You worked hard, but enjoyed life'*.

Whatever we may think about forestry and its impact on the Scottish landscape – and it has not always been an enhancement – we still owe a debt of gratitude to these men and women who gave their whole lives to 'the forestry'. It is almost unheard of today for son to follow father in their occupation, but it is that continuity that provided stability, that maintained culture. With the passing of time and that way of life, we have lost

something vital from the Highlands. Nonetheless, even today, although the Commission's force has diminished, there remains a degree of community cohesion, a common history and a network of support, which ensures that word gets around – how former colleagues are fairing, what they are doing, where they are.

'The forest is a beautiful place to be. I would sleep out in it all night no problem on my own, no problem. ... I would love to be back ... I would start tomorrow.' That's Allan Macdonald talking. Forestry is clearly in his blood and, despite his typical Highland modesty, it is clear that he is proud of his family's place in the history of forestry in the Great Glen. His father is referred to by another interviewee as *'one of these old Highland gentlemen.'* Allan is clearly a chip of the block – but careful with the 'old'!

That the forest is a beautiful place is now being increasingly recognised – the secret is out. A significant element of Commission's activities today revolve around ensuring that everyone is able to discover what Allan and other forestry folk have known for a very long time. Recreational facilities are to be found everywhere in the forest and the Great Glen Way – one of Scotland's most recently established long-distance walks – winds its way through many of the forests described in this booklet.



Walkers discovering the beauty of **Loch Ness** and the forests of The Great Glen

'The forest is a beautiful place to be. I would sleep out in it all night no problem on my own, no problem. ... I would love to be back ... I would start tomorrow.' - Allan Macdonald

Today over 30,000 visitors annually come to the forests of the Great Glen and enjoy them. But too few of those visitors – and too small a proportion of the wider population – know anything of the people who created the Great Glen's forested landscape. This booklet is intended to remedy that deficiency, to tell the story of the men, women and 'nippers' whose legacy can now be enjoyed by the rest of us, whether we're looking for solace, recreation or adventure.



Walking through history in the Great Glen

Acknowledgements

The UHI Centre for History was commissioned by Forestry Commission Scotland to prepare this booklet as part of their Touchwood project; Forestry Commission Scotland's contribution to Highland 2007 – Scotland's Year of Highland Culture. We are indebted to a number of individuals and organisations for their assistance and advice. Above all, this project and booklet would not have been possible without those who have taken the time to recount their stories and allowed the use of their photographs.

We greatly appreciate the opportunity given to us by Forestry Commission Scotland. Particular thanks to Malcolm Wield for steering the project, and to Bob Dunsmore for having the idea in the first place.

This was a team effort and so special thanks to Hugo Manson, Jim Hunter, Fiona Watson, Roland Stiven, Gordon Urquhart, Sandy McLure, Kenny Murray, Norman Davidson, Neil Mcfarlane, Kenneth Knott and others at Fort Augustus District Office. The booklet is based on the story of forestry in the Great Glen, embodying material drawn from oral history interviews recorded in the area and beyond over several months. The booklet also drew from a number of written sources, some of which can be seen in 'Further Reading' below. Any inaccuracies are the responsibility of the author.

All illustrations are acknowledged and we are most grateful to those concerned. Particular thanks go to staff of: Canadian War Museum; the University of St Andrews Archives and Manuscripts Department; SCRAN; Norman Davidson; Heritage North and the Forestry Commission Picture Library, especially George Gates.

We also appreciate support and advice on the project provided by the interviewees. Thanks also to Alan Drever, John Keenleyside, Pauline Jewett, Ian Collier, Alan Stevenson, Steven Mackay, Isobel Cameron, Chris Nixon and Jason Smith.

Text by Mairi Stewart, UHI Centre for History and designed by Andrew Howard, Design & Interpretative Services, Forestry Commission Scotland.

Selected further reading

Fowler, John, *Landscapes and Lives: The Scottish Forest Through the Ages* (Canongate, Edinburgh, 2002)

Gray, Affleck, *Timber! Memories of Life in the Scottish Women's Timber Corp, 1942-46* (Tuckwell Press, East Linton, 1998)

Smout, T C, (ed.), *People and Woods in Scotland. A History* (Edinburgh University Press, 2002)

People of the forestry

The Touchwood history project began in 2006, when initial contacts were made with folk who had worked in forestry in the locality over the years. Training in interviewing was provided by Hugo Manson. Interviews were conducted principally by Sandy McLure, with support from Fiona Barnett, Catherine Cameron, Jeff Dymond, Betsy Walling, Shona Main and Barrie Watson and completed in 2007. Seventeen interviews were recorded, involving nineteen individuals. Those interviewed included: a woman who worked for a few short but memorable years in forestry during the Second World War; forest workers, some of whom spent their whole working lives in 'the forestry'; and foresters who moved between forests but who were invariably dedicated to their job. Also vital were women, often forgotten, but making a significant contribution to forestry.

The following photographs include all those interviewed as part of the project. We have provided a brief summary of their forestry work and the dates when they worked in forestry. We are indebted to those interviewed. They have left a lasting legacy – the story of everyday life – work, rest and play – meaningful, poignant, fulfilling, funny, both ordinary and extraordinary.



Heather Boyd
In forestry: 1977-2000

Brought up in two forestry communities – Farr and Port Clair, she worked for 21 years with FC, at the Fort Augustus office and latterly in the finance section in Edinburgh.



Catherine & Ewen Cameron
In forestry: Ewen: 1966-2000
Catherine: 1973-75 & 96-present

Ewen started in forestry with a contractor in 1966, moving to FC's Glengarry Forest in 1969. After 10 years became a forestry contractor. Catherine worked at Invergarry office in the 1970s. She currently works at the Fort Augustus office.



Allan Macdonald
In forestry: 1955-2002

Born in Auchterawe, the son of a forest worker. Worked for contractors and the Commission, including the road squad. Latterly an FC forwarder operator.



Hughie Macdonald
In forestry: 1942-1986

Born, Port Clair, the son of one of the first FC employees. Full-time on Inchnacardoch squad from 1942. Returned after national service in 1948. Took over his father's job as ranger in 1956 retiring in 1986.



Billy Mackay
In forestry: 1952-1990

Son of a Commission forester; Billy spent his career in the FC mechanical engineering branch, mainly on the Black Isle.



George Mackenzie
In forestry:
1961-67 & 1983-92

Started work with FC as a 15-year old. Worked at Inchnacardoch and on the road squad. Joined RAF in 1967, returning to private forestry work in 1983.



Sandy Maclure
In forestry: 1960 - 1998

Worked at Seafeld estate before going to forestry school in 1964. VSO in Sierra Leone before taking up assistant forester post with FC in 1968. Latterly, head forester at Fort Augustus.

'The job was part of life. You worked hard, but you enjoyed life.' - Bob Dunsmore



Tommy Cameron
In forestry: 1939-1990

Tommy started full-time in 1939, working for the Board of Trade during the war. Over 50 years service with the forestry, nearly 40 as mechanic and workshop manager at Torlundy.



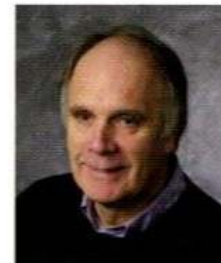
Davie Coutts
In forestry: 1950-1987

The son of a forester, after a stint as a forest worker, he went to forestry school and became a forester, working mainly in research in Grizedale and latterly at Inchnacardoch research station, until retiring in 1987.



Jimmy & Hilda Dargie
In forestry: Jimmy: 1959-81
Hilda: 1978-1983

Jimmy worked on the hydro schemes in Pitlochry. They moved to Glen Nevis in 1959, when Jimmy started with the FC road squad. He retired after 22 years with FC. Hilda worked at Fort Augustus office.



Bob Dunsmore
In forestry: 1970-present

Started as a forest worker in Argyll, Bob studied forestry at University, returning to FC in 1977 as a forester. Now FC Scotland, Highland Conservator.



Eddie Fraser
In forestry: 1967-2007

Brought up on south Loch Ness-side, the son of a gamekeeper, Eddie worked for 40 years as forest ranger on south Loch Ness-side.



Finlay Macrae
In forestry: 1946-2003

A year as a forest worker before University in 1947. Graduated in 1951 and joined FC North Conservancy, where he served until 1982. Worked privately until he retired at 80 in 2003.



Nanny Marshall
In forestry: 1942-1946

Forestry work on the Balmacaan estate during the Second World War.



Peter Quelch
In forestry: 1965-present

Forestry degree at Aberdeen University. Joined FC 1968. Various posts in England and Scotland. Assistant DO Lochaber, 1974-79. FC native woodland adviser, 1992-2006.



Betsy Walling
In forestry: 1979-present

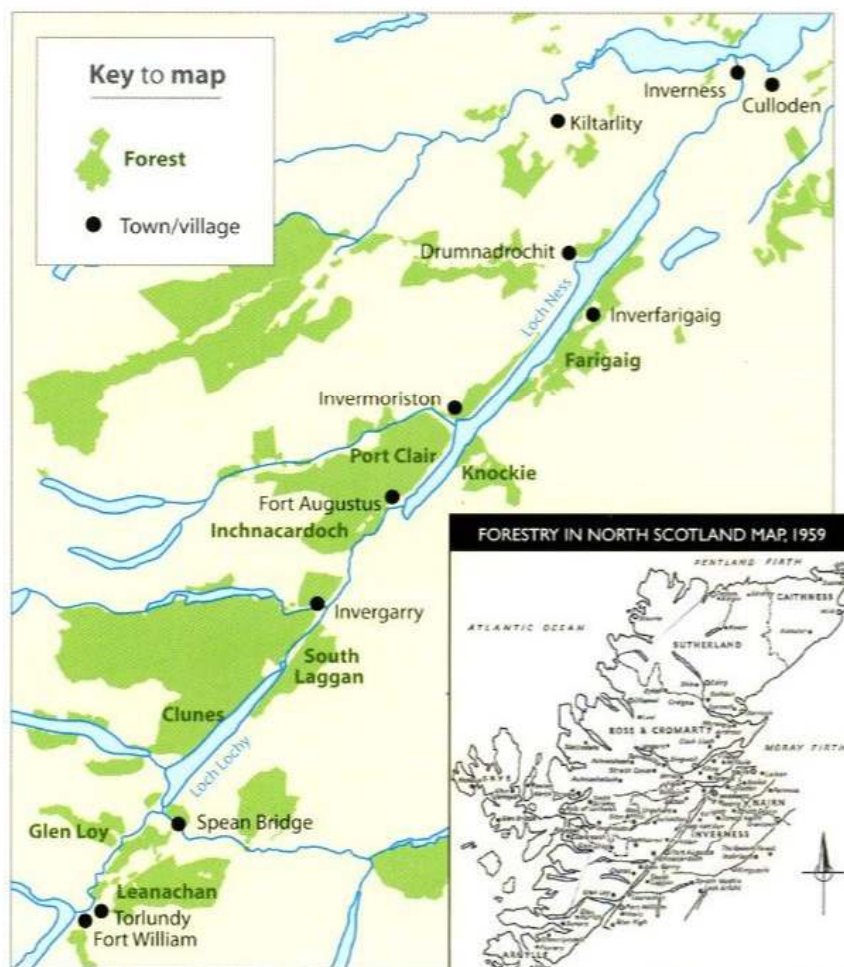
Started in Torlundy office as clerkess in 1979 with a career break in 1990s. Betsy currently works for the conservancy office at Dingwall.



Malcolm Wield
In forestry: 1973-present

Started as forest worker, trained as forester. Various posts in Scotland, including FDM Fort Augustus 1993-2006. Currently FC Highland rural development adviser.

The Great Glen



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Source: Dickson & Innes / Forestry Commission Scotland

Front cover image: Jock Macrae who worked for 40 years with FC, retiring in 1967. Here at South Laggan Forest, 1941. *Courtesy John Macrae.*

Back cover image: Tractor driven by Jimmy Cameron, helped by Jocky Thomson at Glencripesdale, 1953/54. *Courtesy Jimmy Cameron.*

All un-credited images in the publication are courtesy Forestry Commission Picture Library.

Printed on Revive 50/50 Silk recyclable paper, made from 50% post consumer waste.

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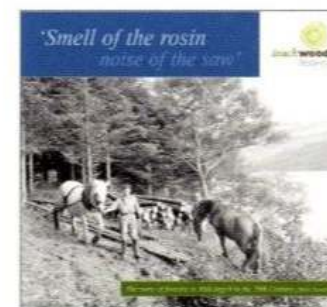
Maini Stewart (2008)

'The forest is a beautiful place to be'.

The story of forestry in The Great Glen in the 20th century.

Forestry Commission Scotland, Edinburgh.

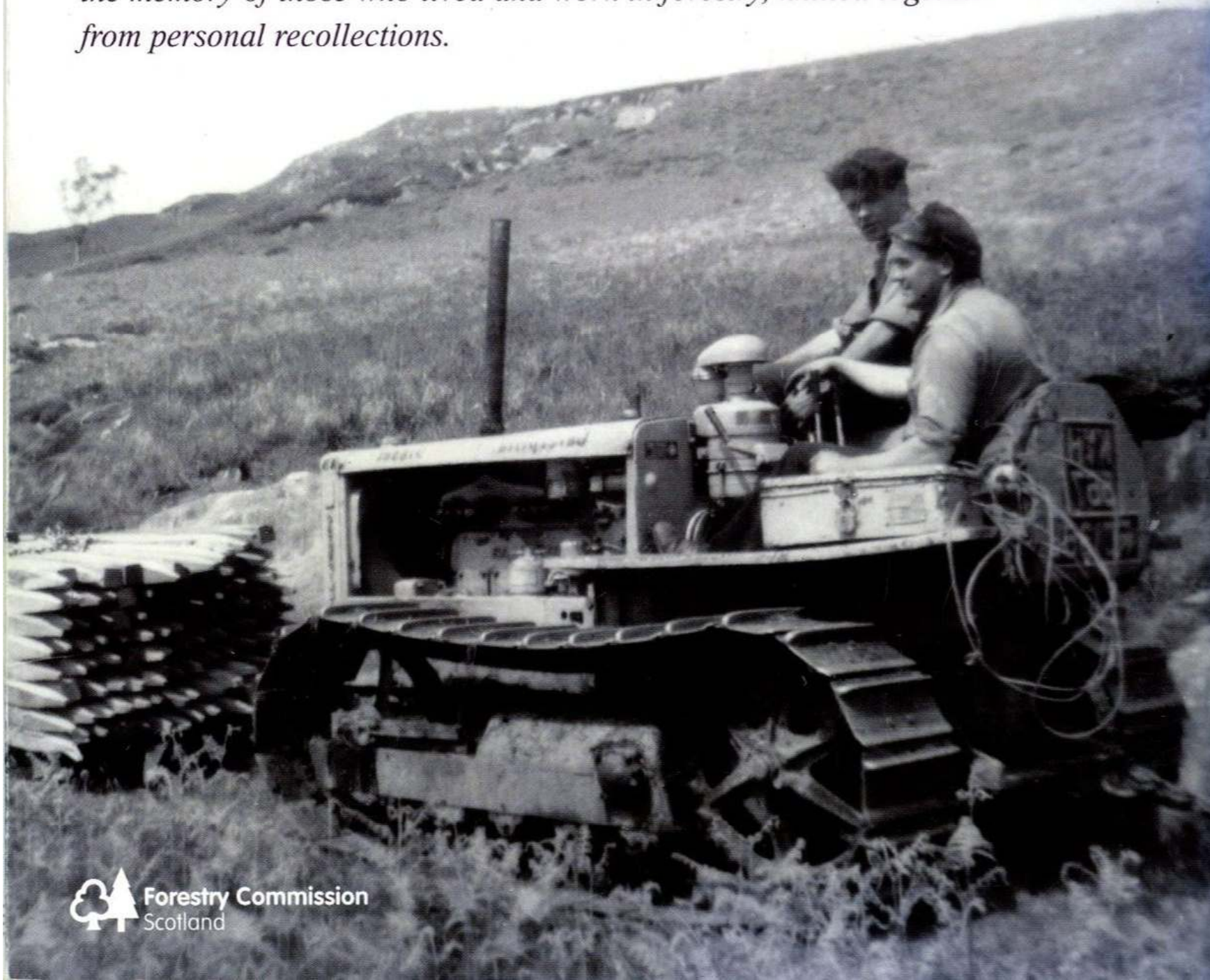
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This is the second in the series of Touchwood History publications. The first booklet was published in 2007 & is titled 'Smell of the rosin noise of the saw'. The story of forestry in Mid-Argyll in the 20th century.



This is the story of forestry in and around The Great Glen, based on the memory of those who lived and work in forestry, knitted together from personal recollections.



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