

## **History of Gearrhoille - from George Ross**

- Until 1800s Used as overnight stop by drovers enroute to Inverness & thence to Falkirk & Crieff
- Circa 1900 Curling pond - used for curling & skating. There was a hut on the E bank of the pond, between 2 big trees. It was about 15 x 30 ft & contained the curling stones etc. Cattle grazed during the summer months
- 1940s WW2 - curling stopped. Locals say no young birch or willow, just mature trees, walking easier through the wood. Red squirrels in the wood. Hazel nuts to eat.
- 1959 Invercarron took over & cattle grazed in winter too - which churned up the soil.
- 1940 -80 Clay pigeon shooting in the wood, every 2<sup>nd</sup> Sat - stopped in 80s when the residents of newly built Oakwood Place complained. The hut was used by the Clay pigeon shooters
- 1971 Oak, larch, scots pine & spruce felled for firewood. Thought to include the large larch, spruce & Scots pine around the curling pond Birch & willow grow in place of felled trees. (bracken too?)

## **History of Gearrhoille as Community Wood**

- 1988 Group set up by Community Council to lease area of woodland from Balnagown estates on a 20 year lease  
Path marked out, bridges & stiles constructed.  
Aims & objectives written. - draft management plan  
Problems with area of lease  
Lease lapsed.
- 2001/2 Outline Planning permission granted to Balnagown estates for houses in the field between Oakwood Place & the woodland  
Community council again express an interest in leasing the wood. Discussions with Balnagown result in the wood being gifted to the community. Larger area. (13.48 ha, 33.3 acres)  
Open day in the wood, organized in conjunction with North Highland Forest Trust (NHFT). Public opinion canvassed for doing things in the wood & people invited to register an interest in being involved in further developments regarding the wood.
- Spring 2003 Meetings held in the hall for interested parties. Decision taken to form a steering committee (open to anyone who wanted to be there) to take forward the process of forming a company limited by guarantee to take ownership of the woodland from Balnagown. The company to be called 'Gearrhoille Community Wood, Ardgay'  
Bird ringing organized in the wood. Pupils from Gledfield School involved.  
Bat night
- George Ross appointed regional officer for Highland Biodiversity Project. Gearrhoille as part of the 'know your own patch' scheme. Money for interpretation boards for the wood. Designed by Marlin Price, with art input from George & pupils from Gledfield school.

	Steering Committee & NHFT, following suggestions from the open day, plan an all-abilities path from the road to the dead pine tree, going along the edge of the old curling pond.
Aug 2003	Some of the curling pond cleared of overgrown willow in premature anticipation that the curling pond would be cleared to create a wildlife pond. A decision on this & other proposals to be delayed until an environmental survey is carried out & any proposals agreed on at a public meeting following the opening of the GCWA to members.
Oct 2003	All abilities path constructed as far as the curling pond. Ground beyond that too boggy to construct path at that spec.
Feb 2004	Narrower path continued to dead pine tree. Certificate of incorporation of public company limited by guarantee - Gearrchoille Community Wood Ardgay
March 2004	Picnic benches & kissing gates provided by Highland Access Project. Also finger posts & waymarkers
May 2004	Moth night. Bird ringing continues
4 <sup>th</sup> June 2004	First meeting of 3 directors. Robin Ross, chairman, Hilda Buchanan, Betty Wright.
Sept 2004	Plans approved for 4-car car park. Grant available through NHFT. Paths for all meetings & training
Dec 2004	Work on Car park
Spring 2005	Questionnaires distributed to get feedback re plans for wood & assess local opinion
Autumn 2005	Fun day in the wood & Ardgay Hall. Live willow demo, storytelling, tipi in the wood & soup in the hall. NHFT support.
Feb 2006	1 <sup>st</sup> AGM in Ardgay Hall. Speaker Henry Fossbrooke from Milton Community Wood.
Summer 2006	Weeding of all-abilities path - by hand & with flame gun
Autumn 2006	Apply to awards for all for grant to survey wood & to draft management plan
Feb 2007	Awards for all grant application successful
March - Aug 2007	Environmental Audit carried out by Scottish Native Woods
May 2007	Piers Voysey from Anagach Community Wood speaks at AGM
Oct 2007	Peter Quelch visits the wood to look at evidence of past management of the wood
Nov 2007	Open Day in Ardgay Hall & in the Gearrchoille - Henry's woodland orchestra, stories from Martin Watsmann & Plants for dyeing with Sandie Beck