

## Oakwoods – The Domesticated Wildwood

The last Ice Age ended around 10,000 years ago and by about 5,000 years ago, when settlers were arriving in Strathearn, the climate had reached a peak of warmth and forests had reached a maximum. Oak, hazel, elm and alder were the main trees in the glen - oak timbers 8200-8500 years old have been found in the Earn's carse clays - but ash, holly, willow, bird cherry and rowan would also have been present as well as birch and juniper (and perhaps Scots pine) at higher altitudes in the hills.

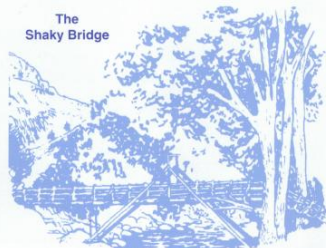
Significant clearances may have begun about 2500 years ago. About 200 years ago only a few substantially sized natural woods remained. Continuing forest clearance and poor transport had made wood for domestic fuel scarce and expensive. However, by 1748, some of the remaining oakwoods were being managed more intensively as coppice and new coppice oakwoods were being enclosed. Oakwoods subjected to coppicing can be easily recognised by multiple, thin, straight stems arising from old stumps. In the wood some trees were not coppiced and allowed to grow to larger sizes for construction use.

Oak became commoner than in the original wildwood, encouraged by human selection and planting - it made good timber, firewood and charcoal and its bark was used in leather tanning: Coppicing was ideal because it produced lots of small stems, much more convenient when transport was difficult and sawmilling was not advanced. Also, coppice regeneration is usually more vigorous and more reliable than newly planted oak. Cutting for coppice took place about every 25 years because that was when the bark yielded the highest level of tannin. By 1838 local landowners were obtaining large revenues from coppiced oak and fuel wood was less of a problem. However coppicing ceased at the turn of this century because coal was then brought by road and rail to Comrie and tannin was being produced by cheaper methods.

## New Trees Make Their Mark

About 250 years ago decorative planting of beech and Norway spruce became fashionable. These trees can be seen upstream from the Wee Caldron. Neither tree is native to this area, both were introduced by man, but both grow well here. Young beech grows well in shade, casting a deep shade when mature. The early cultivation of conifers led to their use as timber trees.

Melville's Monument is a reminder of a different sort of power. As Lord Advocate for Scotland (1775-83), Henry Dundas built political machinery which gave him detailed control of Scottish elections. He became a leading member of the British cabinet under William Pitt 'the Younger' and held many important posts. However, in 1805 he was impeached, though later acquitted, for financial irregularities involving Navy funds and using his influence to reward allies. Despite this he seems to have been motivated by a genuine interest in improving conditions in Scotland. He promoted laws which relieved colliers and salters of virtual slavery, allowed more religious freedom, and lifted penalties imposed on the Highlands after the 1745 rebellion. As a person he was amenable and approachable and his friends erected this memorial to him near his country home at Dunira, after his death in 1811.

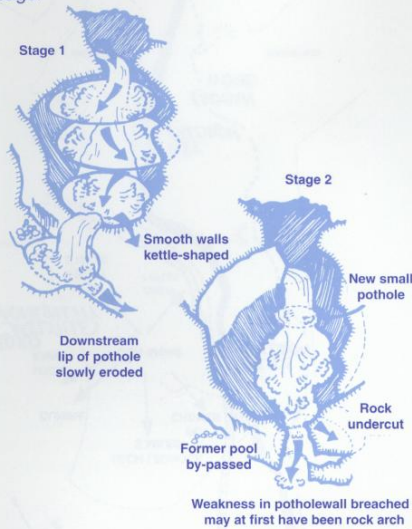


## The Changing Face of Moorland

Above the steep wooded gorge, the glen opens out with the crags and ridges of the hills beyond. When woodland was at its greatest extent the tree line would have extended 300 metres (1000') higher than the present limit of about 450 metres above sea level. Shaky Bridge, on its sycamore support, is about 150 metres above sea level, so this point would have been well within the original forest.

## Deil's Caldron

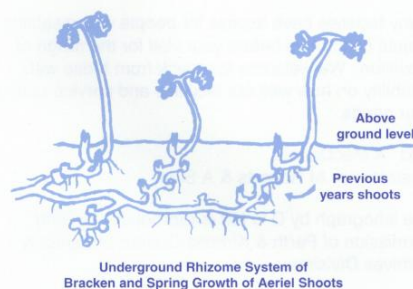
The "Deil" is the Devil and a caldron was used for boiling water. Both are apt names for this waterfall. The Lednock waters have cut a narrow, angular passage through Leny grits, a type of coarse sandstone slightly changed under pressure during the formation of the Caledonian mountains. These grits are well jointed and fractured, breaking up into large, squarish blocks, which allow lines of weakness to be attacked by erosion and weathering. It is one of these lines that the Lednock has followed in cutting its narrow passage.



## Formation of the Deil's Caldron

At the end of the last Ice Age a series of potholes was created by water, ice, and stones grinding out the surrounding rocks. The lip of each pothole was eroded until one large opening - the caldron - remained. A similar process is continuing today in the small pothole at the base of the gap.

Today, moorland is the predominant feature having been formed by a combination of cooler, wetter climate, forest clearance, and progressive burning and grazing. On poorer soils and where grazing has been lighter, dwarf shrubs like heather and bell heather grow. The quiet glen does not reflect the thriving settlements that once existed, some dating from around 400 years ago. Land improvement must have been intensive to support so many people, but with the decline in the number of people living in the glen during the 18th and 19th centuries nature took over on much of the improved land. One of the most dramatic changes has been the spread of the fern bracken. Originally of forest and forest margins, it has capitalised on reduced competition brought about by forest clearance, burning and grazing. It is not itself grazed (being poisonous) and young bracken plants are well adapted to colonise disturbed soil. Established plants can form large, dense, long-lived patches capable of suppressing almost all other plants.

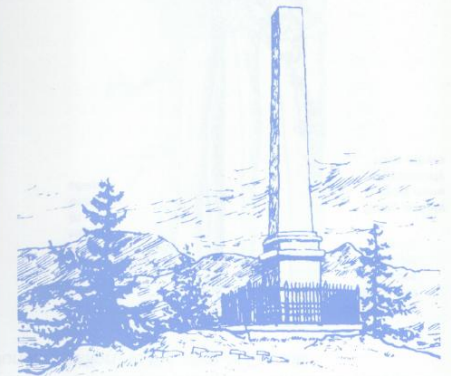


In the more open marshy areas the pinkish flower spikes of heath spotted-orchid are numerous in June. On the river itself look out for the plump, dark brown, white-bibbed dipper flying fast and low over the water in between bobbing on a stone or walking on the riverbed (underwater) in search of insects. Look up and there is a good chance of seeing a circling buzzard.

The banks of the Lednock are still fringed by trees, particularly alder. Alder is able to grow on poor, water-logged soil. The wood was once used for making clogs and in the 18th century there was a Clog Market in Comrie on the first Wednesday of each December.

## Melville's Monument - Force and Power

The walk up to Melville's Monument is a little strenuous, but the effort is well rewarded by magnificent views of Strathearn and Comrie.



Melville's Monument

The monument to Henry Dundas, 1st Viscount Melville, at the top of Dun More 256 metres (840') high, stands on the very edge of the Highlands. The Highland Boundary Fault, a great line of deeply fractured rock running from Arran to Stonehaven, runs through the valley close to Comrie. This is a reminder of the great earth movements which formed the Caledonian Mountains 400-500 million years ago. The fault is now stable... well, almost! In 1790 a series of earth tremors began, a prelude to a seven year period from 1839 when the area was subjected to substantial tremors. Three of the biggest tremors damaged chimneys and house gables. Shock waves were felt as far away as Inverness. Comrie, the 'earthquake capital' of Scotland, became something of an attraction for tourists and scientists and the first seismometers in Europe were set up around Comrie in 1840. More sophisticated instruments were installed in the 'Earthquake House', built in 1869 at Drumearn. By then most of the activity had died away although small tremors still occur occasionally. The activity is probably due to the release of local stress across the fault as the land continues to rise very slowly following the thawing out of the great mass of ice 10,000 years ago.

## The Changing Face of Woodland

In Laggan Wood sparrowhawks, raucous jays (more often heard than seen), red squirrels and roe deer find shelter in the dense conifer plantations. Most of the conifers are from different parts of the world but grow well in our climate and soils. The planting here is sympathetic with natural patterns: remnants of the oak and birch wood have been left on the steep sides of the glen and on rocky knolls. Scots pine has been planted around knolls and a variety of conifers on the remaining land. These conifers include Norway spruce and larch from Europe, Douglas fir, western hemlock, grand fir and noble fir from the North American continent and Japanese larch.



Each species has distinctive cones. All the conifers have drooping cones which drop whole except grand fir and noble fir which are erect and break up while still on the tree. Since most of these conifers produce a distinct whorl of main branches each year and a single leading shoot you can estimate the age of a tree by counting the number of whorls (these trees are about 35 years old). You can see how fast they are growing by the distance between the whorls. Some of the Douglas firs are growing about 1 metre (3') per year - grand fir can grow even faster. It's easy to see why these trees from north-west America have proved popular in British forestry.

Some shoots grow more vigorously than others

More light results in irregular shapes

Competition produces straight stems for height

Illustrating different shoots of the same age from the same stump



Coppice Stool

Surrounding Comrie there are remaining indications of a long period of early settlement. To the west lies Kindrocht chambered cairn, a rectangular burial mound dating to the Neolithic period (c4000-2500BC). Elsewhere, standing stones bear witness to social and religious customs lost long ago. On the moorlands above Balmuck, to the north, are boulders carved with cup and ring markings of a slightly later time (c3000-1500BC). These are possibly linked with metalworking, or with copper ore winning for making bronze tools and weapons. Immigrants and trade brought new ways to the area. 'Fire beaker' pottery (c2000-1200BC) has been found in this area similar to types found in England and on the Continent. Around 500BC iron replaced bronze and in about 80AD the local people came under Roman rule. A fort and camp, now levelled by ploughing, were built at Dalgriess across the River Earn but were only occupied for a short time. After the final retreat of the Romans, the Picts, then later, the Scots, rose to prominence to forge the Scottish nation. One of the best known monuments of these 5th-10th century Celts is Dundurn hillfort, to the west of Comrie

Early History

Beneath the Oakwoods

There are distinct differences between the oakwoods and conifer plantations apart from the very different trees. In the plantation very little light reaches the ground and few woodland wild flowers survive other than in rides and breaks. In the oakwoods a much richer variety and abundance of plant and animal life exist. Trees like oak and other plants native to Britain have been here much longer than introduced species and a much greater variety of insects and other wildlife have adapted to live off, on, or with them. Dead wood provides a home and food for many woodland insects and fungi which break down and return the constituents of the wood to the soil.



Blaeberry

Bell Heather

Hard Fern

The oakwoods on the east side of the river are on quite dry, infertile, acid soil and the ground cover is mainly of heather, bell heather and blaeberry (bilberry). Blaeberry is more abundant as it stands more shade than the other two. Where the shade is denser mosses make a velvety green carpet. Shuttlecock-shaped clumps of hard fern are numerous by the path.

If you have enjoyed the Glen Lednock Circular Walk you will also enjoy any of the following:

- \* Kinnoull Hill Woodland Park, Perth
- \* The Knock of Crieff, Crieff
- \* Lady Mary's Walk, Crieff
- \* Birks of Aberfeldy, Aberfeldy
- \* Falls of Acharn, near Kenmore
- \* Kinardochoy Car Park, Tummel Bridge
- \* Falls of Bruar, near Blair Atholl
- \* Blackspout Wood, Pitlochry
- \* Pitlochry Walks
- \* Den of Alyth, Alyth
- \* Dunkel/Birnam Walk

\* Leaflets available

Disabled Access

Many facilities have access for people with disability. Please contact us before your visit for the range of provision. We welcome feedback from those with disability on how well our facilities and service cater for your needs.

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Illustrations: M Roberts & A Scott

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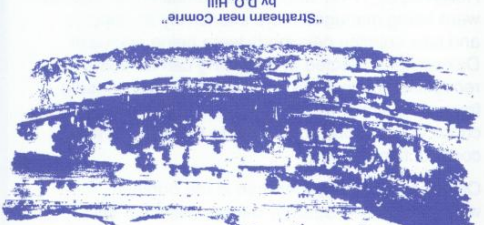
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In the latter half of the 18th century there was increasing economic and agricultural development. Productivity increased but fewer people were needed to work the land. Many were moved to the new planned villages, and in Comrie these people were mainly occupied in cottage weaving. The Industrial Revolution again undercut their livelihoods and many emigrated overseas. A report of 1829 indicates that there were 200 to 300 people preparing to emigrate from the Comrie district.

Little evidence of an early settlement is visible. The old parish church bell dated 1518, points to a medieval date, but the present village was mostly laid out to a plan in the late 1700s, and this was typical of Perthshire villages of that period. Part of the village is now an architectural conservation area.



The name Comrie derives from two Gaelic words - 'Comar', a confluence and 'uidh', a ford or slow moving water. These indicate Comrie's strategic importance as a river crossing from very early times.

This leaflet describes the ever changing features of the Glen Lednock Circular Walk. There are four kinds of habitation - Comrie village, oak woodland, mountain and moorland and the more recent forest plantation. The Walk starts at the Laggan Car Park and can also be joined at any of the other car parks marked on the map. Walking is rough in places and the full walk is some 4 miles.

Glen Lednock Circular Walk

Glen Lednock Circular Walk



Planning & Transportation

Local Walks