



DRUMMOND - BENNYBEG NATURE TRAIL



LADY FERN



RED CANYON



WOOD AVENS



NIPPLEWORT



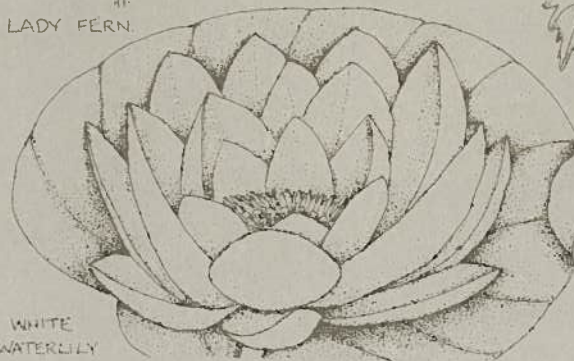
SPEAR THISTLE



WOODSAGE



POLYPODY



WHITE WATERLILY



YELLOW WATERLILY

DRUMMOND

BENNYBEG NATURE TRAIL

GRIMSTHORPE & DRUMMOND CASTLE TRUST LIMITED

would like to thank the following for their help and assistance in compiling this booklet:

John Foster, C.B.E.

William Gauld, Chairman, and Members of Perthshire Branch, Scottish Wildlife Trust

Miss Roberta E. Seath (inside cover)

Mrs Marion E. Shimeld (outside cover)

Dr Rosalind Smith, Nature Conservancy Council

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INTRODUCTION

The wildlife of today is a product of many factors – geology, climate and man's handiwork over centuries being the most important. This trail has been designed to show how these factors interact and we hope that visitors will not only discover and enjoy its natural richness, but will also come away with a sense of shared responsibility for the future of all wildlife, and a better understanding of man's place in the natural world.

POST ONE

The trail leads, in an anti-clockwise direction, round an arable field of about 25 acres. It is no accident that the chosen route encircles an area which, to the farmer, is an 'industrial site.' For centuries man has cultivated and cropped this field to provide himself with food; unwittingly he has also created a habitat for wildlife. Growing under his crops are many wild flowers which can only thrive in a frequently disturbed soil, hearts-ease, poppy and scarlet pimpernel are easily recognised. Many species of seed-eating birds, too, would be absent but for the farmer's use of the land and the harvest and field mice profit from his crops providing in their turn, a bounty for hawks and owls which prey on them. Wild grazing animals – the roe deer and brown hare – would be scarcer if this land were not farmed.

The wetland, Bennybeg Pond and their associated broadleaved woodlands along the southern borders of the field are the creation of our ancestors, as in the plantation at its eastern edge. Only the mighty wall of rock along the field's northern boundary is 'natural.' It is part of a family of parallel Quartz-Dolerite dykes which were intruded into the Old Red Sandstone about 390 million years ago when the ground was being stretched and split during the formation of the Caledonian mountains of that time.

Glacial activity, rain, frost, wind and a few hundred years of man's interference have produced in the last 390 million years the landscape and the nature trail we now present to you.

PLEASE – follow the arrowed trail slowly and quietly, and make use of the notes which relate to each numbered post.

- take nothing but photographs
- leave nothing but footprints
- do not smoke or start fires
- leave your dog in the car with adequate ventilation

Towards Post Two at the corner of the field you walk under an overhead electric power line. Its route has to be kept clear of trees which might become entangled with the cables and this open strip provides space for tall flowering plants. These plants attract insect-food for the birds which live in the shelter belt screening the field from the main road between Muthill and Crieff to give weather protection to the field.

The plantation contains a mixture of Birch, Norway Maple, Oak, Sycamore and Willow. The open strip under the power line has Red Campion, Rosebay Willow Herb, Foxglove, Male Fern and Nippelwort, as well as the agricultural weeds, Dock and Creeping Thistle. Many of these plants are characteristic of disturbed ground.

Other plants to be seen here include Raspberry, Spear Thistle, Wood Avens and Broad Buckler Fern, with the grasses Cocksfoot and Creeping Soft Grass. Stumps of cut-down trees, such as Ash and Sycamore are throwing up fresh shoots, which in due course will also have to be cut down.

Hereabouts you should be able to see Blackbirds, Chaffinches, Pied Wagtails, various Tits, Wood Pigeon and perhaps a Song Thrush.

POST TWO

The ground slopes down to a wet hollow, through which flows a sluggish stream bringing water from Drummond Loch situated on the other side of the Crieff Road to Bennybeg. You may see patches of open water among the vegetation, particularly if it has rained recently.

Here are Meadowsweet, Hogweed, Angelica, Valerian, Marsh Thistle, Reed Canary Grass and Soft Rush, as well as the rare and showy Purple Loosestrife, among whose lower leaves you may see Marsh Bedstraw. Towards Post Three you will find Lady Fern under the trees as well. There are clumps of Alder, Goat Willow and Osier which are cut down from time to time to keep the route of the power line clear. Alder was an important source of charcoal and willow was used for basket making in times gone by. There are many species of willows and they interbreed freely, so many of the willows you see in the countryside are hybrids.

This type of very wet woodland, with patches of dark stagnant water in it, is known as Carr. The humidity and freedom from pollution encourages the growth of lichens on the bark of the trees. In general, lichens do not harm trees, for they get their nourishment from the rain and the air and only use the bark as a holdfast.

Beside the path are clumps of Wood Horsetail, easily recognised because its side shoots branch like fine feathers.

You will see or hear the woodland birds especially the Willow Warbler, Robin and Wren. Swallows and Martins may be skimming over the water, taking their insect prey with open beaks in full flight.

Gradually the water becomes more open.

POST THREE

Here is a tall plantation, about 160 years old, of Oak, Beech, Larch and one Sycamore (which may have been self-sown). Only the Oak is native to Scotland—the others were introduced. The Larch is unusual among conifers in shedding its needles in winter, as most broad-leaved trees do, in autumn the needles turn a beautiful golden-brown. There is a patch of Yellow Iris in the Carr woodland close by.

Wood Pigeons roost here. You may see a Kestrel hovering, and possibly a Sparrowhawk patrolling the ground at low level with rapid wingbeats. Keep an eye to the north over the field dominated by the imposing sweep of the great Dyke. Rooks may be feeding in the field and in the air you may see a Buzzard swing lazily and hear it 'mewing.'

The pond has now opened out. Birds will be moving on it—maybe hastily, if you have not been very quiet.

POST FOUR

Here you will reach the observation platform (limit on numbers). If the pond is undisturbed you should see Mute Swan, Mallard, Coot, perhaps a Little Grebe, and maybe a Spotted Flycatcher darting about over the water after insects. From here you may also be lucky enough to see a Heron standing at the water's edge.

On the surface of the water there are great rafts of floating Yellow and White Water Lilies anchored in the mud below. Around you, and among the Alders along the bank on either side of you, are clumps of Great Water Dock, a rare plant in Scotland, and Soft Rush.

DO NOT venture down to edge of the water. Parts of the margin are very soft and you could quickly sink up to your thighs in soft mud!

POST FIVE

This is a plantation of mature Oak and as you walk through it you will see that oak bark is not attractive to lichens.

One dead tree at the centre of the plantation has been invaded by Bracket Fungus. The soft decaying wood of this tree is ideal for a variety of insects to lay their eggs in; as the eggs develop into larvae and pupae (caterpillars and chrysalises to you and me) they will attract the attention of timber haunting birds such as the Great Spotted Woodpecker.

POST SIX

PLEASE DO NOT continue along the side of the pond when you reach the shelter belt. This area is a sanctuary for the wildfowl to which they can retire when people approach.

The Trail turns sharply to the left through the woodland. There is an edge of young Beech and Oak around a core of Larch and Pine, with small clearings where young trees have fallen or died.

Blue Tits, Coal Tits, and Great Tits, together with Chaffinches, live in this wood and can be seen dropping to the ground to feed. Robins and Wrens live in the undergrowth. Wood Pigeons roost in the tree-tops and will likely fly off with a loud clatter when you approach. A high-pitched twittering – ‘needle-de-needle-de-stitch’ (too high pitched for many people to hear) – will signify a group of our smallest bird, the Goldcrest.

POST SEVEN

Look out over the open field. Towards the left of the panorama the Keep of Drummond Castle, dating back to 1491, stands proud of the trees of the policy woodlands. The ground rises behind and to the right of the Castle to the top of Turleum Hill. It is covered with commercial conifer plantations of mixed age, including some very old Scots Pine, survivors of the old Caledonian Forest that once blanketed much of Scotland. James, 3rd Duke of Perth, a pioneer of forestry in Scotland, planted Turleum Hill in the early part of the eighteenth century. At up to 1,000 ft. it was then the most elevated commercial woodland in the Country.

As you move towards Post Eight the Trail now leads westward, along the south of the Dyke. Here it is broken down and appears as little more than a boulder field, with vegetation adapted to drying out in the summer. Ragwort has found a home here – its dry fronds are poisonous to livestock, but it is the food plant of the Cinnabar Moth whose orange and black banded caterpillars will be active in July. Broom and St. John’s Wort occur in the long grass and young Beech are regenerating. When the adjoining field to the north contains cattle they enjoy lying out on top of the rocks, or shelter from the sun in the nearby scrub woodland. You will see Rooks and Carrion Crows and, if you are lucky, a Brown Hare and Rabbits.

POST EIGHT

A short spur path leads from here to a viewpoint on top of the Dyke. It gives a fine vista across lowland country, with shelter belts of Oak and Beech to the north and Sitka Spruce, Larch and Birch to the east. On the rising ground ahead is Crieff, its well known Hydro conspicuous just under Knock Hill which stands immediately behind the town. Beyond are the much higher hills about Loch Turret (now a reservoir), dominated by Ben-y-Hine (Chonzie), 3,048 feet high. This is the line of the Highland Boundary Fault – where the real Scottish Highlands begin.

Returning to Post Eight from the viewpoint you pass a clump of elder bushes whose creamy flowers are alive with insects. In autumn the dark juicy elderberries will be harvested by migrating birds. Along the south side of the Dyke where the Trail now leads, the rock wall becomes higher and steeper. It is crowned by a fine groove of mature Beech trees, with Bramble, Wild Rose, and other undershrubs.

POST NINE

Here the dyke becomes a vertical face continuing nearly to the main road and varying a little in height. It is not much broken-down for the rock of the Dyke is Quartz-Dolerite, a very hard and fine grained form of basalt, which cooled down slowly inside the surrounding Old Red Sandstone which has since been eroded by weathering and the glaciers of the Ice Ages, leaving the Dyke outstanding.

The whole family of dykes, of which this one is a member, runs east and west across Central Scotland and was intruded through fissures opening in the ground rock during the periods of tension in the Earth's crust at the end of the Carboniferous or the beginning of the Permian Era, about 390 million years ago. About 10 miles to the west, in Glenartney, it bends but does not break where it crosses the line of the Highland Boundary Fault.

The top of the Dyke is crowned by mature trees, mostly Beech and Pine, with occasional Sycamore and Oak, and an understorey of Elder and Broom. One or two large Ash trees grow against the face of the Dyke, taking advantage of nutrients from the decomposing rock.

Nearby a rough track leads up to the top of the Dyke. It is possible, with care, to walk along the top, BUT THIS IS NOT part of the Trail and anyone venturing along this track does so at their own risk as the south edge, overlooking the field, is completely unprotected and potentially very dangerous.

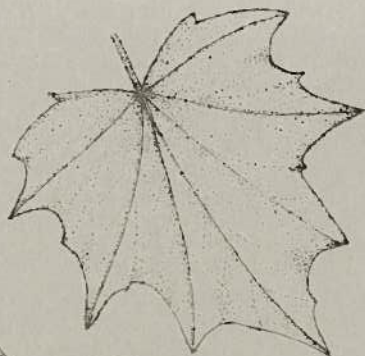
Along the foot of the Dyke you can see the plants typical of dry, steep south-facing rock walls Herb Robert, Polypody Fern, Orpine, Foxglove, Red Campion, Woodsage and English Stonecrop. Look out for the Maidenhair Spleenwort and occasional Black Spleenwort. Sheep's sorrel also occurs, Ivy creeps over the rock-face here and there. Lichens encrust the rock surface itself.

Follow the arrows back to the car park.

You have now completed the Bennybeg Nature Trail. We hope you have enjoyed it and have learned something of the variety of habitats displayed along it and of the plants and animals that inhabit them, and also something about the farmed and managed landscape.



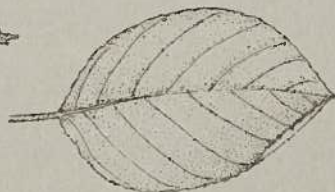
ASH



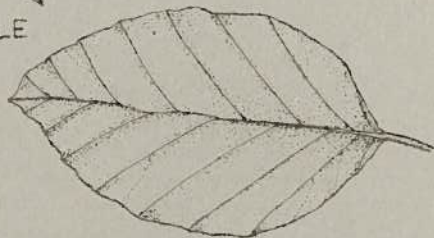
NORWAY MAPLE



BIRCH



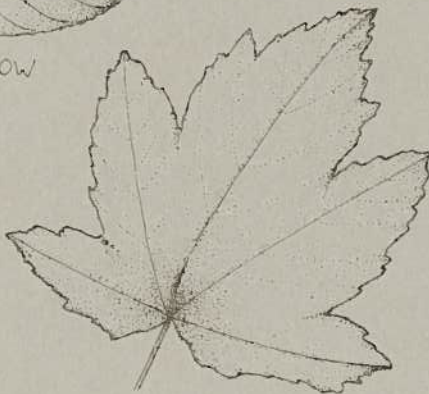
WILLOW



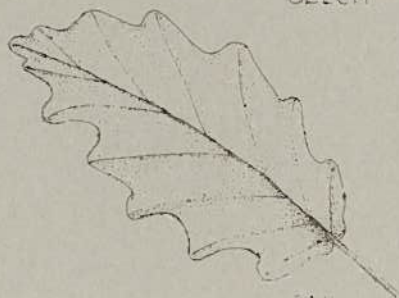
BEECH



ALDER



SYCAMORE



OAK

