

South Pennines: Celebrating our Woodland Heritage



Summary

Woodland is a scarce resource with an estimated 4% woodland cover in the Southern Pennines, including locally distinctive oak clough woodland but there is a rich heritage that helps us connect with our past. Some of our woodland heritage is obvious and dates from the industrial heritage some of is less obvious such as the sites of charcoal burning : some can only hint at the existence of previous woodland through botanical indicator species . Many traditional woodland practices and skills have been lost from the area. This together with the fragmented nature and low level of woodland cover results in poor management or no management at all.

The National Character Area profile for the South Pennines recognises the role of existing woodland in general and clough woodland in particular. Many of Pennine Prospects Partners own or manage existing woodland including the local authority partners, the utility companies and the National Trust. Over-arching these assets are a number of regional and sub-regional woodland projects: White Rose Forest, Pennine Edge Forest , Forest of Burnley.

In a cultural landscape that bears the marks of previous generations the uplands and woodlands of the South Pennines are unique in assisting us to not only understand the past but visualise and interpret the past to future generations. The archaeology of woodlands is hidden amongst the trees, so much of it has not yet been discovered or recorded. The humps and bumps often survive very well, as they have not been disturbed by development or ploughing. The trees themselves can also tell us a lot about how the wood has been used.

The woodlands of the South Pennines have had a unique part to play in the development of the South Pennines. Woods were used to produce materials, such as 'bobbins', for the textile industry, and for charcoal production as well as timber for construction..even clogs! Wooded valleys provided the backdrop to the early development of mills; particularly in the Calder

Valley. It was these industries that eventually formed the foundation of the area's wealth. For example, the prevalence of mature sycamore trees today is evidence of the traditional use of the wood for making bobbins.

Following Pennine Prospects volunteer-led approach to surveying our upland heritage- there is an exciting opportunity to look at our woodland heritage and improve both physical and intellectual access. Not only would this increase awareness of a little-understood historical asset but it would also help to inform woodland owners and managers and the public of the need to manage woodlands. An approach to funders might link a number of initiatives on several key woodland sites across the watershed.

Pennine Prospects: Woodland initiatives in the South Pennines

Pennine Prospects was established in 2005 to protect, enhance and promote the natural heritage assets of the South Pennines. The partnership is committed to "conserving and enhancing the heritage assets to ensure they contribute fully to the social, economic and environmental well-being of the area". It builds on the work carried out for more than 30 years by the Standing Conference of South Pennine Authorities (SCOSPA). In the past, SCOSPA / Pennine Heritage employed a South Pennine Woodland Officer.

Pennine Prospects is a mature cross-sector partnership working at a landscape-scale, with a board comprising:

- Six local authorities: Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees (West Yorkshire); Oldham and Rochdale (Greater Manchester) and Lancashire County Council;
- Private sector companies: United Utilities, Yorkshire Water Services and Northern Rail;
- Membership organisations: National Farmers Union and the National Trust;
- Government organisations: Natural England
- Third sector representatives

Pennine Prospects Board has sought to co-ordinate activity across the South Pennines towards a woodland strategy. There have been a number of developments both in the past and recently within the South Pennines :

- Pennine Prospects has recently undertaken a woodland opportunity mapping exercise funded by the Forestry Commission.
- The utility companies ; Yorkshire Water and United Utilities [both Pennine Prospects members] have embarked upon significant woodland creation initiatives [note; the extent of woodland creation as part of the Sustainable Catchment Management Programme [SCaMP].
- The Woodland Trust are currently seeking to restore Planted Ancient Woodland Sites [PAWS] back to woodland planting associated with ancient woodlands. South & West Yorkshire have been identified as one of ten areas nationally to target activity.
- The Forest of Bradford Project has received Heritage Lottery Funding to survey woodlands in the Aire Valley including Swartha Wood.
- There have been a number of borough-wide and region- wide initiatives relating to woodland creation : Calderdale's million tree campaign, White Rose Forest and Pennine Edge Forest.
- Calderdale's tree & woodland Strategy 2011 has identified a need to focus on managing existing woodland.

- Grassroots organisations including Colne Valley Tree Society and Treesponsibility have planted significant areas of new woodland involving volunteers and local people.
- Volunteers from South Leeds Archaeology working with the National Trust in Hardcastle Craggs have excavated the remains of a charcoal hearth during Spring 2012.

Woodland heritage : An evolving agenda



Lack of awareness raises serious issues of an urgent need for cross-disciplinary collaboration and for effective training and support for field workers. Many of these ancient woodland landscapes are extremely vulnerable to inappropriate management or to intensive recreational disruption. Often unrecognised they may be lost or degraded very easily and very quickly.

Professor Ian D. Rotherham ; Centre for Environmental Conservation and Outdoor Leisure
Sheffield Hallam University

'If amateur enthusiasts can combine together to discover and explain old trees as features of the historic landscape, the case of protecting them will be made far more powerful.'

Richard Muir Ancient Trees Living Landscapes

Nationally there is increasing recognition of woodlands as a historical asset has been under recorded. For example see the work of South East Woodland Archaeology Forum. Elsewhere, notably South Yorkshire, there have been a number of initiatives to further investigate existing woodland as a heritage resource using professional archaeologists alongside volunteers. Site investigations have considered

- Identifying ancient woodlands
- Drains and ditches
- Boundaries and trackways
- Mill dams, leats and mill buildings
- Agricultural activity (e.g. earthworks representing old hedgerows and relict fields)
- Woodland management over time
- Resource exploitation and production (including mining and quarrying)
- Military activity
- Evidence of settlement

Such investigations lead to a greater understanding of the importance and changing role of the woodland resource over time within its regional and national context.

South Pennine Woodlands: A historical resource

Little of this work has taken place in the South Pennines- however in 2012 a group of volunteers started to excavate the remains of a charcoal hearth in Hardcastle Crag after identifying 40 similar features at the site such as hearths, or stances (platforms for burning charcoal), are indicative of wider industrial activity at, or close by the site, and at Hardcastle Crag the possible remains of a bloomery have been identified. The extensive nature of the features at Hardcastle Crag alone beyond the resources of the group to survey. There are indications of other similar structures in Calderdale woodlands : North Dean for example.

Mill buildings, dams and water courses provide significant remains that are evocative of the time of growth of the South Pennines – many existing in a steep woodland context –for example Staups Mill in Jumble Hole Clough, Colden Water, Luddenden Dean and Cragg Vale in Calderdale and Healy Dell, Naden Valley in Rochdale. At least 50 of these mills exist in the Upper Calder Valley alone sometimes dilapidated with little interpretation of their significance. This pattern was replicated over in Rochdale at Healy dell and the Naden Valley.

South Pennine Woodlands : Landscape, management and biodiversity

Although the woodlands of the South Pennines may be small they take on a significance above their size by virtue of their location on steep valley sides commanding the area and framing the moorland plateaux. They remain largely unmanaged, even aged and usually past maturity. Grazing sheep are a constant problem on the smaller woodland in private ownership. Efforts have been made to manage the resource: notably by the local authorities and the National Trust. Recently, a new workers co-operative Blackbark have sought to pilot innovative means of managing woodland for firewood – the Firebox scheme.

There are two notable ancient semi natural woodlands in the Upper Calder Valley: Hardcastle Crag owned and managed by the National Trust and Broadhead Clough owned by Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and ‘the best known example’ of a clough woodland in West Yorkshire. Yorkshire Wildlife Trust also manage Low Wood above Keighley.

The local authority partners to Pennine Prospects own significant woodland assets : Hirst Wood, Crabtree Gill and Deepcliffe Wood in Bradford ; Calderdale Council manage significant woodlands: the Colden Valley, Nutclough and North Dean woods. Elsewhere examples of ancient woodland exist in Rochdale [Cheesden & Naden Book] and Healy Dell [both managed by Rochdale Council]; Towneley Hall Wood [Burnley Borough Council], Roddlesworth Wood near Blackburn [home to the ruin of Hollinshead Hall] and the Colne Valley.

In terms of biodiversity the woodland are important not just for woodland birds including woodcock; at the moorland edge they help to support moorland birds including raptors and ring ouzel . They contained the last remaining red squirrels in Yorkshire; and form a ‘nationally’ important corridor for bats [including Daubentons bats] as well as unusual introductions such as the northern hairy wood ant population in Hardcastle Crag.

The members of the Pennine Prospects partnership, wish to develop a proposal working at the landscape scale to develop a more ‘ecologically connected’ landscape. As such this approach seeks to address the review by Professor Lawton , Making Space for Nature. The report makes a strong case for working across a landscape scale linking elements of habitats

to make them more resilient to change in the future. Activity at the landscape scale will build upon the links to the conurbations of Manchester, Lancashire and West Yorkshire.

South Pennine Woodland : Ecosystem Services

The benefits of woodland in relation to what are known as ecosystem services has only recently been recognised. A whole range of benefits have been listed in the South Pennine Ecosystem Service Pilot from soil formation, erosion control to climate regulation and flood alleviation. Much more research needs to be done on this work but already work has been carried out. Note: the Environment Agency support for the Source Project's innovative woodland planting in the Upper Calder catchment as part of a wider initiative to mitigate retain water in the catchment.

South Pennine Woodlands: A learning resource



Woodlands have been used frequently by many of the local authorities as a resource for schools [reference; Calderdale – Wildside ; Bradford Env'tl Education Service etc]. More recently through Pennine Prospects Watershed Landscape Project KidzArch worked with the Forest of Bradford to build shelters in woodland as a way of explain how generations searched for food and made shelter as part of a workshop: 'footsteps to the stone age.' These were really successful.

In the Calder Valley the Tinderwood Trust has applied the Forest Schools approach to woodlands as an 'outdoor classroom' working with a number of schools and client groups .

In terms of lifelong learning, the South East Woodland Archaeology Forum (SEWAF) exists to engage people with the archaeology in the south east. SEWAF aims are to raise awareness of the existence of this little known branch of archaeology, in particular with woodland owners.

The apparent 'damage' caused by thinning and extraction of mature trees can distress people – especially when a management regime is introduced to woods. [Reference : adverse press coverage Hardcastle Crags]. By promoting woodland management as a means of improving woodland for ground flora and using traditional skills this can be mitigated as we 'celebrate' our woodland heritage.

What needs to be done:



Copyright: Sytetimescapes/geoinformation group – example of LIDAR.

Historic Environment Surveys: The paucity of information on woodland heritage is a key issue. The Project would undertake an inventory of known woodland archaeology based on a desk top study of the Historic Environment Record and the wider documentary resource (historic maps, leases, place name evidence, etc.) This would form the basis for a programme of field survey. There is a great potential to carry out standing building survey with community volunteers/groups, as well as survey within the woodlands themselves. Such surveys have proved successful elsewhere (see, for example, the South East Woodland Archaeology Forum: <http://www.sewaf.org.uk/surveying-and-lidar/>).

Ecological surveys . Botanical surveys can identify whether woodland is truly ancient; surveys can also identify indicator species within grassland that might indicate the previous presence of woodland. Pennine Prospects has experience of managing botanical training for volunteers as part of the Twite Recovery Project . The integration of the survey data would allow for a greater understanding of the historic extent of woodland. The work would guide a survey tool kit for the South Pennines Woodland Strategy.

Woodlands of the south Pennines are of national significance in relation to bats with the proximity of still water [occasionally mill ponds and redundant mill buildings].

LiDAR [Light Detection and Ranging]. The survey technique has been used in Landscape Partnerships – notably 'Growing with Wyre' to uncover the wealth of archaeological remains under the vegetation layer.

Woodland management proposals: .Woodland management is labour intensive and in the South Pennines where access is restricted and rarely cost effective. The benefits in terms of increasing natural regeneration, changing the age structure of a woodland and increasing ground flora are vast. One of the major costs of woodland management is that of fencing particularly on some of the more isolated clough woodland.

Traditional woodland management whether through use of horses for hauling logs; coppicing and/or charcoal production ; although labour intensive still remain some of the most effective ways of managing woodland. These skills can be promoted through a formal training programme with a training provider and be the basis for support to small and

medium sized enterprises. [Note : the work that Yorwoods has undertaken to promote woodland skills].

Conservation of historic features: Clough woodlands have hidden treasures . Gibson Mill in Hardcastle Crag is the most notable perhaps because it has been restored ; yet many valleys had literally dozens of mills and associated structures leats, goits . These are of particular historic interest but also of concern [from a health and safety point of view].There is the opportunity to improve access to our woodlands but also to provide interpretation facilities whether on site or off-site.

Opportunities for Pennine Prospects Partners:

- Woodlands are a distinctive and important feature of the South Pennines landscape.
- This work will link to the evolving programme for the South Pennine Local Nature Partnership
- to actively support and compliment existing initiatives : White Rose Forest, Forest of Burnley, Forest of Bradford & Pennine Edge Forest.
- to add to the knowledge of existing woodland owners both in terms of historical and natural heritage through detailed survey work : co-ordinated professionally but with the training and use of volunteers.
- to improve access to several woodland sites with specific ‘historical assets’
- to increase awareness through interpretation and educational activities.
- to offer training in traditional skills and assist the development of SMEs based on woodland products .
- to encourage surveying, recording and research of the archaeology by helping owners and managers in the use of toolkits designed for this region,
- to provide a focal point for research of wooded landscapes – drawing together past research and formulating new research questions,

Funding opportunities:

- Heritage Lottery Fund :
- Landfill Tax Funding :
- Woodland Improvement Grants
- RDPE [ie LANTRA].

Organisations to consult

- White Rose Forest
- Treeresponsibility/ Source Project
- Blackbark
- Tinderwood Trust
- National Trust
- South Leeds Archaeology Group
- West Yorkshire Joint Services
- Craven College
- Yorwoods
- Woodland Trust
- Forest of Bradford
- Forest of Burnley
- Pennine Edge Forest

Credits :

Photographs : Pennine Prospects

References :

- Increasing Woodland Cover in the South Pennines , Edward Mills, Quarterly Journal of Forestry.:
- Woodland landscapes in Sheffield, England -reconstructing the evidence of four thousand years of human impact; Ian D. Rotherham; Centre for Environmental Conservation and Outdoor Leisure Sheffield Hallam University

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