

PIPER'S WOOD TREE REGENERATION PROJECT

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How should the Club commemorate its Centenary? Many ideas were considered by the Committee. Improvements at Muir Cottage were regarded as too inward looking. Bridge building proposals conflicted with the concept of 'keep the wilderness wild'. Replacement of the mountain top indicators erected by the Club on the summits of Lochnagar and Ben Macdui was not necessary as they were still in reasonable condition. Then, Fiona Cameron came up with the idea of a tree regeneration project and this received enthusiastic support.

The next question was 'where?' It was considered that the Braemar area was the most appropriate and the search began. Glen Ey was looked at first but was initially dismissed because of its exposure and the practical difficulty of driving posts into rocky ground. However, no other suitable site could be identified and after consulting with Drennan Watson, Mar Estate was approached and readily agreed to the enclosing of an area of Glen Ey known as Piper's Wood at map reference 098857. Robbie Middleton and family spent a happy afternoon with the President pegging out the boundary.

An anonymous donation of £1000 'for the Club Centenary' formed the basis of our funding and the Nature Conservancy Council was asked if a grant was available for such a project. The local office was very supportive and welcomed the opportunity to recommend a 50% grant towards the cost of fencing the area. An aside remark was that it made a change from duckponds! An appeal to Club members to fund a reserve for maintaining the fencing was generously supported and included a further anonymous donation of £1000.

The 537 metres of fencing, enclosing an area of 4.3 acres, was completed in May 1989. Part of the agreement with the contractor was that the posts and netting would be conveyed across the Ey to the site. Bill Lobban from the Old School House at Inverey was willing to help and also provided a tractor and trailer. It was not anticipated that the President would drive the tractor from Inverey to the site with Gill Shirreffs as a witness!

February 1990 was a coarse month with very heavy rain and unusual southerly winds. The initial assessment that the site was exposed and rocky proved to be only too true. A straining post came out and took about 50 metres of fencing with it. Continual bad weather and a marked lack of interest from the contractor resulted in the fence being down until June when he eventually came to sort it. He recommended additional posts and bracing to strengthen the fence and due to his dilatoriness we got another contractor to do this work in October 1990.

After the first heavy snowfall for two years in February 1991 it was found that a snowbank had built up at the south eastern corner allowing hares to gain access. A job for the summer will be to raise the netting at this point.

Experience has proved the importance of having a contingency fund to

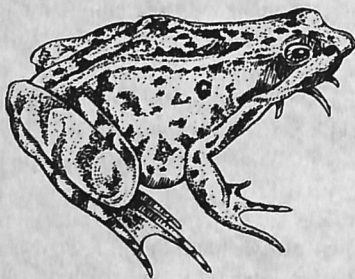
maintain the fencing which we must do for 15 years as a condition of the NCC grant.

A first visit to the Glen Ey enclosure will provoke the question 'what have we fenced'? Piper's wood is a euphemism for about 16 birch trees of great age with an estimated life of not more than six years but still producing seed. They are the remnants of an extensive birch forest which covered the area in the mid 1800's. Continuous grazing by deer and hares has inhibited natural regeneration, but there are many seedlings within the enclosed area. Dr. Heather Salzen was invited to list all the flora within the enclosure and her report forms the main part of this article.

Mrs Betty Lobban of Inverey has provided some historical detail of the area. At one time a portion of the glen beyond the Colonel's Bed contained a village and eight families lived there. Delnafae was either part of that village or very near to it and was occupied by Robert Lamont (Robbie Piper) hence the name 'Piper's Wood' for the wooded area near to the village. The extensive ruins of crofts and lime kilns are still in evidence. The crofters were cleared from the glen in the mid 1800's.

It is understood that the number of lime kilns in the locality far exceed the needs of the local crofters. A supposition is that lime was produced from the limestone schist and 'exported' to Inverey and other nearby crofting areas. A geological survey and assessment of the Piper's Wood 'village' would be welcomed for a future edition of the Journal.

Dr. Heather Salzen's botanical report now follows.



Heather has a Doctorate in Botany and was the first botanist to work with the Nature Conservancy in Scotland. She recently became Recorder for the Botanical Society of the British Isles, covering South Aberdeen (area V.C. 92) which includes Glen Ey.