

16.iii Forestry

Summary

Looking far back in history to Mesolithic and early Neolithic times (8300 to 3200 BC), evidence tells us that the landscape was almost entirely covered in trees. Woodland in Ennerdale would have been predominantly oak, alder and birch. Subsequent episodes of forest clearance occurred and by the post Medieval period (late 15th C) the landscape was dominated by pastoral sheep grazing, with only a few remnant woodlands left on The Side and Latterbarrow. The 1860 first edition Ordnance Survey map shows some small conifer woodland was established around Gillerthwaite and Lingmell before the end of the 19th Century.

The bedrock of forestry policy in the 1920s was the need to rebuild and maintain a strategic timber reserve. Stocks were so depleted by the demands of the First World War that the new Forestry Commission was given a good deal of freedom to acquire and plant land. Planting began in Ennerdale in March 1925¹ and continued through the 20th Century with the final acquisition of land around Clews Gill in 1978. Once again (as with the original woodland clearances), the valley was being shaped by the needs of society - this time a need for timber in case of war.

Towards the end of the 20th Century the Forestry Commission started to widen its remit culminating in 1998 with the publication of the England Forestry Strategy. This saw the focus of forest management shift from timber production (linked to falling market prices and competition from Europe) towards rural development, economic regeneration, recreation, access and tourism, conservation and the environment.

Ennerdale has long had negative press associated with conifer plantations. Times are changing however and great effort has gone into creating more mixed woodland habitats through native broadleaf planting and thinning/clear felling of monoculture conifer forest. The forest provides a haven for wildlife and is an asset for public enjoyment. Visually detracting pockets of plantation forest do still exist and will be addressed as Wild Ennerdale evolves in the future.

Actions (within next 10 years)

- Control Sitka spruce to ensure that this species does not dominate the future forest.
- Reduce the impact of mechanised forestry operations in the valley.
- Prioritise the felling of areas viewed to be visually detracting within the landscape.
- Do not replant recent clearfells.
- Plant native broadleaves and Juniper as seed trees in the eastern valley to give natural processes the opportunity to develop woodland away from becoming dominated by spruce.
- Allow natural woodland encroachment beyond present forest boundary to soften stark contrast between forest and open fell.
- Continue to control sheep grazing on The Side to encourage natural regeneration east and west of the current woodland.
- Introduce cattle into the forest to restore a natural disturbance process.
- As timber operations reduce, identify where sections of the forest track network could be allowed to revert to vegetated tracks under natural processes.

¹ Dale Head was bought from Lord Lonsdale

- Look to thin areas of maturing forest to provide more open habitats for future herbivore grazing.
- Allow small scale timber operations to provide for local need e.g. woodfuel for the YHA's and Field Centre.

Linked maps: N, R, W, & X

Linked Photos: Plates 29 – 32, 41 – 44, 57 & 58