

Living With Trees - Case Study

Fingle Wood <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/wood/5663/fingle-woods/>

(first section taken from WT website, next bit by RW, last section from Dave Rickwood)

Part 2 – PAWS Restoration

The Woodland Trust explains the process of restoring ‘Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites’ (PAWS): “The steep-sided Teign Valley contains unique soil and wildlife communities that have taken centuries to develop and now, beneath the conifers, are at risk of becoming degraded. The success of the Fingle Woods restoration will depend on how well this ancient soil structure has been preserved.

Before restoration work could begin we needed to know more about Fingle and took time to study each forest nook and rocky ridge. We had to make a plan to protect its qualities and make gradual changes, starting with the most run-down areas first. Invasive plants needed removing, rare species needed protecting and the ancient woodland remnants had to be found.

Over time the dense conifers will be carefully thinned so the sun can reinvigorate the diverse woodland life. It’s taken hundreds of years to get where we are now and it could take another hundred to get to where we want to be.”

The Trust is using ‘Continuous Cover Forestry’ (CCF) as the principle method of restoration. Unlike clearfell silviculture, where a whole stand is felled at maturity and replanted, CCF seeks to maintain much of the forest cover during felling and restocking. This means small felling coups up to half a hectare, small groups of trees or even selection of single trees for removal. The surrounding forest protects the felled area, reducing exposure to wind, drought and sun, whilst maintaining ‘forest conditions’ of humidity, mycorrhizal associations and shelter. Seed from surrounding trees can also help restock the felled area.



WT’s Site Manager Dave Rickwood gives more detail on works at Fingle: “CCF has the potential to enhance the long term transition of the woodland to a more semi-natural composition, whilst retaining a commercial imperative. The principle conifer component Douglas fir regenerates well on the steep valley sides and in the shallow acid soils. When well thinned its relatively “light” canopy accommodates the development of a semi-natural ground flora, understory and an increasing broadleaf canopy.

The soils of the valley are heavily depleted following a thousand years of coppicing, forming podzols where the impact is greatest. The dense heavy shade of some conifer species which displaced the coppice in the 20th century has led to extremely acid conditions and soil loss. This impact is manifest following heavy rainfall and flushes of acidity which can be traced in the watercourses.

The protection of soils and water are important long term objectives for the restoration and carefully managed CCF approach will help mitigate these impacts and create space for the regeneration of the soils and the development of semi-natural filters and buffers throughout the forest.”

