



Written by Kirsten Manley



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Dyfi Woodlands

Adam Thorogood
Tom Deacon
Zena Wilmot

Project Coordinator:

Kirsten Manley

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Elizabeth Overton

Local Woodland Management Advisors

Bob Shaw
Peter Bottoms

Dyfi FEI Members, Natural Resources Wales, Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust, and other woodland activity providers

Anni Lloyd
Barbara Angelsark
Barbara Haddrill
Esther Tew
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Tom Aslin

COBWEB Consultants

Andy Rowland
Chris Higgins
Robin Farrar
Stephanie Ties

Independent Community Forest Facilitators

Jane Gronow
Nick Roche

Anthropologist – Social Surveys

Anne Marie Carty

Volunteer Research Advice and Assistance

Richard Hawkins
Elena Blackmore

Design & Marketing

Rosie Strickland

Photographs

Giles Thaxton
Francis Stoakley
Kirsten Manley
Richard Hawkins

Visual Minutes

Chris Iliff
Harriet Wallis

Translation

Afiaith - Martin Davis
Annog Cyf - Huw Tegid

Volunteers

Amelie Holmes
Amos Holmes
Andy McGregor
Anne Hobb
Anneth Prosser (Hobbs)
Anthea Cox
Rebecca Sanderson
Cian Young
Claire Parry

Claire Rhydwen
Dafydd Moore
Dan Gifford
Danny Harris
Danny Jenkins
Deirdre Raffan
Deri Young
Eleanor Llewelyn
Fabienne Plissoneau
Fiona Moran
Fiona Rowe
Frances Stoakley
Helen Parr
Hugh Evans
Inigo Bandares da
Lucas
Jack Grasse
James Cass
James Randle
James Young
Jamie Mc Quilkin
Jan Young
Jasmin Foster
Jayne Hopkins
Jenny Lampad
Jian Lloyd
Jo Cooper
Jo Howard
Judi Stretton
Kai Worthington
Kait Leonard
Karen Rush
Katy Jones
Lee Worthington
Lexiarry Rowe
Lowri Evans
Luke Adey
Lynn Williams
Malka Holmes
Martin Kemp
Megan Jones
Mia Trew
Michelle Clarke
Michele Leslie
Neil Hopkins
Paddy Figgis
Richard Delahay
Rod Bird
Philip James

Rachel Behan
Rhiannon Hopkins
Roisin Cavanagh
Rosie Strang
Rowan Brooks
Sally Carr
Sally Edwards
Sam Howard
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This booklet provides a summary of the collaborative effort between the Dyfi FEI Cluster Group and the local communities of Forge and Machynlleth to develop a transparent woodland management plan for Coed Tŷ Gwyn to meet the needs and interests of all.

The project, which engaged 648 people across both communities, was co-ordinated by Coetiroedd Dyfi Woodlands and was funded through the Forest Education Initiative Partnership Fund and Glasu's Community Resilience Fund.

For a full copy of the report with appendices, contact
Kirsten Manley at: info@dyfiwoodlands.org.uk

Roots

Before the Middle Ages, our Welsh woodlands used to cover at least 30% of the land¹. As the population grew and farming expanded, tree-cover dwindled to a mere 15% by the Middle Ages and 4.7% by the 20th Century², making Wales (and the UK as a whole) one of the least forested countries in Europe. This led to the Forestry Act coming into force with Forestry Commission Wales (FCW) initially established to promote forestry, develop afforestation, produce timber and make grants to private landowners.

Over time conservation became one of the main objectives for FCW³ and the cover of woodlands increased to 14% with an emphasis on regeneration to native tree species. This increase gave rise to the value of woodlands for a range of benefits other than economic gain⁴. Public access has increased with more and more communities taking an interest in either purchasing, or co-managing their local woodland. This has led to a rise in community woodland groups.





A community woodland group tends to be a group formed with shared objectives for managing one or more woodlands shared by the local community. Llais y Goedwig is an association which promotes and represents the many community-led woodland groups developing across Wales. These have been exciting times for the public as members of the association have shown, through their own case studies, how they have been able to lease or even purchase local woodland, with significant benefits being evident in all cases⁵.

The communities of Machynlleth and Forge are nestled in the heart of the UNESCO Dyfi Biosphere. This is an area specifically designated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation in

recognition of how people here value their cultural and environmental heritage while exploring different ways of managing their natural resources sustainably for environmental purposes and economic gain. Despite this dynamic approach to nature, culture and the economy in the Dyfi area, there are currently no community woodland groups established here.

Woodlands are just one of the many natural resources which surround both communities, with the area being known as the Dyfi Forest. In 2001 a small section – 5 acres – of the Forest near Forge was designated as a Forest School site for use by members of the Dyfi Forest Education Initiative Cluster Group for woodland education programmes. The woodland became known as Coed Tŷ Gwyn. Members of the Dyfi FEI Cluster group apply for funding to run activities engaging local

timber merchants, schools, home educating families, forest school leaders and young people in programmes which educate about trees and timber or offer child-led activities in a truly intrinsically motivating environment – woodlands.

In 2013 Natural Resources Wales agreed to expand Coed Tŷ Gwyn's area for use to 24 hectares. Coetiroedd Dyfi Woodlands, as members of the Dyfi FEI Cluster group, secured funding to engage the communities of Machynlleth and Forge in a process of developing a woodland management plan for this site for the benefit of all.

This booklet has been developed to summarise the phases of the process and highlights the outcomes for the communities from each phase.



Fig. 1: Original map of Coed Tŷ Gwyn



Fig. 2: New boundaries of Coed Tŷ Gwyn

Trunks

Public Consultation

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much" – Helen Keller

The communities of Forge and Machynlleth were invited to engage in an introductory consultation process over 2 evenings. Forty five participants attended immersing themselves in learning about the woodland through maps and images of the Coed Tŷ Gwyn as well as introductory talks about the Dyfi FEI Cluster Group, the UNESCO Dyfi Biosphere Reserve, the process for community engagement and the limitations of the woodland.

Their suggestions for how the woodland could be used in the future, the challenges these might face and possible solutions were discussed around five core themes:

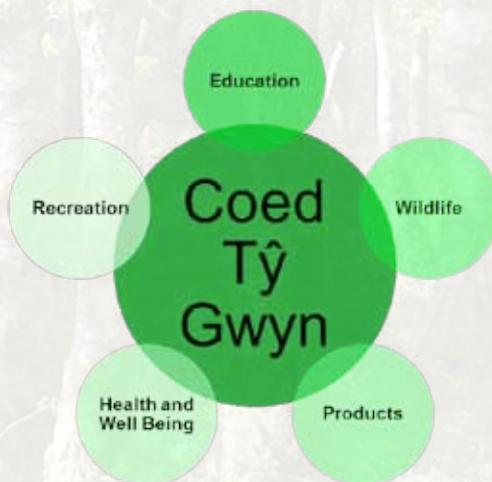




Fig. 3

Results from discussions in these groups indicated:

A keen interest by all to engage with a range of activities in Coed Tŷ Gwyn

A call for improved access to and from the site with a larger car park

A need for more pathways and sheltered areas

A concern about frequent fly-tipping

A desire for increased communication about and within the woodland

A drive for more opportunities in developing skills in the areas of recreation, products, education and biodiversity

An agreement that a collaborative woodland management plan should be established

Participants were invited to attend an open day in Coed Tŷ Gwyn the following Saturday.

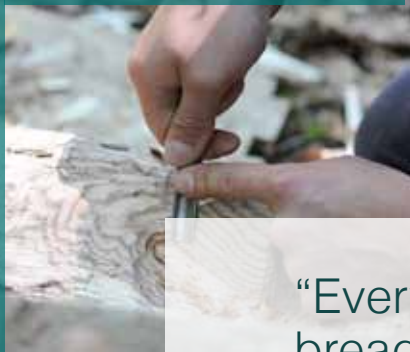


Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Branches



“Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul.” – John Muir



Woodland Working Days and Open Day

The woodland working days allowed time for the woodland to be zoned according to tree species with a stake numbering the zone installed in each.

Volunteers helped to prepare for the open day by installing much needed rope railings in the steeper parts of the woodland and erecting temporary shelters for the visiting public.

The Dyfi FEI Cluster Group members, local timber experts and woodland game providers pooled their skills and resources to offer the communities of Machynlleth and Forge a wonderful immersive experience of woodland activities and talks on different styles of woodland management.

All 60 visitors to the wood were asked to answer a questionnaire about the woodland based on the five themes from the consultation evening. Of the 30 responses education was the main interest with an interest in wildlife coming a close second. Health and wellbeing as well as woodland products were also listed as a potential draw to use Coed Tŷ Gwyn in the future.

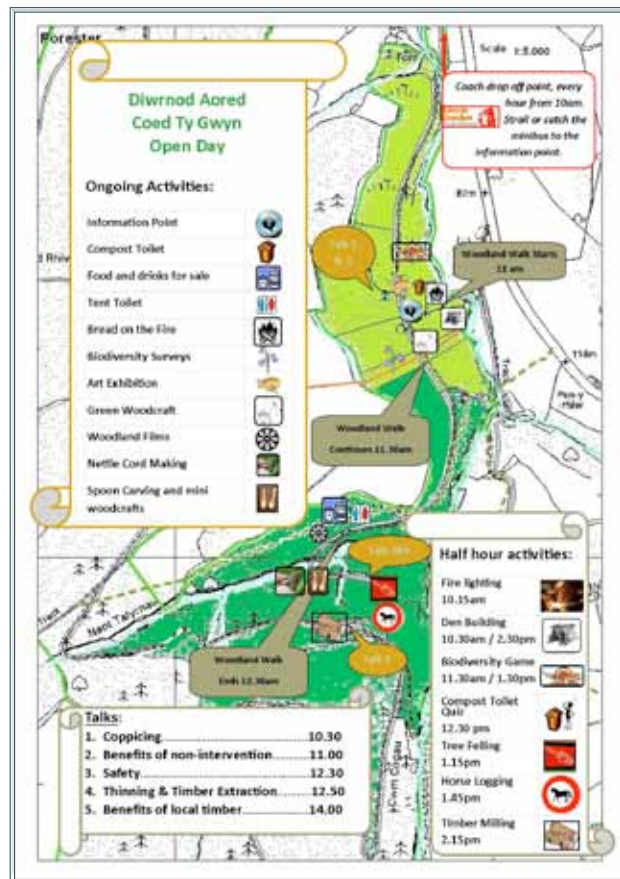


Fig. 6: Map of Coed Tŷ Gwyn & Open Day Activities

Ecology

Woodland Surveys

The communities of Machynlleth and Forge were invited to delve deeper into the wood to find signs or evidence of protected species. With the newly developed zoned map, species information sheets and an introductory talk on how to locate and record evidence, participants were empowered to explore the beautiful expanse of woodland before them.



Fig. 7: New zoned areas of Coed Tŷ Gwyn



Fig. 8




Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



“When we try to pick out anything by
itself, we find it is attached to every-
thing else in the universe.”
– John Muir

The participants appreciated the new knowledge and skills learnt from the talks given by species experts from Natural Resources Wales, Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust and the Centre for Alternative Technology. This supported their investigations by heightening their awareness and understanding of the species being surveyed, resulting in the return of high quality citizen science data from their explorations.

Recording of the data gathered progressed from using papers and pens or pencils to a more technological approach using mobile phones and other handheld devices. A range of mobile applications were tested to establish a more direct route of feedback to the data manager with Nature Notes becoming the more popular application.

The gathered data was uploaded onto a national website called iRecord thus completing the participants' contributions as Citizen Scientists to a national recording system. The results were also uploaded onto a test page on the Dyfi Biosphere website to enable the local participants to view their results.

This citizen science approach also contributed to a larger research project in the Dyfi Biosphere called COBWEB.



COBWEB is a 4 year research project run by a partnership of universities from 5 countries, digital mapping experts and community engagement organisations to develop a mobile application to collect and store information about biodiversity, flooding and land use in UNESCO designated Biosphere areas. This woodland project was the first case study of crowd-sourcing data on biodiversity using digital technology in the Dyfi Biosphere.



Fig. 12: Paper and pen recording method

Methods and technologies developed from using this project as a pilot will be utilised across other Biospheres in Europe thus extending the reach of this project to an international audience. The feedback given has been used to understand end user needs, which have positively influenced how the new mobile application is developed. COBWEB would like this case study to be extended and further surveys to be completed.

Overall, the woodland surveys provided plenty of opportunity for the community, young and old, to explore the woodland and learn new skills. Participants completed a post survey questionnaire; responses again show that education is still a key interest for those engaging with Coed Tŷ Gwyn.

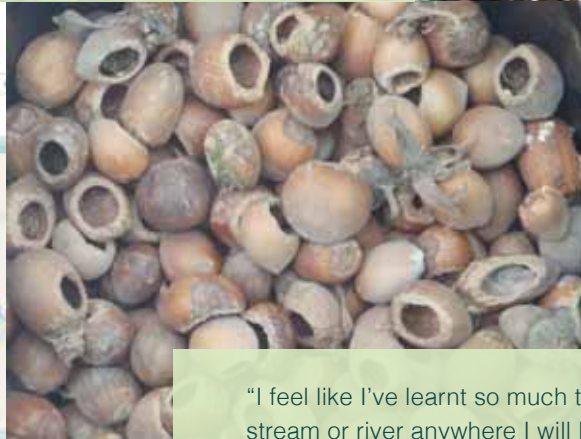


Fig. 13: Mobile application recording method





“Brilliant opportunity to explore plants and wildlife with other people - sharing knowledge, ideas and stories. Definitely improved my plant ID, and appreciation of subtle differences in flora in different woodland environments. Great to work as a team and to have a purpose to the identifying.”



“I feel like I’ve learnt so much that when I walk by another stream or river anywhere I will be thinking ‘like an otter’ and looking out for signs. It has totally added to my excitement in exploring streams and rivers in woodlands. So great to share such an immersive experience with people I’ve not met before, sharing that delight of exploration, anticipation and wonder.”



Networks

Social Surveys

"It takes two to speak the truth - one to speak and another to hear."

- Henry David Thoreau

Networking between the communities of Machynlleth and Forge occurred in four phases:

1. Public Consultation – two evenings
2. Questionnaires to participants after their woodland experiences
3. Questionnaire for the communities of Machynlleth and Forge answered online or during a face-to-face interview
4. Advice from experienced woodland managers

The questionnaire used for online and interview purposes was further developed from the paper version used in the woodland events to ascertain the current and potential use of local woodlands, to gauge levels of community awareness and engagement with Coed Tŷ Gwyn, and to provide an opportunity for people to indicate if and how they might like to be involved in a community woodland group.

This met one of the Dyfi Biosphere aims:

To encourage discussion, agreement and co-ordination between people and organisations with different values and priorities.

The online version was sent to community networks and promoted through social media. The interviews were focused on 'hard to reach' members of Machynlleth and Forge communities i.e. those who do not engage in online activity, and those who had not yet engaged in any woodland programmes. This had the added advantage of increasing awareness of the project and reached people from outside the usual woodland user groups.

A group of secondary pupils from Bro Ddyfi were trained in transferable skills to assist with the interviews within the town of Machynlleth.

There were a total of 226 responses from a population of just over 2,100 in Machynlleth and Forge (2001 census) - around 11% of the local population.

Overall, the social survey was a useful tool in establishing local community needs and interests in relation to woodlands. It has indicated that there is still a strong interest in using them more regularly, with Coed Tŷ Gwyn being popular with those interested in education and potential employment.

Interests from new groups included camping, cycling and wildlife activities.

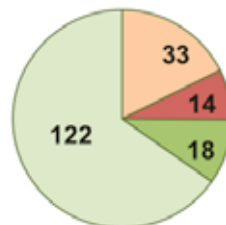
There is potential for the woodland to produce a small profit to help sustain future management practices. However, this will need to be discussed further with Natural Resources Wales as the timber from NRW woodlands has to be charged at market rates.

The surveys also showed a growing interest in the formation of a community woodland group. The 58 individuals who indicated their interest were invited to the woodland management plan workshops.

Groups that have used Coed Tŷ Gwyn over the years added their suggestions for more efficient use of the woodland in the future:

Sessions especially tailored to the group, larger car park, a minibus shuttle, reduced bureaucracy / easier access, access for camping, less restricted use of fires, funding for transport and workshop leaders.

Of the 187 responses to the question about woodlands, 75% of those respondents sometimes or regularly visit a woodland and 13% of those visit Coed Tŷ Gwyn. Of the 25% who rarely or never visit a woodland, 70% of those said they would like to, but are hindered either by transport or time.



- Never or rarely visit local woodlands, but would like to
- Never or rarely visit local woodlands, and not interested
- Sometimes or regularly visit local woodlands, and visit Coed Tŷ Gwyn
- Sometimes or regularly visit local woodlands, and visit other woodlands

Seeds

Woodland Management Plan Workshops

"Man shapes himself through decisions that shape his environment." - Rene Dubos

The two day workshops were led and facilitated by independent International Community Forest experts who guided attendees through a series of participatory sessions to set the vision as well as long, medium and short term objectives for Coed Tŷ Gwyn.

Feedback from the woodland, social and experienced woodland managers' surveys were presented to help inform the decision making process for the long, medium and short term objectives.

The facilitators explained the structure of a woodland management plan, including its hierarchy of objectives, the necessary time-frame and the importance of the management cycle.

Emphasis was placed on the need for an iterative -reflective process of design / redesign, implementation / improvement and review in maintaining a good management plan.



Fig. 15



Fig. 16

Fig. 15 & 16: Visual minutes of the visioning process

"We do not learn from experience...we learn from reflecting on experience." - John Dewey

Vision and objectives that were agreed at the workshops:

Coed Tŷ Gwyn is managed sustainably as a woodland with a diverse structure and habitat type, providing the community with opportunity for engagement through harmonious enjoyment, life-long learning and livelihood activities

Vision	Long Term Objectives	Medium Term Objectives	Short Term Objectives
	There will be a diversity of habitat, species and ages using different management regimes which enhance biodiversity and enable a range of activities	<div>There will be an increase in diversity of habitat, species and age</div> <div>Different management regimes will be initiated</div> <div>A system of zones will be established and maintained</div> <div>A system of surveying and monitoring will be maintained to inform the management process</div>	<div>Develop a forest management programme with the landowner which includes a range of forest management options including coppice rotation, thinning, monitoring, continuous cover management</div>
	The woodland will have a stable and collaborative management structure	<div>A robust management agreement will be in place and maintained</div> <div>Work in partnership with land owners across the landscape</div> <div>Other groups, organisations and networks will be engaged with</div>	<div>A community group will be formed</div> <div>Initial management agreement is negotiated</div> <div>Wider community and user groups are consulted</div> <div>Implement a review of the management mechanism</div> <div>Build relationships with adjacent landowners</div> <div>Look for areas of collaboration</div> <div>Collaborative activities initiated</div> <div>Identify appropriate groups, organisations and networks</div> <div>Build relationships with groups, organisations and networks</div>
	The woodland will provide an economic return	<div>Forest products will be harvested sustainably to generate an income</div> <div>Activities, events and training will generate an income</div>	<div>Identify usable resources</div> <div>Have a pool of potential buyers</div> <div>Negotiate licences with landowner</div> <div>Manage sustainable harvesting</div> <div>Identify opportunities</div> <div>Identify providers and users</div> <div>Agreements negotiated with landowners</div> <div>Develop programme of activities and events</div>
	The Woodland will provide opportunities for life-long learning within the community and for wider sharing	<div>Opportunities to develop green and social competencies will be provided</div> <div>Skills, knowledge and experience will be shared with the wider world</div>	<div>Identifying needs</div> <div>Identify skill base of people willing to deliver</div> <div>Integrate green and social competencies</div> <div>Identify relevant networks where sharing can take place</div> <div>Enrol in and contribute to relevant networks</div> <div>Reach a wide range of people</div>
	The woodland will provide a safe place for the community to develop a deeper connection to, understanding of and respect for place, nature and self	<div>The woodland will provide place and space for people to safely enjoy playing and learning</div>	<div>Structures installed</div> <div>Maintenance programme developed</div> <div>Needs identified</div> <div>Communication strategy developed</div> <div>'Policing' strategy developed</div> <div>Roles and responsibilities clarified</div>

"Arriving at one goal is the starting point to another." - John Dewey

Nutrients

Next Steps

Since the workshop, both National Resources Wales and Llais y Goedwig advisors have suggested that a community woodland group becomes firmly established before further discussion regarding the detailed element of the management plan takes place. Of the 25 attendees, 17 stated that they were interested in being part of such a group, continuing the collaborative decision making process.

Those who chose not to engage in the woodland management plan process have expressed an interest in being part of a larger, collective community woodland group. The group could potentially help them with a woodland closer to their community within the Dyfi Biosphere.

A woodland gathering in Coed Tŷ Gwyn has been arranged to celebrate the success of the project and to initiate setting up the Dyfi Biosphere's first Community Woodland Group.

The Dyfi Biosphere Community Woodland Group can be contacted on: communitywoods@gmail.com

This project has generated the nutrients needed to feed into the next important phase of this process. It is our hope that the collaborative efforts of interested community members and the Natural Resources Wales forestry team will help grow the seeds of Coed Tŷ Gwyn's new woodland management plan into a stable and sustainable future.

"Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is a process; working together is success."

- Henry Ford

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