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A critical forest art practice: the Black Wood of Rannoch

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ABSTRACT

The Black Wood of Rannoch is the most significant Caledonian forest in the Southern Highlands. Working from within the tradition of environmental art research, the authors sought to make a contribution to ideas about cultural ecology and the value of forests such as the Black Wood. The goal of this article is to provide an overview of the steps taken to both experience the visual/sensual conditions and understand the social/cultural aspects of a forest classified as ancient semi-natural woodland. What has emerged is an understanding of the ways in which historic land conflicts reshaped it into its current ecologically robust yet semi-natural condition. However, the cultural content and public interest one would expect to find in relationship to a historically important remnant forest are largely missing. The recovery of that content and interest was the focus of this research.

KEYWORDS

Environmental art; cultural ecology; forestry; Caledonian forest; Scots pine; landscape; Rannoch; Scotland

Introduction

The Black Wood of Rannoch is one of the largest, oldest and most southern remnants of the ancient Caledonian pine forests of Scotland. It is recognised for the aesthetic impact of its mature ‘granny pines’ with broad horizontal branching and a diverse mix of ages spanning 300 years (Figure 1). The terms ‘woodland’ and ‘ancient, semi-natural woodland’ are frequently used in UK forest management and conservation. Although ‘forest’ tends to be understood in relation to conifer plantations in the UK, it is used here interchangeably with woodland to mean much more than tree cover. The reader should imagine a rich complexity of groundcover, shrubs and trees in all stages of growth and decay that feels self-perpetuating and vibrant with life.

To help the reader see the relationship between art practice and landscape research, we provide a brief background. This creative inquiry was informed by a critical understanding of site specificity discussed by the artist Robert Irwin (1985), and the extension of these ideas to creative interaction with society and environment by historians and theorists Deutsche (1996) and Kwon (2002). Subsequently, emergent ideas about social and discursive forms of site-specific art and aesthetics were theorised by Kester (2004, 2011) and Bishop (2012). We provide a wider context within this paper by considering Ingold (2011) and Hudson (2000)—authors who used the arts to engage critically with the intentions, methods and outcomes of anthropology and history. This article addresses how the arts leveraged a dialogue about the Black Wood, a place where interventions and outcomes have been defined by forestry and conservation science.



Figure 1. Four granny pines in the Black Wood of Rannoch.

Methods

Artists Collins and Goto spent much of 2012 considering Caledonian Forests. The Black Wood project began with a meeting with David Edwards at Forest Research, Scotland to discuss the relationship between art, culture and ecology in Caledonian Forests. From that meeting an initial idea about artists, scientists, citizens and select institutions working together to consider the evolving perception and value of forests was initiated. Introductions were made in western Perthshire.

An inductive method of creative inquiry was used to understand the history of the Black Wood and the tensions between specific scientific conservation interests and a wider range of social and cultural concerns. They were interested in establishing a model for artists working with forests rather than making art in forests. They engaged art as an ephemeral forest interface in a rural setting and as a correspondent image, idea or artefact in an urban setting. They wanted to consider how the forest embodies culture and how culture embodies the forest. They were also interested in how the arts can contribute to the prosperity of other living things.

Collins and Goto proposed to immerse themselves in artist's residencies, starting with the Black Wood and its community of interests in Rannoch, then with the curators at the Perth Museum and Art Gallery and the Forestry Commission archives in Tay Forest District. The project culminated at Forest Research, the research agency of the Forestry Commission, where time was set aside for reflection with a social scientist and support from environmental scientists. Our practical methods included archival research and reading, repeated on-site experiences, video, time-lapse photography and audio records of meetings. Time in the Black Wood was complemented by time in the studio to organise and reflect on the materials and begin to assemble image and text relationships.

Background

The following original contributions in arts practice related to trees and forests provide a specific historical context. By 1979, Rosalind Krauss had documented the shift from modernist sculpture to radical new forms that were neither 'architecture nor landscape' (Krauss, 1979, pp. 30–44). The role of art had changed. This is the emergent context of the early work cited below. Alan Sonfist's artwork 'Time Landscape' (1978) is a small afforestation effort established as an urban/native (one quarter acre) forest preserve, a cultural approach to restoration ecology in the heart of New York City. A similar work in a rural setting, 'Meadow' (1986-present), is one acre of nature set free, recognition of the generative potential of nature by the artist Herman de Vries. He defines his ongoing non-intervention and photographic record as a 'piece of the world' or a 'terrain vague'. Joseph Beuys' '7000 Oaks' developed for Kassel Germany (1982–1986) paired 7000 locally quarried basalt columns (piled in front of the Fridericianum Museum for Documenta 7, 1982), with a call for the planting of trees along with placement of the columns, restoring forest cover in that city and developing a material/cultural dialogue linking tree and geology. (Any lone basalt column will forevermore call out for a tree to be planted next to it, in Kassel.) The final point of reference is Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison's 'Serpentine Lattice' (1993). The project considered the aesthetic impacts of ecology, forestry and economics as it affects communities living and working within the redwood rainforest of the Pacific Northwest. In the Harrison's

exhibition at Reed College, Portland, Oregon, images and narrative were used as a means to explore new ground between forestry interests, preservationist interests and policy-makers, and documented in the exhibition catalogue (Harrison & Harrison, 1993). Goto has described the Harrison's project 'The Serpentine Lattice' as a 'sympathy-based ethical position for the dying coastal rain forest' (Goto Collins, 2012, p. 115).

Comparing the historic examples of work by Sonfist, de Vries, Beuys and the Harrisons, Beuys' concept of 'social sculpture' or the potential for art to transform society is a foundational principle. However, it is the Harrisons' processes and method that provide the best point of comparison to the research conducted in the Black Wood. Much of their work takes the form of a dialogue between science and culture, rather than nature recontextualised (protected and displayed apart from society) as culture, as in the Sonfist and de Vries examples. Beuys, in contrast, reasserts the social relationship to nature by establishing a new mythology with a material narrative.

To provide a more contemporary context, we can point to artists working here in the UK such as Professor Shelley Sacks whose 'University of the Trees' makes connections with the inner and outer worlds (2010–present). The artist ran workshops in groves of trees to create a human/non-human setting for a dialogue about the ongoing environmental crisis. Detailed in an extensive website (Sacks, 2014), Sacks sees the work as the development of 'instruments of consciousness,' instead of objects of attention defining traditional thinking about art; additional insight into the artists' approach can be found in 'An Atlas of the Poetic Continent' by Sacks and Zumdick (2013). Another point of reference is found in the work of the Scottish poets Alec Finlay and Gerry Loose, who walked and talked with the American poet Andrew Schelling and others in a project titled 'Seeding the John Muir Way' (Finlay, Loose, Schelling, & Deveraux, 2014). Walking the newly established John Muir trail across central Scotland, Finlay et al. planted pairs of trees whose species were defined by the initial and end letters of a poem composed from phrases drawn from John Muir's writings. Loose, Finlay and Schelling are hybrid practitioners (as many of us are) working across knowledge and practices spanning the visual arts, science and philosophy. This work can be understood as embodied and/or physical poetry. What all of these artists have in common is a sense that they are working to recover and/or renew cultural ecologies through art practice.

In contrast to the earlier generation, Sacks and Zumdick and the Scottish poet/artists Finlay and Loose et al. are interested in the co-evolution of subjectivity through interrelationship between the human and non-human other. While this is an undercurrent in the work of their predecessors, it is a primary feature amongst the more recent practitioners. Finlay and Loose move from observation and pattern recognition in the landscape and the writing of John Muir before developing an idea that is poetically generative and capable of being enacted both literally and physically, a metaphor in both concept and form. Sacks and Zumdick, artist and philosopher, talk about the trees as teachers, enabling a link between imagination and the need to respond to the current environmental crisis. Like the work in the Black Wood, the core activity—the 'content added' to the perception and understanding of the subject of inquiry—is an expansive yet rigorous addition of another layer of human perception to the experience and understanding of places and things. To some in the research community, this is indeed 'important work' attending to the 'tough-to-test-or-quantify matters' such as human values, imagination and culture (Coates et al., 2014, p. 57).

We hope what is written here provides the reader with enough information to see the role of artists in the development of what Ingold describes as 'the creative impulse of life itself' (Ingold, 2011, p. 208). Hudson provides a critical framework that is useful when we try to ground this ideal in contemporary art practice. He talks about 'the dialectic between a science and its pursuit of Truth and the aesthetic and its infinitude of truths.' In essence, the pursuit of positivist knowledge denies the narrative, the 'artful telling of stories' (Hudson, 2000, pp. 275–276). He argues that the more complex aspects of life are lost to an artifice that ignores the life force. The aesthetic infinitude of truths is in turn potentially undermined by the imprint of the artist overwhelming the thing engaged. If the arts are going to make a contribution to the future forest imaginary, we need new ways to evaluate the value of the range of

truths that emerge from the arts, while experimenting with methods that let the forest and its agency come through in the work.

We now move on to an overview of the visual and sensual aspects of the art-led research in the Black Wood, before discussing the long history of conflict in Rannoch Valley and how, in recent years, conservation science has impeded the cultural perception of the forest. We will then consider the loss and recovery of a cultural ecology. The effort to date culminated in the 'Future Forest' workshop focusing on cultural value in tension with instrumental values in a semi-natural native pinewood. The results of that workshop are discussed before we go on to the conclusion.

The forest is moving

If we think of the forest as a living thing that maintains itself against the mischief of the world with the capacity for regeneration and reproduction, the idea of a forest moving over time by a scattering of seed is not hard to grasp. But a forest moves slowly, and to start to sense this movement, we must have a relationship with it. One enters the Black Wood from the north; with the Loch at your back walking gently uphill, the forest is alternately open and closed with a mix of birch and pine, and some rowan and juniper, all growing across a range of age classes from saplings to mature trees. The most memorable trees of the Black Wood are the 200–300-year-old 'granny pines' with their sprawling limbs. One is immediately struck by the forest and its relationship to a curious topography—a mix of small glacial 'moraine' deposits or hillocks with a repetition of smaller hummocks of thick blaeberry, cowberry, bracken and heather. The hummocks are vegetation formed over large rocks and tree stumps, creating an unusual 'lumpy' forest floor that adds texture to the rolling mound-and-hollow topography. The Forestry Commission plans to significantly extend the Black Wood by expanding it southward towards the near hills, restoring native pinewood on recently harvested formerly plantation lands.

Our original project was organised around the idea that the old trails through the forest could be easily identified, mapped and shared with the public. We would contribute ideas about nature and culture while thinking about rural interface and urban correspondence. However, a meeting with the Forestry Commission made it clear that any project that would increase public awareness of the forest or potentially add to the number of people using it would be discouraged. This emergent issue would become the focal point of the text and video installation developed by Collins and Goto for the Perth Museum and Art Gallery titled *'The Forest is Moving/Tha a' Choille a' Gluasad'* (2013).

The video pans left to right (east-to-west) and right to left (west-to-east) in two frames one over and one under the other (Figure 2). The narrative scrolls backwards and forwards as well, as Scottish Gaelic (Gàidhlig) place names appear and disappear on the screen, followed by English translations. The narrative at the bottom and top of the screen is intended to provoke a sense of the iconic import of the Black Wood and the role of public interest in its potential expansion and well-being in the twenty-first century. The text explores aspects of its value and import as a living system conserved by scientific methods, but asks why the cultural record is largely missing from botanic gardens, museums, artwork, stories and songs. By identifying new native forest investment strategies, it argues that the potential for the forest to 'move again' in the future is quite significant. The piece concludes by asking, 'What might it take to deliver a future Black Wood that takes more than a day to walk through, and repays time and attention with special experience and knowledge that fires the cultural imagination for generations to come?' With this new body of work, another question is how would awareness and access to iconic natural forests shape contemporary culture, and what can culture contribute to future forests?

Tim Ingold offers a definition and purpose for this kind of creative work, which also reflects the artists' perspectives:

First we must dispense, once and for all, with the convention that the imagination consists in the power to produce images or to represent things in their absence. ... we must recognize in the power of the imagination the creative impulse of life itself. (Ingold, 2011, p. 208)

Similarly, Martyn Hudson describes the forest in John Berger's writing:



Figure 2. A still from *The Forest is Moving/Tha a' Choille a' Glusad*.

... it is a space where a dialectical imagination converges with the real. It is intertwined with images which are suggested by the location but have a reality only in terms of a sense of projection and abstraction of imagination. (Hudson, 2000, p. 271)

With forest experience fresh in our minds and a series of still and time-lapse photography and video images in hand, the question was how to move the photographic images beyond their function as a record, or what Hudson describes as a 'trace of a reality' or a 'simple factuality' (Hudson, 2000, p. 276). While Ingold suggests the goal is 'not to represent, but rather to participate,' we understand this as the need to seek an empathic relationship with the object of our attention. The artwork presented here is an outcome that emerged from a dialogue between the artists, scientists and land managers, the local community and ongoing experience and an imaginary exchange with the forest itself. It also provided the hypothesis for research that followed: the cultural import of the Caledonian forest will only be recognised by the public if their interests and values are informed by the same access to learning and experience as conservation scientists.

A history of conflict

Can a cultural ecology be recovered when it has been lost or degraded time and time again over a period of 300 years or more? The eighteenth century was a difficult time to live in the largely Jacobite and Gaelic-speaking Rannoch Valley. It was home to rebels working to restore the Roman Catholic Stuart King to the throne. After conflicts that ended in 1692, 1715 and 1745, estate land was forfeited to the crown each time, and a barracks was built in the valley to suppress resistance by force (Table 1). Factors brought in to manage the forfeited estate expected significant harvests (Millar, 1909, pp. 207–269). By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Highland clearances were just about complete. With vast herds of sheep replacing half the population, the forest was again struggling with overgrazing, while trying to regenerate. Then, at the end of the nineteenth century, another fence was erected around the Black Wood to create an enclosed deer forest for the hunting estate (Steven & Carlisle, 1959, p. 140). As a result, generations of herbivores would consume most of the young trees, opening up the canopy for the trees to grow horizontally as well as vertically. It is interesting to think the aesthetic form,

Table 1. A brief history of the Black Wood. Paraphrased from multiple sources including Lindsay (1974), Mackenzie (1914), Smout, MacDonald, and Watson (2005) and Steven and Carlisle (1959).

The Black Wood of Rannoch—history shapes the forest form	
1439	Rannoch estate given to Robertsons of Struan for apprehending the murderers of King James
1689–1745	The estate is forfeited in 1689, 1715 and again in 1745, heavy exploitation of 960 trees per year
1745	The forest was much feared by local people as a haunt for ‘broken men,’ outlaws from the failed Jacobite rebellion. A garrison was established and Jacobite homes were burned
1750	The forest was judged to be in bad shape, yet forfeited estates initiate felling at 1200 trees/year
1757	The Dall Sawmill is burned down by an evicted tenant, a new sawmill is built 1758
1781	The forest is completely enclosed to protect it from domestic animals
1784	The estate is returned to the Robertsons
Late C18th	Swine are put in the forest to break up the soil for regeneration
1803–1815	Napoleonic Wars and significant felling occurs. Canals are dug to float timber to market
Early C19th	The forest is opened again to farm stock; sheep farming in full swing
Mid C19th	The Highland clearances begin with radical increases of the number of sheep The human population of Rannoch is less than half the original number
1895	The forest is enclosed as a deer forest, roads are constructed along former canals
1889–1894	1000 trees are felled for the West Highland Railway
1918	The forest is opened for general grazing
1939–1945	8000 trees cut for the Second World War effort
1947	The forest is protected again from deer
1957–1967	5000 trees are cut by the Forestry Commission
1974	The forest is fully protected as Forest Nature Reserve, later becoming a SSSI

considered so attractive in the Black Wood today, actually embodies, at least in part, the conflicted land use history of this region of Scotland.

In modern times, the Black Wood survived the First World War without being harvested, though there was a significant harvest in the final years of the Second World War. The Forestry Commission acquired the Black Wood in 1947. According to Peterken and Backmeroff, Lord Robinson visited the wood that year and decided, ‘... this piece of old Caledonian Pine Forest should, if possible, be preserved.’ The authors go on to say that, by preservation, it was meant the Forestry Commission would take ‘immediate steps to foster natural regeneration and, where that proved insufficient, plant Scots pine of the same variety and keep out exotic conifers altogether’ (Peterken & Backmeroff, 1988, p. 21). However, as reported in the Black Wood Management Plan 2009–2019, the actuality did not meet that ideal; various ‘improvements’ were undertaken including interstitial planting of spruce and lodgepole pine on the periphery. By 1973, the Forestry Commission Conservator Gunnar Godwin was newly in charge of the Black Wood and, with an awareness of this history and what he saw as potential threats from within his own organisation, he began working closely with the Nature Conservancy Council (predecessor to Scottish Natural Heritage) to establish an agreement for the long-term management and conservation of the Black Wood in 1975 (Table 1). This intervention has resulted in the condition of the Black Wood as we find it today, described in detail below.

Scientific conservation

‘Natural woodland is not a particular state of the stand, but a withdrawal of human influence, the result of which may be any one of a number of possibilities... determined by natural interactions’ (Peterken & Stace, 1987, p. 43).

The prescriptions within the Black Wood Management Plans have been relatively consistent over the last three decades. The forest was divided into core, restoration and expansion zones in the 1986 and 1995 plans and into conservation and restoration zones in the 2009 plan. The primary objective has been ‘to maintain and enhance the historic, landscape and scientific interest of the Black Wood as a semi-natural Caledonian pinewood with its associated fauna and flora, while perpetuating the genetic purity of the local Rannoch pine’ (FCS, 1995, p. 7)(FCS, 2009, p. 10). There are three additional objectives: the first declares no interest in timber production and prescribes natural regeneration of the native

forest; the second identifies the import of study and research to amend future management plans and the third claims the public is welcome as long as there is no conflict with any of the other objectives.

How important is the Black Wood from the position of conservation science? According to the ecologist Richard Thompson (personal communication, August 29, 2014), the Black Wood is arguably the largest patch of functioning (generating, regenerating and biodiverse) semi-natural pine forest in Scotland. There are many documents that attest to the history of research conducted in the Black Wood within the library in the Tay Forest District Office in Dunkeld. In the Forestry Commission Report on Caledonian pine forest management written by Mason, Hampson, and Edwards (2004), the authors identify the Black Wood as one of the six Caledonian pine forests in Scotland with 1000 hectares or more of ancient, semi-natural woodland.

In a meeting at SNH, Collins and Goto were told that any proposed activity that might affect public awareness of the Black Wood, or increase the number of people accessing it would need to be backed up by scientific evidence that no possible harm would come to that sensitive ecosystem, its habitats or organisms, stating that anything proposed must support the primary conservation goals set out in the Black Wood Management Plan. The discussion kept returning to the negative impact of public access in the face of designated conservation interests. The scientific basis for conservation policies excluding public interest is considered in the following section.

In response to tensions about the management of the core Black Wood in the 1980s, Peterken and Stace confirmed the presence of natural regeneration and argued with wisdom for an alternative to the management and control that defined the forestry and conservation sectors, respectively (Peterken & Stace, 1987). Having responded to the foresters' claim that the Black Wood was 'moribund and degenerating,' their proposal was then for the withdrawal of human interest. Curiously, the effect of their ecological ideal could result in an outcome not unlike the foresters' utilitarian desire for tall straight forests with a closed canopy produced through proximate planting. Below, they describe the spatial and temporal heterogeneity and level of biodiversity at that time, and explain how allowing a forest to evolve 'naturally' can diminish biodiversity:

The Black Wood is a rich wildlife habitat, to which the mosaic of closed stands, scattered trees and open spaces is an important ingredient of diversity. The present wave of regeneration, far from being inadequate, could greatly reduce the open spaces and with it the diversity of wildlife, so there will be a temptation (which must also be resisted) to fell patches to maintain diversity. Above all, there will be preconceptions about what a natural pinewood should be like—such as the vague notion in the present management plan of an ideal state which existed in the fifteenth century. (Peterken & Stace, 1987, p. 43)

Ten years into Godwin's conservation plan and decades after Lord Robinson's call for preservation, it would appear the Black Wood had two competing preconceptions: the 'forestry interventionists' and the 'ecology naturalists' arguing their respective cultural positions. The ecologists' paper establishes the fact of regeneration but is the 'withdrawal principle' the necessary conclusion that follows? Ethically, it is an idea that seems to embrace the question 'What is best for the forest?' If the current forest is a native species-rich biologically diverse environment and has a robust mix of ancient, old and recently regenerated trees (Figure 3), shouldn't we (at least) question the withdrawal of human interest in this ancient semi-natural forest ecology? The other question worth asking is if the inspiring form of the Black Wood today is partially a result of historic social conflict, is it not a living memorial (to the Jacobite resistance and the Clearances) that deserves recognition? At the point of any human intervention (withdrawal in this case is a management action), there are questions about intention and method as well as process and outcome. Consideration must be given to the fact that the two zones (discussed earlier) of the Black Wood cover no more than four square miles. Ecologists, conservationists, forest managers and local advocates all agree it is too small to survive a significant catastrophic event. Considering the tensions described above, do the research and management records to date indicate the interests of the forest are best served by continued limitations on public interest? We can't help but wonder if there isn't room under Godwin's favourite tree for a wider range of Black Wood interests beyond the conservation, ecology and forestry communities.



Figure 3. Stills from a time lapse of two regeneration sites in the Black Wood.

Cultural ecology

Is there really a conflict between the Black Wood as a conservation resource vs. the Black Wood as a venerated natural system with social and cultural import? In an article on conservation and ecosystem values, Edwards, Collins and Goto discuss the conservationist's argument for excluding visitors from the Black Wood as a precautionary principle, noting that the actual impact of an increase in visitors is unclear (based upon Marzano & Dandy, 2012). The authors go on to argue that the 'full range of cultural benefits' are constrained by a management process that focuses almost exclusively on biodiversity conservation (Edwards et al., 2016a). Mason et al. add further weight to the argument, highlighting that discussions about the management of the Caledonian pinewoods have tended to take place within a relatively narrow community of landowners, foresters and conservationists (Mason et al., 2004, p. 215).

During the Future Forest workshop organised as part of this project (described below), Paul Tabbush (Chair of Landscape Research Group) defined cultural ecologies as material things and performative actions relevant to natural places. Things can be objectified within a landscape (such as archaeological sites and features), or institutionalised away from the landscape (through artefacts and specimens, recorded stories, maps, paintings, music or literature); ephemeral and performative forms are embodied in users, uses and practices, or even memories of such practice. He also described the aesthetic experience of the forest itself. This idea resonated with the authors; it led to a careful and ongoing consideration of the cultural ecology (or lack thereof) in the Black Wood.

The Black Wood of Rannoch Management Plan (2009–2019) mentions a set of canals as the only archaeological sites (or material culture) in the forest. The South Rannoch Forest Design Plan (2013–2023) provides a bit more detail: 'There are six unscheduled ancient monument sites in the forest. These include shielings, homesteads, a kiln and a relatively modern sheep fank [pen or enclosure]. Further recent evidence has come to light on a series of bloomeries within the forest' (FCS, 2013, p. 16). However, searching the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland records, we identified 46 potential cultural heritage sites in the Black Wood within the Canmore National Database and another 25 within the Historic Environment Record.

The next consideration concerns historic artefacts and samples collected by museums, or published records and recordings of narratives reflecting upon the Black Wood. In the Perth Museum and Art Gallery, there are only a few entomological records and pressed botany specimens. There are no significant artworks, photographs or historic artefacts in the art and material history collections, although there may be additional materials held in the National Museum in Edinburgh. The National Library of Scotland Maps Reading Room has a range of historic maps. The Jacobite history and post-Culloden conflict in Rannoch coupled with the histories of the Clearances and the practical management of the forest and landscape as resource would constrain 'cultural interests' at the time these collections were first being developed.

Along with these material aspects, there are layers of lost intangible cultural heritage associated with the Black Wood, including the traditional forest and pastoral management practices historically embedded in the local society and economy, and the knowledge and world views associated with them. Once the Black Wood formed part of what UNESCO would refer to as an 'organic cultural landscape,' but now it would be defined as 'relict' (UNESCO, 2008). Strategic conservation interests replaced local communities as the main locus of cultural interaction. The Gaelic place names (recorded on the OS Maps) appear throughout the region. Translated locally as part of this project, they hint at a heritage lost that could still be recovered. Is it relevant that so little attention is given to these features, and to their significance in understanding the current forest form and its changing place in the local culture and economy?

Social and cultural relationships were upset during the eighteenth-century years of forfeiture of the Struan Estate to the British crown; then again by the Highland clearances where half the population of Rannoch was lost. The Scottish Gaelic (Gàidhlig) language was still strong at the beginning of the twentieth century but was lost, driven from the people in the first half of the century by 'modernising' schools. Fifty years of conservation management has taken its toll as well, although the most significant modern social/cultural loss may be the Rannoch School, which had a tradition and curriculum featuring engagement with the Black Wood. The forest today is a place without a fence but it has a palpable aura of constraint for anyone outside forestry who seeks to learn about it or find it or access its history.

The future forest

As our efforts developed, it became clear that the Black Wood has an amazing generative power despite a history of conflict. It is evident that human interaction with the Black Wood has occurred over centuries, yet the historical narrative and range of onsite and offsite materials referencing the forest are very limited. The 'cultural indicators' are missing and, as with a neglected church, the 'forest congregation' and its traditions dissipated. Could the arts and humanities contribute to the renewal of a cultural relationship to the Black Wood?

Working closely with partners, we organised the Future Forest workshop (Figure 4), defined as a deliberative process of social learning intended to recover lost cultural values, create new meanings and imagine alternative futures for the Black Wood. We worked with a wide range of people representing diverse interests, including arts practitioners, humanities scholars, government agency scientists, charity representatives and a range of local residents to critically review the physical and aesthetic condition of the forest and its historic management. The event helped establish current ideas about ecology, landscape and culture, while interrogating preconceived ideas about appropriate human-forest interrelationships. The social and cultural domain was understood as a relatively safe place (with minimal political power) to reconsider meaning and value; to forge rural/urban relationships; and reveal local/national value.

Thirty participants attended. Reiko Goto and local resident partners welcomed the delegates and offered an inclusive view of the scope and purpose of the event by asking them to imagine a much larger



Figure 4. A 'Future Forest' site visit.

Black Wood that many people care about. The workshop presentations began with local stakeholder perspectives, then ecological background and records and a broad set of arts and humanities positions. Local Forestry Commission staff provided a history of their role in the Black Wood, and its complex ecology, revealing their sense of pride in caring for the largest Caledonian forest in the Southern Highlands. Arts and humanities experts spoke about environmental aesthetics, Gaelic language and visual culture, the political interest and activity of Highland walkers and the role of art in a public forest context. An account of the Sunart Oakwoods integrated conservation and development plan (Peterken & Worrell, 2005) was used as a possible reference for the future of the Black Wood. These presentations were followed by two intensive 'Future Forest' break-out groups, focusing respectively on 'community' and 'planning and management.' Maps and management plans of the Black Wood and wider region helped participants locate aesthetic and cultural interest and access opportunities within the forest. Groups were asked to proceed from initial scoping of what mattered to them about the Black Wood, through more detailed consideration of issues, opportunities and visions of the future forest.

As the workshop events unfolded, participants considered the social values associated with the Black Wood. There was consensus on the import of aesthetic experience and scientific understanding of the forest itself. Everyone recognised the complexity and fragility of its ecosystem. The various partners shared a sense of the forest as a cultural symbol: an idea and an image with great social value, although it was not agreed where that value to society was accrued.

Key recommendations included the following:

- Further planning exercises with the 'forest community' were needed.
- A proposal to develop a Caledonian Forest Way was discussed. A long-distance trail network of language and literature linking various forests and valleys.
- A combined residency programme was proposed for the village, integrating ecology, arts and humanities practitioners and scholars, a means of initiating aspects of the lost cultural ecology.

This research was focused on developing a public discourse about the cultural import of a native forest in western Perthshire. We have argued that the workshop made a contribution to the recovery of cultural content. It challenged and extended the dominant forestry/ecology framework as the exclusive means to think about forest meanings and values. As discussed previously, formative ideas about the forest were embedded in artwork for the Perthshire Museum exhibition (2013). We reflected on our intentions and the evolution of the artist-led social and creative inquiry in a chapter for 'Imagining Natural Scotland' (Collins, Goto, & Edwards, 2014a, pp. 66–81). A case study considers the workshop in the context of cultural ecosystem services assessment (Collins, Goto Collins, & Edwards, 2014b, pp. 56–59). The loss of the cultural relationship and a record of the creative inquiry about recovery were presented in a report to the community (Collins, Goto, & Edwards, 2015). Correspondent urban meaning was explored in the 'Sylva Caledonia' exhibition at Summerhall in Edinburgh (2015) this is an exhibition date. A chapter on the conservation status of the Black Wood and its relationship to evolving ideas about cultural ecosystem value was also published (Edwards, Collins, & Goto, 2016a) and an article situating the project within the literature on the valuation of ecosystem services (Edwards, Collins, & Goto, 2016b). These outputs are part of an attempt to make sense of the loss of a cultural ecology and contribute to its recovery.

Conclusion

Although we are with the ecologists in spirit and ethical intent to serve the Black Wood (and can relate similar creative intent back to Sonfist and de Vries), we are not convinced human interest can be withdrawn or that it should be. The relationship with the forest needs practical human attention both within and beyond its boundaries. It needs a congregation at its heart that represents more than the 'druids' of ecology, conservation and forestry. A diverse social and cultural ecology is needed to express

a forest's full value and meaning. What was once resource became biodiversity refuge. Evolving intrinsic value suggests new meaning, representation and advocacy.

We have worked to develop a critical relationship to the conservationist narrative. We have described a visual/sensual engagement with the forest, followed by analysis of three centuries of social/cultural conflict, the exclusionary conditions of conservation science and the dimensions of cultural ecology which are either missing or poorly considered at this time. Our enquiry clarified patterns that gave shape to a working hypothesis tested in our 'Future Forest' workshop: 'Could the arts and humanities contribute to a renewed cultural relationship to the Black Wood?' We suggest the outcomes from the workshop and the interest in that work indicate the arts and humanities do have something to contribute to the question of Caledonian forest management. Hudson refers to a similar understanding of trees in Berger's writing.

... the trees of the forest are things not only imaginatively constituted by human beings but things which constitute human beings themselves, they are the natural and social relations which at least partly determine the kind of humanness possible there (Hudson, 2000, p. 270).

This collaborative research has focused upon teasing out a conflicted history of forest–human and human–forest interrelationships and considered what it may mean to expand the range of humanness possible in that place in the future. The research included material outputs and reflective publications. In closing, we suggest these have made a contribution to a discourse dominated by scientific interests. They have begun to clarify ideas about cultural ecology and why this concept may be important for those desiring a wider forest community in Scotland.

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