

My Fair Kelty

Colin Peacock, community and environment ranger for Forestry Commission Scotland, explains how the Kelty community helped change its local forest from ladette to lady ...

Once regarded as a problem forest of burnt out cars and fly-tipping, Blairadam Forest, near Kelty in Fife, is now attracting visitors from the whole region. The forest is owned by Forestry Commission Scotland, and in 2006 it celebrated the tenth year of an exciting three-way community partnership project to transform its negative image.

The Kelty Heritage Trails Group manages the project, and represents a number of different interest groups in the area. As a former mining community, Kelty has its share of social problems and unemployment. Yet despite this there is a strong sense of community in the town. Much of the initial drive for the Heritage Trails project came from the Lindsay Memorial Committee, a group of local ex-miners who had raised funds to erect a memorial to those killed in a local mining disaster. They were looking for an appropriate way to use the remaining funds to commemorate the local mining industry, while improving things for the community. The achievements of the partnership, which also includes Forestry Commission Scotland and Fife Council, were recognised this year, when it was awarded the Scottish Forestry Society's Tim Stead Trophy for Finest Community Woodland.

The partners meet once a month to plan and develop projects. The group is a very fertile source of ideas. The major success of the partnership has been our ability to transform these ideas into action. Progress is often achieved by one of the partners developing ideas using their particular expertise or contacts, with support and input from the others. The result has been an eclectic mix of interpretation methods to complement the improvements.

Meetings are not always plain sailing, and it took time to build up trust and momentum. It is particularly satisfying to see an idea through from its earliest stages to the finished product. The partnership has achieved a great deal by working together, much more than each partner could have achieved on their own.

The Heritage Group has always been keen to incorporate artworks within the forest. One successful installation resulted from links built up with Lauder College in Dunfermline, where the group has the opportunity to commission environmental artworks from the students. The first was a Celtic-style carving of a wildcat chiselled into the brick abutment of an old railway bridge. The carving was not only inspired by local legends of a large black cat, but also by the historic place name Crancat found within the forest, which translates as 'rock of the wildcat'. The Group loved the image so much that we have adopted it as our logo.

Construction of a drystone dyke at the entrance to the forest provided an opportunity for further low key interpretation. Ten massive stones have been incorporated into the design. Each has a set of initials carved into the rock surface. These have already given rise to a number of theories among the locals. The initials in fact refer to each member of the Blairadam Antiquarian Club, close friends of William Adam and Sir Walter Scott, who all met at Blairadam each summer from 1817 to 1831.

The wider community has been kept informed of what's going on in the forest through the local press and the community newsletter. Numerous events such as a woodland spring clean, trail opening, school visits and a forest festival have attracted hundreds of local people into the wood.

One of the keys to the ongoing success of the project is the management committee, which has its own simple constitution. This means that while individual members may come and go over time, the constitution ensures continuity. The project is embedded in the local community, and while agencies such as Forestry Commission Scotland and Fife Council can offer expertise and funding, it is the community's own contributions and sense of ownership which have ensured the town's enthusiastic support.

Links

www.ourheritage.org.uk

www.forestry.gov.uk

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'In communities where men build ships for their own sons to fish or fight from, quality is never a problem'
Old Greek proverb