

## **Introducing Hardknott Forest**

Hardknott Forest is a 600 hectare conifer plantation in the upper reaches of the Duddon valley in the Lake District. It was planted in the 1930s after strong local opposition. Now, over 70 years later, the forest plantations are reaching maturity. After consultation with local people and organisations the Forestry Commission has decided to restore the entire plantation into native habitats of oak and birch woodland, bogs and open ground. This initiative represents a historic opportunity to create the largest semi-natural woodland in the Lake District; linking Hardknott Forest with the existing Duddon Valley Woodlands, a series of ancient oak woodlands that snake down the valley and all the way to the coast.

## **Restoring Hardknott Forest**

Restoring Hardknott Forest is an exciting project to restore one of the largest conifer plantations in the Lake District to native woodland.

Regenerating non-native trees are gradually being removed and replaced with native species such as oak. Some areas are regenerating naturally and we have seen holly, willow, birch and rowan all returning to the forest, with associated benefits for native wildlife. Other areas of the forest will remain as crag or bog.

The local area is known to support rare mammal species such as dormice and red squirrels, and birds increasingly seen here include great spotted woodpeckers, jays and bullfinches. Monitoring of the wildlife and vegetation is an ongoing and fascinating part of the project.

## **Volunteering and education**

In partnership with the Forestry Commission, the Restoring Hardknott Forest Project is organising practical restoration activities and research. Local residents, children from local schools, volunteers from the University of Leeds, and the John Muir Trust have contributed hundreds of days of volunteer work so far.

Volunteer days are open to all and are a great opportunity to socialise and to learn about forest restoration, as well as contribute to creating more native woodland in Cumbria. Tasks include removing non-native trees, planting native species, collecting and propagating seeds, and the protection and maintenance of native trees.

Volunteer days start at the Forestry Commission Birks Bridge Car Park (Landranger Map 96. Grid ref: SD234 995). The car park is on the minor road just south of Cockley Bridge and north of Seathwaite.

Regular volunteer days:

-2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of each month\*

-4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of each month\*

\*Except July and August

Please get in touch before attending in case of cancellations due to bad weather.

Days run from 9.30am to about 3.30pm. Tools and work gloves are provided but bring lunch, a drink and suitable footwear and clothing.

We also run occasional residential weekends, and we can organise days for schools, community groups and special interest groups. Please get in touch for more information.

Contact details: [j.h.hodgson@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:j.h.hodgson@leeds.ac.uk)