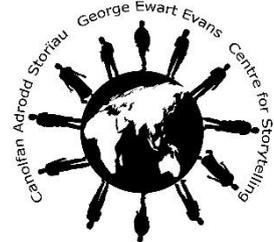




ORCHARD MANAGEMENT PLAN

Blaen Bran Community Woodland



March 2018

1. Site Description

Blaen Bran Community Woodland (BBCW) is located northwest of the town of Cwmbran and is made up of two areas —Blaen Bran Farm and Coed Gwaun-y-Fferiad. BBCW is an upland area with an 18 to 22 degree slope in the upper part of the woodland, which was planted with larch in the early 1970's. This part of the wood had been upland pasture with some arable crops when the Blaen Bran farmhouse was still present (this was vacated in the 1920's when the area was passed over for forestry). The larch was felled in 2013/14 due to an outbreak of the tree-killing pathogen *Phytopera ramuram*. It was decided to plant a community orchard on this cleared land. The orchard is on a gentle slope with a south westerly aspect - looking out over Cwmbran and across to the Severn estuary. It is relatively sheltered having rising moorland behind, up to the plateau of Mynydd Maen, and being close to the circular 'cwm' that gives Cwmbran its name. The geology is the Coal Measures series of the Carboniferous, with limestone boundary with the impervious Millstone Grit being marked by a series of springs, a number of which are within the woodland boundary. Soil type has not been tested, though it is deemed to be more acid than alkaline - as there was larch cover for approximately 30 years and therefore an accumulated needle layer, and gritstone tends to give rise to thin and acidic soils. There are classic woodland flowers coming through now that larch has been removed, including foxglove and native bluebells.

Accessibility – The orchard, and the woodland as a whole, is open to the public. The main tracks and trails are safe and regularly checked, though away from these are areas of boggy ground and steep sections where caution is advised. Dogs are welcome, and horses and pedal bikes are permitted on main tracks. Motorbikes, quadbikes and firearms are prohibited. Picnics are welcome, with visitors urged to dispose of any litter, though fires (including barbeques and fireworks) are not permitted.

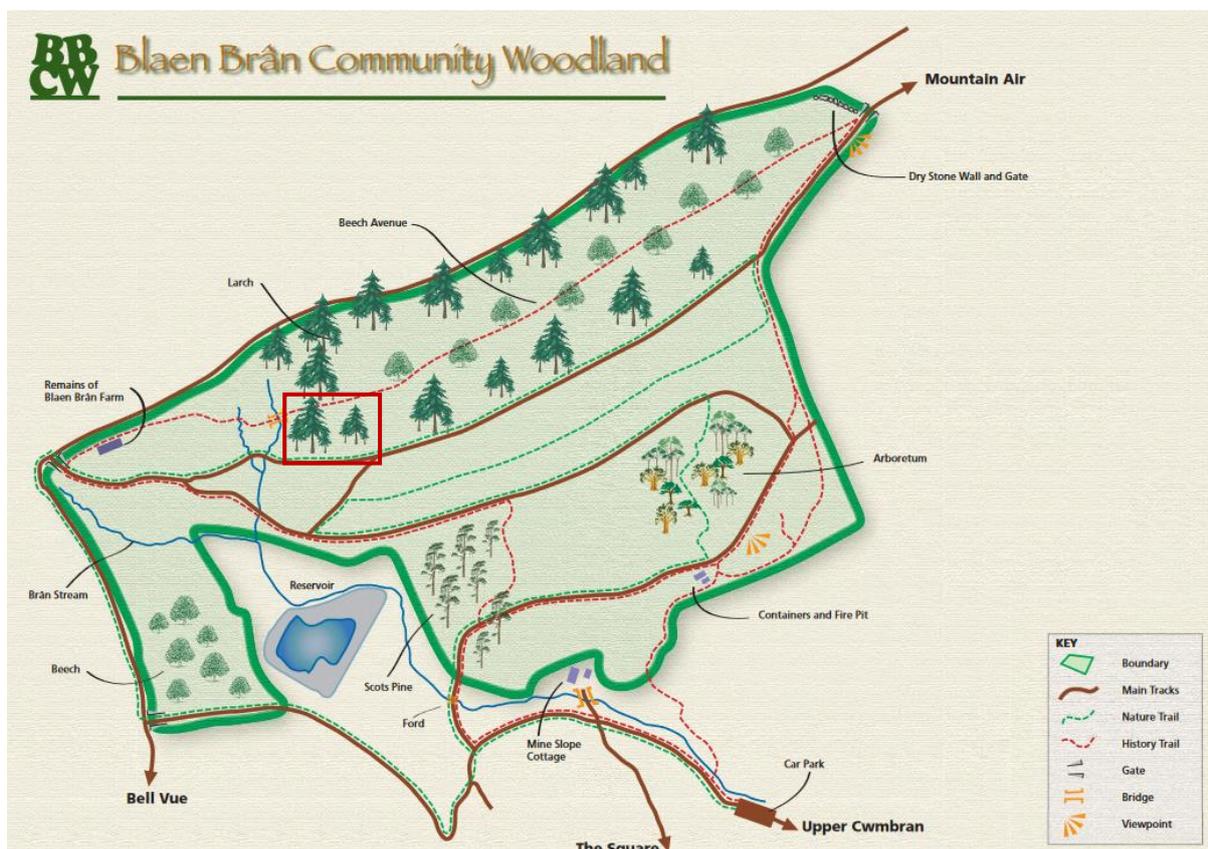


Figure 1: Map of the Blaen Bran site showing the main tracks and footpaths, with orchard area indicated.

2. Biodiversity

Biodiversity at the site has increased since the removal of the larch monoculture. Over 7000 native British broad-leaf trees (including oak, beech, rowan, willow, alder, poplar, hazel, hawthorn, blackthorn and guelder rose) have been planted in part of the former larch plantation area. Natural regeneration has been observed, with mostly foxglove and bluebell. Bird boxes have been placed and the site has hosted Gwent Ornithological walks. Plant surveys across the whole woodland were carried out in 2005 and 2006, with a Phase 1 Extended Habitat Survey carried out in 2015. A pond area has also been created. The group aim to improve the wider biodiversity of the area, of which the orchard will play a major part as an attractor for pollinators, other invertebrates and birds.

3. Current management

There is little 'direct' management of the orchard area alone, though there is some scrub and bramble clearance - by hand with slashers. The area is not suitable for mowing. Native species have been planted up to the orchard area, with a view that these will become a mixed boundary and windbreak. The trees are being pruned following volunteers from the site attending an orchard management course, with a first prune carried out in 2017.

4. Suggested management

Continuation of current management is suggested, and the following activities encouraged:

Mulching – This involves adding a layer of bulky, organic material around the base of each tree in spring. This will suppress weed growth in the growing season, retain moisture in the soil for good root growth, build up soil life and feed the tree. Wood chip from deciduous trees is commonly used.

Feeding - After the tree's first year in the ground it is advisable to begin feeding the tree in preparation for root expansion and fruiting. Adding nutritionally rich organic material such as compost or rotted manure in spring will allow the trees to begin taking up nutrients before the growing season begins.

Grafting – If wishing to propagate new trees, graft wood should be taken by the end of March. A piece of last year's new growth - called a scion - is spliced onto rootstock, from which a "clone" of the original tree will grow.

Pollination – This will begin to take place as the trees blossom. A good mixture of flowering plants should be provided to attract pollinators.

Watering - Growing trees require a lot of water, and keeping them well-watered will also help to prevent pest and disease issues.

Pruning – Pruning can help trees to fight off infections by allowing for good ventilation and should encourage the trees to produce more fruit. Generally, prune pip fruits (apples and pears) in the winter and stone fruits (plums, cherries) in the summer. Ensure you have sharp, clean tools. A pair of secateurs and a small pruning saw should be all you need for most jobs.

Harvesting – This takes place in the autumn, though some varieties will drop sooner than others. Fruit can be used to make juice, cider or perry, preserves, pies and much more.

Planting – Winter is the best time to plant new trees, and the only time bare-root trees should be planted.

5. Orchard use

The planned use of the orchard is mainly around education - informing the public of different apple varieties, etc. There is signage in place that indicates tree variety (each with a unique number) so that families can 'find' all the varieties. The BBCW group are exploring possible use of produce when the orchard begins to crop, and have been involved in a Torfaen Rural Development Plan survey into the potential to link up small orchard areas across the council area.

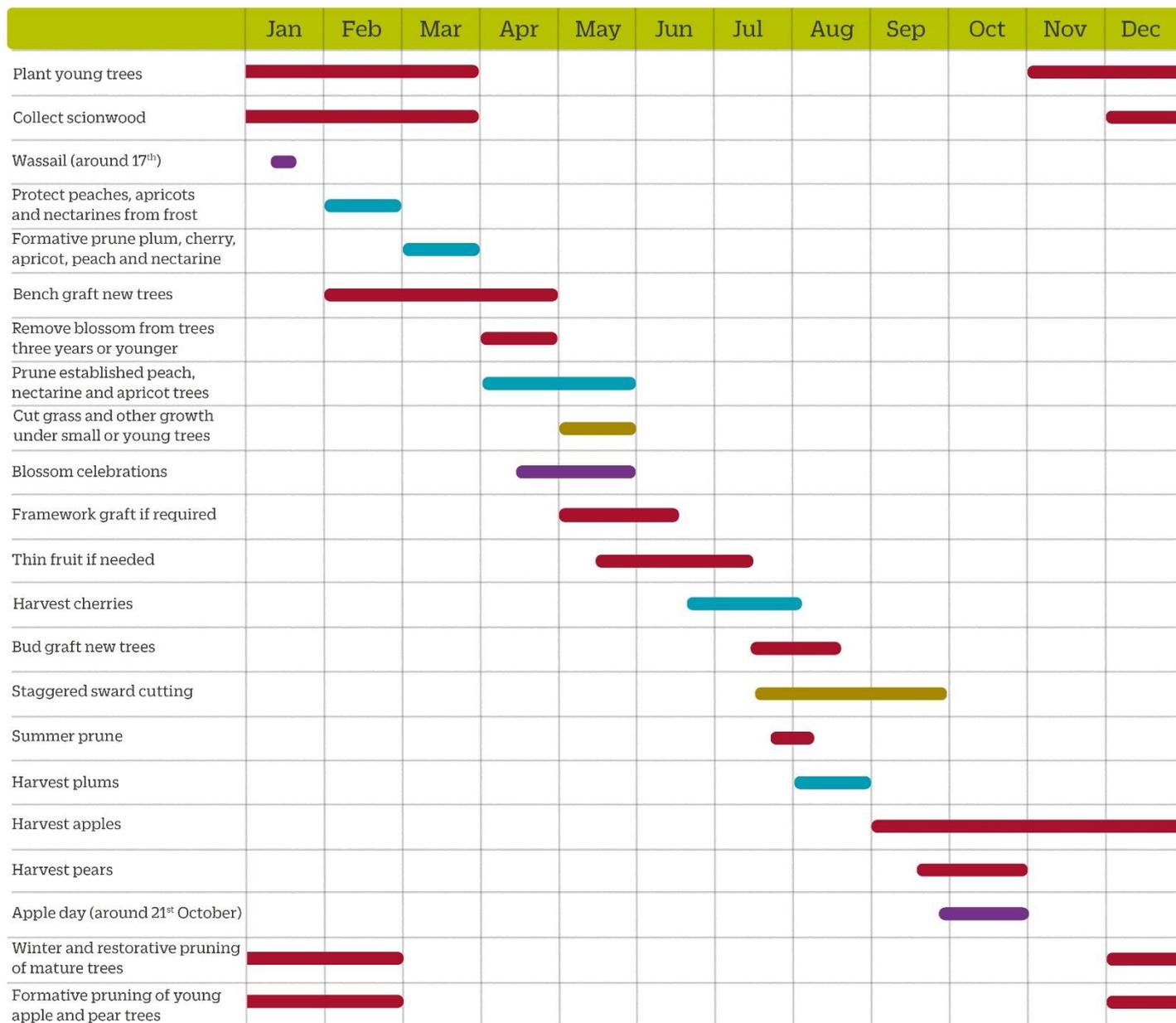
6. Orchard events

Apple Day - Apple Day traditionally falls on 21st October, though events are often held throughout the month. This often involves sale of apple varieties, juice and cider, apple pressing and cooking demonstrations, presentations and apple identification.

Wassail – Wassailing is an ancient custom of encouraging the trees to thrive and bear fruit through singing, reciting incantations and drinking to the health of the trees. This event is usually held on a full moon in January or February.

7. Annual Orchard Plan

The annual plan recommended by the People’s Trust for Endangered Species (below) should be used as a basis for continued orchard management.



An A3 printable version of this plan can be found here:

<https://ptes.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/planner-A3.jpg>

8. Useful Links

These links will provide more information to help maintain and make use of the community orchard.

People's Trust for Endangered Species

The PTES website has a section specifically based on traditional orchards, with a wide variety of information about orchard management, including practical guides which can be downloaded and printed. There is also information on how to make use of the orchard for events, fundraising and produce.

<https://ptes.org/campaigns/traditional-orchard-project/>

Ian Sturrock & Sons

This nursery has been growing Welsh fruit varieties for over 30 years, and the website has several video guides, including tips on pruning, grafting, and identifying and avoiding disease.

<http://iansturrockandsons.co.uk/videoguides.html>

Bumblebee Conservation Trust

Orchards play an important role in protecting bumblebees through providing pollen and nectar from blossoms, and the bees in turn help pollination in the orchard. The website has information on how to manage land – including a fact sheet on orchards - for bumblebees.

<https://www.bumblebeeconservation.org/land-management-advice/>

Wildlife Trusts

Local wildlife trusts can give advice on maintaining biodiversity and managing orchards for wildlife. There are six wildlife trusts within Wales, covering different geographical areas.

South & West Wales: <https://www.welshwildlife.org/>

North Wales: <http://www.northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk/>

Gwent: <http://www.gwentwildlife.org/>

Montgomeryshire: <http://www.montwt.co.uk/>

Brecknock: <http://brecknockwildlifetrust.org.uk/>

Radnorshire: <http://rwtwales.org/>