



The end of the larch

The background

It was inevitable really. For three years we have been aware of a disease that kills larch called *phytophthora ramorum*. This is a plant destroying parasite fungus which has no known cure. It can be transmitted by feet, wheels, paws, rain and wind so it's almost impossible to stop. As soon as it is discovered in woodland, Natural Resources Wales have to be notified and a Plant Health notice is served, ordering the larch to be felled.

We were told a year ago that it wasn't a matter of if *phytophthora* struck but when. As it was already present in Cwmcarn and Wentwood, we knew it was just a matter of time before we were hit by it. Thankfully, it has no effect on animals or humans.



Tell-tale signs of *phytophthora ramorum* in larch. These bleeding black cankers will eventually kill the tree.



This larch will soon all be gone. It's going to look really bare without any trees at the top of the woodland.

The problem

We have 25,000 larch trees we have been ordered to fell by April 2014. We cannot sell the wood as firewood as we are not allowed to move from the site any wood with bark on it.

The solution offered by Natural Resources Wales is for a contractor to be hired who will fell the larch and transport the wood to somewhere where the bark will be incinerated. This works well when applied to a large Forestry Commission site with hundreds of thousands of trees and easy access but is impracticable in Blaen Brân woodland.

Access will prove difficult. Extracting the wood through Upper Cwmbran would be a hazard for walkers and locals. It would also put a huge strain on the tracks inside the woodland. Using the Mountain Air gate would ease the problem with the woodland tracks but would be liable to damage a lot of common ground by Penyrheol as well as proving hazardous to traffic and possibly destructive of the roads as lorries went down to Cwmynyscoy. We are working with Torfaen Borough Council to find the best solution to this.

What now?

We still wait to see whether a contractor would be willing to take down the larch. Another solution would be to chemically kill the larch and leave it standing, to be felled at a later date. The problem with this is safety. Dead trees are liable to fall, especially in adverse weather conditions. To stay safe, we would still have to fell trees reasonably close to the paths. This would be a risky option, presenting a danger to all who used the woods. We can encourage people to stick to paths but we can't force them and we certainly can't force dogs to stick to paths.

If everyone keeps away from any area where there is tree felling and obeys any notices about access or other restrictions, there won't be a problem.



The top larch plantation has least people walking through it so all sorts of wildlife depend on the larch for food, shelter and habitat.

Biosecurity

The first thing we must all do is to avoid going through the top larch plantation. If you do, you will need to clean and disinfect footwear, tyres and paws before you leave. The spores can be spread in needles, soil or water. This means cleaning in the stream is not an option as the spores will travel downstream. If you don't clean everything, the spores can be transferred by means of your vehicle, dog, clothes or footwear. It really is best to avoid the area completely and stick to the paths.



A good idea not to go above this track until the all clear.



Fairy doors - they also look good outside.

The enterprise



The Newsletter of Blaen Brân
Community Woodland

We also need to consider the social enterprise operating in the woods. The enterprise was set up to carry out trade in timber products, provide employment and qualifications for people to generate income to support Blaen Brân Community Woodland and its aims .

They depend on the larch to make firewood, posts and various artefacts for sale. They have quite a lot of stock of milled timber which can be sold but the firewood can no longer be processed. Without a ready supply of materials, this could put the whole enterprise into jeopardy. We are still awaiting the test results to see whether the wood already processed is free from the disease. There are still woodland artefacts for sale . The price list is here

PRODUCT	Price
Snowmen	£40.00
Sleighs	£ 40.00
Carved angels	£ 40.00
Flat snowmen	£14.00
Flat reindeer	£16.00
Flat angels	£14.00
Flat Christmas trees	£ 8.00
Fairy doors	£12.00



Flat reindeer - children love them.



A choir of angels. The dogs at the back are not for sale.



Snowmen for sale

What's On

Volunteer work

Contact Dave 07787525875 or email blaenbran@gmail.com for more details. Easier work takes place on weekends. Technical stuff happens during the week.

Walks Obviously there will be no walks until we are disease free.

Quiz night and social evening

We hope to have this in January or February.

For all details of events

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www.blaenbran.org.uk

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