Tree-planting journey launches map exploring Scotland's lost woods and wildlife

Saturday 10 September, 2016

The lost woods and wildlife of the Highlands are set to be rediscovered thanks to a new Gaelic place-name map project led by conservation charity Trees for Life, which aims to promote the cultural importance of Scotland's native woodland heritage.

Poet Alec Finlay will create the map – which will be used by schools and community groups, and to encourage tourism to less well-known areas – by exploring place-names relating to woodlands, animals, geology and human dwellings in Glen Affric, Glen Urquhart, Glenmoriston and Glen Garry.

The initiative will be launched with a two-day, 20-mile symbolic journey – Turas Nan Craobh: A Journey With Trees – from Trees for Life's Dundreggan Conservation Estate in Glenmoriston to Fort Augustus and Invergarry on 10 and 11 September 2016. Native trees will be transported by two ponies and planted at key sites where place-names evoke a particular tree.

"Place-names contain a record of past ecology and can shed light on the woods and wildlife that once thrived in the Highlands and could do so again, with a little assistance from people," said Alan Watson Featherstone, Trees for Life's Founder.

"With native woodland now covering just four per cent of Scotland – one of the lowest percentages in Europe – we want to inspire communities and schools to discover more about our cultural and native woodland heritage, and to involve them in restoring the endangered Caledonian Forest."

During the journey from Glenmoriston to Invergarry, members of the community, school pupils, artists, heritage and walking groups, and Trees for Life ecologists will follow sections of old military and drove roads. Gaelic storyteller Ariel Killick and poet Alec Finlay will take part in special events.

Participants will plant trees in gardens, school grounds and community green spaces, and in places where place-names evoke trees, such as Achadh-nan-darach – field of the oaks – on Abercalder Estate.

The journey will conclude with public celebrations at Kilchuimen Academy in Fort Augustus on 10 September, and at Glengarry Community Hall in Invergarry on 11 September. At both events, Ariel Killick will deliver a bilingual performance of her 'Adventures with the Gaelic Alphabet and Trees'.

Alec Finlay's subsequent research for the map will seek to identify place-names that indicate the past presence of woodland or animals, such as Creag a' Mhadaidh – the wolf crag – in Glenmoriston, and Beinn Eun – hill of the bird – in Glen Affric. Old maps, photographs, artefacts, census information, newspaper articles and older people's knowledge will all be drawn on.

The map – called 'From Creag a' Mhadaidh to Dubh-Chamas nan Ùbhlan' or 'From The Wolf's Crag to The Dark Bay of Apple Trees' – will be created in stages, with place-names revealed as new findings are uncovered. It will be used in school and community events focused on rewilding and Gaelic in the landscape, and to encourage tourists to visit locations such as Glenmoriston, Glen Urquhart and Glen Garry.

Grace Grant of Glengarry Community Woodlands said: "Our lovely historic woodland is part of our local heritage, and as we plan its regeneration we are delighted to work with Trees for Life."

Alec Finlay's blog at www.alecfinlay.com will feature information from the map together with poetry, linked to Trees or Life's website at www.treesforlife.org.uk.

Ends

Notes to editors

* The mapping project is part of Trees for Life's Rewilding the Highlands project, which also involves the planting of more than 50,000 trees and the creation of wildlife habitats. The project won the Alpine category of the 2016 European Outdoor Conservation Association (EOCA) scheme, securing £23,000 through an online public vote.

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* Partners in the project include Glengarry Community Woodlands, Storyline Scotland, and The Scottish Storytelling Centre’s #DareTo Dream initiative.

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