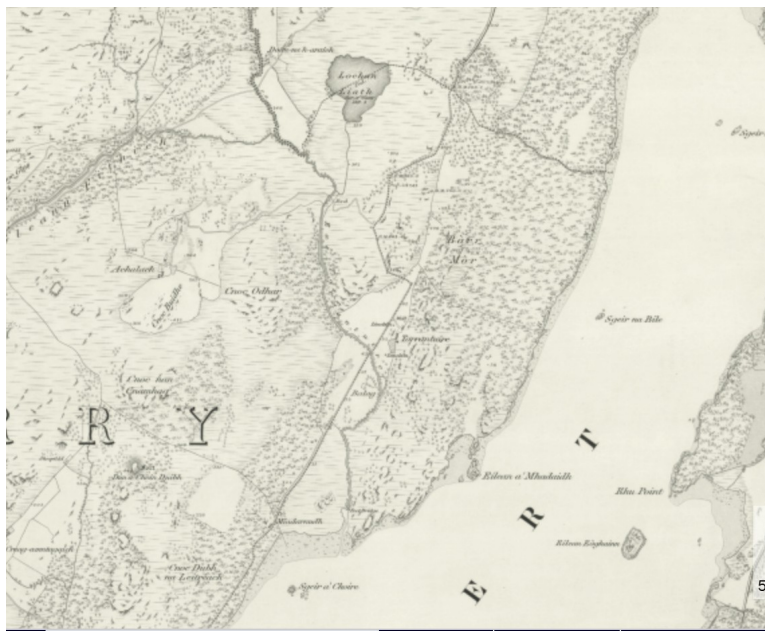


Torinturk and Dalavich Notes

Torinturk, visited 26/8/2026



Google Earth image of Torinturk with picture locations



Torinturk area on 1840s-1880s 6" OS map

From West Tarbert to Ardpatrik there are scattered patches of remnant ancient woodland and more recent growth of alder and birch which have been replanted to varying degrees with conifers. The main blocks of conifers are however out on what had been the open hill. The loch below the slopes is SPA for various birds, but also has native oyster, sea grass and a generally rich marine community.



Many of the blocks are coming up for felling. This presents an opportunity to restore/expand/buffer the remnant semi-natural woodland, but also a risk of soil erosion and increased sediment input to the loch which would damage the marine life. Forestry and Land Scotland are responsible for two of the three main blocks with Scottish Woodlands having a block in between. A local group are in discussion with FLS about their proposals. This visit was an opportunity to have a look at the area and some of the issues involved around Torinturk.



Although the main discussion centred on the felling, there are the usual other problems of rhododendron and deer. Rhododendron has been successfully controlled at Ferry Wood largely by lever-and-mulch working (not seen) further down the coast at Ardpatrik. Only a few bushes were seen in the

Torinturk section. An area of about 20 ha is managed by RBGE and holds some of their more sensitive (non-invasive) rhododendrons.



Deer, primarily Sika, are though a major issue. FLS have stalkers but they are not able to deal with the scale of the problem; needs collaborative effort but as always difficult to get all landowners to agree to put in the effort needed.

Beech is present in small amounts as in many western oak woods. While it is best kept out of the most bryophyte-rich areas, there is a case for accepting it in managed oak woodland as part of the ongoing changes in woodland composition associated with natural succession exacerbated by climate change.



The lochside strip is mainly broadleaved and appears never to have been planted but there has been some self-seeding into it. The local group have been cutting out small trees (hand-tool work) but are not able to tackle the bigger trees. FLS will need to get their contractors to do this; ring barking probably not a good idea as it may stimulate heavy coning.



Lochside strip; a big conifer that will need contractors to fell it.

Small areas of wet ground within the conifer block, if ever planted failed and are now willow/birch. A few oaks were also left.



Looking down into small wet hollow; old drain or small straightened stream

Along the fringes of the lower woodland strip and along main stream courses, felling should ideally be done manually with as low a disturbance to the ground as possible. Consider felling to waste where extraction would be particularly difficult.

With the more substantial blocks of conifer careful clear-felling and extraction is probably the best solution. Any broadleaves should be kept, or if too spindly to stand alone coppiced. Some ground disturbance is inevitable and not necessarily all bad – breaking up the needle mat and exposing some bare soil will provide a seed bed for tree seedlings and ground flora recovery. The problem will be stopping the sediment being washed into the loch. Using brash piles round the edges of felled patches and on towards the bottom of slopes where they are above streams may help to slow surface run-off and drop sediment. Brash can also be used to block any ditches and drains. The key will be to ensure that the actual contractors doing the work are aware of sympathetic to the overall aims. They are in the best position to assess the situation on the ground.

Tree colonisation is likely to be slow in the presence of high deer numbers, but from a sediment control perspective that does not matter as long as a dense ground cover (bracken, grasses, bramble etc) establish. From a rainforest conservation perspective getting some more trees is desirable, but I would not be too bothered if these are mainly birch, alder and willow rather than oak and hazel. The latter two will eventually come, but could be planted in if desired to speed up the process.

It would be good to record the whole felling and restoration process. At a macro-scale this is probably easiest done via aerial (drone) photography, supplemented by ground based photographs from strategic locations. Later it may be worth putting in some plots or transects, but as the experience at Dalavich shows 'permanent' plots can be difficult to maintain and may not always cover what turns out to be the most interesting changes. So consider wider one-off surveys that could be repeated to show overall change, if not direct plot by plot comparisons.

Something that would be worth doing (if it does not already exist) is a lidar survey. This would give you a detailed image of the slopes and stream patterns, but also help to pick out any historic features such as old shielings that might be hidden amongst the trees. If the site is being seen as a 'showcase' for community involvement these features could be as important as the biological communities.

Dalavich, visited 27/8/2026



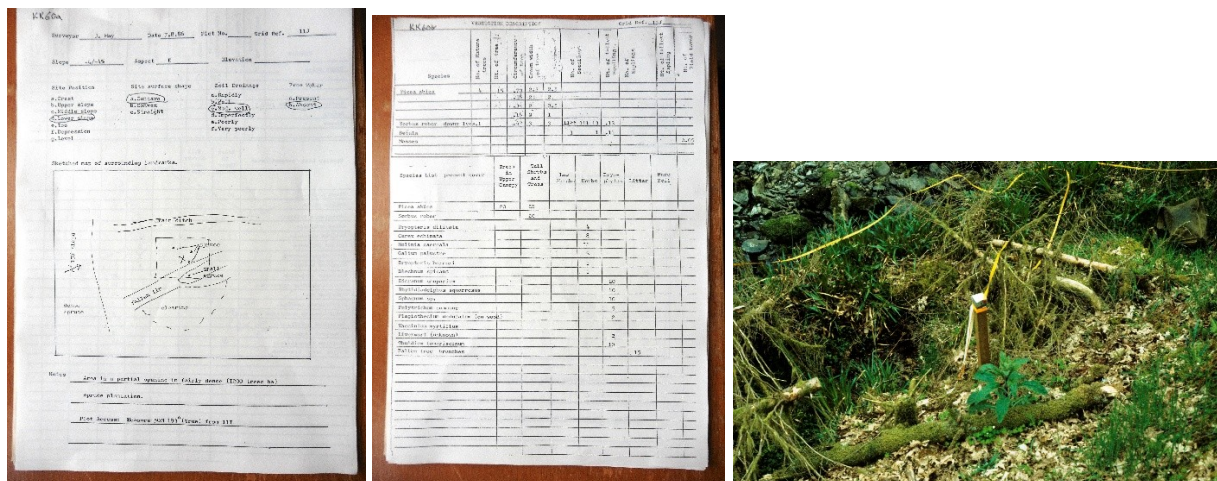
Dalavich Oakwood as shown on 1840s-1880s Ordnance Survey 6" map



Google Earth image, 2020s: the brighter green is oak, the darker green in Dalavich is mainly birch.

The wood was broadleaved in the 19th century but extensively replanted with conifers. However there was also quite a lot of oak surviving amongst the conifer and Dalavich became one of the first sites where Forestry Commission took on significant restoration of replanted ancient woodland following the introduction of the 1985 Broadleaves Policy to complement the southern part of the wood which had little conifer in it and had been made an SSSI.

In 1986 Janet May set up a series of plots through the wood to follow the restoration work: some areas had already been cleared of conifer, but much remained. Janet's survey was based on c.56 plots which were marked by short wooden posts and an example of her record for a 4x4 m plot centred on the post is given below.



Janet May record card (1986); example of one of the posts (from 1988)

I visited the wood in 1987 with (I think) the Native Woodland Discussion Group.



1987 Uncleared;

recently thinned through;



!1987 conifers gone (1);

conifers gone (2)

As a follow-up in 1988 I re-recorded most of Janet's plots (Kirby and May, 1989). I took some photographs of plot posts but unfortunately cannot match the slide labels to my records.



I also recorded some extra temporary plots in the original oak woodland. Here again I slipped up by not making it clear which record sheet went with which temporary position (or if I did I have not found that

map)! Between 1986 and 1988 some more of the conifer had been cleared but some blocks still stood – these were later felled to waste.

In 1998 another Edinburgh student did some work on the plots ((Dahlberg, 1998). I am not aware of any publication from this other than the MSc thesis. I have found my copy of that and will go through it to see exactly what she did. I don't have copies of any other surveys since. There have though been gangs going through from time to time to clear conifer regeneration.

I visited the oakwood briefly in 2014 and did some quick recording and took photographs. My overriding impression was that the bilberry in particular was doing very well.



A priority should be to get all the data into electronic format and plot positions mapped (as far as that is possible, given lack of location data for some of my 1988 data). I had hoped to do that immediately after my Argyll trip to include with this report but other matters have taken priority. I will though try to put it all together by Christmas. We could then consider how easy it would be to do a repeat survey, 40 years on.

The recent visit (27/8/2026) was a chance to how the wood had changed after another decade and whether any trace of the posts remained.



(a) Oakwood; (b) birch growth in area where conifer felled between 1986 and 1988.



(c) Conifer felled to waste post 1988, now young birch; (d) signs of more recent cutting of conifer regeneration.

My general impression of the site is that the vegetation is recovering well; restoration has been a success. There are not many mature conifers left. The areas where they were are predominantly birch and show up well on the Google Earth image.

The ground vegetation is a mixture of *Vaccinium*, *Molinia* (locally dominant in the more boggy areas) and a range of the larger more robust bryophytes associated with western oakwoods. It is possible that some of the rarer rainforest species are not present in the restoration areas, but then given this was probably a very actively managed site in the 17th/18th century they may not be in 'oakwood areas' either.

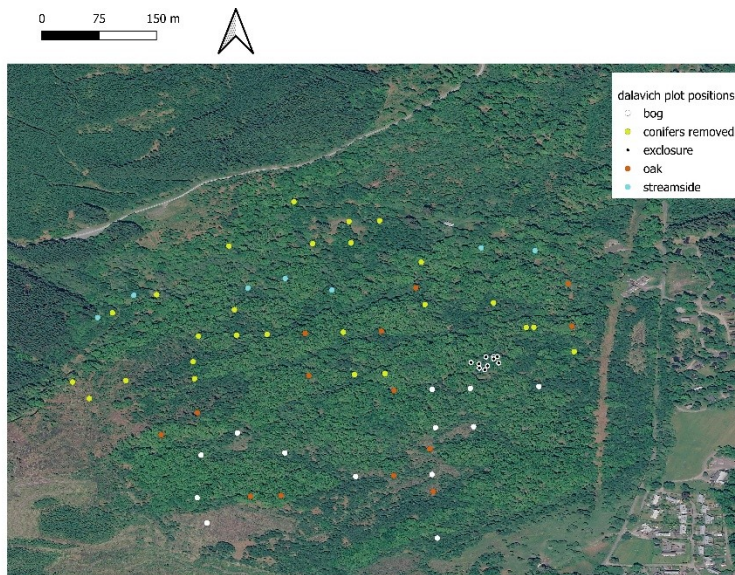
The small exclosure that was included in the May survey is still detectable as a local patch with a lot of young birch and rowan (about 2-3 cm dbh), although the fence has been taken down. Any younger regeneration than this seems to be being hammered by the deer. Snapped and browsed small rowan, birch and willow were noted. Oak seedlings were abundant, a phenomenon I have seen in various other woods across the country, generally reflecting the abundant mast in 2025. Where these occur under even small canopy gaps one option might be put in some small temporary deer fenced roundels, to let a group get away.



Former exclosure 1987, and now with the fence removed.

Overall I think that trying to get someone interested in redoing a survey of the wood would be very worthwhile and that FLS could make more of what has been achieved here.

Recently I attempted to translate Janet's field map of where her plots were on to QGIS. I hoped that this is sufficiently accurate to get withing 10-20 m of the likely post position.



Approximate positions of the May plots.

The visit on 27/8/26 suggests that my GIS positions will generally get you to the right sort of stand. Combined with drawings that Janet did (which were not in a very accessible form for the visit) the exact position can then be fined down.

We did find three surviving posts in the morning (I am now doubtful of our fourth candidate plot which was a round post by the stream) which were offset from my GIS positions in a fairly consistent way.



Posts N6;

N7

N8

In the afternoon, I went back and found another two, again somewhat offset, plus a streamside one of the standard 2x2 square timber type, but much more offset. The discrepancies may be because I have not managed to interpret Janet's map precisely enough.

I need to look at that again.



Posts H9



M7



streamside 42ZR

What I think we have demonstrated is that at least some of the posts, perhaps even the majority could have survived, albeit getting a bit wobbly. Getting someone to do a winter survey when the posts should be easier to see, with hopefully some improved GIS positions from me, would definitely be worthwhile.

Even if it turns out that the only surviving posts are the six we have found, it would still be worth repeating the survey, using the nearest approximate positions. We can then make comparisons in terms of the overall effects of restoration action as if these were completely independent surveys – and it is the overall effect that we are primarily interested in.

DAHLBERG, K. K. 1998. *Ground flora as an indicator of ecological condition in the Dalavich oakwood, Argyll*. MSc Environmental Protection and Management, University of Edinburgh.

KIRBY, K. J. & MAY, J. 1989. The effects of enclosure, conifer planting and the subsequent removal of conifers in Dalavich oakwood (Argyll). *Scottish Forestry* 43, 280–288.