WOODLAND TRUST

# Rhododendron Wood

# Management Plan 2016-2021

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## MAPS

# THE WOODLAND TRUST

## INTRODUCTION

The Trust's corporate aims and management approach guide the management of all the Trust's properties, and are described on Page 4. These determine basic management policies and methods, which apply to all sites unless specifically stated otherwise. Such policies include free public access; keeping local people informed of major proposed work; the retention of old trees and dead wood; and a desire for management to be as unobtrusive as possible. The Trust also has available Policy Statements covering a variety of woodland management issues.

The Trust's management plans are based on the identification of Key Features for the site and setting objectives for their management. A monitoring programme (not included in this plan) ensures that these objectives are met and any necessary management works are carried out.

Any legally confidential or sensitive species information about this site is not included in this version of the plan.

## PLAN REVIEW AND UPDATING

The information presented in this Management plan is held in a database which is continuously being amended and updated on our website. Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations.
Please either consult The Woodland Trust website www.woodlandtrust.org.uk or contact the Woodland Trust (wopsmail@woodlandtrust.org.uk) to confirm details of the current management programme.

There is a formal review of this plan every 5 years and a summary of monitoring results can be obtained on request.

## WOODLAND MANAGEMENT APPROACH

The management of our woods is based on our charitable purposes, and is therefore focused on improving woodland biodiversity and increasing peoples' understanding and enjoyment of woodland.

Our strategic aims are to:

- Protect native woods, trees and their wildlife for the future
- Work with others to create more native woodlands and places rich in trees
- Inspire everyone to enjoy and value woods and trees

All our sites have a management plan which is freely accessible via our website www.woodlandtrust.org.uk. Our woods are managed to the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) and are certified with the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) under licence FSC-C009406 and through independent audit.

In addition to the guidelines below we have specific guidance and policies on issues of woodland management which we review and update from time to time.

We recognise that all woods are different and that the management of our sites should also reflect their local landscape and where appropriate support local projects and initiatives. Guidelines like these provide a necessary overarching framework to guide the management of our sites but such management also requires decisions based on local circumstances and our Site Manager's intimate knowledge of each site.

The following guidelines help to direct our woodland management:

1. Our woods are managed to maintain their intrinsic key features of value and to reflect those of the surrounding landscape. We intervene when there is evidence that it is necessary to maintain or improve biodiversity and to further the development of more resilient woods and landscapes.
2. We establish new native woodland using both natural regeneration and tree planting, but largely the latter, particularly when there are opportunities for involving people.
3. We provide free public access to woods for quiet, informal recreation and our woods are managed to make them accessible, welcoming and safe.
4. The long term vision for our non-native plantations on ancient woodland sites is to restore them to predominantly native species composition and semi-natural structure, a vision that equally applies to our secondary woods.
5. Existing semi-natural open-ground and freshwater habitats are restored and maintained wherever their management can be sustained and new open ground habitats created where appropriate.
6. The heritage and cultural value of sites is taken into account in our management and, in particular, our ancient trees are retained for as long as possible.
7. Woods can offer the potential to generate income both from the sustainable harvesting of wood products and the delivery of other services. We will therefore consider the potential to generate income from our estate to help support our aims.
8. We work with neighbours, local people, organisations and other stakeholders in developing the management of our woods. We recognise the benefits of local community woodland ownership and management. Where appropriate we allow our woods to be used to support local woodland, conservation, education and access initiatives.
9. We use and offer the estate where appropriate, for the purpose of demonstration, evidence gathering and research associated with the conservation, recreational and sustainable management of woodlands. In particular we will develop and maintain a network of long-term monitoring sites across the estate.
10. Any activities we undertake will conform to sustainable forest management principles, be appropriate for the site and will be balanced with our primary objectives of enhancing the biodiversity and recreational value of our woods and the wider landscapes.

## SUMMARY

This public management plan briefly describes the site, specifically mentions information on public access, sets out the long term policy and lists the Key Features which drive management actions. The Key Features are specific to this site – their significance is outlined together with their long (50 year+) and short (5 year) term objectives. The short term objectives are complemented by a detailed Work Programme for the period of this management plan. Detailed compartment descriptions are listed in the appendices which include any major management constraints and designations. A short glossary of technical terms is at the end. The Key Features and general woodland condition of this site are subject to a formal monitoring programme which is maintained in a central database. A summary of monitoring results is available on request.

## 1.0 SITE DETAILS

| | |
|---|---|
| **Site name:** | Rhododendron Wood |
| **Location:** | Kentisbeare |
| **Grid reference:** | ST094071, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 192 |
| **Area:** | 10.60 hectares (26.19 acres) |
| **Designations:** | Area of Landscape Value, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Nature Conservation Area, Planted Ancient Woodland Site |

## 2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

### 2.1 Summary Description

Rhododendron Wood has historically been dominated by rhododendron. Some areas of woodland have been cleared of the plant and in 2017 a major clearance project is due to start. The rest of the wood is a mainly broadleaf wood on steep slopes with a combination of beech sweet chestnut and other broadleaf trees. Rhododendron Wood is part of a much bigger area of woodland managed for commercial forestry. There is a small area of plantation on ancient woodland in the southern corner which is being restored.

There is car park and flat well surfaced bridleway which links to the wider network of footpaths in the area

## 2.2 Extended Description

Rhododendron Wood is part of a large escarpment woodland situated on a prominent greensand ridge at the western edge of the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The soil type is predominantly Upper Greensand which is non-calcareous on the upper, drier slopes. These soils give way to red clays and mudstones of the Triassic Mercia group on the lower slope, where springs emerge at the junction of the sedimentary layers.

The greensand escarpments in the Blackborough area including parts of Rhododendron Wood were excavated extensively for whetstones (sharpening stones). Mining is recorded in the area from approximately 1690 up to the First World War.  The scale of the industry is thought to have been nationally significant and at its height may have produced as many as 500,000 sharpening stones every year. The impact of two centuries of mining has been considerable in Rhododendron Wood. Collapsed depressions can be seen next to the bridleway, and under the rhododendron. These are thought to occur as a result of surface water washing away mining spoil. Adits (mine entrances) are thought to be hidden under the dense rhododendron above the bridleway. Adits are known to extend under the track itself, and spoil was cast down the escarpment slope.

Rhododendron Wood is divided into two compartments, by the well-used public bridleway which runs north south, through it. To the east the woodland is almost entirely dominated by dense rhododendron, with the odd open grown scots pines and oak trees, and a small area of beech woodland at the southern tip adjacent to the road. To the west of the bridleway the woodland is more semi-natural in character, although many of the bigger trees are beech and sweet chestnut. The lower southern end is very small area plantation on ancient woodland site which was planted with Japanese Larch in the 1960s .

The First Edition Ordnance Survey maps of 1880, 1905 and 1906 show the area east of the main track as open heath, with a fringe of conifers adjacent to line of the current bridleway. West of the bridleway is shown as mixed woodland, this merges with the ancient Knowles Wood at the bottom of the escarpment. Close to the track the woodland appears quite open on these early maps and is thought these open areas correspond with spoil from nearby adits.

The wood is accessed mainly from the southern end where there is a Woodland Trust owned car park which has space for around 6 cars. A public bridleway leads directly north through the site from there and a public right of way leads east from the car park up to Downland Plantation.  Both paths link to the wider footpath network in the area. The steep nature of the woodland means that access off these 2 paths is difficult, with no permissive paths through the area.

# 3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

## 3.1 Getting there

The main entrance is at the wood’s southern end directly off a minor road (Broad Road) running north east from the A373. There is a stoned parking area for approximately 6 cars. The bridleway runs north from this point through the wood, after 1.5km the bridleway meets another minor road south of Blackborough. A public footpath crosses the south east corner of the wood starting at the car park. The path passes quickly into Downland Plantation towards Forest Glade Holiday Park. The bridleway is generally flat in overall gradient and was resurfaced in October 2010 by Devon County Council to improve accessibility; the bridleway provides one of the longest off road combination routes in Devon. As an ex mining track it has a fairly solid base, but it is locally uneven, and it has occasional shaded/poorly drained sections where it can be very wet, however, the worst areas have been greatly improved. The bridleway is accessed by a bridle gate from the car park, but there is no barrier where the bridleway exits the Woodland Trust land to the north. The footpath by contrast has an earth surface, and runs steeply uphill from the car park with a squeeze gap stile at each end.
Nearest bus stop: The immediate area is not well served by public transport. The nearest bus stop is at Forest Glade Holiday Park - approximately 1/2 mile away from the wood's car park further up Broad Road which involves walking a steep hill, along a busy rural road with no pavements, or by using the rights of way network, which adds approximately 1 mile on to the walk. Services are infrequent.

## 3.2 Access / Walks

## 4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

The long term vision for Rhododendron Wood is to return the lower slopes to predominately native broadleaf woodland comprising of acidic oak woodland communities in the drier areas and alder/ willow carr woodland in the wetter areas. This also includes the small area of plantation on an ancient woodland site (PAWS) which will be slowly restored by managing light levels to encourage natural regeneration. A mosaic of native broadleaf woodland and grassy heath will be created above the track through a combination of rhododendron clearance, woodland planting and natural regeneration. The wood is popular and well used, and the existing car park, public bridleway and footpath will be maintained in line with that level of use, by keeping them open and welcoming.

# 5.0 KEY FEATURES

The Key Features of the site are identified and described below. They encapsulate what is important about the site. The short and long-term objectives are stated and any management necessary to maintain and improve the Key Feature.

## 5.1 Ancient Woodland Site

### Description

At 0.7ha the area is very small within Rhododendron Wood, however it is a part of a much bigger Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site when combined with the adjacent 17ha of Knowles Wood which is currently managed by Fountain Forestry. Historically the area was planted with Japanese larch and had a dense understory of rhododendron. The rhododendron has now been cleared with little regrowth but the area currently has very little vegetation under it. There are many spring lines (partly providing a water source for a number of local houses) and the vegetation around these is more developed but generally of rushes and grasses.

### Significance

While small the area does fit with the Trusts policy of restoring ancient woodland sites.

### Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints - The road is much lower than the land which has high boundary banks. The western edge is a conifer plantation under other ownership. Within the wood the ground is very uneven with wet spring lines making management access difficult. The infrastructure for the water supply to neighbouring houses also means that any work needs to be sensitively done.

### Factors Causing Change

Phytophthora ramorum in the remaining larch could result in the need to clearfell the area rather than using a gradual restoration approach.
If left unchecked the rhododendron will re-establish itself.
Tree diseases may affect natural regeneration and mature trees, including ash die back disease.
Deer and squirrel damage may affect both existing trees and natural regeneration.

### Long term Objective (50 years+)

Restoration to predominantly native broadleaved woodland of a diverse age structure mimicking woodland characteristic of the landscape, supporting ancient woodland vegetation and flora.

### Short term management Objectives for the plan period (5 years)

Operational objective:
Increase semi-natural composition and ancient woodland characteristics through a gradual opening up of the canopy to support broadleaved regeneration opportunities favouring any ASNW remnant features.
1. Thin a small number of larch to waste to open up the canopy.
2. Control any regeneration of rhododendron.

## 5.2 Secondary Woodland

### Description

This area runs along the lower western side of the site from the bridleway and links with the PAWS area of Rhododendron Wood and Knowles Wood. Soils are acidic but have been heavily modified by the quarrying, there are numerous spring lines and the bottom edge is very boggy. Areas have been planting with beech, sweet chestnut and scots pine in the past. Rhododendron was common but the majority has now been cleared. Ground flora is slowly returning particularly along the spring lines and more open areas.

### Significance

Corporate objective: Aim 2 Protecting native woods, trees and their wildlife for the future.

### Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints:
1. The soils have been much altered through both the quarrying and the effects of rhododendron meaning that appropriate natural vegetation will take a long time to re-establish and in some areas may never do so.
2. The ground is mainly steep, it is flattens out at the bottom where there are many spring lines and the ground is very boggy making management of the area difficult.

### Factors Causing Change

If left unchecked the rhododendron will re-establish itself.
Tree diseases may affect natural regeneration and mature trees.
Deer and squirrel damage may affect both existing trees and natural regeneration

### Long term Objective (50 years+)

Mixed broadleaved woodland, of a diverse age/canopy/species structure mimicking woodland characteristic of the landscape through a limited intervention/continuous cover type system.
Eradication of all rhododendron.

### Short term management Objectives for the plan period (5 years)

To ensure that rhododendron regeneration is controlled.

## 5.3 Mixed Habitat Mosaic

### Description

This area runs along the upper eastern side of the main track and is currently dominated by rhododendron interspersed with a few open grown pines, oaks and beeches. The area closest to the car park is dominated by beech trees and only has limited rhododendron. This area also has a remnant bluebell population. Historically the area was mainly open heathland and scrub, and as with the rest of the site it has been heavily modified by quarrying.

### Significance

Corporate objective: Aim 2 Protecting native woods, trees and their wildlife for the future
The restoration of mixed habitat features will assist landscape scale habitat connectivity which is a one of the objectives within the statutory management plan for the Blackdowns AONB

### Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints
The soils have been much altered through both the quarrying and the effects of rhododendron meaning that appropriate natural vegetation will take a long time to re-establish.

### Factors Causing Change

1. Tree diseases may affect natural regeneration, particularly ash die back.
2. Deer and squirrel damage may affect both existing trees and natural regeneration

### Long term Objective (50 years+)

To create a mosaic of oak woodland, heathy vegetation and scrub, Given the uncertainty of exact habitats, due to the altered soil profiles, a broad aim of a third of each habitat type in the area is anticipated. On-going management intervention may be required to maintain this successional habitat.

### Short term management Objectives for the plan period (5 years)

To clear all rhododendron from the area and treat any regrowth to allow for natural regeneration of vegetation. Some tree planting may be needed if natural regeneration is problematic.

## 5.4 Informal Public Access

### Description

Rhododendron Wood is well used by pedestrians and horse riders. Situated close to the villages of Blackborough and Kentisbeare, and the town of Cullompton The rights of way link with other paths, circular and longer routes which have been identified and promoted by the Blackdown Hills AONB through their website. A public bridleway forms the main route north-south through the wood and provides one of the longest off road routes for riders in Devon. Most visitors drive to the wood. The approach road is narrow, steep and without pavements. All the paths through the wood are dedicated rights of way and a short stretch of public footpath cuts across the SE corner. The WT maintain a small car park constructed before the wood was acquired.

### Significance

Corporate Objective: Aim 3 Inspiring everyone to enjoy and value woods and trees.

Informal public access to Rhododendron Wood raises people's awareness and enjoyment of woodland helping to fulfil the Trust's corporate objective to increase people's enjoyment of woodland. Although there is a relatively high access provision in the immediate area, the wood is a key link within that, and also affords some of the best views.

### Opportunities & Constraints

None

### Factors Causing Change

None

### Long term Objective (50 years+)

Easily accessible, attractive, well maintained and safe woodland that the public frequently enjoy

### Short term management Objectives for the plan period (5 years)

Operational Objective: Entrances and path network are appropriate to the level of use and type of demand from the local population.

Work programme:
1. Cut back paths and tracks at a frequency appropriate to keep the width and height clearance suitable for users. Currently cut once a year.
2. Maintain as necessary car park and access points into the wood, including the provision of welcome signs at all official entrances, litter clearance and remedial action following vandalism.
3. Annual tree safety checks of mature boundary trees in particular, with work as necessary

## 6.0 WORK PROGRAMME

| Year | Type of Work | Description | Due By |
|---|---|---|---|

## APPENDIX 1: COMPARTMENT DESCRIPTIONS

| Cpt No. | Area (ha) | Main Species | Year | Management Regime | Major Management Constraints | Key Features Present | Designations |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1a | 5.69 | Other | 1900 | Wood establishment | Housing/infrastructure, structures & water features on or adjacent to site, No/poor vehicular access to the site, Site structure, location, natural features & vegetation | Informal Public Access | Area of Landscape Value, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty |
| The whole compartment was formally open heathland with some mature open grown trees such as beech, Scots pine, and oak some of which are on historic boundary features. However apart from the southern end which is mature beech with some bluebells the area is dominated by rhododendron which is mainly ponticum, but with some unknown species rhododendron. It is not known what, where or even if these other species still exist on site | | | | | | | |
| 2a | 5.14 | Beech | 1900 | Min-intervention | Housing/infrastructure, structures & water features on or adjacent to site, Mostly wet ground/exposed site, No/poor vehicular access to the site, Site structure, location, natural features & vegetation, Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc | Informal Public Access | Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty |

An area considerably modified by mining activity, the planting of Scots pine, beech and sweet chestnut following phased felling operations and most recently and significantly the widespread growth of rhododendron to the virtual exclusion of all other species. Phased clearance and herbicide operations to control the rhododendron over the period of the last two plans from 2000 to 2010 have for the most part been successful.. Where rhododendron was not dense there remain patches of ancient woodland indicator species such as bluebell, wood anemone and yellow pimpernel, on the lower slopes to the west there are wet flushes and springs lines resulting in characteristic wet woodland with marsh violet, remote sedge, bog stitchwort and sphagnum moss..

Natural regeneration of native species within the compartment is limited. Rhododendron is known to starve soils of oxygen and its mycorrhizae associations protect rhododendron growth from the inhibiting chemicals produced by rhododendron which persist in the soil for long periods after clearance.

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3a | 0.67 | Hybrid larch | 1950 | PAWS restoration | Diseases, Housing/infrastructure, structures & water features on or adjacent to site, Mostly wet ground/exposed site, No/poor vehicular access to the site, Site structure, location, natural features & vegetation, Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc | Informal Public Access | Area of Landscape Value, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Planted Ancient Woodland Site |

Post WWII planting of Japanese larch. The felling of this area prior to planting may have coincided with the thinning/felling operations in other compartments and the restocking of Knowles Wood. The compartment straddles the lower slope of the escarpment and consequently bridges the spring lines. The wet flushes have inhibited the growth of the larch and even rhododendron and areas of the compartment benefit from fragmented native wet woodland.

The presence of rhododendron is likely to make the Larch susceptible to the disease Phytophthora ramorum, if confirmed the compartment would be subject to a Plant Heath Order that would require all the larch to be felled.

# GLOSSARY

### Ancient Woodland

Ancient woods are defined as those where there has been continuous woodland cover since at least 1600 AD. In Scotland ancient woods are defined strictly as sites shown as semi-natural woodland on the 'Roy' maps (a military survey carried out in 1750 AD, which is the best source of historical map evidence) and as woodland all subsequent maps. However, they have been combined with long-established woods of semi-natural origin (originating from between 1750 and 1860) into a single category of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland to take account of uncertainties in their identification. Ancient woods include Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland and plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (see below). May support many species that are only found in ancient woodland.

### Ancient Semi - Natural Woodland

Stands in ancient woods defined as those consisting predominantly of native trees and shrubs that have not obviously been planted, which have arisen from natural regeneration or coppice regrowth.

### Ancient Woodland Site

Stands in ancient woods that have been converted to plantations, of coniferous, broadleaved or mixed species, usually for timber production, including plantations of native species planted so closely together that any semi-natural elements of the understorey have been suppressed.

### Beating Up

Replacing any newly planted trees that have died in the first few years after planting.

### Broadleaf

A tree having broad leaves (such as oak) rather than needles found on conifers (such as Scots pine).

### Canopy

The uppermost layer of vegetation in a woodland, or the upper foliage and branches of an individual tree.

### Clearfell

Felling of all trees within a defined area.

### Compartment

Permanent management division of a woodland, usually defined on site by permanent features such as roads. See Sub-compartments.

### Conifer

A tree having needles, rather than broadleaves, and typically bearing cones.

### Continuous Cover forestry

A term used for managing woods to ensure that there are groups or individual trees of different ages scattered over the whole wood and that some mature tree cover is always maintained. Management is by repeated thinning and no large areas are ever completely felled all at once.

### Coppice

Trees which are cut back to ground levels at regular intervals (3-25 years).

### Exotic (non-native) Species

Species originating from other countries (or other parts of the UK) that have been introduced by humans, deliberately or accidentally.

### Field Layer

Layer of small, non-woody herbaceous plants such as bluebells.

### Group Fell

The felling of a small group of trees, often to promote natural regeneration or allow planting.

### Long Term Retention

Discrete groups of trees (or in some cases single trees) that are retained significantly past their economic felling age. Operations may still be carried out within them and thinning is often necessary to maintain stability.

### Minimum Intervention

Areas where no operations (such as thinning) will take place other than to protect public safety or possibly to control invasive exotic species.

### Mixed Woodland

Woodland made up of broadleaved and coniferous trees.

### National vegetation classification (NVC)

A classification scheme that allows an area of vegetation to be assigned to the standardised type that best matches the combination of plant species that it contains. All woodlands in the UK can be described as being one of 18 main woodland types (W1 - W18), which principally reflect soil and climatic conditions. For example, Upland Oakwoods are type W11, and normally occur on well drained infertile soils in the cooler and wetter north and west of Britain. Each main type can be subdivided into numerous subtypes. Most real woods contain more than one type or sub-type and inevitably some woods are intermediate in character and can't be properly described by any sub type.

### Native Species

Species that arrived in Britain without human assistance.

### Natural Regeneration

Naturally grown trees from seeds falling from mature trees. Also regeneration from coppicing and suckering.

### Origin & Provenance

The provenance of a tree or seed is the place where seed was collected to grow the tree or plant. The origin is the geographical location within the natural range of a species from where seeds/tree originally derives. Thus an acorn collected from a Turkey oak in Edinburgh would have an Edinburgh provenance and a southern European origin.

### Re-Stocking

Re-planting an area of woodland, after it has been felled.

### Shrub Layer

Formed by woody plants 1-10m tall.

### Silviculture

The growing and care of trees in woodlands.

### Stand

Trees of one type or species, grouped together within a woodland.

### Sub-Compartment

Temporary management division of a compartment, which may change between management plan periods.

### Thinning

The felling of a proportion of individual trees within a given area. The remaining trees grow to fill in the space created.

### Tubex or Grow or Tuley Tubes

Tubes placed over newly planted trees or natural regeneration that promote growth and provide protection from animals such as rabbits and deer.

### Weeding

The control of vegetation immediately around newly planted trees or natural regeneration to promote tree growth until they become established. Either by hand cutting or with carefully selected weed killers such as glyphosate.

### Windblow/Windthrow

Trees or groups of trees blown over (usually uprooted) by strong winds and gales.