

# Woodland Creation case study

## Expanding Glenthorne Woods

Creating a larger, more connected woodland habitat



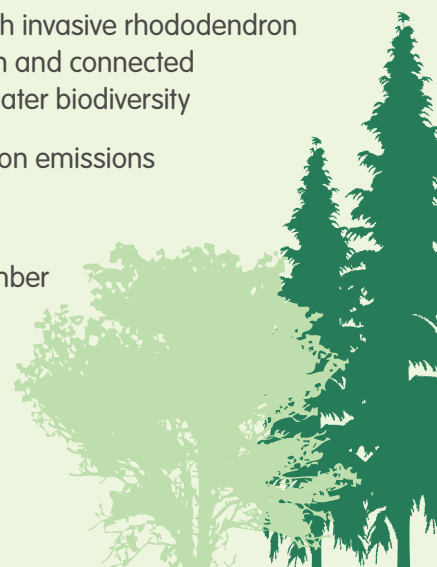
North view showing good connectivity with existing woodland.

### Key facts

- **Type of woodland:** Broadleaf, upland oak-birch
- **Number of hectares planted:** 9.4 hectares of woodland created through planting, natural regeneration, and incorporating existing trees
- **Date planted:** 2001
- **Species:** Whitebeam, oak, and birch
- **Grant used:** A former Forestry Commission New Native Woodland in National Park Challenge Scheme and Countryside Stewardship annual maintenance payments

### Key objectives

- Convert a site overrun with invasive rhododendron bushes into a species-rich and connected woodland, to support greater biodiversity
- Help offset business carbon emissions
- Improve public access
- Generate income from timber





## Embarking on a new woodland project

George Halliday and Maeve Egan own a 440 hectare mixed upland cattle and sheep farm business on the picturesque North Devon coast, within Exmoor National Park. Their holding includes Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), namely for its moorland and the land's geological and nature conservation interest.

In 2001, George and Maeve took the brave decision to clear 11.7 hectares of invasive 50-year-old rhododendron bushes, to make way for a diverse and wildlife-rich woodland. As a result, 9.4 hectares of woodland was created through planting, incorporating existing trees, and natural regeneration – this is where trees seed within the woodland habitat itself. The site integrates open ground to accommodate footpaths, rights of way, viewing points, and small areas of coastal heath.

Adjacent to the additional new woodland is Glenthorne Woods – 100 hectares of thriving woodland, including commercially managed species with integrated pockets of precious Ancient Semi Natural sessile oak woods. The new 9.4 hectare woodland is an expansion of the existing Glenthorne Woods, creating a larger, more connected woodland habitat for wildlife.

Glenthorne Woods will also contribute towards the pioneering Millennium Seed Bank Project coordinated by The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. A collection of endemic whitebeam seeds will be selected and put into cold storage, propagated for research purposes, and later planted to boost future populations in Glenthorne and surrounding local areas.



Clearing rhododendron as part of the site preparation in advance of planting in 2001.

## Support and guidance were on hand

George and Maeve were supported in this endeavour by experienced foresters at Exmoor National Park, who provided technical design and support, as well as managing contractors to carry out the necessary works to clear the site and create the woodland.

To clear a site like this required specialist planning, due to the density of the rhododendron and incredibly steep landscape. There were a few attempts using different machinery systems with varying degrees of success. In the end it was a “motor-manual” approach, involving 10 to 12 chainsaws working at any one time,

supplemented with heavy machinery, chippers, and mulchers working from tracks or benches – allowing work to take place on flatter, more accessible ground.

Endemic whitebeams, recognisable for their dome-shaped canopies and clusters of white-petalled flowers, were considered an important feature to preserve within the existing woodland. High priority was given to identifying and protecting whitebeams in the areas that were to be cleared of invasive rhododendron.





View down to the Bristol Channel as site clearance proceeded.

## Funding to help finance a new woodland

Undertaking such extensive work was expensive and as such Exmoor National Park applied for funding from the Forestry Commission on behalf of the owners. The scheme was successful in securing funding from a former grant for new native woodland, known at the time as the New Native Woodland in National Park Challenge Scheme. This fund helped provide the capital works needed, including the trees and the integral deer fencing required to promote successful tree establishment. The site now benefits from annual maintenance payments through a Countryside Stewardship grant.

*"It wouldn't have been possible without grant funding, the National Park Challenge Grant was crucial to the scheme progressing"*

Graeme McVittie,  
Senior Woodland Officer,  
Exmoor National Park



## Giving biodiversity a helping hand

The ecological value of the site prior to planting was non-existent, due to the continuous stand of invasive species. Nothing native lives in rhododendron. Their dense foliage and the speed at which they grow blocks sunlight, preventing other plants and trees from growing. The leaves and nectar are also poisonous to many insects and wildlife.

Converting what was once a monoculture site into a flourishing woodland has had a significant positive

impact on biodiversity. Adjoining the new woods with the existing 100 hectare woodland has created a larger, continuous habitat – supporting a greater variety of species on the Exmoor coast. Wildlife corridors have expanded and are better connected – further aiding nature recovery. The new woodland is also showing promising signs of ecological recovery, with characteristic coastal rainforest habitat features developing.



Thick moss developing in the wet conditions.





View over the Bristol Channel through planted woodland.

## Far-reaching benefits

Using the Farm Carbon Toolkit, George and Maeve have calculated that the combination of the new woodland alongside the existing woodland comes close to balancing out the carbon output from other activities on the farm.

Creating a new woodland has made good use of marginal land that wasn't making any money and is having a positive impact on the local ecology. George and Maeve are also considering thinning the woods to generate further income from the timber.

There are also wider benefits for society, as the site provides two public footpaths – allowing walkers to take in the stunning coastal surrounds.

## Top Tips

1. Do not overestimate the importance of a management plan. Ongoing work is needed to keep on top of rhododendron, which is invasive, as well as keeping rides open to allow access for maintenance.
2. Consider removing fences and tree guards as part of the overall upkeep of your site.

Discover how woodland creation can benefit you

Find out how the Forestry Commission can help you to finance and create woodland. Visit: [www.gov.uk/forestry/tree-planting-overview](https://www.gov.uk/forestry/tree-planting-overview)

