Corehead

Corehead is a 640 ha (1580 acres) upland hill farm in the Southern Uplands of Scotland. The rolling hills of Corehead are divided into 5 distinct valleys which form the headwaters of the Annan Water. In the west lies an iconic landmark, the Devil’s Beef Tub, and in the east, the shoulder of Hart Fell, the second highest hill in Dumfriesshire, rises to 808m.

Borders Forest Trust bought the site in 2009 to restore the mosaic of natural habitats that would have existed when the Ettrick Forest clothed the land. By integrating low intensity agriculture with habitat restoration techniques, the land is now being managed for wildlife in partnership with the local community.

Visitors are welcome to explore the site, discover the new habitats and look for wildlife. The best way to do this is to follow one of the waymarked walking routes.

Integrating Farming and Wildlife

The farm is home to a flock of Scottish Blackface sheep, a hardy traditional breed well adapted to living in the hills. Sheep graze the western hills and are currently excluded from the east of the farm. This is to allow the recently planted native woodland to establish and heathland plants such as heather and blueberry to regenerate.

The low-lying inbye areas of the farm are used for lambing and give the ewes nursing twin lambs a good start on better pasture. The grass fields are not improved with fertiliser and become flower rich hay meadows later in the season. A crop of wild bird cover is sown annually and left unharvested to provide valuable winter cover and feed for birds. In the wet areas unsuitable for grazing, several ponds and wildlife scrapes have been created, providing wetland habitats for a range of insects, birds and amphibians.

History

Corehead has a rich historical past and features many archaeological sites. William Wallace’s sister married the Laird of Corehead, Thom Halliday. In 1297, Wallace reputedly gathered men from the Ettrick Forest and the Border Clans at Corehead, and from the Tower led his first attack against the English. Throughout his armed struggle with England, Wallace used the Etrick Forest as his base and in 1298 was made Guardian of Scotland at the Kirk of the Lowes by St Mary’s Loch.

Corehead is in the heart of Reiver territory where the Border clans such as the Armstrong, Johnstone, Douglas, Maxwell, Kerr, Oliver, Moffat and Graham families fought fiercely to defend their land, kin and livestock. The deep hollow of the Devil’s Beef Tub is where many of the cattle stolen by the Border Reivers were hidden.

Wildlife and Conservation

At Corehead, habitats are being restored by human activity and also by nature. When purchased there was only one small remnant of native woodland in Tweedhope Valley. Now over 200 ha of new broadleaved woodland is being created in the valleys through the planting of native species including oak, ash, birch, holly, juniper, hawthorn, hazel, Aspen, willows and alder. Over time woodland bird species will be attracted to this new woodland.

Montane scrub is being planted on the higher ground and wetlands are being managed for birds, plants and invertebrates. As the habitats establish, more wildlife will return and existing wildlife will thrive. The nationally rare black grouse are now seen regularly on the farm and the badger population is on the increase.

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Devil’s Beef Tub
A cavernous hollow in the hills, also known as MacLeran’s Loup after a Jacobite Highlander who escaped from the Duke of Cumberland’s forces by rolling down the Beef Tub.

Broad Tae
The remains of an Iron Age settlement is evident from the ringed enclosure. It is surrounded by a post medieval field system of turf walls and rig and furrow.

Map Key
- Corehead Boundary
- Hartfell Walk
- Annandale Way
- Hartfell Walk/ Annandale Way Strait Step
- Deer Fence
- Pedestrian Gates
- New Native Woodland

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