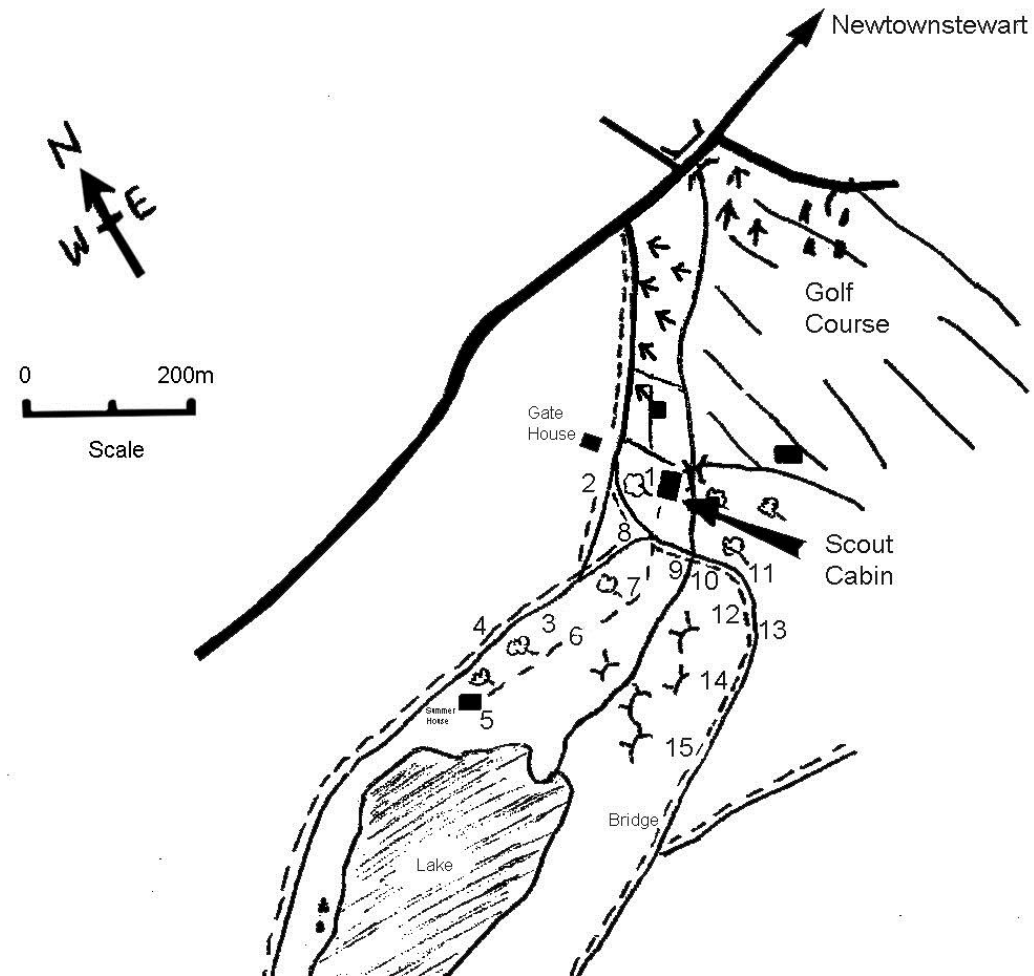


Baronscourt - Scout Camp Woodland Trail

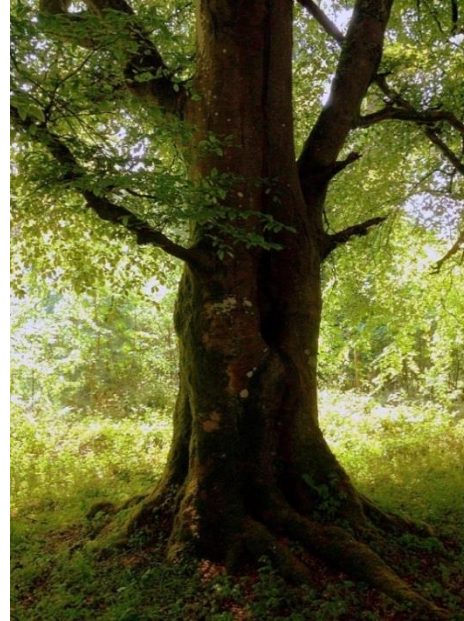


Baronscourt Nature Trail



1. Beech Tree

Standing in the woods behind the Scout cabin is a magnificent beech tree. It has stood here for over 300 years. It has smooth bark and big roots. Huge twisting branches and lots of small leaves cast so much shade that very few plants can grow in the dark beneath it. The ground is covered in brown crunchy leaves and spikey beech nut shells. In the Autumn many types of fungi (mushrooms) can be found growing around this tree.



Beech is the third most common tree in our native woods and was probably first introduced to Britain by the Romans.

The Latin word for Beech is *Fagus* - derived from the Greek language meaning 'to eat'. Beech nuts were eaten in times of famine and the nuts fed to pigs at other times.

The word '*book*' derives from ancient Anglo Saxon word for Beech. Monks used to write their manuscripts resting on big soft wooden blocks of Beech.

Beech trees are often covered in carved graffiti with carved initials and names of loved ones dating back many, many years. Romans had a saying "As these letters grow, so may our love".

It is a soft, fine grained wood and used for making furniture.

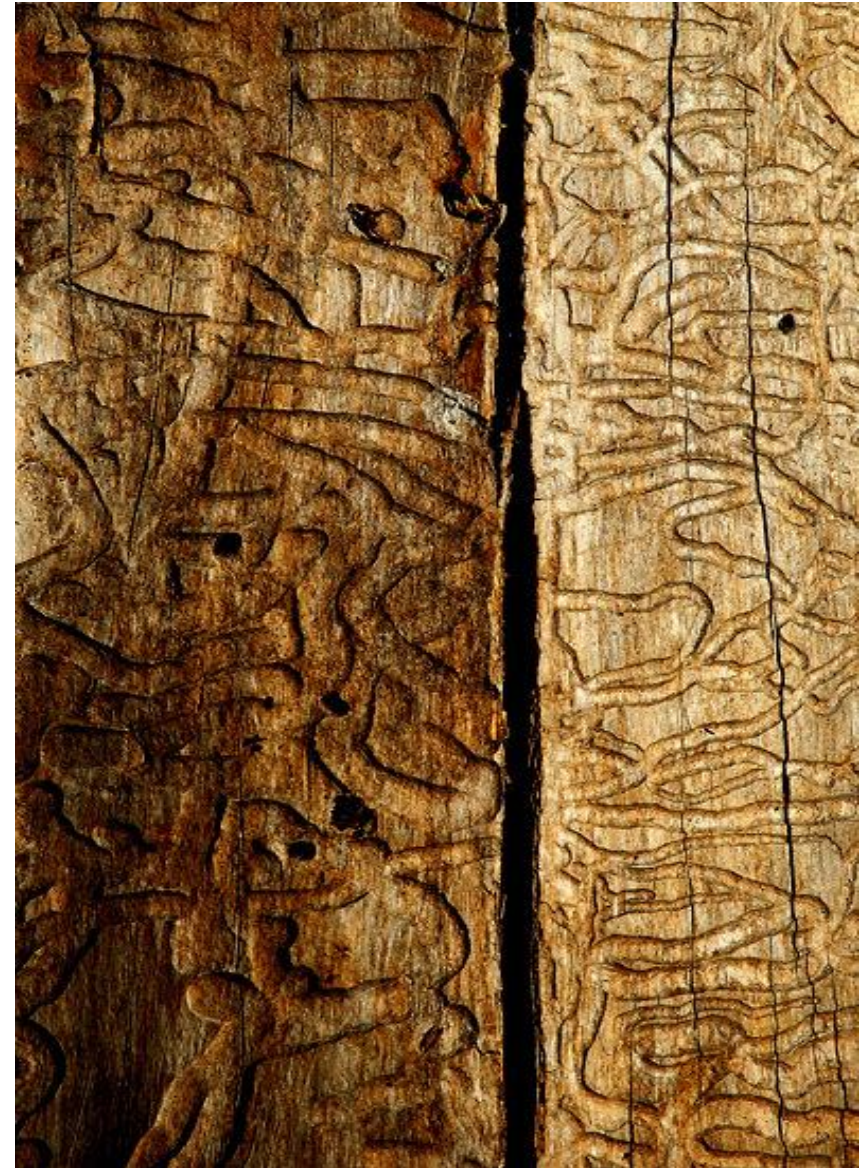
Beech trees are used to make dense hedges and keep their brown leaves over the winter. Beech trees prefer dry sandy soils.



2. Insect holes

Step out of the woods onto the gate lodge track and look for the dead trees. If you look carefully you will see lots of holes in the trees created by burrowing, wood eating grubs and insects. Inside the trees there is a maze of burrows.

Some birds listen for the grubs and try to get them out to eat. The most expert at doing this is the Woodpecker but you are not likely to see or hear one as they don't live in this part of Ireland.



Alongside the track in the summer you might spot some short blue flowers sticking up through the grass.

The shorter ones are called selfheal as woodland workers used to use the naturally antiseptic leaves like plasters to heal cuts and scratches.

The taller ones are called bugle because the flowers are shaped like the musical instrument of the same name.



Also growing alongside the track is a large leafed plant called burdock. The roots of this plant are used to flavour a fizzy drink called Dandelion and Burdock.

You will also see the other yellow flower which is the other ingredient growing in the grass banks.

At the end of the summer the burdock is covered in prickly seed balls which stick to your clothes. This is how the plant spreads its seed, except it is usually the fur of animals like deer, foxes, badgers and rabbits that it sticks to.



3. Rhododendron and Conifer trees

At the end of the track turn right (West) The soil turns acid in the boggy margins to the lake. Tall conifers and rhododendron like this type of soil and can be found growing along this next section of the trail.



The big leaved rhododendron with its purple or red flowers can be found all around the lake path and were planted to provide colour to the woods.

Rhododendron is not native to Ireland and comes originally from Asia. In Victorian times, estate owners used to send plant hunters abroad to bring back exotic species like rhododendron as a

way of showing off how rich they were. With few natural predators in this country, they thrive and grow out of control damaging and shading out our natural wildflowers and trees. As you walk around the forest you will see areas where the foresters are cutting it out to try and control it and protect our native trees.



The owners of the estate were trying to replicate a Scottish highlands landscape and further up the hill is the deer park. If you are quite you might catch a glimpse of the shy animals moving through the woods at dawn or dusk. The deer will eat young trees so newly planted saplings are protected with tall plastic cones and shelters.

4. Old stumps and fallen conifers



As you continue along the track the conifer trees become more spaced out. This is a commercial forestry planting where the trees are grown for timber. They are not very good for wildlife apart from a few seed eating birds and squirrels that feed on the pine cones.

Old stumps are gradually decomposing and turning into soil. Native trees like oak and ash are food to more of our

wildlife so decay quicker than conifer trees which contain resins and gums that insects find hard to eat. Look for fungi, mushrooms, beetles, woodlice, spiders, earwigs and other creepy crawlies on the old stumps and logs.

If you look carefully the trees here are planted in straight lines and equally spaced. These trees grow tall, straight and very quickly. They can be harvested after growing for about 40 years. Conifer trees have shallow roots and if the strong wind gets in they can easily blow over exposing the roots.



Some very interesting shaped rocks with white veins of quartz and other minerals can be found lying around in this section of the forest. See how many you can find.

5. Oak Summerhouse



Further down the track turn left up a low hill and you come to a small brick house overlooking the lake.

Planted around the house are some big, rough barked, broadleaved oak trees. On the ground you might find some acorns.

Oak trees are one of our most important woodland trees for wildlife. Over 300 species of animals, birds and insect live and feed on oak trees.

It is a slow growing tree but can live for over a thousand years but not many live that long because they are prized for their timber. In the past most big sailing ships used oak timbers.

Derry is the Irish name for oak so any towns and cities that have the word Derry in their name usually had oak woodlands growing nearby. The emblem of the city of Derry, Londonderry is an oak leaf.

Druid means 'Oak Men'. Oaks were sacred trees and associated with different gods by the Greeks, Romans, Vikings and the Celts.

Often split by lightning it is associated with the gods of thunder and lightning.

Sometimes known as the King of the woods.

A famous saying is "Mighty oaks from little acorns grow"



Some people believed the acorn cups were the pipes smoked by leprechauns or hats worn by fairies.



Another big root stump can be seen washed up on the lake shore.



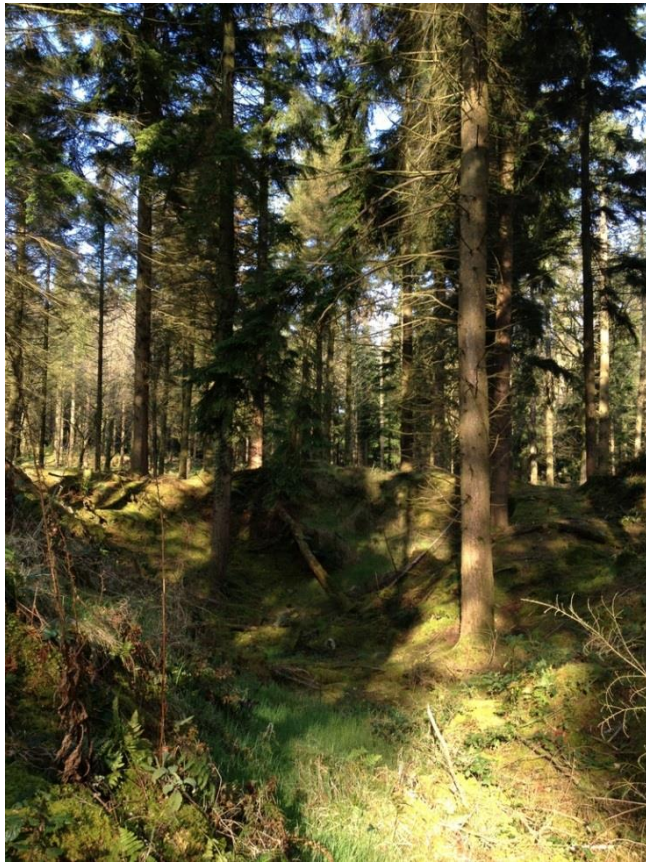
Can you find the large lump of quartz rock lying on the ground in front of the house?

Quartz is the most common mineral in the Earth's crust. It can be found in sandstones, granites, and other igneous rocks. It forms veins in the cracks of rocks. There is a lot of heat and water where they form. Crystals are made when the quartz cools down. The way the crystal looks depends on how hot it was when it was formed and comes in many different colours, white, blue, yellow and reds but white is the most common local colour.

Quartz is used in radios, as crystal gems, sandpaper, soap, prisms, glass, paints, clocks, watches, and computers. It is used for radar, radios, and TVs because it conducts electricity.

6. Quarry holes

Head east, following the grass track back through the trees. On the left there are a number of humps and hollows and are the remnants of quarrying for stone, clay, sand and gravel for making the tracks and bricks for the buildings on the estate.



The woodland becomes more interesting down this path with a wider variety of species. Elder with its white flowers in summer and clusters of small purple berries in autumn can be found growing in the damper, shadier areas. The branches of this brittle bush can be hollowed out to make whistles and flutes. The flowers smell of rotting meat and are often seen covered in hoverflies and other flying insects. Jam made from the berries is very rich in vitamin C and is good for sore throats. Sometimes an ear shaped rubbery, jelly like mushroom can be found growing on the elder bush.

Also growing along the path are brackens and brambles. Twisting and corkscrewing their way up the bigger trees are the climbing wild honeysuckle whose sugar rich yellow flowers attract the bees. You may also spot clumps of fine branches on the birch trees that look like birds' nests. These are known as witches' broom.



7. Scots Pine



Very tall, red barked Scots Pine trees with a clump of green needles at the very top and a few dead and gnarly, twisted branches up the trunks.

It is a native Irish conifer but died out and had to be reintroduced from Scotland in 18th Century.

Pine trunks were hollowed to make water pipes and the logs used to build track ways over wet ground. They last a long time in wet conditions because the wood contains waterproof resins.

If you cut the bark the sticky resin slowly oozes out, and eventual, can form amber. You often find insect trapped in the resin.

The resins have lots of good medicinal properties. Steamed pine leaves can relieve bronchial congestion. Pine essence is used in bath salts to combat sleeplessness, skin irritations and cuts.

Scots Pine was planted as route markers for cattle drovers. Like a hotel sign post, 3 trees planted together outside a farm indicated there was accommodation for animals and people.

8. Sycamore



The path brings us back to the forest track, near to where we started. In front of us is an impressive broadleaf, deciduous, Sycamore tree with large twisty branches covered in ferns.

Sycamores are part of the Maple family of trees. The Maple leaf is emblem of Canada and is on their flag. The Sycamore

has a similar shaped leaf. All maples have five lobed leaves. Shaped like a hand and fingers. Sycamore has many large coarse rounded teeth/serrations on each lobe. The leaf stems are characteristically red. It has large leaf buds which are light green clustered at the end of a twig. In the autumn it has winged seed that look like helicopter blades that help the seed blow away in the wind.

Is it not a native tree to Ireland but has been here so long it has become naturalised.

It grows in a wide range of soils and can tolerate polluted urban air and cold salty coastal environments.

It was possibly first introduced as a shade tree to give respite from the sun in parks and gardens. Its timber is also of use, it is as strong as oak but does not last as long. The wood was commonly used for making toys or kitchen items as it was easily dyed and lacked a sticky resin which some other woods have. Now sycamore is a commonly planted street tree as it copes well with the polluted and harsh environments of our towns and cities.

Sycamore was the favoured wood for making 'love spoons' in Wales. These wedding gifts are linked with rings and were traditionally made from a single piece of wood.

Look behind you back down the path you just came down. Notice the big bent branch on the Beech tree at the end of the path. It grew like this as it tried to get its leaves into the sunlight but was shaded out by the leaves on the branches above. Crooked branches were useful for making v shaped timber for boats and arched roof beams.



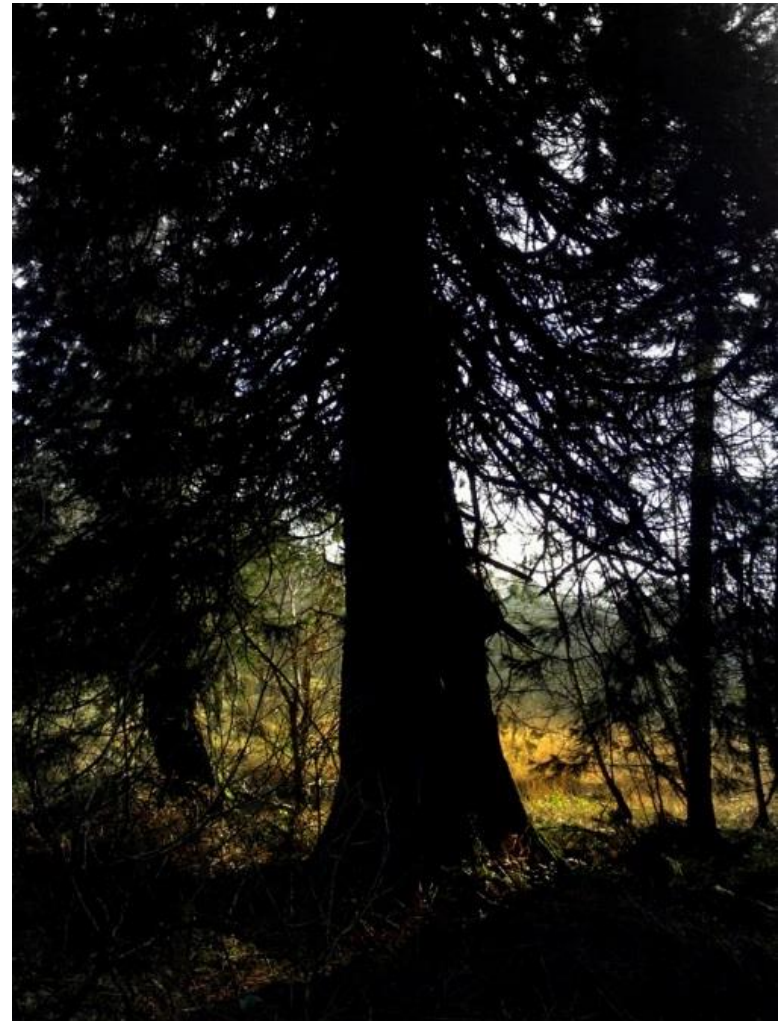
9. Redwood

Now head south east towards the bridge. On your right, down the bank is a big Wellingtonia fir tree. This looks very similar to the California Sequoia or giant redwood tree.

If you feel the bark it is very thick, fibrous and rather soft and spongy. This acts as an insulator and protects the tree from forest fires.

The Victorians loved the giant Wellingtonia trees because of their impressive size. They were planted in many gardens as specimen trees, and in rows creating Wellingtonia avenues.

Introduced by the plant hunter William Lobb in about 1854, the naming of the tree caused an international row between Britain and America. In Britain the tree was named *Wellingtonia gigantea* after the Duke of Wellington, who died in 1852. The Americans wanted to call it *Washingtonia*, after the first US president George Washington. After years of dispute, it was finally named *Sequoiadendron giganteum* because of its similarity to the Californian redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*).



10. Bridge, birch wood and reeds beds



Cross over the hump back bridge and look down at the river flowing beneath. Notice the water lilies with their big round leaves floating on the surface and providing shelter to small fish. You may also see a tall, long legged, grey bird hunting for fish and frogs with its long sharp beak. This is the grey heron.

Growing along the river and in the wet banks are small leaved trees with silvery bark. These are birch trees. Sometimes called the ribbon tree because of its peeling bark.

The bark was used for making water containers, canoe coverings and for writing on. It is also easily burnt and used to start camp fires.

The fine branches were used for making brooms.

Birch sap is used as a major source of sugar in Eastern Europe and can be fermented to make beer or wine.

The tree is a symbol of authority and punishment - bundle of birch rods were carried by magistrates and judges. Criminals and naughty children were beaten and whipped with birch to drive out evil (being birched).

It is used for making shampoo and as an Insect repellent. Dye from the bark was used for colouring fishing nets brown. Fish would avoid white lines

11. Ash plantation



On the left after the bridge you will see a plantation of young ash trees with protective cones around their trunks.

Ash is the fourth most common tree species in Ireland but is currently threatened with a killer disease.

The Ash is sometimes known as the Queen of the Woods.

It gets its name from Anglo Saxon word 'AESC', a poetic word for spear. Its slender straight trunks and branches were made into poles and spear shafts. Also used for walking and hurling sticks.

There is a proverb "Oak before Ash, there'll be a splash, Ash before Oak, there'll be a soak". Which means the weather will be good if the Oak comes into leaf first. If the Ash puts its leaves on before the Oak then it will be a wet spring and summer.

The Ash tree is the last of the trees to come into leaf (May).

Ash burns well and makes very good charcoal. It burns even when green and wet. Never pass an Ash without wishing it "good day" or you will have bad luck.

12. Horse Chestnut and Hazel



Looking back towards the lake and off the track you will see a big forked tree. This is a Horse Chestnut tree. There are a number planted along this section of the track. See how many you can spot.

In summer they have big 7 fingered leaves and in the autumn conkers. In the summer they have tall white or pink flowers that resemble candles.

It is called horse because the nuts were only suitable to be fed to the animals and not to be eaten by people. We do eat the nuts from the Sweet Chestnut and you will often see them being roasted and sold from street stalls at Christmas.

If you break off a leaf stem and look at the end where it joins the branch it resembles a horseshoe and nails.

If you mash up the leaves with some water it makes a basic soap which keeps you clean when camping. The oil in the leaves is very good for relaxing tired muscles. They used to make the horses pulling stage coaches walk through ponds filled with chestnut leaves at the end of the day. Their hooves would mash up the leaves and this would sooth their tired legs. It is still a key ingredient in many bath oils such as Radox.

The game of Conkers, where nuts on strings are used to hit each other until one smashes, comes from an earlier time when snail and sea shells were used

before conker trees were brought to this country.



Also in this area are a number of hazel trees.

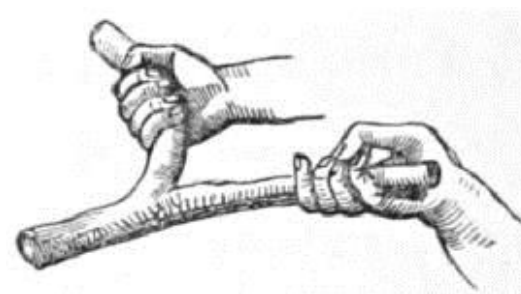


In early spring they have yellow catkins dangling from the bare branches. In the autumn it has bright green hazel nuts. It is these nuts that are a key ingredient in Nutella spread. The nuts were an important food source in Ireland's past.

Hazel rods and sticks have many uses and when cut grow back quickly. Cutting is known as coppicing.

A hazel rod protects against evil spirits and it is the proper wood for a rod of power or wand (Rowan, Birch, Mistletoe can also be used)

The forked branches are used for divining water.



Charcoal from hazel made a primitive gun powder.

You get dyes from this tree which turns wool a lovely 'olive green'.

It is considered the tree of knowledge, eat the nuts and you will become brainy. We also get the sayings "He hasn't twigged yet" and "In a nutshell" from this tree.

Hazel pegs were used to fix and pin down thatch on cottage roofs and as tent pegs.

Hazel nuts were carried in your pocket as a lucky charm to ward off evil fairies or to cure rheumatism in some parts of England and the double nut (St James nut) is particularly powerful. It is a symbol of plenty and prosperity.

Hazel can be woven into many products and is used for making wattle and daub walls (hazel sticks and clay). It is often grown with Oaks which are used for the main timber beams.

13. Rhododendron and Rowan



We have come across rhododendron before on our walk, but this is a different variety. Notice the smaller leaves on this bush. You will also see that it has died back a bit where the frost has burnt the leaves. Notice how twisty the branches and stems are. These branches are used for making rustic furniture. If you cut a branch and leave the log lying on the ground it will root easily and start growing again. When burnt it gives off a poisonous gas so don't burn it indoors. The Victorians used to use this gas to kill butterflies for their collections without damaging them. A living butterfly was caught in a net and put in a jar with some leaves and the gas given off by the leaves would kill the butterfly.

Behind the rhododendron are some more light brown multiple stemmed hazel stands.

Also on this corner is the Rowan tree which has big clusters of red berries in the Autumn. Look closely at the berries and you will see a star shape on each one. This gives the myth that the tree has magical properties and is associated with good luck. The other name for the Rowan tree is the Mountain Ash because it grows in rocky ground high up in the hills. If you look at the leaves they look very similar to the Ash tree, long and pointy arranged in opposite pairs along a stem.



14. Wet woodland



As we continue along the track the woodland on the right towards the lake is a mixture of birch and alder trees which are suited to growing in the wet rushy fields which occasionally flood in the winter. In summer the long grasses are alive with flying insects, butterflies and dragonflies feeding on the wild flowers.

In late spring you will see splashes of bright blue. These are bluebells and indicators of old woodland. Bluebells were first introduced by medieval monks who crushed up the bulbs to make glue for binding religious books and manuscripts and starch for making their ruffs stiff.

15. Alder

Further up the track the land gets wetter and the main tree becomes the Alder.

It has dark oval leaves and small round cones. When cut the wood quickly turn orangey blood red which gives the impression that it is bleeding. It was thus associated with evil and bad luck. Avoid alder when travelling is a good tip as it grows in wet swampy ground.



In Holland it is a favoured tree for making makes clogs (wooden shoes).

A lot of Venice, Dublin Quays and Belfast's City Hall is built on alder pile foundations as they have natural preservatives which stop them rotting in wet ground.

The Irish word for Alder is Ferm which gives us the county name for FERManagh - Land of the Alder.

On the drier land up the hill on the opposite site of the track you will find more Beech trees and Horse Chestnut trees with their big sticky buds in spring. The sticky sap stops the insects from eating the fresh buds by gluing up their mouths.

Woodland edge flowers can be found growing in the grassy verges alongside the track. The big white flower heads made up with lots of tiny flowers is known as Queen Anne's Lace and is a favourite of many flying insects and hover flies which are attracted the flowers smell of rotting meat.

Notice how many of the insects have black and yellow colouring. They are pretending to be stinging wasps and bees for their own protection and to scare off things that want to eat them.

Also in these woods you will see the dark green prickly leaves of the Holly bush and the dark shiny non prickly leaves of the Ivy that climbs up the trees.



Holly is called the lightning bush and myths say a holly tree will grow where lightning has hit the ground.

The wood from the Holly was used for making chess pieces, hammers for harpsichords, butts for billiard cues and chariot shafts in medieval Ireland.

The bark was boiled and fermented to make a sticky substance known as bird lime which was used to trap small birds when spread on tree branches.

Young leaves can be boiled and the steam used as cure for colds and bronchitis.

One of the ancient symbols of the midwinter festival and has been incorporated into the Christmas celebrations.

The bright red berries are admired, red being the colour to ward off evil. It is evergreen and remains 'fresh' throughout the winter.

Good crop of berries warning of hard winter to come (or good summer just gone).

Tall Holly bushes were left in hedges to prevent the passage of witches who are known to run along hedge tops at night.

In the past alcohol was often sold at fairs and markets under Holly trees, today many public houses are called The Hollybush or The Bush, which reflects this early licencing arrangement.

Despite its prickles the leaves are very palatable to animals and it is keenly browsed.

Bridge



As we approach the next bridge more tall Scots Pine trees can be seen on the right. These trees are favoured by Red Squirrels.

The trunks were often used to make ships masts in the past.

The gummy, sticky y sap has medicinal uses and was also used as glue for fixing arrow heads to shafts in the past.

In conservation areas some modern mobile phone mast are disguised as artificial trees that look like pine trees.



If you look along the stream you might spot some old stumps where trees have been cut down.

You can tell the age of a tree by counting the number of tree rings.

Count a dark ring and a light ring as one year. The dark ring is the winter growth and is narrow because the tree doesn't grow much in the winter. The wider lighter rings are the summer growth.

By measuring how wide or narrow the rings are we can get an indication of what the weather was like each year. Wide winter and summer rings indicate good weather and narrow rings, cold wet weather.

If the trees were cut down in 2012 can you count back the years and work out what year the trees were planted?



Leaf hunt



☐ alder



☐ ash



☐ beech



☐ birch



☐ sycamore



☐ elder



☐ field maple



☐ hawthorn



☐ hazel



☐ rowan



☐ holly



☐ horse chestnut



☐ oak

Have you found any other leaves? Draw or stick them here and find out their names:

What have you spotted?



☐ moths

can you see a moth?



☐ birds



☐ feathers

look for feathers on the floor from summer moults



☐ ladybirds

count the spots and look for different species



☐ butterflies

find them on flowers uncurling their proboscis to drink



☐ pollinators

bees, butterflies and hoverflies visiting flowers



☐ noise

how many sounds can you hear? frogs, birds, bees...



☐ aphids

find aphids and their sticky honeydew on leaves



☐ pond

damselflies and dragonflies can be found near ponds



☐ damage

look for trees that have been damaged by deer



☐ squirrels

squirrels feeding on green hazelnuts



☐ smell

can you smell the rotten scent of a stinkhorn mushroom?



☐ flowers

look for flowers high up in horse chestnut trees



☐ blossom

can you see the white blossom of hawthorn or blackthorn?



☐ poo

shiny oval-shaped droppings from roe deer



☐ fungus

bracket fungus or bright jelly fungus on dead branches



☐ buds

long ones, clusters, opposite pairs and big sticky ones!



☐ bats

listen out for bats at dusk, you might see them if you're lucky



☐ dragonflies

look for dragonflies hovering above rivers and lakes



☐ eggs

butterfly or moth eggs under leaves



☐ nest

can you see an old bird's nest in the bare tree branches?



☐ drey

an untidy, twiggy squirrel nest about the size of a football



☐ frogspawn

look in lakes and streams for frogspawn or tadpoles



☐ butterflies

peacock butterflies with deep red wings and 'peacock eyes'



☐ pine cones

see how many different types of pine cones you can find



☐ moss

cushion moss in beech woods under oaks or conifers



☐ birds

look for food - red berries on hawthorn, dog rose and holly



☐ bluebells

bell-shaped flowers which can be found on the woodland floor



☐ caterpillars

big ones, fat ones, small ones and hairy ones!



☐ webs

spider webs glistening with morning dew



☐ mushrooms

can you find a mushroom that has been nibbled?



☐ catkins

hazel catkins in February

P	I	E	L	B	L	U	E	B	E	L	L	E	E	F
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Find

Sycamore	Oak	Fungi	Pine	Cobbles	Butterfly
Ivy	Leaf	Squirrel	Deer	Bluebell	Bee
Nest	Tree	Acorn	Sparrow	Bird	Lake
Feather		Crow	Hazel	Yew	Alder
					Birch