

Is it a Quarry ? Is it a Nature Reserve ? - It might be a Golf Course !

Halfway between Glasgow and Edinburgh, just off the M8 Motorway United Fireclay Products (UFP) operated a series of sites in the Central Region of Scotland. This area is well renowned for its coal mining, digging in geological deposits laid down some 500 million years ago - and where you find coal you will usually find clay.

UFP operated a 200 hectare quarry near to Armadale in West Lothian from 1987 to 1999 and supplied clays to its sister brickworks nearby. During this time some 250,000 tonnes of clay and 700,000 tonnes of coal were extracted from the site resulting in moving some 20 million tonnes of overburden.

Driving past a field of contented grazing sheep it is hard to believe that they are standing on what was a 40 metre deep hole, but the progressive programme of restoration throughout the phased extraction has allowed the development of a sympathetic and regenerated landscape. This has changed an unmanaged, partly industrial degraded landform into a visually acceptable greenscape.



Two views of the same area taken from different angles.

Left is shown part of the quarry in full operational activity, and right the same area infilled and showing the construction of an island wildlife sanctuary.

The planned replacement of overburden, subsoil and topsoil that was removed and stockpiled during the working life of the site has allowed the landscape to be re-contoured within a proposed strategic plan envisaged many years ago. There were no materials imported onto the site, the results have been achieved solely from those at hand.

Restoration took a number of forms including supplementing existing woodland, planting of new structured woodlands, tree belts, hedgerows, wetlands, ponds and nature conservation areas.

External bodies such as Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT), Central Scotland Countryside Trust (CSCT) along with the local Planning Department were continuously involved with UFP in an informal working party.

The result of these meetings (which were held about four times per year) was to dramatically enhance what could have been a simple "return to agricultural use" plan into a sophisticated nature reserve for use by the community at large and to form a "green lung" between three towns.



Left is shown the same island with the pond slowly filling with drainage water

Twelve kilometres of footpaths will have been created allowing access to the towns. In addition these are also linked to an extensive cycle track. This countryside access runs through and around a replication of a traditional Scottish woodland containing over 100,000 trees comprising Hawthorn, Elder, Oak and Pine as well as other species planted during the ongoing restoration.

Boghead Burn bisects this extensive site and constitutes the primary (seasonal) water supply. To create additional water features drainage had to be redirected. The scheme devised by the working group required over one million metres of drainage pipe to be installed so that the site drainage could be channelled into specific areas which then resulted in:

- Over four hectares of a raised bog to encourage species to return
- Over three and a half hectares of wetland

Three new ponds where emergent plants were introduced along with Bullrushes which are a rare and protected species. These ponds are up to six metres deep with a variety of depths, textures and features to suit the requirements of a variety of flora and fauna with all but one containing an island where birds can nest in isolation from predators.

One of these ponds and the adjacent land is to be adopted by the Scottish Wildlife Trust CSCT as a nature reserve and another is to be adopted by a local Primary School - underlining the involvement of the community which consistently runs throughout this scheme.

During the consolidation of the heavy building materials industry which has progressed steadily throughout the 1990's UFP passed seamlessly from the hands of Steetley to Redland and finally to Ibstock. The restoration continued uninterrupted thanks to the endeavours of Alex Muirhead who joined UFP when the initial phase was completed in the earlier stages.

At the present time proposals have been discussed to look at integrating a contemporary country house estate into the area to guarantee that the site is permanently managed as an estate with its woodlands, paths and ponds. An alternative is to add a Golf Course as a complimentary feature.



Nick Faldo (of Ryder Cup fame) as well as other well known designers have visited the site to participate in the design for the course.

This long term extraction site has now left a consolidated core of countryside that enhances and enriches the area with wildlife habitats, wetlands and ponds, bogs, nature reserves and woodlands for all to enjoy. It is an example to all of what can be achieved where parties work together with a common aim - well done.