



West Stormont Woodland Group

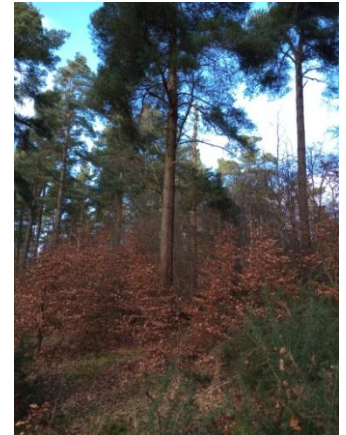
WORKING WITH LOCAL PEOPLE TO BRING
TAYMOUNT & FIVE MILE WOODS INTO
COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

“A February Morning at Five Mile Wood” by Margaret Lear

Dreich doesn't begin to cover it. Weeks of rain, sleet or snow, and the wood is wet, dank, chilly. One storm has passed, another is forecast, and a group of multi-stemmed birches, green with lichen and algae, droop and wait despondently.

I take the rutted cycling path that skirts the woodland edge. Under the tall, fiendishly straight Scots Pines, many scattered beech saplings nestle in their winter boleros of retained leaves. Beech mast is everywhere, but I do not see the older tree from which it has fallen. Beech seedlings tend not to come up near a parent tree, but somewhere there must be a Mother.

Beeches in winter boleros



Snow lingers crystalline along the clay-bottomed ditches where black, cold water lurks and trickles. There's a pond under the pines which so looks like it was formed by an explosion I call it the bomb crater. No signs of frog spawn yet. Several tracks and paths meander where animals come down to drink. Duckweed covers a third of the surface; in the increasing rain thousands of ripples intersect and make diffraction patterns over the other two thirds.

Birds – except for a robin – are silent and glum. A flock of pigeons clatters off towards the field; freshly ploughed, it offers them nothing but the stones that lie heaped in the field corner. How many decades or centuries of cultivation have contributed to this pile? This side of the fence, someone a long time ago arranged stones round a favourite tree, where they remain, moss-covered and half-buried. Larger rocks with wavy patterns etched onto their surface erupt in groups from the forest floor, scarcely distinguishable from the stumps of felled trees. Moss, lichens, algae democratically envelop all.



Blackening Russula

There are charred-looking remains of mushrooms by the path. I think they were Blackening Russulas, an abundance of them. I follow their orbital trail and suddenly find myself under a towering old beech tree, with many spreading branches and a hollowing trunk that makes a chimney of dead wood and fungal rots.

Swings hang from two branches; insects and other invertebrates burrow into the soft core of the tree and make their homes. The woodpecker will soon come calling for her dinner, other birds will nest and shout from the canopy. I have found the Mother of Beeches, and of much else besides.

Mother of Beeches

