

Welcome to **Olav's Wood**

**South Ronaldsay,
Orkney, Scotland**

Olav's Wood is a magical place: A mixed woodland with areas of dense forest, a haven for wildlife, through which runs an attractive burn with cascades and pools, all set in the almost treeless landscape of one of Orkney's islands.



Visitors are welcome to explore the woodland. The website includes a guided walk, details of flora and fauna, maps, contacts and the history of the woodland.

www.olavswood.org.uk

Trees in Orkney

The landscape of Orkney, off the north coast of Scotland, is now mainly treeless. However, this was not always so and evidence suggests that early man in Orkney was at least partly responsible for the removal of the tree cover (climate change may be another factor). Remains of “natural” woodland in Orkney, such as that around Berriedale on Hoy, are now rare.

It is sometimes said that present conditions in Orkney make it almost impossible for trees to grow, except in very sheltered areas. It is certainly difficult to establish new woodland, and young trees need careful attention if they are to thrive. The experience is that losses may be high and it is difficult to predict which species will survive.

The woodland

Olav’s Wood has been established over many years, starting in the 1970s. Major planting began in the 1980s and it continues to be developed today. The woodland is approx. 4.5 acres (1.8 hectares) in area and runs down a hillside towards Windwick, alongside an attractive burn, Oback Burn.

Trees and shrubs from many parts of the world have been successfully established here and the wood now forms dense forest in some places and more open woodland elsewhere. For some of the exotics, this may be the northernmost place where they grow in the British Isles, and possibly elsewhere, given the latitude 58 deg 45 N, making this woodland of both horticultural and wildlife interest.

Helen and Stephen Manson of Cellardyke and Olav Dennison first established the woodland and have been primarily responsible for its development and maintenance. The woodland is a testimony to these people and to others who have contributed to the development of the woodland.

Location

Location: Olav's Wood, Cellardyke, South Ronaldsay, Orkney, KW17 2RN. OS Grid reference: ND449869. Travelling on the A961 (the main road from Burwick to St. Margaret's Hope in South Ronaldsay), look for the turn-off to Windwick (an attractive bay), and follow the Windwick road until you see the woodland on the right.

There is a small car-park (between Masseter and Linklater). Please use this considerately – leaving space for other vehicles and also leaving the roadway entirely clear. The road is used by wide farm vehicles.

Warning

The woodland is on private land and is not a public utility. Access is not easy and can be dangerous. Paths are uneven and steep in places and can be very slippery. There are unfenced steep banks and areas of open water. Because of these dangers, it is not a suitable area for unsupervised children, and adults need to take great care.

Please remember to take your litter with you and, if you are walking your dog, please behave responsibly and do not allow dogs to foul the woodland.

A Guided Walk

Entrance: Enter by the farm-gate where there is a sign for Olav's Wood. To your right is Oback burn.

The upper woodland: In front of you is the youngest part of the woodland where trees are still developing. Notice the protection for young trees at ground level to keep coarse grasses at bay - these can outcompete young saplings, and also wind protection for the trees: salt-laden winds are a constant factor in Orkney.

This topmost area of the woodland is part of the field called Lower Hamisquay - one of the many Old Norse names surviving in Orkney. Hamisquay possibly derives from the Old Norse personal name *Hamie* and *kvi* (an enclosure).

The woodland here is a mix of deciduous trees (those that lose their leaves in the winter) and evergreens. The two commonest evergreens in this area are both conifers - trees with needle-like leaves and cones (like Christmas trees). They are spruce (mainly Sitka Spruce) - narrow branches and short leaves, and Lodgepole Pine - longer leaves bound in pairs. Notice the cones on the pines - even on young trees. Both species are from North America. These evergreens provide shelter for other trees, especially shelter from winter winds. Another conifer planted here is the European Larch. Whilst most conifers are evergreen, larches are deciduous. Amongst many other trees planted in this area are some young Monkey Puzzles trees from the Andes in Chile. These are evergreen and have very prickly leaves on horizontal branches.

There is a network of named paths for you to explore. The paths eventually converge south-easterly by the burn where the woodland is at its narrowest. Here, on the left is mixed woodland including alder, birch and sycamore, on the right is a rose hedge (*Rosa rugosa*) - very prickly and supporting several species of lichen.

Helen's Wood: Cross over the burn at the bridge and, with the burn on the left, turn right and then left entering the densest part of the forest by Olav's Wynd. The forest consists mainly of mature spruce trees. You can explore the depths of the forest by following the "Maze", ignoring the Peedie Wynd which takes you directly to the burn. Teapots used to hang in the trees here to serve as bird nesting sites, but they have now been removed. At least two teapots were occupied in 2012. The forest also serves as a bird ringing station throughout the year but especially in the migration seasons when many interesting and often unusual birds arrive in Orkney. In autumn, look out for various fungi (toadstools) in the forest.

Views: On the far side of the forest, there are magnificent views eastwards towards the bay of Windwick and the headland at Halcro, and southwards towards the Pentland Firth, the Skerries and Scotland.

The burn: To exit the forest, walk downhill to the burn. You may walk alongside the burn, which consists of pools and cascades, or cross over the burn by the dam or bridges. The burn flows from here into a steep-sided gorge. Do take care - watch you don't get too close to the edge. It can be slippery here. The sides of the gorge are clothed with Great Woodrush and ferns, including some fine specimens of Hard Fern.

Burnside woodland: The woodland near the burn is more open and consists mainly of shrubs and small trees, including Rhododendron, Yew, *Crinodendron hookerianum* (the Chilean Red Lantern Tree), *Olearia* (two species of evergreen "Daisy

Bushes” from the Antipodes), bamboo, Flowering Currant, *Hebe* and *Hypericum*. Of note are the Southern Beeches (*Nothofagus*). These are related to our beech trees, but come from the southern hemisphere. There are several species here, some deciduous others evergreen, but all have small leaves and branches arranged in a herringbone pattern. Look out also for Korean Fir, a beautiful conifer with blue-green foliage and large upright cones.

Hestily: The land on the opposite side of the burn from the forest is part of Hestily - another Norse name, possibly from *hestr* (horse) and *hlif* (shelter).

Climbing the hill on this side of the burn brings you to an open area of fields and some heathland with typical heathland plants such as Heather, Bell Heather and Crowberry.

Return: To return to the entrance gate, walk alongside the burn, up into the forest by several paths and then towards the forest entrance at Olav’s Wynd. Follow the burn into the upper area. Keeping alongside the burn will bring you back to the entrance.

More information

An illustrated description of the woodland, including its history, trees, plants and wildlife, maps, contacts and other information can be found at:

www.olavswood.org.uk