

Trees for all seasons

Guide to the Forest of Falkland Tree Trail

If you've always wanted to be able to identify a few common trees, this easy trail will get you started. Try it at any time of year - in winter when most trees lose their leaves, you can still tell them apart using leaf buds, different for every species.

Start at the information board by the Stables Car Park.

There's over 400 hectares of woodland on Falkland Estate, including most of Scotland's native and introduced tree species. You can see many of them on this short stroll along mainly level paths (there's one steep slope near the start, between 3 and 4). There are several benches if you need a rest or fancy a picnic along the way.

1. You are standing in the **lime** avenue. These trees have been pollarded - the branches pruned back to prolong the tree's life. These trees were planted in the 19th century as part of the Designed Landscape around the House of Falkland, which you can see across the parkland to your left.

Lime trees are often used for avenues leading to big houses and castles in Scotland. Lime is native to Scotland - it got here by itself after the last ice age around 10,000 years ago, rather than having been introduced by people. The big heart-shaped leaves are lovely with the sun shining through. In spring, the nectar-rich flowers provide important food for bees and other insects. In Europe lime (also known as linden) flowers are drunk as tea.

Just beyond the information board, take the path to the right that goes between beech hedges

2. **Beech hedge.** In autumn the leaves on young beech turn golden and stay on the branches through the winter, only dropping off when the bright green new leaves emerge in springtime, turning dark glossy

green over the summer. So beech hedges offer good shelter for nesting birds.

3. Two magnificent old **horse chestnut** trees grow one on either side of the path. This is the conker tree most of us seek out in childhood.

Conkers do look like large chestnuts, but they're not edible to humans, and don't do horses any good either despite their name! Horse chestnut, native to southern Europe, was probably introduced to Britain by the Romans nearly 2000 years ago. It's now naturalised in Scotland, which means it regenerates freely without needing any help from people.

4. There's a young **oak** behind the bench. Oak is not only one of the most valuable timber trees in Scotland, but this native species also provides a home and food for many different kinds of wildlife.

Oak trees can live hundreds of years and grow into weird and wonderful gnarled shapes. Sadly all of Falkland's really old trees were felled during various wars, mainly to build ships. Most of these oak trees will be felled for timber to make fine furniture and strong, long-lasting buildings, but we'll leave some to grow really old for future generations - of people and wildlife! - to enjoy.

Now follow the path going left

5. This **yew** tree is the first conifer we have seen on this walk. (The other trees so far have been broadleaves - deciduous trees - that shed their leaves in winter.)

Most conifers are evergreens, with needles instead of leaves - but they don't all produce cones and they don't all keep their needles through the winter! Yew is even longer lived than oak - Scotland's oldest yew growing in Perthshire is thought to be at least 2000 years old. Yew wood is very flexible and was the best wood to make longbows for archers. Although it is called a conifer, instead of cones yew trees produce bright red fruits containing a poisonous seed. However birds can eat the fruit without harming themselves, because the seed simply passes right through their guts.

There's a big **rowan** (or **mountain ash**) beside the yew.

Rowan produces bright red berries, edible to humans but quite bitter so usually made into a savoury jelly, traditionally eaten with venison. In Scottish folklore rowan is the most magical tree of all, perhaps because the red berries are the

colour of blood, the life-force. Scots used to plant a rowan tree by the door to protect their house from bad spells.

6. **Lawson's cypress** is commonly planted as a garden hedge because it grows very fast. Like other members of the cypress family, it has scales instead of needles.

This tree could grow huge - 70m tall and 2m wide. It's native to Oregon in America but named for the collectors working for Lawsons in Edinburgh who first brought it to the UK. The straight grain makes the wood good for arrow shafts. In Japan it's used for coffins and building temples and shrines.

7. **Sycamore** is a type of maple. The large 5-pointed leaves have toothed edges, often with black 'tar spots' caused by a harmless fungus.

The seeds are in pairs with wings and glide away from the parent tree with a helicopter motion - a good example of seed dispersal by wind. Native to central Europe, sycamores were planted here from the 1600s. They can live 300 years and grow up to 35m tall. The white silky wood is used for fine furniture and violins. Sometimes a tree will produce wood with a highly prized ripple effect.

Growing beneath the sycamore is **holly**. It has dark green curly leaves with sharp points and a shiny waxy coating on top.

Holly is another evergreen that's native to Scotland and common in woodland. It grows into dense bushes or small trees, good cover for nesting birds who also eat the red berries. It is used as Christmas decoration as well as being a symbol of long life. The heavy white wood is often used in the making of white chess pieces.

8. **Ash** has a grand scientific name: *Fraxinus* (spear) *excelsior* (taller) relating to the use of this large tree which grows 30 to 40m high.

Young shoots of ash grow straight and tall, ideal for making spears, staffs and walking sticks. The black winter buds on the twigs look like spearheads too. Ash has long been believed to have magical properties and was referred to as the 'Tree of Life' by Vikings, and 'Venus of the Woods' in Britain. The seeds hang from the twigs in bunches called keys. It is a valuable woodland tree as it does not shade out the other ground flowers preventing their growth.

9. This evergreen is **box**; with its small rounded leathery leaves, it's commonly used in garden hedging.

Box grows into a dense shrub when clipped and can be sculpted into shapes (topiary). Occasionally it grows into a small tree up to 9m tall, which produces a very hard, heavy wood used in making clarinets.

10. These **oaks** are probably around 130 years old; that's still young for an oak! Old trees like these are valuable to many other kinds of wildlife for food and shelter.

Oak's egg-and-cup like acorns are eaten by squirrels and birds, and the deeply-lobed leaves provide food for many insects. Old oaks are a symbol of strength and endurance, and the Celts believed it was the 'tree of doors', the site of portals to other worlds. It was also sacred tree to the gods Thor and Zeus. Oak is so deeply respected in many cultures it has been adopted as the national tree in several countries.

Look under the big yew tree on the right. Find a short thick stick and make some woodland music!

11. You are now walking through a young **larch** plantation with other species mixed in, including birch, cherry and beech.

Larch is a conifer but not evergreen - it sheds its whorls of needles in autumn covering the ground in a golden yellow carpet - our only deciduous conifer tree. Larch can grow very tall, up to 50m. The cones are quite small (4cm). Larch was brought here from central Europe, Tibet and Japan. It's widely planted in Scotland because it grows fast, producing tough rot-resistant timber to build yachts and housing - and the poles used in the Scottish game of tossing the caber.

A mole's eye view: As you walk along this section, think about the fact that half the body of a tree may be underground; the shape of the roots is often like a mirror image of the branches above.

12. This large **Sitka spruce** has flattened, 2.5cm long needles, stiff and sharply pointed. They are shiny blue green on top with two distinctive blue grey lines underneath.

On the north west coast of the USA where Sitka spruce comes from, they can reach 700 years old and over 90m tall. The long (8 cm) cones have wavy edges on each of the scales; they're bright green before ripening and turning pale yellow

brown. Sitka spruce is widely grown in Scotland for its light, strong timber.

13. This big **copper beech** has dark purple leaves in summer. This is one of the biggest trees in the Forest of Falkland.

Beech is very common in Scotland and naturalised, but only native to the UK in the far south of England. It grows up to 49m tall and was planted for landscape value on many parks and estates. On older trees only the lower (younger) branches keep winter foliage. The hairy four-lobed nut cases contain triangular shaped seeds - food for squirrels and badgers.

14. This tree is about as old and big as **birch** can get and may be near the end of its life, but dead standing trees soon become homes for fungi, insects and woodpeckers.

The bark of silver birch is very distinctive: papery and white with black vertical lines and diamond patches in places. Birch leaves are small, triangular and toothed. The catkins produce tiny winged seeds which the wind blows to new areas. In this way silver birch can colonise bare ground - a 'pioneer' species.

15. Remember the **horse chestnut** (conker) trees at the start of the trail (3)? Stop here to look at the twigs of this big old individual and see the leaf scars that look rather like horseshoes! In winter, feel the big leaf buds - they're sticky with sap the tree produces to protect the buds from frost and insect damage.

16. As you walk through this plantation of young **larch** and other trees, test your new tree identification skills by looking for **lime, yew, horse chestnut, oak** and **beech**.

Some of these trees will be felled when they're bigger for timber to make buildings, furniture and fine craft items, but others will be left to grow into big, beautiful old trees for everyone to enjoy - people and wildlife!

When you reach the track where you see the Pillars sign on a rock, turn left over the bridge.

17. These **Cappadocian maples** on either side between the bridge and road have leaves similar to sycamore. This species, native to Asia and Turkey, is quite widely planted in the UK as an ornamental tree.

Maple leaves turn gloriously golden in the autumn before dropping off suddenly. The seeds are in winged pairs called a samara - or whirlybird, helicopter or spinning Jenny!

Turn left along the estate road

18. These young **Norway spruce** could grow up to 1m each year and reach to 55m tall. They are native to colder northern Europe and the Alps where they form large evergreen forests.

Norway spruce is commonly planted in Scotland. The wood is used for construction and paper. The big (up to 17cm long) cones on mature trees are a valuable food source for squirrels; they gnaw off the scales to get at the seeds. Look on the ground for cones they've stripped. Norway Spruce is often used as a Christmas tree.

As you return to the car park, look across the parkland on your right. If you have time, take a wander through this field (taking care not to disturb any sheep that may be grazing, especially if you have a dog with you). There are many fine old trees in this Designed Landscape, some of which are around 200 years old.

We hope you have enjoyed this tree trail. If you have any comments or suggestions, please let us know.



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For details of all the exciting events and volunteering opportunities in the Forest of Falkland, and to download this and the Squirrel Trail: www.centreforstewardship.org.uk