

Sheep grazing on Ayrshire's Far Ralia estate - the Forestry Grants farce and woodland carbon bubble

Description



One of two small flocks of sheep grazing by the Allt Guibhseachain, Far Ralia, 14th November. Photo credit Dave Morris

One wonders how much further the price of the Ayrshire Property Income Trust (APIT) will drop from the current asking price of offers over £6.9m once prospective buyers become aware sheep are grazing among the newly created native woodland plantation at Far Ralia ([see here](#))?



Deciduous trees planted on boggy ground near the access road to Far Ralia January 2024

As Drennan Watson has observed, once planted trees start to emerge from their plastic tree shelters they are at a perfect height for herbivores to graze without having to bend their necks too far!



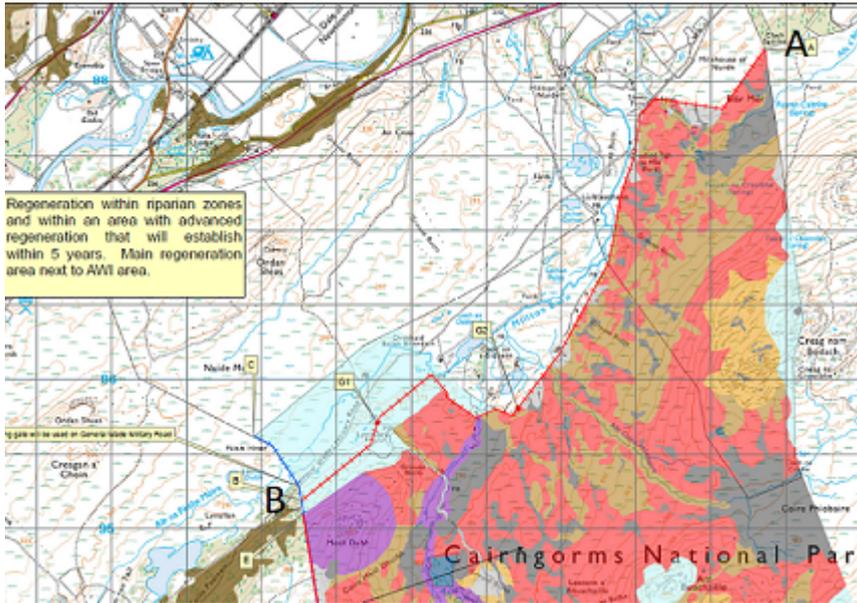
A rowan on steroids at Far Ralia July 2025

One suspects the sheep spotted by Dave Morris last week will have taken advantage of the bounty. Nursery grown trees are usually far more nutritious and far more attractive to grazing animals because they have been boosted with fertiliser. And if the saplings have not yet emerged from the tubes, as in the second photo, and the sheep are particularly hungry many have learned to knock over the tree shelters to eat what is inside.



If you see trees like this which have been uprooted on native planting schemes, one explanation is they have been knocked over, accidentally or deliberately, by herbivores. Photo July 2025.

Sheep, like deer, pose a serious threat to both native woodland and commercial forestry schemes. In Scotland, unlike European countries ([see here](#)), instead of requiring farmers to control their sheep government forks out large amounts of public money to “protect” newly planted trees. Although the owners of the Ralia Estate ([see here](#)) had benefited to the tune of £7.5m by selling part of their estate to Ayr for “nature restoration” purposes, there was no requirement on them to control the sheep on the land they retained.



The new stock fence between Ralia and Far Ralia runs from A to B. You can just see the main gate on the access track, G1, and a second gate, G2.

Hence, it was decided to erect a new stock fence, over 5km long, along the boundary between the two estates as set out in Scottish Forestry's contract with APIT:

The area identified for planting has a boundary of approximately 19.2km with its neighbours. The site will be protected by using a deer fence (2595m) along the boundary with Phonies Estate. With a stock fence (5265m) being used along the Ralia Estate boundary. The deer fence will not be marked with regards to Black Grouse as the Lek is over 2km away from the fence on site. No fencing will occur along the wildland boundary, this will leave an open boundary of approximately 8720m. A stock fence will be erected along the boundary with Ralia Estate, due to sheep farming on Ralia (Operational Plan)

Scottish Forestry agreed to pay for this, as part of their £2,523,301.96 grant to APIT, as follows:

Standard Cost Capital Items							
Option Code: FGS081.04 Option Name: Woodland Creation - Native Scots Pine							
Capital Item	Location Code	LPID	Map letter	Claim Year	Quantity	Unit Of Measure	Maximum Value
Enhancing/modifying a stock fence	79/441/0179	NN/73485/93892	A - B	2023	5265	MTR	10530.00
Enhancing/modifying deer fence - high cost	79/441/0179	NN/73485/93892	C - D	2023	2595	MTR	11625.60
Gate for stock fence	79/441/0179	NN/73485/93892	G1	2023	1	UNITS	136.00
Gate for stock fence	79/441/0179	NN/73485/93892	G2	2023	1	UNITS	136.00
Initial Planting - Native Scots Pine	79/441/0179	NN/73485/93892	1	2023	69.96	HA	131817.19
Initial Planting - Native Scots Pine	79/441/0179	NN/74420/97377	1	2023	7.49	HA	14112.50
Initial Planting - Native Scots Pine	79/441/0179	NN/73485/93892	2	2023	139.99	HA	263766.27
Rabbit proofing of existing or new stock/deer fence	79/441/0179	NN/73485/93892	E - F	2023	1940	MTR	3104.00
Stock Fence	79/441/0179	NN/73485/93892	A - B	2023	5265	MTR	23166.00
Vole Guard	79/441/0179	NN/73485/93892	1	2023	26863	UNITS	5103.97
Vole Guard	79/441/0179	NN/74420/97377	1	2023	2877	UNITS	546.63
Vole Guard	79/441/0179	NN/73485/93892	2	2023	53756	UNITS	10213.64
Deer fence (high cost)	79/441/0179	NN/73485/93892	C - D	2023	2595	MTR	25690.50

Extract from Scottish Forestry's contract with APIT obtained through a FOI request. It would be in the public interest if ALL Scottish Forestry's contracts were published as a matter of course.

While only a small proportion of the total, the c£40,000 of public money spent on the stock fence and gates effectively enabled the Ralia Estate to continue grazing sheep as it wished (with no consideration given to the important wader habitats along the Milton Burn) while protecting the trees planted for Abridn by Akre Trees (which is owned by another member of the family who own Ralia).



View of part of the new stock fence from the access track to Far Ralia January 2024

While sheep are surprisingly good at jumping stock fences and an undulating fence like this may have presented opportunities for doing so, in this case they probably just walked through an open gate and along the access track.



Approaching the gate on the main access track January 2024 after the first trees had been planted.

It just needs one person to leave a gate open and no-one employed on the ground to manage the land for significant damage to trees, again paid for by public money, to follow. As far as I am aware the only local jobs APIT created at Far Ralia was to build the new bothy further up the access track â?? like BrewDog at Kinrara they employed no permanent foresters to care for the trees or the land more generally.



Former gate through deer fence by the footbridge over the Milton Burn across from the Luibleathain bothy

Eagle eyed readers may have noted from the map above that Scottish Forestry and ABRDN only allowed for two gates in over 5km of stock and deer fence. Part of the new stock fence was erected alongside an old unmarked deer fence, a considerable hazard for birds, and there was no requirement from Scottish Forestry either to remove that fence or to protect existing access points. Hence why the stock fence now runs in front of the gate removing a former access point to the moorland.

I will report the fence to the Cairngorms National Park Authority as an obstruction to access rights and the sheep to Scottish Forestry. Both are liabilities APIT needs to address before selling the land. There is a strong case now for Scottish Forestry reclaiming the £40k it awarded APIT for the stock fence as a total waste of public money. There is, however, an even stronger case for reforming the rural payments system so that farmers who fail to control their sheep or other livestock lose all eligibility for public funding.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. access rights
2. CNPA
3. forestry
4. landed estates
5. scottish forestry
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