

# Discover Culag Woods

## Part of the West Coast IPA

### Scotland's magical Celtic Rainforest meets the sea

Perched on the shores of Loch Inver, this woodland walk follows a mix of broad-leaved and coniferous woodland down to coastal bays. This Atlantic woodland is home to a rich diversity of unique small plants that cover branches, trees and boulders. It is these moss, liverwort and lichen species that make the West Coast IPA one of the best places in Scotland for wild plants.

### Where to start

Start from the 'Woodside' car park, found at the southern end of Lochinver (grid reference NC093215).

### Distance

2-mile circular walk, allow 1–2 hours.

### Walk grade

This is a moderate circular walk on narrow gravel paths with steep sections of rocky steps, which may become muddy in places. Sturdy footwear is essential.

### Refreshments

Lochinver is the nearest village for cafes and restaurants.

### WC

The nearest public lavatories are in Lochinver village.



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(*Lobaria pulmonaria*) ©Polly Phillpot

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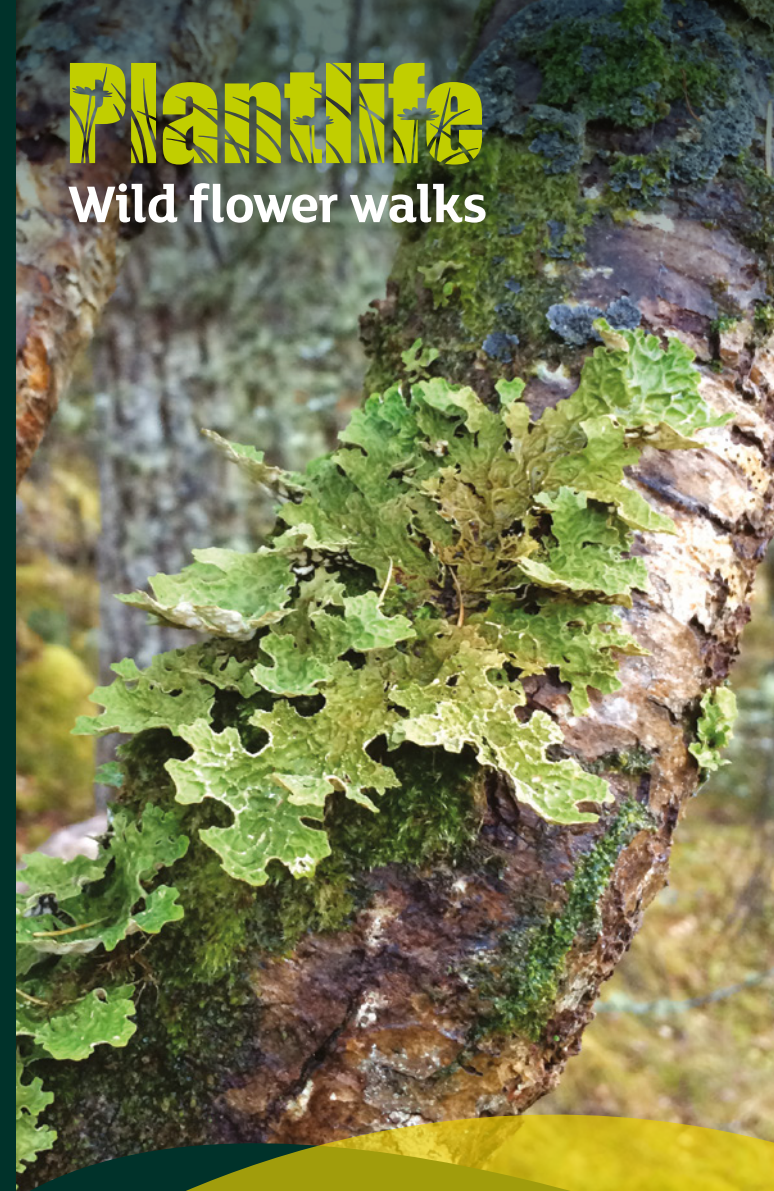
### Thank you

Culag Woods are managed by the Culag Community Woodland Trust (CCWT) and we would like to thank them for their advice and support in producing this guide. The trust was formed in 1995 to manage Culag Woods under a 50-year lease from the owners, Assynt Estates and Highland Council. Funding for this leaflet was provided by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Scottish Natural Heritage.



# Plantlife

## Wild flower walks



## The wild plants of Culag Woods

A 2-mile circular walk in Celtic Rainforest, one of the best places in Scotland for wild plants



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### Directions

- 1 From 'Woodside' car park, head along the path and through the gate, taking the gravel path on your right. Once at the T-junction, turn left heading along the flat path. Look for **foxgloves** here in the summer months.
- 2 Continue, passing a boardwalk off to your left, but keep to the path bearing right. The next junction is at the top of the brow. If feeling energetic, take the right-hand 'View point' path. This path climbs, skirting a rock outcrop. Look at the mosses festooning the boulders here. As the path continues upwards, the trees open out and the path flattens. On your right, there is a large exposed rock face. Where this is closest to the path, a closer inspection at waist level will reveal **Wilson's filmy fern** among the mosses.
- 3 The path climbs again, stone steps taking you to the stunning viewpoint. On a good day, you will see Suilven. Retrace your steps back down to the path junction, turning right, back onto the main path heading downhill. At the bottom, there is a small boardwalk out to the bog on the left-hand side. Look for **bogbean** during early summer, but take care as the boardwalk can be slippery in wet weather.
- 4 Back at the main path continue, passing the play area on your right. At the path junction, look at the small, mossy boulder to your right which is home to **slender mouse-tail** moss.
- 5 Taking the left-hand path, follow this round the corner to the right, as it becomes 'White Shore' path. Reaching the brow of the hill, stay on this path bearing left downhill to the shore. Follow the path down to a pebbly beach with a lovely waterfall behind. Check out the foreshore for seaweeds that have come up on the tide. Can you find the aptly named **bladderwrack**?
- 6 Retracing your steps back uphill, take 'Billy's' path on the left, at the brow of the hill. This undulating path is rougher under foot. Just before a steep descending staircase, find the oak trees to the right of the path by the boulder bank. Look at their trunks and find a patchwork of green and grey lichens, including **tree lungwort** and **green satin lichen**.



- 7 At the bottom of the staircase is a crossroads leading to more rough tracks. However, turn right and ascend the 'Higgledy Piggledy' path. This gravel path has a burn flowing down its left-hand side. Look for **honeysuckle**, weaving through undergrowth and young birches.
- 8 The 'Higgledy Piggledy' path ends at a T-junction. Look ahead here to the rock face and the Sutherland memorial to the Earl of Sutherland who planted the wood in 1847. Take the left path downhill. This gradually climbs and opens out where mossy boulders on your right also include **hard fern**.
- 9 Continue up the hill onto a larger forest track. Do not turn left here. At the top of the hill, go past the gate with good views down the track towards Lochinver village. Shortly after this, turn onto a small right-hand path flanked by gorse and birch. Can you find white **angel's wings fungus** growing here?
- 10 The path leads to another car park, with a shelter and sawmill. Turn right, walking along the flat forest track with bracken, birch and gorse. Soon you come to the road. Here, cross over to the footpath and if time allows, walk downhill to view the river. Otherwise, turn right and head uphill. Opposite the school, look for a gate on the right-hand side, taking you back into the wood via 'School' path. This path has lots of **hazel** close to the start. The path eventually turns right and up a stone staircase. Continue as the path flattens out, then heads



uphill into an area of Scots pine, eventually making a sharp descent with power lines passing overhead.

- 11 At the bottom of the hill, look out for the elusive **ghillie dhu**, who may be found lurking among moss-laden tree roots. Continue, by turning left and retracing your steps back to the car park.

### Important Plant Areas (IPAs)

Culag Woods form part of the West Coast IPA, which is internationally important for its lichens and bryophyte communities. This is one of the 47 IPAs in Scotland. IPAs are internationally recognised hotspots for wild plants and lichens. For more information and to discover other IPAs to visit, go to [www.plantlife.org.uk/scotland](http://www.plantlife.org.uk/scotland)



# Plants of Culag Woods

Part of the West Coast IPA, this Atlantic woodland is a good example of Celtic Rainforest and internationally important for wild plants and fungi. It includes:

## **Foxglove** *Digitalis purpurea*

The Latin *Digitalis* means 'finger-like', so it is not surprising that popular names for foxglove include 'fairy fingers' and 'fairy gloves'. The spots on the petals are more than decoration – they actually help guide bees into the flower for pollination.



c. 3 x actual size

## **Wilson's filmy fern** *Hymenophyllum wilsonii*

Filmy ferns are a real gem of the Celtic Rainforest. So diminutive, they are often overlooked and mistaken for bryophytes (mosses and liverworts). But take a close look and you will find a perfect translucent fern in miniature. Two species are resident in our Scottish rainforests. Wilson's filmy fern is most easily recognised by its veins reaching right to the ends of the fronds.



## **Bogbean** *Menyanthes trifoliata*

An attractive floating aquatic plant that gets its common and Latin names from the three upright, oval-shaped leaflets ('trifoliate') and the green bean-like fruits that it produces. The pink-white flowers that form branching spikes appear between May and June.

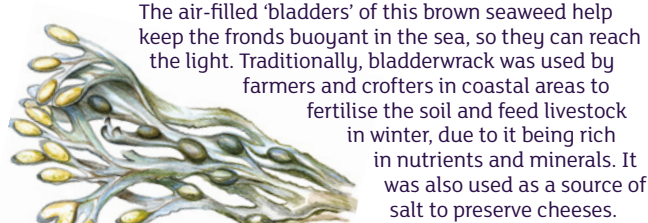
## **Slender mouse-tail moss** *Isoetecium myosuroides*

This moss is characteristic of the Celtic Rainforest and is found mainly on tree trunks and boulders, forming dense mats. On closer inspection, you'll see its tree-like growth form, unbranched near its base and becoming branched above. Look for the orange/brown capsules that grow on long stalks and which release spores.



c. 2 x actual size

## **Bladderwrack** *Fucus vesiculosus*

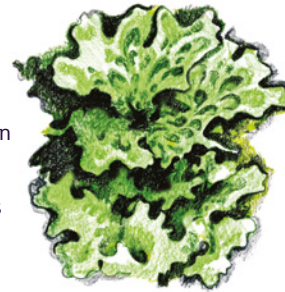


c. 4 x smaller than actual size

The air-filled 'bladders' of this brown seaweed help keep the fronds buoyant in the sea, so they can reach the light. Traditionally, bladderwrack was used by farmers and crofters in coastal areas to fertilise the soil and feed livestock in winter, due to it being rich in nutrients and minerals. It was also used as a source of salt to preserve cheeses.

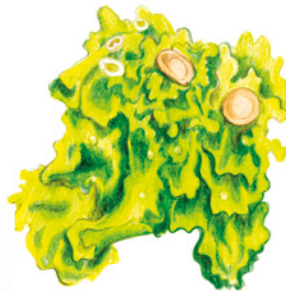
## **Tree lungwort** *Lobaria pulmonaria*

Lichens are a combination of a fungus and a photosynthetic partner, normally an alga. This large, 'leafy' lichen resembles green lungs, hence its common name, and was used to cure respiratory diseases in medieval times. This lichen will look a brownish-green in drier conditions.



c. 4 x smaller than actual size

## **Green satin lichen** *Lobaria virens*



c. actual size

This lichen is similar to tree lungwort, but it is a much brighter green in wet conditions, becoming brownish-green when dry. It also has smaller lobes ('leaves') which are more closely attached to the tree trunk than that of tree lungwort. Look out for its round orange fruits. These are only occasionally found on tree lungwort, but are common on this lichen.

## **Honeysuckle** *Lonicera periclymenum*

When in flower, this plant is highly perfumed with trumpet-shaped flowers from June to August, and is a great source of nectar for invertebrates. In Scotland, this plant was traditionally twisted into magical wreaths to ward off evil spirits and cure people who were ill.



## **Hard fern** *Blechnum spicant*

This small, leathery fern has two types of leaves or fronds. The fertile fronds stick up straight and are long and narrow with spores on the back of them. The sterile fronds, without spores, arch outwards. The fronds are rigid to the touch, hence the name.

## **Angel's wings fungus** *Pleurocybella porrigens*

It's easy to see how this fungus got its name, with its white, bracket-like 'wings' and delicate white-to-cream gills underneath. It grows on decaying conifer wood during the autumn months and is found clustered in groups. It is inedible.



c. 3 x smaller than actual size

## **Common hazel** *Corylus avellana*

Hazel has great significance in Celtic mythology, being known as a giver of knowledge. In Highland rituals, it was believed that hazelnuts put on the fire could provide answers to important questions by the way they burned or jumped. Hazel also has many practical uses, including the hazelnuts being ground and used as a source of flour for bread.



## **Ghillie dhu**

A forest sprite restricted to the west coast forests of Scotland, which they protect fiercely. Ranging in size from 7 inches upwards, they are well-camouflaged with their clothes of leaves and moss. Look out for them hiding in mossy nooks and crannies. They move around a lot, so we have not been able to pinpoint them on the map!

