

TIMBER RIDES FROM THE ISLES

An innovative contract between Forest Enterprise and sawmillers John Gordon & Ltd of Nairn will see around 75000 tonnes of previously inaccessible timber being harvested from remote west Highland forests. Once again, sea transport provides the answer for moving logs to market from islands and difficult coastal locations.

Valued at over £1.5m, the contract involves extraction from forests in Skye and Wester Ross with the first loads coming from Brochel Forest on Raasay and Ardintoul Forest near Glenelg. It also means that remote rural roads will be relieved of thousands of tonnes of heavy timber traffic.

Fort Augustus Forest District Manager Malcolm Wield said that overcoming the challenges of extracting timber from remote locations and reducing dependence on lorries had been the key priorities in developing the scheme. "This venture makes sense economically and environmentally", he said.

"These forests are in locations with very few, if any, roads and we all had to develop a whole new logistical approach. We use barges to transport the timber from shore to a ship which then transports it directly to Inverness for processing.

"The mild, damp climate of the west coast of Scotland produces excellent quality logs. They are in high demand by merchants so we were delighted to be able to use this approach to open out new markets for our timber".

The project was developed with Gordon's who succeeded in an open-tendering process to harvest timber from the above and a number of other remote sites. "It has been an exciting and challenging operation", said the sawmillers' harvesting manager Mr MacLeod, "involving extensive consultation with local communities and wildlife experts.

"Having invested £3m in a new sawmill, Gordon's were looking for suppliers of high-quality softwood for the UK construction market", he said. "The west coast sites threw up some unique constraints and challenges with special care required to manage and operate them due to their extreme sensitivity and conservation needs".

"As the forests have matured ", said Mr MacLeod said, "so has the wildlife living in them. We have worked closely with Forest Enterprise and wildlife experts, such as Roger Cottis, to develop ways to operating within the forests to produce timber while safeguarding important and protected wildlife such as badgers, otters and birds of prey.

"There has been a huge investment by the contractors and the shipping companies involved and we are delighted the operation is now under way", he concluded.

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