

## THE FOREST OF BOWLAND

Summary of talk by E.F. Greenwood, 10 March 2007

The talk started by explaining what was meant by the Forest of Bowland. This was defined as the upland area bounded by the Yorkshire boundary in the east, the M6 in the west, the Lune valley in the north and the Ribble valley in the south.

It is a remote area with few but ancient settlements and with few roads or footpaths crossing the hills. Until recently shooting estates and water catchment needs kept the area private. Historically few botanists had explored the area. Around 1900 Wheldon and Wilson explored the western fells (VC60), Joseph Pickard botanised around Newton and priests at Stonyhurst College recorded in the lower Hodder valley. No more work was done until the late 1960s in the west and the 1980s in the east.

To understand the flora and vegetation it is necessary to understand the changes that have taken place since the last glaciation. The impact of climate change particularly increasing oceanicity leading to bog formation (replacing forest) and the increasing impact of humans in clearing woodland and introducing grazing animals. However the forest laws limited the impact from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries but it was not until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century that sheep became important and moor management for grouse started. Until then grazing in Bowland had been largely by cattle.

These influences gave rise to the present vegetation and flora, which were illustrated with slides. The main habitats covered were summit blanket bogs, heaths and bracken on hill slopes, raised and valley bogs including a variety of flushes ranging from acidic to basic, woodland, meadows and other grasslands, rock exposures and quarries and reservoirs. Each habitat had unique features but the special role of an oceanic, formerly hyperoceanic climate gave rise to some of the more interesting features of the flora and fauna.

The talk concluded with thoughts on the future pointing out that climatically the gradual loss of oceanicity over centuries was profound whilst nitrogen pollution in recent decades had also caused changes with the decline of sensitive species. Climate warming was scarcely discernible but possible outcomes of increased warming were postulated.