The Penpont Project
A Case Study

Launched in the summer of 2019 on a 2,000 acre estate in the Brecon Beacons, Wales, the Penpont Project is the largest intergenerational nature restoration project of its kind anywhere in the world.

Initiated by Action for Conservation(AFC), the Penpont Estate and a dynamic Youth Leadership Group of twenty 12-18 year olds from diverse backgrounds, the project aims to:

- Restore natural processes and regenerative farming practices to Penpont;
- Embed youth leadership and participatory approaches in ecological restoration practice;
- Forge a shared vision for the future that will create diverse social, ecological and economic opportunities for all project partners;
- Create an education hub that can serve young people from the local area and beyond for decades to come.

We have taken an exciting new participatory approach to the generational work of bringing Penpont back to health. At the heart of this approach is the recognition that, as poet Gary Snyder wrote:

"The wild is not about pristine landscapes. Instead, it's about landscapes that are rich and diverse enough to be interesting for everybody, human and non-human alike."

We don't see the people who call Penpont home as abstract beneficiaries -of a top-down approach to nature's recovery.

From the start we decided that, as a community of farmers, foresters, young people, landowners and charity workers who will change as the land changes, we are equal participants in the project.

Alongside the non-human living beings that call Penpont home, we are leading a push for the holistic recovery of nature, culture and community, with a particular focus on enabling young people to step into leadership.

Mapping...

Together we have been on a journey to better understand Penpont using eco-cultural mapping tools.

Developed by indigenous communities, these maps help make otherwise invisible knowledge and relationships to land visible.

Using these tools, we have spent time mapping Penpont's past and the natural and cultural diversity that existed here, the state of the land today and the livelihoods it supports, building a shared, multi-dimensional understanding of Penpont.

The mapping process has fostered important, sometimes difficult conversations, levelled power dynamics and - enabled all of us to articulate an ambitious shared vision for the future, rooted in the potential of the past and the opportunities of the present.

In this future, wild lands and waterways intersect with nature-friendly farming and forestry to form a thriving, bio-culturally diverse mosaic that meets the needs of all.

This will be complemented by a world-leading educational hub for youth-centred approaches to navigating the climate and ecological crisis that will help pass on the lessons learned along our winding way.

We have planted more than 3,000 trees, restored hedgerows, started rewilding experiments that will give nature the space to turn fields back into meadows.

We have sited new ponds, wetlands, - willow beds and are shifting to regenerative agricultural practices.

As participants, playing an active role in restoring these ecosystems is helping us to reconnect with the living world, and find our place in the web of life.

"Without this mapping effort and these discussions, we would not have been able to collaborate in creating a shared vision for a wilder future at Penpont that we are all now striving to achieve together in the action phase of the project."

- Esther, Penpont YLG member

Looking ahead ...

As our project progresses, we will work to make Penpont an exemplar for how youth leadership and collective action across generations, sectors and knowledge systems can achieve the intertwined recovery of nature, culture and community.

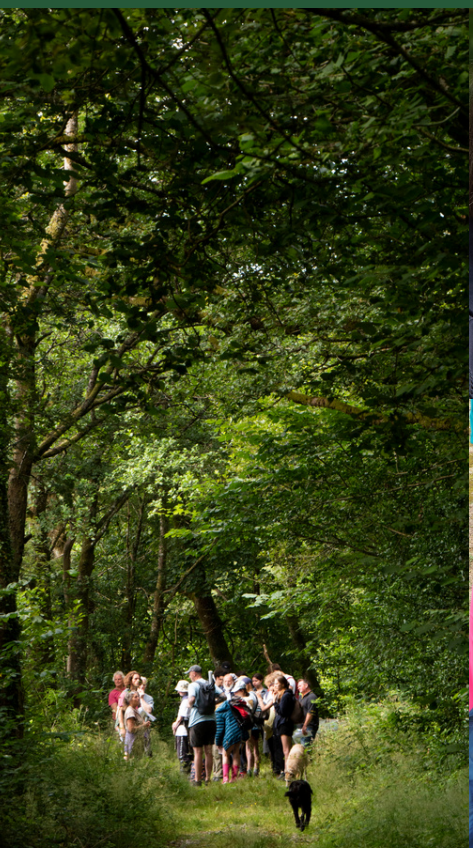
We aim to bring policymakers, land-managers and the conservation sector with us on this journey, influencing wider change in the UK.

Ultimately, we aim to re-make good relations with the non-human living system that is Penpont.

To play our role in helping this special place emerge as somewhere wilder and more abundant- a place rich and diverse enough to be interesting for everybody, always.

100% of the Penpont Youth Leadership group...

- Think that AFC's past, present & future mapping process was effective in creating a shared vision for the project.
- Have experienced an improvement in their well-being thanks to their involvement in the project.
- Say that being involved in the Penpont Project has made them more interested in studying, volunteering and/or a career involving protecting and restoring nature.



Penpont Project Partners:

ACTION FOR CONSERVATION

PENPONT
1666-2016
350 years

Tirmawr Farm
The Davies Family
Penpont | Brecon

For more information visit:

www.actionforconservation.org/penpont