

## 'THE FINZEAN RAILWAY'



A copy of this old photograph has been donated to Birse Community Trust's Parish Archive.<sup>1</sup> The photo shows the extraction of timber from Easter Clune Wood in Finzean in 1919, using wagons and a narrow gauge railway track.

This is the only photo of the 'Finzean Railway' in BCT's Archive and may have been taken because of the relatively unusual nature of the method used to extract the timber.

The Wood had been planted in the late 1850s and was being felled in 1919 at the relatively early age of around 60 years old, to help pay death duty tax following the death in 1918 of the owner of Finzean Estate, Robert Farquharson.

The photo has been posed with a view of Peter Hill in the middle, seen between the summits of the Cramlets and the Scars. This line locates the photo on the leveller ground near the top of Easter Clune Wood.

The timber was extracted by running the wagons downhill along the railway track to the Mill of Clinter road end. The wagons were then hauled back up by horses, as described in 'History in Birse'.<sup>2</sup> The timber on the wagons in the photo is in relatively short lengths and has been peeled (debarked). It is likely that they were for use as coal mine pit props, for which there was potentially a strong demand at that time.

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<sup>1</sup> In October 2014, a copy of the attached photo was found in the late John Forster's papers. It was printed on the back of a page from Finzean Community Association's accounts for the year ending April 2003. Below the photo, John had written 'Finzean'. There was no other information about the contents or source of the photo is given. The photo has been donated to the BCT Archive. This Note about the photo was written by Robin Callander (October 2014).

<sup>2</sup> BCT edition page 137.

The contractor carrying out the felling may have had the railway system as a legacy of the First World War, given the use of narrow gauge tracks and wagons as part of the supply lines to the trenches. Tracks and wagons were also used to extract timber in Glen Tanar following a major fire in 1920 and the route of those tracks can still be seen in places. The only place in Finzean where signs of the Easter Clune railway have been identified is at the Clinter road end.

The horse on the left of the photo is saddled for the shafts of a cart.<sup>3</sup> Alternatively, the shafts could have been for a sledge (or slipe) used to drag the timber out, with the shafts helping to stop the lengths of timber sliding downhill when extracting across a slope. The timber would have been extracted in long lengths and then cross cut into shorter lengths near the track, for loading on to the wagons.

The men standing on either ends of the wagon have their trousers tied below the knee, suggesting that they were horsemen. The horse on the right in the photo looks as if it is being distracted by a person in front of it, as was common in photos at the time.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, a cart to bring the photographer and their bulky camera up the hill.