

Bracken

Words and Music: Nigel Harbron

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 2/4 time signature. The melody is simple and folk-like, with lyrics written below the notes. Chord symbols (E, F#m, B, A) are placed above the staff to indicate accompaniment. The lyrics are: "Though brack - en is a na - tive plant, it's hard to see its charm. It soon takes ov - er op - en land on moor - land or on farm. It shades out a - ny flower - ing plants, puts poi - son in the earth, So when the chance pre - sents it - self, hit it for all you're worth. You can cut it down or pull it, or tram - ple it when new, Just find some way to kill it off wher - ev - er it comes through."

Though bracken is a native plant, it's hard to see its charm.
It soon takes over open land on moorland or on farm.
It shades out any flowering plants, puts poison in the earth,
So when the chance presents itself, hit it for all you're worth.

*Ch: You can cut it down or pull it, or trample it when new,
Just find some way to kill it off whenever it comes through.*

Now bracken's always been with us, it's far older than mankind,
But it's probably only recently that it's become a bind.
In years gone by men found a use for fronds both young and old,
But changing farming practices have let it take a hold.

We've drained our upland areas and filled them full of sheep,
New breeds of cattle cannot cope where land's deemed far too steep;
The weather's also played a part with rain replacing snow,
And fewer cold spells in late Spring have helped the bracken grow.

Not only does land suffer when tall bracken stands appear,
For its greenery is toxic and its spores we all should fear,
For they're far too easily inhaled when taking a deep breath,
They irritate the throat and lungs and can cause an early death.

Although some butterflies and birds inhabit bracken stands,
Sheep and deer ticks lurk there - awaiting legs and hands.
Their bites may not be noticed - they're less painful than a sting -
But blood infections they can cause and Lyme Disease they bring.

So if you've land you care about, and want to keep it clear,
Then get stuck into bracken shoots as soon as they appear,
But be prepared to bend your back or make yourself quite ill,
For their roots go on for ever, and are difficult to kill.



Can you see me? I really am in there, in the middle, and I wasn't crouching down! This photograph comes from one of the nature reserves we work on, and I think it shows just how dominating bracken can become. In truth, you wouldn't be able to take this pic currently, as we have been giving the stuff some grief, and it now looks much less rampant. We reckon that after three years of cutting/pulling, the vigour of each plant is significantly reduced, and two or three more 'hits' should put paid to it for good.

A word of warning to any who might feel motivated by the above to join the BNP (Bracken Neutralising by Pulling), make sure you are wearing stout gloves. Bracken stems, particularly later in the year, can easily lacerate fingers! As mentioned in the song, bracken is also a favoured jumping off point for ticks, so take off all of your clothes after doing something like the above, and inspect yourself closely.*

*(*Once you have arrived home!)*