

# WILD LAND NEWS 53

Summer 2001



## COMMENT: Alterations to Proposed Access Legislation produce a Dog's Breakfast of a Bill

*Article*

At the end of June 2001, the consultation period for the draft Land Reform Bill closed. There was a great deal to consider, and the Steering Team concentrated on the issue of access as the most crucial to tackle.

There has been much in the press about the access proposals, from landowners, farmers, walkers and mountaineers. Much of it has been critical of the proposals. One commentator said that perhaps the Scottish Executive have got the balance right if the proposals are criticised from both ends of the access spectrum. However this is not the case.

The draft bill is a dog's breakfast (with apologies to dogs and their caterers), because the original Access Forum proposals have been altered significantly. The SNH Access Forum comprised most of the major players in the countryside, and had hammered out draft proposals that everyone involved signed up to.

The ink was hardly dry on the paper of these proposals before the alterations crept in. Firstly the SNH Board changed some elements, for some reason, possibly due to either lobbying or worry about how the Scottish Executive and landowners would react. The main changes occurred once it reached Edinburgh and the Executive. The version that was printed as the access section of the draft Land Reform Bill was far removed from the Access Forum proposals. The forum was open and democratic yet the changes were all done unilaterally behind the scenes, without explanation or rationale. Why?

The most likely answer is strong lobbying by land management interests. There may also have been changes produced by civil servants who perhaps may have been favouring the status quo and added hugely complicated elements into the legislation.

It is a sad reflection on our senior civil servants, our ministers and the Scottish Executive as a whole that the product of mature discussions by a civic body, i.e. the Access Forum, has been altered significantly to produce a bill that gets serious criticism and abuse from many sectors of society. The new Scottish Parliament was meant to more open, different from the past, and to support initiatives coming from civic forums, especially ones where agreement on proposals has been reached already.

The Wild Land Group's message to the Scottish Parliament is that the original proposals from the Access Forum must be reinstated as the core of the draft access legislation. **To this end we strongly advise all Scottish members where possible to lobby their MSP to get the bill changed.** This can be done by writing or e-mail, but the most effective is to also visit your MSP's surgery and explain the problems in person. The response of the Steering Team is on our website, or copies can be obtained from the Co-ordinator.

There is time between now and when the bill reaches the floor of Holyrood. Use that time and press for better legislation and an end to behind-the-scenes alterations. Scotland deserves a better bill and one is available from the Access Forum.

There was a good turnout of members and guests came to the Covenanters Inn in Aberfoyle in mid May for the AGM of the Group. This is the second year that the AGM has been held in May, and it is proving more popular for members. There was the option of having a day walk beforehand and a bar supper with the Steering Team.

The Steering Team Co-ordinator, Alistair Cant gave a resume of the activities of the Team over the last 12 months, highlighting the gains such as National Parks, the Lingarbay Superquarry rejection and progress on Scottish Executive legislation such as Land Reform and Telecom masts. On the downside, the fiasco at the Shieldaig hydro scheme public inquiry, owing to the developer pulling out just before the Reporter was due to report, caused great annoyance. The dilution and changing of the SNH Access Forum proposals also gives great concern, as what is in this part of the land reform bill has serious flaws.

Alistair stated that there is a clear need to be ever vigilant, to maintain a close dialogue with your MSP, and to raise issues with friends, colleagues and the media.

There was good news to tell about the establishment of the Scottish Mountain Forum and the proposed International Year of the Mountain (IYM2002) project worker (see elsewhere in the magazine), This initiative came over concern over the proposed sale of the Cuillin and the lack of a co-ordinated recreation/conservation body response.

Alistair concluded by saying the next 12 months have even more challenges, and priorities for the Group include: expanding the new website; devising a new membership leaflet; and hopefully helping organise an event for IYM 2002.

Tim Ambrose gave a brief review of the Annual Accounts, which are healthy. The rise in subscription rates has brought more income which can be ploughed into the website development, a new leaflet and possibly IYM work. There was a good discussion at this point about the need to use funds productively and not just let them accumulate. This met with general support.

The current steering team were all re-elected. Anyone interested in joining the team was encouraged to come forward, either now or any future date, as there are places for more team members. Contact Alistair or any of the Team for more information. The formal meeting then concluded and the talk by Bob Aitken followed (see the separate report on this).

**Focus on National Parks***Article*

*John Digney reports on extra funding for enlarged Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park*

Following the public consultation period which ended earlier this year, the Scottish Executive's final proposals for the structure of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park were announced in June by the Deputy Environment Minister, Rhona Brankin.

The most significant element was the decision to enlarge the boundary well beyond the originally identified core area, with extensions in several directions. The result is largely as we in SWLG, like several other voluntary organisations, had urged in our response to the consultation.

To the north, the boundary now embraces Strath Fillan and the western part of Glen Dochart, so that Crianlarich and Tyndrum are included together with the mountain ranges immediately to their south. To the north-east it incorporates Loch Earn and the twin summits of Ben Vorlich and Stuc a' Chroin. The Lake of Menteith is included, as is Glen Fruin near Helensburgh.

Most notable is perhaps the inclusion of the Argyll Forest Park to the south-west, against the recommendation of Scottish Natural Heritage. There was, however, particularly strong local support for inclusion of this area, which suffers from the legacy of extensive commercial afforestation. The result is that the boundary will reach down to the Firth of Clyde, with Dunoon, although not quite within the National Park, acting as a natural south-west gateway to it.

Although the enlarged boundary was in general warmly welcomed, there was concern among local authorities and the interim park committee that the budget of £5.8m would be insufficient for the wider area.

Perfectly on cue a few days later, it was announced that an extra £2m of European money would be made available. This would finance a marketing programme, a visitor communication and infrastructure early actions programme, a new entrance and path network for Glen Finglas, and public access improvements to the Queen Elizabeth Forest Park.

The National Park Authority (NPA) will consist of 25 members - 5 directly elected, 10 Local Authority nominees and 10 direct appointments by Scottish Ministers. This NPA will be the planning authority for the park area in terms of preparation of the local plan and development control, together with various conservation and environmental responsibilities. The existing Local Authorities will retain responsibility for structure planning with the NPA as a consultee.

A bill is now to follow, with enactment by the end of the year. The Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park is to be up and running by 1st April 2002.

## Cairngorms National Park

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*Anne Macintyre highlights the key issues raised in the recent consultation paper*

The SNH consultation paper on the future shape and management of the Cairngorms National Park invited responses to 14 key issues - including the size of the park, detailed boundary principles, powers, planning functions, composition of the board and the name of the park. In the SWLG response to this consultation we commented on all the key issues however we considered the following issues to be of crucial importance.

### **Size and detailed boundary principles**

We argued that the area needs to be large enough to ensure that integrated planning and management will be effective recognising that what happens in the mountains affects the surrounding communities and vice versa. Our view is that the area of the current Cairngorms Partnership should form the basis of the National Park. This stretches from Laggan in the west, Blair Atholl in the south, Aboyne in the east and north of Grantown. It takes in all the main communities and covers important designated sites such as Creag Meagaidh and the Drumochter hills as well as the core Cairngorms area and surrounding straths. There is an argument that such a large boundary will mean that the National Park Board will spend its time dealing with minor planning issues in local areas rather than the bigger picture. We therefore propose that the Board should be given powers to devolve as appropriate the more

routine local planning decisions to the relevant local authority or appropriate community representation.

We supported the boundary principles proposed by SNH which included following easily distinguishable and permanent natural features wherever possible such as water catchment and slope boundaries. We suggested that hilltops and ridges can provide an easily distinguishable permanent natural feature but urged that skylines are protected through stretching the boundary between 100m to 500m beyond summit ridges. We agreed that land ownership boundaries, field boundaries, roads or paths should generally not be a determining factor as they are likely to change in the future.

### **Powers and planning functions**

We consider this to be the most crucial issue of all as the National Park Board must have the powers to address all land and water management issues in the area including farming, forestry, fisheries, water, sporting, recreation, access and utilities. In our view it must have full statutory and non-statutory planning powers and it must be a statutory consultee for all relevant agencies involved. Experience from other countries shows that international, national and local priorities can only be effectively met where planning powers are the responsibility of the National Park Board. It is also important that the National Park has positive incentive powers as well as regulatory powers to promote good stewardship of the countryside through agri-environment schemes and eco-tourism initiatives. If the National Park Board is simply allowed powers of call in or as a consultee it will become a negative influence on developments - always slowing up the most controversial developments rather than providing positive guidance and support.

The consultation process concluded at the end of April and we now await the final recommendations on how this long awaited National Park status for the Cairngorms will shape up.

Copies of our full response to this consultation are available from Anne Macintyre or the Co-ordinator.

***Editor's note:** As we went to print, we heard that SNH has recommended that the National Park Authority should not be the planning body for the Park area. We disagree strongly with this arrangement, which we believe will undermine one of the most vital functions of a National Park. We expect to have more to say on this later.*

## **New Forum Launches IYM 2002 Project**

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***Alistair Cant** reports on an important Scottish initiative for next year's [International Year of the Mountain](#)*

A forum which brings together many of the key recreation and conservation bodies in Scotland has been meeting for the last 12 months. Called the Scottish Mountain Forum (SMF), it enables organisations and concerned individuals can raise important topics for discussion and joint action.

The forum was formed initially in response to the Cuillin Hills being placed on the market. There was great concern about this potential land sale and a lack of a co-ordinated response from walkers, climbers and conservationists. There was the possibility that a land owning Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) such as NTS or JMT may consider bidding for the hills. This could promote the market for 'trophy' hills where their economic value is very low

in reality. There was also significant concern that the landowner MacLeod of MacLeod did not have a valid title to the hills, according to research carried out by Alan Blackshaw.

The discussions in the forum have led to a much greater understanding and level of co-operation between the bodies involved, who include the MC of S, RA(S), SWLG, JMT, NTS, CC and others. This co-operation was very useful in tackling the access restrictions and damage to rural tourism, especially outdoor activity businesses, arising from the foot and mouth outbreaks.

One crucial initiative arising from suggestions put to the forum, is the post of project worker for the International Year of the Mountain (IYM) 2002. This 'Year' has its origins in the Rio Summit, and the UN General Assembly has designated 2002 as IYM. Initially there seemed to be little planned for IYM in Scotland, with the Scottish Executive taking little interest. There was some activity planned by SNH but this SMF proposal has catapulted IYM into many organisations' action plans.

A proposal to recruit a IYM project worker has been worked up by a SMF Steering Group, and with valuable support from Perth College, has now become a reality. Significant funding has been awarded by SNH, with the balance from donations from recreation/conservation organisations and others. SWLG has promised £750 from its funds to go into the common pot.

The project worker will have several aims: partly to assist SNH organise an international conference in Autumn 2002; partly to promote IYM; and partly to help encourage and co-ordinate activities by various organisations during 2002. In this way a diverse but linked programme of events can be achieved, using governmental and NGO bodies.

The hard work of the key individuals and organisations participating in the SMF, supported by Perth College has made this idea of celebrating IYM 2002 an achievable reality. The funding support from SNH and others is much appreciated. We hope that in SWLG we can help organise something and the steering team are working on this now. This article will spread the message but there is a lot to be done. Volunteers will be needed by us and other organisations, so if you can help, do put yourself forward.

## **Foot and Mouth Disease, Access and the Land Reform Bill** *Article*

*Charles Wallis takes an overview of the epidemic and considers the implications in the light of the draft access legislation*

Problems of access to the countryside have been highlighted recently because of foot and mouth disease and the Land Reform Bill. On the 19th February 2001 signs of foot and mouth disease were noticed in an abattoir in Essex. The outbreak was traced to a pig fattening 'farm' in Northumberland where the animals were fed with swill made from waste food from local restaurants. It is thought that the infection came into the country from meat illegally imported for the restaurants. Once the first outbreak was discovered it became clear that the infection was spreading rapidly around the country, and into Scotland via the Longtown cattle market. Cumbria and Dumfriesshire were some of the worst affected areas. Foot and mouth disease affects all cloven-hoofed animals and is caused by a picorna virus. The current outbreak is due to the highly virulent pan-Asiatic type O. In animals the disease presents with fever, followed by the development of blisters in the mouth and on the feet. Though humans can catch it in exceptional circumstances it does not pose a risk to us. Foot and mouth should not to be confused with hand, foot and mouth disease, which is a mild blistering disease of children, caused by a different virus.

### **Consequences for agriculture and recreation**

Despite hysterical press coverage of the 'deadly' disease it is nothing of the sort. To affected animals foot and mouth disease is essentially a mild infection but it does tend to linger and is highly contagious. The significance of the disease is in its economic impact to farmers. It results in lower milk yields and weight loss, hence lower productivity. Foot and mouth remains one of the few constraints on international trade in livestock. The occurrence of even a single case in a previously disease free country results in an immediate export ban. To maintain disease-free status a country has to ensure high levels of animal health standards and cannot use vaccination to prevent the disease. It is endemic (always present) in many third world countries and the greatest risk is imposed by illegal imports from infected countries. The economic effect of foot and mouth on farming in a previously unaffected country is plain to see, and vaccination is no solution since its use renders the animals unfit for export. In this country the spread of the disease was facilitated by the long distance trading of livestock. It was suggested that an illegal practice of trucking animals around the country, merely to claim fraudulently for EU subsidies, exacerbated the problem.

At the time of the outbreak, movement restrictions on livestock were put in place to stop the spread of the disease. In addition, the government encouraged widespread restrictions on access to the countryside by the general population. Notices blocking access appeared all over Scotland. Walkers, mindful of their responsibilities to the countryside they respected, acted as good citizens and stayed away. This was an unprecedented situation. The hills that were generally considered to have open access were effectively out of bounds to walkers and other recreation groups. Ironically this occurred during one of the best winters for years when local businesses should have been experiencing a bumper season. As time wore on it became apparent that the rural economy was beginning to suffer more from the access restrictions than the disease itself. It became apparent that tourism probably earns five times more than farming for the rural economy.

### **The "Comeback Code"**

Once the outbreak in Scotland came under control the government realised the economic consequences of the draconian access restrictions and sought to improve the situation by advising that the countryside was 'provisionally open' in certain areas and published the so-called 'Comeback Code' just months after effectively banning access. Unfortunately, farmers and landowners have been slow to implement the code, perhaps understandably because of fear of the disease. This resulted in access to the countryside becoming an uncoordinated lottery. Some estates, notably those owned by conservation bodies and progressive landowners such as Grant of Rothiemurchus opened early, much to the welcome of walkers. Others remained firmly shut without any logic behind the pattern.

The result was the ludicrous situation where one estate might be open but with a neighbouring estate closed, the closures bearing no relation to the real risk of the disease. In fact the disease never spread north of the Forth-Clyde gap and yet vast tracts of the Highlands remained closed. Long distance footpaths such as the West Highland Way were particularly badly affected as a single farmer could block the route. By Easter that route finally opened but signs remained all over Scotland. Many farmers were not following the Scottish Executive's advice and there seemed little that could be done. Walkers were unwilling to pass intimidating signs.

Eventually in May, Rural Affairs minister Ross Finnie announced that the veterinary advice was that public access posed an extremely low risk and that new guidance was in favour of access. He noted that the plethora of signs driven by an apparent rather than real risk was unhelpful and damaging the rural economy. Finally by June with some areas still closed he announced a crackdown on unofficial closures. Any remaining that were not listed on a government website could be ignored. Commonsense had prevailed but not before immense economic damage had been done. While affected farmers could claim generous compensation, small rural business such as hotels, bunkhouses, tearooms or outdoor shops were offered a meagre three months rates relief (if they could demonstrate "hardship") and

some marketing activity by the much maligned tourist boards. Many of these small businesses do not have the financial backing of the large sporting estates, and may well become untenable as a consequence.

### Access legislation

By coincidence the Land Reform Draft Bill was published at the time of the first foot and mouth outbreak, in February 2001. These events might not seem related at first sight but they bring a number of issues together. Since the inception of the Scottish Parliament, land reform has been on the agenda. The Land Reform Draft Bill and its related access code are the result of the consultation process started by the 1999 White Paper on land reform and the recommendations of the Access Forum. The aims were to legislate on rights of access, and community and crofting ownership. The bill starts by stating that everyone has rights of responsible access for recreation and passage. A good start but the devil is in the detail that follows. Many of the recommendations of the Access Forum have been significantly altered since it was published in 1998. It is thought that behind the scenes lobbying by farmers and land management interests since then has been responsible for many of the changes.

The most controversial part of the Bill is section nine. This states that the owner of land over which access rights are exercisable may suspend access rights for as long as required because an activity taking place on that land is likely to be interfered with by access rights, or constitutes a danger to the person exercising that right. All the owner has to do is erect some signs indicating what the activity is and how long access is denied. In other words a landowner could block access indefinitely simply by erecting a sign saying 'No access, Land Management Operations' There is no requirement to notify local authorities and no right of appeal against the suspension. One reason for this section is to allow landowners to undertake potentially dangerous activities such as tree felling and pesticide spraying. The health and safety executive were concerned that bill in its original form would be in conflict with UK health and safety legislation, so this section was added. Unfortunately it leaves the law open to abuse by anti-access landowners.

Other sections are causing concern. Local authorities can suspend access rights because extreme weather constitutes a risk to persons on the land. Potentially that means they could suspend access because of avalanche risk, thus taking away a climber's ability to make a risk assessment for himself. Local authorities can also exclude an individual who persistently contravenes the Access Code.

Returning to the issue of foot and mouth it is clear that unofficial signs blocking access could become both legal and widespread if the Access Bill goes through unmodified. Unlike foot and mouth disease which will hopefully go away, this new threat could be long term, and the government will not be able to advise in favour of access, as they belatedly did when they realised that some landowners were acting irresponsibly.

The consultation period for the bill ended on June 30th after being extended because of the access problem created by foot and mouth disease. The Wild Land Group as a body and some of the steering team members as individuals have sent in comments. In addition we have lobbied our local MSP. The bill has a long way to go before it become statute and there is still time to influence the process. The lessons of foot and mouth, while highlighting the potential abuse of access laws, have also shown how important access is to the rural economy. It is important that this legislation is balanced and fair to both sides, in what has unfortunately become a war of words between both camps.

Though the consultation period has ended, details of the Draft Land Reform Bill are available from:

Andrew Taylor  
Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Dept  
Land Reform Branch, Room 106  
Pentland House  
47, Robbs Loan  
EDINBURGH EH14 1TY

Website [www.scotland.gov.uk/landreform](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/landreform)

## Capturing the Will O' the Wisp: Defining Wild land in Scotland *Article*

*Fiona Anderson summarises Dr Aitken's AGM talk*

*Introducing Dr. Robert Aitken as our speaker, John Digney noted that in 19 years of the Wild Land Group's existence there had always been a strong, and usually unanimous, sense within the Steering Team of where a wild land issue was involved, but that we had never actually produced a specific definition of "wild land".*

Dr Aitken said that the concept of wild land is largely a cultural construct of the last 200-300 years. Before then it was something to be feared and tamed, representing unknown lands beyond what was familiar and understood. Even in the present day and age attitudes towards untamed nature can be very variable. But with our current planning system we need to be clear what the main attributes and values of wild land are, in order to be able to press them at planning enquiries, to enable core areas which should remain sacrosanct to be defined, and even, on the ground, to decide how land should be managed - eg. should footpaths in Glencoe be improved or not? Any re-opened enquiry about the Shieldaig hydro-electric scheme will be likely to stand or fall on "wild land" grounds.

We are not talking about "wilderness" in the North American sense, as extensive landscapes untouched by man. In Britain we have only pockets, or remnants, of almost natural environments, which are very precious in terms of 3 attributes: nature conservation, landscape value and recreation. These 3 strands are often closely interwoven in the same area, and not only in remote country - Flotterstone in the Pentlands has often been described as having these characteristics.

Dr. Aitken went on to describe initiatives to define or protect wild areas abroad. Thirty years after the influential Wilderness Act, nature conservation is becoming more important than previously in the USA to protect large tracts as wildlife corridors. In Europe and Scandinavia wilderness protection is picking up, such as the targetting of Mt. Blanc to reduce the impact of tourism, by reducing the number of telepheriques, and the closing of mountain huts. In the UK W. H. Murray's seminal book "Highland Landscape" in 1962 made no mention of the term wilderness, but the areas he recommended went on to become National Scenic Areas with special planning controls (as intended). In Study Group 9 of the Countryside in 1970 Conference Professor Grieve and Tom Weir put in a plug for wild land values, which underpinned later Government reports, such as the criterion of 5 miles from a public road (which defined wild land areas in Northern Scotland only). Dr. Aitken's own thesis in 1977 defining wild land was based on Naismith's Rules for the time needed to walk mountainous or rough terrain. Steffen Fritz and other academics considerably refined the criteria in the late 1990s based on GIS computer algorithms which include intrusive man-made features such as masts, pylons and bulldozed tracks. Restricted access zones were defined for the first time in the Loch Lomond Subject Plan and finally, in 1999 a definition of wild land appeared in NPPG 14 Natural Heritage as "uninhabited and often relatively inaccessible countryside where the influence of human activity on the character and quality of the environment has been minimal".

Dr. Aitken developed his own thoughts on how things might develop in responding to comments from the floor. If the Shieldaig enquiry can be won on these grounds, it will establish wild land as an important planning principle. A widespread appreciation of wild land values is needed among users of the countryside as well as policy makers if other significantly damaging applications are to be opposed. But there seems to be little appeal in it to British politicians, as compared with the USA where the wilderness lobby has large political clout (thanks to John Muir.) Nature conservation is not less important than wild land value, but it is already well recognised in Britain. No one is currently protecting remoteness - new artefacts are constantly being introduced.

Improved access to the hills must be accepted for recreation, but footpath improvement in many areas, such as Glencoe, has perhaps gone far enough while "Munro-bagging" is having a serious impact on the ground in some places. Within 5 years of the SMC Guide recommending Ptarmigan as a route up Ben Lomond a major path had been worn. In fact Dr Aitken considered that new paths appear below newly identified Munros within 3 months. Local solutions are needed to local problems, like the NTS "exclosures" in Glencoe and elsewhere, which can allow a footpath to recover within a few years - depending on how exposed it is. The Americans are heavily into indirect methods such as "impact education", rationing and displacement systems. They have stopped hardening paths, but much of their path networks are in forests where damage is less visible, and node points can be concealed. In Scotland our open terrain is easier to access from different directions.

The future may lie in continued acquisition by the public sector or voluntary groups like the John Muir Trust on behalf of the public. Countries with really effective systems like New Zealand have 70% Crown Land. However, no land comes without management costs. His final thoughts on definition were that areas with the attributes of contained sanctuaries often have the highest wild land values, such as Loch Avon, Loch Coruisk, the heart of Fisherfield Forest, or Flotterstone? As for criteria there is a danger of insisting there is only one way to define remoteness. But perhaps over 2 hours from a tarmac road would suffice to work with.

## Letters to the Editor

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Dear Sir,

ref "Comment", para 5: Grass as a crop in Highlands ([WLN 52, Spring 2001](#)) I'm not a farmer, but I know from visits to a croft on Raasay, and to my sister's Norwegian version of a croft in Sirdal, that grass that looks very mean and ordinary is cut for hay. On Raasay we were shouted at, and told to keep off the grass as we made a beeline up the hillside from the house. That was 25 years ago, and maybe people don't live so marginally now, but to that elderly couple, it was not risible at all. We were mortified of course, to appear to be so inconsiderate and ignorant.

The Law is poor protection of the access aspirations of the "good" - the "bad" public will use the rules to assert their right to be on the land while trashing it, and the "bad" landowner will use the same set of rules to deny access to every blade of grass as destructive to the nation's economy. It is tricky balancing the relative freedom of the past, based on live and let live, and now trying to tie up everything so nothing can be lost, and in the making of the law, finding that when that which was taken for granted has been analysed, and an all case assessment been made, that freedom is deemed to be unsafe.

So I understand what you mean, and agree some farmers and landowners will use every loophole to keep walkers and cyclists away, and especially in countryside around towns, but I wonder if your comment about the grass in this context is perhaps a bit off the mark.

Otherwise, once again, a most readable Newsletter, in content and format. My eyes are soothed by the black and white and your photos.

Best wishes,

Dr. Janet Trythall

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Dear Sir,

While I support to the hilt Richard Gilbert's case ([WLN 52, Spring 2001](#)) against the Loch na h-Oidhche hydro scheme in Flowerdale Forest, and have written about it to the Scottish Environment Minister and to my friends and family, I'm not easy with his blanket condemnation of past schemes. Affric, Luichart, and Strathfarrar, he writes, "were plundered" and now "after fifty years, the power companies are returning". The post-war dams were built, not by companies, but to the order of a Labour government and a Scottish Secretary (Tom Johnston) who saw that the crofters throughout the Highlands desperately needed power to light their homes and dry their hay. I am sure that, like me, he often visited cottages where the light was poor and the cooking inconvenient because of the old reliance on Tilly lamps and Calor gas. The post-1947 schemes lightened the domestic burdens for thousands.

What was lost? Of the glens he mentioned, I visited Strath Farrar most recently, in June last year. It was a dream of beauty. Its "unspoilt" loneliness was a memorial to the clearance by Lovat a hundred and sixty years ago. Now birch, heather, and green pasture surround the few big houses of the absentee owners. After fifteen miles of this you come to the Loch Monar dam - a handsome and monumental work in concrete. Then the great loch snakes away into the core of the Highlands. On the day I was lucky that the water level hadn't been lowered by heavy use, exposing the raw shore. Are such shores, in Cluanie and elsewhere, much different from natural shingle beaches? Drought has much the same effect. The Monar dam, like the power-house downstream, is only a brief interruption in the long, unfolding, sinuous beauty of the glen.

The Highlands can't be left entirely unaltered, for the enjoyment of incomers. Their material resources have to be used, to make life comfortable for the people who live there. A piddling and unnecessary scheme like Loch na h-Oidhche shouldn't be compared with the major works of the Fifties and Sixties, which did their bit towards the saving of a culture.

Yours sincerely,

David Craig