

WILD LAND NEWS 63

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COMMENT - Generation and Conservation

Article

The Asian tsunami might have nothing to do with climate change, but it gave us some idea of the vulnerability of low-lying coastal regions. With many of the survivors vowing never to return in the aftermath of that one event, we can imagine of the social and economic chaos resulting from a permanent rise in sea-levels, with whole communities having to move inland and compete with existing populations for the available land in safer areas.

In Britain last year, freak weather gave us a reminder of our own vulnerability when Boscastle was devastated, followed in a few days by the mudslide in Glen Ogle. Sceptics dismiss these as one-off events and point to precedents. Politicians equivocate, wishing to sound neither radical nor indifferent, knowing that they depend on votes and that any action they take must be carefully measured. In the meantime energy policy will continue to be a muddle until enough people find themselves so inconvenienced by the effects of climate change that they demand action from politicians.

By that time, many environmentalists believe, it will be too late. In fact many experts think it is already too late to get up to speed with renewable technologies that are still in their infancy. Some are now thinking the unthinkable - that the only option is a return to nuclear power. In a TV documentary James Lovelock, author of Gaia, expressed the view that time has now run out for alternative technologies to save the situation, and the almost inevitable accidents in the nuclear industry would be far less serious than the impact of climate change.

In Scotland over the last decade the main development in renewable energy has been the proliferation of onshore windfarms. In SWLG we have accepted in principle the role of wind power, but have argued for developments to be steered towards brownfield sites or places of unexceptional scenic quality, while opposing those which damage our landscape heritage. In this campaign we have found common ground in unusual quarters - we might not normally expect a great overlap in readership with, say, Country Life magazine, yet that publication has been peppered with anti-windfarm articles accompanied by a clever three-bladed design representing a wind turbine, but highly suggestive of the well-known radioactivity hazard symbol.

But even among the country landowning set it seems opinion may be divided. While in the Borders the Duke of Buccleuch has been opposing windfarm developments, his not-too-distant neighbour, the Duke of Roxburghe, stands to make well over £0.5 million per year out of a 56-turbine development proposal on his grouse moors. At £10,000 or more per turbine per annum, not a bad little earner. A decade ago when commercial wind power was just starting in Scotland, we were told that between £1500 and £2200 was the going rate, but the bandwagon has rolled on since then. As usual, the easiest money is made by the landowners.

So what are the politicians to make of all these mixed messages? What policy is going to be the best vote winner? The position is not at all clear; politicians dither and energy policy continues fairly rudderless. Yet if the government were truly committed to reducing fossil fuel emissions, it could have taken positive action in the meantime by placing far more emphasis on energy conservation, rather than concentrating on more and more generation. We occasionally pick up snippets of information from random sources, such as the fact that if every household in the UK were to replace a conventional light-bulb with an energy-efficient one, one power station could be shut down; or if we turn our central heating thermostats down one degree we could save 10% of the energy used.

So why isn't the government promoting this information more? Surely if it really cared about the consequences of over-consumption it would be bombarding us with the message about energy conservation in a properly structured educational campaign, using the press, TV, radio, the internet and whatever else? This would send the right signal to the green lobby, yet would be relatively uncontroversial. It would certainly be better than throwing money at suspect and controversial renewable technologies, with much of that cash inevitably ending up in landowners' pockets in the form of enhanced land values.

The circuit of Stank Glen

Article

being an account of desperate struggles, present and foreseen, to complete what was once and might yet be one of the best hill days in easy reach of the populace, including an ascent of Ben Ledi by its finest route, by David Jarman

Ben Ledi is not quite a Munro, but at 879m it is not far short. Rising straight above the Highland Boundary Fault, with the Pass of Leny at its foot only 80m above sea level, it is one of the most conspicuous of the line of mountains which you see as you look north from the Central Belt. It is certainly the most accessible of our 'proper mountains'. It is much visited and remembered.

Yet the standard circuit, up the tourist path and down by Stank Glen, is a plain and simple route with no excitements other than those conjured by the weather. The upper parts of the ridges are good to walk, and the summit is neat and a grand viewpoint. We suffered terribly for years getting up through the forest and back down again, and the recently reconstructed paths are a mercy undimmed by the long awaiting. Many visitors like to walk on a good path, and not worry about route finding. But such paths do take much of the challenge out of the hill, and there is a great deal of scope here, at one of the prime Gateways into our new National Park, to provide choices for more adventurous hillgoers. This would address several markets

- people in the Central Belt looking to get slightly off the beaten track could do so without having to drive any further into the Highlands than Callander - good for sustainable transport, good for quick half day or summer evening outings.
- people holidaying in Callander-Strathyre would have a choice of doorstep routes of differing severity and interest - as you find everywhere in the Lake District (see Wainwright) and on any mountain close to a resort in the Alps
- youth groups would be able to graduate from the basic circuit to something more adventurous without being at all remote.

The frequenter of Ben Ledi can easily chalk up half a dozen different routes. Some of the better ones on the NE face involve negotiating forestry between the upper forest road and the forest fence, or long detours. Whether they have been allowed for in current felling and replanting operations has not been rechecked, but they should be.

By far the best circuit of Ben Ledi is that described by Donald Bennet in the SMC Southern Highlands Guide (1972 edition):

"a much finer route can be made up the Stank Glen and the north-east face of the hill. Once clear of the forest one turns left and climbs south-westwards beside a small stream directly towards the summit of Ben Ledi. The boulders and pinnacles [previously mentioned as giving the only rock-climbing the hill has to offer] are passed, a little hanging corrie just below the summit is reached, and one or other of its bounding ridges is climbed. The south bounding ridge ends near the cairn, and the north bounding ridge leads to the north top."

This north bounding ridge is the more exciting. Those boulders and pinnacles have come away from its flank, leaving a buttress which can be tackled up a steep but simple nose, or by a diagonal gully which affords a stiff scramble for the ordinary walker. The ridge itself is sharply etched - almost an arête - by a shallow rockslide which has taken away the original north top. Summit gained, where to now?

"the traverse northwards and then north-east from Ben Ledi towards Ardnandave Hill involves some fairly rough going over peat bogs and hummocks."

The first half of this traverse is now a regular path following the old march fence and continuing north to Benvane, another Corbett. To complete the circuit, one has to return to Stank Glen. The SMC Guide describes this, a little confusedly, as a separate ascent route:

"The most direct route to Ardnandave Hill is by the path up Stank Glen. At the point where the Ben Ledi route turns south-west the Ardnandave Hill route turns right, crosses the burn and goes north-eastwards up a break in the trees to the south-east ridge which is followed over a few knolls to the top."

And this was what my son and I were still able to do a dozen years ago in pursuit of his geography project, the only differences being that the burn crossing was now a forest road with an ugly giant culvert, and the gap in the trees up the nose of Creag Gobhlach was a bit of a squeeze. We found Aird nan Damh (meaning Hill of the Deer and horrible anglicised to Ardnandave) at 715m a grand little hill in its own right, its several steep knolls offering a bit of scrambling, and a fine deep pool just off on the south ideal for a warm evening's dip.

A few months ago I returned this way on a crisp winter Sunday morning with a dappling of snow on the interesting parts of Ben Ledi opposite. From the main A84 I had observed over several years the clear felling of the Creag Gobhlach nose, with apparently no replanting above the upper forest road which loops round Stank Glen. Very commendable I had thought, opening up a fine promontory in the landscape as well as a classic route. But at the culvert, a young replanting completely blocked the former direct route described by SMC. Ah well, a quarter-mile detour by forest roads brought me back to where you would naturally tackle the nose (which is quite steep at the top and only negotiable by a little gully).

No route presented itself. The whole slope was a mess of brash and reject trunks. A small part had been planted with larches - a nice scenic touch - but amongst the rest sitka was beginning to reappear, presumably spontaneously. I picked a point to break up it, jinking about to link the more open bits, and fell awkwardly and painfully by slipping on a greasy log concealed by flattened grass. On gaining the foot of the gully, it was choked by brash and the odd young sitka, and the way up beside it was unpleasant, pulling up on hanks of vegetation. No-one in their right mind would come this way. Nor is it possible to avoid the nose - to the right, it is craggy, to the left, up Stank Glen, the forest has been replanted.

Out onto the ridge, with good views opening up to Ben Ledi and Ben Vorlich, another unpleasant surprise lay in store. Dotted all over it, but especially in the most attractive nooks, on the knolls, and out on the valley rims, were scores and scores of young sitka, self-seeding up from the plantations. Most were still small enough to hand-weed, and I did my little bit. They may grow more slowly and more stunted up here, between 450 and 600m, but they will steadily make this fine skyline oddly spiky, and convert the ridge from open to an unnatural weaving between trees and copses. Ultimately, unweeded and ungrazed, they could coalesce into the impenetrable conifer thicket one can find in the Alps near the treeline. They ceased beyond the old fence which crosses the ridge, although a few more cropped up on the rims of Aird nan Damh itself, especially in the inaccessible and sheltered crevices of its rockslips.

And indeed amongst the boulders of the Ben Ledi rockslide, a veritable forest of escaped sitka is springing up. They are beyond pulling, and must await growth to the point where sawing them down will kill them, I am advised.

So just three simple and inexpensive steps are needed to restore this fine, obvious, classic circuit:

- weed out or cut down all the self-sown sitka beyond the forest limit (this should be a matter of good management practice for all forest owners, under the control of invasive non-native species directives)
- clear a generous swathe up the nose of Creag Gobhlach of all brash and rubbish, and reopen a gap in the replanting at first thinning
- restore the direct line up the stream into the corrie of Ben Ledi, which you now have to detour around the extended forest to reach from the head of the Stank Glen path.

There is of course a larger question as to whether, in a National Park, on the best and most popular side of one of its finest mountains, we should still have continuous commercial conifer plantations. Stank Glen is enjoyed by many people today, on its well-built loop path, while the replanting is still young and the views can be seen. Once it closes canopy, the views will only be of the burnside, and it will be no different from any other 'forest walk'. It would undoubtedly be enjoyed much more by many people if it were converted to native woodland, perhaps with some larches for variety, and managed for glimpse and filtered views conveying the sense of being in a 'pleasant corrie'. This approach of 'rewilding' is being pursued in Ennerdale in the Lake District National Park, so why not here ?

If I had a visitor from abroad who had one short day to spare to climb a decent Scottish hill, avoiding busy and constructed routes, I would not dream of taking them to Ben Ledi - it would be an embarrassment. I would struggle to think of somewhere nearer than the Tarmachans. But it could so easily be a credit to Scotland. We own it all, and the land is managed by Forestry Commission Scotland on behalf of the nation.

A response to this article was received from Stuart Chalmers District Forester Environment and Recreation Cowal and Trossachs Forest District:

Ben Ledi is a popular hill and, as mentioned, we have improved the main access paths via Scottish Executive, the European Union, Scottish Natural Heritage and Scottish Enterprise money.

The work you have identified is desirable and we would like to take the opportunity to meet with you and discuss the options and to see if any of the Wild Land News subscribers would like to help with the proposed work.

Incidentally, landowners are not required (by statute) to remove self-sown Sitka spruce but in many circumstances it is certainly good practice to do so. As ever it often boils down to a resource and prioritisation issue.

Editor's note: As a result of this article and the FCS response, we have decided to spend our AGM weekend in the Trossachs and devote some of the time to weeding and clearing the sections of hill in question. Please see the AGM 2005 notice.

"Everyone" Campaign on Climate Change

Article

Fiona Anderson reports on a Scottish Environment LINK initiative

On February 16th, the day the Kyoto Protocol came into effect in 136 countries, Scottish Environment Link launched its "Everyone" General Election Campaign on Climate Change. (Everyone stands for LINK's 26 member organisations, 500,000 supporters, one voice - SWLG is one of them.) A press presentation was held at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh. It was a fairly low-key affair, with three key speakers and a few questions, but the issues raised are worth thinking about.

Moving the environment, and climate change in particular, up the political agenda is the chief purpose of the campaign, and this will not be easily achieved either in the Scottish Parliament or in Westminster, despite it being one of the key issues of the forthcoming G8 Summit.

Why? Because politicians find it hard to engage with a long term agenda, and they cannot get too far away from current public priorities. Ministers like Margaret Becket say they recognise the problems but they need environmental organisations to advance public opinion before they can take significant action. So Everyone is asking us to lobby election candidates in our areas to step up action to cut global climate change.

Fred Edwards, the LINK Chairman said Climate change is not just an environment issue; it will destroy the world economy. The Indian Ocean tsunami (though caused by earth tectonics) showed how vulnerable the developing world is to massive natural disasters. And plenty of these to follow with current temperature trends: extreme weather events and rising sea level could destabilize the economies of whole regions, or countries. After the floods of 2003 some places in Moray cannot get insurance for future storm damage. By 2050 it is forecast that damage globally will exceed countries GDP to pay for it, ie. the world will go broke!

He suggested ways the Government could be acting to implement the EU consensus target of cutting CO2 emissions year on year by 20% in 2010 and 60% by 2050. The campaign identifies 6 areas where action should be taken:

- introducing domestic and commercial energy efficiency targets of 40% improvement by 2020;
- making the price of all transport journeys more fairly reflect their cost to the environment; (cheap flights! congestion charging?)
- requiring all new large public buildings to include Combined Heat and Power (CHP) and/or renewables;
- setting tough emissions trading targets for power companies and industry;
- doubling Research & Development investment in a full range of RE technologies;
- creating a UK task force to take forward action to address climate change..

Professor Blackmore, Keeper of Botany at Royal Botanic Gardens of Scotland explained earlier how climate change has an important connection with plant diversity. The most southerly glacier in the northern hemisphere, in SW China, pictured in the photographs of George Forrest, the Scottish plant collector whose collections founded the gardens, has retreated 250 m in the last 20 years. Though some people doubt from looking at tree rings, whether climate changes are other than cyclical, a recent article in Nature on pollen deposition over 10,000 years found that no summer since 1370 had been as warm as 2003. There will be no winners in this game. In the past, plant species, each with their own preferences and tolerances, could migrate. This is no longer possible in many parts of the world owing to the works of man. Although similar species may occur elsewhere in the world, the genetic differences are often important. We must all play our part to revegetate, conserve and save energy -every household can make a difference.

Robin Pellow, the Chairman of NTS, said that climate change is of concern to all organisations that manage large parts of Scotland. The Kyoto signatories should set sanctions for countries that do not meet the targets - trading CO2 emission credits with other countries should not be allowed.

There was only one question at the end, raising the issue of wind farms to meet CO₂ reduction targets. The answer from the platform was that wind power would not be effective enough to meet national targets, and the best alternative is combined heat and power schemes, as used extensively in Scandinavia , where heating requirements are high. Also that strategic guidance from the Government on location of windfarms is urgently needed.

SWLG would say Amen to that, but go further: a national strategy is needed for Renewable Energy, agreed at least in principle between Government, Industry, local authorities and NGOs that would direct the power industry as to technologies and locations, protecting wild land qualities, as well as giving future technologies (offshore wind, wave and tidal) more generous long term support. Such a strategy could even direct subsidies that presently line the coffers of the power companies to subsidizing the undergrounding of the grid line and undersea cables to by-pass the Highlands.

But quite as important for Kyoto as a national strategy for new energy projects is active promotion of traditional energy efficiency in energy saving methods and products in the home and workplace, especially insulation, but most of all in transport. Energy use in buildings currently contributes 40% of greenhouse gas emissions, but reductions in emissions made by business and the public sector are being wiped out by rises in transport, which could be the largest source of CO₂ before 2015. Energy efficiency in transport will only be achieved, not by contentious road charging schemes in pilot cities like Edinburgh, that depend on wit and skill by local politicians to gain public support, but policies argued properly by the Government for all roads and urban areas. Energy savings in the home and in transport choices are spheres where action by individuals, rather than by an industry, can make a difference - but only with government incentives and support. Without that, at our present rate of progress Scotland will miss the 2050 target by half.



Woodlands and Wildness

Article

Continuing the debate on re-afforestation, Dr. James Fenton reflects on the change to the Highland landscape.

And you had heard from afar of Scotland's expansive landscapes, of its unending vistas, of its open moorland leading to the open hills, and you had heard of how this moorland was unique and of global importance, and you had come to see it for yourself.

You hired a car and entered the Highlands with excitement and anticipation, tired of the endless forests of Scandinavia, the dark haunts of the Schwarzwald and the lesser Alps, and even of the Alps themselves, finding, ultimately, that these landscapes were all the same, troll-like, claustrophobic, narrowing vistas, inward thinking....

You took the great highway up the spine of Scotland, the A9 itself, and you waited for the trees to disperse... Dunkeld, Pitlochry, Blair Atholl, passed by and you began to have doubts.. Not until a long way north did the landscape begin to open, but this first opening was deceptive for you noticed on both sides the signs of new planting, the small heads of trees

poking their heads above the heather, this glorious heather that was now doomed in these places.

It was not until you were nearing the summit of the Pass of Drumochter that you entered a landscape of moorland, short-lived as it turned out to be, but even here you noticed long stripes of conifers paralleling the road, planted in an unsympathetic manner to stop the blowing snow of winter, to ensure that the pass would no longer be wild, confirmed by the endless tracks winding their way up the hills to reach their masts...



There is little disagreement about the impact of bullozed tracks on our landscapes. This eyesore, at well over 2000ft between Glen Tilt and Drumochter, is typical of the way they have been gouged further and higher into the mountains.
(Photo: John Digney)

From your map, you had noticed large tracts without the telltale green to the north and west of the Highland Capital, but, alas, your maps were long out of date. You left with high hopes of finding your landscape of heather and moor, of wide horizons, where the mind could blow free and your eye could pass untrammeled to the very tops of the hills, where there was space to think... Again, your wait was long. At Strath Bran on one side you could get a glimpse of what once might have been the old Scotland, the wide peatlands to the south, but even at the start there were the telltale signs of new trees, replicated right in the heart behind the black ridge of the storm field itself (as you heard was the name given to Achnasheen). Before you even reached the top of the pass leading down to the renowned Loch Maree you encountered a black block of conifers dumped on one side of the road, and the telltale tips of new trees to the right.

At the foot of the pass, your detour to the towering Torridon mountains was no better, finding one fence after another all the way to the end of the road at Diabaig: never before had you seen such a landscape being transformed in such a short space of time. Did the people of Scotland really realise what was happening? And you noticed rhododendrons smothering the hillsides to the south, apparently ignored and allowed to run free while the enthusiasm to plant trees had taken hold of the people.

So you turned north again, enjoying one brief glimpse of moorland to your left, before entering once more old plantations, followed by large signs proclaiming proudly 'New Native Pinewood Scheme', it appearing that pines had been dogging you now all the way from Vladivostok! And shortly after, you observed diggers destroying the peat in their attempt to ensure there were new trees in front of every crag between Gairloch and Poolewe (the biggest new wood in Britain, you heard), and there were new trees appearing to the right beyond the famous Inverewe Gardens, there were new trees obscuring the view down to the famous Gruinard Bay, across at Scoraig, on the slopes above Loch Broom..

Despairing in your quest, and feeling deceived in your imagined portrayal of Scotland, you decided that you had come too late, and you began your long journey south, but, suddenly, joy, oh joy, along, ironically, Destitution Road, you at last found a glimpse of the old Scotland, the wild, undesigned Scotland, the Scotland you had heard so much about.

This inspired you to continue north, but your joy was short-lived, and when you saw the trees marching up to the very heights of Ben More Coigach, you did finally turn south, noticing as you crossed the watershed of Scotland for the last time, but no longer with any surprise, the large new pine plantations smothering the lower slopes beyond the Dirrie More...

And you wondered, what was going on? Why this desire to destroy moorland, to plant common trees, to tame the land, to make sure it bends to our will, to make sure it was no longer wild... But what if the people had misread its ecological history?

Large herbivores munching the uplands of Britain

Article

David Jarman ruminates on the issues raised at a National Trust for Scotland conference

This may sound a rather stolid, plodding subject for a day conference (OK, the title said 'shaping' not 'munching' but, sorry NTS, glaciers shape the uplands, not cattle). But it proved a fascinating and often spirited event - many thanks to SWLG for sending me along in February.

Both Richard Luxmoore and James Fenton of NTS open on our cultural attitudes to landscape - while many in Scotland want to see regeneration of our lost woods (since Fraser Darling taught us to see the open uplands as 'wet deserts'), in the Lake District 'scrubbing up' post foot-and-mouth is seen as a grave threat to valued landscapes.

Too much of the day gets bogged down in lowland European forests (thus contravening EU subsidy rules on avoiding concentrated trampling impacts. Anti-trampling rules are apparently a threat to our tourist industry; why? because they mean you can't keep Highland cattle around fixed feeding stations by scenic lay-bys - but we digress). David Bullock of The National Trust bravely makes a link to our interests by suggesting that climate change is rapidly blurring the lowland-upland distinction, and even more bravely saying this process cannot be reversed, only adjusted to - the goal is to allow species to migrate north freely.

There does seem to be a recognition that the old Scottish forests were less extensive, more open, and more fluctuating than is popularly imagined. After their first rapid colonisation in the dramatically ameliorating climate and on the bare mineral-rich ground as the ice disappeared, the forests would always have struggled to regenerate. The 'large herbivores' would have seen to that. It seems that regeneration was episodic and localised, often after storm, flood, rockfall, and (in the case of Scots pine) fire. Two other factors were new to me:

- thickets of thorny scrub protect seedlings from browsing - the upland equivalents might be bramble patches, juniper, leggy heather, even dense bracken, although James doubts their efficacy.

- wolf and lynx lairs deter winter grazing around them, offering natural 'safe havens' for woodland survival; David notes that wolf reintroduction in Yellowstone has seen a resurgence of aspen forest around dens. Again, James points out that forest cover in Scotland had declined to 4% by 1700, while wolves were still present.

All these triggers for natural woodland regeneration are scarce if not vanished. To mimic them, we cull, we de-stock, we put up fences. And where we exclude grazing, the ground vegetation quickly goes rank, and wild walking off the path becomes miserable. A mile of tussock grass and rushes is quite a penance, like wading through treacle - as in many parts of the Loch Lomond National Park.

So where do we go now, with large herbivores controlling so much of what we see in our wilder uplands - and how we enjoy roaming them?

Cattle - these were once great aurochs, taller even than David Bullock's shoulder, and with formidable appetites and predator-resistance - but only ever on the lush lower ground. Fraser Darling saw domestic cattle as the saviour of Highland ecology, especially under shielding transhumance. David suggests them as one answer to my 'penance' problem - they graze down dead molinia tussock in winter, rather like hay, and the deer profit from it with a fresh bite in spring. But with the past spread of peat, and with wetter winters predicted, it is unclear how high cattle might range. If cattle are important, we need to ensure that the new Land Management Contracts for hill farming fully recognise both their ecological and access benefits.

Sheep - surprisingly little was said about the sheep. Jos Milner, with experience in Letterewe and Norway, sees sheep and deer as partly interchangeable in terms of carrying capacity - but the present gentle decline in sheep numbers (after peaking in the eighties) may not lead to increasing deer numbers, as sheep help to optimise vegetation productivity. If we can overcome our cultural 'Clearances' aversion to sheep, they have their wild antecedents - which keep St Kilda neat and green today, as James points out. The domestic variety are easily manageable with unobtrusive fencing, and it would be good to see more 'wild' sheep looking after themselves on the uplands, as they do in Scandinavia (maybe with some wild shepherds, not the quadbike variety.) Sheep help keep the hills naturally free to roam, and they are little threat to regenerating trees once they are up a few feet.

Goats - the plague animal of Mediterranean demonology (see an admirable book by Dick Grove and Oliver Rackham which wittily slays many comparable myths there) is only mentioned as a pest. Dick Balharry rued the futility of removing exclosure fencing after twenty years of successful regeneration at Letterewe, only to see it all wasted by goats, in the absence of active wolf lairs. But glimpsing true wild goats in the hills, as I have done with David in the Galloway mists, and in Kintail passes, is one of the great wild land experiences.

Deer - our last large native wild mammal has been much maligned, again perhaps as an abreaction to cultural imperialism - indeed I once applauded 7:84's The Cheviot, the Stag, and the black black Oil to the rafters. In Perth, a tide seems to be turning. Why - as Mike Daniels (DCS) puts it - should wild animals eating natural vegetation be construed as damaging? And as Jos demonstrates, heavy culling is ultimately futile: deer numbers are governed by carrying capacity, which is controlled by climate, vegetation, and competition (mainly by sheep). Natural predation doesn't reduce populations much, it keeps them healthy - deer numbers control wolf numbers, not vice versa. Wise human 'predation' likewise harvests them sustainably. At Letterewe, Jos reckons a 90% deer cull would be needed to regenerate all the oakwoods without fencing, because they grow where the deer congregate in bad conditions. The overall deer per hectare density is irrelevant.

Another of those great hill experiences is to see the deer drifting over the brow into the shelter of a glen in winter, amidst snows and smoking mists, never more memorably than a

few Decembers back in - where else - Glen Feshie. To think on my walk across Letterewe one distant Spring, on seeing all the birch regeneration along a ravine rim freshly eaten back down to the level of the heather, I had imagined hiring a helicopter to exterminate the marauding herds.

How do we restore our native woodlands then? Wholesale exclusion fencing (as is now happening in core forest areas) is bad for deer welfare, and for the overpressured ground above the fence. Rotating pocket enclosures, as advocated by Jos (10% of the woodland area for 20-30 years) and by Philip Ashmole (Borders), may be a fair compromise, but not in remote areas of wild character. Perhaps we have to readjust our expectations of how well wooded the uplands were, not in their first glory, but after the Atlantic wetter climate phase set in, and might be now that man has come to dominate the land.

As the day closes, James Fenton says he fears he is living on another planet from the rest of us ([see his own story](#) and tell us if he is) - with Drennan Watson quick to confirm his suspicions. But support comes to hand from a promising quarter - young Dutch ecologist René Lavoncier (Banchory). Visitors to Scotland like him can better appreciate our open heathery 'wastes' - we don't need another Scandinavia here. As for my wading-through-treacle problem, he thinks that ungrazed tussock would just be a stage in a succession towards arctic heath - in 50-100 years time, bit late for me. Others suspect that while this might happen in the drier east, a wetter and milder west could just get more and more impenetrable - as today near sea level (try ascending the Pap of Glencoe from Loch Leven at Caolasnacon), so progressively higher up.

Keith Miller (JMT) poses a key question - what would an upland Scotland landscape driven by large herbivores look like, without our interference? In a post-event e-debate, James suggests that taking Jos's figures of deer carrying capacity (~20/sq.km) and the density needed to allow woodland regeneration (4-8/sq.km) it would be largely open. He goes on to argue that, in terms of global not local biodiversity, our large tracts of heath and heather are rare and far more important than artificial native woodlands. As a pragmatist and tinkerer by inclination, I am being dragged rather reluctantly in his direction.

While James sees our open uplands today as relatively natural, best left to fend for themselves, I still wonder if they have not been so impoverished by mismanagement as to be beyond unassisted recovery. An open, naturally rotating woodland pattern, call it a savannah or a mosaic as you like, with (say) 20-50% tree cover has a lot more opportunities for one of those freak events or special factors to occasionally rejuvenate a patch of it than a bare landscape with only small isolated patches of wood clinging to crags, islets, and perilous places less frequented by large, happily-munching herbivores.

But I for one want to see plenty of those (relatively wild) herbivores in our uplands, for their own delights, and to help keep the terrain negotiable for us stolid, plodding humans.

Where wild land supporters live

Article

Wild-landers would never be caught demanding a level playing field (do we prefer Argyll-type Bowling Greens?), but it is all too easy to tilt the political debating ground against us. One common accusation is that wild land supporters live far away in the cities, and don't know the first thing about the reality of living amongst it. A quick scan of our membership gives us some ammunition.

What stands out is that there is no strong geographical pattern. We live broadly in proportion to the population of Scotland, in cities, suburbs, and countryside. There is a distance-decay effect away from the Highlands, and the east side of the country is a little stronger than the

west. We have a large minority of members 'furth of Scotland', again more in the north - notably a cluster in Cumbria. A little surprisingly we only have three abroad.

It is heartening and helpful to our cause that 20% of us live north of the Highland Boundary, some in Inverness and Aberdeen, but most scattered widely, even unto Shetland and Lewis. If we take Scottish members only, then **37% live outwith the Central Belt**. It is certainly not a Glasburgh 'chattering classes' thing.

Highlands & Islands	70
Grampian & Highland Perth	28
Dundee, Fife, Lowland Perth, Stirling	63
Edinburgh & Lothians	70
Glasgow & Strathclyde	61
Borders, Dumfries & Galloway	20
SCOTLAND	312
N England	66
Midlands, SW, E Anglia	63
London & SE	32
Wales, N Ireland	6
Abroad	3
FURTH OF SCOTLAND	170
TOTAL	482

Statutory right of access now in force

Article

Wednesday 9 February 2005 saw the long-awaited start of statutory access rights in Scotland, as passed in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

There is a dedicated website for access advice, www.outdooraccess-scotland.com. This explains about the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, states how to get a copy, and has downloads of the Code. The full version runs to over 130 pages and comes in a high quality folder from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH).

Information about the code is shown here, together with the code's own special logo. The logo usage is managed by SNH.

Alistair Cant



Know the Code before you go...

Enjoy Scotland's outdoors. Everyone has the right to be on most land and water for recreation, education and for going from place to place providing they act responsibly. These access rights and responsibilities are explained in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. The key things are:

When you're in the outdoors:

- take personal responsibility for your own actions and act safely;
- respect people's privacy and peace of mind;
- help land managers and others to work safely and effectively;
- care for your environment and take your litter home;
- keep your dog under proper control;
- take extra care if you're organising an event or running a business.

If you're managing the outdoors:

- respect access rights;
- act reasonably when asking people to avoid land management operations;
- work with your local authority and other bodies to help integrate access and land management
- respect rights of way and customary access

Find out more by visiting www.outdooraccess-scotland.com or phoning your local Scottish Natural Heritage office.

AGM 2005

ANNUAL MEMBERS' MEETING 11th June 2005

The Annual General Meeting of the Group will be held on Saturday 11 June at 7.30pm at the [Inchrie Castle Hotel](#), (also known as the Covenanters Inn) in Aberfoyle (just on southern edge of town - [map](#)).

**All members and visitors welcome.
Bar meals available from 6.00 pm.**

The plan for the earlier part of the day is to remove forest brash / young exotic trees on path up Stank glen, just to east of Ben Ledi - [map](#). Please ring David Jarman on 01786-474013 if you plan to come so he can co-ordinate numbers/parking/lift up hill from FC. Activity requires basic level of fitness, stout shoes, gloves, clothing appropriate for weather and packed lunch etc

There is camping at the [Cobleland Campsite](#) just south of Aberfoyle.
Tel 01877-382392. Grid ref NS 531 988.

Co-ordinator's [Annual Report \(DOC\) for 2004-2005](#).

Copies of the accounts are available to members from the co-ordinator or treasurer.