

SPRING/SUMMER 2015

# Wild Land News

Magazine of the Scottish Wild Land Group

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Land Reform

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The Wildness of the South Atlantic

# Spring/Summer 2015

## **WILD LAND NEWS** Spring 2015, Issue 87

Magazine of the  
Scottish Wild Land Group

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## Editorial

Welcome to the Spring 2015 issue of *Wild Land News*. This issue is appearing at something of a defining moment for wild land in Scotland. Last year, the Scottish Government adopted Scottish Natural Heritage's Core Areas of Wild Land map and included safeguards for these areas in national planning policies. It was inevitable that developers, driven by subsidies for renewable energy, would test the strength of the Government's resolve. They have recently done just that with a slew of proposals for wind farms in highly valued, supposedly protected areas. Early indications are not encouraging, with the Government's approval of Stronelairg wind farm in the Monadhliath and the subsequent deletion of the Core Area of Wild Land that it will industrialise being particularly troubling. If Talladh-a-Bheithe, Caplich, Glencassley, Sallachy, Allt Duine and others get the go-ahead, we will not only lose some of our most precious landscapes, but notice will have been served on most of the others as well.

Some find this rapid loss of wild areas acceptable. In the context of a global fight against climate change, wild land in Scotland is viewed as a reasonable sacrifice (especially by those who do not appreciate the immense environmental, social and economic value of wild areas). We are encouraged to believe that Scottish wind farms, if not saving the world directly, are making us 'world leaders' in carbon emissions reductions. It would seem churlish to complain about damage to our own environments, however unprecedented, in the face of such achievements.

However, the fact is that Scottish wind farms have achieved very little. The climate system is, of course, global, and is effectively independent of what happens in any one small country -

leading the world is only useful if others can follow. It is both morally questionable and entirely unrealistic to expect developing countries, already starting to suffer the effects of climate change induced by developed countries such as ours, to forego the massive potential of cheap energy sources when our chosen alternative is expensive, inefficient, and intermittent. It is also combined, hypocritically, with the maximum possible exploitation of our own fossil fuel reserves for economic gain. We have a responsibility to help identify global solutions; instead we congratulate ourselves on grand but futile gestures such as building giant windmills on remote mountains.

The parochial and sanctimonious dogma is that wind farms ensure that we 'do our bit' in reducing emissions. Here too, we are failing. Recent figures for total UK emissions (including those we have exported through our reliance on foreign manufacturing) show that they are *still continuing to increase*. Our entire approach to what the Scottish Government calls "one of the most serious threats facing the world" has so far failed to achieve even its most basic, localised objective. If we, as the sixth largest economy in the world, do so little to reduce global carbon emissions, who will act in our place?

Despite all this, wind farm construction continues apace, broadly supported by much of the population. It is a beguilingly painless approach to tackling climate change. After all the warnings of dire consequences and drastic lifestyle changes, regular press releases now trumpet our unparalleled green credentials, bought at the small expense of peat bogs and hills that many politicians, at least, did not really care for in the first place. There is a

discernible relief that our sacrifices turned out to be so easy to make, and a consequent hostility towards suggestions that they may have been fundamentally pointless. The impression of meaningful action is bolstered by environmental groups with prescriptive approaches that demand action on climate change, but only through their preferred technologies. Objectives therefore switch from reducing global emissions to producing more electricity from Scottish renewables, a measure that is completely divorced from the problem of climate change.

Nevertheless, the momentum of wind farm development is sweeping aside all other considerations. The planning system, overwhelmed by applications, no longer appears capable of striking the balances it is intended to protect. Developers with deep, subsidised pockets and broad government backing can usually rely on their preferred outcome – if necessary on the second or third attempt. A government undertaking to ‘safeguard’ wild areas is audaciously re-interpreted as a simple requirement for some tweaks to the design of massive wind farms that will be constructed in those areas. Very few, if any, areas now appear safe from development.

We therefore focus in this issue of *Wild Land News*, once again, on wind farms. We include contributions from a number of environmental groups with similar concerns (as also expressed in our joint letters on the need for reform of the

planning system, below). Helen McDade explains the John Muir Trust’s decision to challenge the Government’s approval of the Stronelaig scheme, the Mountaineering Council of Scotland outline their vision for Scotland’s wild areas, and David Batty of the Munro Society presents their Mountain Reporting scheme and some of its findings. Tony Trewavas tackles some of the myths about renewable energy, and Peter Wright, author of *Ribbon of Wildness*, considers the value of, and threats to, Scottish wild land.

We also include articles on several other important issues such as land reform. Our response to the Government’s recent land reform consultation is outlined, and put into some perspective by David Woodhouse from Mull and Mike Stevens from Australia. Both focus on the need for more National Parks in Scotland, and opportunities for these in the Hebrides and through public ownership of land. We also continue long-running discussions on the nature and importance of wildness, partly inspired, again, by Geoff Salt’s article in the Summer 2014 issue. John Milne reviews *Ramble On* by Sinclair McKay, James Fenton describes the wildness of the South Atlantic, and Michael Burke draws on his experiences to discuss the link between wild mountain areas and the sea.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Wild Land News* and that it inspires you to support or become involved in the work of the SWLG.

## News

### SWLG welcomes new Steering Team members

At last year’s AGM, two new members of the SWLG’s Steering Team were elected: James Fenton and Hugh Tooby. Both are already busy contributing to the Group’s activities, and we will be hearing more from both in due course. Members of the Steering Team are listed on our website at [www.swlg.org.uk/meet-the-team.html](http://www.swlg.org.uk/meet-the-team.html).

#### SWGL Mailing list

Members wishing to join a Scottish Wild Land Group mailing list, for updates on activities and opportunities to get involved, please send their email addresses to [calum@swlg.org.uk](mailto:calum@swlg.org.uk).

## Planning objections

The SWLG recently submitted objections to three planning proposals: Talladh-a-Bheithe wind farm, Caplich wind farm and Ardessie Burn hydro scheme. Talladh-a-Bheithe would industrialise part of Rannoch Moor, and fundamentally change this wild and world-famous landscape. Caplich wind farm would affect a swathe of wild land areas in north-west Scotland, including SNH-identified Wild Land Areas Rhiddoroch – Beinn Dearg – Ben Wyvis, Inverpolly – Canisp, Quinag and Reay – Cassley. Even in the absence of other wind farms, these would have drastic impacts on important areas, wholly outweighing any benefits they may have.

The Ardessie hydro scheme, though smaller-scale, is equally worrying. Renewable energy subsidies are leading to huge numbers of ‘micro hydro’ schemes such as this, each of which makes a vanishingly small contribution to energy generation while causing very substantial damage to the local environment. Even where remediation requirements are properly satisfied (which they often are not), considerable long-term damage occurs. In this case, the scheme would involve damming and permanent track construction alongside a particularly fine burn in the Wester Ross National Scenic Area. We believe this to be one

of the most inappropriate sites imaginable for a hydro scheme.

All of our planning and consultation responses can be found on our website at [www.swlg.org.uk/our-work.html](http://www.swlg.org.uk/our-work.html).

## John Muir Trust Stronelaig appeal

The SWLG has contributed £1,500 to the John Muir Trust’s legal challenge of the Government’s approval of the Stronelaig wind farm. This is a crucial test case that will have major implications for the siting of wind farms in the future and for the processes by which proposals are approved. We believe that the JMT’s case is supported by very strong arguments, and it is important that these are heard (see Helen McDade’s article in this issue). The potential costs of this legal action are high and we fully support the JMT’s associated fundraising activities. To make a donation, go to [www.jmt.org/stronelaig](http://www.jmt.org/stronelaig).

## SWLG land reform consultation response

We also submitted a response to the Scottish Government’s consultation on land reform. A summary of our response is included in this issue, and the full document can be found on our website.

## National Parks Strategy

The Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland recently submitted a petition calling for a Scottish National Parks Strategy. We supported this petition and the ongoing campaign for the designation of more Scottish National Parks (see articles in this issue by Mike Stevens and David Woodhouse).

## SWLG joining letters on planning process

*The SWLG has co-authored two open letters to the Scottish Government to press for fairer, more transparent decision-making in the*

## MCofS petition

The Mountaineering Council of Scotland has launched a petition for remaining areas of wild land to be protected from industrial development.

We strongly support this petition and urge members to sign.

The petition is available at:

<https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/protect-scotland-s-remaining-wild-land-from-development>

***planning system, especially with respect to large renewable energy developments.***

***The letters are below:***

### ***Letter 1***

Few people dispute the necessity of first reducing our energy use, and then substituting the use of fossil fuels with renewable energy alternatives, to help address the challenge of climate change. However, as we have seen, there is public disquiet about proliferation of energy developments in Scotland's wild land areas.

It is vital any decisions on the location of these developments rely on the fair and impartial assessment of all pertinent information and points of view. The people of Scotland depend on their government to ensure this happens.

Unfortunately, we do not believe that the Scottish Government is doing this in a consistent manner with wind farm developments.

In the face of evidence and objections from many different organisations, communities and individuals, the Scottish Government has approved proposals to site colossal wind farms inland, at Stronelaig in the Monadhliath Mountains, and offshore, straddling the Firths of the Forth and Tay. In both cases the Scottish Government chose to ignore the views of its own expert advisers from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH).

Their advice made it absolutely clear that the impact from these turbines will be very significant, and that the locations were problematic as a result. It seems iniquitous to us that, having put in place a planning system which invites the expert views of statutory consultees, the Scottish Government too frequently ignores them if they prove inconvenient. At the very least, evidence of this calibre from SNH should trigger public inquiries.

We therefore call on the Scottish Government to commit to taking cognisance of its own advisers. Rather than force objectors to challenge these decisions in the courts at great expense, the Scottish Government should first

ensure they have been exposed to the proper and democratic scrutiny that their scale and potential impact warrants.

***John Mayhew*** (Director, Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland), ***Brian Linington*** (President, Mountaineering Council of Scotland), ***Peter Willimott*** (President, the Munro Society), ***Sir Kenneth Calman*** (Chairman, National Trust for Scotland), ***David Thomson*** (Convener, Ramblers Scotland), ***John Milne*** (Co-ordinator, Scottish Wild Land Group)

### **Letter 2**

Public trust in the planning process around major infrastructure developments in Scotland is at an all-time low.

This doesn't just concern windfarms; a snapshot of letters pages and online media on any given day reveals angst and suspicion stemming from the sacrifice of areas of wild land, natural heritage, historic landscapes and greenbelt to commercial priorities.

It is understood that difficult decisions need to be made for the good of the nation and the planet. Yet, at a time when community empowerment is supposed to be in the ascendant, it is ironic to see the honest concerns expressed by local communities, and those united by the desire to conserve our most important natural and cultural assets, swept aside in an unequal battle with powerful commercial interests. As has recently been observed, even the Scottish Government itself has been shown to disregard its expert advisers.

This situation cannot continue and it is in everyone's interests to find a way forward.

If we are to rebuild public confidence in the planning process and in the objectivity of Scottish Ministers responsible for making such decisions, then we must find a way to demonstrate absolute transparency, impartiality and fairness. Doing so would help those affected by planning outcomes to accept unpalatable choices.

We propose that fresh impetus be given to revisiting the current planning system with

a view to improving existing procedures, potentially through the creation of a body or process that is truly independent of government. The goal would be to ensure clear, neutral adjudication over controversial planning applications where there could be significant impact on important landscapes, natural heritage interests or local communities.

We accept that there are many questions to answer over how any new arrangements would be established, who would oversee them and so forth; but it is a discussion we must have soon if we are to find a way out of the morass of confusion and recrimination that characterises the present system.

Change would obviate the need for ill-funded individuals, communities and charities to take on lavishly-subsidised developers in the courts where they can rely upon the best advocacy money can buy. It would also create a level playing field on which the needs of nature and communities can be weighed alongside other priorities.

We invite the Scottish Government to join with us in an open discussion based on our suggestions.

**John Mayhew** (*Director, the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland*), **Stuart Brooks** (*Chief Executive, The John Muir Trust*), **Brian Linington** (*President, Mountaineering Council of Scotland*), **Peter Willimott** (*President, the Munro Society*), **Sir Kenneth Calman** (*Chairman, the National Trust for Scotland*), **David Thomson** (*Convener, Ramblers Scotland*), **Stuart Housden OBE** (*Chief Executive, RSPB Scotland*), **George Menzies** (*Chairman, Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society*), **John Milne** (*Co-ordinator, Scottish Wild Land Group*)

## “Generations of Change”

One of our members has penned a fifth verse and chorus to this well-known modern folk song, written by Matt Armour, which describes the changing patterns of work over several generations, as experienced by a family in the East of Scotland. If you don't know it, there is a fine version sung by Joe Aitken, which is

available on the internet, and the original song lyrics are also findable with ease. Try Henry on [mysongbook.de](http://mysongbook.de) or Jim Malcolm's Topsy Courting page for the lyrics. There are several very misheard versions also available...

The new verse was premiered at Celtic Connections' House of Song in January, but a prominent MSP who loudly champions the industry was not there that night. Perhaps Mr Gibson will read his free copy of this magazine and enjoy it anyway.

(“Copyleft” by Hector Forbes- sing it if ye like it.)

Man, afore ye wid know it, the laddies are  
growit,

And up on the moors digging holes in the peat.  
In this modern age they get minimum wage  
Tae build windfarms that profit the rich once  
again.

They've gouged peat in Edinbane, concreted  
Braes o Doune

Fallago, Novar, Whitelee and Ae.

We're telt that it's Green and Clean, but it jist  
seems obscene

Tae waste whit we've got, while the polluters  
don't pay.

Are these days the end days, or are there some  
better ways

For savin the planet while oor will is still strang?  
This crisis will pass and be replaced by the next  
As the bosses and bankers keep control o' oor  
young.

Helen McDade

## Standing up for Wild Land: why the John Muir Trust has taken test case legal action against the proposed Stronelairst wind farm.

*Helen McDade is Head of Policy at the John Muir Trust*

Many SWLG members will know that the John Muir Trust has taken legal action against the Scottish Government. The test case is regarding the government's consent of a Scottish and Southern Energy (SSE) proposed wind farm at Stronelairst, in the Monadhliath mountains to the south of Loch Ness. SSE joined with the government to contest the Trust's case. There have been a number of other decisions approving applications in or near wild land areas so why did we choose to contest this development and this decision?

It wasn't a decision that the Trust took lightly and was after detailed conversations with our legal advisers, amongst our management team and ultimately with the consent of our trustees.

We've been told on numerous occasions that it was a brave decision. However, it was action we felt we had to take. After all, the John Muir Trust exists to stand up for wild land and our members expect us to do so in accordance with our charitable aims.

At time of writing the judicial review has been heard with decisions still to be made. Whatever the result the Trust felt it could not sit by and do nothing if this decision could undermine the value of the new Wild Land Area's (WLA's) map and wild land itself.

Here are the key reasons why the Trust took legal action:

- 1) Not only is Stronelairst the largest wind farm approved to date in the Scottish Highlands, it is also located in an area of wild land. There are larger wind farms in Scotland – Whitelee and Clyde, for instance – but this proposed development of 67 turbines (mostly 135m high, the same height as the London Eye) is to be located in a highly sensitive mountain landscape. This is arguably the wildest place in the UK where an industrial wind development has been approved. It covers an area with the same footprint as Inverness.
- 2) The Monadhliath Mountains support one of Europe's most extensive tracts of upland blanket bog. The developer, a subsidiary company of Scottish and Southern Energy (SSE), acknowledges that the site consists of over 70 per cent wet blanket peat bog. More than one third of this bog is unmodified – in other words in near pristine condition – with the rest capable of being restored.

**Blanket bog is Scotland's equivalent of the rainforest with regard to its importance in reducing carbon emissions to the atmosphere by retaining carbon in the ground** - potentially up to 20 times as much carbon per acre as the average British woodland.

- 3) Despite a robust objection by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) on wild land grounds, the Scottish Government did not call a Public Local Inquiry (PLI). Until the Scottish

Government's 2012 decision consenting the Viking wind farm in Shetland without a PLI – another huge development involving Scottish and Southern Energy (SSE) – it had been usual government practice that a strong objection from a statutory consultee such as SNH would trigger an Inquiry, so that the application could be properly scrutinised.

- 4) Moreover, the United Nations Aarhus Convention and European environmental law require that there is proper public participation in planning applications that have the potential to cause impact on the environment. The Trust believes that in this case, without a public inquiry, that has not been fulfilled. Unfortunately, due to the potential costs of the legal case, the Trust had to try to limit the time spent in court by limiting the arguments we took forward and so with advice chose not to fully develop this particular argument at the judicial review.
- 5) The proposed development was acknowledged in the Scottish Government's decision letter as creating "*some significant landscape impacts*" and that it would "*have a significant impact on the wildness qualities*" of the Monadhliath Search Area for Wild Land (the relevant wild land consideration under the planning policy which was current at the time of the decision).
- 6) The Government's decision letter consenting Stronelaig acknowledged the environmental damage that would be caused, but claimed – without substantiation – that benefits from carbon emissions reduction and electricity production by such a large scheme would offset that loss. No supplementary information was submitted to calculate the carbon savings or economic benefit from the scheme consented – which was reduced to sixty-seven turbines from the original application of eighty-three.

**Moreover, if the premise argued by the developer - that a very large wind scheme was bound to have clear carbon and economic gains - were accepted as sufficient reason for consent there would soon potentially be no wild land left in Scotland.** All that would be

needed to overrule policy protection of wild land would be a sufficiently large wind farm development claiming sizeable carbon target contributions.

- 7) The wind farm would lie in an area that was last year proposed to be officially recognised as wild land by the Scottish Government's natural heritage adviser, SNH. However, the site was excluded from the final map of Wild Land Areas (WLAs) published on 23 June 2014, due to the consented wind farm. The Trust submitted a Freedom of Information Request to SNH and the government which confirmed that, after the decision, the Scottish Government asked SNH to revise this area in the final WLAs map due to Stronelaig. A large area including and surrounding Stronelaig was removed from the final Wild Land Areas map published on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2014. The then-revised map became embedded in Scottish planning policy also published on 23 June 2014 <http://www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/looking-after-landscapes/landscape-policy-and-guidance/wild-land/mapping>.

**This means that under Scottish planning policy over 20,000 hectares around Stronelaig is now not considered to be an area requiring "significant protection" from wind farms.** The timing of the announcement of planning approval for Stronelaig enabled the Minister's Decision letter to avoid considering the WLAs map. However, the previous policy protecting wild land was in place and was more than strong enough to have prompted refusal.

### The legal process

The first stage in the legal process was to apply for a Protective Expenses Order (PEO) to try to reduce the risk of exposure to potentially very considerable legal fees. The PEO mechanism was brought in by the Scottish government to address a requirement under the Aarhus Directive, to enable people to take forward a case for the public good regarding the environment without it being prohibitively expensive. Unfortunately, on 31 October 2014

the judge in the Court of Session refused to grant the PEO. The Trust was naturally disappointed with that decision as it does not have access to the resources of either the Scottish Government or SSE. The Trust believes that this decision, alongside other recent refusals of Protective Expenses Order, suggests that the Scottish system does not fulfil the obligation to allow public participation in environmental cases and we will pursue a complaint to the Aarhus Compliance committee.

After carefully considering the implications of the PEO ruling, but also the generous financial support given by the public to the Trust for this case by that point, the Trust decided to continue with the Judicial Review. We also decided at this stage to drop one of our lines of argument to reduce time in court. This was not because we no longer thought it was a strong or important argument but as a response to the PEO decision.

Our legal challenge against the Scottish Ministers, and also Scottish and Southern Energy who joined in against the Trust as an interested party, took place between 11th and 13th February before Lord Jones in the Court of Session in Edinburgh.

The Trust's case, led by Sir Crispin Agnew QC, involved three main strands. We argued that:-

- i. the Scottish Ministers had acted unreasonably in granting consent to the Stronelaireg development because it was in a Search Area for Wild Land (SAWL), was in a draft Core Area of Wild Land (CAWL) at the time of the decision and, as a result of the decision, was removed from the final Wild Land Areas (WLAs) map published on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2014. This removed over 20,000 hectares from the draft WLA as was still proposed by SNH on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2014, despite Scottish Planning Policy stating that wild land should be safeguarded. The Trust case stated that Ministers did not give proper consideration to Scottish Natural Heritage's advice that to consent Stronelaireg would mean the Search Area of

Wild Land would no longer be wild land. We also emphasised Scottish Natural Heritage's position that the development at Stronelaireg raised natural heritage issues of national importance because of the significant adverse impacts to wild land.

- ii. The Scottish Ministers had taken into account supplementary environmental information which had not been advertised and, therefore, the public had not been given an opportunity to see the information and comment, contrary to law.
- iii. The Ministers' decision letter gave inadequate reasons for departing from SNH's strong advice.

**During the hearing, Counsel for the Scottish Ministers argued that to "safeguard" wild land merely meant mitigating the impacts of a development on wild land by design and reduction of turbines, whereas we argued that to safeguard meant protecting wild land.**

We expect it to be two to three months before there is a decision. The legal action has already cost many tens of thousands of pounds. If, at the conclusion of the case, the Trust wins, we would not have to pay the other side's costs. However, we need to know we are in a position to pay if we lose and we do not know how much those costs are, at any point in the process. If we win, it is likely the other parties would appeal. If we lose, the Trust could appeal if the legal advice was that we had good grounds to do so and if we could do so without exposing the Trust to risk. So the Trust continues to accept donations or pledges to help us with this legal action – see our website. It is because people have responded magnificently that we were able to go to court. We have already received heartening support from over 1000 people – including many of our members, supporters and other organisations including the Scottish Wild Land Group (for which we are very grateful) and also the Mountaineering Council of Scotland and National Trust for Scotland.

As one of our supporters said: *“If we let this one – at the heart of wild land – go through, what chance for Allt Duine, Glencassley, Sallachy, Strathy Wood, Limekiln?”* These industrial-scale developments, which would seriously diminish wild land, are all currently in the planning process. The logical end-point would be the loss of most of Scotland’s wild land.

The Trust is of the view that there is too much at stake in terms of wild land protection both at Stronelaig and throughout Scotland to allow this decision to pass unchallenged. If we win the case, we can fight to return Stronelaig to its place as a recognised wild land area in SNH’s map. So the Trust is fighting for our core principles – to ensure that generations to come can enjoy the wildness of this precious mountain environment.

The Trust is not blind to the David and Goliath nature of trying to win a Scottish legal case taken to protect the environment. However,

taking a strong stand, in accordance with our charitable aims and objectives, to try and stop the Stronelaig development being built and to defend the concept of wild land is too important not to contest. We will also take steps, possibly with others, to seek improvements to the decision-making process to ensure environmental justice. Whether we win or not, we will lodge a complaint under the Aarhus Convention regarding the PEO not being granted and the difficulty for the public in putting forward their views in the Scottish planning process.

Further information and updates at [www.jmt.org/stonelaig.asp](http://www.jmt.org/stonelaig.asp)

*[The SWLG has contributed £1500 towards the costs of the John Muir Trust’s crucial legal action. We also urge members to contribute if they have not already done so].*



*The Torridon village, A E Torode*

## Respecting Scotland's Mountains: The Mountaineering Council of Scotland's Vision for the Future

*The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCofS) is the representative body for mountaineers, hill walkers and ski tourers in Scotland .*

**Mountain landscapes and wild places in Scotland are threatened as never before by ill-considered large-scale developments. A clear, legal guarantee of the integrity of wild and special landscapes is required.**

Scotland is famous worldwide for its mountains and wild lands. They are fundamental to our national, cultural, ecological and historical identity. Over the centuries they have inspired poets, writers, painters and film-makers. Nowadays they are a magnet for visitors. Some come to relax in a beautiful and unspoiled setting, while others want to get out and walk, climb, run, cycle or ski. Many also want to see the wonderful wildlife and plant species. The MCofS understands their value and the need to protect their special qualities for the benefit of all.

However, Scotland's wild areas are under immediate threat from inappropriate developments such as industrial-scale wind farms and unsuitable hill tracks, which damage the character and social value of these landscapes. When wild places are lost, they are gone forever. Experience shows that one development often leads to another, resulting in progressively more damage. Therefore, a coherent, integrated national policy is needed for mountain areas that defines what can, and cannot, be done in such areas in the future.

Our vision for Scotland's mountains and wild places is underpinned by five key elements:

- Scotland's mountains and remaining wild lands should be treated as an ***irreplaceable natural, cultural and economic asset*** – respected and safeguarded for the benefit of all.
- Their wildness and grandeur are a fabulous resource, and they provide unrivalled opportunities to ***develop and improve informal recreation, tourism, health and wellbeing through Scotland's world-class access legislation***.
- Scotland should harness the potential of the mountains and wild land to contribute to a foundation for ***sustainable futures for fragile rural economies***.
- ***Change should be planned and regulated*** to enhance, not diminish, our wild lands and mountains. Stopping intrusive developments such as industrial-scale wind farms will protect Scotland's natural heritage, wildlife, culture and world-wide reputation as a great tourism destination and place to live.
- ***Appreciation and enjoyment of the mountains including good practice and responsibility*** (avoiding litter, erosion and other damage) should be promoted from childhood.

Fulfilling this vision needs an integrated approach in the following key areas.

## Supporting communities

Wild land and mountains are valued by most of Scotland's residents (91% according to a Scottish Natural Heritage survey) and large numbers go walking and climbing. A remarkable 55% of visitors (65% among first-timers) told a VisitScotland survey that they mainly come here for the scenery and landscape. Tourism is worth around £11bn a year. VisitScotland says it is "the engine room of the Scottish economy".

Scotland's population also faces major health challenges associated with lack of exercise and stress. People of all ages need to be encouraged to go out and experience the beauty, enjoy the exercise and benefit from the relaxation that our mountains can provide.

Many of the most fragile local economies and vulnerable communities are in highland areas. Sustainable businesses can be created by making the most of mountains as places for recreation and leisure. To do this their wild quality must be maintained – if not, the evidence increasingly shows that visitors will go elsewhere (MCofS, Wind Farms and Changing Mountaineering Behaviour in Scotland, March 2014). The MCofS wants government, local authorities and others to make the most of our mountains and wild lands. This can be done by empowering local people to provide good-quality facilities and services that contribute to broad-based, diverse and thriving local economies.

## Onshore wind power generation

The MCofS supports the Scottish Government's aim of developing clean, renewable energy sources but opposes developments that threaten the wild landscape of Scottish mountains. The protection for wild land in Scottish Planning Policy 2014 is welcome but falls well short of the absolute protection required.

Our approach to proposed wind farm developments is based on a detailed assessment of each individual proposal taking into account a number of factors:

- **Position:** Proposals affecting areas of mountaineering interest, for example Munros, Corbetts or other iconic hills, are largely unacceptable, as are those in Wild Land Areas.
- **Scale:** Large clusters of turbines are highly intrusive and destroy a wild landscape. Small clusters in less sensitive areas can deliver environmental benefits and also benefit communities.
- **Size:** Scottish mountains may appear high but their grandeur is relative to their surroundings and a function of their setting in the landscape. Large turbines, often with ground-to-tip heights of over 120m, diminish the relative scale of the mountains and dominate the landscape.
- **Siting:** Ridge and hilltop developments are most obvious. Careful positioning can sometimes reduce the impact, but usually they remain visible for miles in many directions.
- **Associated infrastructure:** Wind farms require access tracks for heavy equipment. These can stretch for miles, are wide, and scar the landscape. They are highly intrusive and add to the impression of industrialisation.
- **Pioneer and cumulative impact:** The first development in an area can be particularly harmful. Once approval has been granted for one wind farm in a sensitive area, further applications often follow in quick succession. Developers claim that, as one has been approved, those that follow will have a limited impact.

## Hill tracks

Footpaths made by man have given access to remote areas for millennia. In the past they were small scale and had minimal impacts on the surrounding environment and landscape. However, availability of mechanised earth moving equipment has facilitated the construction of tracks that are relatively wide, sometimes long, and often damaging to the overall landscape.

The MCofS appreciates that land managers

need to access remote areas and that hill tracks facilitate this. The MCofS also acknowledges that mountaineers use these tracks to access the hills. However, we are concerned at the recent unconstrained proliferation of intrusive tracks in wild areas. While welcoming the Scottish Government's current moves to bring tracks into the planning system, its new measures are too weak and fail to ensure democratic oversight. In particular, a default position in which notifications not responded to within 28 days can proceed is unacceptable. All hill tracks should require full planning permission.

Government and local planners must guarantee that certain factors are taken into account when approving the building of new hill tracks. The need for a new track in a particular position should be clearly justified, and there should be no satisfactory alternative available. The scale of the track should be appropriate to its use, with small-scale all-terrain vehicle tracks being much less intrusive than those for 4x4 vehicles or trucks carrying heavy plant. Careful positioning, appropriate drainage and high quality construction should be used to minimise visibility, especially on higher ground where disused tracks often remain very visible. The cumulative impact of tracks within a limited area should be taken into account.

### **Managing recreational activity**

Because of the wider societal benefits which accrue, it is good news that the popularity of mountaineering and other recreational activities in wild lands is growing. But this has an impact. MCofS wishes to work with other bodies to help manage the mountain environment to maximise the recreational benefits and minimise the environmental impacts.

Scottish law has led the way in confirming rights to access land for those who behave responsibly and in recognising that land managers have an obligation to enable responsible access. Yet some estates try to

restrict access in breach of the spirit of the law. In a few cases their compliance with the law is in serious doubt. We will take whatever action is needed, within the legislative framework, to ensure that rights to responsible access are upheld.

We also support measures to improve footpaths when needed to prevent damage to the landscape and environment. We applaud work to remove litter and human waste from popular areas and will continue to emphasise the need for responsible behaviour in the mountains. We will also encourage the provision of appropriately screened parking in areas of high public usage.

### **Realising the Vision**

The 21st century will continue to bring pressure on our mountain landscapes that could never previously have been imagined. Realisation of our vision would see a mountain environment that is enjoyed by people in a responsible way, maintained as wild land by the highest standards of management, and preserved from damaging development.

These are achievable practical outcomes, and the least that future generations will expect.

Anthony Trewavas

## The Myth of Renewables

*Anthony Trewavas is an Emeritus Professor at the University of Edinburgh, a Fellow of the Royal Society (London) and of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and a leading member of the Scientific Alliance. A version of this article first appeared in The Scotsman*

Renewables use sun, water, wind; energy sources that won't run out. Non-renewables come from things like gas, coal and uranium that one day will. But unless electricity and motorised transport is abandoned altogether, all 'renewables' need huge areas of land or sea and require raw materials that are drilled, transported, mined, bulldozed and these *will* run out.

Wind turbine towers are constructed from steel manufactured in a blast furnace from mined iron ore and modified coal (coke). Turbine blades are composed of oil-derived resins and glass fibre. The nacelle encloses a magnet containing about 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of a tonne of the rare earth metals, neodymium and dysprosium. Large neodymium magnets also help propel electric cars. Currently China provides 95% of rare earths, proven reserves of dysprosium will likely run out in 2020. Processing one tonne of ore, generates about one tonne of radioactive waste, 12 million litres of waste gas containing dust concentrate, hydrofluoric acid, sulphur dioxide, sulphuric acid and 75 thousand litres of waste water. Baotou, in China, mines and processes much of the rare earth ores. The town abuts a 5 mile wide, toxic, lifeless, radioactive lake of processing wastewater. Local inhabitants have unusually high rates of cancer (particularly in children), osteoporosis, skin and respiratory disease. This unseen environmental destruction may be far off but no less damaging.

One thousand tonnes of concrete anchors the turbine base. The concrete used for the 5000 or so built or consented turbines in Scotland would be sufficient to construct an eight lane motorway from John O'Groats to Lands End. Cement production generates 7% of the world's emissions. Wilderness that is partitioned between turbines, access roads, crane pads and power lines is no longer renewable.

The Oxford University conservationist, Clive Hambler, has summarised data from Sweden, Germany, Spain, Denmark and USA that indicate one hundred birds are killed per turbine per year on average. For bats (that consume 3000 midges/night), it is two hundred. UK estimates for turbine wild life mortality are not available. But with 5000 Scottish turbines, premature destruction of birds and bats is in the million range/year. Organisations established by government to protect wild life in Scotland, are in denial over the damage their consent to wind farms is causing.

Current expenditure on UK wind farms is more than £20 billion. If that money had instead been used to construct 30 gas fired power stations to replace those using coal, emissions reduction would have been about 37%. Pristine countryside, reliable energy supplies and undamaged wild life would have been maintained. The present plethora of wind farms has only reduced emissions at best by 7.5%; necessary use of gas-fired back-up for reliable electricity supplies makes it less than 4% in practice.

The production of just 6 solar panels requires at least one tonne of coal to bake the silicon at high temperature. Solar panel-production plants generate 500 tonnes of hazardous sludge every year. Their manufacture releases hexa-fluoroethane, nitrogen trifluoride, and sulphur hexa-fluoride, greenhouse gases thousands of times more damaging than carbon dioxide. The life expectancy of solar panels and wind turbines is 1/2-1/4 that of gas fired or nuclear power stations. Even dams for hydropower (concrete again) are only scheduled to last 50 years. The low density of energy for both wind and sun requires huge areas of land for electricity generation. To replace the recently closed Cockerzie power station (1.2GW) would require turbines covering a minimum of 70 square miles of countryside. Geothermal energy requires fossil fuels/cement for power station construction. Power transmission requires cables made either of steel, copper (mined and processed) or even carbon fibre processed from fossil fuels.

Drax coal-fired power station generates 7% of UK electricity and has been partially converted to burning wood to benefit from government subsidies. A forest area substantially larger than Wales is needed for wood supply. But deforestation abroad to supply the wood threatens replacement of diverse ecosystems and wildlife damage with tree monocultures. When burnt, wood is dirtier than coal in releasing CO<sub>2</sub>, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, particulates and organic volatiles. Up to 50 years are required to recover the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Most biofuels produce some surplus energy over energy invested but with poor or negative emissions saving. Displacement of crop-growing land for biofuel forces food price rises.

Renewable energy is a myth; none will last longer than the non-renewable sources they all need. Uranium and thorium reserves should last thousands of years. Nuclear fission in small, fast-neutron, modular reactors generates electricity but waste that decays in 1-2 centuries. A breakthrough in the construction of small containment vessels for

deuterium/tritium fusion has been reported. One kg of fusion fuel produces energy equivalent to 10 million kg of fossil fuel. Deuterium is abundant in the oceans. This is the future, not renewables.

The renewables philosophy seems to be based on the assumption that in some way wind, sun and water are a perpetual motion machine. They may well be in terms of millions of years in that the energy comes initially from the sun but without the ability to access them from non-renewable sources this notion is again mythology. The second assumption is that somehow the energy is free. At source so it is; but so is coal, gas and nuclear energy; at source. Exploitation costs and the costs can be heavy. Currently the costs of exploiting wind are twice those of coal, gas or nuclear energy. To replace the electricity output of the recently closed Cockerzie power station on the river Forth requires at least 2000 turbines that at a minimum must occupy 225 square km of countryside. Cockerzie occupied 1 square kilometre of land. The financial value, let alone aesthetic value of unspoilt countryside and wild land never enters the discussion. Our birthright is being stolen from under our feet. We must challenge those who claim renewables are good for the environment.

Electricity is the lifeblood of our economy and our current existence, it underpins the use of virtually all our activities, lifestyle and future. The cost of electricity determines how freely it flows. And just as blood flows freely through a healthy body, but when constricted causes ill-health, so it is the same for electricity. Increasing the price of electricity deliberately by choosing expensive sources whatever the philosophy behind them, does not bode well for our future. Costs and benefits come with all human activities. The costs of renewables are too high and the benefits too few.

David Batty

## The Munro Society – Mountain Reporting

The Munro Society (TMS) was formed in 2002. Although not part of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, the traditional “Keeper of the List”, SMC was kept informed during its formation. The first president was the late Irvine Butterfield. Much thought went into formulating its Objectives and Ethos. The intention was to be more than a club and social network, although these were important. It was hoped that over time The Society would establish a “voice” in matters pertaining to the Munros and Scotland’s mountain landscape. A membership comprising individuals who had climbed all the Munros was seen as a real strength in terms of credibility and substance.

In those early days several threads were developed. Social activities were relatively easy to set up with an Annual Dinner and lecture, a socially orientated AGM and a few meets per year. Regular Newsletters and a biennial Journal were produced. An archive of matters related to Munros and Munroists was set up, based at the A K Bell Library in Perth.

A programme of Heightings was introduced to attempt once and for all, using modern GPS surveying techniques, to resolve the heights of mountains around the 3000 feet level and ensure they were placed in the right category. However, the most important and enduring activity introduced was the systematic recording and reporting of Scotland’s mountain environment, focussed around the Munros.

It is worth quoting parts of TMS’s Constitution and Ethos in regard to monitoring Scotland’s mountain environment. The Constitution states that The Society should be “an informed and authoritative body of opinion and influence on the protection of and access to the Munros and

their mountain landscape and Scotland’s mountains in general”. Additionally, the Ethos states “as a concomitant to conservation of the physical environment, future generations should also have access to the thinking of those who preceded them on the mountains. There is thus a requirement to record and store what people thought important in their times and in their context.” That leads us into Mountain Quality Indicators and Mountain Reporting.

Initially mountain reporting was called “Mountain Quality Indicators of Environment and Experience” (MQIs). A comprehensive structure of information based on eight criteria was drawn up together with a scoring (or rating) system and this has been applied to date. As could be anticipated the MQI Project has had its problems and its detractors. Three major concerns expressed by some members have been their perception of its subjectivity in judging a mountain, their aversion to the principle of scoring a mountain and the request to provide information on matters outside their competence e.g. flora and fauna. Also, it is true to say that many members wish to go to the hills to enjoy them without the task of memorising what they see and completing a form. Additionally many members, having completed their round of Munros, are now engaged with Corbetts, Grahams, Donalds and Marilyns. These issues have all been addressed and a new form, “Mountain Reporting”, is being launched in spring 2015. A pilot has been running since early 2014. Scoring has been dropped, contributors need only complete what they feel is within their competence, a method of on-line reporting is being introduced and, as The Society is concerned with Scotland’s mountain landscape, reports of any hill

category will be welcome. Of course some members will not respond, whatever is proposed, but it is hoped these changes will lead to greater member involvement.

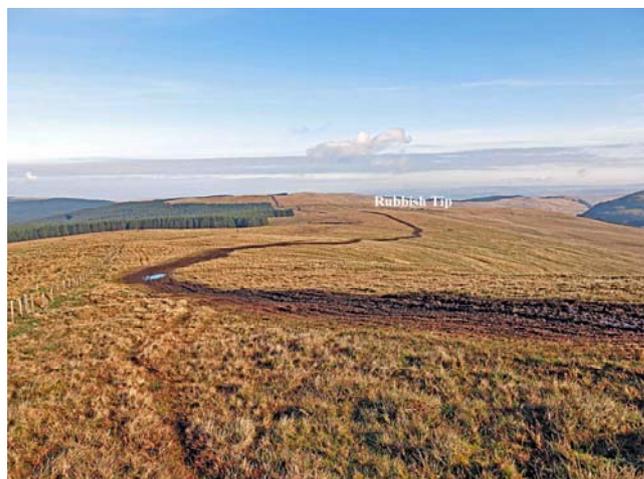
Two further initiatives will benefit the Mountain Reporting project. As part of the on-line reporting initiative all future reports and most of the backlog of past reports will be available on-line. Members of the public will have controlled access to these reports. Photographic evidence is also being introduced. When reporting, members are being asked to provide relevant photographs to illustrate and emphasise matters being reported on – as opposed to simply providing a pretty view although the odd one or two of these will be welcome e.g. if they emphasise the unspoilt nature of the surrounding landscape or otherwise.

So what has the MQI Project achieved to date, what can we look for in the future and how can the information be used? The MQI project has now been running for eleven years covering two phases from 2003 to 2010 and 2010 to date. Over that period more than 1,500 MQI forms have been completed, admittedly of varying quality, by more than 30 members. One member, Derek Sime, has been our most prolific reporter and in 2014 “*completed* an MQI round” on Ben More on Mull. Reports have been received for all 282 Munros for each of the spring, summer and autumn seasons and for almost half of the more demanding winter season. Most of these reports are of good

quality and, although more member involvement would have been welcomed, a sufficient number of contributors, each providing more than fifty reports, has created a substantive body of information across a range of subject matter pertinent to Scotland’s mountain landscape. This information covers access, flora, fauna, past and present human impact, erosion and members’ views on physical aspects and aesthetic response. A Phase 1 report was published in 2010. Information from the MQI reports was used by the British Trust for Ornithology in its Project Ptarmigan initiative. Phase 2 will complete at the end of February 2015 and a second report will be issued. These reports help to reinforce, in a factual way, what is already apparent to those interested in and concerned about many of the issues of concern regarding Scotland’s mountain landscape be it wind farms, hill tracks, footpath erosion, hydro developments, radio masts, litter or other matters. They highlight positive aspects including ease of access, footpath improvement and regeneration. They also “record what people thought important in their times and in their context.” Phases 1 and 2 can be seen as a learning curve and the laying down of a platform on which to build a substantive database of information and knowledge which will support TMS’s objective of being “an informed and authoritative body of opinion and influence”. A measure of success is that TMS, which is only 12 years old, is now being invited to participate along with other long established



*Windy Standard, rubbish tip, at 450 metres*



*Windy Standard, looking back to line of ascent*

bodies in initiatives to lobby and to protect Scotland's mountain landscape. It has developed a "voice".

The worth of Mountain Reporting can best be demonstrated by practical examples of submitted reports, including the photographic evidence. A pilot Mountain Report dated April 2014 from a visit to Windy Standard, a Graham/Donald in Glen Afton, highlighted some serious concerns. A few extracts from the report follow:

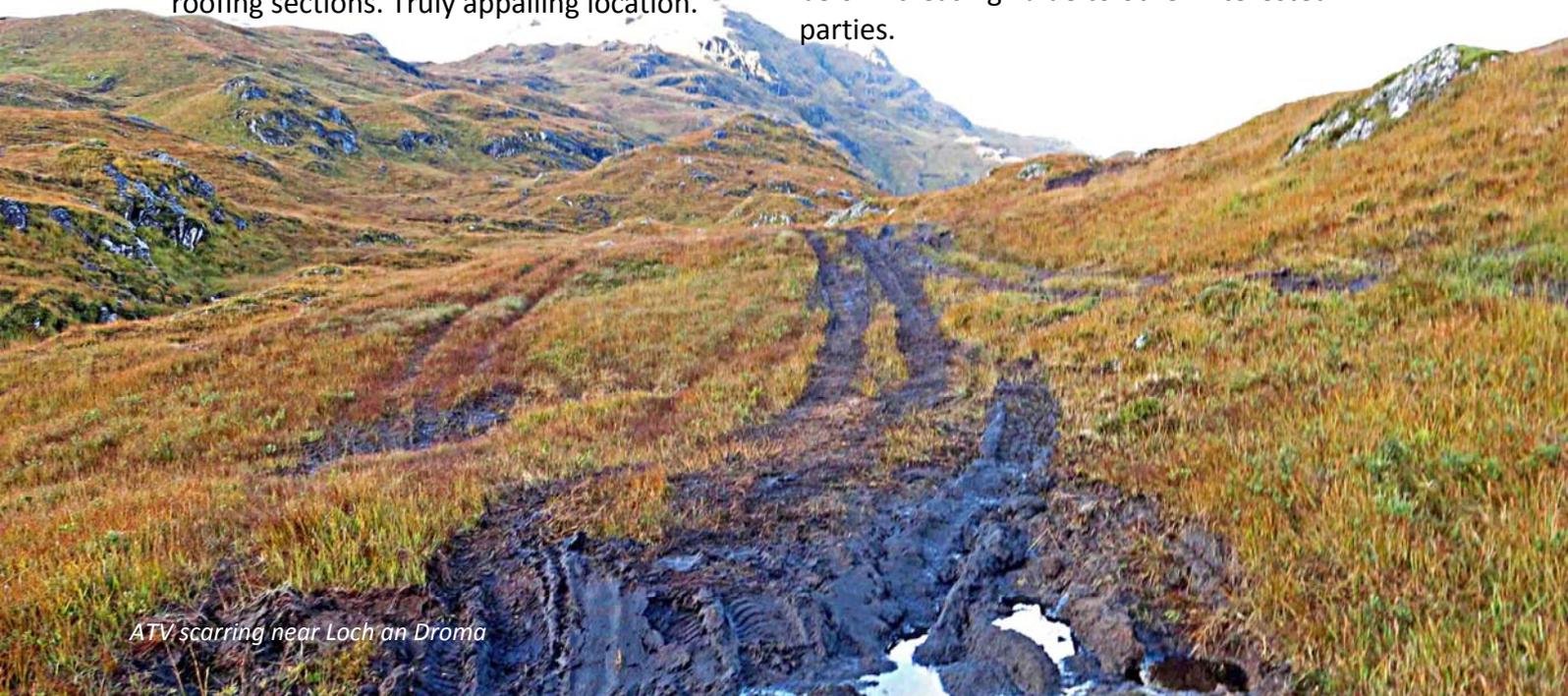
- Appalling wide and muddy ATV track right over Lamb Hill and Wedder Hill appears recently formed to aid erection of a Radio Mast at approx. 632032. (unsure if this will heal or remain damaged for maintenance access)
- Major Wind Farm and related access road on top of Windy Standard.
- Significant non-native plantations in all directions, particularly unattractive near Windy Standard and on east side of Cannock Hill. Tree felling beside west side of Afton Reservoir very unsightly.
- Significant litter at start and on walk up to the dam at north end of Afton Reservoir. Still some litter along west shore of reservoir but less.
- Significant rubbish tip at approx. 626043, 450 metres, beside the estate track. It contained much that appeared to be domestic type rubbish and warning of asbestos which could relate to old broken roofing sections. Truly appalling location.

A report dated October 2014 following a visit to Mullach na Dheiragain reported on ATV tracks:

- As this was the stalking season the use of All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs), particularly near Iron Lodge and in the area around Loch an Droma and Glen Sithidh, was very noticeable. Due to the wet ground considerable erosion and damage had been caused. There was a multitude of tracks going off in several directions. This was much worse than noted on an earlier visit in July 2011, although on this occasion it was near the end of the Stalking season.

On the other hand a report dated April 2014 following a visit to Oban Bothy at the east end of Loch Morar to climb An Stac and Meith Bheinn reported only positives about an unspoilt mountain landscape.

Although Mountain Reporting is well established there remains much to be done. An increase in member participation is required. The on-line system needs more development to go live. Populating the database with past reports will be a big task. Most importantly, how to use the information gathered to best effect is still a work in progress. However, the need for continuing and valid monitoring of change in all matters affecting the Scottish mountains must be self-evident to those who have any interest in these matters. In the absence of any other body taking on this country-wide obligation, The Munro Society does so in the belief that the information collected and made available will be of increasing value to other interested parties.



*ATV scarring near Loch an Droma*

Peter Wright

## Upon the Ribbon of Wildness

Imagine if you will a single geographic feature created entirely within the immense geo-glacial forces of Nature that crests the entire length of Scotland. Imagine too, that this is no modest part of our geography; its wilder credentials are appealing and impressive. Some 27% of its length and habitats are already designated and protected in 90 different sites. The roll-call of Wild Land Areas that it embraces add-up to a formidable 60% of its considerable length, from the border with England to Duncansby Head in the far north-east. An astonishing 87% of it is a combination of Category 6 and 7 Land in terms of its *suitability for agriculture* – as defined by the Hutton Institute. Its *suitability* is therefore marginal, but carries immense potential for bio-diversity. The brand-name that this 1,200 Km feature has so rightly been accorded is ***Ribbon of Wildness***.

This same line links our two current and highly popular National Parks, and would touch upon three more of the aspirational National Parks identified in *Unfinished Business*. For walkers and climbers, it offers outstanding experiences upon the 45 Munros and 24 Corbetts, and with an average elevation exceeding 600m, it has lofty attitude. There are only 20 houses, one redundant church and just a single settlement on it: this feature constitutes a very big and lengthy emptiness. Whilst much of it is remote, there are immensely inviting parts of it within the southern uplands and central belt, so within easy reach of a fair proportion of the Scottish population. The potential for health and well-being is almost boundless.

So what is this great swathe of wildness? It is Scotland's Watershed; the spine of the country, which determines whether rainwater

falling is eventually bound for the North Sea on the one hand, or destined for the Atlantic Ocean on the other. The Royal Scottish Geographical Society recently recognised the route of the Watershed as set out in ***Ribbon of Wildness: Discovering the Watershed of Scotland*** and acknowledged it was a *'hitherto largely unknown geographic feature'*.

As with all campaigning for wild places, we must truly celebrate what we have. It is indeed fair to say that the Watershed is amongst the least interfered-with landscapes on such a vast scale, and is in a state that is undoubtedly at the more naturally-evolved end of the spectrum. In this respect it can be fairly credited with a unique distinction. It is a survivor too, with around 70 Km in the southern uplands having remained intact (just), throughout forty years of commercial afforestation. The one settlement upon it is Cumbernauld, even here, amongst all of the development the Watershed somehow links a succession of established and more recent woodland, old hedgerow and open green space. The Cumbernauld Community Park has pride of place. A Watershed's eye view of this town is indeed comparatively green. The emerging list of Special Landscape Areas within each of the relevant Local Authority domains now incorporates almost 33% of the linear splendour of the Watershed; local populations have been consulted and found these landscapes to be of importance in their lives. The relatively recent formed Central Scotland Green Network partnership, now has a role within the Planning Process - an optimistic means of further strengthening the place of the Watershed meandering around and between many of the more populated parts.

The author writes of this with a potent combination of direct experience, research and published works, see [www.ribbonofwildness.co.uk](http://www.ribbonofwildness.co.uk). Having walked the entire Watershed ten years ago and much of it again subsequently, he can visualise almost every bog and bealach, moor and mountain. He has followed in the footsteps of a small number of fellow travellers, and others have subsequently taken-up the challenge and the pleasure. He argues, with a substantial body of evidence supporting his assertion, that the Watershed, the ***Ribbon of Wildness*** is worthy of wider recognition: quite simply for what it is. He ventures to insist that there should be a presumption of constraint upon encroachment.

The worst form of blemish is where it has been blighted by poorly-sited wind farms. Their location is often ill-conceived and has generally come-about, with rare exception, by sheer opportunism. There is a plea here, to look at the bigger picture; to see beyond the mundane, and embrace the special qualities of the Watershed in its entirety. For it is a largely continuous ***Ribbon of Wildness*** linking a tangible chain of special sites where Nature, biodiversity and real human benefit tower above other considerations.

The Watershed landscapes actively involve every single National environmental agency, and many local such organisations are similarly active upon this great ***Ribbon of Wildness***. This activity, much of it driven by that potent force of voluntary involvement, includes everything from native forest regeneration to peat-land restoration, from wildlife survey and monitoring, to enhancing public access, and so much more. The proposed UNESCO World Heritage Site spanning the Flow Country will straddle the Watershed, and those who venture onto one particular section of it, will look down from the Watershed over the North West Highland Geopark.

As the spine of Scotland, the Watershed has a key place in our landscapes, and there are a hundred or more locations where this is abundantly evident. For those who walk on it,

there is a magnificent sense of place to be enjoyed. To stand on Bodesbeck Law there is all the promise of vistas round from the Lakeland Fells, the Solway Firth, westwards into Galloway, across upper Clydesdale, and then beyond Tweedsmuir to many of the headwaters of that great river. Whilst arrayed at your feet lie the Moffat Hills, where there is such bold evidence of glaciation. Move north to Tomtain in the Kilsyth Hills, and the whole of central Scotland is spread-out in a great mosaic of settlement and greenery. The upper reaches of the Forth, with its backdrop of fine hills marking the skyline, give way to the more rounded form of The Ochils. Morning light catches the meandering Forth estuary, and the viewer will be glad that the elevation of this hill lifts him or her above the noxious output from Grangemouth`s stacks. A last sighting of Tinto provides an opportunity to bid farewell to an old friend, before the journey north continues.

Fast-forward, and the giant roller-coaster around the Rim of Rannoch embraces a 60Km succession of tops providing an experience that seems incomparable, and is indeed breathtaking, yet there are so many surprises still to come. The sudden appearance of the chasm that is the Great Glen is a precursor to the magnificence of a wide swing west towards the Rough Bounds – almost into Knoydart herself. A sharp turn north however on the equally sharp summit of Sgùrr na Ciche does give cause and place for a pause though; to move-on in too much hurry would waste the opportunity.

Beyond Glen Shiel lies two or three days of remote demanding interaction with Nature; the form of the walker may be small within this vastness, but the experience is immense. Approaching The Fannichs, like so much of this, is unconventional and not to be found in any of the guide books. But this fine clutch of hills, and the Watershed`s place among them will never disappoint. Beinn Dearg and her northern neighbours provide a succession of delight, with Seana Bhragh as simply one of the best. What Rhidorroch may lack in elevation, is more than compensated for in the variety, the twists and turns, the hidden lochans, and a view of those great mountains that rear-up from the

landscapes to the west. Breabag is a world apart, its near neighbour Conival presents a formidable non guide-book and challenging ascent. The final tops in the north-west, present terrain that is exceptional in its stark grandeur. Nature chose a route that is unpredictable, with all of the rewards that this brings.

Any notion that the Flow Country of Sutherland and Caithness would be dull or lacking in character should be left behind there, on the summit of Ben Hee. These moors are richly characterised by colour, light, wide-skies, movement and texture. There is only one thing to do on reaching Ben Griam Beg, and that is to find a rock to sit upon for a brew-up, and to take time for some pondering. Finally, Duncansby Head comes into view, along the last few kilometres of cliff-top, with the Stacks of Duncansby standing sentinel in the North Sea. If the lighthouse on the headland is

journey's end, it is also an emotional point at which to stop. The sense of place is enhanced by both the journey travelled, and the view beyond across the Pentland Firth to the Orkney Islands: for another time though.

Just a glimpse then of an exceptional journey upon an equally special route way-marked by Nature alone. We must keep it that way, and just enjoy it for what it is, such *“that this wellspring of natural goodness can ever flow outwards to replenish and renew”*.

From Beinn Bheag to Ben Dorain



## Land reform— the SWLG position

*This is a summary of our response to the Government's land reform consultation, a full version of which can be found on our website at [www.swlg.org.uk/our-work.html](http://www.swlg.org.uk/our-work.html).*

The SWLG is encouraged by recent Government statements about land reform, believing that this is an issue that clearly needs to be addressed, with comprehensive consideration and reform of our system of land management and ownership long overdue. Nevertheless, we did not agree with all of the proposals in the Government's recent consultation, and were particularly concerned that economic development and the perceived interests of poorly-defined communities were being given too much weight. We also argued for public ownership of nationally important areas.

On the basic issue of whether the Government should have a stated policy concerning land use and ownership, we agreed that such a policy was necessary. However, we were concerned by the potential vagueness of this policy, and felt it essential that it accurately and completely described the full range of land rights and responsibilities, especially concerning societal/common interests in land management and ownership, and didn't place undue weight on development, economic benefits or the interests of particular groups.

We were especially concerned about the idea of land management for 'public benefit' being encouraged or required, especially given the track record of successive governments in interpreting 'benefit' only in narrow economic terms. Many of the benefits that people derive from land are not easily or directly measurable in economic or, perhaps, any other terms, but these should certainly not be neglected.

Scotland's landscapes, for instance, are a fundamental part of national identity and provide a wide range of essential and desirable ecosystem services, including mental and physical health benefits. Any attempt to measure all of these and so calculate 'public benefit' would be extremely difficult, and likely to drive land use change towards those benefits for which simple metrics exist (such as economic benefit, again). We believe that the phrase 'in the public interest' is preferable, as it does not lend itself so easily to misinterpretation.

We were also concerned that the draft policy left no room for a lack of management. Historically, much of Scotland's land was effectively unmanaged and, indeed, un-owned (in the modern sense), and it is still the least managed areas that often produce some of the most substantial public benefits (including economic benefits derived from tourism, etc.). A requirement that land should be managed for public benefit would therefore be doubly damaging, preventing land from being entirely unmanaged for environmental or other purposes, and instead forcing some form of management to be implemented with potentially inferior outcomes.

The Government's proposals included measures to substantially increase community ownership of land. However, we believe that public ownership is inherently and clearly preferable to community ownership for ensuring that the public interest is respected and satisfied. By its very nature, community ownership involves the

prioritisation of the interests of people located close to an area of land; interests that may differ greatly from, or even be opposed to, the interests of the wider community. Further, in many remote areas of Scotland it makes little sense to speak of a local community, and even less sense to suggest that the management of large areas that are of national and international significance should be largely determined by a few people currently living close to those areas.

We were also very uneasy about the proposed condition that land should be used to ‘contribute to building a fairer society in Scotland and promoting environmental sustainability, economic prosperity and social justice’. As a national-level aspiration this is a reasonable, if rather platitudinous, statement, but at the scale of individual land holdings it is effectively meaningless, and could allow any form of management to be imposed on the grounds that it contributes to one or more of these vague, undefined and potentially contradictory objectives.

The consultation asked for a list of three actions that the Government should take on land reform. We suggested the following:

- Take more land into public ownership for conservation purposes. As in other countries, publicly-owned National Parks should be established.
- Monitoring stewardship to ensure that it is appropriate for the location (including geological, environmental, social and other characteristics), especially in the case of community ownership
- Introduce land value taxation, with a reduction or waiver for democratically-run charities which provide conservation services.

We also strongly agreed with the suggestion that the types of legal entities that can take ownership or long lease of land in Scotland should be restricted. We believe it is crucial in a modern democracy that secretive companies registered overseas cannot be used to conceal true ownership of large areas of the country. In

addition, information on land ownership should be freely available to all, not least as a statement of the Government’s recognition of land as a common resource, subject to legitimate societal interests in its ownership and use. We do not believe that individual privacy should extend to the secret ownership of large areas of a common resource such as land (and note that it does not extend even to house ownership).

Far less encouraging was the suggestion that powers should be introduced to ‘direct private landowners to take action to overcome barriers to sustainable development’. We believe that ‘sustainable development’ is an excessively vague term, and do not believe that it would be appropriate to define any powers in these terms. If implemented, such a measure would effectively allow future governments to compel landowners to do anything at all, as long as the government described it as ‘sustainable development’ (the current Government’s erroneous conflation of sustainable development, sustained development, and ‘sustainable economic growth’ is notable).

In some sections of the consultation, the aims of suggested changes were unclear. For example, a suggestion that the Forestry Commission and other public sector bodies “should be able to engage in a wider range of management activities in order to promote a more integrated range of social, economic and environmental outcomes” seemed unnecessary (and potentially worrying), and we stressed the lack of justification for industrial development on Forestry Commission land in response. We also argued that any management that damages wild land qualities of core areas of wild land should not be permitted.

Another suggestion that was troubling in its vagueness and potential consequences was that ‘a trustee of a charity should be required to engage with the local community before taking a decision on the management, use or transfer of land under the charity’s control’. We believe that the terms of engagement would be crucial and that, in the case of charities with democratic structures, a requirement to *consult* local communities is appropriate. Where

charities have non-democratic structure, tougher restrictions should apply. However, engagement of all landowners with wider communities of interest is also important, and the same requirements should clearly apply to local communities that receive public support for purchasing land, and other landowners who receive very substantial support from public money.

Nevertheless, we are concerned that undue weight should not be given to the views of a particular group when land is under charitable ownership. Introducing a compulsion for democratic charities to take account of community views would tend to encourage development that may be contrary to the charities' aims and also to the interests of the wider community. This is especially worrying given that landowning charities are responsible for most of the practical conservation programmes in Scotland, at their own expense and in the wider public interest, delivering huge environmental, social and economic benefits to society at large. In the absence of more widespread public ownership for environmental protection, the work of such charities should not be undermined in the interests of a very small sub-group of the population.

In fact, a recurring theme was the definition of 'community'. We argued strongly that the term should not be defined geographically. Local communities do, of course, have very substantial and legitimate interests in the management of land near to them but very much larger communities of interest exist nationally and beyond, and undue weight should not be given to the view of any. For example, the tendency of local communities will be to develop land in their own area for economic benefit, while a strong national interest exists in some areas not being developed for environmental or other reasons. In many of these areas (e.g. Core Areas of Wild Land), no community can be meaningfully identified as 'local', while the areas are important to much of society in general.

In terms of land management, we agreed with the proposition that business rate exemptions

for shootings and deer forests be ended, in order to bring these into line with other forms of rural business. The exemptions are relatively recent and there is nothing to suggest that businesses subject to them would suffer significantly if they were removed.

Nevertheless, we expressed concerns about the effects on landowning charities and others where these activities are not undertaken as a traditional business. We also supported the introduction of further deer management regulations so that, whatever form of management is/is not required, it would be possible to ensure it in a far more robust way than is currently possible - in particular so that SNH could enforce culls where necessary without fear of legal challenge. Finally, we highlighted the need for further action on access rights. We believe it is necessary for all Local Authorities to have at least one specialist access officer in place. Access authorities should be expected to fully implement and fund the Land Reform [Scotland] Act 2003; at the moment there are several long-standing access problems in Scotland and Local Authorities must honour their responsibilities in resolving these problems.

Overall, we felt that many of the proposals in the consultation appeared designed or destined to encourage development of land for economic gain. The potential for environmental damage is great, as is the associated potential for net economic losses. Much of the Highland landscape has always been wild, undeveloped land. This wildness has helped shape the psyche of the people of Scotland who hold strongly to the concept of the wild Highlands, even if living in the Central Belt. Hence any approach to land ownership or management which always puts the onus on development of land will, in the long term, be detrimental both to the people of Scotland and the perception of Scotland abroad. Any new legislation must allow for wildness to continue to be a characteristic that is cherished – and still exists in reality (as promoted in government current planning policy). We believe strongly that any attempt to regulate land management and ownership must carefully take account of the range of benefits, interests and values found in the land resource.

Mike Stevens

## Building Scotland's Greatest Estate - National Parks

*Following recent Scottish land reform discussions we asked Mike Stevens, a previous Wild Land News contributor and protected area and wildlife conservationist in Australia, to provide some perspective and context on Australian National Parks. You can follow or contact Mike on Twitter @bushmanstevo*

I am imagining a day when I bring my twin boys to Scotland to hike the Highlands, through the world's newest national park. Scotland is on its way to having 10% of marine and terrestrial areas protected as publicly owned national parks. The newly created Scottish National Parks Commission is working with volunteers planting millions of Scots pines. Wildlife organisations are reintroducing red squirrel, beaver, Scottish wild cat, pine martin, capercaillie *et al.* Major Universities are undertaking an ambitious research project to rewild a viable population of Lynx to restore the balance of deer and return the grand Caledonian forest. Our hike meanders over snow capped peaks, sensitively through thousand year old peat, amongst the moorlands, down into thick willow and juniper scrub into tall Scots pine glens and finishes at the wild Scottish coastline. We camp in highland bothies along the way, catch a few fish, learn about epic battles and highland struggles such as 'the clearances' from interpretive displays and read about crofters and tenant farmers. All through a single national park with the local surrounding township economies booming from a mixture of nature based, wildlife, adventure and sporting estate tourism.

So what is 'common-good' land in Scotland and how can a grand vision of creating truly National parks be achieved?

What is a national park? The definitive guide can be found in the IUCN's Protected Area

Categories. Areas such as Scotland's Cairngorms National Park are category VI (protected area with sustainable use) being an overlay across diverse private land tenure acting to guide appropriate use and development. Australian national parks are predominantly IUCN category II, large areas of publicly owned land set aside for conservation whilst providing opportunities for science and visitation. Within most Australian national parks, some areas are zoned as IUCN Ia (reference area) and IUCN Ib (wilderness).

How did Australia achieve national parks?

When the British colonised Australia it was based on the fallacy that the entire country was owned by the Crown of England, not the 600 Aboriginal nations across the great southern continent. European settlers had to apply for land from the government and either be granted or purchase parcels of crown land. It was usually followed by Aboriginal people being forcibly removed.

But here is the kicker. Some crown land was never sold off to private interests.

Let us fast forward from the early 1800s to post-WWI. Returning soldiers were granted 'soldier settlement' parcels of crown land for their war service. Often these settlements were in very marginal areas as the best crown land parcels had already been taken. The same occurred post-WWII but the vast improvement in mechanisation meant larger areas were being cleared faster. This era led to the formation of the Victorian National Parks Association in 1952

and the first major steps in protecting areas of crown land from development. Around the 1960s and '70s crown land areas were being seen as vital to the prosperity and growth of Australia. Rivers were being dammed for water and hydroelectricity, and old growth forests logged. Some areas of 'useless crown land scrub' we're starting to be developed by large companies at an alarming rate. Companies would buy the rights to crown land and bulldoze the scrub for agriculture. This was the watershed moment in Victoria. Lobbying by the Victorian National Parks Association in the early 1970s led to the establishment of the Land Conservation Council, who assessed the remaining crown land for suitability to create national parks. The Land Conservation Council had bi-partisan political support and was driven by community demand to significantly increase the number of national parks to protect representative examples of Victoria's ecosystems before they were bulldozed forever. This led to the creation of the National Parks Act in 1975. Utilisation of natural resources for economic gain took a back seat to the conservation of nature. Today, the ecosystem services, tourism economic value and human health benefits national parks provide are widely lauded. Victoria now has 45 national parks covering over 2.8 million hectares (10,820 square miles or the equivalent of one-third of Scotland). In 2002 the National Parks Act was amended to include Marine Protected Areas. It is essential to remember the creation of national parks is only a very small first step in achieving protected areas. It may be a hard fought political and legislative win but delivering conservation action on the ground can not be forgotten. In Australia, national parks not only suffer current threats such as pervasive foxes, rabbits and feral cats but the legacy of historic land use. Tens-of-thousands of years of fire regimes have been changed swiftly. Hundreds-of-years old hollow trees lost from previous logging will take another 200 years to be created. Wetlands have been drained. Some species are locally extinct that provide essential ecosystem services and unfortunately some

species have been lost forever (noting that Australia holds the world record for mammal extinctions). Some parks are isolated in a sea of farmland with no corridors for wildlife movement with populations suffering the silent genetic effects from inbreeding. Ongoing management of current threats and restoring the damage of legacy impacts is critical and needs appropriate long-term resourcing when creating national parks. As a quick calculation, to reserve 10% of the Scottish terrestrial landscape as National Parks requires approximately 780,800 Ha or 1.93M acres. Let's say at a price of around £300 per acre (excluding assets such as estate houses) it will require £772Million just to purchase the land let alone ongoing management costs. Fortunately in Australia, the publicly owned crown land system exists as a starting point. Today, any new addition to Australian National Parks is based on achieving the aim of a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative reserve system. This system aims to ensure that any rare ecosystems, or ecosystems that have been significantly destroyed and that are poorly represented in existing national parks, are purchased and fully protected. Often, the inclusion of important remnant areas into protected areas is not possible or too expensive, prompting the evolution of new mechanisms such as 'covenants'.

A covenant is when a legal note is added on title to a parcel of land prohibiting sections of the land from future development and inappropriate use. The land is essentially 'locked' for the purposes of protecting the remnant natural values. Covenants are attractive to some land owners in Australia as freehold ownership and individual property rights are retained (subject to what is permitted under covenant), whereas the conservation of nature for public good is achieved. It is a useful cost-effective mechanism as land does not have to be purchased, but it can result in a piecemeal approach with small pockets of protected land widely dispersed under multiple ownership and differing management, which can be problematic. Australia has 5,040 properties under conservation covenant, covering 8,913,000 hectares consisting approximately

50/50 by area of private conservation covenants (4900 properties) and large private land trust covenants (140 properties). The key question for the people of Scotland is "What is your goal for environmental protection and land for common good?" If the goal is to create truly publicly-owned national parks that have a comprehensive, adequate and representative area of diverse ecosystems for nature and people, then tough economic and private land ownership buy-back discussions are required. If the goal is to stop

inappropriate development, than a covenant style approach to protect priority sites whilst generally retaining the overall property rights in an area may be more appropriate. Or perhaps the goal is to return land to the traditional owners of the Scottish landscape? Google an amazing man named Eddie Mabo.

David Woodhouse & David Pollard

## The Hebridean Islands National Park Concept Group: An Introduction

### Introduction

Proposals for National Parks in Scotland go back many years, but only two (Cairngorms and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs) have been introduced. SNH (Scottish Natural Heritage) produced a report <sup>(1)</sup> in 2006, recommending a Coastal and Marine National Park, covering part of Mull, Coll, Tiree, part of Jura and the mainland coast north and south of Oban. This proposal was supported by Argyll and Bute Council and although the Scottish Executive produced a follow up report <sup>(2)</sup> there was no attempt to implement the recommendations.

In March 2013 the Scottish Campaign for National Parks in conjunction with the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland produced a report entitled 'Unfinished Business'<sup>(3)</sup> advocating the formation of more national parks in Scotland. This report once again proposed a national park based on the Argyll Islands and adjacent coast, which included Mull, Iona, Coll, Tiree and Colonsay. Other bodies have registered their support for the proposals put forward in the 'Unfinished

Business' report. They include the National Trust for Scotland, RSPB Scotland, Ramblers Scotland, the Scottish Wild Land Group, Woodland Trust Scotland and the Mountaineering Council of Scotland.

Mull, Coll, Tiree, Colonsay and the surrounding seas appear to the authors of this Concept note so obviously to fit the criteria for a National Park that they are surprised that one has not already been set up. Working from the proposals in the SNH and 'Unfinished Business' reports, a list of 'Potential Benefits' and 'Perceived Drawbacks' have been drawn up to act as a starting point for taking the Concept forward (see Table 1)

The National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 defined a National Park as an area within which the aims are:-

- a. to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area
- b. promote sustainable use of the natural resources of the area

- c. promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area
- d. to promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities

### Progress in Cairngorms National Park

The Cairngorms National Park was set up in 2003 and last year produced a report celebrating its 10 years of existence<sup>(4)</sup>. Below are some of the benefits the National Park has brought to the residents who live within its boundaries:

- 200 more people move into the Cairngorms National Park (CNP) than move out each year.
- More than £14 million has been invested in the CNP in community-based projects, land-based businesses and the Scottish Government's 'Shovel Ready' capital projects.
- 235 (23%) of businesses in the CNP use the Park brand.
- Over half the visitors to the CNP come because it is a National Park, an increase of 25% from 2004.
- 250 affordable houses have been built across the CNP in 10 years.
- The number of 18-25 year olds leaving the Park is considerably lower than is the norm in other rural areas across Scotland.
- In Kincaig the Highland Small Communities Housing Trust have been working with the local Community Council to build sustainable houses. Part of this is a partnership project called the Cairngorms Skills and Construction Project: 19 young apprentices are working with the contractors, learning construction and woodland skills, while the Park is getting affordable housing built on affordable land from the Forestry Commission.

### Our Vision for a Hebridean Islands National Park

We live in an increasingly environmentally aware world. The idea that an area is even exploring National Park status immediately suggests that it has outstanding natural wonders. Within a National Park, many things are likely to become more sustainable: schools and school children become more environmentally aware and thus more caring, businesses become greener in their approach to the tourism product, the tourist season lengthens, perceptions of the country and of its government become more sympathetic, alternative energy at an appropriate scale becomes far more likely, and interpretation of our natural environment and adequate small parking areas would become automatic (it is essential here on Mull that visitors are drawn to leave the road and enjoy what they see if we are to encourage them to stay longer).

Arguments have always prevailed here about a lack of funding to solve problems and to create more opportunities, particularly for young people. Many of our young people would have the opportunity to become rangers in a National Park, and from such a platform they could work anywhere in the world in other national parks and environmentally sensitive places. Any product from our park would get the official stamp of 'Produced in The Hebridean Islands National Park', indicating a premium product in potential customers' eyes.

All fishermen understand the problems for their industry today, and a park board would encourage sensitive management for the benefit of them and the general community. The appalling coastal litter would no longer be the problem of school children but inevitably get far more attention and finance from a national park board.

What of much-needed wet weather venues both in Oban and on the islands? Would it not help Oban if they had the Gateway to the National Park in the form of a world class Oceanic Centre? Wouldn't such an inspiring building with so many exciting things to do not

attract more off-season visitors? Don't the islands including Mull also need wet weather venues for visitors instead of only the one significant venue which Mull has at present? What does a young family do on a seriously wet day here, except get on the ferry and go somewhere else?

National park status would also allay so many fears in the islands concerning the narrow band of employment opportunities that we currently have. In all of the world's national parks work opportunities have expanded as local people have been able to take small business ideas to a Park Board and get support.

For those concerned that national parks attract too many visitors, we must remind ourselves that visitors have to catch a ferry to get here. This means that we are able to monitor and even control numbers; something that no other national park in Britain can do.

These are just a few of the obvious benefits of national park status, and we are certain that further ideas will flow if we take this forward. We believe that national park status is the obvious next step for Mull. Some don't want change, but it is certain that these islands will change, not because we are a national park, but because we are not.

There is of course also an ethical question that we should all consider and that is that the Island of Mull currently has little or no protection at all. In fact it is more or less totally open to the whim of market forces – surely inappropriate for somewhere so special. Even our spectacular National Scenic Area, of which we are the guardians, has no management or ranger service.

## The Way Forward

The current Scottish Government's 2011 manifesto made a commitment "to work with communities to explore the creation of new National Parks". It is expected that the Government will take steps to fulfil this commitment before the next Scottish elections. The Concept Group has taken note that the commitment requires government to

work with communities. Our objective in the immediate future is to engage with local communities to ascertain the level of support for a Hebridean Islands National Park and, on the strength of that support, to engage with whatever process the Government initiates to fulfil their manifesto commitment.

The Concept Group is fully aware of the perceived drawbacks to a National Park, but is confident that with the accruing experience of the two existing National Parks these worries can be overcome. The Group will carry out detailed work over the coming months and enlist the support of other organisations to make a strong case for the designation of the Hebridean Islands as a National Park that Scotland can be proud of.

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## References

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## Potential Benefits and Perceived Drawbacks of National Park Status

### Potential Benefits

- Active conservation management of land and sea, preventing deterioration of the landscape and the surrounding marine environment
- Millions of £s worth of additional resources for creating jobs (e.g. Rangers), improving sustainability of existing industries and enhancing biodiversity etc.
- Acts as a focus for biodiversity initiatives and research
- Co-ordination of volunteer support leading to optimum use of professional and volunteer labour
- Positive use of planning system to encourage quality development
- Promotion of sustainable tourism
- Co-ordination of flora, fauna, geological actions
- Co-ordination of archaeological and historical sites.
- Promotion of sustainable marine environment
- Support for sustainable businesses
- Support for sustainable agriculture and forestry
- Modern technology e.g. renewable energy, energy conservation, waste re-cycling and high speed broadband introduced in an environmentally sensitive way will enhance the quality of life of residents without seriously interfering with wildlife.
- Local people will have a say in the running of the national park by electing their own representatives onto the management board
- Business and products 'badged'; status allows high quality products to command a premium in the market place
- Co-ordination and appropriate facilities provided for physical recreation like walking, biking, horse riding, sailing, kayaking etc.
- Organisation of appropriate physical competitions arranged to extend the tourist season
- Organisation of festivals of food, arts, music

### Perceived drawbacks

- Concerns about increased bureaucracy
- Restrictions on planning; some residents may fear restrictions on land use (ie agriculture, forestry, fish farming, field sports etc.) as well as on those developments which require planning permission.
- Effect of increased numbers of tourists
- Interested parties gain too much influence and dominate conservation management
- Restriction of funding by National Government
- Interference by National Government
- There is a danger that the structure of a National Park authority and its responsibilities are ill-defined.

David Woodhouse

## Scotland's Green Gold Revisited

I suppose that all of us at times 'reflect' on what we thought were very sensible, helpful and even valuable suggestions that we offered our leaders in the past, and here I am doing just that regarding the issues that I raised in Wild Land News in 2012 about Ecotourism:

*“Our wildlife and wild places have simply huge potential to fuel the economy in all remote and beautiful parts of the country, and there is an increasing thirst for top environmental experiences. In fact ecotourism has the potential to bring billions into many remote parts of the world. But our leaders live in a narrow-minded bubble, never understanding the real value of ecotourism and its massive potential.”*

The Government's continuing lack of action has underlined still further to me that they do not at all understand the way that the country's rural economy has changed and is changing by the minute. In 2014 there was a massive demand for wild environmental experiences, from across Europe and beyond - whether to climb a first Munro, walk on wild Hebridean beaches, to sail Scottish waters or to cycle around the Highlands and Islands. There is huge interest in seeing our sea eagles, pine martens, red deer, whales, dolphins, otters and maybe, just maybe, a Scottish wildcat. I can personally testify that demand was at times overwhelming, with far too many visitors unable to find accommodation. On one of my own wildlife trips I had my usual 11 people filling the vehicle but this time every single person was from a different country! All because our TV wildlife programmes are travelling the world, as are more people in search of wild experiences.

The Year of Natural Scotland and the year of John Muir, along with other events, are

underpinning the world's interest in our wildlife and wild places. And yet Scotland's government still does absolutely nothing regarding the creation of further National Parks, when we STILL have the fewest National Parks in the whole of Europe. We have the unenviable distinction of being the second-last country in the entire world to even create a National Park in the first place. Is there any sign at all of a glorious Ecotourism brochure and website based on the seasons of the year, to encourage more off-season visitors? Will the west coast and Hebridean islands EVER gain National Park status, despite consecutive Argyll MSPs all stating that "National Park status is the biggest single step forward that the area can make"?

In my opinion Oban needs to be an upmarket gateway to such a National Park, with a glorious glass structure on Oban waterfront (it currently has no wet weather venue). Instead on the suggested site of the Oceanic Center Gateway, we now have a never-used and deserted bowling alley, a Wetherspoons and a Costa Coffee! Are more and more retail businesses really the answer for the rural economy here?

I repeat the question I asked in 2012: does our government understand the rural economy and its needs at all? Does it understand that the west coast and the rest of us in the real world have to speculate to accumulate? Or is it simply, and as always with governments, about the number of votes in a given region? We have to assume it is the latter and that beautiful places like the Hebridean islands will never be in a book about the world's National Parks, sitting on people's coffee tables, while our island economies 'plod' on as they always have.

John Milne

## Book Review: *Ramble On* by Sinclair McKay

I have just finished reading *Ramble On* by Sinclair McKay (Published by Fourth Estate in 2012), *The story of our love for walking in Britain* and probably the best book on the subject I have ever read.

The range of this book, the ground it covers, literally and metaphorically, is remarkable. From "The Garden of England" via the Yorkshire Moors to Rannoch Moor, from Dartmoor via the Peak District to the Cairngorms and the slopes above Kingussie, from issues of access to the literature inspired by the outdoors. You may well ask why the readers of the journal of the Scottish Wild Land Group would wish to read about the long distance ways of Southern England. The answer is simple - it's a book which will be appreciated by all who wander anywhere in our country.

So I introduce you to the tone of the book by quoting a number of excerpts from the book with some observations of my own.

*"We are lucky to be in an age where the walker at last has the moral high ground. Our enthusiastic activity brings health and happiness without side effects. Our carbon footprints are dainty. Where we walk, innkeepers prosper."*

It may well be that walking The Cotswold Way or some such brings nothing but "*health or happiness without side effects*". However even the author knows only too well that it is not all fun as revealed by his account of an outing on Rannoch Moor - "*we spent the next ninety minutes picking our way back across the moor in the midst of a tempest so violent that even King Lear would have had difficulty shouting in*

*it.*" And, from earlier in the book "*...dedicated walkers will look out upon stinging rain whipping across bare moorland, take a deep breath of pleasure, then stride forwards - and upwards, into the raging storm.*" "Pleasure"? However, I am sure we know what he means.

*"Walkers now have a moral duty to roam as much, and as widely, as they can. We live in an age of multiple anxieties, but one remarkably constant fear, stretching back decades, is that we are in danger of losing the countryside that we love."*

*"...the land....is regarded as heritage, needing protection in the way that listed buildings receive it. You will hear the argument with increasing frequency: the land is our legacy. And now, extraordinarily, walkers might be viewed as the guardians of that legacy."*

"a moral duty to roam"? Now there's a great thought for us, the guardians of the land.

*".....ramblers are certain to be co-opted into a new battle for the soul of the countryside. Our walking rights will soon be labeled 'inalienable'. For the more we appreciate local beauty spots, and elevate them to attractions, abundant with rare species, the harder it will be for property developers to move into such places."*

But no problem for windfarm developers. Even property developers have been welcomed into the Cairngorms National Park at the invitation of the Park Authority and with the blessing of the Courts. But surely such ongoing desecration can only encourage us to answer the call to participate in the "*battle for the soul of the*

*countryside.*" It is my hope that a reading of this book will persuade many more to respond to Sinclair McKay's call. But his call is no new thing. Throughout the book there are references to the struggles upon which our predecessors embarked over access.

*"...walkers have, over the decades and the centuries, changed our entire national approach to ideas of property and ownership."*

And so the first chapter of the book, *Edale to Kinder Scout: The Peak District and the First Modern Rambling Battle* is largely devoted to the 1932 Mass Trespass of Kinder Scout, with all its political and class overtones. (However in his book *The Wild Rover* Mike Parker suggests that the 1896 Battle of Coalpit Lane on the moors above Bolton was of far greater significance with 10,000 and a week later, 20,000, turning out, much to the amazement of the organisers, the Bolton Socialist Party and the Social Democratic Federation (Marxist). Many resent the fact that the Kinder trespass with its four or five hundred is the one that is remembered and celebrated.)

And, may I suggest that the struggle is not yet over and while we still have to do battle over access in spite of the legislation, it is now mainly with those landowners, developers and politicians who are determined to industrialise our wildest landscapes.

The author does not refer to wind turbines other than to compare "*hillwalkers [who] today loathe the spectacle of vast white windfarms*" with Wordsworth who objected ("snobbishly" the author suggests) to "*five or six white houses, scattered over a valley, by their obtrusiveness, dot the surface and divide it into triangles, or other mathematical figures, haunting the eye, and disturbing that repose which might otherwise be perfect....*". Is Sinclair McKay really implying that in due course wind turbines will come to be seen as no more intrusive than a few whitewashed houses? Tell that to hillwalkers from all over the world gazing on the Monadhliath from the Cairngorms, should the despoilers get their way.

In relation to the Cairngorms themselves he says that

*"this region also continues to draw in those who wish simply to listen to the sound of their own breathing as they wander alone. These hills and their paths have always seemed especially attractive to the more philosophical kind of Rambler.... This plateau seems in some ways the perfect distillation of what the modern Rambler is looking for: the implacable, unbeautiful face of nature."*

I wish to finish this review, with references to the link between walking and literature which I mentioned in my opening paragraphs.

*"The Romantics looked at nature in her extremity and found that such sublimity could awaken a soaring spirituality in the beholder; as long, that is, as that person was completely alive to what he was seeing. Wordsworth and Coleridge drew their deepest inspiration from the darkness of the hills."*

and

*"..it is unsurprising that walking is also threaded through British literature, like a network of well-trodden paths. Celebrated trampers include Wordsworth and Coleridge, the countryman poet John Clare; Jonathan Swift and Jane Austen; Charles Dickens and W. G. Sebald. In many cases walking is integral to their poetry and their fictions. It brings to the fore far wider truths about human nature."*

I would suggest that the list of *celebrated trampers* ought to include John Buchan, himself an enthusiastic and skilled mountaineer. Many of you will have read *The Thirty-Nine Steps* with the famous chase over the Galloway Hills. Richard Hannay again appears in *The Three Hostages* with its less well-known but equally memorable chase this time over the more rugged hills of the Highlands.

Buchan's first novel, *Sir Quixote of the Moors*, was written when he was a nineteen year old undergraduate at Glasgow University. The narrative is again located in "*the wild highlands*

of the place called Galloway, in the bare kingdom of Scotland". The first paragraph of the first chapter, *On The High Moors*, reads in part

*"Before me stretched a black heath, over which the mist blew in gusts, and through whose midst the road crept like an adder. Great storm-marked hills flanked me on either side, and since I set out I had seen their harsh outline against a thick sky.....Sometimes the fog would lift for a moment from the face of the land and show me a hilltop or the leaden glimmer of the loch, but nothing more - no green field or homestead; only a barren and accursed desert."*

There's a young man, embarking on his writing career, who knew the Scottish hills.

James Fenton

## The Wildness of the South Atlantic

The great southern ocean, far distant and encircling the globe, its eternal gales and tumultuous seas a barrier to the ice-calm sea beyond. A sea of behemoths, of whales, of seals, of penguins, of ice: of ice, certainly of ice.

I could say so much more but I hope I have said enough to encourage you to read *Ramble On* for yourself, and, it goes without saying, John Buchan.

My next review surely has to be Mike Parker's book *The Wild Rover* from which I quote to whet your appetite - "*The scenery of our country has been filched away from us just when we have begun to prize it more than ever before*" (James Bryce, who was to become the British Ambassador to the USA, introducing his Access to Mountains (Scotland) Bill in 1892). Surely an appropriate sentiment for the second decade of the 21st century.

Floes of ice, adding ceaseless interest to the dullness of the open sea. Floating islands of ice, no two the same, myriad and unmatched in form. Waterfalls of ice, frozen in time, pouring off the great plateau behind. Rivers of ice,



gashed by unfathomable and uncrossable crevasses, ending abruptly and unceremoniously at the sea. Cliffs of ice, tall and vertical, impeding any hope of access to the interior. The whole land a blanket of ice, of pristine whiteness in the long winter months and early spring, turning a dirty grey as the summer progresses, or a dirty pink where life on the snow makes the ice its home. For there is little else on which to live. Only in a few favoured flushes is greenery to be found, mosses hugging the soil, lichens hugging tightly the rocks. But in the short austral summer this land can be home to many, feasting off the bounty of the sea, the sea itself feeding off the land, from flour ground-up deep beneath the ice.

Algae beneath the floes that feed the krill that feed the fish that feed the penguins that feed the seals that feed the whales (although it is not quite so simple). A rush to breed, racing against time and weather (a gale from nowhere, sudden snows, instant drifts, whiteout), colonies of thousands, of millions even, not beholden to mankind but acting when they want and where they want. And if we have the audacity to intrude, to clutter up the ice with our infrastructure, cocooned in our shells of civilisation, we have to build around the colonies, walk around the sea elephants (for they are certainly not going to move for us), avoid the moss, tread carefully with every step. The animals and plants were here first, and there is an acceptance of this by us latecomers.

We are not in charge. Our ships, our huts, our bases, miniscule, scaled down to nothing in the vastness of it all.

As the summer ends, brought to heel by the dark and ice of winter, the retreat begins until only benthic life remains. The continent now inaccessible, unreachable, surrounded by the new-formed ice, and by the great southern ocean, encircling the globe, with its eternal gales and tumultuous seas.

But if penetrated, glory is to be found, even in the depths of winter: the rare calm, stillness incarnate, clarity to end all clarities, the sky a blue to end all blues, out of which diamond dust gently falls to sprinkle the glistening and frozen sea. Bergs, both small and massive, imprisoned in the floes, to walk amongst them is to experience heaven itself. And it is the same in summer, drifting leisurely amongst the floating ice on a mirror-calm sea, whether in the clear blue of the sun or with snow lightly falling, hissing gently as it hits the sea, what greater glory has the planet to offer?

And what of the islands that bound this frozen south? South Georgia, gateway to the Antarctic, its mountains, when they can be seen, soaring high, bespattered with ice and snow, glaciers pouring down to the sea – and into the sea in some places, leaving trails of brash along the fjords. The land, when it can be seen through mist and sleet and rain, fringed with tussac and an oasis of wildlife, a tremendous oasis of uncountable penguins, of albatross, of seals. Of seals once hunted and now returned in their



thousands, of crowded beaches, penguins cheek-by-jowl with seals, of no space left for us humans (which is as it should be). But when we as tourists do find a space into which we can squeeze, our faces shine in wonder: why had no-one told us that so much is going on? That we are not needed – ignored even?

But glimpses can be had of the desolate remains of human endeavour, rusting whaling stations, long abandoned from a time when we were south to plunder – but no longer in these enlightened times (if only this were true, for the seas abound with fish, and where fish abound



so the fishing fleets are found).

And 600 miles on to the Falkland Islands, lonely outposts of Britain with a landscape more familiar, Dartmoor nine thousand miles south, or the Hebrides trans-shipped. Wide open moors and blasted heaths, the wind never failing and no shelter to be found. A land of rounded hills, of rock, of peat – and of an expansive sky, always the sky, which dominates the horizontality of the land; with great clouds bringing up the cold from the south, or with bright blue bringing across the dryness of the Patagonian desert. There is space, plenty of space, the land empty of people; for unless you look carefully you may miss the widely-scattered settlements, a few houses here and there standing in defiance, four-square to the wind. The inland may be empty and quiet, apart from the bleat of the sheep or the wind eternally rustling through the white-grass, but the coasts are rich – rich with islands and rich with life. For like all these southern parts, it is the plenty of the sea which feeds the land: which feeds the penguins (four in kind), which feeds the albatross, the geese, the ducks.

Walking the coast, you are passed from territory to territory by steamer ducks (who have lost the will to fly) and by kelp geese (the males as white as snow), both keen by their chattering to move you on; you walk from beach to beach, beaches of pure white sand, and water virginal in its clarity, beaches never empty but crowded with penguins and gulls and oystercatchers. The birds show little fear for this is their home and we have no part to play: they have been here for thousands of years and there is space, plenty of space, they can wander and breed where they wish.

These three southern lands, all uncluttered by our buildings and roads, where we can glimpse back to a time when we were just one of many sharing a planet rich with the myriad miracles of creation: to a time before we took over and crowded out the rest, wanting all the space for ourselves ...

The great southern ocean, far distant and encircling the globe, its eternal gales and tumultuous seas a protective barrier to all the lands within.

Michael Burke

## My Wild Land: Mountain Men and the Sea

I was reading the autumn edition of Wild Land News and two things struck me. One was resonance and the other was coincidence. In his article on the Isles, John Milne quoted Geoff Salt's article from the summer edition "There seems to be a fundamental link between some mountain men and the sea". I have had the good fortune to be on the mountains of Scotland from a young age. Over the last 30 years I also celebrate the privilege to have kayaked the west coast of Scotland from the Cumbraes to the Shetlands, and pretty much everything in between. So Geoff's statement resonated strongly with me. Now coincidentally, John Milne and I were bringing in the New Year in Glenlyon and we discussed his visit to St Kilda and other things 'Island'. This article from me is at his invitation.

So what is this sea kayaking and mountain adventure about for me? It's the excitement of the journey, the people who travel with me, and my encounters with the land, the sea and the universe.

Last year I stood on the top of the much-loved Cobbler, resplendent in its winter coat of icy snow and black rock, reflecting that I had first stood there 50 years previously, when I was aged 14. I was led there and encouraged by the generations of Glasgow men that opened up 'the Arrochar Alps' in the depression, when mountain adventures were better than unemployed lethargy in the City. On that day I met again Bob Smith, not anywhere on the hill, but at the Narnain boulders, the shelter stones of my youthful experiences on our local Alps. Bob Smith, one of those men that had inspired me to take to the hills. Simply, for me, Bob represented the mountain man I aspired

to be. Competent, capable and modest. A longtime member of the Arrochar Mountain Rescue Team, which he led for 13 years, receiving an MBE for his efforts.

To meet him there on that nostalgic day? A coincidence, or an experience provided by the universe in the outdoors? Splendid in his gear, aged 80 and every inch the mountain man, still going strong. A 'chance meeting' that makes you think, reinforces your purpose and inspires you to more.

I join up with two friends Colin and Ian on a Friday afternoon, from a hard won early finish at work. Drive south of Oban and paddle the kayaks out from Arduanie. Over the sound of Luing and through the Grey Dogs. Meet the big Atlantic swell out on the West side. Beach up on Guirasdeal off Lunga and camp on the grass a few meters above the high tide mark, facing north and west into a setting sun.

It's Friday night! The delicious pleasure in knowing that you actually were at work in Glasgow earlier this day, and now you are in this wonderful and remote place. It's Friday night! With pals! Two whole days in front of you, a fire of the kind that can only be made from copious supplies of driftwood, sounds and smells of sea and swell, surrounded by shipping lights and marker beacons. Enlightenment in the air, and rich conversation of shared trips past and future. And the accumulation of it all brings us closer to the edge.

Then out to the Garvellachs, the most meditative of islands, return by the strange Belnahua and the exciting Cuan sound. A parting glass in the chart room at the Arduanie Hotel overlooking the sunset whence you came. What's not to like?

And a mountain journey when last year my wife Linda and I went on a stravaig through the Fisherfields. Out from Kinlochewe and along the shores of Lochan Fada, we head over A'Mhaighdean and Ruadh Stac Mòr. Mist swirling around the tops and opening up dramatic views of Fionn Loch a long way down. Set camp at 700m on the hillside of Stac a' Chaorruinn in the company of a howling wind to ensure you know you're out there...on your own. Continue the journey down lonely Gleann na Muice and engage closely with the Queen of the Hags in her challenging domain. Up the Allt and onto the top of remote Beinn a'Chlaidheimh, the heart of Scotland's wilderness. To think walkers might miss this special experience because it has been 'downgraded' from a Munro! Stand at that wild camp at Loch a'Bhrisidh in the evening light. Look over An Teallach, the king of mountains. Ben Dearg Mòr, the finest of mountains, over yesterday's hills to Slioch, and round to tomorrow's prospects - Sgurr Bàn, Mullach, Coire Mhic Fhearchair and Beinn Tarsuinn. Catch yourself and feel deeply that this wild place is yours to roam. And in this lonely wilderness over 3 days, in Scotland, on Munros - meet no one.

Do we "bag" these trips? That does not even begin to describe the concept or purpose. We live them with each other. With friends you know you would die for if the sea or the mountain asked it of you. Feeling grateful that a rolling sea has returned us; or a clagged-up ridge has released us. Deeply enjoying the understanding, the skill, the physical effort and the emotional strength that allows us to do it.

How far? How many? How long? Who cares!! We could have gone over the Fisherfields quicker - yes, more efficiently - yes, or taken longer - oh yes please!

I understand very well the motivational nature of the challenge and its completion. The Munro classification has brought many people onto the mountains and led them to achievements they did not think possible for themselves. In these days of obesity and mental health illnesses I want our land open and welcoming to as many of our people as is possible. And for some the competition with the elements is a most compelling driving force.

I came to the sea when I gave up competitive sport. I soon discovered that on the sea measurements relate more to your capacity to survive. How strong is the wind, from which direction, how high are the waves, how fast are they coming at us, how long can we go on, how far to the nearest landing? I think it is a folly to compete against the sea; one travels with it and is thankful for a safe return.

Often have I meditated on Chris Guthrie's mantra - only the land endures. And with the untimely death of Ian, my good friend of many years with whom I have travelled so happily the land and sea, my journey and that mantra are only more keenly felt. It's about how one feels, and how you feel often reflects where you are in life. You see what is there but as time and life passes, it is with different eyes and understandings. The fundamental is being open to it, to take the time to appreciate what is around you and why you are here in it: to see,



hear, smell, touch and above all to feel.

To walk in the soft rain on the mountain grass, shimmering with the gossamer of the spiders' webs. Up close in a hammering downpour on a flat sea surrounded by countless little saucer-shaped pools. To stand tall on the top of Bidean taken by mountains stretching endlessly into the sunlit mist, an experience redolent of your journeys still to come. To sit in the kayak on an open corner at Ardnamurchan recognising some 20 islands as my gaze takes me as far as the Western Isles. Or walking any one of the hills around my house at Glenlyon, hills that I know like old friends and to whom I am closely connected.

Two years ago I went up Mont Blanc. It was certainly challenging, required some serious preparation and for me was a great personal achievement. Would I regard it as my most treasured experience? Not by a distance. These times are reserved for the moments when place, people and universe come together in harmony and I am in the zone to feel it. It can't be pre-planned. You travel in hope and in expectation. It happens and you're there, you're in it. It's embedded at the heart of why we make the effort to be in these wild places.

How does it work with the islands? I think that there is a feel and an attraction to individual islands that is common with the mountains, although perhaps in different ways. When I talk about kayak journeys to the islands it is certainly from the perspective of the individual identity that I have made up for each one, which depends of course on my own perspective at that time. So I can express it in terms of the attraction of Rona or the achievement of the Shiant's; the thrill of sitting under the cliffs at St John's Head in Orkney and landing on the unattainable Old Man of Hoy; I could never tire of engaging with all the myriad islands of Mull from the Torrance rocks of Kidnapped, the peace of Iona, the magic of Fingal's cave, and the fun of sitting on the Dutchman's Cap; seeing the amazing birdlife on the cliffs of the Treshnish. I read recently that many Munro baggers leave Ben More on Mull to the last. I wonder why?

For me Shetland must be one of the best kayaking venues in the world. I recall standing on the cliffs overlooking Esha Ness as an Atlantic storm pounded the cliffs and wondering how it was possible to kayak down there. However, we did when it was calm and experienced the many caves, the stacks, the rock architecture that is the consequence of these dramatic seas, and also that singular feeling of being on the edge of the world.

I am taken by how easy it is in Scotland on the hills, and even more so on the sea, to be on your own if that is what you wish. However, when I am out on the sea or the hillside, I do make a habit of engaging with the people I meet. Unless you are on Ben Lomond on a Saturday or Ben Nevis on one of the charity fundraising days, the numbers will be few. I often leave these encounters richer and wiser. It is a throwback to a time when we were interdependent as a community. When travellers and pilgrims relied on each other for information and help.

On a day last June, where Gleann Mearnan and Gleann Cailliche meet, a man approaches us bearing a weighty rucksack. This is unusual because there are no routes to be bagged here in a conventional sense. An encounter and a conversation is shared as we walk together to see the Little People up at Tigh nam Bodach. I was able to advise the traveller on the next stage of his journey over Beinn Mhanach. As he walked away up Gleann Cailliche I was left somewhat curious. He was different, and I did not know why. I now am glad to know him as the Pilgrim who featured in the Autumn issue of Wild Land News. A coincidence or the intervention of the Little People?

These are some of the things that keep me going on land and sea, connecting with the universe, for some more years I hope. It's about the journey and the experiences it brings - often different, always enriching and the prospect of new insights. So, thanks John. I enjoyed reading the Autumn edition of Wild Land News. There was a lot in it for me.

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