

ISSUE 92
WINTER 2017/18

Wild Land News

Magazine of the Scottish Wild Land Group

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Mining a National Park

**National Scenic Areas
& Wild Land**

Keep it Wild Campaign

**The Outer Hebrides
Interconnector**

The Lure of Wild Land

Winter 2017/18

WILD LAND NEWS

Issue 92

Magazine of the
Scottish Wild Land Group

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Printed by
Bay Printing
Dalgety Bay





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*Front cover: The summit of Ben Nevis from Aonach Mor by James Fenton
Left: Rothiemurchus by Tom Leatherland*

Beryl Leatherland

Editorial

During a recent conversation someone mentioned John Digney's editorial in *Wild Land News* 62 (Winter 2004-05). It starts: "You might think that a country which markets its scenery to the paying customers for all it is worth would have put Landscape on some official pedestal. Yet for years it has been pretty much a dirty word in government circles, something that gets in the way of progress, something that costs rather than benefits".

Not a lot has changed in the last 13 years! At the time this was written we had a devolved parliament, the Land Reform [Scotland] Act 2003, a National Access Forum, our first National Park, and Britain had signed up to the European Landscape Convention.

2002 was the International Year of Mountains – do you remember that? It prompted meetings and expensive conferences, many fine words were said and written, spectacular photos and films were

viewed, a range of NGOs set up a landscape Task Force (under the auspices of Scottish Environment Link) held a very inspiring conference in Battleby. The task force is still working away and SWLG are members of it.

All this enthusiasm, however, didn't result in any substantial changes for the better – no new policies, no wider increase in public awareness. Towards the end of that year SWLG produced *Scotland's Wild Land – what future?* I came across a copy recently in a rarely visited spidery corner of our house. Ten authors contributed a diverse range of articles on the outdoors and landscapes.

On skimming through them it is sad to reflect that we haven't moved on much at all since then, what little wild land we have left is suffering from continuing attrition and true wildness is hard to find. New technologies, renewable industry developments (which have an important role in modern life), devastatingly

efficient construction machinery, extensive use of ATVs and 4x4s instead of garrons, certain land management practices and poor stewardship all impact on the landscape resource.

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) had been playing their part: they were working on management strategies for National Scenic Areas (NSAs), had produced a Landscape consultation (which every one presumably responded to eagerly and enthusiastically), they wrote a landscape policy (as did the National Trust for Scotland) and had plans for a Landscape Forum. The latter was eventually set up, but there was little representation from the usual NGOs and charities despite a wide spread of organisations and bodies being involved. After much well regarded work the

Forum produced the Scottish Landscape Charter, but the then Cabinet Secretary declined to sign it and moved to another role. Her successor didn't show much enthusiasm for endorsing it either.

The work of the Forum thus fell rather flat at the first hurdle, to much indignation and angst from the punters. The Charter can still be read on the SNH website, but we have moved on since then and if it were to be resurrected it would need to be revised.

We have renewable power generation established as a necessary contributor to endeavouring to combat global warming, with the Highlands and moors of Scotland providing financially lucrative places for installations to be sited. The

What little wild land we have left is suffering from continuing attrition

The Cairngorms by Kirsten Dallas





The Cairngorms by Kirsten Dallas

ambitions of government are supported by target-led policy, but with no coherent spatial or demand assessment plans.

Subsidy support largely drove the development of the onshore wind industry and subsequently the construction of run-of-river' hydro schemes on every burn deemed to be remotely suitable. We talk of natural capital, and we assess the value of nature and ecosystem services in monetary terms, yet still there is little mention of landscape in government policy.

In the current Scottish Planning Policy there is a (qualified) nod to wild land and special landscapes, as there is also in the National Planning Framework. These few sentences hardly amount to policy documents. As a consequence there is no legislation around landscape, and certainly nothing comparable with that for wildlife protection. NSAs and National Parks are theoretically protected, but in

reality they are not because we see that commercial developments take precedence.

SNH have continued to do their bit for landscape and produced some fine documents, especially guidance documents on various topics. Mark Wrightham and others are to be commended for the thorough and insightful literature they have put together.

The old Scottish Executive, SNH, the Scottish Government and local authorities have consulted at length and the NGO sector has carefully and diligently responded. Yet despite all this effort we have unsightly and inappropriate developments, sometimes in or near our finest wild places, and it seems there is no end to the plans for more.

SNH have identified Wild Land Areas (WLAs), yes, they were scaled back from the original search areas but at least we have something you might think – but WLA isn't a designation and

ambitious developers will try to push the boundaries as we have already seen. The need to “protect” landscapes from “threats” is spoken and written about. Yet landscape changes as a result of our activity; we cannot escape socio-economic realities.

The resistance to legislate for landscape protection is surprising given its immense value to the tourist industry and its supporting infrastructure of various businesses. Walking, outdoor activities, climbing and skiing have never been more popular and accessible. Moreover, countless surveys have shown the value that the public put on Scottish landscapes; and landscape is celebrated in literature and the arts.

apparently made so little progress? We think we have used all the campaigning tools available to us. We need to work in partnership with a wider range of like-minded organisations to both increase public awareness and support and to raise expectations.

In addition to focussing reactively on individual development proposals, maybe we also need to lobby more imaginatively; importantly, we need to plan our advocacy and be much more strategic; to use inspiring ambassadors, maybe even influential “celebrities”.

We need to get parliamentarians and civil servants out of Holyrood and dreary offices, their town

The resistance to legislate for landscape protection is surprising given its immense value to the tourist industry

From the point of view of the enthusiast for special places and wildness, what has gone wrong: have we put in enough effort, could we have done more?

We need good policy around landscape and the legislation to support it. The legislation would need to be robust, implemented and properly enforced. How can we achieve this when we have worked so hard already and

shoes off and their boots on, and to take them out into the countryside to show them the assets on our doorsteps.

Most importantly we all need to play a part and contribute; don't leave this campaigning work to others, be alert for opportunities to make a difference. A good start would be to support the John Muir Trust *Keep It Wild Campaign* – see Mel Nicoll's article on page

Beryl Leatherland

Update on recent SWLG activity

This update continues from that in the last edition of Wild Land News and that given at our November 2017 AGM. In addition we have several matters still in hand.

Planning Bill

Currently we are immersed in considering the Scottish Government documentation on their Planning Bill. We are participating in this with Scottish Environment LINK colleagues, although we intend to participate at the Bill stages on behalf of SWLG to reflect our own specific concerns, as well as “signing up” to LINK responses as appropriate.

We benefit from the range of planning expertise and knowledge generously shared through the LINK network, and without this we would probably not engage with this particular issue.

The proposals are not encouraging; there is no mention of issues that SWLG members care about such as landscape and its protection, environmental matters and considerations.

Significant changes are proposed from the present system (which in itself is far from satisfactory) and there is concern that there will be much reduced opportunities for public participation and the protection of what we hold dear.

The proposals seem to amount to a developers’ charter. The key purposes of Planning and what it is meant to deliver are not considered, the new legislation seems to be intended to facilitate house-building (important, yes) and “economic growth”.

SWLG throughout the consultations and reviews held last year, in all our correspondence and responses, had pushed for landscape issues such as Wild Land, greater environmental protection and a more equal, democratic and fair system via an Equal Rights of Appeal to be included. All to no avail, we have been ignored. We are certainly not giving up, though and LINK is refining an advocacy strategy, which will include a great deal of lobbying

activity. Overall, we think that there will be a reduction in opportunity for public engagement due to the structural changes in the system, such as removal of the Main Issues Report stage, Supplementary Planning Guidance and changes to Local Development Plans.

The only innovative and potentially helpful change proposed is that our elected councillors should be given specific training on planning matters. Of course, this would need to be done in an unbiased way and with appropriate coverage including the legislative framework, but there is scope here to make useful and positive changes to the current system.

Incidentally, we will soon have to be more accountable for any political lobbying we do and may be required to maintain precise records of our engagement with politicians and others. More

bureaucracy will be one of the least desirable implications of this.

Planning consultations

Below I outline the main communications to planning departments made on behalf of SWLG over the last couple of months.

Marine National Park

Argyll and Bute Council, in their Main Issues Report, have included a proposal for a Marine National Park. It is not in line with the Sandford principle or the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 in several areas.

You could question whether a Marine NP is relevant to our interests. To justify our support I would say that seascapes are important in the Scottish context, we have some of the finest sea and land landscapes in the world. Which one of us when on the

The
proposals
are a
developers'
charter



Argyll coast and islands by James Fenton



Islands of Mull, Easdale & Seil in Argyll by James Fenton

Cuillin on Skye hasn't observed that the wonderful rugged ridge line is enhanced by the background of wide vistas over the sea? The joy of such places to my mind is the interplay between the weather, the light quality, the complex skyline and the mood and movements of the sea below. Additionally, Scotland has a rich marine biodiversity, which is a real asset. We have so few National Parks in Scotland that we should recognise the vision of this local authority and support them.

Our National Parks have four statutory aims, one of which is "to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area" which reflects our stated objectives and campaigning activity, as described on the back cover of *Wild Land News*.

The underlying aims of Argyll and Bute Council are largely to address economic concerns, but

many of these can be accommodated in a National Park if done appropriately and sensitively, and with due regard to the local heritage and the environment. We felt we were justified in commenting favourably on the principle of this ambition.

Glendoebeg track

In late November we objected to an application for a hill track at Glendoebeg, near Fort Augustus, largely due to insufficient construction detail having been submitted to the Highland Council, and the applicant omitting several considerations felt to be required. We don't expect to know the final outcome of this for some time yet.

Coul Links golf course

There was considerable email and social media traffic last year on the proposal to the Highland Council for a new golf course at Coul Links on the Dornoch Firth.

Briefly, as you can read in our response online, this site represents the last complete dune system in Scotland that has not suffered anthropogenic detriment, and is one of the last examples of this sort of habitat in Europe.

Undoubtedly this drew comparison with another golf development in a fragile and unique dune habitat, also conceived by a wealthy American with no regard for the natural environment.

We cannot say that the Coul site is specifically wild land, but the proposal is in conflict with our charitable aims. The site is extensive and includes a Special Protection Area, a Ramsar wetland site, a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a National Nature Reserve. There are several European protected species, many of which are red or amber listed, in specific habitats on the site which is of not only national but also international significance.

The applicant hadn't complied with a range of important documents such as Scottish Planning Policy, the Highland Council Local Development Plan, and the Habitats Regulations/ Birds and Habitats Directives. The Environmental Impact Assessment and associated

documents were inadequate on several counts.

There would be fragmentation of the existing mosaic of habitats and the site integrity would be destroyed and ecological coherence disrupted. The proposed management plans would be equally damaging involving the use of pesticides and fertilisers to encourage a monoculture of grass suitable for golf courses in coastal locations.

We also considered the socio-economic issues around the proposal but decided that the weight of evidence against the proposal was such that we had to object – additionally some of our members were encouraging us to do so! There has been a huge amount of public involvement in commenting on this application, both in support and in objection, and local groups have been set up on both sides.

Glen Lyon track

In early January we objected to an application for a track to be upgraded and extended on Chesthill Estate, west of Invervar Lodge in Glen Lyon – despite there being a track suitable for vehicles on the other side of the burn which had been constructed for a hydro scheme up the glen a few years ago.

This proposed track is in a National Scenic Area and in Wild Land Area 10, although the latter was not mentioned in the application. We weren't content with aspects of the species sampling methodology described in the agent's commissioned Habitat Survey Report. There were also deficiencies in their Planning and Design Statement, especially around restoration work and avoidance of burn pollution by silting.

Our main objection, however, related to the purpose of and justification for the track. As in several recent applications (such as the one at Camusrory in a Wild Land Area which we objected to but which was granted planning permission), ATV damage at the end of an existing track was described in the proposal due to people driving over unprepared ground, effectively lengthening the track.

The agent justified the track construction on the grounds that this would ameliorate the damage; however the obvious concern then is that this would merely enable ATVs to access further into unspoilt ground, causing more damage and attrition. Perth and Kinross Council have the task of evaluating whether to grant planning permission.

Other work

Efforts continue to be directed to the **Hilltracks** work and Mel Nicoll is getting on with writing our report. This will be used as an evidence-base for lobbying for a further change to the December 2014 Order that we achieved as a result of our initial campaign – so that all tracks will require a full application to be submitted.

LINK resources have been heavily directed towards **Brexit** activity, as there is concern over how Britain will continue to deliver (or even improve if you are optimistic) on environmental protection, fishery and agricultural matters post-Brexit.

Again this involves a great deal of parliamentary advocacy work and we contribute where we can and where we have interests.

Further proposals around the **Cononish Gold Mine** in the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park and the Ben Lui



A Monadhliath track by James Fenton

Wild Land Area have largely passed the environmental organisations by, possibly due in part to the fact that there are no species designations.

Furthermore, depending perhaps on what you read into them, some people do not find conflict between the aims of the National Park and the proposal. However Bill Stephens, one of our Steering Team members is pursuing this as an individual – see his article below.

I am concerned that the SWLG Steering Team lacks the capacity to respond to the Section 36 **energy proposal notifications**.

We could consider establishing an email working group of interested members to enable a team of us to address this. If you might be interested in participating in such a group – no specific planning knowledge would be required – please get in touch.

All our consultation responses are put in the 'Our Work' section of our website. Please scrutinise these and comment back to us.

We should be pleased to hear members' views so please write to the WLN editor if you want to draw our attention to anything.

Bill Stephens

Mining a National Park

In August last year a planning application, reference 2017/0254/MIN, was submitted by SGZ Cononish for an amended scheme to develop a gold mine in Glen Cononish south of Tyndrum with the site in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park; most of the operational areas lie within the Ben Lui Wild Land Area.

The waste rock from the mine and the ore processing tailings, totalling some 700,000 tonnes, are now to be disposed of in ten 'stacks' and restored to look like drumlins. The company argues this is a more environmentally acceptable solution – but the driver is clearly to reduce costs.

Previously it was intended to dispose of most of the mined rock and more than a quarter of the tailings underground, but it is now proposed to double the size of the area on the surface for the disposal of all the waste material. The ore processing building is also slightly larger, nearly 50% bigger than the average Aldi store, with reduced screening, and the 24-



hour operation of the mine extended from 10 to 17 years – with the potential identified to extract more ore and increase the timescale.

Incredibly, only one tailings sample has been analysed and no restoration trials undertaken, but the silty nature of the material and its potential toxicity to plants means there is a distinct possibility that we could be left with a desert in one of Scotland's most valued landscapes. Further information has been requested from both the National Park Authority (NPA) and the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency but so far this has not been forthcoming.

After realising that few environmental groups or the outdoors community were aware

of or concerned enough to object to the planning application, I did so in early December. Given the restoration uncertainties and the landscape designations, the precautionary principle should apply, and planning permission for what is proposed now, and any application to renew consent for the previously approved scheme, should be refused. The efforts of the NPA should be focussed on the restoration of what is there now and not make things worse.

It is still not too late to object as the planning application is to be considered at a Special Board meeting of the NPA at the end of February.

Bill Stephens is a member of the Steering Team of SWLG.

James Fenton

National Scenic Areas & Wild Land

An excellent summary of the history of landscape protection in Scotland is given in Appendix 1 of Scottish Campaign for National Parks, 2013: Unfinished Business. If you would like a copy, contact admin@swlg.org.uk

The outstanding scenery of much of Scotland has been recognised for a long time, but came to particular prominence in the 19th century through the novels of Sir Walter Scott. Efforts for landscape protection began at the end of that century and have continued ever since. It would appear, however that, right up to the present day, government has been lukewarm on safeguarding our landscapes: everyone is proud of them, but this does not carry over into a government commitment to protect them.

This reluctance can be illustrated in the response to the 1947



Ramsay Report which, as part of post-war reconstruction, recommended five National Parks for Scotland to be in public ownership. Their locations were based on seven criteria, one of which was ‘outstanding natural beauty’ – the maintenance of which was seen as a key to tourism. The proposals were: Loch Lomond & The Trossachs; Glens Affric & Cannich and Strathfarrar; Ben Nevis, Glencoe and the Black Mount; The Cairngorms; Lochs Torridon, Maree & Broom.

Areas of
outstanding
scenic value
in a national
context

One member of the Ramsay committee described a National Park as “A place where intelligent forethought has thrown a protective arm around some still untouched remnant of the beauty of the world, leaving it to exercise its elevating and refining influence on all who come into contact with it.” How does this phraseology compare with the prosaic and development-orientated underpinning of the two National Parks which were eventually set-up over 50 years later?

Fleet Valley NSA by James Fenton



The government of the day rejected the 1947 proposals owing, amongst other things, to lobbying from landowners, forestry and hydro-electric interests. However the five proposed areas remained in the planning system as 'National Park Direction Areas' until the National Scenic Areas (NSAs) were set up. Which brings us finally to NSAs.

Purpose of NSAs

The Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) website provides the following information:

The purpose of the NSA designation is both to identify our finest scenery and to ensure its protection from inappropriate development. NSAs are broadly equivalent to the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty found in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The International Union for Conservation of Nature sees NSAs as Category V Protected Landscapes (the same as Scotland's National Parks). The 40 NSAs are shown on

Map 1, including four which are exclusively within National Parks.

They were first proposed in a 1978 report titled *Scotland's Scenic Heritage* by the then Countryside Commission for Scotland (an organisation later incorporated into SNH). They were established in 1980 under planning legislation, which was updated in 2010 so that they are now designated under Part 10 of the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006; this gives them a statutory basis for the first time. Thereafter the Town and Country Planning (National Scenic Areas) (Scotland) Designation Directions 2010 brought the legislation into force.

Special qualities

The law defines NSAs as areas "of outstanding scenic value in a national context", for which special protection measures are required. They encompass a wide range of different landscape types, not just wild land; for example:

Spectacular mountain ranges, like the Skye Cuillins, Ben Nevis and Glencoe.

Dramatic island landscapes, in the Hebrides and Northern Isles.

Picturesque, richly diverse scenery, such as the NSAs in Perthshire, the Scottish Borders, and Dumfries and Galloway.

SNH has identified a list of ‘special qualities’ for each NSA – that is the landscape qualities which make each one distinctive. The special qualities of each NSA are listed in SNH’s *Commissioned Report No. 374* (2010) available from the SNH website.

Planning guidance

These qualities are safeguarded by local authorities through the planning system, with SNH acting in an advisory capacity; SNH must be consulted on certain categories of development within NSAs, and permitted development rights are more limited within them than elsewhere.

Planning authorities have a duty to ensure that:

- New development in or next to an NSA doesn’t detract from the quality or character of the landscape.
- The scale, siting and design of such development are appropriate.

- The design and landscaping are of a high standard.

Paragraph 212 of Scottish Planning Policy states that development that affects an NSA should only be permitted where:

- Either the objectives of the designation and the overall integrity of the NSA won’t be compromised.
- Or any significant adverse effects on its special qualities are outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of national importance.

Additionally, Scottish Planning Policy makes clear that wind farms are not appropriate in NSAs or National Parks.

Management strategies

A management strategy for an NSA lists its special qualities and summarises the action needed to safeguard them. Strategies are produced in full consultation with the people who live and work in the relevant NSA. However to-date, only the three NSAs in Dumfries and Galloway have active strategies (which have been adopted as supplementary planning guidance). You can download these from the National Scenic Areas page on the Dumfries and Galloway Council website.



North Arran NSA by James Fenton

Wild Land

Map 2 shows the overlap between NSAs and SNH's Core Areas of Wild Land (see *Wild Land News* issue 91 for information about these core areas). It can be seen that 13 of the 40 NSAs do not include any wild land (if the definition of wild land is restricted to that within the Core Areas), and that all the remaining NSAs contain land additional to the wild areas. This reflects the fact that NSAs are designed to encompass both wild and cultural landscapes.

Of the 42 Wild Land Areas, 15 lie completely outside NSAs, and of the remaining areas only 2 (North Arran and Rum) are completely enclosed by an NSA. Hence NSAs are not a sufficient mechanism to protect the Core Areas of Wild Land.

Where an NSA does contain all or a significant part of a Core Area of Wild Land, then this wildness is identified as a special quality. For example, the **Wester Ross NSA** has the following special quality:

Great tracts of wild and remote land

Roads and tracks are few and far between and much of the mountain landscape is renowned for being wild and remote, with a natural vegetation cover and few, if any, buildings or structures. Wild areas can be far distant from any road, only accessible by long walks on foot.

The grandeur of the mountains and the great hidden lochs that can be found between them, together with the wild, unpredictable weather, makes a visit to these remote areas particularly memorable.

However, wildness can also be found in many of the more accessible areas, whether along a stretch of undeveloped coast, a short walk into rocky moorland, or even beside the road where it traverses the mountain interior.

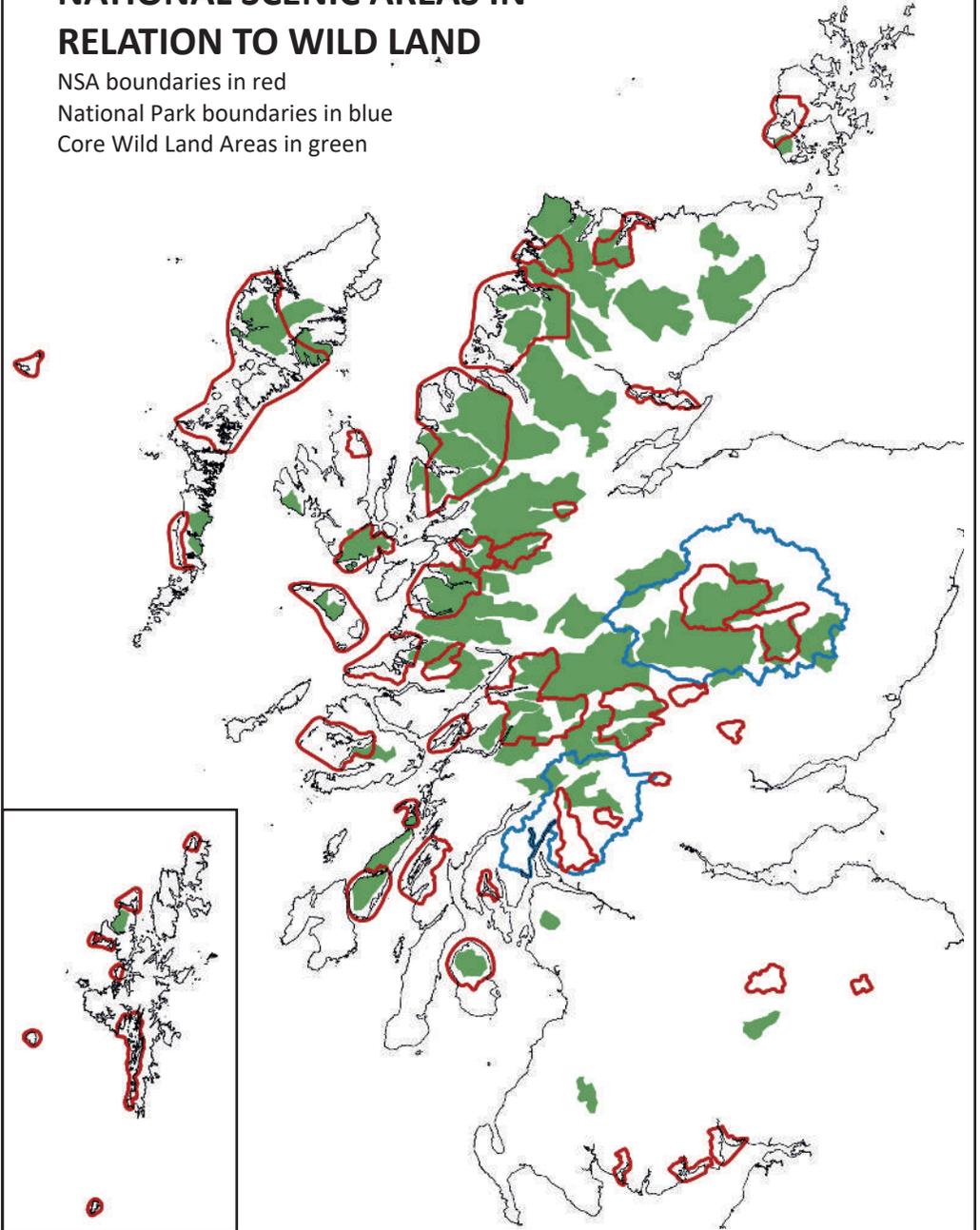
And the **North Arran NSA** has the following special quality:

The contrast between the wild highland interior and the populated coastal strip

The contrast between the upland and lowland landscapes is striking.

NATIONAL SCENIC AREAS IN RELATION TO WILD LAND

NSA boundaries in red
National Park boundaries in blue
Core Wild Land Areas in green



Map 2

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Produced on QGIS by James Fenton January 2018

The interior is rocky, wild, unpopulated and mountainous, with a surrounding foil of moorland and coniferous forestry.

The coastal strip is a narrow ribbon of fields, scrub, hedgerows, dykes and settlement, an intimate, human landscape, with well kept, whitewashed cottages and gardens looking out over the sea.

The interior appears harsh and barren whilst the inhabited coastal strip comes across as lush and welcoming.

It should be noted that even where an NSA does not contain any formal area of wild land, wildness is often recognised within a special quality. For example, the **Fleet Valley NSA** on the Solway Coast has as one of its special qualities:

The gradation from coastal islands to upland hills

With coastal scenery dominating in the south, moving inland there is a gentle transformation through ordered farms and fields, to a landscape with a wilder feel of hills and moors. This juxtaposition enables contrasting aspects of the Scottish countryside to be experienced within a short journey or a single view.

Effectiveness of the designation

In spite of having been around for over 30 years, few people have heard of NSAs and, even if they have, they are only dimly aware

of what the designation means. So have NSAs been effective in protecting our outstanding landscapes? Certainly SNH's approach of identifying the special qualities makes it easier to determine whether a given development will detract from an NSA or not. One obvious success is the government policy of no wind farms within NSAs, although a wind farm outside an NSA can of course have a visual impact from within it.

However, unlike scientific SSSIs, the special qualities are expressed in language that is by its nature imprecise, giving a developer wiggle room to side-step the spirit of the designation. And with the current emphasis on economics, if you argue against a development on the grounds that it is not in keeping with the landscape character, such landscape objections are often criticised (unfairly) for being the view of aesthetic purists who do not live in the area, who want to keep it as a museum-piece and who are only trying to stifle local development.

But landscape quality is lost through a process of attrition: everyone argues that their particular development, whether a new track, mast, unsightly house, dam or power-line, occupies only a small part of an NSA and so will have limited

Special qualities are expressed in language that is by its nature imprecise

impact on the whole. But after, say, 50 years of allowing such small developments, you suddenly wake up to find the quality of the whole has been lost: the so-called salami effect.

However it would be wrong to deny there is at times a definite conflict between landscape protection and economic development. But it would seem that, for understandable reasons, in Scotland it is normally development that wins out in the end. The upshot is that, although everyone still says that Scotland has fantastic scenery, on current trends this will eventually cease to be the case. Will we not then have lost a key element of Scottishness?

Wild land is particularly sensitive to such attrition because by definition it is land without human structures so that any development is liable to conflict with maintaining wildness as a special quality. National Parks were originally turned down in the 1950s partly because of lobbying by the hydro-electric and forestry industries.

These industries continue today to exert an influence on the landscape quality which even the NSA designation does not stop.

NSAs & afforestation

For example, with the government having a policy of a quarter of Scotland under trees, then continued afforestation, with its associated ploughing, mounding, access tracks and deer fences, may come into conflict with certain NSA special qualities.

Within the Wester Ross NSA some recent new native woodland schemes appear to conflict with the special quality of **“The large sweeps of open, expansive moorland.”**

And do reforesters within the **Assynt-Coigach NSA**, for example, take into account the following special quality:

A landscape of vast open space and exposure

The juxtaposition of cnocan, sweeping moorland and concentrated pockets of pasture emphasises the extreme openness of Assynt-Coigach. There are few trees and the skies are often expansive, particularly on the coastal fringe.

This is not to mean that all new woodland is inappropriate here because another special quality of this NSA is:

Unexpected and extensive tracts of native woodland

Although many parts of the NSA are virtually treeless, the cnocan, especially that of Assynt, can hide



Wester Ross NSA by James Fenton

the most unexpected and extensive tracts of semi-natural woodland. Here the deep folds in the Lewisian gneiss, which generally run north-west to south-east, afford some shelter and sufficient soils for linear woodlands of birch and willow to flow along the landform. These stand in welcome relief and stark contrast to the openness and barrenness of the cnochan.

This gives an insight to the kinds of woods appropriate to this landscape. In fact woodland is a special quality of many NSAs, but care has to be taken to ensure that new woods do not conflict with other existing qualities.

NSAs & hydro schemes

With relation to hydro-electric development, both the Glen Affric and Loch Maree areas were saved from inappropriate large-scale hydro-electric development in the

1960s (through lobbying from the likes of the National Trust for Scotland). But over the last year or so hydroelectric schemes have crept in by the back door to both these areas. The wild land special quality of the **Wester Ross NSA** has been given above. The **Glen Affric NSA** has the following special quality:

One of the most beautiful glens in Scotland

Glen Affric has frequently been described as the most beautiful glen in Scotland, representing the romantic, iconic, image of the Highland landscape.

Is it the correct location for new hydro-electric schemes with their dams, tracks and power-houses?

James Fenton is a member of the SWLG Steering Team, and in the past coordinated SNH's work on identifying the special qualities of Scotland's NSAs.

There is at times a conflict between landscape protection and economic development



Keep it Wild Campaign

Why wild land deserves the same planning protection as National Scenic Areas and National Parks

Readers of this journal don't need any convincing that wild land needs protecting. Nor, for that matter, does the wider public.

A Scotland-wide YouGov poll commissioned last summer by the John Muir Trust found that 52% cent "strongly agree" with the proposition that "Wild Land Areas should continue to be protected from large-scale infrastructure such as industrial-scale wind farms, major electricity transmission and super-quarries," and that a further 28% "tend to agree."

Against that convincing figure of 80% support for wild land protection, just 5% "tend to disagree" (and 0% "strongly disagree"). Significantly, the poll also demonstrated that the Highlands and Islands, where most of Scotland's wild land is located, has the highest proportion of residents (60%) who "*strongly agree*" with the protection of Wild Land Areas.

Throughout 2017, national and local campaign groups continued to fight the corner for wild land

on many fronts. We are still anxiously awaiting the outcome of several Public Local Inquiries into large-scale developments that threaten wild land – for example, wind farms at Caplich (in the shadow of Ben More Assynt), Culachy (near Fort Augustus and the Corrieairick Pass) and Strathy South (in the vast peatlands of the Flow Country).

Towards the end of February, John Muir Trust staff will be heading up to Caithness to argue the case once again against the Limekiln wind farm on the edge of Wild Land Area 39: East Halladale Flows – a development that was thrown out by Scottish Government Ministers after the scrutiny of a Public Local Inquiry in 2014.

Extended (and even second) Public Local Inquiries into developments like Limekiln, and that disturbing recent decision to consent, for the first time, a wind farm which will include industrial-scale turbines within a Wild Land Area – the Creag Riabhach wind

A clear commitment to protect Wild Land Areas would mean an end to protracted planning applications

farm near Altnaharra – show the need for current Scottish Government planning policy to be tightened up.

In contrast to the outright safeguards for National Parks (NPs) and National Scenic Areas (NSAs), Wild Land Areas were not afforded clear-cut protection from large scale wind farms in the government's 2014 Scottish Planning Policy. Instead it suggests that wind farms may be appropriate in Wild Land Areas "where it can be demonstrated that any significant effects on the qualities of these areas can be substantially overcome by siting, design or other mitigation."

This weakness in the status of Wild Land Areas has not only led to the loss of wild land but devours time and money as councils, planning officials, energy companies, conservation organisations, government ministers, government agencies, lawyers and judges deliberate over a single application. This could be avoided if Wild Land Areas were brought into line with NPs & NSAs where major wind farm developments are deemed "unacceptable" in Scottish Planning Policy.

That is why the publication of the Planning Bill in December marked the start of another important opportunity to influence the

future for wild land in Scotland, driving the Trust's *Keep it Wild* campaign.

Protection for wild land comes from wider government planning policy, rather than the primary legislation of the Planning Bill. It's a tall order to get protection for Wild Land Areas referenced in the actual Bill but it's a challenge we've risen to. Debate around the Bill as it proceeds through Parliament helps us to raise awareness of the issue and secure support from individual MSPs and even Ministers.

Progress we make now in highlighting the support for wild land protection will put us in a much stronger position when the review of Scottish Planning Policy and the National Planning Framework come round on the back of the Planning Bill.

Getting a clear commitment from Government to protect Wild Land Areas would mean an end to protracted planning applications

Ascending Ben Wyvis by Grahame Nicoll



and Public Local Inquiries. This would free up time and resources for all the interested parties – local communities and government, campaign groups and government agencies – to focus on the huge potential that Wild Land Areas have as places where we could bring back the full diversity of our natural heritage, with truly sustainable economic benefits.

Please join us as the Planning Bill makes its way through Parliament in making sure politicians are aware of the strength of public support for improved protection for wild land. We need as many people as possible to write to their MSPs in the coming weeks

and to take up any other opportunities to influence the discussions and debate that will be taking place in Parliament.

Visit the John Muir Trust website for guidance on writing letters, to find out what else you can do to support the Trust's *Keep it Wild* campaign, and about how we are working with campaign group Planning Democracy to get changes in the Bill that will give the public and communities an equal right of appeal against planning decisions.

*Contact Mel Nicoll
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The Outer Hebrides Interconnector & the Eisgein Wind Farm

The Eisgein Estate is part of the Pairc area in south-eastern Lewis. It is a peninsula bounded by the Minch, Loch Seaforth and Loch Sealg. It comprises over 40,000 acres and is a sporting estate run on traditional lines.

It is one of the most beautiful areas of Scotland with an array of hills and deep glens running down to steep-sided bays, with rivers and lochs. It has the greatest concentration of golden and white-tailed eagles in Europe. It is full of archaeological interest. It forms part of a National Scenic Area and the Eisgein Wild Land Area. And it is threatened.

When the employees of the Welsh company tasked with assessing the wind resource on the estate arrived they took one look at the area and declared it was inappropriate for a turbine development. Regrettably they were not the ones making the decisions and after the usual shadow dance of proposals, objections and revisions initial consent was eventually granted in early 2010 for 33 turbines and a

six-turbine extension was granted in 2015.

To export electricity from the Hebrides an interconnector will have to be laid to the mainland, probably through Skye. This will impose unacceptable burdens on the environment, the taxpayer and the consumer – without a corresponding benefit in terms of carbon saving. The manufacture and installation of this interconnector, as well as the associated infrastructure, will of necessity result in the release of much carbon into the atmosphere.

The turbines on Eisgein will be sited on peatland. It is well-documented that the excavation of peat and the resultant release of carbon gases deleteriously affects any calculation of carbon saving.

To manufacture and lay the interconnector will take millions of pounds. The considerable costs will be paid principally by the consumer. The main beneficiaries will be a French state-owned generating company (EDF), Amec Foster Wheeler, now owned by

One of
the most
beautiful
areas of
Scotland



The Eisegin Wild Land Area. The turbines will be erected on the left slope above the loch and beyond the last hill on the left. By Danny Rafferty

the Wood Group, and the estate owners. Transporting electricity from the islands to the main centres of consumption on the mainland will result in a loss of at least 30% of generated power compromising the entire viability of the project economically and in terms of carbon saving.

The laying of a new line through Skye and the western Highlands could well generate new wind farms in areas which thus far have remained free of them.

Few jobs will be created locally. The cable for the interconnector will be manufactured elsewhere as will the turbines. If the pattern over the recent years in Scotland is continued, the erection and installation of the turbines as well as the maintenance will be completed by sub-contractors employing non-local labour. Traditional jobs in the Eisegin Estate will be lost.

One of the most galling aspects of the whole sad renewable saga in

Scotland is the failure to build productive capacity and a skill base of any scale.

The present UK Government has several times kicked the interconnector proposal into the long grass. They recognise that it represents very poor value for money, will not ameliorate climate change and they have just agreed to set up another 'consultation' which will take us through to the spring of 2019.

If the wind farm goes ahead, there will be some community benefits but these will be small compared with the returns gained by the estate owners, EDF and the Wood Group.

Permissions are already in place for other areas of Lewis. If the interconnector is funded and built, no island in the Outer Hebrides will be safe from the wind farm blight.

Danny Rafferty is a South Uist resident and former SWLG Steering Team member.

The Lure of Wild Land: Revisiting *The Living Mountain*

‘Summer on the high plateau can be delectable as honey; it can also be a roaring scourge. To those who love the place, both are good, since both are part of its essential nature.’ So starts Nan Shepherd’s *The Living Mountain*, her unique work on the landscape, nature and people of the Cairngorms. The sentence sets the scene for a book that is sensuous and thoughtful, gentle and savage, and absolutely without parallel. Once a lost classic, the book is now beginning to get the attention it deserves. But what is it about this work that makes it resonate with so many wild land lovers?

It’s a curious book with a curious background. Shepherd was an Aberdonian, or thereabouts. She was occasionally a writer, but more regularly a teacher. She lived an independent, adventurous life, was well-travelled and well-read, but nowhere stuck with her so much as the Cairngorms. *The Living Mountain* was written in the final years of the Second World War,

then put in a desk for thirty years, before being published in 1977.

The first question to ask is an oddly complicated one: what sort of work is it? Nature writing? Prose poem? Love letter? The prose is dense with meaning but light to read. You could happily read the whole thing in an afternoon, or spend a year studying it and never quite reach the bottom. It is perhaps best to think of it as an intimate portrait in words. Indeed, sometimes it feels almost embarrassingly intimate to read, as though one were walking in on a private discussion between a wife and her husband.

It is remarkably difficult to describe why people like being in wild places. This past year I have visited and revisited the living mountain, and have found that Shepherd’s book had gotten under my skin. Passages would pop in and out of my head like half-remembered snippets of conversation. She would spring up, out of nowhere, on the tors of

It is difficult
to describe
why people
like being in
wild places



Cairngorms by Andrew Painting

Ben Avon, or in a bog in Glen Geldie, or deep in the waters of the Dee and the Quoich. The reason, I believe, is because her book expresses the joy of being in wild land.

The big lump

‘The plateau is the true summit of these mountains; they must be seen as a single mountain, and the individual tops, Ben MacDhui, Braeriach and the rest, though sundered from one another by fissures and deep descents, are no more than eddies on the plateau surface’.

I remember the first time I saw the plateau after reading this passage. I walked up Morrone, above Braemar, from where you can see a remarkable amount of the plateau. To see it as one big lump, rather than as a range of hills, was a revelation.

Shepherd has a real desire to understand the Cairngorms holistically. I have always been impressed by the ‘sense of place’ of the Cairngorms, but Shepherd’s treatment of the Cairngorms as a discrete entity, the living mountain, goes further than that. That ‘eddies on the plateau surface’ metaphor signifies movement and change. Where

most of us would consider the Cairngorms a big, immovable, permanent object (or objects), Shepherd saw a dynamic mountain ecology where the rock is as alive as eagles. Her mountain is populated by rocks, water, snow, birds, plants and people, and all are given equivalence, because for her all are constituent parts of the mountain. Indeed, the quality of the landscape itself is created by the interplay between these actors:

‘Saxifrage - the rock-breaker’ - in some of its loveliest forms, *Stellaris*, that stars with its single blossoms the high rocky corrie burns, and *Aizoides*, that clusters like soft sunshine in their lower reaches, cannot live apart from the mountain. As well expect the eyelid to function if cut from the eye.’

Shepherd’s prose delights in the interplay between the expansive and the tiny. She somehow manages to take in everything, from the broadest vistas to the smallest patch of starry saxifrage, and yet it all miraculously remains in sharp focus. That she achieves this is testament to her understanding of the area and her desire to understand its ‘essential nature’.

A 'sense of place' is an intrinsic quality of many wild land areas in Scotland. In *The Living Mountain*, Shepherd shows us that to understand this quality takes time and effort. Her holistic approach to understanding a landscape is an unfamiliar one. Yet such an approach can help us to found a deep appreciation for wild land and a better understanding of what it is that makes a place special.

There is more than one way to climb a mountain

'Haste can do nothing with these hills', wrote Shepherd, like a true Deesider. For those impatient for the high views there is a long walk in from Deeside to the plateau. Yet Shepherd understood that the true nature of the Cairngorms was not only to be found at the tops. Rather, it is found through

tarrying in the glens, swimming in the lochans and sleeping under the stars. For her, there would be no point in racing to the summits if you didn't also appreciate that the water was 'green like the green in winter skies' in Glen Quoich, or that the birches smell 'fruity like old brandy'. No one in a rush would be able to write: 'sit quietly for a while in some of the loneliest and most desolate crannies of the mountain, where the imagination is overpowered by grim bastions of rock, and a single snow bunting will sing with incredible sweetness beside you.'

This is not to say that Shepherd didn't understand the exhilaration of reaching the tops and climbing new lines. 'To pit oneself against the mountain is necessary for every climber ... to know the hills, and their own bodies, well

Cairngorms by Kirsten Dallas



enough to dare the exploit is the real achievement.' Shepherd is describing a bodily comprehension of the mountain, where physical effort brings the rewards of both self-awareness and awareness of our relationship with the environment. It is a pleasure shared by walkers, climbers, skiers, runners and naturalists in wild places, brought about by physical and mental challenge. When she writes of a climber that 'what he values is a task that, demanding of him all he has and is, absorbs and so releases him entirely', she is describing the process of simultaneously losing and finding oneself in a landscape. And that is as good an explanation of the lure of wild land as I have ever come across.

The Living Mountain sits on the sweet spot between knowledge of the self and knowledge of the

other. Again, this is an unfamiliar way of understanding landscapes. Shepherd's knowledge of the Cairngorms is not so much learned as absorbed during her time on the hill. It is a knowledge that cannot be replicated except by time, effort, and work. She writes 'that it was a traffic of love is sufficiently clear; but love pursued with fervour is one of the roads to knowledge'. *The Living Mountain* is respectful, knowledgeable, and loving almost to the point of eroticism, but it is never reverential about the Cairngorms, nor does it treat the hill as a commodity to be consumed. Shepherd knew that the hills are not something to be admired from afar, but something to visit, to touch, to experience. To be visited, as McFarlane puts it in his excellent introduction to the 2011 reissue of the book, as if on 'an unpius pilgrimage'.

Conclusion

There is always an element of anxiety when reading about wild land in Britain, or indeed visiting it; one feels the precariousness of its existence keenly. *The Living Mountain* is no exception. Indeed, Shepherd felt it herself, when she wrote the foreword in 1977, thirty years after completing the original manuscript: 'in that disturbed and uncertain world it was my secret place of ease'. She saw the threats posed by too



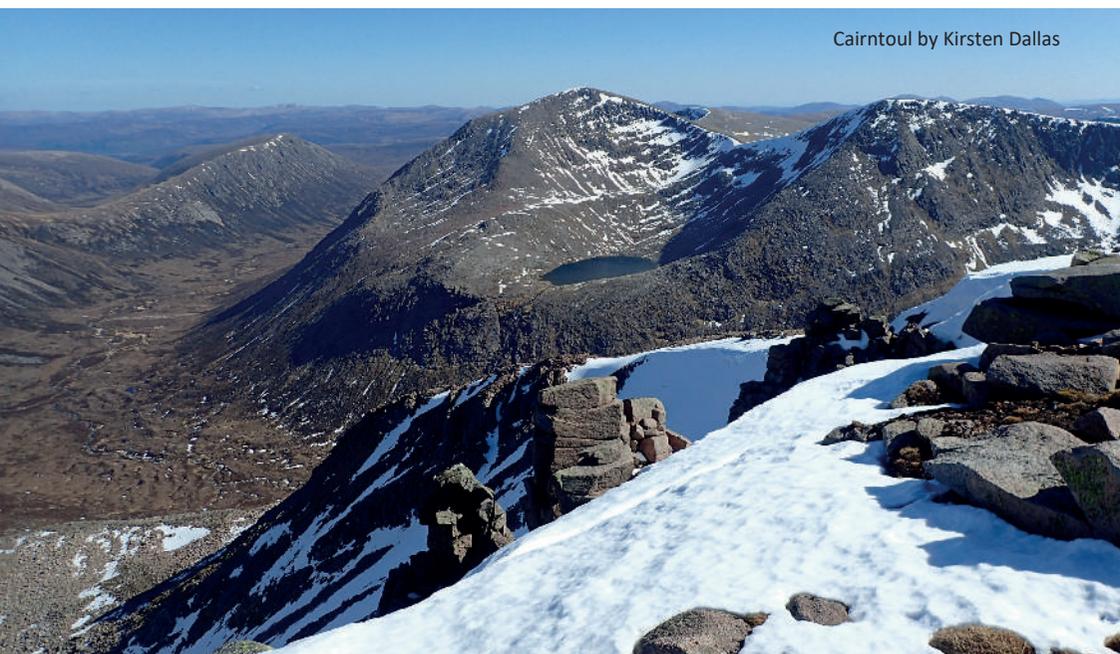
From Ben MacDhui by Tom Leatherland

much development in the Cairngorms, but she also saw that humans were an intrinsic part of the living mountain.

Perhaps the greatest surprise of the book is how recognisable the land that Shepherd describes is today. The 'purple glowing birches' still smell 'fruity like old brandy'. The water is still greener in Glen Quoich than Glen Derry. Loch Etchachan still freezes over in winter. The Cairngorms face many threats, but, for now at least, the living mountain is there for all to visit, and that is surely worth celebrating.

'These people are bone of the mountain. As the way of life changes, and a new economy moulds their life, perhaps they too will change. Yet so long as they live a life close to their wild land, subject to its weathers, something of its own nature will permeate theirs. They will be marked men.'

All quotations taken from Shepherd, N., 2011 (1977). The Living Mountain, Edinburgh, Canongate.



Cairntoul by Kirsten Dallas

Book Review, by Bill Stephens

Literature of The Gaelic Landscape by John Murray

This really is a lovely book and follows on from his 2014 Reading the Gaelic Landscape, reviewed by Calum Brown in Wild Land News 85.

One of the joys of his earlier book was the exploration of the Gaelic cultural landscape quoting from poetry and other sources and is explored more thoroughly in the new book. It's not necessary to have read the first book, although I'd recommended it if you haven't done so, as the first three chapters covers the technical stuff including place-naming, stories, mapping, wayfinding, toponymy and mnemonics.

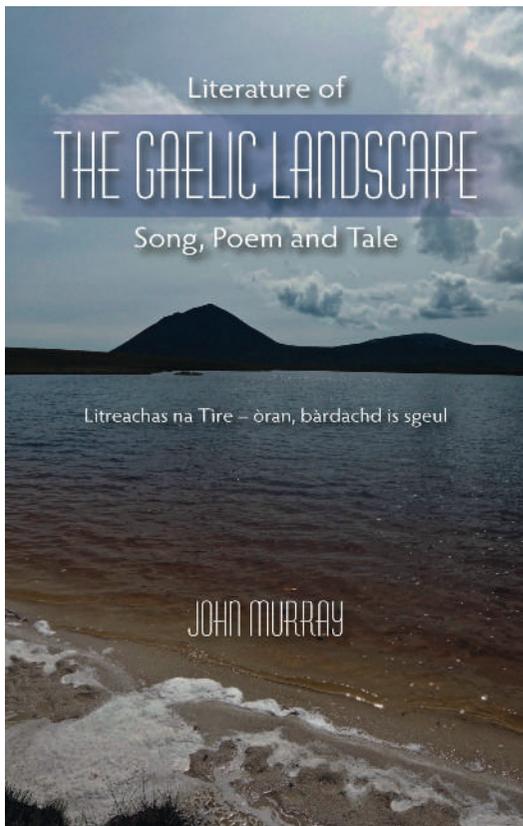
The focus of the book is an examination of some key Gaelic texts and their settings starting with the Landscapes of Finn MacCoul with other chapters exploring Donald Mackinlay's *Oran na Comhachaig* (Song of the Owl), Sorley Maclean's poem *An Cuilithion* (The Cuillin) as well as his *Hallaig* and the songs and poems of Donald ban Macintyre (Fair-haired Duncan of the Songs

or Donnchadh Ban) including: *Oran do Chaora* (Song to a Ewe); *Oran Coire a Cheathaich* (Song to the Corrie of the Mist); *Cumha Coire a Cheathaich* (Lament for the Corrie of the Mist); *Moladh Beinn Dobhrainn* (The Praise of Ben Dorain); and *Cead Deireannich nam Bean* (Final Farewell to the Bens).

Although not a Gaelic writer, Neil Gunn has a Gaelic sensibility and a quarter of the book is devoted to his writings with a photograph of *Loch Braigh na h-Aibhne*, the source of his Highland River, on the front cover. Another non-Gaelic writer that gets a mention is Nan Shepherd where *The Living Mountain* is compared with the works of Donnchadh Ban.

In a short concluding chapter, Staging the Gaelic Landscape, John Murray tries, not entirely successfully, to pull it all together pointing out that in Gaelic literature: 'Nature is infused with animism. Shape shifting between living things happen' and 'a recitation of place-names or a

This really
is a lovely
book



Literature of

THE GAELIC LANDSCAPE

Song, Poem and Tale

Litreachas na Tìre – òran, bàrdachd is sgeul

JOHN MURRAY

story embedded in the landscape will enable us to find a way' without a map.

Paradoxically then, one of the strengths of the book is the various maps John Murray uses to show how the places mentioned in the songs and poems relate to each other and the landscape. The Glen Dochart topo-mnemonic map, the Breadalbane and Lochaber 'songlands', the leaps of the *An Cuilithion* stallion and the voyages described in *The Silver Darlings* all stand-alone, but John Murray has cleverly produced

'songlines' for the other maps covering the places in Glen Etive mentioned in *Oran do Chora*, the path of the deer in *Moladh Beinn Dobhrain*, the *Hallaig* place-name sequence and the Strath of the Highland River.

All the place-names mentioned in the songs and poems are tabulated in the book giving the English translation and grid reference along with helpful notes. Many of the places and landscapes referred to in the text are also shown in good photographs.

A few years ago, I set off to explore Highland River but only got as far as the Falls Pool and the book would have been helpful then and for anyone contemplating doing the same. Other places that the book has now inspired me to visit include *Creag Ghuanich* at the head of Loch Treig, central to *Oran na Comhachaig* and also where the bard Donad Macdonald (or Donald son of Finlay of the poems) was raised in the sixteenth century; *Coire [a] Chruiteir* east of *Beinn Dobhrain* (which John Murray gives as The Harper's Corrie perhaps due to the noise of the wind here but shown on the OS map as *Coire Cruitein* or Kingfisher Corrie, an unlikely habitat for the bird); and *Coire a Cheathaich* in upper Glen



Coire a Cheathaich in the Braes of Balquhidder, the most famous coire in Gaelic literature. By Alan Sloan

Lochay that Donnchadh Ban celebrated and subsequently lamented in his songs of the same name, with the latter also providing a good excuse to climb *Creag Mhor*, perhaps on skis in the coming weeks and tick off another metric Munro.

Coire a Cheathaich became the most famous corrie in Gaelic literature, and in his *Oran* Donnchadh Ban ‘praises every nuance of place and living thing in a cascade of celebration’ as this English translation of one of several similar verses from the song clearly shows.

The Misty Corrie of the roving
young hind
is the dearest corrie of verdant
ground:
How lovely, lea-loving, sleek-
bright sappy,
was every floweret so fragrant
to me;
how shaggy, dark-green, fertile,
teeming,
steep, blooming, full pure,
exquisite, mellow, dappled,

flowery, bonny, rich in sweet
grass
is the glen of arrow grass, and
many a fawn.

Returning there many years later he was dismayed about the loss of wildlife, wildflowers, herbs, shrubs and trees as well as the pollution of watercourses which John Murray suggests could have been caused by intensive sheep farming and prompted Donnchadh Ban to pen his *Cumha Coire a Cheathaich*.

After writing *Moladh Beinn Dobhrain* in the middle of the 18th century he had a similar experience when he returned at the beginning of the 19th century and was moved to compose *Cead Deireannach nam Beann*. All he had known was ‘under sheep’ with the same sentiments expressed in a late 18th century report.

Beinndoran, till lately, was the residence and sanctuary of the roe buck and mountain deer; but now,

the hunter roams no longer on the hill of the chace; the sheep browse on the heath of the forest, and the sons of the mountains have deserted the inheritance of their race for ages, to revisit its springs and glades, and secret haunts no more!

An Cuilithionn begins with a hymn of praise for the mountains.

The Sgurr Biorach (Alasdair)
the highest sgurr
but Sgurr nan Gillean the
best sgurr,
the blue-black gape-mouthed
strong sgurr,
the tree-like slender horned
sgurr,
the forbidding great dangerous
sgurr,
the sgurr of Skye above the
rest.
My place above every other
place
to be on your high shoulder-
blades
striving with your rocky grey
throat,
wrestling with hard peaked
surging chest.

Soon, the poem describes the response of the mountains to the suffering caused by the clearances.

On Sgurr Alasdair in the glitter and silver loveliness of the moon... the screeching of the Cuillin would follow my ears with its anguish.

The focus is then broadened to European fascism and war and the morass of Marabhlainn is introduced, an expanse of what was blanket bog north and west of the mountains but now largely planted with trees, and symbolic of all that is rotten and evil in the world. This is trampled to extinction by *An t-Aigeach*, the Stallion, after leaping from peak to peak and the poem ends with humanity emerging *air taobh eile duilghe*, on the other side of sorrow. We need *An t-Aigeach* again more than ever.

Over the years I've climbed all of the Cuillin peaks but not yet mounted the stallion, a 94 metre high rocky eminence that rears out of the sea at Neist, the westernmost point of Skye. It's



Blabheinn by James Fenton



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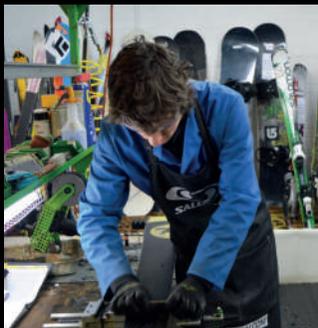
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Scottish Wild Land Group

Working to protect Scotland's species, environment and landscapes



Liathach by James Fenton

The objects of the Group are:

- (a) To promote the conservation of wild land in Scotland;
- (b) To promote public awareness of the problems facing wild land in Scotland;
- (c) To promote and encourage the implementation of good planning policies;
- (d) To co-operate with other bodies to promote the foregoing objects.

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