

WILD LAND NEWS

Magazine of the
Scottish Wild Land Group

Spring 2009

No. 72



Time to Nationalise the “Green Energy” Goldrush ?

Travesty at Lochluichart

Wild Mapping- the Debate Unfolds

Following the Kye, Mullardoch



Scottish Wild Land Group

Registered Charity No: SC004014

Wild Land News

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East Lodge, Craibstone
Bucksburn, Aberdeen, AB21 9SJ
Tel: 01224 716709 or 07754 571364
Web: www.swlg.org.uk
E-mail: enquiries@swlg.org.uk



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Front Cover: *Sgurr nan Clach Geala* and *Sgurr Mòr Fannaich* from *Bac an Eich* © Graeme Cornwallis 2009
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Comment

There is a lot happening in and around Scotland's wild land at present, with a bewildering deluge of proposed developments which could overwhelm those who still resist the tyranny of Progress.

Whilst the world's financial crisis may retard schemes such as the Alladale Game Reserve (a thinly-disguised private resort for those who can afford up to £3,300 per night in the Lodge) for some time, it is encouraging the flight of Capital into onshore windpower, where the profits are vast, the subsidies agreeable and the opposition ineffective.

A member recently asked me what the SWLG does, so I helped him drink his whisky and decided to do something. Researching the Renewables Industry, about which I thought myself to be informed, became an eye-opening and time-consuming trek: here are some steps along the way.

Scottish Renewables (scottishrenewables.com) is an industry pressure group with at least nine staff and a budget of £500,000 per annum, and they were advertising a meeting in Glasgow on 29th January, only tomorrow and 5 miles away...my chance to "do something"! It sounded juicy—"The seminar is aimed at energy industry practitioners who are developing projects and require to engage with a range of stakeholders", and "The Government is determined to speed up the planning application process, whilst at the same time ensuring (sic) that the public has an opportunity to influence the nature of the proposals being determined."

Sounds...interesting. "The Planning Act (etc) 2006 will be introduced later this year in Scotland." (Scotland is the test-bed yet again) The seminar was to inform greenenergy buffs on how to take advantage of the forthcoming laws, in which there will be no "Third Party Right of Appeal", to prevent "good developments" from being "delayed by frivolous or vexatious appeals". The Government "recognises the potential loss of proper accountability this may cause" (such magnanimity!), and the "result is that a greater emphasis will now be placed on rigorous local consultation, and planning approval will not be given without it." This stuff started to chime a hollow bell (I'm aware that a solid bell widna ding, but do keep reading) as I recalled the recent dismissal of the community's views at Lochluichart (see article in following pages), so it was time for a quick telephone call to ask, could I attend as an observer?

"No- members only event", said Chris, who helpfully suggested we join, at great expense. I knew it was members only, as it said so on their website, but why did he not just tell me it was "full", as the website clearly said in red? The seminar suddenly became just a "networking event only", the "interactive and participatory workshop" ceased to be and, no, I couldn't see an agenda or results from the meeting as it was all very informal, which flatly contradicted their website! He consulted someone else after confirming 'SWLG' twice - perhaps we are notorious? - and this got me puzzled.

After printing out the webpage, I noticed that the sponsor's name and logo had vanished, and wondered if they were shy - "Facilitating Change (UK) Ltd"? Never heard of them, ask Mr Google...oh, dear... the top link displayed was "Sellafield", and I was shocked. Green, fluffy windfarmers in bed with nuclear apologists? No wonder they didn't want my type around.

"Facilitating Change (fchange.com) is a facilitation and public engagement consultancy. We deliver workshop and consultation processes for highly contentious issues and proposals. Our team consists of individuals *who are skilled in the delivery of facilitated events.*" (My emphasis). It appears that the seminar would *inter alia* be training developers in the very tactics of divide and rule, as utilised at Lochluichart: tactics which we can expect to see aggressively deployed in all future contentious proposals. Check their website and decide for yourself - are these the people we should be trusting with the future of our very landscape? If onshore wind factories are so self-evidently good, why do the developers need such "intellectual firepower" to force objectors to comply? Perhaps it is because we see the usual profit-hungry exploiters, people who have done well from the fossil fuel age, who are now anxious to maintain their obscene "revenue streams" regardless of the damage they do.

They seek to maintain the status quo, sponge off the taxpayer and to Hell with the indefinable and ill-protected (and much abused) uplands of Scotland.

Scotland is going to be sacrificed on a misguided green altar (remember, First Minister Alex wants "a million wind turbines"!), to make huge profits for largely foreign-owned companies, unless

the fractured environment lobby gets a coherent approach. More in the next Wild Land News. Meanwhile, it is surely time for Scotland's wind and wave resources to be NATIONALISED for the good of the people and our future benefit. You know, like a sensible country would.

As for the facile facilitators; we should never take "FCUK(Ltd)off" for an answer.

Grant Cornwallis.

LATE NEWS

Scottish and Southern Energy's proposed wind factory in South Lochs, Lewis (centred at 350150, OS Sheet 14) has been scaled down to 26 turbines, each 476 feet high.

The deadline for submitting representations is 13th March, so you have time (just) to research and object to the spoiling of this fine area. Try www.lochslewis.org/content/view/288/32, www.wind-watch.org/news and www.mwtlewis.org.uk for photos and background information. www.epaw.org is a good one. Write to The Scottish Govt., Energy Consents Unit, 2nd Floor, Meridian Court, 5 Cadogan St., Glasgow. G2 6AT, or email to energyconsents@Scotland.gsi.gov.uk With 450MW of new wind output required every year to meet the SNPs 2020 targets, it's time to get campaigning.

The rewilding of Glen Cannich

David Jarman



Sgurr na Lapaich and Loch Tuill Bhearnach from Carn nan Gobhar - photo by Hamish Johnston

I never saw the Highlands until I was about 20, having been brought up on the 'wee hills' of Wales and the Lakes. About all I knew of them was from Poucher – his glamour pictures of the iconic peaks and his perfunctory route descriptions. In those days there was little of the pervasive imagery of brooding bens and misty glens we now have on films and TV and in the tourism media – you had to imagine what the wider Highlands might really be like. The reality turned out to be somewhat duller than Poucher would have you believe; but the reality was also a lot more inaccessible and subtle and wild, because Poucher liked to stay in a comfortable hotel at night.

My first live impressions were gained from my girlfriend's base near Inverness – exploring the foothills of Wyvis, Coigach,

Cairngorms (for she was not a born mountaingoer). We especially favoured the western glens: Strath Conon, and Strathfarrar, and of course Glen Affric mesmerised us with their arcadian serenity.

Glen Cannich was the exception. In those days I was an enthusiast for the heavy-duty state-led economic revitalisation of the Highlands, a devotee of the Moray Firth Masterplan, amazed by the new A9 with its bridges across the Black Isle, thrilled by the new aluminium smelter at Invergordon. And yet my first encounter with a big hydro scheme shocked me with its brutality. The power stations down in Strath Glass impressed as handsome works of architecture, set in woodlands. But the Mullardoch dam was just a massive crude barrage of bare concrete, straddling a stark

treeless glen. Behind it lurked the dismal unnaturally high-shored loch with its desolate drawdown, submerging the old tracks into the interior.

Mullardoch - once seen, never forgotten, always avoided

Since that early visit I have instinctively avoided Glen Cannich, reaching its flanking Munros from their other sides. I have never yet taken advantage of the boat to access the remotest ranges, for it would pass over the drowned isthmus to the formerly separate and beautiful Loch Lungard.

Recently I have asked various acquaintances which dammed glens most irk them, and Mullardoch has been the commonest culprit. Cluanie is seen by a lot more people, and Quoich penetrates the wildest land and destroys the finest network of old access routes, but Mullardoch is just so in-
-yer-face. Even in my callow youth I must have sensed that it could have been done better.

Last spring I wanted to explore the Mullardoch Sgurr na Lapaich by way of its south-eastern corries - its east ridge is an unusually acute arête for these parts because, as I suspected, it is sliced into by a massive landslide (bit of a mess really, could have been done more sensitively). And so finally I gritted my teeth and went back up Glen Cannich, prepared to endure scenic horrors and an arduous trackless walk-in-and-out.

A little rewilding goes a long way

First surprise - in early June, the impression winding up from Cannich village into the lower glen is no longer of oppressive conifer forestry, but of verdant green birchwoods. Apparently Trees for Life are involved here as part of their Caledonian Forest project, so there is hope that this is more than a temporary respite until replanting kicks in. Second surprise - the road starts to climb up to the dam, but where was the brutal shock? Amazingly, the hydro company has planted several large groups of birch



and pine woodland, which have matured quickly to the stage where although the crest of the dam will never be hidden, it has softened into near-acceptability (it's about time the fencing was removed to allow some natural thinning of the thickets). But above the dam the glen is as bleak as ever – sadly the hydro company doesn't own any of the lochside slopes above the shoreline, as fringes of native woodland would really transform it – these are deer stalking estates with little interest in rewilding.

Only disappointment – the first mile from the dam along the north side of Loch Mullardoch is a horrible walk, initially on a crude bulldozed track, then over knolls heavily chewed up by quad vehicles. The map shows a path around the shore but this is not evident, and would be an ideal reinstatement project, giving a short stroll for visitors to the dam.

Third surprise – beyond the footbridge, the trackless shore turns out to be admirably tracked for most of the long mile to the Allt Taige, where an old stalker's path emerges from the waters and ascends some way into Glas Toll. The track has been worn by the cattle which have always grazed these slopes, albeit in much reduced numbers now. How long after the old shore path was drowned did it take them to wear in their replacement trods, contouring neatly in and out of little gullies and across bracken swards? How did they settle upon the optimal route? It is just the right width and compactness for fast progress. This must be how all the glen paths were, in days when people were content to follow in the steps of their beasts, before the cutting of paths and roads which beasts perform must follow. I cannot recall coming across a 'new' one like it, cattle not being that common in such places – deer

paths tend to slant up and down, while sheep trods are usually too narrow and form discontinuous braids.

Pathless, trackless, trodless

Glas Toll is truly wild: the cattle don't come far up into it, and the Munrobaggers route circles it, so arrival at the smooth lip of handsome Loch a' Tuill Bhearnach is trackless, a solitary place. The mists are still down, but patience is virtuously rewarded, and eventually the summit is almost clear, allowing glimpses of the great tent-ridge of An Riabhachan ahead. The Victorian Ordnance Surveyors' hut base is just discernible, tucked into the topmost corner of the landslip, a substantial stone hearth and chimney breast still standing. Their virtuous patience must often have been tried.

Returning, I take a shortcut down a convenient slanting berm, past traces of inhabitation amidst lush grazing on the sometimes-sunny south-facing slope. Cattle trods are again helpful, and the quad vehicles follow an unobtrusive higher line here. Now I find the latest OS maps the quad line as a footpath up this slant, which is most unusual for a non-engineered route. It will give anyone wanting to walk all the way along to East Benula a most unhelpful detour; clearly beast tracks don't count but quad tracks do.

Many thanks to Mr Lavitz at Mullardoch dam for his information – he tells me he used to take several hundred people up the loch in his boat each summer, nearly all from England. However, numbers have halved as petrol has got dearer and flights cheaper, and customers are now mainly from Scotland (01456 415347 to book).

Scotland Gets Control of its Seas

Alistair Cant

A small but significant announcement was made in late November 2008 by the UK and Scottish Governments. They have announced that through Marine Bills in both countries, greater control over Scotland's seas will be devolved to Scotland (and to Wales and in due course, Northern Ireland, as well).

Holyrood will extend its control from the 12 nautical miles at present to 200 nautical miles. This will allow the Scottish Government to plan wind and wave power, marine conservation and ideally plan an integrated marine management system. It also aligns marine conservation with the present 200 nautical miles limit of fisheries management - another good plus point.

The Marine Conservation Society is delighted, as they have pushed for this level of control and commitment for many years. Calum Duncan, their Scottish Conservation Manager adds a note of caution : "However, it is imperative that all

UK administrations agree to a high-level marine policy statement that commits them to delivering marine ecosystem protection and recovery through joint Marine Planning at a regional sea scale."

Calum Duncan continued:

"It is essential our seas are managed according to ecological, rather than political boundaries, and that healthy functioning marine ecosystems are the ultimate measure of success. An ecologically-coherent network of marine protected areas throughout UK seas is a crucial part of the solution."

The Scottish Wild Land Group welcomes this news, and the background work that has gone into making it possible. It is vital that protecting marine ecosystems is planned carefully, with sustainable fishing and renewable energy being managed for the nation.

Please renew your subscription!

If you don't pay by Direct Debit / Bankers Order
then please sign up now – it saves a lot of volunteer time.

Or send your cheque to the membership secretary now.

Group Rejuvenated At 2008 Agm

The Group has begun a new era after the 2008 AGM led to a rejuvenation of the Steering Team, who run the 26-year-old campaigning charity.

Four new people signed up to join the Team and two existing members stayed on, to give a healthy mix of old and new blood, experience and enthusiasm.

The lead up to the AGM saw three of the current Post-holders on the Team planning to step down after 15+ years of service each. The prospect of the Group closing down produced a strong response from members and supporters. A good number of emails and letters arrived showing strong encouragement for continuation... and hardy members travelled from Skye, Angus, Perth, Glasgow and beyond to attend the AGM on a winter's night in late November in Stirling.

Co-ordinator Alistair Cant welcomed all those who had come along, and described the many messages from members. He outlined that the slow decline in membership and activity had prompted this move to bring new people onto the Steering Team. He thanked fellow Team Members Fiona Anderson, John Digney and Danny Rafferty who were also resigning, for their contributions over the years, especially John as WLN editor - a key post.

The discussion during the meeting confirmed the view that no other organisation in Scotland filled the niche that SWLG covers, and that there still is an urgent need for campaigning activity to protect and enhance wild land. We are one of the few wholly volunteer-run organisations in this field dominated by large and staffed bodies. The ability of SWLG to work with others, and encourage actions through Scottish Environment Link was another good reason to keep going.

The problems are now more complex, with issues such as renewable energy not black-and-white. We also see small bird habitats having more protection than internationally renowned landscapes.

At the AGM, Tim Ambrose, the Treasurer, outlined that income had reduced slightly in the year, and expenditure was down too, however the Group still had a reasonable carried-forward balance of around £5,000. The accounts were signed-off by the External Examiner and are sent annually with a full report to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR). Copies of the accounts and annual report may be obtained from the Treasurer.

Before seeking nominations for the Steering Team and key posts, Alistair outlined that the Group was in reasonable health, fulfilled all the necessary regulatory requirements and had money in the bank. What it now needed was ideas, enthusiasm and new Team members to boost the profile, activity and membership.

After some discussion, four new people volunteered - Rob McMorran, Grant Cornwallis, Jayne Glass and Graeme Cornwallis. Rob volunteered to be Co-ordinator; Grant - Membership Secretary; and Tim volunteered to stay on as Treasurer. David Jarman continues too, giving a new Team of six. Other people can be co-opted during the year, e.g. Calum Brown.

The meeting closed on a high note with renewed optimism. Thanks were given to outgoing Team members, especially Alistair who was standing down as Co-ordinator. He expressed his delight that Plan B - closure - was soundly beaten off.

Alistair Cant

Mapping wildness in the Cairngorm National Park

Steve Carver

School of Geography, University of Leeds

Wildness and wild land

If you are reading this article in WLN then chances are you already have a well developed appreciation of wild land and are, likely as not, intimately familiar with what it means in the context of Scotland's own unique landscape. You are also probably aware that wildness and wild land are terms that defy definition in the strict legal sense with no equivalent of the USA's 1964 Wilderness Act available to protect our wilder landscapes in Britain. And if like me you've chewed over this issue with friends and colleagues, perhaps over a pint or two in the bar after a long day on the hill, then you'll also be familiar with the many, often conflicting views of wild land and wildness that makes definition uncertain and open to debate. This variety of opinion was made clear in a recent survey of 1300 Scottish residents commissioned by SNH on public perceptions of wild land. This showed that wild places are highly valued as part of Scotland's culture, heritage and tourist industry, and also as important for wildlife and nature, the environment, and the local economy. Half the people interviewed believe that wild places in Scotland are under threat from development, urbanisation and humans. The principal and most encouraging finding was that 91% of the people questioned said that it is important for Scotland to have wild places and three out of five said action was needed to preserve wild areas¹. While this is tremendously encouraging it does emphasise the need for a rigorous and defensible approach to defining wildness and wild land quality across Scotland and the rest of Britain so that wild land can be protected now and in the future.

Existing policy

SNH, the NTS and the JMT all have policy documents on wild land that describe what it is, why it should be valued and stating why it needs to be protected against development and preserved for the enjoyment of future generations². Taking their lead from NPPG14 these definitions are, minor wording differences aside, largely in agreement that wild land is "*uninhabited and often relatively inaccessible countryside where the influence of human activity on the character and quality of the environment has been minimal*"³. Whilst SNH and JMT include maps of remoteness and indicative search areas, neither provide a spatially explicit method for mapping existing wild land that could be used as a basis for supporting decisions about

1. Market Research Partners, Edinburgh. (2008). Public Perceptions of Wild Places and Landscapes in Scotland. Commissioned Report No.291(ROAME No. F06NC03).

2. The National Trust for Scotland (2002) Wild land policy. January 2002; Scottish Natural Heritage (2002) Wildness in Scotland's countryside: a policy statement. November 2002; <http://www.jmt.org/policy-wild-land.asp>

3. The Scottish Office (1998) National Planning Policy Guidelines. NPPG14: Natural Heritage.

protection, conservation measures, planning applications, etc. that effect the quality and distribution of wild land in Scotland. Without such a mapping tool with the ability to delimit the spatial extent of wild land and assess its quality, then this valuable resource remains at risk from gradual erosion from intrusive developments such as 4WD access tracks, wind farms and hydro schemes and more subtle changes in land management such as muirburn and grazing pressure. To this end, SNH and the Cairngorm National Park Authority (CNPA) have commissioned the study reported here to develop a computer-based approach to defining and mapping the pattern of wildness across the Cairngorm National Park (CNP)⁴. This is based on the application of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) mapping software and existing digital map databases to map a continuum or spectrum of wildness values from the least to the most wild within the CNP and its immediate environs.

Developing a wild land map for the Cairngorms

As a starting point the current study takes its lead from earlier studies by the author and colleagues that develops the wild land continuum concept introduced by Nash in his book “Wilderness and the American Mind”⁵. Here he describes a continuum of spectrum of human modification of the environment such that it is possible, in theory at least, to identify a range of environmental conditions from the least wild (greatest level of human modification) through to the most wild (lowest level of human modification) as shown below.



Figure 1. The wildness continuum concept

We can take this concept and apply it spatially using GIS and relevant databases describing human modification of the landscape, to map wild land quality as a similar continuum. Again, it is possible, in theory at least, to identify the least and the most wild locations within any landscape, though in reality the accuracy of the datasets and the assumptions made in the mapping methods make such exact distinctions impossible as we shall see in the following discussion.

Four basic factors are used to map wild land quality. These are taken from the definition of wild land provided within the SNH policy document “Wildness in Scotland’s countryside” and include:

4. Carver, S. et al., (2008) Wildness Study in the Cairngorm National Park. SNH/Cairngorm National Park Authority.

5. Nash, R.F., (2003) Wilderness and the American Mind. Yale University Press.





View West from Sgurr na Lapaich
(Photo: Calum Brown)

- Perceived naturalness of the land cover;
- Absence of modern human artefacts;
- Rugged and challenging nature of the terrain; and
- Remoteness from mechanised access.

These have been mapped using GIS and existing digital map databases as follows:

- **Perceived naturalness:** This refers to the *perceived* level of human modification or management of the vegetation within the landscape, rather than a strictly *ecological* definition. Land cover databases derived from satellite imagery and aerial photographs supplemented by additional information taken from large scale OS maps and field-based woodland inventories were reclassified according to their “naturalness” using a simple five point scale, where 1 = unnatural (e.g. urban) and 5 = natural (e.g. montane vegetation). This takes into account likely level of human modification of the vegetation type and pattern by land management practices such as grazing, drainage, and muirburn, and also makes the distinction between, say, plantation forest and natural woodland and between natural lochs and artificial impoundments. Because these land cover databases provide a description of the vegetation type at a specific point, the naturalness class was summed within a 250m radius across the whole study area to give an index of perceived naturalness of the landscape within the vicinity of an observer at ground level.
- **Absence of modern human artefacts:** This refers to the lack of obvious human structures visible in the landscape from any point. A range of human features were extracted from large scale OS maps and combined with a high resolution digital surface model (DSM) of the terrain to determine how many human features are visible from each location. Human features included in this analysis fall into four basic groups: buildings and other structures (e.g. bridges and dams), pylons (including power lines and ski lifts), linear features (including roads, hill tracks and railway lines), and plantation forest. The effect of distance in reducing the overall impact of human artefacts is incorporated by including a distance decay function. Wind turbines were also included in this analysis up to 35km outside of the park boundary.
- **Rugged and challenging nature of the terrain:** This refers to variation of the land surface within a local area. This is defined here by the range of terrain heights and slope gradients within a 250m moving radius. The effect of harsher weather conditions on the hill is taken into account by applying a simple altitude factor.
- **Remoteness:** This refers to the time taken to walk from the nearest point of mechanised access with reference to Naismith’s Rule and Langmuir’s correction⁶. This takes the relative direction of travel over a terrain surface, its gradient, height gained/lost, effects of

6. Naismith’s Rule states that it is possible to walk 5km/h on the flat with 30 minutes added for every 300m of ascent. Langmuir’s correction modifies Naismith’s Rule by subtracting 10 minutes for every 300m of descent on slopes between 5 and 12° and adding 10 minutes for every 300m of descent on slopes greater than 12°.

ground cover and barrier features (lochs, cliff lines and un-fordable rivers) into account. Two versions of this map were drawn; one based on normal flow conditions where most streams crossed by paths at fords are assumed to be passable, and another based on spate conditions where streams are assumed to be passable only where there is a bridge.

These four maps are combined using a simple, easy to understand method, known as weighted linear summation, which is a member of the multi-criteria evaluation (MCE) family of models. As the name implies, this works by the addition of map layers after they are weighted (multiplied) by user weights that reflect the relative importance of the individual layers. The map shown in Figure 2 represents the wild land continuum for the CNP based on the equal weighting of all four input factors; thereby representing an unbiased view of wild land in the CNP. Other, slightly different maps can be drawn by altering the weights to suit different perceptions of what wild land is in a kind of computer version of the debate we had earlier in the pub. In this way, everyone could in theory have their own customised wildness map and combining these and averaging the results would reveal an overall wildness map. This is a process that can easily be implemented on the internet to ensure a wide range of weights and maps are collected⁷.

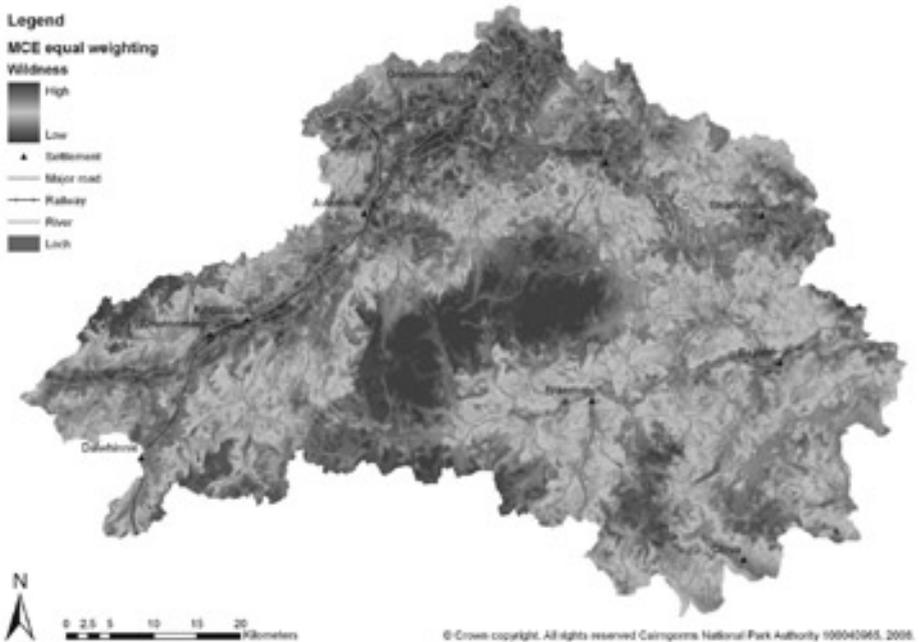


Figure 2. Wildness in the CNP

(This and other wildness maps can be seen online and in colour at <http://www.maptube.org/>)

The main impression given by the map shown is that although there is a general pattern of wilder areas in the core mountain area and less wild areas dominated by the straths and

7. See <http://www.ccg.leeds.ac.uk/teaching/wilderness/> and http://www.ccg.leeds.ac.uk/projects/wild_scotland/ for two different approaches to surveying public opinion on wild land quality.

settlements, the actual pattern of wildness values can be quite complex and variable across relatively small distances. This variability is due in part to the sensitivity of perceived wildness to controlling variables such as terrain and visibility of human artefacts, and in part to its sensitivity to the methods, assumptions, data and the weights used. Nevertheless, it can be seen that the wilder areas of the CNP are in the main confined to the large roadless areas of the mountain core and their associated glens. These include, but are not limited to: the Cairngorm plateau and mountain coires east and west of the Lairig Ghru; the high moorland plateau of Mòine Mhór; the peaks and coires of Beinn a' Bhuird and Ben Avon; Lochnagar and the White Mounth; the remote headwaters of Glen Feshie; and the head of Glen Banchor adjacent to the Monadhliath in the north. At the other end of the wildness spectrum, the least wild areas are strongly controlled by the straths and glens that dissect the park, including Strath Spay, Strath Avon, Strath Don, Braemar and Deeside, Glen Clova and Glen Truim, together with their associated roads, settlements, infrastructure and agricultural land. Plantation forestry also has a marked effect in reducing wildness in key localities such as Glenmore/Rothiemurchus, Strath Avon/Tomintoul and Abernethy, while local ski developments have a marked local effect through their concentration of access roads, maintenance tracks, ski lifts and buildings. These include the Cairngorm, Lecht and Glenshee ski areas, although the effect of the latter is less pronounced by virtue of its location on the park boundary.

Conclusions

Wildness is a quality that is often associated with the mountains of Scotland. It also one that is remarkably difficult to define in a definitive way, yet the work described here shows that it is possible to isolate those elements in the landscape that compromise its wild essence (naturalness, remoteness, lack of human intrusion and ruggedness) and map these to a high degree of accuracy and detail. Once mapped, these can be combined to generate maps of wildness that can then be used to identify the wild places which, although we always knew them to be there, can now be more rigorously defined and therefore defended against the threat of development. While there will always be those who say that wildness is a quality that cannot be mapped, being something more ethereal and related to mood and the changing weather and seasons in a challenging landscape, the need to reduce quality into quantity, to define wildness as something tangible and numeric, is very real. Wild land in Scotland is under threat from many quarters including 4WD tracks, over grazing, forestry, wind farms and a renewed interest in hydro-power. Without definitive maps of the wild places that have been drawn using rigorous and repeatable scientific methods it is in danger of being eroded from these forms of development. Well-intentioned, heartfelt pleas in defence of wild land cut little ice with planners and developers who are more likely to listen to arguments backed up with maps, numbers and hard science. The methods described here are a step in the right direction to redressing the balance in favour of wild land protection. Welcome to the brave new world of map-based campaigning.

Mapping Wild Land – The Fatal Flaws

Steve Carver has done the excellent job you would expect from a professional geographer in mapping wild land with modern techniques, using objective criteria that most people can readily understand, and coming up with a result which obviously works in highlighting the 'wildest' parts of the Cairngorms park – the remote interiors. But there is a catch. How is this map to be used?

Bureaucratising wild land can only diminish it

Steve says it offers a 'rigorous and defensible approach to defining wildness and wild land quality across Scotland so that wild land can be protected'. Unfortunately, developers, planning consultants, QCs, and politicians will use this map to do just the opposite – to shrink the core areas of 'wild land' ever further. How? by producing it as evidence – objective, scientific evidence – that where they want to develop is not a prime wild area, and has already been downgraded by earlier developments and intrusions. No developer actually wants to develop anything at Pools of Dee, so they can welcome this map as demonstrating that there is lots of wild land which their project will not affect. Where they want to develop is, say, between Dalwhinnie and Laggan. A windfarm, let's say, handy for the newly upgraded Beaully-Denny powerline. And hey presto! this map shows Dalwhinnie-Laggan as not really wild at all, middling at best, because it is already compromised by the A887 (a wild main road if ever there was one), some forestry, fencing, bulldozed tracks, and the existing powerline. So they aren't causing any more loss of wild land

by developing here. Never mind that it's in a National Park, deprived Dalwhinnie will certainly vote for it if it brings squillions of dosh into the community chest. Yet this fairly typical tract of open land feels wild to most people, and is a prime gateway to the western and northern Highlands.

Hard by Dalwhinnie is the Pass of Drumochter. In 1887, the great geologist Archibald Geikie – who had tramped much of Scotland – described the Pass as 'a wild glen' despite it carrying 'the great north road' and the railway. Today for many visitors to the Highlands, it is the wildest landscape they experience at close quarters. Yet the map shows it as only middling wild, already compromised. So will they bother to underground Beaully-Denny through it? No need to, if they go by this map.

Unnaturally wild; wasted wild; experienced wild

Three fatal flaws bedevil any attempt at quantifying wildness, as argued in WLN before. First, in the ecological sense, there is virtually no land in Scotland that has not been substantially modified by man. Even in the heart of the Cairngorms, all deer herds and game birds and predators are managed. Vegetation may be native, but not truly natural – even remote ledges have been depleted by plant collectors.

Second, the very idea of wild land as an official designation is a red rag to many Highland people, including politicians and land managers, who see it as a duty to exploit all land to its fullest economic potential – wild land as 'waste'. The wilderness tourist pound is recognised, but many who value wildness (including most

of the famous 91%) pay nothing for it – and may not even visit it. Trying to define it on a map, even in subtle gradations, is inflammatory, and can only provoke attempts to shrink it. Worse, they are well aware of the ecological argument and are quick to rally to the cry ‘there is no wild land in Scotland’.

Third, wildness is entirely subjective, a practical, aesthetic, and for some a spiritual experience. It varies enormously between individuals – as Steve’s paper recognises – and it varies for each of us from season to season, day to day, hour to hour. It cannot be pinned down on any map. Crucially, it is not primarily about distance from a road. Actually the Cairngorm area is too simple to map, with its stark and obvious contrasts. Try wild-mapping the west side of the Highlands, where many of the Munros are within sight and sound of a main road – are they not still wild for most people?

A simpler approach is to map four main types of land use – developed land (including ski domains and wind farms), improved farmland, commercial forestry, and the rest. The rest is *prima facie* ‘wild’ in the sense of being open. And the simple aim should be to protect this price-less resource from further encroachment, for anything other than purely local needs or the most pressing national interests. Indeed the aim should be to rewild more than we dewild.

Here lies the final flaw in Steve’s approach. He draws heavily upon North American models and examples – failing to recognise that the Highlands fit into a small corner of most states. There is space still in the New World to map wild land in this way, which highlights the vast cores of high wilderness value for protection and releases abundant, less special areas for exploitation.

This approach is simply wrong for Scotland, where although the new Scottish Government sadly cannot bring itself to recognise it, the wild resource has already shrunk dramatically in the last century. Indeed any pretence that we have one of the great wild places of Europe is about to go beyond the point of no return.

David Jarman

EDITOR’S NOTE:

Please submit any articles or letters for publication in WLN73

to grantswlg@hotmail.com

by May 10th.

Put ‘SWLG’ in the title of the email, or post to the address inside back cover.

5 New Committee members; 4 Rock-climbers, 3 PhDs, 2 Astrophysicists and a Piper !

Rob McMorran

Rob grew up in the shadow of the Brandon Mountain range in Co. Kerry in Southern Ireland. He first came over to Scotland when he was fifteen to climb on Ben Nevis and in the Cairngorms and has been hooked ever since. Following a degree in Ecology in University College Cork in Ireland and numerous Scottish walking and climbing trips, Rob finally settled here in 2003 when he began an MSc in environmental management at Stirling University. Following the completion of his MSc, he undertook a PhD in forestry management with the University of Highlands and Islands. Since completing his PhD in 2007 Rob has been involved with research projects relating to rural land use, wild land and forestry, through his job at the Centre for Mountain Studies in UHI-Perth College. He now lives in Aberdeen with his girlfriend Triona, travelling to Perth a few days a week and working at home the rest of the time. He has an active interest in all things wild, both from a landscape and nature perspective, and is very much looking forward to working with the SWLG and supporting the cause of wild land preservation and enhancement throughout Scotland.

Calum Brown

Calum is a keen hillwalker, climber and amateur photographer with a strong interest in conservation, having spent as

much time as possible in the wilder places of Scotland since moving from mid-Wales to Skye at the age of five. Calum has a BSc in Astrophysics and an MSc in Managing Sustainable Mountain Development, which focused on the Scottish environment and the issue of re-wilding. He has worked in conservation in Scotland, the USA and Slovakia, and is currently pursuing a PhD in statistical modelling of rainforest ecology at St Andrews University - within easy reach of some wild land!

Jayne Glass

Jayne moved to Scotland after she met her husband in Fort William in 2003. Seeing the West Coast that summer in non-stop sunshine for 3 weeks reignited her passion for wild mountain areas and she's been in Scotland (with the odd spell in Canada/Spain) ever since. Now happily settled in Aberfeldy (even though the sun might not shine non-stop...!), she feels very lucky to live and work in close proximity to the crags, hills and glens of the Highlands. Since 2007, Jayne has been a PhD student at the Centre for Mountain Studies at UHI - Perth College. Her work is looking at sustainability on upland estates in Scotland, with a particular focus on estates owned by non-governmental organisations such as RSPB, National Trust for Scotland, John Muir Trust etc. In her spare time, Jayne can generally be found rock climbing, learning the guitar and watching films. She is a keen writer and is very much looking forward

to being involved in the production of Wild Land News.

Graeme Cornwallis

Graeme (46), originally from Edinburgh but resident in Glasgow for most of the last 32 years, is a private tutor of maths and physics, as well as an author and photographer. A keen interest in walking and exploring has taken him around the Munros twice but also to wild places from remote arctic islands to African deserts. Graeme says he joined the SWLG because he's passionate about wild land, believing that the steady encroachment of (particularly industrial) development is detrimental to us all and should be opposed when possible. (*Graeme is the other astrophysicist.* Ed)

Grant Cornwallis

About twenty years ago, I joined the SWLG and was enthused by the open, friendly and democratic nature of the AGMs. In the early 1990s, with Lionel as Co-ordinator, we had fine meetings like the one where that fellow Ian Wilson (who just happened to own the mineral rights to lots of potential superquarry sites) helpfully showed us why large, exploitative developments have to be opposed. Had such superquarries been approved 10 years ago, it would be much harder to resist the current assault from the profit seekers and their bogus green revolution of wind turbines for all. Cries of "It's too late now, the wild lands have been industrialised already" are mercifully premature, though the threats are legion and have feet of concrete !

The SWLG inspired my group of young hill-goers then, so I believe we can help develop awareness of, and rouse opposition

to, the threats facing Scotland's wild land now. If we allow the exploiters and despoilers (the very same people who brought us Credit Crunchies for breakfast, mind) to proceed unchecked, then future generations will curse our stupidity, whilst they pay the full price for the greed of our times. Some legacy.

Oh, and I'm 41, a piper and traditional singer, who enjoys the rock-climbing and bothying life, which I preferred to attending university



Lochluichart Community Con (-sultation)

After several years of strategic confusion, with the ‘scaling back’ of the proposals from 43 turbines to 22, then finally to 17, LZN Ltd’s wind factory was approved by the SNP Government, in December.

Had there been one less turbine, the decision could have been made by Highland Council, who had earlier declared the area ‘unsuitable for development’. The Megawattage output of a site determines who makes the final decision- start small, then keep adding bits until you have the massive turbine empire you always wanted, but were too modest and duplicitous to ask for at the outset. The SNP are clearly seen as a soft touch by the industry.

And not without reason! Out poured the usual dim blethers from Jim Mather, Energy Minister, and the chummy developers: apparently, the wind factory “will be capable of generating electricity to supply 23,000 homes” (note the vague wording), and “the scheme would create up to 100 jobs” (Aye, right! For whom, for how long?). “We want to approve good projects, in the right places, in harmony with the environment and with benefits for communities”, panted the exultant Minister. I decided to make my own enquiries...

The Minister was swayed by the 5,927 responses in favour of the development (3,170 were against), I heard. This massive ‘yes’ vote, from an area with only around 200 households, got me thinking- who were these thousands who blithely accept turbines in someone else’s backyard? Developers appear to be using

‘independent environment campaigners’ to “scavenge support” for windfarms, (with regular canvassing outside supermarkets, et cetera), and this seems to tie in with the cuddly www.yes2wind website, run by a coalition of Greenpeace, Fiends of the Earth and WWF, all to promote wind energy developments, and make opposers look like cranks.

Read all about it in the www.viewsofscotland Briefing Paper 8 “Strange Bedfellows”. The cardboard cut-out ecowarriors (page 12) who get people to sign letters they haven’t written were perhaps behind the two busloads of Yes2Windbags (about 100 of them!) who descended on a public meeting at Garve, an “intimidating” presence for the 6 or so locals there, as they drowned out the opposition to Lochluichart wind factory.

Does the finance for these taxpayer-subsidised ventures lurk in offshore tax havens, such as the Marshall Islands? Do the ultimate beneficiaries use front companies to assemble a flatpack windfactory with planning consent, ready to be sold back to the parent? It sounds like the PFI/PPP scandal, with a greenwash on it.

Such are the dirty tactics in our new democracy, and we must be prepared for much worse in future. Helen Grainge, Chairperson of the Garve and District Community Council told me that the local divisions caused by the proposals were so great that the Community Council couldn’t function, and that they “have been able to work well together once the issue of turbines was out of our

hands, and that is the main reason for not getting involved in future wind farms". The next proposals are on the adjacent Coire Moile estate, see www.eon-uk.com/generation/corriemoillie. "We think it more effective if ordinary people write letters of objection themselves", she said, going on to explain that they had held two postal ballots and one show-of-hands vote, with opposition to the turbines rising as more information was forced out of the 'commercially sensitive' developers, from 60% to 70% against, but Highland Council chose to ignore this democratic approach, even though they part-funded the ballots! This development is a wedge into the Highlands, and near the proposed Beaully to Ullapool to Lewis cable. Helen Grainge sees it all as "a short-term measure to make the UK and Scottish governments look

like they are doing something".

Minister Mather's speech to the All Energy Conference in Aberdeen, on May 23rd, 2007 is worth reading in full- it can be found on www.scottishrenewables.com/politicsandparliamentpages. I asked Harry Goudie, another local campaigner against LZN, what he thought of this quote from that speech: "So communities will be very much part of our energy strategy". He struggled to reply, "this has destroyed the local community, and it will take years to repair the rifts, if ever."

Sources: Telephone interviews, and email exchanges, with Helen Grainge and Harry Goudie. Ross-shire Journal and West Highland Free Press, both 26/12/2008. Websites &c. as cited.

Grant Cormvallis

Strange Meeting

"I am the enemy you killed my friend.
I knew you in this dark, for so you frowned
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.
Let us sleep now...."

There is (of course) no comparison with Wilfrid Owen's apocalyptic vision from the trenches of 1918, and the recent encounter between 2 of LINK's gallant officers and the Right Honourable Anne McKeichin MP, Under-Secretary of State at the Scottish Office. The "combative" approach of Westminster's finest, with an air of "reprimand" attached, clearly shows that your letters of objection are seen as obstruction by the Government. "Self-appointed activists" do get results after all! We should not be deterred by setbacks, and instead redouble our efforts to prevent further exploitative erosion of our wild land. If it's true that the proposed Kingsnorth coal-fired power station "will emit as much CO2 as currently saved by every single wind farm in the country" (Chris Davies MEP, Guardian, 28/2/2009), then it is surely time for a rethink on turbines outside the Central Belt.

Your Steering Committee for 2009

Co-ordinator: Dr. Rob McMorran, East Lodge, Craibstone, Bucksburn, Aberdeen. AB21 9SJ (01224 716 709 or 07754 571 364. enquiries@swlg.org.uk)

Treasurer: Tim Ambrose, 8 Cleveden Road, Kelvinside, Glasgow. G12 ONT (timambrose1954@hotmail.com)

Membership Secretary: Grant Cornwallis, 36 Mansefield Crescent, Clarkston, Glasgow. G76 7EB (0141-638 2210 or 07968 500 595. grantswlg@hotmail.co.uk)

Editor, *Wild Land News*: Post shared. This issue- Grant.

Jayne Glass: 30 Churchill Court, Aberfeldy, Perthshire. PH15 2AT (07769 704 823. jaynehglass@gmail.com)

Calum Brown: Flat 3, 38 North Street, Cambuskenneth, Stirling. FK9 5NB

Graeme Cornwallis: 201 River Court, Busby, Glasgow. G76 8DR (0141-644 3384)

Notes

General enquiries and information on local developments which you think might concern the Group should be sent to the co-ordinator in the first instance. New memberships and renewals direct to Membership Secretary, please. Enquiries about bankers' orders, Gift Aid, generous donations and any other financial matters should go to the Treasurer.

Articles, letters and photographs for **Wild Land News** should go to Grant and Jayne- if not using email, please 'phone and find out to whom hard copy should be sent.

Any complaints, well they can go direct to the Co-ordinator! Members of the steering team are always pleased to hear from any member, so please feel free to get in touch.

Individual articles in **Wild Land News** do not necessarily reflect the views of the Committee as a whole.

The minimum annual subscription remains at £10. The minimum subscription for unwaged, senior citizens, and juniors (under 18) has finally been raised to £5, to reflect the simple fact that our print and postage costs for 3 issues of **Wild Land News** were not being covered by the old two pounds subscription fee, which hadn't varied for nearly 20 years.

Please make all cheques, etc., payable to Scottish Wild Land Group- subscriptions run to 31st December each year.

The Treasurer will be pleased to supply forms and advice on payment by bankers' order, or Gift Aid. Please do consider Gift Aid, as this allows us to reclaim tax.

We are always keen to increase our membership. If you know of potential members, then pass them the form below, or download it from our website: www.swlg.org.uk

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