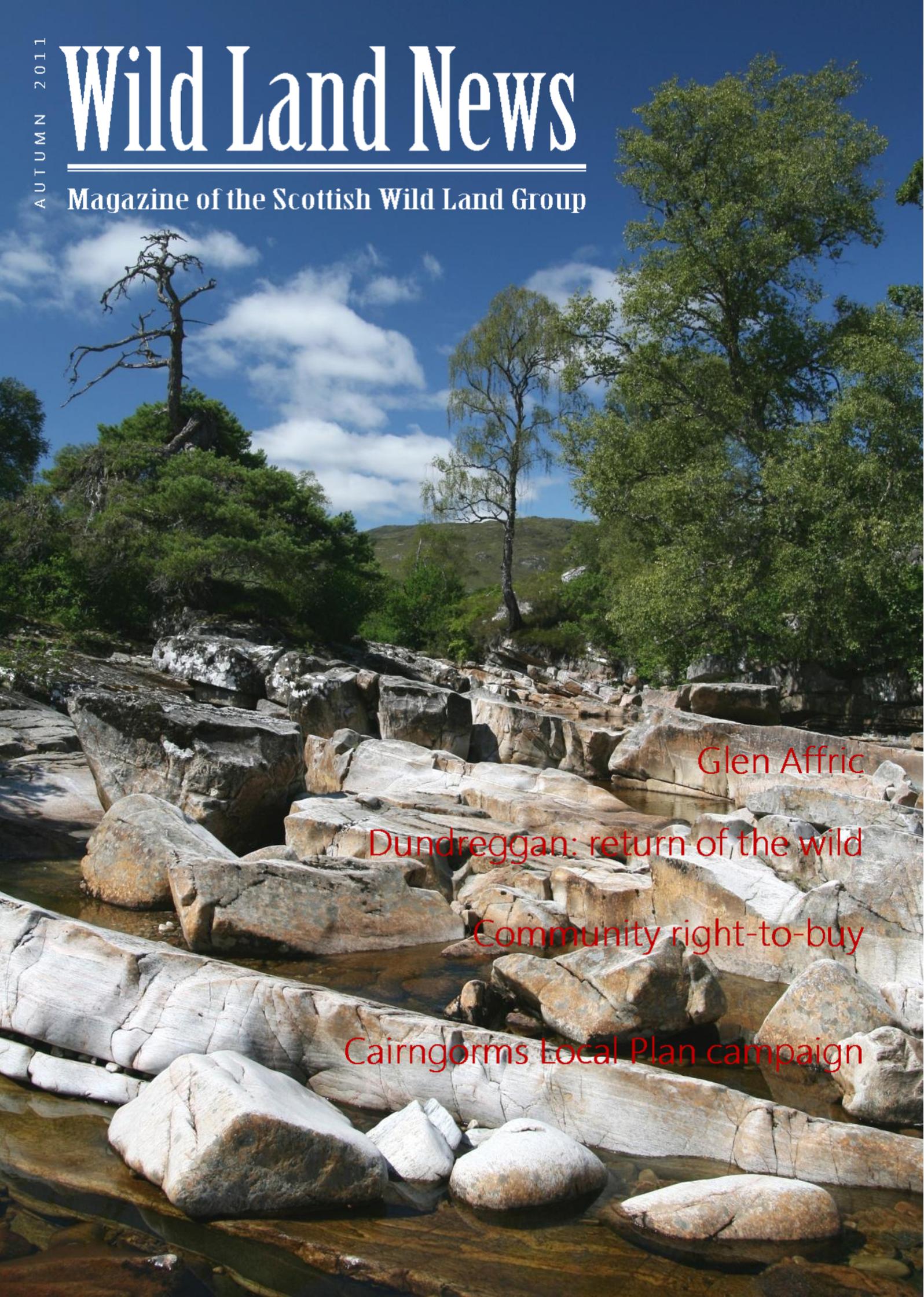


AUTUMN 2011

# Wild Land News

Magazine of the Scottish Wild Land Group



Glen Affric

Dundreggan: return of the wild

Community right-to-buy

Cairngorms Local Plan campaign

Autumn 2011

**WILD LAND NEWS**

Autumn 2011, Issue 79

Magazine of the  
Scottish Wild Land Group

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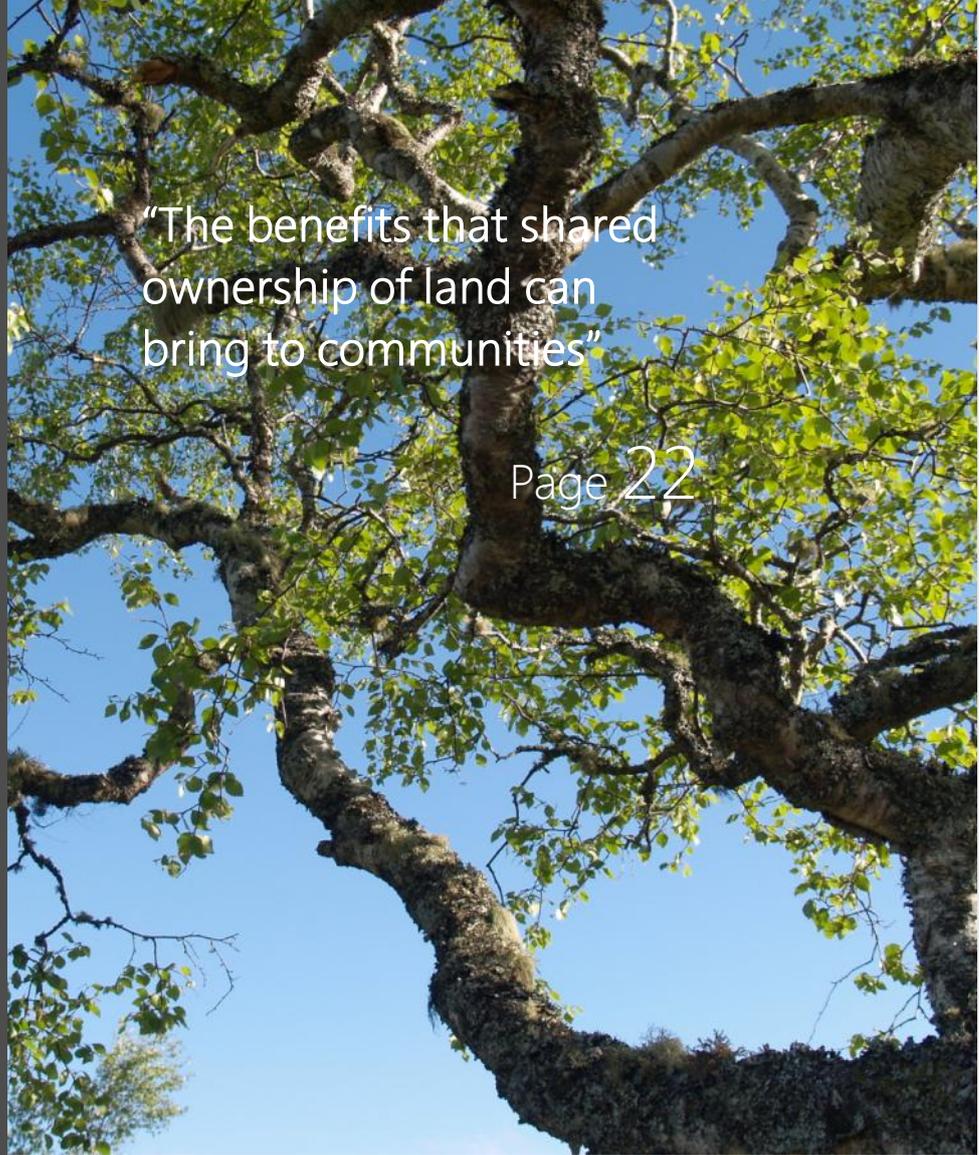
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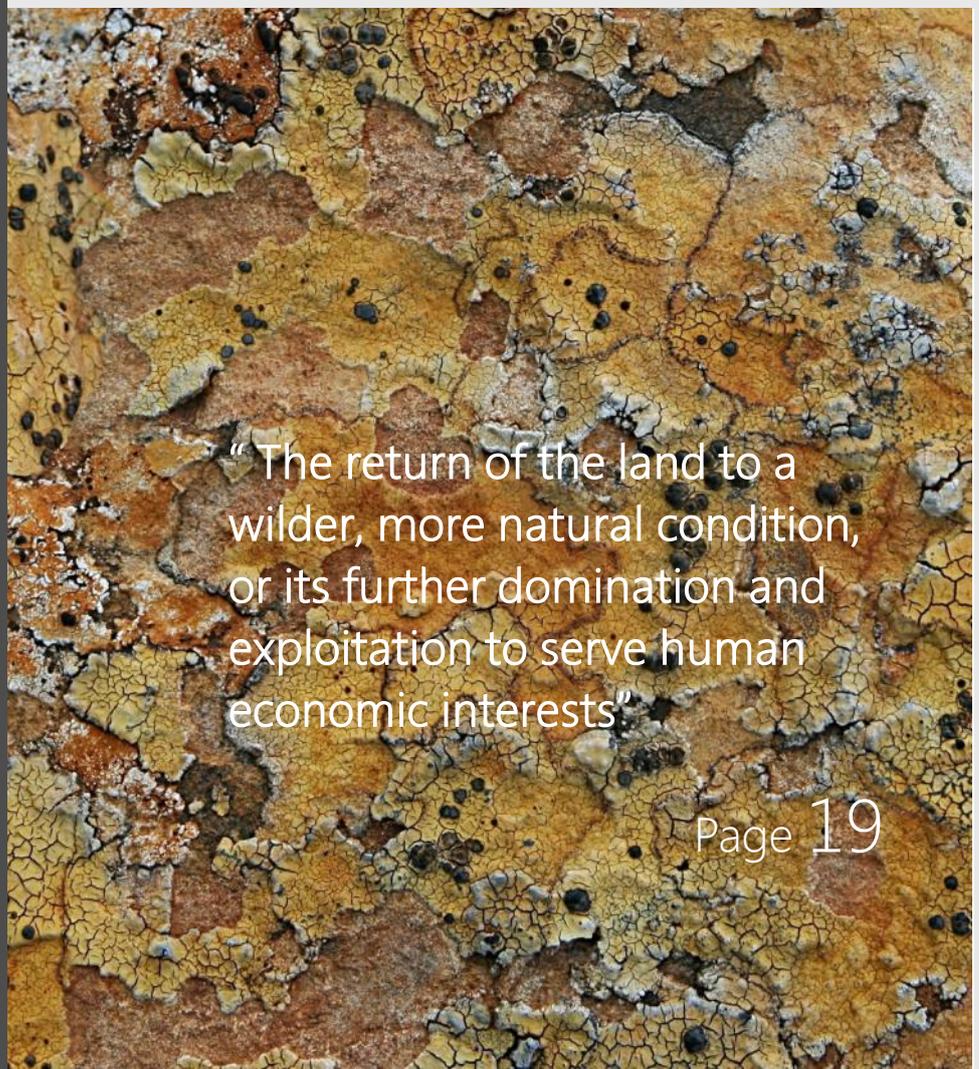


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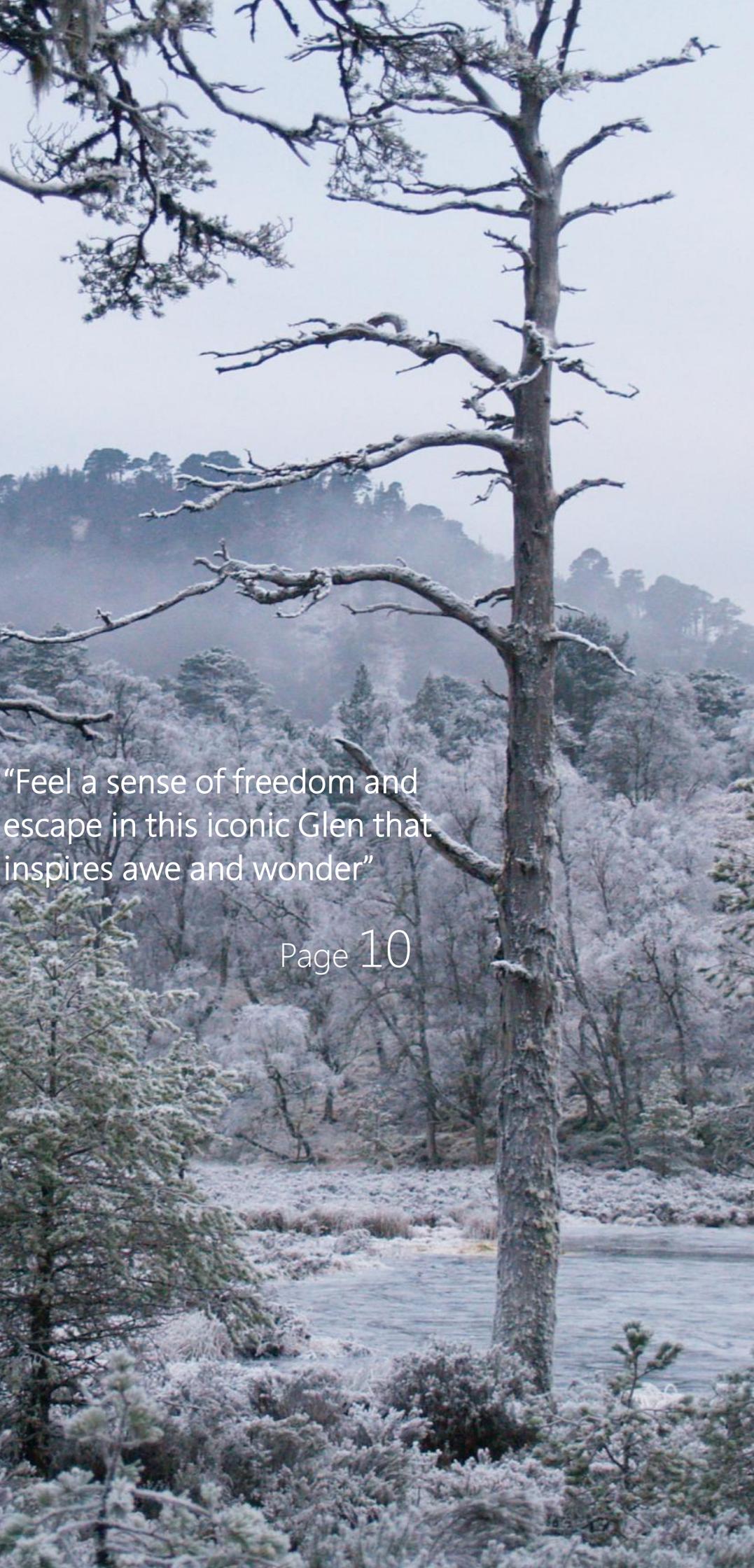
“The benefits that shared  
ownership of land can  
bring to communities”

Page 22



“ The return of the land to a  
wilder, more natural condition,  
or its further domination and  
exploitation to serve human  
economic interests”

Page 19



“Feel a sense of freedom and escape in this iconic Glen that inspires awe and wonder”

Page 10

# CONTENTS

Autumn 2011

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| Comment from Calum                                 | p. 4  |
| Cairngorms new town appeal                         | P.6   |
| Glen Affric—a living link with an ancient past     | p. 8  |
| Return of the wild at Dundreggan                   | p. 17 |
| Assessing the ‘community right to buy’             | P. 20 |
| Obfuscating fog, searing clarity and Bogha-Cloiche | p. 23 |
| Rum and Irvine Butterfield                         | p. 25 |
| My wild land                                       | p. 28 |



Calum Brown

## Comment from Calum, WLN Editor

John Muir once wrote that “few are altogether deaf to the preaching of pine trees. Their sermons on the mountains go to our hearts; and if people in general could be got into the woods, even for once, to hear the trees speak for themselves, all difficulties in the way of forest preservation would vanish”. In this issue, we look in detail at the Glen Affric area, one of the best places in Scotland for people to get into native pine woodland and appreciate the importance of its preservation. The work of the Forestry Commission and conservation charity Trees for Life in maintaining and restoring these woods is well known and widely appreciated – the Glen is one of the most visited and scenic in the country, offering a dramatic glimpse of the Caledonian forest which was once so much more widespread. Whether or not those who visit are as receptive to the preaching of pine trees as John Muir was, they can hardly fail to come away with a greater appreciation of Scotland’s natural environments and the careful management of those that remain.

That this is possible is largely thanks to the ongoing efforts of the Forestry Commission, which are detailed here by District Manager David Jardine. Since *Wild Land News* last ran an article on Glen Affric in the autumn of 2004, many changes have been made to the methods and objectives of the Commission’s work there, and David provides a timely update on the implications of these. We also hear from the people behind the plans, as members of the large team responsible for managing Glen Affric

tell us what the place means to them.

Next-door to Glen Affric is the estate of Dundreggan, bought by Trees for Life in 2008 and now the site of a long-term project of ecological restoration. Little known or visited in comparison to its more mountainous and alluring neighbour, the former sporting estate boasts some of the most diverse and impressive habitats in Scotland, with a number of very rare species located in and around fragments of ancient semi-natural woodland. Trees for Life has been hard at work here (and in Glen Affric), and Alan Watson Featherstone, the charity’s director, writes in this issue about the nature and potential of the estate, and some worrying developments in its vicinity.

Nearby, new plans for the Cairngorms National Park are also a cause for concern. The Scottish Wild Land Group has joined a campaign for changes to the recently adopted Local Plan of the National Park Authority, which allows for large scale development in the park, including an entire ‘new town’ across the River Spey from Aviemore. We believe this to be a dangerous and wholly unjustified project within the borders of a National Park, and Tim Ambrose, SWLG treasurer, starts this issue with an update on the campaign and our role in it.

Controversies of this kind are often wrongly interpreted as attempts by remote conservation groups to curtail the development of local communities. In fact, the rights and

wishes of local people tend to remain undetermined and unaccounted for. One of the most significant moves of recent years towards empowerment of local communities was the 2003 Community Right to Buy provision of the *Land Reform (Scotland) Act*. Calum Macleod of the University of the Highlands and Islands considers the effects of this, and draws some important and challenging conclusions, suggesting that bureaucracy has fettered the practical potential of the act.

Roderick Manson relates a tale of direct action unencumbered by such burdens, in which the late Irvine Butterfield helped to restore a bothy at Dibidil on the Isle of Rum. Having travelled to Rum to erect a memorial to Irvine, Roderick was inspired to re-publish the book Irvine wrote about the project, 'Dibidil – a Hebridean Adventure', which had been out of print for several decades. Now available, it should make a fascinating and enjoyable read.

Many of us take great pleasure in Scotland's wild land, and George Charles gives us his personal view of its benefits. He also considers some different opinions on this subject, and argues that there is room for many perspectives on the value of wild land. Deriving satisfaction and solace from the mountains around Mar Lodge himself, George suggests that common interests should override petty disagreements.

Finally, writer and outdoor equipment tester Phil Turner provides this edition's 'My Wild Land', giving his perspective on the whys and wherefores of wild land exploration. Responses would be welcome (particularly from readers in Cumbernauld) as would articles, opinions and assistance in the production of Wild Land News or work of the SWLG, as ever. We hope you enjoy this autumn issue.

## SWLG Annual General Meeting

The Scottish Wild Land Group will be holding its AGM on **Saturday the 12th of November** at the Royal Hotel in Bridge of Allan at 2.30pm.

Please make a note of the date and come along to meet the steering team and other members, comment on the group's activities, and to get involved. We rely on your support and the AGM is a real chance to influence the work of the SWLG. See you there!

Tim Ambrose

## SWLG supports an appeal against National Park approval for a new town in the Cairngorms

The Scottish Wild Land Group has resolved to contribute £1,000 towards the (potentially very substantial) legal costs of an Appeal submitted jointly by The Cairngorms Campaign, Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group and the Scottish Campaign for National Parks against the Local Plan adopted by the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA).

To summarise a very long and detailed story which has much longer still to run, since the establishment of the National Park in 2003, the CNPA is effectively the ultimate planning authority for the Cairngorms National Park. For several years it has been preparing its Local Plan which sets out the detailed planning policies against which all planning applications in the area of the National Park will be judged. In October 2010, the CNPA formally adopted its final version of the Local Plan.

This includes much which is creditable and worthwhile, but crucially for the wild land interest it also includes approval for very substantial housing developments on woodland, agricultural land and undeveloped land which we believe are completely inappropriate for a

National Park. The most objectionable approval is for an entire new town of up to 1500 houses, with ancillary commercial and community buildings, just on the other side of the River Spey from Aviemore. This new town is proposed to be named "An Camus Mor", which the CNPA and developers must hope is less obvious than "Aviemore New Town" or "Aviemore 2".

The Local Plan also includes approval for 40 more houses in Nethy Bridge on a site of old woodland, approval for up to 117 new houses in Carrbridge, and 300 houses in Kingussie. In each of these cases, the proposed developments would be completely out of scale with the existing settlements, and would have very serious adverse impacts on the wildlife of Speyside - including red squirrels, capercaillie, and numerous less obvious species. Such huge new housing estates in the Cairngorms (and in a National Park) would seriously reduce the wildness of the Cairngorms and their adjacent areas, and set a disastrous precedent for further unsuitable developments in Scotland's wildest mountains.

Huge new housing estates in the Cairngorms would seriously reduce the wildness of the Cairngorms and their adjacent areas, and set a disastrous precedent for further unsustainable developments in Scotland's wildest mountains

The CNPA is obliged to implement, in a co-ordinated way, the four statutory aims set out in the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000. These include:

“a) to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area, and ...  
d) to promote sustainable economic and social development of the area’s communities”,  
with the very important proviso that if there is conflict between the first aim and any other, then the CNPA *must* give greater weight to the first aim – i.e. to conserve and enhance the natural heritage of the area.

How the CNPA considers that building a New Town in the middle of Speyside amounts to *sustainable* development is beyond us (surely “sustainable” means that you can keep on doing the same thing year after year without permanent damage – how can a huge one-off building project on a greenfield site possibly be sustainable?). Regardless of this, a New Town with thousands of houses, roads and other buildings, and thousands of inhabitants and their cars, is clearly damaging to the natural heritage of the countryside in which it is built.

As part of the process leading to the Local Plan, there was an Inquiry conducted by two Reporters appointed by the Scottish Government who considered all the arguments on both sides, and made their recommendations. In relation

to An Camus Mor, they considered all the evidence, including population projections, and concluded:

“we cannot endorse the proposal for a new settlement at An Camus Mor”.

Similarly, in relation to the substantial housing estates proposed at Carrbridge, Nethy Bridge and Kingussie, the Reporters recommended either suspension or great scaling down. The CNPA has decided to over-ride all these recommendations.

We believe the CNPA is seriously wrong, and acting completely unreasonably. The very body specifically set up to conserve the Cairngorms is pushing for large scale developments which will inflict serious and permanent damage to the wildlife and scenery of the area. A formal Appeal against these aspects of the CNPA Local Plan has been lodged in the Court of Session, and if no satisfactory resolution can be reached, it is likely that a formal hearing of the Case will be held in due course.

The SWLG considers this case is very important for Scotland’s wild land, and is pleased to offer its support.

If you would like further information on this case, or to offer support, please contact Tim Ambrose at: [timambrose1954@hotmail.com](mailto:timambrose1954@hotmail.com)

David Jardine

## GLEN AFFRIC— a living link with an ancient past

David Jardine is the Forestry Commission District Manager for Inverness, Ross and Skye

In autumn 2004, an article for Wild Land News on the Glen Affric area was provided by Malcolm Wield, the then Manager of Forest Augustus Forest District. In true wild land, seven years can be a very short time, with imperceptible changes occurring in the landscape. However, when wild land is being restored there can be significant changes during that time. In this article the Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) team, who are the current stewards of Glen Affric, provide an update of 'our wild land' – managing a large area of land is a team effort.

I first visited Glen Affric as a student in the late 1970s, when we were taken round by Finlay Macrae. This visit enthused me, and to become involved in its management through the FCS reorganisation was a privilege. While I had visited since then, it was interesting to review how much the Glen has changed in the recent decades; the change in forest structure from young birches and old granny pines is clearly seen. You only have to re-watch the Tom Weir programme (which is available online, see below), when he was taken round by Finlay Macrae in the snow to see how much has changed.

***'The trees have come and gone through the ages, but the forest still remains'***

So what has changed in the seven years since the last WLN article on Glen Affric?

*Forest Plan:* A new Forest Plan has

recently been developed and approved. This has drawn on the latest GIS technology using the BEETLE (Biological and Environmental Evaluation Tools for Landscape Ecology) software which has helped foresters understand the development of the forest and woodland networks within Glen Affric, and the opportunities for further restoration.

*Vegetation change:* working with natural processes in the Highlands takes an amount of time which causes frustration in humans (and foresters especially!). Photo-monitoring started in 1998 is now starting to record changes. Survey data from the same period also records positive change, with new surveys showing vegetation change and recruitment of trees. For example, Barrach wood, near Cogie, is regenerating and spreading itself outwards. Birch is moving fastest (as you would expect) and the pine is coming along slowly behind. FCS is replanting native Scots Pine alongside this area, where Lodgepole Pine has already been cleared. There are few seed sources further up the hill and this planting will link with native woodlands established by our neighbours.

But are we expecting too much from pine in Glen Affric? Everyone looks to Strathspey and Deeside and hopes for an explosion of pine seedlings. But things are different in Affric (soil, moisture, temperature) and so we should expect a different reaction. Experience in the Black



Photos: Glen Affric and orientation boards at the River Affric  
D. Jardine



Conservation enthusiasts can continue to play an important role by removing the last few non-native trees as they are out enjoying wild land

Wood at Rannoch shows slower pine recruitment, and in the west the species will be less prevalent.

The seed source is expanding, however. Fenced enclosures in the western end of Affric (mostly birch) are coming of age and seed production is increasing fast. Birch can produce anything up to 17 million seeds per tree every 2 years (depending on age and size), so further expansion is likely. Birds are also proving to be really effective at moving rowan around naturally, and these seedlings are establishing well. The slower species to move in, such as hazel, elm, ash and aspen, may require further help.

*Non-native removal:* progress continues to be made with clearance of Sitka Spruce and Lodgepole Pine (this is not quite the Forth Bridge as every trip provides further gains and eventually the job will be done, but at times it does seem similar!). The contribution of Trees for Life (TfL) volunteers over the last 20 years has been very significant in terms of non-native clearance and is becoming increasingly so as there is a law of diminishing returns in seeking out the last few spruce, which becomes prohibitively expensive. This is where conservation enthusiasts can continue to play an important role by removing the last few as they are out enjoying wild land.

There is now an expectation that native woodlands will contribute timber to the local economy. Birch and pine are both very useful timbers and fuel wood has found a new level of importance in both local and national communities. Management in native woodlands will create rotational diversity within woodland habitats.

***'The Caledonian forest is made up of much more than trees'***

Large parts of Glen Affric are covered by European conservation designations, and site condition monitoring is providing information on key species and habitats. Since Malcolm Wield's article the importance of parts of the high ground in Glen Affric for Golden Eagle have also been recognised in the designation of a Special Protection Area.

The recent Wildcat sightings are really exciting. The Highland tiger has a safe place in Affric, as does the Red Squirrel, which is now benefiting from decades of woodland regeneration. Woodland expansion has also allowed Black Grouse to move slowly westwards. Unfortunately the news of Capercaillie is not so good, but its possible extinction from Affric is still an important marker in the story of the glen. Surveys by TfL have also produced a list of interesting and rare insects.

*Deer:* low deer numbers are the key to successful woodland habitats, although deer are also an essential component of natural woodlands. However, both historic and modern population sampling show that deer populations are unfortunately high (as much as 25 deer/100 ha in some locations) and the effects of that are now incontrovertible. We know we have the seed production and that these can get a foothold if given a chance, so culling is an important tool to reduce deer numbers and keep a balance in the habitat. Fences are also useful, but must be used thoughtfully so as to reduce landscape and access impacts. They are also expensive to erect and maintain. Neither is it enough to establish a woodland and then allow the deer population to soar again, as this prevents the continued cycle of regeneration and expansion. Dendrochronology confirms that the intensity of sheep and deer farming

in the nineteenth century effectively created a recruitment gap for Scots pine in the Glen between 1860 and 1945, so deer management will remain an important tool in the management of the woodland areas.

*Open habitats:* the importance of open land habitats has become more evident over the last 20 years, and we are still learning what this means for Affric in terms of monitoring and management. Again, collaborative deer management is critical to protect vulnerable soils from trampling damage, to allow plant layers to maintain a place in the sun, and for scarce plants such as the Woolly Willow to recover above the woodland edge.

***East meets west; Glen Affric links the east and west coasts of Scotland***

A previously unrecorded fort or dun discovered at Cannich points to the importance of the location from a very early time as a community on the east-west route. Sensitive felling around the Comar Dun, which has been scheduled as an Ancient Monument, should guard against future damage to this important site. Nowadays the Glen is used for iconic cross-country events such as the Highland Cross, which continues to go from strength to strength.

During the last 12 months renewed interpretation has been provided at the visitor sites in Glen Affric following work on a Visitor

Experience Plan. This work has also helped to provide off-site interpretation for visitors, including those from overseas, before they come to the Glen (see <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-89YFBY>).

Everybody with a head for heights should re-visit Plodda falls where the old Victorian bridge which was rusting away has now been replaced by a modern viewpoint, which takes you right over the top of the falls..... impressive! As well as car-park upgrades, improvements are underway to the toilet facilities to ensure that something is available through all four seasons of the year, thus reducing fouling problems.

Looking to the future, what might we face? Climate change and new pests and diseases are becoming an increasing concern to Scottish foresters, with Red Band Needle Blight and the Pine Lappet Moths emerging as potential threats. It is hoped that the new Forest Plan, which is based on native species, will be robust to such threats, but everyone will have to play their part in helping to mitigate the effects of changing climate. Other threats such as invasive species (e.g. Rhododendron, Sika Deer, or Wild Boar) are all things which might have to be faced. Whatever comes, we should all rest assured that the forest at Glen Affric has one of the longest histories of continuous forest cover – it has been around for a long time and under the FCS stewardship, hopefully it's here to stay!

The intensity of sheep and deer farming in the 19th Century effectively created a recruitment gap for Scots pine in the Glen between 1860 and 1945

*FCS wishes to acknowledge the support it has received from all of its partners in Glen Affric, including Scottish Natural Heritage and Trees for Life. Staff who have made a significant input to Glen Affric and its restoration during the last seven years include: Keith Black, Giles Brockman, Russell Cooper, Isabelle Destor, Jeff Dymond, Stuart Finlay, Rae Grant, Iain Inglis, Ken Knott, Willie Lamont, Jack Mackay, Neil McAdams, Neil McFarlane, Ross Macaulay, Guy Pembroke, Sandra Reid, Steve Smith, Alastair Smyth, and Malcolm Wield. On the next two pages they give some of their views on what 'Glen Affric means to them'...*



Photo: D Jardine

*As one of the last remaining areas of real wilderness in the UK, Glen Affric has the capacity to absorb large numbers of visitors, yet each and every one can feel a sense of freedom and escape in this iconic Glen that inspires awe and wonder. JM*

*In the working day or in my own private capacity, I walk cycle or drive through the glen and see a mountain of problems, maintenance, and jobs that need done. When I meet the public I see them as customers who need to be looked after and at the same time informally educated and steered in the "right" way to behave. On the occasions when I stop and think about the place, I look at why people are there; they come for the wilderness experience, to be in awe of the natural beauty. Then my cynical head comes back and I start to think about the fact that it isn't natural and if it wasn't for man, sheep and deer then it would be very different place. AS*

*I thoroughly enjoyed being part of the team that tackled the 2010 forest design plan for the wider Affric area. The level of interest both within the Forest District as well as from statutory organisations, NGOs and the local community was outstanding. Perhaps this enthusiasm is not surprising given*

*the sheer delight the area gives, not to mention that it is recognized as one of the most complex Forestry Commission landholdings in Scotland due to its size, its ecological diversity and the array of designations. GP*

*Glen Affric is one of the most important places in Scotland for nature. It is well known that it's an exceptional area for native pine woodland but there are a whole host of rare species there as well. Some of our rarest and most beautiful plants occur here: Highland Cudweed, Woolly Willow and Small Cow-wheat on the alpine crags with One-flowered Wintergreen & Coral-root Orchid in the woodlands. Its also home to rare butterflies and moths including Rannoch Sprawler, Goat Moth and Welsh Clearwing. The latter two burrow into ancient Birch trees, the type of which you only find in a few special glens. Some of my most exciting and memorable days in the field looking for nature have been spent at Glen Affric. JW*

*I have the best job in the Forestry Commission working in Glen Affric! The chance to shape the future structure of the forest in a manner which picks up from the work done previously, using all the modern techniques developed since then, to enhance and expand the native forest to produce a truly multi-purpose landscape gives me a real feeling of satisfaction and pride as a professional forester. KH*

*People say it is the most beautiful glen in Scotland and of course there are many others, but the pinewoods in Affric add their special grandeur to the scene. On my first day at work in Glen Affric, Sandy Walker drove me up on a beautiful spring day. I couldn't believe my luck in being allowed to work in such a wonderful place; every corner we turned had a stunning view with*

To be part of a team whose goal has been to preserve and enhance this wilderness has been a privilege

*pinewoods and snow topped mountains reflected in the lochs. There can be days when you don't see anything and visitors ask where the wildlife is, but then again you could see your first live adder (during a guided walk! I was more excited than anyone), eagles, otter (only once), badgers, black grouse, pine marten, deer, an amazing number of birds in summer, dragonflies, beetles, butterflies and flowers, to name just a few. Only thing I've always wondered - why no juniper? SR*

*I first saw Glen Affric in 1975 when I arrived as a "loon" from South Wales. I was inspired by its scale, unique wildlife and spectacular beauty. Having been touched by forests and wildlife all my life, this was truly a wilderness where I immediately felt a connection to the living past where your imagination could take you anywhere. To be part*

*of a team whose goal has been to preserve and enhance this wilderness has been a privilege and long may it continue JD*

*I spent a holiday during my teenage years in Inverness – it was visits to the forests at Reelig, Farigaig and Glen Affric that sparked my love of forests and trees and inspired me to seek a career in forestry. I have been lucky in that I have been involved with Glen Affric at various stages of my career, and each visit brings a smile to my face, and satisfaction that I have had a hand in its management. My teenage years saw a wild and remote and apparently untouched wilderness – with the extra years, and knowledge and experience my eyes now see a very different picture, richer, more complex, but also more fascinating and no less beautiful. SS*

Photo, following page: pine trees, Dundreggan  
K Brown

The video of Tom Weir's visit to Glen Affric is available at:  
<http://video.stv.tv/bc/scotland-places-20080530-finlay-mcrae-the-districts-conservation-officer-takes-tom-deep-into-glen-affric/>

Photo: C Brown









## Return of the wild at Dundreggan

Dundreggan is a 10,000 acre (4,000 hectare) estate in Glen Moriston, west of Loch Ness in the Highlands, which was purchased by the conservation charity Trees for Life in 2008. Stretching from the River Moriston in the valley bottom to a high point of 680 metres on the watershed divide between Glen Moriston and Glen Affric to the north, the estate contains a variety of habitats, ranging from floodplain woodland and remnants of the native pinewoods of the Caledonian Forest to extensive tracts of wet heath, mire and bog in the north. Although Dundreggan is situated relatively close to the west coast, the local topography results in the estate receiving less rainfall than surrounding areas, and this in turn means that it is home to an unusual combination of species that are more normally considered either principally western- or eastern-based.

There are about 250 acres (100 hectares) of native woodland currently on Dundreggan. The majority is birchwood, although other trees such as oak, aspen, Scots pine, hazel, ash and wych elm are present in smaller numbers. Of particular note is the prolific distribution of juniper (*Juniperus communis*), a priority species for conservation in the UK's Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), which reaches both a substantial height and remarkable density in the birchwood areas, and the widespread abundance of dwarf

birch (*Betula nana*) on the northern half of the estate.

Dundreggan is an important site for biodiversity in the Highlands, and is home to more than 50 species that feature on the UK BAP list.

Prominent amongst those are black grouse (*Tetrao tetrix*), pine marten (*Martes martes*), lesser butterfly-orchid (*Platanthera bifolia*) and the lichen running-spider (*Philodromus margaritatus*). Specialist surveys have led to a number of important discoveries on the estate, including the presence of a sawfly (*Nematus pseudodispar*) that had never been recorded in the UK before, the golden horsefly (*Atylotus fulvus*), which had been seen just twice in Scotland since 1923, and what may be the largest Scottish population of the spectacularly-coloured strawberry spider (*Araneus alsine*).

Trees for Life has been involved in practical work to help restore the Caledonian Forest since 1989, with our work being focussed in an area of over 900 square miles (2,300 square kilometres) in the north-central Highlands, west of Inverness and Loch Ness. This area has a remote, roadless and virtually uninhabited mountainous core that contains the highest peak north of the Great Glen (Carn Eige) and some of the best remnants of the Caledonian Forest (Glen Affric, Glen Strathfarrar). It offers one of the best opportunities for restoring a wild, natural large-scale landscape, complete with its full range of

Alan Watson Featherstone is the founder and Executive Director of Trees for Life

Photos, opposite page:

*Top*—birch, pine and juniper at Dundreggan  
K Brown

*Bottom-left*—wild boar at Dundreggan  
K Brown

*Bottom-right*—The northern part of Dundreggan consists of open moor, with occasional lochans and mires.  
A W Featherstone

Photos: *Top* - These over-grazed birch seedlings near the Red Burn on Dundreggan have been held in check by red deer. Through an innovative and integrated approach to deer management, they will be able to grow successfully, enabling the expansion of the existing birchwood by natural regeneration.

*Bottom*—Naturally-regenerating Scots pine seedling near the summit of Binnilidh Bheag, and view westwards over the valley of the Red Burn on Dundreggan

A W Featherstone

habitats and species, in the whole of the UK. Dundreggan is a key site within this area, providing the potential to restore a natural habitat corridor of woodland and scrub connecting Glen Affric and Glen Moriston, and linking up several of the Caledonian Forest remnants.

Like much of the Highlands, many of the ecosystems on Dundreggan have been in a state of arrested succession because of overgrazing, mainly by red deer. Large numbers of birch seedlings occur on the upper margins of the existing woodland, but are unable to grow successfully because of grazing pressure. Similarly, the later successional stage tree species such as oak, hazel, ash and wych elm are not growing up in the existing open birchwood, because all their

naturally-occurring seedlings are eaten when only a few inches tall. The same story applies on the open ground on the estate, where all the dwarf birch plants are suppressed by grazing, and the natural succession, on suitable sites, from wet heath to dry heath, and from dry heath to pioneer woodland of birch and rowan, is being prevented. A 300 hectare commercial plantation of mainly non-native conifers provides another challenge for restoration.

Set in the context of a 50 year vision for the estate, which envisions native woodland and scrub covering about 60% of the land, a detailed management plan has been drawn up, to promote woodland and other habitat restoration. Although Trees for Life aims to see natural processes prevail again, as part of a wild landscape, we recognise that management intervention is required in the short term, to help return the land to ecological health and balance. Key to this is reducing the impact of grazing by deer, and we are implementing an innovative deer management plan that combines several elements – reduction in deer numbers, diversionary feeding and disturbance of deer from critical areas containing naturally occurring tree seedlings when new growth is taking place in spring – to facilitate regeneration of the birchwood without fencing.

This is being complemented by individual protection of seedlings from the scarcer (and more palatable) tree species, and the establishment of some new areas of native woodland through tree planting. The latter is being carried out by matching tree species to the suitability of the vegetation communities and soil types, and utilising planting patterns that mimic the density and distribution of



naturally-regenerating trees. Specific projects are also focussing on particular habitat types and key species, such as dwarf birch scrub, for which a series of fenced enclosures for restoration are being erected. Another project has involved the planting of a large area of aspen-dominated woodland in the riparian zone beside the River Moriston, to provide both a future habitat for the rare invertebrates and bryophytes that are dependent on aspen, and also to complement the aspens elsewhere on the river in providing potential future habitat for European beavers, if the current trial project at Knapdale is deemed a success and further sites are considered for reintroductions.

In the birchwood itself, a fenced area of 30 acres (12.1 hectares) is home now to a group of wild boar, which we are using to reduce the prevalence of bracken (which shades out forest floor plant species and inhibits the growth of young trees) and provide exposed soil to facilitate tree regeneration. In doing so, we are gaining the benefits of one of the forest's missing large mammals, and are also restoring, on a small scale, one of the absent ecological processes – natural disturbance. Restoration of the conifer plantation, back to native woodland and mire (in suitable parts) will be a longer term process, taking at least 10 years to complete. Another important element of the project is the removal of human infrastructure wherever possible, including the fences, as soon as they are no longer required to facilitate regeneration.

Despite its biological diversity and high ecological interest, Dundreggan has no statutory designations or official protected status, and due to its lack of any high peaks, the estate attracts relatively few walkers and other visitors. This provides a good

opportunity to enhance the wild quality of the land there.

However, running directly contrary to that are two major projects, which represent the 'industrialisation of the Highlands'. The Beauly to Denny power transmission line runs across Dundreggan from north to south and is in the process of being upgraded, complete with substantially taller pylons and 'improved' access roads. Then, immediately to the east, a new massive-scale wind farm is proposed on the neighbouring estates, consisting of up to 138 turbines, each 135 metres tall, with some turbines sited within 100 metres of our boundary. The turbines from another wind farm on the south side of Glen Moriston already dominate the skyline looking from Dundreggan towards the Nevis Range, so the estate is becoming a focal point for two contradictory futures for the Highlands – the return of the land to a wilder, more natural condition, or its further domination and exploitation to serve human economic interests.

Dundreggan is a key site, providing the potential to restore a natural habitat corridor of woodland and scrub connecting Glen Affric and Glen Moriston, and linking up several Caledonian Forest remnants

Photo: rare bee beetles (*trichius fasciatus*) on black knapweed at Dundreggan  
M Brown



Calum Macleod

## Assessing the ‘community right to buy’ land and other assets

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The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 is widely viewed as one of the most significant pieces of legislation passed by the Scottish Parliament since devolution in 1999. It introduced statutory access rights over most land for ‘everyone’, and the ‘community right to buy’ and ‘crofting community right to buy’ eligible land, salmon fishings and mineral rights and other assets such as buildings. Consequently, the Act is often held up as an example of progressive land reform designed to diversify the pattern of land ownership in Scotland. But to what extent has the legislation done this to date? And what are the barriers which prevent these objectives being achieved more widely in practice?

Research on implementation of the Land Reform Act conducted on behalf of the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee of the Scottish Parliament by the Centre for Mountain Studies and partners presents a somewhat mixed picture in relation to these fundamental questions.

There is a popular misconception that the community right to buy provisions contained in Part Two of the Land Reform Act have been instrumental in securing many more community land buy-outs than has actually been the case. In fact, many of the most high profile buy-outs, such as those undertaken by the North Harris Trust, Stòras Uibhist and the Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust, either pre-date the

legislation or took place outwith the Act. According to Scottish Government figures the reality is that only nine community organisations had successfully used the legislation to purchase land and assets as of 2010. These ranged from the Assynt Foundation’s purchase of the Glencanisp and Drumrunie estates, encompassing 44,400 acres of land, to Neilston Development Trust’s securing of the former Clydesdale Bank premises in the town centre.

For these organisations which have successfully completed the process the community right to buy has undoubtedly been invaluable in enabling them to put land and associated assets to uses which directly benefit the communities in which they are located. However, the relatively low number of successful purchases using the Act indicates that this right has not had a significant directly transformative impact upon the pattern of land ownership in Scotland. A number of factors combine to explain the low completion rate of purchases in this regard.

Perhaps the most important explanation lies in the way in which Part Two of the Land Reform Act is designed in relation to facilitating community ownership. The legislation contains what some would call ‘safeguards’ and others ‘obstacles’ which are intended to shape the implementation process in important respects.

Most critically, the ‘community right

to buy' only gives eligible 'community bodies' a pre-emptive right to purchase land when it is placed on the market by a *willing* seller. This is in contrast to the 'crofting community right to buy' contained in Part Three of the Act which does not require a willing seller and which is in some respects akin to a compulsory purchase of land. Consequently, organisations using the community right to buy have to navigate a complex and highly bureaucratic process to register their interest in land but must then wait until the owner puts that land on the market before they can activate that interest and proceed to purchase. For many of these organisations this can be a deeply frustrating experience, leaving them neatly stacked like aircraft in a holding formation waiting for permission to land that may never come.

Even successful activation of an interest (effectively the 'green light' to proceed to purchase) is no guarantee that a community organisation will succeed in securing the land. Nine community organisations have activated their interest only to see their attempts to purchase flounder on a variety of barriers. Six of these organisations were unable to fund their purchases within the timescale set out in the legislation; one was competing with another community organisation; one wished to purchase ineligible land and one had the activation process terminated when the landowner withdrew the land from sale. Aside from the last-mentioned organisation, all had their registration deleted from the Register of Community Interests in Land.

Quite apart from the above, the

sheer complexity of exercising the 'community right to buy' in practice gives any community organisation pause for thought when contemplating whether to embark on what many contributors to our research characterised as an exhausting and resource-intensive process. Our findings highlight the burden of work and demands on volunteer time of using the Act; issues which can be exacerbated depending on the capacity and skills set available to particular organisations.

Other elements of the process can also leave community organisations mired in a bureaucratic quagmire not of their own making. Representatives of community organisations who participated in our research noted the difficulties of meeting timescales and deadlines associated with key stages of the community right to buy process. These included the challenge of organising a community ballot within 28 days of receiving an independent valuation of the land to be purchased and difficulties in getting access to the full electoral roll to determine eligibility to participate in the ballot. Securing funding to complete purchase within a 6 month time-frame following confirmation of the community organisation's intention to proceed with purchase was also viewed as unrealistic by some participants. Some organisations also experienced problems in setting the geographical boundaries of the community or in determining the size of the community, although this was not a universal finding.

Supporters of the community right to buy argue that it has helped to raise the profile of community land ownership generally and research

participants broadly concur with that view. It's more difficult to draw any firm conclusions as to whether the legislation has indirectly stimulated greater activity in relation to the community land sector because of a lack of available data in that regard.

Interestingly, one notable feature of the community right to buy in practice is that the majority of successful purchases have resulted from 'late' registrations of interest in land, made after the land came onto the market. Such late registrations were anticipated by the legislation's architects as being the exception rather than the norm. However, their prominence suggests that the Act has served a useful 'buffer' function by ensuring that communities are afforded the opportunity to purchase, subject to meeting the stringent criteria of the 'right to buy' process, rather than being by-passed by sellers intent on avoiding the legislation being invoked.

The framework of statutory access rights, community right to buy and crofting community right to buy contained in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 has resulted in the legislation being held up as a touchstone for progressive land reform. There's a compelling argument for that view in terms of the access element of the Act. However, the case for the community right to buy is less clear cut for the reasons outlined above. In this context it is arguable that the symbolic significance of the right outweighs its practical utility.

That said, there is much that could be done to reduce the administrative complexity associated with the provisions contained in Part Two of the Act to make them a more palatable option for community organisations to use. Increasing the flexibility of what

constitutes eligible 'community bodies', simplifying ballot arrangements, recasting time-frames associated with the process in favour of community organisations and reducing the burden of mapping requirements have all been suggested by participants in our study as helpful changes to the legislation.

Ultimately the Land Reform Act is only one piece of a complex jigsaw in relation to community land ownership in Scotland. There remains much to celebrate in terms of what has already been achieved through community ownership throughout the Highlands and Islands. Moreover, the creation of Community Land Scotland as an umbrella body for the sector is a significant and very welcome development, both for sharing good practice and advice amongst community organisations and gathering and amplifying the views of the sector to Government and other stakeholders.

However, there is a pressing need to reignite the political momentum which drove the community land movement in the pre-Land Reform Act era and led to the establishing of the Community Land Unit within Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the now defunct Scottish Land Fund. The newly re-elected SNP Government has made manifesto commitments to review the Land Reform Act and re-instate the Scottish Land Fund. Now is the time to follow through on these commitments to show that it is serious about securing the benefits that shared ownership of land and other assets can bring to communities.

There is a pressing need to reignite the political momentum which drove the community land movement in the pre-Land Reform Act era

## Obfuscating fog, searing clarity and Bogha-Cloiche

The sky was a symphony of grey; the earth devoid of all colour. The night had been mild and dry and I had been surprised upon opening my eyes to find daylight already established. A warming bowl of porridge after a night in the heather is one of the more oddly neglected Scottish traditions these days, but it still satisfies. Once charged up, I began the soft snow trudge, before finding wonderfully hard neve, high up on the slopes of Meall Chuaich...

Much has been written of the 'healing' qualities of wild land. It's not a term I'm entirely comfortable with as it doesn't fit easily with my image of myself or my relationship with wild land. The truth of it, however, cannot be denied. I'm much more comfortable focusing on the pull factors which draw me to wild land, when the truth is that the push factors may be just as important. Am I simply a social misfit, a loner and luddite, who goes to the hills to escape from a modern world with which I am unable to cope? And what is it I get from wild land? A greater sense of perspective and feeling of permanence or rootedness must surely have a calming influence in themselves. I wouldn't be surprised if this sense of 'healing' was directly proportional (to some extent) to a person's sensitivity to wild land. But what does this say about the wild land experience itself? Where does the desire to embrace nature and wildness end and the need to escape an antiseptic and unfulfilling modern existence begin?

Bogha-Cloiche came easy in the end. The wind-blown plateau provided easy going after the steep ascent. Patches of blue sky were appearing over the Monadhliath and around the Moray coast to the north. The 'Gorms west of the Feshie remained stubbornly in the cloud. All around lay an expanse of winter; of bleak, vast... wild.

A couple of weeks previously had found me wandering Carn Bhac on a moonlit night of pure ecstasy. Although little snow lay below 800m the moonlight glinting up the Connie was more than sufficient to guide the way onto the well consolidated upper slopes. From here, an array of pin sharp, snow topped plateaux could be seen on all points of the compass, broken only by the great trench of the Dee and Geldie. If this was healing, it was total; and it was heady stuff. The feeling was one of immutability; strength had been drawn from somewhere and the resonance ran deep.

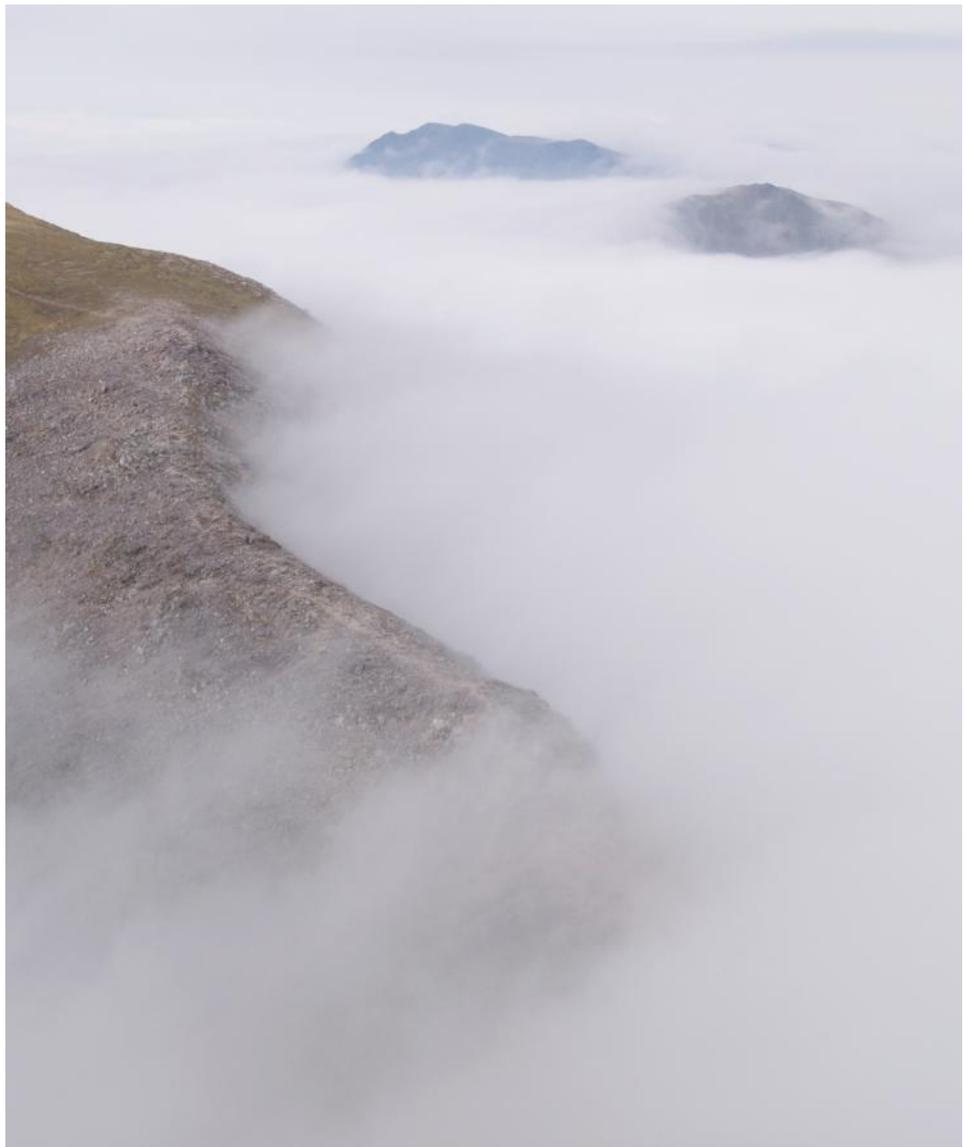
Tired now, I headed down the glen in the warmth of the afternoon sun. Below the snow line the muted winter colours seemed a riot compared with the austerity of the upper slopes. Despite the tarmac road and what must be some of the ugliest estate buildings in Scotland, Glen Tromie provided a fine long walk out. An easing down from the wild upper glen into a more wooded and finally more pastoral landscape.

The wild land experience is just that; an experience that needs to be felt

An array of pin sharp, snow topped plateaux could be seen on all points of the compass, broken only by the great trench of the Dee and Geldie

and desired first hand. Knowledge is gained, but how to define or communicate that is a tricky business. The desire seems to come from inside; I've never known of anyone truly persuaded of the importance of wild land by cold, rational argument. It's easy to feel the situation is one of 'us and them', of those who 'get it' and those who don't. How to work around these differences and how to recognise common ground where it exists are crucial to all the functions of the SWLG.

Photo: C Brown



## Rum and Irvine Butterfield

Lest the above heading give rise to any misapprehensions, I should probably point out that, both by employment and by inclination, Irvine was very much a whisky man. His books will undoubtedly be familiar to SWLG members, particularly "The High Mountains of Britain and Ireland, Volume 1" and "The Magic of the Munros". Likewise, the valuable work he did on behalf of many mountaineering and wild land organisations is too well known to require extensive elucidation (I hope).

This particular story starts about six months after Irvine died on May 12<sup>th</sup> 2009. Bruce Walker, a Kirriemuir sculptor/engraver with a formidable reputation, contacted the Munro Society with the proposal of erecting at his own expense an engraved memorial stone for Irvine. He was passed on to Irvine's executor which, as that was me, was where I came in.

Irvine's ashes were scattered on a small promontory on the west shore of Loch Clair by the view looking towards Liathach that was always his favourite. The proposal to erect the stone there was a non-starter – Irvine had strong views on the subject of the proliferation of memorials on wild land and his executor's are, if anything, even more incendiary.

Finding a suitable site proved to be a tricky task. There were many places Irvine was known to be fond of but none really stood out until I re-read his first book. This was a privately published account of the restoration of Dibidil bothy on Rum in 1970. I

got in touch with David Robertson, the Mountain Bothies Association Maintenance Organiser for Dibidil, and while it was clear that Dibidil was out as a potential location for the stone (that pesky wild land prohibition again), Kinloch, where the Easter 1970 party transporting the shedloads of materials spent a saturated few days, was not. Richard Kilpatrick, the Scottish Natural Heritage warden, was contacted and proved an enthusiastic and very helpful confederate in the venture.

Meanwhile, David had a bright idea. "Dibidil – A Hebridean Adventure" had been out of print for nearly forty years and copies, when they surfaced, would not cost below £50 for a copy in good condition. Why not re-publish it? If I'd realised then that the typing alone would take over forty hours between us (the original was pre-digital publishing and computer back-up), I could have told him why not. So we got the necessary permissions from Irvine's sister Irene and his partner Moira and, blithely unaware of the scale of the task ahead, off we went.

Once we'd got the text processed and added a few appendices relating to a later 1975 work party, the history of Dibidil and another ten verses of "The Dibidil Song" (does anyone out there know the tune?), we had the problem of pictures to address. Fortunately, Irvine had left his slides of the work party to the MBA who had scanned them on to disc so the pictures are now in colour, bar one which we couldn't trace. The full set can be viewed on the MBA website (look under

“Information”, then “General News” and select “2010” – you’ll find them at the bottom of the blurb on the release of the book on 21/9/10).

David and me can type (slowly and inaccurately) and we can proof-read (interminably, or so it seemed) but we had not a clue as to how to set a book for publication. Enter Halifax-denizen John Mitchell, who did a fine job of setting the book for us, and I had the final proofs to peruse at the beginning of September 2010, just in time for my trip to Rum with Bruce to install the stone.

As usual for visits to Rum, I spent the Friday night curled up on the back seat of my car in Mallaig’s west car park and met Bruce at the Calmac office to catch the 0730

ferry, with Calmac’s fine selection of bacon butties to savour. Richard met us on landing and provided us with the sand and concrete we needed to install the stone at a site just above the new pier, on the edge of the settlement area. There is a new track heading east from the pier to two ruined Clearance villages and an otter hide, and the stone was erected by three log seats with views all around which Irvine would have known and loved.

The installation was a taxing process. Not so much for me, as my role was generally limited to fetching and carrying due to my legendary uselessness in this field. Bruce on the other hand suffered torments familiar to those whose skulls have been overrun by Rum



midges. We retreated to the pier in disarray a couple of times but eventually the stone went in to Bruce's satisfaction. It's a simple three-foot high piece of Caithness sandstone (very durable, unlike the Arran sandstone of Kinloch Castle). On one side is Irvine's name and dates; on the other is the quote from William Blake which he would use in book-signings,

"Great things are done when men and mountains meet,  
This is not done by jostling in the street".

Naturally, we had to visit Dibidil the next day and Bruce marked the occasion by finding the only patch of bog on the entire six-mile trek and falling in it, a feat made all the more

remarkable when he replicated it on the way back. There were sea-eagles circling as we looked down to the bothy and we spent a while there just relating the landscape to the book's tale of that incredible restoration project.

Back on the mainland, the book was officially launched at the MBA AGM in Greenhead in October and I do feel that it is now the book as it always could have been had the technology or the money been there in 1972. Copies are available from 33 Cedar Avenue, Blairgowrie, PH10 6TT. Cheques for £8.00 (including postage and packing) should be made payable to "Roderick Manson". Profits will go to the MBA just as soon as we make any.

Photo: The bothy at Dibidil  
C Brown





Phil Turner

## My wild land

Phil is an Edinburgh-based outdoors writer specialising in lightweight backpacking and long distance walking. He particularly enjoys exploring the areas neglected by the summit-obsessed masses, and is frequently found tracing ancient drove roads and stretches of deserted coastline. The best of these routes are to be published in several guidebooks as well as featuring on <http://www.walkhighlands.co.uk> (but not the VERY best routes – they're secret).

Phil runs a successful blog at <http://lightweightoutdoors.com> and has an active following on his Twitter feed at:

<http://twitter.com/PhilOutdoors>

When walking with my usual walking companions, routes fall into two distinct categories – normal routes and *Ibbotson* routes. Personally, I respect the forethought and ingenuity of our ancestors who forged paths through mountain passes and along sensible contour lines taking the path of least resistance. It's true that these pioneers were more concerned with the transport of heavy goods and cattle than the needs of future hillwalkers, but it seems awfully disrespectful to ignore their efforts in favour of Colin's 'straight-line' approach to route-finding.

The truth is that like many walkers my time in Scotland's wild places is limited by those annoyances that make an escape to the hills all the more essential – the need to earn money, interact with family members, smile at people and pretend to be interested in TV programmes or celebrity culture. It's admirable to spend a day struggling through stinking black peat bog to reach a distant summit that features on an arcane tick-list found on an Internet forum, but still being able to see your parked car being molested by an amorous highland bullock takes the shine off things slightly.

No, I prefer wild-paths, and the longer the better. Not the wide surfaced estate roads created to ferry shooting parties into the hills in air-conditioned 4x4s, but the cow-wide paths that lead to nowhere via several fords, a stagnant pond and a ruined sheep fank. These are the routes that nobody treads any

more, maintained by the wise deer that also appreciate the worth of a good path. Often there's a reason for this apparent neglect – the path ends abruptly at the bottom of a sheer cliff (damn climbers), at an unscalable deer fence (damn deer) or simply performs a wide curve through farmland and deposits you a few miles further down the road (damn).

There are of course ways to avoid this – the unadventurous will use a map, the clever will use free online satellite imagery. Whilst I generally prefer not to publicise this, I feel it's time to come clean and admit that I have a Google Maps addiction. Forget the paper 1:50000 maps with their contour lines and stuff, <http://maps.google.co.uk/> is the destination for proper wild-path exploration. Spend the evening idly scrolling around in Satellite view until a suitably road-free section appears, ideally with an interesting feature like a ruined sheep fank in the middle, and zoom in. Pan around, find a suitable path and follow it to the nearest road. Then go there. Unless you've somehow ended up near Cumbernauld – don't go *there*.

If it's brilliant, keep it to yourself, if it's rubbish, keep it to yourself – why spoil the surprise for the next wild-path seeker? Unless it's *really* bad (and you've ended up in Cumbernauld), I guarantee it'll be better than joining the back of the procession trudging up Ben Lomond over the May Bank Holiday weekend. Trust me.



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