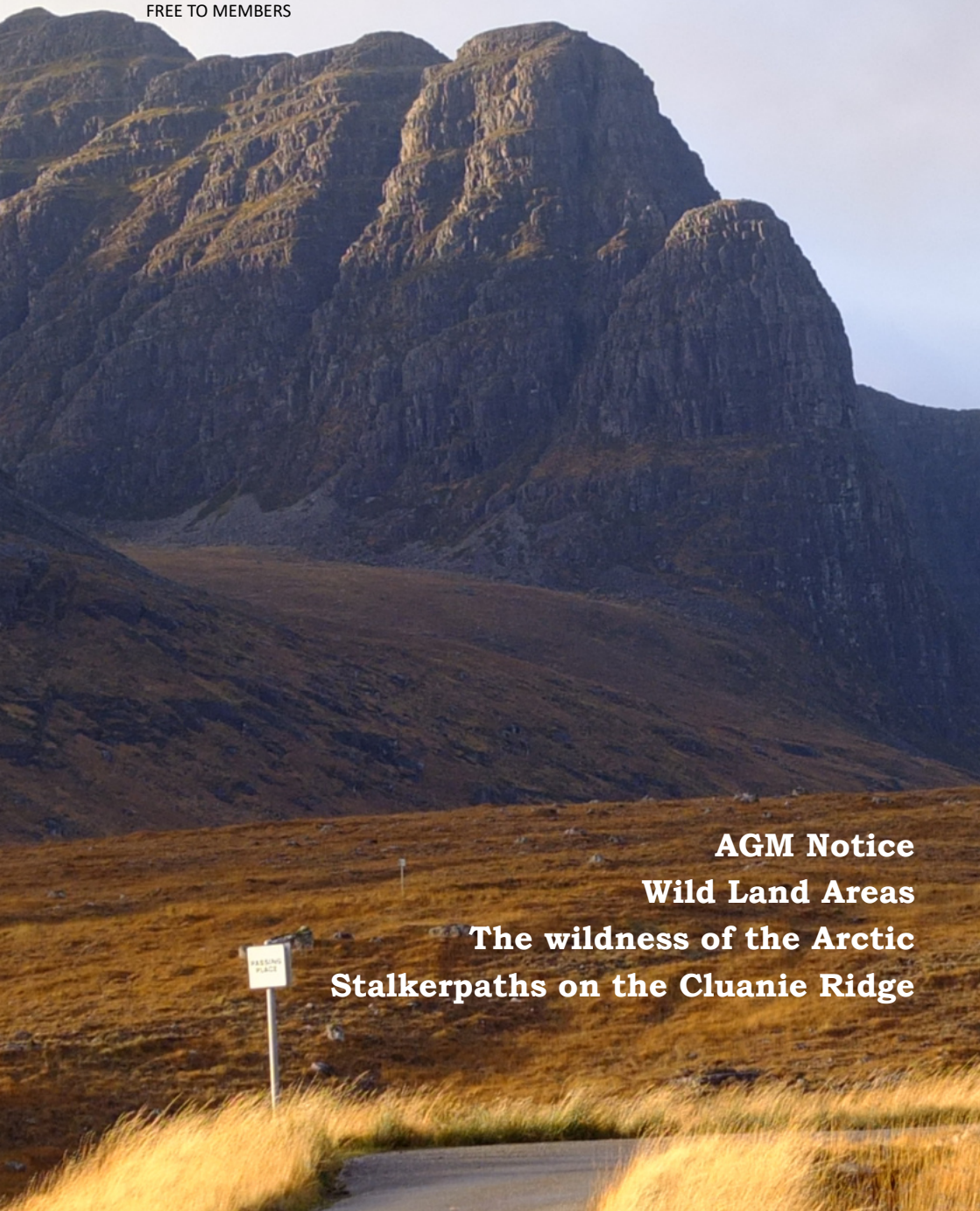


ISSUE 101
Autumn 2022

Wild Land News

Magazine of the Scottish Wild Land Group

£1 where sold or £1 donation to Mountain Rescue/charity tin
FREE TO MEMBERS



AGM Notice
Wild Land Areas
The wildness of the Arctic
Stalkerpaths on the Cluanie Ridge

Autumn 2022

WILD LAND NEWS

Issue 101

Magazine of the
Scottish Wild Land Group

SWLG

www.swlg.org.uk
admin@swlg.org.uk
8 Cleveden Road
Glasgow G12 0NT
Scottish Charitable Incorporated
Organisation No. SC051654

SWLG Convenor

Vacant

Membership Secretary

Grant Cornwallis

Treasurer

Tim Ambrose

WLN Editor

James Fenton
admin@swlg.org.uk
Please send in contributions.
Individual articles do not
necessarily reflect the views of
the SWLG Steering Team.

Printed by
printed.com





CONTENTS

Editorial	p.3
AGM Notice	p.4
Noticeboard	p.5
Book review <i>Tim Ambrose</i>	p.6
Wild Land Areas: SWLG Policy	p.11
The wildness of the Arctic <i>James Fenton</i>	p.13
A path on the wild side <i>David Jarman</i>	p.21

*Front cover and left: The
Bealach na Ba, the pass
over to Applecross.*

Photos: James Fenton

James Fenton



Editorial

Wildness is under threat the world over as we humans continue to take over the whole planet. Do we really want our grandchildren to inherit a world where there is no place left to 'get away from it all'?

This issue takes a wider perspective by looking at the presence of wild land in the Arctic, including the affinities between Arctic tundra vegetation and Scottish moorland. A conclusion is that the vastness of the Arctic is such that, even with new development such as quarries for rare earths, there will always be plenty of wild areas. In contrast, Scotland's wild areas are small and there is little potential for combining infrastructure with wild land. Society will have to decide whether wildness or infrastructure is more important in Wild Land Areas: if the latter, then we will have to accept the continual decline of wildness in Scotland.

Scotland's Wild Land Areas are the only tool we have to protect wild land. However, they do not give it legal protection in the same way that there is a legal duty to conserve the features of a Site of Special Scientific Interest. In this issue we have included a draft 'Policy Statement on Wild Land Areas' where we state that SWLG believes that legal protection is necessary. We

would like members to comment on and endorse this statement at the forthcoming AGM on the 3rd December.

This can then be used by members when lobbying on behalf of wild land. For example, we suggest that members take every opportunity to discuss wild land with their MSP/MP when they hold local surgeries. So, make an effort to see your MSP – unless there is strong political support for wild land, its attrition will continue.

This issue also has an article by David Jarman on stalking paths, a topic which has had little notice to date. As David points out, these are not always shown on the OS maps. However, they can be seen as the first ingress into the wildness of the Highlands, making access to remote areas easier, if only to the landowners and their friends. The beginning of the end of true wildness in Scotland?

The SWLG would like to thank Jonathan Binny who has recently stood down as convenor of the group and who in particular has been focussing on increasing our social media presence. This is a hard nut to crack and SWLG is always looking for members who could assist in raising the group's profile.

Discuss
wild land
with your
MSP



Scottish Wild Land Group

40th Annual General Meeting

Saturday 3rd December 2022

1.30 - 4 pm

Perth Museum & Art Gallery

78 George Street, Perth

Keynote speaker

Chris Townsend

Wild Land in the Cairngorms and the NW Highlands:
A comparison from a walker's perspective

Programme

1.30pm Sandwich lunch

2.00 AGM (download papers from www.swlg.org.uk/agms.php)

2.30 Presentation on SWLG Report 'The State of Wild Land'

2.45 Talk by Chris Townsend

4.00 Tea/coffee

Wild land in Scotland is under as great a threat as ever

Please support wild land by coming along, where you can:

Pick up leaflets to distribute, collect a copy of SWLG's report on the state of wild land, meet other likeminded people, hear Chris Townsend talk ...

Non-members welcome

Note: there is no dedicated parking at the venue



NOTICEBOARD

Strath Oykel wind farm objection

SWLG's recent report *The State of Wild Land in the Highlands* (see last issue) highlighted the lack of consistency by local authorities in granting planning permission (or not) for wind farms in, or adjacent to, wild land.

In October councillors on Highland Council's North Applications Planning Committee unanimously voted against granting permission for a wind farm with 200m high turbines near Rosehall in Strath Oykel, proposed by the German company Energiekontor. There was strong opposition from local people, including the campaign group 'No Ring of Steel'. It was argued that the wind farm, to quote Councillor Margaret Paterson, was "too big, too high and in the wrong place."

Planning officials, in contrast, had recommended approval. Interestingly, it is reported that NatureScot withdrew its objection to the scheme because the area could no longer be considered as 'wild land' owing to the number of other wind farms in the vicinity. Because of the Council's objection, however, the Scottish Government is now likely to hold a public inquiry.

Current Scottish Government consultations:

New National Parks in Scotland

NatureScot is leading the consultation on new National Parks. If there are to be two new ones, where should they be? National Parks can be seen as one way of ensuring the conservation of wild land. If you would like to take part, see <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/protected-areas-and-species/protected-areas/national-designations/national-park>, although the deadline is short: 30 November 2022.

Grouse Moor Management

The Scottish Government are consulting on proposals from the 2017 Werrity Report on the management of grouse moors, many of which are in Wild Land Areas. Proposals include: introducing a licensing scheme for grouse shooting; increased regulation for muirburn (the burning of vegetation to maintain moorland); banning the use of glue traps; and increased regulation of other wildlife traps. The closing date is 14 December 2022. Further details from: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/wildlife-management-scotland-consultation/>

Scottish Landscape Alliance event

The SLA 2022 Debate: **Managing Continuity and Change in Scotland's Landscapes** *Keeping Scotland aligned with Europe and alive to world challenges affecting our landscape.* 10.00am – 1.00pm, 29th November 2022.

Hybrid event: Online or in person at The Engine Shed, Forthside Way, Stirling

Details on SLA website: <https://scotlandlandscapealliance.org/managing-continuity-and-change-in-scotlands-landscapes/>

Green and Prosperous Land A Blueprint for rescuing the British Countryside by Dieter Helm

As many will know, Dieter Helm is Professor of Economic Policy at Oxford University and a well known writer with expertise on the possible applications of economics to helping address the world's environmental problems. His previous works *The Carbon Crunch* and *Natural Capital: Valuing the Planet* set out ways of putting a financial value on the world's intangible benefits, such as biodiversity and the climate, and measuring the monetary costs of damaging or destroying them. Essentially, can financial incentives, which drive much of human behaviour, be the key to solving some of the biggest challenges facing humanity?

In *Green and Prosperous Land* Professor Helm looks in more detail at the British countryside, including our rivers, agriculture, coasts and particularly relevant for our Wild Land interests, the uplands. He sets out the many well-known problems in a pithy style – “With little or no competing land uses, much of the uplands can only be grazed. And grazed they have been: the lack of vegetation is a

product of the millions of sheep, some cattle and lots and lots of deer.” He is, however, sceptical of the benefits of simple “rewilding”, getting rid of the sheep and leaving nature to its own devices, as the new wild will need the top predators – wolves, lynxes and beavers too. He refers to the Alladale Wilderness Reserve, and comments that even with wolves roaming, the animals that would be the most strictly controlled are the people as paying safari travellers.

Deer stalking has led to mass over-grazing of the Highlands, and to an effective reversal of evolution – the survival of the least fit through repeated removal of the healthiest and strongest stags, with the most impressive antlers. As Helm says, “the ultimate victims of over-population of deer are the deer themselves and those who profit from them ... another example of the folly of assuming that those who own the land are the best guardians of nature and the public good, or indeed even of their own.”

Grouse shooting also requires intensive management of the moors,

including the elimination (more in the past, but still in the present) of anything that might get in the way of the game-birds, regarded as “vermin” and including golden eagles, hen harriers, buzzards, as well as stoats, weasels and foxes, not to mention even mountain hares which might spread ticks. Protection backed up by criminal penalties has improved the position in Scotland, but Helm urges that the “polluter pays” principle should apply, with a levy on the land-owners to put right the damage caused.

Helm expands upon the potential benefits of applying a wider “polluter pays” principle with a convincing argument that “From a government perspective, it is much better to raise money by taxing ‘bads’ like pollution, tobacco and alcohol, than it is to tax ‘goods’ like labour, through income tax.” Here, ‘goods’ means good things, beneficial to the public, not destructive or damaging things. Since taxes tend inevitably to discourage whatever is charged to raise the funds, there is a benefit to taxing ‘bads’, and even if the ultimate result of such taxes is to reduce or eliminate the source of the moneys, the benefit will be the reduction or elimination of the ‘bad’, which is itself a good outcome.

In some instances a tax is insufficient deterrent to the activity, such as shooting hen harriers or eagles. Here, Helm is clear that more severe

penalties, including gaol, and charged against the individuals ultimately responsible for the harm, is necessary. Only when the penalties, and the likelihood of them being applied, exceed the benefits from shooting hen harriers, will persecution stop.

Compensation to pay for damage to the environment and public good from development is similar, and because such damage is irreversible, and is difficult to measure, it should be charged on a basis estimated to be higher than our best guess. This would result in the compensation giving a net environmental gain, rather than mere neutrality, so the aggregate natural capital we bequeath to the next generation goes up, even if some bits have been destroyed by the development.

Obvious questions arise from this compensation theory – how do we quantify the compensation, who collects and receives it, and how do we ensure it is applied in the best way to make amends for the damage it has paid for? Helm recommends a clean sheet – a Nature Act leading to a Nature Plan (the “25 Year Environment Plan”) and delivering a Nature Fund. These would require the environmental bodies and interests to overcome their internal fractiousness and innate suspicion of economics and work together in a constructive way to agree priorities to improve the natural environment we

leave to the next generations. But he recognises that “the chances of it happening are not good” with many existing bodies and interests fighting to preserve their own corners. What is needed is to keep the bulk of the population on-side, focussing at least initially on the urban part of the Plan, and making its key parts a “Universal Right for Citizens”, like clean drinking water and electricity. “The current and future generations are entitled to access to green spaces, to nature and the countryside, full stop.”

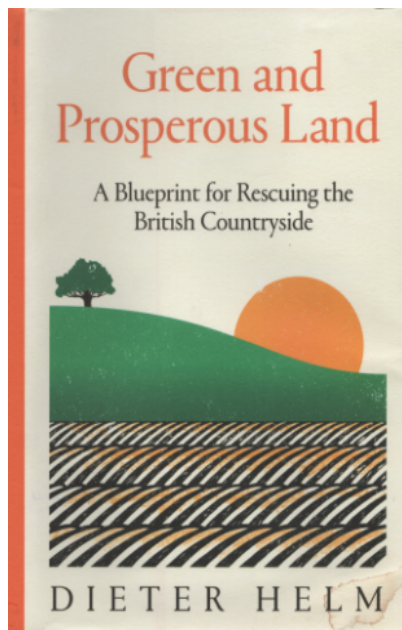
I am convinced that Helm is right that the country needs financial incentives to lead the people who have the clout to make the improvements we can all see the uplands need. One major difficulty with economic incentives is the unforeseen side-effect, the perverse and unintended

consequence, and the way to minimise the impact of these is to retain flexibility, to be able to adjust the plan to keep the outcomes constructive.

This book is a bold call for big action. The current approach to the environment and the economy is mired in decades of bureaucracy and vested interests, but he says that although the politics are complicated, the solutions are not. The country would benefit if our policy makers and committed conservationists read it and acted on its ideas.

“Green and Prosperous Land – A Blueprint for rescuing the British Countryside”, Dieter Helm, William Collins, 2019, £20

*Review by Tim Ambrose,
SWLG Treasurer*



Wild Land Areas: SWLG Policy

In 2014 Scottish Natural Heritage (now NatureScot) identified 42 Wild Land Areas in Scotland which are listed below. SWLG has drafted a policy for these areas which is given on page 11. Page 12 is a *proforma* letter of objection to the relevant local authority for members to use if they have found out about an inappropriate development being proposed for a Wild Land Area. This letter will need to be modified once the Government has finalised its new planning policy (NPF4).

TABLE OF WILD LAND AREAS 2014

Map No.	WILD LAND AREA	Total area (ha)
1.	Merrick	8,176
2.	Talla- Hart fell	9,335
3.	North Arran	11,751
4.	Waterhead Moor - Muirshiel	5,016
5.	Jura, Scarba Lunga and Garvellachs	27,862
6.	Ben Lui	14,497
7.	Ben More - Ben Ledi	21,213
8.	Ben More, Mull	8,720
9.	Loch Etive mountains	50,674
10.	Breadalbane - Schiehallion	44,840
11.	Lyon - Lochay	7,297
12.	Ben Lawers	8,143
13.	Moidart - Ardgour	37,355
14.	Rannoch - Nevis - Mamores - Alder	118,042
15.	Cairngorms	157,225
16.	Lochnagar - Mount Keen	53,583
17.	Rum	6,957
18.	Kinlochhourn - Knoydart - Morar	106,505
19.	Braeroy - Glenshirra - Creag Meagaidh	26,460
20.	Monadhliath	33,978
21.	South Uist hills	10,005
22.	Duirinish	4,469
23.	Cuillin	18,324
24.	Central Highlands	132,703
25.	Applecross	13,662
26.	Coulin & Ledgowan Forest	20,867
27.	Flowerdale - Shieldaig - Torridon	31,782
28.	Fisherfield - Letterewe - Fannichs	80,441
29.	Rhiddoroch - Beinn Dearg - Ben Wyvis	90,467
30.	Harris - Uig hills	45,270
31.	Eisgein	14,197
32.	Inverpolly - Glencanisp	20,544
33.	Quinag	10,446
34.	Reay - Cassley	55,997
35.	Ben Klibreck - Armine Forest	53,023
36.	Causeymire -Knockfin Flows	51,404
37.	Foinaven - Ben Hee	56,907
38.	Ben Hope - Ben Loyal	22,085
39.	East Halladale Flows	15,899
40.	Cape Wrath	22,106
41.	Hoy	4,990
42.	Ronas Hill & North Roe	4,110
	TOTAL	1,537,326

WILD LAND AREAS IN SCOTLAND

Background

NatureScot has identified the 42 wildest areas of Scotland as Wild Land Areas (WLAs). Of these areas, NatureScot states:

“Large areas of Scotland – chiefly in the north and west – have largely semi-natural landscapes that show minimal signs of human influence. These may be mountains and moorland, undeveloped coastline or peat bog.

Our wild land:

- is a big part of Scotland’s identity
- brings significant economic benefits – attracting visitors and tourists
- offers people psychological and spiritual benefit
- provides increasingly important havens for Scotland’s wildlife

Surveys have shown widespread support for safeguarding these landscapes. See, for example, the 2012 Public Perception Survey of Wildness in Scotland.

‘Wild land area’ describes the most extensive areas of high wildness. It is not a statutory designation, but wild land areas are considered nationally important.”

Further information about WLAs, including maps and descriptions of each one, can be found on the NatureScot website [at https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape/landscape-policy-and-guidance/landscape-policy-wild-land](https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape/landscape-policy-and-guidance/landscape-policy-wild-land)

SWLG Policy Statement

The Scottish Wild Land Group fully supports NatureScot’s identification of the 42 Wild Land Areas, but believes that identification of these is only the first stage. There is continuing attrition of these areas from new infrastructure being developed within them, including tracks, dams, wind turbines and fences. If wild areas are to be retained for future generations to enjoy, then stricter protection is needed. Hence SWLG strongly believes:

- Greater emphasis needs to be given to ‘wildness’ in planning decisions, with a strong presumption against any new infrastructure which will impact on the wildness of the Wild Land Areas.
- Wild Land Areas need strong legal protection, provided by a new Act of Parliament giving them statutory protection. Without such protection, SWLG believes attrition of WLAs will continue so that, over time, few tracts of wild land will be left in Scotland.
- SWLG supports any action by local authorities to use the planning system to defend Wild Land Areas against inappropriate development.
- Not all action which undermines wild land is controllable through the local authority planning system, in particular new hill tracks and commercial forestry. These activities in Wild Land Areas need to be brought under democratic control.
- SWLG will strongly support any landowner or land manager who wishes to increase the wildness of areas by removing inappropriate infrastructure, including hill tracks and fences.

Suggested template objection letter for development in a Wild Land Area. See also <https://www.nature.scot/doc/assessing-impacts-wild-land-areas-technical-guidance>

Note: Standard letters of objection perhaps have less impact than more personal letters. Hence the template below is a guide for the content to include and can be tailored to your own personal style. Content needs to be focussed on planning policy. Once the new National Planning Framework 4 is published, the content will need to be adjusted to take account of what it says about wild land.

[Relevant planning official address]

[Name]
Scottish Wild Land Group
[Address]
[Date]

OBJECTION TO [name of development & planning reference no.]

Dear [name of planner or planning dept]

The Scottish Wild Land Group objects to this development owing to its siting within [or adjacent to] a Wild Land Area. Wild land is important in planning terms, as stated in the National Planning Framework 3: “4.4 Scotland’s landscapes are spectacular, contributing to our quality of life, our national identity and the visitor economy. Landscape quality is found across Scotland and all landscapes support place-making ... We also want to continue our strong protection for our wildest landscapes – wild land is a nationally important asset.”

[If a wind farm add: “3.23 ... We do not wish to see wind farm development in our National Parks and National Scenic Areas. Scottish Planning Policy sets out the required approach to spatial frameworks which will guide new wind energy development to appropriate locations, taking into account important features including wild land.”]

Additionally, Scottish Planning Policy (2014) recognises Wild Land Areas as “Areas of significant protection”, and goes on to say “200. Wild land character is displayed in some of Scotland’s remoter upland, mountain and coastal areas, which are very sensitive to any form of intrusive human activity and have little or no capacity to accept new development.”

“215. ... consideration will be required to demonstrate that any significant effects on the qualities of these areas can be substantially overcome by siting, design or other mitigation.”

This proposed development in [adjacent to] WLA [give no. & name from <https://www.nature.scot/doc/wild-land-areas-map-and-descriptions-2014>] will inevitably have significant impacts on the quality of this WLA, resulting in visual and physical intrusion, and so contributing to the loss of the wild land quality for which this WLA was originally designated [if time allows, relate to the actual qualities given for this WLA taken from the above NatureScot website]. It will be impossible to conceal the proposed infrastructure from those visiting the WLA to experience its wild land character, and hence this development will result in the continuing attrition of a nationally important asset. The effect of ‘attrition’ was recognised in the earlier National Planning Framework 2: “The cumulative effects of small-scale changes require as much attention as large developments with immediately obvious impacts.” This proposal is certainly a large proposal, inevitably contributing to the continuing attrition of WLAs [modify this sentence if a small proposal].”

Yours sincerely, member of SWLG

[xxx]

James Fenton

Wildness in the Arctic. Wildness in Scotland. Is it the same?

The Arctic is remote to us living in Europe, although in the news a lot owing to the impact of climate change: we hear that it is warming faster than most other parts of the planet, that the the cover of Arctic pack ice is decreasing year by year, that polar bears are under threat, that the Greenland ice sheet is melting rapidly, with the capability of flooding much of the planet... All is doom and gloom!

Ecological characteristics of the Arctic

This may all be true, but these are not the issues I will be discussing here. Instead I will be concentrating on its wildness and comparing it with the wildness of Scotland. But first of all, where exactly is the Arctic? There are, in fact, various definitions. It can be defined as anywhere north of the Arctic Circle at 66°33' North, that is the

latitude north of which the sun never rises in winter or sets in the summer for at least some of the days of the year. The further north you go, the greater the length of the midnight sun or the midwinter gloom. However, this definition includes locations with very different climates at the same latitude: for example, the mild oceanic west coast of northern Norway and the continental climate of northern Canada.

Another definition of the Arctic, the ecological definition, is determined by the presence of Arctic vegetation, that is, open, unwooded tundra; in other words the area north of the climatic tree line where the temperature of the warmest month is less than 10°C (too cold for trees to grow). The microclimate of the ground surface, however, is often more than 10°, enabling the low growing tundra

The ecological definition of the Arctic is the area north of the climatic treeline

The permanent pack ice covering the Arctic Ocean is declining in extent year by year





*Tundra vegetation in Svalbard,
beyond the climate limit for trees*

plants to thrive, including horizontally-growing species of willow. With this definition, only the very northern tip of Norway with its tundra vegetation is in the Arctic, although well north of the Arctic Circle; and southern Greenland and the northern half of Hudson Bay are in the Arctic although well south of the Circle.

The ecology of the Arctic differs from that of the Antarctic. There is tundra vegetation on the fringes of the Antarctic, but overall the continent is much colder owing to the presence of a high altitude ice sheet covering the South Pole. In contrast, in the north there is only the much smaller Greenland ice sheet with the North Pole at the centre of an ocean. Hence the Arctic has warmer summers than the Antarctic making it more conducive to vegetation growth; it should be noted, though, that because cold air holds less moisture, much of the Arctic has a very dry climate (a cold desert), making the absence of water more of a limiting factor for plants than summer temperature.

It has been known for years that the treeless Arctic has been declining in

extent: in northern Canada trees have been moving north with the result that, in winter, reflective snow is being replaced by dark trees which absorb rather than reflect the solar radiation. Additionally, trees are three dimensional allowing more solar radiation to be collected compared to relatively two-dimensional tundra vegetation. This results in localised warming and a positive feedback loop: the warmer the air, the more trees, and the more trees, the warmer the air.

This illustrates an important point: there is more to global warming mitigation than carbon storage in vegetation: the effect of vegetation on the reflectivity of the land surface, that is its 'albedo', needs also to be taken into account, particularly at high latitudes. This has implications for tree planting in Scotland on open moorland: does the carbon storage gain from the wood in the trees override the localised warming from reduced albedo (not to mention also the oxidising effect of tree roots on soil carbon)?



The indigenous population survived by sustainable harvesting of the larger animals, here musk oxen

Impact of human populations

If wild land is defined as the areas of the planet with minimal human impact, then much of the Arctic is very wild indeed, particularly the land. Until recent years it was a subsistence economy, the local people surviving on what wildlife they could harvest with traditional weapons, or, in the case of the eastern Arctic, from reindeer herding. The terrestrial wildlife of most use to humans, particularly musk ox and reindeer/caribou, was mobile and seasonal so that the people had to move with it. And likewise, the availability of marine life, of seals, whales and polar bears, tended to be seasonal. Hence the landscape was unsuited to the development of large, static settlements, instead the people were dispersed at low density around mobile camps.

Additionally, the populations came and went as the climate varied in the postglacial era, and if people over-exploited a resource they would have starved. Even the large scale trapping of Arctic foxes by the Hudson's Bay Company is unlikely to have resulted in a long-term impact on fox numbers. But overall, a sustainable and minimal impact lifestyle, although it is possible that hunting contributed to the demise of the woolly mammoth.

In terms of the vegetation, the Arctic is unsuited to agriculture because the ground is frozen for much of the year and there is low soil fertility. This latter is caused by the low soil temperature (due to underlying permafrost) inhibiting the bacteria that might otherwise cycle nutrients such as nitrogen. This can be demonstrated under bird cliffs where bird droppings fertilise the soil, resulting in the few patches of green visible in the Arctic. Although there would have been some harvesting of berries and roots, the human population relied on the herbivores to harvest the plants, and then people harvested the animals. This is a very similar situation to that in the UK uplands where nutrients are limiting owing to the podsolisation of the soil (unmixed soils without worms), and the possibility of growing crops other than grass is very limited.

There is a similarity between Arctic tundra and Scottish moorland



Arctic soils are infertile: the only green areas are those fertilised by bird droppings below bird cliffs



Hence, with no forestry and no agriculture, the Arctic vegetation pattern is one of the most natural remaining in the world, the pattern of plants never having been determined by humans. Likewise, there is still the full complement of small herbivores such as voles, lemmings and hares, large ones (reindeer/caribou, musk oxen) and predators (wolves, bears).

There is a similarity here with the upland vegetation of the British Isles, particularly of the Highlands, where the pattern of upland vegetation until recent years has never been consciously determined – in complete contrast to the lowlands which have been actively managed for centuries. Certainly over the past hundred years or so, moorland in the east of Scotland has been managed to encourage heather; but these areas would naturally be heather moorland, management or not, so that, although grouse moor management in the Highlands (burning) certainly changes

the small-scale pattern of vegetation, it has not resulted in heather being dominant in places where it would not naturally be present. And, unlike most of Europe, Scotland has retained a significant population of large herbivores (the red deer) throughout the postglacial period, in the same way that the Arctic has maintained its reindeer/caribou and musk ox herds. Scotland has lost the wolf, although, as in the Arctic, this is unlikely to have significantly affected the overall herbivore numbers. As far as the small animals are concerned, Scotland has never had lemmings but has kept its voles, hares and foxes.

Low latitude tundra?

Hence the Scottish moorland vegetation of grassland, heath and bog has many affinities with that of the Arctic and can be seen as a kind of tundra vegetation. Both tundra and temperate moorland soils are of low fertility with unmixed soils, that is, with organic matter accumulating at

Scottish moorland and Arctic tundra share many birds in common



the surface – which is why peat bogs are common in both the Arctic and Scotland.

The open, unwooded nature of both attracts breeding waders such as dunlin and golden plover, and also geese – although in Scotland geese numbers are likely to have been significantly reduced by past harvesting, and are only now increasing. The upland moorland vegetation of the British Isles, in effect tundra brought down to low latitudes, is internationally important as wader breeding sites. If trees are added to the landscape then wader populations are liable to decline further owing to woodland encouraging predators such as crows and foxes.

Much of the Arctic is relatively flat, resulting in large, sweeping views and wide horizons. There is nothing,

whether tree or human artefact, to detract from a great feeling of space and from being in place where nature is very much still in charge. A very similar experience can be had in the less rugged areas of Highland Scotland – the moors of Lewis, the peatlands of the Flow Country, or Rannoch Moor – and even on the Pennine Moors, made evocative by the plaintive call of the golden plover. These open moorland landscapes provide a complete contrast to those of most of Europe, adding a diversity to the continent. And, after all, one of the aims of the European Landscape Convention (of which Scotland is a signatory) is to maintain such a diversity of landscapes, to prevent a homogenisation of landscapes, to prevent everywhere looking the same.

And, like the Arctic, the human population of the Highlands has always been low and concentrated around the coast, the sea being one of the main sources of food. Similarly, over most of history, some of the interior was never populated and what settlements there were, were small.

Scottish moorland vegetation has many affinities with Arctic tundra, here in Wester Ross



But what about the trees?

Many would argue that the moorland vegetation of the Highlands, unlike the Arctic tundra, is not a natural vegetation pattern at all, for it is south of the climatic treeline and would have been covered in trees if people and their animals had not destroyed all the forest. However, whatever you hear or read, there is very little evidence of widespread human destruction of native forest in the Highlands, and an open, unwooded moorland landscape is what you would expect at this, the oligocratic phase of postglacial plant succession – 10,000 years after an ice age. Indeed, woodland only occurring in isolated pockets could be seen as a key biodiversity feature of the Highlands – but a discussion for another day ...

Not everywhere is wild

But there is one environment in both areas which can no longer be said to be wild and untouched: the sea. In the past, the indigenous people exploited the sea in order to survive in a hostile environment, but without modern technology their inroads into marine life could not endanger whole

ecosystems. All this all changed with the advent of whaling by European nations, starting in the 1600s, and the later development of industrial fishing practices. Hence the Arctic Ocean and the surrounding seas can no longer be said to be natural ecosystems, except perhaps under the permanent ice – which is shrinking every year. Whales, fish and shellfish are all depleted, although there are still plentiful seals and polar bears. Indeed, both walrus and polar bears have been increasing in recent years owing to the cessation of hunting.

—————
The seas are over-exploited even in the Arctic
—————

There are, though, long-term threats to some currently wild areas in the Arctic, in particular the opening up of new mines to extract the minerals and rare earths essential to the modern way of life, including for the renewables industry – for example, lithium. Greenland and other areas are being surveyed and there is already a mine in northern Baffin Island producing high grade iron ore. As well as providing the world with much needed raw materials, such development may well be necessary to provide an income for the local people whose subsistence way of life is no



*Arctic tundra has many affinities with Scottish moorland, here in west Greenland. For example, the bog cotton here on a peat bog is the same species as found in Scotland (*Eriophorum angustifolium*).*

The military DEW line in Arctic Canada. This also shows how much of the tundra landscape is very flat.



longer viable. The Antarctic Treaty places a moratorium on industrial exploitation in Antarctica and also prohibits military activity there. There is no such treaty covering the Arctic, with each Arctic nation vying to exploit its riches.

Global politics can also result in a loss of wildness, with, for example, the early warning Arctic DEW line across Arctic Canada and northern Greenland resulting in military infrastructure in remote areas, and this is currently being resurrected because of Russia's aggression. And Russia itself has filled its side of the Arctic with military bases and carried out nuclear testing in the past with, it is said, various abandoned nuclear submarines. In northern Europe, Norway has been expanding its presence on Svalbard, partly to maintain a political presence in the area, and the archipelago is now hidebound by a plethora of regulations compared to a decade or so ago:


necessary, perhaps, to control the ever-increasing number of tourists to Arctic regions.

Although in recent decades settlements in the Arctic have expanded, with the subsistence way of life dying out (as it has in the Highlands), the area is vast with great tracts of uninhabited wilderness. The area is not particularly hospitable to humans. After all, who wants to live in a landscape where no food can be grown, where it is dark much of the year and tens of degrees below freezing and with no shelter from the punishing winds? It is also an expensive and energy intensive place to reach and supply.

The wildness of the Arctic is enhanced by the presence of predators, that is polar and grizzly bears, who are perfectly happy to eat humans when hungry. This adds a hard edge to the experience if away from settlements.



*A settlement in Arctic Canada.
The old way of life is dying out.*



*An iron ore carrier in Eclipse Sound from
a mine in northern Baffin Island*


In conclusion, the Arctic, because of its sheer size, is likely to keep most of its wildness, particularly if strong environmental protection is enforced. There will, of course, be changes caused by melting ice and local warming, but this will not affect its wildness. The exception is likely to be the Arctic Ocean: as the ice melts, experience elsewhere in the world suggests that its protection may not be so achievable.

The British Isles are obviously not so big as the Arctic, but wildness similar to that found there is still hanging on by its fingertips: open, tundra-like vegetation with minimal human infrastructure, albeit with an absence

of predators who might eat you. This is concentrated in Scotland's Wild Land Areas, but, unlike the Arctic there is little space for both infrastructure and wild land to coexist: it has to be one or the other. Which is it to be?

James Fenton's first job was a polar ecologist studying peat growth in the Antarctic, where there is peat up to three metres thick and 5,000 years old. Since then he has travelled to the Arctic many times, leading ski expeditions, lecturing on small expedition ships and just as a tourist. He has recently completed the third edition of his 'Field Guide to Ice.' He is editor of Wild Land News.

All photos James Fenton



*A polar bear, symbol of the Arctic, eating a seal on an
iceberg in Svalbard. Not yet under threat, but the future?*

David Jarman

A path on the wild side *between Shiel and Quoich over Bealach Duibh Leac*

As a change from rattling the cages of the Philistines, our usually-absent sage just follows a dashed line over a high pass, and ruminates on the fluidity of 'the wild', not to mention how we perceive it.

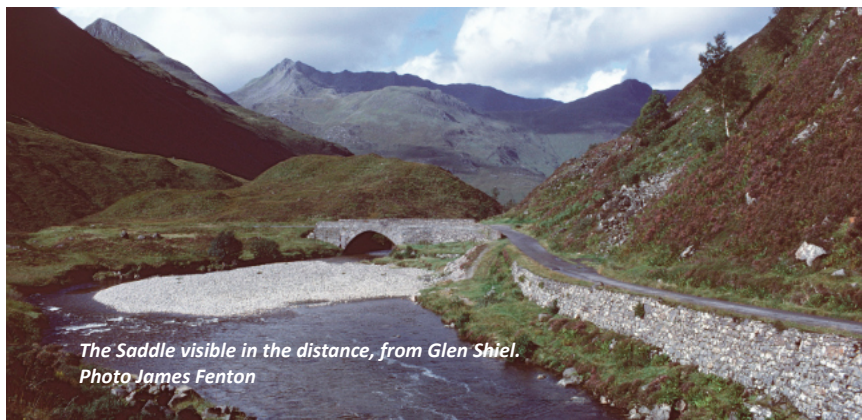
Going through Glen Shiel, there is always a ribbon of cars down at Malagan Bridge. Nearly all are doing An Diollaid – The Saddle, perhaps making a circuit by Sgùrr na Sgine and Faochag, the 'whelk'. Steep, spectacular, narrow in places, 'wild' hills in their roughness, but hardly remote or away from it all. We might ask, how 'wild' is Ben Nevis, with an engineered pony path to its summit since Victorian times, encouraging a plethora of visitors?

A few people may be taking the mapped path which strikes inland south from Drochaid Mhalagain (Malagan Bridge) – probably because

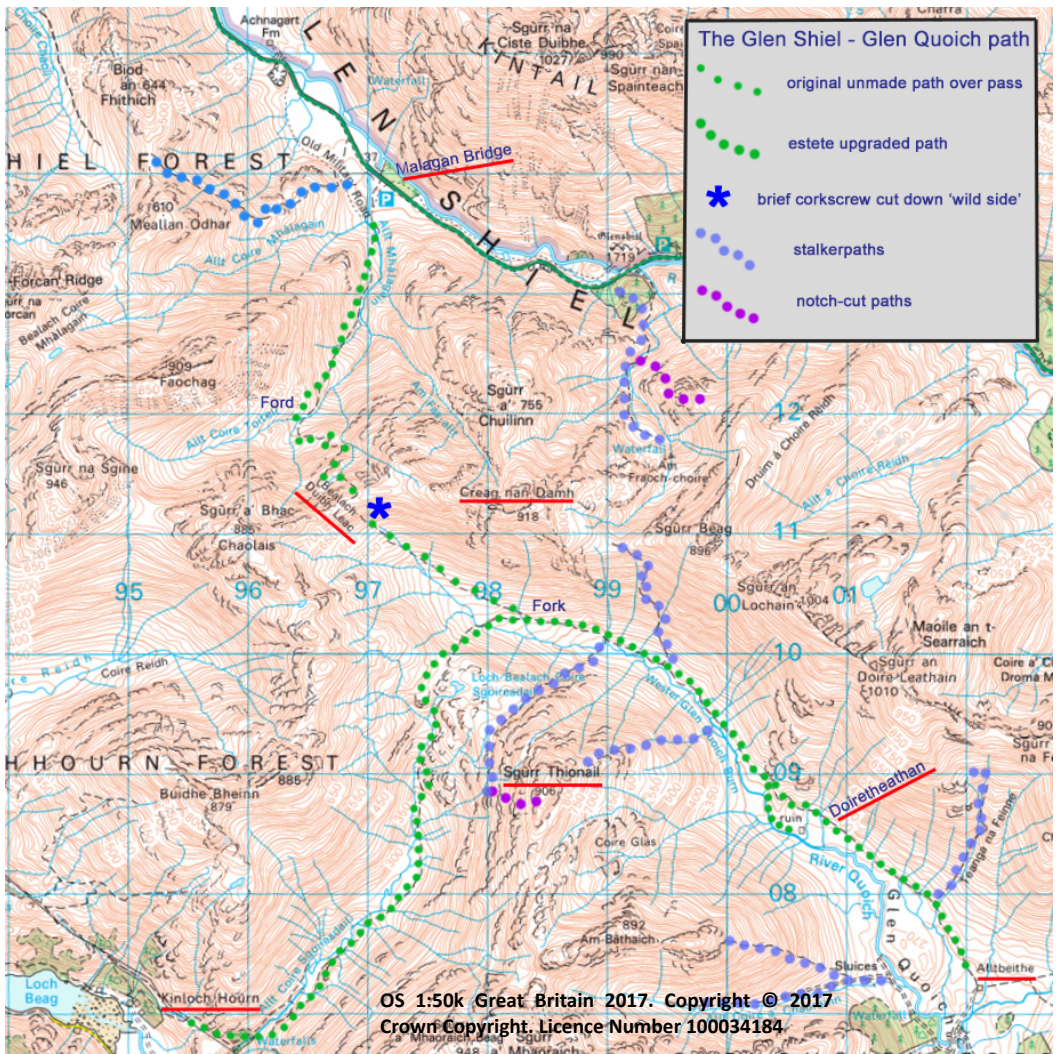
they have missed out the westmost Munro on their South Cluanie Ridge traverse, Creag nan Damh; or perhaps they are hiking the rocky crest out to the Corbett, Beinn Buidhe. Either way, this path is taking them to an unusually high pass, Bealach Duibh Leac, at 730 m almost Corbett height itself – and rising from almost sea level in Glen Shiel.

Only the occasional stravaiger – or coast-to-coaster – will follow the mapped path over the pass on down 'the wild side' into the head of Wester Glen Quoich (1) and through to Glen Garry. Yet this must once have been a regularly walked route, when Glen Quoich was inhabited (2) as their only way to the amenities and communications of the west coast at Loch Duich.

Here the character of this path becomes fascinating. For the last few years we – at 'mountain path



*The Saddle visible in the distance, from Glen Shiel.
Photo James Fenton*



research’ – have been exploring the concept of the “stalkers path” (add apostrophe to taste), on which very little seems to have been published, and for the making of which almost no historical records or references have come to light (not that diligent delving in dim archives is our forté, we prefer to be up and at ‘em). All suggestions and contributions, including pictorial, welcome. Our research has focussed

on the cross-section of the Western Highlands comprising Area 9 of the Original Munro Tables, just north of here, but the essentials hold good. (3)

Before the advent of the sporting estates, there were no made paths in the mountain areas, nor wheeled vehicles (sleds might be used locally, but such goods as were transported went on backs – ponies or people).

The Glen Shiel side - the made path comes up here to the Ford, a worn path wends up ramps through the crags to Bealach Duibh Leac on the skyline



Worn trods and tracks evolved where traffic of hoof and foot dictated – often intermittent or braided. The so-called Drove Roads were not man-made, simply worn. The 18th century Military Roads – as through Glen Shiel – were revolutionary, but exceptional. Even in the sheep-ranching era, with new shepherds houses built in many ‘remote’ glens, no reason was seen to make tracks to them.

The typical sporting estate would require firstly a carriage road up the glen, then pony paths to get the guests up into the hills in small gigs or on horseback (not just for extracting carcasses), and finally stalkerpaths proper zigzagging on higher – for the sportsmen and sportswomen of course, if to a lesser extent than one might imagine, but also, we are coming to suspect, for recreation (4). Good healthy walks were dear to the Victorian lifestyle – and needful to sustain appetites for all those huge meals.

Generally, these estates were self-contained, and apart from their way in, would not build paths across their

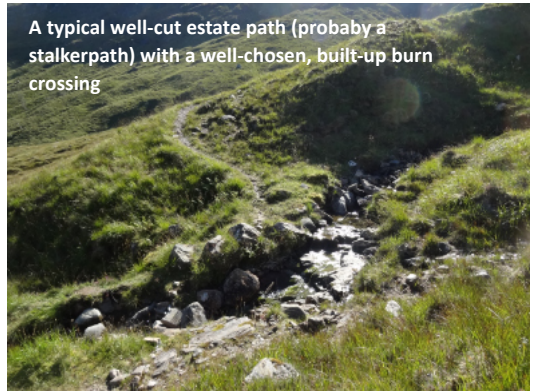
boundaries (an intriguing exception is a pony path from Glen Affric Lodge over a high pass to the drowned Benula Lodge, cut at much steeper gradients than typical stalkerpaths, and suggesting a desire for social intercourse), by pony not foot).

Worn or made?

So here we are at Bealach Duibh Leac entering the Glenquoich Estate, which Grimble (5) singles out for its vast network of tracks and paths, radiating from its grand Lodge (also hydro-drowned). This network is unusually slow to take shape on the OS map sequence <https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore> – possibly as the new ‘lairds’ could be secretive – but in the Wester Glen alone comprises several zigzag paths up both sides, and a pony path over Bealach Coire Sgoireadail round to Kinloch Hourn.

The first OS map, the 1875 Six-Inch, shows none of these – but it does show a through path over Bealach Duibh Leac between Glen Quoich and Malagan Bridge, with a branch down to the shepherds house at

A typical well-cut estate path (probably a stalkerpath) with a well-chosen, built-up burn crossing



Doireleathan midway along the Wester Glen. This branch comes in not from down-glen as one might expect and would have been easier, but from up-glen, suggesting their umbilical link was over the high pass to Kintail, not down to Glen Garry (6).

So was this early path worn or made? On the Glen Shiel side, the map route zigzags boldly up through crag-bands to the pass, apparently in best stalkerpath swagger. But although imagery shows quite a sharp line, it lacks conclusive tell-tales of path-making, even on zooming in close. And while we had followed it decades ago, en route to the missed-out Munro, that was long before we became sensitised to cundies, borrow-pits, and run-off ditches.

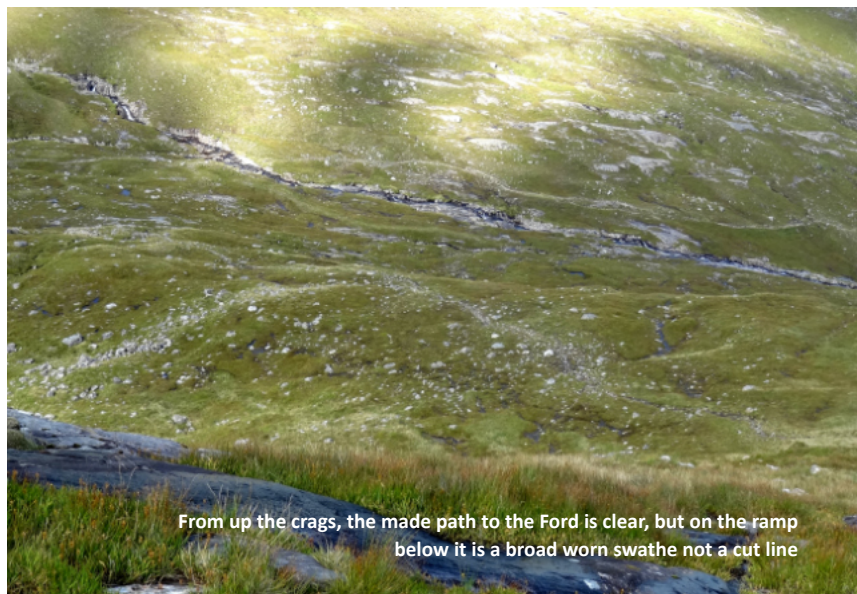
On the Quoich side, things seem more clear-cut: imagery shows the estate

pony-path coming up the Wester Glen then deviating to cross the burn and go over to Kinloch Hourn. Its obvious signature of making is very different from the worn and braided old path which carries on up to Bealach Duibh Leac.

This summer, a revisit from Malagan Bridge is initially messy and confusing, but once out of the ravine finds increasing evidence of a made pony path up the Allt Mhalagain (7). Even so, its heavily deteriorated state attests either to cheapskate making or west-coast bucketings-down, or both. But this made line fades out below Coire Toiteil at a major fording point (probably impassable in spate). Following the map line beyond, a large cairn marks a sharp turnback to the Bealach; we are sorry to confess, from our youthful Cromwellian-Taliban



From up the crags, the made path to the Ford is clear, but on the ramp below it is a broad worn swathe not a cut line



From up the crags, the made path to the Ford is clear, but on the ramp below it is a broad worn swathe not a cut line

idol-smashing days, that we destroyed this cairn – not, diary says, out of rewilding zeal, but as it appeared to lead the unwary onwards to doom in the ravines. But cairns are organic and can regrow.

Back in the day, this map-path, although not then well-worn, had led us unerringly to the pass. Now we can confirm that there are few if any positive indications of human construction above the ford; rather, it bespeaks a close familiarity with terrain, folk over the years knitting together long shelves and ramps with short jinks-back to make relative light of a stern 350 m ascent, whether afoot or with beast of burden.

The far side of the pass is very different, no crags, just steep grassy slopes leading down into the head of Quoich, where a worn line can just be seen along the drier ground of glacial

malagans. Although our business today is again with Creag nan Damh, we can take a moment to drop down the headslope, searching the trend of the map-path for any trace of a once-followable line, whether cut by estate workers or worn by man and beast. With our still-growing knowledge of the 85 paths in Area 9 of Munro's Tables (as were), we have become adept at spying them out, amidst mimicking deer trods and geological lineaments.

Our boots however have their own sensory capacities, and start twisting and turning of their own volition, corkscrewing down really quite tightly and neatly. Once is happenstance, Mr Bond ... but thrice is purposeful intent. Yet down on a little rocky outpost with open slopes below, looking back up, there is still no visible path. The old boots are put to the scent and sure enough wynd back up those delicate

twists (hmm, maybe we'll keep them going a bit longer, even though they have lost most of their front teeth). They seem to have found a wee bit "Path on the Wild Side", after all.

So, in 1875 there was a mappable worn trod over the pass between Shiel-side ford and Quoich-side fork, if hardly so now on the latter, you wouldn't navigate by it in mist or snow. But it has this short stretch of cut path up the grassy headwall, this almost-vanished blip: why?

For a possible answer, we can look across Wester Glen Quoich to that lovely and seriously remote hill Sgùrr Thionail (8). It has a pony path to its foot, a mapped stalkerpath to its midriff, and a remarkable and unmapped extension to the very summit, hardly a spade-spit of a notch wide. Likewise north of Creag nan Damh, a mapped and made path

comes in above the ravine to a ford, whence a vertiginous cut groove spirals up a shoulder of Sgùrr Beag. Both these unmapped notches have an alpiniste quality, for entertainment as much as sport – and many a new laird or his friends will have enjoyed such by now in the Alps. Both make light of what looks impregnable. Both are ad hoc, only cut where needed. Could our corkscrewing fragment, our Path on the Wild Side, albeit a mere notch, be by the same hand, speeding passage onto an enjoyable ridge circuit for estate guests, rather than for heavy-duty deer stalking? It can hardly have been cut just to ease the crossing for glenfolk at their messages.

So which is the wild side?

At Bealach Duibh Leac, there is a sharp if ambivalent transition, solidly delineated on map and ground by a drystone dyke from the sheep era. Wild and rocky on the north, rather

Bealach Duibh Leac, looking west: the Path on the Wild Side follows the prominent moraine just beyond the gully in the sun (thinly worn, not made), then ascends the pale grass headwall





Wester Glen Quoich, with Sgùrr Thionail beyond: the estate path forks to cross the river and over the low pass to Kinloch Hourn (all just in the sunshine). Doireleathan is far left

tame and grassy within Quoich — or accessible and tamed by constant passage on the north, rather remote and unfrequented on the south.

That switch has oscillated over history. Glen Quoich seems to have been uninhabited (8) before the sheep era, apart from a few shielings around Doireleathan (and probably unrecorded at Alltbeithe), while lower Glen Shiel is densely settled on the Roy map. Conversely, during the sheep-ranching boom, Quoich would have been alive with sheep, herds and dogs.

Into the sporting estate era, and a path network conspicuously raw when fresh-cut, densely within Quoich if sparser and more ad hoc Kintail-side. If done today, some might say they were desecrating wild spaces, yet these stalkerpaths, only a yard or two wide,

have receded to near-invisibility, save in sharply-angled sun or fine snow; now, they are historical artefacts of great craft and even beauty. Almost in disuse here, they accentuate the wildness.

But a fresh network of tracks has suddenly sprung up within this ‘wilder side’, conspicuously raw and likely to remain prominent far into the future. This network radiates not from the Lodge but from an electricity sub-station nearby. The estate now taps unearned ‘waterfall profits’ from every other burn and trickle in this catchment. The Death-of-River hydro scheme here is one of the most egregiously offensive we have yet seen. Neither the philistine owners nor the overstretched planners have secured restoration of the web of crudely bulldozed tracks up to weirs

which do not require any regular vehicular access to keep them clear, as some better-handled sites prove possible.

Notes

(1) Our topographical overlords in Southampton have renamed the grim reservoir Loch Cuaich but display inconsistency (or a tin ear) for its other anglicised manifestations (Quoich); no surprise there, we do wonder why the OS was never devolved, a Fort William base would have been nice and central for our landmass...

(2) As were most such glens at various points in time, however seemingly inhospitable today, 300 metres up in the wet west

(3) See <https://nosasblog.wordpress.com/2021/12/15/the-glencarron-lodge-stalkers-paths/> for an intriguing case study and a link to our NOSAS Report, datasheet and slideset – or email us.

(4) We commend our neologism 'stalkerpath' to keeping reminding us of their multiple purposes; they were never

called suchlike anyway – they were pony paths until hillgoers were allowed in to discover them; and stalkerpath solves the apostrophe problem.

(5) Deer Forests of Scotland 1896 – invaluable and available online at <https://archive.org/details/deerforestsofsco00grimrich>

(6) It is possible that in the pre-sporting era, the Glen Shiel lands or sheep tack included at least the north side of Glenquoich, as another such path comes over from Cluanie into the Easter Glen

(7) A universal name hereabouts – yet no obvious meaning; Am Faclair Beag soundalikes suggest a bog plant or small heaps, drumlins even

(8) At 906m it is neither Munro nor Corbett, thus blissfully unvisited and thus 'wild' ... or is it?

(8) Canmore and HER <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG22999> website maps, Roy map (which shows peasant dwellings in many a glen).

David is a long-time member of SWLG.

Photos: David Jarman



The superbly engineered stalkerpath out of Wester Glen Quoich to the foot of Sgùrr Thionail

60
TISO

1962 - 2022
**SIXTY
YEARS OF
ADVENTURE**



1988, TISO CO-FOUNDERS: GRAHAM AND MAUDE TISO. IMAGE TAKEN BY CHRIS TISO IN SVALBARD

VISIT OUR STORES IN ABERDEEN

AVIEMORE | DUNDEE | EDINBURGH | GLASGOW
GLENTRESS | INVERNESS | KESWICK | PERTH

   @tisononline



Geared up for the outdoors

Membership request

I wish to join SWLG: Individual £10 Two at same address £15
 Corporate £50 Reduced £5 (Senior Citizen, unwaged, under 18)

Name (s):

Address:

Postcode:

E-mail:

- I wish to pay by Standing Order and have set this up with my bank online
- I wish to pay by Standing Order and have filled in the form below
- I wish to pay by cheque (Please make payable to SWLG and send it along with this form)
- I have included an additional donation to the Scottish Wild Land Group of £

I would like to receive free copies of Wild Land News:

- By e-mail (this helps us keep our printing, postage and carbon footprint costs to a minimum)
- By post

By completing and returning this form you are agreeing that the Scottish Wild Land Group can hold the above information on its database for use by the organisation only; the information will not be divulged to third parties. The Group's data protection policy is on its website: www.swlg.org.uk

To the manager of

Please pay SWLG the sum of £ annually until further notice, starting on

Please debit my account: Sort code: Account number

This supersedes any existing order in favour of SWLG

Signed Date

FOR BANK USE: Payee sort code: 83-15-18 Account no.: 00257494

Gift Aid your subscription

If you are a UK taxpayer, you can increase the value of your subscription to the SWLG by 25% by Gift Aiding it. This costs you nothing. In order to Gift Aid your donation you must tick the box below:

- I want to Gift Aid my subscription of £ and any donations I make in the future or have made in the past 4 years to the Scottish Wild Land Group.

I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

Signed Date

Please notify us if you want to cancel this declaration, or if you change your address, or if you no longer pay sufficient tax on your income or capital gains. If you pay Income Tax at the higher or additional rate and want to receive the additional tax relief due to you, you should include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self-Assessment tax return or ask HM Revenue and Customs to adjust your tax code.

Please post this form to: Tim Ambrose, SWLG Treasurer, 8 Clevedon Road, Glasgow G12 0NT



Scottish Wild Land Group

Working to protect Scotland's species, environment and landscapes



Liathach by James Fenton

The objects of the Group are:

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

We campaign for:

- ✓ Protection and promotion of Scotland's wild land
- ✓ Safeguards against inappropriate wind farm and other developments
- ✓ Environmentally-sensitive land and wildlife management
- ✓ Planning controls on the spread of hill tracks
- ✓ Restoration of rare and missing species and environments
- ✓ Connection of habitats and protected areas to allow ecological recovery and species movements

We are Scotland's oldest and only volunteer-run wild land charity

Join us today at www.swlg.org.uk



Find us on facebook and twitter

