

WILD LAND NEWS

Summer 2009 No.73
Magazine of the Scottish
Wild Land Group



Registered Scottish charity: SC004014

FOCUS ON REWILDING

Peter Taylor, James Fenton,
Calum Brown, David Jarman

Wild songs and beating hearts

More on wild land mapping

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



Contents

Comment <i>Rob Mc Morran</i>	2
On the ethos of wildland <i>Peter Taylor</i>	4
The Scottish uplands: allowed to be wild? <i>James Fenton</i>	8
The basis for rewilding in Scotland <i>Calum Brown</i>	12
Can we imagine rewilding our Kintail forests? <i>David Jarman</i>	18
Irvine Butterfield 1936-2009 <i>John Digney</i>	22
Wild songs and beating hearts <i>Carol Lang</i>	24
More on mapping: letters to the Editor	28

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Comment

Rob Mc Morran (Co-ordinator)

Welcome to the 'new look' Summer 2009 edition of Wild Land News! This edition focuses on rewilding in Scotland; the relevance of the idea, what it means, key opportunities and even some proposed locations. Peter Taylor, author of *Beyond Conservation* and rewilding advocate, kicks us off with a heartfelt and imaginative plea for rewilding at a large scale. Like Peter, my own first experience of Scotland was of Rothiemurchus forest and the Cairngorms. I distinctly remem-

ber being a teenager, walking deep into the Cairngorms alone and feeling overawed by the bleakness and majesty of the place. It left a profound impression on me.

Peter highlights three key initiatives of relevance to so-called 'rewilding' approaches in Scotland. I share Peter's concerns regarding the Alladale initiative. It is perhaps of potential benefit in terms of rural development, but surely not the

approach to rewilding Scotland as a nation should pursue? In my first year living in Scotland I was shown a video of Alan Watson Featherstone (key proponent of the Trees for Life initiative) explaining how, in his opinion, most of the uplands constituted what Frank Fraser Darling referred to as a 'wet desert'. Since their inception, Trees for Life has achieved many of its early objectives; however, unlike Peter I am not always so sure the Trees for Life 'vision' is one I share. Must we always plant and fence and achieve human 'visions' of what landscapes 'should' be? Here, I find myself drawn to the somewhat unconventional, but nonetheless hugely important view of James Fenton. Why can we not let some of our landscapes fend for themselves and let time and the awesome powers of nature decide on how things 'should' be? I don't doubt the seed source is lacking in certain areas or that regeneration will be hindered by deer, but then perhaps sometimes it is not regard for nature that guides our actions, and instead a desire to 'see things happen' in our own lifetimes.

James's vision is followed by Calum Brown's own hugely convincing call for greater application of a 'rewilding' approach in Scotland. Calum, like Peter, mentions the big scary wolf and the incredible positive ecological impacts the re-introduction of this majestic creature has had in Yellowstone. Clearly, fear of the unknown or the misunderstood represents the biggest obstacle to any proposed re-introduction of such a creature. In both articles there is a strong sense of opportunity, of overcoming our

fears as individuals and as a society to experience something truly great.

In his article, David Jarman highlights some examples of Scottish sites with major potential for rewilding at a grand scale, to turn back past mistakes and address some of the loss of scenic grandeur and wild areas – which has been worryingly highlighted in the recent SNH report (see the 'Latest News' section of our new website). The place names 'Dorusdain' and the 'Falls of Glomach' are enough by themselves to bring visions of Tolkien's middle earth and a tangled web of ancient trees and mythical beasts. Clearly these are but a few of the many sites across Scotland which could benefit from a considered long-term 'rewilding' approach.

Finally, Carol Lang brings us on a personal journey and reveals the importance of thinking 'out of the box' when it comes to wild places in Scotland. Wild water and wild seas can represent a wilderness of unfathomable magnitude to many and can engender a respect for nature as profound as any mountain landscape. Carol's article, as with perhaps all of the articles in this edition, highlights the value of surrendering some control over our surrounding environment, whether it be by kayaking in high seas or by restoring keystone predators. The value that such loss of control can bring us as individuals through changing our own relationship with the rest of nature, and the value to society as a whole, in terms of realising our position within nature and gaining humility in the face of the wild.

On the ethos of wildland

by Peter Taylor

In the first of our articles focussing on rewilding, Peter Taylor considers three very different wild land initiatives in Scotland and show us the tremendous potential for the return of the truly wild world of predators.

When I first came to Scotland as a teenager and walked deep into the Rothiemurchus forest I had my first experience of the mystery that only deeply forested land can bring. The forest seemed to have no boundary. A day's hard walk with backpack and tent only scratched the surface. There was a glimpse of carpaillie among the heather understory, the canopy held exotic crossbills, and the pilgrim goal, the fabled ospreys of Loch Garten, were the ultimate sign of something truly wild and magical. Enchanted by that fostered return of an exterminated predator, I was pervaded by an inarticulate sense that humanity had rediscovered a part of itself. And when, decades later, the Scottish Executive permitted a funicular railway to the top of the Cairngorm plateau, my heart sank as if that fragile retrieval had failed. Scotland is like that for many conservationists south of the border – a screen upon which their deeper relationship to nature and to wildness is played out. It is not just a matter of scale, or iconic species, or vast open spaces, and not alone the harmonies of an ancient forest, but the rekindling of memory, of *relationship* to the wild – something the barren moors, the endless serried rows of plantation spruce, the stone walls, fences, droning roads and barrack housing that is the contained and ordered landscape of England can never retrieve.

Yet, Scotland's population is predominantly urban, highly educated, scientifically literate and globally significant in its contribution to the industrial world. The Highland and Islands Development Council readily agreed to sacrifice the wilds of Lewis for the benefits of a renewable energy supply – though thankfully a protest of reason and soul prevailed. But with a target of 30% renewable supplies in two decades, the wild Scottish landscape will become a distant memory. Thousands of giant aerospace propellers and hundreds of miles of transmission lines will re-power the cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow. The un-wild game of global economics and the modern myth of a low-carbon economy have captured the urban mind.

Where then the *wildland* movement and the shifting paradigm that stretches beyond conservation? Truly wild land will have shrunk to the protected zones of the John Muir Trust and the National Parks. In between will be the electro-technical landscape that reminds first and foremost of ecological peril and economic fragility. Wildland will become an escape zone, a recreational break where what is recreated hardly lasts 'til the next weekend.

Paul Lister's Alladale

Last September, with members of the

Wildland Network, I visited Alladale's developing wilderness centre. Paul Lister's dream was slowly taking shape with the transformation of the old hunting and fishing estate into a wildlife park along South African lines, with a large fence and an intended stock of animals to delight the paying visitors. Already wild boar (well, nearly wild) were foraging in large pens. Two rather lost-looking moose, trans-located from Sweden, occupied another pen. Ultimately, Lister wants wolf, bear and lynx to roam the enclosure in what would become a Pleistocene Park. He is at pains to point out that he does not see himself at the forefront of an ecological movement for the re-introduction of predators or exterminated herbivores like the moose and boar. He is a business man who loves the wild in that also archetypal Scottish way – of the privileged wealthy class who hunt and fish for sport and where all they survey is theirs for enjoyment, whether with friends, or in the new age of paying eco-safaris not so far removed from the economic strategies of English stately homes and their more exotic safari parks.

I was initially very open to the Alladale experiment. Much as I disliked the fence and bemoaned the unnecessary clash with local ramblers, I thought at least new ground was being broken – and there *was* a thrill in seeing even a penned-in moose peering out from Scottish birch and heather. And then there is the sneaky certainty of snow drifts and escape – for boar and moose, lynx and wolf. Backdoor re-introduction – it worked for the goshawk and for the Eng-

lish very wild boar population. But on visiting, it was the same heart-sinking feeling as with the funicular. Something was being lost. I could feel it in the new tracks, gates and fences, the new jobs, the special shop and visitor centre – it was the intrusion of a global idea of nature as something to visit, to pay for, with its attendant special eco-economy in support. And I could not help but wince watching a TV docudrama, with the proto-typical neighbouring English-accented estate owners clearly not inspired to shift any of their own paradigm of privileged access and traditional craft employment.

Glen Affric—Trees for Life

To the south in Glen Affric, Alan Watson Featherstone's vision with the Trees for Life group at Findhorn, ongoing since 1986, is quietly maturing. This vision has always been close to my heart, and Alan's commitment inspiring. It is a living demonstration of the power of holding a vision. Glen Affric is the core of a 1500 square-kilometre range of moor, forest and loch with no through-roads, little agriculture, few industrial intrusions, and a core of ancient Caledonian woodland. As early as the 1950s the Forestry Commission had committed to conserving the native pines and gradually removing the exotic conifers. Trees for Life (TfL) aided in that process, creating nursery enclosures, excluding deer, and planting up remote treeless hillsides. This inspired the National Trust for Scotland to purchase the West Affric estate and working with TfL begin the same process of restoration. Last year, the Findhorn group were able to buy the contiguous Guisa-



Wild boar released into a fenced enclosure at Alladale.

Photo: Alladale Wilderness Reserve

chan estate, and a large core area of landscape-scale wildland management took shape. There are now experimental pens for wild boar to investigate their potential as a forest management tool.

In all this time, Trees for Life have openly articulated their vision of a return to the original primeval forest complete with the predators – lynx, wolf and bear, even if it is fifty or one-hundred years hence. And though the rationale is conservationist and ecologically scientific, with its imperatives of ecosystem restoration, keystone species and moral (and even now legal) obligations, the essential purpose has always been the restoration of something human that had been lost. This, for me, is the real purpose of a wildland initiative – it goes beyond species composition and ecological function, and it cannot be measured or mapped, nor factored into a local economy. Some would argue that the wolf and the bear have their own right of return and a safe haven, that wildland should be free and ‘self-willed’ and in that I would concur, but in this modern world, it will happen only if we will it first. As with the moose, the wolf and bear will have to be translocated. I think the lynx has already

sneaked in through the backdoor, along with an assortment of rather larger cats.

Carrifran Wildwood

Further south, we visited Carrifran in the southern uplands. This is an area almost totally denuded of native forest with extensive over-grazed acid grassland and spruce plantation. At the turn of the millennium, the Borders Forest Trust instigated the now famous public subscription campaign to buy the 1000-acre valley and, after only a few years, the planting programme has borne fruit. The birch and alder are already at human height and the sense of a returning forest is palpable. And no new tracks, bothies, visitor centres, or experimental pens – just the footpath fading as we go higher.

This restoration project is also more than an ecological map. It has a constituency of souls nurtured by the knowledge that something very special is growing and they have contributed. And there is also a vision of new holdings and a more extensive wildland zone connecting to other valleys and across the border into the Northumberland National Park and Kielder Forest. Once such an extensive broadleaf forest returns, the animals and

birds would follow, including the return of large wild herbivores and their predators.

These are three very different models of 'development', all with something to contribute to the wildland ethos that goes beyond the normal conservation paradigm. And there are more large area initiatives – with the Woodland Trust in the Trossachs, RSPB and National Trust for Scotland with their contiguous holdings in the Cairngorms, and though each tends to stay within their traditional remit – whether it be trees, or birds, or the cultural landscape, they are also embracing the concepts of minimal management and intervention.

Scotland is thus blessed not just by landscape and iconic species, but with pioneering wildland initiatives and tremendous potential for larger core areas and corridors for the return of the truly wild world of predators. In this, humans derogate some power (however illusory and temporary that might have proven) and accept some risk, some sacrifice and economic penalty – which I advocate should be borne not by individual landowners, but the community at large. In Sweden, landowners are paid by the State for having breeding wolves, lynx or bear on their property and this works better than compensating for livestock losses.

Return of the 'big three'?

As we gathered at Findhorn, I among many other southern pilgrims among a mix of committed individuals, agencies and voluntary groups, all strategising the return of the 'big three' predators as the

next step without which wildland is not truly wild, I stepped out of the conservation paradigm to offer a shamanic prayer – much I think to the disconcert of those seeking to make re-introductions acceptable to the bureaucracy that would ultimately issue the licenses! We had asked, would the wolf return in our lifetime, or beyond, or never? I offered the thought that the wolf is already here and has never left. It lives in the human heart. In Native American culture it is revered as the pathfinder and shamans summon its power as an ally. And though mostly we in our culture have projected our own shadow-self, the wolf is scarily close to our psyche, and when we can embrace it we might find something of this dysfunctional human world resolves and heals.

Scientific conservationists and what might be called recreational economists shy away from anything they fear tones of an earth-based new religion, or even perhaps, the resurrection an old one, but I am talking of a very modern psychotherapy that stretches to the transpersonal. As a one-time anthropologist I am only too aware that our religious heritage has distanced the soul from an abundant and forgiving mother-earth in favour of a sky-dwelling somewhat judgemental father and separated the psyche from nature as with all other



'objective' realities, thus coming to denigrate the inner worlds of vision and feeling as somehow subjective, untrustworthy, unscientific and ultimately uneconomic. There will be no great leap forward until the inner worlds of what we call separately private religious experience are made whole again and can redirect our relationship to the natural

world. In this quest, extensive wildland and the return of the wolf will mark our progress far more than the turbines and tidal barrages built upon a philosophy of survival and sacrifice.

*Peter Taylor is an ecologist, a founder of the Wildland-Network (www.wildland-network.org.uk), and author of *Beyond Conservation* (Earthscan 2005).*

The Scottish uplands: allowed to be wild?

by James Fenton

Are we too hung up on defining 'management outcomes' and prescribing desired futures for our wild, upland landscapes? James Fenton suggests that we 'let it be' a little more and have more faith in the ability of nature to take care of things.

How in God's name did the earth manage to run itself for the last 4,000 million years without our help? A ridiculous question, you might think, but, taking one small part of the world, the Scottish Highlands, most people stand aghast when it is suggested that we allow it to manage it itself – allow it to go 'wild'. All kind of reasons are given why this is an impossible approach: "It is not in balance...", "It would go rank...", "There are no predators to control the deer...", "We would lose wildlife...", "It needs to be managed...", "It would become overgrazed...", "It would become undergrazed...", "We first need to put back what we have destroyed...", "We have obligations under EU Directives..." On close inspection, do any of these responses stand-up? Or are we just conditioned nowadays to believe that nature needs our help – nest boxes to be put up, ponds to be dug, birds to be fed, trees to be planted, moorland to be burnt, grazing to be controlled, deer to be shot, na-

ture to be protected from itself...

I remember a study visit to some Penine grouse moor, observing in one location that muirburn was killing the heather, resulting in bog cotton or bracken becoming dominant in its place. When this was pointed out to the gamekeeper, he responded by saying "burning is good for heather." And, indeed, we all know this, don't we, that heather moorland needs to be managed?

This illustrates the point that most of us live in our minds: we just know things: as well as heather moorland needing to be managed, we know that vermin need to be controlled to protect rare breeding birds, that wildlife needs to be protected from walkers and dogs, that overgrazing is a bad thing, that woodland is the climax community, that there has to be a tree-line, that rare species and habitats are rare because of human action, that sheep damage biodiversity, that the up-

lands need to be managed...

It is often as though the scientific revolution has never taken place: we believe what is in our mind instead of the images presented by our eyes. The eyes of the Pennine gamekeeper were telling him that burning was killing the heather but, even though his livelihood depended on keeping the heather, his knowledge that 'burning is good for heather' overrode the evidence of his eyes. I have come to the conclusion that this is how most people see the landscape, that most people see the land with their eyes shut. The tourist industry says the Highlands are wild and unspoilt, and probably believe it, even though this is not what objective analysis tells us. The truth is often unpalatable. Fundamentally we are rational creatures, and we much prefer remaining in the comfort zone of what we 'know' – even if it is not objectively true!

Pond dipping

I dug a small pond in my garden a few years ago. I introduced some bottle sedge, bog pondweed and the red alga *Batrachospermum*, together with some water, from a neighbouring pond, and thereafter let it be. And 'letting it be' is, surely, the essence of wildness: ecological wildness, that is. In my pond I have passed control of what happens underwater to nature. Lesser water boatmen quickly colonised, as did whirligig beetles, pondskaters, palmate newts, frogs and toads. But so did great diving beetles, and even though their larvae probably eat most of my tadpoles, I am not intervening to stop them!

However, I am not really standing back to let nature take its course. If I 'let it be' completely, the bottle sedge and pondweed would take over and open water would disappear; eventually ecological succession would result in a *Sphagnum*-dominated bog. Hence I do thin-out these plants to keep an area of open water. In other words, I am not letting the pond be wild but letting my preferences determine the habitat I want. And is this not the case with the wider countryside of the Scottish uplands? I am not talking about the inbye land, where we want to maintain a vegetation pattern suited to farming, but referring to the (once) open hills. Are we not letting our preferences determine the vegetation pattern and species compositions? We want maximum grouse and breeding wader numbers on our east coast heather moorland. We want more trees in the hills. We want rare species to be more common. We do not want too many deer or sheep. We want this habitat here, and we want this bit to have higher grazing than that bit. We want scrub. We want species-rich grasslands. We want eagles and black grouse. We want twinflower and juniper. We want riparian woodland. We want heather. We want, we want... Aaargh!

And it *should* be this: there should be less bracken, there should be a better balance, there should be some tree regeneration, there should be a better age structure, there should be a more variable sward height, there should be more trees, there should be more scrub, there should be more heather, there should be more predators, there should be less herbivores. There should be, there

should be... Aaargh!

Getting along just fine

Ought we not have more confidence in nature? The Scottish uplands have survived the vicissitudes of climate change, sheep farms, deer numbers, humans, burning, wolves, trees, etc. It has also rained for 10,000 years, resulting in long-term successional trends to mor soils, iron pans and peat bogs.

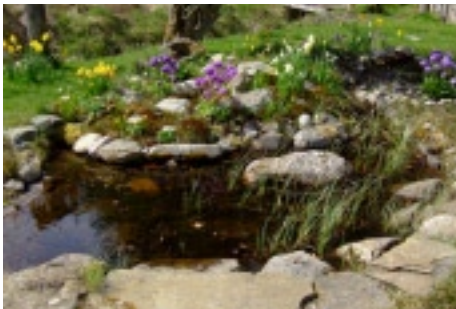
Until the 20th century, no-one had ever designed the vegetation pattern: no-one had said "there should be trees there, rushes over there, a stony flush there, heather on this bit." And there are not many parts of Europe of which this could be said. Is this not the essence of wildness?

What is wild?

It is often said the Scottish uplands are not wild, or not wildernesses, because they have always been managed, and were once more populous. However, I have never been convinced by this argument. Fundamentally I think there is difference between the land 'being managed' and 'being used'. Certainly the hills have been used on and off, probably

since Neolithic times: grazing animals have come and gone, and likewise burning. But grazing and burning are both natural ecological phenomenon and I believe that there is little evidence that, over millennia and until the 20th Century, this has fundamentally affected the vegetation pattern. After all, you cannot over-graze natural systems: if there are 'too many' grazing animals, they die from starvation: the system is self-limiting.

Grazing is a natural phenomenon, and has been since animals evolved: if you think about it, dinosaurs must have had a massive impact on the vegetation pattern, as would have woolly mammoths. And today, both coral reefs and our rocky inter-tidal zones rely on very heavy grazing to maintain the species diversity. Grasses (with their basal meristems), and thus grasslands, evolved in response to grazing pressure. People flock to the African game parks to see herds of grazing animals. Hence vegetation, except on offshore islands has to, and always has had to, put up with grazing; if a particular vegetation type cannot survive, it will not be there. And we, as humans, in wild areas should accept the natural vegetation pattern that arises.



James' pond with mostly open water



About two years later: open water disappearing

At the Burg, on Mull, you can see woodland expansion amongst sloe scrub, in spite of grazing by virtually unmanaged red deer, goats, sheep and cattle. This relates to the particular climate and soil of this part of Mull. However, such grazing levels will have different outcomes in many other parts of the Highlands. To let it be wild, we have to accept the outcomes nature gives us, throwing away our preconceptions, or 'what we know.'

Hence the uplands have long been used to a greater or lesser extent; but this is not to say they have been managed. Grouse moors in the east are managed nowadays, with short-cycle rotational burning, together with vermin control, dosing of grouse, digging of wet scrapes and putting down grit. But this intensity of management is a relatively recent phenomenon in terms of postglacial history, and remains localised.

In terms of the argument that, because there were once more people in the Highlands they cannot be wildernesses, I cannot see the logic of this. People can come and go, so why not wildernesses? Anyone who has extensively walked off the road in the Highlands will know that there is a far greater extent of land that has never been populated than that which has. There are miles and miles of remote, mid-altitude ground that have never been inhabited. However, because most people tend to travel through glens and straths, it is easy to over-estimate human influence – I am generalising.

Vegetation can recolonise so that areas once influenced by humans can revert to

being indistinguishable from the surrounding native flora. Can you spot the site of the large roadside construction camp east of the A9 north of Dalwhinnie, dating from the re-building of the A9 in the 1970s? Or the village (with cinema) north of the A87 above the Cluanie Dam? Or how many old unused roads and tracks have you walked that have reverted to bog, with significant peat growth over, say, the past 100 years?

Let nature decide

Letting things be wild means letting nature decide what happens. It means throwing away preconceptions about what should or should not happen. It is the antithesis of management, but also very relaxing – whatever will be, will be! Why get hung-up on outcomes? It is about visions that are open: we will let nature decide the species composition and the vegetation pattern. It is *not* about prescriptive visions.

There is a *caveat* though. If persecution or collecting has unequivocally caused a species to become extinct, then management is appropriate if it relates to the re-introduction of that species. Additionally, if species introduced by humans are colonising a wild area, then management to remove it is likewise appropriate. Otherwise, why can we not just let our uplands be wild? And stop managing them? It is the lowlands that are in desperate need of our care, attention and *management*...

James is an ecologist brought up in the Highlands. These are his personal views.
www.james-hc-fenton.eu

The basis for rewilding in Scotland

by Calum Brown

Can Scotland be rewilded? Calum Brown, member of the SWLG team, guides us through the history that has led us to this point and argues that now is the time to investigate the full potential of rewilding and the benefits it could provide.

In many ways, rewilding is an alien concept in Scotland. It has developed almost exclusively in North America, and its central tenet of protecting large areas and all native species within them seems most suited to the remaining wilderness areas of that continent. This does not necessarily make it irrelevant here, however. Rewilding is principally concerned with 'keystone species' - large predators that (in theory at least) have an impact on their ecosystem far out of proportion to their numbers – with the space and habitat to thrive. Ecosystem health, the argument goes, will follow.

In Scotland these predators are missing, and their reintroduction may seem an impractical and abstract goal. The focus on keystone species, however, removes the need to arbitrarily choose a prior state to restore – only species already present or recently vanished that still function as keystones in their natural environment are of interest. Where artificial environmental changes have degraded the available habitat – as in the deforestation of Scotland – rewilding becomes a strategy simply of improving ecology. In this respect it may be indistinguishable from many other forms of conservation or restoration, but with the defining aim of re-activating the stalled self-regulation of an ecosystem.

'De-wilding' Scotland

Our modern Scottish environment has developed since the last ice age ended between 15,000 and 9,000 years ago. As people followed the retreating glaciers they were accompanied into the open tundra of Scotland by other pioneers – tree species such as birch formed scrubland and woodlands, roamed by mammals like the auroch, beaver, brown bear, lynx, pika, red and arctic fox, red deer, reindeer, saiga, tarpan, wolf and woolly mammoth. Several of these quickly fell prey to a changing climate, others to human hunting.

After this, the ecology of Scotland evolved almost unperturbed for several millennia. Human activity remained diffuse and had little lasting impact. By around 5,000 years ago, forests had reached their maximum extent, covering up to 80% of the land. Their subsequent retreat is partly attributable to the development of the warm, wet climate with which we are all so familiar, but mainly to the arrival of agriculture.

From this time onwards, a pattern of woodland clearance emerges and human activity claimed its first Scottish species. The elk and auroch probably succumbed to habitat loss between 3,000 and 4,000 years ago, and other species began to be targeted for the real or perceived threats

they posed to domesticated animals. These species included the lynx, brown bear (the Scottish variety of which may well have survived until as recently as the 10th century and appears to have been a favourite feature of Roman gladiatorial contests), and of course the wolf. The 19th century naturalist James Edmund Harting wrote that the wolf was finally “effectively extirpated” by the “cutting down or burning whole tracts of the forests which harboured them”.

This only added to the rapid rate of deforestation in Scotland. Warring factions had already burned huge areas in the south-east and the Vikings had followed suit in the north and west. By the mid-18th century only 4% of the country was wooded, and the aftermath of the Jacobite Rebellion and advent of large-scale sheep farming gave rise to further clearances of woodlands and people. Capercaillie, bittern, great auk, great spotted woodpecker and spotted crane inexorably vanished, species by species.

Those that survived into the 19th and 20th centuries witnessed the proliferation of sporting estates, and many were irrationally labelled as ‘vermin’. The polecat, osprey, white-tailed sea eagle, red kite and

goshawk were killed off, and the pine marten and wild cat suffered enormous declines. The sole beneficiaries amongst Scotland’s natural complement of species were those identified as game: this probably saved the red fox, otter and deer from extinction.

Conservation and rewilding

At the same time that Scotland’s ecology was becoming almost entirely shaped by man, a Scottish emigrant to the United States was shaping the philosophy of conservation. John Muir popularised the idea of non-utilitarian environmental value in a country that was witnessing man-made environmental change of unprecedented speed.

A strong conservation movement resulted, initially shepherded by the newly formed US Forest Service. Gifford Pinchot, the first head of the Forest Service, believed that “the first principle of conservation is development, the use of natural resources...for the benefit of the people”.

Meanwhile, the emerging science of ecology offered a contrast, stressing the intrinsic value of nature and human responsibility towards it - expounded by



Can we imagine the potential of rewilding in Scotland? Photo: Calum Brown

Aldo Leopold. Scientifically, human enjoyment of the environment was irrelevant to its protection. Large, unmanaged 'wilderness' areas with a natural complement of large predators were necessary if inexorable species loss and decay of ecological function were to be avoided.

From here, the concept of rewilding developed. Appealing to the morality of Aldo Leopold and the aestheticism of John Muir, it also rests on a strong scientific foundation. Competitive structuring of communities, for example, is part of the orthodoxy of ecology, and numerous studies have found that this is mediated to some extent by predation. The idea of keystone species goes further than this, but still enjoys growing support.

Can Scotland be rewilded?

Conservation in Scotland has not generally been of the North American kind. In Britain as in much of Europe, a long history of agricultural land use has led to the close association of farming and culture, while a prevailing anti-regulatory political climate has provided massive monetary support for environmentally detrimental practices. Conservation designations, too, have distinctly different emphases. SSSIs, for example, may be damaged in the interests of "agriculture, fisheries and forestry; social and economic development;...and the specific interests of owners and occupiers and local communities".

In this respect, the Scottish environment is treated as a natural resource, with protection generally provided on the condition of continuing use. Largely absent,

though, is the principle of equitable distribution found in America (ironically, given the traditions of this kind in Scotland such as that of open access). The strong aesthetic current in Scottish conservation is similarly constrained – 'wild' landscapes are valued, but increasing 'wildness' (or natural afforestation) is viewed negatively and associated with agricultural abandonment and cultural decline. The case for inherent environmental value is rarely made in support of environmental protection.

Scotland has a unique ecology, and it is sometimes argued that this has become unsuitable for extinct species during their absence. In fact, the timescales involved have very little ecological or (especially) evolutionary significance. There are enough deer in Scotland to support viable populations of all native carnivores. Several studies have further concluded that reintroductions would decrease densities and alter grazing patterns (as the Yellowstone wolves have dramatically done) and probably initiate the beneficial 'trophic cascades' that improve ecosystem health as a whole. Sufficient (or better) habitat is present for fully self-supporting populations of beaver, wild boar, lynx, and even wolf.

While some species (notably the brown bear) would have to wait for larger areas of native woodland to be available, a potentially greater barrier for all is their social and political acceptability. It is because of this that many people view rewilding as an impossible, not to say romantic and naïve, ambition, with the greatest impediment to rewilding being

an unwillingness to imagine it.

In fact, rewilding could bring substantial socio-economic benefits to Scotland. The proposed structuring of core protected areas, linked by corridors and surrounded by 'buffer zones', provides scope for a wide range of land uses in their vicinity. Jobs, production of natural resources, and certainly tourism, would be among the obvious beneficiaries. To some extent these effects are quantifiable, but little or no work has been done to analyse their economic potential.

Meanwhile, the relative strengths of current land uses that represent the accepted alternatives to rewilding receive minimal consideration. Many are justified on the basis that they have already been practiced for some time and have consequent cultural significance. This is not the same, however, as representing the best or most efficient use of land.

Scotland is recognised as being poorly suited for agriculture – 84% of the country is classified as agricultural 'less favoured area'. Ironically, this ensures that inflated subsidies are available to support the industry rather than seek more viable alternatives. Recent years have nevertheless seen a sharp decline in revenues, most obvious in upland sheep farming, which has enjoyed dominance in Scotland since the 18th century.

Estates, too, have suffered, and are similarly vulnerable to charges of inequity. The majority are managed for sporting interests, but are largely subject to the motivations of their owners, which tend

to focus on private enjoyment. As a result, deer densities, maintained at artificial levels for their sporting value, have risen inexorably in Scotland – it is estimated that they have doubled to over 300,000 in the last 30 years.

Estates also have a history of resource conservation from which the native flora and fauna have often benefited. Concentrated power over large areas of land can be a mechanism for rapid and dramatic improvement, where that power is used in the interests of conservation. However, estates already require financial support by their owners, and relying on their desire to improve the environment is unreasonable, especially where that requires costly restorative efforts.

Once again, the case for rewilding must be considered and made objectively. In much of Scotland, it requires only (initially) the regeneration of native woodlands, but sets that effort in a wider context. This can only help inform public opinion – already broadly favourable to reintroductions in the few surveys carried out. It seems likely that further investigations would find great potential for rewilding, and great potential benefits for Scotland's ecology and people.

It is here, perhaps, that rewilding's greatest strength lies; its ability to demarcate the changes that people have wrought to their environment, the steps that would be required to reverse them, and the reasons why people are unwilling to embark upon these steps. Few other conservation strategies are so illuminating of our relationship with our environment.





Above Loch Ness.
Photo: Calum Brown

Can we imagine rewilding our Kintail forests?

by David Jarman

How do we make the idea of rewilding a reality? David Jarman challenges us to imagine transforming the forests of Glen Shiel and Dorusduain in order to realise their true potential as components of our wild landscapes.

Elephant in the room: Glen Shiel forest

If you head up the A82 north of Tyn-drum, you cross Rannoch Moor - still almost a wild landscape, with just one be-nighted arbitrary block of forestry near the summit - and, once over the main Grampian watershed, you plunge precipitously into Glen Coe - still, thanks to the miracle of NTS ownership, preserved from gross intrusions and cherished as the acme of the real Highlands by millions.

If you repeat this transition beyond the Great Glen, you head up the A87 north of Invergarry, traverse the moors above Loch Loyne and beside Loch Cluanie - still an impressively vast mountainscape despite hydro dams and the abominable Glenmoriston wind factory - and, crossing the main Highland watershed again, you plunge headlong down Glen Shiel. But unlike Glen Coe, upper Glen Shiel is dominated by commercial forestry, all along the north side, hemming in the road, almost unbroken for four miles.

We planted this forest, way back when, we own it, we manage it - now through the Scottish Government's control of FCS. And hardly any of us can remember Glen Shiel before it was afforested.

Which means it has become a given, scarcely noticed, accepted as part of some unquestioned scheme of things

(we might not need the pitprops but we still need to keep our pulp and chip mills going). The dense conifer stands are no more than a minor inconvenience for walkers attempting to get on or off the Three Brothers by unconventional routes.

No-one celebrates Glen Shiel, hardly anyone stops in it for pleasure, most race on to greet the Atlantic at Loch Duich, pausing only at Eilean Donan Castle on their way to Skye. Yet Glen Shiel ought to be celebrated as one of the greatest main-road passes of Scotland, second only to Glen Coe, certainly finer than Drumochter or the passage up Loch Lomond or through to Ullapool. The upper glen is framed on the south by one of the finest and longest crest walks in Britain, the six-munro Cluanie Ridge, and by a chain of massive peaks on the north. And from below the 'Pass of Glen Shiel' (the narrows by the 1719 battle site), the Saddle and the Five Sisters of Kintail rise for a thousand metres on either side, some of the longest highest slopes we have. This is mountain country on a scale comparable with many parts of the Alps or Norway, equal to Glen Coe in height and greater in extent.

But Glen Shiel is not in a National Park, and not even the heart of a National Scenic Area - for, with depressing timidity,

the planners decades ago excluded it from the Kintail—Affric NSA, presumably because its scenic quality had already been compromised by afforestation.

Imagining Glen Shiel without the forest

If the glen were still unplanted, and if today it was proposed to afforest it, would there be an outcry? Probably not, because no-one would get to know other than a few locals until the trees began appearing, there would be no campaign, no real opportunity to object, no inquiry - afforestation is still exempt from planning permission. Would anyone complain when they did appear? Probably not, because forests grow with stealthy slowness, and don't involve conspicuous earthworks or construction. So this mind-game can best be tackled by trying to imagine Glen Coe, or Drumochter, with their flanks overnight swathed in sitka - put these images to a vote, and I guess the majority would prefer them as they are.

Now imagine travellers through Glen Shiel and walkers over the Cluanie peaks being invited to vote for a glen maintained like it is, with endless conifer rotations, or a glen 'rewilded'. I hope more than a few, but I wonder how many could actually envisage such a transformation, let alone urge it on.

Your Group was recently invited to a consultation meeting on the Forest Design Plan for Glen Shiel, in the Cluanie Inn. There was no-one from the local 'community' if one can be said to exist around Shiel Bridge. There were a few employees from adjacent estates with



Glen Shiel conifer 'fungus' seen from a helicopter, with recent clear-fell coups, and Saileag above. Photo: Forestry Commission Scotland

practical points to make. There were no tourists or hillwalkers, obviously, because the system isn't geared up to consult the vast majority who have the wider interest in these things. And our 'rewilding' input (as expressed in several WLN features on forestry over the last few years) was amazingly pre-empted by a small estate owner from some miles away, Duncan Poore, who was once head of the UK Nature Conservancy and has a forestry background. He simply stated that the glen should never have been planted and ought to be restored. His justification was both visual and ecological, plus a practical concern for deer management where the hill is fenced off from the glen along a roadside.

Wild woodland in Glen Shiel?

The Glen Shiel forest is a huge visual intrusion, but an insignificantly tiny fraction of the total FCS estate. Rewilding it would have negligible impact on national forest productivity. And rewilding doesn't just mean putting it back to grassy hillsides for deer and maybe a few sheep - the opportunity here is to create a new

native woodland, with plenty of open ground, and natural edges fading out. Some of the forest has already been clear-felled and replanted - sadly with even more sitka content than at present, because the management regime here is purely commercial - but most of it could easily be redirected to native species, mainly birch but with scope for oak woods on the sunny south aspects where soils are rich enough, and perhaps some Scots pine on the driest knolls.

It only needs a few of us with enough imagination to conceive of such woods along the roadside and in views across the glen, or of walking up through them onto the ridge crests; it only needed a handful of people to recognise the ecological case for rewilding Glen Affric and restoring its fabulous pinewoods; it just needs a few media mentions and supportive politicians; and our FCS, the ex-

perts we employ, would be only too happy to do it, given the modest necessary budget allocation.

You might in fact have noticed quite extensive new plantings on private land, above Loch Cluanie and on the south side of Glen Shiel, which seem to have a fair mix of native species in them - the side of FCS which gives generous grants for private forests seems better able to achieve this. It will be interesting to see how they come on. And the Five Sisters are owned by NTS, who have fenced off several areas for natural regeneration: ideally they would be partners in managing the whole north side of Glen Shiel as one landscape, but when we approached them informally they showed no interest, such is their sorry decline.

The secret forest - rewilding Dorusduain
If you don't speed on along Loch Duich



Dorusduain forest filling the head of Strath Croe, with A' Ghlas-bheinn above and the way into Bealach an Sgairne leading off to the right - view from A87 causeway. Photo: Cornwallis Images

towards Skye, but turn off into Strath Croe, you soon reach Morvich, the NTS caravan site and outdoor centre. This is a fabled starting point for the two passes through to Affric or for scrambles up the airy crest between them onto the sweeping upland of Beinn Fhada. In here is true wild country, nearly all NTS, spared from inevitable encroachments by the miracle of the Unna purchase. But as you enter the northerly pass, up into the defile of Bealach an Sgairne, you have to run the gauntlet of close proximity to several kilometres of commercial forest just the other side of the Allt Choinneachain - a forest with the lovely name of Dorusduain [we've had trouble tracing an accurate meaning of this beautiful name—can you help? Ed.].

The conifer block is typically unattractive and incongruous, but most people will pass by with barely a sideways glance, eyes only for the excitements ahead (on my first visit, wild goats were on the crags). If however you want to visit the Falls of Glomach, the usual path starts at Dorusduain and the first mile is entombed within the forest.

Forest land sales - a new wave

Most of this forest is also ours, but we have just been notified by FCS that it is going on the market. Abandonment of the government's plan to long-lease the entire national forest estate has left a big hole in the FCS development budget, which they are seeking to fill by selling dozens of forest blocks which are of less commercial value to them - e.g. because they are isolated, as here. Some of these blocks may go to community buyouts,

such as possibly in Glen Brittle on Skye, which would be fine. Most will go to private forestry companies, or to neighbouring estates, and future management will depend on FCS regulating Design Plans and awarding or withholding grants.

At Dorusduain, the most likely buyer is the adjoining Inverinate—Killilan estate. This has a wealthy owner who keeps it primarily for sporting interests. A recent foray up Glen Elchaig suggests that it is quite benevolently managed in terms of wild land, with no badly intrusive tracks or plantings. The main eyesore is the roadside feeding stations for the large Highland cattle herd. Public access is tolerated rather than encouraged (this estate owns the private road into Dorusduain, over which we can drive to the FCS car park, although the signage does not make this clear).

Even though it is slightly off the beaten track, Dorusduain should never have been block planted, standing as it does at the gateway to some of our finest ways into the wilds, and on the edge of a National Scenic Area. It fills in the whole valley-head of Strath Croe almost wall-to-wall. It ought to be converted back to a native woodland, with room for some smaller commercially-useful compartments, and opened out considerably, with all its edges softened.

This will be a lower priority site for FCS, compared with Glen Shiel and many other blots we can list. It might be that a sympathetic sporting estate would share most of these 'rewilding' aims, with deer

benefiting from low-ground shelter in open woodland. But we can't leave this to chance - and FCS will maintain the status quo unless pressed otherwise. Our land ought to be sold under an agreed design and management plan, which achieves these aims, and makes public access to the Falls, the munro of A' Ghlas-bheinn, and the gates of Affric an even finer experience than it is now.

Kintail - trailblazer for forest rewilding?

We have argued before that we can live with 85% or even 95% of all the present commercial forestry in Scotland. But drawing back the most intrusive frontiers by even 5% would have huge benefits for rewilding. Kintail seems to offer two of the best opportunities to experiment and showcase this concept in a prime tourism and hillgoing area which also has problems of rural economic deprivation:

- Glen Shiel would be a highly-visible

landscape transformation, fully comparable with the great achievement for ecology in Glen Affric;

- Dorusduain would be a testbed for more subtle multi-purpose redesign, whether under public or private ownership - and could offer scope for sensitive development at and around the farm ruins, possibly for recreational activity, or for 'woodland crofts' for local people and rural businesses.

Do we have the imagination?

Readers may recall valuable contributions to our Cannich AGM and to WLN 61 by Malcolm Wield, then FCS District Manager at Fort Augustus, now running the National Forest Land Scheme (disposals to community and NGO interests). We are grateful to Malcolm for a thorough briefing on the background to the current land sales programme at their Dingwall office recently.

Irvine Butterfield 1936-2009

by John Digney

Irvine Butterfield passed away on 12 May 2009 in Dundee. An inspirational member of Scotland's mountaineering and wild land communities, he has left a great legacy behind him.

With the death of Irvine Butterfield on 12 May we lost one of the most dedicated and passionate campaigners for the protection of Scotland's wild land. For SWLG it was a particularly sad day as Irvine had been a founder member and for the first six years acted as Treasurer. Although he had left the Steering Team before any of the current or recent members joined, he had overseen the finances for the production of the first

seventeen issues of WLN as well as the Group's first major glossy publication: *Cairngorms at the Crossroads*.

Irvine was born near Skipton in 1936. His work with Customs and Excise brought him to Scotland in 1960, and he eventually settled in the picturesque Perthshire village of Pitcairngreen. By 1971 he had completed all the Munros, finishing with the most westerly

mainland one, Ladhar Bheinn.

The publication in 1986 of his guidebook *The High Mountains of Britain and Ireland* made him a household name among hillgoers. The book became essential reading for the ambitious Munroist with its challenging, full-day, multi-summit routes, and had the added bonus of including all the 3000ft peaks in the rest of the British Isles. Lavishly illustrated with contributions from 46 photographers as well as Irvine himself, it was a book to drool over in the evenings and remains many people's favourite.

Irvine's love for the mountains and his urge to give something back led him to become involved in various organisations. As well as SWLG, he took high-profile roles in the Mountain Bothies Association, the Crochallan Club, the Mountaineering Council of Scotland and the Perthshire Alliance for the Real Cairngorms. However, it was into the John Muir Trust that he channelled much of his energy in his later years. Although he remained a member of SWLG and occasionally attended AGMs even after leaving the Steering Team, I only got to know him when he invited me to contribute photographs for his forthcoming book *The Magic of the Munros*, which was published in 1999 with the proceeds going to the Trust. We spent two afternoons looking through boxes of slides, and he amazed me with his capacity for instant recognition of just about any peak from any possible angle. I was amused at his pronunciation of the hill names – he made no attempt at the Gaelic – but articulated the more ob-

scure ones absolutely phonetically in his unmodified Yorkshire accent. This way, he explained, he could write the names down accurately without constant reference to the map for the correct spelling!

Irvine was a most generous, warm and down-to-earth person. His enthusiasm was compelling and he was eager to hear about other people's experiences of the hills he loved. He was totally unpretentious and very much his own man, and he would sometimes grumble about the bureaucracy in the organisations to which he belonged. He would be quite forthright in his opinions, even about the less interesting hills whose 3000ft status nevertheless obliged him to include them in his Munro books – he was bluntly dismissive of the Monadhliath as "unrelentingly tedious" and of a pair of the nearby Drumochter hills as "featureless hummocks".

Yet he was an emotional man, and I remember him choking back the tears as he stood in his kilt to make his closing speech at the impressive and well-attended launch of *The Magic of the Munros*. He will be much missed by those who share his love for the hills.



Photo courtesy of Baton Wicks Archive

Wild songs and beating hearts

by Carol Lang

In the first in a series of articles about “wild land experiences”, sea kayak coach Carol Lang takes us on a journey around Raasay and reflects on what Scotland’s wild land means to her.

“It makes your heart sing, and beyond that I simply can’t explain”. This was my thought as I sat looking out onto a world which I could see was feeling chastised and tormented. The sound made from the instrumental and operatic spirit of the sea fusing with the background personality of all that is not aquatic pleases and satisfies like nothing else. Perhaps it is this musical spirit that keeps calling me back. It is humbling to be given permission to sit amongst it and simply just ‘be’.

A fourteen year old girl is telling me that this is the first time she has seen a cow. To her this is wilderness. To me it is a moment of wide-eyed bewilderment. I nearly fall off my feet.

I’d never considered what wilderness was before. To me it was picturesque and hostile, a contrast of beauty and evil: rolling mountains, jagged peaks, wild seas and lonely arctic landscapes. It was a place where you could go and be alone, feel freedom, awe and fear all at once.

A seven year old girl sets eyes on the sea for the very first time. She smells it in the air. She sees that it is angry. She is afraid that those white horses might take her away. She is one of the luckiest kids alive and she doesn’t know it. I am that girl.

I didn’t know then that I would befriend the sea and fall in love with it. I didn’t know that I would live months of my years wrapped in its arms and grow a respect for its emotions which topped all other respect I have felt for humankind. I did not know that it would become my wilderness.

Absorbed in reflection and thought I walked away from my viewpoint with a fusion of happiness and amusement squelching under the sole of my wellies. This was accompanied by a small and welcome relief that hit me as I reached the bottom of the hill and weaved a path through the rocks towards my tent. Dusk had almost stripped away the sharpness of the day’s light. Suddenly, and without reason, I was grateful not to be here alone: tonight I knew I was going to share my wilderness and enjoy good company, conversation, and laughter. Perhaps tomorrow, all being well, we would be allowed to carry on further up the coast. With that thought I drifted into a peacefully deep slumber.

The next morning we slipped off into the water and watched a seal playing in the small bay where we had landed the evening before. Under a blue, windless sky, the remaining west coast of Raasay was waiting for us and expectations of reaching Rona were high. Even though we

were paddling around an inhabited island, I was reminded that just one of the many gems of Scotland's wild areas is that sometimes you can see no-one and nothing for days, not even a local fishing boat. Since leaving mainland Skye and turning our backs on the Raasay Ferry to face north, the only human contact we had was with two other kayakers. I wondered if they were there for the same reasons. I wondered if they also heard the song of the sea.

With a blue sky blazing, the sea and the world seemed in harmony - no sails, no engines, no glare of street lights, no background fuzz or white noise - a place you could hear nothing and everything simultaneously. The charm of the coast must surely lie in the fact that every sea cave and arch you discover is never the same as the one before. Each one whispers different tales of the past.

Basking in the rhythm of paddling and exploring, we carried on in silence. I began to wonder if somehow this was a wilderness that had become my sanctuary, my escape from real life and time. I contemplated the selfishness in this and puzzled over what, for me, is simply a pure intense and inexplicable need to go to the sea.

Affording myself the time to smile, to take a deep breath, and allowing a sense of happiness to pervade, all seems bitter-sweet, given the harsh reality of today's world. Some may say it's a selfish indulgence. I don't disagree, but I know it keeps me out of mischief!

Shadows of clouds flitting down the hill-sides and skating across the surface of the water disturbed me from thought and I looked over to see my friend looking down into the water searching for life. A little shiver crossed my shoulders and I glanced down at my watch. We had lost hours absorbed in exploring. We were in a small channel and what we couldn't see was the wind beyond that which was waiting for us. It was a bit unnerving that there had been no mention of such wind in the forecast! By now the wind and waves were pushing us north at quite a pace, more off shore than we wanted to go. We spotted a possible landing place and fought hard to turn the kayaks in that direction. In doing so we were aiming across the waves and the wind, and with every paddle stroke there was an obligatory curse at the fact that we seemed to be losing the fight. We were gradually edging closer to where we were trying to get to, when without warning a wave lifted and swallowed my boat. I managed to paddle through it and not to be eaten, but I seemed to acquire the extra gusto I needed to make it to land.

Half an hour later I was sitting on top of the hill trying to get an updated weather forecast. Decisions to be made: carry on or camp. The forecast was positive. The winds were due to ease that afternoon. Sheltering behind the tussocks of grass I looked out at the sea one last time before standing and trudging off back down to my friend and the boats. I should have asked why it was smiling back at me!

The passing of two hours had already seen the winds drop and the fierce white horses dissipate. We decided to continue. Eight kilometres would see us land at what we were certain was going to be an easy beach to pull our boats up onto and camp for the night. We surmised that we would be there in less than two hours. We cut through a small channel which at high tide dissects the very north of Raasay from its main body.

After half an hour of paddling it suddenly became the wrong decision. The sea had once more become a breathing, living mass, seething through its teeth, waiting to scold us and slap us squarely in the face. It seemed just as stupid to turn around and run from its temper as it was to face it square on. I felt like a young apprentice who had been scowled at by my master. I was suddenly overwhelmed by a feeling of vulnerability which I couldn't quite control. So many options were flooding through my head but none of them seemed realistic.

A small cleft in the rocks appeared just after another heavy squall had hit us. The cold raw pain of icy sharp rain made us paddle into the cleft for shelter, hoping that the squall would pass. Out of desperation to escape the clutches of the heaving mass of fury, we were reduced to wondering how long, if necessary, we could wait in this tomb of dead seaweed and sleeping anemones. A rising tide put stop to any temptation.

A long time later and with only a short distance under our hulls we came across a tiny patch of pebbles and a pillar of

rock that stood like a sentinel guarding against pirates landing to pillage and plunder. We clambered up the gully at the rear side of the pillar, welcoming the soft grassy top and, in equal measure, a hot drink and some food. Inevitably we found ourselves discussing the possibility of sleeping there for the night. With another two kilometres to go until we reached the beach we had marked earlier that afternoon, doubt was starting to creep in as to whether it was a beach at all. Suddenly it felt like reality was weighing down and smothering all logic.

Surveying the menacing horizon from our outpost it was with tired bodies and a reluctant acceptance that we slid back into our boats hoping for some fortune which of course, perhaps, would just be around the next corner. Another hour dragged by, and so too did only another kilometre. Watching ourselves slip by the sea cliffs was a slow and painful process, every inch was a fight and should either of us stop we would lose ten minutes worth of hard work in a matter of seconds.

Having rounded many corners and having enthused ourselves with fresh bursts of optimism on passing each one we finally caught sight of the beach that we had seen on the map earlier. Relieved that it was there, every paddle stroke felt even more purposeful and became more urgent. The closer we got the more reassured we became. Nearly five hours in total since leaving our previous refuge, we pulled ourselves from our kayaks and scuttled up the steep stony beach, feeling an equal measure of relief and ex-

haustion. Even scuttling felt like hard work and with feet sinking into the rounded pebbles it felt like we were being sucked back out to sea. I didn't want to go back, at least not tonight.

We both busied ourselves with the task of setting up camp and cooking tea and every now and again there was a smile with unspoken meaning that passed between us. We had been given a reprieve, and although we fought with every ounce of fight we had, we knew that it had not been our journey that day. The sea had taken us on its journey. It had played out its rhythm to us in a frightening cadence of rumble and boom that

served to heighten our sense of humbleness. Only when it was ready were we allowed to leave, this time knowing that the sea would always win.

Less than a year later, as I sit here writing about the wilderness that I love, I still feel an enormous sense of gratitude. I now know that should you even come close to feeling comfortable in your wild place, it will remind you not to get too cosy! If wilderness wants to take you on its own journey it will. If it wants to sing you a song it will, and it will make damn well sure you are listening!



Carol enjoying some respite on a calm day

Carol is a qualified and experienced freelance sea kayak coach who works and plays in the seas of Scotland. She is available for individual and group coaching from a variety of locations around the country and can be contacted on: carollang76@hotmail.com.

More on mapping: letters to the Editor

In the last edition of Wild Land News (Spring 2009—available from www.swlg.org.uk), Steve Carver explained recent work that attempts to map wildness in the Cairngorms National Park. In the same issue, David Jarman asked whether we should be concerned about how such a mapping tool would be used by developers and policy-makers. We received letters in response to these articles from Steve Carver and Matthew Hawkins, Senior Heritage Manager of the Cairngorms National Park Authority and Project Manager of the wildness mapping work. All letters to the Editor of WLN can be found in full on our website—excerpts are reproduced below.

Dear SWLG,

As hill-goers we all know that any map is not perfect, and as readers of WLN we know that the challenges posed by mapping something as subjective wildness are many. However, I would counter that not to try is tantamount to negligence. So, do we rise to the occasion and meet the developers and renewables lobby head on by playing them at their own game? Or do we act like so many frightened ostriches, pretend that doing nothing is the best policy and bury our heads in the metaphorical sand?

In his letter David set out by suggesting that "Bureaucratising wild land can only diminish it". However, the alternative is a far less savoury option, because if we don't defend our arguments in support of preserving wild land and, indeed, creating more using all available methods - including GIS mapping - then wild land is ultimately doomed. Planners and policy makers understand maps and numbers and, as history shows us, these bean-counters and their well-paid legal counsel have little time for heart-felt pleas however reasoned or eloquent. Nor is the kind of mapping we develop here the

only way forward, but should be seen as a positive move towards a rigorous and scientifically defensible argument that will stand up to detailed scrutiny in today's climate of evidence-based decision-making. It is better to have a map to use as the basis for informed debate and decision-making on defending wild land and promoting its values than not and risk the gradual and, in some cases, dramatic erosion of wild land that will surely occur without it. The pro-wild land lobby needs to be as informed, if not better, than the pro-development lobby if we're to win through.

Wild land is more than just ecology; it's about landscape values... of remote, rugged and challenging land that is devoid of obvious human intrusions.... an "unnatural" wild as David puts it and this is just what we set out to map in the Cairngorms.

The method developed is universally applicable, be it in the Cairngorms or the Western Highlands and Islands or, indeed, in North America. It is based on flexibility of definition and priority of inputs and so can be tailored to any and all

local conditions. The map shown on page 15 of the Spring 2009 issue was only one example. Running the model with inputs from many different people simply improves the robustness of the outputs and should begin, with successive iterations, to show the core wild areas that the majority of people value most.

I fail to agree with David's alternative "simpler approach". Wild land is about more than just land use. Using land use alone grossly over-simplifies the problem.

If the Scottish government wishes to stop the rot then they need to commit to mapping it, and then use the maps to identify core wild land areas and grades of wildness beyond that. They can then use these in the decision-making process about which landscapes to protect and which to restore to a wilder state. We need to think more positively about this, work together for a common cause and take appropriate action. Failure to do so, will surely lead only to greater development in inappropriate locations leading to further losses of wild land.

*Steve Carver
University of Leeds*

Dear SWLG,
"Bureaucratising wildland can only diminish it": I have to say that I cannot agree at all with this. For wild land to be bureaucratized is for it to be recognised by the governing authorities, be that at local or national level. This surely is a good thing because to be recognised as such means that it can be given proper consideration. What is important is the

way that it is bureaucratized.

Mapping wild land and wildness is undoubtedly difficult. Not least is the big question of whether to do it at all. I think however that we have gone beyond this question. What Steve's work has given us is a scale of wildness. The map shows relative degrees or strength across the National Park. What the map shows is that the Cairngorms National Park is a place that many people will find wild, though it has features that will reduce this perception for others. We are now in a position to have a useful debate about the complexity of the wildness values within this area and discuss ways to increase attribute strength, rather than simply say this is wild or not wild.

The real value of Steve's work is that we now have a way of discussing not only the relative wildness but dissecting the component attributes to discover the ingredients at any particular point. I would certainly agree that this work is not 'the answer'. There are problems as there are with most methodologies. However I am firmly convinced that it is as Steve says "robust and defensible" and it is the best answer that we have yet produced.

It is quite reasonable for landowners to seek an economic return from their land. It is therefore understandable for them to be suspicious about restrictions being placed upon their land. The CNPA would not describe wild land or wildness as a designation. In fact we see Steve's work, and the policy that shall be developed from it as, providing opportunities for enhancing economic activity rather than

limiting it. Ecosystem service analysis shows the importance of uplands for water quality, runoff regulation and flood prevention and not least for carbon capture and storage. It may well be that many of these functions are exactly compatible with wild land and rewilding. What Steve’s work has given us is a valuable tool for analysing and describing these elusive perceptions in a way that can directly support efforts to realise such opportunities.

I find Mr Jarman’s alternative mapping methodology of interest. It would certainly be simpler. However it would not recognise the complicated interplay of the attributes. For example a windfarm would be excluded but the area immediately outside this would still be heavily influenced by its presence but would be labelled wild. This would devalue the title as few would consider it such.

*Matthew Hawkins (Project Manager for the wildness mapping study)
Senior Heritage Manager CNPA*

Dear SWLG,
I thoroughly enjoyed David Jarman’s article on rewilding Glen Cannich. As a very poor but extremely hard

working forestry worker I got to know every nook and cranny of district.

It appears to me that the SWLG is surprisingly quiet on on the Save Loch Arklet View campaign. I am very familiar this area. In fact, almost a decade ago, before the term ‘Great Trossachs Forest’ was coined, I recommended to my colleagues in the Forestry Commission that they should exclude this little bit from forests. Incidentally, according to the oldest maps of Glen Arklet dating from 1580s and early 18th century military maps, the only patch of woodlands in the glen was above the shieling (Bruach) where I was born. The old drove can still be seen traversing the mid-slope from Stonichlachar (located west of the the present Stronachlachar) through the Bruach woodland and west and north above Inversnaid. Of course, Glen Arklet was never truly wildlands but is an iconic Scottish landscape just the same.

*Alexander Robertson
www.windandlandscape.com*

*For more information about the ‘Save Loch Arklet View’ campaign, visit
www.locharkletview.org.uk where you*

New SWLG website launched
www.swlg.org.uk

You may have already noticed that the SWLG website (www.swlg.org.uk) has had a facelift. Although still developing, we hope to use the website more and more to publicise our work, share information, and hear your views about wild land issues in Scotland.

It is possible to download past editions of WLN, read our consultation responses and letters to the relevant bodies.

Keep an eye on the website as it develops—we welcome any comments or contributions to the site’s content.

SWLG Steering Team

Rob Mc Morran (Co-ordinator): East Lodge, Craibstone, Aberdeen, AB21 9SJ, 01224 716709 or 07754 571364 (enquiries@swlg.org.uk)

Tim Ambrose (Treasurer): 8 Clevedon Road, Kelvinside, Glasgow, G12 0NT (timambrose1954@hotmail.com)

Grant Cornwallis (Membership Secretary): 36 Mansefield Crescent, Clarkston, Glasgow, G76 7EB, 0141 638 2210 or 07968 500595 (grantswlg@hotmail.co.uk)

Jayne Glass (WLN73 Editor & Webmaster): Jayne Glass, 30 Churchill Court, Aberfeldy, PH15 2AT (jayne@swlg.org.uk)

David Jarman: Findon Cottage, Culbokie, Ross-shire, IV7 8JJ (david@swlg.org.uk)

Calum Brown: Flat 3, 38 North Street, Cambuskenneth, Stirling, FK9 5NB (calum@swlg.org.uk)

Graeme Cornwallis: 201 River Court, Busby, Glasgow, G76 8DR (graeme@swlg.org.uk)

Notes

This edition of Wild Land News (WLN) is designed and edited by Jayne Glass. Individual articles do not necessarily reflect the views of the SWLG Steering Committee. We welcome any general enquiries about wild land in Scotland as well as any comments you may have about the content of WLN. We are also keen to hear about any local developments in wild areas which you think might concern the Group. Please contact Rob Mc Morran, the Co-ordinator, in the first instance. We also welcome contributions for WLN (articles, letters, photographs etc). Please send any contributions to editor@swlg.org.uk or contact us if you would like to send hard copies.

If you would like to join SWLG, please complete the membership form below and return to the Membership Secretary with the correct payment. It is also possible to join SWLG via our new website (www.swlg.org.uk). If you have any enquiries about bankers' orders, Gift Aid, generous donations and any other financial matters, please get in touch with Tim Ambrose, our Treasurer.

An individual annual subscription costs £10 and includes a subscription to Wild Land News. The reduced subscription for unwaged, senior citizens, and juniors (under 18) is £5. Corporate membership and family membership (for two adults living at the same address) are priced £20 and £15 respectively. Please make cheques payable to Scottish Wild Land Group (subscriptions run to 31 December each year). We are always trying to increase our membership so that Scotland's wild land can have a stronger voice. Please spread the word about us and direct potential members to our website (www.swlg.org.uk) where they will find membership information and online payment options.

Membership Form

Please enrol me as a member of the Scottish Wild Land Group.

I enclose a subscription of £_____ (see notes above)


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