

**TIME TO TAKE  
ACTION ON HILL  
TRACKS**

# WILD LAND NEWS

Spring 2010

No.75

Magazine of the Scottish  
Wild Land Group

**Beaully-Denny: Goodbye wild Highlands**

**Rewilding in the Southern Uplands**

**Cairngorms Environmental Change**

**Wind factories and bats**

**Major wild land conference**

scottish  
**wild land**  
group

Registered Scottish charity: SC004014

## WILD LAND NEWS:

### *Magazine of the Scottish Wild Land Group*

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Front cover: Beinn Bhuraich hill track ditch on Corriegarth Estate near Foyers, June 2009.

Photo: Alex Sutherland

### **Comment**

#### ***Rob Mc Morran (Co-ordinator)***

Welcome to Wild Land News 75! Calum Brown kicks off this edition, with an authoritative look at the issue of hill tracks. Despite repeated calls for action, the commissioning of research and clear recognition of the need for action, little has been done to arrest the development of these intrusions into Scottish wild land. As Calum points out, hill tracks are not

just intrusions on scenic quality, they are in fact much more, with a variety of associated environmental impacts. The continued proliferation of hill tracks, as with the approval of Beaully-Denny, demonstrates a key point: Scotland's wild land continues to be grossly undervalued by decision-makers. To counteract this, the SWLG strongly encourages you to send



us information about tracks you come across and sign The Mountaineering Council of Scotland's petition ([www.hilltrackscampaign.org.uk](http://www.hilltrackscampaign.org.uk)).

Next up, Philip Ashmole revisits the rewilding debate, responding to many of James Fenton's assertions in WLN 73 which relate to the use of active land management to encourage land to 'rewild'. Carrifran is an admirable achievement and a real lesson in 'people power', with the purchase of the site facilitated by donations from over 900 folk! Philip returns to the argument of key-stone species and once again the reintroduction of lynx is advocated as a deer control measure. Philip's vision may be viewed as optimistic by some; however, it is also something else – inspirational. Carrifran is already having an impact beyond its own boundaries and the vision of such initiatives is highlighting the potential for a more widespread rewilding of the uplands.

Chris Andrews draws our attention to the importance of long term monitoring in wild areas. Taking a look back at his own involvement in monitoring the Allt a'Mharcaidh catchment in the Cairngorms, Chris highlights the importance of assessing changes which are often invisible over the short term and only apparent from long term monitoring and data analysis. Chris's article highlights a key point – large scale visible impacts on wild land are not the only type of impact such areas face, with long term climate change and gradual land use changes also representing potentially massive threats over the longer term. Interest-

ingly, the article by Roger Cottis further illustrates the importance of long term monitoring in relation to the impacts of wind farms on bat populations.

The SWLG is also delighted to be able to include two articles from SWLG members in this edition. Geoff Moore takes an impassioned look at some of the myriad of inconsistencies around the renewable energy agenda, while Robert Russel takes us on an intimate journey which illustrates the depth of importance of wild land to him at a personal level – as well as highlighting the importance of the continued work of the SWLG! Finally, Heather Morning takes a quick look at what wild land means to her and how being without it, even for a few weeks, simply drives her nuts!

On a more depressing note, on the 6 January 2010, the controversial plans for a line of giant pylons from the Highlands to central Scotland were given the go-ahead by the Scottish Government. In February, the Beauldy-Denny Landscape Group (of which SWLG is a member) requested that the Beauldy-Denny Inquiry be re-opened. Specifically, Jim Mather MSP has been asked to respond to questions regarding procedural errors in the handling of the decision, the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment, and an inconsistent approach to under-grounding. The message from the BDLG is very clear: the fight is not over yet.

We hope you enjoy WLN 75 and we welcome further articles and letters.

*10 March 2010*

## ***Act Now to Stop the Spread of Hill Tracks*** ***by Calum Brown***

*One of the most marked impacts on wild areas is the damage done by the development of hill tracks in Scotland's uplands. The Mountaineering Council of Scotland has recently launched a campaign to call for an overhaul of the uncontrolled rights of landowners to construct these monstrous tracks through our wild areas. SWLG wholeheartedly supports this campaign ([www.hilltrackscampaign.org.uk](http://www.hilltrackscampaign.org.uk)). In this article, Calum Brown, member of the SWLG Steering Team, explains the inherent issues with planning legislation where hill tracks are concerned and tells us what we can all do to help.*

We are all familiar with the sight of bulldozed tracks driven into remote glens or mountainsides with little regard for their impact on the landscape or environment. Unregulated under current planning law, such tracks are highly visible and have contributed to the rapid loss, between 2002 and 2008, of one quarter of the land in Scotland classed as 'visually unaffected by development'. If we want to save our remaining unspoiled views, urgent action is needed to pressurise government into changing planning regulations.

Wild Land News last ran an article on hill tracks in the autumn of 2006, when there were promising signs that the problem was being taken seriously. Several particularly egregious examples of careless track construction had received publicity and caught the attention of the Scottish Executive, which promised a review of relevant planning laws. Herriot-Watt University was commissioned to carry out this review, and it was published soon afterwards. Scottish Natural Heritage had also recently published a detailed best practice guide emphasising



Gulvain Mallie track  
 Photo: David Jarman

the search for alternatives and the importance of sensitive design and construction – and later removal – of hill tracks.

However, despite the universal concern and oft-expressed good intentions, hill tracks have continued their spread across the wild land of Scotland unabated, and still enjoy the Permitted Development status that exempts them from all planning safeguards. Originally granted in the postwar period, this apparent oversight in fact reflected government policy of the time - to encourage the rapid expansion and intensification of the forestry and farming industries. Planning laws that might hinder this were therefore circumvented, effectively providing blanket permission for infrastructural developments regardless of size, design, location, or even necessity.

Since then, of course, policy has changed. The intensification of farming and forestry is no longer encouraged - indeed it is actively inhibited by British and European regulations – and both industries have become subject to stricter environmental constraints. Diversification has become the official mantra for rural areas, and yet no other industry benefits from the extraordinary free hand of Permitted Development. Even American billionaires cannot yet *entirely* bypass the planning system.

In addition to this general inequity, many specific problems related to upland track construction have emerged. Numerous studies in the 1970s and 80s established that hill tracks have significant detrimen-

tal effects on local ecology, water flow, soil chemistry, vegetation patterns, and landscape. Soil chemicals are markedly depleted in their vicinity; vegetation cover is reduced; single species proliferate; and further erosion follows. In marginal habitats the floral community can take years to recover, and on moorland and blanket bog may never revert to its original composition. Hill tracks are far more than just eyesores – although their impact on landscapes for miles around is surely sufficient reason to curb their use.

In fact, governments have been considering such changes for many years. Legislation in 1992 (the amended General Permitted Development Order, or GPDO) was originally set to require the prior notification of farm and forestry track construction – a small step, already in force for buildings, that was nevertheless omitted from the final bill. Just three years later, a review found that “the GPDO is an overly complex and out of date mechanism...[which] is difficult to understand and interpret” [1995 white paper ‘Modernising the Planning System’]. Despite this, it was not until the Heriot-Watt report of 2006 that recommendations for changes were sought – recommendations that still await implementation.

The anaemic response of government has apparently influenced others – the Cairngorm National Park Authority, for example, issued a draft Local Plan in 2006 which included no curbs on track construction, even in the Park’s most sensitive areas. The SWLG argued in response that new and upgraded tracks



should be entirely precluded here; a position that was also adopted by last December’s official report on the Local Plan Inquiry, which stated that “there should be a core within which there would be a presumption against any development including the intrusion of tracks” (p59). The absence of such a presumption represented “a defect which should be rectified before this local plan is progressed to adoption” (p60).

Similarly, the larger-scale Heriot-Watt report concluded that Permitted Development Rights for vehicular tracks should be “universally withdrawn” (p8) within protected areas, and that “if open landscapes with semi-natural vegetation are mapped, PDR should then be withdrawn from all private vehicular ways within them” (p9). Furthermore, the upgrading of non-vehicular tracks should require planning consent, as should the broadening of existing tracks beyond their current boundaries. Finally, the report recommends the imposition of “a general condition that any incidental or consequential damage to adjacent ground be made good” (p9).



Beinn Bhuraich track, Corriegarth Estate, June 2009  
Photo: Alex Sutherland

The Permitted Development status granted to agricultural developments suffers from an obvious defect in itself – the GPDO does not define agriculture, and so offers no basis on which to distinguish a track’s purpose. Even if it did, of course, a prospective track-builder merely has to *claim* that an agricultural purpose will be served, and he may proceed entirely un-

fettered by normal constraints. We have all come across bulldozed tracks carved deep into mountain areas entirely devoid of farmed livestock and anything resembling arable land. Many of the most damaging examples of hill tracks have clearly been constructed for the purposes of field sports, and so should have been subject to planning permission. They were not, however, because the legislation remains confused and confusing, openly invites subversion, and is wholly outdated.

The only practicable solution is for Permitted Development rights to be removed from hill tracks in all areas, whatever their supposed purpose. If a legitimate case can be made for the construction of a new track or the improvement of an existing one, then planning consent should be sought, rather than preemptively granted. Reasonable conditions and safeguards can then be imposed, and not simply suggested in optimistic best practice guides.

Having commissioned the report carried out by Heriot-Watt in 2006, the Scottish Government is well aware of the action

that needs to be taken to modernise and repair the GPDO. The fact that this is being repeatedly postponed implies either a lack of interest or a failure to grasp the urgency of reform. Fortunately, not all MSPs are guilty of the same inertia. Several are supporting a Motion put to parliament by Peter Peacock, MSP for the Highlands and Islands, expressing concern over the proliferation of tracks and requesting greater scrutiny and control in the future (the Motion can be viewed online at: <http://www.tinyurl.com/ygpq2rs>). Without sufficient public support, however, it is unlikely that the momentum required for real change will be generated. It is crucial, therefore, that we act now to demand action on this issue, before any more of our wild land is lost because of ill-conceived planning law for the benefit of pseudo-agricultural interests.

*Thanks to Calum for this well-researched article. Please do send Calum any records/photos of hill tracks that you come across and sign up to the MCoFS campaign online. The more support and evidence we have, the more effective the campaign will be.*

### What can you do about Hill Tracks?

- ✓ Sign the online petition set up by the Mountaineering Council of Scotland and supported by the SWLG and others, at: [www.hilltrackscampaign.org.uk](http://www.hilltrackscampaign.org.uk);
- ✓ Write to your MSP and urge them to support the above Motion and changes to the law;
- ✓ Record the locations of any hill tracks you find, and send details (and photos) to: [calum@swlg.org.uk](mailto:calum@swlg.org.uk).

## ***Carrifran, ecological restoration and the Wildwood Group***

***by Philip Ashmole***

*In Peter Taylor's article in WLN73 (Summer 2009), the Carrifran Wildwood Project in the Southern Uplands was brought to our attention as an excellent example of how a denuded landscape can be transformed to a more diverse ecosystem. To follow on from this, we asked Phillip Ashmole, co-ordinator of project, to share his insights into the links between the work at Carrifran and the wider 'rewilding' debate.*

Rob Mc Morran's request for a contribution to *Wild Land News* proved a considerable challenge, given that several of the foremost thinkers about wild land had already provided penetrating analyses in the summer issue. However, the timing is right, since we have just completed the first decade of our work on the ecological restoration of Carrifran and have recently published a book about the project.

The Mission Statement of the Wildwood Group, formulated before we found Carrifran, runs as follows: *The Wildwood project aims to re-create, in the Southern Uplands of Scotland, an extensive tract of mainly forested wilderness with most of the rich diversity of native species present in the area before human activities became dominant. The woodland will not be exploited commercially and the impact of humans will be carefully managed. Access will be open to all, and it is hoped that the Wildwood will be used throughout the next millennium as an inspiration and an educational resource.*

Clearly understood by the group, though not explicit in this statement, was the idea that the needs of wild plants and

animals would take precedence. This is similar to the avowed 'primacy of nature' policy of Scottish Natural Heritage on National Nature Reserves, but in the Wildwood Group it is linked to a determination to allow the Wildwood site to develop gradually into a semi-natural ecosystem, with steady reduction in the intensity of management operations. Our policy is thus founded – like that of *Trees for Life* – on the conviction that if we can remove the destructive forces which have caused the damage we aim to repair, and can get restoration started, nature can be relied on to do most of the subsequent work.

### **Confidence in nature?**

In his article in WLN 73, James Fenton says "Ought we not to have more confidence in nature? [...] Letting things be wild means letting nature decide what happens." Few restoration ecologists would disagree, provided that 'nature' is currently in the driving seat. In the Scottish context such ideas carry the dangerous implication that a *laissez faire* attitude is appropriate, even though man has long been in control and has been responsible for drastic change.



Fenton rails against the tendency of ecologists to say that they *want* certain outcomes or that habitats *should* be in a certain state. He argues that “*The Scottish uplands have survived the vicissitudes of climate change, sheep farms, deer numbers, humans, burning, wolves, trees, etc.*” One may ask, however, what is meant by the word ‘survive’? The mountains and rivers are still in place, but do our upland landscapes in any sense represent a natural state and can they safely be left to nature? I think most ecologists are convinced that we have caused grievous damage to ecosystems, in Scotland and in many other places, and that we have to a large extent emasculated nature, so that its resilience is undermined and it is no longer equipped to undertake repairs.

On a timescale of millions of years the catastrophic destruction of ecosystems – for instance by massive volcanism, meteorite impact or the sudden onset of an ice age – provides extraordinary opportunities for evolutionary diversification of all forms of life. But this is not the timescale of human societies. If we wait for evolution to repair anthropogenic damage, the world will be a poor place for the foreseeable future.

My conviction that things have gone very wrong has deep personal roots. As a young teacher at Yale University in the 1960s, I was caught up in the ferment of theoretical ideas swirling around the North American ecological establishment at that time. In 1960 Hairston, Smith & Slobodkin set the cat among the pigeons. In a four-page paper in *American Natu-*



Winter at Carrifran. Photo: Philip Ashmole

*ralist* they argued that the world is green because herbivores as a class are predator-limited. Most ecologists, especially on this side of the Atlantic, had tended to the view that herbivores (at any rate vertebrate herbivores) are resource-limited, with predators creaming off the reproductive surplus. Half a century on, however, it may be that the 'HSS' argument is an idea whose time has come.

### **Missing our large predators**

In his 2008 book "*Where the Wild Things Were*", the American science writer William Stolzenburg vividly describes the studies on a variety of ecosystems which demonstrate the role of predators as 'keystone species', exerting a major influence on the composition and dynamics of the communities in which they live. This work provides compelling evidence that in ecosystems that have reached a dynamic equilibrium, predation generally ensures both high animal diversity and vegetation rich in species and in structure. If large predators disappear, fundamental changes occur. Stolzenburg's long section on the role of deer in North America after the removal of wolves and other predators carries an uncomfortable message for all those concerned with the Scottish countryside.

In parts of the northwest Highlands and some other high areas with a cold, exposed climate, prehistoric loss of native woodland may have been caused mainly by progressive leaching of soils, with periods of high rainfall leading to waterlogging and peat formation. In other parts of the Highlands, however, herbivores are strongly implicated in deforestation

and in such places trees grow readily if given protection from grazing. In the Southern Uplands the pollen record over 10,000 years indicates changes in vegetation in parallel with climate change, but the devastating impact of humans and their activities on biodiversity is also clear, especially over the last thousand years. We cannot know how much of this impact was caused by the lack of large predators, but I suspect that it played a major part.

### **A question of scale?**

In the Wildwood Group we are not environmental lawyers or philosophers, but we share a strong sense that the wildlife species native to our land have a right to co-exist with us. There may be common ground here with Fenton, who feels that on the one hand it is right to remove species introduced by humans that are colonising a 'wild' area, and on the other hand that we are justified in reinstating and managing species that have become 'extinct' through human action. However, there is a problem of scale. Since species that are globally extinct cannot be reinstated, Fenton is presumably thinking of national extinction. But is there any logical difference between humans acting to reinstate beavers or lynx in Scotland because they are unlikely to cross the North Sea on their own, and reinstating oak, juniper and other species in a denuded valley because seed sources are so remote that natural recolonisation would take a very long time?

### **Restoring a more natural habitat**

The members of the Wildwood Group



were stimulated in the early 1990s by the efforts already under way to restore native pinewoods in the Highlands, and began to feel a responsibility to bring back the native broadleaf forest of the Southern Uplands. We quickly realised that although we could only hope to restore a relatively small area, the positive impact on people could be profound. In our region the main losses of more natural habitats occurred so long ago that there is no folk memory of woodland on the hills. A demonstration that our land is capable of carrying native woodland and harbouring all the associated wildlife might bring wider realisation that deforestation in our local area was comparable to that which we deplore as we see it happening elsewhere. Our work might thus inspire other initiatives in restoration ecology.

The search for a site to recreate the wild-wood of southern Scotland was long and full of frustrations, and finally succeeded only as a result of a serendipitous walk by a member of our group with a friend who mentioned that his farmer cousin had recently bought land in the Moffat Hills. Negotiations were tortuous, but we eventually obtained a two-year option on Carrifran, a spectacular 650 hectare valley rising to the fourth highest point in the south of Scotland. We were then faced with

the need to raise a third of a million pounds by public subscription. It was hard work, but we were not really surprised when we found that the boldness and clarity of our vision of a restored ecosystem was stirring deep chords. The response was remarkable and over the years more than 900 individuals – most of them from far away – have given £250, £500 or more to support the project.

Planning the restoration work at Carrifran was underpinned by a conference organised by the group at the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh in 1997, under the title '*Native woodland restoration in southern Scotland: principles and practice*', which was attended by 180 delegates. Details of the plan for the valley were worked out during the fundraising period at a long series of meetings in the local pub, with up to 25 people including professional foresters and biologists but



The first high planting camp, Firth Hope, February 2007  
Photo: Mike Baker



also those with very different experience and outlook.

We soon recognised that denudation at Carrifran was so complete that intensive intervention was needed if restoration was to be achieved on a reasonable timescale: over decades and centuries rather than millennia. Natural regeneration of trees was bound to be minimal, with many species entirely absent and the rest highly localised and with very small numbers, so we had to depend on planting. Funding for this was available from the Forestry Commission, while the National Lottery paid for fencing and SNH contributed to management costs.

In the ten years since Carrifran was purchased by Borders Forest Trust (BFT), about half a million trees have been planted in the main valley and the high corries, over 50,000 of them by volunteers. Almost all are derived from seeds

or cuttings collected by members of the group. The aim is to establish woodland over nearly half the total area (~300 ha) and extending from the lowest parts of the site at 160m to a natural treeline at about 750m.

Our approach to silviculture has been minimalist, since the aim is to create a natural-looking forest. The pattern of planting is highly irregular, with no mechanical ground preparation. Tree tubes are used only in bracken-infested areas and a little fertiliser only in special situations. However, all trees have vole guards and pre-planting spot treatment with herbicide has normally been used. Although the main planting is now complete, we are still adding trees where appropriate species are missing, as well as caring for those already in place, while volunteers will continue monitoring the perimeter stock fence, needed to exclude feral goats and the sheep from

neighbouring farms. Since roe deer have free access to the area, rigorous culling is required to ensure survival of our young planted trees.

Nevertheless, there has always been a clear intention to reduce management intensity progressively, and generally 'to let nature decide' the outcome. We reckon to put the key elements of a healthy



Planting in Firth Hope, April 2008  
Photo: Philip Ashmole

ecosystem in place and then to let it run. We are prepared to 'let the chips fall' as succession and community interactions proceed. We shall accept the disappearance of some species if they have been given a fair chance and will try to resist the kind of micro-management that is necessary in conservation projects designed with specific objectives in view.

### Where next?

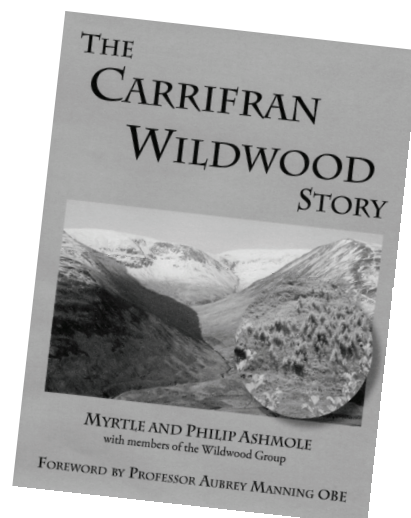
We wholeheartedly agree with John Muir's assertion that "*None of Nature's landscapes are ugly so long as they are wild.*" However, we want to be sure that our restored landscape really is wild. A fully functioning natural ecosystem in the Southern Uplands would need to include beavers (though not in the rugged terrain of Carrifran) and several large predators. Reinstatement seems impractical for some of the latter, but lynx deserve consideration. In Europe the primary prey of lynx is roe deer, with fox in second place, and the only likely downside of lynx reintroduction is that some sheep might be lost. Large predators need large areas and Carrifran by itself is far too small, but roe deer abound in the broad expanses of conifer forest in the Borders and Dumfriesshire, and BFT's continuing efforts to restore parts of the ancient Etrick Forest will provide additional habitat suitable for lynx.

David Hetherington calculates that southern Scotland could support around 50 lynx. The long term survival of a population of this size would not be assured, but it is conceivable that lynx might take over deer control at Carrifran so that we could take another step back in terms of man-

agement. In the meantime, we must ensure that the foundations of the Wildwood remain firm while the passage of time allows natural processes of birth, growth, death and decay to reassert themselves. Already, we can watch shady habitats developing and the diversity of birds, insects and fungi increasing; we can also observe multiplying signs of nature red in tooth and claw.

The Wildwood Group is aware that much work remains to be done, but at least we have made a start in repaying some of our debts to the species with which we used to coexist. We hope that those who visit Carrifran or read about the project will become more sure that individuals working together can make a real difference, and that environmental change in the modern world need not always be in the wrong direction.

*For a fuller account of the Wildwood project, see "The Carrifran Wildwood Story: ecological restoration from the grass roots", published in September 2009. If it is purchased direct from [www.bordersforesttrust.org](http://www.bordersforesttrust.org) all of the proceeds go straight into the project.*



## ***Environmental Change Network in the Cairngorms National Park: 10 years and counting***

***by Chris Andrews***

*Long-term monitoring of ecosystems is important if we are to understand the impacts of climate change, land management and other developments on Scotland's wild land. Chris Andrews from the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology in Edinburgh explains why work in the Cairngorms is vital for understanding long-term change. All photos are by the author.*

Fortunately for me, I find myself in the enviable position where both work and personal interests often take me to the same part of the world. The weekly Wednesday drive north along the A9 between Perth and Kincaig never fails to surprise me. Whether it's because of the visual changes of the landscape through the seasons or a more localised interest due to inclement weather (frequent), no two journeys ever seem the same. I think it's that feeling of suspense that keeps me alert and awakened, not as you might think, watching for that moment of lunacy that driving the A9 seems to

bring out in some drivers, but for the moment the section of dual carriageway up the Pass of Drumochter spits you out in the Highlands. The change in the landscape over the relatively short area from the agricultural/pastoral lands of Glen Garry around Blair Atholl to atop the Drumochter pass is, to me, staggering; it's amazing what a few metres of altitude can do to a landscape!

And then there's the weather. Without doubt, on the drive toward Drumochter, I will have been making bold predictions to disbelieving students about the ex-



Looking south to Sgòran Dubh Mòr, Allt a'Mharcaidh



pected weather around Feshiebridge (our destination), almost certainly predicting the exact opposite of the weather we've encountered on the drive so far.

Luckily for me I am more often than not proved to be correct, and the students, having been mentally preparing for a day in the rain, happily find they can keep their waterproofs stashed away for another day. It's one of those complexities of mountain weather systems that the Pass of Drumochter often acts as a useful buffer with rain on one side when there are drier skies on the other.

Ultimately our destination is the Allt a'Mharcaidh, a small catchment of 10km<sup>2</sup>, just west of Feshiebridge. The site became part of the Cairngorms National Nature Reserve in 1954, and was partially ring-fenced to protect against deer in 1972. Now, the fences are long gone and recent land management strategies have been to allow the area to re-wild naturally, with the only exceptions being the necessary control of deer numbers and occasional brushing around paths through the forest. The catchment is a good microcosm of the greater national park. There is the seemingly obligatory forestry plantation on nearly all adjacent land, but on entering the catchment proper this subsides to ancient Scots pine stands. On the slopes above the older trees there is that rarity of Scotland; a scattered but regenerating natural tree line. Higher still, the catchment contains large areas of rank heather and damp bogs rich in mosses and cotton-grass, until eventually opening into the wind-scoured heaths characterised by lichens and clipped heather, so

typical of the higher plateau. Dominating all stands the high peak of Sgòran Dubh Mòr at 1111m.

The walk up onto Creag Follais on the east side of the catchment rarely fails to deliver some interest either. An old stalkers' path cleverly takes you gently (though some colleagues may disagree) up the 400m of ascent, taking in all the habitats mentioned previously. All British members of the grouse family are regularly seen whilst we occasionally encounter many of those unique species that tourists visiting the national park hope to see (I'm now only holding out for a sighting of the elusive Scottish Wildcat!). Last November alone we had two very close encounters with Golden Eagles in the forest, brightening up days that would otherwise be remembered for the quantity of water passing straight through supposedly waterproof clothing.

My appreciation of how the Cairngorm Mountains are now is somewhat heightened by the thought of changes that are predicted to take place in the not-too-distant future. A mixture of climate change, pollution and land-use change in the next 50 years is likely to see drastic change in the landscape we currently know. General warming may see the region become drier with less snow-lie in winter (although this December and January brought a welcome change to the norm!), leading to increased wildfires and subsequent loss of vegetation and peat; and whilst some atmospheric pollutants (notably sulphur) have declined

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Escaping it all on the shores of Iona  
Photo: Micah Stanbridge



*Continued from page 15*

over recent decades, the deposition of others, such as nitrogen, may see the spread of more competitive grasslands into areas currently occupied by heather. A reduction of grazing land for use by forestry and recreational enterprises is also likely to have dramatic impacts on the landscape we see today.

These regular visits are a fortunate bonus of my work as an ecologist for the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology. My research involves the operation of an upland research site for the UK Environmental Change Network; one of 12 terrestrial sites in the network ([www.ecn.ac.uk](http://www.ecn.ac.uk) for those whose interest I have managed to spark). Through the collation of a large array of biophysical data we hope to answer questions such as “Is the environment of our wild areas changing?” “If so, how is this affecting the animals and plants that inhabit them?” “How can we better manage the land to lessen the effects of any future change on wildlife?” The data required to answer these questions are collated in a number of ways. We use an automatic weather station and the chemical analysis of collected precipitation, soil water and stream water to create the bulk of the physical environmental data, whilst surveys of fauna (typically beetles, moths, butterflies and spittlebugs) and flora provide much of the biological data.

The unique location of the Cairngorm Mountains makes them an especially important site for monitoring in both the UK and Europe. Despite the maritime

climate of the British Isles, the height and mass of the Cairngorms mean they experience a more continental climate than more westerly mountains (the Pass of Drumochter being a fine example of why). It’s this location which has led to the sensitive sub-arctic montane habitats found within the Park (there are not many other locations that support reindeer herds on these shores), but which ultimately puts the habitat at an increased risk from a warming climate. Species constituting the sub-arctic habitats already exist close to their southerly distribution limit, so only a modest increase in ambient temperature is likely to push them beyond their thresholds and see them out-competed by more adaptable species. Effectively we could expect to see montane species initially migrate to higher altitudes, but with further warming this may eventually lead to local extinctions. It is because of this heightened sensitivity that we could see biological and physical change here earlier than many other sites both in the UK and abroad. This in turn makes our research not just important to the UK but also to several other European and global networks of which we became a part; these include SCANNET, a network of high latitude sites from around the northern hemisphere, and GLORIA, a network of montane sites from around the world. Our position in these two networks demonstrates the importance of this site’s location between alpine and arctic climates.

As we have only been collecting data for a relatively short time (10 years) we are still not confidently able to discern long-

term trends from background fluctuations, although so far we have recorded significant increases in both ambient temperature and windiness. There is also growing evidence of both an increase in extreme climatic events (largely intensity of rainfall, although it's worth keeping this winter in mind as another example) and a decrease in beetle populations.



Deep snow in the upper Allt a'Mharcaidh (Christmas Day, 2009) captured by a remote imaging system

I like to hope that in 50 years I could still be out enjoying the uplands (not sure my knees would agree!) and that decades of records showed that nothing had substantially changed, that the species and landscapes I love now will still bring pleasure to people. Unfortunately only time will tell. Land management practices may help mitigate some future impacts, but a slow process of change is al-

most inevitable. A small hope then, that through continuous long-term monitoring we are better prepared to predict and hopefully protect our ecosystems from whatever change the future brings.

*For more information about the Environmental Change Network, log on to [www.ecn.ac.uk](http://www.ecn.ac.uk).*

### ***Membership subscriptions for 2010***

You may have seen a "Red X" on your envelope that we sent the last issue of WLN in. This was fairly successful in reminding members to renew their memberships for 2010 – thank you very much to those who did - but we still have a few outstanding subscriptions. We would be very grateful if members could please pay their subscriptions for 2010 upon receipt of this magazine, if they haven't already, rather than leave it until later in the year. Early subscription allows us to plan ahead, and with 4 issues of Wild Land News anticipated this year, we really do need your continued support. Funds are required for campaigning on issues like Beaully-Denny, launching new campaigns, developing educational and promotional material, and raising SWLG's public profile. Thank you very much for your ongoing support.



## ***Beaully-Denny: Goodbye wild Highlands***

On 6 January 2010, the controversial plans for a line of giant pylons from the Highlands to central Scotland were given the go-ahead by the Scottish Government. This decision was reached despite a lengthy Public Local Inquiry and over 20,000 objections. SWLG (along with other members of the Beaully-Denny Landscape Group and Scotland Before Pylons) were outraged at the decision – it reflects the Scottish Government’s lack of a vision for the protection of Scotland’s priceless landscape heritage.

SWLG opposed Beaully-Denny because the project opens the doors wide for the futile sacrifice of most of the surviving wild, remote, beautiful Highlands to mega wind factories. The Scottish Government has backed these proposals because of vested interests that will profit (power companies, landowners and consultants to name a few) and there is a lack of understanding that Beaully-Denny and wind factories are yesterday’s technology: costly, inefficient and unreliable. This is a highly visible, quick-fix, save-the-planet, green gesture that ignores the obvious alternative to an overhead line: subsea cables from Caithness and the Northern Isles to the major centres of Scotland and England. By harvesting marine energy (wave and especially tidal), together with all of the wind power, the obvious solution is to tie in with these huge offshore projects that are now forging ahead. This subsea-marine energy package (BLUENERGY) is seen as the way forward by experts and public agencies, and fits into an emerging European grid.

Subsea cables are proven technology and lose far less energy en route than overhead power lines. This package also creates more jobs for Scotland and sacrifices none of our scenic heritage or wild places.

On 23 February 2010 the Beaully-Denny Landscape Group (which includes SWLG) and Scotland Before Pylons wrote to Energy Minister Jim Mather to ask him to reopen the Public Local Inquiry into the Beaully-Denny line. We want clear answers to outstanding issues raised by the decision to approve the new transmission line and have requested that Mr Mather responds to questions regarding procedural errors in the handling of the decision, the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment, and an inconsistent approach to undergrounding.

Two legal points have also been raised by the decision to approve the 137 mile Beaully-Denny line. The rules governing Inquiries state that if the Minister has differed from his Reporters in a number of material respects, then parties involved at the Inquiry should be allowed further representation.

In his decision, Mr Mather chose not to follow the view of Reporters on areas it was recommended that consent be withheld. By deciding to overrule his Reporters without consulting local authorities and other bodies, Mr Mather acted outside of his powers, under rule 21(4) of the Inquiries Procedure (Scotland) Rules. The absence of a Strategic Environmental

Assessment for the scheme could be a further legal barrier to development of wind power in the Highlands.

The groups also believe the Energy Minister had the power to specify undergrounding along the route of the line. Section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 allows the imposition of any conditions which the Minister sees fit to impose.

David MacLehose, Chairman of Scotland before Pylons said: "These are important issues that must be answered. While they are left in the air, there are no winners in this process, only unanswered questions. The decision was clearly an indication of short term panic, not the long term strategy which Scotland's energy potential requires. There are effective alternatives to overhead lines including subsea cables which the European Commission has supported, and undergrounding which is an established good practice for transmission."

Helen McDade, Chairwoman of the Beaully-Denny Landscape Group, said: "It is vital when there have been 20,000 objections to a development that the proper procedures are followed and the concerns of objectors are dealt with. Some of our most important landscapes depend on Mr Mather taking our points on board and reopening the Inquiry to examine these issues fully. The objectors believed that a Strategic Environmental Assessment would show that the proposed Beaully-Denny line is an unnecessary cost to hard-strapped electricity consumers."

Keep an eye out for updates on this story on the Latest News page of our website ([www.swlg.org.uk/html/latest\\_news.html](http://www.swlg.org.uk/html/latest_news.html)).

*If you are concerned about any local developments in your area that have an impact on wild land, please contact [enquiries@swlg.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@swlg.org.uk).*

### ***Moving with the times: SWLG joins Facebook and Twitter***

You can now follow SWLG news and updates on Facebook and Twitter. We already have plenty of followers since joining these sites last month and it's a great way to keep you up to date on wild land issues and news stories as they emerge. There are links to our new pages on these sites from any page of the SWLG website ([www.swlg.org.uk](http://www.swlg.org.uk)).

You do not need to join either social networking site to view the pages but you will need to set up an account if you wish to comment/take part in any online debate. If you have any questions or suggestions for these pages or the SWLG website in general, e-mail [admin@swlg.org.uk](mailto:admin@swlg.org.uk).





## ***Wind farms and bats: a need for research and mitigation measures***

*by Roger Cottis*

*Do we really understand the impacts of wind farms on our bat populations? Bats are a vital part of our native wildlife, accounting for almost a third of all mammal species in the UK. They occupy a wide range of habitats and can tell us a lot about the state of the environment because they are sensitive to changes in land use practices. Roger Cottis draws our attention to the lack of monitoring of bat casualties at British wind farms and shares worrying insights from research in Canada.*

There is little or no monitoring of bat casualties at British wind farms and with all species being afforded the highest protection through both European and British legislation, there seems to be a failing on behalf of governments and their agencies.

It should be incumbent on governments and their agencies to insist that the wind energy industry investigate each proposal for bat presence to inform the planning process. Conversely, the conservation movement should raise awareness of the impacts that wind turbines might have on bat populations and promote research within the wind energy industry to establish best practise mitigation measures. In addition, bat surveys should be undertaken nationally in potentially sensitive areas to establish maternity roosts and hibernacula; this would also assist in any future planning applications.

Problems with wind farms and dead bats were highlighted by research reported in August 2008 by Erin Baerwald, based at the University of Calgary in Canada. Baerwald and colleagues collected 188 dead bats from wind farms across south-

ern Alberta, and determined their cause of death. They found that 90% of the bats had signs of internal haemorrhaging, but only half showed any signs of direct contact with the turbine blades. Only 8% had signs of external injuries but no internal injuries. Further research identified that the moving blades cause a drop in air pressure that makes the delicate lungs of bats suddenly expand, bursting the tissue's blood vessels. This is known as a barotrauma, and is well-understood by divers. The greatest pressure differential at wind turbines occurs in the blade tip vortices, which are shed downwind from the tips of the moving blades and the pressure drop in the vortex increases with tip speed. Bat deaths are now being recorded in mainland Europe, from Germany to Spain, under similar circumstances.

Mitigation will be best informed when we understand where summer bat roosts are located in relation to feeding grounds and winter hibernacula. Whilst the Bat Conservation Trust is trying to encourage their members to undertake surveys, they have limited resources to do so. The various governments and their agencies within the United Kingdom, together

with the wind energy industry, should respect the requirements of bat legislation and fund surveys and research, at least in areas of potential wind farms. Research undertaken from the University of Leeds found that pipistrelle bats were feeding over moorland at 800m altitude in the English Lake District and that they are capable of hunting at a height of 150m above ground level, which indicates that most wind farm sites could be in conflict with bat feeding or movement between roosts. There is strong evidence that the majority of bats are killed when electricity generation starts at a wind speed less than 6m/sec. It is considered that relatively low levels of electricity are generated up to this wind speed and bats forage less at higher wind speeds. This would suggest an achievable mitigation measure with generation starting above 6m/sec for existing turbines and other sites having progressed through the planning process but failing to address the issue of potential bat presence.

Technologies in the form of sophisticated and basic bat detectors, together with thermal imaging cameras are available for monitoring proposed sites. Where anemometer masts are erected to check

wind speed, a simple extension can carry microphones linked to a sophisticated bat detector. This can record all bat passes over many months and distinguish the various echolocations produced by passing bats using computer software.

Heather moorland can attract many insects to feed during the late summer flowering season, which in turn attracts bat species to hunt. Insects have been seen to congregate around wind turbine sites under these conditions, increasing bat vulnerability.

Unless action is taken to survey each site and its surroundings, we may have a decline in bat numbers. This may not be understood for many years in much the same way we may have lost water vole colonies to American mink without knowing.

*Roger Cottis of Tawny Croft Wildlife Consultants in Skye is also Chairman of the charity Scottish Badgers ([www.scottishbadgers.org.uk](http://www.scottishbadgers.org.uk)) and committee member of the Skye & Lochalsh Environment Forum ([www.slef.org.uk](http://www.slef.org.uk)).*

### ***We're looking for volunteers...***

Would you like to help with the distribution of Wild Land News? We send a copy to all members and a range of organisations across Scotland and the UK. Committee members also distribute copies around bothies, outdoor shops, local libraries, doctors' surgeries etc. across the country to try and widen our readership as far as we can. This is hard work though as we don't have many hands between us! If you would be able to help distribute copies in your local area, please drop us a line ([admin@swlg.org.uk](mailto:admin@swlg.org.uk)) and we can arrange for some to be sent to you. Thank you!



## Articles from SWLG members

We welcome articles and letters from members for inclusion in Wild Land News. In this edition, Robert Russel shares a chilling story about Loch Horrisdale and Geoff Moore questions the maths behind claims made about just what renewable projects can achieve.

### **A Story of Wild Land**

by Robert Russel

Back in the mid-1950s, a boy on holiday in Wester Ross found a fist-size piece of twisted aluminium in the heather near Shieldaig, Badachro, while hunting for grasshoppers for trout bait – he was going fishing on a nearby hill loch with his father. They learned from a local crofter that a plane had crashed in the area over 10 years before. Fast forward to 1999 – the same boy, now in his fifties, took a walk up to that loch (Loch Braigh Horris-

dale) while re-visiting the area. Instead of re-tracing his route, for a change he struck back from the east shore of the loch, over rough ground upwards to a series of small lochs shown on his map. The view south to the Torridon hills was breathtaking – a real expanse of wild land. Approaching one of the lochs, he saw what appeared to be a tree-stump on an island, unusual in the tree-less landscape. On getting nearer, he could see it was in fact a propeller attached to a rusting engine block – and ahead by a small rock-face were more aircraft re-



Approaching the crash site, with Baisbheinn in the background

Photo: Robert Russel

mains – wheels, landing gear, spars, and lots of large pieces of aluminium. By chance, he had come across the wreck, which was that of a Liberator bomber. Returning to the USA in June 1945, it got into trouble in thick cloud. Descending to find its way, or possibly make an emergency landing, it struck the hillside only 20 feet below the summit. All were killed instantly. On the rock face there is a brass memorial plaque sponsored by families and friends, listing the nine crew and six passengers who died in the crash. And that same small piece of aluminium, found about 1km away by a boy over 40 years earlier, came from this plane. Standing looking at the aircraft remains, he thought how sad it was, that by this little loch with its beautiful view south to the Torridon hills, life should end so suddenly for those who had survived a war.

If you haven't guessed already, that boy was me. Recently, I fulfilled an ambition from my boyhood - to follow the track south from Loch Horrisdale, up into the hills as far as I could. On a perfect August day – blue sky, little cloud, gentle breeze – I set off from Shieldaig up the track. Two people firing an air-rifle at a target were the only humans I saw all day. Past Loch Horrisdale and beyond the ruins of a sheiling, I came across the confluence of two streams, each with an impressive waterfall. I headed up a boggy track with Argocat tyre marks and occasional wooden pallets squashed into the ground. To my right was rising moorland, to the left the bulk of Baosbheinn, whose squat shape is easily seen from Gairloch, and ahead the distant looming forms of Beinn Eighe and Beinn Dearg. The first

remote loch reached was Loch Gaineamhach, and the track continued south-east to the highest point, 300m, before descending to Loch a'Bhealaich. Here, 10 km from Shieldaig, I rested and lunched in perfect conditions by a sandy beach with a boat – the reason for the Argocat tracks. Later it clouded over, and I returned by Loch Ghobhainn which like the previous loch lies on the west flank of Baosbheinn, and also has a boat. Regaining my original route, it was downhill through heather and boggy tracks back to Shieldaig and the car.

Why am I sharing this personal experience with you? Because many years ago, SWLG took part in a campaign to prevent these three lochs beyond Loch Horrisdale being dammed as part of a hydro-electric scheme. I was one of those who wrote to object, the proposal eventually failed, and I always wanted to see the lochs I had only read of in SWLG's magazine. I was not disappointed – the beautiful day, and the serenity of the whole area, made me feel once more that areas like this really are worth protecting, and that every action we take – however small - to ensure that is the case, is worthwhile. Man's presence in this area – a wrecked aircraft\*, an abandoned sheiling, a couple of boats on a loch – seem minimal in contrast to the mountains and moors of this area. Let's keep it that way when and where we can.

\*The aircraft wreck lying at the northern edge of the isolated area stretching between Gairloch and Torridon is well documented. If you do visit it, enjoy the beauty of the area, think of those who lost their lives there, and take only memories away.

## ***The Great Renewables Lie***

*by Geoff Moore*

I was dismayed at the recent announcement that the Beaully-Denny power line has the go-ahead. No doubt now even more white elephant renewables schemes and power lines will be built. There has been much recent misinformation, ludicrous claims and media announcements sensationalizing recent renewables schemes; released by the government and vested interests that stand to profit greatly from them.

The 100MW Glendoe scheme was described as being capable of powering a city the size of Glasgow. Actually, the average total consumption of Glasgow is nearer 400MW. And the reservoir, which takes about 40 days to fill, would empty in the order of 6-12 days if the plant were run at full capacity. Some simple calculations show that it would actually need around 25 Glendoes to power Glasgow; and during peak demand the figure could rise to 35-40! A typical Scottish hydro scheme only runs around 35% of the year due to lack of water.

And then there are the 2 proposed pumped storage schemes in the Great Glen (described thus “New Loch Ness Hydro Scheme would be Scotland’s biggest”). There are 3 relevant ways to describe the size of a hydro scheme: the actual physical size of the infrastructure (dams, power stations, reservoirs etc.); the total quantity of electricity generated per year; or the maximum power rating (how much energy is converted per sec-

ond). Only using the latter measure could the new schemes be Scotland’s biggest (depending on whether SSE uses 300MW or 600 MW turbines; the existing Cruachan scheme is 440MW). Bear in mind that a typical pumped storage reservoir empties in less than a day. Using the former method, the Tummel scheme is Scotland’s biggest with no fewer than 9 power stations and 7 dams, built between 1930 and 1962, and covering an area of 1840 square km. By contrast, Glendoe (which was also described as Scotland’s biggest) has 1 power station and 1 dam over an area of less than 100 square km. The two Great Glen schemes would be even smaller.

In my opinion most of this misinformation is deliberately released to generate public enthusiasm for these schemes. The companies building them always say that we need them to address climate change. Don’t believe it folks; it’s all about making rich people even richer (at public expense). The public seems to be fairly evenly split on the debate but how much support for renewables would evaporate if the public knew the truth? Many of their “facts” don’t hold water; pardon the pun.

It’s no use ranting without an alternative solution. I believe that all subsidies for renewables should cease; and instead plough the money into clean coal and carbon capture technology (Scottish Power recently demonstrated the commercial viability of this). The new technology could be exported to America and China, the world’s biggest polluters (they



get most of their energy from coal). Bear in mind that our biggest coal fired power station (Longannet) can produce as much electricity as all the Scottish windfarms and hydro plants combined (especially when the wind drops!) and Scotland has vast coal reserves. I would much rather

have a few of these than have what's left of Scotland's beautiful landscape ruined. Also, this (gold) rush for renewables is taking our eye off the ball; we should be reducing demand through less wasteful use of electricity.

*Thank you to Robert and Geoff for these thought-provoking articles. If you would like to comment on any of the content of WLN or submit an article/letter, please e-mail [editor@swlg.org.uk](mailto:editor@swlg.org.uk).*

## **Major wild land conference to be held near Perth May 2010**

Should areas of Scotland be rewilded? What might the impacts of climate change be on wild land? What does recent research on wild land and wildness mean? What direction should policy take to ensure the sustainable future of Scotland's wild landscapes?

These are just some of the questions that the upcoming "Scotland's Wild Landscapes – A way forward" will attempt to address. A two-day event taking place in Battleby (near Perth) on 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> May 2010, the main aims are to: raise awareness among key stakeholders; identify future opportunities and threats

for wild landscapes; provide a discussion forum, and develop recommendations for the conservation and enhancement of Scotland's wild landscapes.

The conference is open to all and is supported by: UNESCO, John Muir Trust, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Scottish Wild Land Group, Cairngorms National Park Authority and UHI Millennium Institute.

To register, e-mail [wildlandresearch@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:wildlandresearch@leeds.ac.uk) or visit [www.wildlands.info](http://www.wildlands.info) for more information.



## ***Back to basics: what is the SWLG?***

***by Tim Ambrose (SWLG Treasurer)***



The Scottish Wild Land Group (SWLG) is a registered Scottish charity that campaigns for the conservation and protection of Scotland's wild land. Membership is open to all, and the group is run by a Steering Team of enthusiastic volunteers elected annually by the members. SWLG was set up in 1982 by a number of concerned individuals who decided to act on a number of threats to the remaining areas of Scotland's wild land – one particular issue at the time was the proposed sale of the Knoydart estate and the possibility that the Knoydart peninsula might be acquired by the Ministry of Defence to be used as a military training area. This would have untold implications for the wildlife, scenery, local community and access.

Membership grew rapidly as the need for a clear voice to support wild land was recognised, and the group grew in numbers and influence. The group's magazine, Wild Land News, is distributed to all members, as well as to MSPs and other interested parties, several times each year. We aim to inform members of the

latest wild land issues and report on our campaigning and action – you are now reading issue 75!

SWLG was a founding member of LINK, the grouping of Scottish conservation and recreation bodies established in 1986 to co-ordinate and strengthen the voice of Scottish countryside and wildlife.

Much of Scotland's wild land is unique, and too much of it is under threat of unsuitable and short term development. Once desecrated, whether by bulldozed hill tracks, wind farms or blanket forestry, the wildness of a mountain or moor can never be fully recaptured. Nevertheless, we strongly support efforts at re-wilding damaged areas.

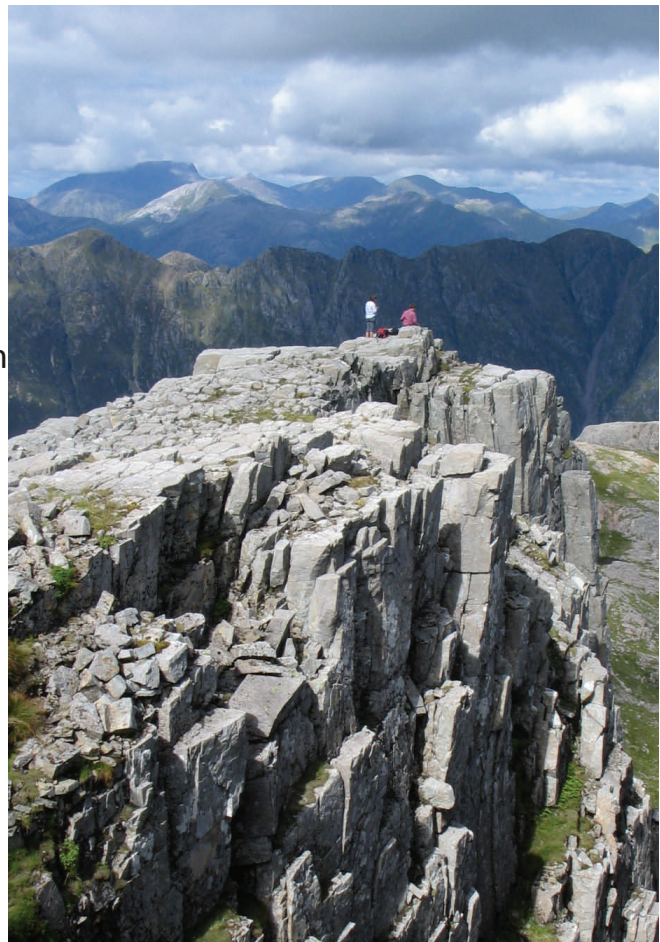
There have been many changes since the group was set up but many of the threats, such as the uncontrolled bulldozing of hill-tracks for shooting parties (see Calum's article on page 4), remain. The establishment of the Scottish Parliament has generally had positive implications for Scotland's wild land, including

### ***SWLG T-shirts***

SWLG T-shirts are available from our Membership Secretary, Grant Cornwallis. The new logo or covers of WLN can be printed onto white cotton, high quality T-shirts. A range of sizes and women's and children's fits are available. T-shirts cost £15 (including postage). Cheques (payable to Scottish Wild Land Group) and full details of your order requirements should be sent to Grant (address on inside back cover). Please do not send cash and allow 28 days for delivery. Credit/debit cards can be accepted by post or telephone.

setting up the (far from ideal) Loch Lomond and Cairngorms National Parks and some positive legislation on access rights, but new threats have arisen. In response to climate change, Scotland's answer seems to be the development of vast, obtrusive wind-factories in some of Scotland's wildest areas. They come with much damaging development, as well as the perceived need to march a line of enormous electricity pylons through some of Scotland's finest mountain scenery – the Beaully-Denny line which the SWLG has fought long and hard against.

The SWLG is needed as much now as ever, and if you value the qualities of wildness and remoteness and want future generations to be able to enjoy these in Scotland, please support us and add your voice to ours.



*SWLG has been working to conserve and protect Scotland's wild land since 1982. The larger our membership, the louder our voice...*

Above: On the cliffs of Stob Coire nan Lochan Photo: John Digney (you may remember this inspirational shot from a previous edition of WLN...)

***Wild land questionnaire:  
Human perceptions and beliefs about mountains***

Members of SWLG are asked to take part in an online questionnaire survey about their perceptions and beliefs regarding mountains. A student at the University of the Highlands and Islands is conducting this questionnaire as part of dissertation research for an MSc in Managing Sustainable Mountain Development at the Centre for Mountain Studies at Perth College.

The project focuses on 'Sacred Mountains', with the aim being to add to the very limited published literature available from historical and more recently published material. To complete the questionnaire, visit:

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/venerationofmountains>  
(open until the end of March 2010)



## ***My wild land...by Heather Morning***

*There are many different perceptions of 'wild land', which makes it a hard concept to pin down and portray to those who have the power to protect (and disrespect) it. In the first of a series of wild land 'musings', Heather Morning, Mountain Safety Advisor at The Mountaineering Council of Scotland, shares her thoughts with us.*

It's late January 2010. The sun is shining and the snow-clad mountains look stunning in front of their blue sky backdrop. I am driving across the Laggan Road from Fort William to Aviemore but my heart is sad. There is a tear in my eye as I long to be back on the hill, walking, climbing, skiing and, to be brutally honest, just being there.

You see, mountains are so much a part of me. They have shaped who I am, what I do, where I live and to take them away is like losing a part of myself. The feeling is almost impossible to express and even more challenging to put down on paper. I've been unable to go out on the hill now for exactly 29 days. It seems like a lifetime. Torn medial collateral ligament in my right knee. Nothing spectacular, no daring-dos, just an unimpressive fall on easy piste in perfect snow conditions on a clear day. Where's the justice in that, after skiing for 25 years in more challenging and remote places around the world? It's no biggy: eight to ten weeks off the hill whilst physio and a committed relationship with the swimming pool keep me relatively sane.

Back to my beloved mountains: like many things in life it is too easy to take them for granted. They are always there for me when I choose to indulge in them. Granted, sometimes they are more enjoyable than others. I guess it's like relationships though; you take the rough

with the smooth, the good, the bad and the downright ugly. But I just know that my love affair with the mountains will last for life. It's quite strange. I feel very privileged that the mountains and wild places have been the one continuum in my life, the thing that I always strive for, turn to and need to spend time in. It doesn't always have to be 'gnarly' or challenging. Sometimes it's enough just to 'be' and spend my time in the hills in quiet solitude at a remote bothy with some good friends.

For me, much of our modern, materialistic society is very shallow and false. The hills keep me grounded: a place where the decisions I make have very real consequences. I enjoy the harsh bleakness of our winter mountains. Like many, I enjoy the physical challenge, but it's not about 'pitting yourself against nature'. It's all about respect and working with it.

I'm writing this as I travel on the train south through Drumochter, something I somehow struggle with these days. It's like leaving God's Country, which is 'rich' considering I'm a Yorkshire woman! Now don't get me wrong, I don't do the whole 'religious' thing. But I do feel that the mountains are my church. It is in the mountains where I find peace, fulfilment and contentment.



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**Notes**

This edition of Wild Land News (WLN) is edited by Jayne Glass and Rob Mc Morran. Individual articles do not necessarily reflect the views of the SWLG Steering Team. 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. 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) or complete the standing order form available on our website (where you also have the option of paying via Paypal). 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).

**Membership Form**

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

I enclose a subscription of £ \_\_\_\_\_ (see notes above)

Name:

Address:

E-mail:

*Please return the form and subscription fee (cheques payable to SWLG) to:  
Membership Secretary, SWLG, 36 Mansefield Crescent, Clarkston, Glasgow, G76 7EB*

**TISO AD**