

AUTUMN 2013

# Wild Land News

Magazine of the Scottish Wild Land Group

Geodiversity:  
The foundation of Scotland's landscapes

National Parks

Glenlyon's woodland history

Restoration in Scotland & Australia

Braemar bridge

Walking the Tay catchment

# Autumn 2013

## WILD LAND NEWS

Autumn 2013, Issue 84

Magazine of the  
Scottish Wild Land Group

## SWLG

www.swlg.org.uk  
enquiries@swlg.org.uk

8 Cleveden Road  
Glasgow  
G12 0NT

Registered Charity No: SC004014

## Coordinator

John Milne

## WLN Editor

Calum Brown

## Membership Secretary

Grant Cornwallis

## Treasurer

Tim Ambrose

## Editorial

Individual articles do not  
necessarily reflect the views of  
the SWLG Steering Team.  
Contributions should be sent to:  
Calum Brown  
calum@swlg.org.uk

## Graphic Design

Calum Brown

## Printed by

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Tel: 0141 552 5519

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Slioch from above Loch Maree  
C Brown

“the shared vision to  
achieve landscape  
restoration across  
Scotland is gradually  
being realised”

Page 18



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Photos:

left - Aspen & water, K Brown

right—woodland on Dundreggan estate,  
C Brown

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# Editorial

It has been a busy year for the SWLG since the Autumn 2012 issue of *Wild Land News*. We have published our special issue on wind farms (by far the most widely-distributed issue of *Wild Land News* to date), responded to several planning proposals and government consultations (p 22), increased our membership and funds (p 7), and part-funded and worked on campaigns against unregulated hill tracks, plans for a new town in the Cairngorms National Park, to help tackle wildlife crime (p 9) and for a rational, properly justified energy policy that doesn't cause unnecessary environmental damage. We have had a great deal of interest and positive feedback about these campaigns and are grateful for the support of members and donors.

It is now nearly time for our 2013 Annual General Meeting (see box opposite), and we encourage everyone to attend, to make their voices heard and to get involved in the work of the SWLG – especially at such an important and busy time. As ever, the work of the Group is done by a small team of volunteers, and the more involved our members and others are, the more we can do to protect Scotland's landscapes

and environments. So, come along on 23 November if you can!

We also have a busy issue of *Wild Land News* this autumn, with articles on geodiversity, ecological restoration in Scotland and Australia, the continuation of Tom Beel's history of Glenlyon's woodlands, National Parks and, more locally, contrasting views on the proposed new bridge across the Dee at Braemar and information on the work of the Highland Perthshire Communities' Land Trust.

We also hear from Stefan Durkacz, who will be walking the entire catchment of the River Tay next year to raise money for the SWLG and the Venture Trust (p. 36). Stefan's ambitious expedition will take him through many different landscapes across a large area of the country, and we look forward to his updates as his preparations continue and his walk begins. We are delighted that he has chosen the SWLG as one of the two charities he will be raising money for.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Wild Land News* and look forward to seeing some of you at our AGM.

## Email subscriptions

Several members have contacted us to enquire about e-mail subscriptions to *Wild Land News*. We are happy to offer this as a way of minimising our printing and postage costs (which are substantial). Email subscriptions can now be requested on our membership form (p.39) and any existing members who would like to subscribe by email can send an email to the Editor at [calum@swlg.org.uk](mailto:calum@swlg.org.uk), giving their name, postal address (to ensure we keep our records correct) and preference for receiving *Wild Land News* only by email or by email and post.

## Local volunteers

Members also regularly get in touch with us to enquire about our position on proposed developments (often wind farms) in their local area. As a small and volunteer-run group, we do not have the resources to monitor or respond to all of the proposals that we would like to, but encourage any members who are willing to assist with this to get in touch by email to [enquiries@swlg.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@swlg.org.uk).

## Coordinator's report

Our Editor is determined that this issue be not dominated by articles relating to our ongoing wind farm campaign and I very much agree with him. Some of us need to keep reminding ourselves that the SWLG is not an anti-windfarm campaigning group although given our activities of recent months not many outsiders would necessarily appreciate that. However I cannot resist the temptation to take this opportunity to update you on our campaign including advising you of some of my favourites from among the reactions to our special issue, *Wind farms gone wild—Is the environmental damage justified?*

*"I strongly recommend for your reading an excellent free collection of articles (14 different authors, each with different expertise) summarized into one report: Wind farms gone wild. Environmental organizations worldwide should be copying the commendable efforts of the Scottish Wild Land Group. Kudos to them for being real environmentalists!"* (John Droz Jnr, Physicist and Environmental Advocate, North Carolina)

*"A fantastic piece of literature"* (Well I am not sure even I would go that far but we do appreciate the sentiment.)

*"I find this magazine both amazing and heartening, because it shows that at least one environmental group bases policy on facts and concern for people."* (Jonathan DuHamel in the Tuscon Citizen)

But perhaps the most rewarding of all comes from Jim Crumley, a founding member of SWLG, in The Courier. While not agreeing with everything we say *"The Scottish Wild Land Group has recently begun to recover some of its campaigning zeal....There's a lot of reading in there and some of it is very authoritative and well put*

*together, and everyone in the land should read it and I suspect that almost no one will.....It's powerful, and it's well researched and I wish I could believe it will change anything."*

And I must draw your attention to the update on Christine Metcalfe's complaint to United Nations Economic Commission for Europe's Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee on page 9. This is surely an enormously significant development in the ongoing struggle to preserve the well-being of our democracy and not only in relation to our environment.

Still within the context of democracy I wish to make a personal observation on the objections we have lodged in relation to applications for planning permission relating to wind farm developments (page 22). We do not have the resources to submit many such objections and so I am particularly pleased that we were able to submit one in relation to the Leadhills Windfarm development. It may be my Annandale heritage but I have never believed that appreciation of our wild landscapes should be limited to those of the rugged Highlands. Climb in the Moffat Hills (especially my favourite, Saddle Yoke), visit the Duneaton Valley by Crawfordjohn, the site of the proposed Leadhills Windfarm, and see for yourself the beauty that is under threat.

Before I go any further I turn now to our AGM being held in the Royal Hotel in Bridge of Allan at 2.30pm on Saturday 23rd November. We do hope you manage to attend as this is an opportunity for our members and friends to take part in a discussion on the activities of the past year and to help shape SWLG strategy for future years.

### SWLG AGM

This year's Scottish Wild Land Group AGM will be held at 2.30pm on Saturday the 23rd November in the Royal Hotel, Bridge of Allan

As a consequence of the publication of *Wind farms gone wild* SWLG has achieved quite a momentum upon which to build. While it is obvious that an increase in membership is desirable, an increase in membership involvement is even more so and how better to get involved than by attending the AGM. We appreciate that some members are too far away for attendance to be practical and the onus is on the Steering Group to consider ways of offering opportunities for involvement for members no matter where they live. The best way to start is by giving us your email address so that you can share with us your thoughts.

SWLG, a group which is persuaded of the case arguing for the reality of anthropogenic climate change, is eager to promote robust, open and informed debate on energy policy. For instance, one of our members submitted the following paragraph, undoubtedly provocative in some circles, to the Steering Group for email discussion.

*Professors Dieter Helm\* and Gordon Hughes argue in favour of gas as an alternative to coal because it produces less than half the carbon output of coal and is vastly cheaper than wind. The original objection that UK supplies from elsewhere would be insecure and very expensive now looks less compelling because of the discovery of abundant, world-wide deposits of shale gas - including in the UK (mainly England). And the USA, once a major source of global carbon emissions, has reduced both the price of electricity and its output of carbon far more dramatically than all the wind farms in the world have been able to do. So, like it or not, 'fracking' looks like becoming the next world-wide obsession—and an inevitable one that might work for long enough for some genuine research and development on more sophisticated energy technologies, as Dieter Helm urges. Hence the need for a moratorium on all wind farm developments and the establishment of a genuinely independent commission on energy to assess all aspects of energy generation, consumption and need.*

What do you think about this? Take your minds back to the Århus decision. Will the consequence of Christine's victory be a

moratorium which gives us a window of opportunity to establish the commission referred to above and called for in the Editorial in *Wind farms gone wild*? What do you think of SWLG's involvement in the debate on energy strategy? My argument is that climate change is an enormous threat to our wild lands, their habitats and their fauna and flora, and we strongly suspect that the current strategy is achieving next to nothing. But you may have a different opinion.

**We on the Steering Group ask you to remember that in spite of our evolution towards a total opposition to wind farming as a means of generating electricity that opposition originates in a very serious concern about the potentially tragic consequences of global warming, as does our conviction that it is essential that there be open discussion on all aspects of energy policy among an informed community of citizens.**

I know of no better way of closing than sharing with you some recent words of David Cameron. Yes indeed, that David Cameron.

*"Our countryside is one of the most precious things we have in Britain and I am proud to represent a rural constituency. I would never sanction something that might ruin our landscapes and our scenery."*

I see no need to comment any further on this truly memorable pronouncement other than to suggest we set aside all cynicism, verging on the impossible though that may be, take it at face value and hope he convinces his fellow first minister north of the border of its wisdom.

\*Professor Helm of Oxford University and *inter alia* Chairman of the Natural Capital Committee argues that "*the environmental movement is often more interested in pursuing a soft-focus vision of a greener world than in actually fixing climate change.*" (Review of his book *The Carbon Crunch* in the *New Scientist*). This is a point of view with which the SWLG has sympathy.

## SWLG Annual General Meeting report

The last SWLG Annual General Meeting was held in Bridge of Allan on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2012 at the Royal Hotel – where we were well looked after with tea, coffee and generous helpings of bacon butties. Despite the fine wintry weather, several members attended and joined the Steering Committee for the usual AGM agenda items. The whole Steering Team was re-elected, and John Milne confirmed as the Group's Co-ordinator (but Christiane Valluri has since left the Steering Team).

The AGM was followed by a free-ranging and open discussion on topics of concern. These included the on-going need in this age of fast transmission for good communications, both to members and others, and ways in which we might enhance our strategies for

spreading and sharing our messages and concerns.

Inevitably a lot of the discussion focussed on the increasing threats to wild land posed by the proliferation of wind farms, among other developments. John described plans for the Special Edition of Wild Land News (now published), which focused on wind farms. We have good working relationships with various organisations in this field and are developing links with others.

We thank those members who managed to attend and contribute to a lively discussion. Some useful suggestions were made, and we are following up on these.

Tim Ambrose

## SWLG finances—thank you from the treasurer

In last autumn's issue I wrote a brief note explaining that the SWLG had run at a deficit for the previous three years, and that this was not sustainable without increased subscription income or donations.

I am very pleased that several members increased their annual standing order, others sent generous cheques, and we received a particularly generous donation from an anonymous donor "to help towards the continuing publication of Wild Land News which is such an excellent little magazine." I have no idea who this donor is, but a very big Thank You!

We also received a donation which largely financed the Special Issue on wind farms, and since its publication

several members and supporters have made generous donations which have enabled us to send copies to Scottish Councillors and to many other recipients who were not on our original circulation list. I also put together and submitted the Group's Gift Aid claim covering all the qualifying subscriptions and donations for the last four years.

We are now increasing our membership, with more new members than resignations, so, all in all, the finances are showing a much healthier position than last autumn, and the Accounts for the year to 31 March 2013 will show a good surplus.

Thanks again to everyone who has contributed to this.

Tim Ambrose

## Cairngorms Legal Challenge – now to the Supreme Court of the UK

Members will know that the SWLG has supported the Cairngorms Campaign in its legal challenge to the housing policies of the Cairngorms National Park Authority as set out in the Local Plan, which we see as excessive and include the Authority's support for large housing estates and a New Town in the middle of the National Park on the opposite bank of the River Spey from Aviemore.

In the first round at the Court of Session, the Cairngorms Campaign put forward several arguments against the housing policies at Carr Bridge, Nethy Bridge, Kingussie and the proposed New Town at An Camas Mor, but Lord Glennie dismissed all these arguments, holding essentially that the CNPA's approach was not so unreasonable that no planning authority could have come to it.

An Appeal was lodged against this judgement focussing upon one specific argument arising from Articles 6.3 and 6.4 of the Habitats Directive protecting sites of particular wildlife importance, several of which would be affected by the proposed developments. The Habitats Directive requires that a planning authority must prepare an "appropriate assessment" of the effects of a housing plan on any Natura 2000 sites, and "*shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned*". In its assessment, the CNPA put off the necessary checks and research until a later stage by saying merely that detailed planning permission would require that no damage be done. Many parties in the conservation movement find this approach very disturbing, as

once the momentum of a development plan has got going, it is far harder to stop it if damaging effects on protected wildlife arise, rather than if these had been identified, as required by the Directive, at the earliest possible stage.

Unfortunately, the Appeal judges of the Court of Session again treated the issue as one of "reasonableness" rather than the unlawfulness of the CNPA's approach, and found in favour of the CNPA and the developers. Our legal advisers believe the point is of such importance, and our arguments so strong, that it is worth pursuing the issue to the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom, with the possibility of a reference to the European Court of Justice if the issue is not considered to be sufficiently clear.

Accordingly, in August 2013, the Cairngorms Campaign, Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group and the Scottish Campaign for National Parks, lodged a formal Appeal to the Supreme Court on this point. This Appeal will inevitably be very costly, despite our solicitors and advocates working for substantially reduced fees because of their belief in the importance of the arguments – Court fees alone are several thousand pounds. The issue has become much wider than the Cairngorms alone, and we hope that this final round of the legal challenge will be supported by other conservation charities.

If members would like any further details of the case, or wish to add their support, please send any enquiries or donations (payable to the Cairngorms Campaign), to the treasurer: **Tim Ambrose at 8 Cleveden Road, Glasgow, G12 0NT**. We will be very grateful!



# Other SWLG Campaigns

## **Hill tracks campaign**

The SWLG is supporting the continuing campaign to bring hill tracks into the planning system. As previous articles in *Wild Land News* have detailed, tracks with a claimed agricultural or forestry purpose are exempt from the planning system under anachronistic Permitted Development Rights. These are now widely used by landowners of sporting estates to bulldoze tracks high into the hills to access grouse butts and stalking areas.

Despite seeing dramatic evidence of the damage caused by large numbers of poorly designed and constructed tracks, the Government last year decided not to alter the legislation, but did invite further evidence and promised to keep the situation under review. The SWLG and several other organisations in Scottish Environment LINK have been gathering evidence of bad practice in hill track construction from across Scotland and will

shortly present this to the Minister for the Environment and Climate Change, Paul Wheelhouse.

We have provided some funding to the campaign and assisted with evidence gathering, and send thanks to all members who submitted their own reports of hill tracks. We will provide an update on the result of the campaign in a future issue of *Wild Land News* and on our website.

## **Wildlife crime campaign**

The Group is now working with Scottish Environment LINK on another campaign, to tackle the problem of wildlife crime in Scotland. Many high profile cases involve persecution of birds of prey (see *Wild Land News*, Autumn 2012), but these are bound to be only a small minority of the incidents that actually occur. Better detection and prosecution rates are badly needed, and we are part-funding and supporting work to achieve this.

# Aarhus ruling on renewables policy

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe has decided that the UK Government breached Article 7 of the Aarhus convention in its implementation of the National Renewable Energy Action Plan (NREAP), by denying the public impartial information and opportunities to participate in shaping the policy. The ruling was made in response to the complaint made by Christine Metcalfe, Pat Swords and others, previously covered in *Wild Land News*.

While this has been interpreted by some as a body blow to the Government's renewable energy policies, the exact effects remain to be seen. The Committee cannot declare NREAP illegal, and so it is currently not certain how the Government will respond. However, Christine Metcalfe interprets the ruling as follows: "The ruling will have a profound effect on planning applications for wind farms right across Scotland. The emphasis in the 2006 Scottish Planning Act was, as much as anything, on the necessity of effective public

consultation, and on the opportunity for the public and affected citizens to be able to participate in the process. In relation to wind power, this right has been overridden and ignored. This will call into question the legal validity of any further consents. Until such time as the NREAP is fully compliant with the requirements defined under National and Community law and International Treaty Arrangements with regard to environmental democracy and public participation, there should now be a moratorium on such consents. The solution for the Government is quite easy: go out to consultation on your Energy Programme, rather than just publishing facile 'Routemaps' which support expansion based on scientifically dubious targets which have no foundation other than in politics".

Our congratulations go to Christine and all those involved in this hugely significant decision, and the consequences of the ruling will be followed in future issues of *Wild Land News*.

Simon J Cuthbert

## Geodiversity and Scottish wild land

**Simon Cuthbert is a lecturer in Earth Sciences at the University of the West of Scotland, Honorary Secretary of the Geological Society of Glasgow and an Executive Committee Member of the Scottish Geodiversity Forum.**

The iconic Scottish landscapes - the hills that frame our "gulfs of blue air"<sup>1</sup> - have been hewn from rock by the fluid tools of air, water and ice, wielded by gravity. Like any raw material, each type of rock gives its peculiar character to the forms carved from it. Scotland is blessed with riches in its rocks, which underpin landscapes that change in character around almost every corner.

A journey from Glasgow to Ballachulish takes you past the basalt crags of the Campsie Fells, Glasgow's own Table Mountain, to the rolling farmland of the Vale of Strathendrick, its russet soils stained by the Old Red Sandstone beneath. Along the Highland border the Old Red's frill of tough conglomerate rears up into the cobbly ridges of Conic Hill, then we cross a great crack in the crust, the Highland Boundary Fault, and enter the southern Grampian mountains that reach still higher on their gnarled foundation of twisted schists and grits. We wind through the deep glacial trough of Loch Lomond and turn into Strath Fillan, strewn with gravelly hummocks of moraine abandoned by a retreating Pleistocene glacier. Ben Lui glowers at us along Cononish Glen, concealing base metal and gold in the folds of its corries.

Passing Bridge of Orchy and Loch Tulla we ride up onto Rannoch Moor, a vast dome of granite, its white boulders littering the heather, crumbs of Earth's crust. The Moor is cloaked in peat, sequined by a constellation of shining lochans, each the grave of a turquoise fragment of ice, decaying relics of the Pleistocene ice-cap, long turned to water. Glancing westwards, Glen Etive's granite flanks rise in perfect curves, but to its north Buchaille Etive Mor erupts with brutal verticality from the plateau.

Its volcanic rock gives a craggy aspect to Glencoe beyond, the valley sides rising in vertical facets, each picking out a lava flow or a bed of ash from some stupendous detonation. The mountains are slashed by felsite dykes along the gullies and hanging valleys, homes for mythical heroes. Reaching Ballachulish, our destination is the ruler-straight trough of the Great Glen, tracing out another great fault that rends Scotland's foundations from Mull to Shetland, the belt of seismically shattered rock gouged out by the glaciers.

This journey visits only a sample of the geological diversity - "geodiversity" - displayed across Scotland. The Cairngorm granite, Cuillin gabbro, Torridonian sandstone and Caithness flagstones all have their own distinctive topography, soil, vegetation and local cultural heritage. These geological underpinnings of our wildlands are a fundamental influence on our senses of place and belonging. Long recognised by generations of writers, artists and thinkers, the value that we attribute to our special landscapes continues to be expressed in our attempts to protect and preserve them, and our collective outrage when they are degraded.

The modern concept of geodiversity, like biodiversity, arises from the desire to protect something special. This has become embodied in the "geoconservation" movement. Those not initiated into the mysterious ways of the nerdy geologist are often puzzled by this desire to "protect" rocks, which are surely robust enough to take care of themselves, abundant enough to make it unnecessary or just too boring to be worth bothering? Yet one only has to dip into the engaging writings of Hugh Miller or see the spectacular TV shows

of Iain Stewart to see how infectious the geology bug can be (and surely a rare and exquisitely preserved fossil is a jewel to be prized?). More practically, good quality geological sites are essential for the education of the professional geologists who seek out the wherewithal to keep our civilisation functioning; such places do have real value and are easily lost. Some sites are truly epoch-making in their significance, such as Siccar Point on the Berwickshire coast, where one of the more down-to-earth activists of the Enlightenment, James Hutton, recognised the unsettlingly long span of geological time - "Deep Time". Hutton's insight paved the way for Darwin's ideas on evolution, and changed the very way we think about time. The recent proposal to deface the outlook from Siccar Point with the paraphernalia of a vegetable processing plant has caused an international outcry, sadly to little avail.

A major outcome of the British geoconservation movement is the Geological Conservation Review<sup>2</sup>, an inventory listing hundreds of sites deemed worthy of state protection. The collective narrative woven from all these sites spells out a grand tale of Britain's three billion year journey across the face of the Earth; the opening

and vanishing of oceans, the rise and decay of mountain ranges, the advance and retreat of ice sheets and the story of life itself.

Admittedly, the messages written by Nature in rocks are often obscure, but if you can learn how to read them a whole new world is opened up to you. Landscapes are the products of long histories, palimpsests upon which the record of successive ancient events accumulates, but is also often erased. Looking out from Loch Maree or Lochinver we see a billion year old range of hills emerging from under the Torridon sandstones as modern erosion strips them away to reveal their undulating foundations of Lewisian Gneiss. In places you can walk on this half-hidden landscape, and your imagination has new worlds to conjure. You could day-dream of being transported back to the time just before this landscape was buried by kilometers of red sand; you would find yourself struggling to breathe the oxygen-poor air, the bare rock is colonised by only a thin film of bacteria. A Himalayan-scale mountain range fills the view to your west where the Atlantic ocean now lies. A white-hot asteroid streaks across the sky towards you...

Photo:

Slioch – bedded Torridonian sandstone on a pediment of Lewisian Gneiss (foreground and right-hand base of crags).

S Cuthbert.





Photo:

Moor of Rannoch –  
granite  
foundations and  
blanket peat,  
gathering-ground  
for the great  
southern Highland  
ice cap.

S Cuthbert.

Landscapes, then, become our teachers and rocks our libraries. Scotland's tradition of reasoned enquiry and its geodiversity have been a fertile combination, nurturing our understanding of the way the Earth works. These ideas have often emerged from the wild lands. Assynt's Moine Thrust Fault showed us that huge slabs of crust have been thrust over each other for great distances, paving the way for a mobilistic view of the solid Earth that ultimately led to Plate Tectonic theory. The southern Highlands taught us about the hot, deep roots of mountain chains, where dull muds are metamorphosed into silvery, garnet-studded schists and pleated into monstrous overfolds by the collisions of continents. Glencoe cuts deep into an ancient, extinct volcano similar to the dangerously explosive active volcanoes of the American Pacific coast; there are lessons from Glencoe that can help understand the deep plumbing of these angry and unpredictable monsters and thus, perhaps, help to save lives. Scratched and polished rock pavements strewn with scattered, exotic boulders made the Highlands and Galloway Hills the test-bed of the Ice Age hypothesis, revealing that glaciers within a continental-scale ice-sheet were the most potent agent to have shaped the Scottish mountain landscape. The great

blanket of peat that spread over the naked land after the ice retreated holds a finely resolved record in its tiny, preserved spores and pollen grains of the northward spread of the forests as the climate warmed again. In the Devonian and Carboniferous sedimentary rocks of the Lowlands some of the finest fossil fish and amphibians known to science have been found, documenting the emergence of the first complex land ecosystems.

Hugh Miller, a self-taught amateur geologist and pioneer expert on fossil fish, was a popular evangelist for geology as well as his celestial God.<sup>3</sup> To him, prizing open the strata to reveal a new fish fossil was completely analogous to opening a new page of a book. In his time, the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, geology was the most popular science and a matter of great fascination to the public. The situation is now very different. While interest is undoubtedly increasing again, fueled by the TV series of Aubrey Manning, Iain Stewart and Brian Cox, the level of formal education in the Earth Sciences is lamentable, and probably not helped by the recent withdrawal of the Scottish Geology Higher qualification. Yet Scotland's geodiversity lies at the very heart of its economic development, its landscapes and its cultural heritage. Public

understanding of geology is essential in a democracy faced with difficult issues in which resource security and environmental protection have to be balanced, including nuclear waste disposal, shale-gas “fracking” and, yes, wind farms. Yet understanding the nature of the ground only a small distance beneath our feet is intrinsically difficult. Geology teachers know that learning to visualize the three-dimensional complexities of the subsurface demands a long effort; some people never get it at all. Among the wider public, such understanding is virtually absent or, worse still, plagued by misconceptions. Scotland’s geodiversity, combined with the excellent three-dimensional view of the geology provided by its mountainous terrain, is a fantastic resource for helping learners to gain that skill in visualization – “seeing into” the hills, “reading the landscape”.

The insights gained from geology are important. They help us to understand more completely the vulnerability of wild land ecosystems. To take the examples of wind farms and mountain vehicle tracks, their aesthetic impact is only part of the issue; they are often cut into peat deposits that are important repositories of ancient carbon, sequestered from the atmosphere over thousands of years by the growth and decay of plants. Excavation and drainage of blanket peat systems releases large quantities of that buried carbon back to the atmosphere by direct oxidation as the peat dries out, and by loss of dissolved carbon in the drained groundwater. The level of carbon loss from the peat may, in some cases, cancel out the benefits of wind energy in reducing carbon emissions. Furthermore, hydrological changes from the construction of drains may increase the flood risk further down the catchment due to the more rapid transit of water through to streams. These insights arise from a fully three-

dimensional, whole-landscape view, incorporating the biological and geological elements of the ecosystem.

The historical insights from geology are also important. Rocks store a record of environmental change covering billions of years that may help us to understand the future impacts of changes that we are driving now. Evidence from geologically young materials like our peat deposits (covering mere thousands of years) shows us that Scottish upland ecosystems are dynamic and were in constant flux long before humans appeared. So, if we wish to restore or “rewild” an ecosystem, which point in time do we select as the exemplar of a perfect “natural” system? And, as the human impact has been significant for a very long time, how do we define “natural” at all?

On a more personal level, the ability to read the landscape adds immensely to the experience of a day in the hills. The ground over which we walk reveals a series of other, hidden landscapes; a walk is a journey in four dimensions. In many parts of the world the rewards of such experiences have long been the foundation of “geotourism”, which is an increasingly vibrant part of the global tourist economy. Its development in Scotland is patchy, and is probably held back by the general lack of public geological awareness. There is, however, a small but active body of enthusiasts who are working hard to spread the word. They come from local geological societies, adult education classes and museums. It is these stalwarts, often amateur converts to geology, who have been the driving force in the geodiversity movement. They are passionate geo-conservationists, but also play an important role in promoting geology to the wider public and visitors. To these heroes we must add individuals from the Countryside Ranger services, geology converts among the Biodiversity

The ground over which we walk reveals a series of other, hidden landscapes; a walk is a journey in four dimensions

Officers, National Park staff and government agencies. An encouraging recent phenomenon in which they play a part is the development of Geoparks in Scotland - in Shetland, the Northwest Highlands and Lochaber. What is especially interesting about Geoparks is that they are founded upon strong community involvement, which suggests that geodiversity is being recognized as having economic benefits to those living in these special landscapes, and recreational benefits to visitors.

Finally, our relationship with the kingdom of stone has been much more intimate than our current pre-occupations with environmentalism and recreation. Our townscapes retain the colour and texture of their geological foundations through the stone masonry of their buildings. The dry-stone walls, village churches and castle ruins of the rural landscape change character as the bedrock changes beneath them. The narratives that survive from our deep human past often come to us from carvings in stone, an enduring medium for communication – the “Stone Voices”<sup>4</sup> of our forebears. When you plant your boot in a footprint on the Dalradian rocks of Dunadd, or

tentatively explore a cup and ring mark with your fingertip, you connect with a time when stone was an intimate part of the everyday world. In such ways our wild lands help us to reconnect with our deepest foundations and deepen our understanding of the world.

#### Some useful information sources:

Scottish Geodiversity Forum: <http://www.scottishgeology.com> (with links to Scottish Geoparks)

British Geological Survey: <http://www.bgs.ac.uk>

Global Geoparks network <http://www.globalgeopark.org>

<sup>1</sup>Jim Crumley *Gulfs of Blue Air. A Highland Journey.* Mainstream Publishing Ltd., Edinburgh, 1997 (quoted from Norman McCaig *High Up On Suilven in Collected Poems*, Chatto & Windus, 1990).

<sup>2</sup><http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1>

<sup>3</sup>See Michael A Taylor Hugh Miller – *Stonemason, Geologist, Writer.* NMS Enterprises Ltd. 2007.

<sup>4</sup>Neal Ascherson *Stone Voices: The Search for Scotland.* Granta Books, London, 2002.

Angus D Miller  
Simon J Cuthbert

**Angus Miller is Chair of the Scottish**

**Geodiversity Forum, tutor in the Office of Lifelong Learning, University of Edinburgh & Proprietor of Geowalks**

## Scotland's Geodiversity Charter: promoting and managing our unique geodiversity

Scotland is special! In many ways, and in none more so than our geodiversity - our rocks, landscapes, geomorphology, soils and active geological processes; all this underpins and is responsible for the variety in our hills and glens, straths and firths and the unique character of much of our built heritage - brochs, castles, shielings, round houses, tenements and houses. Our geodiversity has been the

stage for significant developments in our understanding of the Earth and how it works. But geodiversity is even more important than that, in contributing to our economy (oil and gas; raw materials for industry and building; tourism, leisure and education), supporting biodiversity and contributing in many different ways to our sense of who we are as a nation.

So, it is nothing short of shameful how under-appreciated this wonderful geodiversity is, when it should be taught in our schools, appreciated by visitors, hill-walkers and all those who spend time out doors, and should certainly be at the heart of government strategies to promote Scotland and develop our economy.

Scotland's Geodiversity Charter, published in June 2012, sets out to change the status of geodiversity in Scotland and to build a strong and wide consortium of people and organisations that promote and celebrate our geodiversity, work to make sure that it is managed appropriately for this and future generations, and used effectively and wisely. This wide-ranging charter looks at why geodiversity is important and sets out a vision where geodiversity is valued and safeguarded. There are suggested actions for different sectors, backed up by a range of case studies that show what is already being done. For example the development of Machrihanish Dunes Golf Course was carried out in consultation with SNH to preserve the dune systems and allow

space for the ongoing natural processes. Quite a contrast to a golf development elsewhere.

Almost 40 organisations have signed the Charter, representing a range of interests from national organisations such as Scottish Natural Heritage and the British Geological Survey across to local geoconservation groups and small tourism operators. Further involvement is welcomed, it would be great to get more organisations celebrating our geodiversity and show-casing why it is important.

The Charter is being led by the Scottish Geodiversity Forum, a small voluntary organisation of individuals and organisations who are passionate about rocks and all other things geodiverse. We have a lively email discussion forum, which is a good place to ask questions, get support for events and projects, and find out what's going on, and we also organise regular meetings and conferences. Find out more at [www.scottishgeodiversityforum.org](http://www.scottishgeodiversityforum.org), all welcome!



Photo:

Walking group enjoying the ascent of An Sgùrr on Eigg, the remains of a pitchstone lava flow that filled in a valley eroded in older rocks.

A Miller

Mike Stevens

## Australian Outback meets Scottish Highlands

**Mike visited Scotland in July 2012 from Victoria, south-eastern Australia, on scholarship to study ‘the role of missing species in ecosystem restoration’. Mike works as a land and seascape-scale conservation manager for Parks Victoria, is a committee chair of the Australia-New Zealand Cooperative Research Centre bid for ‘Safeguarding Biodiversity’, member of the IUCN Young Professionals in Protected Areas, and contributes to the Habitat 141° initiative. Over 16 days Mike met with 31 people across 15 organisations and estates, providing an overview of threatened species management and wild land projects occurring throughout Scotland.**

The restoration of ecosystems and species that can provide important ecosystem services is being called for globally<sup>1</sup> to achieve resilience of natural systems to climate change and to meet targets for biodiversity conservation<sup>2</sup>. A key theme suggested in achieving this restoration (or ‘wildlanding’) is landscape-scale and connectivity conservation.

In Australia excitement surrounds Scotland’s re-wilding projects. There is much interest in the grand visions to restore Caledonian forests across the Scottish landscape, ambitious attempts to reintroduce missing species such as the beaver, and having bold and open discussions about the role top order predators could play in achieving ecological restoration. I was extremely privileged to visit sites where wild land restoration is being attempted, experience Scottish hospitality and talk with many passionate individuals and organisations (see acknowledgements).

### Observations

Whilst standing atop a hill on yet another rainy, windswept Scottish Highland summer’s day, the similarities in our shared conservation challenges became apparent. Conflicting social and political viewpoints exist on how to manage over-abundant herbivore

populations to achieve natural revegetation. Debates on whether reintroduction of predators would restore missing ecosystem processes our just impact humans lives. Attempting reintroductions of native species through adaptive management whilst fast-tracking feasibility, paperwork and other processes. Plus the highly technical shared challenges such as addressing wildlife disease and genetic concerns, and improving translocations, ex-situ programs and in-situ conservation.

A stark difference however was my impression of the resilience of the Scottish landscape compared to parts of Australia, and how subsidy systems influence land-use practices in Scotland. It was inspiring to see sites where grazing pressure had been removed or significantly reduced and dense moss layers, woodland and scrub species were naturally returning (albeit with some preferentially-browsed species requiring a helping hand). However, it did raise a question of how long this resilience will last under a changing climate scenario and continuing pressures across the broader landscape.

### Global case studies

Many global examples demonstrate that ambitious ecological restoration

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projects can work. Brilliant examples exist, such as large-scale Black Footed Ferret restoration in Central U.S.A and amazing island rodent eradication, native fauna reconstruction projects and community-led sanctuary restoration in New Zealand. Here are some examples that highlight the exciting possibilities.

In South America, the Great Green Macaw is being used as a 'flagship species' to achieve improved connectivity of its habitats<sup>3</sup>. In 1994, a group of 22 organisations established the 'San Juan-La Selva Biological Corridor' that runs across 1.2 million hectares linking national parks as core areas. By 2012 the population had increased from 210 to 302 animals. The Save the Great Green Macaw campaign was successful in educating school children, increasing public awareness and creating a sense of national ownership of this iconic native bird, and also in changing large-scale land practices such as forestry whilst creating employment opportunities.

The wolves of Yellowstone National Park in North America are an example of a 'keystone species' being used to restore a landscape<sup>4</sup>. Wolves were hunted to extinction in the 1930s, resulting in an explosion of large herbivore numbers. Planning for reintroduction started in the '60s and, following fierce debate and controversy, 31 wolves were reintroduced in 1995. By 2009, 171 wolves were back in the food chain in Yellowstone. What resulted was Elk numbers being lowered through predation and fear, leading to reduced herbivory impacts and intricate food web interactions being restored, such as unforeseen benefits to species such as beaver, woodland birds and scavengers. More wolves also attracted an additional 150,000 visitors, and income from tourism multiplied from \$32m to \$85m.

Landscape-scale restoration isn't limited

to dry land and can apply to 'seascapes'. In 2002, plans to return missing 'ecosystem engineers' to badly damaged oyster reefs and seagrass beds in Virginia USA was seen as a 'crazy' idea that was 'not going to work'<sup>5</sup>. Oyster reefs filter water and provide habitat for marine life while seagrass acts as a nursery, traps sediment, and reduces wave energy. The 317 acres of seagrass planted in 2010 exploded to over 4500 acres across coastal bays, and 47 acres of oyster reefs have been successfully established over five sanctuaries.

### **Scotland highlights**

Highlights from my study-tour of Scotland included the following projects and experiences.

The application of fine-scale fire mosaics to achieve both species and habitat restoration objectives by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds at Abernethy Forest. Innovative use of Wild Boar as ecosystem engineers being trialled by Trees for Life at Dundreggan Estate. The collaborative beaver trial reintroduction to get the science right and demonstrate proof of concept prior to (hopefully) larger-scale restoration of beaver populations across Scotland. Learning about the realities of what it takes to manage herbivores and the benefits it can yield in large-scale, unfenced areas at Glenfeshie and Glenmore. Spending one-on-one time with Roy Dennis and being inspired by his experience while looking at natural regeneration inside fenced areas at Coignafearn, or discussing ambitious plans for reintroduction of Lynx and practical recovery actions forming part of the Cairngorms Wildcat Project with David Hetherington.

Most surprising and thought provoking was visiting innovative art and conservation projects taking a non-traditional approach to connect people with nature and conservation such as

2020 Vision and extINKed - on display at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh.

### The Australian context

The Australian Commonwealth government has sent a clear signal to organisations and community groups, through development of the National Wildlife Corridors Plan<sup>1</sup>, to develop large-scale, cooperative, coordinated, community restoration projects. Essentially, funding is beginning to align towards these large-scale initiatives through the \$946M (£627M) 'Biodiversity Fund' that is part of the Australian Commonwealths 'Clean Energy Future' Initiative. There is a growing recognition of the need to maximise the services and benefits of Australia's complex patchwork of natural areas, with a focus being to improve connectivity and resilience by linking core protected areas with stepping stones, buffers and revegetated corridors.

However, we cannot have critters without the bush, and we cannot have the bush without critters.

In Australia we have recently experienced the first extinction of a mammal species in over 60 years, lost four frog species to disease, watched our last and largest marsupial predator fighting for survival, and seen an alarming decline in mammal populations sweeping across northern Australia. Where I work in southern-eastern Australia, fauna assemblages have already suffered significant extinctions, including top order predators and nearly all soil engineers. Managers struggle to deal with isolated remnant threatened species populations and pervasive threats such as foxes and cats.

However, as I write, a group of dedicated researchers, land managers

and diverse industry organisations are collaborating and nervously waiting on the announcement of a \$40M (£26.5M) Collaborative Research Centre (CRC) grant application, the Safeguarding Biodiversity CRC ([www.twitter.com/biodiversitycrc](http://www.twitter.com/biodiversitycrc)). This CRC grant (if successful) will undertake urgent research to help save endangered wildlife species whilst working collaboratively with people on the ground at large-scale sites identified across Australia and New Zealand to solve practical problems.

### Conclusion

In Scotland I observed progress being made. Although globally we all need more, urgent action, and at times we feel momentum is glacial, there remains a fantastic attitude and hard work continues to be delivered on the ground. Different approaches are being taken, but the shared vision to achieve landscape restoration across Scotland is gradually being realised.

The Scottish and Australian landscapes are vastly different yet we are working on strikingly similar conservation challenges and each achieving our own wins. Importantly, we can all learn from each other, and establishing a network is essential to continue to share knowledge and exchange ideas.

However frustrating it may be, getting the science right is essential. Taking an adaptive management approach is crucial to making sure work gets done on the ground while learning to inform and improve management. This helps to achieve quick wins that are essential to demonstrate proof-of-concept prior to going large-scale, whether it be for species reintroductions, restoring missing ecosystem processes or landscape-scale habitat restoration.

Nothing will be achieved without the

The Scottish and Australian landscapes are vastly different yet we are working on strikingly similar conservation challenges

community. Gaining community trust and support for ambitious projects underpins everything we do. Projects such as 2020 Vision and extINKed are interactive and provocative non-traditional methods of conservation communication and engagement and will only become more useful to mainstream action and influential on policy.

I was extremely privileged to ‘head up in the hills’ with many of Scotland’s custodians. The opportunity to research ‘the role of missing species in ecosystem restoration’ demonstrated that ambitious projects can be achieved. Landscape-scale and species conservation can work together. In some instances flagship species can harness community support and action to restore ecosystems and in other instances species can contribute to restoring vital ecosystem services to help meet our objectives.

**To get in contact with Mike phone +61-3-53614004, email [mike.stevens@parks.vic.gov.au](mailto:mike.stevens@parks.vic.gov.au) or follow on twitter @bushmanstevo**

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**Citations**

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<sup>3</sup>Chassot, O., and Monge Arias, G. 2012. Connectivity conservation of the great green macaw’s landscape in Costa Rica and Nicaragua (1994-2012). *PARKS* **18**(1).

<sup>4</sup>Hayward, M. W., and Somers, M.J. 2009. Reintroduction of Top-Order Predators. Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, UK.

<sup>5</sup>Schrack, E., Beck, M., Brumbaugh, R., Crisley, K., and Hancock, B. 2012. Restoration works: Highlights from a decade of partnerships between The Nature Conservancy and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Restoration Center. The Nature Conservancy, Arlington, VA, USA.

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Photo, this page:

Mike at Rothiemurchus

Next page:

Redpoint beach looking towards Diabaig

C Brown





# SWLG consultation and planning responses

## National Planning Framework and Scottish Planning Policy

The Scottish Government carried out two important consultations this summer, on the third National Planning Framework and the Scottish Planning Policy. These documents define the overall objectives of planning policy in Scotland, and are intended to balance the various demands made on Scotland's resources. The documents are important because they set national planning rules for several years, identify favoured types of development that are then subject to less stringent planning regulations, and can also provide protection from development for certain areas.

The SWLG found both of the drafts put forward for consultation to be strongly biased in favour of industrial wind farm developments and to offer very little meaningful protection to sensitive environments or wild land (much was made of the proposal to prevent the construction of wind farms in National Scenic Areas and National Parks, but this simply formalises current practice and leaves far too many areas at risk of industrialisation). Both documents would have the effect of favouring short-term financial gain by large companies and landowners while disempowering local communities and undermining Scotland's long-term economic and environmental prospects.

We made a number of responses to the consultations. First, we submitted our own full responses to each consultation document, making the following main points:

- That the Government's 'overall purpose' of achieving 'sustainable economic growth' is poorly defined and, in practice, means that short-term

economic benefits will be prioritised over longer term economic, environmental and social factors.

- That it is inappropriate for planning policy to be used to achieve one set of policy targets (the expansion of renewable energy developments) when its role should be to balance competing interests and requirements for land use.
- We support the proposed protection of National Parks and National Scenic Areas from wind farm developments, but believe that this protection should include any large industrial developments, and that it should extend to 'core areas' of wild land and incorporate buffer zones around sensitive landscapes. Local and regional designations should also be better respected.
- That a coherent strategy for renewable energy developments is urgently needed, to end the overloading of the planning system by speculative proposals.
- That peat lands represent a priceless environmental resource and carbon store, and should have stronger protection.
- That establishing a National Ecological Network to link protected and semi-natural areas would bring considerable benefits, not least in terms of mitigating the effects of climate change, and should be a priority.
- That the conditions for allowing damaging developments in protected areas should be clearer, and should not include subjective terms such as 'substantially', 'significantly' or 'satisfactorily', which are very hard to interpret in practice.

We also wrote an open letter to the Government with seven other environmental organisations (with a combined membership of over 350,000) to express support for the limited proposals for protection for National Parks and National Scenic Areas, but also to call for robust protection for wild land (especially areas identified as ‘core areas’ of wild land by Scottish Natural Heritage), other designated areas such as National Nature Reserves, and locally important and designated landscapes. Currently, protection for all of these is undermined by the use of the above subjective terms.

### **Wind farm visualisation consultation**

Scottish Natural Heritage carried out a consultation on the rules for ‘visualisations’ used to illustrate the potential impact of wind farms when planning permission is sought. These visualisations are used to present proposals to local communities, and have been the subject of controversy in the past where they have been thought to underplay the visual impacts of wind farms. As a result it is important that the process is regulated and that consistent and accurate visualisations are used, and we responded to the consultation for this reason.

### **Leadhills wind farm proposal**

A proposal for a wind farm of fourteen 137 metre high turbines above the village of Leadhills was brought to our attention by a member. This area represents a magnificent example of Southern Upland landscape, and is a true hidden gem just a few miles from the M74. We submitted an objection to the proposal on the basis of the area’s visual beauty, the damage the wind farm would cause to peatland, its potential impact on tourism in the area, and the cumulative impact of the many wind farms in the area.

### **Fairburn wind farm extension**

Scottish and Southern Energy has applied

for planning permission for 12 new turbines 1km from their existing Fairburn wind farm. In a worrying move, they are treating the extension as part of the original wind farm in order to bring its capacity over 50MW and so bypass local planning regulations (wind farms of over 50MW go directly to the Scottish Government for consideration). Although the two sites will be treated as forming a single application, we understand that refusal will not result in both being dismantled—meaning that SSE have hit upon a risk-free method of avoiding local council scrutiny. We have objected both to the proposal and to this manipulation of the planning system.

### **Scarista wind turbine**

The SWLG also submitted an objection earlier in the year to the West Harris Trust’s proposal for a 33m wind turbine at Scarista, on one of the finest stretches of coast in Scotland. We support the West Harris Trust’s work and its aim of ensuring that the area’s communities have a robust and viable future, and so our decision to object was made reluctantly and after careful consideration of the proposal and its context.

The location is particularly sensitive, being part of an open coastal landscape that is of exceptional value, and which itself draws tourists and residents to the area. Although the turbine’s immediate surroundings are not ‘wild’ (two considerably smaller turbines are located nearby), the wider setting certainly is, and the turbine would have a substantial visual impact on this. We believe that an industrial structure of this scale is not appropriate in such a setting and decided to object on this basis.

**All SWLG responses and planning objections are on our website at [www.swlg.org.uk/articles-campaigns--consultations.html](http://www.swlg.org.uk/articles-campaigns--consultations.html)**

Calum Brown

## Book review: *A saga of Sea Eagles* by John A Love

This summer, Sea Eagles bred successfully on the east coast of Scotland for the first time in 200 years, following a long-term programme of reintroduction that began on Fair Isle in the 1960s and was developed over many years on the Isle of Rum. Nearly 500 Sea Eagles have fledged in the wild in Scotland since the first Norwegian juveniles were released, and the species is now tentatively re-established over much of its former range (if not at its former abundance).

It is therefore an appropriate moment for a book on Sea Eagles to be published, and *A Saga of Sea Eagles* marks the occasion well. Written by John Love, a key player in the reintroduction programme on Rum, it is primarily an account of that programme, its origins, setbacks and eventual success. Love is obviously very familiar with his subject, and has also carried out a great deal of research into the behaviour, ecology and history of the species. This makes the book more than a first-hand (and fascinating) account of a pioneering reintroduction project; it is also a useful and very readable reference work on Sea Eagles.

Many of us have been lucky enough to see wild Sea Eagles in recent years, especially on Mull where the local population has proved to be a major tourist attraction. Fewer, perhaps, have much knowledge of their behaviour – their tendency, for example, to attack prey with such commitment that they are sometimes unable to extricate their talons, even when dragged underwater to their death by large fish. There is even one tale of an eagle finding itself attached in this way to the floating carcass of a cow, and drifting slowly into

shore using its outstretched wings to catch the wind. In encounters with the smaller Golden Eagle, however, the Sea Eagle is almost always the less aggressive.

There is also considerable detail here about the merciless persecution suffered by Sea Eagles in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, which would eventually lead to their extinction in the UK. Trapping, egg collecting, poisoning and shooting all took their toll, with several birds sometimes being killed in a single day, or pairs being targeted year after year, having their young and one adult killed, the other being left to try again, hopelessly, the following year. Golden Eagles, with their preference for habitats that coincide with less populated areas (especially since the Clearances) and estates used for deer stalking, were both less apparent and less apparently threatening, and were therefore less persecuted. Some of the reintroduced eagles suffered similar fates, and their habit of feeding off carrion still leads to them being blamed for the losses of far more lambs, in particular, than they are actually responsible for. New threats have also arisen in recent years; wind turbines on a single Norwegian island killed 38 Sea Eagles in just 5 years, a toll that could be catastrophic if repeated in Scotland..

Despite these and other problems, the dedication and care with which John Love and his colleagues pursued the reintroduction programme has finally restored the Sea Eagle to its rightful place on Scotland's coasts. For now, their position looks secure, and *A Saga of Sea Eagles* is a book for anyone who can appreciate this rare success.



## Unfinished Business: National Parks in Scotland

Scotland's landscapes rank amongst the best in the world in their richness, quality and diversity. We have wild mountains, pristine rivers and lochs, ancient forests and stunning coastline and islands, all rich in wildlife and history. Our landscapes enhance our quality of life and our well-being; they give us inspiration, refreshment and enjoyment. They provide great opportunities for outdoor recreation, including walking, cycling, canoeing and mountaineering. They are one of the main reasons why people visit Scotland, so they support important economic benefits through tourism, our largest industry.

With landscapes of such quality you might expect Scotland to have several National Parks – the principal tool used across the world to safeguard and manage fine landscapes. However, although the world has over 3,500 National Parks, including 60 in Canada, 29 in Norway and 14 in New Zealand, Scotland has only two. Another way of looking at it is that, for example, 20% of Wales and 12% of Iceland are designated as National Parks – yet only 8% of Scotland.

The Scottish Campaign for National Parks (SCNP) and the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland (APRS) have been campaigning for National Parks in Scotland for over 60 years. Both bodies feel that more of Scotland's landscapes deserve designation as National Parks. We think that the Scottish Government should have a strategy to implement its 2011 Manifesto commitment to 'work with communities to explore the creation of new National Parks'. However, as it doesn't, we've written

one for it. Since 2010 SCNP and APRS have been running a joint project to prepare and promote a strategy for more National Parks in Scotland, and on 10 April 2013 we launched our report *Unfinished Business*.

'National Park' is the leading internationally-recognised designation for places of the highest national importance for natural or cultural heritage, including landscape, wildlife and recreation. It is the highest accolade which can be given to a place within its national context. Many are truly wild; others, as in Scotland, are wholly or partly lived-in, working landscapes. The sort of world-renowned places designated as National Parks include Jotunheimen in Norway, Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, the Galapagos islands in Ecuador, Cradle Mountain in Tasmania, the Karakoram in Pakistan and Yosemite in the USA.

We believe that National Parks bring many environmental, social and economic benefits to the country in which they are situated. However, many of these benefits can be delivered in other ways and by other bodies, so the obvious question is what can National Park designation deliver better than any of the other options? We feel the key issues are that National Parks generate a high profile, support the active management of an area, not just its protection, encourage integrated planning and management by all public bodies, and invest additional national resources to help both residents and visitors make the most of the landscape whilst conserving it for future generations. National Parks mostly supplement and add value to existing

**John Mayhew is Project Manager of the Scottish National Parks Strategy Project and director of the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland**



Photo, this page:

Mull, image courtesy of Scottish Natural Heritage

Map:

National Parks recommended by SCNP and APRS

Photo, opposite page:

Glen Affric, image courtesy of The National Trust for Scotland

designations rather than duplicate or replace them. Another crucial issue is the inherent permanence of National Park designation: other arrangements may come and go, but National Parks are rarely abolished.

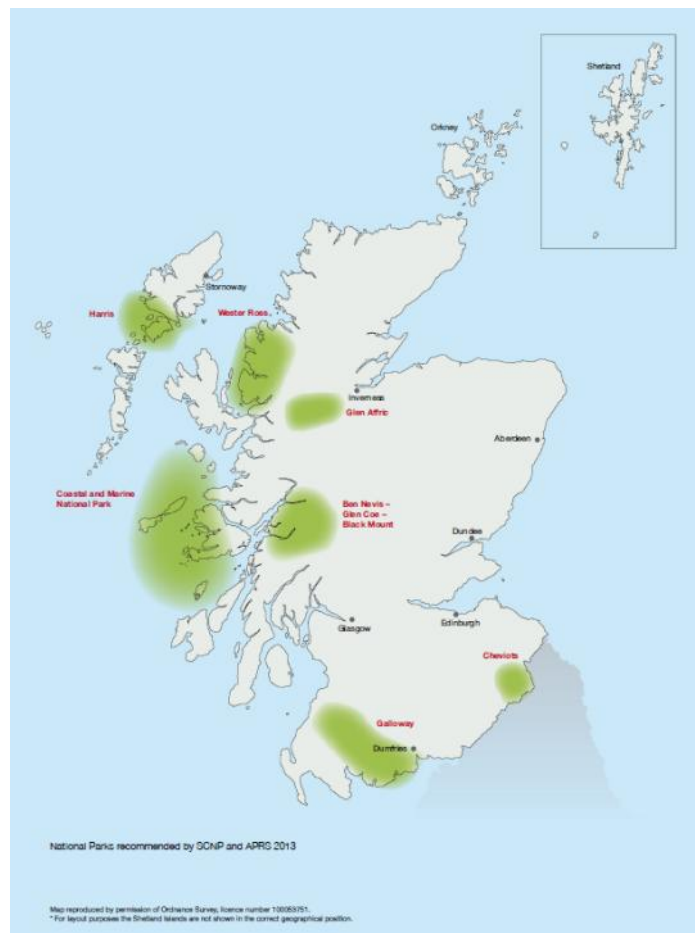
In 1947 the Ramsay Report recommended five areas of Scotland as National Parks, and in 1990 the former Countryside Commission for Scotland recommended four areas. After lengthy pressure from non-government organisations, Scotland eventually joined the National Park family in 2000 when the Scottish Parliament passed the *National Parks (Scotland) Act*. Scotland was therefore one of the last countries on earth to have National Parks; the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park and the Cairngorms National Park were designated in 2002-03. In recognition of our superlative marine environment, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Executive put in a great deal of work during 2005-06 towards preparing for Scotland's first coastal and marine National Park. However this was shelved after the 2007 election in favour of work on the *Marine (Scotland) Act*, which was eventually passed in 2010.

Our joint report *Unfinished Business*, which was launched on 10 April 2013, summarises the benefits which National Parks bring and recommends a number of improvements to the operation of the two existing and any future National Parks. It sets out criteria against which any future National Park should be

assessed, and proposes seven further areas which we consider meet these criteria and therefore merit National Park status, including at least one coastal and marine National Park. We are now campaigning for the Scottish Government to implement its proposals. We would welcome support for our proposals from other organisations or individuals, and I would be pleased to submit articles for other publications or to speak about the report at conferences or other events. Please contact me on [scnp-aprs@btconnect.com](mailto:scnp-aprs@btconnect.com) or 0131 225 7012 if you would like to get involved. The best way of all to support our efforts would be to join SCNP or APRS, which you can do at [www.scnp.org.uk](http://www.scnp.org.uk) or [www.ruralscotland.btck.co.uk](http://www.ruralscotland.btck.co.uk).

*SCNP promotes the protection, enhancement and enjoyment of National Parks, potential National Parks and other nationally outstanding areas worthy of special protection. SCNP is a registered Scottish charity, No: SC031008.*

*APRS promotes the care of **all** of Scotland's rural landscapes. APRS is a registered Scottish charity, No: SC016139.*



National Parks recommended by SCNP and APRS 2013

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\*For layout purposes the Shetland islands are not shown in the correct geographical position.



Tom Beels

## The history of Glenlyon's woodlands: part 2

Little twists of fate govern all our lives, the web of wyrd shifts and there is change. The results of that shift are sometimes not immediately apparent, or can set in process a whole series of other shifts. In Glenlyon a few of these little twists may have provided the circumstances for one individual's truly inspired vision of what the glen could become. A vision that today, some 280 or so years later, we observe as wildness appearing. The formal plantings are disappearing into the sylvan backdrops that their seeds have enabled and to which they now give form. Nature is using its tools and opportunity to (re-) make wildness.

In the first article on Glenlyon's woodlands (*WLN Autumn 2012*) we recalled the tragic deforestation that took place in the 1670s. Forests of Oak and Pine covering areas of several square miles were felled and extracted

in a most callous manner to pay the debts of a major landowner, Robert Campbell. Aged 66, Robert died fighting on a Flanders beach, still in the army and still trying to pay back his debts.

His legacy today mostly concerns his part in the Glencoe Massacre, the clearance of Glenlyon's ancient forests being merely a footnote to an unfortunate life. However, one can wonder if it may not have been the action he most rued? The effects of it would have been evident to him whenever he was in the glen, and not just from a picturesque perspective. At that time timber provided the means for tenants to build homes and to heat them. A lack of it provided neither. His tenants lived in the cold reality of his legacy, little knowing that their offspring would see the emergence of a very different glen.

**Tom Beels is a forester in Glenlyon and here continues his three-part history of the glen's woodlands**

Menzies was a canny fellow; he had time on his hands and most of a Highland glen awaiting his attention at home.

The year is 1692 and the Marquis of Atholl has owned the glen for 7 years but is finding it hard going. He sells it to Colonel James Menzies, a knight of Weem, who buys Glenlyon with the spoils of the raids and battles he engages in. The Colonel was a formidable warrior who reportedly once returned from a battle with the Lochaber Campbells having slain their leader and wearing nine arrows in his "armour of proof". We can only speculate on the kind of neighbour he might have been.

The impression of Glenlyon at this time is of a bleak and desolate glen, prone to flooding with bad roads and overgrazed lands.

The story moves forward 23 years to 1715 and the Colonel's nephew James Menzies (of Culdares) has inherited the estate. He, however, is being held in the Tower of London facing execution for his role as a leader of the Jacobite uprising. Being aged under 21 he is spared death and instead exiled to the Austrian Tyrol. His followers are mostly sent to Maryland, one of Britain's colonies in America.

Why Menzies is sent to the Tyrol remains a mystery but the twist of fate that sent him there is perhaps the main factor in enabling him to envision and create much of the heritage woodland seen in the glen today. Far more similar to home than Maryland was, one can imagine that the Tyrol of that time could have opened Menzies' mind to all kinds of opportunities for learning, many of which could have direct application in Glenlyon. German silvicultural techniques were already highly advanced in the 1700s and, had he wished to, Menzies would probably have had the opportunity to become well versed in forestry disciplines and thus be aware of effective and proven methods of (for example) upland

plantation forestry or nursery management. As we shall see later Menzies was a canny fellow and mostly likely he availed himself freely of the knowledge on offer; he had time on his hands and most of a Highland glen awaiting his attention at home.

James Menzies (by now known as "Old Culdares" or "The Highland Gentleman") is next recorded by history in 1737 making a return to Glenlyon. A portmanteau bag accompanies him and in it are some larch seedlings. He stops at Dunkeld and gives five seedlings to the Duke of Atholl, and a further twelve are left at the Duke's seat of Blair castle. At least eight are planted in Glenlyon, much of which James Menzies now owns.

Older history books credit him with introducing larch to Scotland; more recent ones reveal a few specimens here and there from the 1720s onwards. I would suggest that Menzies was instrumental in popularising larch in Perthshire, a county sometimes described as the cradle of Scottish forestry.

He would most probably have become aware of its remarkable properties while in the Tyrol and may well have eulogised over these properties to the Duke of Atholl and others. He had larch of good provenance and it was the right tree for the right time, well suited to mountainous and rugged ground and durable enough to bear comparison with oak.

During his exile The Highland Gentleman had enlarged his estate in Glenlyon and by 1732 had begun a long-running dispute with a neighbouring landowner, the Earl of Breadalbane, over what Menzies claimed was the historic right of his tenants to pasture their cattle in the Earl's Royal Forest of Mamlorn. This forest bordered Menzies' estate to the

west and in 1738 his tenants were grazing some 1200 cattle in it. Menzies managed to drag on the legal dispute until 1751 when his tenants eventually grew fed up and demolished the house of the forester most opposed to their activities.

The subtext of this is that for some twenty-plus years crafty Old Culdares managed to get what must have been a pretty significant proportion of the cattle on his land pastured at someone else's expense, leaving his own land in better fettle for his tree planting activities. During this time his forester Ian Dubh (Dark John) and a large number of workers must have been hard at it, for the labour required to fulfil Menzies' vision for Glenlyon was tremendous.

Improvements to infrastructure saw the building of a new road going for over 13 miles up the glen alongside several miles of flood defences and at least 20 miles of deer proof dry stone dykes which enclosed young plantations and old woodland fragments alike. The remains (often quite intact) of these dykes can still be clearly seen today. Their particular characteristic being that they are, whenever possible, built to run alongside deeply eroded burnsides. In this way they gain both height and a "Ha Ha" gully effect adding to their impregnability. This clever design must have reduced the labour input a little; no bad thing when you think of the effort required to build mile upon mile of 6 foot high dry stone wall that will inevitably need to go straight up and down steep hillsides.

Old Culdares and Ian Dubh were about more than enclosures however. They lined their new road with equally spaced rows of trees; mostly beech, but also oak, elm and ash. Quite a few of these trees still stand today, often of impressive size and with great presence when seen as a row or an avenue with a

high and intricately interwoven canopy.

The different ethos of the times can be seen in the way trees were planted for practical reasons as much as for their aesthetic appearance. These reasons included "for the protection of travellers" and famously as milemarkers from Pass of Lyon to Meggernie Castle (Menzies' home) some 13 miles up the road. Numerous riverbanks and older roads were also lined with avenues of beech, much of which was pollarded, presumably in its formative years. Had a pollarding cycle been continued these trees could have produced regular harvests of usable timber or firewood for over 250 years and would probably continue to do so into the future. They have meanwhile become desirable habitat for flora and fauna alike; red squirrels eat their nuts and owls roost in their cavities. Some of these beech avenues have become ecosystems in their own natural way.

The Highland Gentleman died aged 66, his final trick being that his improvements had cost so much that half the estate (from Chesthill down) had to be sold to pay his debts. He had achieved his dream presumably knowing this would happen; his trees were in the ground, his legacy secure. It would always have been understood that they would outlast him - indeed this is the implicit agreement made by everyone who plants trees.

In a curious footnote to this life, the Stuart Menzies family (who inherited his estate) undertook some tree planting using seed from their own (Caledonian) Pine and larch stock including perhaps from the original trees that Menzies had brought back from the Tyrol. This planting, undertaken somewhere in the 1840s at an elevation of 1910 feet was thought to be the highest planted hill in Scotland.

Today, some 170 years later, its

Menzies created the foundations for modern Glenlyon's sylvan wilderness. The beech and larch he introduced are naturalised here now, their different generations visible on the slopes and flats alike.



Photo, above:

Planted by a Jacobite, felled by a chainsaw. The last 2 of those 8 larch seedlings were felled for safety reasons in 1998.

R & I Webster

Below:

*"Where towering firs in conic forms arise, And with a pointed spear divide the skies"*  
Perth Journalist and tree enthusiast Thomas Hunter describes this woodland in the 1880's.

T. Beels

remnants have become a diverse and unusual habitat. Covered in lichens and mosses then blown over and tangled together by wind and time these larch and pine are quite spectacular, not least for the wild place they have created. Whether the intention of Menzies' relatives in planting this steep hill was that that it should, in time, resemble an alpine forest such as would be found in the Tyrol will remain unknown. It is however perhaps interesting to speculate that some family memory lingered of what The Highland Gentleman had seen during his exile.

The vision Menzies fulfilled would attract few supporters today. Someone

taking "their own" glen and flooding it with non native species in an apparent vanity project would be unlikely to endear themselves to conservationists or general opinion. The infrastructure improvements such as the 13 miles of new roads and flood defences would be hideously expensive and attract few financial backers (but much paperwork). As to feeding the cattle on the neighbour's land for 20 years, it does not even bear thinking about.

However, Menzies did do all this and in so doing he created the foundations for modern Glenlyon's sylvan wilderness. The beech and larch he introduced are pretty much naturalised here now, their different generations visible on the slopes and flats alike. That is of course the way with nature; exclude the herbivores and the trees will come. Opportunity is all.

In Part 3, we will look at Menzies legacy, the Forestry Commission missing a trick and the return of the Pinewoods; a vision of hope for the future.



# Wildness and the new bridge at Braemar

It is self-evident that our efforts to protect our wild land have been ineffective. Whatever we've been doing so far isn't working - the wild quality of the wild land is being diminished at an alarming rate.

In my writing I often put the term wild land in single-quotes and it's worth explaining what I mean when I write wild land or 'wild land'. I use those terms to distinguish between land that is truly-wild and land that is not-quite-wild; wild land is land that shows no sign of human activity while 'wild land' is land that shows minimal sign of human activity. Allowing those definitions it is self-evident that we don't have much truly-wild land left in upland Scotland, but we do have some. Fortunately, most of upland Scotland is either wild land or 'wild land', but much of it is gradually being de-wilded; becoming less and less wild. De-wilding is such a slow process that we hardly notice it happening, but in the area of upland Scotland I know best (the upland of Mar) the area has become less and less wild by the generation.

Many hill-goers are rightly outraged by the industrialisation of 'wild land' by the introduction of wind factories into it, but few show any concern for the creeping urbanisation of 'wild land' by the introduction of footbridges, and the upgrading of tracks, and shelters. As a wild land advocate, my objections to the urbanisation of wild land are profound. I acknowledge that they are not in the same category, but tracks, bridges and mountain shelters are the thin edge of the same development wedge that wind factories and bulldozed estate roads are the thick end of. None of what I'm suggesting is new - by 1937 at least one man could see the very thin edge of the very long

development wedge that has been diminishing the wild quality of upland Scotland since then. In 1937 Percy Unna, the then President of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, wrote a letter to the National Trust for Scotland in which he set out what have become known as the Unna Principles.

## Percy Unna's 5th Principle

I am a wild land advocate and I hope I do Percy Unna no disservice to suggest that he was a wild land advocate too. I'd also like to believe our reasons for being wild land advocates were the same; that he gained, as I gain, greater enjoyment from being among the hills where the wild quality of the wild land is high. Percy Unna's 5th Principle argues against diminishing the wild quality of the wild land with track work - he wrote:

*“paths should not be extended or improved; and that new paths should not be made”*

In the history of unambiguous statements Percy Unna's 5th Principle is about as unambiguous as they get - all track work: extending, improving, building (new) diminishes the wild quality of upland Scotland.

## Wildness (2011)

It is self-evident that building and maintaining tracks, bridges and mountain shelters diminishes the wild quality of the wild land - it feels less wild. Those who build and maintain and those who support the building and maintenance are as guilty of diminishing the wild quality of the wild land as any bulldozing landowner. With the publication of Wildness (2011) the Cairngorms National Park Authority introduced the concept of banding -

**Joe Dorward is 'webitor-in-chief' at [theuplandofmar.squarespace.com](http://theuplandofmar.squarespace.com) ; the 'upland of Mar' local history and geography project**

acknowledging that (a) all land is relatively wild; that an area may be more or less wild than adjoining areas (their banding) and (b) that the wildness of an area (in one band) can be diminished by development in an adjoining area (in another band). In Wildness (2011) this fact is acknowledged as follows:

*“development may have impacts upon wildness across one, two or all three bands. This will vary according to the type and scale of the development, as well as its exact location. This is most likely to happen through visual effect. For example, a structure erected within band B may be visible from band A and therefore introduce a modern man-made feature. This is likely to reduce the feeling of wildness” Wildness (2011) (p5)*

#### **Proposed footbridge over the Dé near Braemar**

The recently proposed footbridge over the Dé near Braemar is the perfect example of how upland Scotland is being urbanised and how areas that were once wild land have become 'wild land' - and how 'wild land' becomes not wild at all. In Strath Dee the site of the proposed bridge is an area of 'wild land' while the adjoining land to the north is

an area of wild land. The introduction of a footbridge and the 'essential' track work required for its use will reduce the feeling of wildness in both areas. The introduction of a footbridge into the 'wild land' will urbanise it and push its boundary outward while pushing northward the boundary of the wilder land.

To repeat myself - this urbanisation is the thin edge of the same development wedge that wind factories and bulldozed estate roads are the thick end of. When it comes to protecting wild quality the only option is zero-tolerance - it is impossible to strike a meaningful balance between building projects that are worth diminishing wild quality for and those that are not. None are, and we are kidding ourselves if we think we know where to draw that line.

There is no doubt that track, bridges, and shelters make getting about in the upland of Scotland easier. How many among us value the wild quality of the 'wild land' highly enough to forgo the conveniences of its urbanisation? How many among us are willing to forgo those conveniences and argue against them and for the re-wilding of upland Scotland?

George Charles

## The Braemar bridge: a response to Joe Dorward

**George Charles lives in Braemar and is a member of the SWLG Steering Team**

Joe Dorward's article argues for zero-tolerance for building projects which 'diminish wild quality', which his article seems to suggest includes every building project north of the Highland Fault regardless of the individual circumstances of each case. While it is not my intention to write in support of the proposed bridge at Braemar, I believe Dorward's concerns are wide of

the mark in this case. Location and scale are key in cases such as this; a new development in a relatively untouched area (for example, Invercauld's proposed shooters' lunch hut in Glen Gairn) reduce wild land quality and should be resisted; the same is true of projects out of scale with their surrounding built environment, such as the Scarista wind turbine proposal. The

When it comes to protecting wild quality the only option is zero-tolerance - it is impossible to strike a meaningful balance between building projects that are worth diminishing wild quality for and those that are not.



bridge in Braemar is close to the village and A93 and seems unlikely to have much of a negative impact on the landscape.

It's possible that the bridge will come to be the route of choice for walkers and climbers heading up the Slugain and so to Beinn A' Bhurid and/or Ben A'An but if so it won't fundamentally change the nature of a day on these hills. The Garbh Coire of Beinn A' Bhurid will remain among the least accessible in the Cairngorms. Even the smaller hills, Carn na Drochaide and Carn Liath, will remain more accessible from the Quoich and the Keiloch respectively. The bulk of users are likely to be low level walkers out for a stroll from the village, cyclists avoiding the A93 between Braemar and the Keiloch and through-walkers from Speyside wanting to minimise the tarmac tramp on the way into Braemar.

The fundamental issue, of course, is not how this bridge affects Braemar but how it impacts on the wild land to the north of the Dee. I consider the effect to be negligible. The north side of the Dee

at this point is not remote or inaccessible by any standards; there is a well-established vehicle track running from the Quoich to the Keiloch with various dwellings (mostly 'reekin' lums') alongside it, and the sharp lines of forestry on the hillside of Creag A' Chleirich do more to 'urbanise' this landscape than the presence of a bridge ever could. In short, the landscape is a lived-in one, and the bridge won't change the essence of that.

Dorward claims the uplands of Mar have become 'less and less wild by the generation' taking his definition of wild as 'signs of human activity'. Are there really more signs of human activity than in the times of thriving townships in Glen Lui and Glen Dee, with their shielings in Glen Derry or Glen Geusachan? Or when government troops were placed at the Dubrach after the '45? Or when the Macdui-Cairn Gorm plateau supported 3 emergency shelters? Or when a bulldozed track reached almost to the plateau of Beinn A' Bhurid?

Are there really more signs of human activity than in the times of thriving townships in Glen Lui and Glen Dee, with their shielings in Glen Derry or Glen Geusachan?

Tim Fison

## Highland Perthshire Communities Land Trust: Dun Coilich

In 2002, the communities around Aberfeldy in Highland Perthshire succeeded in buying 1100 acres of hill land in Glen Goulandie, between Coshieville and Tummel Bridge. It lies between the East Schiehallion property of the John Muir Trust (JMT) and the B846 road. There is a car park and visitor hut at NN768528, from which there is easy access to the land. It is managed by the Highland Perthshire Communities Land Trust with a view to providing public access, educational facilities, increasing biodiversity and establishing native woodland as part of

a mosaic of habitats.

The ten trustees have been working to protect the tree plantings and existing regenerating trees by repairing the perimeter fence to exclude deer. There is extensive co-operation with conservation bodies such as JMT, the Woodland Trust (WT) and Scottish Wildlife Trust. School parties are very important: Breadalbane Academy helped with fencing and have used Dun Coilich for their geography field work. Pitlochry High School planted 2 acres of Jubilee woods with seedlings provided

by the WT and have done other activities in connection with JMT awards. There have also been visits by several primary schools and the Beaver Scouts from Aberfeldy. Students from Edinburgh University have also helped with tree planting.

The trustees and other members of the Trust bring their own knowledge in terms of natural history, forestry, botany and geology to the management. They wish to extend community involvement and links are being established with the Highland Youth Project in Aberfeldy.

A number of routes have been marked across Dun Coilich to link with the JMT paths and these provide an alternative access approach to Schiehallion. However, the aim is not to tame the area with extensive paths but to leave the summits free of artefacts. The land supports the second largest blackcock lek in Perthshire and is home to many interesting birds, mammals and insects. The ground rock includes Dalriadan

limestone and this creates ideal soils for a lime-loving plant community like that on Ben Lawers.

Some of the water from the Allt Mhor is used for the Keltneyburn Hydroscheme and this provides a regular income for the Trust. This burn runs through a deep wooded gorge wooded with aspen, rowan, birch, Scots pine and the odd juniper. One of the aims is to extend this native woodland ecosystem.

The variety of habitats has been increased by scraping out ponds along the lower sections of the Glengoulandie Burn to provide water for amphibians and suitable feeding grounds for birds.

To find out more about Dun Coilich and become involved in our shared community land, contact Richard Paul (chairman of the Trustees) email: [richard@rannoch.info](mailto:richard@rannoch.info) or check out the website at [www.hpclt.org](http://www.hpclt.org) (Scottish Charity number SC 032801).

## Letters

### Cnoc a' Choire

On Saturday, 6<sup>th</sup> of October, I walked with a friend on a small hill which is about 6 miles west of Lairg. We were on our way to a MBA meeting at the Crask Inn. He is doing the HUMPS – hills of a 'Hundred Metres Prominence', the lowest of the Munro, Corbett, Graham, Marilyn hill taxonomy. The hill is Cnoc a' Choire and we started by walking up a track wider than the A839 we had come from. On both sides there were swathes of mature forestry. When we approached open ground the first turbines came into view and there was an office with a couple of pristine 4WDs outside. We then struggled through a clear-felled area with awkward brash underfoot and a plethora of an unattractive ochre-coloured fungus growing amongst it. It was a bit easier

walking through the turbines themselves though hardly pleasurable. Having got through this, all that remained was some bog and wet tussocks and a deer fence. Only the top 20 metres was relatively untouched though it probably had been deforested a few millennia ago. From the summit to the east and north-east turbines were visible on many hills and notwithstanding the attractiveness of the view inevitably these disturbed the eye. The walking experience itself was very dispiriting.

One point not mentioned by Calum Brown in his excellent article on wind power in WLN (Summer 2012) is how this 'windfall' has reinvigorated the present system of land ownership in Scotland. This is a new and very lucrative revenue stream for

landowners and the best part is that it demands very little or no effort on their part to accrue it. Secondly, if and when the interconnector is built from Lewis to the mainland, there will be another set of giant pylons going from west to east: Kintail-Glen Affric-Beauly? If you really want to depress yourself, consider the possibilities of further windfarms feeding into this new line. There already is a windfarm on the hills north of Invergarry and one under construction at Aultguish just north of the Fannichs so this idea is not completely fanciful. Our only hope may be that the unsustainable economics of onshore windpower will kick in sooner than expected. After all any system of power generation that requires a hefty subsidy in the three phases

of development – planning, build and production can hardly last - can it?

**Danny Rafferty, South Lochboisdale, Isle of South Uist.**

**Eagles & poetry**

I read with interest John Milne’s article on wild land poetry, and I hope it encourages more of what he would like to see in *Wild Land News*.

Bob McMillan’s article on eagles also touched a cord in me, so perhaps I can please John Milne also with my poetic response to the plight of that great bird.

**Bill Mejury, Cumbernauld**

THE EAGLE SOARS FOR HEIGHT TO DIVE,  
HIS PREY TO CATCH, A-RUNNING LIVE.  
BORNE ALOFT ON HIS POWERFUL WINGS,  
OUR SPIRIT THRILLS, HIS LIFE ZINGS !

UPON TREE OR CRAG, HIS CHOSEN NEST,  
IN A QUIET SPOT WHERE HE CAN INGEST,  
RABBITS, VOLES, AND IN BOUNTY SHARE,  
WITH BROODING MATE AND EAGLETS PAIR !

AQUILA CHRYSAETOS  
(DRAWN BY A. YOUNGMAN)



**BILL MEJURY**  
( CUMBERNAULD)

MAJESTY ATTENDS THIS RAPTOR'S FLIGHT,  
THE HEAVENS ARE HIS FROM EARLY LIGHT,  
HIS PIERCING TALONS AND MENACING DART,  
CREATES PANIC IN EVERY SKITTISH HEART !

HOW GRAND TO SEE THIS KING OF THE SKY,  
RIDING THE BREEZY AIR CURRENTS HIGH ;  
THE JOY HE GIVES US JUST NEVER CEASES,  
OH ! CALEDONIA ! - PROTECT HIS SPECIES !

Stefan Durkacz

## Walking the River Tay catchment boundary in aid of the Scottish Wild Land Group and the Venture Trust

**Stefan Durkacz is currently based in London where he works as a social researcher. He is originally from Scotland and visits home regularly to explore and camp in the Highlands and elsewhere**

If you were asked to define the heart of Scotland, both physically and spiritually, you could do worse than to open a map and trace a red line around the boundary of the River Tay catchment.

A few months ago I traced that line over a series of Landranger maps, all 290 miles of it. What I saw fired my imagination and sense of adventure, and on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2014 I will be setting off from Monifieth Sands to walk the boundary of the Tay catchment in a single expedition. Being a watershed walk, most of it, especially in the Highlands, will be off-trail, over moors, ridges, and mountains, keeping to the high ground. As far as I can tell, it is not a route that has been walked in its entirety before. Although I'm a seasoned hillwalker with many Scottish mountains under my belt, climbed in all weathers and seasons, this is by far the most ambitious backpacking trip I have undertaken.

The walk will raise funds for Scottish Wild Land Group (SWLG) and Venture Trust, and is sponsored by Alt-Berg, the Yorkshire-based walking boot manufacturer.

Most readers will be aware of SWLG's work in promoting Scotland's wild places and opposing inappropriate planning and development, but some may be less familiar with Venture Trust. Working in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK, they deliver transformational wilderness-based personal development programmes for vulnerable young people who have had difficult and chaotic lives, supporting them to develop the strategies and core life skills they need to overcome and succeed.

Venture Trust's work demonstrates the practical value and power of wild land. Time, space and support in a wilderness setting, far away from the pressures of home, where they are faced with physical, emotional and social challenges, takes participants into a personal 'stretch' zone where powerful learning can happen.

I chose to support these two charities because I believe that wild land is a 'must-have', not a 'nice-to-have'. It is a powerful resource in itself and has real value for our well-being. Yet as more people start to understand this, our wild land faces grave threats. It is still seen by many in power as endlessly exploitable and expendable, it seems. Through its work and through *Wild Land News*, SWLG maintains an independent and sophisticated voice in defence of wild land – a *real* voice, the antithesis of the NIMBY and Luddite caricatures that many politicians and others would have us believe in. Venture Trust's work realises wild land's potential to change lives for the better. That is a form of exploitation of a natural resource that is truly renewable, and that we can all live happily with.

As proud as I am to be supporting these two great organisations, I formed the idea of this walk several years ago as a personal challenge. Heading north from Dundee's eastern suburbs through the Angus lowlands and onto the heathery swell of the Mounth, the route bends ever more west on a journey into the wildest moors and mountains of the central Highlands. On the Black Mount, in sight of Glen Coe, the trail turns decisively south and gradually east over some of the great peaks of the southern

Highlands, reaching its highest point on Stob Binnein (1165m), before returning to the lowlands around Auchterarder and Gleneagles, and culminating in a traverse of the full length of the eastern Ochils all the way to the sands of Tentsmuir Point and the North Sea.

Scotland's most extensive river system is a microcosm of much of the country's landscape, encompassing wild mountains, lochs and moors; fertile rolling farmlands; gentle lowland hills; and expansive sandy coastline. It has also been the cradle and the forge of much of Scotland's history and identity from pre-history to the industrial revolution. It straddles Scotland's great physical and psychological divide, the Highland boundary fault line. From the time when Agricola pushed north over the Tay to face the Pictish army at Mons Graupius, to the Jacobite uprisings, cultures have clashed here. The sharpness of the divide can still be felt in maps, how abruptly the Gaelic place names give way or become mangled as the contours give out, particularly towards the west.

All this, of course, makes the Tay catchment boundary a fascinating, challenging and fantastically varied walking route. In the spirit of the charities I'm supporting, I intend to experience it to the full with as little as possible between me and the landscape. I'll be travelling light (and I

hope lightly), wild camping mostly, and re-stocking with food and supplies along the way rather than planning and buying everything in advance, thus helping to support local businesses.

Sadly, there will be some very immediate reminders of what I'm walking for, as the route in its latter stages leads through the Braes of Doune wind power plant, and the Green Knowes plant above Glen Devon in the Ochils. I can't think of a greater motivation to get me through to the end of the walk, should I be starting to flag by then.

I hope you feel inspired to support Scottish Wild Land Group and Venture Trust by making a donation. If you would like to do so, please visit <https://mydonate.bt.com/fundraisers/taycatchmentwalkswlg> and the same address ending [/taycatchmentwalkvt](https://mydonate.bt.com/fundraisers/taycatchmentwalkvt) (I would be grateful if you could split your donation equally between the two). I am meeting all the costs of undertaking the walk out of my own pocket.

For more details of the Tay catchment boundary route and my preparations you can visit my blog: <http://ansgarsoch.blogspot.co.uk/>.

#### Links:

Venture Trust: [www.venturetrust.org.uk](http://www.venturetrust.org.uk)  
Alt-Berg: [www.altberg.co.uk](http://www.altberg.co.uk)


Scotland's most extensive river system is a microcosm of much of the country's landscape, encompassing wild mountains, lochs and moors; fertile rolling farmlands; gentle lowland hills; and expansive sandy coastline.

Maps:

The Tay catchment and route of the walk.

From Wikipedia Commons





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