

SUMMER 2014

Wild Land News

Magazine of the Scottish Wild Land Group

Land value taxation

Deer management

Landscape & song

Wild land debate

Reading the Gaelic Landscape

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Summer 2014

WILD LAND NEWS

Summer 2014, Issue 85

Magazine of the
Scottish Wild Land Group

SWLG

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“everyone has an equal
right to the land
resource that provides
the necessities of life”

Page 8



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Editorial

Welcome to the Summer 2014 issue of *Wild Land News*. It has been longer than planned since our last issue, but the SWLG has been busy in the interim, with a growing Steering Team and new plans for future activities. It has also been a busy time for wild land, and so we now have a suitably full and varied edition of *Wild Land News*, with contributors and articles focusing on many aspects of land management in Scotland.

It is an appropriate time to consider such a wide range of issues. Not only have recent consultations, planning proposals and Government policy announcements brought wild land issues to the fore but, as the independence referendum nears, fundamental questions about the future of Scottish land are being asked. Whatever happens on the 18th of September, the current systems of land ownership and use are no longer seen as fixed. This is particularly true following the publication of the Land Reform Review Group's final report, and the Scottish Government's response to its recommendations could have major implications. Serious discussion of how land should be owned and managed, the benefits it can produce and how these should be distributed, is long overdue and can only be a good thing.

The Land Reform Review Group was set up to identify how land reform could be used to *“enable more people in rural and urban Scotland to have a stake in the ownership, governance, management and use of land... [leading] to a greater diversity of land ownership, and ownership types, in Scotland; assist with the acquisition and management of land (and also land assets) by*

communities...[and] generate...new relationships between land, people, economy and environment in Scotland”. Despite these stirring words, the Group noted that *“Government approaches to land reform, when there has been a political will to engage with the issue at all, have traditionally been characterised by periodic review and piecemeal intervention”*, and concluded that a far more stable, coherent approach was required. It also argued that the existing system of land ownership in Scotland needs to be significantly changed in order to operate in the public interest, with a decrease in the dominance of large estates. To that end, *“changes to the current fiscal regime should include structuring them to encourage an increase in the number of land owners in rural Scotland, in the public interest”*.

These are arguments that some have been making for many years, of course, but their clear and robust adoption by the Land Reform Review Group is welcome and, perhaps, surprising. They are bound to be strongly opposed (Scottish Land and Estates have already labelled the report “extremely disappointing” and claimed that the Group “focused far too much on ownership”), but politicians now have the opportunity to alter the highly unequal distribution of power over a crucial and common resource, should they wish to take it. In the report's recommendations (of which there are more than 60), they also have the means.

One of these recommendations is that a system of Land Value Taxation should be examined and seriously considered.

By taxing owners of all land, from private homes to large estates, on the basis of the value of their land to society, the system could discourage hoarding of land and encourage more diverse patterns of land ownership and use. The introduction of such a tax, as a replacement for Council Tax and business rates, would mark a fundamental shift in our relationship with land, and a recognition that, at some level, it belongs to everyone. This could have numerous benefits, which John Digney thoroughly and persuasively sets out on page 8.

Land use is inescapably linked to land ownership, but there are changes that can and should be made under current ownership patterns. The extremely high densities of deer maintained by many sporting estates, for instance, preclude a variety of natural processes and alternative land uses that could be of substantial benefit to us all. Pete Ewing considers this issue and an alternative, wilder vision of land management on page 13. The ongoing spread of wind farms, with the associated destruction of landscapes and environments, and transfer of wealth to large landowners and energy companies, is another example of a damaging imbalance in power that stops more environmentally, socially and economically beneficial developments from occurring, as Ken Brown argues. The absence of proper justifications for current energy policy has been pointed out several times in *Wild Land News*, and even those that are given are often highly suspect, as Geoff Moore finds in an investigation of the power generation of renewable energy schemes. Perhaps most blatant is the exemption used by estates to build hill tracks without planning permission, meaning that no justifications at all have to be provided for what are often extremely damaging

developments. The campaign to end the unregulated construction of these tracks continues, and Calum Brown provides an update in this issue.

Each of these issues reflects a lack of balance between the various interests in how land is used, and the need for a more open-ended approach. For example, there has been considerable debate recently about what constitutes wild land in Scotland – what it does or ‘should’ look like and how it can be identified. Jonathan Agnew, George Charles and James Fenton all contribute to this debate here and, while they might disagree on some issues, they share a conclusion that land must be subject to natural processes to qualify as truly wild. The absence of human control need not result in an absence of human benefits, however, and the promise of richer, more stable and valuable ecosystems is an exciting one.

Not least amongst the potential benefits is a re-establishment of the deep connections between people and the land they live on, as expressed through culture and language. Geordie McIntyre and John Murray’s *Reading the Gaelic Landscape* (reviewed in this issue) both explore these links. Finally, in this issue’s *My Wild Land*, Geoff Salt reminds us that wildness can be found beyond the land itself, and especially where it interacts with the sea.

We hope that you will enjoy this summer issue of *Wild Land News*, and, as ever, we welcome letters, comments and articles in response.

News

Tay catchment walk

At the time of writing, SWLG member Stefan Durkacz has begun his walk around the Tay catchment to raise funds for the SWLG and the Venture Trust. Described in issue 84 of WLN, Stefan's walk will take him through some very varied and challenging country. This is the first known attempt to walk the entire boundary of the Tay catchment and it promises to be a fantastic walk. Stefan's updates on his progress can be found at ansgarsoch.blogspot.co.uk, along with details of how to donate, and there will be more about the walk in the next issue of *Wild Land News*.

Raptor deaths

The news of the discovery of 22 dead buzzards and red kites in the Conon Bridge area has made headlines recently, and led to new calls for stronger action to tackle raptor persecution. So far, 16 of the birds have been confirmed as poisoned by banned substances

While the discovery of a mass-killing of this scale is unusual, smaller incidents in which single birds are found dead, or simply disappear, remain all too common. The increase in satellite-tagging of birds is demonstrating that persecution is widespread, with tagged individuals frequently falling prey to illegal persecution or vanishing in the vicinity of grouse moors.

The Government has announced that it plans to wait for evidence of whether its current approach is working before considering other options for tackling persecution. However, the notable lack of successful prosecutions, together with the considerable difficulties of determining the extent of the problem, make it unclear what form such evidence might take. Meanwhile, as the unsolved poisonings, shootings and trappings mount up, the perpetrators appear to be

operating with impunity, and Scotland's raptor populations remain fragile.

Hill tracks

The Scottish Wild Land Group and other environmental organisations involved in Scottish Environment LINK's campaign to bring hill tracks into the normal planning process are waiting for the Minister for Local Government and Planning, Derek Mackay, to announce his decision on whether to take action. A report on the problems caused by unregulated track construction, *Track Changes*, was published late last year following the Minister's earlier decision to keep the situation 'under review'. Earlier this year, Scottish Land and Estates produced their own report, which attempted to discredit *Track Changes* and provided examples of tracks voluntarily built to high standards. Scottish Environment LINK duly responded, and these documents can be found via www.scotlink.org/hilltracks. An article about the campaign and significance of the Government's eventual decision is on p.28 of this issue.

Thanks are due to all those who have supported the campaign by submitting images of tracks or by writing to their MSPs, and we hope that many of you will continue to pressure the Government to change this anachronistic and damaging loophole in planning law.

Nethy Bridge housing objection

The SWLG has submitted an objection to a proposal for 58 houses at School Wood, Nethy Bridge. The site, within the Cairngorms National Park, includes native woodland and sensitive habitats, and the direct and indirect damage caused to these and to the species that depend upon them would be great. A development of this scale would be inappropriate in this location, and would clearly be inconsistent with the National Park Authority's legal obligation to

“conserve and enhance the natural... heritage... of the [Cairngorms] area”. The SWLG’s objection can be read on our website.

New Steering Team Members

Two new members of the Steering Team were elected at the last SWLG Annual General Meeting: Ken Brown and Pete Ewing. Both are already busy with work for the Group (and with articles for *Wild Land News*) and have considerable expertise in land management and conservation. We look forward to working further with them both.

Stronelaig

The huge 67 turbine Stronelaig wind farm proposal was approved recently by the Government, despite strong opposition from a large number of individuals and organisations. The decision marks a further, major step in the industrialisation of the Monadhliath mountains, with an area the size of Inverness (at the centre of the Monadhliath Core Area of Wild Land) now set to be covered by turbines, access roads and borrow pits. Set high on the Monadhliath plateau, the 133-metre-tall turbines will almost reach the height of a Munro and will be visible for many miles around, and will add substantially to the ring of steel around the Cairngorms National Park. The famously attractive and largely single-track B862 along the Eastern side of Loch Ness will undergo ‘mitigation’ measures including widening and double-tracking, and well over a million tons of earth and rock will be excavated for borrow pits, tracks and foundations for the turbines. The Core Area of Wild Land identified by SNH in the Monadhliaths has been fragmented by

the development, raising serious questions about the Government’s commitment to protect Scottish wild land and sensitive environments, notwithstanding the inclusion of this commitment in the National Planning Framework (see below). While announcing the decision, Fergus Ewing, Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism, also announced that the smaller Newfield wind farm near Lockerbie was being refused permission on grounds of ‘unacceptable impacts on the landscape’.

Planning policy and wild land

Scottish Natural Heritage’s map of Core Areas of Wild Land in Scotland (updated to reflect the loss of a large area of wild land in the Monadhliath mountains as a result of the Stronelaig wind farm decision) has been recognised in new planning policy documents. Both the National Planning Framework and the Scottish Planning Policy now acknowledge the importance of wild land as identified by SNH, with the Scottish Planning Policy stating that wild land areas “are very sensitive to any form of intrusive human activity and have little or no capacity to accept new development. Plans should identify and safeguard the character of areas of wild land as identified on the 2014 SNH map of wild land areas”. This follows widespread support for such a safeguard from the public and environmental organisations including the SWLG, and strong opposition from energy companies to any planning guidelines protecting wild land. Both documents are very important in setting the context for planning decisions and so the recognition of wild land is a substantial step forward, although serious concerns remain about implementation and the extra pressure potentially placed on other areas.

Subscriptions due!

SWLG membership subscriptions for 2014 are now overdue - please send cheques for the correct amount to either the Treasurer or the Membership Secretary (SWLG, 36, Mansefield Crescent, Glasgow. G76 7EB). Back issues of recent magazines are also available from the Membership Secretary; please enquire.

John Digney

Land Value Taxation—the Essential Reform

John Digney is a member of the Scottish Wild Land Group and former editor of *Wild Land News*.

The early years of the Scottish Parliament were marked by a flurry of activity on land reform. Years of apathy and prevarication at Westminster meant there was plenty of work to do. After the Labour landslide election of 1997, the formation of the Land Reform Policy Group (LRPG) by the Scottish Office meant the new parliament could hit the ground running with ready-made proposals for reform. Yet despite the late Donald Dewar's hopes that land reform was to be an *"ongoing process"*, after the first few years of the millennium the momentum subsided. All went quiet until summer 2012 when the SNP broke its silence and formed its own Land Reform Review Group (LRRG). Once again the big landowners are squirming, anticipating another attack on their privileges. But have they any need to fear? Is there anything truly radical in the offing or is it just going to be window-dressing?

There was some very good work done under the general banner of land reform in those early days of the Scottish Parliament. MSPs had barely got their feet under their desks before they were dismantling the feudal system. Then came the long-awaited legislation on national parks and public access rights. Much less successful, however, was the flagship Community Right-to-Buy (CRtB) which was an attempt at redistribution, recognising the problem of Scotland's highly concentrated pattern of private land ownership.

Failure of the Community Right-to-Buy

The CRtB emerged from public consultations by the LRPG and was promoted *"as an essential prerequisite*

of land reform" by Donald Dewar. The LRPG predicted that it would *"effect rapid change in pattern of ownership,"* a claim that sounded wildly optimistic even at the time, and which has proved to be pure fantasy. The Scottish Government's own figures show that by 2012 only 11 successful purchases had been made since the legislation came into force. In a newspaper article in 2009 Andy Wightman calculated that at the current rate of progress it would be year 2025 before even 1% of Scotland's land was in community ownership.

The idea of buy-outs was probably inspired by the success of communities such as those of Assynt (1993), Eigg (1997) and Knoydart (then ongoing). These were iconic purchases which had enjoyed huge press coverage about the problems of remote communities under absentee landownership. Much of the funding came from the public purse, trusts, charities and individual private donations. However, the assumption that such contributions would continue on the same scale until the *"rapid change in pattern of ownership"* had been accomplished across Scotland was always implausible. Even if communities could negotiate the complex bureaucracy required to prepare a bid for a buy-out, where would the funds come from? The notion of huge sums of public money being poured into the pockets of already-rich landowners would have grated with the majority of taxpayers.

Donald Dewar was all too aware of the problem and the risk of becoming a hostage to fortune when he warned that *"we would need to ensure that the wishes of the community did not*

automatically lead to a demand on the Government for funds – we cannot be the provider of all resources for this project". The Government has now admitted that the money available from the Scottish Land Fund *"is often too small to make more than a modest change to the pattern of land ownership in Scotland"* which begs the question as to why such extravagant predictions were made for the CRtB in the first place.

The LRRG is due to complete its work shortly [it has done so since the time of writing], but so far it seems they are committed to extending the CRtB in some form. Unlike the LRPG, their remit rightly includes urban land. Land reform ought to be about the ethics of recognizing the equal birthright of all citizens to what Nature has provided, and those ethics don't change with change of land use. Whatever the LRRG comes up with, it must be based on firm principles that don't vary according to whether land is pigeon-holed as rural, urban or something in between. So in view of the limitations of the Scottish Land Fund it will be interesting to see whether they will pursue the CRtB in an urban context where land values may be hundreds or even thousands of times greater acre for acre than in remote rural parts.

Rather than flogging a dead horse, now would be a good time for the SNP to ditch the CRtB as a failed Labour initiative. At best it could be retained in the event of a community finding a generous private benefactor, but realistically it should be acknowledged as a policy cul-de-sac.

A fiscal approach

If we accept the axiom that everyone has an equal right to life, and therefore to the necessities for sustaining life, we must accept that everyone has an equal

right to the land resource that provides those necessities. Land reform legislation must give practical expression to this and must restore equal land rights.

Nevertheless, we should not expect the Government to achieve this by seizing or buying the land from current titleholders and reapportioning it equally (or arbitrarily) among the population. With the current pattern of distribution as a starting point we can, through the fiscal system, achieve fairness by balancing the privilege of land ownership with a corresponding financial obligation on the owner to the rest of society. We do not need to divide up the land physically; we do not need land nationalisation; we simply need to socialise the rental value of all land.

The case for land reform was greatly advanced in the 1990s by the series of McEwen Lectures. In the 1996 lecture, Prof. John Bryden repeatedly urged a fiscal approach. He noted:

"We need to capture for society realised incremental rents arising from sources other than investment by landowners, including those arising from general social and economic changes, public investments, public subsidies and regulations."

and:

"We need to reverse the situation which has given to landowners the "residual power" in land, and which enables them to capture many of these incremental rents for private benefit."

Prof. Bryden was the external assessor to the LRPG, and it is a pity that these ideas were not pursued to their logical

“Land has no production cost; its value is purely a measure of the level of public demand for particular locations, further enhanced and sustained by the provision of publicly-funded services and infrastructure. These publicly-created values should be returned to the public purse.”

conclusion. It follows that if we are to capture future incremental rents for society, we should also apply the principle to existing land values, as these are simply the aggregate of past increments, generated by the same processes of social and economic change and public investment. For all practical purposes the supply of land is fixed and finite. Land has no production cost; its value is purely a measure of the level of public demand for particular locations, further enhanced and sustained by the provision of publicly-funded services and infrastructure. These publicly-created values should be returned to the public purse as a prime source of public revenue, with a concomitant reduction of existing punitive and destructive taxation on work and enterprise. The way to achieve this is by the system commonly known as Land Value Taxation (LVT), which regrettably was kicked into the long grass by the LRPG, but more encouragingly, was included in the LRRG’s initial list of potential reforms for consideration.

Land Value Taxation

Land Value Taxation would involve:

- The annual payment of a sum equivalent to the economic rental value of the land. It would include all land parcels, large or small, rural or urban.
- It would be charged on the value of the land alone, and would exclude the value of buildings and other man-made improvements on the land.
- Valuation would be based on optimum permitted use within prevailing planning and environmental constraints.

The implications and effects would be:

- The privilege of holding land would be balanced by a reciprocal obligation to society in direct accordance with the value of the land held.
- It would cancel out the financial advantage of merely owning land *per se*, as rental income to the owner would be equalled by the amount payable.
- It would dismantle the power structure of landlordism which is based on the legalised monopoly of our most basic resource.
- The benefits accruing from community-generated land values would flow into the public purse rather than private pockets. Public subsidies and investment in services and infrastructure that drive up land values would be recycled back into the public purse.
- Those who claim to “own” the country would have proportionate financial responsibility for the country’s running costs.
- It would apply universally to all land and all landholders, so could not be portrayed as selective, arbitrary, divisive or vindictive.
- It would restore society’s stake in the land resource without recourse to nationalisation or physical repossession, and without compromise to the principle of legally-secure tenure.
- It would penalise and therefore discourage the holding of land as an indulgence or as a trophy. Land hoarding would become expensive and pointless, and speculative values would collapse. This would break the cycle of boom-and-bust which is driven by the property market – it is the land that is the volatile element of that market, not the bricks and

mortar.

- Inefficient rural estates would begin to break up and the way would be open for a wider pattern of ownership.
- It would penalise and therefore discourage dereliction. Land held deliberately out of its designated use would incur the same charge as if it were in use. Permitted development of available land within existing urban areas would therefore be encouraged, relieving the pressure of sprawl into rural areas.
- Land rendered economically useless through, for example, conservation designations or by virtue of its sheer remoteness, would have zero rental value and therefore zero liability for LVT. Such land would therefore not be a financial burden on the owner and there would be no pressure to develop it to cover costs.
- The temptation to manipulate the planning system for personal profit would be reduced as the enhanced value from planning permission would be captured for the public purse rather than by landowners/ developers.
- Whereas the present tax system is a cheats' charter and a breeding-ground for institutionalised corruption, dodging LVT would be impossible as land cannot be hidden or exported to a tax haven.
- Assessment could be done largely from maps. The skills for valuation (distinguishing the location value of land from the separate value of buildings and improvements) already exist within the surveying/ valuation/estate agency professions.

Crucially, as a huge source of *alternative* rather than additional revenue, it would

enable the Government to liberate the economy from the burden of penal taxation on labour and productive enterprise. Massive cuts could be made to our present counter-productive taxes.

With rental income matched by outgoing payments, there would be much less incentive for landowners to encourage inappropriate development as the increase in income would be absorbed to leave no net gain. Windfarms on upland sites, for example, can generate megabucks as well as megawatts, sometimes to the tune of tens of thousands of pounds in rent per turbine per annum. This uplift in value would be returned to the public purse instead of going into the private pockets of landowners who have done nothing to create it.

The full effect of LVT would only be felt if it were to be levied at 100%, but most recent studies have considered a more modest application at local authority level. The Scottish Government's Burt Committee report of 2006 into local government taxation found very few drawbacks with LVT, with public unfamiliarity seemingly the main one. Burt queried the ease of valuation, but there were no concerns over this in a pilot study in 2009 by Glasgow City Council which confirmed that *"databases, systems and controls are in place"* and stated *"We have therefore not identified any insurmountable problems from a practitioner's perspective in introducing a LVT."* A study by Oxfordshire County Council in 2005 was similarly confident about implementation. Andy Wightman produced a detailed study of LVT for the Green party in 2009, the results of which are summarized in Chapter 30 of his book *"The Poor Had No Lawyers."* Most recently the Mirrlees Report of 2011, commissioned by the Institute for

"Massive cuts could be made to our present counter-productive taxes"

Fiscal Studies, observed: *“The economic case for a land value tax is simple, and almost undeniable”* and recommended replacing business rates and stamp duty land tax on business property with a land value tax for business and agricultural land.

Despite the term LVT being used in all of the above-mentioned studies, it is something of a misnomer. It is more of a user fee than a tax, on the same lines as a parking fee where you choose your space and occupy it at the going rate for the location. Even homeowners are land monopolists, albeit on a tiny scale, and the way to achieve a level playing field is for us each to compensate the rest of society in accordance with the extent of our chosen monopoly.

The Greens are the only party promising LVT. Both the Liberal and Labour parties used to have it as a core policy, although Labour rather lost the plot with their post-war attempts to capture publicly-enhanced land values for the public purse. Their legislation was fatally flawed as it relied on one-off charges levied at the point of development, which simply caused stagnation as developers sat tight and hoarded land while awaiting the inevitable repeal. Now Ed Miliband wants to curb land hoarding - why not look at LVT?

Disagreements between the SNP and Westminster about oil revenues pepper the independence debate. But if the SNP considered the land under their feet as well as the resources under the North Sea, they could unite with their pro-independence allies, the Greens, and tap a huge alternative source of public revenue. Unlike the oil, the land won't run out. The link between land reform and fiscal reform needs to be made. If we allow politicians simply to “do” land reform in isolation and then

move on to something else, the result will inevitably be a ragbag of improvised policies targeting the various symptoms rather than the underlying malaise. We need to break the power of land monopoly at source, or we shall always be on the back foot in our efforts to control it.

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¹¹http://www.andywrightman.com/docs/Glasgow_LVT.pdf (Sections 3.10 & 3.11)

¹²http://www.andywrightman.com/docs/oxfordshire_study.pdf (P. 9-10)

¹³“A Land Value Tax for Scotland” <http://www.andywrightman.com/docs/LVTRREPORT.pdf>

¹⁴“The Poor Had No Lawyers” Birlinn (2010); ISBN 978-1-84158-907-7

¹⁵“Tax By Design” <http://www.ifs.org.uk/mirrleesReview/design>

Deer management and rewilding

Landseer's *Monarch of the Glen* – available to view in the National Gallery, or, more conveniently, on the nearest shortbread tin – is familiar enough to be a cliché. The painting focuses on a male red deer (*Cervus elaphus*): specifically a twelve point or 'royal' stag. Very much in the background is a mountain wilderness - hazy, distant, nebulous. It's almost as if the wild land was sketched in as an afterthought once the important bit was done. But perhaps this reflects the priorities of the time. The typical Victorian sportsman was interested in the monarch, not the glen.

Unfortunately, little has changed since 1850. Deer are still prioritised over the wider ecological interest. Many sporting estates prefer to keep deer numbers at artificially high levels. This is understandable – the value of an estate is directly linked to the number of stags shot each year. It's the first thing mentioned in the selling agent's prospectus or the full page advertisements in *The Field*.

But the downside is the impact of such high deer populations. Overgrazing by deer maintains the highlands as a 'wet desert'. Our bare hills are not representative of what used to be there, as the preserved pine roots protruding from the peat testify. The tattered remnants of ancient pinewood cannot regenerate due to browsing pressure, peat is trampled, natural succession to forest is prevented and new native woodlands cannot be established unless fenced.

But fencing is as much of a problem as it is a solution. It detracts from wilderness, inhibits access, and kills capercaillie. Nor is it natural for woodland to have no grazing pressure at all. Deer are originally forest animals and light grazing pressure helps keep the woodland understorey in check.

Another option is culling deer to bring the population down to a more natural sustainable level. Recreational stalkers will pay over four hundred pounds to shoot a stag, but to control populations you need to cull hinds. Because there is no trophy involved, and because hind stalking takes place in the colder months, this is mostly done by professional stalkers rather than paying recreational stalkers. It is an expensive, labour-intensive and skilled task. The cost of the hind cull falls disproportionately on the taxpayer – the Forestry Commission own 8.5% of the land, but cull 36% of the deer. We have the bizarre situation of FC rangers working hard to control populations while some private estates feed the deer in winter to keep the numbers up.

It is likely that the population of red deer has tripled since the 1960s, although there is some controversy about this. Counting deer is more difficult and less precise than measuring the mass of planets orbiting distant stars. Ground surveys, aerial surveys and dung counts have all been tried, but a study in the British Deer Society journal *Deer* found that different methods give worryingly different numbers.

More important than these numbers are the impacts of too many deer, and this is more easily quantifiable. The Forestry Commission's *Native Woodland Survey of Scotland*, published in February 2014 after eight years of research, found that only 46% of our native woodlands were in satisfactory condition. The biggest threat is overgrazing, predominantly by deer.

The Scottish government has been taking evidence from environmental organisations who would like to see deer numbers reduced, and from landowners and game keepers, who

Pete Ewing is a GP in Crieff and a recreational stalker. He is working towards the Mountain Leader qualification and is also a new member of the SWLG's Steering Team.

"Little has changed since 1850. Deer are still prioritised over the wider ecological interest."

would like to maintain the current high populations. At present the system of deer management is largely voluntary and Scottish Natural Heritage have so far not used their powers for demanding mandatory culls, probably because of the difficulty of proving necessity and the likely legal challenges from landowners. Andy Wightman observed that the poor had no lawyers, but the corollary is that the rich have rather a lot of them.

More involvement of environmental organisations on Deer Management Groups would help, although it is challenging for an environmentalist to persuade landowners and keepers of the bigger picture. Most DMGs are dominated by landowning interests.

There is another solution – the reintroduction of large carnivores such as the Eurasian lynx and the wolf which predate on deer. Relatively small populations of these predators have very large effects on overall biodiversity – the so called ‘trophic cascade’. As well as reducing populations, predators move deer around, preventing areas of high browsing pressure. They also make deer more wary, which might increase the challenge for the human hunter, giving him or her an experience closer to that of the Palaeolithic hunter-gatherer.

Predator reintroduction would encourage regeneration of native woodland, which is the natural habitat of the red deer. Although red deer can, and have, adapted to living on the open hill, they do far better in a forest environment, growing to a significantly greater size.

There are no reports, even in anecdote, of lynx attacking people. Attacks on humans by non-rabid wolves are astonishingly rare. George Monbiot observed that you are more likely to be killed by lightning, or the wrong kind of bedroom slippers.

The current situation of woodland under threat from overgrazing is an unforeseen consequence of the extermination of the wolf 250 years ago. As Aldo Leopold observed, it is like taking a clock apart and throwing away some of the cogwheels because you don’t understand their purpose. When you reassemble the clock, it doesn’t work as well as it used to. The Highland ecosystem is a particularly broken timepiece.

Deer stalking is obviously valuable to the economy and brings the stalker a sense of challenge and connectedness. I personally would like us to become more like Fennoscandinavia, where hunting is a mainstream pursuit - the hunters are environmentalists and the environmentalists are hunters. Contrary to popular belief, deer stalking – at least for hinds - can be one of the more accessible and least costly of the shooting sports.

‘Rewilding’ with expansion of native woodland, reintroduction of large carnivores and subsequent restoration of natural processes could be a win-win situation for environmentalists, hunters and those who simply love waking up to sunrise in the forest. We could have a more natural environment where less human management is needed or desired. The wild country hiker could have a more authentic experience. The hunter could have greater challenge and bigger deer. There need be no reduction in the stag cull - the current deer populations are far greater than what is needed to provide the current cull of ‘sporting’ stags. And to keep wolves fearful of humans they could occasionally be shot under licence. Hunting as a sport could still thrive with much reduced deer numbers.

And, more importantly, so could our native woodlands. Our wild country could be a notch closer to wilderness.

Wild Land Mapping

In recent years there has been a growing interest in wild land mapping. This has culminated in the recent production by SNH of a map pertaining defined areas of wild land entitled 'Core Areas of Wild Land' (CAWL) ⁽¹⁾. Previous to this mapping was led by the John Muir Trust and Leeds University's Wild Land Research Institute when they produced a preliminary map of the top 10% wildest areas ⁽²⁾. These projects represent a push to achieve recognition of wild land in Scotland and safeguard such areas from development – at present particularly wind farms. In the fight against industrialisation of wild places CAWL represents a huge step and warrants broad support. These are a vital piece in the jigsaw towards wild land protection, but what do they really show us? That depends on what you perceive as wild.

When building the wild land map SNH did so based on four key requirements: perceived naturalness, rugged or challenging terrain, remoteness from public roads and visible absence of built development and other modern artefacts. These wildness qualities, similar to those used in other mapping exercises, are indicative of the anthropocentric and aesthetic nature of wild land mapping to date. This is apparent from language used in SNH's description of methodology which explains that the approach considers the *"...context within which wildness is experienced,"* that the areas of wild land *"...will have some relevance to people's experience of wildness,"* and requires a scale that *"...can evoke the full experience of wildness."* This is the tone set for the exercise and therefore basis of what SNH would now define as wild and non-wild land.

That wild land is experienced and appreciated by people is surely

important, and this recreationalist approach is a founding principle of the movement, going back to great minds such as John Muir and Aldo Leopold. However, taking an anthropocentric standpoint is central to the destructive nature of unrelenting development which has wrought the elimination of so much wild land. So much abuse of the land can be derived from the enlightenment opinion that humans stand atop the evolutionary podium and the world serves a human purpose. To avoid falling into this trap ourselves we must look at what wild land means to wild land.

Self willed land

Looking at the root of the word 'wild', it can be derived to 'self-willed.' What we are really talking about here is self-willed land ⁽³⁾. Jack Turner poses that to be wild, land must be largely free from the control of humans. It is by control that we tame the natural environment. In Scotland we have had millennia of control to a degree, but only intensive and widespread control since the agricultural revolution ('improvements'). Such was the difference between humans living in the natural environment and humans radically altering the landscape, a process intensified by the industrial revolution. It was around the time of the latter period that the Highlands of Scotland began to be radically altered to suit the economic and leisure desires of a land rich class. They created what Scotland is known for around the world, made famous by the romanticism of Sir Walter Scott, Queen Victoria and of course Sir Edwin Landseer - the open hillside, the empty heather moor. This is a landscape where 'wildness is experienced,' and makes up much of the identified areas of wild land but it is largely a tamed place. It is controlled by

Jonathan Agnew is an Ecologist at Mar Lodge Estate

“we are not defending wild land until those factors which prevent free willed ecological processes are removed”

the decisions of humans through the removal of predators and the promotion of grazers. This land is not self-willed, even if it appears wild to our eyes.

The self-willed nature of land is an ever increasing rarity on this planet but one which is vital for the healthy functioning of natural systems, for the sanctity of diversity and the sanity of us all. Wild land is important because it is a safeguard for ecological health and is vital for the robustness and brilliant vigour of the planet. It represents the natural environment unchecked by human control, but not necessarily devoid of human presence; humans can form part of an ecologically balanced system. It is a natural landscape which has all its component parts intact and functioning which is self-willed, regardless of whether people are there or not.

The wild places

Why do we want to protect wild land? Is it purely so that we can feel alone when we are ‘out there in the wilds’ and that it took a long time to get there? Surely there is more to wild land than this. There are many places across Scotland where attempts are being made to remove aspects of control by beginning to restore biological mechanisms hindered by human influence. These include The National Trust for Scotland’s Mar Lodge, Trees for Life’s Dundreggan and The John Muir Trust’s Knoydart Estate. Such projects are attempts to relinquish some control of the landscape and support the natural mechanisms which lie dormant under grazed heather over much of our ‘wild land.’ These are Scotland’s Yellowstones, generating a melee of unexpected knock-on biological interactions. They already contrast starkly with other areas of ‘wild land’ which remain strongly and detrimentally controlled by humans. Even if mapping wild land helps towards protecting areas of high ‘perceived naturalness’ the

Scottish countryside will not be self-willed under the current treatment of the land.

The anthropocentric nature of recent mapping is classic of much of the wild land debate. Summed up by Roderick Nash’s oft quoted definition of wilderness, “*a quality that produces a certain mood or feeling in a given individual and, as a consequence, may be assigned by the person to a specific place,*” wild land has been reduced to a human emotion⁽⁵⁾. As people have become accustomed to what is a simplified landscape there is no sense of loss when walking through a glen bereft of scrub or woodland. Distortion of the landscape into simplified moorland is less apparent than into farmland, but no less complete. Such adaption to our surroundings is often described as ‘shifting baseline syndrome’ which shows that human perception and emotion are malleable qualities. Consequently mapping should not be left to such features. Wild land recognition and protection that positively impacts upon the natural environment will only be achieved upon considering the non-human. It is dangerous to base wild land recognition on the distance from roads and presence of human artifacts not only because this writes-off wild areas including such features (something the wind farm industry is pouncing upon) but because this restricts the picture to a coarse human relation to the natural environment. There is a lesson to be learned here from the American wilderness movement: that there is a big difference between wilderness and wildness⁽⁶⁾. Wilderness is a human experience, whereas wildness has innate value beyond human perception. What SNH has achieved is the identification of areas which are perceived to be beyond human control because as humans we experience them that way. This is different to land which has the full compliment of natural

processes and an absence of major human distortion.

The point of this article is not to dispute the benefit of mapping wild land, or to discredit these valuable exercises. Despite its shortcomings CAWL will hopefully be an important tool in preventing the unplanned march of industrialisation and those involved have fought hard to reach this stage. This is, however, an appeal to go beyond the traditional, recreationist ideas of wild land now that the debate has reached this stage. If we stop a wind farm from being plonked on a remote area, we are surely defending the land against the march of industrialisation, but we are not defending wild land until those factors which prevent free willed ecological processes are removed. Perhaps there needs to be a distinction between wild land and that with great potential to be wild but which currently – once the ‘Landseer screen’ is removed – has been vanquished of so much that is wild. Or just between recreationalist and ecologically wild land. Biophysical naturalness is an aspect of the mapping method which should be built upon to

show where natural processes are relatively unchecked, where land really is wild. Intensively managed heather moorland should score low and regenerating woodland, working floodplain and montane scrub high. Whatever the impact of SNH’s map, impoverished land should not be accepted as secure wild land. An additional pressure on land which has the potential to be truly wild is vital for the future of wild land in Scotland.

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George Charles

Scottish Woodlands—A Heathen Writes

When I first started travelling to the Scottish hills after a brief apprenticeship in the more vertically inclined areas south of the border the striking difference I noticed was not in the mountains; Wales in particular has an abundance of steep rock and narrow aretes; but in the glens. Enormous, expansive glens, many, admittedly, with a vehicle track but a precious few without even a footpath are what sets Scotland apart (and the small matter of having many times the number of hills than in the rest of the country). I well remember the first impression of far off views of mountain ridge behind mountain ridge but that close up view of

an empty glen stretching out for uninterrupted miles was the one that struck the deepest chord. I knew instantly that that was what I had been missing within the compressed hill country to the south. What didn't strike me at the time was that these glens needed fixing.

However, the consensus among those charged with looking after our wild land is just that. An open, treeless landscape is a sign of desecration brought about by years of mis-management, principally over-grazing by deer and, in places, sheep. I wouldn't dispute any of this although I feel it raises an important

“Ecological wild is an academic achievement and pales into insignificance next to the feral, fickle beast of the instinctive wild”

semantic point in relation to the use of the word "wild". I'm tired of being made to feel as though my response to landscape is somehow less profound or valid than that of other people because I value the instinctive response over the learned. My response to Scotland's landscape has always been so far from the intellectual the idea it could be changed by academic knowledge is somewhat farcical. Indeed, a reasonable definition of the word "wild" as I understand it could be "an absence of science". This wild can be found in Scotland in abundance, if you have the eyes to look.

I'm fully supportive of the work of JMT and other organisations in bringing Scottish deer numbers down to a sensible level and improving the biodiversity of our countryside. The seemingly endless list of new discoveries at Dundreggan is a fine example of what can be achieved. However, this ecological wild is an academic achievement and pales into insignificance next to the feral, fickle beast of the instinctive wild, which can elude you in the most praised locations and creep up on you at the most unexpected moments..

While there is still plenty of work to be done I'm enough of a pragmatist to welcome the rise of the wild land agenda in political and public consciousness. However, there's a part of me that feels that just as punk rock

James Fenton

Wild land and 're-wilding'

James Fenton is an ecologist, consultant and writer.

If John Muir had not left Scotland at an early age and spent his life walking the moors and hills of Scotland, I wonder what his attitudes to them would have been? I hope he would have seen them as I do, great tracts of wilderness, stark uncompromising landscapes where it is impossible to avoid nature in the raw;

died the first time someone said "punk's not dead" so there is no surer sign of a lack of wild land than a map demarcating the areas of wild land. The land on the ground will undoubtedly benefit to some extent from such recognition but this instinctive wild land, created by the meeting of man and landscape, will irreparably suffer to some degree.

Knowing the names of the upland flora and fauna, or pieces of local folklore, or the causes behind various geological formations can all add colour to time on the hill but none of these things are the reason I spend time in the mountains. I don't require intimate ecological knowledge to feel a connection with the land and I would strongly argue there are many different ways of appreciating landscape, some more superficial than others, but that a deep connection is not exclusively bound up in Leopolds 'world of wounds'.

This piece was not meant as a put-down to those working tirelessly on behalf of Scotland's landscape but as a reminder of what we are so fortunate to have in this country. Wilderness may be a purely natural landscape but wild land is a combination of the landscape and mans' perception of it. We need to nurture the part of the wild land equation that lives within us all just as surely as we need to nurture the glens back to health.

grand, open vistas studded by cloud shadows, enveloped in mist, or with the wind ranging across the blasted heath; the hand of man is there in places if you look closely, but often invisible and barely scraping the surface of an area where nature remains in charge. Wild land.

Yes, I know detractors would say that people once lived in the now empty lands, and that there should be more people there and that it is a wildness only because of man's inhumanity to man. But I am not convinced by this argument. Certainly in places the glens and straths were more populated than now, particularly in the more recent past, but away from the in-bye land and peat-cuttings, their only influence would have been to manipulate the natural factors of grazing and burning, and their coming and going has probably not significantly affected the overall appearance of the landscape. Throughout most of history the presence of wolves would have restricted the grazing possible by livestock, and in any case, there are huge tracts of land at mid-altitude that have never held a human population. People coming and going is part of the history of the place, but, speaking objectively as a scientist, this should not ultimately make any difference as to whether the place is now wild land or wilderness. After all, even in John Muir's great American wildernesses there was still a human population.

My real fear is that by constantly holding prescriptive visions for these Highland landscapes, by implementing these visions, and also by continually stating that these areas "need to be managed", we will eventually lose understanding of how large-scale ecosystems operate, of our understanding of nature itself. If every square inch of the planet ends up being managed, which is the current global trend, we will lose sight of how nature managed things. After all, it has for the last 4,000 million years of the earth's history! By managing everywhere we will also lose a myriad of species, many small and apparently invisible, because we can only manage for a limited number of the vast array of species present in ecosystems: and many may get lost in the management regimes we choose. Some say that choosing 'not to

manage' is management itself, but to me this is a misuse of language.

No, I do not want to live in a planet where every square inch is managed. Speaking selfishly for myself and my grandchildren, I want to live in a planet where there are still wild places, where it is nature that directs the pattern of vegetation change, where our preferences become immaterial. Places that, until relatively recently, would include large tracts of upland Scotland, although there are still some hanging on by the skin of their teeth. And on our increasingly crowded planet, we cannot say that there is no space for these wild places on our little bit of the British Isles, for every country will say the same and attrition of wilderness will continue.

I have had the fortune to work in some of the wildest places on earth, so I know what these places should be like: in Antarctica where nature is overwhelming, in the Arctic where the presence of a top predator can add a real fear to being outdoors and you can also see indigenous herbivores grazing the landscape to the bone, even in the Falklands where the extremely low population density means that to all intents and purposes nature does remain in charge. Hence to see the loss of wildness in upland Scotland during my lifetime makes me extremely sad: I can remember in my childhood when you could drive across the Scottish watershed without even seeing a fence.

So yes, I support the concept of wild land, and fully support the concept of 're-wilding', of bringing the wildness back to a landscape, of having places where natural processes determine the direction of ecological change. But, of course, if the land is wild already, then one cannot 're-wild', other than bring back species whose demise was unequivocally brought about by the hand of humans, or by removing the non-indigenous species we have inadvertently let loose.

"By constantly holding prescriptive visions for these Highland landscapes we will eventually lose our understanding of nature itself"





Geordie McIntyre

Landscape and Song

Geordie McIntyre is a singer and songwriter well known for his repertoire of traditional songs, ballads and poems

Reflected in song, poetry and prose, Scotland has a rich legacy and clear connection with our flora, fauna and diverse natural landscape. This treasure trove also demonstrates the enduring themes of pride of place and identity with place. Landscape has been, and is, a source of inspiration, spiritual and physical renewal or, more simply, a necessary background or stage where everyday life, its joys and sorrows, its comedies and tragedies, are played out. This overview will not include the rich Gaelic legacy. Enough to say, this deeply-rooted vocal tradition is permeated with nature references.

Hollin Green Hollin

*Alone in Greenwood must I roam
Hollin Green Hollin
A shade of green leaves is my home
Birk and green hollin.*

*Where naught is seen but boundless green
And spots of far blue sky between.*

*A weary head soft pillow finds
Where leaves fall green in summer woods.*

*Enough for me, enough for me
To live at large with liberty.*

This evocative song is attributed to James Douglas of Cavers, in the Scottish Borders. It is said to date from the early 19th or late 18th Century. What is remarkable is its powerful identity with the forest habitat and, above all, the liberating impact of the forest.

The musical and poetic creations of our national bard, Robert Burns (1759-1796) are peppered with nature references. In this extract from his love song **Now Westlin Winds**, he demonstrates his acute observational powers of both flora and fauna.

*The partridge loves the fruitful fells,
The plover loves the mountain.
The woodcock haunts the lonely dell
The soaring heron the fountain.
Through lofty groves the cushat roves
The path of man to shun it.
The hazel bush o'erhangs the thrush
The spreading thorn the linnet.*

The weaver-poet and songsmith of Paisley, Robert Tannahill (1774-1810), who was in many ways a disciple of Burns, was a keen walker and outdoors man.

The Braes of Balquhiddier

*Noo' it's high summer time
And the flowers are a' bloomin
And the wild mountain thyme
On the breezes perfumin'*

*Will ye go lassie go
Tae the Braes o' Balquhiddier
Whaur the blueberries grow
Mang the bonnie purple heather.*

Looking north and to the west of Stuc-a-Chroin, Tannahill could see these Braes on his rambles in the Gleniffer Braes and Renfrew Heights - visible on a clear day, across the Clyde valley.

In his fine song **Gloomy Winter's Noo Awa** he writes

*So my lassie let us stray
O'er Glen Killocks sunny braes
And blythly spread the gowden day
Midst joys that never weary.*

The writer was certainly enchanted by the 'joys' of nature, so much so that one observer stated that his enchantment was such that in his love songs, the lady in question often comes in distant second-best to the countryside.

Photo, previous pages: Alex Scott, www.alexscottphotography.co.uk

Burns and Tannahill really provided the template for dozens of 'lesser' songsmiths and poets throughout the nineteenth century. As the industrial revolution got underway a body of industrial folk-song emerged, spearheaded by textiles and coal, whose principle concerns were, for example, pride of occupation and the formidable dangers, hardships and, often, protests against the harsh working conditions and wages.

The first oil industry was of course whaling, and like the above, its songs were not over-concerned with the landscape.

Greenland Bound

*We do not go to fight the foe
Nor cross the ragin' main
We only go to hunt the whale
And then return again.*

Typically, no references are made to conservation or the environment. That was the norm. We need to fast-forward into the last century before these concerns came into being.

The classic song *I'm a Rambler* was written in 1932 by Ewan Maccoll (1915-89). Ewan was a participant in and part-instigator of the Mass Trespass on the great moorlands of Kinder and Bleaklow. This song brought to a wider public, in Britain, the matter of 'the right to roam'. It is both witty and pointed. Here is the response to a hostile gamekeeper (verse 3).

*He called me a louse and said "think of the grouse"
Well I thought but I still couldn't see
Why old Kinder Scout and the moors
round about
Couldn't take both the poor grouse and
me.
He said, "all this land is my masters"
At that I stood shaking my head
No man has the right to own mountains
Any more than the deep ocean bed.*

CHORUS

*I'm a rambler, I'm a rambler from
Manchester way
I get all me pleasure the hard moorland
way
I may be a wage slave on Monday
But I have my freedom on Sunday.*

This song – now widely sung – was a key marker on the fight for rights to responsible access, pioneered in the previous century by the Scottish Rights of Way Society. This process accelerated post-World War II, and numerous songs were written on environmental and conservation themes.

The late Jim Brown, Clydeside ship yard worker and life-long mountaineer was one of the many song-smiths addressing such issues.

Quiet River (verse 3)

*The world is full of sound
There's screech and rattle and roar all
around
And it's hard to find a place to ease the
troubles
Of your mind.
But my river still is here
And I hope it never dies
And they don't build on the green fields
Where the pine trees touch the skies.*

CHORUS

*And so I go, to where I know
The river flows.
And so I go, to where I know
The river flows.*

Jim Brown typifies the ordinary working man and woman escaping from the city and discovering another world of being. The wild areas were no longer the exclusive preserve of the privileged minority.

I was introduced and alerted to environmental and conservation themes and concerns back in 1962 by my dear and late friend Dr Helen Fullerton: eco-warrior, soil scientist, poet and songwriter. They provided me with the

inspiration and focus to write songs such as *The Ballad of John Muir*. Here is the third verse.

*Every flower, every tree, every living thing
you see
Are fragments in a tapestry of Grand
Design
This message is profound, in one circle we
go round
Now's the time to sing
Let's hear it – for John Muir!*

I recently dedicated a song to Dr Rennie MacOwen of Stirling – novelist, journalist, poet and true mountain man. The last verse, to the tune of Johnnie Cope, goes:

*Time wears on, I have to say
And on the shelf my boots now stay
But the memories won't fade away
Of days in magic mountains*

CHORUS

*In the moment's where to be
In the moment's where to be
Where the eagle circles free
Up, into the mountains.*

In her insightful and engaging recent book *Blossom*, Lesley Riddoch makes a valid generalisation about our non-outdoorsy, urban-dwelling majority, who are, in many ways and for many reasons, indifferent to “where the eagle

circles free” – in many ways, disconnected. Environmental understanding should be woven into the fabric of Scottish society, at every level. Our democratic muse can, along with all the creative arts, continue to play a part in this necessary bridging process.

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Full texts of the songs referred to can be found online. The website alisonmcmorland.com gives details of CDs, books etc. that my wife and I have produced as a duo and as single performers.

Ken Brown

The Rape of the Glens; rewilding on the defensive

'I am an environmentalist and founder member of the Greens but I bow my head in shame at the thought that our original good intentions should have been so misunderstood and misapplied. We never intended a fundamentalist

Green movement that rejected all energy sources other than renewable, nor did we expect the Greens to cast aside our priceless ecological heritage because of their failure to understand that the needs of the Earth are not

separable from human needs. We need take care that the spinning windmills do not become like the statues on Easter Island, monuments of a failed civilisation (emphasis added).'

James Lovelock

Lovelock's final sentence in this extract from his letter of objection to a wind turbine application (12-12-2012) might have been taken as hyperbole had it not been for recent events in the Ukraine. Whatever the rights and wrongs of Vladimir Putin's intervention in that country, the impotent response of the European Union underlines a significant fact; its obsession with renewable energy has forced it into abject dependence on *fossil* fuel from a Russia that it now portrays as hostile to western interests. And the 'systemic industrial massacre' of the EU identified as a consequence of that reckless EU commitment to renewable energy by industry commissioner, Antonio Tajani, now also emerges as the Achilles' heel of EU foreign policy. This point is worth making because it helps to elucidate Lovelock's message in the preceding sentence; that we are trashing a priceless ecological heritage in pursuit of a lopsided view of the proper relationship between the human and the 'natural'.

Nowhere is this contradiction more evident than in a small group of Scottish Highland glens where valiant efforts to enrich the biodiversity of some wild landscapes now face the threat of massive industrial wind farm developments. In Glenmoriston, the principal route from Inverness and Loch Ness to Skye and the Western Highlands, a rash of installed, consented and proposed wind farms threatens the visionary attempt by conservation charity, Trees for Life, to restore areas

of the native Caledonian forest and its associated wealth of biological diversity. Slightly further north, in a parallel glen, proposed wind turbine arrays would dominate the gateway to what is arguably Britain's most iconic relic of the ancient, forested landscape; Glen Affric. And just a few miles from that, the famous Aigas Field Centre in Strathglass is now having to resist a proposal for an array of 25 giant turbines that would loom over woodland and lochans where beaver have been successfully reintroduced to their original habitat. And these are only headline examples of years of work by conservation bodies to protect and enhance our superb but diminishing natural heritage. Now these laudable rewilding initiatives face a threat that is unprecedented both in scale and in the speed with which it is being imposed.

Take, for example, the Dundreggan Estate in Glenmoriston; 4,000 hectares of wild upland on which Trees for Life is pioneering a major native woodland restoration project. Repeated ecological surveys have revealed what the charity describes as 'a lost world of biodiversity' consisting of 2,815 plant, animal and fungal species, including 8 never previously recorded in Britain. Amongst the plant discoveries was a rare Lapland marsh orchid, described as a 'botanical gem' and a midge whose feeding behaviour had never previously been observed in Europe. This major initiative provided the centrepiece of a landmark book, 'Feral', on the subject of rewilding by the well known conservationist, writer and broadcaster, George Monbiot. Despite all, this, the Scottish government recently approved SSE's proposal for the enormous Bhlaraidh wind farm on land immediately adjacent to the Dundreggan estate and essentially similar in ecological terms. And the most immediate new threat is a

proposal by the energy company, E.on, to establish another immense wind farm on Forestry Commission land with relics of ancient pine woodland on the southern ridge of this superbly rich glen.

Director of Trees for Life, Alan Watson Featherstone, has responded to this latest assault on our natural heritage with a letter confirming the charity's intention to object to a formal planning application by E.on, anticipated early this summer, pointing out that this, '...will result in Glenmoriston becoming an 'industrial alley', ringed by the steel of numerous highly visually intrusive turbines and pylons...'. Worse still:

'The proposed wind farm includes part of the area of Inverwick that is covered in forest. This area includes some of the last remnants of the original Caledonian Forest, and has been subject to restoration measures by the Forestry Commission in recent years. Trees for Life has been a partner in this process, and it is unacceptable that these restored areas will be damaged and seriously impacted by the tracks, powerlines and turbine bases of this project, all of which will require clearance of the trees. With the Scots pine having recently been declared the National tree of Scotland, and the Inverwick area being targeted by the FCS for restoration to Caledonian pinewood (a priority habitat under the EU's Habitat and Species directive), it is completely incompatible with those objectives for for this wind farm to be proposed here now.'

The problem, of course, is not confined to the visual intrusion of these enormous superstructures but to the enormous ecological damage caused by miles of access roads, the excavation of borrow pits and the injection of hundreds of thousands of tons of

concrete into upland areas, much of which consist of carbon-rich peat. In addition to the danger posed by turbine blades to raptors and other bird species, Alan Watson emphasises the extreme vulnerability of local populations of brown long-eared bats, a priority species for conservation under the UK's Biodiversity Action Plan.

Supporters of wind energy may wish to claim that such objections are all trumped by the urgent need 'to do something about climate change'. In fact, we might as well build pyramids or resort to animal sacrifice to appease the climate gods. Evidence for the effectiveness of renewable energy technology is pivotal in determining whether environmental damage on the scales described is justified by its potential for mitigating climate change. And that is clearly not the case. The evidence for reductions in carbon output as a result of wind energy is derisory.

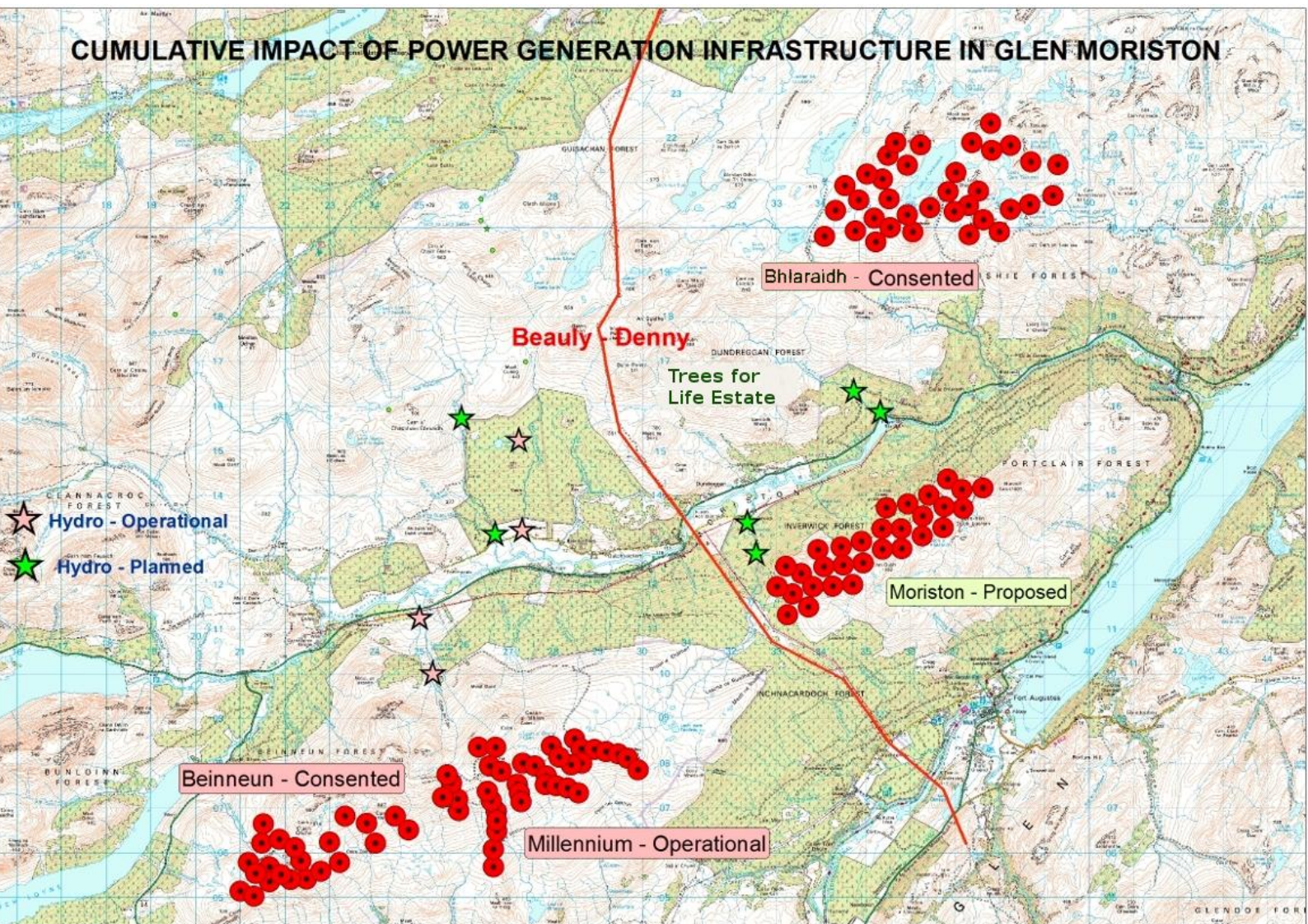
Last year, figures produced by National Grid and seized upon by the corporate lobby, Scottish Renewables, for their propaganda value, claimed that all UK wind farms had reduced carbon emissions by the annual equivalent of 7.3 million tonnes. Global emissions were estimated for same period at 35.6 billion tonnes. In other words, all British wind farms (including those in Scotland) reduced global emissions by one paltry five thousandth. This feeble reduction by the world's 'seventh largest economy' was far less than one hundredth of the global *increase* in carbon emissions – and well below the increase in Britain's own emissions for that period. Since the widespread publication of these data, the commercial lobby has learned its lesson and now habitually includes savings by Scottish hydro power in its glosses on

“Evidence of potentially catastrophic climate change morphs into a propaganda exercise for the benefit of a minority of landowners and a multinational corporate energy sector”

the contributions of renewables – an infrastructure installed well before the birth of most proponents of wind energy that offers little scope for expansion. The result is that comparable, current data are hard to come by, but we can be confident that increased turbine numbers have been more than balanced by increased global and national carbon output.

We are faced in Scotland with a 'back of the envelope' political strategy that has grown arms and legs to become an an outrage against nature and a mockery of democratic procedure. The International Panel on Climate Change's latest report, ostensibly a dispassionate

review of the science, is now being translated seamlessly into demands for more renewable energy – to the exclusion of virtually all realistic alternatives. Evidence of potentially catastrophic climate change morphs into a propaganda exercise for the benefit of a minority of landowners and a multinational corporate energy sector. And the price we are paying for these empty gestures towards environmental responsibility is formidable; the prospect of a natural environment tragically depleted by the folly of politicians addicted to sound-bite policies and the greed of corporations that owe loyalty to no cause other than their shareholder value.



Calum Brown

Hill tracks and the future of Scottish landscapes

Calum Brown is a member of the SWLG Steering Team and editor of Wild Land News. A version of this article appeared in the Scotsman on June 3rd.

The ownership and use of Scotland's natural resources are at the centre of the independence debate. However, one natural resource that is too often overlooked in discussions about Scotland's future is the land itself. Whatever else we may or may not have – large offshore fossil fuel reserves, exploitable wind and tidal energy and underground gas deposits - we unquestionably possess large areas of land that are internationally famous, central to Scotland's identity, and relatively empty. These have immense cultural, environmental and economic value, but their potential is much greater still.

The Scottish Government currently faces a number of decisions that will clearly outline its attitude to Scotland's land, and will also go a long way towards defining its vision for Scotland's future. Each decision hinges on whether land is regarded chiefly as a common resource in which all of Scotland's people have legitimate interests, or a private resource mainly subject to the interests of large landowners and companies. Currently, of course, Scotland has a highly concentrated and opaque system of land ownership that bestows considerable power on those who either own large areas or who can demonstrate an ability to generate large, quick profits. The Government's response to the Land Reform Review Group's final report will reveal whether it agrees that this system needs to change, but a number of smaller, less complex decisions will provide some illumination in the meantime.

One of these relatively small but revealing decisions is whether or not to bring the construction of 'hill tracks' into

the planning system. At the moment, tracks with a claimed agricultural or forestry purpose (purposes that are not properly defined in the legislation and, in the case of agriculture, effectively impossible to disprove) have pre-emptive planning permission. Forestry tracks are regulated to a certain extent by the Forestry Commission, but landowners and managers can construct 'agricultural' tracks almost anywhere in Scotland without consulting anyone or meeting particular standards. So, while residents of rural communities with plans to alter their house or garden are subject to the full rigours of the planning system, nearby landowners can (and do) freely take bulldozers to hillsides and dig huge, meandering tracks that significantly lessen the aesthetic, environmental and economic value of the area to everyone else. Nobody has a formal right to object and the closest thing to regulation is a set of advisory guidelines issued by Scottish Natural Heritage that has been widely ignored for years.

If this sounds like an incredible (not to say indefensible) degree of freedom to allow one particular group at the expense of the wider community, that's because it was originally granted nearly 70 years ago, at a time of national emergency. At the end of the Second World War rapid intensification of forestry and agriculture were in the national interest, and so 'minor' developments such as tracks for those industries were exempted from the normal planning process. The arguments for retaining this anachronistic exemption tend to focus on the supposed urgency of track construction, their economic importance, and the examples of tracks

built to relatively high standards. The same arguments could of course be made for many other kinds of development, but they really miss the fundamental point: that developments with the potential to damage the benefit or enjoyment that people derive from a place should be carefully considered, demonstrated to be justifiable, and then built in such a way that the balance of interests is respected. This is why we have a planning system in the first place, and why a host of developments far more minor than hill tracks are tightly regulated.

Successive governments have, so far, chosen not to close the loophole. Hundreds of miles of tracks created outside the normal planning process have been documented, hundreds of photographs of unnecessary damage have been published, independent and non-independent reports have recommended changes to the current system, but the law remains designed for a 70-year-old post-war emergency.

Since then, machinery has become vastly more powerful and more easily available, and tracks have been bulldozed across ever greater areas as sporting estates take advantage of the agricultural dispensation. Many tracks are the width of major roads, cut deep into peat and rock, and run for tens of miles through National Parks and over some of our highest summits. Peat bogs are drained and dried, huge quantities of silt are washed into sensitive and protected rivers, iconic landscapes scarred and ancient footpaths destroyed. Meanwhile, priorities have shifted decisively away from national self-sufficiency in food and timber and the economic value of Scotland's landscapes and environments has rocketed, with 90% of visitors here giving scenery as a major reason for their visits, contributing significantly to the £11 billion that tourism generates

for the Scottish economy. There is no possible justification for tracks to be effectively unregulated in this context.

Nevertheless, a recent Government consultation on proposed changes to the law resulted in no action being taken, despite "compelling evidence" of damage caused under the current system being received. More evidence was requested, and a group of Scottish environmental organisations working under the umbrella of Scottish Environment LINK duly supplied it, in the form of the recently-published *Track Changes* report. The debate continues to revolve around this evidence: tracks that amount to little more than environmental vandalism are identified, and countered with examples of tracks voluntarily built to high standards by responsible estates. More and more tracks are being hastily dug into the countryside as this drags on, and the resulting mess is only cleared up when charities like the National Trust for Scotland or private estates like Glenfeshie do so at their own expense.

However, this is not only a matter of evidence but also a matter of principle: firstly, that Scottish land and landscapes are national resources that nobody should be allowed to damage without some minimum of oversight, and secondly, that people and communities affected by changes to their surroundings should, at the very least, have the right to object. It is these fundamental principles of democracy and environmental justice that explain why the campaign for change is supported by almost all of Scotland's environmental groups, public opinion, several MSPs of different parties and, privately at least, some estates and forestry interests. This is also why the Government's decision about whether to take action should be so easy to make, and why its eventual choice will reveal so much about where it thinks power over Scotland's land should lie.

Geoff Moore

Power from wind and water?

Legislation called the Renewables Obligation was introduced on April Fools' Day 2002, apparently to encourage lower carbon forms of electricity generation in the UK, but also to supersede a previous failed mechanism called NFFO (Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation) of which nuclear was the main beneficiary. It kick-started a huge increase in applications for renewable energy schemes, particularly wind farms, but is due to be phased out for new schemes from this year. It will be superseded by yet another piece of legislation, CFD (Contracts for Difference), from which nuclear can benefit once again (is this an admission that wind cannot replace nuclear, and that nuclear is handy for meeting CO2 reduction targets?). During the last twelve years we lovers of wild landscapes have been told many times that sacrifices have to be made; the reason given is that to not do so will be even worse for the environment as the climate will continue to change having an adverse effect on flora and fauna.

Questions often arise as to whether these policies actually make a difference to global greenhouse gas emissions and therefore to climate change, whether their indirect and unintended consequences negate much or all of the claimed benefits, whether they are indeed reducing our dependence on fossil fuel or nuclear power, whether energy ministers actually know anything about electrical generation, whether the money could be better spent in other ways, and whether by 2050 the hills will be littered with hundreds of abandoned wind turbines due to a policy doomed to failure. The topic is huge but in this article I will look at one piece of the jigsaw by examining two flagship Renewable schemes, one in each main

category, to see whether they have lived up to the hype.

Wind

The Viking Wind Farm on Shetland was initially granted planning permission in 2012. Here are some recent quotes from the website of the developer (a partnership between a subsidiary of SSE and a Shetland-based organisation): "one of the most productive wind farms in the world...rising levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere could set in motion large-scale and potentially abrupt changes in our planet's natural systems which could be irreversible... Europe's largest wind (and marine) resource...The price and availability of fossil fuels remains volatile...Every unit of electricity produced in a wind farm reduces the amount of electricity that has to be produced in a conventional power plant...full 457 megawatts...wind turbines operate for around 98% of the time and produce electricity around 70-85% of the time...The capacity factor is likely to be much higher than average and comparable with fossil fuel power stations". All very impressive stuff!

However in September 2013 I spotted a small advert near the back of a local paper (I won't suggest that it was hidden but it was certainly the smallest planning advert I've seen for a major power project, and nobody from the company or Holyrood seemed to be making enthusiastic press releases about it like they often do about major Renewable schemes) for a planning application by the very same SSE for a major new fossil fuel power station in Lerwick, Shetland, that is bigger than the existing one (it is of up to 120MW compared to 67MW for the old one). Strange! One would have thought that

with all the impressive claims above about the planned mega-windfarm, they would be applying for a *smaller* conventional power plant thus resulting in reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and in the dependence on fossil fuels, because after all, said reductions were two of the main reasons for the transition to Renewable Energy. A three minute video was placed on their website about this project but neither Viking Wind Farm nor the potentially significant increase in capacity of this new plant are mentioned. No doubt some spokesperson from the energy sector would claim that it depends how much it operates, but the private sector doesn't normally invest tens of millions in a new plant to leave it idle most of the time, if they are the ones who will be operating it.

For those who still believe we are on the verge of some green energy utopia, this situation suggests otherwise. Shetland would be the best place in the UK to develop such an idea due to its wind and wave resource. If it's not going to happen there then it's not likely to happen anywhere else any time soon. (Viking is currently on hold mainly due to legal proceedings).

Water

Glendoe (cost £160m) was the first new major hydro electric scheme in Scotland since works were completed in Glen Strathfarrar in 1963. Back then a handful of other large schemes were under consideration but never went ahead for various reasons, and there was never any reported intention to expensively dam the small streams high in the hills above Fort Augustus. The works progressed with much media attention. The first explosive charge for one of its tunnels was initiated by Tony Blair in 2006. In 2008 Alex Salmond pressed a button to begin filling the reservoir. In 2009 The Queen officially opened it. But

two months later part of a tunnel infamously collapsed, halting electricity production for three years.

In 2007 Environment Minister Joan Ruddock visited Sloy hydro scheme and was briefed on Glendoe (source: Defra archives). Soon after, a headline appeared in many media sources stating that "Glendoe can power the number of households in a city the size of Glasgow". Other media sources, via misunderstandings and Chinese Whispers, changed this to "completely supply the demands of a city the size of Glasgow", which could be misinterpreted as including non-household consumption too. I was surprised by this claim and knew that there was no way that this could be remotely true, judging from the small flow rate of water in the streams at the site which would be needed to keep the reservoir topped up (I extensively walked in this area pre-hydro days and the flow rate could be seen from the waterfalls at the head of Glen Tarff). So I set about doing a simple calculation.

In Wild Land News 75 I showed an approximation that it would need around 25 Glendoes to electrically power Glasgow (including non-household consumption) based on hydrological information obtained from SSE and other sources (e.g. how long it took to fill the reservoir, how long it might take to empty it at full production etc. Also, Wikipedia has an article on Glendoe and coincidentally (or not) states that the scheme would provide approximately 5% of Glasgow's electricity consumption - likewise implying that this includes non-household consumption). However, I knew I would need to wait for the results of a full year's production to obtain a more accurate figure. Alas the tunnel collapsed so I had to wait.

Recently the first anniversary of resumed production at Glendoe passed

"During the last twelve years we lovers of wild landscapes have been told many times that sacrifices have to be made"

“Hydro largely escapes the scrutiny directed at wind because it’s relatively hidden away”

and I had frustration trying to obtain the production data, an email or two to SSE not being answered and the Ofgem datasets seemingly impossible to penetrate. Finally I was directed to the website *variablepitch.co.uk* where I saw that production from October 2012 to September 2013 was 142.36 GWh, far short of SSE’s projection of 180 GWh per year. The load factor (actual production compared to the potential production if the plant had been running constantly; a figure that depends heavily on rainfall for hydro power plants) was only 16%, compared to the long term UK hydro average of 34% (Digest of UK Energy Statistics). Ideally we need many more years’ figures to obtain an average, which may turn out to be more, or less, than the above figures. The obvious question is whether that 12 month period had lower rainfall than average in the hydro catchments, but *variablepitch* states that the average Scottish hydro plant load factor for the same period was 37.8%. So, I will now do some simple calculations for the capability of Glendoe in 2006 (the press release was in 2007), using the figure of roughly 279,000 households in Glasgow (the average of figures from the 2001 and 2011 census), and Glendoe’s actual production in said 12 month period of 142.36 GWh.

My sources for data are Government websites: Glasgow-specific from sub-national Electricity Consumption Statistics, and UK-specific from the Department of Energy and Climate Change’s Digest of UK Energy Statistics (DUKES). 1 GWh= a million kWh, and 1 kWh= 1 unit of electricity. For my first calculation I will use the figure commonly used by the industry at the time of 3,300 kWh average electric consumption per home. Critically, the people who claimed a relationship between Glendoe’s production and Glasgow’s consumption did *not* (as inadvertently revealed to me by a very

senior employee at SSE) include any factor to take into account that the water would run out after a week or two if the generator were to be left running continuously.

Glendoe actually generated 142.36 GWh during the 12 month period. Glasgow’s annual consumption: 3300 kWh multiplied by 279,000 = 920.7 GWh. Divide 142.36 by 920.7 gives approx. 0.15 or 15%.

So Glendoe can only electrically power 15% of households in a city the size of Glasgow (using old industry data). Another way of putting this is that it would take almost seven Glendoes to produce the household electric consumption of Glasgow. Or they could have qualified the press release by adding “until the water runs out after a week or two” (the reservoir has 11.5 million useable cubic meters of water, 18 of which are used per second, so in a drought it could run for about 8 days non stop).

Now I’m going to examine the industry’s old figure of 3300 kWh per home annually. My sources state that the average UK household electric consumption was 4600 kWh annually. So re-calculating using this more realistic figure, Glendoe can power only 11% of Glasgow’s household consumption. Or, according to Government data, we would need nine Glendoes to electrically power Glasgow’s homes.

What about those media sources which effectively state that Glendoe can power *all* (which would include non-household) of Glasgow’s electric consumption? My sources give 3405 GWh as Glasgow’s total 2006 electricity consumption. Dividing this by Glendoe’s production gives approximately 24. Or it would take 24 Glendoes to electrically power a city the size of Glasgow.

But the word “power” (see original press release) refers to all forms of energy, not just electrical. What is the result if electricity were substituted for all the gas used in Glasgow? For anyone thinking that I am being pedantic here and that this is irrelevant, one government idea is that as many homes as possible have electric heating (and cars) by 2050. I will use the latest data here as some of these data are not readily available from 2006, and the calculation is not 100% accurate as, for example, figures are not readily available for oil-fired central heating, but these minor omissions would have no significant impact on the final result. My sources give 12,580 kWh as average sale per meter of household gas in Glasgow, and 3300 kWh as household electrical consumption for homes with only a standard meter (and presumably with heating based on a non-electric source, usually gas), and 6600 kWh for all-electric consumption for homes with both standard and off-peak meters (and presumably have electric heating). Total energy use for homes with gas is 15,880 kWh (12,580+3300) compared to total for all-electric of 6600 kWh, indicating that use of gas is less efficient than electric. The efficiency ratio comparing these two figures (excluding standard electric) is 0.262 so applying this to the total Glasgow gas consumption of 5603 GWh reduces it to a rough electric equivalent of 1468 GWh. Adding this to 3063 GWh (total actual electric) gives an electrical equivalent energy use for Glasgow of 4531 GWh. Dividing this by Glendoe’s production of 142.36 GWh gives 32. Or it would take around 32 Glendoes to provide all forms of power to a city the size of Glasgow.

Some people naively believe these press releases (hydro-supporting letters appear in the press immediately after), other examples being “Hydroelectric energy could power every Scottish home by 2017” (Scotsman 2009) and “Salmond: Scotland on verge of second

hydro revolution” (Times 2014). UK hydro generated 5,300 GWh in 2012 which is far short of total Scottish household consumption of 11,000 GWh, and examining a DECC table of hydro output since 1990 (Long Term Trends table 6.1.1) shows said output to have an annual average from 1990 to 2002 of 4726 MWh, and from 2003 to 2011 of slightly *down* to 4700 MWh despite 400+ new UK “run of the river” or “micro” hydro schemes coming on stream since 2002 (this criticism does not apply to hydro built pre-1963 as that was built in the right places from a technical point of view, by the public sector, and these 51 power stations still deliver the lion’s share of all the hydro electricity generated today). Some of that small reduction is due to companies down-grading pre-1963 plant to bring it down into bands attracting higher subsidies. A scientific article which I recently read criticised the subsidy regime for hydro as achieving very little extra production while subsidies “went through the roof”.

For those who still believe the myth that hydro will fill in when the wind stops blowing, the evidence refutes this. Hydro largely escapes the scrutiny directed at wind because it’s relatively hidden away. A Holyrood-commissioned survey in 2009 identified seven *thousand* potential new hydro sites in Scotland, and whilst National Scenic Areas have up to now been protected from wind farms, they have had no such protection from hydro.

To conclude, the results of my calculations prove that the original Glendoe press release should not be taken at face value. Could it be construed that such releases are gathering support from politicians and the public by misleading them into subsidising expensive new hydro schemes in a country where very little extra significant hydro capacity remains?

Calum Brown

Book review—*Reading the Gaelic Landscape*

John Murray, the author of *Reading the Gaelic Landscape*, is Director of Landscape Architecture at the University of Edinburgh, and clearly an avid student of both landscapes and the Gaelic language. In this book, he sets out to reclaim some of the heritage that is lost to those of us, locals and visitors alike, who do not speak Gaelic and therefore have only a slight understanding of the place names of the Scottish Highlands. He gathers together a wealth of information on Gaelic names, their spelling, grammar, pronunciation, literal meanings and, more importantly still, their hidden information and stories. As the author puts it, his book is an attempt to “*recapture a poetry of place, enshrined in the identifying labels which have been given to the landscape by Gaelic speakers*”.

This is a substantial task, but one that the book largely succeeds in, despite being surprisingly light and readable. While encyclopaedic in its coverage, with all the tables, figures and details that you might expect, there are also extensive quotes from Gaelic poetry and historical sources, helping to bring the subject, as well as the landscape, to life. While most readers will probably use the book to find information on specific places or names, it certainly repays more extended reading, even (or particularly) if done more or less at random.

The richness of meaning in Gaelic names (which in many cases eclipses English equivalents that have lost many of their original connections to features of the landscape or environment) is likely to surprise all but the most fluent speakers. For instance, hill walkers familiar with the various names for peaks are probably not familiar with the different degrees of apparent height and ruggedness that they originally denoted, and may benefit from an ability to understand these pithy descriptions of geomorphology, printed on maps alongside the more widely appreciated contour lines. In other

respects, names illuminate long-vanished characteristics, either environmental or cultural. They can indicate the presence of ancient woodlands or moors, species that have since become extinct, or even, *en masse*, whole shifts in ecosystems and our relationships with them. We therefore discover that the birds most traditionally associated with Scottish landscapes are raptors, and not the grouse that have largely replaced them in recent times. We also discover landscapes populated by forgotten people and the stories they told, and used for a wide range of different purposes in different seasons. Place names, properly understood, contribute eloquent evidence to the current debates about land ownership and management.

John Murray stresses the interaction of physical, biological and cultural elements in forming landscapes, and the importance of our own knowledge and interests in determining how we perceive them. Those with little or no knowledge of Gaelic (and, perhaps, some appreciation of natural history) may be tempted, like Dr Johnson, to see parts of Scotland as a “*wide extent of hopeless sterility*”. With the ability to understand Gaelic place names, however, “*we pass the site of a clan battle whose participants, no doubt spirited enough at the time, have long been forgotten, together with their cause. We skirt a rock once concealing the den of a pine marten, and once covered in shrub. We ford a burn once stirred up each year by the feet of people and their beasts as they travelled together each summer to the breezy sheiling in the hills*”.

This is a beguiling argument, and one that *Reading the Gaelic Landscape* makes well. For that reason alone this book is a useful resource for those interested in Scotland’s landscapes, environment and history - whether or not you wish to follow the author’s example and pursue a detailed study of Gaelic place names.

My wild land

There seems to be a fundamental link between some mountain men and the sea. The nature of that link I know not, only that it exists strongly, in the same way that a fast-running tide, though it may not easily be seen, can exert a great influence on one's course. For instance, H. W. Tilman led a pre-WW2 attempt on Everest, and wrote many books on mountain exploration that make interesting reading. But he will always be remembered for his expeditions to the Arctic Ocean in the old Bristol pilot cutter 'Mischief'; this was an ancient, leaky, wooden working boat, and Tilman was in his eighties when he lost her in the ice off Greenland. The Scottish landscape writer W. H. Murray, who died in 1996, was also a significant mountain man of the Himalayan scene who later took to a sailing boat, the better to pursue his writings, and I have heard of others who made their way down to the sea and ships from the heights of the hills.

Several years ago, I knew nothing whatever about boats, but I felt strangely impelled to investigate this unusual mode of travel and exploration. Scanning the adverts in the *Oban Times*, I saw that there was a small sailing boat for sale on Skye. Off we went to the small harbour of Isle Ornsay on the East coast of the island to see Tamara, an 18-foot cold-moulded wooden sloop of the most seductive lines. From this moment on, sailing boats would determine my life to the exclusion of almost every other influence; I was completely lost to the mountains which had sustained me so far.

With powerful new Diesel engines I was able to go through the dreaded sluice of Kylesha whenever tide and weather served. This strait had acted rather like a valve, restricting further exploration to the South. First to be visited was

Mallaig, the busiest herring fishing port on this coast; little did I know that this would later become almost literally my 'home port', for many years the base from which all expeditions were to start. From Mallaig, the way South-west was towards the 'Small Isles' of the Inner Hebrides. Thirteen miles in this direction lies Eigg, which is a beautiful island of old volcanic strata, with a shapely horn of harder rock thrusting several hundred feet into the sky. Just a few square miles in area, it is an island of lovely sandy beaches, fertile soil, stands of timber and historic caves. It has about fifty inhabitants, who have formed a trust to take over its ownership, and a very insecure fair weather anchorage.

Two miles further South lies the island of Muck (Muc in Gaelic means 'pig'). This is tiny, only about 2.5 miles in length by about half that in width, and is run as a single fertile farm, with just a few inhabitants and a small, rudimentary harbour.

West across the sea from Eigg lies Rhum, the largest and most magnificent of these 'Small Isles'. This is almost entirely composed of the roots of old volcanoes, forming a series of mountain peaks – to which the Vikings gave strongly masculine Norse names such as Askival, Ainsval and Orval – rising 2600 feet out of the sea, on which they seem to float as on a large serene lake. Rhum is almost entirely composed of rock and bog, without compromise, except for the anchorage at Loch Scresort, where there is a stand of trees. It once supported a large population, but famine and other causes eliminated the people in the 18th and 19th centuries. The island was almost deserted when in the 19th century an Englishman decided to build a large Baronial mansion near to the only

Geoff Salt is a long-standing member of the SWLG. This article is an extract from his book *A Twentieth-Century Life*.



anchorage. Examples of astonishing anachronisms like this are to be found in many Hebridean islands, and seem to be monuments to all who would like to perpetuate their name in stone. This imposing building will inevitably crumble away in the next two hundred years, for it is built of poor-quality friable red sandstone shipped from the isle of Arran in 1900.

Rhum is a Nature Reserve used as an open-air laboratory, re-introducing flora and fauna lost in previous centuries. One used to need permission to visit, and would have to have a good reason for doing so, but now control are exercised only in special experimental areas. Together with Skye, Rhum dominates the seascape in this part of the Hebrides. Diamond-shaped, it is about 8 miles by 8 of hard, elevated rock, good to look upon – from a distance.

Two miles west from Rhum lie the most beautiful islands of Canna and Sanday, with the harbour between. Of all the Hebridean islands Canna remains my Paradise isle, green and fertile, with low hills which somehow belie their lack of stature to become imposing, abundant sandy beaches, high vertical cliffs to the North coast, and a lovely forest of trees by the harbour. This is an extensively-farmed island with just a handful of inhabitants, who greet my frequent returns as those of a long-lost

neighbour. I spent many months of my life anchored in Canna harbour, and would not object if my ashes were deposited therein, except that the harbour regulations proscribe the casting of ashes into the water.

These four of the small isles are also known as the cocktail of islands, a name that seems to suit their varied characters.

The next island on this voyage of Hebridean discovery lies 11 miles east of Canna, but can rarely be seen from there because it lies tucked close in to the massive bulk of Skye, the second largest of the islands. This is the dumbbell-shaped Soay, in some ways the most interesting of all the hundreds of islands that lie off the Scottish seaboard and make up the Hebridean archipelago. Soay is but a tiny fragment of ancient rock and bog, with few houses and even fewer people. The island once had a thriving fishing and crofting community, but was deemed non-viable by its residents and was cleared by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in about 1946.

It was bought by Major Gavin Maxwell, who was later to write the delectable masterpiece *Ring of Bright Water*, about his otter-breeding experiences at Glenelg on the Sound of Sleat. His purpose here was very different, though, from his activities which he

detailed in his sensitive account of otters. The intention here was to stalk and brutally kill the great basking shark, the largest fish in European waters at 30 feet in length, for the half-ton of valuable liver oil each contained. His book *Harpoon at a Venture* relates how his plans to catch the shark and extract the oil failed because the specially-built processing plant on Soay could not cope with the quantities required for the enterprise to succeed.

These great fish were hunted and killed using the most primitive and cruel techniques of whaling harpoonery. Lining the North side of Soay harbour are the remains of Maxwell's purpose-built oil extraction factory, a dreary collection of concrete bases and remains of steam winches used for hauling the massive fish carcasses for flensing. This is a story of man's greed doing ecological harm. These fish weigh perhaps five tonnes, the oil a few hundred pounds at most. The rest is waste, and the numbers of basking shark in these waters has declined almost to vanishing point. Certainly, I have not seen one in 24 years of sailing, whereas fishermen used to find them very common. An analogy is the elephant killed for his ivory, but the poor old plankton-eating basking shark

is generally unknown to, and unloved by, humans.

The last of this initial round of islands of the Inner Hebrides is Skye. It was called 'The Winged Isle' in olden times, and it certainly seems to push out pinions in all directions, in an amoeba-like fashion. It dominates this part of the seascape, with its very distinctive profile of the Cuillin ridge that includes some of the most difficult climbing in the United Kingdom.


Despite its hundreds of miles of coastline, Skye has very few secure harbours; I can think of only three or four, including Portree, the only town on the island, and its capital. The harbour which means most to me, though, is Isle Ornsay, where I first found my boat Tamara, whose discovery was the starting point for all these island adventures. It was so different in the old days before Tamara; then I came to walk and climb the uplands, where the very spirit seems elevated, not least because one cannot linger in such places, only visit them. Now I look upon those heights from a safe sea-level base, more or less at leisure; the sea allows one extra time to gaze, if it permits one to do so at all.

"Sailing boats would determine my life to the exclusion of almost every other influence; I was completely lost to the mountains which had sustained me so far"

Photo, opposite page:
The Cuillins from Tarskavaig, C Brown

This page: The South coast of Rum, C Brown





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 - restoration of rare and missing species and environments
- connection of habitats and protected areas to allow ecological recovery and species movements

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