AUTUMN 2016

Wild Land News

Magazine of the Scottish Wild Land Group

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SCOTTISH WOODLAND

Examining the potential of Scotland's uplands

HILLTRACKS UPDATE

Still work to be done

HYDRO SCHEMES

Saviours Or Destroyers?

Autumn 2016

WILD LAND NEWS
Autumn 2016, Issue 89

Magazine of the
Scottish Wild Land Group

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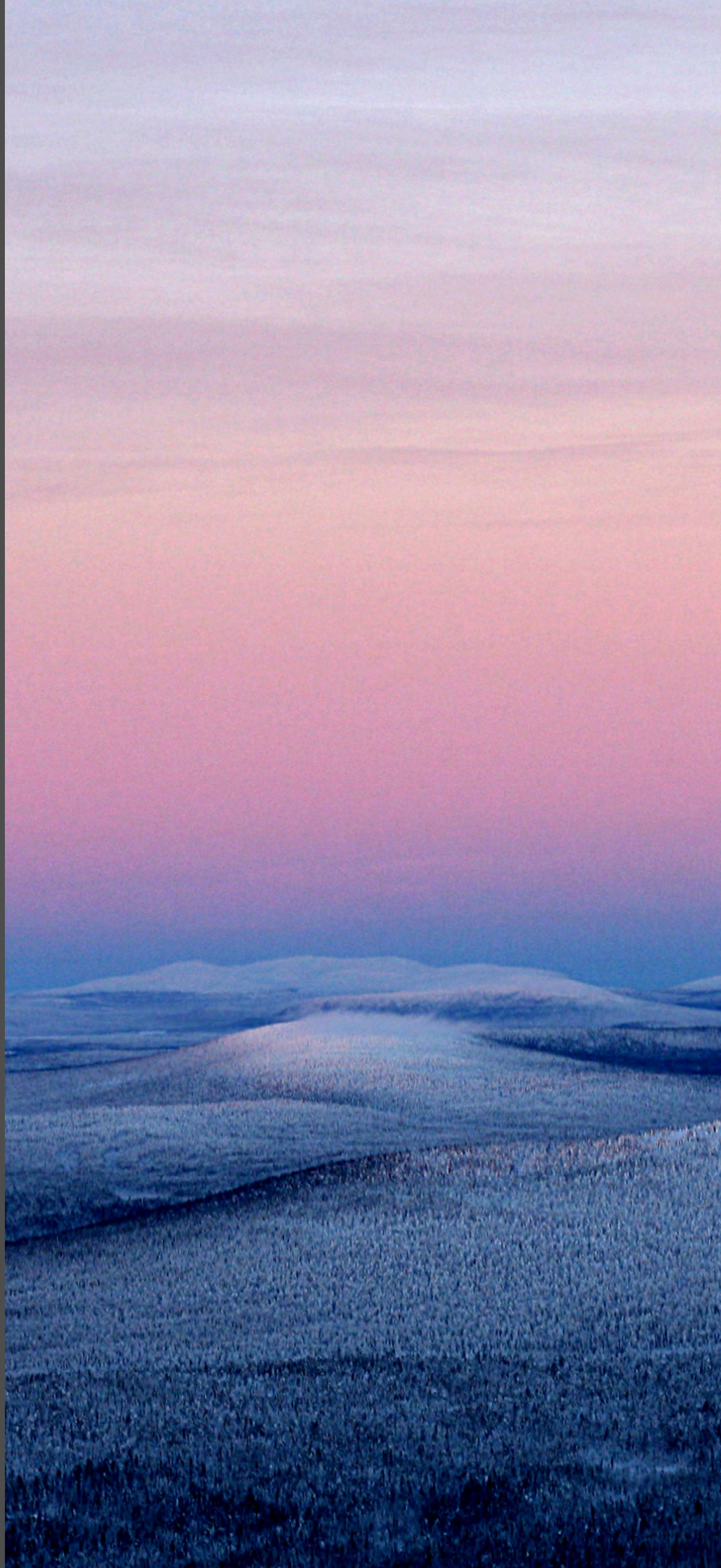

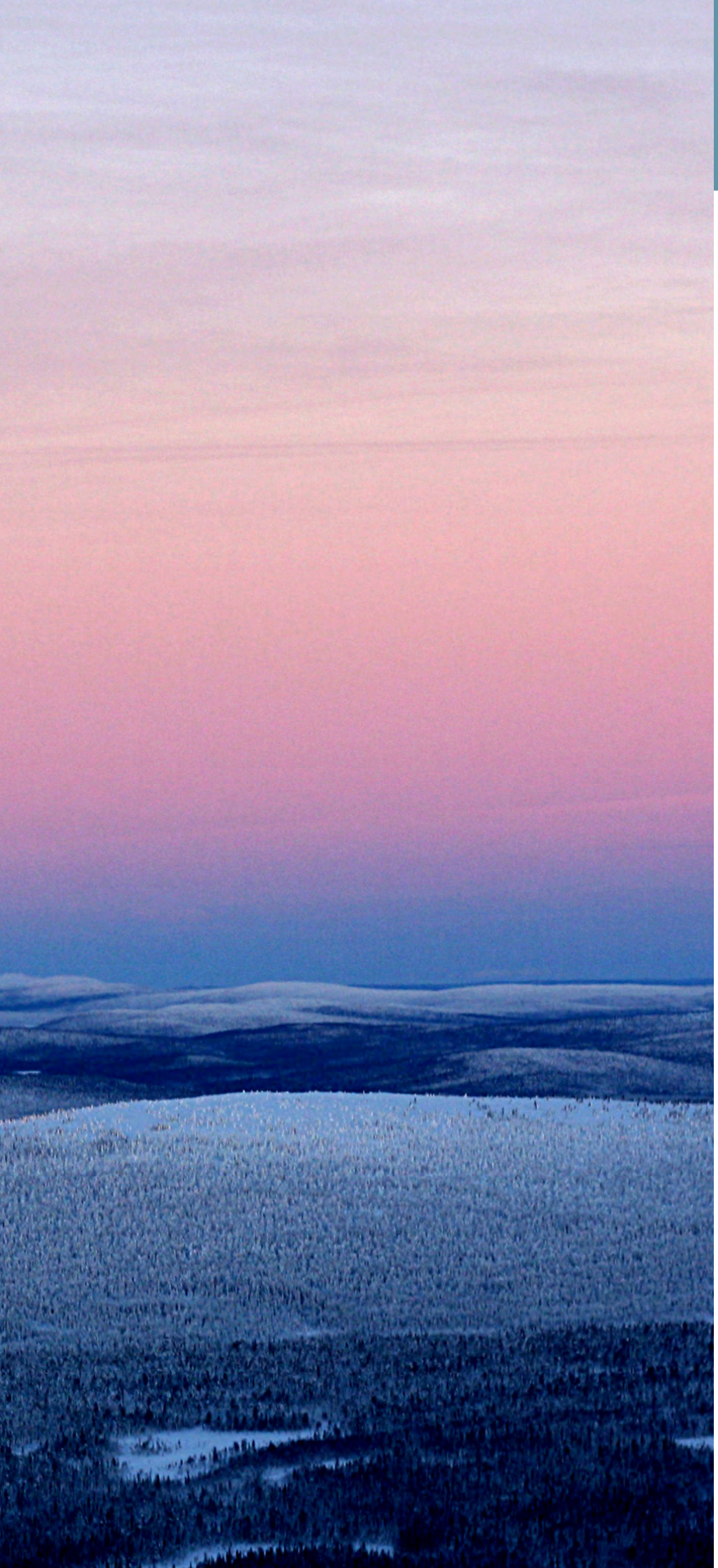

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Front cover: Liathach, the Torridon mountains, A.E. Torode

Left: Lapland, Finland, Petri Koikkalainen

Editorial

There have been plenty of interesting developments in the wild land of Scotland over the last few months. Some have been positive such as the return of breeding Hen Harriers to Upper Deeside and the announcement by Lynx UK they plan to apply for a trial reintroduction licence for Kielder Forest (largely in England, I know, but the trial has obvious implications for Scotland); some less so, such as the continuing proliferation of small-scale hydro schemes and associated infrastructure in inappropriate locations, particularly in the North -West Highlands. Particularly disheartening was the announcement that the Stronelairg windfarm in the Monadhliath can now go ahead following the overturning, on appeal, of the verdict of the Judicial Review bought about by the John Muir Trust last year. A bitter defeat, especially coming at a time when it seemed as though common sense was beginning to prevail in decisions regarding large-scale windfarms

This issue of WLN is kicked off with Helen Armstrong's paper detailing the issues regarding woodlands in the Scottish Uplands first published by the Forest Policy Group in May 2015. Helen gave a very interesting talk on this topic at last year's SWLG AGM and many of the issues raised then are covered here. John Low from the John Muir Trust contributes a piece detailing their opposition to the siting of certain windfarms and how the inclusion of Wild Land Areas in the National Planning Framework has influenced this. SWLG convenor Beryl Leatherland writes a piece updating on her work regarding hilltracks through the LINK organisation. James Fenton writes a piece detailing his concern about the aforementioned hydro schemes in the Gairloch area. We have a book review of '349 views of Scotland' and a piece reflecting on time spent in the wilderness of Northern Finland.

Finally, the SWLG is in need of a new archivist so anyone interested in keeping the flaming soul of Scotland's wild land alive please contact Alistair Cant at alistaircant@barkmail.com. Also, a reminder that the Cairngorms National Park are consulting on the National Park Partnership Plan. Cairngorms.co.uk for more info.

Date for your diaries!

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This will be held on
Sunday 27th November 2016
in the Bridge of Allan Parish Church
in their Honeyman Hall.

The AGM will start at 2pm and be followed by an illustrated presentation to introduce a discussion on environmental impacts of hydro developments in the National Parks and elsewhere.

The presentation will be given by Nick Kempe who runs the parkswatch blog and is well known for his work in this field - and others of course!

Helen Armstrong and Forest Policy Group (FPG)

The Benefits of Woodland: Unlocking the Potential of the Scottish Uplands

This article was first published by the FPG in May 2015 and is reprinted here with their permission. It provides an overview of the topic. A second article, which can be found at http://www.forestpolicygroup.org/topic-papers/, provides a review of the supporting evidence.

Summary

The Scottish uplands are widely celebrated for their wild quality, but they have long been regarded as inherently un-productive due to poor soils, high rainfall and climatic exposure. Received wisdom suggests they are only suitable for the production of hardy sheep, grouse, red deer and exotic conifers. There are, however, other options that we believe should be more widely considered. Many of these moorlands could support mixed woodland. Unlocking of this woodland potential can be achieved in many upland areas simply by reducing grazing pressure from sheep and deer and limiting the practice of muirburn. Implementing these two measures alone can result in the rapid natural growth of a diverse woodland and shrub cover. Such a change in land cover has benefits for soils, water quality and flow, fisheries, carbon capture, shelter and forage for domestic stock, fuelwood and timber, biodiversity, game animals and birds, and resilience to both climate change and pests and diseases. These improved outputs and ecosystem services would be of value both locally and nationally.

Many people think that the familiar treeless landscapes of the uplands are an entirely natural phenomenon. This is not the case.

Introduction

The uplands cover around 70% of Scotland's land area. Many people think that the familiar treeless landscapes of the uplands are an entirely natural phenomenon. This is not the case. Certainly, where geology, topography and climate have resulted in soils that are nutrient poor and waterlogged, the resulting blanket bog is never likely to support more than a few, stunted trees. Although economically unproductive, these areas are valuable for their large stores of carbon and their specialist wildlife. Elsewhere, however, large areas of grass and heather moor could be supporting woodland, were it not suppressed by grazing and burning.

Although open moorland landscapes have their admirers and their values, the presence of mixed woodland in the landscape can provide many benefits, as described below.

Soil productivity

Without trees and shrubs, the soils of Scotland's upland areas are generally wet, acidic and low in plant nutrients. In most areas the under-lying rocks yield little in the way of soil nutrients when they break down. Additionally, the abundant rainfall washes soil nutrients out of the soil. Short vegetation, with its shallow roots, presents little resistance to the movement of water into, and through, the soil, so nutrients are easily dissolved and taken on into streams, rivers and eventually, the sea. The soil is left poorer in nutrients, more acidic and un-productive. Where the iron content is high the dissolved iron is deposited further down the soil profile and can form a hard layer of iron oxide (an iron 'pan') which impedes drainage, making the soil permanently wet as well as nutrient poor. In the most extreme cases, this results in complete water-logging, inhibiting the decomposition of dead plant material which builds up as peat. Most of Scotland's upland soils have been subject to this sort of leaching for hundreds, or in some cases thousands, of years since woodland cover first started to decline. Muirburn for grouse moor management, or to provide young plant growth for sheep to eat, exacerbates the loss of soil nutrients.

Fortunately, this process can be reversed. Trees have deep roots that can bring nutrients up from the lower levels of the soil. They can sometimes even break through an iron pan. Deciduous trees and shrubs, when they lose their leaves in autumn, return those nutrients to the woodland floor. Their leaves decompose easily and produce a nutrient-rich compost that fertilises and improves the soil. Scots pine woodland with a mix of other tree species and an open canopy can achieve the same effect. However, soil acidity is increased by the thick mat of needles that builds up under dense plantations of conifers.

Soil erosion

Rain falling on short grassy or heathy vegetation, especially if it has been recently burned or is heavily grazed, runs rapidly over the surface, often dislodging soil particles and carrying them into the nearest stream. By contrast, rain falling on wooded ground infiltrates more slowly into the soil. Much of the water is held in this organic-matter-rich, 'spongy' soil until it is brought back up through the roots of trees and other plants. The rest of the rainwater moves through the soil too slowly to dislodge soil particles.

Landslips

Landslips occur on steep slopes, particularly after prolonged heavy rainfall when the soil is saturated with water. They create scars on the hillside and block roads in their path. The bare scars are then susceptible to erosion. Tree roots

Muirburn for grouse moor management, or to provide young plant growth for sheep to eat, exacerbates the loss of soil nutrients.

provide a framework for the soil, helping to stabilise it. A cover of trees and shrubs on steep slopes therefore reduces the incidence of landslips, such as occur regularly on the A83.

Siltation and flooding

Soil particles that are washed off the land are taken into streams. The particles are deposited as silt on the bed of slow running parts of streams or rivers (see Fisheries, below) or on the bed of lochs or reservoirs. By reducing the amount of soil washing off the land, a cover of trees and shrubs can prolong the life of reservoirs.

Much more carbon is stored in the vegetation and soils of woodland than in those of open ground

Compared to short vegetation, trees and shrubs have a high surface area of leaves and branches so they 'catch' more of the rain in their canopy, from which it evaporates back into the atmosphere. More water is also drawn up from their deep roots and transpired from their leaves. The higher water holding capacity of the soil under trees and shrubs means that any water remaining in the soil is released slowly into watercourses. In treeless river catchments the water runs off more quickly, increasing the chance of flooding downstream. By slowing down the flow of water into streams, a cover of trees and shrubs can reduce flood risk.

Fisheries

Salmon and trout need to lay their eggs in the well-aerated gravel beds of small upland streams, free of silt. The young fish need cool water which has high oxygen levels. They also feed on invertebrates which in turn feed on algae or water plants requiring a supply of nutrients. All of these factors are improved when deciduous trees or shrubs clothe the banks of streams. The trees and shrubs reduce siltation, cast shade, and provide a supply of leaves that are easily decomposed. Streamside trees also help to maintain the riffle-and-pool structure of the stream bed, providing both young and adult fish with suitable areas for feeding, resting and escaping predators.

Carbon sequestration

Much more carbon is stored in the vegetation and soils of woodland than in those of open ground. Developing woodland cover in the uplands increases the amount of carbon stored from quite early on in the process. The exception may be where soils with a peat depth of more than about 50 cm are ploughed or otherwise disturbed prior to planting. This is likely to dry out the soil allowing it to oxidise, releasing carbon dioxide. This does not occur where woodland expansion is by natural regeneration and there is no soil disturbance. Some carbon is lost from peat soils due to the drying effect of the trees as they grow and this is greater on soils with deep peat. This is likely to be more than compensated for, however, by the growth of the trees and other woody species. On deep peats, trees will not grow well without prior drainage so any natural regeneration is

Photo: Sheep grazing in Norway in a pasture containing recently pollarded ash trees. In the background is ungrazed mixed deciduous woodland. Similar land use is possible in the Scottish uplands. Kate Holl.

likely to result in only scattered, stunted trees that have little effect on its hydrology or carbon storage. This kind of 'bog woodland' is currently a scarce habitat in Scotland.

Shelter and forage for domestic stock and deer

The poor quality of forage available on the open hill, together with the lack of shelter from the often harsh weather conditions, means that only less productive sheep and cattle breeds can be grazed in the uplands. Trees and shrubs provide shelter and, by improving the soils, foster more nutritious pasture plants. Grazing stock do better on meadows set within a matrix of woodland and shrub cover or within open woodland, as is the norm in many other European countries, than they do on the open hill.

Red deer, too, are more productive when they live in woodland, producing more calves and growing larger than in the exposed conditions of the open hill.

Fuelwood and timber

Mixed woodland with a high proportion of broadleaved trees can be managed for a range of timber products including fencing and saw logs, fuelwood, pulpwood and chipwood. Broadleaved trees can produce quality timber if managed appropriately and can be economically viable despite growth rates being generally lower than those of conifers. Demand for fuelwood, a renewable energy source, is currently growing and is likely to increase further. A woodland varying in open-ness, as well as in the mix of tree species, can yield

these products sustainably without the need for clear-felling with its associated impacts on soils, run-off, erosion and biodiversity. This approach is used in many other European countries.

Biodiversity

Open upland grasslands and heathlands, whilst having specialist species, are relatively low in rarer species compared to open deciduous woodland and shrub habitats. A mixed landscape of patches of open areas set within a matrix of woodland and shrubby vegetation provides a wide range of habitats that support a diverse flora and fauna. Additionally, allowing trees and shrubs to colonise the uplands would create habitat types that have almost entirely disappeared from Scotland due to human impacts: montane shrub, treeline woodland and bog woodland. Rare species such as black grouse, capercaillie and wild cat would benefit. Taller vegetation would also provide more cover and food for small mammals and birds, supporting in turn more predatory species. Golden eagles, once thought to need large areas of open land over which to hunt, are now known to do well in landscapes composed of a mosaic of wooded and open habitats. The biodiversity associated with existing conifer mono-cultures can also be enhanced by making them more natural by diversifying the tree species, felling only small patches at a time and leaving some stands to become older than the normal felling age of around 45 years.

Photo: Woodland planted at Carrifran by Borders Forest Trust since they purchased the land in 2000, together with sheep removal and deer control, has already had a large positive impact on biodiversity (Adair, S. (2016). "Carrifran: ecological restoration in the Sourthern Uplands." Scottish Forestry 70(1): 30 -40). Helen Armstrong.

Game animals and birds

With a general increase in biodiversity comes the potential to hunt a wider variety of game species such as black grouse, capercaillie and wood cock. Red grouse would thrive in montane scrub areas as they do in Norway (where they are called willow grouse). A woodland landscape provides more shelter and forage than does the open hill so woodland–living red deer are bigger and produce more calves per hind. The maximum sustainable yield of venison is therefore greater and trophy hunters can shoot larger stags. With more woodland cover, deer would have a larger area in which to shelter and forage in winter, their impact would be more spread out and the density of deer compatible with allowing young trees to escape from browsing would be higher. Nevertheless, in the absence of large predators, continued hunting would be essential to ensure successful woodland regeneration.

Non-timber forest products

Heavy grazing by sheep and deer over most of the Scottish uplands severely reduces the production of berries from plants such as blaeberry, cranberry and cloudberry. Neither heavily grazed woodlands nor closed canopy, coniferous forests have the understorey of small trees and shrubs such as hazel, willow, rowan, elder, dog rose, raspberry and bramble that produce edible nuts, berries and stems for woven crafts. Fungi, many of which are edible, proliferate in mixed woodland and can be harvested by those who are suitably trained. Mixed landscapes with a high proportion of open, mixed woodlands are thought to be best for such products. An increase in the extent of this type of landscape would make it possible for more people to enjoy the health and wellbeing benefits of harvesting these items - a popular activity in many other European countries. It may also allow commercial businesses to develop, though these would have to be carefully regulated to ensure sustainable use.

Red grouse would thrive in montane scrub areas as they do in Norway (where they are called willow grouse)

Resilience to climate change

Predictions of the impact of climate change on Scotland come with a high degree of uncertainty as to both their nature and timing. In an uncertain world, fostering diversity is the best approach to ensuring resilience. A diverse ecosystem with a wide range of structures, habitat types, species and outputs stands the best chance of withstanding whatever changes occur since, if some species or habitats decline, others can expand to take their place. A diverse ecosystem providing diverse outputs is therefore likely to be both ecologically and economically more stable, whatever happens to the climate.

Resilience to diseases and pests

A mixed landscape of open habitats set within a matrix of species-rich wooded and shrubby habitats also offers high resilience to the effects of pests

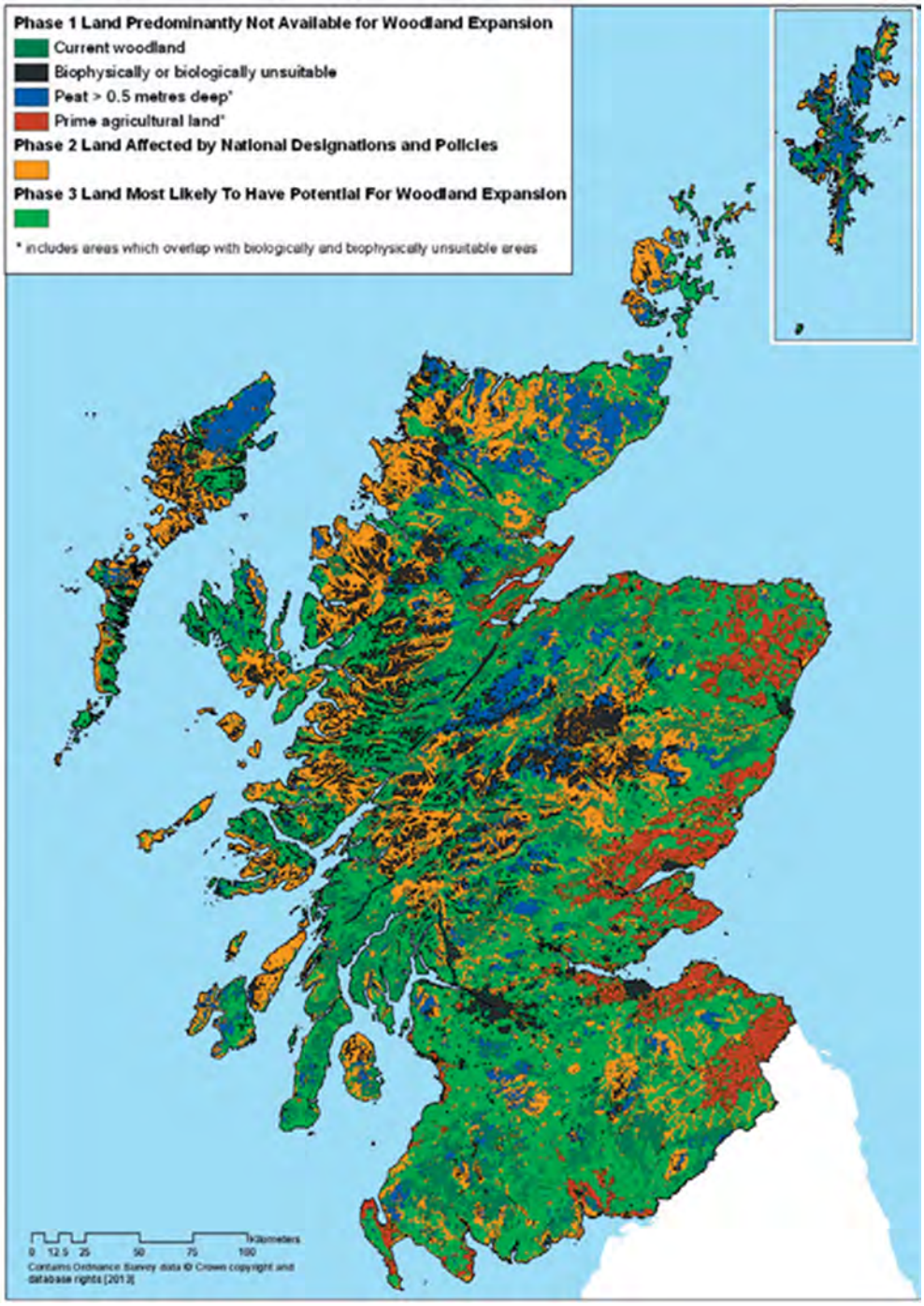

Figure. Light green areas represent land most likely to have potential for woodland expansion. From Sing et al. (2014). "Woodland expansion in Scotland: an assessment of the opportunities and constraints." Scottish Forestry 67(4): 19-25.

and diseases. Mono-cultures of one species, such as Sitka spruce, grouse, sheep or red deer, are susceptible to catastrophic declines in productivity if affected by pests or diseases that are newly introduced or that proliferate as a result of climate change. By contrast, the productivity of a multiple-output, diverse system is less vulnerable to a decline in any one species. Additionally, where individuals of any one species are more spread out, species-specific pests and diseases are less likely to spread and cause severe damage.

Achieving the transition

Conditions over much of the Scottish uplands are suitable for trees and shrubs to grow. Grazing and burning suppress natural

regeneration over much of this area. Releasing this regeneration requires three actions: a large reduction in the number of deer, a reduction in the number of sheep (beyond that which has occurred since the change in the subsidy system in 2008) and a large reduction in the area of land that is burned. In much of the uplands, these actions alone would result in spontaneous natural regeneration of woodland and shrubs, as has been demonstrated in pioneering projects at Abernethy, Creag Meagaidh, Glen Affric and Glen Feshie. South west Norway also provides a good example of a region, similar in climate and soils, where this has occurred. Planting or ground preparation would only be needed in areas that are distant from a seed source, such as at Carrifran in the Scottish Borders, or where the ground vegetation is too dense or the soils too poor. A gradual re-structuring of existing conifer plantations to make them more akin to natural woodlands would also help to bring about the benefits listed above. Reducing deer numbers would have additional public benefits including reduced tick densities, a probable reduction in the incidence of Lyme disease and fewer deer-vehicle collisions.

Conclusion

Over much of the uplands, the current land use regime, dominated by mono-cultures of sheep, deer, grouse and exotic conifers, is maintaining, and even exacerbating, the low productivity of the land.
A landscape with an increased cover of mixed woodland, in mosaic with open areas, would provide richer, more productive and more stable ecosystems. These, in turn, would provide an array of increased outputs and services that would be of major benefit to both private and public interests. The relevance, importance and value of each of the benefits of woodland described above will differ according to local circumstances. The potential of woodland to provide these benefits should be more widely considered, however, in both the development of national land use policy and in local land management decision making.

Photo: Successful tree regeneration in Lochaber on open ground in the presence of controlled cattle and deer grazing. Helen Armstrong.

John Low

Wild Land Areas

Scotland's wild land is an asset of national and international significance but it is a finite resource.

The John Muir Trust (JMT) is dedicated to protecting and enhancing wild places. We are aspirational but also pragmatic and understand that 'sustainable development' is essential to the environmental, economic and social well-being of our country. We firmly believe that Scotland's wild land is an asset of national and international significance but it is a finite resource. Wild land plays a vital role for carbon storage in trees and peatland, gives us clean air, water and food and is home to valuable wildlife. Wild land also plays a vital role in supporting tourism and a wide range of other economic and leisure activities. JMT believe that it is a precious asset which should be nurtured and improved both now and in the future and it should not be damaged for short term gain. Currently there is a particular threat to wild land from those who want to build onshore wind farms - tomorrow the threat could come from a different direction. The Trust is committed to policy principles which support the current targets of the UK Government and Scottish Government for greenhouse gas emissions reduction as these are the primary public policy tools directed at climate change mitigation. What we do not support is the construction of industrial scale wind farms on wild land or developments that would adversely affect wild land. Human beings are very clever and with a bit of creativity we believe it is possible to protect and enhance wild land areas and at the same time achieve our emissions targets; we should never accept damaging one part of the environment to save another. John Muir once wisely said "*Not blind opposition to progress, but opposition to blind progress*" and this encapsulates our stance today.

The identification of the forty two wild land areas (WLAs) by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the publication, in June 2014, of their WLA map was a milestone which JMT, SWLG and many others had campaigned for long and hard. Whilst we may have felt some other areas such as some coastal regions could have been included, in general we feel this was a huge step forward. However as with many things, it was only the beginning of a journey as we all continued to

work hard to establish what in reality a Wild Land Area actually stood for and what the new National Plannning Framework 3 (NPF3) section 4.4 actually meant when it stated that ''*We also want to continue our strong protection for our wildest landscapes – wild land is a nationally important asset.*'' Also what was the meaning of the statement in the new Scottish Planning Policy (SPP2) Table 1 Group 2: Areas of significant protection: ''*Recognising the need for significant protection, in these areas wind farms may be appropriate in some circumstances. Further consideration will be required to demonstrate that any significant effects on the qualities of these areas can be substantially overcome by siting, design or other mitigation* …….''

To get a definition of what this all meant in practice we needed 'case law' as defined by a variety of decisions taken by Councils, Scottish Government Ministers and Reporters at Appeals and Public Inquiries. Over the last 20 months we have worked exceptionally hard to this end along with many friends such as MCoS and SWLG and a body of evidence has started to build.

In particular over the five-month period from July to November 2015 the Scottish Government rejected five wind farm applications, all of which JMT objected to, which would have been constructed wholly or partially within the Wild Land Areas, totalling 134 turbines. The judgements behind four of these decisions are very important.

The first was Allt Duine Wind Farm on the western edge of the Cairngorms National Park in the Monadhliath WLA 20. Following an Inquiry the Scottish Minister's decision over ruled the Reporter's findings in some aspects including: ''*Ministers agree with SNH's advice that the Allt Duine wind farm will result in a number of effects on the wildness attributes of the WLA resulting from-:*

- *The physical reduction in extent of wild land qualities due to the addition of a prominent new focal feature within the interior of an area of wild land.*
- *A reduction in the current sense of sanctuary and appreciation of lack of human intervention across a large extent of the WLA.*
- *The cumulative effect of a further wind farm within and visible from areas where wind farm development is not/will not be readily apparent or a dominant feature.*
- *A reduction in the currently apparent expansive wild land qualities that are appreciated collectively with the adjacent Cairngorms WLA''*

With regard to Glencassley wind farm in WLA 34 near Ben More Assynt (featured in JMT's Area 34 campaign) they said '' *Although Scottish Ministers' policy envisages that wind farms on wild land may be appropriate in some circumstances, where it can*

Over the five-month period from July to November 2015 the Scottish Government rejected five wind farm applications, all of which JMT objected to, which would have been constructed wholly or partially within the Wild Land Areas

be demonstrated that significant effects on the qualities of the area of wild land can be substantially overcome by siting, design or other mitigation, Ministers have concluded, with respect to this Development, that the wild land impacts are unacceptable and cannot be mitigated.''

For Sallachy wind farm in WLA 34 part of the judgement said ''*Ministers are of the view that the Development would have significant adverse effects on the wildness attributes of the south eastern segment of the Reay-Cassley WLA to the degree that this area of the WLA would no longer be considered to be wild land. This in turn means that the Development would still have a significant effect on the Reay-Cassley WLA when considered as a whole''.*

The Reporter's decision on Carn Gorm wind farm, which was planned to be partially in WLA 29 near Ben Wyvis was that ''*I have considered the benefits of the proposed development and the support contained in national policy. My conclusion is that the presumption in favour of sustainable development and the proposed development's accordance with other aspects of national policy would not be sufficient to outweigh the conflict with protecting landscape and safeguarding the character of areas of wild land. This conflict justifies refusal of planning permission.''*

The final wind farm of the five was Talladh-a Bheithe in WLA 14 on the edge of the Rannoch Moor which would have been highly visible from Ben Alder, Schiehallion and the Glen Lyon hills which we are sure would have been refused on similar grounds to those stated above. However, without even getting that far it was refused because when they submitted their application the company legally did not exist.

There are positive signs... that we are beginning to win the clear protection for Scotland's wild land and wild places that so many of us want.

The total number of wind farms planned to be in or partially in WLAs and rejected by the Scottish Government is currently six, involving 158 turbines. These decisions have considerably strengthened our position by giving us authoritative and justified judgements to quote in support of our objections to further developments on or directly impacting on wild land. However, we remain vigilant and active as there are currently four applications totalling 77 turbines outstanding for wind farms within Wild Land Areas. All are further down the pipeline, so no decisions are expected at Scottish Government level in the near future. In addition we have objected to a further 20 proposals for wind farms outwith WLAs totalling 413 turbines because of their visual impact on WLAs. It is important to stress though that there have been hundreds of other applications across the country which we have not objected to.

So where are we now? Do we have a definitive definition of the characteristics of each WLA? Unfortunately the answer is no.

SNH is currently a year late in publishing the WLA descriptors but we hope for them to come out soon. However there are positive signs as described earlier that we are beginning to win the clear protection for Scotland's wild land and wild places that so many of us want.

Unfortunately despite the removal of subsidies by Amber Rudd, the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, in June 2015, so far there has been no noticeable reduction in the number of large scale windfarms applying for planning permission. This does seem to suggest that these large scale developments can be financially viable without public subsidy. A view supported by Johannes Teyssen, the Chief Executive of E.On, who in an article in the Telegraph, June 2014 was reported as saying that European governments must stop handing generous subsidies to green energy technologies; and that renewable power sources, such as wind and solar, were no longer in their infancy, so to continue to hand them special treatment had a distortive effect. Speaking in London at the annual conference of Eurelectric in 2014 (the European electricity industry body of which he was president), Mr Teyssen said: "*10 years ago renewables were in an immature state and needed to be nurtured. "Today they are the biggest animal in the zoo and if you continue to treat them as imbeciles and feed them baby nutrition you will just get a sick big cat."* He claimed the only people blocking debate about ending financial aid for renewables were those who "*just want to harvest subsidies without accountability"!*

To date no developer has shown they can design a wind farm to be located in a WLA which will, in the words of SPP2, be able to *''demonstrate that any significant effects on the qualities of these areas can be substantially overcome by siting, design or other mitigation''.* JMT are of the view that in actual fact it would be impossible to achieve this.

Whatever happens next the Trust will continue to robustly defend wild land areas. We are all the custodians of the future and this is a responsibility JMT take very seriously.

Whatever happens next the Trust will continue to robustly defend wild land areas.

Beryl Leatherland

HILLTRACKS – AN UPDATE
[and a plea for help with information gathering!]

SWLG continues to contribute actively to the Hilltracks Campaign. This was pulled together in 2013 by several of the member organisations of Scottish Environment LINK, including the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland [APRS], the Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group, the Cairngorms Campaign, the RSPB, the Scottish Campaign for National Parks, North East Mountain Trust, the NTS, Ramblers Scotland and us. The campaign is also supported by the John Muir Trust and the Mountaineering Council of Scotland and co-convened by Helen Todd of Ramblers Scotland and me.

There is a long history of concern and opposition to the indiscriminate construction of hilltracks in the hills going back over several decades. Such tracks often contribute to visual scarring, erosion, poor drainage and peat damage, and it is now appreciated that the latter in particular contributes to our carbon emissions. Such tracks

Below: Damaged peat and high mound due to excavated trench alongside Charr to Edindocher track, looking south.

come under General Permitted Development legislation, and full planning permission is not required for their construction; this is a surprise to many. This is a hangover from the end of World War II when it was essential to enable agriculture [and forestry] in Britain to grow and thrive as part of the united effort to make the country more prosperous after the war, and there was a desire to facilitate delivery of these aims by keeping bureaucracy to a minimum.

So there was rather an anomaly in that such tracks could be dug or bull dozed into the hills for claimed agricultural purposes, when in fact the true reason for constructing them was often for sporting purposes. A full planning application to the local authority would be required for a purely "hunting and shooting" track, whereas by claiming some agricultural purpose – which could be as trivial as driving a few sheep along it very occasionally – landowners and managers could, legitimately under the law of the land, build a track wherever they liked, often of a poor standard and with no long term maintenance plan.

Immediately after the war there was less pressure on high ground from track building, as hunting pursuits were still carried out along traditional lines, with shooting parties relying on approach on foot and using garrons to carry out carcasses via long established stalker path networks. In more recent times, of course, stalking has become a more intensive business activity for estates and clients are carried into the hills in 4X4s for a day's shooting, often during a fleeting visit.

A few years ago Scottish Natural Heritage [SNH] produced excellent guidance in the form of their "*Constructed Tracks in the Scottish Uplands",* 2nd edition June 2013. But guidance is exactly that; there is no compulsion to follow it.

There was rather an anomaly in that such tracks could be dug or bull dozed into the hills for claimed agricultural purposes, when in fact the true reason for constructing them was often for sporting purposes.

Advocates of Scotland's uplands and wild places felt powerless to prevent this intrusion into some of our finest landscapes. Some years ago a survey in the Cairngorms indicated that land more than 3 km from the nearest road decreased from around 680km^2 in 1960 to around 155km2 in the early 80s; and the attrition has continued. Dissatisfaction reached a peak; I don't know what contributed to this; maybe it was due to certain high profile tracks suddenly appearing in the hills, enabled by newer more powerful digging machinery, such as the one at Ledgowan – a particularly controversial track. Members may have heard our member Ken Brown speaking on the BBC Out of Doors programme about an access issue he had experienced on this estate one week, to be followed by his son Calum, a member of our Steering Team, being interviewed a week later about the same unsightly hilltrack seen prominently from Achnasheen village.

There was a consultation on General Permitted Development Rights in 2012, with a specific mention of tracks. The Minister though, maybe due to the landowning interests lobbying strongly, was minded not to take action as he felt that "there was not enough evidence to persuade him". So the campaign was organised to provide him with direct evidence from all over Scotland of the damage being caused by the proliferation of unregulated track digging.

After sharing our concerns, an advocacy plan was drawn up and agreed, and funds were raised from members and also generously contributed to by a grant from the Scottish Mountaineering Trust.

Below: Borrow pit at side of Charr to Edindocher track

We obviously needed to collect strong evidence. An excellent and persuasive report, "*Track Changes*" was compiled by Calum, from examples of tracks sent to us as a result of a plea for evidence to members of the participating organisations. This enabled us to graphically illustrate the level of destruction that was occurring, to highlight the issues and to suggest solutions. Copies were distributed to MSPs, SNH and everyone we could think of who might have been relevant or helpful in effecting change, as well as landowning representatives. The report was, gratifyingly, well received, except by the latter.

Helen persuaded the then Planning Minister, Derek MacKay, to attend a site visit with us. He could only afford half a day so a recently dug track of a deplorable standard was selected for this purpose in the Pentlands [but outside the Regional Park] and Helen, Calum, Dave Morris and I viewed the track with the Minister, and a Scottish Government planner with this as his area of work. This made quite an impression on the Minister, but we knew that he would also be listening to the views of SLE and landowners in general, as well as FCS and the commercial forestry industry.

Forestry tracks are included as their track construction activities also come under the general permitted development umbrella, although, generally speaking, such tracks were not causing the greatest concern, and they were less intrusive into wild land.

To cut a long story short, as a result of extensive lobbying on all sides, stakeholder meetings, and negotiations with the SG planning department, there was a change to the secondary legislation and the Minister put forward a new Order which came into effect on December 2014. [*Town and Country Planning [General Permitted Development [Scotland] Amendment order [No2] Order 2014 [SSI 2014 No 300].* This requires landowners who wish to construct new tracks to submit their proposals to their local authority via a Prior Notification. The authority then has up to 28 days to raise concerns. Should there be any then they can request that the developer submits a Prior Approval which addresses any concerns that may have arisen.

This was a victory for the campaign in one sense, in that now there would be some scrutiny by local authorities of the standard of construction and location of tracks. Up to that point, tracks had even been dug in protected sites such as SSSIs and in the National Parks, quite legally. On the other hand we did not achieve what we wanted, which was that full planning applications would be required for all such tracks.

We realised that the decision to proceed along the prior notification route would cause problems for us in monitoring the effectiveness of the implementation of the new Order. This was because local authorities could not be compelled to list them on their online public access portals along with full planning applications, so

Some years ago a survey in the Cairngorms indicated that land more than 3 km from the nearest road decreased from around 680km2 in 1960 to around 155km2 in the early 80s

It seems that a review is quite useful in some cases for kicking awkward items into the long grass.

we would not necessarily be aware of them. We managed to encourage the Scottish government planners to advise authorities to do this, however. This resulted in the majority of them listing them, although they could be difficult to find. We have persevered with those that didn't list them and at the moment the authorities we are monitoring have finally all started to list them.

A further problem arises in that one cannot make an objection to a prior notification in the same way as one can where a full planning application is involved; all we can do is identify problems and submit our views as letters of concern. In fact, some authorities state on their websites that no comments will be accepted for these submissions. There are thus democratic deficits associated with prior notifications. We would hardly concur that the implementation of the current Scottish Planning Policy is a properly democratic process, [especially where the interests of individuals and communities are concerned] but here public consultation, input and comment on plans are all virtually eliminated.

A further feature of prior notifications is that the local authority only has 28 days to raise any concerns with the developer. This isn't at all satisfactory, as capacity constraints make adequate scrutiny unrealistic in many authorities where planning departments are understaffed and under pressure. Prior notifications are low in the hierarchy of planning applications, they do not command a fee and other bigger developments take precedence in terms of economic growth considerations. In addition, due to their location there is often research to be done on geomorphology, heritage, landscape and natural history features as well as designations and protected sites to be identified. All this takes time.

How could we achieve some idea of what was happening once the new Order became effective?
In September 2015 we set up a monitoring strategy involving volunteers [mostly] as trackers allocated to each of 11 local authorities and the 2 national parks. These were chosen as they are the areas where there are most concerns especially over landscape and wild land features. The trackers send in their findings each week and I collate them. Any tracks that raise concern are pinpointed and local authorities contacted, either by the individual member organisations or in a couple of cases, as LINK.

Is the Government monitoring the implementation of the new Order and its effectiveness?
Sort of. Soon after the new Order came in, the responsibility for planning went to Alex Neil. There was a parliamentary planning committee meeting and LINK members gave evidence alongside representatives from the landowning and forestry industry. Evidence was presented on behalf of LINK by employees of the RSPB and APRS, both of whom had been very active throughout the campaign

Note height of peat cut and collapse of dried peat banks, one of several examples along Charr to Edindocher track

and had excellent professional knowledge of the planning issues involved. As a result, the new Minister decided that a review would be held. When in doubt, it seems that a review is quite useful in some cases for kicking awkward items into the long grass.

This took some time to put in place; consultants had to be appointed and a brief drawn up. We were not optimistic as only £10,000 was set aside for this. The consultants produced a couple of questionnaires, we submitted our own report and a stakeholder meeting was eventually held. The consultants subsequently published their final report, which includes all our findings and concerns. Since then we have had a Scottish parliamentary election, we have yet another new Minister, and our Government planning contact has advised us that there seems to be no ministerial intention to progress this work, despite the resources that have already been put into it.

Meanwhile, we haven't given up on this and we continue to monitor the weekly planning lists and have asked again via our members' websites that the public send us photos and details of any new tracks they see when they are out in the hills. At the time of writing this report we have several current queries in with local authorities concerning different tracks which we consider are unjustified or are not of an acceptable standard. If you can contribute to this work please see the appeal on the SWLG website which gives full details. Material should be sent to Hilltracks@scotlink.org.

No doubt the time may well come when we decide that we need to start lobbying again for a further improvement to this state of affairs, in order to achieve more democracy and to protect our landscapes and heritage from inappropriate damage.

James Fenton

Hydro Schemes: Saviours of the Planet or Destroyers of Wildness?

Scotland is currently awash with small-scale, run-of-river hydroelectric schemes. Many of these are within in our national parks: for example most of the burns descending into Glen Falloch are being hydro-electrified, including the one which provides the waterfalls above The Drovers' Inn.

In practice these schemes involve bulldozing an access track high into the catchment, building a dam, and then taking the water through a buried pipe to a power plant at the bottom of the glen. They are widely promoted as environmentally friendly, producing renewable energy and so helping to mitigate global warming.

But there are two sides to the equation. Extracting renewable energy in commercial quantities is best carried out in locations of the highest energy potential: for wind, this means high altitude, for hydro, a large height difference between intake and power plant. And of course these

Photo: The large Loch Cluanie. When you consider that total power-output of all the large hydro-schemes is about 10% of Scotland's electricity needs, you wonder we are bothering with small schemes at all, especially if it involves bringing infrastructure into previously remote areas.

conditions are best met with in our mountainous areas, areas much valued for their wild and remote nature in the same way that John Muir venerated Yosemite.

So which is more important: keeping wildness in our mountains, or mitigating global warming? Interestingly a report published in WWF's *Arctic Bulletin* a few years ago concluded that the main legacy of the Alaska oil industry would be the infrastructure left behind once the oil had all gone, such as

Top photograph: A recent small-scale run-of-river hydro-scheme up Glen Buidhe (above Loch Creran) on a route up the Munro Beinn Sgulaird.
Bottom left: A new dam on a previously wild loch within the Wester Ross National Scenic Area.

Bottom right: A new track already showing significant erosion. The construction style of this track can only be described as 'shoddy'. All hydro schemes necessitate access tracks. In Scotland's wet climate, these are likely to erode unless extremely well built, with continual clearance of cross-drains and pipes (something that rarely happens in my experience).

Top left: The above track has been extended up the glen above the dam, but here showing major erosion and track-side gullying. Building any track or path across a hill slope concentrates water, resulting in erosion if not well built in the first place or not maintained thereafter (tracks rarely are).

Top right: A little discussed aspect of the construction of hill tracks is their acting as conduit for species not normally found in the area. The yellow plant beside this new access track is a Brassica, which would never grow naturally here.

Middle left: An access track built for the creation of a hydro scheme down the Boor Burn, above Loch Ewe within the Wester Ross National Scenic Area. This burn used to provide one of the best locations in the area for short walks through woodland up rapids and waterfalls. A small-scale wild area.

Middle right: The developers assured SNH that they would reinstate the ground, converting the track to a footpath. However the quality of ground restoration is poor, and many plants which were not originally found up the burn are now spreading into the area. The power plant is the building on the left. Many years ago there used to be a mill here, but it only had a short lade leading to it. It looks as if the archaeology of this has been destroyed.

tracks, hardstandings and concrete. These are all things we currently adding to our hills without let or hindrance through the plethora of renewable energy developments, so it would appear that the legacy of the renewable energy gold-rush in Scotland will be the same as that of the Alaskan oil-rush.

But it is worth it, I hear you say, because reducing global warming is all important … Well, yes and no. By its very nature, renewable energy has a lower energy density than fossil fuels or nuclear energy. If we want to extract every last kilowatt from our natural energy flowers, then we will have to cover a huge area with infrastructure, whether windfarms in Scotland, solar farms in the Sahara, or hydro-schemes in Brazil. In contrast one nuclear power station will take up very little space, although there will be environmental damage somewhere from the quarrying of the ore, and perhaps also a smaller amount in any future burial site for nuclear waste.

The trend over the centuries, now rapidly accelerating, is for humans to take over the whole planet. But do we really want to live in a planet where there is infrastructure in every square inch? Where there is nowhere to walk, or take your children, without seeing buildings, roads or vehicles? Areas where nature is still in charge are nowhere to be found? Was it not to prevent all this that national parks were first created? …

Previous page, bottom left: Gorse colonising the construction site of the above scheme, below the road. Gorse was not previously found here. Gorse is spreading throughout Wester Ross, often using roadsides and tracks. For example, further north the whole length of the road from Drumrunie to Achiltibuie has gorse colonising its verges, introducing the plant to, for example, the Stac Pollaidh area.

Previous page, bottom right: Even in the heart of the Torridon Mountains, new tracks are being bulldozed into the hills. This track is visible from the main Loch Maree road. Beinn Eighe visible in the background. Nowhere is sacred!

Bellow, top : Another new track and power station in a remote area of Wester Ross, where many schemes are currently being built. It would appear that soon every remote glen in Scotland with a decent-sized burn will soon have a new track and dam.

Bellow, bottom: Even designation as a National Park does not protect wildness: a new scheme being built on the Ben Glas Burn above Glen Falloch in the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park.

But returning hydro-schemes, when you see the huge schemes of the 1950s and 1960s, such as the Lochs Cluanie and Shin this world, and realise that their sum total is about 10% of Scotland's total electricity demand, you do wonder why we need to continually desecrate our wild land by building schemes which produce only peanuts in comparison.

With recent schemes in wild areas of the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park and, incredibly, within the wild core area of the Torridon Mountains, it would appear that no area of Scotland is deemed of high enough landscape value to be worth conserving in its own right.

A recent report in Current Biology is titled *Catastrophic Declines in Wilderness Areas Undermine Global Environment Targets.* It would appear that Scotland is up there, leading the assault. Is this where we want Scotland to be?

What is desperately needed is real government commitment to the few remaining areas of wild land, together with a map of all the water catchments of Scotland identifying some where we should let the rivers continue to run wild. I am sure the fishing community would support this. And did not WWF have a 'Wild Rivers' campaign a few years ago?

The pictures illustrate many of the wild issues associated with run-of-river hydro-schemes.

The famous Ben Glas Burn water-falls above the Drovers' Inn in Glen Falloch. This burn is being piped to a new power station (see bottom photo on previous page).

Beryl Leatherland

349 Views of Scotland by David Squires

Published by Whittles Publishing, ISBN 978-184995-1715 196 pages, 130 photos 18 of which are colour, 32 location maps, £18.99

All Munro baggers and Corbett tickers have seen view indicators at some stage in their travels to seek out Scottish summits. On a fine day these make an interesting diversion after a long ascent as they help us identify other hills in the surrounding landscape. We may also be familiar with other plaques, labelled images or discs scattered in various scenic locations at lower levels. Doubtless we rarely give much thought to how the viewfinder arrived at that point or to its history, but here in one useful unique manual is all the information you need.

There are 349 of these listed in various places in Scotland ranging from hilltops to parks, golf courses, roadsides and coastal sites, often in very fine locations. The photos, many taken by the author, span a period of years and the older ones are evocative of a Scotland long since gone. The author, who sadly died soon after the book was published, does not claim this to be a complete list but has listed those he researched in a very efficient manner, under local authorities, together with their design, building date, and the group that built them together with notes on their relevant history. He visited all of them, saying that visiting them gave him some wonderful days in wonderful places.

I enjoyed a splendid afternoon recently, visiting the viewpoint on East Lomond in Fife, on a fine clear day, rare for this summer, and was fortunate in being able to see almost every named feature on the bronze disc on its granite column, unveiled in a ceremony on 6th October 1928, made all the more interesting for having read its description and history in this book.

The book is intended as a reference book and an informative companion on one's travels around Scotland. Indeed, once you have finished ticking off the Munros and Corbetts, it would be an excellent idea to visit all the viewpoints. In fact you might decide to do this instead of visiting the cairns and trig points on top of our hills and as an alternative choose to view them from lesser heights.

The idea for this book apparently originated with the mountaineer Ben Humble who visited many of them in the 1930s and wrote articles for the Glasgow Evening Times.

This is a delightful little book and it would make an unusual present for anyone who appreciates the variety of Scottish landscapes and her history.

Text: Pete Ewing
Photos: Petri Koikkalainen

Sixty seven North

All photos curtesy of Petri Koikkalainen —an amateur photographer who lives in Rovaniemi, Finland; petri.koikkalainen @ulapland.fi

Rovaniemi is a town on the edge. It's where the electrified railway ends, and the electrified sky of the aurora begins. The Arctic Circle hovers to the north like a giant halo, as if the place had been somehow beatified.

To reach Rovaniemi from the south you must cross the Kemijoki river by a bridge known as the *Jätkänkynttilä.* That translates as *Lumberjack's Candle*, apparently because the beacon on the top of the bridge resembles one. But this explanation is no explanation, because these days very few people know what a lumberjack's candle is. Lapland is different, and the differences are more cultural than linguistic.

And just to add further to this frontier atmosphere, Rovaniemi also has the world's most northerly MacDonald's restaurant. For some people, civilization ends here.

I walk past the golden arches to the map section of the bookshop, where I spend fifteen euros on a blank sheet of paper.
I exaggerate slightly. The map has a spattered rash of blue, a few whorls of contour lines like a giant's fingerprints and the usual lattice of grid lines, synthetic in their straightness. But the rest of the sheet is an intimidating white expanse. In any other country that would indicate moor, or desert, or nothingness. But Finnish cartographers show tree cover as white. In a land that is essentially a forest, it saves a lot of green ink.

It's a short walk from bookshop to bus station. The northbound bus crosses the Arctic Circle without ceremony and deposits me – and, I notice, no-one else - at the trail-head. The transition is abrupt, unsettling in its speed. Tarmac and traffic behind me, a landscape of forest, river and sky ahead. The bus disappears in a cloud of diesel and dust.

The trees, at least, are familiar - they are what we parochially call Scots pine, otherwise known as *Pinus sylvestris,* or in literal translation, pine of the woods. But this is not just a wood. This is boreal forest, the great northern tree belt, stretching from here to Siberia, and back through Alaska and Canada. Gaia's emerald necklace, clasped with salt water.

I tighten the hip belt of my rucksack and start walking.

It's probably after midnight, though I'm not sure about that

because my watch is buried somewhere at the bottom of my pack. I am sitting on the needled forest floor by my campfire.
A red sun grazes the horizon and shines through the pines. The trees are tall, their shadows infinite. A shaft of light illuminates a cloud of mosquitoes. They oscillate under the spotlight, quivering, vibrating. They remind me of a physics demonstration from long ago, and then the forgotten term enters my head: like Brownian motion.

Wood smoke and pine resin season the cool air of evening – or perhaps I mean morning. Day, night, evening and sunrise – these normally precise words become blurred at sixty seven degrees of latitude.

I hear – almost feel - a low rumble in the distance. It's the river, a mile away, engorged with a winter's worth of snow melt and moving boulders the size of a fridge.

The fire burns low. I split another birch log with my *puukko* and cast the shards on the embers. It's like turning a light switch. The dry wood flares up and I stare at the dancing flames. Not for nothing is the camp fire known as the bush television.

What I am doing here is difficult to explain. There is no word for it in English. The Japanese call it s*hinrin-yoku* which translates literally as 'forest bathing'. I like that phrase. It implies immersion, and it also chimes with John Muir's famous declaration: 'Break clear away, once in a while, and climb a mountain or spend a week in the woods. Wash your spirit clean.'

Perhaps the Finns have a word for *shinrin-yoku,* the long purposeless walk in the woods. They almost certainly do – in Finnish the concept of a dead, desiccated standing pine useful for both firewood and shelter construction is neatly

Below:
Kemijoki River

Only natural rhythms actually matter. Dawn, dusk, moon state, tides, weather

compressed to a single word: *kelo.* Language is defined by the land.

My friends back home consider a solo trip to Lapland to be proof of my insanity, but they underestimate the rewards and overestimate the risks. I haven't seen any bears, much less been eaten by one. I haven't wandered over the Russian border. Nor have I trod on one of the land mines sown by the retreating Germans in 1945. The Finns dealt with that problem with typical Fennoscandian efficiency: the initial de-mining was done by the prisoners of war who laid them. Then they left it to the reindeer to finish the job. They probably harvested the resulting minced venison too.

Russians and land mines and bears, oh my. I take a pine log, make a deep cut in the end with my Swedish folding saw, and then widen it with a few strokes of the *puukko* . Then I rotate the wood a quarter turn and make another cut, dividing the end into quarters. Two more cuts and it's divided into eight wedges of wood separated by air. If I had an ink pad I could use it as a Union Jack stamp. I thrust it in the campfire until it's blazing and stand it on end. The lumberjack's candle. It doesn't just give light. You can cook on one if you make it big enough.

I've seen four almost-sunsets since I left the trailhead, and in that time I have seen no-one. This may be the country that

gave us Nokia, but my mobile phone shows no signal. There's just pine and birch, rock and water, sun and sky. And a feeling.

I've had this feeling before, and always after two or three days solo on the trail. Self reliance is part of it, but there's much more to it than that. The human concept of time contracts to a virtual unreality, just numbers behind glass. Only natural rhythms actually matter. Dawn, dusk, moon state, tides, weather. They are real in a way our nebulous constructs like interest rates and share prices are not. The twenty euro note in my pocket has reverted to its true value – out here it's tinder, not tender. The banker's candle, perhaps.

I don't know what to call this disassociation with the artificial, this reconciliation with the natural. Connectedness, maybe. I only know that it gives me perspective, and to get that in return for a few mosquito bites and blisters is the finest bargain since the Alaska Purchase.

It's the following Monday at eight in the morning. I'm sure about the time because I'm wearing my wristwatch. I arrive at work and hang up my field jacket. It smells of wood smoke.

'Welcome back to reality,' says my colleague.

'No,' I say. 'I've just left it.'

Below:
Kemijoki River

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Photo: Torridon, A. Torode

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