


AUTUMN 2017

Wild Land News

Magazine of the Scottish Wild Land Group

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**Scotland's Wild Land Areas:
What are they?
Where are they?**

Personal Views of Wild Land

Wind Turbines on Orkney

Removal of a hill track

Autumn 2017

WILD LAND NEWS

Issue 91

Magazine of the
Scottish Wild Land Group

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Individual articles do not
necessarily reflect the views of
the SWLG Steering Team.

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Page of Inca by James Fenton

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Please note our AGM is in Birnam on 4th November, followed by a talk from Chris Townsend. Please join us if you can. See details on **page 38** and on our website.

*Front cover: The summit of Beinn Eighe, Torridon, with the new R. Grudie hydro dam in the foreground
See also photo on page 8
Left: A gorge on the R. Grudie; Slioch in the background
Photos: James Fenton*

James Fenton

Editorial

There has been some interesting correspondence recently on wild land. Writing in *The Herald* about SNH's Wild Land Areas [see page 12 below], David Johnstone of Scottish Land and Estates states:

“There is almost nowhere in Scotland which has been shaped only by nature and therefore might be considered wild land or wilderness.” But I would argue that the evidence suggests that in large tracts of upland Scotland natural forces rather than human activity have been dominant in shaping the vegetation pattern: the area is as wild as any remaining in Europe. And we should be doing our best to protect it.

However issues are rarely black and white and there are degrees of naturalness: indeed, a recent IUCN report on wilderness states clearly that most wildernesses have been influenced to a greater or lesser extent by people, or at least have had a human population. In spite of this, I think we would all agree that there are

locations on this planet where natural forces are still the main determinant of the vegetation pattern, *i.e.* wilderness does exist. It is also possible to re-create wild land where it no longer exists, the concept behind ‘rewilding’.

David Cameron, currently chair of Community Land Scotland, said at the organisation's annual conference on Skye that “there is now a range of established views, policies and forms of designation on land use, that seek or have the effect of keeping our countryside devoid of people. Those policies value emptiness, what some perceive as wildness, and give scenic considerations a higher value, it can seem, than the value of having people in the landscape.”

I am sad to read this and it seems a hark back to the confrontational debates of the 1980s. It also annoys me, as someone who, from an early age has lived much of his life in the Highlands, because it implies that, as a supporter of wild land, I don't like

Those arguing the need to keep some areas wild have a long uphill struggle

people and want to thwart local communities' reasonable expectations! I would argue that his view does not in fact reflect a true understanding of the history of the Highlands because even though The Clearances emptied many glens, there always have been large, unpopulated areas. To quote Haldane in his book *The Drove Roads of Scotland*:

“When cross-country droving on an appreciable scale first began, and for many a year thereafter, a great part of the Highland and upland areas of the country was common land, or at the least land which, while nominally owned by the local chieftain, was in fact unused and uncared for. In the earliest rentals for Islay and Kintyre ...

“The figures representing the total of the ‘merk lands’ held by the tacksmen from the local chieftains do not amount to more than about one-third of the total extent of these areas as shown on modern maps. The rest was

wasteland which was gradually merged into the tacksmen's holdings with the progress of agriculture.

“... not until sheep farming on a large scale became common in the Highlands were these upland areas put to fuller use than for the grazing of cattle from the shielings in summer and early autumn.”

The comments above from David Johnstone and David Cameron show that those such as SWLG arguing the need to keep some areas wild still have a long uphill struggle ...

The SWLG Steering Team would like to thank George Charles for editing the last few issues; and also Chrissie Valuri and Calum Brown who have moved to Germany and so left the team.

Note: To contact the new editor please use the email address james@swlg.org.uk



Paps of Jura by James Fenton

Beryl Leatherland

Update on recent SWLG activity

SWLG Steering Team members scrutinise development proposals that may impact on wild land. Our main focus has to be on landscape but we also consider the issues listed on the back cover.

As we are all volunteers, time is limited. It is frustrating that we do not have the capacity to respond to all the applications that concern us. For example, the scoping of an extension to the Lochluichart windfarm, which would involve a new sweep of the tallest commercially available wind turbines being erected between Loch Glascarnoch and the eastern edge of the existing wind farm. We objected to the original windfarm many years ago, as did lots of individuals and other organisations, but it was nevertheless eventually constructed and commissioned.

In June this year, I took the opportunity to go up Ben Wyvis. I knew that I would be able to see the nearby Lochluichart windfarm but was depressed to see just how dominant in the landscape it

was as viewed from the ascent, even on the lower slopes. However, I am not against the principle of windfarms: they have a place in our overall generation capacity as we are currently over-reliant on fossil fuels.

SWLG is on the government's Energy Consents Unit's consultee list, so developers send us their Section 36 proposal documents. The number of major energy proposals has reduced since the change in the subsidy regime, but they have by not ceased. If anyone can offer us some help in this work in scrutinising documents and identifying areas of concern please contact us.

In addition, we receive alerts about undesirable applications through the Scottish Environment LINK Hilltracks work via our valued monitors who diligently scrutinise local authority and National Park online planning portals. Over recent years, there have been huge numbers of applications for run-of-river hydro schemes, an apparently benign



The Loch Luichart Wind Farm by Peter Dunn

matter, but their construction has resulted in unsightly, often over-engineered tracks up many glens and on hillsides. These are often associated with peat damage, poor restoration, erosion and habitat damage. The LINK Hilltracks group is supporting the Munro Society in their work in monitoring this, and SWLG has commented on or objected to some application proposals.

Action since last AGM

- We responded to the Scottish Government (SG) *Places, People and Planning* consultation, stressing the importance of wild land, the SNH map and the lack of democracy in the planning system as shown by the inappropriate use of some permitted development rights – specifically justifying hill tracks that may be used for other purposes – and the lack of an Equal Right of Appeal. We also responded to the more recent SG position paper on planning, and since our previous comments had not been taken into account, we took the opportunity to reiterate them. We now await the Planning Bill, expected at the year end.

- We commented on SNH’s draft *Assessing Impacts on Wild Land Areas – Technical Guidance* and the SNH and Historic Environment Scotland’s on *Local Landscape Areas*.

- We objected to the proposed Birneyknowe wind farm, south of Hawick, on landscape grounds. This went to a public inquiry, to which we were invited to contribute but were not able to do so. We were invited to two other inquiries as a result of previous objections to applications for similar schemes but to date have not had the capacity to engage. If you are able to offer experience in this area, we would like to hear from you!

- We objected to the proposal to upgrade peaty tracks to narrow stone tracks at Camusrory Lodge, Loch Nevis, in a wild land area. There seems to be some increase in the number of applications to repair tracks that have been damaged by over-use, when there was no definite track there originally, or maybe just a lovely old stalkers’ path. Such tracks can



The new R. Grudie hydro scheme in Torridon by James Fenton

end up being over-engineered and prominent features of the landscape. There can also be a fine line in interpretation between repair and creation of a new track.

- In 2016 the Steering Team, under the auspices of Nick Kempe, had a site visit in the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, to look at the standard of construction and restoration of hydro tracks in the Glen Falloch area. Nick subsequently gave us an excellent presentation followed by a discussion at our AGM.
- During this year we objected to the Ben More hydro scheme proposal at Crianlarich. There is already a commissioned hydro scheme at Benmore farm which, although well-built, is still an

eyesore in the views of some, and there are several concerns about the new scheme.

- One application that caused a deluge of email activity was the new ski road at Glencoe, from the car park and traversing at a high level up on to the ski plateau. This would potentially scar the hillside and have some impact on the scenic approach to Glencoe from the west. We objected on several grounds. The Highland Council decided that it needed an EIA, so an Environmental Statement was submitted by the developer and the scheme was approved. There are conditions attached to this regarding requirements to follow the mitigation strategies that have been identified. As we know, hard pressed planning departments rarely monitor

delivery of conditions in such locations, so at least one of us will try to pay a visit to look at progress on the ground.

- An Camus Mor, the proposed new town near Aviemore continues to cause controversy. We objected to the recent Section 42 variation condition of ‘planning permission in principle’. We have kept an eye on this complex planning issue and have supported our colleagues in the Cairngorms Campaign and the Badenoch & Strathspey Conservation Group, who have contributed an enormous amount of effort to this work. Despite numerous objections, planning permission has now been granted for a further three years. There are implications for access rights in efforts to reduce impacts on landscape and ecology. We await the Access Management Plan with interest.

The list above is not exhaustive, but we try to ensure that our letters of objection and comment are posted on our website www.swlg.org.uk

We occasionally sign up to some Scottish Environment LINK responses to major consultations where usually a member of staff in one of the bigger organisations takes the lead in drawing up a draft, although we have done so

in the past. This is an extremely useful way of enabling small charities like ours to contribute and benefit from a range of expertise.

We are also members of the LINK Hilltracks campaign which I co-convene with Helen Todd of Ramblers Scotland. After some fund-raising earlier this year, we have been able to employ Mel Nicoll on a temporary consultancy basis. The Hilltracks work area has been particularly busy this year with lots of new information coming in and several meetings.

We have a plea for information and help with this campaign on our own website as well as that of our campaign supporter charities, and it is pleasing that some SWLG members have responded and sent in useful material. Our aim is to have Hilltracks brought into the full planning system; we achieved a significant change in that they are now covered by the Prior Notification process, but this could be greatly improved upon as we have found that some unsatisfactory matters have still not been addressed.

There is a lot happening and we hope to update you more fully in the next edition of the magazine. In the meantime, please keep an eye on the website.

SNH invited us to contribute to an initial scoping meeting with several other environmental organisations to discuss the SNP manifesto ambition for an Upland Vision. The outcome of this multi-stranded work, after several stakeholder meetings, an online survey and further discussion, can be seen on the SNH website. We now await the decision on any future progress of this concept from the government.

The Government position

The SG's key policy documents are the Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) and the National Planning Framework (NPF3). See page 15 below for the relevant text of these documents. However I do see as worrying the phrase in paragraph 215 of the SPP: "In areas of wild land development may be appropriate in some areas. Further consideration will be required to demonstrate that any significant effects on the quality of these areas can be

substantially overcome by siting, design or other means."

We have already seen several applications for development proposals in Wild Land Areas. Furthermore, Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No. 919, titled *A review of the social, economic and environmental benefits and constraints linked to wild land in Scotland*, available from the SNH website, does perhaps indicate the direction in which the wind is blowing. By the way, I have no criticism at all of the work of SNH, they are merely delivering the requirements of the government; but it will be interesting to see the next iteration of the NPF.

Prospects for wild land

It seems at times that the battle – for that is what it feels like sometimes – to convince others of the short-sightedness involved in spoiling our fine landscapes and their associated features



takes not only constant effort and vigilance, but it is perhaps ultimately fruitless. With the ever increasing sophistication of machinery, intrusion into relatively unspoilt glens and forests is facilitated to such an extent that within only a few days of construction teams being on site devastation can result. In addition, landowners, land managers and, increasingly, complex financial consortia, have support through the Scottish Government's ambitions for economic growth.

The planning system encourages development, but economic benefits can be exaggerated, and jobs often don't materialise in the numbers expected. There is a lot of aspiration described in policy around front-loading, community involvement, public consultation and so on, but the public at large has very little ability to influence planning decisions. Despite the fine rhetoric there is a huge democratic deficit in the planning system.

The legal system is of little help either, with a few zealous QCs at Inquiries arguing cases for their clients based on legal issues and procedures that to the layman seem far removed from matters of concern on the ground. Look at the Stronelairg Windfarm case, which was outstanding for the

persistent and courageous campaign sustained by the John Muir Trust.

In a nutshell, the case was not argued on the merits of the development, but on points of law. SWLG, along with others, supported the actions of the JMT throughout their long campaign; they were not successful, it was a costly, demanding and stressful business, but they highlighted the problems that exist in the system and at least JMT survived, with its reputation enhanced: licking their wounds perhaps, but able to carry on with their campaigning work.

It can be questioned whether our current approach to securing better protection for wild land is working. There is a strong case for revising our advocacy strategies and for developing alternative approaches that will achieve more successful outcomes.

Beryl Leatherland is convenor of the Scottish Wild Land Group.

She is also co-convenor of the Scottish LINK Hill Tracks Campaign: see <http://www.scotlink.org/work-areas/link-hill-tracks-campaign/>

The planning system encourages development, but economic benefits can be exaggerated

James Fenton

SNH's Wild Land Areas & Government Policy

For more information on this topic see Scottish Natural Heritage's web pages:

<http://www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/looking-after-landscapes/landscape-policy-and-guidance/wild-land/>

The SNH approach

The Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) website has a section on wild land where the following is stated:

“For many people, one of Scotland's defining characteristics is its 'wilder' landscapes – extensive, largely semi-natural areas with minimal signs of human influence. Often found in the north and west, these can be mountains, hills and moorland, stretches of undeveloped coast or large areas of peat bog.

“These wilder landscapes have a distinct and special character, which is increasingly rare to find and distinguishes Scotland from much of the rest of the UK and many parts of Europe. A key component of Scotland's identity, they bring significant economic

benefits, attracting visitors and tourists. Many people derive psychological and spiritual benefit from their existence, and they provide increasingly important havens for Scotland's wildlife. SNH has published two reviews of the range of benefits (and constraints) attributed to these landscapes, in 2006 and 2017.

“Surveys have revealed strong and widespread support for safeguarding these landscapes. For example a 2012 survey found that 77% of the Scottish population believe it is very important to protect wild areas in Scotland, and 60% felt these areas were under threat (this 2012 review also provides an overview of earlier surveys).”

Mapping wild land

In June 2014 SNH published a map which identified the remaining core areas of wild land in Scotland. There are 42 such areas which are shown on the map in the centre spread of this magazine, and which are also listed in the table below. The SNH

website gives a full description of every wild land area, including a detailed map and the key attributes and qualities of each one.

The SNH process of mapping wild land is as follows: “Wildness is a quality experienced by people when visiting places of a certain character. Measuring wildness is inherently difficult, as people respond differently according to their personal experience and their expectations of a place. However, we consider wildness depends on four physical attributes being present, which can be measured and mapped.

“The Wild Land Areas are the result of a three phase analysis. **Phase I** applied GIS analysis to map the relative wildness of all of

Scotland, using four physical attributes:

- **Perceived naturalness**
- **Rugged or challenging terrain**
- **Remoteness from public mechanised access**
- **Visible lack of built development and other modern artefacts.**

“These four layers have been combined to produce a map of **Relative Wildness of Scotland** [see page 14 below].

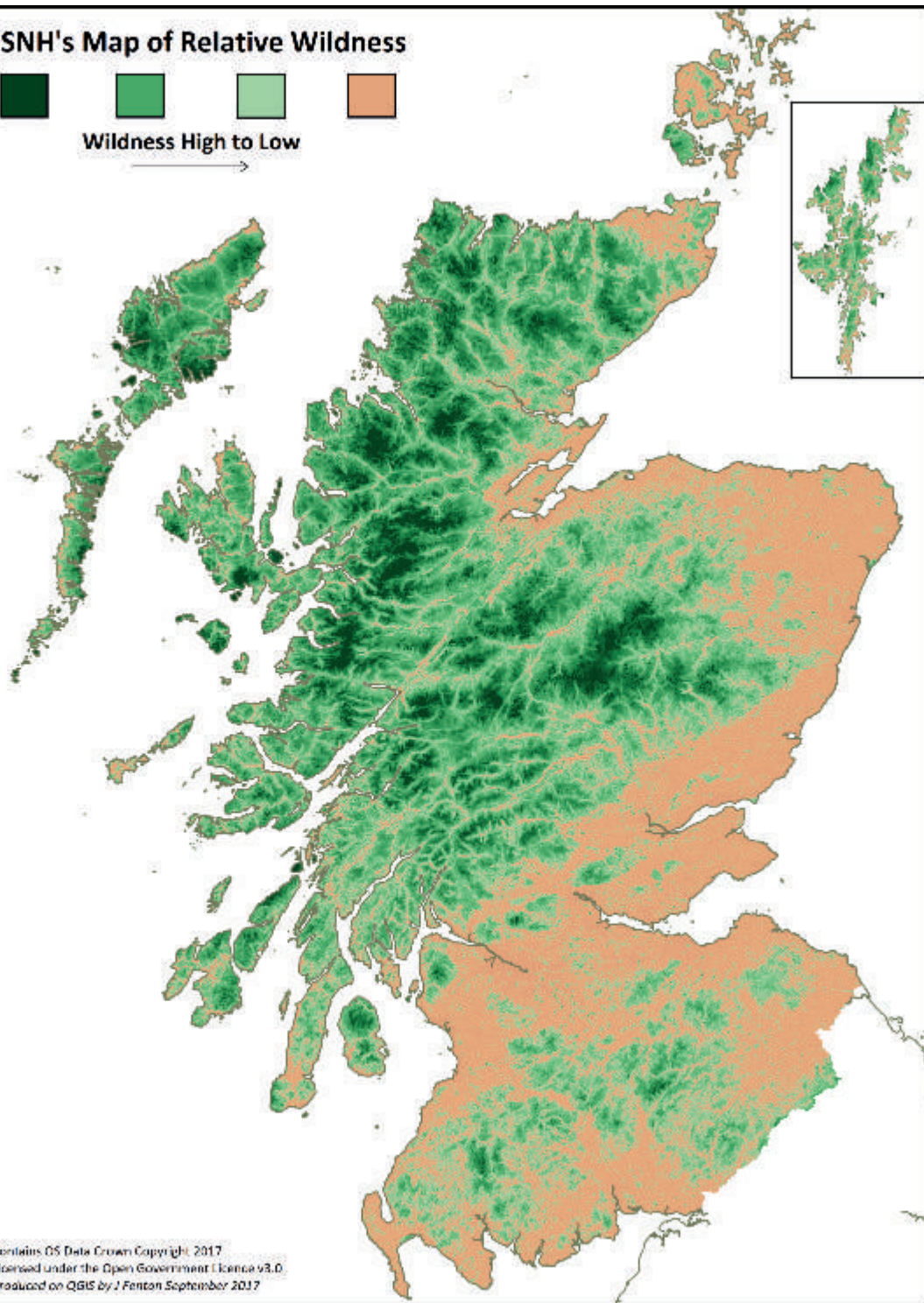
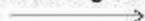
“Phase II analysed the data to identify the largest and most wild areas (producing a long list of possible areas of wild land). Phase III used informed judgement to select wild land, and define their extent.”



SNH's Map of Relative Wildness



Wildness High to Low



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Produced on QGIS by J Fenton September 2017

Planning policy

SNH states that “Wild Land Areas are the most extensive areas of high wildness. They are identified as nationally important in Scottish Planning Policy, but are not a statutory designation. The areas have been identified following a consultation in 2013 on our Core areas of wild land map. This informed the preparation of the new map and our advice to Government.

“The Scottish Government's third National Planning Framework recognises wild land as a "nationally important asset" requiring strong protection. Scottish Planning Policy sets out how this should be achieved, by identifying and safeguarding the character of Wild Land Areas (WLAs) in Development Plans and in Spatial Frameworks for onshore wind farms, and considering the effect of development on these areas.”

National Planning Framework

The Scottish Government's strategic planning overview is given in its National Planning Framework 3, available to download here: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0045/00453683.pdf>

It has two references to wild land, in paragraphs 3.23 & 4.4 [emphasis added]:

“Rural communities will benefit from well-planned renewable energy development ...

3.23 Onshore wind will continue to make a significant contribution to diversification of energy supplies. We do not wish to see wind farm development in our National Parks and National Scenic Areas. Scottish Planning Policy sets out the required approach to spatial frameworks which will guide new wind energy development to appropriate locations, taking into account important features including wild land.

“4.4 Scotland's landscapes are spectacular, contributing to our quality of life, our national identity and the visitor economy. Landscape quality is found across Scotland and all landscapes support place-making. National Scenic Areas and National Parks attract many visitors and reinforce our international image. We also want to continue our strong protection for our wildest landscapes – wild land is a nationally important asset. Closer to settlements landscapes have an important role to play in sustaining local distinctiveness and cultural identity, and in supporting health and well-being.”

Scottish Planning Policy

The Scottish Government's policy on wild land is given in their

Measuring wildness is inherently difficult



Scottish Planning Policy (2014) which is available to download at: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/Policy>

The policy gives guidance on local authority **Development Plans** where it states in relation to **coastal areas**:

“91. Plans should safeguard unspoiled sections of coast which possess special environmental or cultural qualities, such as wild land. The economic value of these areas should be considered and maximised, provided that environmental impact issues can be satisfactorily addressed.”

In relation to the **siting of wind farms**, the policy identifies:

“**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.” Within this Group “other nationally important mapped environmental interests” are listed including “areas of wild land as shown on the 2014 SNH map of wild land areas.”

In terms of **Development Management** the policy states:

“169. Proposals for energy infrastructure developments should always take account of spatial frameworks for wind farms and heat maps where these are relevant. Considerations will vary relative to the scale of the proposal and area characteristics

but are likely to include: ...
landscape and visual impacts,
including effects on wild land.”

In the section “**Valuing the Natural Environment**” wild land is mentioned as follows in relation to Development Plans:

“200. Wild land character is displayed in some of Scotland’s remoter upland, mountain and coastal areas, which 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 ...”

“Areas of Wild Land:

“215. In areas of wild land (see paragraph 200), development

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.”

No statutory protection

Paragraph 200 above is the key statement in the planning policy; however, although the National Planning Framework identifies wild land as a nationally important asset, SNH’s Wild Land Areas are not underpinned by any legislation. Hence in planning terms, there is no legal duty for any individual or organisation to protect them. The only protection is provided in the Scottish Planning Policy given above, where the language is the weak



The Inverasdale peninsula, Wester Ross:
Wild, but not in a Wild Land Area

‘Consideration should be given to wild land ...’ rather than ‘Wild land is protected by law.’

It should be noted, though, that a view expressed by many people in the Highlands is that there is no such as thing as wild land because all the land has at one time been peopled and managed, and hence is not in a pristine, natural or wild state. Additionally, bearing in mind the history of the Highlands, there is a general resistance to outsiders coming in and telling people how their land should be managed.

Of course naturalness is never clear cut and people across the planet have been impacting on the naturalness of most areas of the earth. However I would argue that over much of the Highland upland landscape, at least until the last century or so, there has been minimal management of the land, many areas have always been unpopulated and we have wild areas as good as any on the planet – an issue for a future article.

Hence in my view there is true wild land in Scotland and many areas would meet the IUCN’s definition of wilderness:

“Usually large unmodified or slightly modified areas, retaining their natural character and influence...”

However there is a second criterium:

“...which are protected and managed so as to preserve their natural condition”

which, it could be argued, is not fully met in Scotland.

Note also that wildness is not exclusive to the Wild Land Areas: it can be found in many smaller areas of Scotland.

Guidance planned

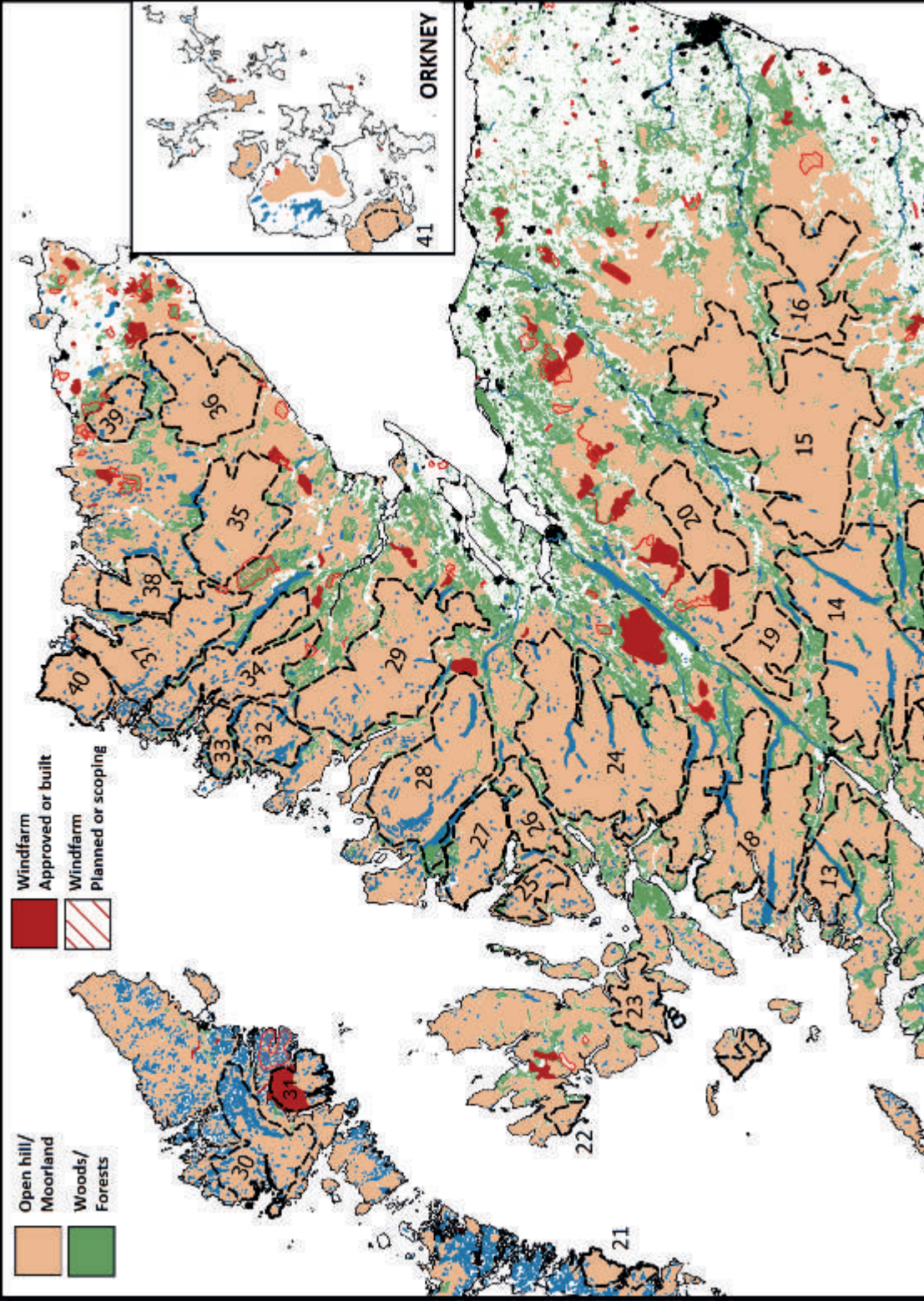
SNH is currently developing detailed guidance on how to assess the impact of any particular development on the wild land qualities of an area. So watch this space ...

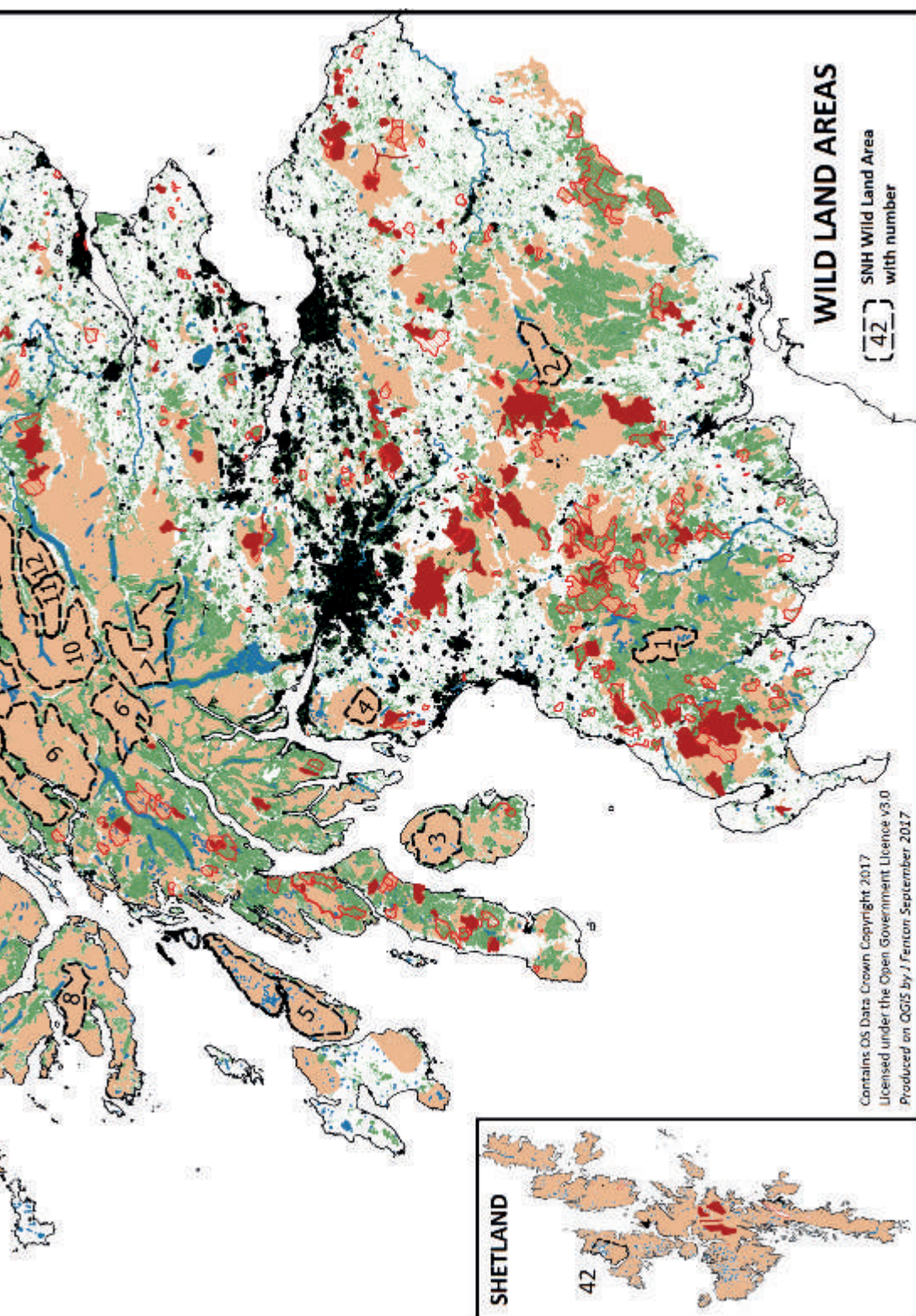
Photos & Maps: James Fenton

Wildness
is not
exclusive
to Wild
Land
Areas

SNH WILD LAND AREAS

No.	Name	Area (ha)
1	Merrick	8,176
2	Talla – Hart fell	9,335
3	North Arran	11,751
4	Waterhead Moor – Muirshiel	5,016
5	Jura, Scarba Lunga and Garvellachs	27,862
6	Ben Lui	14,497
7	Ben More – Ben Ledi	21,213
8	Ben More, Mull	8,720
9	Loch Etive mountains	50,674
10	Breadalbane – Schiehallion	44,840
11	Lyon – Lochay	7,297
12	Ben Lawers	8,143
13	Moidart – Ardgour	37,355
14	Rannoch – Nevis – Mamores – Alder	118,042
15	Cairngorms	157,225
16	Lochnagar – Mount Keen	53,583
17	Rum	6,957
18	Kinlochhourn – Knoydart – Morar	106,505
19	Braeroy – Glenshirra – Creag Meagaidh	26,460
20	Monadhliath	33,978
21	South Uist hills	10,005
22	Duirinish	4,469
23	Cuillin	18,324
24	Central Highlands	132,703
25	Applecross	13,662
26	Coulin & Ledgowan Forest	20,867
27	Flowerdale – Shieldaig – Torridon	31,782
28	Fisherfield – Letterewe – Fannichs	80,441
29	Rhiddoroch – Beinn Dearg – Ben Wyvis	90,467
30	Harris – Uig hills	45,270
31	Eisgein	14,197
32	Inverpolly – Glencanisp	20,544
33	Quinag	10,446
34	Reay – Cassley	55,997
35	Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest	53,023
36	Causeymire – Knockfin Flows	51,404
37	Foinaven – Ben Hee	56,907
38	Ben Hope – Ben Loyal	22,085
39	East Halladale Flows	15,899
40	Cape Wrath	22,106
41	Hoy	4,990
42	Ronas Hill & North Roe	4,110
	TOTAL	1,537,326
	Land area Scotland	7,877,000
	% land area	20%

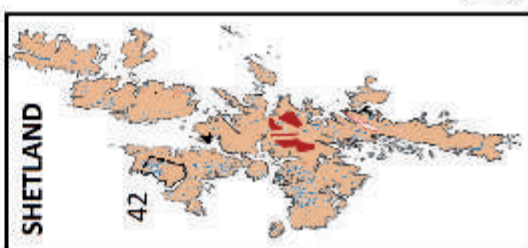




WILD LAND AREAS

SMH Wild Land Area
with number

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SHETLAND

42

Personal Views on Wild Land

Beryl Leatherland

Is there any truly wild land in Scotland? Absolutely, I think there is anyway, plenty of it. But you have to seek it out, and then keep your special place a secret.

An essential feature of wild land to my mind is scale – big skies, open vistas, enabling one to step out and breathe deeply. To experience this usually means attaining some altitude, but not always. Rocky coastal locations can be exhilarating and breathtaking, especially in wild weather and scudding skies. But as a dreadfully nausea prone sailor I must keep my feet on land.

Ambience is important: challenging winds, snow to flatter the landscape and enhance the beauty of its form, wildlife to emphasise the point of it all, one's mental state, being alone on a trip, difficult conditions, moonlit clouds, the weather, all contribute to a sense of wildness. There must be a lack of intrusion and human generated noise –

especially of road traffic and aeroplanes, the scourges of modern life. Mobiles must preferably be left at home.

Mind you, I'm quite partial to the adrenalin surge I get from a fighter jet on a training flight suddenly emerging from nowhere like a bullet flying low and fast along a remote glen or over a col. I remember clambering up and clinging to some wet greasy friable rockface on a truly godforsaken Scottish cliff when my experience was considerably elevated to joy by a jet roaring past, fast and unbelievably close, beneath me; the superb engineering of the machine and the skill and bravery of the young fellow at the controls emphasising my vulnerable position.

I have been fortunate to have had the opportunity to camp on Svalbard and in remote parts of Patagonia and the Caucasus, and even in summer and in the company of others I felt that I was in true wildernesses. In Scotland

—————
We cannot
take wild
land for
granted

however, a crucial feature is missing; the absence of a large mammalian predator. However remote your camp is, you have no need to consider the possibility of a living thing being out there that is higher in the food chain than you are! The time may be right, during this phase of deliberations over Land Use and a possible Vision for the Uplands, for a national discussion and wide ranging consultation on species re-introductions such as the European Lynx and to learn from the experiences of other countries and the research they have carried out.

We cannot take what wild land we have left in Scotland for granted. There are so many intruders and plunderers of our diminishing wild land resources that we must guard all we have and strenuously oppose those who seek to spoil it via ill conceived developments; we must try to show them the immense value of what they may

inadvertently destroy, while recognising and trying to counteract some of the political and economic realities of life.

Tim Ambrose

I came to live in Scotland over 40 years ago so that I could go hillwalking in what I thought of as wild Scotland. I still love Scotland, though the wild places seem to be becoming harder to find. But I also agree that it is hard to define Wild Land.

Probably the wildest place I have ever been is on the summit plateau of Franklin Island, a remote and uninhabited volcanic island in the Ross Sea of Antarctica. Franklin Island is half covered by a dirty ice-cap and glacier, inhabited only by a lively, noisy and smelly colony of Adelie penguins who live near the shore, and has no plants or vegetation cover at all. The summit plateau is reached by a steep struggle up friable black ashy gravel, and is

completely devoid of any signs of human existence, fiercely windswept, and completely inhospitable.

Yet, the day I was there it didn't really feel *wild* to me – because I was part of a large



Adelie penguins, Antarctica



Beinn Dearg

group from our ice-breaker, all clad in similar bright weather-wear, with a guide from the ship to explain the geology, it hadn't taken any real effort to get there, no risk or hazard, and there was the sanctuary of a warm cabin just a short zodiac's ride away.

So I must agree that wild land is as much a state of mind as an objective fact – wild land in Scotland may be less remote than in many inhospitable places on Earth, but if it has taken a long uneven walk in to get there, alone and meeting no-one else, mist or rain not far off, and nothing to see beyond moorland or rock, crags and perhaps a few bent trees, this feels wild to me. Even a rough damp bothy can be pretty wild. A giant wind farm, with all its roads, hardstanding, concrete,

rubbish and thumping, completely destroys the wild, and this can never be reversed. Wildness is gone for ever from yet another area. That is the tragedy of what is happening now.

George Charles

I find it easier to think in terms of a wild land experience rather than 'wild land'. To me a wild land experience is a meeting of the landscape with a receptive person. Therefore, when I use an area as 'wild land' what I mean is that it's 'an area in which it is possible to have a wild land experience'. It follows that different people will have different ideas of what wild land is although it's remarkably easy to find a broad consensus of where the core areas of wild land in Scotland lie. Some people don't acknowledge the existence of

wild land at all as they are not receptive to that sort of thing. The usual answers people come up with (distance from road, lack of human artefacts etc) are certainly factors but ultimately it's in the eye of the beholder so if you feel like you're in an area of wild land; you are.

The Highland landscape has played an integral role in forming my personality and sense of self. The quiet rhythm of time spent alone in wild places has become an emotional backdrop to the rest of my life. I welcome landscape based designations as I believe the landscape has intrinsic value which supersedes any economic or ecological issues. The landscape should be protected for its own sake, not frozen in time but given due regard in any decision making processes.

Peter Willimott

As a young schoolboy in Norfolk in the late 1950's I spent harvest time riding a horse with cart in the fields collecting the corn sheaths. I graduated to a tractor in the 60's although initially the clutch had to be raised by wooden blocks so I could reach it! (So much for health and safety). The tractor on the small farm where I worked heralded the start of mechanisation in the local agriculture. Hedgerows began to be uprooted as fields were

enlarged. I became appalled and inserted a standard paragraph in most of my school essays deploring the destruction of the beautiful English Countryside which spread like a quilt over the ground.

In 1970, shortly after my arrival in Scotland, I began hill walking in earnest and my concept of 'wild land' changed. The fields in Norfolk, although important, I no longer considered as 'wild land'. I recently retraced a walk in Norfolk enjoyed as a schoolboy, and although the walk was nostalgic any feeling of wildness I remembered as a child walking footpaths across fields was gone. My concept of 'quality' with the resultant 'certain mood' described by Nash below had changed:

"There is no specific material thing that is wilderness. The term designates 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. Wilderness, in short, is so heavily freighted with meaning of a personal, symbolic, and changing kind as to resist easy definition".

(Nash, 1982, *Wilderness and the American Mind*).

As a mathematician I was impressed by a talk I attended in

It's remarkably easy to find a broad consensus of where the core areas of wild land in Scotland lie



the early 80's given by Bob Aitken (1977). Bob related the 'wildness' of a point to the time to reach it, calculated using Naismith's formula from the nearest motorable track. The longer the time the 'wilder' the point. I had just completed the Aonach Eagach ridge in Glencoe when I heard this. The ridge overlooks the A82 and, although close in terms of horizontal distance, is about 2 hours in walking time from the road using Naismith's formulae. I certainly felt I was in a wild place as I transverse the ridge despite the noise of traffic filtering through from below.

Bob's method introduced an objective assessment to a subjective subject and now plays a key part in the mapping of wild land areas.

Wild Land can be important for straightforward commercial reasons. It can attract 'casual' visitors as is happening, perhaps to excess, in Skye currently. Other visitors may take part in outdoor leisure activities. Perhaps less obvious is the commercial importance of storing pure water and the use of soils and vegetation for carbon storage.

On a personal level the importance of wild land derives from the spiritual feelings derived from walking, often in remote places, enjoying the views and observing wildlife. Some of the walking may be challenging and may require navigational skills giving rise to a feeling of achievement when accomplished. During part of my working career the contrast between my office bound life, which occupied most weekdays and many a weekend, and the limited weekend time available for hillwalking was invaluable.

Reference

Aitken, Robert (1977) *Wilderness Areas In Scotland*, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Aberdeen.

Photos: James Fenton

The importance of wild land derives from the spiritual feelings derived



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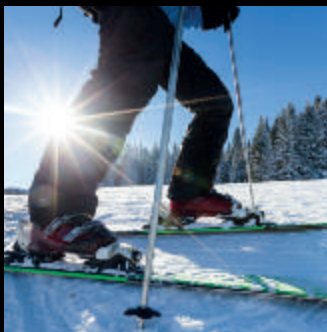
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David Watson

Wind Turbines: Power vs Landscape High Voltage Interlink for Orkney?

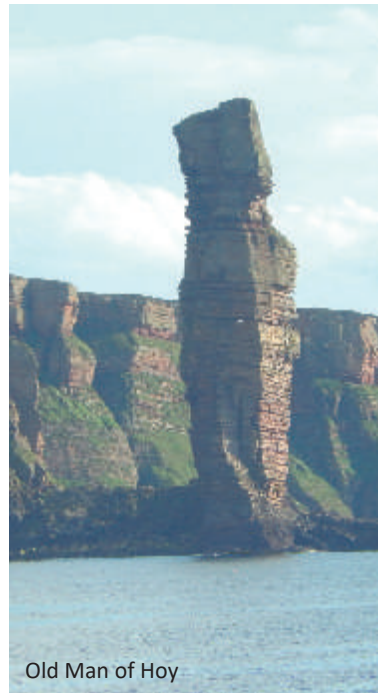
There is considerable concern within the general public as to the large areas of land required to generate what are very low, and unpredictably intermittent, levels of electricity output from wind turbines.

Whitelee on Fenwick Moor near Glasgow has readily available detailed performance data. With the original windfarm occupying 55 square kilometres (sqkm), an area almost identical to the city of Aberdeen its output averages 2watts/square metre (sqm).

Our domestic electric showers are rated typically from 6.5 -10.5kW (kilo, or thousand, watts). If we choose a single shower rated at a very typical 8kW then to generate this power using wind turbines requires a land use of 4000 sqm at 2 watts/sqm output ($8000/2$) – an area equivalent to the playing surface of Hampden Park.

In recent years there has been considerable discussion regarding future provision of two high voltage interlinks from Orkney to

the Scottish mainland. One is projected at 200 megawatts (MW) alternating current and the other at 600MW direct current giving a total link capacity of 800MW which is almost equivalent to 80% of the capacity of Hunterston nuclear power station.



Old Man of Hoy

Whilst Whitelee average output is almost 30% of installed capacity it may be reasonable to determine that Orkney windfarms can provide, at the upper estimate, 45% of their installed capacity over an average year. The average for UK offshore wind in 2015 was 41.4% (ex BIES-UK Dept of Business and Industrial Strategy) and this would deliver 3 Watts/sqm.

Whilst there is considerable ongoing research and testing of marine generating devices in Orkney waters there remains a concern that commercial and political pressure will be put upon Orkney Islands Council to permit “ready now”/ “quick return” wind turbine generation to be allocated considerable interconnector capacity.

Based upon this upper expectation average Orkney output of 45% of installed capacity then to average 400MW output yearly will require a windfarm installed capacity of

approximately 890MW (400/0.45).

This would approach the installed capacity of the London Array (phases 1 and 2) which was, at design the largest offshore windfarm in the world. If a similar rating of wind turbine to those at Whitelee of 2.3MW were used then this installed capacity would require 387 turbines (890/2.3) each more than 100m tall to the blade tips.

The minimum approximate land area required to generate, on average, 400MW for export at 3 watts/sqm in Orkney will be $400/3 = 133.3\text{sqkm}$. This is a quarter of the area of Mainland Orkney (524 sqkm) and approximately 2.5 times the area of Aberdeen city.

For a range of average annual generation the following table lists the required wind turbine quantities where each is rated 2.3MW as at Whitelee :





Annual Avege Output (MW)	Installed Capacity (MW)	Total Turbines	Land Area (sqkm)
400	890	387	133
300	667	290	100
200	445	194	67

Note that for an annual average output of just 200MW the windfarm land area required is still 20% bigger than the city of Aberdeen

Because wind turbines cast wind shadows we cannot increase the power generated/unit area to minimise the land use. Spacing of 5 times blade diameter is the accepted technical constraint. Bigger turbines will require to be spaced further apart.

Large scale corporate applicants will also prefer their installations to be concentrated in the minimum area possible for interconnection costs avoidance and it will therefore be reasonable to anticipate that huge pressure will be put upon the Scenic Areas, Strategic Open Spaces, Areas of Significant

Protection and World Heritage Sensitive Ridgelines etc .

The Development Plan 2017 “Areas Where Windfarms are not Acceptable” now only applies around north Hoy and south of an E-W parallel fairly close to and north of Skara Brae the Ring of Brodgar and Maeshowe in Neolithic Orkney. This, apparently, will allow wind turbines to be erected and be clearly visible in an area that is largely flat and around 4 kilometres of the World Heritage sites of the Ness and Ring of Brodgar across the Loch of Harray.

In addition large tracts previously coded as “Areas of Potential Constraint” are now described as “Areas with Potential for Windfarm Development”.

Other than in North Hoy the outer isles no longer have any areas where wind farms are declared not acceptable.

One wonders what the passengers on the ca. 140 cruise ships visiting Orkney annually would make of these beautiful islands forested with typically 100m tall turbines?

Given the potential scale of windfarm development that could follow 800MW capacity interlinks to Scotland, it and the environmental objectives of the Spatial Strategy objectives within the Development Plan, plus Orkney's £31m/year tourism industry, are unlikely to be able to co-exist.

Orkney needs to examine its long term priorities. This is a concern equally applicable to the rest of Scotland.

David is a Chartered electrical engineer who spent almost his entire career in major project design for one of the world's largest energy engineering companies.

He has been published widely and has written technical appraisals for several leading engineering journals on the status of the UK Grid resulting from the uncoordinated and un-modelled development, particularly the expansion of renewables following privatisation.

In this article David has updated his previously submitted comments on the Orkney "Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance" to address the recently circulated March 2017 Draft of the Orkney Local Development Plan.

Photos of Orkney: David Watson

Orkney needs to examine its long term priorities



Removal of the Beinn a’Bhuird track

In 1997 National Trust for Scotland (NTS) started an innovative scheme to fill in an obtrusive vehicle track. 20 years later Andrew Painting takes a look at how things are progressing.

In 2016, in *Wild Land News*, Beryl Leatherland wrote of a new wave of hill tracks wending their way up into wild land areas, and SWLG’s Herculean efforts to bring the issue greater public attention. She noted that “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.”

In 1973 Adam Watson wrote an article in *Mountain Life* magazine decrying a new wave of hill tracks wending their way across the Cairngorms: “Many of these roads have been bulldozed right on to high plateaux on Beinn a’Bhuird, Glas Maol, Moine Mhor and many other hills, where estate Land Rovers can leave the road and be

driven easily over the vegetation, causing fresh scars on untouched vegetation miles from the roads themselves.”

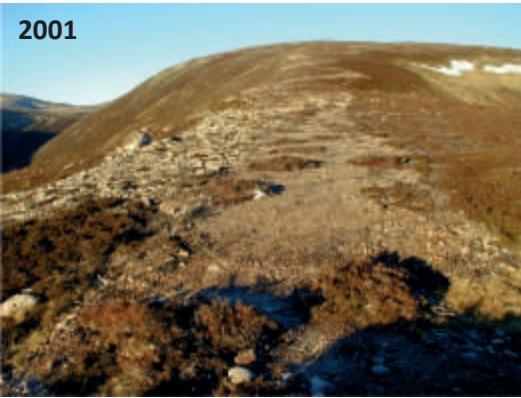
The development of hill tracks in Wild Land Areas is an issue that has stubbornly refused to go away. There is, however, hope for the future: Beryl’s article explained recent developments in the campaign against the development of new hill tracks, and how we can all help bring the issue to a head.

But what of the hill tracks that have already been created? Back in 1997, NTS embarked on an innovative scheme to remove hill tracks from Mar Lodge Estate in the heart of the Cairngorms, including one track that led right to the top of Beinn a’Bhuird. The work was to prove both pioneering and challenging, and the results are there for all to see.

Beinn a’Bhuird is a place of gentle gradients and long slopes, home to dotterel, ptarmigan and snow bunting. In the 1960s these very

The work was to prove both pioneering and challenging

2001



2017



qualities suggested to its owners that it would make a good base for skiing. In 1963 a track was bulldozed up the hill to an altitude of 1,060 metres.

Although skiing never took off, the track was subsequently used by stalkers, shooters and hill walkers. When NTS acquired Mar Lodge Estate in 1995 it was felt that the land could be wilder, and that one way to do this was to remove vehicle tracks.

How it was done

Work started in 1997. First, the original ground profile was resculpted with spoil from the track sides using a digger. Drains were removed. What was once a vehicle track was reduced to an unobtrusive and very serviceable footpath. Next came the hard bit: transplanting thousands of individual plants and plate-sized turfs of heather, blaeberry and grasses. Plants were sourced from the surrounding area to ensure genetic viability and site

suitability. All work above 900m was completed by hand. Plants were transplanted from the old spoil heaps and within 60m of the track. Herein lay a problem – a lack of plants. The plateau is an airy, cold, well-drained place, and vegetation is at a premium. Only 20-30% of the track could be covered, without causing undue damage to the surrounding area. What would happen?

The results

NTS ecologists have been keeping a very close eye on the track. Vegetation quadrats have been analysed and compared with control quadrats from nearby. Every year fixed point photos are taken of the track to provide a visual record of how the mountain is reclaiming the land, and how the scar is healing over.

The evidence shows that, largely, it has worked. The transplanted plants have survived and started to colonise bare areas of the track. It has been slow progress,

Differences in vegetation between the heather dominated old track with pine seedlings (left) and deer grass dominated untouched ground (right)



as you would expect in a subarctic environment. But a walk up the track – and I urge you all to go and see it for yourselves – will show you a hill that is healing. On the lowest stretches of the hill, heather has completely covered the track so that, unless you know what you are looking for, it has disappeared. Excitingly, Scots pine seedlings are now covering places where Land Rovers used to drive.

As you ascend the hill heather and blaeberry give way to mosses and grasses; sturdy stuff like stiff sedge, wavy hair grass and fescues. Here and there dwarf willow, our most diminutive tree species, is creeping onto the track, as is upland specialist trailing azalea. Thrift, moss campion and dwarf cornel are not too far behind.

Such pioneering work is bound to throw in some curveballs and

there have been some interesting side effects. By creating what was essentially a bare, newly ploughed piece of land, the work favoured fast-colonising species like grasses, sedges and mosses.

Where the track meets the edge of the Caledonian Pinewood of Glen Quoich the filled-in track continues to enjoy better drainage than areas which were never touched. The result? More heather and more pine seedlings than in the surrounding area, and less moisture-loving species like deer grass.

There is also evidence that external environmental factors are at play around Beinn a’Bhuird. The vegetation monitored in the control quadrats has also grown and expanded. There are a number of possible explanations for this, from reduced grazing

pressure to climate change. Future monitoring hopefully will inform us as to how the ecology of the hill is changing.

Twenty years is only the blink of an eye in the life of a mountain some four hundred million years old. Time will tell to what extent the track will heal itself, and how the ecology of the hill will change and develop over time. In the meantime, NTS will continue monitoring the recovery of the track through fixed point photography and five-yearly vegetation surveys.

In our crowded island, a view empty of humans is a great luxury, while a view empty of human influence is an almost impossible dream. The pioneering work done here shows that with persistence, time and (as ever) money, wild land can be reclaimed from hill tracks. The Beinn a’Bhuird track was not the only one to receive NTS’s attention. Similar work was undertaken in Glen Dee, Glen Derry and Glen Luibeg.

This, along with the swathes of newly regenerating Caledonian pinewood, means that there has never been a better time to experience the wildness of Mar Lodge Estate, Britain’s newest, and largest, National Nature Reserve.

Andrew Painting is the NTS Assistant Ecologist at Mar Lodge Estate. Photos: A.Painting

Book Review

OUT THERE: A Voice from the Wild by Chris Townsend

Chris Townsend is speaking at SWLG’s AGM in November: see inside back cover for details. Here Beryl Leatherland reviews his latest book.

This is a book to savour. When I first opened its pages, I was surprised to find no evocative photographs of wonderful wild places. I soon came to appreciate that this might have been deliberate on the part of the author. As I travelled through the book, revelling in Chris’ descriptions of nights under the stars, coping with heavy loads and bad weather, building igloos, absorbing big panoramas, and listening to the sounds of wildlife, I realised that my imagination was on overdrive; I could visualise these landscapes and conditions with Chris, maybe dripping with sweat, rain or condensation, or appreciating a brew in camp after a long day, enjoying immersion in wild places.

Chris has a penchant for what one could call challenging overnight stops. He sleeps in the open whenever he can, he doesn't ever use a bivvy bag. If it rains he usually uses only a tarp if he can tie one up, and retreats to a tent reluctantly in the harshest of weather or when driven to do so by biting insects. I must say he does seem to have a bit of a phobia about the latter, but considering where he has travelled especially in high summer in northern latitudes where the mosquitoes and other biters are enormous and vicious, this is understandable.

He vividly describes the joys of living in a snow shelter or igloo on winter trips. These are hard work to build, yes, especially if you have to build a double wall around the igloo for additional protection, but staying in one is a memorable experience. If you have never tried over-nighting in a snow shelter of some sort you will be tempted to do so by reading this book.

Many readers who are also keen backpackers will appreciate his enjoyment of campsites and the simple pleasures of finding a good pitch with all one needs to hand – a good water supply, good ground and scenic or protective surroundings. He prefers to find a site fairly early in the day so that

he can settle in and enjoy the delights of what his pitch has to offer; listening to the sounds of wildlife, watching the light change as the sun sets, especially over snowfields, and waiting for the rising sun hitting the tent or his sleeping bag and warming everything up. At least that is what happens on a fair weather day.

Chris has had more than his fair share of tough conditions but he says philosophically that looking back on his many trips it is often the rain lashed ones that stand out as they are so challenging and hence unforgettable.

Chris is known for his impressively challenging walks at home and abroad, far and wide; North America, Arctic Canada and Spitzbergen, Europe, the Himalaya, often taking solo journeys on long distance trails and cross country over several weeks. Although he relates some experiences from these trips this book doesn't describe these journeys, Chris has written other books about those.

This one describes the process of making a journey, the walking, carrying a big pack or using a sled, the camping, keeping warm, making a brew, gaining experiences, the pleasures of a journey and surviving with comfort whatever is thrown at

He vividly describes the joys of living in a snow shelter

the traveller. Protecting hands from cold damage to keep them functional and melting sufficient snow or ice to maintain hydration are described; at home we don't even think about these survival strategies but out camping and travelling in winter these become major preoccupations. They have to be in order to survive.

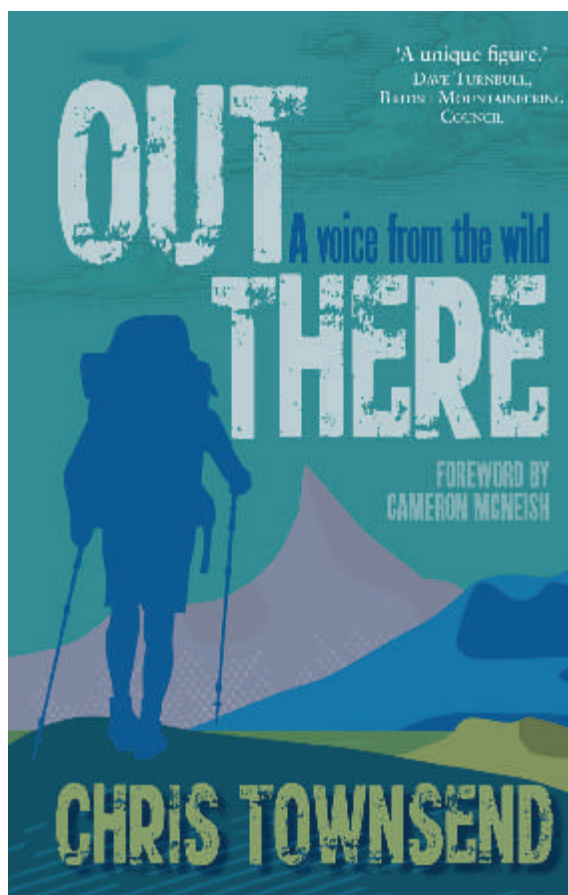
He describes the pleasures that the different seasons have to offer and says that "Spring is an ideal time to undertake a pilgrimage to the wild". In winter "wild places become wilder". He obviously enjoys being in wild places.

He gives some wonderfully detailed observations, such as in Yellowstone National Park, "brightly coloured volcanic rocks set against the bright whiteness of the snow and the dark trees plastered with ice and rime and frost", and bizarre thermal features in an exceptionally cold and snowy landscape. He is a close observer of wildlife too, and points out that since tents make good hides the traveller is more likely to see or hear wildlife going about its business, especially at dawn or dusk and particularly when travelling solo.

He mentions encounters with bears, moose, bison, bald eagles, snakes and the mixture of fear

and excitement of being close to wolves. He talks of a feeling of immersion in nature and how such encounters can transform an uninspiring or difficult day.

This is an extremely well written book, and Chris is a compelling and engaging author. There are too many delights in its pages to describe in a brief review, I suggest you read and enjoy it.





Scottish Wild Land Group
Scottish Charity, no SC004014

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2017

Saturday 4th November at 2.00 pm

Birnam Arts and Conference Centre, Dunkeld

Join the SWLG Steering Group members for a pre-lunch riverside or forest walk in the Birnam area at 10.30am. Lunch – at your leisure in Birnam, where there is a variety of cafes, hotels and other eateries, or take lunch in the Birnam Centre or bring a picnic.

AGM Agenda:

- 1 Welcome, Attendance and Apologies
- 2 Chairman's report
- 3 Treasurer's report and Accounts
- 4 Election of Officers and Committee [see below]
- 5 Questions and discussion as time allows
- 6 Thanks and AGM close, followed by light refreshments

2.45pm Guest Speaker: Chris Townsend – My Watershed Walk

We are delighted that Chris Townsend, the well known mountain walker, wild camper and author of many wilderness and long trail walking books will be joining us. Chris will give a talk on his recent long distance Scottish trip, which he wrote about in his recent book "Out There".

Election of Office Bearers and Committee

The current committee includes: Tim Ambrose [Treasurer], George Charles, Grant Cornwallis [Membership Secretary], Pete Ewing, James Fenton [Editor], Beryl Leatherland [Convenor], Bill Stephens, and Peter Willimott.

All are prepared to continue in their roles. We do however, need additional committee members especially people with recent planning experience and those with IT and social media skills to offer. If you might be interested please contact us to discuss or join us at a committee meeting before the AGM to enable you to judge whether you might be interested in joining us.

MEMBERSHIP REQUEST

I wish to join SWLG: Individual £10 Two at same address £15
 Corporate £50 Reduced £5 (Senior Citizen, unwaged, under 18)

Name (s):

Address:

..... Postcode:

Mobile no.: Landline no.:

E-mail:

I wish to pay by Standing Order and have set this up with my bank online

I wish to pay by Standing Order and have filled in the form below

To the manager of

Please pay SWLG the sum of £ annually until further notice, starting on

Please debit my account: Sort code: Account number

This supersedes any existing order in favour of SWLG

Signed Date

FOR BANK USE: Payee sort code: 83-15-18 Account no.: 00257494

I wish to pay by cheque (Please make payable to SWLG and send it along with this form)

Yes, I would like to receive free copies of Wild Land News:

By e-mail (this helps us keep our printing, postage and carbon footprint costs to a minimum)

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Please add me to the SWLG e-mail mailing list and keep me posted about SWLG volunteering opportunities

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If you are a UK taxpayer, you can increase the value of your subscription to the SWLG by 25% by Gift Aiding it. This costs you nothing. In order to Gift Aid your donation you must tick the box below:

I want to Gift Aid my subscription of £ _____ and any donations I make in the future or have made in the past 4 years to the Scottish Wild Land Group.

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Please notify us if you want to cancel this declaration, or if you change your address, or if you no longer pay sufficient tax on your income or capital gains. If you pay Income Tax at the higher or additional rate and want to receive the additional tax relief due to you, you should include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self-Assessment tax return or ask HM Revenue and Customs to adjust your tax code.

Please post this form to:

Tim Ambrose, SWLG Treasurer, 8 Clevedon Road, Glasgow G12 0NT

Join us, share in our work and help to protect Scotland's wild land



Scottish Wild Land Group

Working to protect Scotland's species, environment and landscapes



Liathach by James Fenton

The objects of the Group are:

- (a) To promote the conservation of wild land in Scotland;
- (b) To promote public awareness of the problems facing wild land in Scotland;
- (c) To promote and encourage the implementation of good planning policies;
- (d) To co-operate with other bodies to promote the foregoing objects.

We campaign for:

- ✓ Protection and promotion of Scotland's wild land
- ✓ Safeguards against inappropriate wind farm and other developments
- ✓ Environmentally-sensitive land and wildlife management
- ✓ Planning controls on the spread of hill tracks
- ✓ Restoration of rare and missing species and environments
- ✓ Connection of habitats and protected areas to allow ecological recovery and species movements

We are Scotland's oldest and only volunteer-run wild land charity

Join us today at www.swlg.org.uk



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