

WILD LAND NEWS 62

Winter 2004/5



COMMENT - A Landscape Forum?

Article

You might think that a country which markets its scenery to the paying customers for all its worth (which is a lot, as a slice of the economy) would have put Landscape on some official pedestal. Yet for years it has been pretty much a dirty word in government circles, something that gets in the way of progress, something that costs rather than benefits. Indeed ministers have been heard to say that landscape is only a vote-winner for the Tories.

Scottish Natural Heritage has played down the landscape issue, partly because its own merged roots lay in scientific nature conservation with a lacing of countryside recreation, and mainly because every time it peeped over the landscape parapet it got its head blasted. SNH submitted an important paper on National Scenic Areas - to give them some teeth - back in 1999, and is still awaiting a response from a disdainful Executive. Last year, SNH put out a Landscape consultation, which said most of the right things, but pretty cautiously; it scarcely mentioned the economic value of scenery, let alone the notion that money might usefully be invested in restoring damaged or declining landscapes.

We have been active in responding to such exercises, attending discussions, and pushing a more upbeat line. So it is encouraging to hear SNH suggesting that they have hopes for a Landscape Forum. This would be drawn from groups with interests in the landscape, and would have some formal status and remit. Ideally, it would be convened by the Executive, alongside Forums it has created for other priorities such as renewable energy, but it may be down to SNH to organise.

We have welcomed such a move providing it is not just a talking shop, a way of kicking an irritating ball into the long grass. It could for example follow the model of the Access Forum, and be tasked with spelling out the scope of legislation to give landscape some formal recognition. This might codify what the various protective designations actually mean. More importantly it could create a duty of care for the landscape which all public agencies must exercise. Who knows, it could commission research on the value of landscape - and campaign for a Landscape Restoration and Improvement Fund charged with actively managing our scenic assets as though they were historic buildings or prime farm and forest.

LINK Landscape Task Force

Perhaps sensing that the L word is coming in from the cold, Scottish Environment LINK is creating a new Landscape Task Force. This replaces the Special Areas TF, which did much good work on the National Parks legislation, and the Recreation TF, ditto on the Access legislation. We hope to play a leading role in this Task Force, to be chaired by Bill Wright (ex-Cairngorms Campaign, now Rural Scotland).

LINK may be a mysterious creature to most readers; believe us it becomes even more mysterious on the inside. As a lobbying umbrella for over 30 organisations spanning archaeology to bat conservation, it does not push a high profile for itself (with a handful of paid staff in Perth), and it has to embrace interests which naturally will become almost diametrically opposed at times. What is inspiring is the commitment to try and resolve these conflicting priorities - global warming and windfarms, to name but one - within the camp.

We have already drafted a remit and manifesto for the Landscape TF, which has been put round likely members such as Ramblers, National Trust, MCoFS. This is on our website (along with other key documents we get from LINK and elsewhere): if you think it falls short, say so. We will publish the final (but never Final) version in WLN.

LINK can be pretty influential - we attended a meeting with two Ministers to express concern over Climate Change, including threats to precious landscapes. We demanded a clearer Executive policy on the location of renewable energy installations, and believe some progress may ensue. SWLG may be a minnow amongst the large-membership organisations on LINK, but we have a voice and you can help script what it says.

Wolves at the fence

We have been waiting with bated breath (especially in dark and silent hours while bivvying in remote places) for someone to get fed up with the bureaucracy that surrounds species reintroductions, smuggle some wolves into the country, and release them in some unpopulated glen.

Now the press tells us that that glen might be Alladale, a magnificent and well-hidden corner of the Beinn Dearg massif in back of Bonar Bridge. Beyond Croick Church, it is visited only by the odd Corbett-bagger (Carn Ban, 845m) and the even odder pursuer of rockslides. As a thinly-wooded trough biting deep into a vast undulating plateau, it actually rather resembles Scandinavian wolf country.

Were the wolves simply to be released here and left to fend for themselves, that would be very interesting. It might reduce the number of Corbett completers, indirectly of course (we are assured that wolves only predate on the laggards who would never have completed them anyway). But we gather that Alladale is to be fenced in (shades of Glenbogle). This is of course entirely unacceptable, on many fronts. Paying for entry to a whole glen cuts across the open access principle. A perimeter security fence would be intolerable, especially if it followed the estate boundary around the valley rim. And the whole point of reintroducing a once-native species is that it too has the freedom to roam - anything less is a mockery.

Windfarm bottleneck

Article

*By **Davie Black** Wildland Campaign Officer, Ramblers' Association Scotland.*

The government's approach to renewable energy development appears to be in serious difficulty as a result of a failure to address key grid transmission issues. Resolving this issue is likely to lead to a fundamental reappraisal of the location and nature of renewable energy development projects in Scotland. The key problem is that a large new powerline is needed through north west England to transport the energy generated in Scotland to the demand centres further south. The level of public opposition to such a powerline is likely to be enormous and is almost certain to cause a major shift in government policy on renewables along with a collapse in the confidence of investors who have been supporting industrial-scale windfarms in Scotland.

The "Renewables Network Impacts Study", published by The Carbon Trust and Department of Trade and Industry earlier this year indicates that construction of new powerlines must start in 2004 - (recognised by the report as "extremely difficult") and noting that major reinforcements are needed in Scotland and in the Scotland-England interconnector which represent a "significant bottleneck under the present regulatory framework".

Planning consultations have not even started on a new Scotland - England interconnector and it is very unlikely that the present government would risk an acrimonious debate on such an

issue in the run up to the next general election. We are much more likely to see a rearrangement of the financial system which at present delivers huge financial benefits to the industrial-scale onshore windfarm developers. New arrangements are likely which will favour smaller scale, community-based wind projects, and other renewable technologies.

In recognition of these problems, Ramblers Scotland is calling for much more emphasis to be given to marine transmission between Scotland and England. A recent Ramblers Scotland policy statement calls for most long distance transmission in the future to be based on sub-sea cables, not through the construction of new overland routes or by increasing the height of existing pylons. Such long distance transmission should also be used primarily for energy sources that are supplying substantial amounts of power in a reliable and continuous way. This means, for example, that energy generated from tidal or wave power sources in the Western Isles would go direct to Liverpool by sub sea cable and not by a complex, inefficient and intrusive land based powerline system starting on the north or north west coast of Scotland.

For those campaigning against the massive windfarms now appearing on the Scottish hills, with their 100 metre high turbines, the message is clear. Stop the new Scotland - England interconnector and we can say goodbye to the industrialisation of our hills. In its place will come a whole new approach to wind turbines - a recognition that these should be primarily to meet domestic and local community use and properly integrated into the local landscape - such turbines should be well under 100 metres in height and in small groups, located on brownfield sites or land which has already been in cultivation in recent times. The place for 100 metre turbines is well offshore, connected by sub sea cables and short land based powerlines to the energy demand centres of southern Britain.

Links:

- The Carbon Trust, 2003. [The Carbon Trust & DTI Renewables Network Impact Study](#)
- Ramblers' Association Scotland, 2004. [Renewable Energy - Policy Statement](#)

Access Legislation

Article

The access legislation part of the Land Reform Act (Scotland) is likely to come into force in February 2005. The preparation has taken a longer time than planned, but the final piece in the jigsaw - the guidance to local authorities - is being finalised and laid on the floor of Parliament.

Hopefully, this time delay will allow local authorities, SNH and land owners and managers more time to prepare for the introduction of the statutory right of access. Existing common law rights still exist and are not extinguished or replaced - the statutory right is an 'add-on'. Similarly, rights-of-way retain their full current legal status.

Alistair Cant

John Muir Trust conference: Sustaining Wild Land

Article

Fiona Anderson reports on a high-profile event

This conference was held at Pitlochry Festival Theatre from October 21-23. SWLG was represented on the first day only. The conference was introduced by Dick Balharry, Chairman of JMT, followed by a very personal message of welcome and congratulations to the Trust from its Patron, the Prince of Wales, on video. A Ministerial address was scheduled to follow but, significantly, no such person appeared and the slot was filled instead by Linda Macmillan

from Yosemite. She emphasised the connectedness of everything in the biotic universe, as John Muir had done, and that we must make decisions based on the requirements of the land or environment resource, not on those of special interests. That way Benefits will extend beyond Boundaries - this may possibly be easier to achieve, I thought, in USA's extensive nationally protected parks and monuments than on this crowded island, though the message is still worthwhile.

International context

The morning session of speakers was on the International Perspective. Lawrence Downing, ex President of the Sierra Club, spoke on the work and legacy of John Muir, followed by John Beatty, a naturalist, film maker and photographer who presented a superb slide show of images from Europe, Africa and South America, accompanied by comments based on his first-hand experience of the environmental issues and problems. He considered preserving the biodiversity of species is the best way to sustain wild land - and to travel across the globe to see unique places is indefensible (except perhaps in his case!)

Nick Hanley came next, a town planner, former Countryside Commission officer and Strategy Coordinator for the Norfolk Broads Authority, (noting the extent to which protected national areas were confined, until the Broads was designated, to the mountains), and now Head of the Nature and Biodiversity Unit of the European Commission in Brussels. He emphasised that many established, if not "wild" environments in Europe are likely to disappear, such as Alpine hay meadows or the Norfolk Broads itself, and require continuing management to retain their diversity.

The EU is in the lead internationally in establishing an ecological network called Natura 2000 to preserve species, and in setting a target in 2001, the Gothenburg Objective aims not simply to slow, but actually to halt the decline in biodiversity by the end of this decade. Natura 2000 does not comprise sample areas, but a full network of 200 habitats for over 400 species covering 18% of EU territory. Threats from agricultural intensification are lessening as single farm Agri-Environment payments replace productivity subsidies in more countries. He put the crucial question in asking how critical the concept of wilderness or wild land is to the Objective? He conceded it has a role to play, but the concept must have broad appeal, with scope for eco-tourism, maintainig livelihoods, water catchment management, climate management etc. Emotive values are important - like wolves, an icon for wildness. Natura 2000 protects the habitat for 2500 wolves to roam in NE Spain and elsewhere.

The question and answer session which followed emphasised the role of management and spreading resources and facilities, not only to defuse tourism pressures from honeypot areas like Yosemite (or Loch Lomond), but to spread the load to a wider area and balance the economic benefits with the protection of wild land. Compromise might be necessary - allow some development providing a pristine reserve is set aside. How important is size of area protected? The redemptive solace of wild land can be experienced by some people by venturing only 200m or so from their cars! Cairngorm mountain railway and the cable car up Mount Teide in Tenerife, where pedestrian access from the top is strictly controlled in both cases, were cited as (rather controversial) examples of management to protect wild land. Each sensitive area should have its own management plan, with the zoning backed up by resources and facilities.

Wind-farm controversy

On the use of wild land in Scotland (which was more a subject for the following day) there was no dispute that government support for the Kyoto Agreement on Climate Change should not mean that wind farms should be sited in an unstructured, ad hoc way. These developments are only taking place because of the public subsidies the electricity companies receive, so Government ought to direct them better on strategic location.

The lucrative subsidies being handed to vulnerable landowners and crofting communities do not help wild land either, and are being paid for ultimately by taxpayers. Mr Hanley was asked directly whether there is any chance of an EU Wild Land Directive that would help put pressure on the Government to direct wind farm location. The answer effectively was negative (owing undoubtedly to its excessively value-laden nature), but there is a lot of scope, he said, to make more use of the (scientific-based) Habitats Directive, as many wildlife sites occupy wild land, and the Environmental Assessment Directive for planning applications is about to be enhanced to require more strategic assessment.

The term rewilding of wild land was introduced, with examples in Europe of natural flood basin control, moving river walls back 100m, reclaiming alluvial forests, though reforestation on hill land is more problematic because of the need to exclude deer and sheep. Removal of bothies and bulldozed track restoration have the same purpose.

In the afternoon Bob Aitken spoke on the evolution of the wild land idea, attributes, issues and the progress of policy definition and initiatives in recent years. He mentioned a significant statement of the Californian Sierra Club : "Wild land will be protected in proportion to the number of people who know its value at first hand." He concluded that the NSA system (National Scenic Areas) will be the main mechanism for integrating enhanced management of wild areas in Scotland within existing systems. But we need to work much harder to secure greater political commitment for wild land.

Cameron McNeish followed with his expected inspirational approach - it was a pity that he was preaching largely to the converted at that conference. He emphasised the importance in Scotland of bringing deer numbers down and the need for new legislation to achieve this. The current pressures for wind farms amount to the mass industrialisation of wild land. There should be a moratorium on turbine height over 50m and an Energy Forum should be set up to include local community interests, especially about financial incentives and National Grid requirements.

Wild land not a main political concern

Finally, John Thomson, The Director of Strategic Operations (West) at SNH and a former Head of Planning Division in the Scottish Office spoke on the likely future directions of Government policy towards wild land. Ultimately this was discouraging. The most hopeful thing was that the UK is close to ratifying a European Landscape Convention, which will "provide a significant platform for wild land" as it will value all landscapes. He said that no Minister had come to address the conference because they do not see the relevance of wild land to their main political concerns. They have a duty to save us from the consequences of climate change, and the concept of wild land is elitist or even unhelpful. It is all too easy to take this resource, or natural heritage generally, for granted. In reviewing the conflicts between rural and urban agendas, he said that concern with wild land is not generally considered to be a rural issue, where people are more concerned with depopulated landscapes and meeting renewable energy targets.

On key areas for action an SNH review of NSA designations is very relevant, but this was started in 1997 and Ministers have not dealt with it to date. Even more worrying is the review within 2 years of NPPG 14 (National Planning Policy) where there may be some falling back on the encouraging definition of wild land that was given there. He acknowledged that a more strategic approach is needed to the location of wind farms, and that amendment of the GPDO (General Permitted Development Order) as affecting bulldozed tracks is a possibility - at least one consultation has been carried out on it but it was never brought to a conclusion. On land management he considered there is a possible case for extending incentives for positive land management to achieve public aspirations, and that links could be strengthened between biodiversity objectives in European designations and wild land

On the wider picture there is a strong need to:

- reinforce linkages in the public mind between wild land, tourism and other economic alternatives;
- to promote better recognition of the value of remote coastal areas and wild areas close to population centres (which are not recognised to date in the NSAs); and
- encourage debate to increase consensus on the value of wild land.

I conclude that this JMT conference was very worthwhile and well set up - with a first-class Charity Concert in the evening. But there was a need for a wider audience, such as educational, power generation and rural community interests, to have been invited on the first day when national and international perspectives and policies were being discussed. And as for the prognosis - we still have a long way to go!

The conference concluded with a five-point **DECLARATION FOR THE WILD** urging UK and devolved governments actively to demonstrate that they recognise the importance of large areas of wild land and of all wild places, as an integral part of our national culture and heritage by:

1. Encouraging and supporting people of all ages and of all backgrounds to experience and understand the value of wild places, for the benefit of their health and spiritual well being.
2. Supporting local communities and land managers by developing a new, broader range of grants and incentive schemes to help restore and enhance wild land.
3. Reviewing planning policy and legislation to strengthen the protection and enhancement of wild land.
4. Establishing a forum to agree a national strategy for the appropriate siting of renewable energy developments.
5. Ratifying the Council of Europe's Landscape Convention and embracing the responsibility to protect our national landscape heritage.

The SWLG position on renewable energy in Scotland

Article

Alistair Cant on a sugary tale that becomes a recipe for disaster

This article must start with the standard phrase that echoes round meeting rooms and policy papers... "We all love renewable energy projects, but..."

So why does this happen. My theory is that it is a classic British Fudge .the recipe being as follows:

Fudge recipe

To achieve a policy aim you leave it up to the market and throw in generous ongoing subsidies. The commercial companies that get involved wish to have their cake and eat it - i.e. implement it to maximise private gain and achieve the subsidies. The implementation conflicts with aspects of public concern. The government leaves the companies to go hell-for-leather and the strongest / most resilient wins. The regulatory system (in this the Planning system) is unable to cope with the conflicts generated as it can only rein in the wildest excesses and can only respond to the demands generated by the commercial companies - it cannot direct those companies' activities in a planned way.

This British fudge for renewable energy projects has been singed in the oven of public objection and there are likely to be more burnt offerings to come.

What should happen would be a Tablet recipe - for Tablets of Stone i.e. direction laid down by government:

Tablet recipe

Government, industry, planners and non-governmental organisations' (NGO) representatives agree a strategy for implementing a policy, with the aim of minimising conflict and encouraging broad support. Subsidies are targeted and time limited to kick-start an industry but not allow excess profits to be generated. Future technologies are given more generous long term support as a seedbed. Existing technologies to be given the minimum support. Consistent decision-making at all tiers of government to reinforce the direction agreed - the Tablets are not to be sold down the river for individual / short term gain. Implementation is achieved much more quickly as conflict is dealt with by negotiation and concessions agreed at the strategic national planning stage. Sustainable development can be built in as planning is in progress at the centre / in advance / with the medium to long term in mind.

So where does this leave us in respect of renewable energy projects in Scotland. NGOs can only respond to fudge by increasing the heat in the oven and burning a few (or more than a few) of the cookies. They can also try and lobby to alter the recipe, but there are now strong vested interests for the current flavour and method of cooking.

All this fan-fired hot air is leading up to the Wild Land Group steering team setting out its stall on renewable energy in Scotland. We are not willing to accept the existing system as one that can be worked within. Our position therefore is perhaps more principled than some, but it in essence is as follows:

1. There should be no more medium-to-large scale renewable energy projects in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland (i.e. north of the Glasgow - Aberdeen line). Wild land areas in the Borders to have a moratorium too. Very small projects of appropriate height, scale and location would be fine, based on meeting local community needs.
2. There shall be no increase in the extent or capacity of the transmission grid in the same zone.
3. There shall be a national strategy for renewable energy agreed jointly between Government, Industry, Local Authorities and NGOs. This shall direct the industry as to the technologies and the locations, as well as the size and shape of schemes. Subsidies shall be targeted to achieve a reasonable return for industry/investors with more subsidy directed to the longer term future technologies. Capacity of manufacturing plants for equipment shall be encouraged to meet the planned expansion.
4. Conservation of energy shall receive as high a profile as new energy projects.
5. The precautionary principle shall be paramount - e.g. if building wind farms on peat bogs means the significant loss of carbon-storing peat, then this shall not be allowed for the present, even if the extent of release of stored carbon is not yet been predicted fully.
6. The aim, on present information, is to base the future on these ideas below:
 1. Production to be near the areas of high demand i.e. in or near the central belt.
 2. Turbines to be built on brownfield land where possible. The height to be restricted to agreed levels, rather than an ever increasing height.
 3. Aim for off-shore projects - wind, wave, tidal - again carefully sited away from key marine / coastline / island areas.

4. Connection to the national grid based on undersea cables direct to an existing major connection to the grid (e.g. Torness, Hunterston)
5. Small scale localised low-height turbines for farms/small communities to be encouraged, subject to careful siting.
7. Thus the Group are against major new renewable energy developments in the Western Isles, against the proposed new or upgrading of transmission lines within the Western isles, from Ullapool to Beaulieu and the Beaulieu to Denny proposals. The 'choice' of route options or to having very small sections underground is a false choice based on the premise 'it's going in anyway so be glad for these crumbs'.
8. We are also against the current system where projects are seen in isolation e.g. one wind farm is proposed as the 'starter' and more ones are swiftly proposed close-by, once the way has been opened up and precedents set.
9. The root of the sugar pill of renewable energy projects is the financial incentives which drive the system, and which are often in the end, paid for by the consumer. These need a complete overhaul, allied to the strategic assessment of society's needs.

We have no illusions that our proposals are likely to be implemented; however, we wish to set out a coherent planned approach so that the current debates over 'which route is best' and 'which are the key schemes to block' are set in context.

How wild is Creag Meagaidh?

Article

We were on our way to a club meet at Roy Bridge, one late winter evening. I pulled over near Aberarder and insisted we got out, even those dozing in the back seat. Clear black above, a slice of moon invoking faint icy-white mountain shapes, stars as our headlamped eyes let them come out; far enough from the sodium pall over Glasgow, Inverness, even Aviemore for the night sky to be timeless and unsullied. Completely still, deep freeze, streams gellified; no other cars on the A86, so completely silent. Half a minute was enough, back in for last orders at the Roy Bar. This could have been arctic Sweden, or Alaska. Wild, at the road side.

Those icy-white mountain shapes of the Creag Meagaidh range are frequented by climbers lured up Coire Ardair, and in summer by those on the prescribed circuit round three Munros, but its 15 sprawling km are less renowned than classic ridges such as the Mamores or Cluanie, perhaps because the crest is rounded. It is slightly beyond day's range from the central belt, and there are more seductive goals further on for a weekend.

So it was that Meagaidh had escaped my attentions for 30 years, apart from a sweep of the Tops along the fore-walk around Moy Corrie. I nursed a notion that the way to do it would be end-to-end, requiring feats of transport organisation sufficient to keep it on indefinite hold. Then on a weekday this Midsummer I found myself emerging from that handy B&B opposite the Roy Bar under blue skies with fair forecast and a bike on the roof actually in working order. Some unaccustomed pedalling saw me from Moy over into the upper Spey wondering where best to get up onto the hill. At least there is no blanket wall of forestry to corral access onto Meagaidh, unlike its unfortunate neighbours on the west.

I chose the wrong one of the three toes of the range to ascend (boundary of three maps problem), not least because it had been muir-burned to a crisp. The right one had a quadbike track to follow, as I found at the 767m trig point. Sadly this persists for 4 km on up the crest almost to the first Munro, denying the simple pleasure of making your own way along an open ridge - either you go along with it mindlessly, or you are consciously striving not to. And of course at the Munro (Carn Liath) you join the circuit from Aberarder, and a nascent walkers' path.

Also at the trig point I met the only fence of the range, mercifully a low one which soon contours off. The posts of an earlier fence adorn the march boundary all the way to The Window, passing over two Munros. SNH own the south side, and are opposed to fences on hills, so why don't they organise removal of these unsightly remains? From The Window up over the magnificent Cairngorm-like summit there is no fence, no path, no trammelling of any kind save an extraordinary cairn platform on the brink of Braeroy. And then the fenceline resumes, a surreal acute angle of wooden posts coming up the main watershed and turning down the immensely powerful shoulder of Creag na Cailliche, my route down to Moy. I pulled a score of loose stobs out of their sockets and laid them neatly to rot, a task for some team to complete. The fence becomes a monumental drystone dyke, its near-intactness over the rocksteps and nicks testifying to old skills deployed in hostile places. In its lee (for the evening has turned chilly) stands the lone sheep of the day. I happen to pass at some distance, but it does no more than swivel its head. I realise it is a ram.

Over the last kilometre down to Moy, you become aware of the fruits of the SNH purchase of this side of Creag Meagaidh since they cleared the hill of sheep (so it was a love-and-affection-starved ram). The gorge of the Moy Burn is much leafier than on my last visit. The heather is leggy, and countless rowans are shooting above it, most getting nipped by the deer that without any upper fence (there is a roadside one) will always come in however hard culled on the SNH land. A narrow trod follows the gorge, but the last bit across to the gate is getting jungly. In some or many years time, natural-looking woodland will clothe the lower slopes of Meagaidh, and as in Norway, access will become naturally corralled to one or two well-walked lines.

Wildness, not remoteness

For the whole of this magnificent traverse I was within 5 km of the A86 'trunk road' or the public road up the head of the Spey. Distance from a motorable road is the only criterion SNH use to map 'search areas for wild land' *. With bands at 2, 5, and 8 km it is unlikely that government or developers will accept anything under 5 km as 'wild' when push comes to shove. So how wild is Creag Meagaidh, really?

Up on the Munros, you are in the midst of the Highlands, surrounded by mountain ranges. There is a long jaggy skyline to the west of the Great Glen, running north to Affric, Strathfarrar, and even Wyvis; the burly massing of the Nevis range; the superb north wall of the Alder massif; the distant Cairngorm upswelling; and the unfathomable Monadhliath. The most visible intrusions into this protean mountainscape, from some outer viewpoints if not from the core of the Meagaidh group around the Window, are the Laggan and Spey forests; but they are at low level and do not detract unduly from up here. Then there is the pylon line coming over Corrieyairack. Today I had to strain to see it in flat light. Just once a shaft of sun later on caught the sole wind generator on the Monadhliath, at Dunmaglass over 30 km away. This could look very different soon, if big wind farms spring up any nearer than that recently approved at Farr, and if a 400kv transmission line replaces the present modest affair over Corrieyairack (the controversial Beaully-Denny proposal comes this way). Distance from a road will become immaterial in defining 'wildness' if such developments become visible from the summits of our great hill ranges.

On this day of settled weather, Meagaidh does not feel threateningly wild - nowhere would, but the way was long and isolated and exposed to any sudden deterioration. Today the wildness is simply an ambience. The greatest intrusion, inevitably on a weekday, comes from morning, afternoon, and (just to rub it in) early evening sorties by military jets round their Ness-Spean-Spey circuit, breaking off for a few games of tig on the way. Even though the sound may only be present for a few minutes, it echoes on in the mind, and the anticipating lasts even longer.

At less than 5 km from the A86, there is no traffic noise audible. And despite such easy proximity, there is only one other person on the hill all this fine day.

Creag Meagaidh is incontrovertibly wild. The wildness may be benign midsummer, deep-freeze midwinter, or howling wet gale at any season. No measure of distance can define where it begins. As the native woodland re-establishes, it is beginning to feel wilder soon after you leave the road. Up on the ridge, old fence-lines are minor irritations to some and will fade away, the wall is an archaeological treasure, the new quad-track a sign of mechanised activity that should be discouraged in all such places. The wildness of Meagaidh is end-to-end and Spean-to-Spey, and no line can be drawn through its wholeness outside which developments will magically not compromise it. And in any case, the greatest threats to experiencing its wildness come not from proximity to roads and ease of access, but from visible and audible intrusions in the middle and further distance.

We need to give SNH the confidence to say that wild land is not the same as remote land.

David Jarman

- SNH : Wildness in Scotland's Countryside - a policy statement. undated, but issued 2002. Map 3 'search areas for wild land' has a blob embracing the Monadhliath and Creag Meagaidh - but not its southern slopes. It refers for its definition to Para 13 of Annex 1, which ends at Para 12.

Simon Brooks of SNH comments: *"The search areas in the SNH policy statement weren't based solely on distance from roads - which can be seen if the search area map is compared with the remoteness maps on the centre pages. The search areas were intended to be a starting point for identification of wild land, and aim to include all the larger areas within which it might be found. The annex to the statement suggests criteria which might be used to do this, and these areas were therefore drawn with an eye on all of these factors (including remoteness). Incidentally, the explanation of the purpose and scope of the search area map is in para. 12 of the annex rather than the non-existent para. 13 - a typo well spotted in your footnote.*

Having said all of this, wildness can of course be found much more widely, sometimes closer to larger settlements and particularly in traditional Scottish weather, in winter conditions or at night. The policy statement recognises this, but generally focuses on 'core' wild land to reflect the scope of NPPG 14 - the pretext on which it is based. We need to raise awareness of the value of prime wild land areas, but it's also very important to recognise the existence of more accessible wild places or experiences - which are enjoyed by many, not just the fitter hillwalker."

Developments in Renewable Energy since March 2004

Article

An update by Fiona Anderson

The six monthly account in this magazine of the hundreds of turbines and scores of windfarms proposed in Scotland, submitted, objected to, altered, called in, and their related power lines and preceding masts, has become more than a bit repetitive. (This period alone reveals 340 and 13 respectively within an 18 mile radius of Perth.) Readers will have well and truly understood by now the nature of the threat that they are posing to the unique landscapes of Scotland, and more particularly to its wild land. Consequently this time I propose to mention only the most significant information that has come forward in the last 6 months, mainly concerning plans, or lack of them, and policy reports.

No strategic policy

At the end of June the Scottish Parliament's Enterprise and Culture Committee published a report Renewable Energy in Scotland which calls on the Scottish Executive to produce a "fully fledged" energy policy for Scotland. The dominance of onshore wind power over other forms of RE has caused concern and is due to the lack of a national strategic framework. The report calls for strengthening of the planning system to deal with windfarm proliferation and asks that the executive issue clearer guidance. Yet a spokesman for the Executive rejected a call by the Green Party and Friends of the Earth, both strong supporters of RE, to adopt a more strategic approach to developments. "A regional strategy is unnecessary. It is far too early to look at the levels of capacity that individual areas of Scotland might be expected to accommodate in order to meet our national targets. This would act as an additional constraint and might lead to perfectly credible developments being stifled." And in September, after criticism of Highland Council for backing plans for 17 turbines affecting Dornoch Firth NSA at Beinn Tharsuinn, Easter Ross, the Planning Director said "there is no such thing as a no-go area ...under Scottish Executive policy each application has to be judged on its merits, and in an NSA the social and economic benefits have to be considered alongside scenic impact." The Planning Committee Chairman admitted "We desperately need a master-plan from the Executive setting out no-go areas and places where it might be possible to have wind farms."

That is just what happened in Wales in July when the Welsh Assembly published a draft Technical Advice Note outlining seven strategic areas seen as most suitable for large-scale wind farm development. They have been chosen so as to avoid national parks, AONBs (Areas of outstanding natural beauty), wildlife designations, common land etc. The Environment and Economic Development Ministers jointly stressed that the list does not mean that applications to build wind farms in the areas identified will automatically be approved, nor that wind farms can never be built in other areas. This could surely be done for Scotland.

Alternatives to wind energy

The Scottish Parliament's committee report also recommended that a comprehensive Scottish energy policy be created in co-operation with Westminster, to seek to shift the focus from large onshore windfarms to other forms of renewable power in order to meet longer term targets. " Scotland has real potential to develop leading edge technology for wave and tidal power. The focus on wind power is depriving other technologies of much needed investment." A month later a House of Lords Science and Technology committee report also urged the government to use a wider range of RE sources. The public needs more than consultation to be persuaded to support renewables.

In May a landscape capacity report was produced by consultants, commissioned by SNH for the Western Isles RE Partnership, to assess and map the visibility of different sizes of turbines and developments from a range of different viewpoints in the barren landscapes of the Western Isles. It concluded that in uninhabited areas boggy and rocky moorland could accommodate more turbines than mountain, rock and lochan landscapes; dispersed siting could result in relatively localised visibility effects; while a cumulative effect of several developments, concentrated siting policies or very large developments could result in major character changes.

Local guidelines

In June both Borders and Perth and Kinross Councils approved guidelines for wind farm development, both based on consultants' studies. The former recognised that turbines with a blade-tip height of 100 metres will dominate the landscape up to 2.5kms, will still visually intrude up to 5kms, and will have a moderate effect up to 7.5kms away. The latter examined three of the most sensitive areas with high potential for development, including the Ochil Hills where it concluded that any windfarm of commercial scale would be inappropriate. A single

development of smaller turbines in a compact layout may be acceptable, subject to landscape and visual assessments. Both studies will now be incorporated into development plans.

The Ramblers Association suggested three changes to the policy for Perthshire: a presumption against any turbines taller than 50m; a stronger recognition of the value of wild land in the area and a presumption against development on moorland/rough grassland; a stronger presumption in favour of brownfield sites, cultivated land or forestry.

Two Community Councils near Farr in Inverness-shire have been offered £1m upfront payment as well as £1157 per megawatt generated annually by the developer, Npower Renewables. This is the largest payment yet offered in the UK.

Transmission lines

The Shetland RE Forum has been told that the Northern Isles could provide far more green energy than the whole of Scotland needs to meet government targets because of the tidal potential of the Pentland Firth and because there are relatively few anti-wind farm protesters. They could have large-scale windfarms in Shetland by 2008/9 but it is no good getting power to the mainland unless the cables could be laid across Scotland to the central belt.

The revised route for the 400,000 volt National Grid transmission line between Beauly in Easter Ross and Denny in Stirlingshire will involve further consultations by Scottish and Southern Electricity to consider further options for the 5 most contentious sections. Undergrounding has been ruled out because of cost and environmental disruption. Ullapool Community Council are objecting to it north of Beauly. The action group Highlands Before Pylons is to lobby for use of less invasive undersea routes and will ask for a valuation of the loss of amenity and potential tourist revenue. They have written to ask SNH board members to clarify their role in approving transmission lines that affect wild land as OFGEM the electricity regulator does not appear to have a remit to consider the environment. An MSP acknowledged that upgrading the grid is essential if we are to tackle climate change, but we need to make sure we go about it the right way

A new political organisation, Scottish Wind Watch, has been launched in Scotland to campaign at the European elections against the spate of windfarms in the country and to stimulate debate about "what is being planned for our wild places."

Scottish ministers are to be given consent powers in a Westminster Energy Bill to approve projects in new RE zones beyond the 12-mile limit in waters around Scotland. Funding was announced in September for a sizeable demonstration project to build a wind farm of up to 200 turbines in the Beatrice Field, Moray Firth in water depths of 35-45m. However, the UK government believes that 95% of its latest offshore windfarm licenses could be hit by legal challenges from the RSPB. RSPB says the government needs to do more to understand where there might be problems and to steer windfarm developments away from these areas. Developers are furious after RSPB involvement in many rounds of consultation, and Greenpeace says its position is very unhelpful for the drive towards renewables.

Many commentators, including the Chairman of the Royal Society and Brian Wilson, former Energy Minister, believe the longer-term goal of reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 60% by 2050 is simply not possible without the nuclear option. Speaking on Climate Change, Tony Blair, said the government has not "closed the door" on this option.

Irvine Butterfield reports on an exhibition in Blair Atholl last Autumn to raise the profile of the case for including highland Perthshire within the Cairngorms National Park.

Perthshire Alliance for the Real Cairngorms (PARC) was set up to promote the inclusion of the areas of Highland Perthshire as originally recommended by the SNH report on the provision of the Cairngorms National Park. The community of Blair Atholl is represented on the PARC committee and is being encouraged to promote Blair Atholl as one of the gateways to the park; the other being Spittal of Glenshee. The Munro Society, formed in 2002 to provide a forum for those who have completed the round, were encouraged to support PARC and the community through the provision of an exhibition of mountain photographs and paintings.

It was argued that there is a continuing need to keep the objectives of PARC before the general public, and that an exhibition such as this would be an encouragement to those most affected by the National Park in the area along the busiest approach by way of the A9 corridor near Blair Atholl. Atholl Estates were pleased to offer a venue, the Banvie Hall at Blair Castle, and through the good offices of a Munro Society member, Michael Urquhart, display stands were offered by B & S Graphics of Glasgow. Several contributors to Irvine Butterfield's books offered support through the loan of slides for photographic reproduction, with an international dimension added by the offer of the collection of the Dundee Mountain Film Festival, and framed panoramic photographs by Ian Evans. Alan Gordon provided calendars in panoramic format and well-known mountain artists Neil Barlow and Paul Craven added paintings, small desk calendars and greetings cards to provide a selection of merchandise for sale. This was a means of helping to defray costs. Society members also pitched in with loans of paintings, and offers of help to be on hand through the ten days of the exhibition. Support was also forthcoming from Sir Hugh T. Munro himself in shape of his effigy, courtesy of his creator Robin Campbell!

Throughout the exhibition visitors to the castle expressed their approval with many suggesting that this was not only a pleasant means of supporting the objectives of PARC, but also a means of promoting the beauties of Scotland at large. Though late in the season, the organisers and the people of Blair Atholl were pleased to find that Sir Hugh's collection jar contained the sum of £122.30. This has gone to help the community to further progress a paper which they hope to submit to a committee of the Scottish Parliament, making the case for Blair Atholl's continuing claim to Cairngorm gateway status. This will also enhance the claims to be made for redrafting the park boundary to that originally envisaged, which are to be set out in a Private Members Bill supported by a cross-party alliance of MSPs. The Munro Society is to retain the mounted photographs used in this exhibition which, along with the images of the Dundee Mountain Film Festival, could be made available by arrangement for future events of this kind.