



COMMENT - "it's our landscape - and we're looking after it" *Article*

We had a valuable opportunity to meet with Deputy Minister for the Environment Rhona Brankin on a LINK delegation in early March to press for our 'Landscape' to be valued more highly. Coincidentally, the Scottish Executive section covering it (and SNH) has just been renamed 'Landscape and Habitats Division' - a hopeful portent?

Our main aim was to persuade her that 'landscape' is not just a Countryside Alliance, Tory-voter, Prince Charles kind of elitist interest, or a NIMBY thing - as some of her colleagues have said before. Hearteningly, the meeting could have been over in five minutes - this is clearly not how she sees it (perhaps helped by having lived on the Black Isle for 20 years). But we had plenty of extra arguments fashioned for her, in case any lurking Neanderthals proved harder to persuade that Scotland's landscape heritage is one of our most valuable - and perishable - assets.

Never mind the tourist pound, euro, and dollar; never mind the health benefits of the great outdoors; never mind selling Scotland-the-product with heathery hills and winding lochs as a backdrop - each with a department and a Minister to enlist support from. Jack McConnell himself has begun to say that our biggest longer-term challenge is to keep our own numbers up, with enough people to create the jobs, earn the wages, and pay for the pensions of an ever-ageing population. What better way to persuade capable, creative, entrepreneurial people to move here, to invest here, to stay here than to make sure our countryside (tame and wild, near and far) is well-cared-for and a sure refuge from the pressures of city and industrial life? That way, we might live up to Jack's brave claim that Scotland is the best small country...

Here's [the letter we helped draft from LINK to Rhona Brankin](#) - it has twelve specific 'helpful suggestions' for her, covering 'Raising the Profile', 'Protecting our Landscape' - on the back of the National Scenic Areas consultation (see below), and 'Investing in our Landscape'. Signing the European Landscape Convention gives us a platform for action here.

David Jarman

part 2 - the south

"If you could wave a wand and 'disappear' a thousand acres of that sitka-type afforestation we all know and love, where would your prime candidate be for rewilding?"

This was how Part 1 started - and it struck a chord, not only with SWLG members but also with Forestry Commission Scotland. Within weeks, we were invited to a session to replan Glen Doll (one of my six featured 'candidates'). Surely a WLN article can never have born fruit so fast - one for the global warming phenologists ?



For many years the approach to Ben More's N.E. ridge involved an initial trudge through a conifer plantation with uncertain route-finding. FCS have acknowledged the problems, and although felling has improved matters, the contractors apparently forgot to remove their access prohibition signs when they had finished! Ben More is the highest peak in Scotland's first National Park and the N.E. ridge is arguably the finest direct route to its summit - the approach ought to be attractive and welcoming. *Photo: John Digney*

The southern half of Scotland has suffered rather more invasion of popular mountain areas by forestry, notably in what is now the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park. This is because it is more accessible, the hills are generally lower, and the terrain better suited to timber production (in fact, Argyll is most like the wet west coast of British Columbia where the sitka originates). There is less remote wild land to win back, so the emphasis is more on restoring open access to the hills - making it what we might call 'wild from the roadside', or simply a more natural mountain experience.

Indeed Nick Kempe (a former MCoS Chair and SNH Board Member) responded to Part 1 by telling us of his attempt to run the circuit of Glen Croe, from Ardgartan by Arrochar. This is not quite the 'Tranter round' of Glen Nevis, but still a very interesting proposition - The Brack, Donich, Beinn an Lochain, Ime, The Cobbler. Nick found it a considerably greater challenge than he had bargained for on the map, because (as I know only too well) there is no path at all from Ardgartan up the obvious SE ridge of The Brack. It only 'goes' by jinking and ducking and struggling, with thanks to the deer forcing their way. Then the forestry in Rest-and-be-thankful obstructs the crest of Ben Donich's NE ridge. And the descent of The Cobbler to Ardgartan is a mean and over-steep trod, squeezed by conifer branches to gully brinks.

What is needed here is not just paths up through dense forests, but a 'rewilding' of the whole of these fine noses, with open views and plenty of room to manoeuvre (and zig-zag freely) so that path erosion is less likely. The standard route up The Cobbler is already being freed up, and this must be extended to all the obvious 'desire lines' and prominent landforms.

Commercial timber management can continue on the ordinary glen sides, although Glen Croe and others like it would be transformed if there were a shift to mixed native species.

Now for my own candidates for forest rewilding in southern Scotland - with comments from the FCS District Managers :

1. Galloway - here I must confess to almost utter ignorance, apart from one ascent of Corserine, and a wild-goat count on Mullwharchar in thick mist. Glen Trool forest is obviously popular, so my candidate here is the once-grand valley of the Gala Lane, which cuts right through the heart of the hills between Merrick and Corserine. If the conifers and the forest roads were pulled back, this would become truly remote and wild, almost a southern cousin to Feshie-Geldie as an off-road through route from Ayrshire to Galloway. Rob Soutar of FCS comments :

The open hill land of the Merrick and Corserine is very wild in character and very challenging to the walker. The plantations at the Back Hill of the Bush are being restructured and downsized as a means to supplement the wildlife populations of the open hills (species such as blackgame and merlin benefit from increased forest edge and scrubby habitats). A wide corridor is being established to permanently link the open habitats of Rhinns and the Merrick Range, and considerable areas are being taken out of timber production to create "moorland fringe". Moorland fringe is essentially open semi natural habitat with up to 10% tree cover, ideally of native species but usually comprising mainly natural regeneration of conifers. I would not class this moorland fringe work as rewilding, as it may take interventions to ensure that parts of it are not swamped by spruce regeneration. FCS will also remove forest in the areas linking Lochs Riecawr and Macaterick and create moorland fringe along the Gala Lane floodplain north to Loch Doon. Although this Forest Design Plan will take 25 years to achieve, it is hoped that funding partners may assist in bringing part of this work forward (particularly in the Gala Lane area). We have no plans to decommission forest roads.

This is encouraging, and will of course take time - but as we said in Part 1, controlling sitka regen and pulling back forest roads are the costly bits, and essential to the rewilding vision.

2. Cowal - well, where do you start, such is the density of forest cover, seemingly fingering into every side bay and through every lower hill pass? Back in the eighties, I made pilgrimage to our south-westernmost Highland Corbett, Beinn Bheula, and traversed across the deep pass occupied by Curra Lochain to take in a few more of the delectable, little visited Lochgoilhead tops. The traverse was notable for the worst black ice I've ever encountered, and for finding that beautiful pass had just been forestry-ploughed. Today, crossing it would be kind of annoying; even following it as a through way from Goil to Eck would be scenically much impaired. Gordon Donaldson of FCS responds:

The Forest Design Plan for this area has the complete removal of all introduced conifers. It is expected that some areas towards the western end of the young planting will revert to native species following clearfell. Unfortunately due to the age of the trees in this area this work is not targeted to start for a further 15 years and would take some 10 years to complete.

Another fine wee hill in this range (worth visiting for its dramatic rockslides) is Mullach Coir' a' Chuir. The way in from the foot of Hell's Glen is through conifer forest now being clear-felled, but still completely blocking the mouth of the hanging valley. Gordon comments :

At the entrance to the forest there is a significant area of remnant native [oak] woodland, and it is hoped to allow this to develop over much of the area being felled. Further west some restocking will take place but this will be a much smaller area and at a much lower tree line. Indeed the coupe due to be felled in about 10 years, which has the highest tree line, will not be restocked in any way.

More generally, he recognises our concerns and says : *with regard to Forest Design Plans in this area, most if not all are indicating the reduction of non-native woodland and certainly a lowering of the planting line significantly downhill.* Given that even the new National Park Plan more or less accepts blanket conifer as the established land use in Cowal, this is really quite radical. We can move on from establishing the principle to campaigning for priority and resources for FCS to do a thorough job. Here, our meeting with Rhona Brankin was helpful - she evidently sees the turn-around in what we want from our forests as one beacon of hope in our threatened landscape.

3. Crianlarich - seared onto my hard drive is the recollection of my first encounter with Bob Aitken, after a SCAC event at Bridge of Orchy. His philosophy of allowing no pause between road and summit was put to a stern test by the implacable barrier of sitka on the nose of the Cruach Ardrain circuit, but his will-to-power-up prevailed. I haven't been back to see if it has been made any easier, but forestry certainly impedes access to the classic ridge circuit of Ben More-Stobinian-Meall na Dige from the NE. There is a gate at the forest edge into the splendid hanging valley, but you have to be an Indian tracker to find the way to it, which includes quagmire-paths and fall-line chutes. In 'wild land' terms, this means that even though a large proportion of the range is open country, the existence of the forest (both visually as an artificial element in the mountainscape, and as an obstacle to be wrestled with at each end of the day) heavily overshadows the experience. It certainly took the edge off a camp-in with my sons to see the midsummer sunrise, not least when I got lost on the way out and we went round in a long circle. And when I remonstrated with FCS, their attitude then was that they were improving the forest walks, but couldn't comprehend the mad idea that anyone might actually want to get out of the forest onto the hill...
Now, Donald McNeill comments :

At Crianlarich we are about to update the two forest design plans that lie between Glen Dochart and the Cruach Ardrain/Ben More hills. One of the main things we will be looking at is how to improve access to the hills above the forest area and improve the landscaping of the forest to fit more sympathetically with the landscape in general. We will look at the main hill access books to help in identifying areas of the forest where hill access improvements are most needed. New forest roads in the Ben More block may be helping though they may cause some confusion when allied with older hill route books and the routes through the forest are not very well waymarked at present. Any feedback you can give us to help with the design plan would be much appreciated.

4. Ballachulish - this is Cowal writ large, with forestry filling many of the corries and side glens, and lapping over some of the cols and onto intermediate skylines. The various possible circuits of Beinn a' Bheithir have long been thus bedevilled; I would recommend the traverse of Fraochaidh over to Duror as particularly fine were it not for the forestry blots and obstacles in that glen. Again there are signs of hope -
Donald comments :

In the Ballachulish to Glen Duror area we are working on two mountain access routes which should do much to improve access onto the Horseshoe Ridge. The main forest design plan here is also due for an update next year, so we have another opportunity to take a more positive look at future hill access and landscape accordingly. It is likely that native species will become much more prominent in future plantings and that

top edges will be drawn down to reflect better top edge shaping and concentrate timber production on the most suitable ground.

These are all public forests run by FE. I have also raised the issue of private forests, where one problem is that restocking to commercial standards is a condition of the whole grant-aid process. With timber prices low, some owners would be glad to abandon their forests as uneconomic, but they can't be seen to be getting away with it. Surely the solution here, where forestry pull-back and rewilding are desirable, is to ensure that the costs of doing it well are roughly equivalent to the costs of refencing and restocking.

One example is in lower Glen Etive, where private forestry is a considerable visual intrusion, and obstructs access to the Bidean and Beinn Fhionnlaidh ranges. Syd House at Perth advises that FCS and SNH are in discussion about reducing the extent of forest cover here.

Again, dear readers, your own prime candidates for rewilding and more open access are welcome - and if you can liaise for us with your local Forest District on their Design Plans, even better.

We have really put forestry under the spotlight in recent issues (and in our last couple of AGM field visits), so we will leave it fallow for a while, apart from reporting any specific progress. Such as - I attended a consultation in Dundee last month on the new Scottish Forestry Strategy, and am now working with its encouragingly-enlightened author Hugh Clayden on some 'rewilding' clauses (he has been known to climb above the forest edge, and indeed has first-hand awareness of Nick's near-impasse on The Brack). And while in Dundee I was able to brief an MCoFS colleague, Dougal Roy, to input these ideas for us at the Glen Doll group. Policy and practice all in one day, can't be bad - watch those spaces.

Plans For Stronger Landscape Protection

Article

Alistair Cant reports on a Scottish Executive consultation paper

A paper entitled '[Enhancing our care of Scotland's landscapes](#)', issued by the Scottish Executive, has just been out to consultation. It contains proposals for legislation that would give Scottish Ministers powers to designate, de-designate, or revise the boundaries of any National Scenic Area (NSA). It also proposes a statutory definition of a NSA and criteria for designation. Finally it urges the adoption of management strategies and action plans for individual NSAs.

Whilst the proposed powers focus on an existing designation, it is important that this existing designation be put on a firmer footing than at present. NSAs were proposed by the Countryside Commission for Scotland (CCS) in 1974, and 40 NSAs were identified in the 1978 report Scotland's Scenic Heritage. They were formally introduced in a Scottish Office Circular in 1980. This required Local Authorities to have policies to protect NSAs, restricted some permitted development rights, and required consultation with CCS (now SNH) on certain defined developments. The protection given to NSAs was strengthened in 1999 by National Planning Policy Guideline (NPPG) 14.

One example of the protection afforded to NSAs is that permission is required to construct a bulldozed track that rises above 400m in a NSA. Sometimes such permission may be granted too easily, or breaches may have a blind eye turned; however the basic protection is a welcome thing.

The 40 NSAs cover just over 1m hectares, and range in size from St Kilda at 900 hectares to Wester Ross at 145,300 hectares. The list reads like a roll-call of remote and marvellous places.

This Consultation Paper has been a long time coming, as in 1997 Government asked SNH to review the designation, following concern that the designation was not sufficiently effective and that NSAs were perhaps concentrated in the remoter north and west of Scotland.

In 1999 SNH presented its recommendations to Government, following consultation. SNH concluded that the priority for action should be the better care and management of the existing NSAs, to be achieved by management strategies. Finally, about 7 years later, Government has started to act by bringing out this paper, hopefully a precursor to legislation.

The Wild Land Group is happy with almost all the proposals, and we see management strategies as a very useful tool. They need to be followed through, with a national perspective. A pilot Strategy for the Wester Ross NSA at times seem to read like a local enterprise development plan, rather than a method statement for caring for a magnificent piece of wild land. However it certainly stirred up the debate locally.

The one suggestion of contention is that concerning the role of NSAs in National Parks. It is suggested that NSAs may not be needed as they should be under expert care already by the National Park Authority. This is something we are not so trusting about. NSAs focus on scenic value, whilst national parks have 4 founding principles - their natural heritage needs to be considered along with the social and economic remit. The de-designation of a NSA (or of the part within a national park) could lead to a lessening of protection. We feel this is very wrong.

Landscape as a concept, can be fairly elusive to define. However in other respects, it is at the core of Scotland - its heritage, its history, its make-up, its tourism, its business and its psyche. To weaken one of the few (and already weak) designations in this way is fundamentally wrong. We also have great concerns that national park authorities, especially in the Cairngorms, are focusing too much on other issues such as affordable housing, local employment and such like. Whilst these are important, we feel the landscape and the natural heritage should have a primacy when development and conservation are being considered.

We would also like to see a stronger case made for the designation of new NSAs. Many years have passed since the 40 were first proposed. Our experience and expectations of landscape and wildness have changed. We believe there is a need more than ever for wild places - special places - to be given more protection, for their landscape, their scenery. They should not have to rely on protection simply because a four-leaved toad, or twin-bladed fescue (or whatever) resides there!

Whilst the consultation period closed officially on 24 April we are sure this topic will be mulled over for some time, so we urge members to write to the Scottish Executive and to your MSP to ensure that NSAs will not be de-designated in National Parks.

See website for formal response.

AGM 2006

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 17th June 2006

The Annual General Meeting of the Group will be held on Saturday 17 June at 7.30pm at the [Balavil Hotel, Newtonmore](#)

The focus for the day will be a field trip on the Creag Meagaidh Reserve, preceded by a presentation by Peter Duncan of SNH.

Meet at Aberarder Farm at 10 am - [Map](#)

The evening will be spent at the Balavil Hotel, Newtonmore, where there will be a short AGM at 7.30pm followed by informal discussion. Beforehand we shall be having a bar meal in the hotel lounge bar from 6pm onwards.
Please join us for all or part of the day.

A Highland Members' Group?

Article

SWLG member Hamish Johnston reflects on the inaugural meeting

In March 2006 I went to my first SWLG meeting. So what? Well, I have only been a member since 1982 when SWLG first appealed for members, and I have a complete set of Wild Land News to prove it. But like many members, I suspect, I pay my subscription, glance through the magazine and do little else. The travel from Inverness put me off meetings in the central belt, but recently David Jarman contacted all Highland members to see if there is any interest in forming a Highland SWLG members group.

My original interest had been stimulated by the then threat to Knoydart which was being eyed up by the army as a training area. As a keen hill walker with an amateur interest in natural heritage who knew at first hand about no-go areas in Devon and the Salisbury Plain, the prospect of not being able to access the Knoydart Munros was well worth a £5 subscription.

And so, almost 25 years on, I found myself at my first SWLG meeting, together with some ten members and other interested people, at David's home near Culbokie on the Black Isle. As well as sounding out opinion on the idea of a local members' group, David was keen to find out what members think about the issues of the day, and what SWLG should be doing about them.

I was surrounded by an impressive array of professional talent - geologists, forestry experts, environmental consultants, a media professional and several people with a particular concern about current wind-farm applications in the Monadhliaths. Not surprisingly, initial discussion focused on this and the other big current local issue - the Scottish Hydro-Electric Transmission Ltd. proposals for a Lewis-Ullapool-Beauldy-Denny pylon line.

Soon we were on the major issue of the day - future sources of energy in the context of climate change, and the consequences for wild land. All types of renewable energy sources were mentioned, each representing some degree of threat to wild land (and sea). Current economics favour wind power, so without changes in government policy we can expect wind farms and their power lines gradually to nibble away at our wild land until there is nothing left. There is a serious danger that wild land, and the Highlands in particular, could be sacrificed to production of renewable energy.

Yet if this were to happen, what difference would it make in the face of increasing British and world demand for energy? Very little. But what would be very clear is that we had lost, once and for all, that precious commodity that is our wild land. We can not assume that government in its wisdom will see the need for a policy to limit wild land loss, especially for the Highlands. Yet a strategy would provide a common framework within which all parties could operate. Bodies like SWLG would be able to contribute their positive arguments and counteract their NIMBY reputation.

So why, I asked, is the SWLG Steering Committee opposed to nuclear power, when nuclear development would remove or reduce these threats to wild land? If global climate change and rising sea levels are such big issues, then surely the problem of storage and disposal of spent fuel-rods pales into insignificance. There was no dissent.

What does "wild land" mean? This question stimulated lively discussion, but alas no satisfactory answer. All sorts of different definitions were suggested, none of which was complete, and all of which failed the test of some pertinent criticism. Most ideas involved the visual impact of human activity, and/or remoteness. More technical ones involved indigenous flora and fauna and restoration. This issue is so subjective that the best definitions are inadequate, and the esoteric are impracticable. But unless we can define what we mean, how can we achieve shared understanding, define aims and influence others? We must have a common language to be able to operate - as we must - in the world of science, designations and statutory bodies.

But that is not the whole solution: we must also speak to public opinion in the language of the media. So in our discussions we reversed the telescope. We all know that people come from all over the world to see the beauty of Scotland's landscape. They come to see wild land, and although they can't define it they know it when they see it. They certainly do not come to see wind turbines and hillsides scarred by crude bulldozed tracks.

Since the meeting The Scotsman has published the results of its Seven Wonders of Scotland poll. Glencoe and the Sky/Light of Scotland were 4th and 7th respectively. Other wild land "wonders" in the thirty-strong short-list were the Cuillin of Skye, the Loch Lomond/Trossachs National Park, Fingal's Cave/Staffa, the Ancient Caledonian Pine Forest, Ben Nevis, Scotland's Wildlife, Arthur's Seat/Salisbury Crags and St Kilda. Overall, ten of the thirty were wild land "wonders". This suggests that there is a significant public opinion and non-technical support out there for what the SWLG is trying to achieve in speaking up for the intrinsic and economic value of wild land.

If there was a conclusion to the (very wide-ranging) discussions it was that SWLG must influence public attitudes, which in turn will put pressure on politicians and decision-makers, elected or otherwise. SWLG should of course accommodate technical debate on specific issues but above all it must develop a simple and consistent message for the general public that the media find easy to use.

This message must lead public opinion - and that of the public's elected representatives - to the belief that wild land has an economic value. "Seven Wonders" support disappears if jobs and livelihoods are at risk. Wild land is a significant reason why so many people come to Scotland as tourists. As a start, SWLG needs to connect with the bodies that have an interest in the success of the Scottish tourist industry. The one that attracts visitors from home and abroad, creates jobs and keeps houses in remoter communities occupied by local people rather than second home owners. The wild land Highlands are a unique and priceless commodity to be nurtured now so that it can provide for its people in the decades and centuries to come.

So will I go to another SWLG meeting? I think so. The issues today are even more important than they were in 1982, and deserve a more active membership. And in giving us a direct link to Steering Committee business David's initiative means that influencing what happens has never been easier.

John Digney reports on a woodland regeneration project at the heart of Scotland's first National Park.

Loch Katrine lies at the centre of the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park. From its beautifully wooded eastern end at the true heart of the Trossachs it stretches 9 miles north-west to lonely Glen Gyle. Here the wild scene is marred only by an ugly pylon line - arguably a greater intrusion than the relatively discreet Victorian engineering works that converted the loch into a reservoir to supply Glasgow with clean water. Loch Katrine seems to suffer relatively little from the effects of drawdown that disfigure the hydro-electric reservoirs in the north.



There is public road access to Loch Katrine at only two points, but walkers and cyclists can enjoy 12 miles of its shoreline along a virtually traffic-free road. *Photo: John Digney*

Following a major policy review by its predecessor in 2001, the present water authority, Scottish Water, took the decision to dispose of the non-core elements of its Loch Katrine operation. Sheep-farming has ceased on the surrounding hills after concerns over water contamination, and the running of the 106-year-old steamer, SS Sir Walter Scott, was transferred to a charitable trust. 2005 marked the beginning of a new era when Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) took on a 150-year lease for the entire catchment of Loch Katrine and its feeder, Loch Arklet.

FCS have now carried out a detailed survey of the 9598ha catchment and have produced an ambitious management plan, at the heart of which is a native woodland regeneration scheme on a grand scale. This will link with native woodland schemes on the neighbouring RSPB Inversnaid reserve to the west and the Woodland Trust's Glen Finglas estate to the east. Information will be shared between the three organisations and work coordinated to produce a habitat network stretching from Loch Lomond to Callander with a continuous corridor for flora and fauna.

Scope of the project

Trees could potentially be established throughout the catchment up to an altitude of 350m - a total of 3600ha - but rather than continuous cover, the aim is actually to achieve 2000ha of new native woodland of which 800ha will be planted, with the remainder occurring through natural regeneration. Planting will be scheduled to begin in spring 2008 and continue until 2014.

Aerial photography was used to ascertain the extent of existing woodland. Broadleaves currently cover 669ha, and there are 122ha of commercially planted conifers of which only 17ha, mostly Scots pine, will be retained. Birch and oak are relatively plentiful, but others such as slope alder, wych elm, hazel, juniper and aspen are under-represented.

Constraints

The choice of where to plant has been influenced by a variety of factors. The entire catchment is designated an Area of Great Landscape Value and includes two National Scenic Areas. FCS recognise the importance of retaining open space in key areas for the huge numbers of visitors to enjoy uninterrupted views of this celebrated landscape. Also to be taken into account are two areas designated as SSSIs, amounting to 222ha, and the need to safeguard existing habitats such as blanket



The north-west end of Loch Katrine with Loch Arklet to its left, see from Beinn Bhreac. Loch Tinker is the small hill lochan in the foreground. *Photo: John Digney*

bog, heath and grassland will be another constraint. There are ornithological considerations too as the catchment is home to a number of protected bird species, and SWLG's David Jarman has been consulted about certain geomorphological features which need to be acknowledged in the design plan.

Access

Long before the new legislation was enacted, FCS operated a policy of open access, and this will have a major bearing on the pattern of planting which will take account of routes people are most likely to follow on the hills. Rights of way will not be impeded, and FCS are working with the Sir Walter Scott Trust to improve opportunities for walkers and cyclists. The steamer timetable is to be revised to allow greater flexibility for passengers wishing to spend time ashore, and an additional shuttle vessel is to be introduced to give access to smaller piers on the loch. FCS will construct new paths and improve existing ones to provide walks of various length for a range of abilities.

A community-led project to restore sections of old road, including a portion of early 18th century military road between Stronachlachar and Inversnaid, is hoped to be incorporated into the final scheme. It will provide a traffic-free link between Loch Katrine and Loch Lomond as well as a circular walk from Stronachlachar. FCS have stressed their commitment to working with local communities.

Fencing

Although fenced enclosures will protect the areas of newly planted trees until they are well enough established to withstand browsing - up to 20 years - the controversial proposal to

construct a deer fence right across the catchment has now been abandoned. Various options were considered for the line this should take, and the preference was for a 28km fence running approximately east to west and linking the lochs, which themselves are natural barriers to deer movement. After much debate within the Balquhiddy Deer Management Group, of which FCS in Aberfoyle is a member, it was decided to drop the idea, much to the relief of those of us who despair at the proliferation of fencing across open country.

There has been some deer movement into the catchment from estates to the north, and although densities are currently greater than FCS would like, the impact will be monitored and it is hoped that the absence of grazing stock on the hills will compensate. However, once the water treatment works at Milngavie, north of Glasgow, have been completed, a farming operation will be established, initially with native breeds of cattle. This will help to meet biodiversity objectives and keep rank vegetation down. There are no plans as yet to return sheep to the area, but that option is not ruled out for some future stage.

Conclusion

The aim of this project will be to maintain the wild character of the area and restore the kind of woodland that nature intended here. It all seems a far cry from the days when we watched in horror and disbelief as cherished landscapes were transformed under a suffocating blanket of sitka, and routes to and from the hills became a maddening struggle through the tightly packed trees. Today the expression "felling to recycle" is very much part of FCS language when harvesting is uneconomic but the need to remove or redesign plantations is acknowledged.

So for those of us who have seen many commercial conifer plantations come and go, perhaps the only regret is that we are unlikely to live long enough to see this native forest reach full maturity.

We are grateful to Russell Lamont of FCS for his help in providing much of the information for this article.

The Revenge of Gaia bodyswerves Scotland?

Article

by David Jarman

When I mention James Lovelock I am often greeted with scepticism, if not suspicions of crankiness - and similar innenduos trail him in the press. But I have never read his Gaia book, and only have a vague awareness of the hypothesis. So when he turned up in the wilds of Devon to promote 'The Revenge of Gaia' I go along with an open mind to judge his creditworthiness.

That very afternoon I am sauntering with my brother (who has played a small part in transforming the stuffy old National Trust into one of South Britain's best-informed and most effective campaigners on climate change). He is surprised that I should confess that it is only in the last couple of years that the 'peak oil' penny has really dropped for me: the sheer profligacy of mankind discovering a vast lake of fossil fuel and burning the lion's share of it in a few centuries. Not to mention all the greenhouse gases released thereby.

I am equally surprised a few hours later to hear James Lovelock confess that the climate change penny had only just dropped for him. Until recently, his vision of Gaia was of a robust life-support system, with checks and balances that redressed any natural or man-induced wobbles. His own revelation emerged from a spell at the Hadley Centre here in Devon (where I am in semi-exile). This world-leading collection of climate change scientists took him through each of their specialisms and demonstrated that wherever they look - the Arctic,

boreal forests, oceans, tropics, Antarctica, atmospheric aerosols - the trends are towards rapid global heating (his phrase - warming still sounds rather benign to some). Far from cancelling each other out as he was accustomed to finding, they now reinforce and accelerate each other in what is known in systems theory as 'positive feedback'. Thus sun-reflecting arctic ice melts and is replaced by black water which absorbs solar energy and further warms the oceans...

Analytical and realistic

Lovelock comes across as sane and realistic, on the scientific facts and probable trends. He is not himself a climate specialist - his gift is to synthesise and communicate, to see and show us the bigger picture. Nor is he an evangelist - he is not peddling any pet solutions, because he sees their futility. He is more like a wise old family doctor who has seen his patient recover from many a passing illness, but now has to pronounce that it is a severely crippling affliction from which recovery to anything like former fitness is nigh-impossible. Perhaps his most telling remark is that the Hadley scientists are completely detached and analytical. They are just there to do the science, as accurately as possible, and make the best predictions; they are not going to trumpet them from any rooftops because that is not what scientists do.

We have an hour of Q&A of the most stimulating quality. Lovelock is excellent at fleshing out the science, but eventually admits that he is unable to answer questions about what governments should do about it (nationally, let alone internationally). He proclaims himself a natural optimist, but his age and generational experiences betray him - he found living through the blitz thrilling, and the ability of everyone to pull together against a common enemy a good omen for humankind's survival this time round. He also sees the way forward as a way backward, to low-energy lifestyles - and envisages a great general who can save his army by a well-managed retreat, living to fight another day.

Sadly, his martial analogies are fallacious. A general is a dictator - but the prospects for finding a benevolent despot capable of leading our greedy and divided polity back to living within the world's means are remote. And in WW2 there was a tangible enemy who could be defeated in a few years with survivable pain and expense. Now the enemy is within - for it is in effect humankind - and cannot be conquered without unimaginable trauma for many generations.

The scale of abuse

Lovelock the scientist can talk confidently about the survival of our species over Darwinian timescales of evolution, glossing over the political and human realities of how our numbers might reduce rapidly from billions to millions. He can cite a volcanic eruption which gave us a 'year without a summer' two centuries back - and a volcanic cataclysm 55 million years ago which injected as much 'pollution' into the atmosphere as we just have, from which Gaia was able to recover in, oh, about 100,000 years.

This is what he means by the revenge of Gaia - he remains loyal to his original, brilliant conception of a self-healing ecosphere, but now admits he had failed to conceive of the scale on which we were abusing it. Global heating does not mean Earth lurches uncontrollably towards the lifelessness of Venus or Mars, just that its carrying capacity for human life will soon be much reduced for a very long time.

Fretting about what cars we drive or how often we fly off on holiday becomes rather trivial from his lofty perspective. Given that Lovelock has been portrayed as selling his soul to nuclear power, it is interesting that the Q&A barely touches on this (near the end, a few young antis attack him on ethical rather than rational grounds, and he easily rebuts them with simple statistics about relative numbers of deaths and volumes of waste from other forms of energy- citing Hans Blix as seeing management of the present quantity of

radioactive waste globally as a trivial concern). In fact, Lovelock has always viewed nuclear as an acceptable component of a power supply portfolio - and is scathing about the impracticality of wind and biofuel as global panaceas.

His most vital statistic from the Hadley scientists is a projected global heating this century by 8°C in the temperate zone and 5°C in the tropics. Leaving aside rising sea levels (which can be adapted to by defence or retreat), such heating is a problem because rainforests disappear, deserts spread, oceans become too warm for plankton, productive farmland shifts and shrinks, and above all, global fresh water supplies are dislocated and reduced. So even if we could adapt to a low-carbon, low-energy world economy, the politics of sharing out rights to food and water would go far beyond the dystopian sci-fi imaginings of even such pessimists as Doris Lessing.

Why might this 'we are all doomed' apocalypso bodyswerve Scotland and indeed Devon then? Lovelock goes local by pointing out that the Gulf Stream currently makes Britain markedly warmer than any other place at this latitude - such as Hudson's Bay. Switching it off - as has happened in past deglaciations - will simply bring us into line with the rest of our parallel. Our mild, wet, productive maritime location will make us one of the most desirable pieces of real estate on the planet. For everyone else to covet. Gaia might spare our island her revenge, but not necessarily its present tenants.

- at this precise moment, on a gloriously sunny Devon spring afternoon, I answer the phone to learn I may soon become a grandfather for the first time

Never mind Lovelock (or my son) being a born optimist, many of the questioners want him to qualify these predictions, to confer some hope and purpose. One invokes a Swedish study suggesting that fossil fuels will simply run out (or be priced out) before the worst can kick in. Lovelock is not dogmatic, he freely recognises the very unpredictability of these system feedbacks, and he extols our ingenious way with technofixes (orbiting solar umbrellas, reflective ocean surfaces). But his best estimate is that global climate is currently undergoing a perturbation more drastic than any experienced in the last few million years, with unforeseeable because unprecedented consequences. Surely, people ask, some Chernobyl-type catastrophes will wake governments up in time? Sure, they will occur, and Hurricane Katrina has had an impact within USA, but the 2003 heatwave in Europe which killed tens of thousands hasn't deterred us from demanding cheap energy and flights of our elected representatives.

Curiously, I leave somewhat elated. A man who is devoting his life to conserving wildlife in tropical Africa asked whether it was all pointless. Lovelock skirted with useful bits of science until a straight answer was demanded. Yes, he replied. But my National Trust brother says no; in geological timescales, man can only be a fleeting occupant of the planet, but while we are its tenants we should act in accordance with our best instincts and impulses, not just give up. My own instinct is that we should be doing our best to ensure that our knowledge and achievements are preserved in the fossil record - in which the early history of *homo spp* is suspiciously elusive.

The Dissuaders

Article

*Another small-scale hydro scheme threatens the north-west. **Alistair Cant** reports.*

On occasions, the Wild Land Group is consulted, at an early stage, to give its views on a possible development project. Typically we will get a large envelope from an Environmental Consultant, who is keen to hone their project by including the views of people such as us who might be against it.

Sometimes we do not have the time or resources to study these proposals in sufficient detail, but sometimes we do. One such project was that for the Reay Forest - the area to the east of Kylesku, and the north and east of Loch Glendhu (that runs eastwards from Kylesku).

The proposal is a hydro scheme in two parts: one extracting water from the Maldie Burn where it leaves Loch an Leathaid Bhuain; the second through damming the burn leaving Loch Srath nan Aisinnin thus creating a bigger water catchment.

I quote from [our submission to the Consultants](#) one section which sums up our approach to schemes such as this: "In general we do not support such small scale hydro schemes in wild land, due to the landscape and ecological impacts being relatively significant compared to the very small output generated by the scheme - 8 MW. We believe major sources of renewable energy generation should be sited much closer to the major demand sources and not on wild land, e.g. on brownfield sites in the Central Belt. The penetration of a scheme like this in relatively unspoilt wild land means the qualities of such wild places are lost or degraded and it could hasten other degrading developments in the locality or elsewhere of a similar nature. We and others fought successfully against the Shieldaig hydro scheme predominantly for these key reasons."

We made some more detailed comments about aspects of the scheme. We also shared our views with like-minded organisations who also then could look at the details of the scheme and make comments of their own. This collective set of responses built a stronger case against the proposal.

We shall await and see whether the developer (RWE Npower plc and Grosvenor Estate) modify or even withdraw their scheme in the light of the collective comments.

Update on power line upgrade

Article

Anne Macintyre

The Scottish Executive has received over 17,000 objections to the proposals for a 400,000 volt transmission line supported by 600 giant pylons up to 213 ft high and stretching over 136 miles from Beaully to Denny.

Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) has joined the growing list of public bodies opposed to the proposals. Highland, Perth and Kinross, Stirling and Clackmannan Councils have resolved to object to the proposals.

The members of CNPA unanimously agreed that the proposal conflicted with all four of the park's statutory aims:

1. To conserve and enhance natural and cultural heritage
2. To encourage sustainable use of the natural resources
3. To support sustainable economic and social development
4. To promote understanding of the park's qualities.

The board agreed that the proposal failed to demonstrate there was no possible alternative and that it had failed to comply with the electricity industry's own guidelines that high-voltage overhead lines be routed away from high amenity value areas.

The board has now called for the Scottish Executive to convene early meetings involving all interested public bodies in an attempt to avoid a public inquiry. However, it is looking increasingly likely that the proposal from Scottish and Southern Energy and Scottish Power will result in a public inquiry.

Five possible areas suggested for new Coastal & Marine National Parks

Article

Alistair Cant

A further step forward was made when SNH at the end of March published its list of suggested candidate areas for the first Coastal & Marine park - the first of its kind in Europe.

The five suggested areas are: The Solway Firth; Argyll Islands & Coast; Ardnamurchan, Small Isles and the South Skye Coast; The North Skye Coast and Wester Ross; North Uist, Sound of Harris, Harris and South Lewis.

The Wild Land Group is pleased that progress is steadily being made, and there seems growing support for such a designation.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir,

I was interested in the articles about future energy in the recent issue of your magazine. It was appalling that only one person raised wild land issues at the forum on Highland renewable energy. Why do so few people care about wild land? It is more vital to us than it has ever been in our increasingly frenetic world to have wild places to escape to, and even if no-one goes there, these places should exist in their own right. The ecology demands it, and we destroy them at our peril.

After much thought and reading on the matter, I am more and more convinced that nuclear power is the only viable and clean alternative to future power production. We have the technology, and it should not be beyond the wit of man to deal with the problem of waste and to ensure safety. Wind turbines would need to cover the whole country to produce enough power, and then only intermittently. Wave power is a good option but a huge number of turbines would be needed. The infrastructure for all these turbines, wind and water, would be enormous and the cost of producing it would outweigh the benefits. Also, thousands of migrating birds are killed in off shore wind turbines in America. On balance, I feel nuclear is the only option, and I agree very much with what James Lovelock of Gaia fame has said. However, if global warming is really accelerating at the rate he suggests, it may already be too late. But I do think we have to try.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Lesley Evans MRCP MSc
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