

Scottish Wild Land Group

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COMMENT - Scotland's New Government - Opportunity And Threat

Article

So Scotland enters a new era - minority government, coalition politics, an SNP administration. There is a range of policy statements/proposals that will please and annoy a range of people - no nuclear power stations; dropping the Forth and Tay bridge tolls; boosting renewable energy schemes... And the environment has also started biting back - with flooding (albeit much worse in England) and poor summer weather affecting tourism and farming.

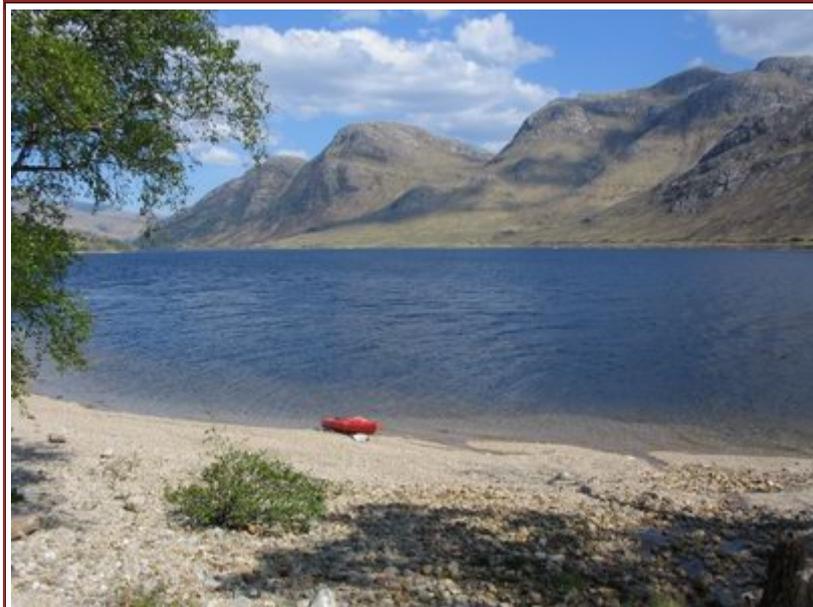
So what does the immediate future bring for those like the Scottish Wild Land Group, pressing for greater protection and enhancement for Scotland's landscapes? The answer is... it is up to you. We now have a Government which should perhaps listen more to the public, that will back issues that people feel strongly about.... as they need to court the voters for the next election.

So lobbying, campaigning and raising the profile of wild land is not just to be done in election time - it can be done all the time...with MSPs, with the media, with the Scottish Government (the new name for the Scottish Executive). Of course others will be doing the same, so we, the environment lobby, need to be as strong if not stronger in order to get our message across.

So let's use the new political terrain to inject more vigour into our message; to say to Government you must protect our fine landscapes and wild land.

At the local level, the political map has altered too, with the change to proportional representation at the local Council elections. There are now new Councillors and changes to parties in power in some cities. These politicians can be lobbied and local and regional environmental issues raised with them.

So, a time of change, as ever. For the better.. or for the worse .. that's up to you.



The northern reaches of Loch Shiel.
Photo: John Digney

Access Issues Hit The Courts

News

In the first case over access hitting the Courts, landowner Ann Gloag has won a Declarator order in the Sheriff Court in Perth to exempt part of the grounds surrounding her house, Kinfauns Castle, near Perth, from statutory access rights.

The case was fought by Perth & Kinross Council and the Ramblers' Association, and they have decided not to appeal the decision. The Ramblers' are lobbying the Scottish Parliament to have the legislation tightened up to make the issue of grounds round large houses clearer, and to make the Access Code central to any court interpretation.

Reports about the huge sums of around £200,000, understood to have been awarded to Ann Gloag in costs, could prove a disincentive to others in challenging wealthy landowners. Furthermore, voluntary organisations and local authorities cannot reasonably gamble on incurring further expense though an appeal in the higher courts, whereas a super-rich landowner might well be prepared to take the risk.

Wild Places: Moor

Article

*An extract from **Robert Macfarlane's** new book*

*In the course of a congenial evening in the editor's bothy sticking hundreds of labels on envelopes and stuffing WLN's into them, we noticed one going to a Robert Macfarlane in Cambridge. Could this be the Robert Macfarlane, lecturer in English, who won the Guardian First Book Award for *Mountains of the Mind*? Since it was nearing year's end, we sent him a card soliciting an endorsement for our case against Beaulieu-Denny and all that goes with it. He responded in fullness of time with a ringing denunciation printed in *Wild Land News* 69:*

*And he offered us the chance to publish extracts from his new book, **Wild Places**, along with those equally august journals *The Herald* and *the Telegraph*. So here is the first, from Chapter 4 'Moor', with another to come next issue:*

That far into the Moor, the vast space we were in resolved the land around us into bacon-like bands: a stripe of sky, a stripe of white cloud, a stripe of dark land, and below everything the tawny Moor. The Moor's colours in that season were subtle and multiple. Seen from a distance it was brindled; close up, it broke into its separate colours: orange, ochre, red, a mustardy yellow and, lacing everything, the glossy black of the peat.

It took us all that day to reach what I had come to think of as the Moor's centre, the Abhainn Bà - the point where the River Bà flows into Loch Laidon. We stopped there, for dusk was spreading over the Moor, and pitched a small tent. We lay talking in the dark: about the ground we had covered, the ground still to go, about the odd mixture of apprehension and awe that the Moor provoked in us both. Our sleeping-place was cupped in a curve of the river, on a miniature floodplain that the winter spates had carved out and flattened: a shelter in the middle of the Moor's great space.

In a land as densely populated as Britain, openness can be hard to find. It is difficult to reach places where the horizon is experienced as a long unbroken line, or where the blue of distance becomes visible. Openness is rare, but its importance is proportionately great. Living constantly among streets and houses induces a sense of enclosure, of short-range sight. The spaces of moors, seas and mountains counteract this. Whenever I return from the moors, I feel a lightness up behind my eyes, as though my vision has been opened out by twenty degrees to either side. A region of uninterrupted space is not only a convenient metaphor for freedom and openness, it can sometimes bring those feelings fiercely on.

To experience openness is to understand something of what the American novelist Willa Cather, who was brought up on the Great Plains, called 'the reaching and reaching of high plains, the immeasurable yearning of all flat lands'. To love open places - and they have, historically, not been loved - you have to believe, as Cather did, that beauty might at times be a function of continuous space. You have to believe that such principalities might possess their own active expansiveness. Anyone who has been in an empty sea, out of sight of land, on a clear day, will know the deep astonishment of seeing the curvature of the globe: the sea's down-turned edges, its meniscal frown.

Open spaces bring to the mind something which is difficult to express, but unmistakable to experience - and Rannoch Moor is among the greatest of those spaces. If the Lake District were cut out of Cumbria and dropped into the Moor, the Moor would accommodate it. The influence of places such as the Moor cannot be measured, but should not for this reason be passed over. 'To recline on a stump of thorn, between afternoon and night,' Thomas Hardy wrote in *The Return of the Native*, 'where the eye could reach nothing of the world outside the summits and shoulders of heathland which filled the whole circumference of its glance, and to know that everything around and underneath had been from prehistoric times as unaltered as the stars overhead, gave ballast to the mind adrift on change, and harassed by the irrepressible New.'

For W. H. Murray, it was not even direct exposure to the spaces of moor and mountain that consoled him during his prison years, but the memory of that experience. He knew that these places continued to exist; this was what sustained him.

In 1977, a nineteen-year-old Glaswegian named Robert Brown was arrested for a murder he did not commit, and over the course of the following days had a confession beaten out of him by a police officer subsequently indicted for corruption. Brown served twenty-five years, and saw two appeals fail, before his conviction was finally overturned in 2002. When he was released, one of the first things he did was to go to the shore of Loch Lomond and sit on a boulder on the loch's southern shore in sunlight, to feel, as he put it, 'the wind on my face, and to see the waves and the mountains'. Brown had been out on the loch shore the day before he was arrested. The recollection of the space, that place, which he had not seen for a

quarter of a century, had nourished him during his imprisonment. He had kept the memory of it, he recalled afterwards, 'in a secret compartment' in his head.

We have tended to exercise an imaginative bias against flatlands: moor, tundra, heath, prairie, bog and steppe. For Daniel Defoe, traveling in 1725, the moors above Chatsworth were abominable: 'a waste and a howling wilderness'. Reactions like Defoe's occur in part because of the difficulty of making the acquaintance of flat terrains. They seem to return the eye's enquiries unanswered, or swallow all attempts at interpretation. They confront us with the problem of purchase: how to anchor perception in a context of vastness, how to make such a place mean. We have words we use for such places, half in awe and half in dismissal - stark, empty, limitless. But we find it hard to make language grip landscapes that are close-toned, but that also excel in expanse, reach and transparency.

Robert MacFarlane's book "Wild Places" was launched at this year's Edinburgh Book Festival. ISBN: 978-1-86207-941-0. Publisher: Granta. RRP: £18.99

Braes O' Doune

Article

Returning to Scotland from Devon, David Jarman is appalled at the industrialisation of a familiar landscape

There is a moment as the train north corkscrews the down grade from Plean Junction to Bannockburn when, if you are sitting on the counterintuitive east side, the cutting opens out, the Ochils come into view, and for a few hundred yards the line twists sufficiently for the alert passenger to see north-west through the Stirling gap to the first mountains of the Highlands. The train is travelling at its fastest here and is soon down on the carse.

Travelling south, on the upgrade, you have slightly longer, but have to be facing backwards, or crane yourself to the disconcert of fellow travellers. Either way, the train always gives you a discreet reminder, as the track cants quite perceptibly from one way to the other; in railway terminology these are 'reverse curves'.

This may be your first sight of the Highlands ever, or for an unconscionably long time, or of the day, if you are commuting south, or since the morning if you are returning home; always assuming of course that they are visible under an Atlantic front, or above a carse fog, or in the late dawn or early dusk of the short days. If you have made this journey hundreds of times, you may be so immersed in a paper, or papers, or (rare treat) good converse, that you miss the nudge of the reverse tilt, or respond to it tardily. The wee kicking you give yourself restores your alertness, for a few journeys. For it is important to know they are still there.

The mountains are Ben Vorlich and Stuc a' Chroin, the nearest Munros to the Central Belt along with Ben Lomond. They are a pretty mis-shapen pair, surviving teeth in an almost empty lower jaw, but they are unmistakably Highland and quite different in ruggedness and ancient-ness from anything further south in Britain or indeed Europe; for they are the ramparts of the Caledonides. They are set back a few miles from the Highland Boundary, one of the greatest and most abrupt geological transitions of these isles, so that the land rises up to them in stages; their neighbour Ben Ledi is not quite a Munro but more prominent because it is right on the Boundary.

Of course most travellers north come up the motorways, and as they cross the brow and come down to the inner carse on the west side of Stirling this great prospect unfolds in panavision. And the thousands upon thousands who ascend to the battlements of Stirling Castle or climb the Wallace Monument can savour it to the full, with the aid of their handbooks, or tour guides, or interpretation boards. For this is one of the very best broad landscape views it is possible to obtain in Scotland from an accessible vantage point. While

the view of the castle is truly iconic and sells the postcards and calendars, it is the view from the castle - harder to capture in pixels - which is the more enduring impression.

It is possible to stay almost twenty years in a place such as Stirling and still have territory within close compass to explore. I long knew some good bike rides above Doune, up through field and forest to where the rough grazing begins. They were ideal for summer evenings, with a saunter out onto the moor as far as the enduring wetness allowed in trainers. Above the moor the slope increases to the tedious flat skyline of Slymaback, a ridge so obviously peat-hagged and so difficult of approach that when time was called on my lease of Stirling, I had still never ascended to it, despite intentions of proving its horrors, for it is only 1600' high, and in a fine dry spell finer options beckon. This skyline is fully part of the view from the castle, but its very dullness serves to lead the eye further in to the bolder swellings just before the Boundary and the culminating Munros beyond.

So when a few years back I heard of a 'wind farm' proposal for the Braes o' Doune it seemed as "least bad" a place as any. My idea of a wind farm in similar uplands at that juvenile stage of their evolution was Black Law in Lanarkshire, quite visible from the M74, but not at all offensive on moorland slopes; likewise that on bleak Soutra Hill beside the A68 into the Borders. I never even troubled myself to go and look at the plans, to visualise their impact, or to discuss it with friends or neighbours. I was never aware of any campaign against it, other than perhaps a few Nimbys more bothered by construction traffic up their lanes. Apparently the National Trust did object, but the Council backed it without a qualm; this at a time when going green was all the rage, and wind generators a symbol of progress and foresight.

By contrast, at around the same time I reacted with fury to the proposal to erect a wind installation on the anonymous sub-Corbett hills above Lochearnhead and Glen Ogle. The turbines would have been right in the foreground of the view north from Ben Vorlich towards Ben Nevis, centre-stage in the great arc of the Grampian Highlands from Stobinian round by Alder to Lawers. Happily the planners soon ditched that one - not because of the mountain scene, but because it was just within the upcoming National Park. Poor Slymaback is just four miles outside.

On one of my last sorties from Stirling, I finally went up Slymaback, in trainers, with dry feet, by dint of some stimulating route selection. Amongst the hags on top there sat a man, the odds against which - on a winter weekday - I would have wagered a years' pay. Ever curious I went over. He was being paid to sit there - counting birds in a before-and-after survey required by planning condition on the wind farm. It started construction soon after my last evening constitutional along the golf course rim to take leave of its irreplaceable prospect. I still had no inkling of what was about to befall it.

A year later, the Braes of Doune wind project is inaugurated by Alastair Darling. Soon there are cries of horror from aghast friends, and reports in the local press expressing outrage - the councillors and planners say they had no idea it would be so intrusive. I make a fleeting revisit to Stirling, there being no NHS dentists left in Devon. Thick mist.

My next return is to give evidence at the Beaulieu-Denny Inquiry, resisting the mega pylon line which would unlock a proliferation of mega wind installations. Already, we have one above Inverness, smack in the middle of the stupendous view from Cairn Gorm, spanning from Ben Nevis right round to the Caithness hills. And the view from our ultimate Munro, Ben Hope, now terminates eastwards in the mushrooming wind installations of Caithness. And the prospects right across the Highlands from eight Munro groups will soon have the Glenmoriston scheme in the frame. And there are plans lurking for the Arkaig hills, commanding the approaches to the Rough Bounds.

I take the train north from Glasgow to the Inquiry at Perth on one of those mild February days of pale sun, slight haze, and anticyclonic calm when you are uncertain what you might see in that fleeting moment on the down-grade. The Ochils are soft, with cloud wisps around Ben Cleuch. And there they are, Ben Vorlich and Stuc a' Chroin, as of old, barely a trace of the snows of January, today placid, benign, distant, with so much subtle intervening texture that with a frame around the glimpse it would pass for a Constable or a Raeburn.

Smack dab in the line of sight is the wind factory, a score or more of shiny steel columns with brilliant white rotors, some revolving lazily, others static. Even 12 miles distant, the scale of these objects can reasonably be described as giant. They render the mountains beyond puny. Some rotors rise above the skyline of Slymaback. The complex is much, much more intrusive than Grangemouth, which we have just passed a mere five miles away. It humbles the castle on its modest rock. It completely supersedes the Wallace Monument as the dominant landmark for miles around.

How should we react to Braes of Doune ? Leaving aside the climate change and peak oil arguments, how should we view this first big highly visible scheme to impinge on the Highlands, purely in landscape terms ? Will it become an accepted part of the scene, maybe a tourist attraction in its own right ? There is no doubt the two Forth Bridges are immensely popular, and are justly celebrated as the pride of Scotland's engineering tradition, and should be preserved as monuments. Supposing Braes o' Doune had been conceived as a gigantic artwork, like the Angel of the North, or Scotland's underrated answer to it, The Horn by the M8 ? Can we see it not as a vandalised Constable, but as a surrealist masterstroke, a cheeky moustache enhancing a Mona Lisa ?

At the official launch, the local MP admits that a lot of people are upset by this cuckoo in their nest, but bravely asserts that once you get up there it really is very impressive. Indeed the pictures of rotors against the sky are photogenic, even sublime; being amongst them on a windy day must be quite awesome - and the views out from it are of course unspoiled.

Maybe in years to come revised guidebooks will be urging people to visit the parapets of Stirling Castle for the incredible views of the windfarm, with the mountains serving as the painted backcloth to the real action. Indeed many visitors unaware of how it was before may well say gee that's quite something and snap away uncritically. We are so good at making a virtue out of necessity, of finding the saving grace, of mentally turning a sow's ear into a silk purse, of seeing the shiny revolving silver lining below the clouds. Even oil-shale bings have become historic monuments. We are so good at becoming inured to changes for the worse all over the Highlands - blanket forestry, hydro reservoirs and power lines, road improvements and sign clutter, fish farms in every loch and bay, bulldozed tracks up the glens and onto the high tops. All good ideas when they first began.

But if Braes of Doune becomes acceptable, so will scores more wind schemes, and the novelty value won't quite be the same. We don't need to attract more visitors to Stirling Castle, we don't need to make its view more dynamic, we didn't need to make that sacrifice of what was, until now, one of the very best almost unspoiled panoramas in the country.

I have two sons, brought up in Stirling, one a hill-lover, t'other more a city boy. I chose not to mention this manifestation. One travels north by coach, sees it from the M9, says he just could not believe anyone would have let this happen. The other drives up from London to Inverness to ensure the grandson is born Scottish. He simply says now he will never be able to show the wee lad what his daily view to and from school used to look like.

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) is currently seeking feedback from the public on the operation of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. SNH has a statutory obligation to keep the Code under review and needs to gather information on its implementation.

More details can be found at www.outdooraccess-scotland.com from where a monitoring form can be downloaded.

SNH stress that the form is for on-going monitoring purposes, rather than for reporting incidents, where the local authority or national park authority should be contacted.

We would strongly urge anyone who has comments on the Code to complete a form.

AGM Report

Report

The AGM was held at the Covenanters' Inn, Aberfoyle, in early September. The Co-ordinator gave his annual report (summarised below) and the accounts were presented and accepted. Because of a large donation to the Beaully-Denny campaign, we made a slight deficit, but income generally met running costs, with no increase in subscriptions now for many years.

The Steering team was re-elected, apart from Anne Macintyre who was stepping down for family reasons. Her contribution over the many years was much appreciated and she will keep in touch informally.

Earlier in the day, in showery weather, members climbed Stuc Odhar, north-east of Brig o'Turk village, and viewed some of the work of the Woodland Trust who now own this large estate around Glen Finglas Reservoir.

Extract of the full Annual Report and Accounts - available in full from the Co-ordinator upon request:

"The Group has been active in a number of ways throughout the year. One main focus has been to work with other interested bodies in Scottish Environment LINK to take issue with the proposed electricity connector between Beaully, near Inverness, and Denny, near Stirling. We have been working with 5 other environmental non-governmental organisations at the public inquiry into the Beaully-Denny power-line. There has been a significant number of objectors to the power-line and the Group supports their efforts by joining with others to have the topic debated fully at the public inquiry.

On a more collaborative note, members of the Steering Team have been working with various parts of the Forestry Commission to look to reconfiguring some of Scotland's public forests to enhance their visual appeal, recreational benefits and ecological sustainability. The FC has welcomed such involvement and committed advice.

The past year has also seen the endorsement by the UK Government of the European Landscape Convention and the Co-ordinator attended an important seminar on the issue organised by Scottish Natural Heritage.

The Group was part of the 'Everyone' campaign organised by Link to publicise environmental issue in the run-up to the recent elections for the Scottish Parliament.

The Group continues to function successfully as one of a minority of wholly volunteer run and staffed organisations."

Alistair Cant

In September 2007 The Scottish Landscape Forum published its report that was sent to Scottish Ministers in March 2007. The report is the culmination of short but intensive work from the Forum, which comprised a diverse range of governmental and other bodies.

The report has 22 recommendations under 4 main headings -

1. Taking forward the European Landscape Convention
2. Promoting a people-centred approach
3. A stronger institutional framework
4. Improving our practices.

We in SWLG are interested especially in the topic of strengthening the institutional framework, the proposals include the following wish list:

- A National Statement on Landscape from Scottish Ministers
- Update and modernise current legislation with a possible Landscape Bill if this was seen as the most appropriate way to deliver landscape protection, planning and management.
- Require public bodies to have regard for particular landscape values.
- Strengthening the protection and management of National Scenic Areas.

The report outlines how steady progress could be made, but this will only happen with strong leadership from the Scottish Government and senior officials. Our concern is that landscape protection is rarely given prominence or priority when deciding major issues. The proposed actions must have some teeth to give better protection for our wild land and other landscapes.

The Landscape Forum was originally a short-life Forum, but it is to continue its work, and look in more detail at certain aspects. This is to be welcomed, but equally well, the report needs to be backed and implemented by Government, rather than welcomed and filed. We support the work of the Forum and SNH and wish to see more resources and action into this important field.

Alistair Cant

Dear Sir,

I read with interest the article by David Jarman in the summer issue of Wild Land News in the form of "an open letter to the National Park Authority". Sensational title but does the article hold up to scrutiny?

Your readers may be interested to know that the Park was designated in 1951 and within its boundaries 26,000 people live. Many of the residents depend on the Park for their livelihood. The tourism industry is a major employer not surprising considering that over 10 million visitor nights are spent in the Park each year. The Authority was established in 1996. We employ less than 190 staff and manage a fair chunk of Wales on a budget of less than £10 million. Our powers and purposes are limited and prescribed in the 1995 Environment Act. We have two statutory purposes - conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage and promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the

special qualities of the Park by the public. We also have a duty to 'seek to foster the social and economic well being of the local communities'. What is often overlooked is that Section 62 of the Act requires all relevant authorities to have regard to the statutory purposes when carrying out development in the Park.

Let me now turn to the article. We don't have the draconian powers that David seems to think we have. The vast majority of the land in Snowdonia is in private ownership and getting things done requires cooperation and partnership working. The article paints a rather one sided and grim picture - a grand tour of the black spots. Yes it is true that some of the developments we have inherited from the past are an eyesore and they would not normally be approved today. However, as much as we would like we cannot undo the past, not overnight anyway. The large forest plantations referred to were planted many years ago, before the Park was designated. These days we work closely with the Forestry Commission and the felling and re-planting programmes are much more in-keeping with the natural landscape. However, some mature and established plantations on sensitive skylines and valley sides remain. I agree with David, the main national power transmission lines are an eyesore, the result of having two nuclear power stations in North West Wales to serve the energy needs of the UK i.e. the national interest. We recognise that some of the other long established power lines are also incongruous and we are currently actively working with the main network operator to underground some of the most visually intrusive lines. Invasive weeds like the rhododendron and others are a massive problem. The Authority currently operates an ambitious rhododendron control scheme. However, the task and the cost of managing and controlling the spread of these weeds is way beyond our meagre resources. The bike tracks are a more recent and growing problem in certain areas. Some may be lawful, but we are working with the local police and the Countryside Council for Wales to ensure that unlawful incursions by off roaders are stopped.

So let's not hammer the National Parks and the Authorities that are responsible for their well being. Yes, there is a debate to be had about "wilderness" and the role of relevant authorities in looking after Parks, but National Parks in the UK are not museum pieces. These special living landscapes will continue to evolve and the Park Authorities will continue to work hard with the limited powers and resources at their disposal to ensure that their special qualities are conserved and enhanced for the benefit of future generations.

Aneurin Phillips
Chief Executive,
Snowdonia National Park Authority

Perils of the Gaelic

Letter

Dear Editor,

With respect to the Gaelic names of flowers I would like to say that it is not unusual for there to be two or three different names for the one flower. It depends on which part of the Gaidhealtachd you hail from. I did a little research on "tormentil" and I got the word "leamhnach" in addition to "cara-mhil a' choin" and "cairt-lair".

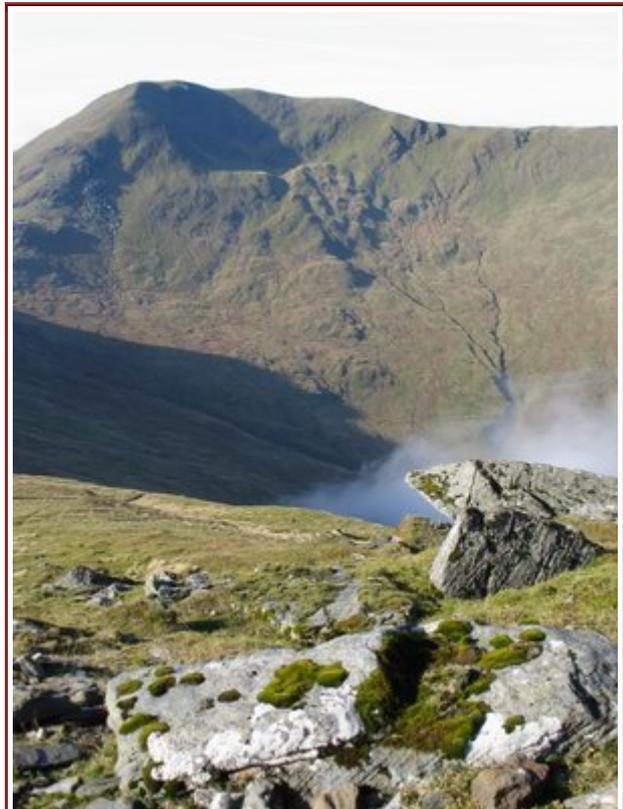
A classic example is the word for a spider. In Wester Ross and parts of Lewis it is "poca-salainn" (bag of salt) while the more commonly used word is "damhan-allaidh". For hoody crow some say "feannag", others say "starrag"; for eiderduck some say "lach mhòr" (big duck) and others "lach lochlannach" (Norwegian/Viking duck).

With reference to Meall Corranaich "raineach" can mean fern(s) as well as bracken. There's not much of the former and none of the latter (unless they existed there in the past) so we need to look for another interpretation. The adjective "corrach" means notched, sharp,

barbed or prickly as well as pertaining to a sickle or hooked. In this case the hill would be called "Meall Corranach". However, the noun "corranach" means loud weeping, mourning. I tend to favour this as grammatically it is correct. You can say "Meall Corranaich" or "Meall na Corranaich". The arguments will no doubt rage on.

On the topic of hyphens, i.e. too many as in "cara-mhil-a-choin", this is an error I have frequently noticed. It is either a slip-up at the printer's or the writer knows only a little Gaelic. Hyphens frequently appear where there should be an apostrophe and where they should not be found at all.

Yours sincerely,
Liz Patterson
Gargunnoch,
Stirling



Meall Corranaich from the slopes of Ben Lawers.
Its name is the subject of debate.

Photo: John Digney