

JOHN MUIR TRUST

JOURNAL

67 AUTUMN 2019

- 16 People, place and the meaning of challenge on Britain's Big Rounds
- 22 Celebrating community drive, energy and creativity in Knoydart
- 26 How nature can help us hit net-zero carbon emissions

Lyrical landscapes

Demystifying our maps

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JOURNAL 67, AUTUMN 2019

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Farewell message from Andrew Bachell

RETIREMENT is difficult when you continue to care about the cause which has been behind an entire career. But retiring I am after a short but productive and energetic period with the Trust.

I'm delighted at the progress we've made. We have more staff than ever working directly on the land we own and manage. The John Muir Award has spread into new areas and membership has grown. The internal workings of the Trust are more robust and our processes are more efficient. But I am still left with a niggling feeling that something is not yet quite right.

Perhaps it is the growing realisation that, at a global level, nature conservation is being undermined by a combination of climate change and the failure of political leaders to address the urgent environmental

and social threats we face. The mass production and consumption of plastics for example – up from 1.5million tonnes in 1950 to 348 million tonnes in 2017– has created an environmental catastrophe.

In the First World, we consume far more than our fair share of the Earth's finite resources, so those of us who live in richer countries really have to accept the responsibility to do more than our share to reverse the damage we have already done.

There is no solution to our environmental problems that leaves people out of the equation. And that I think is the bit of unfinished business

that troubles me. Although we have tried to put people right back at the heart of the Trust, where they were at the start, we still have a long way to go. And that applies as much to our day-to-day work to protect and restore wild places at home as it does to the climate crisis that confronts society worldwide.

In 2014, the Scottish Government along with its advisory body Scottish Natural Heritage published a map of wild land in Scotland. It consisted of 42 of the most remote and rugged areas in the country covering 20 per cent of our total landmass. The same techniques applied across the UK would further include areas in north Wales, the Lake District and perhaps a few other places.

We campaigned for these areas, and polls have

shown that a large majority of Scotland's population support protection for wild land. But the very existence of the map has been divisive, especially in communities within the vicinity of some of the designated Wild Land Areas. That division has opened up because it was not driven by consensus. Some saw it as a top-down exercise imposed by people in distant offices and without consultation with people on the ground.

Conservation designations have always attracted controversy, because they tend to pitch national or international aims on one side against local needs. I feel it's time to move away from this, towards a more integrated approach.

We all understand the importance of wild places. As well as supporting biodiversity, they enrich our lives, improve our well-being, strengthen our cultural connections to the land, and sustain jobs in communities in some of our most fragile areas. I would suggest, however, that to widen support for our aims, we need to think about moving beyond an adversarial, all-or-nothing debate around lines on maps.

The Trust has recently signed new agreements with community land trusts in the Highlands and Islands that recognise the role of nature and landscape as vital assets that can contribute to local, sustainable economic growth. Meanwhile, in urban and rural areas across the UK, we are working to widen access to wild places in towns through participation in the John Muir Award.

Personal experience through direct connection with nature is a powerful force that can change lives for the better. And it teaches us respect for the natural world. Those who learn to love wild places are more likely to have responsible and sustainable lifestyles, and to support public policies that protect rather than destroy our natural world.

When I am told that caring about the landscape matters less than caring about biodiversity it can set me off on a bit of a rant. Over 50 years ago, my journey into environmental action began with exploring nature at home. I had the privilege of being introduced to the landscapes of the Scottish Highlands at an early age. For decades I carried on that journey in my work and learned a lot along the way.

Conservation is weak when it fights alone and stronger when it works with people. If we are to repair our world and rewild our lives, we need to be part of something that extends far beyond the normal circles of traditional conservation thinking.

Finally, I would like to close with thanks to all of those who have supported me and the Trust over the past two years. The Trust is in excellent shape, with a talented team of staff, including many younger people. I wish all those involved, and the Trust as a whole, all the very best for the future.

Andrew Bachell
Chief Executive, John Muir Trust





PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST

Lakeland community praises role of Trust

The highly respected chair of Patterdale Parish Council, Rob Shepherd, has expressed hope that the Trust will manage Glenridding Common for many years to come.

Writing in *Common Ground* (see cover), a special eight-page publication produced by the Trust and circulated to over 2,000 households around Glenridding, he described the feelings of nervousness around the community when it was first proposed that the Trust take on the lease of the property.

“I’m happy to say, however, that 18 months on, our experience has been entirely positive. From the very start, Trust personnel have made a huge effort to engage with the local community. This is in no small part down to the efforts of Pete Barron whom we know, trust and respect of old. He has done a fantastic job in working to maintain the delicate equilibrium between the need to enhance the environmental quality of the common and the needs of the local community.

“In addition to the work carried out on footpath restoration and the enhancement of the common’s unique flora, the Trust has worked closely with the community on schemes to alleviate flooding further down the valley through clearance of drainage channels and selective planting.

“Links are also being forged with the local primary school to ensure that all local children have a good understanding of the rich environmental heritage on their doorstep.”



PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST

Rob Shepherd addresses members at our Glenridding AGM

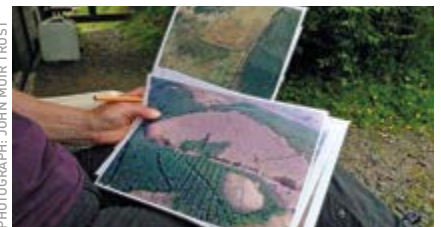
Trust signs agreements in the Western Isles

The Trust recently signed its first Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the largest community landowner in the Western Isles – the Galson Estate Trust (known as Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn / UOG).

Under community ownership since 2007, the area has a 2,000-strong population and covers 22,600 hectares, including the second largest expanse of blanket peatland in the UK (after the Flow Country in Caithness and Sutherland).

The news comes on the back of renewing an MoU with the West Harris Trust for a further four years. The Trust is also close to finalising a new MoU with the North Harris Trust, with whom we have had a close working relationship since 2003.

These agreements enable the John Muir Trust to support island communities with their conservation management and help us refine our own policy and practices by learning from the experiences of community-led conservation management.



PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST

Glenlude felling plan

This autumn, the Trust is changing its approach at Glenlude in the Scottish Borders. Up until now, we have been hand-felling and using horses and small vehicles to extract timber from Glenlude in an effort to maintain canopy cover, protect soils and maximise ecological, economic and social activity.

However, the trees are fast outgrowing our ability to fell by hand, so our updated, three-year plan, kindly supported by Andy Howard from Pennine Forestry, will involve thinning and felling using the smallest harvesting machinery possible. This plan respects our ethos, the work done so far by volunteers, plus the ongoing need for volunteer and other group activities.

“We will thin the spruce, removing every sixth row of trees which maintains canopy cover and allows the remaining trees to grow on, and fell 90 per cent of the larch – which is being removed now for disease prevention,” explains Glenlude land manager Karen Purvis.

Wild Space refreshed

A fresh coat of paint and new signage has given our Wild Space visitor centre and gallery in Pitlochry extra kerb appeal in preparation for the busy festive season.

Seven years after opening, the centre will have more to offer visitors and supporters than ever. In addition to staging our 40th exhibition in the Alan Reece Gallery – Anke Addy’s photographic essay *The Living Cairngorms* – there are a range of free, creative writing workshops in October.

Wild Space has also established a strong relationship with talented artisans at the Corbenic Camphill Community – a nearby home for people with social, emotional, intellectual and learning disabilities.

Their woodwork, pottery and designs are proving a hit in our shop, as are our ever popular Christmas cards, and the Wild Nature diaries and calendars. Browse our latest Gift Catalogue or the online shop to find out more.



Freshened up: the Trust’s Wild Space visitor centre in the heart of Pitlochry

PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST

Bla Bheinn visitor facility upgrade nears completion

Work to increase car parking provision and build two composting toilets at the foot of Bla Bheinn on the B8083 between Broadford and Elgol in Skye is nearing completion.

The restructuring was carried out by Torrinn-based contractor John MacKinnon. Parking provision has increased from approximately 20 spaces to 34 and includes disabled access bays. The composting toilets are a low-cost, minimal maintenance and environmentally-friendly way of providing toilet facilities.

The upgrade will also include new signage and interpretation boards to help visitors better understand the landscape, wildlife, culture and heritage of the local area – and to remind people of the importance of responsible visitor behaviour.

Rich Williams, the Trust’s Land Operations Manager, commented: “As we all know, tourist numbers coming to Skye are on the rise, creating infrastructure problems in certain areas. The purpose of the upgrade is not to encourage more traffic but to tackle existing parking congestion along with thoughtless litter and human waste problems.”

The Trust would like to thank the Scottish Government’s Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund for funding the work.



Visitors will soon benefit from much improved facilities

PHOTOGRAPH: RICHARD WILLIAMS



PHOTOGRAPH: EMILY HAGUE

Wallace-Rubens grant: spread the word for 2020



The annual grant set up in memory of two Scottish mountaineering giants – Bill Wallace and Des Rubens – is now open for new applicants for 2020.



Among those benefiting this year were Emily Hague, pictured left, who received a £500 grant towards a solo research project looking

into the decline of harbour seals around Orkney and Shetland; Nat Spring, pictured above left, who was awarded a £230 grant for a 40-day solo and unaided cycle challenge across Scotland to aid his recovery from a head injury that affected his memory; and Midlothian school student Blaine Ferguson who received £500 towards a scientific expedition to the jungles of Mexico’s Calakmul Reserve gathering data about trees, birds, large mammals and herpetofauna (amphibians and reptiles).

See more at onthekillerwhaletrail.com (Emily Hague) and 40days.org.uk (Nat Spring).



Ground trampled
by deer outside
a fence

PHOTOGRAPH: LESTER STANDEN

Scotland-wide poll reveals huge backing for nature and wildlife

Almost nine out of ten Scots (86 per cent) are concerned at threats to wildlife from climate change, habitat loss and pollution, according to a new Survival poll, while an overwhelming 94 per cent see the natural environment as 'very important' or 'quite important' to Scotland's national identity and economy.

Commissioned by Scottish Environment LINK, the umbrella body for over 30 environment organisations, including the Trust, the survey also found that 84 per cent of respondents would like the Scottish Parliament to pass new laws to ensure that Scotland keeps the same or higher levels of environmental protection than current EU laws in the event of Brexit.

Trust hopeful of breakthrough in plans for stronger deer management across Scotland

After two years of investigation and deliberation, the Deer Working Group, an independent body appointed by Scottish Ministers in 2017, is expected to report its findings to the Government at the end of November.

The group was set up following critical reports of the state of deer management in Scotland by Scottish Natural Heritage in 2016 and by a committee of the Scottish Parliament in 2017.

Initiating the review, the Government acknowledged that while there have been some improvements in deer management, "significant issues remain".

The Deer Working Group was asked to "make recommendations for changes to ensure effective deer management in Scotland that safeguards public interests and promotes the sustainable management of wild deer".

Mike Daniels, the Trust's Head of Land Management, said: "As governments start to understand the importance of natural solutions to climate change, the sustainable management of deer is more critical than ever. We need to move away from a Victorian model that encourages unnaturally high deer densities and severely hampers natural woodland regeneration.

"The recovery and expansion of natural wild woods could lock up carbon, reduce flooding and increase biodiversity – a win, win for all."



PHOTOGRAPH: MARK HAMBLEN

Visitor management

Senior advisors to Scotland's Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs, Fiona Hyslop, have met a Trust delegation to discuss ideas for managing the pressures generated by rising tourism in parts of the Highlands.

London calling

We will hold the first John Muir Trust London Members' Gathering in the evening of 11 December at the University of West London, Ealing. Find out more about this event and other local members' group activities in the flyer sent out with this *Journal*.

2020 AGM

Annual General Meeting and Members' Gathering will be held on 5-6 June in Innerleithen Memorial Hall, near our Glenlude property in the Scottish Borders.

Glencassley wind farm

Four years after being rejected by the Scottish Government, a revised plan for a major wind farm on Wild Land Area 34 has been tabled by power giant SSE. The development is still at the scoping (pre-planning) stage.

New Trustees sought

The Trust is seeking seven new Trustees to join the board. We would especially welcome applicants who have experience in human resources, outdoor learning, fundraising, marketing, and retail or other commercial activity to help us achieve a broader mix of skills.

Trustee Duncan Macniven, pictured left, who will step down from the board next year, said: "The Trust is well governed, and as well as the right skills we'd like a board that is sufficiently diverse across gender, age, location and ethnicity to better reflect the different groups of people we work with."

Closing date for nominations is 3 March 2020. To find out more or express an interest, visit johnmuirtrust.org/trusteeCALL



PHOTOGRAPH: KEVIN LLELLAND



New look: a view from the first section of the path (main); whinchat (below)

PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST

A fresh look at Schiehallion

Liz Auty provides details on a new path at the foot of Schiehallion that will offer a completely different experience of the surrounding landscape

WORK has begun on a new footpath at Schiehallion in partnership with Forestry and Land Scotland and Highland Perthshire Communities Land Trust (HPCLT) – two of the Trust’s Heart of Scotland Forest project partners.

Currently, around 20,000 people walk up Schiehallion each year and the first section of the existing route was designed to be easy access. This section now requires resurfacing and the Heart of Scotland Forest Partnership decided to look at options for a low-level, circular route. With an all access path and boardwalk, the new route will offer a fulfilling way of enjoying the countryside and viewing Schiehallion for people who don’t want to walk up the mountain, but who would still like to visit this wild place.

The 1km walk starts and finishes at the Braes of Foss car park (which will be partially affected by the works). It crosses forestry land as well as community-owned woodland on Dun Coillich, managed by HPCLT, linking with the existing Schiehallion path to form a loop.

The path will comprise boardwalk and stone chips and will include seating along its length. New interpretation boards will



PHOTOGRAPH: LIZ AUTY

provide information on wildlife and archaeology plus details on the Heart of Scotland Forest Partnership. There is abundant birdlife along the route including black grouse lekking on early spring mornings, plus breeding willow warbler, cuckoo and whinchat.

This is an exciting project that will enable people of all abilities to experience the hills and also allow us to hold educational and public events together

with our partners HPCLT and Forestry and Land Scotland.

The Trust is pleased to have secured funding for the project from the Scottish Government and European Union through the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme Improving Public Access Fund, although we are also fundraising through our Wild Ways Path Appeal (see further info) to secure the remaining amount needed to cover the cost of building and maintaining this new route at the foot of the mountain.

Following a fantastic response to an earlier appeal in 2018, we also plan to carry out repairs on the high-level path to Schiehallion that continues to prove so popular with walkers. □

Further info

If you would like to support our development of this new route, plus other path repairs across all the wild places we care for, you can donate to our Wild Ways appeal at johnmuirtrust.org/wildways. You can also text **PATH** to **70085** to donate any amount from £1 to £20.

About the author

Dr Liz Auty is the Trust’s East Schiehallion Property Manager



Living language

In the first of a two-part section exploring language and landscape, **Ross Brannigan** reflects on how our vivid use of words to describe landscape has evolved over time and place

WHAT IS LANDSCAPE? Is it something we look at or are part of? Is it something to be observed or interacted with? These might seem somewhat abstract questions more suited to a literature or philosophy seminar, but the answers demonstrate not just how we view landscape in a very broad sense, but also its ownership, use, history and culture.

At its core, this is about language. The way we talk, write, feel and care about landscape is ultimately determined by language, because that shapes our perceptions. Here in the UK, a land of many languages and influences, there is a beautiful, intrinsic link between words and landscape.

Today, the John Muir Trust is present in many exceptionally language-rich parts of the UK: west and northwest Scotland with Scots Gaelic; our partnerships in the Western Isles with its Norse influences; the presence of Scots in the Borders around Glenlude and elsewhere; Glenridding Common and its Cumbric connections; plus our work through the John Muir Award in Wales.

What is so delightful about language is that it is a living,

breathing thing. We can come up with a word right now to describe anything – the sensation when water runs down your back, the sound of gurgling water under the ground on a hillside, or a way to describe when the sun is visible through cloud and appears like a white disc. It does not matter if such things already have their own words, we can think of our own. As children, we gave places names and made up words all the time.

EVOLUTION OF LANGUAGE

As a living thing, language often evolves according to our needs. It also acts as a window into a culture. Take Scots Gaelic, for instance. In Gaelic, to say “I have a boat”, one would say, “*Tha bata agam*”. This does not directly translate to ‘I have a boat’, rather ‘the boat is at me’.

How does this help us? Well, evidently the idea of ownership is not something we can construct in Gaelic quite so easily. This phrase shows a more communal ownership – the boat is at me just now, but it isn’t mine.

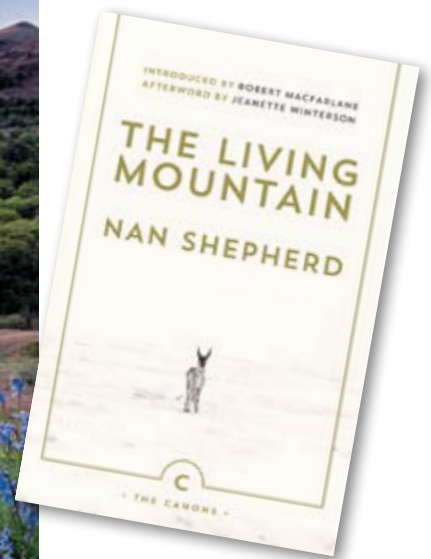


Similarly, Gaelic contains a lot of fascinating words relating to shielings and cattle: *clach-tachais* (meaning a stone for cows to scratch against), *cotan* (a piece of turf for calves in the shieling), *gàrraidh* (group of shielings), and *làrach àirigh* (remnants of a shieling). However, my favourite is *rathad nam banachagan* – the path to the shieling, which translates literally into path of the dairymaids.

It is not just this working aspect of landscape that worms its way into language, but words that are only created through close observation of the land. There's *brasfwrw* (Welsh for big, spaced rain drops), *Helm* (destructive north-easterly wind blowing down the Cross Fell escarpment of Cumbria) and *jachelt* (old Scots relating to trees bending or growing in the direction of the wind).

Sadly, as Robert MacFarlane writes in his book, *Landmarks*, while nine out of ten children can identify a Dalek, only three in ten can identify a magpie. Today, we are seeing an evolution of language, but one that is disconnected with the natural world.

Seilebost Bay
in Norse-
influenced
Harris



Of course, language does not just evolve, it also moves. It might seem obvious, but places such as Cumbria and Wales are far more connected than they might seem. Cumbric, a variety of Common Brittonic brought here by the Britons in the Iron Age, prevailed south of the Firth of Forth. With a stronghold in the Kingdom of Strathclyde, Cumbric made its way, as the name suggests, into the mouths of Cumbrians and Cymry, who would break into Cumbria and Cymru (Wales).

This explains the linguistic crossover between the two. Take Helvellyn, a name that often looks quite Welsh for that corner of England, but which is reckoned to be Old Cumbric for 'pale yellow moorland', thanks to the colour of the grasses at certain times of the year.

Now to settle the ongoing debate between Cumbrians and, well, the rest of the UK ... where exactly does the word 'fell' come from? As a hill runner, I was informed that I was a fell runner in the Lake District and a hill runner at home. Cumbrians hold dearly to 'the fells'.

The answer comes from Scandinavia. Northern England and southern Scotland have changed hands many times over thousands of years, so while the Britons, Picts, Gaels and Scots moved across the border, bringing languages with them, so too did the Danes and the Vikings.

You can find fjäll in Old Norse, Swedish and Icelandic, as well as a dozen other variations in Danish and Norwegian. So, it is thanks to these overseas invaders that fell and hill runners as well as walkers now suffer identity crises when we cross the border.

LANDSCAPE WRITING

We know language evolves and moves, but it is also moulded by people and place. For millennia, humans have painted pictures of the land, writing about it in poems and stories. Keats, Hardy, Wordsworth, Grassie Gibbon, Walter Scott, RS Thomas, Edward Thomas and Burns are all names that are etched into the history of landscape writing.

Each has a fascinating perspective on land. In his poem, *Addressed to the Same*, Keats wrote:

*Great spirits now on earth are sojourning;
He of the cloud, the cataract, the lake,
Who on Helvellyn's summit, wide awake,
Catches his freshness from Archangel's wing*

Many writers of the age placed landscape and religion in relation to one another, marvelling at the 'glory' of the natural world. Wordsworth, born in Cockermouth, wrote of how his 'heart with pleasure fills, And dances with the daffodils'. The

language in such works puts a pastoral view of landscape in our heads – one created by men who had the time and money to write about such quintessential landscapes.

Meanwhile, in 20th century Scotland, Grassie Gibbon wrote in his classic novel *Sunset Song*: "So that was Chris and her reading and schooling, two Chrisses there were that fought for her heart and tormented her. You hated the land and the coarse speak of the folk and learning was brave and fine one day; and the next you'd waken with the peewits crying across the hills, deep and deep, crying in the heart of you and the smell of the earth in your face, almost you'd cry for that, the beauty of it and the sweetness of the Scottish land and skies."

Here, Chris is not detached from the land, but in it. The language speaks of the toil of the folk in Kinraddie, not the pleasantries afforded to Wordsworth or Keats.

Later, when Nan Shepherd came onto the scene, we had not just characters but fresh writers stepping into landscape writing. Shepherd went places often only accessible to the time-rich gentry. Although Shepherd was well-educated herself, she sneaked under the fence and added a new way of seeing and writing about landscape. She even brought Doric into her novels and spent years promoting a 'Scots literature' using the rich work of Hugh MacDiarmid and others.

Although, according to her biographer Charlotte Peacock, Shepherd tired of this advocacy, she left an indelible mark on landscape literature by breaking the monopoly that male writers had on the art form.

For Shepherd, landscape was no longer something to be looked at, but to be immersed in and played with. In *The Living Mountain*, she wrote: "Lay the head down, or better still ... bend with straddled legs till you see your world upside down. How new it has become! ... Details are no longer part of a grouping in a picture of which I am the focal point, the focal point is everywhere. Nothing has reference to me, the looker. This is how the earth must see itself"

It was a truly radical approach to landscape writing. No longer was it the masculine aim of objective looking and conquering of landscapes, but subjective seeing and immersion in them.

Language, then, is everywhere – from our speech to our writing, from our maps to our road signs – and who uses it and in what way is hugely important when it comes to our view of landscape. Often, we take it for granted, but our language shapes our perspective in more ways than we imagine. Now, awa' an' stravaig. □

About the author
Ross Brannigan is the Trust's
Engagement Officer



PHOTOGRAPH: DEREK SIMS

Meall Tairneachan (Rounded Hill of the Ptarmigan) – seen on the horizon – hints at the wildlife around Schiehallion

Reading the land

In our second feature on language and landscape, **Kate MacRitchie** explains how an understanding of Gaelic place names can help reveal the full richness of Highland landscapes

OPEN a map of Highland Scotland and non-Gaelic speakers would be forgiven for feeling bamboozled by the wealth of beguiling yet unpronounceable place names. It's possible to get along fine without learning what these names mean but, given the inseparability of Gaelic language and landscape, does blissful ignorance lead to landscape illiteracy?

Surrounded by hills, lochs and rivers with names that are not always understood, lovers of Scotland's landscapes are excluded from a rich store of knowledge and lore. Enshrined in mystery, a part of these beloved landscapes will remain forever inaccessible without the language that links people and place.

To demystify the Gaelic place-names of Schiehallion and the Trust's Skye properties, I spoke with Ruairidh MacIlleathain (Roddy MacLean), a Gaelic author, broadcaster and educator, who acknowledges a missing connection. "After experiencing the Aboriginal heritage in Australia, where people and language are closely linked to the landscape they inhabit, I realised we were in danger of

losing the special relationship Gaelic has with the Scottish landscape," he says.

This is unfortunate considering Gaelic's specific and varied stock of nature words, rich in visual poetry. Within ten minutes of speaking with Ruairidh, I learn that Gaelic has "well over 100 words for hill or mountain".

Beinn ('ben') is a good starting point as the common word for a big hill. *Meall*, ubiquitous on the map, is a rounded, lumpy hill, while *sgùrr* denotes a high, pointed peak. Other common hill words are *càrn* (commonly seen as *càirn*) meaning a heap of stones, and *creag*, meaning a rockface. *Cnoc* and *tom* denote smaller, rounded hillocks, while *stob*, meaning pointed stick, is a high, rocky hill.

A hill can be *mòr* (big), *beag* (small), *àrd* (tall), *riabach* (speckled), or *maol* (bald). *Coire* (corrie) and *bealach*, meaning pass, are also common hill features.

Landform is often qualified by colour. But just as the one-size-fits-none word 'hill' is inadequate to describe the varied landscape of the Highlands, so too do primary colours fail to express the mutable shades present in our natural world.

Gaelic colours often take inspiration from nature itself. *Ruadh* is the russet shade of autumnal bracken or a fox's pelt, while *dearg* ranges from arterial red to heather. *Glas* denotes a greyish-green colour while *gorm* – blue – is interchangeable with green. *Odhar* is a dun or sallow colour and there is a clutch of words for white (*bàn*, *fionn* or *geal*).

It is these subtle nuances in the Gaelic landscape which standard English fails to express. Gaelic place names provide a specific intelligence useful for hill walkers and climbers, providing an alternative lens through which to view familiar landscapes, and a surer means of orientating oneself.

TRUST PROPERTIES

Such toponymic diversity is evident at Schiehallion and around the Strathaird Estate. At Schiehallion there is a proliferation of *mealls*, *càrns*, *cnocs* (hill or knoll) and *creags*, while in Skye the prominence of *sgùrr*, *storr*, and *beinn* reveals the altogether rockier, rougher nature of the terrain.

While the landscapes of Schiehallion

and Skye vary dramatically, Ruairidh points out that the Gaelic words used to describe those landscapes are “amazingly similar”. Both use parts of the body to describe landform. Hill formations are distinguished as breast-like (*ciche*), nose-shaped (*sròn*), or ridged like a spine (*druim*). There is even *Creag an Èarra* – the tail-end of the crag – on the south slope of Schiehallion.

Though it is worth noting a key difference; on Skye there is a distinct Norse influence in names such as *Blà Bheinn* (Blue Mountain, from the Norse *blà-fjall*) and *Harta Coire* (Corrie of the Harts), a lasting echo of Viking invasion. Meanwhile, at Schiehallion, *Pitkerril* tells us about the mountain’s former inhabitants – ‘pit’ being a Pictish word for farm, and Kerril a Christian missionary from Galway.

Wildlife also flourishes in the place names of both properties. Golden eagles leave their mark in *Cnoc na h-Iolaire* (Hillock of the Eagle) at Schiehallion and *Nead na h-Iolaire* (Nest of the Eagle) in Glen Sligachan. Red deer hinds (*Cnoc nan Aighean*), stags (*Creag an Daimh*), ptarmigan (*Meall nan Tarmachan*), and ravens (*Cnoc an Fhithich*) thrive in the Gaelic place names of these areas, suggesting the diversity of species the Gaelic landscape supported, and still supports today.

Near Schiehallion there is also possible evidence of a more maligned animal in the names *Creag a’ Mhadaidh* and *Allt a’ Mhadaidh* – the crag and the stream of the wolf. Ruairidh cautions, however, that *mhadaidh* can also be translated as ‘fox’. Without the prefix *ruadh* (red) or *allaidh* (wild), it’s impossible to know for certain, though wolf place names are numerous across Perthshire.

Tantalisingly, north of Schiehallion there is *An Catachan*, a possible reference to wild cats. John Murray, author of *Reading the Gaelic Landscape* (an indispensable book for anyone seeking to better understand Gaelic place names), points out that a person from Sutherland is also called a ‘catach’. However, there is the puzzling ‘-an’ suffix.

“There’s a *Coire Chat-achan* (Corrie of the Cat Fields) of Johnson and Boswell fame near Broadford in Skye and I wonder looking at that if we are dealing with another field name,” he reflects. “If so, correctly *An Catachan* is a compound noun and would be *An Cat-achaidhean*. Cat Fields.”

Gaelic’s inextricable link with nature could therefore aid conservation efforts by providing insight into the species the land supports. “If people like countryside rangers and mountain guides are reliant solely on anglophone sources of information, often understandably, linked to England, then they will struggle to fully

understand our landscape and how it was named,” notes Ruairidh.

Gaelic place names reveal a diverse environment that can be as fragile as it is beautiful, so ignoring their subtleties could come at a cost to our increasingly frail ecosystem. At Schiehallion, *Allt Coire Cruach Sneachda* (Corrie of the Stacked Snow) is a sobering name in times of global warming. Glen Sligachan comes from *sligeach*, which translates to a ‘shelly’ place – in other words, a place abundant with shellfish.

Schiehallion’s *Coire nam Fraochag* (Corrie of the Blaeberry or Whortleberry) and *Malnainoirag* (Meall nan Oighreag – Rounded Hill of the Cloudberry) show the diversity of native plant life – vital food sources for vulnerable species.

In *Gathering: A Place Aware Guide to the Cairngorms*, Scottish-born and internationally recognised poet Alec Finlay gives evocative insight into the importance of being ‘place-aware’ when he writes:

Linguistic and botanical biodiversity go hand-in-hand

A culture that is considering the reintroduction of wolf, lynx and boar may wish to consider renewing their place-names

Meaning is as local as the condition of the soil

Renewing a language can empower the will to build or plant

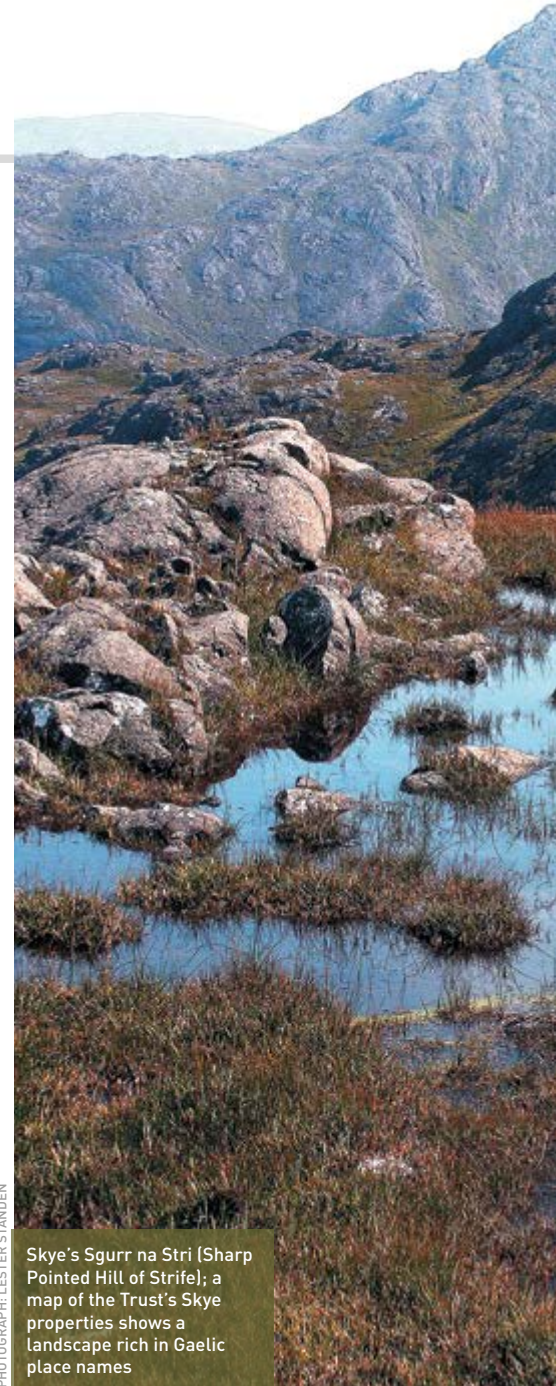
Place-names are allied to habitat restoration.

REINVIGORATING THE LANGUAGE

Continued enjoyment of wild places is dependent on nurturing fragile habitats, a demanding challenge that could be aided by a language rooted in the natural world, providing a framework for how we might enjoy and manage the landscapes we care about. However, with native Gaelic speakers dwindling, this knowledge base faces an erosion of its own.

John Murray notes the vital role those most familiar with Scotland’s natural environment could play in reinvigorating the language: “A lot of my work is about trying to encourage people to use the Gaelic that’s on the maps even though their knowledge of the language is minimal. At least if they gather a basic toponymic vocabulary, which many already have, and then learn how to pronounce the words, then their use becomes possible.

“This is really important in most of the Highland mainland where Gaelic is absent. Since we’re not making up new names for landscape attributes, it makes sense to use those which are already recorded. Walkers



Skye’s Sgurr na Stri (Sharp Pointed Hill of Strife); a map of the Trust’s Skye properties shows a landscape rich in Gaelic place names

PHOTOGRAPH: LESTER STANDEN

and other recreationalists are now the main users of Highland landscape, so there is a great potential for them to reinvigorate mapped Gaelic.”

This estrangement from land and language has not always been the case, with mapped names revealing the presence of people living side by side with nature. There is evidence of dairy production in a corrie below Blaven (*Choire a’ Caise* – Cheese Corrie). *Abhainn Cille Mhaire*, a river running into Loch Slapin, suggests a nearby site of worship – *cille* means cell/church and St Maolrubha was a patron saint of southeast Skye.

At Schiehallion, *Allt Ruidh nan Coireachan* (Burn of the Shielling of the Corries) points to the practice of transhumance, which saw people migrate to upland slopes during the summer months to produce cheese, butter and milk. Evidence of whisky distillation has often been found near shieling sites, as *Alt Brachain* (Burn of Fermentation) possibly



attests to. Evidently, we were once on more intimate terms with the landscape.

Time and time again, Gaelic place names reveal a rich seam of culture and history that connects people to the land they inhabit. *Sgurr na Strì* (Sharp, Pointed Hill of Strife) is a reminder of a boundary dispute between MacKinnons and MacLeods. Clach Oscar (Stone of Oscar), at the north end of Loch Slapin, is an echo of Fingalian legend, with Oscar being the grandson of mythical warrior Fionn mac Cumhaill.

Schiehallion too is rich in legend, its name derived from the Gaelic *Sith Chaillean* - The Fairy Hill of the Caledonians. The cave network running along *Gleann Mor* (the Big Glen), on Schiehallion's south side, adds an air of mysticism. One of the caves, *Uamh Tom a' Mhòr-fhàir*, can be translated as Cave of the Knoll of the Big Man.

In 1845, local minister Reverend Robert MacDonald recorded that this cave was said to be full of chambers from which

no-one who entered could return. *Fuaran na h-Inghinn* (Spring of the Young Woman) references the young women who bathed there at daybreak on May Day.

STORY OF PLACE

Munro Gauld, a traditional flute player from Perthshire, is leading a musical project with local musicians, storytellers, artists and poets to tell "the story of place" at Schiehallion. "It helps if you can be creative in allowing people to access place name information as not everyone finds lists of direct translations interesting," he explains.

"But when you are actually in a landscape looking at physical features on the ground and can relate the place name to what you are seeing, then that is particularly powerful. Especially with Gaelic place names which are so descriptive."

For Munro, art is a powerful vehicle for understanding our place within the Gaelic landscape. "It helps the story to come alive and actually touch people emotionally, rather than only at a cerebral level. How could you not be moved by the story of the old man from *Leachd nam Broilag* bathing in the waters of the Tay. It brings the place to life, allows you to connect emotionally to someone who lived there 250 years ago."

In understanding Gaelic place names, we interpret the landscape differently,

discovering links between communities and land that have existed for generations. However, as native Gaelic speakers wane these vital links are being lost.

"I think the loss of any language results in the loss of one way of seeing the world," believes John Murray. "Gaelic has distinct ways of defining landform, water and colour for example. Since most place names in the Gàidhealtachd are in Gaelic, without knowledge of the language we cannot access Gaelic's interpretations of the landscape, even though these would be perceptions made at the time names were applied."

Demystifying Gaelic place names transforms a mapful of daunting words into a landscape resonant with birdsong, bellowing stags and voices of the past. As we 'rewild' our depleted vocabulary, new connections with places we love will emerge, sharpening awareness of landscape and our place within it.

As Ruairidh MacIlleathain asserts, "Gaelic is the language of the land," and as walkers, climbers and conservationists we profit by learning it - not only boosting our enjoyment of Scotland's Highland landscapes but learning how to care for them so that they may be enjoyed for generations to come. □

About the author
Kate MacRitchie is a writer and Gaelic learner, based in Blairgowrie



Landscape and fellowship

David Lintern has written the first guide to mainland Britain's three big 24-hour mountain challenges. In this extract, he reflects on the meaning of challenge and how it connects us with landscape

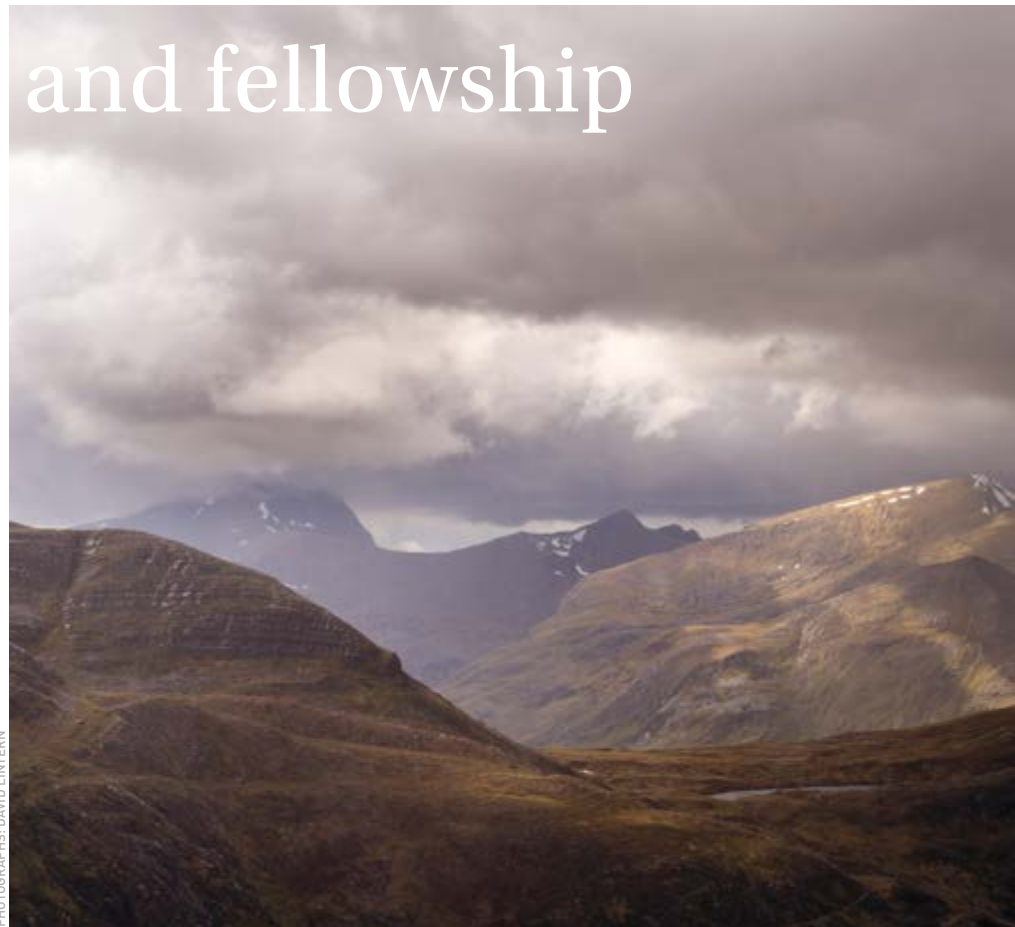
THE BIG ROUNDS – the Bob Graham Round, the Paddy Buckley Round and the Charlie Ramsay Round – are known to mountain runners as three of the most difficult 24-hour challenges in the world. Collectively, the 'Big 3' take in 113 mountain summits, more than 25,000m (83,000 feet) of ascent and nearly 300km (183 miles) across three of Britain's most distinct mountain ranges – the Snowdonia National Park in Wales, the Lake District National Park in England, and a vast area of Lochaber in the Highlands of Scotland.

They also cross two places cared for by the John Muir Trust – Helvellyn and Ben Nevis. Each round is a long-distance classic in its own right, rich in the history and culture of 'fell' or hill running.

I arrived at these rounds not as a hill runner, but as a means of challenging myself in our islands' wild places. Long distance routes are not the province of hill runners only, and the hills are agnostic – they belong to all of us and none of us, and they don't care if we walk, run, or crawl. Passion and persistence are what counts, and they aren't exclusive qualities. But all these statements are generalised, almost to the point of cliché.

Why the Big Rounds, specifically? It's no accident that each of the three includes the highest mountain in Scotland, Wales and England – they are 'big' in height as well as distance. But it's more than just number crunching that makes these routes appealing. Scafell, Snowdon or the Ben may grab your interest initially, but these ambitious, circular rounds provide an unparalleled sense of journey. Each round is a grand tour on which you get far more than you bargained for. Like any adventure worth the title, it's not about the destination, but the journey – the unexpected, the silent corners, the places in-between.

This, the rounds have in common, but they also offer a window into the distinctness of some of our highland regions, our mountain vernacular: Welsh spoken on the bus to Llanberis; the



PHOTOGRAPHS: DAVID LINTERN

“If Lochaber is pink, then Cumbria is blue and Snowdonia is gold. If this sounds absurdly romantic, then I plead guilty ... just wait until you are on your first top at sunrise!”

climbing history of Wasdale; the shielings and bothies of Glen Nevis. Each round allows deeper empathy with what makes our hill cultures different, as well as what binds them.

And that sense of place is carried into the hills themselves. Mountain light can be hard and high contrast, or milky soft – and all the rounds face the sea and share a Celtic gentleness – but even so, for me each round has its own particular colour temperature. If Lochaber is pink, then Cumbria is blue and Snowdonia is gold. If this sounds absurdly romantic, then I plead guilty ... just wait until you are on your first top at sunrise!

HILL CULTURE

The rounds are also an opportunity to discover more about our islands' peculiar variant of hill culture and, specifically, our unique mountain running culture. They are made as much of people and history as they are of mountains, and are a great example of how people and place come together – a modern, physical link between us and the land.

Each round was brought into being by

enthusiasts who shared information, kept each other company on 'recces' and paced each other on attempts. Mountain friendships can be among the most enduring, and in the story of these rounds those friendships cut clean across both class and regional divides. In the story of how Ramsay's Round came to be, for example, Cambridge journalist (and Trust co-founder) Chris Brasher rubs shoulders with an Edinburgh rec' officer and a Kendal stonemason.

This ethos continues today, facilitated through online forums, regional running clubs and race meetings. Runners still help others to beat their own times, one challenge leading to the next: witness the local fell runners who came out to help Spanish runner Kilian Jornet beat the 36-year-old Bob Graham Round record held by Billy Bland (including the son of one of Billy's pacers, the Trust's land manager at Glenridding, Pete Barron). There may be banter and competitive spirit, but it's leavened with mutual support and respect, regardless of background.

It's a defining characteristic of both hill



Clockwise from left: Binnean Beag with Ben Nevis behind (Charlie Ramsay Round); the understated Rossett Pike (Bob Graham Round); Tryfan at dusk (Paddy Buckley Round); Charlie Ramsay at home in Edinburgh



running in general and the Big Rounds in particular. Three routes, in three unique countries, but through a love of moving freely and unfettered in the open, we enjoy a shared culture. When we travel these trods, in very literal terms we recreate that fellowship.

Runners start with one round but make haste for the others ... busy, gangly pilgrims meeting, sharing, pushing each other to do better. Mountain people travel, and travel broadens the mind. The simple act of putting one foot in front of the other brings people together.

This camaraderie is why the rounds exist at all. We are a long way from mere scenery - this is landscape as community, as culture. In the creating and recreating of the rounds, runners

become hefted to the hills just as sheep, deer, shepherds and ghillies can be. We return having changed, deposit more memories, benchmark internal progress, move on. Landscape becomes Place as we populate it with our own stories.

In this way, whether you run them or walk them, the rounds are an invitation to change, a vehicle for inner journeying as well as outer adventure. Embarking on the rounds may reveal another side to some of our more famous hills ... but also another side to ourselves. These routes are not easy: they strip away our prejudices and our pretensions. It seems incredible to me that a runner such as Jasmin Paris can achieve under 17 hours on a round

(the Ramsay) that still takes me days to backpack, but then again, when I started this project six years ago, I didn't hill run at all.

While I'm certainly not in the same league as any that feature in the book, I now enjoy running in my home mountains; maybe not far or fast but moving at pace and sometimes even with a spring in my step. Running (or walking) is at heart a joyful act, a reminder that life is all about movement and that nature is change. □

About the author

Trust member David Lintern is an outdoors writer, photographer and editor

Further info

The Big Rounds: Running and Walking the Bob Graham, Paddy Buckley and Charlie Ramsay Rounds is published by Cicerone and available at cicerone.co.uk/the-big-rounds

For the love of it

From Skye to Sandwood and Glenlude, our land team's latest all-female recruits share what their new conservation roles mean to them

CATHRYN BAILLE, SKYE CONSERVATION RANGER

Working for the Trust has enabled me to devote my time to something that I care deeply about, and in a place that I love.

Some of my earliest memories are of being in nature; I have always loved the natural world and am at my happiest when far from civilisation. I want my young nieces and nephew to have access to the same experiences that I had. In this time of climate breakdown, I feel it is more important than ever that we conserve and protect our wild places for the future of us all.

Four years ago, I attended the Rural Skills course at West Highland College in Broadford. It was pretty life changing for me and set me on my new path. I ended up in Wales on a traditional woodland management course and spent the following two years immersed in learning traditional and sustainable skills and techniques like coppicing and roundwood timber framing.

I am hugely impressed by the work the Trust is doing, although the scale of the task seems pretty daunting to a newbie like me. I was surprised to learn how few people actually work for the Trust and am quite amazed at how much is achieved given how many different factors are involved with managing the land in our care.

Since joining the Trust in June, a lot of my time has been spent familiarising myself with the land we manage. Taking part in national wildlife surveys is a great way to get to know the plant and animal life here. Habitat monitoring is a big part of my role so far, as is documenting all the great work that is taking place here in Skye.

Having the opportunity to get to know Skye and its wildlife better is a big highlight for me, as is helping to bring trees back to the island. Seeing the impact of rewilding in some of our woodlands is fantastic and really rewarding to be a part of. Of course, having access to delicious local venison is also a big plus!

In Skye, we manage land with a variety of uses including crofting townships and very popular tourist destinations; I suspect that as my role develops then managing people and their differing views and opinions will be challenging at times. And, of course, you can't spend your life outside in Scotland without occasionally being challenged by our delightful midgies!

CARRIE WEAGER, SANDWOOD CONSERVATION RANGER

I started working for the Trust at the end of May 2019. I had just finished my Environmental Science degree and had been volunteering with the Trust at Sandwood following a work placement I did as part of my course last year. I have always loved northwest Scotland and was looking for a job in conservation, so when this position came up the timing couldn't have been more perfect.

I have always cared about the environment and loved the outdoors – hills and remote places in particular – which I think came from spending time hill walking and fishing with my dad when I was young. Since leaving school I worked mainly in retail, but in my early 30s decided to pursue something I really cared about.

The John Muir Trust carries out an enormous amount of work for such a small team (prior to starting the job I had the impression that the Trust was a much larger organisation than it actually is).

I am of the belief that people form an important part of the landscape, and so was dismayed when I heard some accuse the Trust of wanting to exclude them. I have not found this to be the



PHOTOGRAPH: KEVIN LELLAND



“We engage with a wide variety of groups – from local volunteers to charitable groups which span all ages and walks of life”

Sarah Livingstone

PHOTOGRAPH: KAREN PURVIS



“Seeing the impact of rewilding in some of our woodlands is fantastic and really rewarding to be a part of”
Catherine Bailie

PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST



“A definite highlight of the job is the monitoring work that allows me to be outside all day observing and recording nature”
Carrie Weager

case at all. Instead, what I have found is a team of people dedicated to protecting and improving the land and habitats in their care, and who work hard to encourage people, particularly children, to form a connection with these places and to value them.

The job has been extremely varied so far. I've done lots of work surveying wildlife, including bats, butterflies and bees, as well as monitoring herbivore impacts on dwarf shrub heath and woodland. I have led guided walks, helped with volunteer work parties, maintained the toilet facilities at the Sandwood car park, assisted with deer management, and looked after the Trust's stand at various Highland games and other events.

A definite highlight of the job is the monitoring work that allows me to be outside all day observing and recording nature. There's an area of machair here where I've set up a bee survey – it's a place that is just heaven to me.

I also appear to be quite the tick-magnet, particularly when working at Quinag where there are very high numbers of ticks. As they have found their way through gaiters over waterproofs over leggings tucked into socks, I don't go to Quinag without my wellies these days!

SARAH LIVINGSTONE, GLENLUDE CONSERVATION RANGER

I started in March 2019 after several years of volunteering with the Trust and following its work. It felt like a dream job when it came up – particularly with a strong people-orientated aspect to the role.

I've always been interested in the natural world, and being a part of it, but it wasn't until I saw a leaflet at Schiehallion car park for path work volunteers that I considered conservation work. I joined in with work parties over the next four years and started taking the winters off work for longer conservation stints with various organisations, and haven't looked back since.

Before, I worked primarily in youth hostels in the Scottish Highlands and islands. It was a fantastic lifestyle, living in beautiful landscapes, near many impressive Trust properties,

exploring mountains and watching eagles. I loved working with people and the energy and reward that it brings.

I love John Muir's idea of “making the mountains glad”. It felt rare to engage with an organisation which expressed my own values and poetic tendencies. I also admired the Trust's advocacy for enjoying the wildness in our lands and ourselves in a way which feels powerful and sincere.

The work at Glenludde is incredibly varied. We do a lot of tree planting and maintenance, as our aim is to turn large parts of a former forestry plantation and upland hill farm into native woodland. We also recycle trees that we fell by producing firewood and by making deer-proof brush hedges, plus grow our own trees from seed in our polytunnel.

Perhaps most importantly we engage with a wide variety of groups – from local weekly volunteers to charitable groups which span all ages and walks of life. We involve them in our day-to-day work, and they make a huge difference to what we can achieve on site.

We also carry out a lot of survey work which keeps us informed about the state of nature on site, be it birds, adders, deer numbers, or plant life.

I love witnessing the change in people from when they arrive to when they leave – particularly those who are new or not used to being in the outdoors. Seeing them relax into the new and unknown, and getting to actively engage in the setting by doing work, or simply wandering around, makes the difference and starts reconnecting people.

Tailoring work to each group can be challenging. Some people want to lift the heaviest log, and others are not able to walk far on uneven ground. We've had groups in snow and 30-degree heat. It's always different, and these challenges keep you on your toes. ☐

With thanks

The expansion of our land team has been made possible thanks to funding from the ALA Green Charitable Trust

Breaking barriers

Izzy Filor explains the thinking behind the proposed Women in the Hills Research Network – and why the Trust has got involved



Encouraging more women into the rural land management sector

WHILE PROGRESS towards greater gender parity has been made in many sectors, women remain hugely under-represented in the world of rural land management compared to their male counterparts. The reasons behind this are not always clear. It could be that women's social lives shape how they access and interact with the land, or perhaps biological differences negatively influence female interaction with upland areas, or there are simply too many barriers preventing women from entering the rural land management profession.

A proposed research group, the Women in the Hills Research Network, aims to dig a little deeper and address some of these questions. Proposed by Dr Rachel Hewitt (Newcastle University), Dr Kerri Andrews (Edge Hill University) and Dr Joanna Taylor (University of Manchester), the network will connect professionals, academics and employers as it explores two main topics: the biological realities of women's lives and how these currently impact access to the upland areas; and assessing whether the land is currently managed around a 'default male'.

When the John Muir Trust was approached to contribute to this network, we were delighted to get involved. The partnership offered by the Women in the Hills Research Network provides an opportunity for us to assess our own land management practices and how we inspire and support people, regardless of gender, to access wild places.

Although we are proud that over half of

our current land team are women, the same is not true across wider land management. The lack of female deer stalkers or traditional land managers, for instance, are both glaringly obvious.

Childcare represents a huge barrier for those working in rural locations and it is often just women, rather than both parents, who are presented with the

“When the Trust was approached to contribute to this network, we were delighted to get involved”

Jen Derr
from Nevada
on a recent
conservation
internship at
Schiehallion



PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST

greatest working flexibility. I'm happy to say that the Trust is exceptionally flexible in this regard – an enlightened approach that we are delighted to share with other employers in the land management sector.

The questions raised by the research network also relate to other facets of the Trust's work. For instance, what barriers exist for young people undertaking the John Muir Award, many of whom may be exploring wild places for the first time? Equally, do biological realities such as periods, pregnancy, or breastfeeding deter women from accessing wild places in the first instance?

It's difficult to know what we, as land managers, can do to reduce these obstacles. Increasing social acceptance and education will undoubtedly help, but the Trust should take the lead in looking at ways in which we can help remove any barriers.

The research network is still in its infancy, with the outcome of a funding application submitted to the Arts and Humanities Research Council expected by the end of September. It's an important step forward given our need to constantly reflect on how we can create and improve equal opportunities in upland areas. The hope is that this research network will play a vital role in bringing far more of any barriers to light and, ultimately, begin to break them down. □

About the author
Izzy Filor is the Trust's conservation officer at Schiehallion

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PHOTOGRAPH: ALAN MCCOMBES

Firm foundations

Community drive, energy and creative thinking can be a powerful combination, as **Alan McCombes** discovers on a visit to Knoydart last winter

KNOYDART has been described, with good reason, as the spiritual home of the John Muir Trust. It was here that the four founding members first got together to resist a plan by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to turn the 'Rough Bounds' into a military training zone.

In 1982, they drew up an alternative vision for the peninsula which involved bringing the land under community ownership as a means of protecting the rugged tranquillity of the mountainous interior, while at the same time – in the words of one of the founders, Chris Brasher – “allowing development along the shoreline to meet the needs and aspirations of the indigenous inhabitants”.

In the meantime, the group of four worked with what was then a small local

community to rebuff the MoD – and out of that campaign the John Muir Trust was born. Fifteen years later, the Trust became one of the main partners in the establishment of the community-led Knoydart Foundation.

The history of this famously remote peninsula is a microcosm of the story of much of the Scottish Highlands: eviction and clearance; sheep and deer; a revolving door of absentee landlords. That is until the community took over the ownership of the western half of the peninsula on the first day of March 1999 “to preserve, enhance and develop Knoydart for the well-being of the environment and the people”. The occasion, said Chris Brasher, was an “absolute triumph – the air is now full of hope”.

Twenty years on, the people have never looked back. Under community ownership, the population – which at times during the twentieth century was reduced to a few dozen – now stands at around 120 full-time residents. Even in December, with the tourists gone and a low winter sun hanging over the Sound of

Sleat, there is a vitality here which contrasts sharply with many other parts of the West Highlands at this time of year.

Around Inverie and the other small settlements scattered along the spectacular coastline, new houses have sprung up in recent years, all of them blending in harmoniously with the surrounding environment.

“The Knoydart Foundation is by far the biggest provider of rented accommodation on the peninsula,” explains Angela Williams, until recently the operations manager for the estate. The foundation provides 11 affordable rented houses, compared to just two by the Lochaber Housing Association, one by Highland Council, and three that are privately rented.

“We’ve also facilitated private housing by selling plots of land at low prices, which come with burdens to provide some level of protection for that house into the future to ensure it will stay in the affordable market.”

In this idyllic setting, where, as a legacy of the old estate, private houses tend to be



PHOTOGRAPH: ALAN MCCOMBES



PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST

Knoydart scenes: the shore at Inverie (main); nearby woodland (above); Trust co-founder Chris Brasher speaking at the launch of the Knoydart Foundation in 1999

large and expensive, the provision of affordable housing is crucial to sustaining and growing a strong working population with young families. And that, in turn, is key to both the environmental health and the economic viability of Knoydart.

NATURAL ASSETS

Like many other rural community landowners, the foundation sees the local landscape and natural environment as its most valuable assets. And it's in it for the long haul. The foundation has a 200-year vision to reforest the peninsula from the shores of Nevis in the south to Loch Hourn in the north, linking up with the John Muir Trust's regenerating woodland at Li and Coire Dhorrcail.

"It's good to paint a picture, but it's not so much a target as a notion that it's possible," says Grant Holroyd, chair of the Knoydart Foundation. "If you look at a map, you start to see the dots are already getting joined up. That doesn't mean that it will be a continuous chain. I tend to describe it in terms of stepping stones that may eventually join up."

Originally from Glasgow, Grant has been a forester here for 25 years and now works for the Knoydart Forest Trust (KFT), a separate community-based charity which looks after the foundation's woodlands. A sizeable chunk of the local economy here is tied up with the work of Grant and his co-workers, who produce boards, cladding, sheds, firewood, floorboards and other timber products in their workshop at the edge of Inverie. They also organise green woodworking courses, which teach local people skills such as carving utensils and constructing rustic furniture.

In addition, KFT also does contract work such as planting, felling and fencing for local private landowners, and is currently carrying out work for the community-owned Isle of Eigg, 20 miles over the sea to the southwest.

Over the past 20 years, the community here has planted more than 350,000 trees. These consist of a mixture of native and broadleaf species including Scots pine, oak, birch, aspen, willow, rowan, hawthorn, alder and sycamore alongside some of the more naturalised commercial

conifers such as Douglas fir and western red cedar.

"We've been reducing the amount of Sitka and other spruce and we're planting more mixed stuff that will be useful to people in the future," explains Grant. "It's helped that we've more or less eradicated the rhododendrons here with the support of external volunteers, including regular John Muir Trust work parties. That's possibly been our biggest single identifiable achievement."

WOODLAND EXPANSION

Deep in the interior, out in the north-facing Gleann na Guiseraim, in the shadow of the mighty Ladhair Beinn, the foundation's ranger Amie Dow shows me the extent of the woodland expansion at close quarters. Amie is an informative and engaging guide, with a deep knowledge of the land, ecology, culture and history of the area. Her role includes income-generating activities such as managing the campsite, running a cycle-hire enterprise and providing private, customised guided walks and Land Rover tours. All help to

“This is what the whole of the Highlands should look like: big, open glades, alongside areas of dense forest”

Amie Dow

fund free and affordable events through the summer months, as well as volunteering activity and educational work with local schools.

Even though the glen is colder and has less light than the southern coastline around Inverie, large expanses of new and regenerating woodland now sprawl across a landscape that for generations was bare and desolate. Amie explains that a previous landowner, back in the nineteenth century, “flooded the land with deer to create the oxymoron known as a ‘deer forest’ – and wrecked the landscape”.

Most of the new woodland has been developed behind deer fences, and Amie says she likes to bring visitors out here to educate them about the damage caused by overgrazing. “Deer over there, no deer over here,” she says, pointing to the stark difference on either side of the fencing. “This is what the whole of the Highlands should look like: big, open glades, alongside areas of dense forest.”

To attempt this model on a national scale would mean erecting thousands of miles of deer fencing at a cost of tens of millions of pounds. The Knoydart Foundation, however, for pragmatic financial reasons, runs a commercial deer-stalking operation, and funds its fencing through the Scottish Government’s Forestry Grant Scheme.

Jim Brown, the head stalker, stresses that the foundation runs commercial stalking not for sporting objectives but to generate the revenues to carry out conservation deer management. He accepts the validity of the John Muir Trust’s focus on reducing deer numbers to levels that allow natural regeneration to occur freely but says: “We have to maintain a certain deer population to keep the sports stalking side of the operation going. It brings a lot of income into the wider community, and directly £60k a year for the foundation, which pays for four stalkers and ghillies, with any surplus above that invested in new equipment and improved facilities.”

As Grant Holroyd puts it bluntly: “It’s all very well and good if the John Muir Trust, with thousands of members, or some rich Danish person can afford to improve the habitat by spending money, but we’re not in that position – we have to find ways of doing that work without it becoming a net cost.”



Knoydart ranger Amie Dow (left); Knoydart Foundation chair and forester Grant Holroyd (below)

PHOTOGRAPH: ALAN MCCOMBES

Both men emphasise that deer fencing is a temporary expedient and will be removed after 20 to 30 years – “a blip in the timescale”, according to Grant.

FORWARD THINKING

Further into the wilds of Gleann na Guiseraim, far from the shoreline, Amie shows me an area of an old cash-crop woodland which she says has “kept us awake at night because it would be very difficult to fell and replant”.

Instead, she came up with the idea of building three huts in the area: two that would be rented out to the general public, and the third assigned for the exclusive use of local people. “Every member of the community would be entitled to two free nights every year as a way to get people closer to the land they fought so hard to acquire,” explains Amie.

“You wouldn’t believe how many people in Inverie haven’t been in the glen for 10 or 20 years. So, this would be a way of encouraging them. And the huts could also be used as a base for volunteers, such as John Muir Trust work parties, scout groups and school groups. It would also be great to get mountain bike tracks in the woods, some wildlife hides and other facilities so it becomes a truly multi-purpose site.”

The idea has since been approved by directors and put out to consultation. It has received a positive response so far with the vast majority in favour, according to the foundation’s new operations manager, Craig Dunn. As he explains, the project would bring different parts of the community together, with the foundation’s maintenance company



PHOTOGRAPH: ALAN MCCOMBES

taking on the groundwork to prepare the site, then the foresters would supply the wood and help to build the huts, and the ranger service would manage the site on completion.

Such imaginative, forward thinking is just one of the things that sets community land apart from more traditional land ownership models. Shared ownership of the land across a diverse range of people with different backgrounds, experiences and priorities tends to generate different ways of thinking and a multiplicity of new ideas. Crucially, the land starts to serve the common good rather than the personal interests of a single individual.

Back on the coastal road, the sun sets the sky on fire above a silhouette of southern Skye. The days are short now, but the inky-blue sea is tranquil and the magic of Knoydart palpable. The place has endured a stormy past, but for now, at least, the land seems to be at peace with itself. □

About the author
Alan McCombes is editor of
the *Journal*



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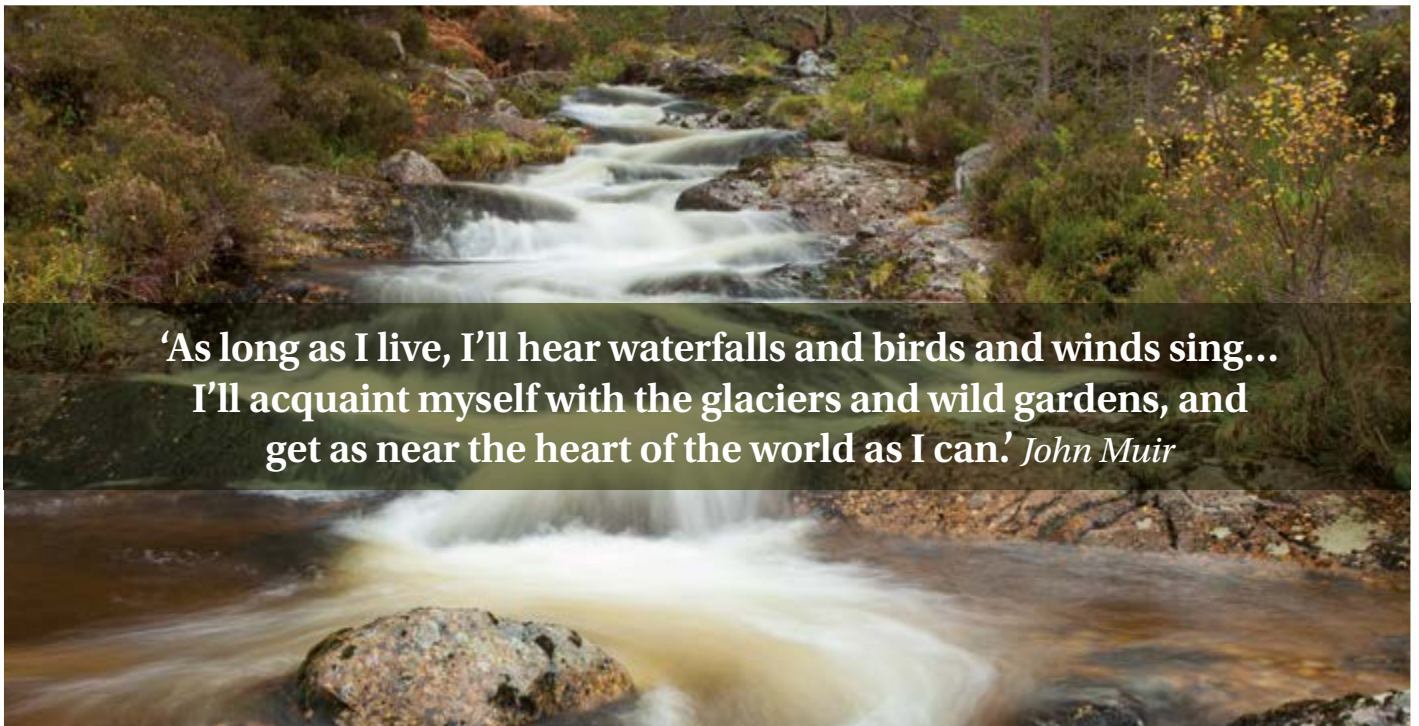
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Natural solutions

PHOTOGRAPH: CRAIG MCLEAN

As young people take to the streets and governments declare climate emergencies, **Mel Nicoll** looks at the role of nature in achieving net-zero carbon emissions

IT WAS recently reported that the past five years – from 2014 to 2018 – were the warmest ever recorded since the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration began tracking global temperatures 139 years ago. With every year that passes, the impact of climate change is becoming more and more visible. No serious scientist or politician now disputes that it is one of the greatest – probably *the* greatest – threats facing human society.

Climate change is a world-wide issue; closer to home, it is already affecting the wild places in the Trust's care, with evidence of changes to the unique habitats and biodiversity that characterise these special places. Rare and beautiful alpine plants – like Iceland purslane, snow pearlwort and Highland saxifrage – are retreating up and into the mountains, seeking the consistent colder corners that places like Ben Nevis have to offer.

A report published back in 2006 warned that a two-degree rise in temperatures by the middle of the century would reduce the amount of lying snow in the Cairngorms by 90 per cent. With snow serving as a natural blanket – keeping the soil beneath it moist and protecting plants, fungi and microbes – species such as ptarmigan, dotterel and snow bunting would be unable to survive such a drastic change.

More recently, the Scottish Avalanche Information Service has predicted increased avalanche risk, making Scotland's mountains more dangerous for walkers and climbers. The uncertainties of climate change mean we cannot take anything, including wildness and wild places, for granted.

The good news is that the protection and restoration of natural ecosystems is a huge part of the solution. Wild land in a healthy state plays an integral role in the life support systems of the planet: healthy woods and blanket bogs act as precious carbon

sinks, supply us with clean air and water, and provide a home for important species.

Centuries of tree felling, peat extraction, muir burning, artificial draining and intensive grazing have, however, taken their toll on the capacity of our land to support nature-based solutions to climate change.

A 2016 European Commission document, *Biodiversity and Climate Change*, couldn't be any clearer: "We cannot address biodiversity loss without tackling climate change, but it is equally impossible to tackle climate change without addressing biodiversity loss," it noted. "Protecting and restoring ecosystems can help us reduce the extent of climate change and cope with its impact."

And as recent research led by the Swiss university ETH Zürich concluded: "Planting billions of trees across the world is by far the biggest and cheapest way to tackle the climate crisis ... [forest] restoration isn't just one of our climate change solutions; it is overwhelmingly the top one."

"What blows my mind is the scale," added Professor Tom Crowther, a member of the research team. "I thought restoration would be in the top 10, but it is overwhelmingly more powerful than all of the other climate change solutions proposed."

TRUST ACTIONS

Earlier this year the Trust set out in its new strategy the urgency of reversing historic losses of habitats and species, with explicit reference to addressing climate change. It's a strategy that combines working on landscape-scale restoration projects – on our own properties and with neighbouring landowners, whether public, private, or NGO – and campaigning actively to persuade politicians and other decision-makers of the need for bold action to protect and revitalise nature.

Specific examples of action on the ground include the Heart of Scotland Forest Partnership around Schiehallion in Highland Perthshire, which is connecting and expanding sensitively-designed woodlands across 3,000 hectares of land; a long-term, ongoing project to plant and protect 50,000 new native trees in



PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST



Nature cure (clockwise from main): tree planting, Glenlude; creating space for a tree nursery, Li & Coire Dhorrcail; snow hunting, one of the species at risk; school planting, John Muir Award

PHOTOGRAPH: FERGUS GILL/2020DIVISION



PHOTOGRAPH: KATRINA MARTIN/JOHN MUIR AWARD

“The benefits of planting and regenerating woodlands with a strong native component extend beyond storing and removing climate-destroying carbon”

Skye and Knoydart; a Peatland Action application for restoration of blanket bog under exotic conifers at Strathaird; the gradual transformation of a former commercial conifer plantation at Glenlude into an abundant and varied native woodland; and working with crofters at Sandwood to protect existing pockets of trees and identify opportunities for new woodland.

At policy level, it means promoting responsible land management that reduces deer grazing pressures so that native woodlands can regenerate freely, and which restores damaged peatlands back to health by removing drainage systems.

Earlier this year, in response to the Scottish Government's declaration of a climate emergency, the Trust and nine other organisations wrote to the First Minister suggesting natural solutions to help Scotland meet its net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045. Proposals included expanding new native and productive broadleaved woodland at least equal in extent to new Sitka plantations; increased community participation in afforestation; and a reduction in deer densities to sustainable levels.

AMBITIOUS TARGETS

Scotland's now more ambitious timescale for achieving net-zero emissions – by 2045 rather than 2050 for the rest of the UK – reflects its greater capacity to remove carbon, especially through large-scale afforestation projects. According to the UK Climate Change Committee, the area of land currently under forest cover in Scotland could be increased by half again (from 20 per cent of total land to 30 per cent).

This potential large-scale increase in afforestation does raise important questions about the potential impact on our landscapes, especially if combined with further major expansion of wind power and other renewables along with the associated significant upgrades to the transmission and distribution systems which some have argued would be required.

We need thoughtful and sensitive strategic planning of land use that learns lessons from the mistakes that were made in the twentieth century when healthy peatlands were damaged or

destroyed by large-scale conifer planting.

We should also recognise that the benefits of planting and regenerating woodlands with a strong native component extend beyond storing and removing climate-destroying carbon. Native woodlands provide a haven for insects, plants, birds and animals that enrich the biodiversity of rural and even urban land. They also provide recreational opportunities, replenish soils and help prevent floods by soaking up excess water.

Crucially, woodlands can bring short- and long-term economic benefits, especially to fragile rural communities. They have the potential to supply a wide range of timber products, whilst the scaling up of the whole forestry supply chain – from seed production and tree nurseries to log yards and sawmills – can generate new local businesses, jobs and training opportunities.

Tough decisions need to be taken. We perhaps need a more holistic approach that puts into practice the intent behind the Scottish Government's Land Use Strategy to help us realise the potential of nature-based climate solutions while achieving other public benefits such as growing food, producing timber, generating energy, regulating water flow and providing space for nature and people.

It's a long game, but the role of nature-based solutions in addressing the climate crisis has, encouragingly, moved up the agenda. Of course, trees take decades to grow to maturity, so large-scale restoration of woodlands and their associated habitats cannot be achieved overnight. Similarly, peatlands can take several decades before they are restored to full health. But the potential in both areas is huge.

In the light of accelerating climate change, the mission of the John Muir Trust – to work with others to inspire people to get close to wild nature, prevent the loss of wild places, plus repair and rewild what has been damaged in the past – is more urgent than ever before. □

About the author
Mel Nicholl is the Trust's
campaigns coordinator

Head space

Lucy Sparks explores the connections between nature, creativity and self-expression – and their positive impact on mental health and wellbeing

AS A devoted sea lover, I'm often baffled by how I came to live in Glasgow, one of the largest cities in the UK. I escape to the coast on a regular basis, however; it's a necessity that, like the pull of the tide itself, has been with me since childhood.

For the in-between times, I am fortunate that the city has an abundance of greenspace: I forage for urban nature experiences, dwell in the parks, linger under the shade of leafy trees and delight in the flowery scents that punctuate my morning commute. Photography and writing help me tune in, appreciate the small things and capture memories.

Here and elsewhere, the natural world is fascinating and ever-changing. Even revisiting familiar haunts always offers something new – a different light, a fresh perspective, varied wildlife, or seasonal change. It can inspire creativity in us all, offering the potential to unlock imaginations and express emotions through our words and artistic creations.

And just as nature invites us to find our own inner artist, photographer, or poet, it can calm, soothe and free our minds. I defy any person to gently turn a snowdrop flower upside down – a trick learned from a recent John Muir Award participant – and not be inspired by its beauty, or to feel an urge to share that appreciation with others.

Creative expression through language, poetry, song, sketching, storytelling and woodcraft are all wonderful ways of engaging with the people and places around us. As the writer Robert Macfarlane reminds us: "Language is written deeply and richly into our relationships with landscape and with nature: there, as the place-names on our maps, and the many names of species, common and rare, with which we share our lives."

MORE THAN WORDS

Literacy is traditionally understood to be the ability to read and write, but in practice it's a far wider concept based on communication skills, including both speaking and listening. The ability to use language effectively lies at the centre of both the development and expression of our emotions, thinking, learning, wellbeing and sense of personal identity.

Of course, there are many opportunities for exploring literacy in wild places, both in terms of experiencing different locations but also using a variety of natural media rather than pen and paper: we can write, create and express ourselves using stones, sand, mud, wood and more.

Overall, the natural world offers inspiration and stimulation in equal measure; it provides rich, multi-sensory experiences that can be a perfect springboard for creative writing. Learning about the natural world can build not just knowledge, but a whole new vocabulary.

This real-life context – the spending of time in wild places – often helps us retain information. From time spent alone in quiet reflective spaces to engaging in adventurous activities as part of a group, there are always opportunities to process and communicate thoughts and feelings when in the outdoors.

Through the John Muir Award, many participants find that creative activities can help unlock their voice and help them express their feelings more readily. We know well that connecting with wildness through language, creativity and self-expression offers valuable opportunities for improving mental health and wellbeing.

Such connections encourage people to engage with their head, heart and hands; to try new things, build skills and improve



PHOTOGRAPH: URBAN ROOTS

“What a healing experience this is for my mind, leaving turmoil in my head behind, and meditating naturally on my surroundings, feeling the gentle warm breeze on my face”

literacy; to voice personal feelings and emotions; to socialise and work with others; to observe and connect to surroundings; to encourage sharing and celebrating; and to make memories and discover new interests.

Through our work at the John Muir Award, we often find ourselves having discussions with colleagues and partners about the wellbeing benefits of nature connection on a community or on a national scale. However, it's also important to remember the difference that spending time in wild places can make for individuals and their own quality of life.

This is certainly reflected in the experience of many individuals who have completed their John Muir Awards through Branching Out – Scottish Forestry's woodland-based programme for adults recovering from long-term mental health problems.

And as the extracts from Branching Out participants on these pages illustrate, connecting with nature and the outdoors can make a huge difference to a person's wellbeing – from the peace and calm that wild spaces offer them to the sense of belonging they gain. □

About the author
Lucy Sparks is John Muir Award
Scotland Inclusion Manager

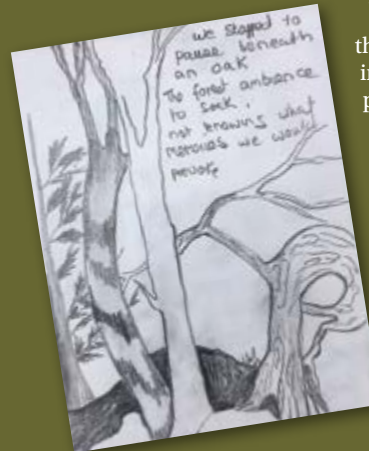


Branching out

Developed by Scottish Forestry (formerly Forestry Commission Scotland), Branching Out is a 12-week programme of woodland-based activities for adults who are recovering from long-term mental health problems. Delivered in partnership with organisations from environmental and mental health sectors across Scotland, each programme is tailored to suit wild places local to the group as well as individuals' needs and interests.

Activities include environmental art, photography, practical hands-on conservation tasks, bushcraft and outdoor cooking, green exercise and relaxation. Sessions also create vital space for socialising, sharing and building a sense of community within the group.

"At the centre of our ethos is to connect people with each other and with the landscape," explains Nathalie Moriarty, Branching Out Manager. "We want to make lasting changes to individuals' lives and for them to experience an increased quality of life."



This approach is a natural fit with the John Muir Award, which has been integrated within the Branching Out programme since 2008. Over the past 11 years, more than 2,450 John Muir Awards have been achieved by Branching Out participants.

All extracts and examples on these pages are from Branching Out participants, in their own words and by their own hands - from journals, scrapbooks, group diaries and photo albums. Thank you to all all involved for helping celebrate and showcase this work.



Making connections (clockwise from main): circle of autumn leaves; building nest boxes; weaving willow fish; poems and stories

Mindfulness

Addressing our own thoughts and exploring our inner feelings
 Forest so peaceful
 Listening - the birds sing
 The moss is a beautiful vibrant green
 The sun shining through creating its own shadows and reflections
 My mind is calm

Untitled

Campfire greets us,
 With a marshmallow welcome.
 Canopy of trees,
 Create a womb warmth.
 Red squirrels dart in and out of our laughter.
 Safe, secure, respectfully held,
 Space to be



The birds of Glenlude

John Savory reveals more about the surveys of bird life found at Glenlude over the past six years – and hints at what changes are likely as the property continues its gradual transformation



IN 2014, Karen Purvis, the Trust's property manager at Glenlude in the Scottish Borders, invited me to help initiate a scheme of regular, systematic bird surveys there. Birds are sensitive indicators of environmental change and the aim was to see how they would respond to the 25-year plan to slowly transform Glenlude into native broad-leaved woodland.

Trust management of the property commenced in 2011 and, so far, environmental change has been slight, so this summarised account of our surveys in the six years from 2014 to 2019 can be regarded as a baseline against which to judge future change.

In its present state, however, Glenlude is notable for its range of very different habitats. Roughly half of its 149ha area is a commercial plantation of Sitka spruce and larch that was planted by the Forestry Commission in 1995 and where some felling has started.

About a third is a mix of acid grassland with areas of bracken, heath and bog that was used as sheepwalk and where about 2,000 young native trees and shrubs have so far been planted. It includes four small ponds that were created artificially to attract ducks and other wildlife. The remaining area is a narrow finger of riparian habitat extending north along the Paddock Burn and containing mainly willow scrub.

From the outset, Karen and I agreed that it was important that our surveys should cover this range of habitats. We therefore decided on four specific transects. Transect one begins at the northernmost point on the site and heads south next to the Paddock Burn with its associated willows as far as Glenlude Farm.

Transect two begins next to the farm where there is a clump of mature broad-leaved trees and conifers, then goes west through grassland and bracken near the Glenlude Burn, before turning south and climbing next to the boundary fence

through heath towards Glenlude Hill.

Transect three heads eastward from the boundary fence through heath, grassland and bracken along the northern edge of the conifer plantation, then along tracks through the plantation down to the volunteers' hut.

Finally, transect four goes southwest from the hut along a broad fire break through the plantation, then southeast next to the boundary fence through native broad-leaved trees (mainly birch), that were also planted by the Forestry Commission in 1995, as far as the road that passes the property.

Each transect is roughly a mile long and the total survey takes about three hours to complete. In each year the survey was performed on one day in May and one day in June. And in each transect all birds seen or heard, including any flying nearby, were identified, counted and recorded. Care was taken to try not to record the same bird more than once.

Adjacent land from which some birds originate comprises sheepwalk to the west and south, and a large commercial forest to the east, much of which has recently been felled and replanted with conifers. Apart from occasional intrusions, sheep are absent in all transects.

OUR FINDINGS

A total of 49 bird species were recorded in the surveys over all six years, and no more than 32 species were recorded in any one year. The only changes over time in numbers of birds recorded were with willow warblers, which were particularly abundant in 2017 and 2019, blackcaps, which increased in 2018 and 2019 (possibly reflecting broader increases across Scotland in recent years, as shown in annual BTO Breeding Bird Surveys), and wrens and robins, numbers of which crashed in 2018 following a hard winter (the 'Beast from the East') and then partially recovered in 2019.



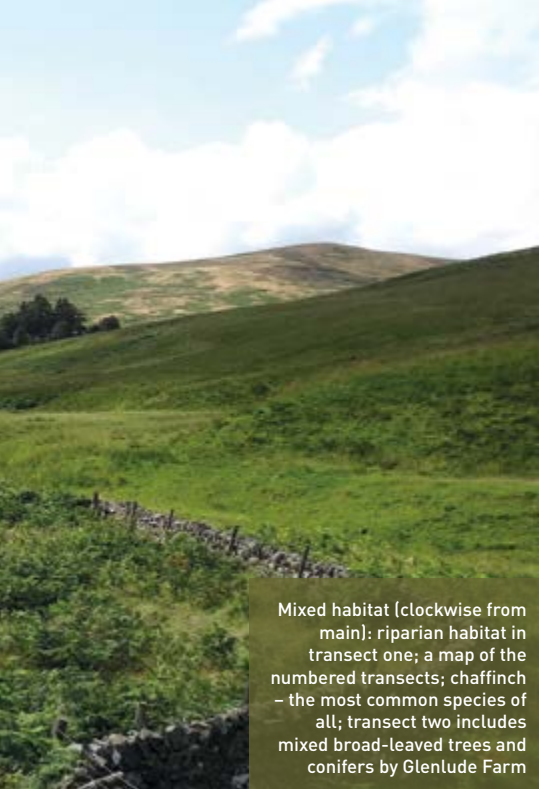
PHOTOGRAPHS: JOHN SAVORY

In the table, total numbers are used to show the ranking of the six most abundant species in each of the four transects, in order to summarise the effect of the varying habitat on birdlife at Glenlude.

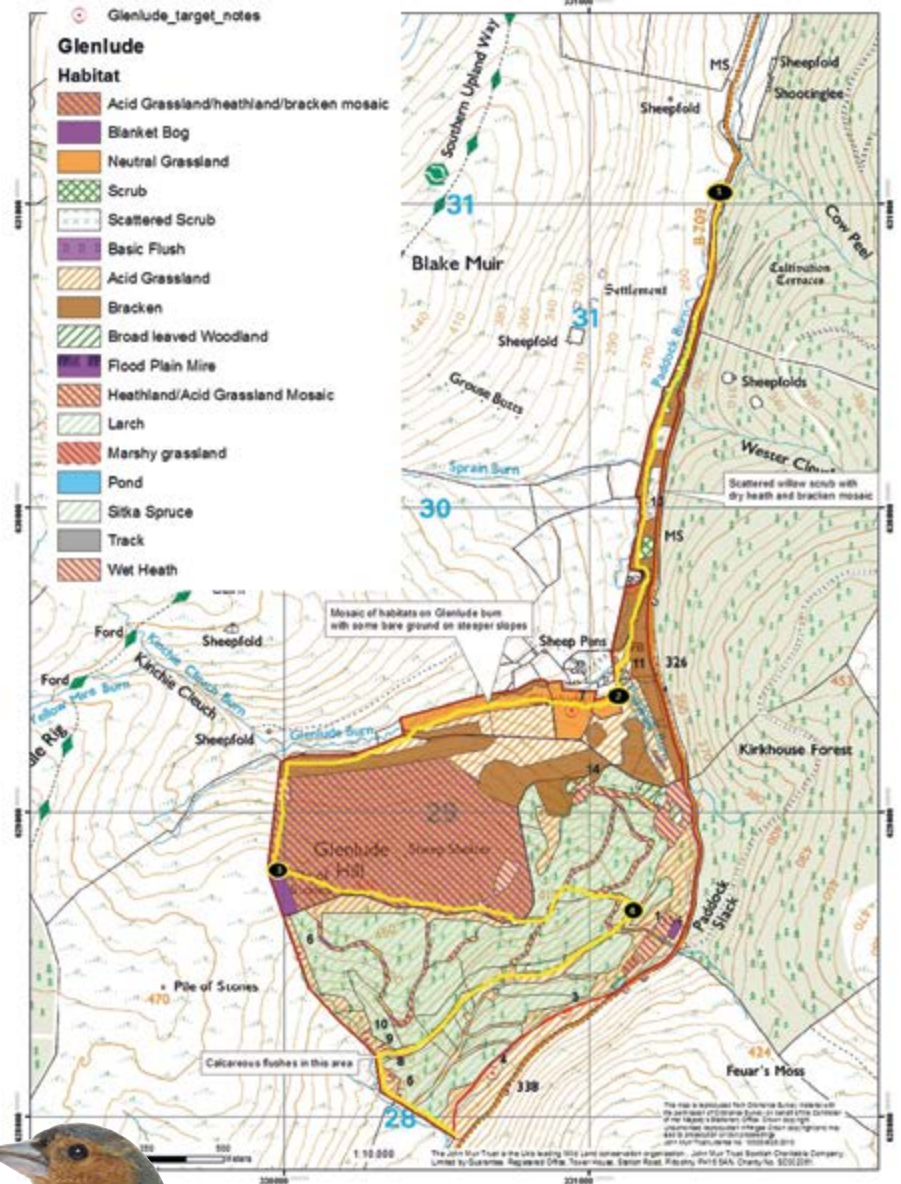
Across all four transects, chaffinch (which is known to be a 'habitat generalist') was the most common species recorded, followed by meadow pipit and willow warbler, and then wren and robin. The greatest differences between transects/habitats were evident in just a few species. As such, of more specialised woodland birds, blackcaps were common only in the willow scrub in transect one, and lesser redpolls and blackbirds were common only in the mixed habitat in transect four.

On the other hand, birds which occupy or fly over open country, like meadow pipits, skylarks, curlews, woodpigeons, swallows and carrion crows, were common only in the unwooded areas in and next to transects two and three. The six most common species accounted for roughly 80 per cent of all birds recorded in transects one, three and four, but only 61 per cent in transect two (where other birds such as whinchats, stonechats and mallards were also recorded regularly).

There have been just occasional



Mixed habitat (clockwise from main): riparian habitat in transect one; a map of the numbered transects; chaffinch – the most common species of all; transect two includes mixed broad-leaved trees and conifers by Glenlude Farm



observations of a few species that are of particular interest, such as black grouse, sparrowhawk, tawny owl, woodcock and crossbill. In 2019, we also discovered a small breeding colony of sand martins in transect one.

But what of the future? As the conifer plantation and unwooded areas that were previously sheepwalk at Glenlude are gradually replaced by developing broad-leaved woodland over the next two decades, it can be predicted there will be increasing colonisation by many different woodland birds.

These will include 'habitat specialists' which will change as the new woodland progresses slowly through pioneer and building stages of ecological succession towards a mature climax community containing an understorey of shrubs and plenty of dead trees. □

About the author

Since retiring following a career in poultry science, John Savory has been a Steering Group member, and regular volunteer, at Borders Forest Trust's Carrifran Wildwood. His expertise in carrying out annual bird surveys at the site led to the Trust requesting his help at Glenlude



Notes: Each column shows the six most abundant bird species recorded in each transect, in descending order, based on total counts (shown in brackets) in all surveys from 2014 to 2019. Also shown are the percentages that these six species comprise of the total numbers of all birds recorded in each transect.

Glenlude: most abundant bird species, 2014-2019			
Transect one	Transect two	Transect three	Transect four
Willow warbler (99)	Meadow pipit (178)	Chaffinch (96)	Chaffinch (142)
Chaffinch (96)	Chaffinch (51)	Meadow pipit (51)	Willow warbler (83)
Wren (55)	Woodpigeon (33)	Willow warbler (40)	Robin (54)
Robin (42)	Swallow (33)	Robin (29)	Wren (36)
Blackcap (18)	Carrion crow (33)	Wren (29)	Lesser redpoll (23)
Carrion crow (15)	Curllew (28)	Skylark (14)	Blackbird (14)
79%	61%	78%	80%



Rewilding: Real Life Stories of Returning British and Irish Wildlife to Balance, by David Woodfall

Alan McCombes reviews an important new anthology edited and illustrated by acclaimed Welsh-born wildlife photographer David Woodfall

IN THE popular imagination, the term 'rewilding' tends to conjure up visions of vast and remote forests devoid of human life where wolves, lynx and bears roam free.

Yet this book is primarily about people and how they are helping to revitalise nature on their own doorsteps. And not just professional ecologists, but farmers, foresters, council tenants, nurses, anglers, lawyers, recovering alcoholics, coastguards, beekeepers, prisoners, crofters, photographers, landowners, gardeners, Bangladeshi and Chinese women and children.

This collection of 53 'real life stories' – illustrated with superb images from award-winning photographer and editor David Woodfall – illuminates the incredible diversity that is encapsulated in a single word.

Far from being an outlandish new cult, rewilding has long been part of the fabric of everyday life in countless communities across Britain and Ireland where people voluntarily give up their time to repair damaged habitats and restore natural balance in areas where they live.

One of the strengths of this anthology is the geographical and social breadth that it spans. Some of the stories will be familiar to members of the John Muir Trust: the work to regenerate the Caledonian Forest in the Highlands; the impressive spread of the Carrifran Wildwood in the Southern

Uplands; the Summit to Sea project in the Cambrian Mountains; and the Wild Ennerdale partnership in a remote valley in west Cumbria.

The essays also include a beautifully written piece on Glenlude by Em Mackie, describing how a range of community groups, charities and schools are working together to transform a jaded commercial conifer plantation into a living, breathing landscape of native woodlands harbouring an abundance of wildlife.

Other stories, however, are more surprising: the community garden that has sprung up on the site of the former stadium of Swansea City Football Club; the inner city council housing estate in Sheffield where birds of prey hover over ancient woodlands; the island bird sanctuary with 150 species in the heart of Glasgow's tough East End; and the flowering grasslands and intricate habitats that have sprouted on colliery spoil heaps in the valleys of south Wales.

Rewilding also provides a glimpse of some of the pioneering projects taking place in Ireland, from the mysterious lunar landscape of the Burren on the west coast of Clare to the bogs and lochs of Mayo and the wetlands of Tipperary, where the local community combines protection of habitats with celebration of the area's natural heritage through music, folklore, song, dance and poetry.

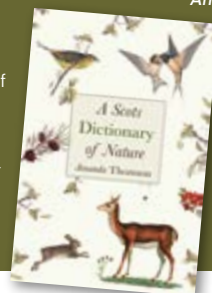
As David Woodfall points out in his concluding chapter, rewilding can have a transformational effect on people as well as landscape: "You will become healthier, more grounded, learn about the land and science, and develop many new practical skills. You will learn about team-working, develop new friendships and become more connected to the earth and your community."

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About the reviewer
Alan McCombes is editor
of the *Journal*

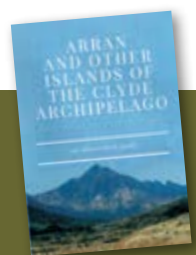
Others we like

A Scots Dictionary of Nature, Amanda Thomson
For countless centuries, people have lived and worked amid Scotland's hills, rivers, forests, coastlines and wildlife. Out of that intimate connection with the land, they developed a rich vocabulary to describe their surroundings. Amanda Thomson has done a fine job rescuing, recording and reviving words and phrases that reveal the expressive power of a language rooted in Scotland's diverse rural landscapes. £9.99 (paperback); £12.99 (hardback). saraband.net



Arran and Other Islands of the Clyde Archipelago: An Illustrated Guide, David C. & S. Alison Kilpatrick

Inspired by their own long relationship with, and love of, Arran, this fully illustrated guide digs deep into the outstanding natural beauty and wildlife found on the nine islands within the Clyde archipelago. Arran, Bute and Great Cumbrae are the best known of the islands, with all three readily accessible and easy to explore. Others, such as Ailsa Craig and Holy Island, require a little more planning, not to mention a sense of adventure, but are worth every moment. The guide combines background and present-day information on the key centres of population, plus an insight into the abundant wildlife, archaeology, plants, walks and more quirky places of



Sky Dance: Fighting for the wild in the Scottish Highlands, by John D Burns

Daisy Clark reviews an action-packed new novel that confronts some of the major controversies surrounding land use in the Scottish Highlands

“FOR THOSE who take the time to look, or are lucky enough to wander the empty places, there are glimpses of wildness to be seen. It is in the tail flick of an otter in the pool of evening, it is in the silent sweep of a barn owl as it heads off to hunt in the failing light, it is in the bright eyes of a pine marten fleeing into the forest, and it is in the dance of the harrier. We come from the land and the memory of it remains in all of us.”

It’s a passage that reflects how the lure of wild places weaves through this action-filled tale of conflict between landowners in the Scottish Highlands, written by John D. Burns, author of *The Last Hillwalker* and *Bothy Tales*.

Calling on a diverse cast of characters, Burns explores some of the key controversies relating to Scottish land management today – deer overpopulation, energy developments, rewilding and species reintroduction, grouse moors and the persecution of birds of prey.

At the centre of the story are hillwalkers Angus and Rory, who, after witnessing the

shooting of a hen harrier (the sky dancer of the title) on a grouse moor, are pulled into a battle between pompous and greedy landowner Lord Purdey, still clinging to the traditional Victorian ideals of Highland life and hunting, and his conservationist neighbour Tony Muir – a man on a mission to rewild his property and bring the lynx back to Scotland.

Shocked by Purdey’s relentless destruction of the wildlife on his land, Angus and Rory find themselves gradually drawn into the world of environmental activism and the need to protect the wild places that mean so much to them.

Burns is at his best when writing about the mountains he loves and some of the most eloquent and gripping parts of the story relate to the invincible power and magnetic pull of the hills, and the welcoming respite of the beloved bothy.

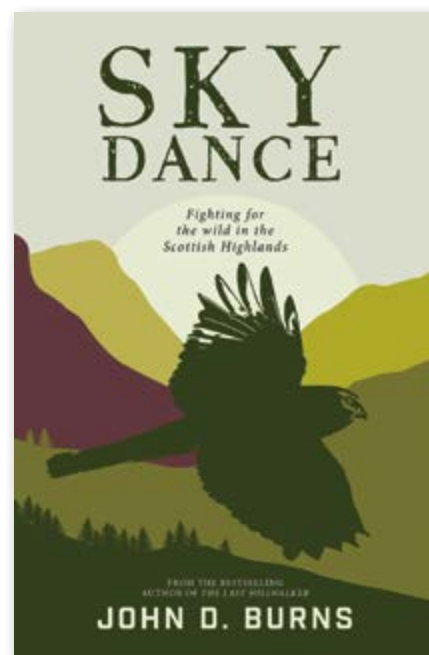
Part outdoor adventure, part detective story, part conservation call-to-arms, *Sky Dance* is an enjoyable, lively read, with plenty of action and humour, alongside moving explorations of friendships and relationships, coming to terms with loss and ultimately letting go of the past.

An accessible introduction to the history and issues facing Scotland’s land, it also poses questions for the reader: are we holding on to the past when we should be moving forward? And what is the best future for Scotland’s landscapes?

£9.99 (Paperback); £6.99, (eBook)
v-publishing.co.uk

About the reviewer

Daisy Clark is the Trust’s Fundraising and Digital Campaigns Manager



interest found throughout this wonderfully varied collection of islands. Visiting hillwalkers, birdwatchers, cyclists, or just those with a more general interest in natural history would do well to find space in their backpacks for this informative guide. £10.00. fast-print.net

The Equilibrium Line – Poems inspired by climbing, David Wilson

In its intensity and preoccupation with line and space, the climbing experience is akin to poetry, so says poet, novelist and accomplished climber David Wilson. This thought-provoking collection of poems celebrates climbing in all its forms, from indoor walls and ice climbs on Ben Nevis to big routes in some of

the world’s most formidable ranges. Beautifully written, the poems examine a variety of themes, not least ambition, failure and where (and when) to draw the line when climbing. It is a collection of work that satisfies on many levels. For poetry readers, it opens a window into the world of climbing, from its joys and motivations to the inherent risks involved. For climbers, it highlights the power of poetry to explore and reveal just why they do what they do. A quick word too on the intriguing title: *The Equilibrium Line* refers to the altitude on an alpine glacier where snow gained (accumulation) is equal to ice lost (ablation). It’s a title chosen, says Wilson, because of how “the poems are preoccupied with what it means to find balance: on rock and ice, within ourselves, and within threatened environments that are melting in front of our eyes”. £9.95. poetrybusiness.co.uk





Extreme gardening

Hillary and Rick Rohde's new book *Li* gives an insight into their life's work – 40 years spent creating a family, woodland and beautiful garden in the 'Rough Bounds' of Knoydart

RICK first saw *Li* in the summer of 1974 after days of walking around the remoter parts of the West Highlands while searching out a place for us to live. At the time we were living in a borrowed house on the equally remote Applecross peninsula, without transport, but eventually we arranged a visit.

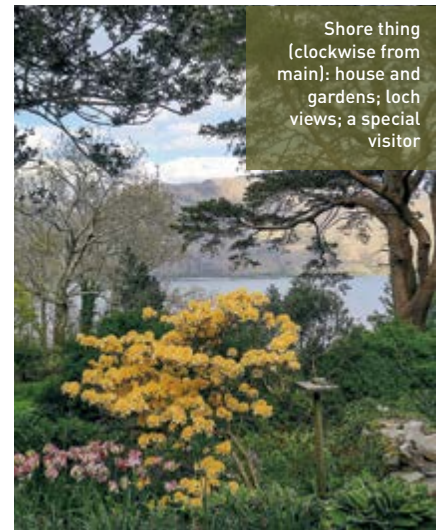
Viewed from our approach in a small open boat we saw a stony shoreline strewn with seaweed. The mouth of a stream roared into the loch. Naked branches of ash trees grew along the banks and at the far end of what might once have served as a field, three magnificent Scots pines obscured the remains of a small croft house; all of it dominated by snow-capped mountains slipping into the deep, steel-green waters of a sea loch.

Apart from the splashes of dazzling white snow, the landscape looked brown. Winter. Cold as ice. Our new home. We were in

equal measure exhilarated and terrified.

Neither of us could have imagined our future garden in a place so bleak and ferocious. It was, in every respect, the extreme opposite of everything we had grown up with. The scale of the landscape alone was forbidding, and we knew very little about plants, quite apart from the fact we had two small children and were preoccupied with securing the minimal of home comforts and a modest living. There was no electricity, no toilet or furniture and precious little money. A garden would have been a deep conceit.

The need for fresh vegetables drove us to dig a piece of ground between the pines and the shore. It took weeks of digging up rocks with a pick-axe and wheel-barrowing them down to the beach, (except for the precious large flat stones that would one day, far away, be needed for paths) until at last we had what looked like a nice patch of earth about 30 feet square.



Shore thing
(clockwise from
main): house and
gardens; loch
views; a special
visitor



PHOTOGRAPHS: HILLARY AND RICK ROHDE

On a good high tide, seaweed, rich in minerals, lay in opulent quantities along the shoreline waiting to be barrowed up the stony beach to the awaiting patch. Up we hauled endless barrow loads of salty seaweed as well as goat and horse dung, which quickly rotted down into a lovely rich soil. I've since read that it's better to leave seaweed to desalt out in the rain, but we were either too impatient or too ignorant to do anything other than lay it like a deep pile carpet across what felt like virgin soil.

We planted a large vegetable garden fruitful enough to feed a village. We bottled, pickled and buried the excess produce in hay-lined earthen clamps for root vegetables such as carrots, beets and parsnips but, just as importantly, the success of the vegetable garden hinted at other possibilities. □

Further info

This extract is taken from *Li: A garden on the West Coast of Scotland* by Hillary and Rick Rohde, published by Rough Bounds Publishers. Buy it from the authors direct for £30 by emailing rick@garnisdale.org

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