JOHN MUIR TRUST
JOURNAL
66 SPRING 2019

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18 Is nature the ultimate antidote to depression?

This land is your land
Community conservation in the Outer Hebrides

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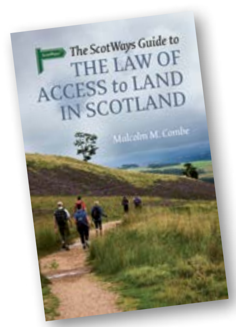

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Nature or jobs: a false choice

FROM our earliest days, the Trust has always sought to integrate the interests of communities and the natural environment that surrounds them. The main feature reports on how four community land trusts on the island of Lewis and Harris are working to improve the lives of local people while respecting the natural environment.

That goes to the essence of what the John Muir Trust is all about. We are part of nature and for thousands of years, people have been as much a part of our landscapes as the trees, the birds and the insects. We all have at least a little bit of wild nature within us, a legacy from the days before humans lived among concrete, steel and rural monocultures.

The Trust recently commissioned a series of films, sponsored by VisitScotland, some of which have already been released under the title of *The Wild in Me*. The narrators have their own unique, personal relationship with wild places, and each have discovered a lot about themselves through that relationship.

PHOTOGRAPH: KAREN PURVIS

Many people lack the time, the opportunity, the resources, the skills or the physical health to explore rugged mountain ranges. But we can find contentment and pleasure much closer to home. Nature can be a highly effective antidote to the stresses and pressures of our cluttered everyday lives.

Few of us want to give up our modern comforts and conveniences. But our lifestyles have been achieved at the cost of diminishing our wild planet. And that, in a nutshell, is the conundrum we face in seeking to defend wildness and wild places.

Collectively we consume too much and follow lifestyles that threaten the future of our planet. But that's not the end of the story. On a global scale, there is a wide gulf between those with access to comfort and security and those without.

Even within the countries of the UK, there is a huge disparity in opportunity to experience the pleasures and challenges of the wild. Perhaps that explains why our campaigning work to protect wild places can sometimes engender mixed reactions.

We're often presented with a stark choice between nature and landscape on the one side or jobs and prosperity on the other. But these are not the choices we should be forced to make. Following the publication of our new strategy document, *Wild Places for People and Nature*, I received a number of emails, especially on the subject of onshore wind. Some advocated zero tolerance of major wind farms, while others argued that we should support climate change goals over other objectives. These divergent views were all expressed by people who care enough about wild places to be members of the John Muir Trust.

We should bear in mind that the coming of the railways in the nineteenth century was deemed by many to be destructive of rural scenery. Yet they opened a new world of travel and trade.

In contrast, large-scale commercial wind farms offer fewer tangible benefits to people who live in the areas where they are located. But familiarity does tend to produce a degree of acceptance. If there is one major lesson to learn from the huge expansion of renewables over the past decade or so, it is the need to find suitable locations that will avoid diminishing our grand and wild places.

And where we do object to development, we need to try and help secure alternative investment that supports communities on the land. In our own small way, the Trust is already doing this. We are developing a visitor management strategy whose aim, at least in part, is to find ways of making sure that visitors contribute to local facilities and help support the people who live and work in these areas.

It is not the role of the Trust to prescribe an exact balance between competing aims, or to compromise our principles, but we should strive to offer a way forward that takes into account other interests and includes helping local communities benefit from the wild places where they live.

Finally, I want to mention my recent visit to a primary school in East Ayrshire, where the John Muir Award is being used to great effect to support the education of pupils for whom the daily routine of the classroom inspires little enthusiasm.

I joined them on an expedition to clear litter and plant trees on a piece of land near the school, where we discovered earthworms aplenty and watched them disappear back into the ground around our newly planted hedgerow. In this more informal setting, the pupils were able to connect with that bit of wild within themselves – of the positive rather the negative kind. As a result, they were engrossed, inquisitive and cooperative.

So I come back to the question of privilege. What we might take for granted can be a world away from the experiences of others – so our efforts to protect landscapes and nature should not be too narrowly focused, but should aim to benefit as many people as possible.

Andrew Bachell

'The Long Walk' Rod Ireland (top) 'Karst bagging in Yanshuo,' by Steve Jacques

PHOTOGRAPH: RODIRELAND.CO.UK

Top shots from Kendal Mountain Festival

The 2018 Kendal Mountain Festival Photography Competition's Trust-sponsored 'Mountain Landscape' category celebrated two Lake District-based photographers.

Winner Rod Ireland and runner-up Steve Jacques may have captured their breath-taking images on opposite sides of the world, but they had one thing in common – both strayed from the beaten path to grab their shot.

Professional photographer and mountain leader Rod Ireland is based near Glenridding Common. His winning image 'The Long Walk' was taken in Glenshee in March 2018.

"The Long Walk shows the Sron na Gaoi, the ridge which leads up to Glas Maol," he explains. "The lighting was just sublime. It was only when I'd returned home I noticed there were two mountaineers in the shot, tiny dots perfectly illustrating how small we are in the vastness of the world surrounding us."

Postman Steve Jacques is also based in the Lakes. He took his photograph 'Karst bagging in Yanshuo' while on an extended family road trip back in August 2016.

"The picture was taken in Yangshuo in South Western China, famous for its karst landscape which stretches up from Northern Vietnam. A local recommended this viewpoint and after a short but steep hike we shared the views with only a handful of other tourists, which in August is a miracle!"

PHOTOGRAPH: STEVE JACQUES

New deer management course launches

A new Countryside Skills and Deer Management for Conservation course is set to begin on Skye this autumn, subject to approval, following work carried out jointly by the John Muir Trust and West Highland College UHI.

Pathwork skills on Skye with the Trust

PHOTOGRAPH:JOHN MUIR TRUST

The course, based at the Broadford campus of the college, will cover skills such as fencing; path work; construction of stone walls, structures; use of machinery and specialised tools; and working with trees. It will also consider habitat management, and countryside recreation, focusing on the rights and responsibilities of both land managers and those who use the land.

In a pioneering new initiative, the course will include a section on deer management from the perspective of conservation and integrated land management.

This part of the course will also include a placement with the John Muir Trust, or another organisation with similar objectives.

The Trust and West Highland College UHI have worked together each year since 2016 on path work and fencing skills modules, including hands-on experience around Glen Sligachan, and at Strathaird Farm.

Heather McNeill, the Course Leader, said: "We are delighted to have been approached by the John Muir Trust to work on this exciting project together. The new course aims to equip students with the skills and confidence needed to work in the countryside, and offers progression and specialisation for both students on the current Crofting & Countryside Skills course, and direct entrants."

Info: **admissions.whc@uhi.ac.uk**, call **01397 874000** or visit**whc.uhi.ac.uk**

Trust funds community projects

Last year, the Trust awarded £4,250 to local conservation projects in North Harris, West Sutherland and the Lake District that will benefit both the local community and the environment.

We contributed £2,500 towards the cost of a survey of three popular upland footpaths in North Harris: the Huisinis cliff path, the Loch Leosaid link path and the Loch a' Ghlinne path.

"The path network is a key asset for us, allowing people to safely access the most remote regions of this mountainous island," said Gordon Cumming of the North Harris Trust.

"The cliff walk, which runs from the machair of Huisinis along coastal cliffs to the remote beaches of Mheilen and Cravadale, has spectacular views out to the Atlantic. It was originally built to link long deserted villages and is now overdue some major repairs.

"The path survey funded by the John Muir Trust has given us some crucial information about what needs to be done where and how much it's likely to cost."

The Trust contributed £1,000 to the West Sutherland Fisheries Trust to help develop a nature booklet – *Wellies and Wildlife* – aimed at interpreting the wildlife and habitats of the area for locals and visitors.

Dr Shona Marshall of the West Sutherland Fisheries Trust said: "Getting people to engage with the natural world is a really important way of getting them to look after it.

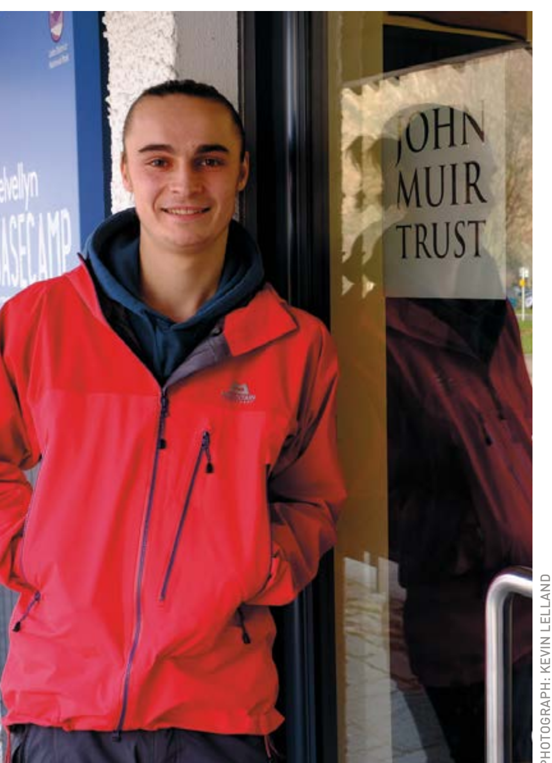
"We have a large, wild area and helping people to explore it and learn about it in a safe manner can only be good."

The Trust also donated £750 to a project led by Tim Clarke of Patterdale Parish Council which is exploring the potential development of the dilapidated Greenside mine as an educational and tourist asset for the communities of Glenridding and Patterdale in the Lake District.

The Trust's head of land management, Mike Daniels, said: "The grants awarded showcase the diversity of ecological, educational and economic activity on land that is managed by the Trust and its partners. We look forward to monitoring the progress of these projects and the benefits they bring to wild places, local people and visitors."

The Huisinis peninsula on Harris

PHOTOGRAPH: ALAN MCCOMBES



PHOTOGRAPH: KEVIN LELLAND

Trust opens 'Helvellyn Basecamp'

The Trust has opened a small office and visitor space in Glenridding next to the Lake District National Park's Ullswater tourist information centre.

Called the 'Helvellyn Basecamp,' it has been funded with support from the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation and will be used by staff, volunteers and visitors to the Trust-managed Glenridding Common.

The space will be used as an office and a hub for local volunteering activities while also enabling locals and visitors to drop-in and meet with the Trust's staff.

Isaac Johnston (pictured), the Trust's Glenridding Common conservation ranger, says: "It's an open door for people to come in and find out about the Trust's work and how they can get involved. We're hoping that locals and visitors alike will feel they can let us know what they are noticing up on Glenridding Common itself – the sort of feedback that will help us manage this place for the benefit of everyone."

Obituary – Adam Watson *Born 14 April 1930 Died 24 January 2019*

THE Trust was saddened earlier this year to learn of the death of renowned Aberdeenshire-born scientist Dr Adam Watson (pictured), who published more than 30 books on upland flora and fauna based on fieldwork carried out in his beloved Cairngorms.

He was one of only five people ever to be honoured with a John Muir Trust Lifetime Achievement Award for his pioneering scientific writing and research, his formidable mountaineering achievements and his dedicated campaigning to protect and revitalise nature.

Nigel Hawkins, one of the four founders of the Trust said: "Adam was affectionately known to us as 'Mr Cairngorms' for his unparalleled expertise on this iconic part of the Highlands.

"He was also a campaigner par excellence who understood the importance of valuing and safeguarding the Cairngorms for the benefit of both nature and people.

"He inspired in others a deep love, affection and true understanding of the unique and special qualities of the mountains of Scotland."

Influencing policy – consultation responses

In response to a UK Government review of England's National Parks and AONBs the Trust called for the current explicit recognition and adherence to the Sandford principle to be upheld, to protect and enhance the quality of the natural environment.
We also contributed to a Scottish Government consultation on enshrining European environmental principles into Scottish legislation after Brexit and responded to the Cairngorms National Park Authority consultation on its Local Development Plan given the importance of wild land to the area.

PHOTOGRAPH: SHUTTERSTOCK

Striding Edge, pictured here, is in the Lake District National Park

Viking saga takes new twist

The 12-year saga of the Viking wind farm on the central Mainland of Shetland took a further twist earlier this year when the developers of the consented 103-turbine wind farm (which has yet to be constructed) submitted a revised application to increase turbine heights from 145 metres to 155 metres.

The original development was approved by the Scottish Government in 2012 without a Public Local Inquiry, but no development has occurred as the economic case for the subsea transmission cable has not been agreed.

The Shetland Islands Council raised no objection to the revised application prompting the Trust to issue the following response: "We have a number of members on Shetland and have long supported the stance of local campaigning group Sustainable Shetland and the two adjacent community councils to protect the landscape, wildlife and ecosystems that will be damaged by this giant development. We remain convinced that any development on this scale should be properly scrutinised at a Public Local Inquiry."

Keep it Wild Campaign and Planning (Scotland) Bill

As the Planning Bill continues its progress through the Scottish Parliament, further amendments can be expected followed by a full parliamentary debate at some stage.

Along with other campaign groups, the Trust would like to see an amendment introducing some form of Equal (or Community) Rights of Appeal.

This would allow communities (of both place and interest) and environmentalists to challenge poor planning decisions without having to resort to expensive legal action.

As we have previously reported, it is unlikely that there will be any further consideration given to amendments on wild land protection during the passage of the Planning Bill.

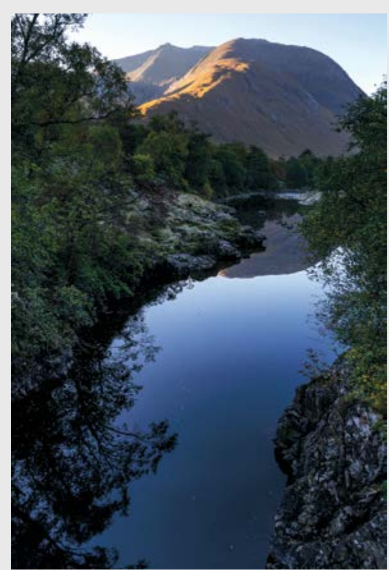
The Trust, however, hopes to revisit some of the issues around wild land protection in the run-up to the next review of Scottish Planning Policy (expected in late 2019).

Glen Dye wind farm
Aberdeenshire Council has objected to a proposed 26-turbine wind farm near popular mountain Clachnaben. Along with a number of other organisations, the Trust has opposed the development, close to the eastern boundary of the Cairngorms National Park.
The final decision now will rest with the Scottish Government.

Glen Etive hydro
Seven controversial applications for run-of-river hydro schemes at Glen Etive have been approved by Highland Council.

Trust chief executive Andrew Bachell said: "We do not have blanket opposition to development in wild or scenic areas, but we are concerned that two of the schemes will adversely affect the landscape of a popular and accessible glen.

"Rather than a narrow conflict between commercial development or landscape protection, we'd like to see a wider public debate about how to manage our natural resources for the benefit of local communities and the nation as a whole."



PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID LINTERN

Hilltracks campaign
Efforts by the Scottish Environment LINK Hilltracks campaign, backed by the Trust and Mountaineering Scotland, to tighten the rules around the construction of vehicle tracks in the uplands are continuing.
A recent decision by the Cairngorms National Park to approve an application for a track at Balavil estate in Wild Land Area 20: Monadhliath has caused some dismay.

Point and Sandwick Trust's three community turbines. Bottom: Alastair McIntosh

PHOTOGRAPH: ALASTAIR MCINTOSH

Local power for local people

As energy giant EDF powers ahead with is proposal for a 36-turbine wind farm north of Stornoway, Lewis-raised writer and land campaigner **Alastair McIntosh** argues for an alternative approach

SUPPORTERS of the proposed Stornoway Wind Farm development have argued that wind farms on a massive scale are necessary to secure an electricity connector from Lewis.

In one way they're right. The island's capacity to absorb more renewable energy is currently full. At first sight, the only way to increase financial benefit to the island's communities is to yield control to multinational corporations.

I don't doubt that many who pursue this line of logic, and especially the Stornoway Trust, have the greater good of the community at heart.

However, the technology of renewable energy is fast changing. New options are opening for local initiatives at local scales. The interconnector, requiring turbines on a scale that would be ruinous to large areas of the island's beauty, might have been a 20th century solution. But consider what is offered by tomorrow's world.

In Norway, the proven success of the world's first electric vehicle ferry has led to a further 53 orders for the shipbuilder, Fjellstrand.

Meanwhile, the Norwegian airport authority expects that all of their short-haul flights will be electric by 2040. Indeed, their first commercial route, operated with a 19-seater electric plane, is scheduled to start in 2025.

That's not never-never land. We're talking only seven years' time. This is all made possible by fast-developing battery technology. What's more, the noise from planes and ships is cut by half and greenhouse gas emissions by 95 per cent.

Imagine an island future built without the interconnector. Where local power is generated for local use from the providence of wind, rain and sun. Where the power runs not just lights, the TV, an electric fire and kettle, but heat pumps, ferries, buses, cars and planes. Where pump storage using sea or hill lochs evens out fluctuations in supply, and fossil fuels are used only for the backup. Where planning consent is granted only to community land trusts.

After all, there is a great psychological difference between a vast wind farm built to export profits to a landlord or to venture capitalists, and a community scale of endeavour based around Iain Crichton Smith's principle of "real people in a real place". These emergent 21st century alternatives to an interconnector are fast becoming reality.

"The technology of renewable energy is fast-changing. New options are opening for local initiative at local scales"

On Eigg, where I was closely involved with the 1990s land buyout, 90 per cent of the electricity comes from renewable sources. Their 'national grid' is run entirely by their own crofters. Locally, what goes around comes around. Here is a Hebridean community enacting a 21st century future that has pulled the community together, not split it apart.

I understand why people might think that the interconnector is their only salvation. It was the same on Harris, in the 1990s, with the superquarry proposal.

But look at Harris now. Thanks largely to new-found confidence and opportunities offered by land reform, a matrix of job opportunities have sprung up that don't depend on trickle-down handouts from corporate and landed power.

Lastly, imagine jumping on a plane to Norway to bring the likes of the Fjellstrand electric shipbuilders over to Arnish [fabrication yard near Stornoway].

We don't have to be some corporation's latter day colony. We can take back control, and do so to give life.

About the author
Alastair McIntosh is a writer and activist

Alastair is speaking at the Trust's Edinburgh Local Members' Group Gathering on 9 November 2019

Western horizons

Alan McCombes visits Lewis and Harris to meet four community landowning trusts who are harnessing their natural assets to help reverse generations of population decline

PHOTOGRAPH: MARGARET SORAYA

DEFIANT in the face of the elements, the coastal communities strung along Scotland's north western fringes have to be tough to survive. In spring and early summer, when the sun sparkles on turquoise bays and wildflowers dance among the machair in the soft breeze, the Outer Hebrides are beguiling. But in the twilight of a winter afternoon, when the tourists have gone and the soft breezes have accelerated into raging storms, this ragged shoreline on the edge of the ocean might feel, to some people, unfit for human habitation.

But inhabited much of it is – and has been since time immemorial. The 5,000-year-old standing stones at Callanish are older than the pyramids of Egypt. But in contrast to neighbouring Skye and parts of the mainland Highlands, the Western Isles – Eilean Siar – have suffered a long-term population haemorrhage. Between 1991 and 2011, the number of residents dropped by two thousand – the equivalent of a 300,000 population loss across Scotland and almost four million UK-wide.

Yet today, a new-found confidence is galvanising the islands, for reasons that can be summed up in two words: community ownership. "The idea that geographically defined communities should take control of their land goes back a long way in the islands," says Calum MacLeod, the Policy Director of Community Land Scotland. He explains that the first ever community buy-out took place in Glendale on Skye as far back as 1908, and that in 1923 Lord Leverhulme bequeathed 28,000 hectares around Stornoway to local residents, who have owned and managed that land ever since.

Today, after generations of inertia, the Western Isles is at the forefront of a new wave of land reform that has seen the geographical extent of community landownership grow four times over. While still at an embryonic stage in mainland Scotland, 75 per cent of the population of the Outer Hebrides now live on land that is collectively owned and managed by communities, covering half the 3,000 square kilometre landmass of the islands.

COMMUNITY SPIRIT

In the blustery gloom of late November 2018, I travelled to the island of Lewis and Harris to meet four community land trusts which among them own and manage 57,000 hectares – an area of land one and half times larger than the Greater Glasgow conurbation. I came away from four days of conversation with staff and trustees of the North Harris Trust, West Harris Trust, Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn (Galson Estate Trust) and Urras Oighreachd Chàrlabhaigh (Carloway Estate Trust) impressed by the dynamism and creativity that community control has unleashed, and by the deep connection between local people and the landscape they inhabit.

The Talla na Mara Centre

In these areas, people are pulling together to create jobs, support local businesses, facilitate affordable housing for sale and rent, and reverse population decline. At the same time, this diverse population, which includes traditional crofters, fishermen and weavers as well as those working in construction, services and tourism, recognises that the landscape, the sea and the wildlife of the islands are precious assets that enrich the quality of life for local people and help to support economic regeneration.

NORTH HARRIS TRUST (NHT)

The storm-lashed Atlantic coast of Scotland is never going to compete with the Greek Islands. In the Western Isles, even reports of severe traffic congestion and overcrowding from just across the water in Skye feel like dispatches from a foreign land.

"The situation here is very different because there's a finite limit on tourism on this island," says Calum MacKay, the Chair of North Harris Trust (NHT) since its foundation in 2003. "The Skye bridge is permanently open, but people can only come here by ferry or by plane – and in summer the ferries are full and accommodation providers are stretched to the maximum."

We chatted in the conservatory of Calum's home which gazes out across the indented seascape to the island of Taransay, the last stop before Newfoundland, and one of a hundred islands of the Outer Hebrides. A native of Harris, he is one of the pioneers of the community buy-out that was launched in 2002 when the mountainous estate was put on the market by its former owner, the cider millionaire Jonathan Bulmer.

From the start, the John Muir Trust supported the campaign for community ownership, both financially and by offering advice on land management. In the official history of the NHT, published in 2007, Janet Hunter recalls that "this encouraging relationship did much to boost morale for people who were under tremendous pressure". In the autumn of 2002, the residents voted by a resounding two to one majority in favour of the buy-out. They have never looked back.

"From the beginning, the John Muir Trust has always been really supportive and in all that time we've never had any issues or disagreements," says Calum Mackay. His sentiments are echoed by Gordon Cumming the Manager of the NHT, who says: "We really appreciate the advice and practical land management support we get from the John Muir Trust. The work parties that Sandy Maxwell brings over for weeks at a time are fantastic. The standard of work, the amount they do – every time they come over it's a real eye-opener for us, and something we would love to expand on."

The NHT's logo – the silhouette of a soaring eagle against a background of mountain and sea – reflects the community's intimate connection to the land, the ocean and the wildlife.

→ continued

"There's a great natural asset here and we've chosen to go down the road of trying to manage that for the greater good," says Gordon Cumming. "That means encouraging and improving access, and it means looking after the environment to support the local booming tourist industry here."

VISITOR ATTRACTIONS

In recent years, the NHT has created an unstaffed visitor centre with shower and toilet facilities and camper van hook-ups at Huisinis, a tiny crofting settlement which clings tenaciously to life at the end of a long and winding – and occasionally precipitous – single-track road.

The John Muir Trust works closely with the community to repair and maintain the footpath that twists across the hillside from the white sands and machair of Huisinis to the beautiful shoreline at Crabhadail beach on the other side of the peninsula.

Among the Harris hills, the NHT has also built an eagle observatory, which attracts thousands of visitors a year. The community ranger, Daryll Brown, conducts a free-of-charge guided walks programme including an eagle walk and a dolphin walk during the summer months, and a rutting deer walk in the autumn. All are incredibly popular with visitors – not least because they have a near 100 per cent success rate in spotting these charismatic creatures.

The isles of the west, with their howling winds, waterlogged peat soils and salt spray from the sea are not well-suited to the kind of large-scale rewilding projects that seek to revive and revitalise native woodlands across extensive areas in places such as the Cairngorms, the Southern Uplands, Glen Affric, Knoydart and Highland Perthshire.

"There's no way Harris is going to become a wooded island," says Gordon Cumming, "but there are sheltered glens where we could have quite extensive pockets of native woodland. If you go round the coastline and see some of the inaccessible cliffs and crags, there are remnants of old woodland, relic trees, so if we can create areas that are not heavily grazed by deer, we might ultimately get to the stage where we start getting some natural regeneration of native woodlands."

Over the past decade or so, the NHT has established some small native plantations that include tree species such as oak, Scots pine and rowan.

WEST HARRIS TRUST (WHT)

Last year, the John Muir Trust signed a new memorandum of agreement with both the North Harris Trust and its neighbour, the West Harris Trust (WHT).

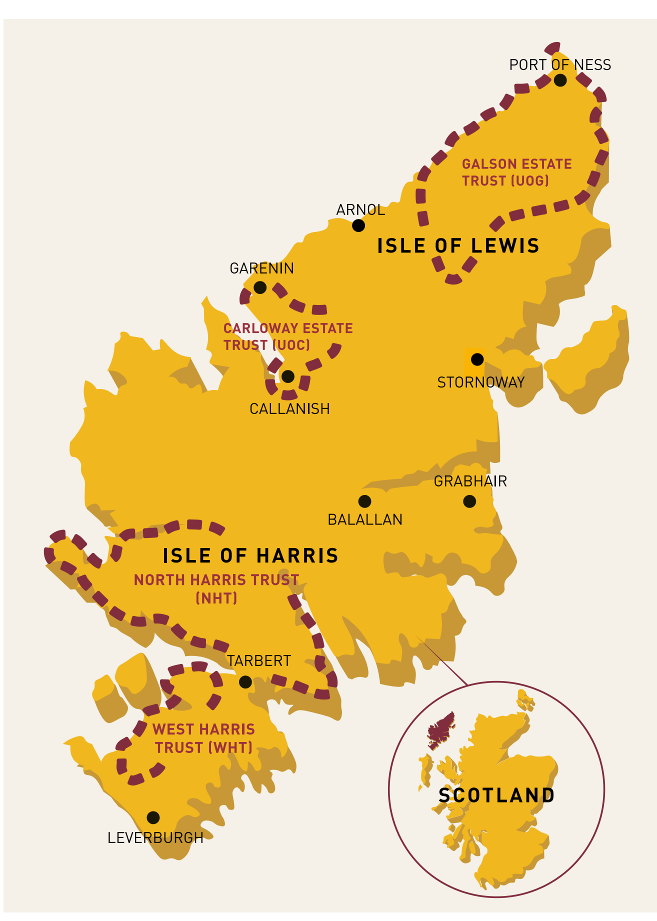
In this part of the island, which includes some of Europe's most scenic beaches such as Luskentyre and Seillebost, the topography of the Atlantic coastline is more gentle and the soil more fertile. Even under a granite-grey late November sky, this is a strikingly beautiful landscape, where sweeping expanses of white sand are fringed by the famous Hebridean machair while the mountains of North Harris brood silently in the distance.

Overlooking one of the numerous picturesque coastal strips of West Harris stands Talla na Mara – 'Hall by the Sea' – the stylish headquarters of the WHT that also houses four creative business studios, a meeting place for local people and visitors, a music venue, a café/restaurant and a spectacularly picturesque wedding venue. It sits adjacent to six brand new houses, built in partnership with the local social landlord, the Hebridean Housing Partnership. The small development may not seem much until you figure out that, pro-rata to the population, this equates to 220,000 new homes for rent across Scotland.

In 2010, when the community purchased the estate from the Scottish Government, 120 people lived in the area. WHT Director Neil Campbell says: "We set ourselves a target to grow the population by 50 per cent by 2020. So far we've reached 30 per cent." Neil acknowledges that it's easier to attract new blood to come and live on this part of the island, with its mesmerising colours and photogenic beaches, than to the boulder-strewn grey landscape on the east coast. But the high proportion of holiday homes in West Harris means affordable housing is at a premium.

Alongside its focus on jobs and housing, Linda Armstrong, the Commercial Manager, points out that one of the key aims of the WHT is "to advance environmental protection including preservation and conservation of the natural environment."

The organisation is appreciative of the regular John Muir Trust volunteer work parties that come over to support the community. "They do some great work for us," says Linda. "They've planted



At a glance guide

UOG: Galson Estate Trust (galsontrust.com)
Size: 22,600 ha
Population: approximately 2,000
Passed into community ownership: January 2007

UOC: Carloway Estate Trust (carlowayestatetrust.co.uk)
Size: 4,600 ha
Population: approximately 550
Passed into community ownership: May 2015

NHT: North Harris Trust (north-harris.org)
Size: 25,900 ha
Population: approximately 1,000
Passed into community ownership: 2003

WHT: West Harris Trust (westharristrust.org)
Size: 7,200 ha
Population: approximately 150
Passed into community ownership: 2010

Clockwise from this picture: Blackhouse village near Carloway; some of the team from Galson; a work party in North Harris; the completed Talla na Mara centre

PHOTOGRAPHS: ALAN MCCOMBES AND SANDY MAXWELL

marram grass at the golf course to prevent erosion, repaired dry stone walls, cleaned beaches, laid some turf for us here at the centre, and planted 400 trees behind the buildings. And they recently built a lovely stone seating area."

GALSON ESTATE TRUST (UOG)

Although they share the same island, it's a 70-mile drive from Seilebost in West Harris to the Port of Ness, the most northerly point of the Outer Hebrides, closer to Iceland than to London and sitting at a higher latitude than parts of Alaska.

Roughly the same size as North Harris, Galson has double the population, mainly living in 22 crofting townships strung along the coastal strip. This is one of the last great strongholds of Gaelic culture, reflected in the official name of the Galson Estate Trust – Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn (UOG).

Lisa MacLean, the Commercial Development Officer, is at the centre of a complex operation which involves overseeing more than 600 crofts, developing income streams, supporting local businesses, managing deer, restoring peatlands, relieving poverty, facilitating affordable housing, preserving Gaelic culture and heritage, and equipping local people with the skills and training they need to make a living.

Sadly, the UOG's purpose-built office building, with its vivid, yellow-striped exterior that had come to symbolise the power of community, has since burned to the ground. But the Gaelic-inscribed stone laid outside to commemorate the foundation of the community trust in 2007 still stands.

"The estate has seen some pretty radical changes in that time," says Lisa Maclean. "Before the community buy-out the two privately owned estates in the area employed no-one. But we've since gone from zero jobs to 12 staff employed directly, and others that we've supported indirectly."

> **"In these areas, people are pulling together to create jobs, support local businesses, facilitate affordable housing for sale and rent, and reverse population decline"**

Over a decade ago, local crofting communities in this part of Lewis mounted a sustained four-year campaign against an application by a multinational company for a 181-turbine windfarm on this land, which was then owned by several private estates. The proposed development, which would have ravaged the protected peatlands, landscape, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area, was finally thrown out by the Scottish Government in 2008.

Today, an altogether more modest community-owned three-turbine wind farm, one third the height of the rejected development, spins furiously in the gale. And nobody is complaining.

"The wind turbines provide us with a crucial income stream," says Lisa. "They help sustain the work of the UOG itself and have allowed us to fund 71 local projects since 2014 and distribute almost a quarter of a million pounds across the community.

"It has always been a key aspiration of the UOG to safeguard the land and protect the natural environment. But alongside that we want to improve the social and economic condition of the community – and the turbines have helped us do that."

MYSTERIOUS MOORLAND

The UOG's strategic plan for the next 20 years pinpoints tourism as one of three key priorities, along with elderly care and crofting. Across the interior of northern Lewis sprawls hundreds of square kilometres of uninhabited bogs, marshes, fens, heath, scrub, rock and water.

The second largest expanse of blanket peatland in the UK after the Flow Country, this mysterious moorland harbours an abundance of rare plants, mosses and birds, while the coastline is rich in archaeology, traditional culture and marine life alongside dramatic cliffs, rocky coves and hidden beaches.

→ continued

Lindy Cameron-Saunders, a former countryside ranger in South Lanarkshire who came to work for the UOG last year, along with local photographer and designer Fiona Rennie, is driving forward an ambitious plan to create a long-distance walking route winding 48 kilometres round the northern coastline.

"There's a horrible route down to Tolsta on the east coast that's kind of along an old peat road and then basically across the peatland till you're up to your knees in the stuff," says Lindy. "The route has been a bugbear of the community. But if you stick to the coastline, it's absolutely breathtaking."

Lindy and Fiona insist that the new trail will be sensitively planned. "No one wants big ugly vehicle tracks like you see when you're driving down the A9," says Lindy. "And there will be no built footpaths either because that would be unmanageable and unmaintainable. What's needed is half a dozen bridges of varying sizes, and some gates, waymarkers and signposts in from the road. And really nice map packs with information about the natural history, built history, heritage and folklore. It will cost a fair bit of money to do it – however the lasting social impact of connecting up all these villages by foot along the shoreline and the economic benefit from tourism could be really substantial."

Fiona explains that most crofts stretch right down to the shoreline, so they're now trying to get on board all the grazing committees before moving on to the next stage. As well as bringing in contractors, they want to get local people – especially young people – involved in the physical work when it starts.

"We find a lot of 12 to 18-year olds have heard about the John Muir Award and would like to do it," says Lindy. "It would be great if we could get an Award project to pick out a stretch of the route. Maybe they could even become path wardens and walk leaders."

CARLOWAY ESTATE TRUST (UOC)

Further down the west coast of Lewis, a relatively new community land trust established in 2015 has already been using the John Muir Award to help create a new walking route from the famous Callanish standing stones to the traditional crofting township of Carloway with its well-preserved hill-top Iron Age broch.

"Having such a rich cultural and natural heritage here, we believe tourism is the way forward," says Sally Reynolds, Development Officer for Urras Oighreachd Chàrlabhaigh, the Carloway Estate Trust (UOC). "The initial plan for the estate was to install three wind turbines to form an income source, but that didn't happen because of grid constraints and changes to the feed-in tariff. So, now we see tourism as the main income generator.

"The Bonnet Laird Walk, as the new trail is called, won't bring us direct income, but it will improve visitor experience and support local businesses. And it can maybe help us develop other income streams, for example from guided walks and a tourist hub. We've taken care to develop this in a community-minded away, so every bit of work has been done by local people."

Sally says that the first wave of work involved secondary school students doing their John Muir Award. "One of their best days was early on, when they reached the top of a hill and discovered they could see the Flannan Isles really clearly about 20 miles out in the Atlantic. They were flabbergasted. Then they found a crag no-one had climbed before, took a picture of it, told stories about it and shared these through local newsletters and magazines.

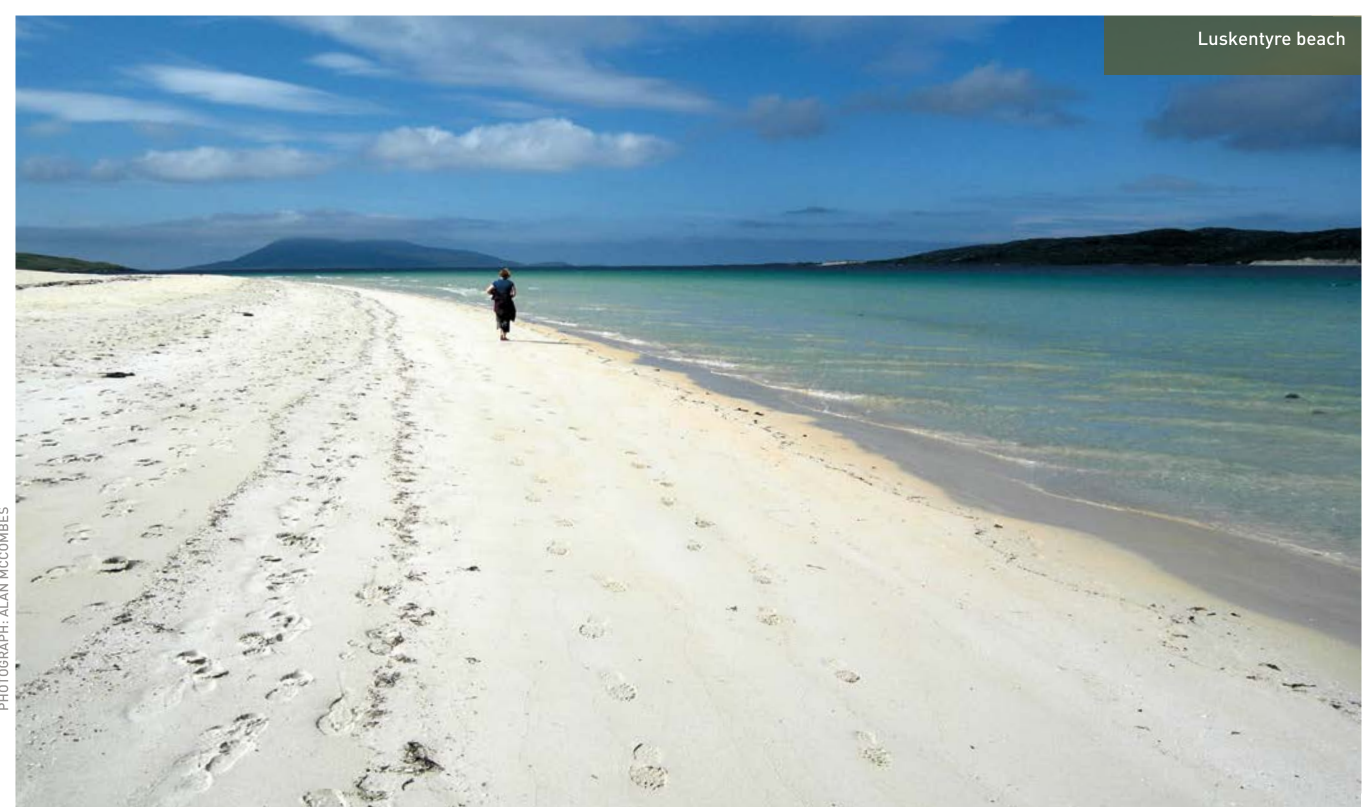
"Later, as part of the conserve element of the John Muir Award, they worked with crofters and other older volunteers to build stiles as part of what we called an 'intergenerational day'. And they've since a built an entire bridge and inscribed on its handrails place names they've chosen in Gaelic and English. Last weekend they came to the AGM of the UOC with a song and a poem they'd written, and a map of the things they'd been doing along with a slide show. It was fantastic."

Sally, one of five Scottish Land Commissioners, typifies a new breed of community land activists who are driving forward progress in the Western Isles. A crofter and native Gaelic speaker from Ness in the far north of Lewis, she is young, dynamic and determined to transform the prospects for young people on these islands while honouring the cultural and natural heritage that has forged this landscape and its people.

Another is Calum MacLeod of Community Land Scotland, who grew up in Finsbay on Harris, within sight of the proposed Lingerbay super-quarry which ignited a firestorm of controversy in the 1990s before the application was finally withdrawn.

"The Holy Grail is to connect up social, economic, cultural and environmental dimensions," he says. "There is scope to do that – of course there is. The John Muir Trust has been doing that with community organisations for decades."

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


Luskentyre beach

PHOTOGRAPH: ALAN MCCOMBES

Trustees and staff in Letterewe, 2001

PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST

Facing the future

No organisation can afford to stand still for long. **Alan Dobie** reports on the discussions now underway to bring the governance of the Trust into line with wider societal change and the advance of technology

IT WOULD be fair to say that most people find the idea of governance pretty dull, yet it is vital to any organisation. Setting out the purpose of a charity, business or other organisation, ensuring its structures work efficiently, and overseeing how it operates can mean the difference between success and failure.

Like most charities, the John Muir Trust is overseen by a board of trustees which makes sure the governance framework is operating effectively and the organisation is running smoothly. It may not be the most exciting part of the Trust's work, but it is crucial. So, when the call went out for trustees to join the Governance Working Group, I put my hand up.

The ad-hoc group soon morphed into the more formal and long-term 'Governance Committee', which since June 2018 has been spearheading a review of the Trust's governance. For my sins, I'm now the chair.

The Trust's objectives were set out by its founding members back in 1983 and remain broadly relevant today. Much has changed, however, in the past 36 years.

New charity laws have been introduced and best practice has evolved across a number of fronts. And the Trust itself has grown from the handful of volunteers who kept things together in the early days, into an organisation with almost 11,000 members, 50 staff, an annual turnover of over £2 million and nine properties under our ownership or management.

Our Memorandum & Articles of Association (i.e. constitution), our Standing Orders, our policies and procedures have to move with the times, remain fit for purpose and reflect best practice. Accordingly, we have initiated a review of governance, bringing on board an expert adviser to help us through the process.

The changes we are considering include legal and technical detail such as notices for meetings, quorums, electronic voting, simplification of the trustee election process, virtual meetings and conflict of interest provisions. Some of these matters can be resolved in the short term and have therefore been scheduled for discussion at the 2019 AGM in May.

We are also considering broader strategic changes, relating for example to: the size and composition of the board; how best to attract new trustees with specialist expertise; how to achieve a better demographic balance of age and gender; and the feasibility of co-opting additional members to fill identified skills gaps.

On these strategic questions, we need to avoid rushing into decisions that require lengthier discussions and a thorough examination of the various options.

Recommendations will be brought before the 2020 AGM, allowing us plenty of time to consult with staff and the wider membership. The Members' Research Panel may provide a useful forum for these soundings.

There's an old adage that says "if it ain't bust don't fix it". The Trust's constitution is far from bust – but it has been suffering some growing pains over recent years.

We believe the time is right to have a serious look at how the Trust's governance can be improved so that we are in the best possible shape to face the future.

Help shape the Trust

The Membership Research Panel is open to all members and helps us get your feedback on the important issues affecting the running and direction of the Trust. Panel members are contacted up to a maximum of four times a year and may be asked to fill in a questionnaire or take part in a telephone call or focus group. If you are interested, please visit **johnmuirtrust.org/mrp**

About the author
Alan Dobie is a trustee and chair of the Governance Committee

Should deer stalking be opened up?

Cal Flyn reports on alternative models of deer control being pioneered by communities, foresters and conservationists

THIS spring, deer management is set to come under fresh scrutiny as a series of expert deer commissions make their reports to the Scottish Government.

The Lowland Deer Panel, established by Scottish Natural Heritage, is shortly to file its findings on the impact of deer across lowland Scotland. Not long after, the Deer Working Group – chaired until recently by one of Scotland's leading environmental campaigners, the late Simon Pepper OBE – will make its final recommendations to the Government in April.

The John Muir Trust welcomes the attention now being focused on an issue which has a profound impact upon Scotland's rural communities and on the natural world. It seems there may be no better time than the present to ask: are there better ways of doing things?

Thanks to Scotland's unusually unequal distribution of land ownership, deer stalking is a somewhat exclusive pastime. On traditional sporting estates, hunting is conducted privately, between the owner and select friends, or commercially – when clients expect to pay in the region of £400 to £500 to shoot a single stag. These estates have historically been valued by the number of stags they support – thus providing a financial incentive to maintain a high population of deer.

Such a system has led to the perception of stalking as the preserve of a rich elite, and keeps deer densities at levels far higher than is environmentally sustainable. But this need not be the case – as a number of existing models of deer management at home and abroad already demonstrate.

In North Harris, in 2003, the local community banded together to bring 55,000 acres of what was then the Amhuinnsuidhe estate under collective ownership – and with it, the associated stalking rights. Working with property tycoon Ian Scarr-Hall, who bought Amhuinnsuidhe Castle and its surrounds, they shortly thereafter introduced the Harris Stalking Club so that locals could experience hunting and take on the responsibility for annual cull targets.

"The club was formed partly for egalitarian reasons," explains the North Harris Trust's Development Officer Karen MacRae. Working with Scarr-Hall's gillies, the initial intake of 10 to 15 members worked to build experience. Now, all Harris Stalking Club members are required to gain their Deer Stalking Certificate Level 1 within two years of joining.

> **"Norway is an interesting case. There, landowners are legally required to keep numbers to a level that doesn't compromise the public good"**

This year, a cull target of 50 stags and 80 hinds was set across both properties. "The castle has the majority of the stags, as taking out paying guests is an important part of their business," explains Karen, "so the castle is allocated 40 and the club gets 10. The hind cull is split down the middle between club and castle."

Stalking "is not a cheap hobby by any means," she warns, noting that members have to invest in equipment, clothing, insurance, and other items. Nonetheless, the club has opened up the practice of stalking, both for recreation and for responsible land management, to the wider community. "For us, this model works very well indeed."

On a larger scale, the National Forest Estate, run by Forest Enterprise Scotland (FES) and comprising 650,000 hectares (9 per cent of the country's landmass) manages its deer population using several different approaches. In-house wildlife rangers "underpin practical deer management," says Willie Lamont, the FES Deer Management Officer. Last year the agency culled 11,505 deer. It also oversees around 50 contractors who now do the majority of the culling (22,414 last year, or over 66 per cent of the total).

"Contractors are selected by national competitive tender and must have the appropriate qualifications, firearms licence, equipment and insurance.

"Our aim is to manage deer density cost effectively and humanely at a level that has acceptable impacts on forests and other habitats," says Willie.

In some places, deer densities are higher than FES would like. But in others, where the deer are under better control, the agency operates a third system whereby recreational stalkers can bid for permission to stalk on the forest estate – and to keep the venison they produce.

Bids open at £400 and top out around £2,000; last year around 230 recreational stalkers were given permission to hunt on the forest estate, accounting for nine per cent of the total cull, or 3,055 animals.

"Recreational stalkers enter into an agreement with FES to cull an agreed number of deer," explains Willie. If deer numbers in that area begin to rise uncontrolled, FES will step in.

Other countries take different approaches. Many states in the USA, for example, run lotteries for a limited number of big game hunting licences; in this way, the general public gets the

PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST

PHOTOGRAPH: PETER CAIRNS/SCOTLANDBIGPICTURE.COM

Skye manager Ally Macaskill trains Campbell the pony to carry out deer from Strathbeg on Torrin

opportunity to hunt on public lands via a fair and transparent process, and the number of licences released can be adjusted annually according to wildlife populations. (Native Americans on reservations and owner-occupiers of farms are often exempt.)

Closer to home, Norway is an interesting case. There, landowners are legally required to keep numbers to a level that doesn't compromise the public good, such as by overgrazing. To this end, five-year 'harvest plans' are agreed with the local kommune (council) based on data held by a national deer register.

After that, landowners are free to sell hunting permits on their own land in line with their harvest plan, and have financial incentives to hit the cull target. In Scotland deer are currently managed by landowners on a voluntary basis – and, as a result, less successfully. Norway may therefore offer a useful model.

It is interesting to contrast social attitudes towards hunting between our two countries. Norway is a nation of stalkers, where over 500,000, or 10 per cent of the population, are listed in the register of hunters; they do not belong to an elite class. Hunting on state land is considered a communal source of both recreation and food, and local people have priority use.

Game meat is considered an important part of Norwegian food culture, rather than a by-product of trophy hunting as is often the case here. But its removal can prove logistically challenging, as the John Muir Trust's Ally Macaskill learnt during his time there.

"The Norwegian government forbids the use of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) on the sensitive upland areas in the north," he explains. "So if you hunt reindeer, you have to pack it out." The same is true in the protected 'wilderness areas' of the USA, where motorised vehicles are barred.

After his experiences in Scandinavia, Ally has been doing the same on the Trust's land in Skye and Knoydart, where he is property manager. It's an unusual approach here, where most estates use established access tracks.

"Some of our property is inaccessible other than on foot and I'm wary of using ATVs, so a lot of this was borne out of necessity. Part of the justification for culls is to benefit the environment. But if it leads to great black tracks across the hillside, then that doesn't hold so much water."

Initially, he says, "when I was younger, I was carrying out whole carcasses. You can tie and wear them like a rucksack, a technique I saw used in New Zealand. But after a while I felt I was doing too much damage to myself."

Now Ally tends to divide the carcass on the hillside, taking only the best cuts. Food standards legislation means this meat can no longer be sold; it is often distributed to local residents, and this approach also has ecological benefit, as the nutrients from what is left on the hill return to the earth.

Emphasising venison's role as a food source seems a no-brainer in a country where there are too many deer. Venison too has become fashionable in recent years and local supplies have not kept up with burgeoning demand.

Perhaps, in the near future, it might play a greater role in the Scottish diet – as a more environmentally sustainable and socially egalitarian system of deer management comes into place.

About the author
Cal Flyn is a freelance writer from the Scottish Highlands

Nature's healing hands

As society starts to embrace the power of the natural world to improve wellbeing, **Coralie Hopwood** digs deeper to find out more about 'green therapy' and its wider impact

PHOTOGRAPH: CORALIE HOPWOOD

EVERYONE will be affected by poor mental health at some time in their lives. I have found that being in a living landscape with sun, rain, wind or snow on my face is one of the best antidotes to anxiety and depression that I know.

The words of Octavia Hill, the English social reformer and founder of the National Trust, resonate deeply with me: "We all need space; unless we have it we cannot reach that sense of quiet in which whispers of better things come to us gently… The need of quiet, the need of air, and I believe the sight of sky and of things growing, seem human needs, common to all."

And I'm not alone. Ample evidence exists to highlight links between natural environments and mental health. From GPs 'social prescribing' nature walks and bird surveys, to 'self-care courses' based on psychology, wellbeing, and conservation, responses to this evidence are becoming more mainstream.

Gavin Hill, Head of Community Services for the mental health charity Mind says: "Ecotherapy, such as outdoor exercise and getting out into nature, is not only good for mental health but can also help address the social issues that come with having a mental health problem. It has been shown in some cases to be more effective – and cost less – than medication."

It isn't just humans who benefit. People who have a strong connection to nature also tend to have a greater sense of environmental responsibility. But it's complex. Our response to nature is tied up with how we experience our time outside.

When we have space to absorb and reflect, share with others, engage in meaningful activity and develop a personal relationship, we are more likely to form a closer bond with the natural world.

A landmark academic study published in May 2017, *Pathways to Nature Connection*, demonstrated that emotion,

Cwm Idwal National Nature Reserve, Snowdonia

"We use Cwm Idwal National Nature Reserve in Snowdonia as a place to introduce people to nature walks in the mountains where participants are able to partake in mindfulness and meditation sessions. Natural environments are invaluable to supporting people with health issues as people are able to interact with the natural environment, while exercising both the body and mind.

"At Cwm Idwal there is plenty of fresh air, and the cultural and linguistic history gives a sense of connection to the landscape."
Guto Roberts, Cwm Idwal Partnership Officer
nationaltrust.org.uk/carneddau-and-glyderau/trails/cwm-idwal-walk

> **"The need of quiet, the need of air, and I believe the sight of sky and of things growing, seem human needs, common to all"**

compassion, meaning and beauty are as vital as basic contact when it comes to enabling this bond.

Given the benefits of fostering closer relationships, we must acknowledge inequality of access. The National Lottery Heritage Fund seeks to address this by insisting that projects they fund should involve a wider range of people.

The organisation's Policy Adviser on Communities and Diversity, Liz Ellis, and its Head of Landscape and Nature, Drew Bennellick, agree that the UK is an unequal society with uneven access to all areas of heritage. Liz said: "This outcome is a brilliant opportunity for everyone applying to NLHF to think about who is not involved in landscape and nature, what the barriers are, then work together to find solutions."

Slowing environmental damage depends on individuals making small but significant choices about how they live. By meeting people where they are, and enabling them to connect to nature on

→ continued overleaf

Woodland Minds and Woodland Rescue, Suffolk

PHOTOGRAPH: PAUL BARCLAY

"The groups we engage with are marginalised members of society, mostly coming from a mental illness or addiction recovery background. We remove people from their usual environmental cues and take them to a space where they can develop positive patterns of behaviour and start to identify with that personality. The natural rhythm of the woods enables peoples' minds to slow down to match it.

"They can be mindful and allow their creativity to come to the fore and it helps re-affirm that we are part of nature, not separate from it. Watching the change from winter to spring, year upon year encourages us to clear out the old and usher in the new, filling us with optimism. We do things we didn't know we were capable of, confidence starts to grow and we start to succeed.

"Living in the woods and using tools is the environment humans evolved in for thousands of years. It is a reassuring place to return to, particularly at times of difficulty."

Andrew Brooks and Peter Foster, Green Light Trust
greenlighttrust.org

Bethlem Royal Hospital, London

In January Coralie spoke to Imogen Jackson, horticultural instructor at the Bethlem Royal Hospital in London, to find out more about their therapeutic use of the outdoor environment.

What is the nature of the 'green therapy' offered at the Bethlem Royal Hospital?
The programme was created by Peter O'Hare, Head Occupational Therapist, 10 years ago when he fought to get use of an old Victorian walled garden, used by the keepers but not accessible to the patients. We now work with a wide range of people with diverse mental health conditions, either in-patients or out-patients at the hospital. The programme offers a range of therapeutic, horticultural interventions as well as providing routine, meaningful work or simply an opportunity to get off the ward. It offers a chance for people to get outside, engage with nature and reconnect.

Reconnecting with the growing cycles of nature and the food you're eating is all really powerful. There is a lot of metaphor to be found working in the garden. It encourages an acceptance of life and death and can develop an inclination to nurture something else. If you're used to being looked after yourself this can be tremendously empowering.

Feeling the elements, whatever they are, is also very important. We encourage people to go outside whatever the weather. The other day I was thrilled when I offered a walk in the woods in the rain, or an indoor activity, and everybody chose the walk in the woods!

Imogen Jackson (right) at Royal Bethlem Hospital

PHOTOGRAPH: CORALIE HOPWOOD

How does the John Muir Award support your work?
The John Muir Award allows space for that additional reflection which isn't the focus in other groups. The group connect their Award activity to many other activities at the hospital, including art, mindfulness, woodwork (making hedgehog boxes!) and practical horticulture. The sharing aspect adds a huge amount – specifically in relation to how being outside makes people feel.

The Award structure allows us to be very patient-centred and co-develop the programme with participants. We run an eight-week course which gives an opportunity to create a safe space and for progression and consistency. People are also encouraged to do something else in between sessions, such as research on John Muir or the owls outside their window.

It also ties in well with therapies. People can struggle with silence, and being with their own thoughts and focusing on the natural world becomes a way to externalise anxiety and connect with something else. For example, some participants have discovered a more mindful way of birdwatching. The Award means different things to different people. For one person it was their first award ever. We love doing it!

→ continued

their own terms, we can strive to develop society-wide environmental advocacy.

In my role with the John Muir Award I support many organisations working to improve mental health and access to nature, through diverse and innovative partnerships. I am always privileged to hear of the impact they have on both wildlife and on those involved, as this shows how mental health is intrinsically linked to the health and resilience of our wider environment.

We cite here just a few examples of groups that bring people and nature together to respond to that "human need, common to all" described by Octavia Hill.

About the author
Coralie Hopwood is the John Muir Award England Inclusion Manager

Wild Ways Well, Cumbernauld

"Wild Ways Well is based on the concept that being outdoors, in nature, makes everyone feel better about themselves and their lives. We take people out into green spaces and show them the incredible places that exist right on their doorsteps.

"Our sessions are aimed at anyone suffering from, or at risk of, poor mental health – which means everyone. You don't have to be a nature expert to take part; we're all part of nature.

"One of our participants said: 'It's about peace and calmness. Nature doesn't judge you, it just is.'"

Paul Barclay, Cumbernauld Living Landscape
cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk/project/wild-ways-well

Without Walls

What will they think of me!
What will they see?
Can they all tell that I don't like me?

You've made the first step just one more... go!
If you don't even try then you'll never ever know.

Nerves kicking in and feeling shy,
Then Shar wandered over with a friendly "Hi"

This might be ok, this could be good.
We head to the meadow to clear the wood.

The hours flew past I laughed and I chattered,
I don't remember when I last felt so shattered!

But not from depression and sadness and pain,
But from working and moving and seeing the gains.

Over the weeks which seem to have flown,
Self-esteem and confidence, both have grown.

I've raked and I've dug, cleared woodland and streams.
Made friends and built shelters all as a team.

Made fires to boil water, for tea is a must,
And now in myself I have faith and trust.

Learnt about nature and insects and trees, got downright dirty in the mud on my knees.

I've managed to deal with some of my fears, all with the help of these volunteers.

Thoughts plagued my mind these things seemed to matter,
Now fade away over tea and a natter.

This course offers more than people can see,
For now I confess... I like being me.

Sarah Saxby, Education Futures Trust, East Sussex (November 2018)
educationfuturestrust.org

Wild Learning with Woodland Wellbeing, Devon

"I brought my work outside 15 years ago as I could see that people function better in a natural setting.Our sessions are loosely based on a day-long forest school session.

"We sit together around the fire and have a check-in, drinking tea and eating toast. Then we go for an 'explore' walk, find things, and stop for at least five minutes under the trees and be quiet, alone. Once back, people choose from cooking, conservation tasks, crafts and green woodworking. That takes up the rest of our time together; people can be alone or in a small group and we all achieve things.

"We encourage each person to find their place, make the most of what they have. People say that being in the woods helps them to cope with their (sometimes chaotic) lives, to make changes and to make friends."

Jenny Archard, Neroche Woodlanders
youngwood.org.uk

Woodland Wellbeing Award group

PHOTOGRAPH: JENNY ARCHARD

How you can help our work

Looking to give something back to the wild places you love, but not sure where to start? Development Manager Helen Mason and Fundraising Administrator Clare Pemberton reflect on the various ways in which volunteers can and do support the Trust

PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST

Volunteers James Brownhill and Apithanny Bourne at Glen Tanar

WHETHER you're a recent member of the Trust or an old timer, chances are you will have heard of our conservation work parties even if you haven't made it along to one yourself. But volunteer support from Trust members doesn't stop at tree planting and path maintenance.

From organising Local Members' Group gatherings to taking on their own fundraising, our volunteers and supporters are a multi-talented bunch, dedicated to helping the Trust in myriad ways beyond their membership subscription.

So if you're looking to give something back, but you're not sure where to start, here are some recent examples to set you thinking.

SUPPORTING OUR LAND TEAM

As part of her PhD at the University of Edinburgh, funded by the Natural Environment Research Council, Vanessa Burton embarked on three-month placement with the John Muir Trust.

Her specialisation – understanding the influences of land ownership on benefits from woodlands expansion – ideally placed her to crunch the numbers on ten years of habitat-monitoring data for tree seedling growth and heathland health. That in turn has allowed the Trust to get an accurate picture of progress across our properties. As the graph overleaf reveals, the average height of marked seedlings monitored at each of our properties over the period 2008-18, has, to varying extents, increased at all sites apart from Schiehallion, where browsing pressure remains too high. (The coloured lines on the graph overleaf indicate the average seedling height on each property, while the grey border show the parameters of the lowest and highest individual seedlings.)

"Hopefully my work has helped illustrate the positive effects that wild land management can have," says Vanessa. "On the other hand it also shows that, despite great work by the Trust, more needs to be done at national level to tackle high deer numbers to allow large-scale natural regeneration of woodland to take place".

It wasn't all spreadsheets and statistics – Vanessa was able to get her hands dirty too, with some practical conservation work on the Trust's Highland Perthshire property at East Schiehallion. "Planting real trees as part of the fantastic Heart of Scotland Forest Partnership project was a welcome change from writing about planting them! I'm looking forward to going back and seeing a growing woodland."

Mike Daniels, Head of Land Management at the Trust said: "While the Trust is small, and office space and living accommodation constrained, we are always delighted to welcome work experience students, interns or volunteers where we can fit them in.

"The energy, enthusiasm, ideas and new perspectives that they bring are always a great boost to our work. Vanessa did an amazing job on the multitude of tasks we gave her as well as (literally) digging in at Schiehallion helping to plant trees. We can't thank all of our volunteers enough – they help make the Trust what it is."

→ continued

Vanessa Burton planting trees on Schiehallion

PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST

The average height of marked seedlings monitored at each of our properties over the period 2008-18, has, to varying extents, increased at all sites apart from Schiehallion, where browsing pressure remains too high. (The coloured lines on the graph indicate the average seedling height on each property, while the grey border show the parameters of the lowest and highest individual seedlings.)

HELPING OUT IN WILD SPACE

Closer to home – right downstairs from the John Muir Trust HQ in Pitlochry in fact – Derek Sime has been volunteering in the Wild Space visitor centre, shop and Alan Reece Gallery for over three years.

A long-time mountaineer and member of the Trust since the early 1980s, Derek was drawn to the role after he retired as a way of "putting something back" to the wild places he had been exploring all his life. Volunteering on a regular weekly basis, Derek says: "It's great to meet people who visit Wild Space from all over the world and to talk to them about the work of the Trust and about John Muir himself, and to share experiences of the hills and wild places."

Keeping in regular touch with Trust staff complements the other membership organisation close to Derek's heart: "I'm also a member of the Munro Society, which like the Trust wish to see our wild mountains protected, so it's always good to speak to the team in Pitlochry."

Derek's advice for those considering volunteering? "Think about what type of volunteering you want to undertake, as well as the practicalities. There's a wide variety of activities that you can participate in."

Alice Carbone, Wild Space Manager, said: "Derek has been invaluable for Wild Space. Not only has he been essential at the front desk, but he has helped shape the visitor centre into what it is now. He is the soul of this place.

"Having other passionate people volunteering in Wild Space is extremely beneficial – I'm looking for new voices and fresh perspectives to make Wild Space a place where anyone can feel at home and share their love for nature."

PARTICIPATING IN LOCAL MEMBERS' GROUPS

Across the UK a dedicated band of volunteers organise Local Members' Group gatherings where members come together to share ideas and learn more about the Trust, wild land and wild places. They also carry out active conservation in their local areas.

James Brownhill has volunteered for the Trust for just under a decade and currently organises the North East Scotland Local Members' Group: "I have gained a huge amount out of volunteering for the Trust – a new life. I've met like-minded, sincere, ethical people. I've found new avenues to follow that I had never thought of before I came across the John Muir Trust."

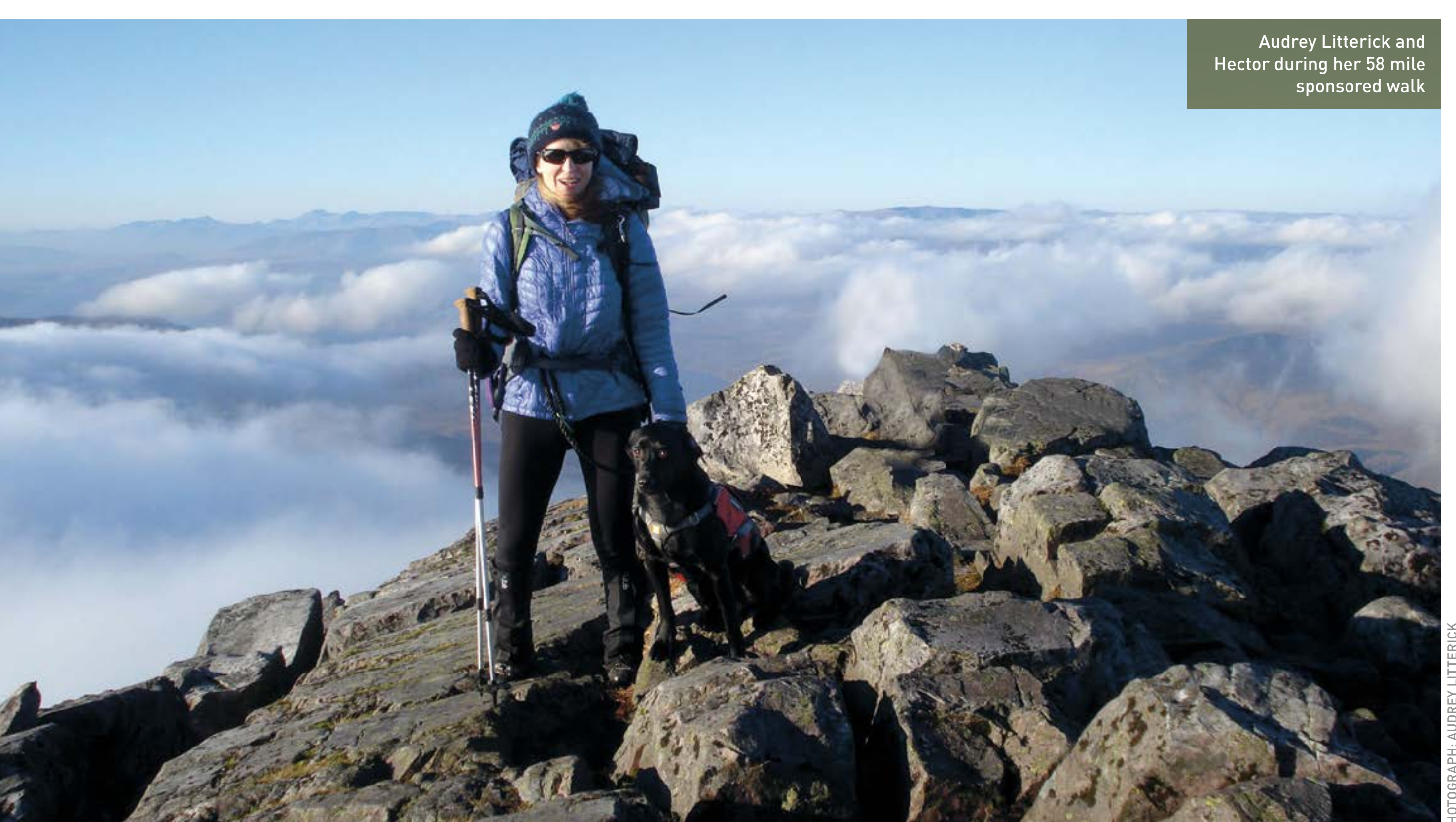
When asked if he had any advice for those considering volunteering for the Trust, James replied "Nike captured the best logo ever: 'Just Do It'. If you enjoy it then do more, if not then do something else!"

Kevin Lelland, Head of Development and Communications for the Trust said: "Volunteers do so much, not because they have to, but something in their heart says it's essential.

"While trees are planted, meetings organised and cross drains mended, the founding ethos of the Trust is shared, retained and passed on. Giving time and energy to the Trust helps keep it relevant."

PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST

Wild Space manager Alice Carbone with Derek Sime



Audrey Litterick and Hector during her 58 mile sponsored walk

PHOTOGRAPH: AUDREY LITTERICK

RAISING FUNDS

For some people, the motivation to take action springs from personal connections to the cause.

Audrey Litterick lives on the edge of Schiehallion – the mountain that inspired her to support our recent appeal to fund vital path repairs.

"My dad and grandad introduced me to the Scottish hills – Schiehallion was a favourite of theirs. I've been a keen hillwalker and explorer all my life and I wanted to give something back. The John Muir Trust's values are my values."

> **"Mass walking or running events are not for everyone. Those who prefer a quieter time can set a challenge that suits them, and can make it as small or as large as they want"**

Fitting fundraising plans in around a busy working life, Audrey devised the route for a 58-mile sponsored walk, and set off with her trusty black labrador Hector to take in the summits of two Munros (including Schiehallion), three Corbetts and a Marilyn over the course of five and a half days.

"It was a great chance to take time out to walk the mountains that I love, to think about my dad and grandad and the legacy that left me – and to appreciate the generosity of the many friends and colleagues that had donated in support."

With funds donated via her online giving page, as well as sponsorship collected in person, Audrey raised over £1,600 for our Schiehallion Path Appeal.

When asked what advice she would offer others thinking about raising funds for the Trust, she said: "There's nothing wrong with mass walking or running events, but they are not for everyone. For those of us who prefer a quieter time, it's totally possible to set a challenge that suits you and your goals. People can make it as small or as large as they want. "

Setting himself a challenge that definitely falls into the 'large' category is supporter Oli Warlow, who last year set out to complete the 82 climbing routes in Ken Wilson's *Classic Rock*, travelling a total distance of almost 2,000 miles from the tip of Cornwall to the Cuillin on Skye, entirely by bike.

Oli's friend and climbing mentor Jamie Fisher achieved the same circuit back in 1997 but sadly died in a climbing accident in the Alps a few years later. "I did the challenge in Jamie's memory," explains Oli. "The experience of exploring wild places while raising money to help protect them was fantastic."

Fundraising activities needn't always entail intrepid outdoor exploits. There are plenty of other ways to help – for example, requesting donations in lieu of gifts at birthdays, weddings and other special occasions; holding fundraising events locally or at work; seeking sponsorship for a 'plastic free' month.

"The possibilities are endless," says Adam Pinder, Head of Fundraising for the Trust. "We are extremely grateful for everyone who takes on their own fundraising for the Trust, whether they run a marathon or raise £50 by holding a cake sale. We're keen that people feel they are contributing to the bigger picture and that their efforts really help."

GET IN TOUCH!

The first page of our recently published John Muir Trust Strategy 2019-21 ends: "We welcome people engaging with us and contributing to our work, because that allows us to do more."

If you have ideas about how you could support the Trust we'd be delighted to discuss how we can help.

This year we're particularly keen to hear from anyone interested in organising a Local Members' Group in their area or anyone doing their own fundraising for the Trust.

Find out more about how to offer time, effort or skills to the Trust and take action towards conserving wild places by visiting our website at **johnmuirtrust.org/support-us**

About the authors
Contact Development Manager Helen Mason **helen.mason@johnmuirtrust.org** and Fundraising Administrator Clare Pemberton **clare.pemberton@johnmuirtrust.org**

PHOTOGRAPHS: JOHN MUIR TRUST

Tackling tourism pressures

As the Trust develops a new strategy to address the impact of rising visit numbers around our properties, **Sarah Lewis**, explains why

FROM all sides, we are encouraged to get out and up close with nature. Glorious landscapes have a starring part in TV dramas, car adverts and Hollywood blockbusters, while social media is awash with enticing images of mountains, coastlines, rivers and forests. Meanwhile, government health campaigns exhort us to get out and explore the great outdoors because nature keeps us alive and well.

The Scottish Highlands has an abundance of landscapes that feed our zest for life. Consequently, the region attracts hordes of visitors. The numbers fluctuate throughout the year and vary wildly from place to place. But at the height of the summer season, this intensification of interest brings with it motorised wild camps, congestion on single track roads, creative toilet practices, land degradation, and problems with litter and vandalism.

In most cases, that's not because the majority of beauty seekers come with the intention of pulverising the landscape but more because they know no better. Access laws in Scotland allow responsible access. Some visitors have misinterpreted this as an invitation to roam freely without boundaries on their behaviour.

Public spending cuts have aggravated the problem. The closure of public toilets and the near extinction of local authority countryside rangers have left communities to deal with the consequences.

With the flip side comes revenues, employment and business opportunities. Some parts of the Scottish Highlands are now undergoing an economic resurgence thanks to the success of tourism.

> "How do we accommodate mass tourism without destroying the goose that lays the golden egg?"

So, where is the balance? How do we tend the spirit of what attracted people in the first place without entirely homogenising and developing the life out of an area, a landscape feature or a historic structure?

A large part of the attraction of the Scottish Highlands is the sense of freedom and lack of restriction that it offers. So how do we accommodate mass tourism without destroying the goose that lays the golden egg?

Here on Skye, the John Muir Trust manages an extensive area stretching 13 miles north to south as the crow flies from Sconser to Elgol, and 11 miles east to west from Kilbride to Loch Coruisk.

As well as wild and remote mountains, that land also includes a number of settlements and a lengthy stretch of the single-track road that connects Broadford on the east coast to Elgol in the south west. That means we are responsible for a number of tourist hotspots and gateways into the Cuillin.

Clockwise from top left: signage at Bla Bheinn car park; tackling erosion at Druim Hain, Skye; irresponsible wild camping aftermath

Visitor pressures on the Isle of Skye are especially acute, but to one degree or another, all John Muir Trust properties face the same issues. The problem is too big and complex for the Trust to tackle on our own.

Instead, we need to join forces with communities, and with other organisations and groups who are affected, both positively and negatively, by the escalation of tourism.

To that end, the Trust is developing a new visitor management strategy, which recognises that the situation is fluid and dynamic – and that conservation has to deal with socio-economic questions as well as environmental impacts.

We strive to provide land management solutions that are inconspicuous, with as little impact as possible on the landscape.

Any infrastructure we develop will always take into consideration the feelings of local communities as well as the needs of visitors. And it has to be compatible with our environmental and ecological responsibilities.

About the author
Conservation officer Sarah Lewis worked at the Trust for almost 10 years, firstly at Nevis and more recently on Skye

Our Visitor Management Strategy 2019 (extracts)

Context

Recent years have seen a rapid growth in visitor numbers around our properties with impacts aggravated by the sharing of popular hot spots on social media and by local government cuts in public toilets, bin collections and countryside ranger services. This has resulted in significant pressures on local communities.

Socio-economic impacts such as rising property prices and rents, and the growth of seasonal employment have heightened tensions between those who benefit financially and those who are inconvenienced.

Communities, landowners and land managers are being increasingly empowered, encouraged or forced (depending on perspectives and circumstances) to take on infrastructure such as car parks and toilets. Central government in Scotland is making some visitor infrastructure funding available.

Overflow from Braes of Foss car park at Schiehallion

PHOTOGRAPH: LIZ AUTY

Focus

As well as protecting and enhancing wild landscapes, the Trust has a responsibility to manage visitors and to highlight wider land impacts and issues.

We facilitate visitor access by providing car parks, toilets, all-abilities paths, summit paths and interpretation.

While providing guidance and interpretation, we are encouraging people to take responsibility for exploring and experiencing the landscape themselves.

We seek to promote a visitor ethos of responsibility and respect towards the environment and local communities. We encourage visitors to spend time experiencing and enjoying wild landscapes rather than rushing through them. We aim to raise awareness of the local environment and promote minimum impact visits.

Partnership working

The issues of visitor management and impacts are far wider than the Trust. We seek to work with partners to deliver this strategy to the benefit of all. In particular we will aim to work with:

- Local communities and businesses
- Transport operators
- Land partnerships
- Local authorities
- Representative bodies (e.g. other NGOs and community landowners)
- Destination marketing organisations (e.g. Visit Scotland and NC500)
- National governments and statutory agencies.

Rural economy

We aim to increase revenue streams to support local communities and the Trust's conservation work on the ground by:

- Optimising formal income streams (e.g. events, films)
- Optimising income from toilets and car parking
- Supporting sustainable local projects through the Trust's Conservation Fund

Going home

Since our earliest members brought Ladhar Bheinn on Knoydart into our stewardship in 1987, the Trust has gone on to become the guardian of an inspiring list of famous peaks. **Kevin Lelland** spoke to some people whose lives are shaped by mountains

MOUNTAIN landscapes are the backdrop to many lives. People live and work there, building friendships and communities in their shadow. They help us stay sane, shine a light on our own behaviours, skills and motivations and act as a source of creative inspiration. We're drawn hypnotically to crags, corries, ledges and edges. The shape of a cliff face might alter due to natural elements but a pinnacle of granite can be revisited from one generation to the next.

Mel Nicoll, the John Muir Trust's campaigns officer remembers that when she was a child, her dad would disappear from their home in Sussex once a year for a week to climb in the Scottish hills. "He'd return with a beard and a far-away look in his eyes," she says. "I knew from a young age that spending time in the hills was transformative. My immersion in mountains since has served me well in life and in my role at the Trust."

Helvellyn has been a big part of Pete Barron's life for over 25 years. Now he's the Trust land manager at Glenridding Common, which includes the popular and iconic mountain. "Where you live can shape your character," he says. "I believe that people living in and working in a mountainous area are shaped by the weather. The ever changing 'wallpaper', as a farmer once described it to me. It creates tenacity."

Pete believes that upland areas are important to our cultural fabric but also to our day-to-day lives. The latter he says, is sometimes unrecognised. "Clean water, food production, flood mitigation, recreation, personal expression through these uplifting landscapes and wild nature. We need a national governmental focus to embed these into policy, because, although our uplands are wonderful, there is much that needs to be done to protect and conserve them for future generations."

Persuading others that wild places such as mountains require care has been part of the Trust's DNA since its inception. The Trust was born out of campaign to stop the Knoydart peninsula from being turned into a Ministry of Defence bombing range, keeping its wildest nooks and crannies open to the public at large. The campaign played its part in a wider movement that led to the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

Outdoor writer and photographer David Lintern says: "The 'freedom of the hills' is more than just a platitude. It's means travelling with my own agency, under my own steam. Within reason, I can go where I like, when I like. There are few places where this is truer than in Scotland. Whether we use them or not, our access laws are a cornerstone of the northern consciousness, and have an explicitly political dimension."

"It's interesting that climbing mountains is a metaphor for life," says Dr Liz Auty, the Trust's land manager at Schiehallion. Liz has spearheaded the formation of the Heart of Scotland Forest Partnership, which brings together public, community, NGO and private landowners in a joint venture to transform a vast area of Highland Perthshire around Schiehallion. "The most special places for me are where restoration and healing is happening and that's most inspiring when it's about both trees and people marching up mountains."

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PHOTOGRAPH: ELA DZIMITKO

PHOTOGRAPH: PAUL KELEHER

PHOTOGRAPH: KEVIN LELLAND

This picture: Helvellyn, seen from Striding Edge. Insets below, from left: Bonita Norris; Graham Watson; Mel Nicoll

“Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity”
– John Muir

PHOTOGRAPH: GRAHAME NICOLL

→ continued

Sir Edmund Hilary once wrote that it's not the mountain we conquer, but ourselves. Romany Garnett, the Trust's conservation officer at Quinag, feels time spent in mountains gives her confidence. "I often struggle with my own personal dilemmas just like everyone does. When I walk up a mountain the world opens up. Somehow those everyday niggles and stresses dissolve on the slope and I find perspective. I'm in my element when I'm on top of the horizon, wind-blown in a raw natural state."

Bonita Norris, who became the youngest woman to summit Everest in May 2010, believes that high alpinism has taught her a lot. "The mountains really are a mirror into the best and worst of us." she says. "Climbing mountains has shown me that I often rush when really I need to slow down, take the moment in and enjoy the fresh air, the rhythm of my breath, the sound of my feet crunching on snow. The silence. The hours slip away in seconds. And then somewhere during the climb, there's a shift as the mountain opens up, and I am listening, and as I climb we talk to each other."

You don't need to go for a first or highest ascent in a stab at immortality to enjoy wildness. David Lintern feels that we can all be good at being outdoors, growing our skills, nerve, fitness and stamina over time. An important component of this is the unknown outcome. "Freedom is defined by the acceptance of risk, and the willingness to fail. We try, to see if we can. One of the chief lessons I have learnt outside is to trust my instinct – to go with my gut. But committing to the unknown takes practice, and lots of it."

Spending time in mountains does of course bring with it risk and reward. Graham Watson, the John Muir Award manager in Cumbria and a qualified mountain guide, knows this better than most. He was avalanched, with a client, on Buachaille Etive Mor in 2002 and hospitalised for three weeks with multiple injuries including a fractured skull, eye socket and jaw. He recognises that the way he has engaged with mountains has changed since, but the attraction to spend time in them has held.

"Despite being almost killed, the mountains continue to be a mainstay of my life. I was very much inspired in my teens by Bill Murray's two-volume book *Undiscovered Scotland* and *Mountaineering in Scotland*, and that passion has stuck ever since. I recently returned and climbed Curved Ridge, the scene of my accident, with my daughter. It was a fantastic day."

Whether we tend to cling to a crag or stroll towards a trig point it's clear that experiencing wildness on mountains is an essential part of many of our lives. All at once, they help us reflect, initiate change and remind us to live in the moment. Even looking at a landscape photograph or painting can make us want to step into the frame and return to those places where the ravens call, the claggy mist descends and we are at one with the natural world.

The mountains will outlast us all, so let's continue to inspire people to experience, protect and care for them. After all, going to the mountains is really all about going home.

About the author
Kevin Lelland is the Trust's Head of Development and Communications

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS RUTTER

Bla Bheinn and Sgurr nan Each

PHOTOGRAPH: LW IMAGES

The wild in me

Legendary climber and mountain photographer Dave 'Cubby' Cuthbertson, (pictured), the star in the Trust's latest *The Wild in Me* film series, has always had an affinity with mountains. He lives near Trust-managed Ben Nevis, a place that is especially dear to his heart.

"I sometimes think that climbing chose me and I never had any say in the matter – quite uncanny really. I've nearly lost my life on many occasions, but those experiences gave me confidence and fuelled my imagination. Life on the edge puts things into perspective and allows me to better deal with everyday life and society on my own terms.

"Climbing gave me the confidence to live a life less ordinary. It allowed me to travel and meet people from a wide range of backgrounds and occupations. It didn't matter that I was largely uneducated and working class – for we all share a common thread which is our passion for the outdoors.

"I didn't find out until later life that I am slightly dyslexic, which if I was looking for an excuse explains why I experienced some learning difficulties in my formative years at primary school in Edinburgh.

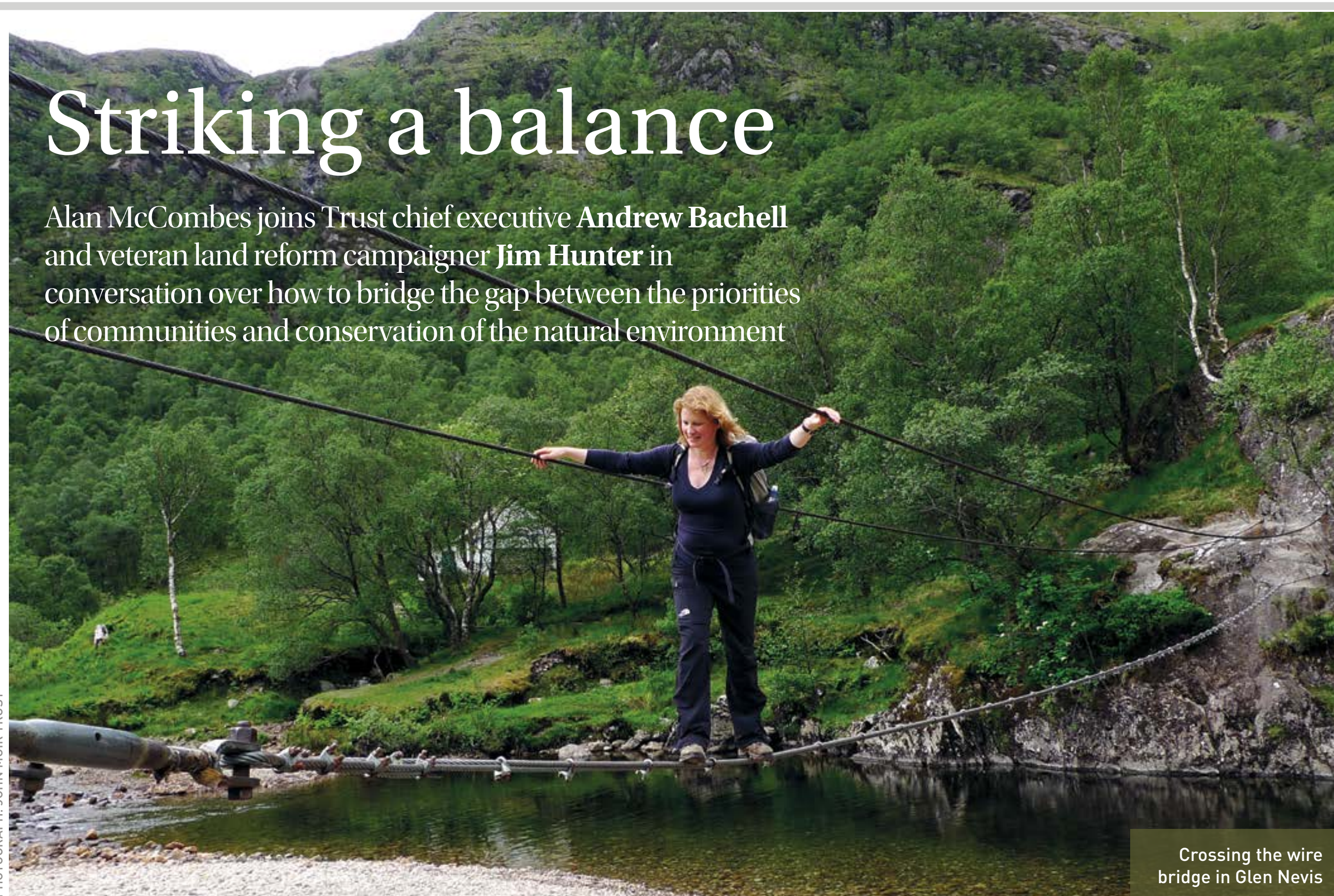
"I was always a bit of a dreamer, a romantic with a vivid imagination – art was my natural subject. My main climbing partner of many years in the 1970s, Murray Hamilton, was the polar opposite of me in most respects – education, class background, and personality. We approached the texture and feel of climbing routes in completely different ways. We complemented each other and for two to three years I can say confidently we were a force to reckon with in Scottish and British climbing.

"When I was in my early twenties a friend of mine – the late Mal Duff – approached me and said, "I'm starting a guiding company, do you want to be a guide." I'd always wanted to go down this route so, although I'd no experience of outdoor education, I jumped at the chance. The first year was a baptism of fire but I learned so much about who I was as a person and the way I could connect with other people. It brought out qualities that others recognised but I couldn't yet see in myself.

"The seasoned and wise old mountain guide Geoff Arkless said to me: 'You're a natural climber but you also build relationships with your clients.' I'd never had feedback like that before. In the years to come, his affection and mentoring made him a climbing father figure. Beyond climbing he really shaped my life by encouraging me to think for myself.

"As I grow older I'm a lot more at ease with my strengths and weaknesses. While others can stand up in front of an audience, I prefer to inspire people with my photography and books."

johnmuirtrust.org/thewildinme



Striking a balance

Alan McCombes joins Trust chief executive **Andrew Bachell** and veteran land reform campaigner **Jim Hunter** in conversation over how to bridge the gap between the priorities of communities and conservation of the natural environment

PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST

Crossing the wire bridge in Glen Nevis

PUBLISHED 25 years ago, Jim Hunter's book *On the Other Side of Sorrow* explored the tension in the Scottish Highlands between local communities who live and work on the land and conservationists striving to protect and restore landscapes and ecosystems.

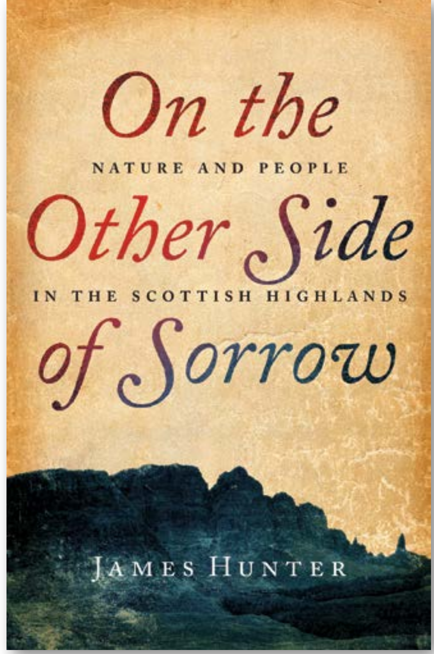
Drawing on his deep knowledge of the social and ecological history of the Highlands, he argued for mutual tolerance and understanding, so that both sides could work together for the benefit of people and nature.

So I began by asking Jim and Andrew Bachell how they feel things have progressed since the mid-1990s.

"It's a global problem, and hugely complicated, especially in the Highlands," says Jim, a long-term member of the Trust. "There are psychological and cultural issues here that are so much bound up with centuries of history when the area was sort of run from outside, and people on the ground were not in control of what was happening.

"And they'd see environmental bodies and the wider environmental agenda as just another manifestation of that.

"But I think it has improved. In the past, although there were some terrific people in the old Nature Conservancy Council [the forerunner of Sottish Natural Heritage], there was at times an almost colonial mentality towards the local communities, so there was a kind of antagonism and a mutual suspicion.



I do think it's better than what it was and I do think there's potential for collaboration there. And it's already happening, but I recognise it's not easy."

COMMUNITY FOCUS

Andrew explains that in recent times, the John Muir Trust has begun a serious reorientation towards working with communities. "We've had a lot of discussion around this recently and have been reconnecting with community land trusts that we worked with in the past. I went to see some of them and was struck by how warmly they welcomed the prospect of getting these relationships back on a strong foundation.

"We're just about to publish a new policy statement on wildness which I feel is a big step towards having a more open attitude to people who might see things differently. It recognises, for example, that one person's wildness can be another person's cleared land. And we make it clear that wildness itself is influenced by culture and history as well as by the physical geography of the land."

Jim, who was an early director of the Trust, believes that's a positive move. "I'm glad to hear that because one of the things that set the John Muir Trust apart back at the beginning was that it always attempted to work with communities. It was viewed differently from other conservation bodies who seemed less interested in the views of local people and were seen as trying to impose external values.

"I've not been directly involved in more recent times, but it's been my strong impression that that community emphasis, although not forgotten, had been somewhat downgraded. So it's good to hear there are efforts underway to rehabilitate that original impetus."

Andrew says: "Well, it's hard-wired into our purpose, but I do understand why that emphasis was reduced. In all honesty, it

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can be very difficult to work with some communities, because no matter how much effort you make, it isn't always reciprocated. My view is that we have to go and earn that reciprocation because unless we bring these elements together, we'll end up in a polarised state where nothing is achieved and nobody benefits. So, we're looking to find common ground that could satisfy the needs of both local communities and conservation interests."

"Yes, it has to be a two-way process," says Jim. "It's all very well saying to the John Muir Trust or the RSPB 'You've got to be more attuned to this and to work with communities' but equally somebody has to say to the communities 'you have to be prepared to work with these guys'.

"The fault isn't all on one side. As an environmental organisation you can go to these places with the best will in the world and get shown the door pretty smartly."

POPULATION LOSS

An Emeritus Professor of History at the University of the Highlands, Jim is the author of 13 books focused on the history of the region, and between 1998 and 2004 was chair of the development agency for the north of Scotland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise. Much of his work has dealt with population loss.

"One of the most positive things that's happened to the Highlands in my lifetime is that in the last 30 to 40 years there have been far more people moving into the area than moving out," he says. "In Skye for instance, the population had fallen from a peak of around about 25,000 in the 1840s to not much above 6,000 in the 1960s – an astonishing rate of decline.

"Now the population is double what it was 50 years ago. And the same thing is happening in Mull. In most community owned estates too, the population has risen – in some cases doubled.

"A couple of days ago, Highlands and Islands Enterprise published the results of a survey which confirmed that a substantial majority of young people in the Highlands now want to stay there. That's a complete and utter reversal of the situation when I was their age.

"We just assumed we would leave. It was like the weather: you didn't like it but you couldn't do anything about it. To get three good Highers was our equivalent of the emigrant ship."

The overall increase has, however, been driven by exceptional growth rates in specific areas, particularly around the regional capital Inverness.

In some of the more sparsely populated areas of the Highlands, further north and out to the west, the picture is more bleak, prompting calls from some to 'light up the glens' by attracting new populations into places which are now empty and silent.

Andrew Bachell recently received a warm response at an event hosted by Community Land Scotland (CLS) to launch a report called Community Empowerment and Landscape, which examines the relationship between people, place and landscape designations.

While CLS makes it clear that it wants to look to the future rather than the past, it has called for "no-longer existing communities" to be mapped along the same lines as the mapping of wild land.

PHOTOGRAPH: MARK HAMBLIN / SCOTLANDBIGPICTURE.COM

"In some parts of the world, rewilding is a purist activity for removing the people and letting nature sort itself out"

"I think some people may have been surprised when the John Muir Trust spoke up in support of the idea," says Andrew.

"There's a misconception that we want wild places to be free of people. But that's never been the attitude of the Trust. Yes, there are large areas of wild land at high altitudes that are uninhabitable. But there are also some areas which have people and buildings.

"A map of where people once lived would be useful in helping to move discussions forward."

Jim says that he has "always had some hang-ups" about the Wild Land Areas map. "In principle you can map some natural features, but wild isn't like that, it's an immeasurable thing, it's a state of mind. What I think is wild, you might not."

Rewilding at Glenfeshie
Right: Professor
Jim Hunter

PHOTOGRAPH:COMMUNITY LAND SCOTLAND

"In principle you can map some natural features, but wild isn't like that, it's an immeasurable thing, it's a state of mind. What I think is wild, you might not"

Andrew acknowledges that there can be problems with a binary map. "Before the SNH Wild Land Areas map, the John Muir Trust commissioned a colour-coded map of relative wildness.

"That's more sophisticated because you can then say, 'well that shade of dark green is common up here in the Highlands, but this shade of light green at the edge of Edinburgh might be more important' – because it's one of the few places in that area where people might be able to experience a sense of wildness."

"I'm speaking personally here – but what appeals to me far more is rewilding," says Jim Hunter. "Frank Fraser-Darling's phrase, 'devastated landscape' is still relevant. I think most of what we call wild land is pretty knackered ecologically for all sorts of reasons, not least because it's over-populated by deer.

"So much of it should be covered in woodland. The only reason it isn't is because so much of our land has been mismanaged for a long time. These areas that are now empty were ecologically far richer and much more diverse when they were populated.

"There's no reason why we can't have a relatively high human population alongside a much more diverse and interesting habitat. Repeopling and rewilding are not incompatible – in fact I would say the opposite. One would tend to follow the other.

"If you have rewilding in the sense of major woodland expansion with all the associated benefits, that's exactly where repeopling can also take place. It would certainly open up far more opportunities than are offered by the current land management of most areas."

"Rewilding as an economic driver seems to be gaining credibility," adds Andrew. "In some parts of the world, it's a purist activity for removing the people and letting nature sort itself out.

"But that's not generally the experience in Europe, where for centuries, and even millenia, people have lived close to wildness and been part of the shaping of the landscape.

"I think the term 'rewilding' is still divisive at the moment but it's also potentially positive if we can convince people it's more than just an ecological process, but that real economic and social benefits could flow from it."

"Yes, and there's a fear that rewilding is about removing people and could lead to a new Highland Clearances," says Jim. "And people do become fixated by wolves, which is not what it's about – although I have to say that wolves never did as much damage to the Highlands as the landlords."

Jim has long been a driving force for change in the Highlands, to redress extreme inequalities of land ownership and restore power to local communities. But he does gives credit where it's due.

"Two or three years ago I went to Glenfeshie [Cairngorms] for the first time in years and was astonished to see how the trees have come back. It's wonderful and remarkable, and it shows the possibilities.

"Needless to say, I have mixed views about Mr Povlsen [Scotland's biggest private landowner]. One big problem is that it's inherently precarious. What happens if he's run over by a bus? If this type of work could be done under the aegis of the John Muir Trust or the local community, or both, it would be much more secure."

The population of the Highlands and Islands may be small – less than ten per cent of the Scottish total – but it covers over 50 per cent of the landmass.

"The Highlands and Islands are big enough to accommodate a range of different land uses," says Andrew Bachell. "But to move forward we all need to understand where everyone else is coming from, so this kind of dialogue is essential."

About the author
Alan McCombes is the Trust's communications editor

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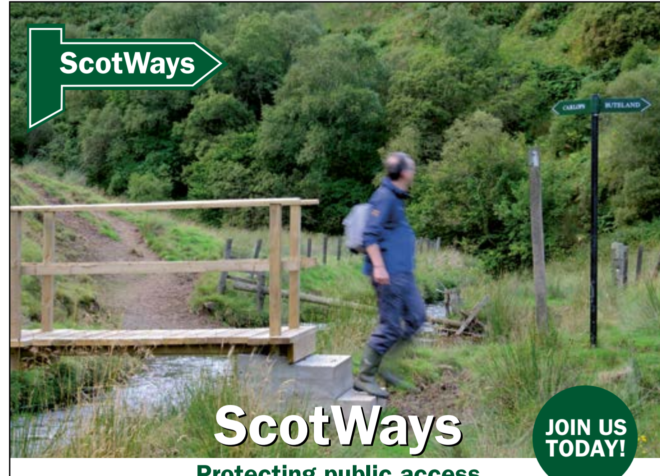

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Scotland: A Rewilding Journey by Susan Wright, Peter Cairns and Nick Underdown

THIS is a beautifully written and lavishly illustrated book with a serious purpose: to inspire land managers, politicians, conservation NGOs and the wider public with a vision of a wilder Scotland, where large areas of our land, rivers and seas are brought back to life for the benefit of the nation as a whole.

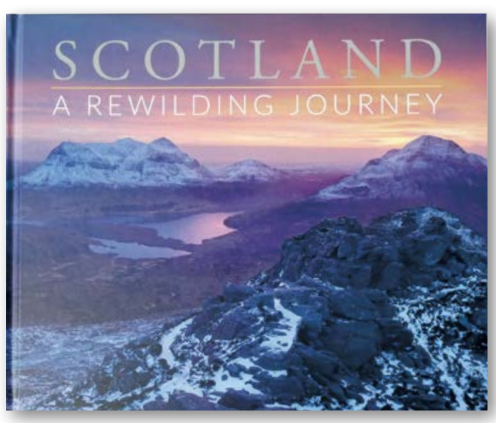
The book is the latest offering from Scotland: The Big Picture, a collective social enterprise based in the Highlands which uses top-quality visual imagery to tell powerful stories about our land, our people and our wildlife.

A Rewilding Journey describes how and why much of Scotland's uplands are ecologically degraded, yet the book strikes an optimistic tone. It charts examples of some of the work already underway to revitalise depleted landscapes, showing a glimpse of what is possible.

It also recognises that in Scotland, as in most of Europe, rewilding has to win the support of the people who live and work on the land: "Wild is defined in the dictionary by what it's not: not cultivated, not civilised, uninhabited, inhospitable. It's hardly surprising that an aspiration to return land to a wilder state is viewed with scepticism by many who have worked tirelessly over generations to overcome the wild and make land productive. But wild shouldn't be about what it's not; it should be about what it gives us."

£25.00
scotlandbigpicture.com

The reviewer:
Nicky McClure is the Trust's communication officer



Scaling the Heights – Measuring Scotland's Mountains by the Munro Society

ON the face of it, this looks like a highly technical book about surveying methods both old and new. But like the heights of hills, appearances, can be deceptive. Excellent colour photos and diagrams bring the story to life, as do some entertaining appetisers from erstwhile elders Robin Campbell and Hamish Brown before we get into the main course.

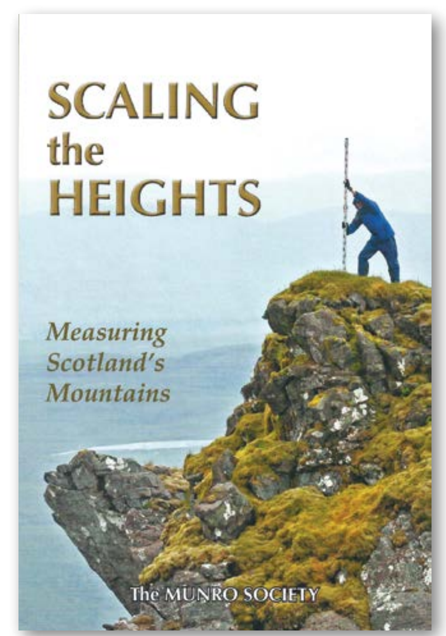
In 1974, when Ordnance Survey went metric, questions arose over accuracy: a 3,000ft Munro would actually be 914.4m, rather than 914m as marked on the map. There were 21 hills prioritised for measurement as being close to the magic 914 figure, and these became the venues for the 'Heightings' – measurements using modern day GPS-based surveying technology, but thankfully undertaken with just as much mountain grit and gristle as of old. Measurements began in 2006 and the teams made some surprising discoveries.

This could potentially amount to quite a dry read, but thankfully the technical sections on how and why are well leavened with the who and how – reflections and remembrances from Munro Society members who lugged the gear up and down the slopes in what often seems to be appalling weather.

There's a brief appearance by John Muir Trust board member Chris Townsend in one story; a *Daily Mail* reporter gets his comeuppance on Foinaven; and Barrisdale Bay – next door to our very own Li and Coire Dhorrcail – features too.

£12.00 plus postage and packaging
Published by Munro Society

The reviewer:
David Lintern is an outdoors writer, photographer and campaigner on outdoors issues



Others we like

***The Scotways Guide to the Law of Access to Land in Scotland*, Malcolm M Combe.**
Scotland's ground breaking 'Right to Roam legislation' is the envy of the outdoor community worldwide. But access can still be a complex legal minefield as shown by recent controversies over 'No Entry' signs, spiked gates and wild camping bans. This readable, user-friendly guide to the law will be of particular value to land managers, landowners, rangers, legal advisers and other professionals.
£20, **scotways.com**

***Cape To Cape*, John Sutcliffe.**
A wonderful account of a geologist's long hike up from Cape Cornwall to Cape Wrath. The author began his epic 1,250 mile-long solo trek as he approached his 70th birthday and the resulting book is clearly a labour of love. Beautifully illustrated and enjoyable reading, with ringing endorsements from Chris Townsend and Mike Harding.
£17.95, **Crescent House**

***The Arctic*, Richard Sale and Per Michelsen.**
It's one of the last great wildernesses on the planet; a place where animals have survived for thousands of years protected only by fur and feathers. But with global warming advancing twice as fast in the polar regions than across the rest of the planet, the Arctic has become the 21st century canary in the coalmine, an early warning of the dangers ahead. A beautiful and informative book bringing together science and photography.
£25, **Whittlespublishing.com**

PHOTOGRAPH: PETER FOULKES

A walk on the tame side?

Following a Trust board meeting in Peebles, **Peter Foulkes** took a gentle walk in the Moorfoot Hills, where he chanced upon similarities and differences with his home ground, the Cambrian Mountains

THE name Windlestraw Law aroused my interest – and it would mean a height gain of only 380 metres. So I set off for a pleasant morning's stroll under a clear blue sky.

Immediately, this part of the Southern Uplands struck me as familiar, its rolling hills landscape reminding me of the Cambrians on my own doorstep. Both built from the same mud and sand deposited on the floor of the Iapetus Ocean, the body of water that kept Southern Britain and Scotland apart back in the Palaeolithic Era.

I also soon discovered that, just like the Cambrians, the Moorfoots are blessed with purple moor grass (*Molinia caerulea*). The Moorfoot variety however is not quite as punishingly 'disco', and not so extensive, as its Cambrian cousin.

The cover here – which also includes extensive expanses of ling (*Calluna vulgaris*) seemed more tamed and less wild than in the Cambrians. Towards the top of the hill, I also found patches of cloudberry (*Rubus chamaemorus*) but, unfortunately, with no sign of its delicious orange berries.

It's been a long search of mine to find cloudberry in the Cambrians, but so far it's been like the historical quest for the Holy Grail. Perhaps cloudberry has found a niche in this rather manufactured sporting habitat? If so, perhaps I should be less ardent in my Cambrian search for the species.

But what a glorious panorama from Windlestraw's trig point! I just had to ignore the small telecoms kit a few metres off, the wind farms in the middle distance and the nearby conifer plantations to focus instead on the profiles of the Lothian coast to the north, the Moffat hills to the south west and the Cheviots away to the far south.

> **"Immediately, this part of the Southern Uplands struck me as familiar, its rolling hills landscape reminding me of the Cambrians on my own doorstep"**

I don't think I've ever seen so many red grouse, or medicated grit trays! In the Cambrians you occasionally see a feral pair (grouse that is, not grit trays). But if you are lucky when walking the moorland surrounding the highest peak in the area, Pumlumon, you may come across a hen harrier quartering the ground in search of dinner. Buzzards and red kites are also common sights in mid-Wales, but as with the harrier I spotted neither of these raptors over the Moorfoots.

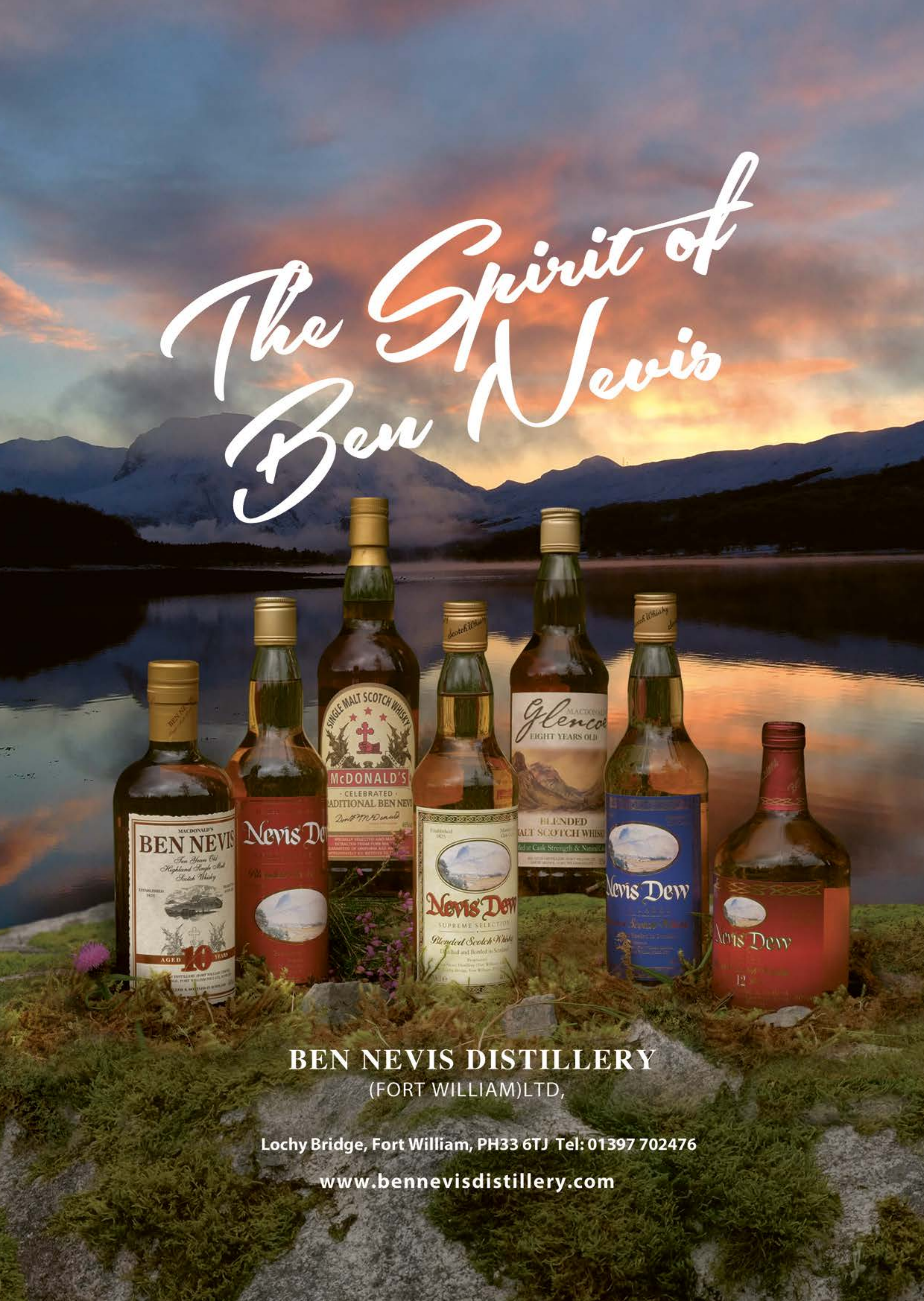
Dropping back down into the glen I followed a fence line which again looked quite familiar with ling-covered slopes to one side and rough grass on the other, complete with sheep. Coming from Wales I know something about sheep – but it's still a shock to see so many.

As a former scientist, I am aware that this snapshot view of the Moorfoot hills of the Southern Uplands is open to challenge. Perhaps it is a little biased to compare a range of hills that you only really met that day to a whole mountain massif which you know well.

Yes, I had visited the Trust's property, Glenlude, the day before, and I'm aware of other wilding projects in the wider area such as the Carrifran Wildwood.

But over and above the great work being done in the Southern Uplands by the Borders Forest Trust, and in the Cambrians by the Summit to Sea project, there is still huge scope for large-scale natural restoration work in both these upland areas where past and present land management practices – sheep walks, grouse moors, conifer plantations and wind farms – have 'challenged' both landscape and biodiversity.

About the author
Peter Foulkes will step down as a trustee at the forthcoming AGM after serving a three-year term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