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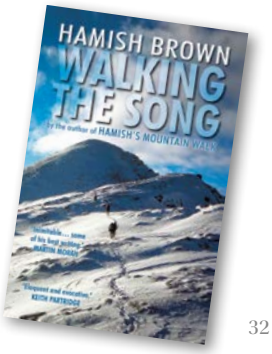

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PHOTOGRAPHY: PETER CAIRNS, SCOTTISH WILDCAT ACTION

COVER: MORNING SUN OVER STRIDING EDGE, CLEARVIEW/ALAMY

JOURNAL 62, SPRING 2017

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‘A pleasure and a privilege’

WELCOME to the spring edition of the John Muir Trust *Journal*, both to our regular readers and also to anyone who may be picking up this magazine for the first time.

Our regular readers are mostly members – and that’s certainly the best way to receive this publication. If you’re not a member, then please consider joining; this is a great time to support the Trust’s work to protect and enhance wild places.

Many of you may already be aware that I’m about to take a new post with the National Trust for Scotland, so this will be my final foreword. Inside this issue, I share some of my personal reflections on the last eight years as the Trust’s chief executive.

Farewells are always tinged with a little bit of sadness, but at the same time, I’m gratified to know that I leave the Trust in good heart, and with a clear sense of purpose and direction. Leading this organisation has been a great pleasure and a privilege.

Early in the New Year we announced our plans to take on the lease of Glenridding Common in the Lake District. As the main feature by Richard Rowe eloquently reminds us, this is a spectacular wild place, which includes the summit of Helvellyn and the famous Striding Edge ridge.

The Trust has had a long history of involvement in this National Park through our John Muir Award partnerships, so it feels like a natural step for us to become involved in land management there.

The principles of good land management are universal – and of fundamental importance is the need to have an effective planning process which involves everyone with an interest in the property.

By the time you read this, the formal consultation process will have been concluded. I’m pleased to report that all the signs so far point to a willingness on the part of all interested parties to work with the Trust to secure effective stewardship of the land for the next three years – and hopefully beyond.

In this issue of the *Journal* we also share some exciting news about a new woodland expansion project centred on Schiehallion due to launch in the summer, report on ground-breaking work to get more people from our mainly urban-based ethnic communities out into wild places, consider the future prospects for Scotland’s Wild Land Areas and check-in with some of you who have been volunteering on our conservation work parties.

We all have a vital role to play in speaking up for nature and for our beautiful landscapes. If you’d like to support any of the projects or initiatives we cover in this issue, then please check out our website or get in touch via the Trust office in Pitlochry.

Finally, I’d like to wish my successor, Andrew Bachell (see page 7) all the very best for the future, and to thank staff, trustees and Trust members for all the support you’ve given me over these past eight years. I leave with many happy memories!

Stuart Brooks
Outgoing Trust chief executive

Thirlmere from the west side of Helvellyn

PHOTOGRAPH: STUART BROOKS

Campaign news

Scottish Wild Land Areas
Along with detailed descriptions of Scotland's 42 Wild Land Areas (see p16-17, Scottish Natural Heritage has also published a draft document 'Assessing impacts on Wild Land Areas – technical guidance' to provide greater clarity for planners and prospective developers.

The Trust has contributed to a public consultation on the draft guidance document.

Stronelairg
As we go to press, we are awaiting the outcome of discussions relating to the costs associated with our Stronelairg judicial review. We would like once again to thank all those who supported us with this action.

Hill tracks
Poorly constructed hill tracks can cause landscape and ecological damage. We have seen some progress through the introduction of a system of prior notification, but it's important to keep an eye out for new proposals, and to look out for new tracks which have not gone through any planning process. More information can be found on the campaigns page of our website.

Public Local Inquiries
The Trust is preparing to participate in two key Public Local Inquiries (PLIs) – over the Culachy wind farm near Wild Land Area 19 close to Loch Ness (25-28 April), and the Caplich wind farm in Wild Land Area 34 in north-west Sutherland (19-30 June).

A further PLI has been triggered after Highland Council objected to a repeat application from Infinergy for a 24-turbine wind farm on the edge of the world-renowned Flow Country in Caithness.

Richard Fraser-Darling

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Richard Fraser-Darling, a John Muir Trust trustee from 2009 until 2015, and our neighbour at Strathaird on Skye. His funeral in Inverness was attended by the chief executive and the chair, and by current and former trustees. Our thoughts are with his wife Nina.

PHOTOGRAPH: NICKY MCCLURE

Knoydart stalwart moves on to pastures new

ALONG with departing chief executive Stuart Brooks, Lester Standen, our Li and Coire Dhorrcail land manager was given a warm send-off by staff and trustees at a special ceremony in the Wild Space at the end of February.

His involvement with the Trust, as volunteer and a member of staff, stretches back 25 years, to the day he read a magazine about the work we were doing on Knoydart. For the next six years, he took part in numerous work parties on Knoydart and Skye, then worked as contractor for the Trust before becoming a staff member in 2007.

Lester's tireless woodland regeneration work on the wild and remote north coast of Knoydart was formally recognised in 2015 when Li and Coire Dhorrcail won the New Native Woods category at the Scotland Finest Woods Awards.

Having responsibility for the Trust's Knoydart estate has given Lester the most satisfaction over the years – but as he says, there's still LOTS of work to be done there.

Ally MacAskill, our Skye land manager, will now take over responsibility for the Knoydart property.

Sligachan pathwork complete

THE Trust has just completed the second phase of the Skye footpath repair project on the Sligachan to Loch Coruisk path at Druim Hain.

In contrast to the fierce weather during phase one, in the winter of 2015-16, specialist contractors Arran Footpath Partnership have benefited from unusually mild and dry conditions this winter to construct 415m of footpaths.

The work included involved 970m^2 of landscaping, which involved transplanting turf to block braids and help encourage revegetation of a highly visible erosion scar 6m wide in places.

Contractor Donald MacKenzie said: "The path line is now less intrusive, and the new footpath will help keep walkers on the same line, allowing the vegetation to recover."

Since 2014, the Trust has spent £210,000 on path repair work on Skye, including at Bla Bheinn, Beinn Dearg and two phases of work at Druim Hain.
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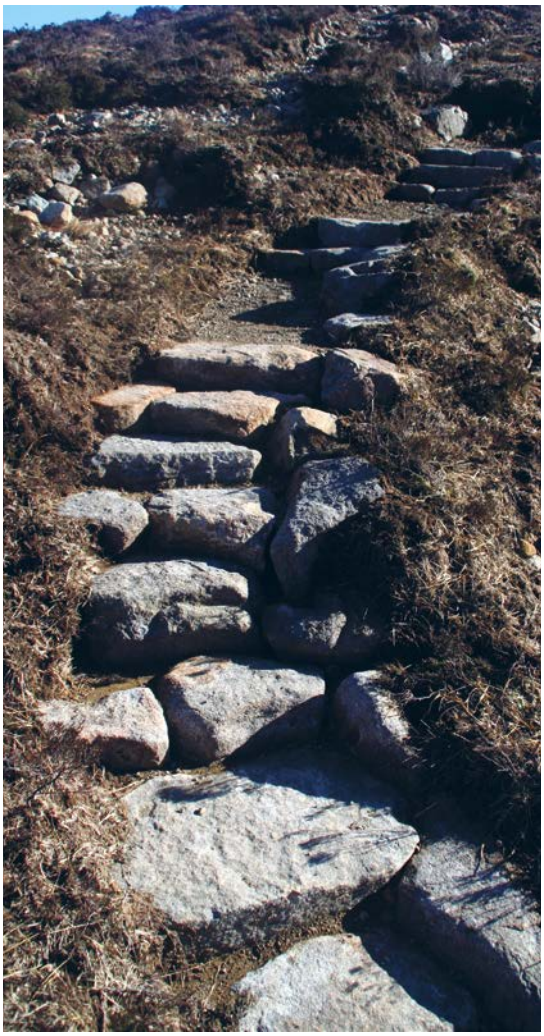


PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS GOODMAN

Breathtakingly wild images...

ONCE again, staff and trustees have selected their 10 favourites for the John Muir Trust Wild Places Prize 2017 – in the Scottish Landscape Photographer of the Year competition.

Our congratulations to all 10 winners – including Skye-based Nick Hanson, who also won the overall accolade of Scottish Landscape Photographer of the Year for his portfolio, which included *Glamaig Reflection,* taken on Trust property on the Isle of Skye (above).

Nick described how he captured his winning image: "As the sun started to rise behind Glamaig and the red Cuillin, it created lovely soft colours in the sky above, which were also captured in the perfectly still loch."

The competition, now in its third year, was created by Fife-based landscape photographer Stuart Low, who said: "Once again, photographers from all over the world have taken to the mountains, the islands, the coasts and the streets to capture stunning and diverse views of our spectacular country. Congratulations to them all!"

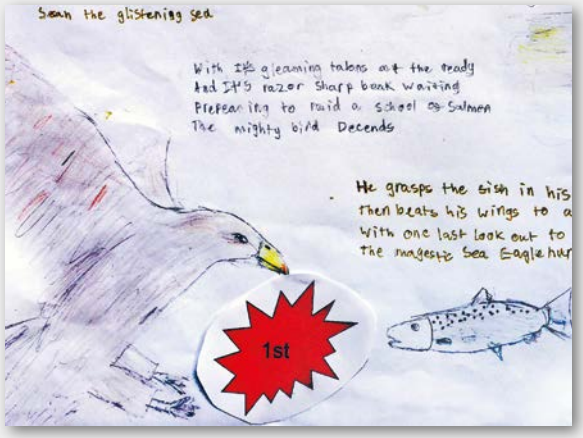
The 10 Wild Places prize winning images will be displayed later this year in the Alan Reece Gallery in the Wild Space visitor centre.

Meanwhile, you can see our top 10 shots online in the 'Latest' section of our website.

550 entries to Lochaber schools Wild Poetry competition

WITH a record number of 550 entries submitted from Lochaber primary schools, the John Muir Trust Wild Poetry Competition continues to go from strength to strength.

Due to the high calibre of the poems, the judges from the John Muir Trust, the Highland Council Ranger Service and the Highlife Highland Glen Nevis Visitor Centre had a mountain to climb when selecting the winner. Around 20 per cent of all entries received either a Highly Commended or Commended certificate.



The category winners were:

- Calum McIntyre, Strontian (English, P4-7)
- Alexander McDonell, Mallaig (Gaelic, P5-7)
- Fiona Austin, Spean Bridge (English, P1-3)
- Maggie Griffin, Mallaig (Gaelic, P2-4)

The competition is part of the annual Fort William Mountain Festival, and the prizes were sponsored jointly by the John Muir Trust and Iomairt Lochabair.

PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY OF ANDREW BACHELL

Trust welcomes new chief executive

THE Trust is delighted to announce the appointment of one of Scotland's most senior and respected nature conservationists as its new Chief Executive.

Andrew Bachell, who for 15 years has been part of the senior management team at Scottish Natural Heritage, will take over the post from Stuart Brooks (see page 20-21).

While at SNH, Andrew was responsible for landscape and wild land, and advised the Scottish Government on access, ecosystems and biodiversity, rural resources, planning and renewables.

He has 35 years of experience working on environmental and conservation issues having previously worked for the National Trust for Scotland as its Director of Countryside and at the Woodland Trust as its Director in Scotland.

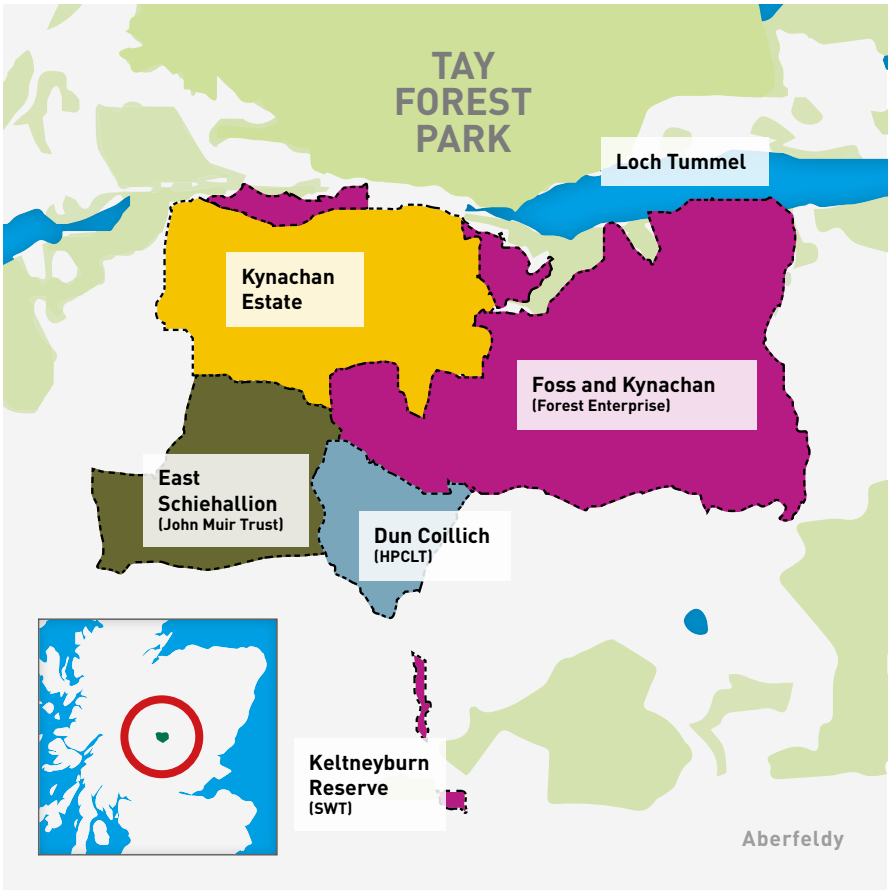
He said: "Across the years I've witnessed an organisation that is bold and relevant. It's exciting to now join and lead its work to advance the case for why wild places matter for people and nature. The link between nature and our own well-being has never been more important or more under pressure."

Trust chair Peter Pearson said: "Andrew's wealth of experience coupled with his in-depth expertise in nature and landscape conservation makes him the ideal person to lead the Trust into a new phase of its history."

Andrew will attend the AGM in May before taking up his new role on 15 June 2017.

Breathing new life into the Heart of Scotland

The Trust has linked up with five partners to transform 50km between Loch Rannoch, Loch Tummel and Loch Tay



THE HEART of Scotland Forest Partnership is a collaboration between the Trust and five other organisations. The partnership will involve five neighbouring landowners – the John Muir Trust, Forest Enterprise Scotland, Highland Perthshire Communities Land Trust, Kynachan Estate and the Scottish Wildlife Trust – plus Woodland Trust Scotland. It will begin working this summer on an ambitious new plan to connect woodlands across Highland Perthshire.

Dr Liz Auty, the Trust's property manager at East Schiehallion, and a key player in the formation of the partnership, commented: "We have a long term vision of this vast upland area as a living breathing landscape with native trees, woodland corridors, flourishing wildlife and picturesque footpaths.

"This project, we believe, can start to turn this landscape into a marvellous asset for the local community and a precious legacy for our children and grandchildren."

Each partner will take forward different elements of the initiative. The Trust will replace non-native conifers with Scots pine and broadleaved woodland.

Seedling regeneration will be supported by sensitively sited fencing, allowing aspen, birch and rowan – currently held in check by browsing – to reach their potential. Regenerating willow scrub will provide additional habitat for black grouse, willow warblers, whinchats and other associated species.

A further aim of the partnership is to bring locals and visitors closer to the land. Willie McGhee, Forest Manager of Highland Perthshire Communities Land Trust, said: "From the start we believe this project will benefit the local community by bringing new funding into the area and creating training and employment.

"We want to encourage people to get involved, deepen their understanding of nature and learn new skills."

The partnership is set to be launched this summer, when we are likely to be launching a fund-raising appeal.

Contact
liz.auty@johnmuirtrust.org

Working together to create a vibrant landscape in the shadow of Schiehallion

The Heart of Scotland Forest project allows us to work with our neighbours to produce an integrated forest landscape across ownership boundaries. This will bring benefits by increasing native tree species, environmental diversity and an interesting collaboration between a range of partners.

Peter Fullarton, Tayside Forest Enterprise Scotland

The Scottish Wildlife Trust is pleased to be part of this landscape-scale regeneration initiative, working with multiple partners. Such large projects, which bring about much needed woodland expansion and help connect existing habitats, is vital for Scotland's wildlife.

Robert Potter, Scottish Wildlife Trust

We're proud to be part of this exciting partnership to extend native woodland cover in a much-loved scenic landscape. Our aim is to benefit the public, wildlife and the economy. Hopefully this work can inspire and encourage similar large-scale partnerships elsewhere. We can achieve more working together than we can separately.

Carole Evans, Woodland Trust Scotland

Kynachan Estate has worked closely with the John Muir Trust since 2011 to deliver effective deer management. Mutual respect and cooperation have been at the heart of this partnership, which will continue to deliver great benefits in this important and sensitive part of the Scottish Highlands for many years to come.

Jez Robinson, Kynachan Estate

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Common ground

The Lake District National Park Authority is consulting on a proposal for the Trust to take over the management of Glenridding Common – a very special area of land that includes one of the best-loved mountains in England, writes **Rich Rowe**

IN MOST mountain areas, the main attraction is the highest peak, but not so in the Lake District National Park. While Scafell Pike is higher, it is Helvellyn – at 950m, the third highest peak in England – that is perhaps the most celebrated of all Lakeland fells. As Alfred Wainwright, the great doyen of Lakeland fell walking, wrote in 1955: "Legend and poetry, a lovely name, and a lofty altitude combine to encompass Helvellyn in an aura of romance".

The high point on a lengthy ridge line, Helvellyn stands proud between Thirlmere to the west and Ullswater to the east. There are many ways to its summit; walkers who tackle the short, sharp routes from Thirlspot or Wythburn on the west side are keenly aware of the relentlessly steep slopes – a gradient that contributed to the terrible landslips that closed the main road between Grasmere and Keswick during the floods of December 2015.

But it is only once the summit plateau is reached that the mountain reveals a very different character: a plunging cliff-line, steep arêtes that connect a chain of lesser peaks, and a glacial tarn nestled beneath imposing crags. This rugged sweep of land is Glenridding Common, a 1,000ha area that stretches all the way from the village of Glenridding on the shores of Ullswater, up and across the famed Striding and Swirral Edges, then onto Helvellyn's broad summit.

Thousands of walkers and climbers test themselves on the mountain's precipitous edges each year, but the common also has its quieter sides: the much less-visited Keppel and Brown Coves, plus an area on the flanks of Raise that is home to a ski-tow run by the Lake District Ski Club.

This feature serves as a modern nod to a landscape that has been shaped as much by humans as by the elements. One of many areas of registered common land in Cumbria – a particularly English land use based on a system of collective management – Glenridding Common has served as an integral resource for generations of hill farmers. Today, it is grazed by two local farmers with commons rights.

→ continued

The result is a rich physical and cultural landscape that the John Muir Trust hopes it might soon have the privilege of being involved in managing.

The Lake District National Park Authority (LDNPA) currently owns around 9,000ha, or four per cent, of the land in the National Park, the bulk of it comprising six areas of common land, including Glenridding Common.

In 2015, with funding squeezed, the LDNPA shared plans to review its property holdings with potentially interested parties as it looked to explore other ways of enhancing the special qualities of the land. "As a public authority we have a duty to find the best way of doing things, so it was sensible to explore this kind of option," explains Martin Curry, Property Services Manager at the National Park Authority.

Bird life is also rich, with snow bunting found on the high tops in winter, while upland species such as raven, wheatear and ring ouzel all breed here in the summer

EXPLORING OPTIONS

The Trust made its interest known, with discussions eventually focusing on Glenridding Common – one of the jewels in the National Park's crown. Under a proposed three-year lease of the area, the National Park would remain as the main landowner (part of the site is jointly owned with the National Trust), and the John Muir Trust would become a leaseholder. The existing rights of farmers to graze would continue unaffected, as would the Lake District Ski Club's license for its parcel of land.

The Park Authority began a three-month consultation period on 17 January, during which the Trust has held numerous meetings with local stakeholders and shared its draft management plan for the common with interested parties.

Once the consultation finishes on 17 April, the LDNPA will evaluate the results and take them to its 20 members, all appointed by various public bodies. With the next full Authority meeting scheduled for May, a final decision is expected in early summer.

If the proposal is given the go-ahead, the Trust will be directly involved in managing land outside Scotland for the first time. "We've had a long-held ambition to be involved with a property south of the border," says Peter Pearson, Chair of the Trust. "Around 17 per cent of our members live in the north of England and we're often asked when we will manage property outside Scotland."

This is especially important at a time of political uncertainty, adds Peter. "The Trust is neutral on the debate over the future of the UK, but we want to ensure that whatever political changes might lie ahead, the Trust will continue to remain relevant to its members across Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland."

It's hard to overstate just what being involved with Glenridding Common could do for the Trust's profile, particularly in England. As one of the most popular and well-known mountains in a national park that sees more than 17 million visitors a year, managing the summit of Helvellyn and wider common would put the Trust in the public eye like never before.

"Taking over the management of land which includes Helvellyn would be an ideal way for us to broaden our land management operations and increase our support base while remaining true to our historical focus on wild land," says Peter. "Helvellyn has a special character and status – people feel close to it."

PHOTOGRAPHS: PETER CAIRNS; PETE BARRON; OUTWARD BOUND; MARK HAMBLIN

Previous page: Striding Edge ridge and Red Tarn.
Opposite page: Helvellyn wildlife, including aspen, purple saxifrage and ring ouzel.
Clockwise from centre: Flora of the Fells conservation day; Helvellyn helilift; completed stone pitching; Outward Bound students

One man who knows Glenridding Common particularly well is Pete Barron, the newest member of the Trust's land team. Having worked for the National Park as a ranger for 23 years on everything from upland management and path maintenance to raptor protection, supervising volunteers and community engagement, Pete's local knowledge is a massive asset to the Trust.

"It feels almost like I know every stone on the west side of Helvellyn following years of footpath repair work there, but the east side is also a special place for me," explains Pete. "In my early days as a ranger, we helped cover the work of Fell Top Assessors during their days off, so I got to know the mountain exceptionally well in all conditions."

Interestingly, Helvellyn is a mountain that attracts more winter weather than any other part of the Lake District. "Helvellyn has more of an easterly influence, so the eastern fells see a lot of winter climbers," explains Pete.

CHALLENGES

But an influx of winter climbers can bring its own challenges, particularly when the crags are not 'in condition' – i.e. not fully frozen. In his previous role at the National Park, Pete worked closely with the British Mountaineering Council and Natural England on a project that encouraged climbing only in peak conditions – and for very good reason.

"The exposed faces in these high-altitude corries serve as a refuge for a range of arctic-alpine plants, many of which are real rarities in an English context," explains Pete. "Unfortunately, these plants are all too easily damaged by winter climbing tools when they're used on unfrozen turf. If the Trust gets the go-ahead to lease Glenridding Common, we'd look to progress this educational work."

And arctic-alpine rarities are not the only natural assets of a common that sits within the Lake District High Fells Special Area of Conservation. The area also holds significant stands of juniper scrub woodland, plus a variety of montane and upland heath, grassland and flush communities. Some of that plant life now benefits from a Higher Level Stewardship Scheme, introduced by Natural England in 2013 for a period of 10 years, which determines grazing levels at specific times of the year.

Elsewhere, the frigid waters of Red Tarn hold a population of schelly, one of England's rarest species of fish, plus England's highest population of stickleback. Bird life is also rich, with snow bunting found on the high tops in winter, while upland species such as raven, wheatear and ring ouzel all breed here in the summer.

SEEKING ASSURANCES

The Trust has a significant presence in Cumbria through the John Muir Award, which the National Park Authority itself has embraced as a core part of its educational remit (see sidebar, At home in the Lakes). "We already have a strong working relationship and see the Trust as a responsible partner and a body that could really help re-energise our work at Glenridding Common," comments the National Park's Martin Curry. "Ideally, we envisage a long-term relationship with the Trust."

Even so, the prospect of change and a different organisation taking over has met with hesitation in some quarters – much of which stems from the integral role that common land plays in the area. Cumbria has the largest concentration of common land in Western Europe, with much of it situated in the National Park. The resulting landscape of special cultural significance has been identified as one of the key qualities supporting the Lake District's current bid to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

→ continued

"The local farming community has shaped the look of the Lake District through a land use that is epitomised by the area," says Martin Curry. "As such, there is considerable support for the common land system to be maintained."

Such concerns were raised at a public meeting in Glenridding in February 2017 when the Trust gave attendees assurances that its potential lease would not affect the rights of commoners to graze sheep at levels they have negotiated with Natural England, nor impact on the current trail hunting arrangements with the National Park and National Trust landowners.

"We also asked whether the Trust would be keen to work with local groups in preserving the industrial heritage of the site and again were assured this would be the case," explains Rob Shepherd, Chair of Glenridding Parish Council. "We have every confidence that the Trust will do an excellent job of managing the common in a way that preserves the unique nature of the environment and ensures its continued benefit for visitors and the local community."

While local stakeholders are keen to see plans fleshed out in more detail, the Trust's draft management plan already makes a variety of firm commitments. These include working closely with graziers, neighbours and the communities of Glenridding and Patterdale to develop future plans; addressing issues such as footpath erosion, sheep worrying, litter and illegal parking; using the property as a basis for volunteering activity and conservation work parties; and gradually working towards a richer, more diverse landscape where people and nature thrive alongside each other.

"Helvellyn has more of an easterly influence, so the eastern fells see a lot of winter climbers"

Pete Barron

"It's understandable that there is concern locally and that's why we welcome the consultation process as an opportunity to offer reassurances about our plans," says the Trust's Peter Pearson. "Our land management elsewhere aims to protect and enhance the ecology, culture and landscape – and that will be the same for Glenridding Common."

Another positive that the Trust brings to the table as a membership organisation with charitable status is a potential to access new and additional funding streams to manage and staff the property that are simply not available to the National Park. "We have a strong track record of accessing funding from a variety of sources for these purposes," stresses Peter.

Any future investment would certainly be of use when working with local communities on projects such as flood resilience – a key issue locally following the recent devastating floods in Glenridding.

"We are confident that we will work effectively with the Trust on our Community Flood Resilience Project," comments Rob Shepherd. "We are also sure that the Trust will be supportive of other community initiatives to help both preserve and enhance our wonderful landscape while ensuring it's not just a 'museum', but a place where real people live and work.

"We firmly believe that the values of the Trust match those of our community and that, as long as there is effective mutual consultation and cooperation, the management of Glenridding Common by the Trust can become a model of effective land stewardship in England."

Such positive words suggest that the Trust is on the right track as it contributes to a process that allows all interested parties to learn more about the future plans for one of Lakeland's most celebrated areas.

"Managing Glenridding is a great opportunity," says Peter Pearson. "We're not there yet, but hopefully we will be soon."

About the author
Rich Rowe is a freelance outdoors writer and a former editor of the *Journal*

Winter climbers tackle the Helvellyn headwall

PHOTOGRAPH: PETE BARRON

At home in the Lakes

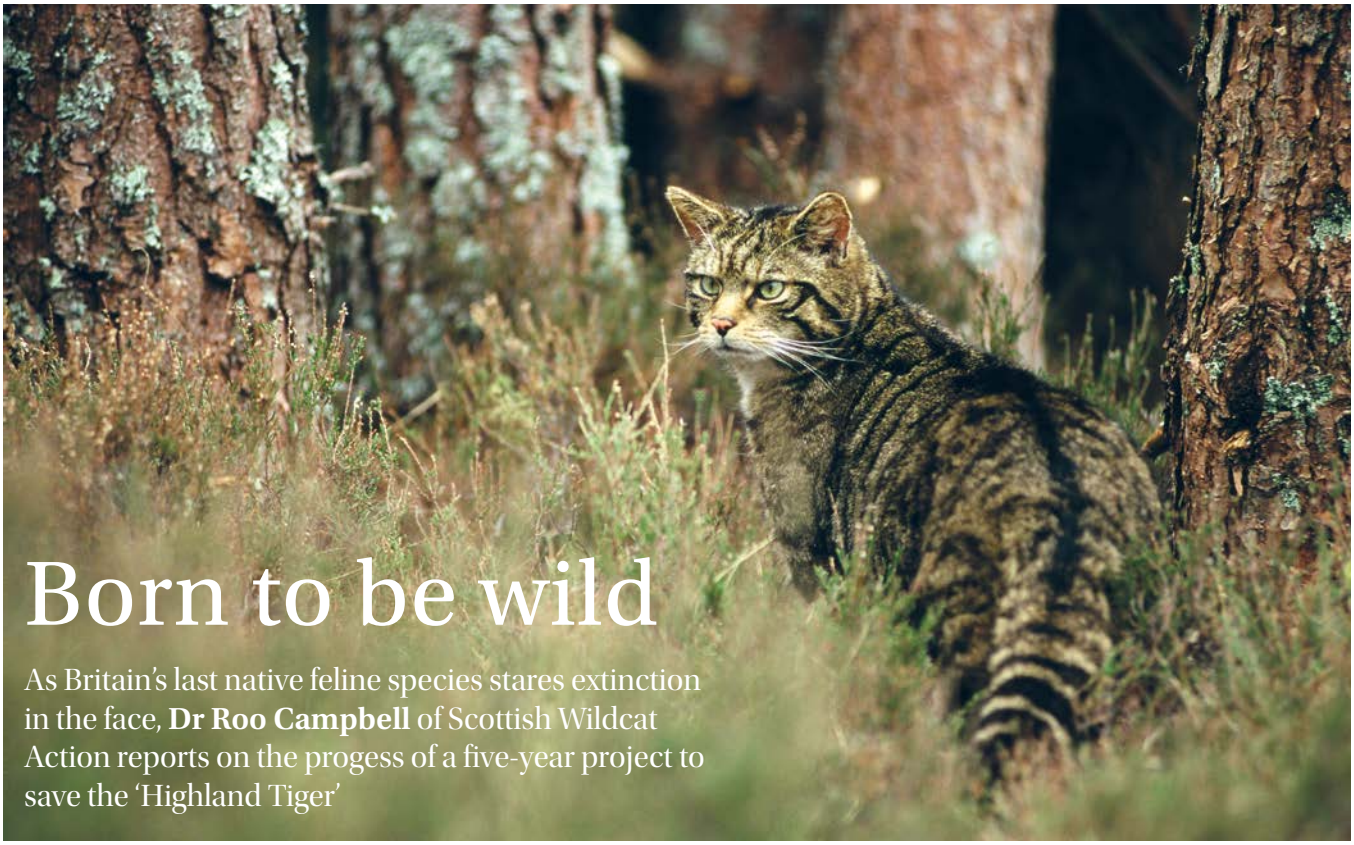
Although it does not yet manage property south of the border, the Trust already has a strong, long-term presence in England through the John Muir Award – and no more so than in the Lake District where the National Park Authority uses the Award as a core part of its educational remit.

"The Award has operated in Cumbria since 2003, so there's a large section of people who have been introduced to the Trust and what it stands for," explains Graham Watson, John Muir Award Manager, Cumbria.

As elsewhere in the country, the Award is well-used by a whole host of schools, outdoor centres and outdoor learners, with upwards of 3,000 Awards a year through National Park partner participation – and more than 1,000 by the Outward Bound Trust.

"One of the farmers neighbouring Glenridding Common has Award groups come to him through Outward Bound, so that's a healthy connection," adds Graham.

For the last three years, Graham has worked out of the National Park office at Keswick, which has helped create a close awareness of how the Trust operates. "I strongly believe the Award is one of the reasons why we have got this far in the process," says Trust Chair Peter Pearson. "The National Park recognises we have a track record of managing other properties well, and with a real community focus."



PHOTOGRAPH: PETER CAIRNS, SCOTTISH WILDCAT ACTION

Born to be wild

As Britain's last native feline species stares extinction in the face, **Dr Roo Campbell** of Scottish Wildcat Action reports on the progess of a five-year project to save the 'Highland Tiger'

IN 2015, Scottish Wildcat Action, a partnership project involving over 20 organisations in the conservation, land management and scientific communities (including the John Muir Trust) gathered together with one purpose: to save the endangered Scottish wildcat from further decline.

The project, which will carry on until 2020, has three key aims. First, to reduce threats to the wildcat from hybridisation through neutering feral and hybrid cats, and fostering a culture of responsible cat ownership; second, to lessen the risk of persecution; and third, to gain a better understanding of wildcat distribution, numbers and genetic makeup.

After extensive survey work using 347 trail cameras, Scottish Wildcat Action have found at least 19 wildcats in the Scottish Highlands based on coat markings – also known as pelage scoring – which is used to identify specific wildcat type traits. With the help of 150 fantastic volunteers, the huge task of sorting approximately 200,000 images from the trail cameras used last winter and spring is now complete.

Survey work will continue but this vast bank of data is helping staff on the ground to target their conservation efforts. As well as capturing wildcats, the trail cameras also revealed locations where feral cats and hybrids are living wild.

The Scottish wildcat is our only remaining native cat and contributes to the diversity and health of our ecosystem. They have also played a role in Scotland's cultural heritage, with, for example, some clan crests featuring the species. A European Protected Species, they are now near the brink of extinction, with an estimated 100 to 300 left in the wild.

The presence of this elusive creature can go unnoticed. Tracks, signs and dens are a poor identification method. They are primarily an 'edge' species – living on the margins of open ground but dependent on cover such as woodland, scrub or even piles of boulders.

"A European Protected Species, they are now near the brink of extinction, with an estimated 100 to 300 left in the wild"

They often hunt in open habitats such as grassland, but are also drawn to recent clear-fell, which attracts grassland prey such as field voles. Where available they prefer rabbits, which they generally turn inside out – one of the few reliable signs of their possible presence. They can also predate on other small rodents and birds.

Scottish wildcats have hung on in pockets across Scotland to the north of the Highland Boundary Fault. Pre-project surveys defined six wildcat priority areas where there is the greatest probability of being able to save the wildcat population that remains – Strathspey, the Angus Glens, Strathavon, Strathbogie, Strathpeffer and Morvern.

Now the focus is on taking action to save what's left in the wild, while building up a robust population in captivity suitable for later release through a conservation breeding programme led by the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland.

In wildcat priority areas, staff and volunteers are focusing on neutering and vaccinating as many feral cats as possible, while raising awareness of the plight of the Scottish wildcat with local gamekeepers, cat owners and schools. To help protect wildcats near them, the project also asks cat owners to neuter their pet cats from the age of four months, vaccinate them annually and tag them with a microchip.

How you can help

- Report sightings of any cats that are living wild (domestic, hybrid or wildcat)
- Make sure your pet or farm cats are micro-chipped, neutered and vaccinated
- Adopt a wildcat or make a donation
- Follow the project's Facebook or Twitter account

Contact

scottishwildcataction.org
Follow them on Facebook and Twitter **@SaveOurWildcats**

About the author

Dr Roo Campbell is the project manager for the priority areas programme of Scottish Wildcat Action

Northern vision

As Scottish Natural Heritage publishes vivid descriptions of Scotland's 42 Wild Land Areas, **Mel Nicoll** warns that the battle to protect them from large scale development is not yet over

PHOTOGRAPH: LORNE GILL, 2020VISION

TRAVEL TO INVERNESS, go north, further – and keep going. When you reach Scotland's far north coast at Thurso you are 675 miles north of London, and on roughly the same latitude as Oslo, St Petersburg and Juneau in Alaska. To picture it better, draw a line roughly from Loch Broom, near Ullapool, to the Dornoch Firth on the eastern coast.

This is a land of dazzling contrasts. Towering, distinctive mountains gaze over rolling peatlands, picuresque glens and ragged coastlines. The roll-call of hills in this spectacular region includes Ben Klibreck, Ben More Assynt, Ben Hope, Ben Loyal, Ben Hee, Foinaven, Arkle, Morven and Scaraben, whose evocative and poetic names are familiar to hillwalkers and other lovers of wild places.

Less obviously – but fulfilling a vital ecological function as carbon stores and home for rare wildlife – are the vast peatlands of the Flow Country, whose 200,000 hectares spread across the far north east corner of the Scottish mainland have been nominated for potential inclusion as a UNESCO World Heritage Site as the largest area of blanket bog in the world.

Here, you are in wild land – officially. The northern counties of Caithness, Sutherland and Ross-shire include no fewer than 10 of Scotland's 42 Wild Land Areas, mapped in 2014 by the Scottish Government's nature and landscape adviser, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH).

Yet this area of picture-postcard beauty is also a magnet for energy companies seeking to develop large-scale wind farms. Recently, the Scottish Government gave the go-ahead for a major development at Creag Riabhach, near Altnaharra, which will consist of 22-turbines up to 125m tall, including five within Wild Land Area 37. Other major wind farms at various stages in the planning system include Caplich, Strathy South and Limekiln.

This June, the SNH Wild Land Areas map will be three years' old. It has played a vital role in raising awareness of wild land and helping guide planning applications. In the first two years after its publication, seven wind farms were refused consent for reasons which included adverse impacts on wild land.

The Creag Riabhach wind farm decision however, was a setback, flatly contradicting the advice of SNH, whose analysis had set out in no uncertain terms the significant impact this would have on wild land.

More positively, in January 2017 SNH published its Descriptions of Wild Land Areas – a document that provides detailed information about each of the 42 Wild Land Areas, painting a picture of their distinctive landscapes, ecology, geology, archaeology and current human activity.

Crucially, the descriptions set out the extent to which these landscapes are currently impacted by development. We believe that this document should be integral to the assessments

The Flows National Nature Reserve

"All the wild world is beautiful, and it matters but little where we go, to highlands or lowlands, woods or plains, on the sea or land or down among the crystals of waves or high in a balloon in the sky"

John Muir

developers have to make when they submit their applications, and to the ultimate planning decisions of local authorities and the Scottish Government.

The descriptions, however, are also a powerful reminder of this amazing asset, and hopefully will be used by VisitScotland and other agencies to encourage more people to explore these remarkable wild places, with knock-on economic benefits for local communities in the Highlands.

It's understandable that in these beautiful but economically fragile areas, the community benefit funds offered by wind farm developers can exert a strong pull, as can the prospect of a short-term boom for hoteliers, publicans and shopkeepers during the construction phase.

But if we allow the industrialisation of these dramatic, wild landscapes that attract visitors from all over world there will be long term consequences.

"Arresting, isolated mountains rise up in stark contrast to surrounding peatland and glens, amplifying the awe-inspiring qualities of each"
From SNH Description for Wild Land Area 35: Ben Klibreck-Armine Forest

We would also encourage local communities, councils and the Scottish Government to explore the potential economic benefits of repairing and restoring damaged ecosystems in our uplands and peatlands.

For example, an economic impact study carried out for the Peatlands Partnership 'Flows to the Future' project, which is working to restore areas of blanket bog damaged by commercial forestry planting, outlines the potential of this work for employment and tourism; this includes 26 full time equivalent (FTE) jobs until 2019, then 11 FTEs in future years.

The phenomenal success of the North Coast 500 circular route – a project launched just two years ago in an effort to achieve sustainable economic growth in the north of Scotland – provides a further glimpse of the potential for a new future for the north. It has already achieved impressive results, with reports of increased visitor numbers driving the expansion of local businesses. Vital to its success is what VisitScotland has described as "the unspoilt, dramatic scenery in the far north of Scotland".

In consenting the Creag Riabhach wind farm, Ministers did recognise the impact the development would have on wild land. By their own admission, they wrestled with the challenge of balancing the benefits and impacts of the development as a whole, in the context of "different and competing policies". These rightly include the transition to a low carbon economy by encouraging renewable energy, and realising socio-economic benefits for local communities.

But while the extent to which visitors will be put off by wind farms remains a point of contention, there is a growing sense that any short-term financial benefits from industrialising wild landscapes will be come at a heavy cost to the ecology, landscape and local economies within these areas.

Wildlife tourism, for example, is now making a significant and growing contribution to Scotland's economy, especially in the Highlands and Islands. Its magnificent natural environment now features regularly on prime-time TV, from the *Spring, Winter* and *Autumnwatch* programmes presented by Chris Packham and Michaela Strachan to the recent BBC documentary series, *Highlands: Scotland's Wild Heart*, narrated by Ewan MacGregor.

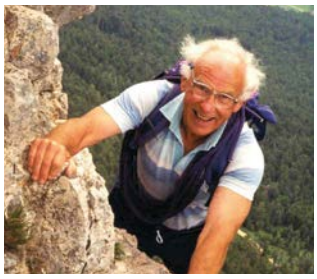
A year ago, I wrote in this *Journal* of our hope that decisions would continue to be made in favour of wild land, so we can then turn our focus to the challenge of enhancing and regenerating nature in these areas. But, as the Creag Riabhach decision illustrates, the battle to protect Scotland's Wild Land Areas is not yet over – and with several other major applications still in the pipeline, we need your continuing support.

Find out more
Please sign up to our newsletter for news of our latest actions by going to **johnmuirtrust.org/newsletter**

About the author
Mel Nicoll is the Trust's campaign coordinator and a mountaineer with extensive knowledge of Scotland's uplands. She can be contacted at **mel.nicoll@johnmuirtrust.org**

Remembering two outdoors giants

The Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant is an adventure fund managed by the Trust for people seeking out life-changing experiences in wild places. **Toby Clark** reflects on where it has come from and where it is going



IT STARTED WITH a sad ending. In February 2006, Bill Wallace – 73 years of age and with two artificial hips – had just completed one last sweeping, elegant turn on the snow after a week's ski-mountaineering in the Swiss Alps. He then died instantly of heart failure, his companions by his side. Bill's obituary in the *Scotsman* reflected that this "was a culmination he would have wished for himself" – yet for "his friends and family it was a tragedy".

Bill was respected for his many exploits. Most notable was the first British ascent of the second-highest mountain in the Americas, the 6,768m Huascaran, in Peru, and the man-hauling of a sledge across the Greenland ice-cap. This was just the second crossing following in the footsteps of Nansen.

As past president, treasurer and secretary of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, and, at various stages, a trustee, secretary and treasurer of the John Muir Trust, he was also an organiser and a leader.

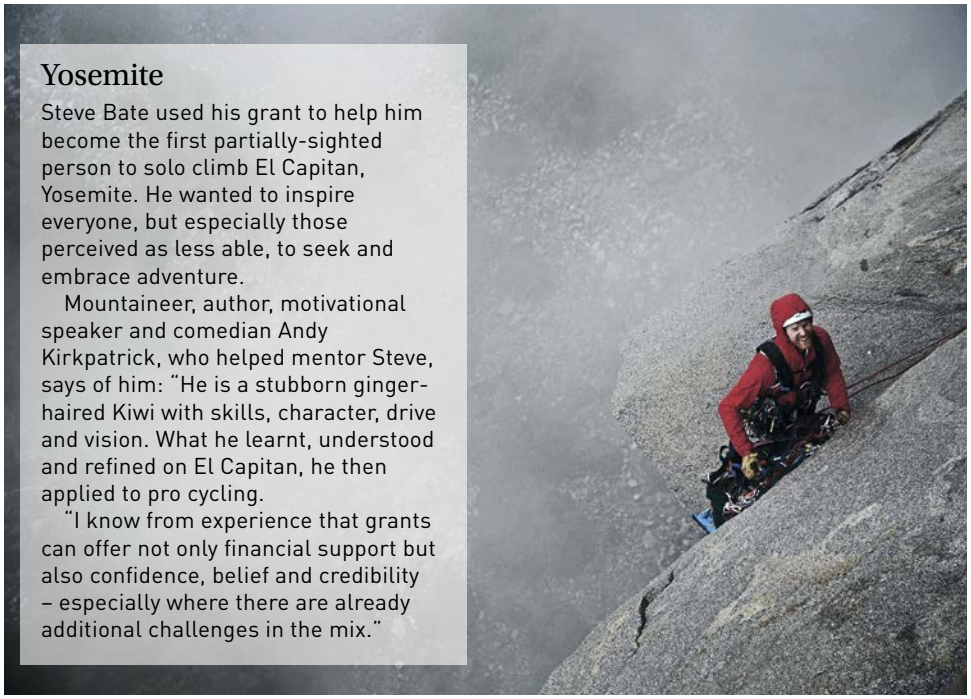
The Bill Wallace Grant was launched in 2007, triggered by donations to the John Muir Trust made at his funeral. The Grant was quickly supported by additional funds from the Scottish Mountaineering Trust, the John Muir Trust, the Tiso family and many of Bill's climbing friends.

The John Muir Trust manages the annual grant, which helps people from all walks of life take part in life-changing adventures in wild places that are of educational or scientific value. The sums awarded – ranging from £200 to £2,000 – aim to encourage practical action to conserve our natural environment.

So far, 33 people have benefited. They've come from all walks of life, from students to scientists, from grandmothers to gardeners. They've visited places all around the world, from Uganda to Uist, from the Andes to the Arctic. They've dived beneath the sea, biked, hiked, skied, climbed, ran, kayaked, surveyed and sailed – all to benefit people, nature and place.

This year, the grant is embracing a new legacy – again sadly rooted in tragedy. Des Rubens, another distinguished and much admired Scottish mountaineer, was killed aged 63 in an Alpine climbing accident in June 2016.

Last year, the families of both Bill and Des supported a proposal from the John Muir Trust to widen the grant into a joint memorial to both men. The Scottish Mountaineering Trust immediately



PHOTOGRAPH: ANDY KIRKPATRICK

Yosemite

Steve Bate used his grant to help him become the first partially-sighted person to solo climb El Capitan, Yosemite. He wanted to inspire everyone, but especially those perceived as less able, to seek and embrace adventure.

Mountaineer, author, motivational speaker and comedian Andy Kirkpatrick, who helped mentor Steve, says of him: "He is a stubborn ginger-haired Kiwi with skills, character, drive and vision. What he learnt, understood and refined on El Capitan, he then applied to pro cycling.

"I know from experience that grants can offer not only financial support but also confidence, belief and credibility – especially where there are already additional challenges in the mix."

The fund's global reach

North America
California, Canadian Rockies, Newfoundland

South America
Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Trinidad, Venezuela

Antarctica
Heard Island

PHOTOGRAPH: BERTIE GREGORY

Vancouver Island

The Bill Wallace Grant helped Bertie Gregory camp for four months on a remote island off the west coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, where he filmed and shared the incredible story of coastal wolves.

Before his adventure on the Pacific coast, Bertie had honed his talents photographing urban wildlife – including peregrine falcons in the heart of London – as a Young Champion with 2020VISION, the multimedia initiative that aims to communicate the link between human wellbeing and habitat restoration.

Bertie, who is still in his early 20s, is now one of the country's foremost young professional wildlife photographers, filmmakers and presenters.

donated a further £12,000, and generous donations from Des's friends and peers flooded in.

A popular teacher at Craigroyston High School in Edinburgh, Des was a passionate believer in making the great outdoors accessible to all – and especially to young people.

His obituary in the *Scotsman* spoke warmly of how he "enthused young people through his love of the outdoors and was a caring, patient and devoted teacher".

A former president of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, Des brought his passion and expert knowledge of the mountain environment to his work in outdoor education.

Although his first love was the Scottish hills in winter, he made some 20 expeditions beyond Europe, to India, Pakistan, Peru, China and other parts of the world.

The passion of both men for remote and inspiring environments galvanised them into standing up for the protection of wild places.

It is fitting that the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant now offers others an opportunity to follow in their footsteps.

About the author
Toby Clark, John Muir Award Scotland Manager, helps run the Bill Wallace and Des Rubens Grant
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Kenya

Grant aid helped Emma Vicary join the Bee Elephant Enterprise Project, which aims to reduce conflict between farmers and elephants over crop damage in the Tsavo National Park.

Taking advantage of elephants' innate fear of bees, the team build beehive fences around small farms to deter the animals. It helps conserve the threatened elephant population, and provides income from honey production to impoverished farmers.

Emma Vicary said: "We're really proud that as well as protecting elephants we also helped one local girl to attend school and improve her future prospects.

Moving on

As Stuart Brooks steps down as Chief Executive to take up a key post with the National Trust for Scotland, he talks to **Alan McCombes** about the highlights and challenges of the past eight years

STUART BROOKS' first memory of Scotland was travelling up the A9 past Pitlochry bound for the far north west. Hailing from the flat marshlands of the Cambridgeshire Fens, the rugged mountain landscape blew him away, and would draw him back to the Highlands time and time again. But it was that week spent on a peat bog in the shadow of Foinaven that would shape the future course of his life.

Stuart had come to Scotland on a field trip as part of his geography degree at Newcastle University. "We camped out by the river and sat out on a hill every day surveying peatland. From there I taught myself the basics of peatland ecology. So I left university with a modicum of knowledge about peatlands just at a time when the habitat was getting on the nature conservation radar."

Stuart acquired his love of nature as a boy in the idyllic Georgian market town of Stamford. "Growing up on the edge of the countryside gave me access to the kind of wild places that some of us are lucky enough to discover at a young age. For me that was the River Welland, which winds its way through the water meadows of Stamford. I would walk along it, sit by it, fish in it and swim in it. These experiences gave me a love not just of the outdoors, but of the value of solitude within nature."

Before he joined the Trust, Stuart spent 15 years working for the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT), which he joined as a field officer on an EU-funded raised bog project. For two years, he researched peatland restoration across Europe. That "modicum of knowledge" he had acquired as a student in Sutherland grew and grew; in 1997, he co-authored *Conserving Bogs: The Management Handbook*, which remains to this day the definitive guide to managing and restoring peatlands.

He later moved on to become SWT's Director of Conservation, in charge of its nature reserves, policy and communications and helping develop a pioneering new vision of conservation "going beyond traditional nature conservation, which focuses on priority habitats and species, to one which looked towards a landscape-scale approach". When the opportunity came along, Stuart was keen to continue on that journey with the John Muir Trust. He was attracted by "the amazing portfolio of properties" managed by the Trust.

He was more familiar with the National Trust for Scotland, the RSPB, the Woodland Trust and other environmental NGOs, whereas the John Muir Trust "was a bit more of an unknown quantity".

But he was attracted to the Trust's honesty about the value of landscape. "As a nature conservationist, you tend to focus on wildlife. But most people go into the countryside not just to look at wildlife – they like to be in that place because of how it makes them feel." He thinks that "the general public tends to place a higher value on landscape than many nature conservationists". That emotional connection cannot be measured scientifically, but for Stuart, "the idea of a landscape aesthetic has added something to my approach as a conservationist".

Stuart confesses that when he first arrived at the Trust, he initially struggled to weld together different components of the organisation. "The Trust had this tremendous engagement initiative, the John Muir Award. It owned and managed some of the finest areas of wild land in the Highlands. It had teams of dedicated volunteers carrying out vital conservation work. And it was beginning to have a voice in the policy area.

"Hopefully the conflict between large scale industrial development and wild places will now start to diminish, and the Wild Land Areas will be seen… as a valuable asset that can benefit people and communities as well as nature"

"I wanted to connect these things – find the golden thread – so pretty early on I went through a comprehensive exercise to develop a new vision, not just for the Trust but for wild places more generally."

He involved staff, trustees and members in the shaping of a document, *Our Essential Wildness*, published in 2010, drawing together the different strands of the Trust into a cohesive vision.

It includes a map, produced by Dr Steve Carver at the University of Leeds Wildland Research Institute, delineating the top 10 per cent of the UK's wildest land, almost all of it in the Scottish Highlands. This work showed a lack of protection for wild landscapes, especially in Scotland.

Six years on, the position looks more optimistic: an area covering 20 per cent of Scotland's landmass is now officially recognised by the Scottish Government as wild land, and provided with some protection.

"The publication of the Wild Land Areas map was a major milestone. Just to have wild land acknowledged as a legitimate concern in public policy was a crucial breakthrough. And the official definition of wild land, developed by SNH and accepted by the Scottish Government, is in tune with the John Muir Trust's view."

Stuart believes that the long, hard campaign to get where we are now has been complicated by the fact that the biggest impact on wild places in recent years has come from the renewables sector in the form of large-scale wind farm development.

"The Trust's stance has brought us into conflict, but the debate is shifting and there is acceptance that development cannot come at the cost of destroying wild land of national importance. Hopefully the conflict between large-scale industrial development and wild places will now start to diminish, and the Wild Land Areas will be seen, not just as a planning constraint, but as a valuable asset that can benefit people and communities as well as nature."

Stuart emphasises that the Trust's conservation philosophy for its core wild land areas is "to work with natural processes and, where possible, allow nature to determine its own outcome".

Yet this also brings challenges, from a different direction. "We've taken a progressive view on deer management to support the wider public as well as private interests." Always an optimist, Stuart believes that change is happening for the better. "There are numerous public and an increasing number of private landowners who share our vision for more sustainable deer management."

Less contentious has been the Trust's central role in helping bring people together with wild nature. The John Muir Award now engages with 1500 organisations and is "a fabulous ambassador for the Trust".

He is proud too of the Wild Space visitor centre, which he steered to completion in 2013. It has since welcomed well over 100,000 people through its door and become a major cultural asset to the Highland Perthshire community.

Clockwise from top: opening the Wild Space visitor centre; with Chris Packham at the Spirit of John Muir event 2015; on the boat with the late Richard Fraser-Darling at Elgol; hands on at Glenlude

PHOTOGRAPHS: DAVID LINTERN AND JOHN MUIR TRUST

After eight years, Stuart believes the time is now right to move on. "Personally I've invested a lot in the development of the John Muir Trust as a business as well as a conservation body. It's been fun, tough going at times, but rewarding too.

"That reward comes from knowing you've made a difference. I'm grateful to my staff colleagues and trustees for their dedication and support over the years. I'm looking forward to joining the NTS. I've lived in Scotland half my life and I want to stay here and work to conserve its natural and cultural heritage. It has amazing places, magnificent landscapes and people whose values I share."

Stuart also intends to continue with his role as Chair of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) UK National Committee.

The final word though, comes from Trust Chair Peter Pearson. "Stuart has been a popular figurehead among both staff and trustees, not just because of his calm, measured demeanour but also because of his expertise, professionalism and strategic vision. We owe him a great debt of gratitude and wish him all the best for the future."

About the author
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The mountains are calling...

Lucy Sparks and **Coralie Hopwood** – Scotland and England John Muir Award Inclusion Managers for the John Muir Trust – report on the work of a range of organisations to get people from black and minority ethnic communities involved with wild places

"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; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life."

John Muir's words were written at the height of the industrial revolution, when record numbers of immigrants were being drawn to US cities by the promise of life-changing high wages. They still ring true in today's multicultural urbanised society.

In the 21st century, more than half the world's population live in cities – over 80 per cent of people in the USA and over 70 per cent in the UK. That – plus the demands of a 24-hour information-based society – means that the need for wild places to provide a welcome sanctuary and help us lead a healthier and more sustainable life is stronger than ever.

Not everyone, however, has the skills, confidence or motivation to head outside for pleasure, learning or sustenance.

"Mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life"

A key aim of our engagement initiative – the John Muir Award – is to make sure that circumstances are not a barrier to experiencing wild places. During 2016, over 10,000 John Muir Awards were achieved across the UK by people experiencing some form of disadvantage.

We're proud that every year since 2000 at least 25 per cent of John Muir Awards are achieved by people who are experiencing some form of disadvantage – what we refer to as "inclusion" activity. This may be a result of age, health, unemployment, literacy, economic poverty, disability – or, as the following case studies demonstrate, ethnicity.

The Grange, Norfolk

The Grange is a family-run smallholding in Norfolk that offers a place of sanctuary and learning for people who have been forced to flee from persecution.

Many have experienced trauma and are currently seeking asylum in the UK. It's a place for people to experiment with living by permaculture ethics of people care, earth care and fair shares.
The John Muir Award is offered to residential groups and to those taking part in "Workday Wednesdays." Local volunteers support participants as they engage in practical tasks, explore the 10 acres of meadows and gardens and get to know the local countryside. The group then reflect together on their achievements at the end of each day.

According to Ben Margolis, the Director of The Grange, the John Muir Award benefits participants mentally and physically by getting them out into the countryside, and by giving them a real purpose in life at a time of difficulty – a crucial part of recovery and emotional wellbeing.

"People seeking asylum in the UK are not allowed to work and find it very hard to access learning opportunities," says Ben. "Being able to gain a certificate for their efforts is a huge benefit for our residents and visitors, and something they are able to put on their CV if they do get leave to remain.

"Achieving their own John Muir Award is also a huge boost to their confidence. I'm delighted that some of our Workday Wednesday regulars, having achieved their Discovery Award, are now getting stuck in to working towards their Explorer Award."

Find out more at thegrangenorfolk.org.uk

Boots and Beards, Glasgow

This Glasgow-based organisation aims to unite and motivate like-minded BME adventurers into exploring and promoting Scotland's natural landscape with "no talent other than decent banter required". We spoke to two organisers of the group – Kashif Butt and Zain Sehgal.

When our grandparents came to Scotland, they worked hard to establish businesses because they wanted to pass something on to their kids.

Our parents' generation weren't very active – it was all work, work, work. For our generation it's more about mental work. The pressures of deadlines and dealing with people can be stressful.

Trying to find a release can be difficult. Hillwalking provided a chance to get a bunch of guys together, talk to each other about any problems, exchange advice and get away from the city.

Our routine is to set off on a Sunday morning around 7am, drive to our destination, have a hill walk and then come back to Glasgow for around 1pm, so we can spend the rest of the day with our families. Because the time is tight, we mainly go to places within striking distance of the city – for example around Loch Lomond or the Trossachs.

Women are welcome – we won't turn anyone away, but they tend not to want to come out unless it's a family event. We've held about six of these where they come with their husbands and kids. And there are plans to establish a women's group.

It's brought wider families closer together. In the past we would only meet maybe a couple of times a year on big occasions like Eid, but now get together regularly in the fresh air – and have a good laugh too.

The John Muir Award is very much in tune with what we do. So far, our members have gained eight Discovery and four Explorer Award certificates.

Find out more at bootsandbeards.co.uk

Backbone, Ross-shire

Since 1995, Backbone has provided environmental training to marginalised groups, particularly black and minority ethnic (BME) women. Founder Pammy Johal tells us more.

We work closely with Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland, our two national parks, the National Trust for Scotland, Historic Scotland, helping them design projects for communities that wouldn't normally know how to access the great outdoors.

As well as physical barriers to access, such as lack of transport, there are also psychological barriers.

The people we work with don't always have the confidence or the know-how to access the wonderful nature that Scotland has to offer. They may also struggle with language and literacy skills.

The John Muir Award is completely integrated into our learning model – it's the most accessible award that we know of. People can express what they want, how they want.

We use it to train leaders to be environmental champions back in their communities, and we expect them to start delivering their own environmental projects when they go back. We support them by giving them qualifications, skills, confidence and resources.

We address issues such as health and isolation, and we also try to inspire women to have a degree of ownership of the places we experience.

Early on, some thought they didn't really belong here, and felt as though they were being stared at.

Now we're celebrating Scotland's nature as part of our life and our landscape. There's a real togetherness.

Find out more at backbone.uk.net

Invisible barriers

Artist and poet **Alec Finlay** reflects on the limits of the right to roam – and seeks imaginative ways of discovering places that are physically inacccessible

LAST SUMMER, I met Liz Auty who manages Schiehallion for the John Muir Trust. Embarrassing as I found it, I had to explain that, due to an old muscular condition, I couldn't climb the mountain – that I had never climbed one.

We opened the map and settled on an old sheep fank as our X. My familiar summit is the lower slopes, like the fond walkers in *John Anderson, My Jo* whose hiking days are done. When the path widened enough to walk side-by-side, she told me about the months after she gave birth, when she found herself in a wheelchair. For the first time in her life she couldn't access the hills. Those months were still vivid for the frustration of feeling the hills becoming strangers.

Being confined to one square of the map I know the feeling well – worried by distance, factoring in the closeness of contours, and rehearsing what I'm due to be doing in the next few days.

Whenever I go for a walk I calculate the likely effect, based on incline and terrain. If I go to that copse, or as far as that burn… or even, could I make the waterfall? Enthusiasm often gets the better of me, but if I am being sensible then the last day of a trip is the one to walk furthest. I can rest in pain at home.

It's not that I can't go further – the temptation is always there – but what I call the lag in my legs would be disastrous. Aches pass; what causes lasting hurt is when beautiful places become tangled up with the wrong kind of suffering. Knowes, cnocs, and toms are my thing. Sometimes I refer to my anti-summitism – mountains are there to walk in and around, as Nan Shepherd said, as well as up.

ACCESS CONUNDRUM

This enforced love of knowes held true until the last two years when I had three runs up on the hill in a landrover – once with a local guide, once with a gamekeeper and once with an estate factor. It's hard to explain to a non-hiker what this access feels like – being on Cùlardoch looking across to Ben A'an, picking out the Leabaidh an Daimh Bhuidhe; taking in the relic pines of Glen Derry; or pootling around the ruins of the old lodge at Loch Builg.

But here's the conundrum: my access depended on roads built by lairds. That brings another question trailing behind it: how rare is it for people with limited walking, or with a disability, to gain access to the mountains? I know of no scheme that allows it.

Why? Is this a failure of land access campaigns, driven as they are by boots on the ground?

There's a disconnect between the new tracks pushed into the hills by estates and the Forestry Commission, and any sense of the access they could provide. The roads are for shooting, timber, or wind-farm access. Whether publicly or privately owned, most have a locked gate blocking the way. This limits boy-racers and keeps the top for 'hill pursuits'; nevertheless, I'm struck that there are very few access schemes.

There are always logistical issues. Access would need to be planned. Well-made tracks allow wheelchair use, and there could be arrangements for electric-powered buggies, or the odd horse-drawn carriage. Best of all would be a Landrover trip with a local guide. Why not?

The funicular railway up Cairn Gorm to the Ptarmigan Restaurant is an exception – it is fully accessible for wheelchair users – but I've never felt like going as it seems such an imposition on the mountain. Maybe someday.

Instead of every trip being a walk too far, with the ache that follows, I started to use maps as ways to extend my looking into viewing. Simple enough to walk a wee way, sit down, and then try and understand where you are – and perhaps compose a poem there and then, and photograph it.

Gradually I understood that place-names – especially Gaelic names – and their meanings were another way to access the landscape, closing distances imaginatively, moving the eye and thought rather than feet. I had the help of friends who spoke Gaelic, and then I began to read the likes of William J Watson, author of *The Celtic Place-names of Scotland*, ecologist and Cairngorms expert Adam Watson, place-name scholar WFH Nicolaisen, and John Murray who wrote *Reading the Gaelic Landscape*.

that must be such-and-
such a burn…
and there's the ruins
of the farm called…
and those hills are….

Rather than walking a line, reeling in distant points of interest until they grow into the detail of up-close scale, I accepted what seeing, naming, and joining places together could offer. Meaning settled into colours, textures, and stories in the faraway. It was touching to look for a name – to find the pale patch of grass, stony field, crook in the river or stand of juniper that a name had predicted would be there, like sewing a button on a shirt and making it whole again.

In the past couple of years I have devised walks, composing by way of paired names rather than real terrain – these remain imaginative routes, or, at least, eccentric ones. And I've composed poems drawing on eye-witness reports, from books, maps, flickr photos, walking and climbing websites.

For some years, my condition worsened into what I called LWI, my Long Winter Illness. Months were spent mostly in bed. The loss of lung capacity and stamina meant that May and June were a time of beginning over, when every path leading off from a car-park was an invitation that seemed blocked with gates. Physical illness takes our habitual measure of pace – which, being so familiar, is also invisible – and dissects it, irradiating the surrounding landscape with a kind of vertigo-for-legs. There is that fear: will I get home from here?

Standard measures of distance fall down. A walk of a few hundred yards might be possible, but each hundred yards less reduces the view exponentially. In the Cairngorms my beginner walks were along the gravel track by Felagie, among the pines beneath Craig Leek and, a little further along the line of the burn, by Creag na Spaine, the Spoonlike Crag, walking back down the glen towards Aberarder.

This is the heart of access: to feel a sense of belonging, to settle into a landscape, despite the strangeness that illness or limit brings. There can never be too much access, too much closing of distance, as long as it furthers care for the earth.

About the author
Alec Finlay's artistic work reflects on the interaction between culture, nature and landscape.

"Gradually I understood that place-names – especially Gaelic names – and their meanings were another way to access the landscape, closing distances imaginatively, moving the eye and thought rather than feet"

PHOTOGRAPH: HANNAH DEVEREUX

Cairngorms: Art installation at Craig Leek (left) and chilling out in Glen Ey

On the right lines

Trust Head of Policy **Helen McDade** reports on some encouraging decisions safeguarding sensitive landscapes in north west England and south west Scotland from intrusive electricity transmission lines

FOR SOME TIME, the Trust has supported local groups in the Lake District and Dumfries and Galloway campaigning to reduce the environmental impact of proposed transmission infrastructure on wild areas and much-loved landscapes. We are pleased to report that, following public consultation, both projects have been significantly altered. This, we hope, signals a promising start for a new UK regulatory and decision-making procedure that could bring increased protection for wild land.

The regulatory framework for transmission lines throughout Great Britain is overseen by the UK Government and Ofgem (the UK electricity regulatory body). Their approach has changed considerably since the decision was taken by the Scottish Government, with Ofgem support, to consent to the 220km Beauly-Denny line, which cuts through the Cairngorms National Park.

During the 11-month Public Local Inquiry over that scheme, there was 72 lines virtually no public consultation over the proposed route of the line, nor was there any serious attempt to explore alternatives such as subsea cables or undergrounding.

There have been recent changes in National Grid's remit, which includes a wider role as the Systems Operator for the whole of the UK, in addition to its existing role as Transmission Operator in England and Wales.

The new regulatory process looks much more promising, with early public engagement so far delivering better, less damaging schemes.

In the Lake District, National Grid has over several years consulted extensively around its proposal for two double 400kV transmission lines running north and south from Moorside, near Sellafield, around the Cumbrian coastline. In our response, the Trust argued that this development should not go ahead before any decision is taken to proceed with the Moorside nuclear plant.

In the meantime, based on an assumption that the transmission will go ahead, the Trust along with the Friends of the Lake District and the Lake District National Park Authority, has focused on seeking to minimise impact on the landscape and environment in and around the National Park and other designated landscapes.

The new process has allowed us to consider several options, including subsea cables; overhead cables with a Morecambe Bay tunnel; and partial undergrounding. National Grid's preferred route, after consultation, includes 23km of the line undergrounded through the National Park with a tunnel under Morecambe Bay.

Acceptance of undergrounding is a great result for both the campaigners and the regulators. We hope the same spirit of openness will lead to a re-examination of a short subsea route (called HVAC cables), avoiding overhead lines around the Duddon estuary as currently proposed.

In its new role as Systems Operator, National Grid could also provide a robust, independent overview of applications from Scottish Power and Scottish and Southern Energy.

Indeed, the spirit of this new, more cautious approach, to ensure that the grid is not "over-engineered", may have contributed to the recent decision by Scottish Power to reduce its proposed Dumfries and Galloway Strategic Reinforcement transmission scheme from 400kV to 132kV, which will substantially lessen the environmental impact.

The Trust has worked alongside Dumgal Against Pylons who have campaigned tirelessly for this result.

A further encouraging sign was the decision by SSE to put on hold, at the National Grid's request, its proposed reinforcement of the Beauly to Kintore transmission line in North East Scotland. This more rational approach can only benefit the environment. Make no mistake, though – it is unlikely that these national policy changes would have taken place without strong lobbying from the Trust and other campaigners over many years. So, thanks for everyone's support – and let's toast those successes!

About the author
Helen McDade is the Trust's head of policy and can be contacted at **helen.mcdade@johnmuirtrust.org**

alpine exploratory

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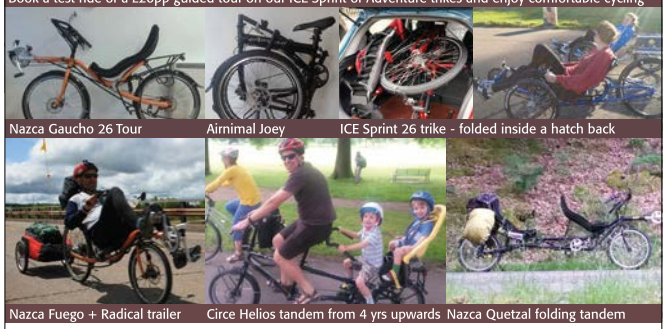

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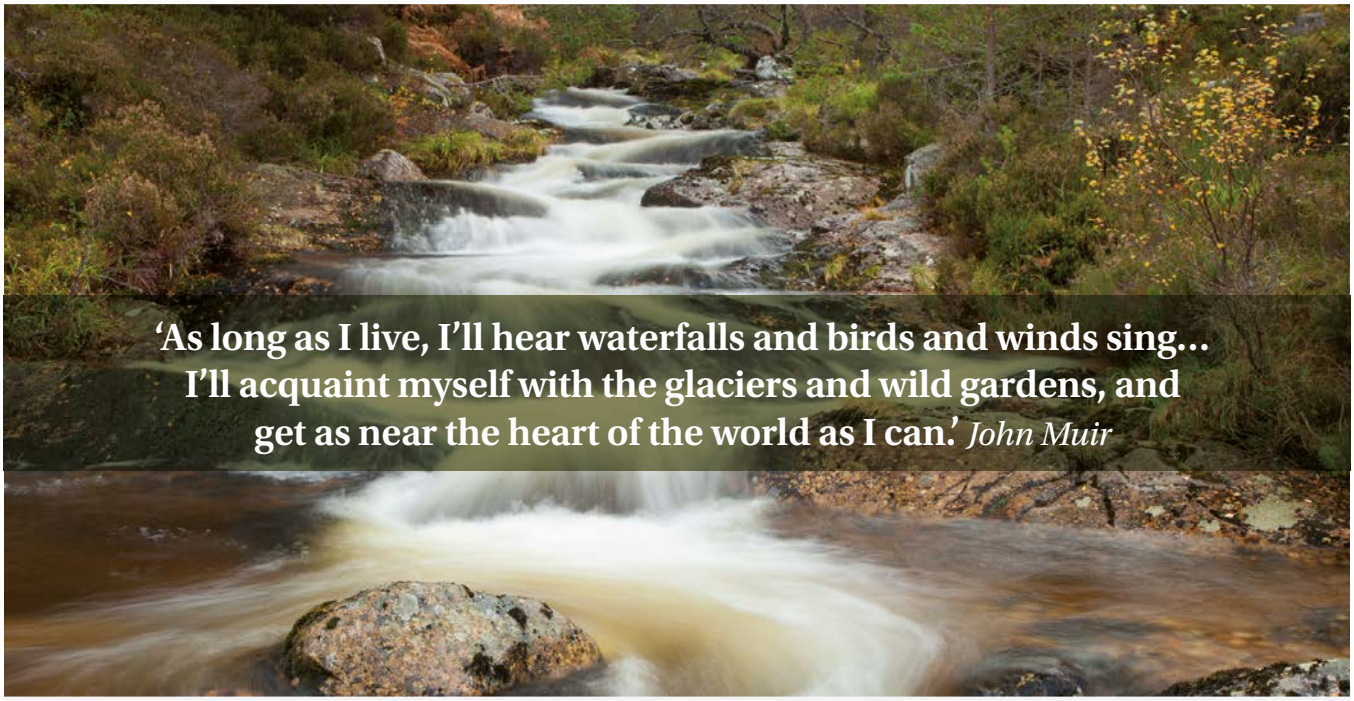

'As long as I live, I'll hear waterfalls and birds and winds sing... I'll acquaint myself with the glaciers and wild gardens, and get as near the heart of the world as I can.' *John Muir*

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JOHN MUIR TRUST

Earth, frost and fire

Planting trees, digging ditches, clearing invasive species – and just relaxing under the stars by an open fire. Here we get a flavour of what it's like to be a John Muir Trust volunteer

PHOTOGRAPH: JAMES BROWNHILL

PHOTOGRAPH: JAMES BROWNHILL

PHOTOGRAPH: DOMINIC SPRACKLEN

GLEN TANAR, CAIRNGORMS

At 10am on a blue-sky, frosty January day, 16 volunteers from the Trust's North East Group assemble at the Braeloine Visitor Centre in the Cairngorms National Park. There we get a work and safety briefing from the local rangers before heading down the Riverside Walk alongside the Water of Tanar.

Our project of the day is to cut back any vegetation that might be encroaching on this walk, and we're well equipped with a variety of saws, and a mattock – a tool that's deemed essential by our John Muir Trust leader.

The path takes us through pinewoods, over minor burns, past sheep pastures and into wonderfully natural riparian woodland through which the sun is unable to penetrate, leaving us working at times in a frosty crystal palace.

A steady work-rate is needed to keep warm, but there's plenty to do; trimming, cutting and even felling some small trees that have become a danger on the path. One or two rhododendron bushes, noted on previous conservation days, are finally cut fully back. With all the cuttings, we make habitat piles set back from the path.

Away from the work site, the ranger spots some animal dropping, which we identify as otter "scat", probably less than two hours old. We take a mid-morning break at the work location, then at lunchtime head back to the Visitor Centre where, in the centre of the outdoor meeting circle, a small fire gives out an encouraging glow as the smoke drifts lazily through the trees.

By 4.00pm, with the sun setting behind Mount Keen, the most easterly Munro, we're heading home… until next month.

James Brownhil

BEN NEVIS

It's 5.30am on a mid-January morning, and as I drive through Glencoe, I know it's going to be a brilliant weekend.

Behind me, the sun is beginning to rise, while a full moon is plainly visible ahead in the slowly brightening, deep-blue morning sky.

A blanket of snow covers the glen, making for a spectacular vista. Car loads of people stop to take photos, while others have already begun their treks, head-torches bobbing on the distant slopes.

I've volunteered for a weekend work party, planting trees on the mountain trail to the top of Ben Nevis, and building wire fence enclosures in the glen to help establish the native Scots pine.

The work will help to prevent erosion on the mountain path, provide habitat for wildlife, and start to reintroduce native trees in areas that have been grazed bare by centuries of burning, and grazing by sheep and deer.

I really enjoy volunteering with the John Muir Trust because I learn a lot from Sandy and other enthusiastic and hard-working staff.

And then there are the volunteers who are brought together through their tangible love and respect for Scotland's wild natural heritage. Everyone works hard as a team to deliver as much as they can. These are the things that make volunteering special.

And we always get a laugh! At one point we're startled by an agonised cry of "Stop!!!" as Sandy watches his roll of wire spin down the slope, as if in slow motion at first, then gathering momentum as it bounces all the way down to the bottom of the hill.

Darren Kelly

PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY OF SANDY MAXWELL

Clockwise from far left: clearing ground at Li and Coire Dhorrcail on Knoydart; communal campfire at Glen Tanar; Sandy (left) and Darren fencing at Ben Nevis; the team at Duddon Valley, in the Lakes (with Jude Spracklen second from right)

LI AND COIRE DHORRCAIL, KNOYDART

Knoydart is a long way from most places, and to get to the John Muir Trust's land on the north side of the peninsula, we have to be ferried across Loch Hourn.

I've cleverly hitched a lift with the Trust's volunteer co-ordinator, Sandy Maxwell – my logic being that the boat won't leave without him!

It's my first time volunteering with the Trust, and the remoteness of this location requires us all to wild camp on site and bring our own provisions.

The dozen or so volunteers are a friendly bunch and it's amazingly sunny weather for October.

This weekend we're clearing bracken, turf and stones to create nursery beds for pine seedlings. Once they're strong enough, they will be planted out across this landscape that was once completely covered with forest.

Gloves and tools have all been provided, and the seasoned volunteers are well prepared, with snacks of nuts and chocolate, and in some cases whole cakes. This proves essential for keeping our strength up – this is basically hard labour and the digging is almost continuous.

I manage to keep pace with everyone else in the group – but then many of the volunteers are older than me and I'm impressed by their stamina.

After our various rehydrated dinners, we all meet at the lochside to gather around the fire, drink and marvel at the number of stars in the unbelievably clear skies above us.

We know we've been preparing soil for trees that we'll never live to see fully grown – but it's nice to know that we're helping them on their way.

Neil Braidwood

DUDDON VALLEY, THE LAKE DISTRICT

Driving up the Duddon Valley from Duddon Sands on the Cumbrian coast, we are quickly immersed in a landscape of farmland, oak and birch woodlands and fell. Soon views of Dow Crag, Harter Fell and the Old Man of Coniston appear.

Rounding a bend in the road, a harsh block of conifer woodland appears. This is Hardknott Forest, a 600ha conifer plantation, planted in the 1930s after strong local opposition.

This weekend, 80 years later, we are here to work alongside the Forestry Commission to help restore the plantation into native woodland, crags, bogs and open ground.

We meet staff from the Forestry Commission at 9.30am on Saturday morning. Today's task is to remove Sitka spruce regeneration that is threatening to overcome native trees.

We work slowly across the hillside using bow saws and lopers to remove spruce saplings. Hands and arms quickly become scratched on the spiky spruce branches.

But it's rewarding work, especially when removing a spruce exposes an oak or birch sapling that was being swamped by a conifer.

Saturday evening is spent in the bunkhouse below Wallowbarrow Crag – just a five minute walk through oak woodlands to the Newfield Inn for a well-deserved dinner. On Sunday we're planting trees, and at the end of the day more than 100 oak saplings are scattered across the hillside.

It was great to play a role in helping to restore what will eventually become one of the largest semi-natural upland woodlands in England. And we'll be back in the spring and autumn of 2017.

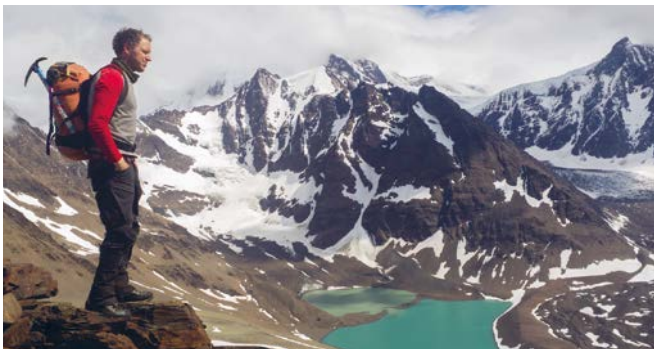
Jude Spracklen

Find out more

Interested in joining a Trust work party? For the 2017 work party schedule, see **johnmuirtrust.org/workparties2017**

Kings of the south

Highland Perthshire-based Trust member **Jamie Grant** recalls a magical experience on a subantarctic beach during his time as artist-in-residence on the remote island of South Georgia over the austral summer of 2015-2016



THE FIRST INDICATION THAT we were getting close to St Andrew's Bay on the subantarctic island of South Georgia was the noise. I heard it as we traversed the last, high pass from the other side of the peninsula and finally looked down onto a three-kilometre sweep of sandy beach, bound by tumultuous ocean. A cacophony of high-pitched voices rose to meet us, reminding me of the excited chatter in a theatre before the curtain opens on a play.

It took me a moment to register that this distant chatter was from some 200,000 king penguins in ceaseless commotion. Home to the largest colony of the species on South Georgia, St Andrew's Bay must surely be one of the great natural wonders in the world. And it isn't just the wildlife that makes this place so special.

Over 1,000 nautical miles from the Falkland Islands, South Georgia is one of the most remote locations on the planet. An outlier of the Andes, it rises majestically out of the Southern Ocean and consists largely of a 100-mile chain of mostly unscaled mountains. The only settlement is the British Antarctic Survey base in Cumberland Bay where the population typically rises to just 18 during the high season.

Before descending from our look-out across the bay, I paused to take in the colony's panoramic setting. The shattered peaks of the 2,000-metre high Mount Roots and Mount Kling drifting in and out of the cloud. The Buxton and Cook Glaciers running down the valleys, like beaten metal in the silver light. The beach with a swathe of tussock grass behind it, almost black with penguins that from our high perspective looked like a swarm of ants.

The king penguin colony was first discovered and described in 1883 by the German International Polar Year Expedition. Since then, numbers have swelled and are now thought to be higher than ever previously recorded – the population estimates vary wildly, although no-one has ever been foolhardy enough to try to count them.

By the time we made it down to the bay, it was snowing heavily and so cold the batteries were dying in my camera. Walking to the colony felt a bit like strolling through Hyde Park in London in the height of summer. There were preening penguins, courting penguins, calling penguins, penguins feeding their young. Some were moulting, others waddling out of the pounding surf. A few were so full of squid and lantern fish that they lay like abandoned bowling balls on the beach, barely able to flipper themselves upright on the sand.

Second in size only to emperors, king penguins stand almost 40 inches tall. They are inquisitive creatures: as soon as I sat down, small groups surrounded me and fixed me with intense, unblinking stares, before continuing their seemingly aimless amble along the beach. By moving slowly and sticking to the fringes of the colony, we were able to keep a low profile and minimise any disturbance that might be caused by our presence. We weren't the only uninvited guests in St Andrew's Bay. Leopard seals hunt penguins along the edge of the kelp beds and giant petrels patrol the beach for the weak and vulnerable.

To protect their young from these predators, the kings keep a juvenile crèche at the heart of their colony, packed with awkward looking teenagers covered in fine brown feathers. When the parents head back from a fishing expedition to feed their young, they find each other through their distinctive identifications calls – which explains the din of competing voices. Kings only bring up two chicks every three years, and the young take a year to fledge. This unique breeding cycle means that the colony is often courting, sitting on eggs and raising chicks at the same time.

I found the visual spectacle overwhelming, the noise deafening and the smell overpowering. I had come to take photographs, but

Left to right: from the Allardyce Mountains to St Andrew's Bay

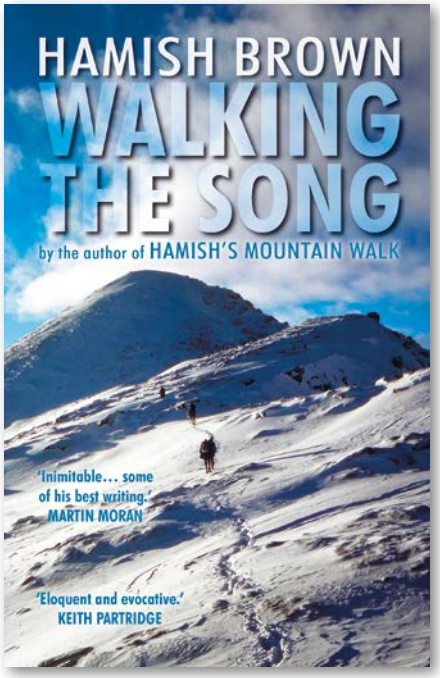
had no idea where to start because I couldn't take in anything beyond the wall of sound and colour. Eventually I realised I had to step back from the clamour, stop seeing penguins and look instead at the entire colony and its surroundings as one interdependent landscape.

I walked to higher ground and framed the beach, the river, the mountain and the colony in a single image, aiming to pull this discordant world together and make it whole again. Taking a photograph like this is an act of faith. I've never felt more present – as though my entire life had been leading up to that one, tremulous moment.

Now when I look at these photographs of St Andrew's Bay, I have to pinch myself with wonder at the fact that I was actually there, and that true wildernesses like this still exist beyond even the bounds of our imagination. May we never tame them.

"I've never felt more present – as though my entire life had been leading up to that one, tremulous moment"

About the author
Jamie Grant is a writer and photographer based in Highland Perthshire. His book *Summer in South Georgia* is available from **jamiemurraygrant.co.uk** and **aberfeldywatermill.com**
Share you own wild moments at **johnmuirtrust.org/wild-moments**



Walking the Song by Hamish Brown

Author and mountaineer **Chris Townsend** was inspired by Hamish Brown's first book published in 1974 – and is enthralled by his latest collection of essays

HAMISH BROWN has been writing about wild places, nature and outdoor activities for nigh on 50 years.

His book Hamish's *Mountain Walk* about the first continuous round of the Munros inspired me and many others. It is, in my opinion, one of the finest books ever written about the Scottish hills.

Walking the Song, his latest book, is a collection of essays, most of which first appeared in various magazines and newspapers.

The range of interests and places they reveal is astonishing for one man, with adventures throughout the world and a host of activities from climbing to canoeing to camping. Throughout these pages, Hamish's enthusiasm and optimism shine out. This is a man who enjoys life.

There is far more here than tales of climbs and walks and canoe trips, entertaining and exciting though these are. Brown has a wide range of interests, so *Walking the Song* includes history stories, nature observations, favourite books, people anecdotes, and city and country descriptions.

It's difficult to single out individual chapters – they are all worth reading – but I particularly enjoyed the tales of a murder on Goatfell in 1889, a visit to Handa Island, and a piece on his favourite books that included encounters with the writers. Many of the Scottish trips I found especially fascinating too – I had the maps out to follow some of them.

It's not all serious stuff either. There are some wonderfully funny stories. An accident with a cake stand, a dog, a cat and a hot water jug had me chuckling, as did the story of the vanishing dog on the Inaccessible Pinnacle.

The book is written in an engaging easy-to-read style. At the same time, it isn't a book to rush – there is depth here, of thought and experience. This is a wise book and many of the author's comments, which could seem just throwaway lines, are worth pondering.

Walking the Song is a book you can either read cover to cover or dip in and out of, reading pieces as you fancy.

I'll certainly be reading favourite ones again. It may be early in the year but I doubt there'll be a better or more enjoyable outdoors book in 2017.

Price £8.99
sandstonepress.com

Further info
Hamish Brown is the author of dozens of books charting his adventures in the mountains of Scotland and farther afield.

The reviewer
Chris Townsend is a trustee of the John Muir Trust – and, like Hamish, a prolific author and explorer

Others we like

***Bothy Bible*, Geoff Allan**
The Scottish Bothy Bible is the first ever complete guide to Scotland's hidden network of bothies and mountain huts.

The author spent five years researching the stories behind these once derelict huts and cottages that now offer a haven for hillwalkers in some of our most remote landscapes.

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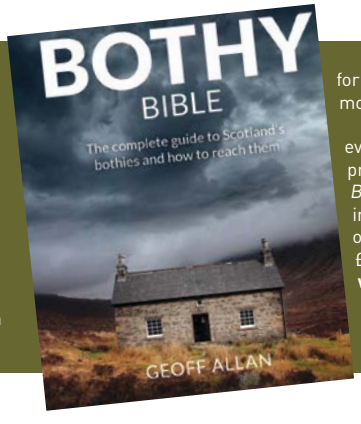

***Images from a Warming Planet*, Ashley Cooper**
A long-standing member of the Langdale and Ambleside Mountain Rescue Team, the author spent 13 years in 30 countries assembling a powerful portfolio of images from across the world showing the impact of our changing climate upon people, places and wildlife.

From flooding in Yorkshire to burnt-out forests in Australia and smog-laden cities in China, the book tells a compelling story.
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Castles in the Mist by Robin Noble

At a time when the management of Scotland's uplands is under scrutiny, **Mike Daniels** discovers an important contribution to our understanding of the shaping of the Highlands

IT'S A FAMILIAR NARRATIVE: the Victorians shaped large tracts of the Highlands, creating the land use – or, from a conservationist's point of view, land abuse – we see today.

So successful was the cultural and ecological cleansing undertaken to create the Highland estate, replete with stalkers, tweeds and abundant deer and grouse, that even today few of us can picture an alternative. But what came before it?

Robin Noble's *Castles in the Mist* offers a valuable insight into the historical context of the evolution of the current Highland landscape.

Like James Hunter's *On the Other Side of Sorrow*, it makes a compelling case that before Culloden, the Clearances and Balmoralisation, the Highlands were experiencing something of a golden age. Contrary to current received wisdom (in part perpetuated by the Victorian rewriting of history), rather than wallowing in dark squalor, many glens were brimming with people, economic activity and ecological richness.

Noble describes the process that began in the aftermath of the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion: agricultural improvement, the mass introduction of sheep, clearance of the glens, large-scale social upheaval and movement of people away from the Highlands.

Around the same time, the first tourists began to arrive: artists, writers and sportsmen lured by the romanticism of the writings of Walter Scott and James MacPherson. This in turn led to the dramatic rise of the hunting estate or deer forest – from six deer forests in 1811 to over 100 a century later, when 3.6 million acres was exclusively dedicated to deer.

Owning a sporting estate became the essential accoutrement of the wealthy and had the added value of blurring the distinction between old and new money in the "aggressive snobbery" of the 1800s. With it came the lodges – vast edifices designed, not to withstand the ravages of the Highland climate, but to impress the visitors who would come for a few months each year.

In a series of easy-to-read chapters, *Castles in the Mist* takes the reader on a gentle stroll through the geography, culture, history and ecology of the Highlands from Skye to Strathspey, from Assynt to Strathardle.

There are some fascinating sidetracks too – for example, into the Victorian sporting background of the famous author Gavin Maxwell. The conundrum of the richer environment that enabled the Victorian gamekeeper to slaughter such incredible bags of "vermin" is also explored in terms of acid rain, Icelandic volcanic eruptions and climate change.

But the overall theme of the book remains the pervasive impact of the Victorians on our landscape and the challenges this poses for conservation and community regeneration today, especially with regards to the deer problem.

As Robin Noble writes: "We have to be prepared to think long and hard, and laterally, to solve the problem caused by this highly contentious part of the Victorian legacy. The responsibilities of those who hold shooting rights need to be widened and strengthened… culling on an increased scale will be needed into the indefinite future, gamekeepers will be guaranteed jobs, and the predictable hysterical cries that it will all mean the end of the sporting estate will be absolute nonsense."

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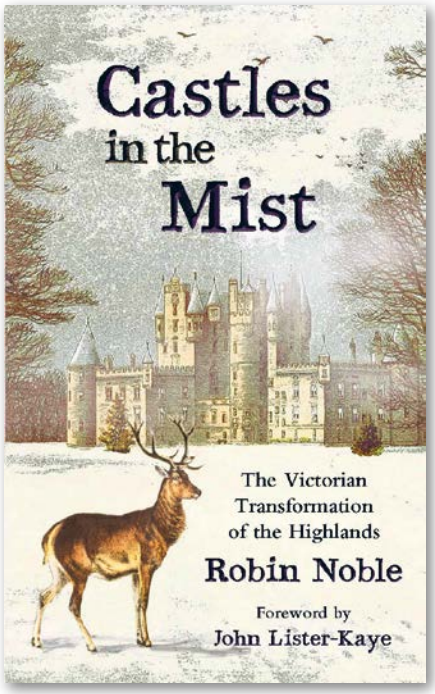

The reviewer
Mike Daniels is the head of land management for the John Muir Trust

Wild Guide to Scotland
Kimberley Grant, David Cooper and Richard Gaston

Another quality publication from the same publisher as the the Bothy Bible, the *Wild Guide to Scotland* focuses on the Highlands and Islands, wandering off off the beaten path to explore some of the lesser known parts of the region.

Illustrated by great images from a talented trio of young Glaswegian photographers, it features secret caves magical waterfalls, lost ruins, soaring cliffs, ancient forests and amazing wildlife.

Well organised into regional sections and colour-coded categories, it also contains lots of useful information about local food, traditional inns, secluded cottages, remote campsites, artisan whisky distilleries and wild swims.
£16.99
wildthingspublishing.com

PHOTOGRAPH: LEE PROCTOR/inov-8

Nicky Spinks

The record-breaking fell-runner and cancer survivor is an inspiration to those who hear her stories of hope and endurance. **Kevin Lelland** went for a run with her to find out more

How and when did you first get into fell running and why?
In 2001 I started road running in Yorkshire with a friend. By October 2002, I was training for the Great North Run and came across an advert in Runners World for the Trunce – a four mile, 500ft fell race near Barnsley. I thought it sounded exciting, so I went and reccied the route, then worked out a similar route that I could practise on from my farm. At my first fell race it was hailing and windy. There were 34 runners and I was scared. But I loved it.

You set the fastest time for a double Bob Graham round last May completing the route in the Lake District in 45 hours and 30 minutes. What motivated you to take on that challenge?
I wanted a challenge in 2016 that would celebrate my surviving 10 years since my breast cancer diagnosis, and test my physical and mental strength. I also wanted to raise money for the Odyssey charity (**odyssey.org.uk**) and give hope to other people diagnosed with cancer.

Running and hiking for that length of time is incomprehensible to most people. How did you prepare yourself mentally and physically?
I prepared mentally by breaking down the round into two distinct sections, each of which seemed doable. Physically, I prepared by doing back-to-back training days in the Lakes.

Are there hills or places you go back to because the location is special to you?
The day before my mastectomy in 2006 I ran to Rocking Stones in the Peak District with my husband. We had a picnic and I promised myself that I would return in six months at Christmas – and we did. Since then, every milestone that comes along is celebrated by a run or walk to Rocking Stones.

How do you juggle managing a farm, training and taking part in these long-distance events?
In winter, I'm able to train consistently because the cows are fairly easy to look after until they start calving in February. I can always run from the farm, and the moors are only 20 minutes away. I also have a good arrangement with my husband: he looks after the farm at weekends, and in return chooses the destination of our annual holiday – and gets a few weeks extra time while I look after the farm!

What steps do you think can be taken to strengthen the ties between conservation organisations and the farming community?
Farmers understand what environmental organisations want, but we are running businesses. A softer, less finger-pointing approach from conservationists would be appreciated – plus a little recognition that we don't harm the environment because we want to, but because we're sometimes forced by political or financial pressures, or even by the weather, to do things we'd prefer not to do. And I always find that a bit of home-made cake is a great way of smoothing things over.

What sorts of songs or thoughts get stuck in your head when you are spending long hours in the hills?
I often like to clear my head by thinking things through while running, so I avoid music. When I'm on a long challenge or race the one thought that does often stick in my head is, "What am I going to eat when I get home?"

Watch Nicky's film *Run Forever: Nicky Spinks and The Double Bob Graham* at **inov-8.com/blog/run-forvever-film-nicky-spinks**

Further info
Nicky Spinks hosted a hill run and was a keynote speaker at the Peebles Outdoor Film Festival sponsored by the Trust. She is an ambassador for all-terrain running company inov-8.

About the author
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