

JOHN MUIR TRUST

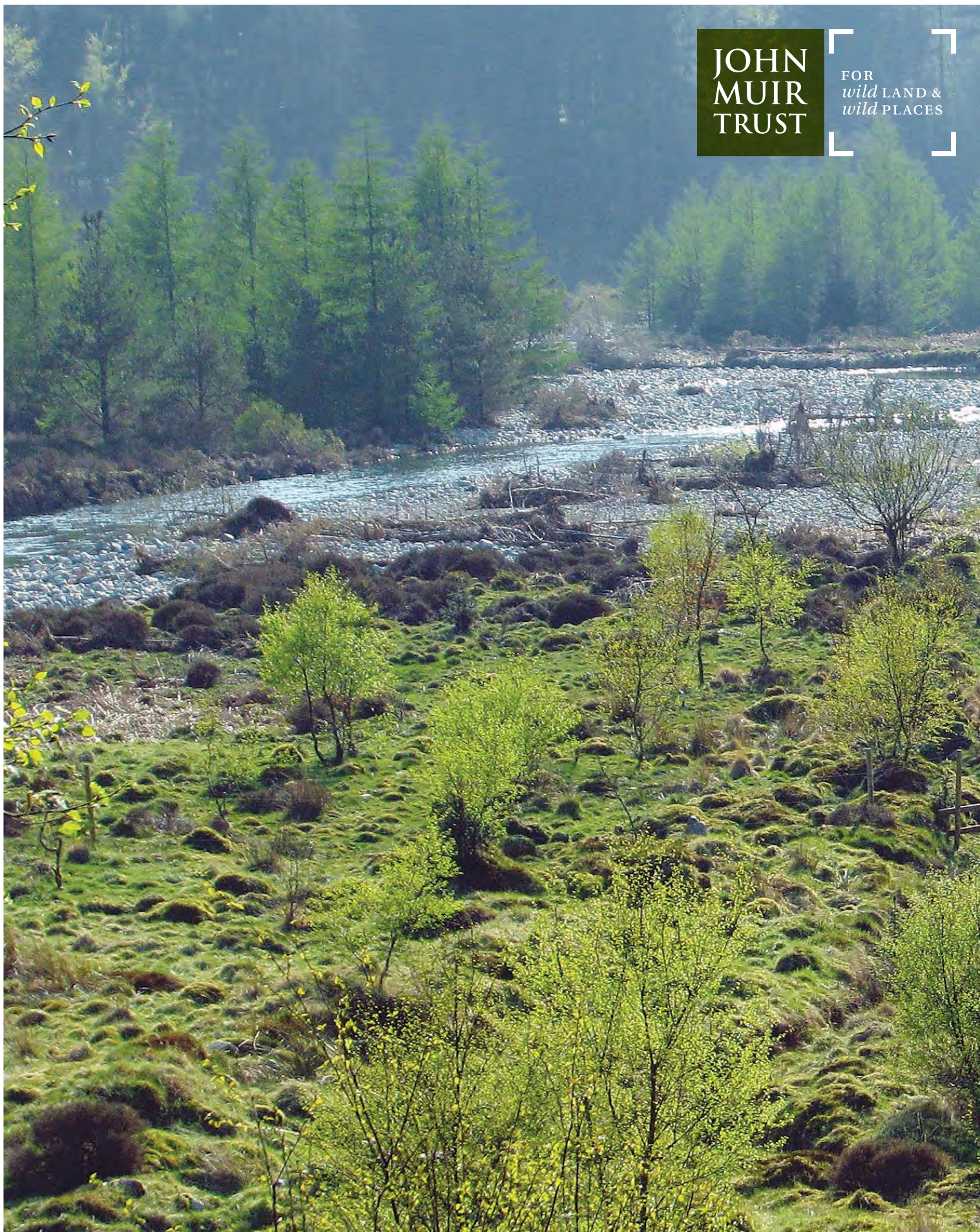
# JOURNAL

52 SPRING 12

- 10 Our position on the national energy debate
- 16 Breathing new life into Assynt and Coigach
- 26 The transformation of a Lake District valley

JOHN  
MUIR  
TRUST

FOR  
*wild* LAND &  
*wild* PLACES





## Wonder of life.

Spring is here and with it a flourish of new growth. Life that has lain dormant over winter awakens slowly. In thriving habitats, nature prospers, giving us clean air, fresh water, great beauty and endless wonder. That's why the John Muir Trust works to improve all sorts of habitats - from native woodland and peat bog to dwarf shrub heath and machair (one of the rarest habitats in Europe).

If you'd like to join us, call 0131 554 0114 or email [membership@jmt.org](mailto:membership@jmt.org)

**REGULARS**

- 04** Foreword from the Chief Executive
- 06** News round-up
- 19** Testimonial  
Wilderness Scotland – inspiring adventures in the wild places of Scotland
- 32** Classic texts  
Walden: or Life in the Woods, Henry David Thoreau
- 33** Book reviews  
The Great Wood, Jim Crumley; There are Other Rivers (Mappazine edition), Alastair Humphreys; Skimming Stones and other ways of being in the wild, Rob Cowen and Leo Critchley
- 34** Properties and their wildlife: Ring ouzel at Quinag

**FEATURES**

- 10** Any way the wind blows  
A Q&A with head of policy Helen McDade which sets out the Trust's position on the energy debate
- 14** Setting the tone  
The Trust manages the land it owns according to a clear set of standards that can now be viewed by everyone, thanks to a new website
- 16** Bringing life to the landscape  
A look at the Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape Project – an ambitious conservation initiative in a particularly rugged corner of the Highlands
- 20** Ring of fire  
An important part of Scotland's outdoor heritage, the Craiggallian fire was a beacon of hope for many young Glaswegians during the 1920s and 1930s
- 24** Against all odds  
A profile of a remarkable woman who has refused to let disability prevent her from experiencing all that the outdoors has to offer
- 26** Wild Ennerdale  
Personal reflections on a Lake District valley that is home to one of the longest running wild land restoration projects in the UK
- 28** Paving the way  
An experience of a lifetime for one Trust volunteer who went to southern Chile to help in the creation of the future Patagonia National Park

**JOURNAL 52, SPRING 12**

Editor: Richard Rowe

EMAIL: [journal@jmt.org](mailto:journal@jmt.org)

Managing editor: Susan Wright

EMAIL: [susan.wright@jmt.org](mailto:susan.wright@jmt.org)

Design and production: Various Creative

EMAIL: [ask@various.uk.com](mailto:ask@various.uk.com)

This Journal is printed on Revive 100 Uncoated stock, a recycled grade paper containing 100% post-consumer waste and manufactured at a mill accredited with ISO 14001 environmental management standard. The pulp used in this product is bleached using an Elemental Chlorine Free (ECF) process. We use a Scottish printer, Thomson Colour, who have excellent environmental credentials, achieving environmental standard ISO 4001 in 2006 and the FSC and PEFC standards in 2006.

If you would rather receive your publications from the John Muir Trust electronically, please email [membership@jmt.org](mailto:membership@jmt.org)

The John Muir Trust is a Scottish charitable company limited by guarantee. Registered office: Tower House, Station Road, Pitlochry PH16 5AN  
Charity No. SC002061  
Company No. SC081620

**PITLOCHRY OFFICE**

John Muir Trust

Tower House, Station Road,

Pitlochry PH16 5AN

TELEPHONE: 01796 470 080

FAX: 01796 473 514

**LEITH OFFICE**

John Muir Trust

41 Commercial Street,

Edinburgh EH6 6JD

TELEPHONE: 0131 554 0114

FAX: 0131 555 2112

[www.jmt.org](http://www.jmt.org)

[info@jmt.org](mailto:info@jmt.org)

**Cover photography**

Spring sees the Ennerdale valley turn a vibrant green

© GARETH BROWNING, FORESTRY COMMISSION

**Inside front cover photography**

A tormentil blooms in Assynt

© KEITH BRAME



PHOTOGRAPH: KETH BRAME

# From the Chief Executive

Wild places have the capacity to generate powerful and emotive stories – something that **Stuart Brooks** celebrates in introducing our latest issue



Welcome to the Spring 2012 edition of our Journal. If this is the first time you've picked up a John Muir Trust publication, perhaps as a new member or a casual acquaintance, I hope it conveys the passion we have for wild places and inspires you to take some action. That might be to spend some time in a wild place, support one of our campaigns or join us as a member.

This edition is all about telling stories. On one level, the Trust's objectives are very singular – we exist to conserve wild places. However, in order to do that we engage in a range of activities and there's a story to tell about each and every one of them – whether it's the work we do on the land to enhance its qualities and wildlife, or in helping many thousands of people each year to experience wild places through the John Muir Award and work parties on our properties. This edition of the Journal attempts to pick out just a few of these stories.

Of course, one of our big stories is the continuing campaign for better statutory protection of the UK's best wild land. You can't pick up a daily newspaper these days without an article or a letter about wind farms and the country's energy future. Over the last three years, we've been increasingly active in this debate and have tried to highlight the issues because large-scale wind developments are threatening to impact greatly on our wild land areas. Inevitably, we've been drawn into some of the more technical arguments. I hope the discussion-led piece with Helen McDade, our head of policy, will help clarify the Trust's thinking around what is a complex issue (see p10).

Whenever I attend a John Muir Award event, or hear participants speak of their experiences, I am always struck by the many and varied ways the outdoors can have a positive impact on people. It's these individual stories that help bring to life the benefits of conserving wild places – and it is here that the value of storytelling comes into its own. We're privileged in this issue to hear a very personal story from Julie McElroy (p24) that highlights not only the power of wild places to inspire and challenge, but also the immense personal courage she has demonstrated in meeting those challenges.

Sometimes we find a story outside the Trust that resonates strongly with our values. Last year, we were made aware of an idea to build a small memorial to celebrate the workers of Glasgow who gained warmth and companionship – and escape their harsh urban surroundings – by the 'Craigallian fire' just off what is now the West Highland Way. By telling their story in this Journal (p20), I hope that in some small way we're able to keep the memory of the flame alive. I hope you'll agree it's a wonderful story and part of our mountain culture that is well worth supporting.

Elsewhere in this issue we learn about progress with the Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape Project (p16) and hear from our very own Sarah Lewis, conservation officer at Nevis, about her tales from a recent trip to Patagonia (p28). Enjoy our stories and, of course, the wonderful pictures that form the backdrop to our words.

**Stuart Brooks**  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
JOHN MUIR TRUST

---

Taking it in (left to right, from opposite): on the summit of Ben Dorain looking towards Ben More and Stob Binnean, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park; Willie and Iain Grieve from the Friends of the Craigallian Fire by the original fire site; schoolchildren planting saplings near Lochinver, Assynt



PHOTOGRAPH: WILLIE GRIEVE



PHOTOGRAPH: NIALL BENWIE/2020VISION

### TRUST EFFORTS TO ACQUIRE TALLA AND GAMESHOPE

Some members and Journal readers may have noticed a flurry of media activity in March around the Trust's possible purchase of wild land in the Borders. A last minute opportunity arose to bid for Talla and Gameshope, a rugged estate of 2,150 hectares (5,300 acres) in the southern uplands, which includes the magnificent valley of the Gameshope Burn and an extensive high plateau with 12 peaks over 600 metres (2,000ft).

Bordering the Carrifran Wildwood to the south and the Tweedsmuir SSSI to the north, the estate offered a tremendous opportunity for major landscape-scale conservation, with potential for restoring habitats and encouraging rare mountain plants and wildlife such as golden eagle and black grouse. Trustees considered this a once-in-a-generation opportunity and agreed to make a bid in partnership with the Borders Forest Trust.

The wild Talla and Gameshope estate in the Scottish Borders



Thanks to the fantastic generosity of supporters and benefactors, the bid was made in March following a last-minute public appeal for pledges towards the purchase price of the estate. The story was covered in a range of media including the Scotland on Sunday newspaper and BBC Reporting Scotland.

"This was an opportunity to do something special with a beautiful and unique piece of Borders land, but unfortunately it wasn't to be," said Stuart Brooks, Trust chief executive. "Staff and trustees, along with colleagues at the Borders Forest Trust, worked so hard and we are incredibly disappointed not to have realised our vision for the estate.

"We understand there was a lot of interest and although we managed to gather enough resources to put in a very credible bid we understand we were just pipped at the post. We'd like to thank everyone who gave such a great show of support. We continue to keep an eye out for special areas of wild land that could potentially come under our care."

### LAUNCH OF JOHN MUIR AWARD CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE GUIDE

Michael Russell, MSP, the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, has helped to launch a new resource for teachers produced by the John Muir Award team. The resource, a four-page guide complete with visual mind map, explains how the John Muir Award can contribute to the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence to meet a range of educational needs.

The minister launched the guide at Lochgilphead High School with the aid of S2 pupils who have already achieved their John Muir awards, helping to present their Award certificates and listening to a presentation as they shared their experiences doing a variety of conservation activities.

"Outdoor learning has an important role in delivering the Curriculum for Excellence," said Russell. "This resource demonstrates that the John Muir Award supports learning outside the classroom and helps to meet many educational needs and themes across learning. I'm delighted to be able to launch it here at Lochgilphead High School.

"I hope it will encourage more schools to give every pupil the opportunity to appreciate and do something positive for wild places."

"The John Muir Award has a simple structure so it's incredibly flexible. This means it can be used to fit in with subjects across the Curriculum for Excellence," said Rebecca Logsdon, John Muir Award Scotland education manager. "This allows it to be delivered in a range of ways from school grounds projects, to local community partnerships and residential programmes. Pupils also have their achievements acknowledged by gaining a nationally recognised certificate."

For more information, contact Rebecca Logsdon at [rebecca.logsdon@jmt.org](mailto:rebecca.logsdon@jmt.org) or download a PDF of the Curriculum for Excellence John Muir Award guide at [www.johnmuiraward.org](http://www.johnmuiraward.org)

Michael Russell, MSP, at Lochgilphead High School with John Muir Award Manager Rob Bushby, Scotland Education Manager Rebecca Logsdon, and a group of S2 pupils who recently received their Awards



PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MACTAVIS

### ▮ MANY HANDS MAKE BIG IMPACT

The John Muir Award conserve audit continues to demonstrate the tremendous impact of award activities across the UK. Throughout 2011, John Muir Award groups were asked to capture and quantify what they did to meet the Conserve Challenge – a key part of the Award – and what differences they made to wild places in the process.

The 749 responses received represent the activities of 18,777 participants – 81 per cent of the total participants and 62 per cent of groups involved overall. Their activities account for an impressive 138,531 hours of dedicated conservation volunteering – that's more than seven hours for each individual.

Here are some of the key findings, which will be produced as a report later in the year:

- 2,464 homes created for great crested newts, barn owls, stag beetles, slow worms, bumble bees, frogs, otters, ants, birds, red squirrels and many other species
- 32,000 metres of footpaths maintained and created (equivalent to more than four tourist paths up Ben Nevis)
- Campaigns included Beach Watch, Rights of Way and Earth Hour; national surveys included water voles, butterflies, bugs, seaweed, Open Air Laboratories (OPAL)
- 18,967 trees of native species planted. An area the size of 100 football pitches was cleared of invasive species, including rhododendron, Himalayan balsam, ground elder, snowberry and sea buckthorn
- 74,711m<sup>2</sup> of meadow created, raked, seeded or mowed
- 82,451 bin bags of litter cleared
- Woodlands were the preferred activity location, with double the number of visits to tree-filled areas than to other sites

Thanks to everyone who contributed to this impressive collaborative reporting effort. A summary report is available at [www.johnmuiraward.org](http://www.johnmuiraward.org)

### ▮ SNH WORK ADDS MOMENTUM TO WILD LAND CAMPAIGN

Progress towards improved protection for wild land might be a step nearer with the publication, in early February, of new work to map Scotland's wild land.

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has completed the first phase of a project to map relative levels of wildness for the whole of Scotland. Completion of the mapping is something that the Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions Committee has been keen to see in the context of the Trust's petition calling for a new designation to protect Scotland's best wild land, and will help to inform ongoing discussions about whether there is a need for legislative or policy change.

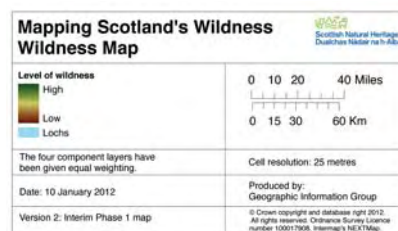
This is also the first time in Europe that a national wildness map has been produced at this level of detail, something which could potentially be replicated for other areas and which the Trust hopes could extend the debate about the importance of wild land elsewhere in the UK.

SNH has followed a very similar approach to the Trust's earlier wildness mapping work and assesses the level at which four physical attributes are present: the perceived naturalness of land cover; ruggedness of terrain; remoteness from public roads or ferries; and absence of modern artefacts (buildings, roads, pylons etc).

Whilst SNH and the Trust might differ on the fine detail, the Trust is hopeful that consensus might be reached on where our core wild land areas are.

A second phase of the work will examine the options for identifying wild land areas which are considered of particular importance from a national perspective because of their quality and extent. At the time of writing, SNH was intending to present the results of this work in spring 2012. Public opinion is also being used to inform Phase II of the work, through the results of a recent SNH survey to better understand what the public understand by wildness in Scotland. Some Trust members were invited to contribute their thoughts and the Trust is looking forward to seeing what conclusions SNH draw from this.

More work and further guidance for planning authorities will obviously be necessary to ensure that the information contained in the maps is applied in a consistent manner across Scotland when informing planning and land use



decisions. However, the Trust is delighted that the SNH work largely reinforces its earlier findings in identifying Scotland's wild land. It is hoped that the SNH work will not only support the Scottish Government's existing policy of safeguarding the natural environment but also provide evidence – through being able to show where current statutory protection is lacking – in support of the Trust's call for a new designation for wild land in Scotland.

Meantime, through the Wild Land Campaign, the Trust is developing its proposals for how better protection might operate in practice, as well as continuing efforts to show how national energy strategy needs to change in order to prevent inappropriate development in wild land. The presentation later this year of the Trust's petition to the UK government will be an opportunity to increase awareness of these issues throughout the UK, and also support the work being done by other organisations to secure better protection for key landscapes outside Scotland.

Make sure you are signed up to receive regular e-newsletters so that we can keep you up to date with latest campaign news and actions. [www.jmt.org](http://www.jmt.org)

→ <http://tinyurl.com/6mhkw9o>



**Above right:** SNH's interim phase one map showing areas of relative wildness in Scotland

**Left:** Pupils from Cockburnspath Primary School in the Borders cut back vegetation and cleared litter from local woodlands for their John Muir Award



PHOTOGRAPH: YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Rae Lonsdale with his MBE

#### ▮ MBE FOR AWARD STALWART

Rae Lonsdale, a champion for the John Muir Award in the Yorkshire Dales, was awarded an MBE in February for his voluntary service in North Yorkshire. Rae has been a long-standing volunteer with a number of organisations including the Cave Rescue Organisation and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. He has also raised the profile of the John Muir Trust and its Award and has been instrumental in running the Award with the Yorkshire Dales National Park (YDNP) Authority's Ranger Service in conjunction with local schools.

Rae, who lives in Settle, said: "There has been the good-natured leg-pulling and curtsying from some of my more comical acquaintances, but also the congratulations from many people, to say nothing of the anticipation and reality of the visit to Buckingham Palace. When Her Majesty said 'You seem to have done a lot', I just said that I hadn't done anything I hadn't enjoyed."

"I want to use my active retirement to encourage and enable young people – whether local or from farther away – to appreciate what's special about the Dales, then to get stuck in and enjoy caring for them. Everyone should have the opportunity and the John Muir Award offers that opportunity."

John Muir Award manager Rob Bushby congratulated Rae, saying: "We've really valued Rae's enthusiastic support. Combining volunteering, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, John Muir Award and YDNP activity has been a fantastic example of partnership working in action. Long may it continue!"



PHOTOGRAPH: RORY SYME

Inverloch Primary School pupil Daniel Parfitt receives his certificate from John Hutchison, chairman of the John Muir Trust

#### ▮ LOCHABER SCHOOL CHILDREN GO WILD FOR POETRY

Young bards from Lochaber were rewarded for their efforts at the Fort William Mountain Festival in February. Nearly 400 primary school children from schools across the district took part in the Trust's Wild Poetry Competition, submitting poems in English and Gaelic which reflected local wildlife and landscapes. The best entries were put on display at the Mountain Festival and the winning children were invited to a presentation at the Nevis Centre.

Daniel Parfitt, a primary one pupil at Inverloch Primary School, won first prize in the English Primary 1-4 category for his poem titled *Nevis Range*. "I like Nevis Range because you can go skiing and biking there," he said. "I really like going downhill fast!"

John Hutchison, chairman of the John Muir Trust, presented the children with their certificates. "This is a super competition," he commented. "As ever there was a very high standard of entries with good descriptive writing. A love of local wild places really comes through in the poems."

The winning poems are published at [www.jmt.org/wild-writing2012.asp](http://www.jmt.org/wild-writing2012.asp)

#### ▮ OUTDOOR EDUCATION BOOST FOR GAELIC LEARNERS

The John Muir Trust has secured funding from Bòrd na Gàidhlig to create and pilot Gaelic John Muir Award resources, so increasing the opportunity for Gaelic learners to connect with, enjoy and care for wild places through a recognised environmental award scheme.

The funding has enabled the Trust to support a Gaelic pilot programme in partnership with Comunn na Gàidhlig – a social enterprise working across Scotland – that targets young people from Islay, Lochaber, Inverness and Skye. All are areas where there is a strong focus on supporting young people to enhance their Gaelic language skills and participate in activities. However, the new resources will be freely available for anyone across Scotland wishing to participate in the John Muir Award through the medium of Gaelic.

In addition, the Trust has gained funding to increase awareness and understanding of the importance of the Gaelic language and its relevance to the Scottish landscape and wild places across its staff team and partner organisations through a specific Gaelic awareness training day.

The chairman of the John Muir Trust, John Hutchison, said: "As custodians of important parts of the wild land of Scotland, we are aware of the legacy of our indigenous Gaelic language in place-names and the natural environment. We will play our part in using these wherever possible, and welcome the support of Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Comunn na Gàidhlig."

#### ▮ AGM & MEMBERS' GATHERING

Don't forget that from 4-6 May we'll be heading to Ardlui by Loch Lomond for a busy weekend of meetings and events. We've added a members' social on Friday night to give people more time to chat with staff and trustees and to mingle with other members. If you have been planning to attend this year's event and have not yet booked, please visit [www.jmt.org/gathering2012.asp](http://www.jmt.org/gathering2012.asp) or call Maggie on 0131 554 0114 to check what spaces are available for the Members' Gathering. The AGM is open to all members, but please do book so that we know to expect you.



### UNDERSTANDING LANDSCAPES

In what is being heralded as a first-of-its-kind project, the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) has produced a series of maps and guidance that are designed to help retain and enhance those landscape qualities within the park that are 'good for the soul and the economy', while also making landscape information much more accessible to interested parties.

The maps highlight the constant process of change in a landscape influenced by both natural processes and human land use. With advancing technology, an increasing population and changing expectations, the pressure on our landscapes gets greater by the decade. The online resource uses Google maps to show what the character of an area is and where the landscape is sensitive.

"Today's landscapes are very different from those of our grandparents," said Frances Thin, CNPA landscape officer, who is behind the project. "Very recently, the gales have brought down trees and heavy rain has caused landslides and rivers to swell, erode banks and flood the straths; all this reminds us that landscape change is constant.

"We must strive to keep the different character qualities from glen to glen and town to town [in the National Park]. These differences are greatly valued by people. We hope that this easy-to-access information will be used by them to inform their work and studies and help keep our National Park special."

Initial information and maps are now available, while in time it will be possible for photographs to be uploaded to help illustrate local landscape qualities. The CNPA would welcome any feedback. [www.cairngorms.co.uk](http://www.cairngorms.co.uk)

### EXPLORE THE GREAT GLEN

The Olympic's Discover Explore initiative has been working with the John Muir Award team, Historic Scotland, the National Trust for Scotland and the Abriachan Forest Trust to develop a range of exciting family-friendly missions to encourage exploration of the Great Glen, which lies between Fort William and Inverness.

It's a web-based game designed to help children discover many of the extraordinary places and stories that relate to the area and is the third major commission from Discovering Places – the Cultural Olympiad campaign to inspire communities across the UK to discover their local environment.

Budding young explorers need to create an account on the Discover Explore website to locate the missions, which focus on several key locations along the Great Glen, including Glen Nevis. They can then follow these missions outdoors in the glen with their families and earn rewards in the form of badges by correctly answering questions online about their adventures. Find out more at [www.discoverexplore.co.uk](http://www.discoverexplore.co.uk)

The high Cairngorm plateau – just one of many valuable landscapes in the National Park



PHOTOGRAPH: JAMIE HAGLEY

Dawn on the Amazon

### SEEKING ADVENTURE IN WILD PLACES

In 2011, Jamie Hagley and Jenny Newall joined expeditions to the Amazon and Arctic Svalbard respectively following receipt of funding through the Bill Wallace Grant – a scheme that supports people seeking life-changing experiences for the benefit of themselves and wild places. The grant takes its name from Bill Wallace who played an important role in the development of the John Muir Trust.

Looking ahead, the 2012 application process has highlighted a fantastic mix of inspiring, adventurous and challenging expeditions from independent explorers who have demonstrated a clear need for grant assistance. The successful projects supported by the grant this year include a trainee instructor developing mountaineering skills in Norway; a disadvantaged young person researching coral reefs in Borneo; and the first circumnavigation of the entire South American continent by bike.

### MAUREEN WALLACE

In related news, the Trust is sad to report the recent death of Maureen Wallace, a long-serving and enthusiastic supporter of the Trust both in her own right and together with her late husband. Latterly, Maureen was volunteering on the group overseeing the Bill Wallace Grant.

Maureen had battled bravely against cancer for more than a year but passed away on 13 January. Rather than flowers, Maureen's family asked mourners to make a donation to the Trust for the Bill Wallace Grant.

→ [www.jmt.org/bill-wallace-grant.asp](http://www.jmt.org/bill-wallace-grant.asp)



PHOTOGRAPH: BJ KINNAIRD

# Any way the wind blows

In recent years, the John Muir Trust has increasingly been engaged with the national debate on energy policy and wind turbine developments. The Journal asks head of policy, **Helen McDade**, if this represents a change of purpose by the Trust

**Journal:** Helen, why has the Trust got involved with the issue of wind power?

**Helen McDade:** A study by Leeds University's Wild Land Research Institute in 2009, commissioned by the Trust, found that most of the top 10 per cent of wild land in the UK is in Scotland and is of international importance. However, Scottish Natural Heritage recently produced figures that showed that in 2002, 41 per cent of Scotland was unaffected by visual impact from built development, while in 2009 that figure had dropped to 28 per cent.

In seven years Scotland has lost one third of landscape free from visual impact. This will come as no surprise to anyone who regularly visits Scotland's remote areas. The current greatest threat to wild land in the UK is inappropriately sited wind developments. That is why, as the UK's leading wild land conservation charity, we are campaigning on energy policy.

**No-one would deny that some energy infrastructure developments will intrude on the scenery of wild areas, but if we are serious about reducing carbon emissions – and as a conservation organisation we should be – then surely we have to accept the need for renewables? Losing some scenery might be the price we have to pay to prevent catastrophic global warming.**

The Trust would not oppose development proposals in wild land areas if it could be shown that a particular proposal was necessary for the national or global good and that it could be robustly demonstrated that a particular scheme was the most cost-effective, least-environmentally damaging method of achieving the critical aims. Unfortunately, it sometimes seems as if current UK and devolved energy policies, and related planning decisions, are taken out of blind faith rather than looking at the facts.

A key part of the Trust's UK work is explaining why an urgent re-assessment of energy policy is needed. We're calling on the UK and devolved governments to develop a national sustainable energy strategy that places energy conservation at its heart and maps out how to achieve a secure, low carbon energy supply that

doesn't destroy valuable and irreplaceable wild land, is paid and accounted for through the tax system, and actually delivers what it promises.

**So what are the key issues?**

Where do I start? Large-scale wind generation is currently the major issue for wild land encroachment and also currently receives the lion's share of the renewable subsidies available.

Therefore, we need to know:

- What were we told the expansion of wind developments would deliver?
- What do they need to deliver for both climate emissions targets and energy needs?
- What are they actually delivering?

When I first started researching this topic in 2005, many people were saying that Scotland was doing this as an exemplar for the world so that we could demonstrate to key developing countries, such as China and India, that the technology worked and that the developed countries were committed to using it. The hope was that the developing countries would then adopt the new technologies – essential if a significant contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions was to be achieved.

However, the costs associated with this relatively mature technology are not reducing much and are greater than those for fossil fuel energy. Indeed, as we shift to increasing dependence on offshore wind generation, the costs of Renewable Obligations Certificate (ROC) subsidy per MW output in the UK will more than double.

The major developing countries, far from adopting our heavily subsidised technology, are focusing on fossil fuels. The number of coal-fired power stations in China has multiplied enormously in recent years: the electricity generating capacity rose from just over 10 gigawatts in 2002 to over 80GW in 2006. If the aim is to spend public money on potentially game-changing technology for export so that the large developing countries adopt it, then that technology must be economic and efficient in those countries. Investing in carbon capture and storage

research and development, which is aimed at reducing emissions from coal, might well be a better priority for public investment, for example.

The current ROC system of subsidy in the UK was introduced to enable new renewable technologies to move from the research stage to commercial scale. However, both the energy industry and governments say that the mature technology of wind will still require significant subsidy at least until 2037.

Another change in official thinking concerns landscape impact. When large-scale wind developments were first being proposed in 2005 it was commonly said that the public only needed to accept 10 per cent of wind applications then in the Scottish planning system to achieve the (then) renewable targets of 40 per cent. Then the official government position was that the target was not a cap and could be exceeded.

Seven years on, Scotland has a 2020 target of the equivalent of 100 per cent of our electricity consumption from renewable energy, something most observers view as 'challenging'. Evidence is sparse that all the wind development to date has significantly reduced greenhouse gas emissions or that the electricity produced is contributing sufficiently to our energy needs given the public money spent on it. A cautionary tale is Denmark, which has considerable wind development, can't use 50 per cent of it directly, has the highest electricity costs and little evidence of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

**Surely the whole issue of bringing large amounts of wind generation onto the grid for transmission to the rest of the country was debated at the Beaulieu-Denny Inquiry? The decision there went in favour of the power line with only minor mitigation. Why are we still carrying on the argument?**

At the Beaulieu-Denny Inquiry in 2007 the Trust and many others objected to the proposal for a 220km 400kV power line to be carried by giant pylons through some of the Highland's most beautiful landscapes. The remit of the inquiry did



PHOTOGRAPH BY KEITH BRAME

THE TRUST IS ALL ABOUT PROTECTING AND VALUING OUR LAST WILD AREAS. WILD LAND IS A FINITE RESOURCE THAT WE CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE

not address the issue of whether large-scale energy generation in remote areas was actually the best way of meeting the country's electricity requirements.

The Inquiry refused to consider evidence regarding the costs of getting the power to where it was needed. The industry regularly over-estimates benefits and under-estimates the costs of major projects. For example, Beaully-Denny was estimated to cost £350 million. That estimate has risen to £600 million. Now the transmission projects required to move the power south from Denny are being rolled out with price tags of billions.

**At the Beaully-Denny Inquiry and in subsequent cases the Trust has moved in to economic and technical arguments about power generation as well as environmental evidence. Are we not moving a long way from wild land conservation?**

There are two major issues here. The first is that the Trust enters these cases to win and so we need to give it our best shot. Planning policy carries a presumption for economic growth in most circumstances so for the Trust and other environmental objectors to win a decision we need to be able to make the economic and social arguments, as well as the local, national and global environmental arguments. We need to carry the day with those whose priorities may not be conservation and wild land but who are probably thinking 'regeneration of this region and cheap power to the country'.

Actually, the key economic argument, which should have been examined at the Beaully-Denny Inquiry but which

was specifically ruled out, was about the cost of getting electricity from the north of Scotland to the main UK consumers in middle England. This economic argument, if considered properly, would have protected significant wild land areas. There will be yet more landscape and nature impacts to come throughout the UK. We are seeing major transmission line projects being rolled out - through the Cambrians and the Lake District, for example - and the case for these, too, is based on 'best-case' economic arguments from the industry that may well not stand up to proper scrutiny.

**What did the Trust learn from its high-profile involvement in Beaully-Denny?**

Losing one important battle doesn't mean we should give up. What Beaully-Denny did do was lead the Trust to launch our Wild Land Campaign - to fight for better protection for our wild land through appropriate statutory designation and by contributing to a re-assessment of the UK's irrational and damaging energy policies.

**We are told that northwest Scotland is one of the best locations in Europe for siting wind turbines because of the prevailing winds. If there is a need for renewable energy, then shouldn't we be using this wind resource?**

The 'use it because it's there' argument completely fails to take account of the full economic, social and environmental costs. In this case, those costs include the massive spending on transmission, impact on tourism and permanent loss of wild and natural landscapes. There is a lot of nonsense talked about 'restoring these areas in 25 years'. There is no

The Red Hills and Loch Slappin from the summit of Blaven on Skye. The north west of Scotland is an area of unique beauty, dramatic geological features and important ecosystem services that should be protected

intention, even if it is realistically possible, of concrete bases and roads being taken out.

Moreover, the suggestion that these sites will be restored in 25 years because there won't be ongoing wind development is tacit recognition that, using current technology, commercial wind is an inefficient method of producing electricity. It's often described as an interim technology to bridge the energy gap between older conventional power stations and forthcoming more efficient renewables. Surely we would do better to spend more now on the research and development to speed up implementation of those better technologies.

The Stuart Young report, Analysis of UK Wind Power Generation November 2008 to December 2010, which the Trust supported, highlighted this inefficiency. Taking first-hand data, the report showed that windless conditions can and do occur for several days at a time in winter. It showed that at each of the four highest peak electricity demands of 2012, wind output was less than 6 per cent of nominal capacity, as opposed to the 30 per cent often claimed to be the average load factor.

→ continued



PHOTOGRAPH: KEITH BRAME



PHOTOGRAPH: KEITH BRAME

Beautiful and essential: Quinag in Assynt framed by bog flora (left); a tumbling burn in Glen Leirerag, west side of Quinag

Even the huge £800 million proposed pumped storage hydro scheme at Coire Glas, near the Great Glen Way, can only provide back-up for approximately 1800 MW capacity of wind for 50 hours in windless conditions. So the intermittency problem of having a major percentage of our electricity provided by wind is not yet solved. Currently, when setting targets for what proportion of our electricity can come from wind, no account is taken of the extra costs of back-up through conventional electricity generation when wind is not available.

Finally, of course, electricity generated in such remote locations has to be transmitted great distances, generating huge infrastructure and power loss costs which have to be met, in the long run, by consumers. However, this is not factored in to planning decisions.

**So, do we have to focus entirely on energy economics in order to win the environmental battle?**

Definitely not. The environmental costs of badly sited industrial wind developments are immense and have been largely ignored in the debate. These intrusions can seriously damage habitats and disrupt wildlife. The importance of biodiversity is increasingly understood along with the need to protect wild land habitats, yet every other week another important site is impacted.

Furthermore, most of the wild land targeted for wind developments is peatland. Peatland represents the single most important terrestrial carbon store in the UK. According to the International

Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) UK Commission of Inquiry on Peatlands, a loss of only 5 per cent of UK peatland carbon would equate to the total annual UK anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions.

Peatland plays a comparable role in temperate areas to rainforests in the tropics in countering global warming. There's international concern, quite rightly, over the loss of rainforest but in contrast there has been a cavalier approach to the destruction of peatland over the years. Surely it would be sensible to regard our peatlands as equally precious as the rainforests, particularly in energy policy, with regard to retaining damaging climate change gases? This is not considered properly in decision-making either at planning or in energy policy.

There is also a simple question to consider: do we want to lose all our open, undeveloped spaces – wild places where people can escape their urban environments and where nature can flourish – or do we want to ensure these special places survive? Obviously, the Trust is all about protecting and valuing our last wild areas. Wild land is a finite resource that we can't afford to lose.

**If Britain was to reverse its policy of promoting wind energy, would this not be out of step with international practice? Many countries are already investing heavily in wind power?**

It's useful to look at countries that have significantly invested in wind. Take Denmark, for example. It's commonly said that they produce 20 per cent of

their electricity from renewables – mainly from wind generation. What is less commonly added, is that they only use half of that directly (that is, about 10 per cent of the country's total electricity need); the rest has to be exported.

Because neighbouring countries also have good electricity production at those times when the wind resource is good, Denmark has to export that surplus wind-generated energy cheaply, typically to Norway, which can store energy using its extensive pumped-storage hydro systems. However, at other times when Denmark needs more energy than it can generate, it has to buy back the energy at a much higher cost.

Elsewhere, the Dutch government has announced a review of energy policy and has cut subsidies to offshore wind development, and Spain has recently cut the subsidy offered to new wind developments because of their financial situation. This should be a salutary economic lesson. If the UK spends significant subsidies on an inefficient system, our economy will suffer. At the moment, the money is flowing but if it's not a sustainable economic system, even before we cost the environmental impacts properly, there will be a crash.

There was a time when you wouldn't have been able to find many people speaking out about the sub-prime mortgages system because the money was flowing among those who were best placed to raise any concern. Similarly, the Trust is sometimes portrayed as outside the consensus on energy but

IT WOULD BE SENSIBLE TO REGARD OUR PEATLANDS AS EQUALLY AS PRECIOUS AS THE RAINFORESTS FOR RETAINING DAMAGING CLIMATE CHANGE GASES



PHOTOGRAPH: MICK BLUNT. PHOTO MONTAGE: STUART YOUNG

recently the evidence has been stacking up. The Trust has reached its position on an evidence-based, holistic examination which we re-visit as new evidence comes forward. It's a position based on science.

**Presumably the Trust wants to see carbon emissions cut and our dependence on fossil fuels reduced. How is it advancing this?**

The Trust's case on energy is positive and increasingly supported by similar positions of other organisations - for example, the Institute of Engineering and Shipbuilding in Scotland and the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England.

We believe the UK and devolved governments need to develop energy strategies designed to deliver three aims:

- A secure, adequate and affordable energy supply
- The required reduction in greenhouse gas production
- A commitment to protect our local and global environment as much as possible

The most effective way for public money to contribute to this is for any tax taken to support policies on energy and greenhouse gas emissions reductions to be primarily spent on energy conservation measures. These would cost somewhere in the region of one third of the cost of generating an equivalent amount of energy, regardless of whether that generation is coal, wind or nuclear.

**We continue to hear of approval being given to large-scale wind developments in unsuitable places. Do you ever feel the Trust is fighting a lost cause?**

The John Muir Trust is dedicated to protecting wild land. In all its policies, the Trust is committed to a scientific, evidence-led, holistic approach. It applies these standards equally to the management of wild land and to scrutinizing the threats that wild land faces.

In the case of large-scale wind energy development, this level of scrutiny is increasingly demonstrating that the policies of national and devolved governments have been underpinned by wishful thinking, selective evidence and fragmented and inadequate planning processes.

It's the Trust's job to fight for the right policies for wild land regardless of whether that is difficult or popular. For some time, the Trust's views appeared to be in the minority. Increasingly, others in environmental, economic and political fields are expressing similar views to ours. The fight goes on. ☐



What we stand to lose (above): a visualisation of the Muaitheabhal wind farm that's been consented for the Isle of Lewis. Over 30 turbines, taller than the London Eye, will be visible from Bheinn Mhor within the National Scenic Area; Helen McDade, the Trust's head of policy

THE TRUST'S CASE ON ENERGY IS POSITIVE AND INCREASINGLY SUPPORTED BY SIMILAR POSITIONS OF OTHER ORGANISATIONS

**Further info**

Helen McDade is head of policy at the John Muir Trust. She can be contacted at [helen.mcdade@jmt.org](mailto:helen.mcdade@jmt.org)



## Setting the tone

The Trust manages the land it owns according to a clear set of standards that can now be viewed by everyone, thanks to a new website. Susan Wright explains

Imagine the majority of our wild land supporting natural habitats and species. Imagine a diverse landscape of natural tree lines, sustainable numbers of grazing animals, rich flora and abundant wildlife. Imagine the wide open spaces, stunning views, fresh air and clean water that are so important to people's health and quality of life, being valued and protected. This is the Trust's vision of wild land management.

The Trust recently launched its new Wild Land Management Standards website and booklet (the latter can be downloaded from the former at [www.wildlandmanagement.org.uk](http://www.wildlandmanagement.org.uk)). These are the principles that guide the Trust in the management of its properties, to provide a framework for the Trust's and other land managers to work to and also to interest a wider audience. Whether you're curious about predator control, community engagement or fencing issues, the Trust's aims and objectives on all aspects of land management are clear for all to read on the website.

Although the Trust's vision for conserving land has remained relatively consistent from its early days, it has taken a lot of work to pull them together and articulate them fully. "We've been keen to develop

these standards for some time," explains Mike Daniels, the Trust's head of land and science. "They have an important role to play in achieving consistency across our properties, and in making it clear why we're doing things. They also offer clarity for our partners who can look at our standards and see what the Trust's land management is all about and how it fits in with the way they do things."

### FROM THE GROUND UP

The 28 standards start from the premise that everything depends on the geology and soil, then the biodiversity that lives on that, progressing to the impacts on the land of grazing animals, such as sheep and deer, and engaging with the people, visitors and communities that live on and visit the land in a huge variety of ways. Encompassing it all is the management plan that should enable land managers to see what they're doing and why they're doing it.

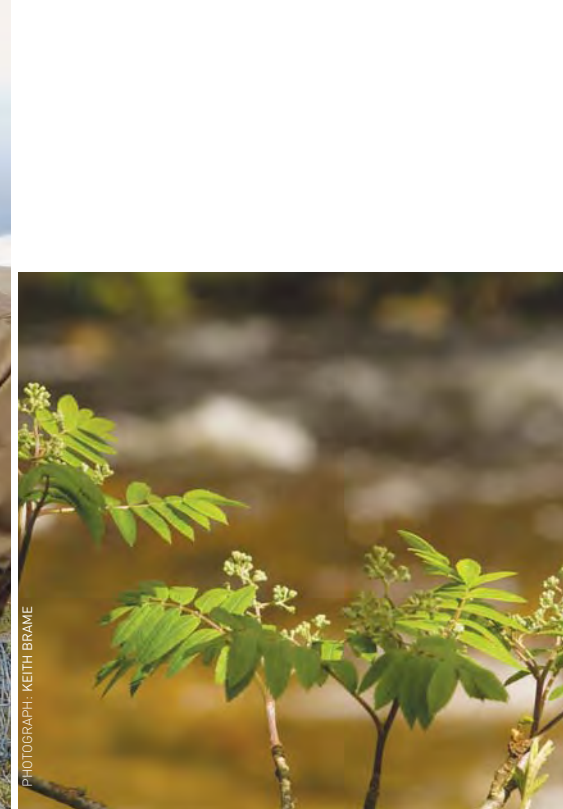
The standards have evolved over the years, shaped by the Trust's experiences managing its different properties which encompass a variety of habitats - from native woodland and peat bog to machair, moorland and commercial forestry. Some are remote, some well-trodden, some

more suppressed through over-grazing than others, but they all share wild land characteristics.

"It could be argued that wild land management is an oxymoron," notes Mike. "However, due to man's influence on the land for thousands of years, doing nothing is also a form of management. For example, without natural predators, deer populations will soar if left unmanaged. With ownership comes responsibility and responsible wild land managers need to take a proactive approach to conserving and enhancing the wild land resource.

"By definition, management activity tends to concentrate on the fringes of the wild land we own and less in the centre. The exception, of course, are footpaths that penetrate into wild land such as on Ben Nevis or Schiehallion. These require intensive management due to the hundreds of thousands of visitors that use them when they come to experience and enjoy wild land."

The standards not only provide a means of directing wild land management on the Trust's lands and partnerships, but could also be used in the future to assess wild land more generally. "If we were able to audit the condition of core wild



land across the country, using the standards, we could benchmark the state of wild land management and see whether this improves in the future,” says Mike.

#### CONSISTENT APPROACH

The standards are new and old all at the same time. Although they represent the most complete picture to date of the Trust’s approach to wild land management, the philosophies underpinning many of them have been a part of the Trust from day one.

In 1987, the John Muir Trust bought Li and Coire Dhorraicail on Knoydart with funds that included a £5,000 grant from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). In 1989, the Trust applied for more funding from WWF to cover the cost of hiring a conservation officer and begin executing its conservation plan. The five-page application form sent to WWF states two primary objectives for the Trust. These were to ‘develop a conservation strategy for Knoydart’, and to develop ‘access and recreation planning, including involvement of recreational users of the area in its conservation’. Where these aims conflicted, conservation would take precedence.

The application highlighted similar problems to those that exist today, pointing out that ‘the over-stocking of deer and consequent browsing has caused substantial destruction of the native pine and oak woods in the area’ and that ‘a recent detailed survey of the woodlands on the Trust property indicates that they are likely to disappear

completely in the next 50 years if active conservation is not pursued, and this is true also of the remaining native pine wood in Glen Barrisdale’.

The native woodland regeneration seen today in Knoydart is the result of early management ambitions but with the subsequent acquisition of more properties, and work with partners, the need to have clear management standards has grown considerably.

“The appointment of a dedicated deer officer in 2010 was a significant step forward in our wild land management because it helped bring consistency to our deer policy and actions,” says Mike. “The newly appointed footpath officer represents a step in the same direction, enabling us to take a more proactive and sustainable approach to this key element of wild land management.”

And effective, sustainable management of wild land is what it’s all about. Taking a more proactive approach within a clear framework should stand the Trust in good stead for the challenges ahead. If others can be persuaded to do the same, then that would really be a great result for wild land. □

#### CHANGING LANDSCAPES

Scotland’s landscapes have altered drastically over time, particularly in the last few centuries with the advent of extensive sheep farming, increasing deer numbers and continual burning. As a result, many of our habitats (such as montane scrub) have become virtually extinct while others (such as native woodland) have been heavily suppressed or damaged. Consequently, much of the diversity of life that relied on these habitats – the insects, birds and predators – have suffered too.

This is not irreversible. By reducing the number of grazing mouths, the woody species can start to regenerate, and with them, in time, all the insects and other animals that depend on them. It is a much slower process to restore than to destroy but nature is resilient and will usually find a way back. On Knoydart and Nevis, we are already beginning to see signs of recovery. Other areas of land in Scotland are also turning the corner, such as Creag Meagaidh and Glenfeshie.

#### THE STANDARDS

Our 28 wild land management standards fall into six categories: management planning; soil, carbon, water; biodiversity & woodland; deer & livestock; facilities & heritage; communities, visitors & awareness. You can browse all the standards and their related actions, or download them as a PDF handbook, at [www.wildlandmanagement.org.uk](http://www.wildlandmanagement.org.uk)

How it could be (clockwise from opposite top): regenerating woodland on Trust land in Knoydart; Trust staff remove a redundant fence at Schiehallion; rowan, Glen Nevis

#### About the author

Susan Wright is the Trust’s head of communications. She can be contacted at [susan.wright@jmt.org](mailto:susan.wright@jmt.org)

# Bringing life to the landscape

**Rory Syme** learns more about the Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape Project – a major conservation initiative designed to bring social and ecological benefits to a rugged corner of the Highlands

Something is stirring within the rugged landscapes of Assynt and Coigach in the northwest Highlands. In June 2011, six landowners – the John Muir Trust, Assynt Foundation, Culag Community Woodland Trust, Eisg Brachaid, Scottish Wildlife Trust and Tanera Mòr – came together to announce the beginning of one of the biggest landscape-scale conservation projects ever undertaken in the UK.

The Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape (CALL) project is nothing if not ambitious. The six partners have a long-term plan to bring woodland connectivity, species-rich flora and fauna, and economic prosperity to a rugged coastal corner of the Scottish uplands through projects that deliver both environmental and social benefits.

Covering an area of more than 70,000 hectares, the project focuses on one of the wildest and most beautiful parts of the UK. “This is a spectacularly varied landscape that ranges from the peaks of Sulven to Tanera Mòr, the largest and only inhabited island in the Summer Isles,” explains Fran Lockhart, the Trust’s property manager at Quinag and representative on the CALL steering group. “We hope over time that landowners within the Assynt-Coigach National Scenic Area will join the project and increase its reach even further.”

CALL follows a model developed by the Wildlife Trusts that has been successfully applied elsewhere in the UK. Landscape-scale conservation recognises that to ‘do’ conservation properly, a reserves model that sees resources concentrated on small, unconnected areas is simply not enough. To get it right involves spanning much larger areas and building a strong involvement from local people.

To date, more than 100 Living Landscapes are already in place, from the Ouse valley in Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire and Northern Ireland’s Belfast Hills to an innovative project that encourages London’s three million gardeners to create mini nature reserves in their back yards.

Viv Halcrow is the person charged with making things happen in Assynt and Coigach, having been appointed as CALL project officer in September 2011. She comes to the role with a background in ecology and also knows the area well having lived in the northwest Highlands for more than a decade.

Two of her main tasks involve keeping communication lines open between all six partners and the local communities, and working to secure funding to get specific projects off the ground. “The big challenge has been getting to grips with the breadth of the project,” admits Viv.

The CALL partners have a long wish-list of projects that includes forestry apprenticeships for local youngsters, events focused on local produce such as seafood and venison, and establishing orchards, berry gardens, hay meadows and new native woodland. The main focus for 2012, however, will be on developing a small number of projects that can be started quickly.

And, as Viv explains, the current CALL partners may soon see additions to their ranks. Jim Sloane, the owner of 400 hectares of land at Kylesku, is another landowner who has already expressed an interest in joining the partnership.

## PROJECTS WITHIN PROJECTS

One of the first projects to come to fruition is a tree nursery which will provide saplings for future expansion of native woodland. Located five miles outside Lochinver on Little Assynt Field – an area of land owned by the Culag Woodland Trust – the nursery will raise a variety of local native tree species, with a particular focus on the rarer ones such as witch elm, oak, bird cherry and wild cherry that can be difficult to source from elsewhere.

Because there are so few trees in Assynt it is hard to source local genetic stock in the area. The nursery will provide a ready supply of saplings to allow an expansion of native woodland. Eventually the tree nursery will support three jobs, which, as Viv points out, “is very significant in Lochinver terms”.

“A big thing about CALL is that it’s not just habitat improvement, it’s also about the human landscape,” she adds. “If we can demonstrate that good quality jobs can come from this project then that plays a big part in terms of building acceptance within the community.”

Looking further ahead, in October, the CALL project will host Deerfest, a one-day event to promote local venison – appropriately at Inchnadamph, ‘the field of the stags’. The aim is to encourage people to make more use of the venison produced locally. “A lot of the venison produced here is exported through game dealers, and conversely much of the venison you see in the supermarket comes from New Zealand,” explains Viv.

Deerfest will feature a cooking demonstration from venison specialist Nichola Fletcher, and a number of other fun events aimed at people who work with deer, as well as those just visiting the area. “One of the biggest problems is that people have tried venison once and decided it wasn’t for them because it wasn’t properly prepared,” says Viv. “We want to show people what you can do when it is cooked well.”





PHOTOGRAPH: ANDY SUMMERS

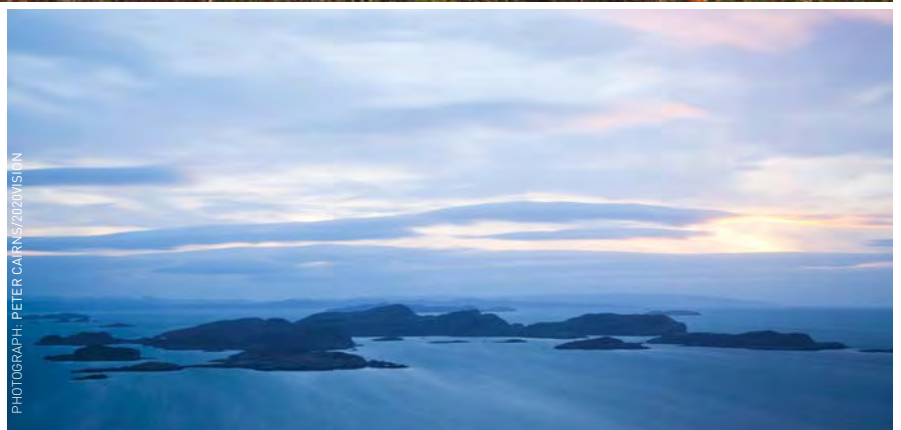


PHOTOGRAPH: IAIN ROY



PHOTOGRAPH: NIALl BENWIE/2020DIVISION

Local life (clockwise from top left): a successful stalk; views to Suilven and Quinag; tree planting with local children near Lochinver; Summer Isles panorama



PHOTOGRAPH: PETER CAIRNS/2020DIVISION



PHOTOGRAPH © ASSYNT FOUNDATION

**LOCAL BUY-IN**

So far, the reaction from the local community has been very positive, says Viv, with several public meetings held to explain all about the project. “A lot of the people who came along to the meetings had been involved in getting the Living Landscape set up and remain very enthusiastic, but many of the others had never heard of the project and were just coming along to find out more.”

And while there is still work to do in terms of getting more people involved, she feels that word is definitely getting around and the aims of the project are hitting home. “I think people are seeing that the project will make a real difference to the area.”

What is clear is that whatever its grand aims and current momentum, the success of the CALL project ultimately depends on it being sold to local people in a tangible way. That means providing social benefits – more jobs, community stability and attracting more visitors – alongside ecological ones such as wildlife corridors and habitat restoration. If this happens, there is more likelihood that additional landowners and communities will get involved and the CALL project’s reach within Assynt and Coigach will grow further. □

Taking stock: recording data during a CALL seedling survey (above left); Suilven from Canisp (above right)

▮ **AN INSPIRING PARTNERSHIP**

The Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape project is a partnership between six landowners, including the John Muir Trust, with plans to recruit more partners as it progresses.



PHOTOGRAPH © M FOXWELL

**ASSYNT FOUNDATION**

Established ahead of the community buy-out of the Glencanisp and Drumrunie Estates in June 2005, the Foundation manages land for the benefit of the community as an important part of the protection and sustainable development of Scotland’s natural environment. [www.assyntfoundation.org](http://www.assyntfoundation.org)

**CULAG COMMUNITY WOODLAND TRUST**

Formed in 1995, the Trust manages the Culag Wood under a lease from Assynt Estates and Highland Council, and owns Little Assynt Estate which it purchased in 2000. [www.culagwoods.org.uk](http://www.culagwoods.org.uk)

**EISG BRACHAID**

A privately-owned estate in the west of the project area, owned by a family based in Australia with experience in conservation management. The land is factored by CKD Galbraith and managed under an agricultural tenancy by a neighbouring landowner.

**SCOTTISH WILDLIFE TRUST**

The Scottish Wildlife Trust is a charity that owns the Ben Mor Coigach wildlife reserve. It seeks to raise public awareness of threatened habitats and species and manages more than 120 wildlife reserves around Scotland. [www.swt.org.uk](http://www.swt.org.uk)

**TANERA MÒR**

The largest and only inhabited of the Summer Isles, owned by the environmentally conscious Wilder family, who run holiday cottages, a sailing school, cafe and residential courses on the island. [www.summer-isles.com](http://www.summer-isles.com)

**About the author**

Rory Syme is the Trust’s Press and Communications Officer. He can be contacted at [rory.syme@jmt.org](mailto:rory.syme@jmt.org)

# Inspiring adventures

Gold corporate member Wilderness Scotland is renowned not just for providing memorable adventure travel experiences, but also the emphasis it places on conserving

Wilderness Scotland is an award-winning adventure travel and ecotourism company based in the heart of the Cairngorms National Park. Throughout all levels of the business, from guides to office staff, the company is extremely passionate about the outdoors and knows the wild places of Scotland better than anyone.

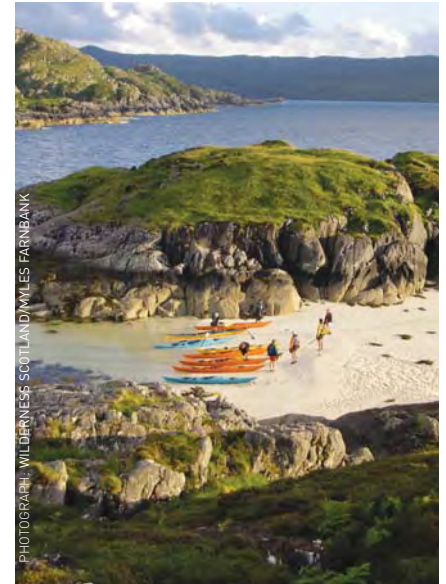
As a founding principle, Wilderness Scotland is wholly committed to supporting nature conservation efforts in the wilderness regions in which holidays are offered. The company is pleased that its Conservation Contribution Scheme provides financial support to the John Muir Trust. The scheme sees each holiday booked with Wilderness Scotland include the option of a small voluntary payment (£5/person) that contributes to an annual donation made to the John Muir Trust to support its invaluable conservation work and campaigning to protect Scotland's wild places.

In addition, Wilderness Scotland also supports the John Muir Trust with a company-funded financial donation, plus ten staff volunteering days each

year. Most recently, staff donated time in autumn 2011 when they headed to the beautiful, yet vulnerable slopes of Schiehallion in Perthshire. There, the team carried out path and trail maintenance on this popular hill – an experience that helped those involved develop a greater appreciation of the pressures that high walking traffic and erosion place on our upland landscape.

As a core value, Wilderness Scotland is completely committed to sustainability and responsibility. The company's mission is to provide inspiring and memorable adventure travel experiences of the highest calibre and which benefit the local environments and communities in which it works. Wilderness Scotland operates a 'leave no trace' policy on trips to ensure that it does not damage these fragile landscapes. Continuous research and implementation of new policies ensures that it operates to the highest environmental standards – efforts that have resulted in numerous awards that recognise an innovative approach to sustainable adventure tourism.

Set in the context of growth in the adventure tourism market and travellers who are increasingly looking to explore a connective experience with the places they visit, Wilderness Scotland is privileged to partner with the John Muir Trust.



The John Muir Trust would like to thank the Ben Nevis Distillery and all our Corporate Members and Supporters, as well as those other companies who provide support such as payroll giving schemes

## GOLD CORPORATE MEMBERS

Anatom<sup>®</sup>  
Berghaus  
Dandy Collective  
Graham Tiso Limited  
Highlander (Scotland Ltd)  
Mountain Equipment  
Wilderness Scotland

## SILVER CORPORATE MEMBERS

Ben Nevis Distillery  
HF Holidays  
Fergus MacFarlane Pharmacy  
Radical Travel Group  
The Ski and Snowboard School

## BRONZE CORPORATE MEMBERS

Alpine Exploratory  
Beyond the Glens  
Charles Taylor Woodwork  
Dewar's World of Whisky  
Edinburgh Mountain Film Festival  
Four Seasons Hotel, Loch Earn  
Kings Manor Hotel, Edinburgh  
Northshots  
RSP Consulting Engineers LLP  
The Watermill, Aberfeldy  
Walk Wild Scotland  
Webducate

## SUPPORTERS

Aspect Capital Ltd  
BP Employee Matching Fund  
Corrour Estate  
Image Scotland Ltd  
Northern Light  
Profitmaster Systems Ltd  
Serco

We value the contribution of the growing number of companies that support the Trust through membership, donations, promotional initiatives and in-kind support. If your business would like to help our business of protecting wild land and wild places, please contact Fiona Mackintosh on 01796 484 970 or email [fiona.mackintosh@jmt.org](mailto:fiona.mackintosh@jmt.org)



## Ring of fire

A potent symbol of freedom and belonging, the Craigallian fire was a beacon of hope for many young Glaswegians looking to escape the urban squalor of the early twentieth century. It also represents an important part of Scotland's outdoor heritage, discovers **Richard Rowe**



PHOTOGRAPH: IAIN GRIEVE

PHOTOGRAPH: IAIN GRIEVE

There is something very special about a campfire. It provides warmth, of course, and a means by which to cook or boil water, but the appeal goes far deeper. There is something welcoming, nurturing and deeply primal about a campfire, and the ritual of gathering around it. It's a place to share stories at the end of a long day, or just to sit and listen or reflect while watching the flames lick and climb into the night sky.

And there can be no more powerful example of how a simple campfire can bind people together – and stand for something – than one that was said to have first been lit in the 1920s and whose flames barely went out for much of the next decade. Situated on the west side of Craiggallian Loch on the Carbeth Estate north of Milngavie, just off what is now the West Highland Way, the Craiggallian fire became a meeting place for an assortment of young walkers, climbers, adventurers and wanderers. Most came to sit and talk for a while. Others would sleep by the fire before taking off again at first light to continue a life on 'the road'.

#### SOCIAL UPHEAVAL

The fire was very much a product of its time and place, its origins set against the urban deprivation of the 1920s and the Great Depression years of the 1930s. For many of the industrial working class in Glasgow and Clydebank, this was a time of widespread unemployment, terrible poverty and appalling living conditions. No surprise then that this period saw a growing interest in walking, climbing and enjoyment of the outdoors – all means to escape the hardships of urban life.

With hills and wild countryside less than 20 miles from Glasgow city centre, the possibilities must have seemed endless and intoxicating. For those who could afford the fare, it was a one-penny tram ride from the centre of Glasgow almost as far as leafy Milngavie. Craiggallian Loch lay just two miles further north and beyond that the Campsie Fells, Loch Lomond and the wild lands of the north.

It was around this time that the socialist-inspired Clarion Holiday Fellowship established a camp on the Carbeth Estate, close to what would become the fire site. Developed to spread socialist ideals while giving the working class a chance to experience fresh air rather than city grime, the Fellowship's presence in the area grew to include a series of tented campsites. At nearby Craiggallian Bridge, there was also said to have been a traveller's camp.

The Fellowship's work did not go unnoticed by the sympathetic estate owner who allowed the development of several hutted areas for use by ex-servicemen, the unemployed and working men and their families from around the Clyde basin. The area became well-used and at some point – whether by hutters, walkers or travellers, no one can be sure – the Craiggallian fire was first lit.

Whoever struck the first match had chosen the site well: it was sheltered, with plenty of fuel available in the nearby wood, a burn that ran close by and views over the loch. Those first fire-lighters could not have imagined what they had started. Offering warmth, company, lively discussion and no small amount of inspiration, the fire became a staging post, a gateway through which so many would pass. Those who sat around it found an unspoken welcome, an ever-boiling drum of tea, and joined in endless tales of adventure and songs that were sung long into the night.

#### OPENING UP THE COUNTRYSIDE

The fire became a symbol of comradeship, togetherness, a love of the outdoors and its lore, and an education and escape from the poverty of the city. Perhaps not surprisingly given the social unrest of the time, its flames were fanned by something of a revolutionary air. The talk was not just of the outdoors, but also of social topics, philosophy and changing 'the system'.

While many of the older fire-sitters simply provided inspiration for the younger generation, some became pioneers in the movement to open up Scotland's countryside for the benefit of all. One such man was Robert (Bob) Grieve, a 'weekender' from Maryhill, who became a civil engineer then a prominent town planner and Chair of Town & Regional Planning at Glasgow University before being appointed the first Chairman of the Highlands and Islands Development Board in 1965. In addition to various public honours, including a knighthood, he served as President of the Scottish Mountaineering Club and Mountaineering Council, the Scottish Countryside and Rangers Association, and the Scottish Rights of Way Society.

"I was very aware of the fire when growing up," recalls one of his two sons, Willie Grieve. "It was a feature of my father's conversations about the outdoors. For him, growing up in Glasgow in relatively poor circumstances, the fire was a great discovery. His uncle used to take him out on walks to the Campsie Fells and that, and the discovery of the fire, really represented freedom to him."

Part of the fire's appeal was the chance to meet with like-minded people, and it was in its warming embrace that famous mountaineering clubs such as the Creagh Dhu, Lomond and Ptarmigan were born. Many an adolescent schoolboy would listen to the 'old timers', who would sit closest to the fire telling fantastical tales about their adventures further north. The lines between truth and fiction were often blurred in the telling, but that only added to the mystique and appeal.

Gone but not forgotten (clockwise from opposite): passing the fire site on the West Highland Way; a fire 'reunion' held as part of a photoshoot for the Herald in December 2011; the fire site from the east side of Craiggallian Loch

→ continued



PHOTOGRAPH: IAIN GRIEVE



PHOTOGRAPH: IAIN GRIEVE

As Willie explains, the conversations were often radical and quite political, although given the context of the time it would have been unusual had they not been. "It was the time of the Left Book Club, of Jack London and other radical writers. That was the culture they grew up in. One time, our father spoke about two canoes built by the Creagh Dhu which were left at Balmaha boatyard for the free use of everyone. The canoes, I think, were called May Day and Revolution – names that were very much in keeping with their radical politics."

Another vivid recollection was of men returning home from the Spanish Civil War, some still with their weapons which they used to kill deer on the slopes of Ben Lomond to feed their families in Clydebank. This was typical of what went on, says Willie. "There were amazing stories of men back from fighting Franco, hunting deer, irate landowners and running battles with local gamekeepers. Whether true or not, I don't know, but I'd like to think so."

Another famous 'son' of the fire was Jock Nimlin, a renowned climber of the day. A hammerhead-crane driver in the Clyde shipyards for 30 years, he went on to become the first Field Officer for the National Trust for Scotland and set in train what would become the present-day ranger system.

Reminiscing in an article, *May the Fire Be Always Lit*, that appeared in the Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal in 1963, Jock wrote: "The fire and the people who were drawn into its glow could provide a long tale. The setting, the wooded hollow with its ranks of varied trees reflecting the changing colours of the year on the sheltered loch and the double echo, sensitive to the lightest bird call, epitomised the wonder of the wide Scottish landscapes beyond the treetops."

"Established some time earlier, the fire had become a magnet for all the outdoor types escaping from the smoke and grime of the Clyde basin. Already it had a mystique, a glow which drew the cauldrons into community, and the other fires that were soon to glow in the woods and howffs of the Highlands were projections of this parent; shrines of the heat-worshippers."

It is almost certain that none of the original fire-sitters are alive today, for they would have to be aged at least 95, but there are recollections to be enjoyed by others who sat around the fire when very young. Willie Grieve recently received a letter from one lady, now 87, who retains strong memories of nights by the fire – times that greatly influenced her own love of the outdoors. "I was only seven when I used to sit with my family and my mother and father, a billy can on the boil and my parents enjoying some very interesting conversations," she wrote. "This lore of the outdoors was the opening up of the great outdoors to us and because of this I am still grateful to my parents."

#### MEMORIAL PLANNING

The story of the fire and the tales that were told represent an important part of our outdoor heritage – one that could so easily be lost forever with the passing of time. It is this fear that has prompted Willie, his brother Iain and David Campbell, who owns an Edinburgh company that designs and installs interpretive exhibits for museums and cultural heritage sites, to come together to form 'The Friends of the Craigallian Fire'. The Friends plan to commemorate the legacy of those pioneering fire-sitters and weekenders, who contributed so much to our own ability to enjoy unlimited access to the countryside, by marking the site of the fire with an interpretive memorial.

Gateway to adventure: walkers on the West Highland Way with the fire site copse and Drumgoyne ahead (left);

In 2008, the 'Friends' were put in touch with Tom McGuinness (one of the later fire-sitters) who, with Jack Williamson, led a group to the site. Pictured are (from left to right) Jack Williamson (back), Tom McGuinness, Willie Grieve, David Graham and Iain Grieve

There is great momentum behind the move, not least from the current landowner who has set aside a patch of woodland and also made a generous contribution towards the sculpture itself. The John Muir Trust, too, has made a donation. Once in place later this year, the sculpture will serve as a fitting tribute to those early pioneers whose spirit lives on in all those who love the outdoors today. □

#### Further info

For many more fire stories and information about the memorial project, including donating, visit [www.craigallianfire.org.uk](http://www.craigallianfire.org.uk)

#### About the author

Richard Rowe is editor of the John Muir Trust Journal. He can be contacted at [journal@jmt.org](mailto:journal@jmt.org)



Sgor Gaoith, Cairngorm (photo: Anne Pinney)



... the UK's largest and most active ski touring and ski mountaineering club offers a range of tours every year, as well as training courses and social activities. [www.eagleskiclub.org.uk](http://www.eagleskiclub.org.uk)

4th British Ski-Mountaineering Symposium

Join us on 10-11 December 2011 in Snowdonia for a weekend of expert speakers, mountain skills sessions and equipment sales, with guest speaker Stephen Venables. [www.skisymposium.co.uk](http://www.skisymposium.co.uk)

Eagles ski tour in Scotland  
[www.eagleskiclub.org.uk](http://www.eagleskiclub.org.uk)

Membership Secretary,  
Eagle Ski Club,  
5 Fitzgerald Road,  
London SW14 8HA

**SCA**  
Scottish Canoe Association  
Comann Curach na h-Alba

## TAY DESCENT

27 October 2012



**TWO GREAT EVENTS  
IN OCTOBER 2012**

## PADDLE 2012

SCOTLAND'S ANNUAL  
CANOE & KAYAK SHOW

27 - 28 October 2012



For more info visit  
[canoescotland.org](http://canoescotland.org)



**'Our social network'**  
Philippe, Anna, Leo, Leah & Rob



**berghaus**  
LIVE FOR ADVENTURE™



[www.berghaus.com](http://www.berghaus.com)



## Against all odds

Julie McElroy has refused to let disability get in the way of adventure and impresses Rory Syme with her commitment to experiencing all that the outdoors has to offer

PHOTOGRAPH: MILES FARBANK

Julie McElroy's love for the outdoors started when she was ten years old. Born with cerebral palsy which limits her mobility, she is also profoundly deaf. Growing up with an able-bodied twin sister and friends, Julie felt singled out. She wanted to take part in outdoor activities like hill walking but it seemed virtually impossible.

But when her Dad gave her the opportunity to climb Ben Lomond, Julie struggled her way to the summit with characteristic determination. "I did everything possible, from walking and crawling to even moving on my bottom," she recalls. "It was tough getting to the top, but also amazing fun and I was ecstatic. I guess that's when my buzz for the outdoors first began."

And there has been no stopping her since. In November 2011, Julie achieved her John Muir Conserver Award having completed an impressive array of challenges over two years, including joining the Loch Lomond Mountain Rescue Team on manoeuvres, paddling the length of Loch Shiel, scaling Helvellyn, trekking in the Himalayas and leading a group of disabled people in outdoor activities on the Isle of Arran.

Julie's award is not just exceptional because of her personal circumstances: of the 130,000 Awards that have been achieved since 1997, just two per cent have been at Conserver level.

### INSPIRATIONS AND INFLUENCES

In 2008, Julie was one of ten young people selected for a four-week expedition in South America led by ex-SAS commando Ken Hames - a challenging and emotional journey captured in the television series *Beyond Boundaries: Across the Andes* that aired on BBC2 the same year.

Julie says that Ken was the first of two major influences that led her to undertake the John Muir Award. "He always put pressure on me, asking 'what are you going to do next?' He wanted me to take on outdoor leadership. I promised Ken I would spend more time in the outdoors after I had finished studying, so he was the first person behind my John Muir Award."

The second person was Bill Kidd, Julie's MSP, who sent her a report by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health looking at the health impacts of the John Muir Award. "Bill Kidd opened the door to the John Muir Trust for me," she explains.

Grit and determination (left to right from top): Julie paddling on Loch Shiel; taking a breather; Julie with fellow members of the Sirius Award paddling group





PHOTOGRAPH BY MYLES FARNBANK

“I thought what was really missing from that report was disability, and how the outdoors impacts on people like myself. I guess that really got the ball rolling for what I wanted to achieve with my Conserver Award. I really wanted to aim high, make some noise, and hopefully inspire people in the process.”

#### PADDLE JOURNEY

It would be hard to cover everything that was incorporated in Julie’s Award, but she says a paddle journey down Loch Shiel on the west coast of Scotland was a particularly life-changing experience. Julie was taking part in the Wilderness Foundation’s Sirius Award – a scholarship for future environmental leaders. The programme aims, amongst other things, to encourage personal growth through reflection and challenge and to provide an opportunity to explore radical and new thinking with other like-minded people.

It was an immense challenge, says Julie. “Five days paddling down the loch was really tough. There were times where I struggled, but everyone in the group had their own personal difficulties. Sometimes I just wanted to jump in the water and say ‘I can’t do it!’”

The camaraderie formed within the group, inspirational words from guide Myles Farnbank, plus an improvised seat made from a fold-up camping chair, got her through it and gave her higher aspirations. “The programme was a great start and really opened my eyes to what I could achieve on my wilderness leadership journey,” she says.

One of Julie’s main passions lies in ensuring that other disabled people have the same opportunities as able-bodied

people when it comes to enjoying the outdoors. As part of that commitment, she has worked with both Forestry Commission Scotland and the National Trust for Scotland to develop the ‘Wilderness Weekend’, a project designed to encourage more people with disabilities to access woodlands and green space.

The first weekend, held on the Isle of Arran, saw six disabled people take part in outdoor activities including arts and crafts and woodland walks. They also learned basic survival skills such as lighting fires from sparks.

“I want to unleash opportunities where disabled people can climb a mountain, get involved in taking responsibility for the natural environment and, most importantly, enjoy the fun and adventure of exploring the wild,” says Julie.

“There are many more opportunities to raise awareness and inspire those with disabilities to get into Scotland’s great outdoors to come. My experience has had a considerable impact on me as a person and I’ve seen a wide range of physical, intellectual and emotional effects. I will continue to draw on these as I strive to achieve equality for all.”

Achieving her Conserver Award seems like more of a beginning than an end for Julie. If there’s one thing for certain, there’s more to come. □

#### ABOUT JULIE’S AWARD

Julie McElroy received her John Muir Conserver Award (below) from presenter and broadcaster Dougie Vipond at the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park headquarters in Balloch. These are some of the messages of congratulations she received:

“By getting involved in the John Muir Award, Julie McElroy has set an example for us all. Not only has she refused to see her disability as a barrier to experiencing and caring for wild places, but she has actively encouraged others to do the same ... I’m pleased that Julie’s John Muir Conserver Award helps recognise and celebrate her own spirit of adventure and challenge.”

**John Hutchison, chairman, John Muir Trust**

“[Julie’s] outstanding achievements and leadership are inspiring not only for disabled people but for all society... I look forward to hearing more about what [she] takes on in the future, especially in manifesting opportunities to improve the lives of disabled children and adults, and demonstrating what can be achieved with the drive and determination to succeed.”

**Stewart Stevenson MSP, Scottish minister for environment and climate change**

“Adventure is important, it challenges and stimulates us, and it can lead us to wonderful wild places we perhaps wouldn’t normally visit. Julie’s achievements are a reminder to us all that experiencing adventure and challenge in Scotland, and further afield, should be open to all, regardless of age, ability or background.”

**Dougie Vipond, presenter and broadcaster**



#### About the author

Rory Syme is the Trust’s Press and Communications Officer. He can be contacted at [rory.syme@jmt.org](mailto:rory.syme@jmt.org)



# Ennerdale reborn

Graham Watson offers a personal reflection on Ennerdale – a Lake District valley that is home to one of the longest running wild land restoration projects in the UK

PHOTOGRAPH: ROSIE WATSON

Lying on the north western edge of the Lake District National Park, Ennerdale stretches 10 miles or so from its eponymous lake foot on the western edge of the mountains to Great Gable in the central fells. It is a valley with no tarmac road and the only access is on foot or by bike, except for some permitted work vehicles and visitors to a youth hostel and field centre. It's a place I know well, having lived and worked in the valley a decade or so ago, and with family connections that continue today through the local school and field centre.

It must have been 1987 when I first ran round Ennerdale's skyline. For a young fell runner it was a route to be ticked. My tiredness after seven hours of exertion gave it a sense of scale, although the greater experience being had by a friend I met on the way who was walking the horseshoe over twice that time probably passed me by.

When I came to live in the valley in 1992, a much older family friend talked of protest in the 1920s when the Forestry Commission purchased the valley and

began planting. In 1965, Wainwright wrote of '... a dark and funereal shroud of foreign trees, an intrusion that nobody who knew Ennerdale of old can ever forgive, the former charm of the valley having been destroyed'. Certainly, my own first experiences were of a long, dark corridor of sitka spruce, devoid of views.

However, further exploration soon revealed magnificent wild coves of deep heather, rough hillsides, spectacular cliffs, arctic char and ancient woodland. The high coves were little frequented, felt remote and wild. There was plenty of wildness to be had even on the valley floor and my daughter once described it as the "best place possible" to have spent her childhood.

#### EARLY PLANNING

In May 2000, I climbed on Pillar Rock, the most remote of Lakeland crags, with the then new National Trust Warden, Jeremy Barlow, who talked of how great it would be for the valley to be managed as one entity with a single plan and to remove the political boundaries that would in turn enable the removal of physical boundaries.

At the time I knew nothing of Wild Ennerdale. But, in 2003, a partnership was formed between the three landowners – the National Trust, Forestry Commission and United Utilities – one that was born of a vision to see Ennerdale evolve as a wild valley for the benefit of all, relying more on natural processes to shape its landscape and ecology. As the partnership points out today, Wild Ennerdale is not about abandoning the valley but managing it at a lower level of intervention, and working with the natural processes. In so doing, the aspiration is for a more diverse and robust ecosystem functioning as a near-natural area with minimum human intervention.

Initially, some local residents were sceptical. Questions were asked. What would it mean for us? Restrictive vehicle access, a change from current farming practice, difficulty in running our businesses? Certainly, some embraced it and saw opportunities, while others didn't like the idea of change at all.

By 2005, a Stewardship Plan was in place and, although the pace of progress seemed slow at first, seven years on



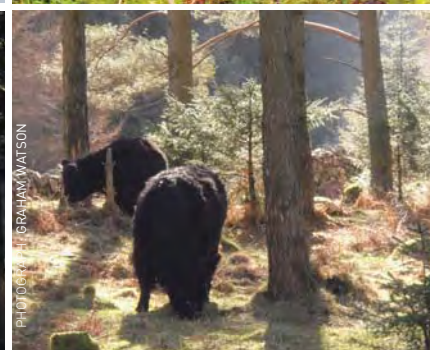
PHOTOGRAPH: GRAHAM WATSON



PHOTOGRAPH: ROSIE WATSON



PHOTOGRAPH: ROSIE WATSON



PHOTOGRAPH: GRAHAM WATSON

Return to the wild (clockwise from opposite) a lone walker in Ennerdale; the valley in winter; the author planting oak saplings; views across the lake

the changes are remarkable in many ways. The harvesting of sitka spruce has opened up the views, while regeneration of broadleaves has been assisted by strategic planting as a seed source. Where possible, fences and boundaries have been removed, while forestry tracks have been decommissioned and are now growing back into the hillsides.

Three small herds of resident Galloway cattle are also busy breaking up the ground to aid natural regeneration, and sheep numbers have been reduced. The valley feels a wilder and more natural place. Water quality in the lake has improved, the once dwindling population of arctic char appears to be recovering and salmon are once again spawning in tributaries not visited for many years.

In another positive sign, the local community has become heavily engaged, with a thriving volunteer workforce, regular meetings and public events, plus close interaction through the village school and an involvement with the local pub and planning for a community hub. And it's not just Ennerdale school - three other local schools make regular use of the

valley with at least one involved with the John Muir Award on a long-term project.

#### MEMBERS' GATHERING

In June 2011, Ennerdale was the scene of one of the John Muir Trust Members' Gathering visits. We were lucky to be joined by Simon Webb from Natural England, Gareth Browning from the Forestry Commission as well as Admiral Sir John Kerr, a former Deputy Chair of the Lake District National Park, and enjoyed an informative day.

Members had clearly been inspired - "a very progressive project full of imagination", commented one when asked for feedback - and many thought there was good learning for the Trust in terms of community involvement, management of a formerly heavily-forested valley and partnership working.

The stewardship plan is currently under review and it will be interesting to see what the partners themselves have learned from their first seven years. I think Wainwright would be most encouraged by the changes now taking place. □

#### Further info

Ennerdale is one of the few Lakeland valleys with no public road and very few inhabitants. Today, the land is owned by just two parties: the Forestry Commission, with a large amount leased to the National Trust, and United Utilities. In the valley itself, residents are mainly youth hostel and field centre wardens and so tend to be fairly transient, while the main parish population lives to the west of the valley where it exits onto the coastal lowlands. [www.wildennerdale.co.uk](http://www.wildennerdale.co.uk)

#### About the author

Graham Watson is the John Muir Award Regional Manager for Cumbria. He can be contacted at [cumbria@johnmuiraward.org](mailto:cumbria@johnmuiraward.org)

# Paving the way

The Trust's Sarah Lewis recently swapped her usual beat in Glen Nevis for a stint in southern Chile helping with plans to create the future Patagonia National Park – billed as the 'Yellowstone of South America'. As Sarah details here, it was an experience of a lifetime

For anyone who finds pleasure in the harshness and remoteness of wild places, then I would challenge you not to fall in love with the extreme beauty of Chilean Patagonia – my home for six weeks in autumn 2011.

The seeds of the adventure were sown when I read an article in Issue 48 of the Journal detailing how Conservación Patagonica, a California-based conservation body, was working to establish a future national park for Patagonia in southern Chile. With its borders now established, the park is opening in stages, with an eco-lodge, campground and a variety of trails already available for visitors, but the wider habitat restoration and infrastructure development will likely continue for several years yet. Once complete, the Patagonia National Park will comprise around 750,000 hectares – roughly the same size as Yosemite National Park in the US.

One way to help, mentioned the article, was to volunteer. My imagination had been fired. I wanted to get involved. Visiting the land of the gauchos, maybe I'd even release my inner cowgirl?

## SCALE OF THE TASK

At the centre of the national park is Chacabuco Valley. It is one of the few east-west valleys in the region and marks a vast, ecologically-rich transition zone between the semi-arid steppe (grassland) that extends eastwards into Argentina where the Andes block the brutal westerly winds, and swathes of southern beech-dominated forest to the much wetter west.

Much of the area was previously used as a working 'estancia' which saw sheep and cattle introduced to the grasslands. As a result, heavy grazing and more than a century of poorly-managed, short-sighted land use have taken their toll. Today, one area of the park retains sheep farming as a sustainable food resource for those living within the park as well as visitors. Gauchos can still be seen riding out on night watches with Pyrenean sheep dogs to help guard their flocks from hungry pumas.

The park's plentiful natural resources, including the Baker, Chile's longest river, have long proved attractive for exploitation – as became apparent during my first night in Coyhaique, capital of the Aysen region in which the park is situated. That night saw a Conservación Patagonica-backed protest outside the government offices as part of a coalition campaign for 'Patagonia Chilena ¡sin represas!' (Chilean Patagonia without Dams). It was a response to plans by a multi-national conglomerate to create large-scale dams in the area, complete with a line of transmission pylons that would range over a distance of some 1,200 miles. If the plan goes ahead, the transmission lines will pass through large areas of untouched and ecologically-sensitive wild land, principally that of the Rio Baker valley which reaches its confluence with the Chacabuco at the border of the park.

We had been greeted warmly by the campaign group – many the close acquaintances of staff with whom I would be working – with a firm hug and a single kiss on the cheek. The vigour with which these people defended nature provided an early insight into the type of character I was going to be working with over the coming weeks.

## BUSINESS AND PLEASURE

It quickly became clear just what a bountiful time of year it was to be in this part of the world. With most mornings well below zero, the days often started and ended with the intoxicating smell of wood smoke in the air, but spring was nonetheless on its way, with buds appearing on trees and shoots peeping through the ground. Muir would have revelled in the vastness of nature here and the solitude.

I was part of a dozen-strong team of volunteers whose work mainly involved the removal of hundreds of kilometres of old fence line that ran from the flatlands high up into the hills to contain grazing cattle. Removing the fences would allow guanacos (a relative of the lama), pumas and the endangered huemules (Patagonian deer) to range over their

preferred habitats, so encouraging natural management of the ecosystem.

We used old mountain gaucho camps as bases, as they were often in the best locations, with the cleanest running water and shelter from the constant winds. We would often watch as different weather fronts chased their way across the landscape, sometimes only minutes apart; it was a little like Scotland, albeit on a far grander scale and with winds that were frequently ferocious. It was nature at its most raw and invigorating. I loved it.

The bulk of our time was spent in the transition zone of deciduous southern beech forests, where native lenga beech, often covered in drooping old man's beard lichen and an interesting parasite called Darwin's bread mistletoe, blend with forest-edge scrubland and areas of bog full of sphagnum mosses.

In Patagonia, it is said that spring starts a month late and so by the end of October (halfway through my trip) the vivid colours of the season were starting to show. Forest edge plant communities included an array of calafate, anemone, yellow orchid and dog orchid, while butterflies such as the Chilean satyr and fritillaries were everywhere. Legend decrees that if you eat the berries of the (savagely prickly) calafate bush, you will return to Patagonia one day... we consumed them in every conceivable way and didn't scrimp on the seasonal delight of morel mushrooms for dinner either.

I found the birdlife particularly striking with various species of humming bird, small parrots, flamingoes, Andean condors, the spectacularly large black-chested buzzard eagle and forest-dwelling megallinic woodpeckers all on show. Meanwhile, the extremely cheeky austral negrito, an inquisitive red-capped little bird, was a constant companion on many a road trip.

→ continued



PHOTOGRAPHY: SARAH LEWIS



Repairing paradise (clockwise from top): Sarah in action during fence work; the endangered huemule, or Patagonian deer; volunteers living gaucho style

Some of our work involved back-breaking days spent in Valle de vacas – valley of the cows – spending hours with our hoes ridding the flats of invasive plant species such as sheep’s ear and dandelion. We’d finish the day sharing a quenching gourd of ‘mate’ – a drink made from the bitter, caffeinated leaves of the native yerbe mate. Although not to everyone’s taste, it is gaucho tradition to share, so we continued this practice within our own small tribe.

I was keen (some might say pushy) to take to horseback and help track huemules with a local gaucho who has committed his life to safeguarding the species and their habitat. For four days and three nights, I followed and learnt from this non-English speaking devotee. The majority of the remaining deer that live within the park are collared and tracked daily to monitor their development and better understand the reasons behind their decline. Although endangered, huemules do not yet see humans as a threat and so one day I was able to sit for over an hour while a female grazed in the sun just a couple of feet away.



## SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Staff and volunteers are working hard to create an energy-independent national park. While I was there, volunteers were installing a new energy monitoring system to help the park run entirely from local, small-scale sources of renewable energy. In addition to constructing buildings that benefit from advanced insulation, solar panels and a micro-hydro station, the long-term plan is to utilise wind power and store it through a hydrogen system that in time will provide power for both buildings and vehicles.

There appears to be a huge amount of interest in the project, not least from overseas. During my stay alone, we were joined by Japanese businessmen, a writer from Cumbria and a former Secretary of State under Bill Clinton. Some, like me, came to volunteer their time, while others were looking to offer financial support and promote what they consider to be a hugely meaningful undertaking.

But not everyone is behind it, as was made clear when, on a day off, I hitched to a nearby town with another Latin American volunteer to collect supplies

---

Flavours of Patagonia: the River Baker, Chile’s longest (left); native fire tongue (below)

from a local store. The driver who picked us up, a young engineer, was no friend of the project and informed us of his belief that most of the endangered species had been imported to support the project’s cause and that huemules and pumas had never existed there in the first place. His feeling – put forcefully and translated by my companion – was that the project was dressing itself up as a conservation initiative and that (unspecified) dark forces were behind it.

It was a striking example of some of the local opposition to the project. The land is no longer capable of providing for the cattle industry and its workers, but as can be the case the world over, some in the local community fear change.

Little wonder then that those behind the park want to be as transparent as possible about their aims. School groups from the local area come to learn more about the project, while construction is well underway on the Aysen Natural History and Education Centre, which will be a central component of the park facilities. Educating local schoolchildren and engaging neighbouring communities will, it is hoped, build a foundation of support that will enable the park to flourish long into the future. Ultimately, the goal is to donate a fully functional new park to the Chilean state – one with healthy ecosystems, thriving wildlife and excellent visitor facilities.

Establishing a new national park from scratch is a massive challenge and it was a pleasure to play a small part in the development of what will hopefully be seen as a major conservation success story. The specialised knowledge of those behind it and the enthusiasm of volunteers have given the project the kind of momentum needed to overcome its many challenges and ultimately succeed. □



### Further info

For much more on the creation of the Patagonia National Park, visit [www.conservacionpatagonica.org](http://www.conservacionpatagonica.org)

### About the author

Sarah Lewis is the Trust’s Nevis Conservation Officer. She can be contacted at [sarah.lewis@jmt.org](mailto:sarah.lewis@jmt.org)

**All rucksacks come  
with full instructions -  
“fill and seek adventure!”**



At Tiso we know you'll need the right gear whether you're wild camping in the Cairngorms, planning your first family camping holiday, or just planning some adventures in the hills. That's why we're geared up for you. We like to test the gear that we sell in the only way we know how. Out there. We know what it's like to bag your first Munro and we've fallen in more streams than you could imagine. So when you leave the store you'll have the best advice and the right gear.

Visit your nearest Tiso store or shop online at [tiso.com](http://tiso.com)

Geared up  
for you  
[tiso.com](http://tiso.com)



LET YOUR LEGACY ALLOW THE WILD LAND AND  
WILD PLACES YOU LOVE TO FLOURISH, FOREVER.

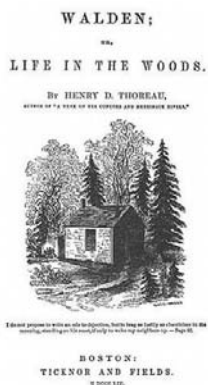
# FOREVER WILD

## TIME FOR REFLECTION

PLEASE CONSIDER INCLUDING A GIFT IN YOUR WILL TO THE JOHN MUIR TRUST.  
FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT OUR WEBSITE OR CONTACT ADAM PINDER FOR A LEGACY INFORMATION PACK.

[www.jmt.org/legacy](http://www.jmt.org/legacy)      [fundraising@jmt.org](mailto:fundraising@jmt.org) / 0131 554 0114

LOCHAN DUBHA IN THE HEART OF THE CUILLIN, ISLE OF SKYE, CARED FOR BY THE JOHN MUIR TRUST.



## Walden: or Life in the Woods, Henry David Thoreau

**Denis Mollison is enchanted all over again by the simplicity of life presented in this classic of American literature**

“Say what you have to say, not what you ought.” That is why Thoreau took so long to be understood, but it is also why his work just grows as time passes. *Walden* is the account of a two-year experiment of living in nature in 1845–7: “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.”

The narrative is tied loosely to the changes of nature through the seasons, interspersed with long digressions on how men live and ought to live. In this, he was following transcendentalism, a movement founded by his mentor Emerson, that believed that humans are inherently good, and live as part of nature. To this Thoreau added a conviction that reform of society could only come through reform of the individual.

He begins with a plea to simplify: we waste our lives acquiring things that stand in the way of real happiness. He reckoned that six weeks’ labouring could earn him enough to live for a year, giving time to live as he wished: to enjoy nature and to think.

His descriptions of nature are wonderfully rounded, including precise observations, ecology, history, and his own and other people’s responses to nature, whether describing the whip-poor-wills singing at a fixed time before sunset; the surface of the pond on a calm day, with the

water-bugs detectable a quarter-mile off; or the different layers of ice as the pond freezes in winter.

And he then slides effortlessly into abstract thought: “Let us spend one day as deliberately as Nature... Let us settle ourselves, and work... through the mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance, ... through poetry and philosophy and religion, till we come to a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we can call reality.”

His friends, including Emerson, criticised him for not being more engaged with society. But, as Thoreau was very aware, his thoughts would bear fruit in their own time. His life in the hut he built near Walden Pond was interrupted by a night in jail, for refusing to pay taxes that implicitly supported slavery. This episode led to his essay *Civil Disobedience*, later to inspire Tolstoy, Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

He never travelled far, preferring close observation of the world at hand, and to travel in his mind: “There are continents and seas in the moral world, to which every man is an isthmus or an inlet, yet unexplored by him, but that it is easier to sail many thousand miles... than it is to explore the private sea, the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean of one’s being alone.”

But his writings, especially *Walden* and the essay *Walking* that was one of John Muir’s favourites, set the stage for wild land conservation. What the wild means to us has not been better described than in the passage used as preface to the John Muir Trust’s first Management Plan in 1987:

“Our village life would stagnate if it were not for the unexplored forests and meadows which surround it. We need the tonic of wildness – to wade sometimes in marshes where the bittern and the meadow-hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe... At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be infinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable. We can never have enough of Nature.” □

### Book details

*Walden* is as widely available as it should be: free from Project Gutenberg ([www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org)) or for not much more, as *Walden and other writings*, with an excellent introduction by Joseph Wood Krutch (paperback or e-book). Amazon is your best bet.

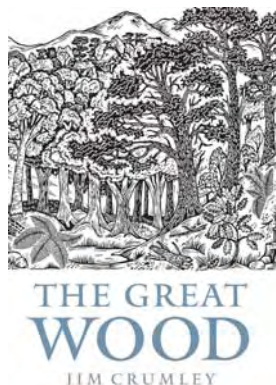


PHOTOGRAPH: DENIS MOLLISON

### The reviewer

Denis Mollison is one of the founders of the Trust and a current Trustee.





**The Great Wood, Jim Crumley**  
Reviewed by Lester Standen

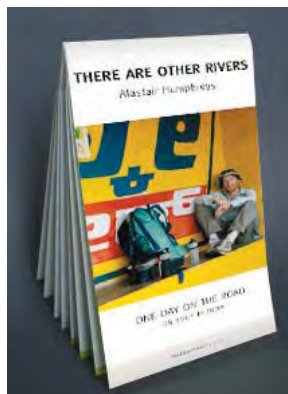
In 5,000 years time, will future Brazilians occasionally refer to the great wood of Amazonia of myth and legend? Will they debate whether or not it really existed and whether or not their country could actually be anything other than a desert? It seems to me that this is the same context in which Jim Crumley is grappling with the concept of the Great Wood of Caledon – the historic native forest of Scotland that once covered large tracts of the country.

His book begins with a visit to the ancient Fortingall yew that is possibly 5,000 years old and may well have stood within the Great Wood. He finds it in a churchyard all alone, languishing behind bars and bereft of the forest that once surrounded it. He begins to imagine the tree in its un-walled stance on a south-facing slope before the church-builders set to. Searching for that forest, he journeys through the tattered remains of Highland woods and gradually paints a picture of that woodland today.

Asking what that Great Wood was like, he applies what he sees during quiet observation and interweaves this picture with visions of how the landscape and its flora and fauna may have appeared in the past.

Highland woodland reached a nadir during the 20th century, but has increased in extent in the recent past, with commercial plantations and new native woodlands adding to the picture. Time spent in woodland observing and thinking becomes a basis for the author's advocacy of a newer picture, an optimistic vision for the future of the Great Wood, whatever it was in the past.

Birlinn, 2012, £9.99  
[www.birlinn.co.uk](http://www.birlinn.co.uk)  
ISBN 978 1 84158 973 2



**There are Other Rivers, Alastair Humphreys. Mappazine edition**  
Reviewed by Graham Watson

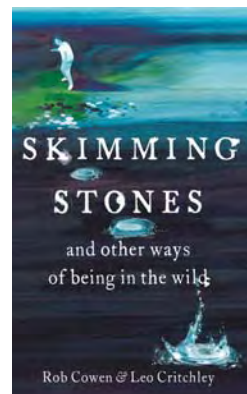
Alastair Humphreys is an adventurer, blogger, author, motivational speaker, film maker and photographer. More than anything he's a 'Go and Do It' person hoping to encourage others and in this mappazine he's typically stepped out of the mould with something different.

Subtitled *On foot in India* this is the story of a journey across India following the course of a holy river. And, perhaps as befits a journey, it is produced in map style. That is to say, a folded sheet rather than a book full of chapters. Actually *There are Other Rivers* exists in several formats but the idea of a mappazine appeals to me and perhaps to you too if, like mine, your maps have as much prominence on your shelves as books.

As with a map, you can unfold it fully and look at the big picture, taking in the images of landscapes, people, events and curiosities (but curiously no actual map). Or you can dip in and read Alastair's thoughts on travelling presented as short sections on each fold. He writes of freedom and being alone, quest and adventure, and about his own philosophy of exploring rather than the journey itself.

He's not concerned with a chronological description of the whole journey – instead, it tells the story of the whole walk through an account of a single day. There are many interesting illustrations around the text but I would have liked both a map of the journey and some captions for the photos to give reference points to the author's stories. Read the words straight through and you'll be done in an hour, but I am enjoying this mappazine greatly, just unfolding it now and again to catch a snippet.

100 photographs, 9,400 words. £5.00 + p&p  
[www.alastairhumphreys.com/books/thereareotherivers](http://www.alastairhumphreys.com/books/thereareotherivers)



**Skimming Stones and other ways of being in the wild, Rob Cowen and Leo Critchley**  
Reviewed by Richard Rowe

This is a book for anyone who remembers a childhood full of endless summer holidays spent outside building dens, damming rivers and climbing trees, only returning home when hunger (or parents) called. It is probably also for people who wish they could still do such things – and a reminder of why they should – even when they are supposed to be 'too old for that kind of thing'.

With a blend of story-telling, informative 'how to' sections on anything from tracking animals and making a kite to that ultimate outdoor skill, lighting a fire, and accounts of how their own experiences of such pleasures help them reconnect with the wildness that is all around, it is hard not to be carried along by the authors' exuberance. They are also skilled artists, with simple line drawings accompanying the pages.

From an opening chapter that explores the (for some) lost art of stone skimming to a final chapter on the invigorating effects of a simple walk in the wild, the pages within offer a reminder that, like all animals, humans are hardwired to have a connection with the natural world – sadly one that is so often stretched to breaking point by our fast-paced, urban-centred existence.

In its introduction, the authors invite us to dip in and out, picking chapters depending on time and mood. And that's exactly what I did. It's a lovely way to enjoy this mellow, thoughtful book.

Coronet, 2012. £12.99  
[www.hodder.co.uk](http://www.hodder.co.uk)  
ISBN 978 1 444 73598 7

# Ring ouzel, Quinag

John Muir Trust biodiversity officer **Liz Auty** looks at the ring ouzel – an upland blackbird found at Quinag and other properties

The ring ouzel is the normally shy, white-chested blackbird of the scree slopes. It prefers a grass and heather mosaic for feeding, with small crags and taller heather for nesting. Like its garden-dwelling cousin, the bird also likes a good supply of berries in late summer. In Britain, the birds are associated with upland areas and we are lucky to have several on Quinag where they can sometimes be seen – or more commonly heard – in the upper corries and rocky places.

Ring ouzels spend the winter in Southern Spain and North Africa, before returning to Northern Europe to breed. In Britain, the population has declined since the beginning of the 20th century; between 1970 and 1990 its range has reduced by 27%. A national survey, carried out in 1999, showed that the decline has continued. Although a loss of winter habitat may be a factor, the populations in continental Europe are thought to be stable, so the losses in Britain seem to relate more to their breeding habitat.

## WHEN ARE THEY AT QUINAG?

Ring ouzels usually arrive at their breeding grounds in late March or early April and migrate south again at the end of September. The breeding season is from April to July, with the birds often rearing two broods during that time. Nests are usually located among heather or in crevices in the rocks. The young are fed on invertebrates such as earthworms, leatherjackets and beetles.

## HOW DO I KNOW IT'S NOT JUST A BLACKBIRD?

They do look similar, but ring ouzels have a white chest band (in a crescent shape) and are easily identified by a distinctive chack chack call and a 'fluty' song. It's true that they can be confused with leucistic blackbirds – those with white patches or mottled feathers – although they are more commonly associated with low ground. Ring ouzels also lack the distinctive yellow bill and eye of the blackbird. The male is black and the female dark brown, but both sport the white chest band.

In 2010, Fran Lockhart, the Trust's property manager at Quinag, had a close encounter with a male bird while carrying out habitat monitoring at Quinag and was able to take several photos of this timid bird. "I had only ever seen ring ouzels at a distance before," she recalls. "This one was so engrossed in searching for insects amongst the short-cropped grass and boulders it seemed unaware of our presence. It was one of those magical wildlife moments and we were privileged to watch this bold bird just going about its business for several minutes."

Wild land, wild life:  
Quinag from Little  
Assynt (top); ring  
ouzel on the hunt for  
insects (below)



PHOTOGRAPH: KEITH BRAVE



PHOTOGRAPH: FRAN LOCKHART

## WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

The ring ouzel is a UK Biodiversity Action Plan species, which is also on the Scottish Biodiversity list, and its conservation status is red-listed due to its steep decline in range and numbers. It is also listed in the Sutherland Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

## WHERE CAN I SEE THEM?

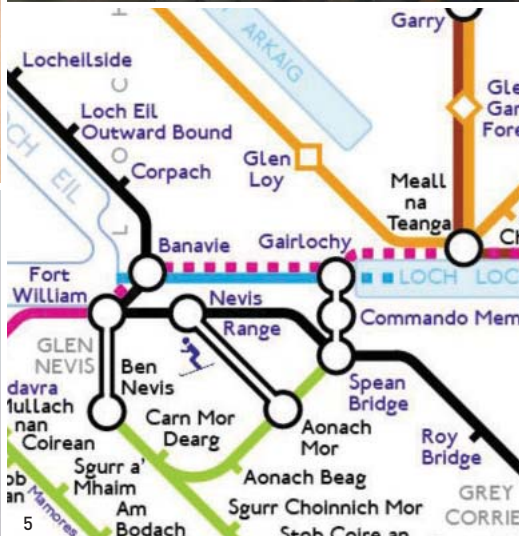
Ring ouzels are found at Quinag (which you can visit on our Wild Day on 14 September) and have also been recorded recently at Li and Coire Dhorrcail, Nevis and Skye, and historically at East Schiehallion. □

## Further info

To hear the song of the ring ouzel, visit [www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdguide/name/r/ringouzel/index.aspx](http://www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdguide/name/r/ringouzel/index.aspx)

## About the author

Liz Auty is the Trust's biodiversity officer. The Trust would be very interested to hear from members who spot ring ouzels on any of its properties. Please contact Liz at [liz.auty@jmt.org](mailto:liz.auty@jmt.org) with a date and location.



- 1 The Coombe family from Cumbria sent in this photo from a camping holiday at Sandwood Bay. Imber the dog, Sebastian, Tricia and Edward had a fabulous time
- 2 Our friends at John Muir's Birthplace celebrated their 100,000th visitor when a class of children from East Linton Primary came for a tour as part of their John Muir Award
- 3 A lone holly bush, photographed by Fran Lockhart, Trust property manager, hangs on in sight of Quinag in Assynt despite years of relentless grazing that has removed the woodland in which it should be thriving
- 4 Trust conservation officer Lewis Pate found this perfectly split hazel shell in Nevis Gorge, a possible sign of the first red squirrel in the gorge
- 5 The forthcoming Munroverground map offers a new perspective on Scotland's wild places. The John Muir Trust will receive a donation from every map sold. Look out for details at [www.tubularfells.com](http://www.tubularfells.com)
- 6 Don O' Driscoll, Trust conservation officer, found the remains of a Leatherback Turtle washed up on a beach close to Sandwood. Leatherbacks are believed to trail their jellyfish prey along the gulfstream to the UK
- 7 Nearly 400 primary school children from across Lochaber entered the John Muir Trust's Wild Poetry Competition, submitting a fantastic selection of poems in English and Gaelic
- 8 Trust contractor, Drew Love-Jones, captured this golden eagle on candid camera on the Isle of Skye with a remote camera trap
- 9 Sarah Lewis, Trust conservation officer, caught this fox looking for a midnight snack in Glen Nevis
- 10 The John Muir Award team have been indulging in simple pleasures in the outdoors. Here they are enjoying a 360 degree panorama from the top of Catbells in the Lake District
- 11 The People's Postcode Lottery awarded the Trust £50,000 for its new visitor centre project in Pitlochry. The Trust's Kate Barclay, Susan Wright, Stuart Brooks and Trustee David MacLehose accepted the cheque from Jo Bucci and Annemiek Hoogenboom of the PPL



# Dram, fine, splendid

*...need we say more!*



BEN NEVIS DISTILLERY (FORT WILLIAM)LTD,  
Lochy Bridge, Fort William, PH33 6TJ  
Tel: 01397 702476 • Fax: 01397 702768  
E-mail: [colin@bennevisdistillery.com](mailto:colin@bennevisdistillery.com)

[www.bennevisdistillery.com](http://www.bennevisdistillery.com)