JOHN MUIR TRUST
JOURNAL
51 AUTUMN 11

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PHOTOGRAPH: SHIRLEY GRANT

REGULARS

FEATURES

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First Light, Old Man of Storr, Isle of Skye

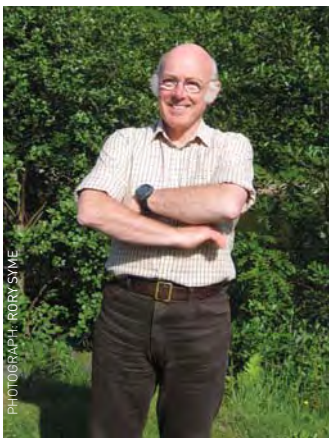
Inside front cover photography
Beinn na Caillich, one of the Red Cuillin on Skye

Continuing our focus on preserving wild land

PHOTOGRAPH: DOMINIC DONNINI

From the Chairman

John Hutchison introduces an issue of the Journal that does much to reinforce the John Muir Trust's focus on highlighting the value of wild land and wild places


PHOTOGRAPH: RORY SYME

Welcome to the Autumn 2011 edition of the Journal, as we again celebrate our work and the beautiful landscapes held in guardianship for the future. That land, plus our members and staff, are our most precious assets. I hope you will agree that this Journal transmits our enthusiasm to 'educate, conserve and inspire'.

As a Lochaber resident, I'm pleased to see the testimonial from the local Ben Nevis Distillery, where Manager Colin Ross has been an enthusiastic supporter of our work for some time. We deeply appreciate and are greatly encouraged by such support from our corporate members.

In this issue, our educational theme runs through book reviews such as Frank Fraser Darling's *Island Years, Island Farm* (see page 32) and Muir's own *My First Summer in the Sierra* (p33), both veritable classics. I hope that *Ribbon of Wildness*, Peter Wright's book about his epic watershed walk through Scotland, will become a classic, too. The interview with Peter (p26) provides an engaging segue from Nic Bullivant's article in the last Journal which recounted a wild walk from Glen Clova to Beinn Alligin – pretty well reversing the route of one of my own TGO Challenges from a few years ago.

Another character-forming walk for me was my 'First Class Journey' while in the Scouts in the early 1960s, with the 50-mile route finishing via Glenlude in the Scottish Borders. For this reason, the Glenlude estate which is now in our portfolio has a special resonance and John Thomas's article (p34) takes me back to those days when I tentatively ventured further afield from Edinburgh.

Our Chief Executive, Stuart Brooks, explores the need for a wild land designation and the role it can play in restoring, maintaining and preserving outstanding parts of our landscape. We will continue to take a strong lead in this, working with governments, natural heritage and environmental protection agencies and other NGOs throughout the UK.

One of these NGOs – the National Trust for Scotland – features in Shaila Rao's article on the often intricate ecological work involved in the restoration of the Beinn a' Bhùird hill track on the Mar Lodge Estate (p18). While this is located deep in the Cairngorms National Park, we can read too in Rob Bushby's account how our work with the John Muir Award continues to forge strong links with other National Parks around the UK (p24).

Elsewhere (p14), Ruth Chambers from the Campaign for National Parks explores the question of whether National Parks in England and Wales are 'working' and to what extent they are achieving their aims. At the time of writing, I am involved with a group that is assessing the need for more integrated management of Glencoe and Nevis, so this analysis is particularly useful for me.

Talk of Nevis leads me to one of the most inspiring days I have had on the hill for some time when I joined 25 others to be enthralled by climber Dave MacLeod's guided exploration of the north face of Ben Nevis. An event that was part of a UK-wide series of celebrations marking 'One Year to Go' to the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the day was blessed with excellent weather as we learned first-hand of Dave's mental and physical approach to his craft (see p22).

Whether a member, supporter or staff in the John Muir Trust, I hope that you enjoy this Journal as a celebration of our work and the landscapes in our care. Please come back to us with comments, ideas and opinions or simply to let us know what you would like to see in future editions.

John Hutchison
CHAIRMAN
JOHN MUIR TRUST


PHOTOGRAPH: ROB BUSHBY

Wild ridge (opposite): Striding Edge in the Lake District National Park; the north face of Ben Nevis (right)

WILDLIFE AWARD FOR ARGYLL BEAVERS

The Scottish Beaver Trial in Knapdale, Argyll has won the prestigious Lonely Planet Wildlife Comeback Award. The award celebrates the trial as a must-see tourist destination over the last 12 months and recognises the site's growing popularity.

"We're absolutely delighted to have received this award as only 24 were given across the whole world," commented Simon Jones, Scottish Beaver Trial Project Manager. "This is a huge accolade and fantastic recognition for the project and for the local area."

The first beaver families were released in May 2009 as part of a five-year trial reintroduction and are now settled in their new home in Knapdale. The trial, a partnership project between the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, the Scottish Wildlife Trust and host partner Forestry Commission Scotland, aims to determine how beavers will prosper in Scottish habitats and to assess their impact on the current Scottish environment.

The independent scientific monitoring of the beavers is being undertaken by Scottish Natural Heritage, and it is their final report at the trial's conclusion that will help to decide the long-term future for beavers in Scotland.

Beavers are native to the UK and were once a common sight before they were hunted to extinction by man in the 16th century. Beavers are known as a 'keystone' species in that they bring many benefits to wetland environments and improve habitats for a variety of other species. More than 20 European countries have already reintroduced beavers back into the wild.

"The beavers have been busy constructing lodges and building dams, as well as enjoying swimming in the lochs, all of which provide a great spectacle for those visitors fortunate enough to catch a glimpse of these amazing creatures," explained Jones. "We're delighted that the Lonely Planet Awards will raise the profile of the project and highlight the opportunity people have to explore a beaver landscape in a stunning part of Scotland."

→ **www.scottishbeavers.org.uk**

The Knapdale beavers continue to draw wildlife tourists to the area

PHOTOGRAPH: STEVE GARDNER/SWT

WALK ON THE QUIET SIDE

Visitors to Loch Ness can now explore the less-travelled south side of this famous Scottish loch with greater ease, thanks to the opening of a new 45-kilometre trail taking in the best the area has to offer.

The South Loch Ness Trail, which was officially launched in August, creates a continuous, managed track along the south side of the loch, offering an ideal way primarily for walkers, as well as off-road cyclists and horse riders, to enjoy the surrounding landscape. The trail, which runs from Loch Tarff near Fort Augustus in the west to Torbreck on the outskirts of Inverness in the east, connects existing and upgraded tracks with new sections along the way.

Alternately bordered by steep moorland and dense pine forests, highlights of the trail include the falls at Foyers (of Rabbie Burns fame), the site of an Iron Age fort at Inverfarigaig and the finest surviving example of a single span General Wade bridge dating from the 18th century.

Trail users are guided by way markers and informed by interpretation panels to help them understand a local environment that is rich in flora and fauna (maybe including a certain mythical beastie).

The opening of the trail is part of an ambitious long-term tourism plan for the area with the Destination Loch Ness organisation working in partnership with other agencies to improve the visitor experience in the area. Future plans include linking the trail to the Great Glen Way on the loch's north side, while from spring 2012 visitors will also be able to take advantage of the new Great Glen Canoe Trail from Fort William to Inverness.

→ **www.visitlochness.com**

On the South Loch Ness Trail, near Fort Augustus

PHOTOGRAPH: DESTINATION LOCH NESS

FUNDING COMMUNITY CONSERVATION

Solar panels on the Isle of Skye, a pony enclosure on the Knoydart peninsula and a heritage trail in North Lewis are among projects across the Scottish Highlands and islands that have benefited from the John Muir Trust Conservation Fund. In all, ten projects in Skye, Knoydart, Lewis, Harris and Sutherland have been awarded grants totalling £15,000.

"The purpose of the Conservation Fund is to support projects on our properties and partnership properties that will benefit the local community and the environment," explained Mike Daniels, the Trust's Head of Land and Science. "We want to ensure that people living in remote communities are able to live sustainably among the spectacular landscapes that we value. I'm really looking forward to seeing these projects progress."

Other projects to receive funding this year include work to restore peatlands on a croft at Drinan in Skye, and support for two crofters on the Sandwood Estate in Sutherland who aim to improve biodiversity on their land.

Elsewhere, the Knoydart Foundation has been awarded funding to help build a new pony enclosure at Follach. The ponies are used as an environmentally friendly alternative to all-terrain vehicles for extracting deer carcasses on the 7,000-hectare Knoydart Estate.

"The ponies are an integral part of our deer management operation, enabling us to extract deer carcasses from some of the most remote parts of the peninsula, which adjoin the John Muir Trust land at Li & Coire Dhorrcail," explained Jim Brown, the Foundation's head stalker. "The new enclosure will help us maintain the deer population at a density that conserves the open range habitat, while ensuring key areas of land are protected for native woodland regeneration."

The Conservation Fund allocates grants once a year to projects that reflect the values and ethos of the John Muir Trust. It aims to help individuals, communities and groups residing on John Muir Trust land – or land managed in partnership with the Trust – to undertake environmental and associated cultural activities consistent with the Trust's charitable objectives.

SAVE THE BBC WILDLIFE FUND

The John Muir Trust has added its name to other conservation bodies who have all signed a letter calling for the BBC not to close its Wildlife Fund and to ensure that the Fund continues to support threatened species and habitats at what is a particularly critical time for global biodiversity.

Although less well-known than other BBC appeals such as Children in Need, the Wildlife Fund is nonetheless extremely important. Since it was established in 2007, the fund has raised nearly £3 million and supports 87 projects around the world.

Many of these projects involve highly endangered species such as the Sumatran rhino, Siberian tiger and leatherback turtle. Closer to home, it has supported projects to help a variety of species, from water voles and sea eagles to stag beetles which thrive in some of London's wild places.

The public petition to save the Wildlife Fund can be found at **www.savebbcwildlifefund.net**

Ponies are an invaluable resource for extracting deer carcasses

PHOTOGRAPH: JIM MANTHORPE

PHOTOGRAPH: MIKE BELL/TAY LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP

Kinnoull Hill, near Perth

LOTTERY BOOST FOR SCOTTISH LANDSCAPES

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has earmarked first-round passes for grants totalling £3.3m to protect two diverse Scottish landscapes: the Lomond Hills in Fife and sections of the River Tay near Perth. While funding is not guaranteed, a first-round pass means that money has been set aside by the Heritage Lottery Fund and is an indication of positive support.

In the case of the Living Lomonds Landscape Partnership, the project has been awarded a first-round pass of £1,800,400, including a development grant of £90,600. The Living Lomonds focuses on a 162km^2 area of Fife covering the Lomond Hills and contrasting communities to the north and south of them, including Falkland – Scotland's first conservation village – and historic mining communities such as Benarty.

Led by Fife Coast and Countryside Trust, the scheme aims to reconnect people with the hills so that they can better understand and celebrate the built and natural heritage that they share. Woodlands, dry-stone walls and historic pilgrim routes will be restored and new all-access paths created. Volunteering, training and employment opportunities will be created in heritage skills while a programme of activities will aim to provide a stronger connection between people and the landscape.

Meanwhile, the Tay Landscape Partnership has been awarded a first-round pass of £1,535,500 including a development grant of £100,000. Led by Perth & Kinross Countryside Trust, the scheme covers an area of 200km^2 and is designed to reconnect communities with the area's natural and cultural heritage, as well as restore what remains.

A programme of reed-bed management will be introduced, remaining orchards protected and historic buildings conserved. Access to the Tay, as the main feature of the landscape, will be improved with new path networks and other initiatives so that people can reach the river. Many volunteers will be involved in carrying out the works, while community and school events such as orchard festivals, talks and workshops will engage the public in the area's landscape and history.

The Landscape Partnership is designed to help conserve landscape through the forging of public and community partnerships. People work together, through many interlinked projects, to tackle the environmental needs of their local landscape, while celebrating, conserving and restoring the natural and built heritage of the area.

Over the past six years, HLF has helped protect some of Scotland's most treasured landscapes, from Orkney's Scapa Flow to the floodplains of the River Tweed, thanks to an investment totalling more than £8.5m.

→ **www.hlf.org.uk**

The Lomond Hills from Benarty

PHOTOGRAPH: LIVING LOMONDS LP

SWIMMING THE CORRYVRECKAN

The notorious Gulf of Corryvreckan has wrecked ships and nearly drowned George Orwell, but Rohan Beyts, an Aberdeenshire social worker, has successfully swum across this daunting strait to raise money for the John Muir Trust.

A keen hillwalker and cyclist, Rohan, 56, from Ellon, is a Trustee of the John Muir Trust. She swam the 1,100-metre channel in 30 minutes, during a narrow window of slack tide. At the time of writing, she had raised more than £1,300.

Rohan was inspired to take on the challenge after reading about it in a magazine. "I thought it would be an interesting thing to do," she said. "I hardly slept thinking about the swim but it was better than I imagined. You don't know what to expect because the sea can change so quickly. The conditions couldn't have been better but I still had some choppy waves coming over my head."

The Gulf of Corryvreckan, between Scarba and Jura in the Inner Hebrides, is home to the third largest whirlpool in the world. This phenomenon is created by an underwater pinnacle that forces the fast-flowing water upwards towards the surface. As the tide flows faster round one side of the pinnacle, it catches the upwelling and creates both whirlpools and turbulence.

John Hutchison, Chairman of the John Muir Trust, said: "Rohan is incredibly fit and there was no doubt she could rise to the challenge. Every year I'm amazed by the physical feats that people set themselves to help raise funds for the Trust."

For more on Rohan's challenge, visit **http://rohanswim.blogspot.com**

Rohan in mid swim

PHOTOGRAPH: RORY SME

PHOTOGRAPH: CNPA/WILL BOYD-WALLIS

Loch Etchachan, high in the Cairngorms

WILDNESS KEY TO NATIONAL PARK PLANNING

The Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) has set out a draft plan for controlling development within the park over the next five years – with wildness a key part of the overall thinking.

The Cairngorms National Park is home to some of the best wild land in the UK, including impressive mountains such as Ben Avon, the easternmost of the high Cairngorms, and Carn Dearg in the Monadliaths, which is under threat from a wind farm development.

"Wildness is one of the reasons so many people love and enjoy coming here," said Hamish Trench, CNPA Strategic Land Use Director. "We need people to take part in our consultations and share their ideas and suggestions on how we can build on the work already underway to make the National Park a better place to live, work and visit.

"The responses we receive to the draft National Park Plan will help us shape the priorities for the future management of the National Park."

Wildness is one of the main priorities in the draft National Park Plan. The Authority's target is for a 10% increase in the area characterised as 'high or medium wildness' by 2017. However, the Park Authority says that achieving this target will be a challenge given the number of large-scale wind developments proposed around its boundary.

The National Park Authority is also consulting on its Cairngorms Local Development Plan Main Issues Report. The Local Development Plan will determine where and what kinds of development can take place in the Park.

The consultation for both documents began in September with a closing date for submissions of 9 December. Copies of both publications and details of how to respond can be downloaded at **www.cairngorms.co.uk**

A typically wild Cairngorm view

PHOTOGRAPH: CNPA/RJ KINNAIRD

DOUBLE YOUR MONEY

For the second year running, we are offering the chance to double your donation to the John Muir Trust, through the Big Give Christmas Challenge 2011. To take advantage of this opportunity, all you have to do is donate through the Big Give website from 5-9 December. The double your money offer means that if you give £25 to support our protection of wild land, your donation will actually be worth £50 to us.

In 2010 the Big Give raised £13,000 for the John Muir Trust thanks to generous support from members and supporters. This year we hope to raise £12,000 in donations that will then be doubled to £24,000.

This year's total will be used to extend the Trust's work to protect wild land through our activities in Scotland and throughout the UK.

If you can help, please make a diary note to go online at www.jmt.org/biggive on 5 December. To ensure your donation counts, please ensure you get online as soon as possible. A limited amount of funding is available each day and will be used up by others if we don't get there first!

For further information, please contact Kate Barclay on **0131 554 0114**, **kate.barclay@jmt.org**

Please mark 5 December in your diaries now – and spread the word to others who also want to protect wild land

STOP PRESS

The 2012 John Muir Trust AGM & Members' Gathering will be held over the weekend of 4-6 May at the Loch Lomond Outdoor Education Centre, Ardlui. The weekend will see an informal dinner and social on the evening of Friday, 4 May. Staff Reports and the AGM will then be held on the morning of Saturday, 5 May, with an opportunity to join excursions in the afternoon. A BBQ will be provided in the evening and will be followed by either a lecture or local music to end the day. Further excursions will be available on Sunday, 6 May.

Time to act

The John Muir Trust believes there is a strong case for improving statutory protection of wild land across the UK – with time very much of the essence. **Stuart Brooks** explains

The John Muir Trust's call for better statutory protection of wild land is far from an isolated voice. A number of debates, policy and practical initiatives for our protected areas network in the UK have created a supportive backdrop to our ambitions. Here, I would like to explore some of the options and connections that could see the UK address many of the inadequacies that have led to our failure to meet biodiversity conservation targets as well as the despoiling of our natural, wild landscapes.

The UK has a long history of protecting its natural and cultural heritage, in part recognising the moral imperative that wildlife and landscapes have intrinsic value and should be cherished to pass on to future generations. Now, fresh arguments for protecting nature for its ecological or ecosystem services, such as provision of clean air, food, water and regulation of our climate, are beginning to drive land use policies and influence the debate on the future of our protected areas network.

The cornerstone of modern protected areas legislation in the UK was the National Park and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. This laid the foundations for designating places that are special for wildlife (such as National Nature Reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest) and people (National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty). Subsequent legislation has improved first the protection and, more recently, the management of wildlife sites. However, there has been no real recognition of any physical or functional connection between these special places – and many have subsequently become isolated fragments of nature in an increasingly hostile territory.

The Natura 2000 network – which comprises Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas across Europe – provides a higher level of protection and has encouraged active management for habitats and species in the UK. The underpinning European Directive (Article 10) also recognises the idea of a network of sites to support ecological coherence[1] although the ambition was never truly realised in its implementation in the UK.

On the landscape front, in 1980, 40 areas of 'outstanding scenic value in a national context' in Scotland were designated as National Scenic Areas (NSAs). Along with the two National Parks, NSAs provide the most effective means of protecting Scotland's valued landscapes. However, just as with the nature-based designations, the approach to selection of the NSAs was to identify a representative sample of the best bits of scenery across Scotland. In other words, they do not represent a comprehensive coverage of all areas of the highest scenic quality.

One might think therefore that the UK is awash with designations and protected areas, many of them overlapping, and the last thing we need is any more. Some certainly argue this point vigorously – but it is not just a numbers game. The real point is whether the current network of protected areas is adequate and effective at protecting our natural heritage and – of particular relevance to the John Muir Trust – whether our wild land resource is adequately protected by existing separate designations conceived to protect our landscape and biodiversity.

OUR VISION

In 2010, the Trust published its new Vision entitled 'Our Essential Wildness'. In that document we made the case for improving protection for wild land as the means to protect the special qualities of 'wildness' that we think are so important to us and society as a whole. A key purpose of our Vision is to encourage decision-makers to recognise the issues and take action. It is important that we set out in the clearest possible terms what we think is the priority for protection and the best way of doing that is to use our Wild Land map (see section opposite) showing where we think the best wild land is in the UK.

This is our starting point, so where do we want to end up? We have covered this before in previous Journal articles, but it is important to restate that our wild landscapes, particularly in Scotland, are now under increased pressure at an unprecedented rate and extent.

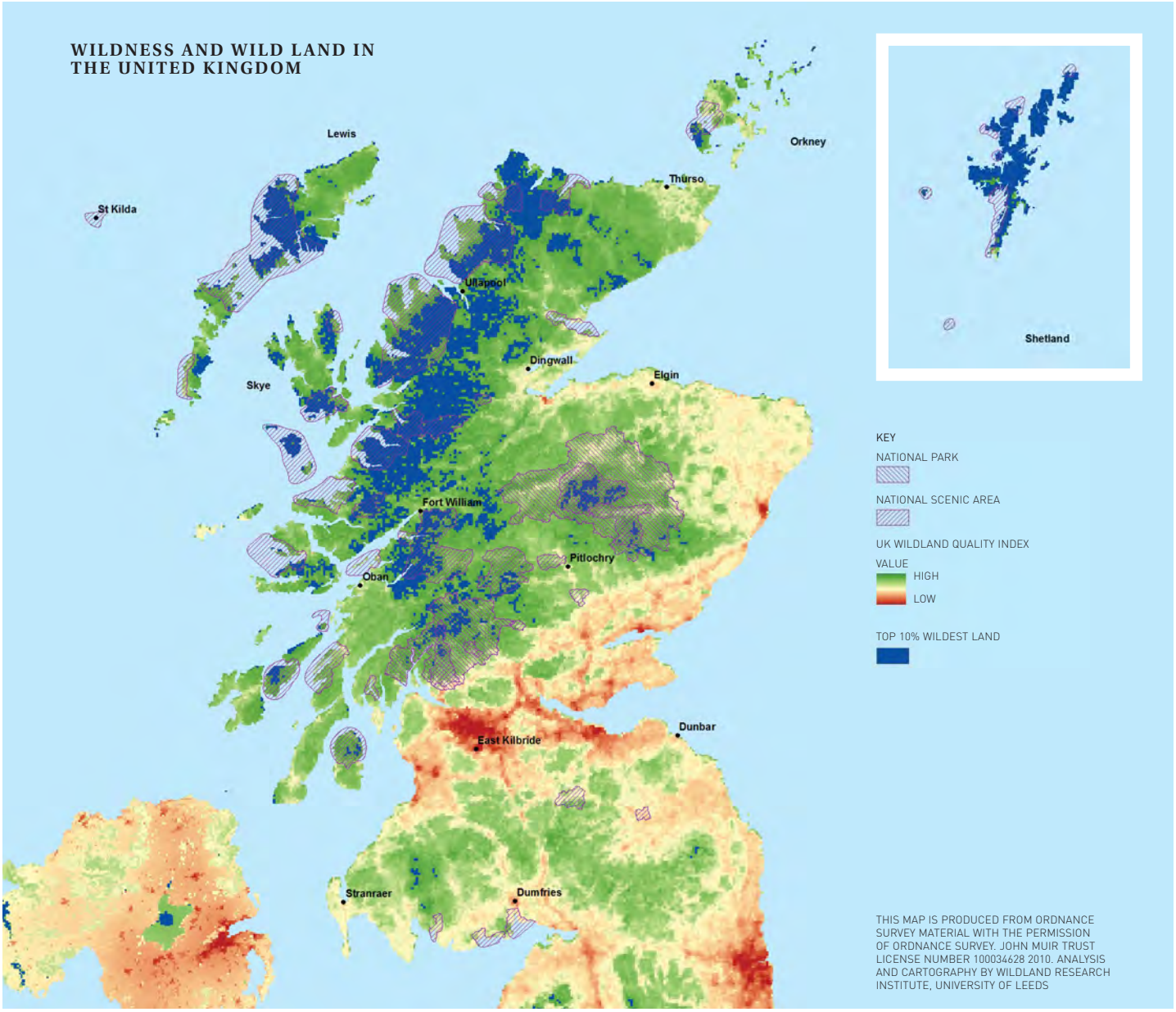
In its response to the John Muir Trust petition[2] to the Scottish Parliament seeking 'better protection for wild land' Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) accepted that something needed to be done. It cited its own research showing that areas in Scotland without visual influence decreased from 31% in January 2008 to 28% in December 2009 (from a baseline of 41% in 2002). SNH suggests that the most significant contributor to this decline is the development of wind farms, a consequence of their prominence and extensive visibility and siting in rural locations with little or no previous development.

A more detailed study[3] has been undertaken of the Affric-Kintail-Knoydart area, exploring historic trends in the extent of wild land by considering the visual effect of roads, tracks, plantation forest and hydro-power schemes, and changes in accessibility. This revealed a reduction in the area unaffected by these features of around a third over the past 100 years, with the scale of change much greater in the second half of the 20th century.

PHOTOGRAPH: KEITH BRAME

Standing tall: autumn pine, Glen Derry, Cairngorms (above); the Trust's Wild Land map (opposite)

WILDNESS AND WILD LAND IN THE UNITED KINGDOM



PERCENTAGES OF BEST WILD LAND AREAS PROTECTED BY STATUTORY DESIGNATIONS

TOP 10% WILDEST LAND IN UK	ALL STATUTORY DESIGNATIONS	NATIONAL PARK	NSA	NATURA 2000	SSSI
SCOTLAND	49.6	6.6	33.6	20	23.1
ENGLAND	97.1	90.1	7	24.3	2.5
WALES	99.5	97.2	1.2	63.6	67.2
UK	52	8.7	32	19.2	24.4

SOURCE: WILDLAND RESEARCH INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Section of the John Muir Trust Wild Land Map showing areas of cross-over with statutory landscape protection including National Scenic Areas and National Parks in Scotland.

Details of the Wild land Map can be found at **www.jmt.org/assets/pdf/policy/wild%20land%20policy.pdf**

Just as the Government-commissioned Lawton review[4] of wildlife sites has made the case for a new approach for wildlife conservation in England, we must now raise the profile of landscape protection. Lawton points to the inadequacy of the sites system (i.e. Special Sites of Scientific interest) in England (the same arguments are relevant to the rest of the UK) and, in the context of climate change and declining ecological indicators, says that a failure to meet international obligations requires a 'step-change in our approach to wildlife conservation, from trying to hang on to what we have, to one of large-scale habitat restoration and recreation, under-pinned by the re-establishment of ecological processes and ecosystem services, for the benefits of both people and wildlife'.

Lawton concludes that there is a way forward, that it will take considerable time and resources to implement but that it must be done if England is to remain a 'green and pleasant land'.

BEING BOLD

Much of Lawton's arguments support the need to address wild land protection in a similarly bold fashion. Our Wild Land map is a starting point as it outlines where we think the most valuable resource is. This can be further refined but, fundamentally, it encompasses the most natural landscapes and wildlife areas – albeit influenced by centuries of human land use. I think this gets to the heart of the issue and teases out what it is exactly we are trying to 'protect'. In one word, it is 'wildness' – where landscape and nature meet with minimal human influence.

Our analysis shows that the NSA system only covers a third of the best wild land areas in Scotland (see table above). To be pessimistic, one might conclude that if nothing is done to bolster our systems of landscape protection in Scotland and we are reliant solely on NSAs and existing National Parks we could, over time, lose two-thirds of our existing best wild land resource.

It is true that wildlife is protected (mainly by SSSI and Natura) in around 50% of the same wild land area but we have found that under the current system – whereby a site is designated either for wildlife and associated habitat, or for scenic landscape quality – places under threat from development cannot be defended taking into account both landscape and

→ continued

PHOTOGRAPH: KEITH BRAME

wildness qualities if the development is not deemed to be detrimental to the particular special feature or purpose of the designation.

So, while we might be in with a chance of defending some of the wildlife, our landscapes are highly exposed to development.

We are also now battling against many developments just outside of our designated areas, most notably in the Monadhliath Mountains near the Cairngorms National Park. I don't think anyone could have envisaged the scale of these impacts and its effects on the integrity of our National Parks and NSAs.

JOINT PROTECTION

Where we can make a connection with the Lawton work is to bring the concepts of wildlife and landscape together. After all, wildlife lives in landscapes and some of our most charismatic and important species and habitats such as golden eagle, wild cat, red deer, blanket bogs, pine woods and mountains exist or are dependent on our wildest and least-developed areas.

Here, the concept of scale is paramount. Nature is more resilient (to climate change, for instance) where it has room to adapt and move and where natural ecological processes are allowed to prevail with minimal human intervention. As such, the creation of large ecologically connected areas and networks are now being seen as a solution to conserve and restore our native biodiversity – promoted by the Wildlife Trusts in their Living Landscapes and RSPB in their Futurescapes. Could this also be an opportunity for our wild landscapes?

However, neither the Wildlife Trusts nor RSPB are necessarily arguing for new designations to enable them to deliver their ambitions. They may well feel that their interests are already well served by the existing protected areas network and other policy instruments and approaches can be used to good effect.

This may be true and, in many cases, it is as much a matter of will as legislation – more carrot than stick. This perspective is driven by an acceptance that our core areas for wildlife are already protected although focus now needs to be on making sure that these areas are physically or functionally connected by wildlife corridors, stepping stones and a more permeable and wildlife-friendly wider countryside. I don't think it can be said that our landscapes are equally well served by the existing protected landscape network. We are still at the stage where the core areas, the best areas, require further statutory protection in order to conserve their special qualities.

ECONOMIC ARGUMENTS

These arguments are not just about the aesthetics and the undoubted contribution wild land makes to society's wellbeing, there are also compelling economic arguments for protecting and promoting our wild landscapes[5]. Our landscapes are of world renown and they should be seen as an accolade and the foundation for supporting sustainable and economically resilient communities.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in the UK is currently undertaking a project to map all the protected areas in the country[6] and assign them to the various IUCN protected areas categories. It is surprising this does not exist already but when the project is complete I think it will demonstrate some of the inadequacies that are already apparent as we struggle to defend some of our best areas of wild land. I also hope that it might provide an opportunity to reconsider how our protected areas in the UK might be simplified and bolstered and where core areas for wildlife might overlap with our best landscapes. In this way, we can establish an ecologically connected network that could be used to protect and promote our wild land resource including its landscape and wildlife components.

This might well be a longer term ambition; it will certainly require vision, political will and, perhaps of more immediate concern, significant resources. There are perhaps other more modest steps that could be considered in the interim: creation of more National Parks and establishing buffer zones around our existing ones, reviewing our National Scenic Areas and production of specific guidance to planners and developers to help protect our landscapes and the qualities of wildness (similar to the recent Cairngorms National Park supplementary planning guidance on wildness[7]). Other routes to protect and enhance wild land through guardianship by NGOs and local communities such as the North Harris Trust and Knoydart Foundation require ongoing support.

Land value (clockwise from top): Cairngorm panorama; Birling Gap, South Downs NP; fishing boat off Skye; lone walker enjoying the Lake District hills

The status quo is not enough. Our current statutory systems are inadequate and we are losing the quality and extent of our wild land year after year. In their response to our Scottish Parliament petition I think SNH managed to sum up this sentiment extremely well and they therefore have the last word:

'We would note, however, that given the intensity of current pressures, the time available for existing approaches to prove their efficacy must be regarded as limited. If they are unable to do so, alternatives such as that advocated by the John Muir Trust would become essential. There is a history, in the field of environmental protection, of acting decisively only when the resources in question are under extreme threat. Given the distinctiveness and rarity of Scotland's wild land resource – in a western European, not purely a UK, context – we must surely avoid this trap and act before it is too late.'

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About the author

Stuart Brooks is Chief Executive of the John Muir Trust. He can be contacted at **stuart.brooks@jmt.org**

PHOTOGRAPH: SOUTH DOWNS NP

PHOTOGRAPH: RUTH CHAMBERS

PHOTOGRAPH: RICHARD ROWE

What next for our National Parks?

Ruth Chambers from the Campaign for National Parks looks back at the creation of the National Park system in England and Wales and highlights some of the threats these special areas face today

The National Parks journey for England and Wales began in earnest in the 1930s. Much of the countryside was out of bounds as it lay within large estates jealously guarded by game-keepers and grouse moor beaters. But so great was people's need for recreational escape from the polluted northern cities of Sheffield and Manchester that they joined together in the now legendary Kinder Scout Mass Trespass in 1932. It was a turning point in the campaign to secure greater access to the countryside and catapulted access rights onto the political agenda in spectacular fashion.

Later that decade and for much of the 1940s, attention turned elsewhere as war broke out, but not long after hostilities ended the campaigns for National Parks and access to our green spaces were back on the agenda. With legislation in the bag in 1949 (the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act), most National Parks were designated in the 1950s with the twin purposes of conserving their natural environment and promoting public enjoyment of it. The Broads joined the family in 1989, the New Forest in 2005 and the South Downs in 2010.

PARKS BOOST

In England, the National Parks family was given a huge boost when the South Downs joined in 2010. This followed a long campaign that had its roots in the 1950s, as the South Downs had been the only area to have been cited in the 1947 Hobhouse Report not to be designated as a National Park. The South Downs Campaign, established in 1990, was instrumental in winning the fight for National Park status, thanks largely to unstinting public support and national political commitment. The South Downs is an interesting addition to the family due to its long and linear shape, large population and high visitor numbers.

Today, Natural England is considering extending the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks – a move that would complete unfinished business from the 1950s when Park boundaries were often drawn to reflect administrative convenience rather than landscape value. If this project is successful stunning landscapes such as the northern Howgills and Mallerstang and the limestone wonders of the Orton Fells will be included in the Yorkshire Dales National Park, while the Lake District's eastern borders will be boosted by the quiet wonders of Borrowdale (Westmorland) and Bretherdale.

Disappointingly, the expansion of the Parks is opposed by local authorities, despite the fact that the public (their electorate) overwhelmingly supports the extensions. We welcome the John Muir Trust's support for this important campaign.

So where will our focus turn once the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales expansions have been secured? In England, there is a sense that the National Park journey of designations is nearing completion. In Wales, some of us still hanker after a Cambrian Mountains National Park that would cover the upland beauty and wildness of the Elenydd. But the chances of securing political support for this seem slim at present. In Scotland, there are many choices for extending the National Park family including an exciting opportunity to create the UK's first marine and coastal National Park, which is only possible under Scottish legislation.

→ continued

Stretching the legs: cycling in the North York Moors NP (left); limestone pavement, Yorkshire Dales NP (opposite)

PHOTOGRAPH: FRIENDS OF THE LAKE DISTRICT

PEOPLE POWER

Our National Parks are part of a worldwide network of landscapes that, collectively, we have decided should be protected for current and future generations. But unlike many other types of protected area, National Parks in the UK have one crucial difference – people.

People have helped to shape the National Park landscapes that we know and love, and people continue to care for them today, by farming, visiting, volunteering and campaigning. And it is clear that without people National Parks would not exist in the way that we know them today; they are, after all, a human concept dating back to the late 1800s when Yellowstone became the world's first National Park.

But as well as being instrumental in their establishment and protection, people are, in some ways, the greatest threat to National Parks. As our population and demand for natural resources grow, so too will the pressure on our vital open spaces. As our lives become more stressful and we reject far-flung holidays because of carbon budgeting and purse tightening, we turn increasingly to places like the National Parks for solace and to satisfy our growing hunger for adventure, escape and tranquillity.

I believe that National Parks have delivered on their founding aims. They remain large tracts of largely undeveloped countryside with excellent public access – a glance at a map of night-time Britain shows the National Parks as reservoirs of darkness, thanks largely to their protected status. They remain free to everyone and recognise the importance of attracting new audiences. Society has changed greatly since the 1950s and it is important that the National Parks reflect this.

It is our belief that people need National Parks, but our National Parks also need people. In the short term, a major threat lies with their resourcing. National Parks, like many other areas of funding, have lost out in the UK Government's programme to reduce the deficit. The full impact of the cuts on Park budgets will not be known for some time, but it seems that rights of way, bus services and visitor facilities could be hit the hardest.

ADDITIONAL THREATS

Some of the most obvious threats are the ones that we can see, including development proposals of all kinds. National Parks enjoy the highest status of protection in relation to their landscape and scenic beauty, but that doesn't prevent them from being targeted by developers of housing, energy and quarrying schemes. For example, a company called Sirius Mining is currently sinking eight exploratory boreholes into the North York Moors National Park to determine the extent of potash underground with a view to applying for a major new potash mine.

And while national and local planning policies have succeeded in protecting the Parks, in England the government is consulting on a new national planning policy framework. Meanwhile, in Wales, the government is reviewing how planning is delivered in National Parks. There has always been a tension between the protection of nationally important landscapes, creation of local jobs and, in some cases, provision of nationally important resources (for example minerals or space for military training). This tension is unlikely ever to resolve itself while the overall population and the demands of society grow. So we must remain vigilant and ensure that the planning frameworks remain robust and that development is undertaken sustainably within National Parks.

Of course, loss of vital local services and lack of affordable housing threaten to undermine the communities that live and work within the National Parks – schools, buses, shops, garages and pubs are all at risk in this time of austerity.

However, perhaps the most serious threats to National Parks are the ones that we can't see. The changing climate will have major implications for our Parks, their wildlife and the communities that live within them. Meanwhile, our complicated and volatile world means there are so many demands for people's time and attention that there is a real risk that people will take National Parks for granted and assume that their protection is guaranteed.

Governments invest in vote winners and National Parks must be seen as an essential part of society and not as a luxury if they are to enjoy continued public and political support. This is why we have been working for the past 11 years on Mosaic, a groundbreaking project that helps individuals, groups and communities to understand, gain access to and benefit from National Parks. It focuses on those audiences who would not normally visit such places and provides them with the knowledge, tools and confidence to explore these wonderful landscapes.

NOW MORE THAN EVER

We strongly believe that the role of National Parks has never been more vital. They represent our finest landscapes and bring pleasure to the millions of people who visit them every year, as well as a much-needed escape from the stresses of everyday life. They are havens for many valuable species, harbour much of our cultural heritage and will make a major contribution to tackling climate change.

As such, National Parks are a vital part of many people's lives, providing opportunities to escape, reflect and keep healthy. The designation has largely worked but many challenges lie ahead. A healthy and sustainable future for National Parks will depend on the involvement of us all.

About the author

Ruth Chambers is Deputy Chief Executive at the Campaign for National Parks – an organisation now in its 75th year that campaigns to inspire people to look after and enjoy our National Parks. For more details, visit **www.cnp.org.uk**

PHOTOGRAPH: FRIENDS OF THE LAKE DISTRICT

PHOTOGRAPH: MIKE KIPLING/NORTH YORK MOORS NP

PHOTOGRAPH: FRIENDS OF THE LAKE DISTRICT

Park life (clockwise from top): the northern Howgills; the 13 National Parks across England and Wales; Bretherdale Farm, which could soon be part of the Lake District National Park; walkers exploring the North York Moors

PHOTOGRAPH: SHAILA RAO/NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND

Covering tracks

The pioneering restoration of a major hill track on the Mar Lodge Estate in the Cairngorms demonstrates that such damage can be reversed over time. **Shaila Rao** explains

The 4.6km Beinn a Bhuird hill track on the Mar Lodge Estate was bulldozed in 1963 for stalking and potential ski development and was a highly prominent scar in the landscape of the Southern Cairngorms. Varying in width from three to six metres, the track extended from the foot of the mountain (680 metres) almost to the saddle between the north and south summits at 1,080 metres.

In 1997, with a view to enhancing the wild land quality of the estate and promoting the idea of the 'long walk in', the National Trust for Scotland embarked on a programme of track removal – with the Beinn a Bhuird track the first to be tackled. Restoring the track was to prove both pioneering and challenging in terms of the altitude, exposure and fragility of the montane plant communities.

Overall, the aim was to restore the track site to its original conditions, with the first stage being to recreate the original ground profile by relocating the large quantities of spoil from the track sides back into the line of the track. This was followed by the painstaking transplanting of vegetation that had been lifted from the spoil heap prior to its relocation back into the re-profiled ground. To enable continued access for hill walkers to the summit of Beinn a Bhuird, a footpath, clear of vegetation, was retained within the line of the track.

Track transformation: there has been a marked change in vegetation cover between 2001 (top left) and 2010 (top right); working on the hill track in November 2000 (opposite top)

The success of the track restoration would ultimately be judged on the growth and survival of the transplanted vegetation and how closely this matched the surrounding vegetation. For this reason it was important that sufficient time, resources and attention to detail were put into the transplant work. To achieve the level of precision required, all work above 900 metres was carried out by hand. Below this, a machine was used to move material although much of the actual transplant work was still performed by hand.

With the Beinn a Bhuird track restoration regarded as very much a demonstration project in terms of attempting to recreate original ground vegetation, a decision was made not to sow grass seed or introduce plants from outwith the local area to facilitate the re-vegetation process. Instead, workers relied upon the vegetation that had established itself on top of the spoil heap, supplemented by plants collected from densely vegetated areas within 50 metres of the track.

Individual plugs of grasses were transplanted by hand, as were small, plate-sized turfs of species such as heather and blaeberry. Using this method it became apparent that there was a shortage of vegetation to transplant and that it would only be possible to cover 20-30 per cent of the track. However, this level of cover was accepted with the expectation that over time the vegetation would grow and reach the level of cover of adjacent areas. What was considered most important at the time of the initial work was the need to 'blend' the reconstructed track with the adjacent vegetation and surroundings.

MONITORING SUCCESS

Key to gauging the success of the track restoration was the establishment of a monitoring programme to measure changes in the transplanted vegetation. Since 1998, quadrats in the upper part of the track have been carefully studied, with the percentage cover of different plant species recorded along with fixed point photographs of each quadrat and selected areas of the track.

The monitoring measured changes in the transplanted vegetation in three distinct areas: control (an area of existing original vegetation just off the track); infill (vegetation transplanted into the track line that was filled in using the spoil heap); and spoil removed (vegetation transplanted into the area where the spoil heap was located).

Results show that the track restoration and re-vegetation have been successful on two counts: the transplanted vegetation has survived and maintained itself in terms of percentage cover; and the vegetation has grown and expanded over the last ten years, although it does not yet match the control vegetation.

It is clear that at this altitude and with such high levels of exposure the growth of vegetation is very slow and it may take many more years until the re-vegetated areas match the control areas. In the transplanted areas the amount of moss colonising into bare stony ground outweighs that found in the control quadrats. Colonisation by mosses is usually the precursor to vegetation establishment so this suggests that continued expansion of the transplanted vegetation is likely.

Looking at the different species groups within the transplanted vegetation, the grasses, sedges and rushes are the only species that have grown to match and in fact exceed the coverage of the vegetation in the control quadrats. This is no real surprise: grasses, sedges and rushes are better colonisers at high altitude than sub-shrub species such as heather, blaeberry and cowberry. We anticipate that it will take more time for the sub-

→ continued

Clear as day: the Beinn a Bhuird hill track seen from Avalanche Gully in 2001

shrub species to develop and compete with the grasses, sedges and rushes.

It is also likely that there is more seed source available locally for some grass, sedge and rush species, such as the locally dominant three-leaved rush, than there is for the sub-shrub species. Similar results have been found on the other side of the Cairngorms where high-altitude, unseeded bulldozed ground was colonised first by mosses and grasses, sedges and rushes and, even after 25 years, the development of the sub-shrub community remains limited.

The data clearly illustrates the changes in the transplanted vegetation since 1998 but the results are seen most strikingly through fixed point photographs (as is clear from the photographs on page 18).

Interestingly, the vegetation in the control treatment has also grown and expanded over the last ten years and it is not clear why this may have occurred. This trend suggests that there may be some external factor at play that is influencing both the existing vegetation and the transplanted vegetation. There are a number of possible reasons, including reduced grazing levels and climate change.

The National Trust for Scotland knew that the Beinn a Bhuird track restoration was always going to be a long-term project in light of the slow growth and extreme conditions when working at altitude. However, more than ten years on, it has demonstrated that track restoration is possible at high altitudes and with use of only local materials. The work to restore the track was neither quick nor cheap but most people would agree that the track removal has improved the landscape in the southern Cairngorms and enhanced the wild land experience to be had on Mar lodge Estate. Ongoing monitoring of the site will reveal whether the re-vegetated areas continue to grow and ultimately match the control areas of existing vegetation.

Similar work has since been performed elsewhere, with further tracks restored in Glen Dee, Glen Derry and Glen Luibeg. This work has not been as technically challenging as the Beinn a Bhuird track, but we hope that visitors have reaped the same benefits in terms of landscape and wild land experience.

About the author
Shaila Rao works as an ecologist for the National Trust for Scotland at Mar Lodge Estate. She has spent many years working in ecology in the Highlands and is also a keen hillwalker, photographer and naturalist.

Further info
For more on Mar Lodge Estate, visit www.marlodgeestate.org.uk

Ben Nevis Distillery – the spirit of a wild place

The UK's highest mountain and Ben Nevis Distillery, which stands in its shadow, are intrinsically linked. The mountain not only provides an impressive backdrop to the traditional Scottish craft of distilling whisky but also the key ingredients that give it its provenance

The importance of this relationship is reinforced through the Distillery's membership of the John Muir Trust. As a silver corporate member since 2008, Ben Nevis Distillery has helped to look after this inspiring mountain and is the key sponsor of the 'Spirit of the Wild Places' lecture at the John Muir Trust's AGM & Members' Gathering.

"Ben Nevis Distillery recognises the important work that the Trust performs as one of the guardians of Ben Nevis," says Colin Ross, Managing Director, Ben Nevis Distillery. "We are therefore delighted to be able to provide our support through our corporate membership and sponsorship and hope that we can continue to develop and build on this relationship for the future."

Incorporated within the Distillery is a visitor centre, which is built into the former bottling hall, and an old warehouse dating from 1862. Visitors to the centre will encounter the mythical giant Hector McDram who reveals the Legend of the 'Dew of Ben Nevis' in a specially commissioned audio-visual presentation. The centre also offers home cooking in its coffee shop and restaurant.

For further information on Ben Nevis Distillery and its range of whisky, visit www.bennevisdistillery.com

PHOTOGRAPH: BEN NEVIS DISTILLERY

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

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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 0131 554 0114 or email recruit@jmt.org

PHOTOGRAPH: KEITH BRAME

Tales from the top

Ben Nevis and local climber Dave MacLeod were the stars of the show during a high-altitude day on the mountain as part of the countdown to the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. **Rob Bushby** joined the audience of eager participants

PHOTOGRAPH: ROB BUSHBY

PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN HUTCHISON

PHOTOGRAPH: ROB BUSHBY

Traditional rock and ice climbing are unlikely to become Olympic sports any time soon, but if they were included in the London 2012 Olympics, Ben Nevis would offer a world-class venue and Scotland's Dave MacLeod would be a gold medal contender. One sunny July weekend, these two elements were brought together by the John Muir Trust as part of a range of celebrations marking 'One Year to Go' to the London Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Of the 1,200 events held across the UK, this was not only the highest, but quite possibly the most dramatically located. Some 26 members of the public – joining more than a million others on Open Weekend events – headed up the Allt a' Mhuillin path, past the Charles Inglis Clark hut to a height of 1,000m. The imposing corries and buttresses on the northern flanks of the Ben provided the ideal setting for the special theme of this walk: to explore the Ben's climbing history, from the earliest Victorian ascents to Dave's own triumph on Echo Wall in 2008 – a route widely considered the hardest traditional rock climb in the world.

The Trust invited Dave MacLeod to lead the event not only due to his intimate knowledge of its crags, but also because of his appreciation of the Ben's cultural heritage, natural aesthetics and place in mountaineering lore. In one week in 2010, Dave and Andy Turner repeated the six first winter ascents made on consecutive days in 1960 by Jimmy Marshall and Robin Smith, including the mini Alpine-route, Orion Face Direct.

The unique aspect of a guided walk in the company of a climbing superstar wasn't lost on those attending. "It was an unmissable opportunity for non-climbers to see the Ben's north face close up, and to hear from the expert how he goes about his extraordinary business," commented Duncan MacPhee, Director of Lochaber Sports Association.

Dave himself reflected that of all his many talks about his Echo Wall 'project', this was the first he'd given directly beneath the wall itself. Some of the attendees were climbers themselves and so the chance to spend time in Dave's company on a mountain where he has forged much of his climbing reputation was a particularly enjoyable experience.

Heading home (clockwise from left): participants on the return walk; Dave MacLeod in full flow; gazing up at the Ben's north face

"As a climber it was an honour to have a chance to chat to Dave, with the culmination of the day sitting in the shadow of Echo Wall listening to him speaking of the climb itself and other past adventures," said Robert Wall.

"The day was captivating and inspiring because not only did we hear some great stories about the Ben, but at the same time we got to gaze at the walls and gullies where the adventures unfolded," added Douglas Rankin.

Attendees were also able to learn more about the John Muir Trust and the challenges around managing a high-profile estate like Nevis. The day fitted well with the Trust's belief that wild places are among the country's finest assets and should be celebrated. As part of the Cultural Olympiad, we were able to promote one of our most dramatic and culturally rich mountain landscapes to a new audience.

And as a local mountain athlete who exemplifies Olympian values of peak performance, pushing boundaries and exhilarating achievements, Dave MacLeod was the ideal candidate to place at the heart of such a celebration.

About the author
Rob Bushby is John Muir Award Manager at the John Muir Trust. He can be contacted at **rob@johnmuiraward.org**

Further info
Open Weekend is supported by BP as part of the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad. Spread over four years, the Olympiad is designed to give everyone in the UK a chance to be part of London 2012 and inspire creativity and involvement in art, film, literature, music, theatre and the outdoors. This particular event was commissioned by Discovering Places, a UK-wide campaign to inspire people to discover, explore and be inspired by the buildings, public spaces and natural places where they live and work.

For more details, visit **www.london2012.com/get-involved/cultural-olympiad**

Working with National Parks

The John Muir Award's links with a variety of National Parks give it an important UK-wide presence, writes **Rob Bushby**

With John Muir considered a 'founding father' of the National Parks movement, it is not surprising that there is much common ground (pun alert) between National Parks and the John Muir Trust. In 1947, Sir Arthur Hobhouse, Chair of the Committee on National Parks, outlined their essential requirements as 'great natural beauty, a high value for open air recreation, and substantial continuous extent', which echoes the Trust's current wild land mapping criteria. They should also, he added, 'be such that at least one of them is quickly accessible from each of the main centres of population'.

To help promote the public's understanding and enjoyment of National Parks – one of their key statutory purposes – many Parks around the UK now work closely with the John Muir Award.

Orlando Rutter, Dartmoor National Park's Senior Learning and Outreach Officer, recently ran a programme for eight family groups that included walking, climbing, sketching, poetry, snorkel-litter picking in the River Dart and repairing fire pits. The programme was established so that the range of activities would meet the four Challenges – Discover a wild place, Explore it, Conserve it, Share your experiences – that are at the heart of the Award.

"The John Muir Award provides a really easy-to-use framework to deepen people's relationship with National Parks, their special qualities and their conservation for the future," says Orlando. "It provides the National Park Authority with a way of developing appreciation and empathy for Dartmoor."

Elsewhere, our working partnerships with a variety of National Parks are now well established. The Award's presence in Cumbria, for example, has received backing since 2002, with the Lake District National Park now hosting our Regional Manager as part of its learning service. Meanwhile, one of the first decisions of the Cairngorms National Park Board in 2003 was to appoint a dedicated John Muir Award Manager – a role now integrated into a permanent Outdoor Learning Officer post.

In all, 12 of the UK's 15 National Parks now make regular use of the John Muir Award. Some, such as Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park, have a network of rangers, teachers and youth workers who use the Award locally. Others, such as the Peak District National Park, have a 'champion' at senior level who helps to co-ordinate and 'cascade' activity across staff teams and beyond. Such activity contributes to a vibrant mix of John Muir-branded engagement across a spectrum of wild places and audiences.

In these financially straitened times, the Award is seen as a cost-effective means of meeting Park aims and an effective catalyst for linking activity with local initiatives and government objectives. As Pete Crane, Senior Visitor Services Officer at the Cairngorms National Park Authority, points out, it is estimated that "one full-time member of staff promoting and supporting the Award within and around the Park produces outcomes similar to four members of staff on the ground".

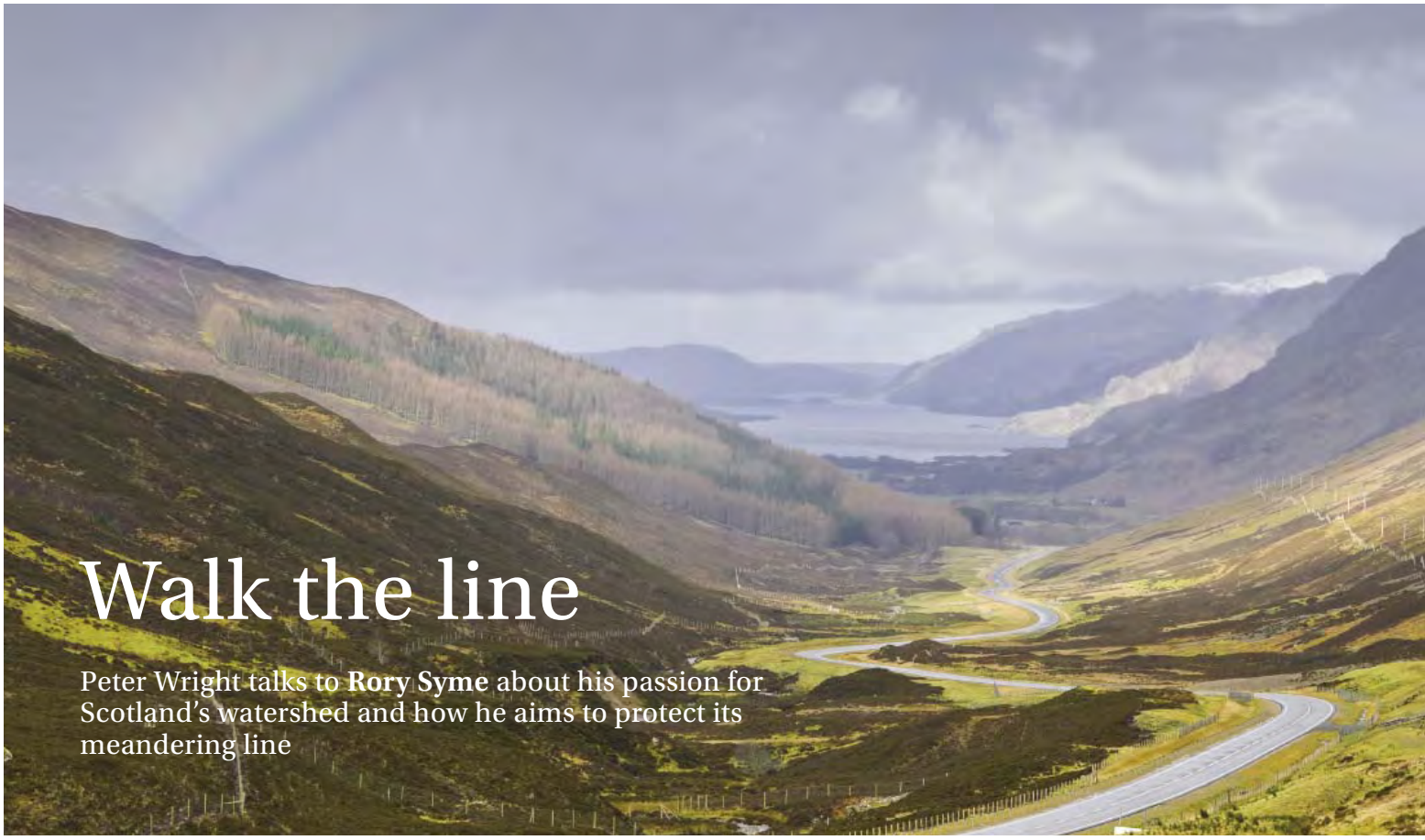
Additionally, the Award helps to recognise achievement and promote progression in National Citizen Service projects and is also seen as a way of helping involve those who don't usually venture into National Parks. A Scottish Natural Heritage report into 'Barriers to Engagement' noted that 'amongst the strongest feedback from external partners was the value of the Park Authorities in providing well structured and packaged experiences for those seeking to engage in the Parks. The use of developed packages or existing award schemes such as John Muir Award or Duke of Edinburgh Award provides a more structured basis upon which to build engagement'.

Most importantly, putting all the infrastructure, boundaries and terminology to one side, we are left with thousands of valuable experiences that reflect Muir's ethos – a sense captured by a young homeless woman who recently spent three days in The Trossachs as part of Quarriers' 'What if ...!' project: "The air actually feels clean. It's great to get a chance to be away from all the noise and hassle back home. I wish I could stay here forever, it's amazing!"

PHOTOGRAPH: NATIONAL TRUST

Digging deep: Award participants work with Fix the Fells in the Lake District National Park

About the author
Rob Bushby is John Muir Award Manager at the John Muir Trust. He can be contacted at rob@johnmuiraward.org



Walk the line

Peter Wright talks to **Rory Syme** about his passion for Scotland's watershed and how he aims to protect its meandering line

"I defy anyone to draw any other line on the map of Scotland, certainly anything like 1,200km in length, that consistently incorporates such wildness." So says author Peter Wright, describing Scotland's watershed – the long divide that separates the catchments of the Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea.

It would be foolhardy to take up the challenge. The watershed is a physical metaphor for wildness. The meandering line it describes includes 44 Munros and 24 Corbetts, both of Scotland's National Parks and comes within at least 500 metres of 87 other designated features.

When Wright went looking for a major project, he fell back on his love of geography, one of the few subjects he enjoyed during a school career that ended at 14. Unable to find a detailed reference of the Scottish watershed within the Royal Geographic Society, or its Scottish equivalent, he pored over maps in order to chart his own path, before spending 64 days walking the route in 2005. He's happy that *Ribbon of Wildness*, his subsequent book about the walk, has been given a positive review in the journal of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, which he sees as accreditation of his line.

It was while walking the line that he became aware of the wildness that the watershed embodies. "I suppose the point at which it became most evident was when I was crossing the Central Belt," he explains. "A lot of keen walkers would scoff at the idea of walking across the Central Belt. However, I found that I was making my way from one piece of higher ground to the next, where there had been little agricultural activity and where even in the areas of industrial blight, nature was reclaiming its own.

"I became more and more conscious of this wildness business, and the great thing for me about the word wildness is that it's relative. When I did the research, I discovered all of these designated areas – every conceivable kind of protection and designation is there and in disproportionate quantity so that something like 30 per cent of the watershed is protected."

The watershed takes in a startling number of protected sites, 89 in total. Starting on Kielderhead Moors which straddle the border and finishing at Duncansby Head in Caithness the list of important areas for landscape and biodiversity includes Ben More Assynt, Forsinard, Glen Barrisdale, the Carrifran valley and Rannoch Moor.

Dipping down: Loch Maree from Glen Docherty

WILDNESS UNDER THREAT

The watershed illustrates the immense natural forces that have sculpted Scotland's landscape; vast glaciers and tectonic forces have carved and shaped the land, creating the network of winding ridges that we marvel at today. The powerful Moine thrust has had a particularly significant influence. By tilting the west of Scotland upwards, it forced the watershed to dart westward at the Great Glen from Laggan to Sgurr na Ciche. From there, its line seems perilously close to the sea as it winds its way north.

"I think that the wildest bit is where it takes that huge sweep westwards and goes in to the 'rough bounds', almost into Knoydart," says Wright. "The map there is covered with what I have affectionately referred to as rocky doodles, where the contour lines just disappear into wee black squiggles. When you are on the ground, that really is wild."

The watershed has remained wild for many thousands of years, even as much of the country was subdued by civilisation. Historically, much of it has been treated as the boundary of parishes, estates and farms, turning it into a kind of no-man's land. Fundamentally what has protected the watershed is that it is, by definition, upland.

According to mapping by the MacAuley Institute, 87 per cent of the watershed – some 915km – has virtually no value for agriculture other than rough grazing and, aside from Cumbernauld, which straddles the watershed as it journeys through the Central Belt, there has until now been precious little trace of habitation.

As Wright points out: "There are only about 20 houses [on the watershed]. There have been a couple of new ones built directly on the watershed in the last couple of years but generally unless you've got pots of money to build all the infrastructure you're going to need, it is just not the right place to build a house. That in turn has determined its emptiness.

"Looking at how Scotland was colonised over thousands of years, it started at the coast and on the islands, gradually worked up the river valleys and the very last place was on the watershed. Indeed in many places the watershed was just ignored, as its consistent elevation renders it unsuitable for most agricultural activity."

→ continued

A TASTE OF THE WATERSHED (SOUTH AND CENTRAL)

The Reiver March – Ettrick Horseshoe

The Moffat Hills are among the finest of the rolling hills that form the Southern Uplands, and the watershed's meanderings amongst them provide not only good walking, but fine vistas, too.

Route:

Travel on B7009 from Selkirk to Ettrick village. Turn right and follow C road SW from there to park at Shorthope at 222126. Ascend by Lochy Law and Black Knowe to join the watershed at Bloodhope Head (3km). Follow the watershed clockwise around the headwaters of the Ettrick Water valley, crossing the Southern Upland Way at Ettrick Head and leaving it at Herman Law (19km). Descend by Standtrae Knowe and Cossars Hill to re-join C road, and on to Shorthope (4km)

Total distance: 26km (walk time, 9-10hrs).
OS Landranger: 79. Option to shorten route by parking at Nether Phawhope, or descending from Andrewhinney Hill

The Laich March – around Gargunnock and Fintry Hills

As you take a break at the ancient cairn on the summit of Carleatheran, you will immediately be impressed by the wide views across the upper Forth Valley, with the jagged skyline beyond. The rambling line of the watershed will have brought you to this special place, yet with much of urban Scotland so close by. You may just ponder the issue of wind farms too!

Route:

Travel on B818 Fintry to Denny road. Stop at western end of Carron Valley Reservoir and park in car park at the dam at 673858. Follow C road to NE to join the watershed north of Cairnoch Hill (3km). Travel north by Hart Hill and wind farm to Carleatheran. Follow the watershed SW via Spout of Ballochleam to Stronend (14km). Return to car park by spot heights on Fintry Hills to Todholes (6km)

Total distance: 23km (7-8hrs).
OS Landranger: 64

However, in the modern age, the watershed is threatened by development and changing land use. Commercial forestry, communication masts and wind farms have all left a mark. "When I was rewalking part of Eskdalemuir Forest where the first generation of trees had been felled and the forest had been restocked, I found to my horror that an area that six years ago had been forest rides, right on the line of the watershed, had partially been planted over with trees. In ten years' time, anyone wanting to walk the watershed is going to find that a problem."

When writing about wind farms in his book six years ago, Wright concedes that he didn't come down that hard against wind farms on the watershed, but he would think differently if writing today. "I'd say it was a thoroughly mad idea. There are two slap-bang on the watershed, which paradoxically are reasonably sensitively located. However, others that are planned are creeping closer and closer to the watershed and to my mind it's too prominent a location, so this notion that we should not have wind farms on the skyline is an important one."

DESIGNATING THE WATERSHED

Wright is infectiously passionate about the watershed and he has big plans for its future. He describes *Ribbon of Wildness* as the anchor for a much wider project that will bring greater awareness and protection. Aiming to work towards building a community of interest around the route, he has a plan to recruit volunteers to look after sections by gathering information about their patch and observing changes to the landscape.

"I want to work with whoever I can to promote awareness of the watershed, for what it is as something truly special and an immense celebration of the best of Scottish landscape," he explains. "In the longer term, I'd like to see the watershed designated in some way. There's no way in its entirety that it would fit the bill for a long, skinny SSSI, but there's probably some designation that could be used that would help protect it."

It seems as if the journey described in *Ribbon of Wildness* is just the start as Peter Wright begins an even longer quest to bring more attention to this precious strip of Scotland.

PHOTOGRAPH: PETER WRIGHT

Walking wild: Peter with Loch Nevis behind; Rannoch Moor from Black Mount

PHOTOGRAPH: PETER WRIGHT

A TASTE OF THE WATERSHED (NORTH)

The Heartland March – above Ba in the Black Mount

A demanding day out by any standards, but one that finds the watershed only a short distance from the salt water of Loch Etive on the one hand and well on its circumnavigation of Rannoch Moor on the other. Much rock and mountain, the promise of vast vistas, and wildness aplenty.

Route:

Travel on the A82 to Glencoe Mountain Centre (White Corries) and park. Journey on the West Highland Way (WHW) south to join the watershed at 282512 (3km). Ascend via Meall a Bhuird and follow the watershed anti-clockwise around the headwaters of the upper reaches of the River Ba valley, by Clach Leathad, Stob Ghabhar and Beinn Toaig (16km). Descend to the WHW and return north to Glencoe Mountain (8km)

Total distance: 27km (10-11hrs).
OS Landranger: 41 & 50

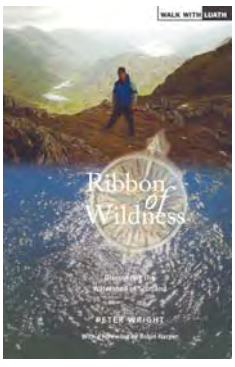
The Northland March – from Crask into the Flow Country

The subtler pleasures of the Flow Country come to the fore in this venture, with the richer moorland colours, wide skies and dancing light upon the lochans. The excitement of the terrain in this boggy and deceptively beautiful landscape is so typical of the watershed.

Route:

Travel on the A836 north from Lairg. Park at the Crask Inn at 524247. Journey north to spot height 264 and Join the watershed at The Crask (1km). Ascend east to Cnoc Sgriodain and Carn Fheidh, and follow the watershed south and east to spot height 496 (16km). Return north and west via Loch a Bhealaich, Bealach Easach (re-crossing the watershed) to Crask Inn (14km)

Total distance: 31km (10hrs).
OS Landranger: 16



Further info

Peter Wright has had a lifetime of involvement in the voluntary sector, working with both the National Trust for Scotland and the John Muir Trust. He received an MBE for his work developing the Duke of Edinburgh Award. His book, *Ribbon of Wildness*, is published by Luath Press.
www.ribbonofwildness.co.uk

About the author

Rory Syme is the John Muir Trust's Press and Communications Officer. He can be contacted at **rory.syme@jmt.org**

Buying wildness

Over the years, the John Muir Trust has acquired some of the finest pieces of wild land in the UK. **Denis Mollison** reflects on the Trust's philosophy underpinning land acquisitions and what the future might hold

PHOTOGRAPHY: KEITH BRAME

'The Trust's distinctive role in the conservation of wild land is to safeguard whole landscapes within it, areas sufficiently large – whole hill ranges or watersheds – that they retain or can be restored to their natural processes and biodiversity, and can provide the spiritual qualities for which humans value wild land: freedom, tranquillity and solitude.'

This excerpt from the John Muir Trust's 'Acquisition Principles' underplays the challenge that has faced the Trust from its beginning; that is, the sheer scale of what we aim to conserve. One of the Trust's founders, the athlete Chris Brasher, put it well when he wrote in the Observer in 1977 about a coast to coast journey on skis across northern Scotland, and included the plea: 'But please leave us some part of Britain that is still a wilderness, a land where you can walk for four days and see no man.'

From the ecological perspective, too, the case for scale is compelling. As former Trust Chairman Dick Balharry liked to point out, the wildest land in Britain can be measured in golden eagle territories, with each pair typically requiring 50 to 100 square kilometres. In 2002, Conservation International (www.conservation.org) identified the 30,000 square kilometres of the Scottish Highlands as one of five remaining areas of great wilderness value in the highly developed countries of Europe.

If we are to protect the wild land value of such a huge area, much of our work has to be indirect: communicating with the public, influencing government policy and legislation, and working with other conservation bodies and with communities. Nevertheless, outright ownership remains the securest safeguard, and also gives our views the credibility only achieved when seen to practice what you preach.

With limited resources, the Trust has developed an acquisition strategy with three arms. The first is purchases designed to safeguard as a whole Britain's 'finest wild landscapes' – areas such as Knoydart, the Cairngorms, Fisherfield, North Harris and West Lewis, Assynt and Coigach, and the Cuillins in Skye. Our aspiration is that the whole of such areas should be managed with a prime aim of conservation of their wild land character.

The second arm is purchases in other fine wild areas that have particular strategic value: deflecting threats, pursuing ecological restoration, and cooperating with or influencing other land managers. A case of particular interest here is that of England and Wales. The Trust has several times reconsidered and reasserted that it is a UK body, and has made some determined though unsuccessful efforts to buy land south of the border.

Thirdly, we value cooperation, which we see as good in itself as well as cost-effective; that is, partnerships in ownership and management, whether with communities, private owners or other conservation organisations.

OUR BUYING HISTORY

Over the years, the Trust has been actively involved in all the 'finest areas' mentioned above. We began in 1982 – before the official founding of the Trust –

Essential wildness (clockwise from opposite): Loch Coruisk, Skye; Loch Unapool, north of Quinag; shieling on the Galson Estate, Lewis

with an attempt to buy the whole of Knoydart, then threatened with becoming a military training area. Our first actual purchase, five years later, was of a small but very fine part of Knoydart, and in 1999 we gave major help to the Knoydart Foundation's buyout of the main inhabited part of the peninsula.

Through the 1990s, with community support, we bought four properties in the Cuillins of Skye. A little later we were involved in discussions of possible acquisition, on our own or as part of a community bid, of the remaining large estate which includes the Cuillin Main Ridge.

We have made major efforts in the Cairngorms, attempting to buy Upper Glen Avon in 1984/5, and larger estates with various partners: Glenfeshie in 1993 (with RSPB) and in 1997, and Mar Lodge in 1994/5 (with RSPB and WWF). The Cairngorms are now part of a National Park, with the National Trust for Scotland (Mar Lodge) and RSPB (Abernethy) both having large holdings. All of this diminishes the case for any John Muir Trust acquisition in the area, and we do have substantial involvement in the area through the John Muir Award. In Fisherfield, the Trust attempted to buy small but key properties on the south side in 1989 and 1992, and on the north in 1998 and 2000.

In 2003, we helped the North Harris Trust's community buyout of a large part of the finest wild area in the Western Isles, and we continue to be actively involved in supporting its conservation work. Two years later, we played an active role in the Assynt Foundation's acquisition of Glencanisp and Inverpolly. That same year a generous anonymous donation enabled us to buy the adjacent Quinag estate. Both estates are involved in the recently launched Living Landscapes CALL project that covers much of the wider Assynt-Coigach area, with partners including the Scottish Wildlife Trust, which owns a large part of southern Coigach.

In other wild areas, we have looked mainly to make small purchases of key areas. Sandwood (1993), Schiehallion (1999) and Ben Nevis (2000) were motivated largely by access-related threats, including the need for major path repairs. In 2004, we accepted our first donated property, Glenlude in the Borders.

The Trust also has a variety of partnerships with a diverse range of organisations, including the Nevis Partnership, the community at Galson on Lewis, the private owner at Corrour, and with the Borders Forest Trust at Carrifran.

South of the border, our main efforts have been in Wales, where in the 1990s we came close to a purchase in the Rhinogs, and more recently to a conservation partnership in the Cambrians. In England, we have at the request of members considered a number of small properties, including in the Peak District and on Dartmoor (in 2005).

WHERE NEXT?

In nearly 30 years, we have built up a splendid and diverse portfolio. While concentrating on those 'finest wild areas' our nine properties lie in six different Natural Heritage Zones, thus representing many different habitat types, and calling for a wide range of management solutions.

This has been against a shifting political and social scene. In our first decade, we had much support from public funds, especially the National Heritage Memorial Fund. Then came community trusts, which we have supported and worked with since their beginnings in Assynt, Eigg and Knoydart in the early 1990s.

All our purchases have been at a modest cost level. The largest and most expensive, Strathaird (60 square kilometres for about £700,000) was only possible because we had built up a Land Fund that covered half the price. Recent generous donations and legacies are making it possible for us to rebuild the Land Fund.

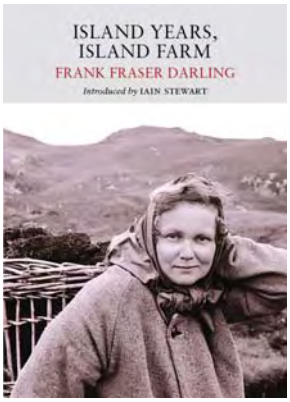
Taking on new properties increases recurrent costs but if we insisted on gold-plating these in advance, we would probably never make another purchase. If we make the right acquisition choices we can reasonably hope to increase our resource base, and especially our membership, to an extent that will cover our increased costs.

Trustees and staff are now revising our detailed acquisition strategy. It will, of course, have to remain flexible to account for the many different circumstances that may arise. We would like to hear from members, whether on consolidation or expansion, pristine land or restoration opportunity, or on their enthusiasm or lack of it for that elusive small but perfectly formed wild land property south of the border.

And we'd like to hear member views on land acquisition in general. My view is that land acquisition is not only a prime aim, but that over the long term it also brings us the resources and standing essential to our partnership, policy and education work.

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

Members' views on land acquisition are very welcome and should be directed to Mike Daniels, Head of Land & Science, **mike.daniels@jmt.org**



Island Years, Island Farm, Frank Fraser Darling

Paul Ramsay rereads two of the books – published together in one volume – that highlight Frank Fraser Darling's formidable work ethic and commitment to his science

The republication of Sir Frank Fraser Darling's *Island Years* and *Island Farm* by Little Toller Books is a most welcome event. Frank Fraser Darling is a fascinating and enigmatic figure. Born of a single mother, who had been cast out by her family, in a hayloft on a Derbyshire farm, he felt a powerful romantic affinity with Scotland.

On the strength of a one-year diploma in agriculture he got himself into Edinburgh University to undertake a PhD in the genetics of the fleeces of blackface sheep. Having achieved his doctorate, Fraser Darling decided to research the ecology and behaviour of red deer. The subsequent publication of *A Herd of Red Deer* in 1937 put an end to his work on that species for the time being, but created a marker for others to follow. Having done so much work on one species, he might have been expected to continue in the same vein but opted instead to examine the periodicity of the breeding behaviour of sea birds, and the biology of grey seals.

The book's preface by Alasdair Fraser Darling, son of Fraser Darling's first wife, Bobbie – a charming photograph of whom illustrates the cover of the book – conveys something of his father and there is an informative introduction by Professor Iain Stewart.

Island Years covers the period between 1936 and 1938 when Fraser Darling, accompanied by Bobbie and Alasdair, lived on the three islands of Eilean A'Chlèirich, Treshnish and Rona. There, Fraser Darling undertook his studies of sea birds and seals, despite the considerable difficulties of surviving on small remote islands. In the background, world events were deteriorating, culminating in Chamberlain's flights to and from Munich in 1938.

Fraser Darling describes how he hopes there will now be peace, but that is not to be. Although aged 36 in 1940, he had no previous military experience and so was not liable for immediate enlistment. That did not stop him from questioning his next move, however. Should he join up, or should he turn his experience in Highland agriculture to good use and work on the home front to prepare for the post-war world? Col. Ian Grant of Rothiemurchus advises him to do the latter. As an elderly subaltern he might well find himself posted as Railway Transport Officer for Fort William: and what a waste that would be.

His conscience thus eased, Fraser Darling heads for the island of Tanera Mòr, the largest of the Summer Isles, accompanied by the indomitable Bobbie, and Alasdair during the school holidays. They set about the backbreaking tasks of liming (best done at ten tons to the acre, but two tons will do for the time being) and slagging the ground (1.25 cwt bags of slag) in which they are to grow crops. They rebuild the abandoned quay and repair the ruinous house. One dark, wild evening, as they work, Fraser Darling notices that Bobbie has gone blue and lifeless. He carries her to the house, where he strips off her wet clothes, puts her in bed, lights the primus stove and boils a kettle with which to fill a hot water bottle and give her tea to drink, a whole quart of it. As Bobbie recovers, her husband notes that hard as things are for them they at least can get themselves warm and dry: there are probably men out on the Atlantic in upturned boats and without prospect of rescue, he reflects.

From the pages of *Island Farm* we witness the fall of France and the surrender of the Highland Division at Saint-Valéry en Caux. Fraser Darling describes the devastation that is felt locally at this terrible blow. In these two books, brought together, we see the coming together of threads that made Fraser Darling's human ecology.

Wilderness and Plenty was the excellent title of his famous Reith Lectures of 1969 and summed up what he was about.


PHOTOGRAPH: FRANK FRASER DARLING

In the Highlands, as elsewhere round the globe, we have created our 'wet deserts,' but with proper care we can restore wilderness and plenty.

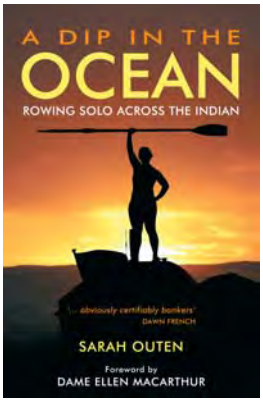
Throughout the two books, the reader is aware of the author's driving commitment to his science, to his extraordinary stamina for struggle and survival, along with a Herculean capacity to go on building and repairing heavy stonework. He puts his experiences into lyrical prose that declares his strong spiritual intent.

It is right that Bobbie's photograph is on the cover of the book because she took on a formidable task as Fraser Darling's wife and helpmate – though it was perhaps unsurprising that they were to eventually split. Fraser Darling's achievements in those years were extraordinary and could never have happened without her support, as he laid the foundations of his human ecology for the Highlands, which are as relevant now as ever.

Book details

Island Years, Island Farm is available through Little Toller Books, an imprint of Dovecote Press. £10.00.
ISBN 978 1 908213 01 3
www.dovecotepress.com

The reviewer
Paul Ramsay is a conservationist and landowner. He lives at Bamff with his wife, Louise. A former trustee of the John Muir Trust, he is preoccupied at present with the return of the Eurasian beaver to Scotland.



A Dip in the Ocean – Rowing Solo across the Indian, Sarah Outen
Reviewed by Rob Bushby

This book reminded me that great adventures have three key ingredients: high endeavour, uncertainty of outcome and shared experience. The last might seem odd for a solo row across the Indian Ocean, but it is perhaps the element that comes across most poignantly in Sarah Outen's book. As part of the grieving process following the death of her father, 23-year-old Sarah spent 124 days rowing across 4,000 miles of unpredictable ocean. In doing so, she collected three Guinness world records, including the first woman and youngest person to row solo across the Indian Ocean.

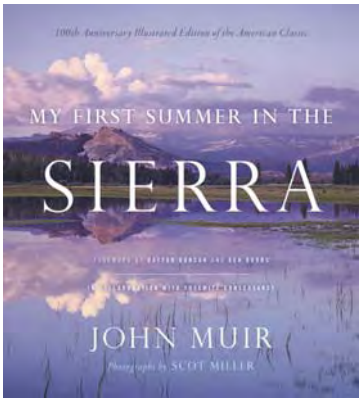
There's a strong collaborative spirit behind a driven approach that Sarah portrays with grace, humour and equanimity. It's a journey that is shared in a variety of dimensions: logistically, with a small support team, global blog followers and worldwide radio listeners; with aquatic acquaintances en route; and with her family. Her father's influence pervades the book as an inspirational reference point, and in a way that celebrates the father-daughter bond.

Much of the writing is conversational, with a vibrant energy, freshness and naive charm of youth (with just the occasional bit of clunky prose and hyperbole).

The anticipation builds through a compelling overview of the months of preparation, gearing up to the journey itself. While we know its outcome, there's a sense of both the drama and drudgery inherent in any grand adventure. And as Sarah leaves us with a tantalising glimpse of her next trip – a circumnavigation of the globe by boat and bike – it feels like an invigorating pleasure to have shared her marine adventure.

Summersdale Press, 2011, £8.99.
www.summersdale.com

ISBN: 978 1 84953 127 6



My First Summer in the Sierra, John Muir, 100th Anniversary Illustrated Edition (in collaboration with Yosemite Conservancy). Photographs by Scot Miller
Reviewed by Susan Wright

'No words will ever describe the exquisite beauty and charm of this mountain park. Nature's landscape garden at once tenderly beautiful and sublime,' wrote John Muir about Yosemite on 13 August, 1869, but that didn't stop the pioneering conservationist from giving it a try.

My First Summer in the Sierra catalogues daily the wonders of being in and around Yosemite. Written over four months, as he helped drive a herd of sheep from the central valleys of California to the mountains, Muir's journal shows him to be a natural naturalist – as comfortable measuring the wingspan of a mosquito as poeticising about the mountain landscape to which he feels so akin.

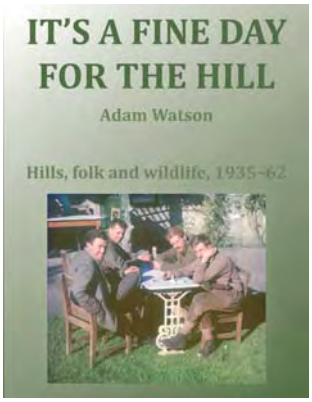
'How interesting everything is! Every rock, mountain, stream, plant, lake, lawn, forest, garden, bird, beast, insect seems to call and invite us to come and learn something of its history and relationship,' he writes.

Along the way, we gain an insight into late 19th century California life as Muir meets a small band of Native Americans managing to live outside of reservations, muses on the variety of ways that beans may be dished up at camp, and reflects on the environmental destruction wreaked by the gold rush (and sheep).

In this edition, Scot Miller's photographs complement Muir's musings but are somewhat overshadowed by the words. However, sales of the book will benefit Yosemite Conservancy – a good reason to plump for this edition if you don't own a copy already.

Published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011. $30.00 (around £19.00).
www.hmhco.com

ISBN 978 0 618 98851 8
For a full review, see www.jmt.org/books



It's a Fine Day for the Hill, Hills, Folk and Wildlife 1935-62, Adam Watson
Reviewed by Richard Rowe

Snow, ice and the wild mountainscapes of the Cairngorms have fascinated Adam Watson since early childhood – and set the scene for a lifetime of ecological study, exploration and adventure.

As the author notes in his introduction, this book – its title taken from Watson's often optimistic proclamation to his wife, Jenny, following a glance outside – is testimony to his belief that exploring alone, preferably without any detailed planning or formal training, is 'the best joy the hills can give.'

Growing up in lowland Aberdeenshire in the 1930s, Watson's sense of wonder and curiosity about the natural world brought him into contact with some of the great Scottish naturalists and mountaineers of their day. In particular, the friendships forged with the likes of Seton Gordon, Derry stalker Bob Scott, Tom Weir and Tom Patey shaped his life, and each has a chapter devoted to them.

Such luminaries fired Watson's imagination in different ways, with Weir the man responsible for introducing the author to the joy of skiing in 1947. Watson hardly looked back and he went on to spend as much time in the snow as possible. 'Even when crawling on hands and knees in storms, or sitting out squalls in snow-holes, I found snow so interesting that discomfort became secondary,' he writes.

This delightfully eclectic collection of stories and memories dating back to his early schooldays charts the life of a man, now in his eighties, who himself became an ecologist, conservationist, prolific author and mountaineer of considerable renown – with the wildlife and landscape of the Cairngorms his specialist subject.

Published by Paragon Publishing, 2011.
ISBN 978 1 907611 58 2

Glenlude, Scottish Borders

John Thomas introduces the John Muir Trust's latest property – a wild place that gives the Trust a valuable presence in southern Scotland

On a calm April morning the cry of a curlew breaks the night curfew and we catch the first warbling call of a black cock lekking below us. I'm here with Robin, a local Trust member and volunteer, counting the remnant black grouse population at the top of Glenlude hill for the Southern Upland Partnership.

The hills of the Scottish Borders are a lot wilder than many think, and Glenlude – the Trust's most recent acquisition – is at the very heart of one of its most beautiful parts, just above Traquair near Innerleithen.

Generously gifted by the late Sheila Bell, the Trust took active possession of Glenlude on her death in October 2010. Half the property is commercial forestry, half open hill. At 400 acres, it is the smallest of the Trust's seven properties but provides a valuable foothold in the Southern Uplands.

Seemingly insignificant at first sight, take a walk around Glenlude and you will find a host of interesting opportunities: four burns waiting for riparian woodland; a peat bog inviting restoration; black grouse habitat in need of improvement and protection; and open hillside that provides a blank canvas on which to explore and develop our conservation ideas.

A preliminary survey by Liz Auty, the Trust's biodiversity officer, has identified a range of interesting plants, while crossbill, owl, woodcock and hen harrier have all been observed on site, in addition to black grouse.

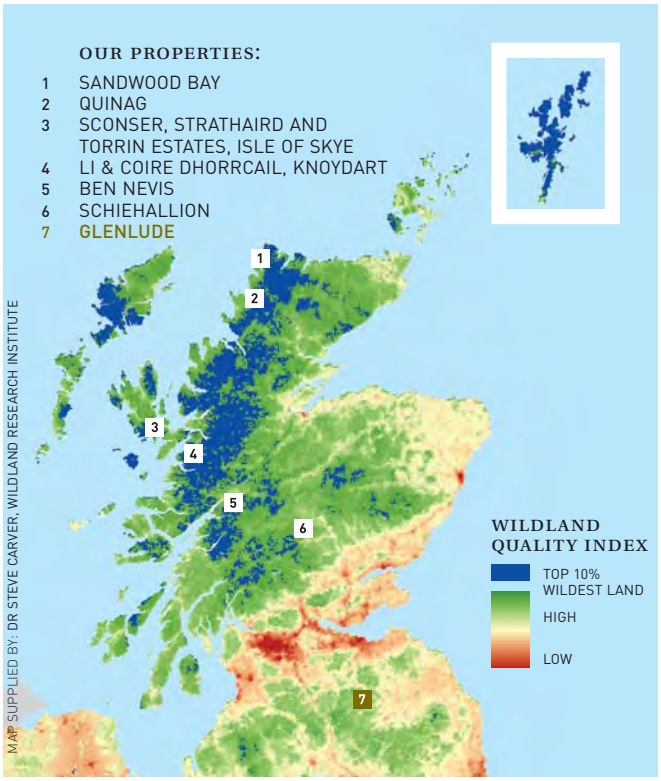
We have many ideas to consider in developing the draft management plan for the property, including restoration of native woodland along some of the streams and around the ponds established by Sheila Bell, and improving black grouse habitat, ideally including restoration of the peat bog.

Glenlude's small scale and excellent access makes it well suited for exploring different conservation approaches. With Edinburgh only an hour's drive away and Newcastle, Carlisle and Glasgow within a two-hour drive, Glenlude is ideal for introducing people from both sides of the border to volunteering.

The large spruce and larch plantation, now ready for thinning, presents its own challenges and opportunities. These will revolve around the economic value of the trees, the potential for replacing portions with native broad-leafed trees and restrictions around commercial forestry.

Glenlude also gives the Trust a stake in the landscapes of the south of Scotland, and with it the opportunity to participate in partnerships which are beginning to look at conservation on a landscape scale.

There is much to do. That's why the Trust is launching an appeal for funds that will provide a foundation for the management of Glenlude, once a management plan has been agreed. These are exciting times, for us, for the local black grouse and for the other wildlife that might find a future home in Glenlude.




PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN THOMAS

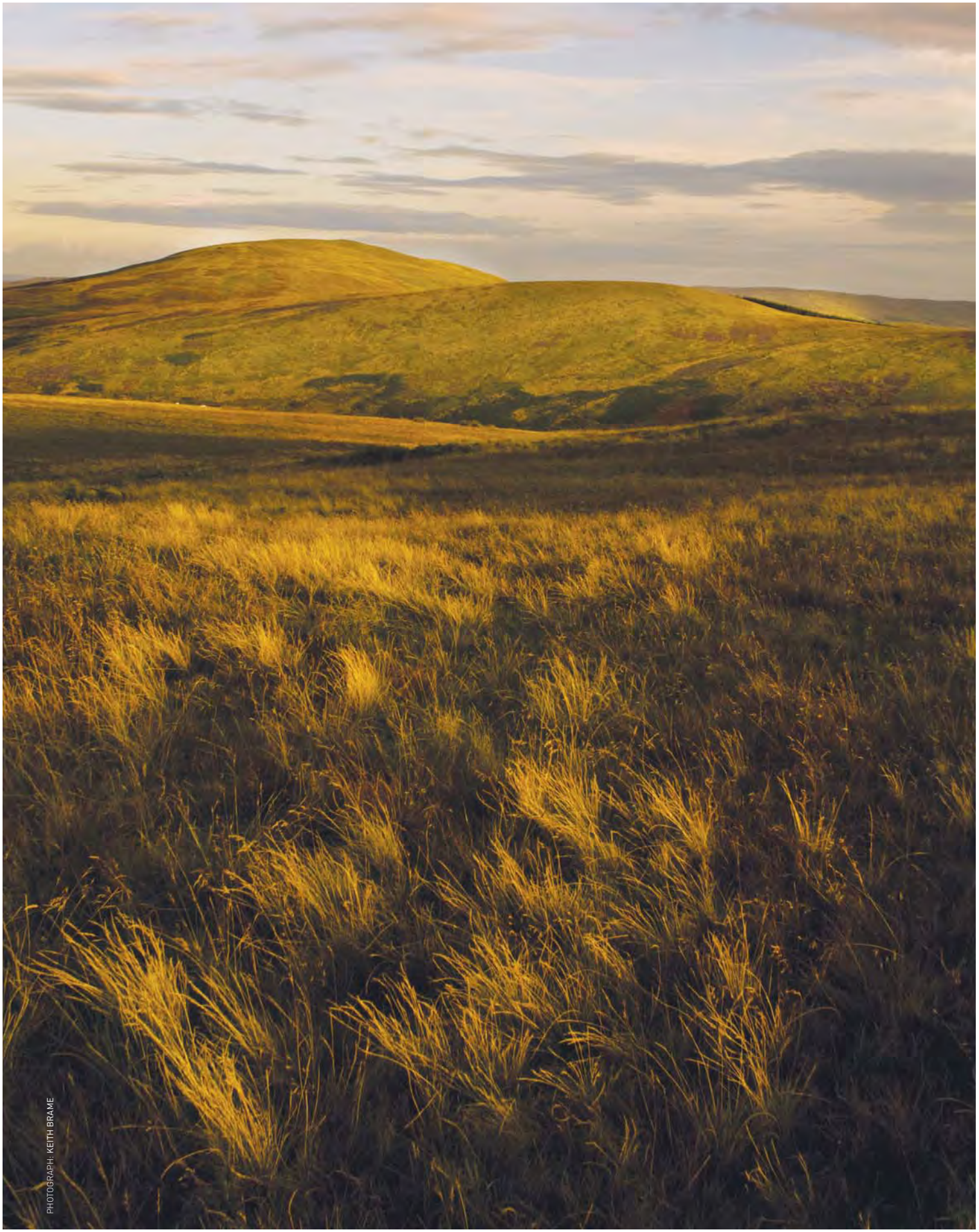
Glenlude glade: a taste of the Trust's latest property

About the author
John Thomas is a Trustee of the John Muir Trust and a lifelong hillwalker. He is based in St Boswells in the Scottish Borders.

Further info
Look out for the Trust's Glenlude appeal, which is looking to raise £25,000 to begin management work on the property. The Trust is also setting up a Land Management Endowment Fund to provide secure finance for ongoing land management costs across all John Muir Trust properties. Any additional funds raised for Glenlude will go into this fund.

For more information and to make a donation, please go to **www.jmt.org/appeals.asp**, call **0300 321 4964** or text **WILD09** to **70070**.

Rolling hill ground on the
Trust's new property at Glenlude



PHOTOGRAPH: KEITH BRAME

Dram, fine, splendid

...need we say more!

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