JOHN MUIR TRUST

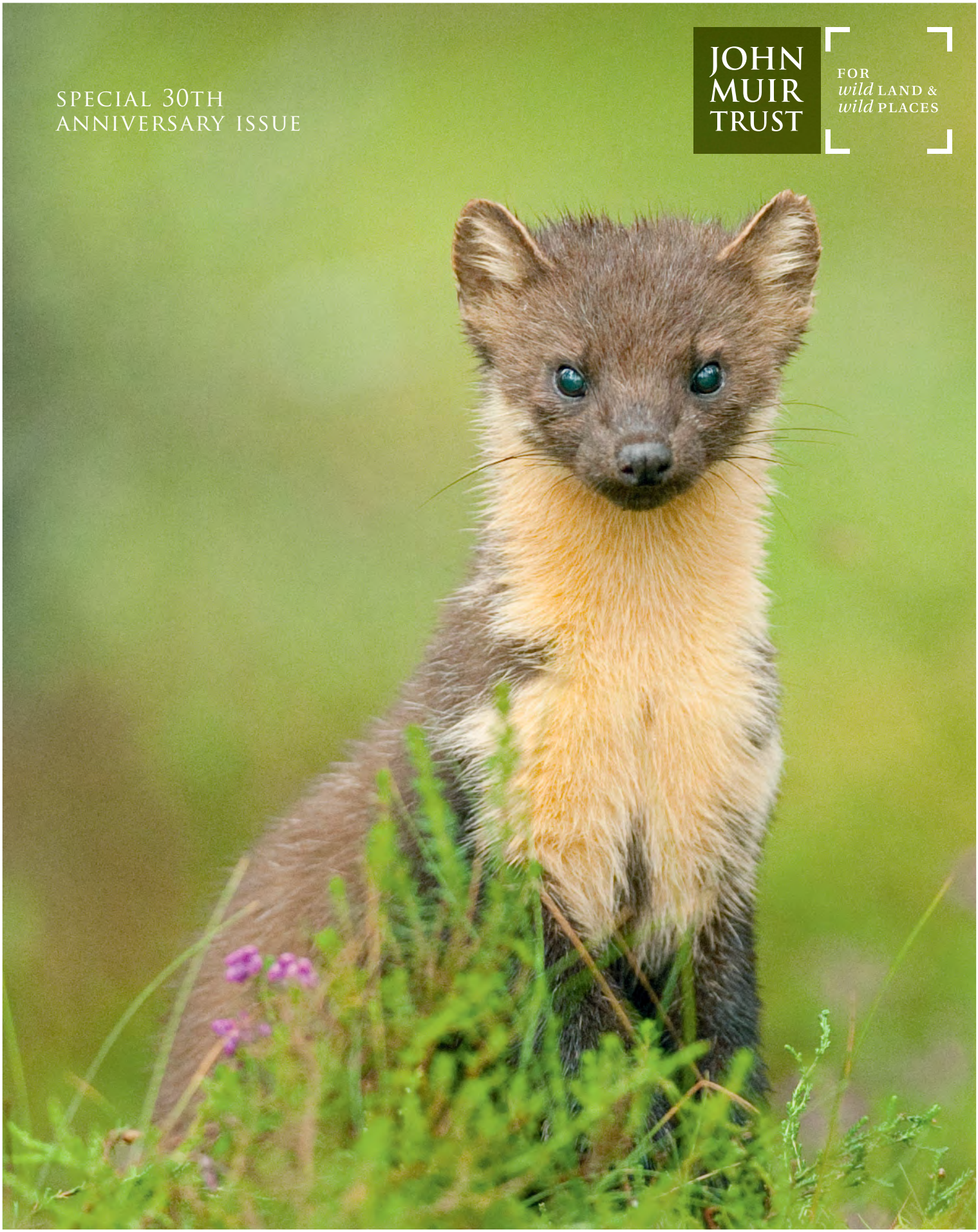
JOURNAL

54 SPRING 13

SPECIAL 30TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

JOHN MUIR TRUST

FOR *wild* LAND & *wild* PLACES



Like birds of a feather …

Deer and woodland go together. Trees provide food and shelter for deer; deer create gaps and niches for tree seedlings and other plants to flourish. More plants = more insects = more animals = more birds = more trees = more plants = more insects = more animals … and so the circle of life goes.

If we help nature flourish, our reward is a thriving ecosystem that delivers food, fuel, shelter, building material, fresh water, beauty and a sense of wonder.

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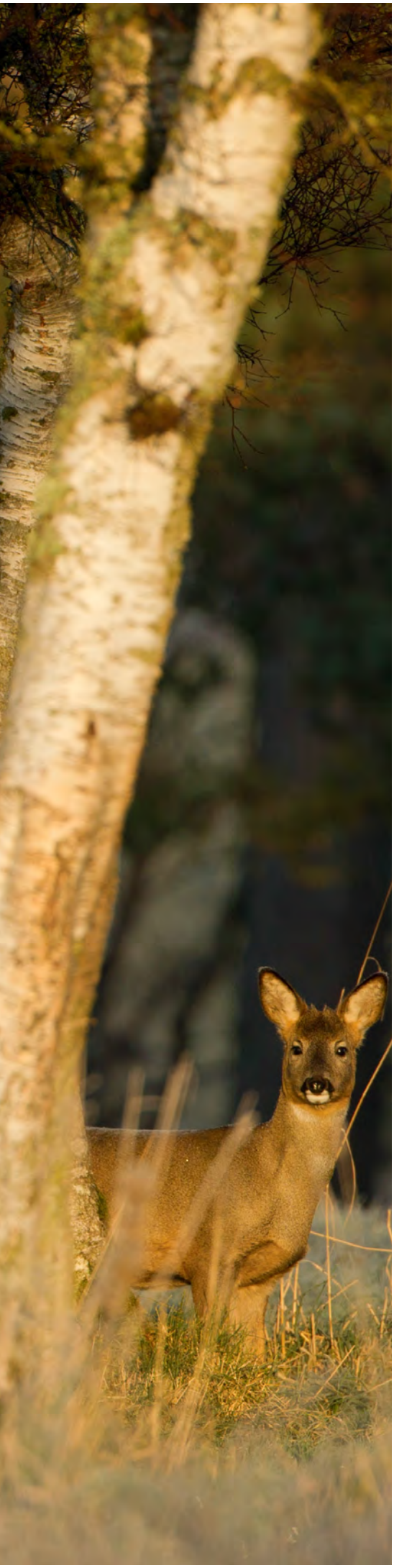

REGULARS

FEATURES

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Cover photography
The pine marten has returned to Knoydart thanks to a flourishing of new native woodland

Inside front cover photography
Roe deer in the Highlands

PHOTOGRAPH: MARK HAMBLIN/2020VISION

From the chief executive

This issue of the Journal has a celebratory feel, as **Stuart Brooks** explains

Welcome to the spring edition of the John Muir Trust Journal – a special edition that marks the Trust's thirtieth anniversary. Thirty years – the lifetime of a golden eagle. It seems no time at all when you think of it like that, but much has happened.

As well as an opportunity for celebrating achievements, anniversaries are a prompt for reflection; a time to consider where we have come from and, equally, where we are heading. We are extremely fortunate that some of our founding members and long-serving members of staff are able to share their perspectives and memories with us in this edition. If others have similar stories, pictures and reflections, we would be delighted to hear from you. It's vital that any organisation like ours maintains such connections to ensure that we remain true to our mission and keep alive the passion and vision that created us in the first place.

I've said before in these pages that I see one of the Trust's roles as that of a guardian of wild land. We have a responsibility to ensure that such land is protected and can continue to support the people and wildlife that depend on its existence. It's sobering to think that man now has the technological ability to fundamentally alter the nature of wild land on a landscape scale; we can build huge dams and flood valleys, erect vast wind farms and drive roads and railways through mountains. The Trust has seen threats come and go, whilst others endure. In these pages, we trace some of these moments and also mark significant milestones within our brief history. How things have changed, how we have changed.

The Trust has grown and adapted, not only to counter threats but also to tell the positive story of wild land – and help people connect with its values. Our Award does a wonderful job and, without it, I suspect we would be restricting our audience and rather preaching to the converted. In this issue, we highlight some of the amazing work we have done with people who have experienced difficulties in their lives and how connecting with nature is helping them overcome challenges. Perhaps this is a message for our politicians: that wild places are for everyone, not just the privileged few.

Also in this issue, our Chairman, John Hutchison, explores the spiritual dimension and qualities of wild land – a point Muir himself recognised and promoted, writing how "mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber, but fountains of life".

Inevitably, and importantly, we also look forward as a new chapter in our history begins with the opening of our Wild Space visitor centre in Pitlochry in April. Susan Wright, our head of communications, provides a brief insight into the thinking behind our first major public space and a glimpse through the door to what you might find inside. Please read the article but, even better, come and see it for yourselves. It is your place, and you will be warmly welcomed.

Stuart Brooks

CHIEF EXECUTIVE
JOHN MUIR TRUST

Breathing it in: Marsco, Isle of Skye (opposite); enjoying Glen Nevis (below)

PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID LINTERN

PROGRESS ON WILD LAND DESIGNATION PETITION

In February, the Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions Committee looked again at the petition calling for a new designation to protect Scotland's best wild land.

Originally lodged in January 2011, the petition had stalled because the final phase of wild land mapping work being undertaken by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) had yet to be released. The Trust wrote to the committee in late January asking it to explore the mapping issue with the Scottish Government and SNH as a matter of urgency.

We were pleased when our petition was discussed by the committee on 19 February. There was cross party support for the petition to be continued and the committee felt it was important for the Chief Executive and Chair of SNH to appear before the committee in the near future. Once this has taken place, the Environment Minister and the Trust will also be invited to appear before the committee.

This is positive news as we have yet to be given the opportunity to provide oral evidence as we outline the case for a wild land designation.

At the time of writing, the Trust also anticipated a debate in the Scottish Parliament which would give added focus to calls to protect wild land. The debate followed a Motion S4M-05602 Endangered Species and Wild Land Conservation submitted by Murdo Fraser MSP, which acknowledged calls for "a concerted effort in 2013 to deliver a step change in conserving wild land and endangered species".

The Trust would like to say a big thank you to all our supporters who have written to their MSPs and the Minister, following our recent calls to action (see **www.jmt.org/wild-land-campaign.asp** for more).

In other news, the Trust presented a UK petition of more than 6,000 signatures to the Houses of Parliament in December, with the support of Glyn Davies MP. There has been an encouraging response from the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We will build on this as we look for concrete action to protect the UK's wild land, with a specific focus in the immediate future on pressing for Government approval of the proposals by Natural England to extend the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks.

In addition, the Trust will continue to work with other organisations to ensure that recent changes in planning regulations do not weaken existing protections for National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. We will also urge governments across the UK to seek solutions to energy transmission and distribution that avoid new development on wild land, for example by undergrounding transmission lines in protected areas.

PHOTOGRAPH: RORY SYME

Trust chief executive Stuart Brooks (right) and campaign supporter Cameron McNeish with the Trust's Wild Land campaign petition

CAPE WRATH COMMUNITY PREPARES FOR BATTLE

PHOTOGRAPH: ANNE BURGESS

The Stevenson lighthouse that guards the Cape Wrath headland

When access to Cape Wrath at the most northwesterly tip of mainland Britain was threatened by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) recently, the local community around Durness turned to the Trust for help.

Cape Wrath is located just north of our Sandwood property and is at the end of the newly-opened Scottish National Trail (see news item on page 9). The Northern Lighthouse Board put the land up for sale at the end of 2012 and closure was threatened when the MoD said that it wanted to purchase the land to extend its bombing range on the peninsula – the only one in the UK where live rounds are fired.

In a letter dated November 2012, Mark Francois MP stated that the MoD intended to use the 58-acre site for training purposes, adding: "For reasons of health and safety, any access by the local community would be precluded."

Although the MP has since issued a second statement, which claims "should the site be purchased by the MoD, there are no plans to restrict public access further than present arrangements", there is a fear in the community that the only reason the MoD would buy the land would be to close down access. Residents of Durness rely on the tourist traffic to and from Cape Wrath to bring revenue to the wider area.

The community has now launched its own bid to buy the land and has formed the Durness Development Group. It is calling for public support to keep Cape Wrath open and invites everyone to sign a petition to prove to the government how important the area is to walkers.

To download a petition visit **http://bit.ly/XJTzMG** or add your name to the many signatures already collected at **http://bit.ly/103bo0P**

TRUST JOINS 2020VISION ROADSHOW

The Trust is pleased to sponsor an ambitious multi-media project that aims to encourage people across Britain to engage with the natural world. For the next two years, the Trust will accompany the 2020VISION roadshow as it tours cities around the UK, presenting the breath-taking work of top nature and landscape photographers such as Peter Cairns, Mark Hamblin, Andy Rouse and Danny Green.

The events will feature a street gallery exhibition and theatre show presented by several of the 2020VISION artists, who will tell the inspiring and motivational story behind the many significant efforts underway to repair and reconnect UK ecosystems.

As well as promoting the benefits of wild land, our sponsorship will enable the Trust to spread the word about our work to a wide audience.

As the Trust's membership manager, Fiona Mackintosh, explained: "2020VISION has kindly invited the Trust to talk at its theatre shows. This provides a valuable opportunity to promote membership of our organisation and ask for support for our conservation projects, such as the Coigach-Assynt Living Landscape partnership project."

As part of the agreement, 2020VISION has contributed 100 high-quality photographs to the Trust's image library for promotional purposes. For more on 2020VISION and the travelling roadshow, visit **www.2020v.org** or call us on **01796 470 080**.

PHOTOGRAPH: JOE CORNISH/2020VISION

View from the summit of Sgorr Tuath, Coigach

YEAR OF NATURAL SCOTLAND FOCUS ON JOHN MUIR

The Trust has welcomed the Year of Natural Scotland – the latest in a series of 'year of' campaigns by the Scottish Government – as an opportunity to build awareness of John Muir and inspire everyone to enjoy the great outdoors. The initiative will promote Scotland's natural beauty and biodiversity, encouraging visitors to enjoy its landscapes, wildlife and heritage responsibly throughout the year.

Celebrations of John Muir's life and work will focus on April, with special events, activities and walks taking place at national nature reserves, national parks, country parks and other sites around Scotland.

Meanwhile, the 175th anniversary of Muir's birthday – 21 April 2013 – has been designated 'John Muir Day'.

The Trust will celebrate in a number of ways including supporting a Scottish Natural Heritage geological tour of Perthshire for 12 people, starting in Dunkeld and ending at our property on East Schiehallion; and the official opening of our new visitor centre, the Wild Space, in Pitlochry, on 22 April. Visitors to the Wild Space will be able to learn much more about Muir and how he continues to inspire our work.

The Muir celebrations are also set to continue into 2014, as Scotland prepares to mark the centenary of his death and recognise his legacy to the conservation movement and the environment he campaigned so hard to protect.

→ **www.visitscotland.com/natural**

Year of Natural Scotland 2013

JOHN MUIR BIRTHPLACE TRUST CELEBRATES 10 YEARS

A unique John Muir resource marks a special anniversary this summer. The John Muir Birthplace Trust (JMBT) is a collaboration between East Lothian Council, the John Muir Trust, Friends of John Muir's Birthplace and Dunbar Community Council. It was formed in 1998 with the aim of preserving John Muir's birthplace at 126 High Street Dunbar and turning it into a centre for the study and interpretation of his work.

Muir's father operated the three-storey house as a grain and food store until the family emigrated to the US in 1849. The building was redeveloped and opened to the public in August 2003 and welcomed its 100,000 visitor in February 2012.

→ **www.jmbt.org.uk**

Excitement continues to build ahead of the opening of the Trust's new Wild Space in April

THE WILD SPACE LAUNCH

Landscape photographer Colin Prior will open the Trust's new visitor centre in Pitlochry on Monday 22 April – the day after John Muir Day and also Earth Day 2013.

The John Muir Trust Wild Space will feature an interpretive display showcasing Scotland's fantastic wild places, incorporating the work of top landscape and wildlife photographers – including some from Prior himself. The space will also offer a series of audio postcards from some of Scotland's wildest places, including Knoydart and Sandwood, and a specially commissioned film about the Trust.

We hope the Wild Space – developed with key support from the Reece Foundation, the players of the People's Postcode Lottery and the Gannochy Trust – will become an inspiring place where people can engage with the work of the Trust and discover the beauty, value and importance of our wild landscapes.

The event will also mark the official opening of the Alan Reece Gallery and a new exhibition by renowned nature photographer, Peter Cairns. Come and visit when you have the chance, and turn to page 26 to read more about the Wild Space.

HELP COMMEMORATE TOM WEIR

The campaign to honour one of Scotland's best loved conservationists is gathering momentum, with a variety of fun events planned to raise £50,000 for a statue of Tom Weir.

A long-standing member and supporter of the Trust, Tom's writing and broadcasting on the Scottish landscape, people and natural history inspired a generation of Scots to experience the natural world.

The Weirs lived at Gartocharn, Loch Lomond, where Tom famously climbed Duncryne Hill every day. The Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority has agreed to find a site for the statue of Tom, which the Tom Weir Memorial Group is hoping to unveil at his centenary celebration in December 2014.

Show your support for the plan by attending fundraising events from ceilidhs to 5k runs and the first Tom Weir Gala Day on 13 April. Special guests attending the gala in Gartocharn will include Tom's wife, Rhona, and Sean Hedges Quinn – the statue's sculptor, who will be displaying his proposal for the first time.

Find out more at **https://www.facebook.com/tomweirmemorial** or donate directly to the campaign at **http://bit.ly/1689oES**

WILD LAND INSPIRES WINNING POETS

This year's Wild Poetry Competition at the Fort William Mountain Festival attracted more than 300 entries from children attending Lochaber Primary Schools. Children were invited to write in English or Gaelic about a variety of subjects, with the winners of each category announced at the festival.

"It was a treat to find out what pupils in Lochaber think about all sorts of wildlife, from kingfishers and otters to deer, foxes, hedgehogs, salmon and more," commented Alison Austin, the Trust's Nevis conservation officer. "Their exciting outdoor activities poems resonated with mountain bikers and skiers alike, while the more reflective poems made us realise that all ages appreciate time spent in wild places – whether it is on top of the Ben, splashing in muddy puddles, or safe in their den on the hillside."

She added that it was difficult to decide the winners and chose the entries that really stood out: "It might have been an interesting subject; a unique choice of descriptive words; a cadence, flow or rhythm; an ability to conjure up the special quality of an animal, or place; or the feeling of taking part in something outdoors in our wonderful wild weather!"

The children who'd submitted the winning and commended entries received their prizes at school assembly.

Many thanks to our friends and supporters who sponsored this year's prizes: Lochaber Gaelic Development Group; Glen Nevis Visitor Centre; Ellis Brigham Mountain Sports; Nevis Sport; Cotswold Outdoors; and Field and Trek.

To enjoy the winning entries, visit **http://bit.ly/W4Vcbs**

Inspirations (from below): Lochaber schoolchildren showed their love for the outdoors through poetry; the memorial group's special hat tree in honour of Tom Weir; the man himself, with his famous bobble hat

LAUNCH OF SCOTTISH NATIONAL TRAIL

In early February, outdoor writer and broadcaster Cameron McNeish visited Kirk Yetholm (the northern terminus of the Pennine Way) in the Borders to unveil a plaque to mark the beginning of a long-distance walking route across Scotland he devised.

The 470-mile Gore-Tex Scottish National Trail was officially launched in October 2012 by First Minister Alex Salmond, in Edinburgh. It uses established long-distance trails – known as Scotland's Great Trails – and walking routes to link the Borders to Cape Wrath, the most northwesterly point on the British mainland.

The route is split into four sections: Borders to Edinburgh; Edinburgh to Milngavie (just north of Glasgow); Milngavie to Kingussie in the Cairngorms; and Kingussie to Cape Wrath. More details on the trail can be found in Cameron's new book, Scotland End to End (**http://bit.ly/Z9wd4f**).

For more on Scotland's Great Trails, visit **www.scotlandsgreattrails.org.uk**

SAFEGUARD THE CAIRNGORMS

Help prevent developers build a new town in the heart of the Cairngorms National Park by supporting the Safeguard the Cairngorms campaign. The costs of a legal challenge are high and the group aims to raise £30,000 to cover them. For more on the campaign, visit **www.safeguardthecairngorms.org.uk**

Alison enjoying the Skye Cuillin

PLANNING APPLICATIONS FOR WIND TURBINES

The Trust engages on a daily basis in specific planning cases where developments will impact on wild land. As such, we welcome the recent decision by Highland Council to vote for a site visit before it decides whether to object to the Stronelairg wind development in the heart of the Monadhliath Mountains. The Trust has objected to this development, which would see 83 turbines, each 135 metres tall, built almost entirely on peatland habitats east of Loch Ness, close to the boundary of the Cairngorm National Park.

The Highland Council also voted recently to object to applications for wind turbines at Dalnessie (in Sutherland) and Glenmorie (Easter Ross). There will now be Public Local Inquiries for each, in which the Trust would expect to be involved. All objections made by the Trust can be found on our website.

→ **www.jmt.org**

Taking a break during a Wild Day in Glen Nevis

PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID LINTERN

GOODBYE & GOOD LUCK

Alison Russell, the Trust's director of resources, left in March after six years with us. A committed member of the Trust, Alison brought energy and humour to her work overseeing our financial, administrative and IT functions, and membership and fundraising teams. We have greatly valued her keen insight, eye for detail and head for multi-tasking, as well as her homemade cakes. The Trust wishes Alison all the very best for the future, and extends a warm welcome to her successor Fiona Kindless, who took up position on 4 March.

WILD DAYS 2013

The Trust invites members to come and learn about wild land conservation first hand during our 30th anniversary year. Our Wild Days offer an opportunity to explore Trust land accompanied by one of our land managers. A recommended donation of £20 per person (£10 unwaged) helps us cover staff and equipment costs for the day. Group sizes are fairly small and there is plenty of time for questions and discussion. Choose from the following Wild Days throughout the year:

Glen Nevis, 27 May
Enjoy the spring flora and fauna on a walk through Steall Gorge – a chance to see the finished path repairs achieved through donations to the 2012 Steall Gorge appeal.

Knoydart, 5 June, 6 June
Two opportunities to take a trip aboard Trust boat *The Silver Fox* across Loch Hourn to visit our oldest native woodland regeneration project in the full flush of summer. Places limited to four for each day.

Isle of Skye, 7 June
A guided walk with Trust ranger Ally Macaskill around the rugged coastline of Elgol and Camasunary.

Quinag, 1 August
Don O'Driscoll explores the ecology of this dramatic part of Sutherland.

Sandwood Bay, 2 August
A day exploring the coastal wildlife, pools and shoreline of the magical far northwest.

Schiehallion, 30 September
A fascinating tour of this historic upland site combining archaeology, geology and ecology.

Glenlude, 21 October
An autumn visit to this accessible Borders estate, discovering more about the 'Phoenix Forest' and our other conservation projects in action.

To reserve a place, contact David Lintern on **0131 554 0114** or **david.lintern@jmt.org**

PHOTOGRAPH: DENIS MOLLISON

In the beginning…

Denis Mollison, one of the original 'gang of four' who founded the John Muir Trust 30 years ago, recounts how the seeds were sown for an organisation that now has a scale and scope that is unrecognisable from its early days

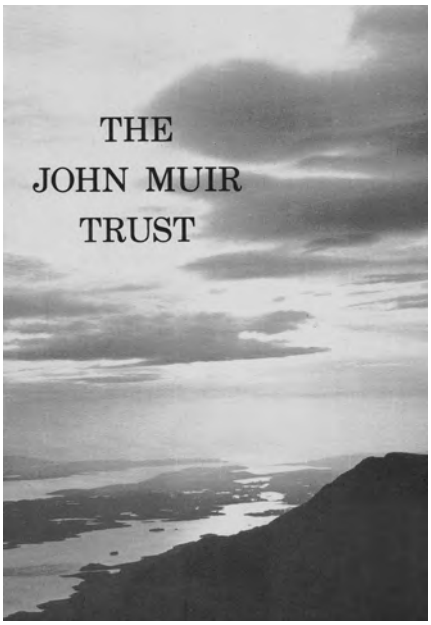
THE THREATS TO wild land were not so different in the 1970s, with blanket forestry playing the role that wind farms take today. Perhaps the most important difference in debate was over recreational developments. The bodies that should have been most prominent in protecting wild land, particularly the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) and what was then the Countryside Commission for Scotland, were widely viewed as playing on the wrong side, having developed intrusive visitor centres, and new bridges and paths through wild heartlands. Many eloquent voices protested, among them Rennie McOwan, Hamish Brown and Jim Crumley; far fewer thought the positive initiative of a new wild land trust viable.

A series of chances brought together four who did. We found that we argued over many things, but not about our shared ideal: to conserve wild land for nature and people. That we agreed even on details, whether to do with wildlife or paths or local people, is not I think coincidental: it is because it is a coherent, rounded ideal – take away one part and it all looks wrong.

Chris Brasher, steeplechase Olympic gold medallist and journalist, wrote in his *Observer* column in 1977: "There are some, no doubt, who will say that land should be used more profitably – that it could be improved or made better for sheep or trees or tourists. And so it could. 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."

PHOTOGRAPH: DENIS MOLLISON

> THE THREATS TO WILD LAND WERE NOT SO DIFFERENT... WITH BLANKET FORESTRY PLAYING THE ROLE THAT WIND FARMS TAKE TODAY



Nick Luard, co-founder of Private Eye, author and socialite, wrote *The Last Wilderness* about his search in the Kalahari for why the wild matters, concluding: "... there is in reality no wild at all. The wilderness as we conceived of it did not exist. There was only life, and life was indivisible. We were [destroying] not merely the records of the past but the survival manuals of the future – our future."

About the same time that his book was published, Nick renewed an old friendship with Chris, helping him organise the first London Marathon. In that same year, 1981, journalist Nigel Hawkins and myself, a theoretical ecologist, came to the end of a long attempt to persuade NTS of the value of maintaining wild land – with, as I put it at the time, "minimal development and publicity, and with access open but not particularly facilitated".

Following the failure of this attempt, Nigel set out our joint views in a draft constitution for 'Wild Land in Trust', with the objectives of: encouraging the conservation of wild land as a national heritage resource; and acquiring tracts of wild land in Scotland and managing them as a national heritage resource by maintaining their 'wilderness' quality in perpetuity.

Having discussed the need for a new trust with Chris over the previous five years, I sent Nigel's draft to Chris, who, ironically, had just been asked to give the NTS Golden Jubilee lectures and had chosen the title 'Happiness is a Wilderness'. At this point, the whole 20,000 hectare peninsula of Knoydart was put on the market, and at a discussion over this at NTS (they were not interested), Chris agreed with my suggestion that any new trust should be named after John Muir.

Early days (clockwise from opposite): Ladhar Bheinn from across Loch Hourn, August 1988; Jim Ross, Keith Miller and Terry Isles lever a fallen boulder off the path while working at Coire Dhorrcail (also August 1988); the cover of the Trust's first Membership Leaflet (June 1987)

→ continued

BUILDING MEMBERSHIP

For an organisation that saw its public launch five years after its actual formation, it's perhaps no surprise that membership took a little time to gain momentum. By 1987, the Trust had around 70 members, recruited by word of mouth and some low-key publicity. But that all changed the following year when Chris Brasher's impassioned article in the *Observer* and the Trust's appeal for its first property, Li and Coire Dhorrcail in Knoydart, saw membership surge to 700. Having the Prince of Wales sign up as patron of the Trust – a position he still holds today – didn't hurt either.

"The *Observer* article in particular was a real breakthrough and probably one of the biggest single spikes in membership we've seen," recalls Keith Anderson, who took over membership duties in autumn 1987. "The article was about the only visibility the Trust had at that point. It included a freepost address which did the trick – it probably generated around 400 new members."

The Trust hasn't really looked back since. By October 1991, when Keith handed over the bulk of membership duties to his wife, Jane, numbers had risen to 1,500. The succession of land purchases during the following decade generated further significant growth.

"Most membership spikes came via the publicity generated around property acquisitions," explains Keith. Interestingly, some proved particularly popular, with Sandwood (in 1993), Strathaird (1994/5) and Ben Nevis (2000), all generating significant interest (not to mention national coverage in the case of the latter).

But who was signing up? Typically in those early days, the Trust attracted predominantly middle-aged, well-educated professionals, many of whom had a love of the Scottish mountains and a deep knowledge of specific areas. "That said, I do remember one enquiry from a member about how they might get a caravan to Knoydart," recalls Keith. With a long run-up, one might have been tempted to answer.

So, what has the Trust learnt about being a membership organisation? "I think mainly that membership does not happen by itself and takes a lot of work," believes Keith. "Today, we have a membership department of three people managing more than 10,000 members, although there is still a need to continue investing in membership."

Richard Rowe


PHOTOGRAPH: DENIS MOLLISON


PHOTOGRAPH: DENIS MOLLISON

Gathering momentum (clockwise from top left): the appeal for Ben Nevis; Sierra Club president Larry Downing speaks outside John Muir's Birthplace at the Trust's launch (with children in ca. 1840 costume); scattered remnant woodland in lower Coire Dhorrcail (1988); Ben Tindall and Nigel Hawkins on Ladhar Bheinn, New Year 1985, during a prospecting trip when it was learnt that part of Knoydart might be for sale; the 10th anniversary appeal for Sandwood

Nigel and I spent the following year trying to persuade friends in Scotland to found a wild land trust, but they instead founded the campaigning Scottish Wild Land Group (a body which remains today). Meanwhile, Chris and Nick spent the year in ever more desperate plans to save Knoydart, ending with a time-share scheme which they rashly sent for discussion to NTS, just around the time that the Ministry of Defence (MoD) expressed interest in buying the peninsula. [The reason given was that in the wake of the Falklands War, our army needed a rugged training ground – a paradoxical argument as the army had performed very well on the Falklands' rough terrain.] It was at one of these NTS meetings, on 20 December 1982, that all four founders were together for the first time.

NTS, with support from a consortium of established bodies, now hijacked what had become a gang of four's initiative only to eventually have the rug pulled out from under them by their own unenthusiastic council.

Meanwhile, Chris and Nigel had visited Knoydart to make common cause with the inhabitants, and Nick had dined with Michael Heseltine the evening before he took over as Minister of Defence: the next day the MoD withdrew their offer.

In continuing unsuccessful negotiations with NTS, the idea of a Knoydart Foundation was born, and gained considerable publicity, though it was not to come to fruition for another 16 years. Rather less publicity was given to the signing the same day – 19 January 1983 – of the Memorandum and Articles of the John Muir Trust.

PHOTOGRAPH: DENIS MOLLISON

After the NTS consortium's collapse that March, it took more than a year for the four founders to get their breath back and choose Trustees, who first met on 12 April 1984. Chris and Nick were among the Trustees, Nigel became secretary, and myself treasurer. Two months later, membership was started, with long-standing ally Bob Aitken as membership secretary (membership reached 55 in its first year, see sidebar, Building membership, opposite). It took a further two years to buy a first property – ironically a small piece of the Knoydart Estate whose fragmentation we had tried to prevent.

There followed a year of quiet fundraising, culminating in our public launch outside John Muir's birthplace in Dunbar on 21 April 1988 – Muir's 150th birthday. The launch was addressed by our first Chairman, Sir Kenneth Alexander, and Larry Downing, President of the Sierra Club founded by Muir, who deserted his half-million members to celebrate with us – and brought with him a cheque for $25,000.

Two weeks earlier, our first paid employee, Terry Isles, had started work. Two weeks later, an article by Chris in the *Observer* highlighting the Trust's purchase in Knoydart gave impetus to our launch, helping our membership soar from 70 to 700 over the year. And in June 1988, we held our first work party on Li and Coire Dhorrcail in Knoydart. Our real work began at last.

ENTER THE AWARD

One of the Trust's most far-reaching contributions to date is an educational initiative that was never part of the original plan. Launched in 1997, but conceived several years before, the John Muir Award has helped spread the Trust's conservation message to a much wider audience – with a particular focus on encouraging young people to engage with the outdoors.

The brainchild of Ben Tindall – whose father did much to repatriate the Muir name to Scotland in the 1970s – the development of the Award was first mooted in 1993. Trust member number four, the first editor of the Journal (then a newsletter), and a strong advocate of environmental education since the Trust's early days, Ben was keen to develop an award scheme aimed at school-age children. Evolved together with teacher and Muir scholar, Graham White, the idea was to launch the scheme in Lothian and then expand it to the Highlands, closer to where Trust properties were located.

"At the time, I was using the Duke of Edinburgh Award as a model for a non-competitive award that we could piggy back throughout the country and across various categories based on Muir's own varied life and career," he explains.

It's fair to say that not all Trustees at the time were entirely convinced, but when Ben helped secure funding of £8,000 from Scottish Natural Heritage, the Trust was able to bring Dave Picken on board for three months to work on getting the Award off the ground. What began in Lothian expanded east to – appropriately enough – Dunbar and grew from there. The rest, as they say, is history. In March 2010, celebrations were held for the 100,000th John Muir Award.

"I remember we were delighted by its rate of growth," recalls Ben, who points to a basic design and structure that remains unchanged today. "It was seen as a good alternative to other recognised schemes and was more in tune with the enthusiasm and interests of kids and teachers."

For more on the inclusion work of the Award, turn to page 28.

Richard Rowe

Further info
Chris Brasher's *Observer* article which helped generate so much interest in the Trust's early work is available to view at **http://bit.ly/YMnIyG**

A landscape reborn
For more on how the Knoydart landscape has changed since the Trust's acquisition in 1986, turn to page 22.

Changing times

While the Trust has changed considerably since its early days, so too has the external landscape in which it has operated. Here, we highlight six key developments – some positive, some less so – from the past 30 years

Expansion of commercial forestry

THE TRUST was formed at a time when conservationists were beginning to raise concern about large scale commercial afforestation in the Flow Country of Sutherland and Caithness. While this was claimed to be an economically valuable land use in a region with few alternatives, it was also argued that the Flow Country was a wetland habitat of international significance. As a result of the controversy and an amendment to the tax system, this type of planting was halted in 1988.

The controversy had a significant effect both on forest practice and nature conservation. One consequence was the break-up of the Nature Conservancy Council (into country-specific agencies in the UK), while another was the move away from commercial forestry and the adoption instead of 'multiple objective forestry', with a new focus on conservation and recreation rather than simply timber.

However, the legacy of this type of planting – large areas of dense, non-native conifers on deep peat sites – remains. A range of land owners such as the RSPB at Forsinard in the Flows, Corrour Estate by Fort William (with assistance from the Trust) and others are currently working to remove these plantations and restore the peatland habitat beneath.

Elsewhere, wider woodland restoration projects have also proliferated, with good examples at Carrifran in the Borders and Dundreggan by Loch Ness, alongside management to halt the loss of the remaining fragments of Caledonian pinewood in areas such as Abernethy, Glenfeshie and Mar Lodge. //

De-stocking of land

PHOTOGRAPH: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/NAUMOID

PHOTOGRAPH: RICHARD ROWE

THE POPULATIONS of sheep on the hills have fluctuated since the Trust was formed. Numbers continued to rise steadily in the late 80s and 90s and then, following changes in subsidies away from headage payments and outbreaks of foot and mouth disease, fell over the last decade. Last year, numbers rose again.

Where sheep have 'come off the hill' in areas of wild land, the changes in vegetation have been clearly visible. Land that was heavily-grazed for decades – and often centuries – has transformed from grass to heather and scrub to the beginnings of woodland. In many places, however, this effect has been kept in check by an expansion of deer (both in terms of range and density). Their heavy grazing has simply replaced the trampling and browsing of sheep.

The greening of agriculture has also become mainstream over this period, with 'agri-environment' schemes (and their many associated acronyms!) becoming well established as one of the pillars of agriculture. However, their success in terms of biodiversity benefit on wild land remains patchy. Whilst some species, such as corncrake, and specific locations have benefitted, heavy grazing by sheep continues to suppress natural processes across many areas of wild land. //

Ups and downs (clockwise from left): commercial forestry at Glenlude; heavy browsing by sheep has impacted much of our upland landscape; deer numbers remain far too high in many areas of wild land; North Harris crofter Kenny McKay at Rhenigidale

PHOTOGRAPH: PETER CAIRNS/2020VISION

PHOTOGRAPH: KEITH BRAME

Rising deer numbers

SINCE THE TRUST was formed, deer populations have continued to rise steadily throughout wild land (and the wider UK). Incremental attempts at UK and Scottish legislation have timidly increased the pressure on land owners to recognise that deer have public costs as well as private benefits. To date, however, deer management remains voluntary, with land owners having and culling as many, or as few, deer as they want (in stark contrast to much of Europe and North America) over most wild land areas.

At the same time, opposition to any change from 'traditional' high density deer management has become more organised and vocal – often leading to an outcry when any increase in culling is proposed.

When the Trust originally planted trees behind fences on Li and Coire Dhorrcail in Knoydart, the aspiration was that when the trees had become established the fences could come down as the deer population around would be lower. More than 20 years later, when the fences were ready to come down, the surrounding deer population had in fact *increased* and attempts to cull more deer have been met with opposition from some neighbouring sporting estates. //

Community ownership of land

THE IDEA OF collaboration between the Trust and communities has been there since our beginning: it is rather the scene about us that has changed. Our idea in 1982/3 for a Knoydart Foundation had the dual aims of employment and conservation of wild land. And among our first trustees, as well as Bill Murray setting out ideals for wild land management, we had Jim Hunter, the first director of the Scottish Crofters Union, putting the case for combining conservation and development.

Between 1991 and 1997, we bought four crofting estates, and discussed collaboration with the leaders of the Assynt Crofters and Isle of Eigg buyouts. All this was at a time when there was public money for conservation buyouts, but not for communities. The Heritage Lottery Fund generously endowed Mar Lodge for National Trust for Scotland in 1995, while the Knoydart Foundation's eventual success in 1999 was largely funded by conservation donations, from the John Muir Trust and its friends.

A few years later the situation reversed: public funding for conservation purchase became harder, but for a brief period there was very generous funding for community buyouts, including North Harris and the Assynt Foundation.

An unhappy consequence of imbalance between conservation bodies and communities has been occasional conflicts, and occasions when with hindsight one might say that land has ended up with the wrong ownership.

More happily, we now have a wide diversity of patterns of ownership and management. Chris Brasher, one of the Trust's founders, always argued strongly for this diversity, both to avoid putting all one's eggs in one basket, and because competition stimulates ideas and improvements in management.

With diversity comes the need for understanding and collaboration. One of the most promising of recent developments has been the Coigach Assynt Living Landscape project, which brings together the environmental charities, community trusts and private owners that own the uniquely beautiful wild landscape of Coigach and Assynt. //

→ continued

PHOTOGRAPH: IAIN ROY

PHOTOGRAPH: MCOS

High value: the Ardvar Woodlands on Quinag (left) are a Special Area of Conservation, forming part of Europe's Natura 2000 network of protected sites; industrial-scale wind farms pose a very real threat to peatland habitat (above)

Development of Natura 2000

THE ESTABLISHMENT of the Natura 2000 network of sites in 1992 represented a significant step forward in the protection of valuable habitats and wildlife across Europe. The Natura network, made up of Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas, incorporates our best wildlife areas.

Although the sites are protected by UK law, they are also within the jurisdiction of EU legislation – giving them a much higher level of protection. The UK Government is open to criminal proceedings and hefty fines if Natura sites are intentionally damaged (by land owners, developers or governments). Recognising that many sites across Europe had suffered historically from damage, Natura sites have benefitted significantly from access to enhanced funding for restoration and ongoing positive management work. Scottish Natural Heritage grant aids management of the Trust's designated areas.

There are still some weaknesses in Natura as it has been applied to the UK. Site selection was based largely on existing designations, which were only 'examples' of different wildlife habitats and these sites don't necessarily form a coherent ecological network. The UK has the smallest (by area) terrestrial Natura network in the EU and many important wildlife areas remain unprotected and in poor condition.

Generally speaking, designated features have improved over the last 10 years with about 80% considered to be in favourable or recovering condition. However, upland habitats are some of the poorest, especially where over grazing occurs across multiple land ownerships.

Although there is still significant room for improvement, there is no doubt that Natura has been fundamental in providing positive management and resources for some of our most important wildlife areas. //

A changing climate

CLIMATE CHANGE is presenting enormous challenges across the world. It's a major threat to people and wildlife, and there's no doubt we have to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and move towards cleaner, more sustainable forms of energy. We are also facing an unprecedented decline in biodiversity across the world. It's a double whammy of major proportions. Woodlands and bogs have come and gone as the climate has warmed and cooled over the millennia. The difference now is the rate of change and the fact that much of our natural environment is degraded, habitats are fragmented and wildlife will find it more difficult to move and adapt, potentially leading to local extinctions.

A key part of the Trust's current work is therefore concerned with improving the ecological health of wild land, restoring peatlands and woodlands and reconnecting habitats to build this natural resilience. A good example of this is the Coigach Assynt Living Landscape project. In their own right, peatlands and woodlands have a beneficial effect in regulating our climate, as they lock away carbon extracted from the atmosphere. Burning, draining or otherwise destroying these habitats has the opposite effect. People who live and work in wild land areas have close dependencies on the land; they, too, benefit from having a resilient, good quality natural environment.

An indirect, but very significant, impact on wild land has been the proliferation of on-shore wind farms. Our wild and natural landscapes cannot accommodate these huge, industrial structures and the concrete bases and access tracks destroy peatlands, significantly offsetting any carbon reduction benefits. During the past five years, the Trust has focused significant attention on the planning system, defending key wild land areas from poor decision making as well as trying to influence some of the more strategic factors that have driven developers to our remote wild land locations.

While supporting the need to shift to low carbon energy production, we do not think this should come at the price of destroying our wild land and the loss of its many benefits to society.

Compiled by
Mike Daniels, Stuart Brooks and Denis Mollison

Highlander (Scotland Ltd)

It was a chance encounter at Schiehallion that saw outdoor gear manufacturer Highlander (Scotland Ltd) sign up as a Trust Gold Corporate Member

Highlander's connection with the John Muir Trust is an interesting and personal one. It started in August 2009 when owner and managing director, Baram Golzari, and his son, Ramin Golzari, a Highlander director, were hiking up Schiehallion. During their ascent, they came across a group of people working on the maintenance of the track. Stopping to chat, Baram was curious to learn that they were volunteers working on the footpath on behalf of the John Muir Trust – the first time he had a chance to learn about the Trust and what it stood for.

Baram was so impressed that he subsequently signed Highlander up as a Gold Corporate Member of the John Muir Trust. "I was very impressed by the work being carried out by the volunteers," he recalls. "I am an avid hill walker and it was really something to see these guys fixing the path so that it was better able to support the volume of walkers that climb Schiehallion. I am passionate about the outdoors and this is what Highlander has been built on."

Highlander prides itself on offering a great range of quality outdoor equipment that is affordable to all. However, it does so in the recognition that the popularity of hill walking can take its toll on our mountain landscapes. "This is where it is important to recognise and support the work carried out by the John Muir Trust," says Baram.

Highlander is proud to be a Gold Corporate Member and to be affiliated with an organisation that shares the same belief and passion for the preservation of wild land.

PHOTOGRAPH: HIGHLANDER

Baram (right) and Ramin Golzari, Schiehallion, August 2009

The John Muir Trust would like to thank Highlander (Scotland Ltd) 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 01796 484 970 or email fiona.mackintosh@jmt.org

PHOTOGRAPH: NAME

Unfinished business

The Trust can be proud of how far it has come, but there is still much to do if its core mission of protecting wild land is to be realised, writes **Alan McCombes**

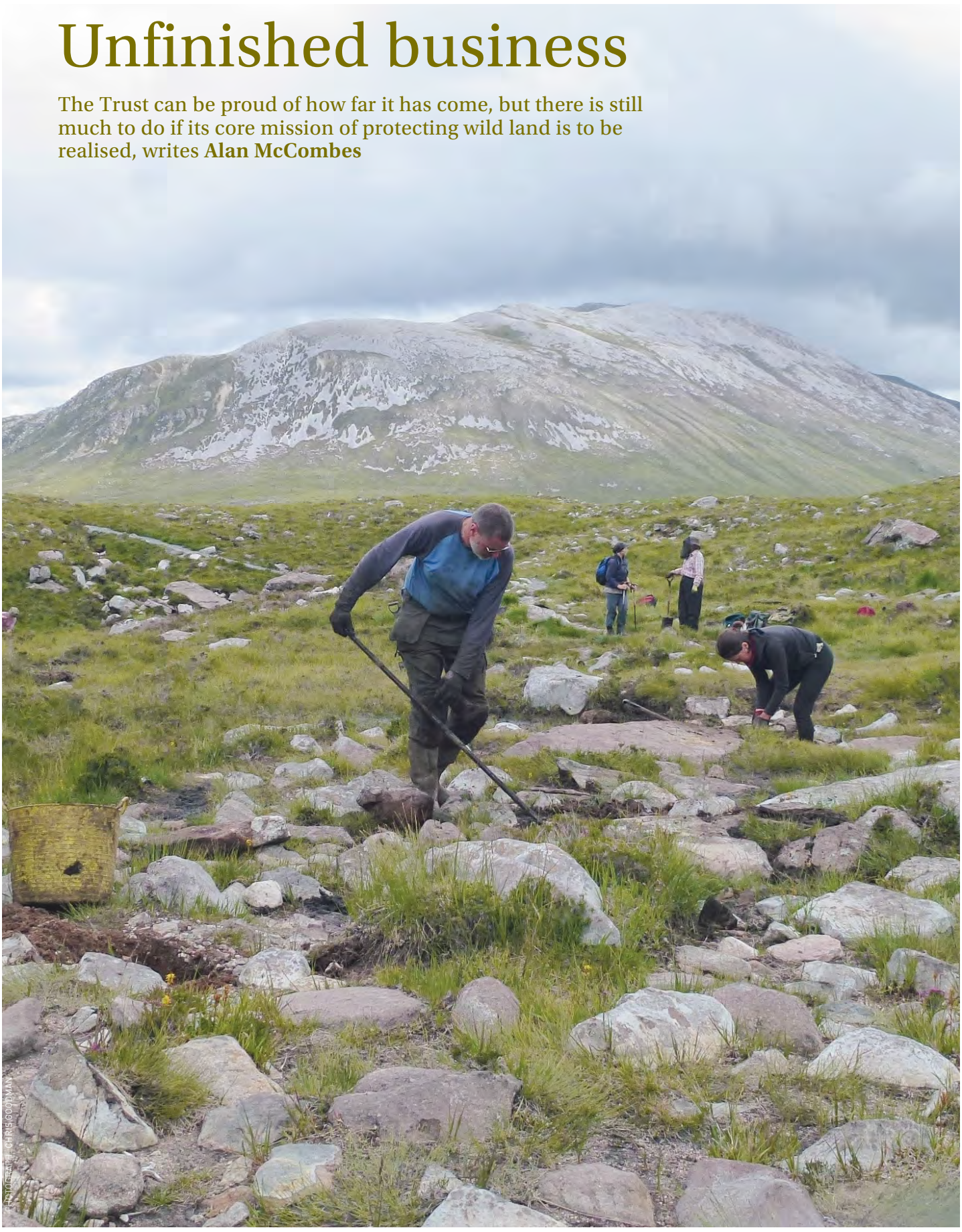

PHOTO: © CHRIS GOODMAN


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PHOTOGRAPH: RICHARD BRAINE

FOR A LARGE PART of the year, Sandy Maxwell lives in wild and remote country, cooking and sleeping in the back of his van or, when the weather is clear, camping out under the moon and the stars. As the Trust's work parties coordinator, Sandy spends much of April through to September mobilising teams of dedicated volunteers out on the land digging ditches, building drains, clearing litter, planting trees, rooting out invasive species, removing fences, constructing dry stone dykes and much, much more.

"I wouldn't pretend that joining a John Muir Trust work party is like going on a green holiday," admits Sandy. "We're out working from nine to five, often for days at a time in all weathers. We don't lay on comfortable accommodation or entertainment. We focus very much on getting things done and making a difference. That sense of altruism inspired the formation of the Trust, and it remains at the heart of the philosophy of the organisation today."

PAST AND PRESENT

Some of the challenges faced by the founders of the Trust have changed – although echoes of the past still ricochet back to the present. Thirty years ago, the Trust was born out of a campaign to stop the MoD from taking over the Knoydart Estate and closing it to the public; today, the Trust is actively supporting a community buy-out at Cape Wrath to prevent the MoD from purchasing the site from the Northern Lighthouse Board, and restricting or even banning open access to the headland.

Such battles, however, are now rare in Scotland, thanks in large part to the enlightened Land Reform Act (Scotland) 2003, which enshrined the idea of the 'right to roam' in law – a reform that outdoors organisations in many European countries can only dream of.

"But in other areas of land use, progress has been glacially slow," notes Mike Daniels, the Trust's head of land and science. Sporting estates still cover half the area of the Scottish Highlands and almost a third of Scotland's total landmass. The popularity of shooting for sport – as opposed to hunting for food – can be traced back to the nineteenth century. "The Victorians created an ecological nightmare for the benefit of a small number of people, and we're still trying to deal with it today," explains Mike.

> "I LIKE TO THINK OF THE TRUST AS A LONG-TERM GUARDIAN FOR WILD LAND"

He welcomes the fact that some sporting estates are now taking a more ecologically sensitive approach, but the scale of the problem remains immense. "In Scotland today we have the highest red deer population in the world – up to 30 per square kilometre when we need under five per square kilometre for a sustainable ecological environment."

The ancient Caledonian Forest – a rich wilderness of Scots pine, birch, rowan, aspen, hazel, juniper and oak, supporting a profusion of plants and animals, as well as thriving human communities – once covered a fifth of Scotland's landmass, but was virtually destroyed over centuries of exploitation, leaving much of the landscape bare and desolate. "Now in the whole of Scotland, there is less than two kilometres of natural tree-line," says Mike.

GUARDIANS OF WILD LAND

Today, the Trust owns ten estates across Scotland, and is involved in a variety of land partnerships with community trusts, plus a few private estates that share our ecological aims. Mike Daniels supervises a team of conservation rangers, land managers, a deer manager, a footpath officer and a biodiversity officer who together work to bring our properties up to the Trust's own 'wild land management standards'. The standards have a broad scope, including minimising pollution and carbon use; restoring native habitats; restructuring woodlands; controlling deer; maintaining old sheilings and historic bridges; recycling and reusing materials; removing redundant structures; encouraging Gaelic; and working with local communities.

"I prefer to think that we manage land rather than own it," says Mike. "We are custodians, protecting and improving wild land for perpetuity."

His views are echoed by Trust chief executive, Stuart Brooks. "Owning land can be an awkward concept. I like to think of the Trust as a long-term guardian for wild land. We can provide long-term guardianship through ownership, but equally that could eventually be provided through robust protection provided by the state."

But in recent years, the state has shown little stomach for standing up for conservation in the face of powerful economic interests. Recently, following a two year public consultation over the proliferation of hill tracks that are progressively disfiguring Scotland's upland landscapes, the Scottish Government minister in charge of planning announced that the free-for-all would be allowed to continue. The right of sporting estates to transport their clients using 4x4 vehicles to places they could easily reach on foot was deemed more important than landscape, wildlife or ecology.

→ continued

Digging deep (clockwise from opposite): Sandy Maxwell and others hard at work on footpath repair; the scourge of hill tracks; deer populations remain high in many areas of wild land; habitat monitoring training with Mike Daniels

Spreading the message (clockwise from top): "Wild land is our core mission," says Stuart Brooks; a visualisation of a giant wind farm consented at Muaitheabhal, Lewis; an Award participant at Vogrie Country Park

Meanwhile, the UK and Scottish governments have encouraged the march of regiments of large-scale wind farms across wild landscapes – some with a footprint the size of small cities, and with turbines the height of the Forth Road Bridge.

"One of our founders, Maude Tiso, made the point that no-one could have imagined when the Trust was founded the scale of the threat to wild land that we face today," comments Helen McDade, the Trust's head of policy. "That land can never be reclaimed. First, because almost all the wind developments on Scotland's wild land are on peat soil and once that is dried out, it's degraded forever, and starts releasing carbon into the atmosphere. And, second, because a large wind development will need up to 40 kilometres of paved roads to maintain and service it."

The Trust has objected to around two dozen planning applications over the past five years on the grounds of scale and suitability. The fact that ten of these have been lodged in the past year alone is evidence, says Helen, of "an accelerating drive by the energy corporations into Scotland's core wild land areas".

And each objection consumes a huge amount of time. "For a two-week inquiry, we will spend at least the same amount of time again preparing our case. We go to inquiries, we give very good evidence, we have experts – and although we should have had the right result on several occasions, we didn't get the right result in any of them. The current planning system is not fit for purpose, which is why we launched the Wild Land Campaign. You have to get change through national regulation."

In recent years, the Trust has taken the battle for wild land into the heart of the corridors of power. Petitions calling for new wild land designation have been lodged at Holyrood and Westminster; there have been meetings with MSPs and MPs across the political spectrum to build support for protection of wild land; and the Trust continues to work with individual politicians to have questions raised and motions proposed in parliament.

But Stuart Brooks, chief executive, insists that the charity is not a preservation society. "You can't preserve a wild place, because nature changes and the species that inhabit that place will change. Conservation is about accepting change while trying to safeguard the intrinsic value of the place.

"It is also about working *with* rather than against people and communities. Wild land in good condition can benefit us in all kinds of ways – physically, mentally and economically. Tourism, for example, and all the spin-offs associated with it, is the lifeblood of many of our rural communities in remote areas.

"Wild land can also support sustainable industries, from seafood fish farming – if carried out in a sustainable way – to woodcraft. Around the world, people coexist with natural woodlands and make a living from the forests."

AWARD ACHIEVEMENTS

While having wild land support sustainable industries is part of the Trust's long-term vision, a more immediate way of working with people is to help them connect with nature and the outdoors. "We live in a rapidly changing society which has made phenomenal technological leaps forward over the past few decades," says Stuart. "And one of the toughest challenges we face is encouraging the next generation to get involved with wild places and the natural world."

As such, one of the proudest achievements of the Trust has been the success of the John Muir Award. Since its launch in 1997, more than 160,000 people have completed at least one of the three levels of the Award. Flexible and non-competitive, the Award encourages a spirit of adventure, and has been especially effective at inspiring young people in their teens and twenties to experience wild places.

The Award has also helped broaden the appeal of the Trust beyond the outdoors and conservation communities. "Wild land is our core mission," says Stuart, "but to deliver that core mission, you have to develop wider public appeal beyond those who are more committed. Landscape is a big part of our national psyche. A lot of people who live in Scotland might never get round to spending time in wild places, but they know about and feel proud of them. People have a strong sense of local identity and heritage, and that is to some extent bound up with their affinity with the landscape."

Fundamentally, he says, the Trust's role comes down to protecting the intrinsic value of wild places for future generations as opposed to trying to extract short-term commercial benefit from them. "As an environmental organisation, we're here for the long haul. There's a quote from John Muir on the wall of the Scottish Parliament: 'The battle for conservation will go on endlessly. It is part of the universal battle between right and wrong.' That pretty much also sums up the story of the Trust."

About the author
Alan McCombes is the Trust's communications editor. He can be contacted at **alan.mccombes@jmt.org**

PHOTOGRAPH: CATHEL MORRISON

Lost and found

John Hutchison draws on the spiritual connections between people and landscape – both here and overseas – to reflect on why he is driven to safeguard wild land

WHY DO WE WANT to safeguard wild land – what drives us on? I could argue that actually it is more about people than land, contending that the two are inextricably linked. Thirled and hefted; interesting concepts both.

Our landscape is dear to us in its many moods, often experienced through different combinations and permutations of light, weather and vegetation; all random and natural. I discovered solitude in my early teens when wandering in the 'Kingie', Holyrood Park in Edinburgh – something we could do safely in those days – checking my memory for the landforms around each corner and trying to make sense of place-names such as Hunter's Bog, evidence of human links with the land.

My graduation from Arthur's Seat to the Pentlands and then onto the Borders was partly driven by songs and poetry. At that time, I focussed on events, what had happened where, and the connection of local people with particular locations.

Over time, I became aware of the strong connection between indigenous people and the land around the world. In particular, I identified with the concept presented by Dougie Maclean that "you cannot own the land, the land owns you". I realised too that folk were no longer thirled or hefted to the land as they once were; that privileged position is perhaps now restricted to those who are brought up on, or live close to the land.

The loss of the link between people and land in Scotland began with the collapse of the clan system. Subsequently, land was traded and people moved to the cities. But since the 1930s when city dwellers found their way back in some numbers, whether Kinder Trespassers or Clydeside shipyard workers, the reconnection between people and land has grown steadily. Today, this is mainly through leisure activities, although community ownership and purchases by bodies such as our own Trust have also given folk an anchor-hold.

To a Native American tribesperson, the 'child of the earth' who emerged from a sipapu (hole) in the ground, and Scottish clansman alike, the concept of land ownership was alien. In western Canada, Chief Dan George lamented the changing world and his generation's failure to protect it, sad that his grandchildren would not befriend creatures as he had and pondering whether he had done enough to earn his grandchild's fondness. This is a question for us too.

And through the desire to improve communications, we have lost awareness of topography; to quote writer Wendell Berry, "the bridge was built and the river forgot". Closer to home, we need only read the poetry of Duncan Ban MacIntyre or Sorley Maclean to begin to understand the depth of the Gael's connection with the land. Poets push our minds to envision. There was a deep spiritual connection then that may be all but lost, although I am heartened by growing awareness of a connection between community land ownership, social justice and human rights.

With the Trust's own need to argue its case, we have developed criteria for defining wild land using geographic information system technology, while other organisations have carried out visual-based visitor surveys. While such calculation of 'natural capital' has its place, conservation bodies nevertheless still struggle to quantify their arguments.

Often, our senses condition our viewpoint; visual images play a strong part in the Trust's advocacy, while we also speak of noise intrusion on landscapes. For my part, I try to combine my interests – music, place names, poetry and senses – and always come to realise that we base our judgement far more on these than our more modern calculations.

I then reflect on times that I've spent alone in wild land, and remember how I felt. Successful product or destination marketing also reaches how we feel. When wind turbines are erected in the vicinity of Callanish, we feel pain. I realise then that we are driven not by experience but by feelings; feelings from, and of, wild places that young folk carry with them and long for in later years, as a kind of rejuvenation.

So, why do we want to safeguard wild land? What is it that drives us on? We do this because of how we feel. Yes, how we feel; that's it.

About the author
John Hutchison is chairman of the John Muir Trust. He can be contacted at **jch@abrach.com**

A landscape reborn

From early days as a volunteer to his role now as property manager, Lester Standen has witnessed a remarkable ecological journey at the Trust's Knoydart property

PHOTOGRAPH: HENRY STRAKER-SMITH

PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID LINTERN

PHOTOGRAPH: LESTER STANDEN

PHOTOGRAPH: TERRY WHITTAKER/2020VISION

I OFTEN VISITED KNOYDART in the mid 1980s. Back then, I spent much of my time exploring, seeking wild and remote places, trying to get as far from the madding crowd as I could. As I criss-crossed the West Highlands, I continually found vestiges of forest: fragments surviving on outcrops and in gorges; pine cones in peat; felled stumps in reservoirs when the water was low; and even a single pine branch, together with a wildcat skull, lying in a cave in a bleak glen.

Mostly, the landscape was empty and devoid of its original diversity. On one occasion, in January, I came through deep snow across the hills from Shiel Bridge to Kinloch Hourn, and on to climb Ladhar Bheinn. On the way through Barrisdale, I stopped to talk to a couple who were cutting up an old wind-blown Scots pine for firewood. It was a poignant moment in a moribund and fragmented forest.

On Ladhar Bheinn, I could have been anywhere; with iced-up cliffs and ramparts of snow, lost in swirling spindrift, it had an ethereal feel. I'd get occasional glimpses of black sea, blue ice, shafts of orange sunlight and white mountains. The magic of the place took hold and became entwined with my life.

When I heard that the John Muir Trust had erected a 20-hectare enclosure as the first stage of a reforestation plan in Knoydart, I got involved with a passion. What could be more useful, creative and visionary than restoring a native forest to an empty landscape?

It was all just beginning. My first work party was in Arnisdale collecting acorns, but I soon lost count of the times I went to Knoydart and the work I did there. Each visit was rewarded by tiny but telling glimpses of change. New growth sprang up behind wire deer fences; heather and blaeberry began to appear; swathes of birch seedlings emerged amongst planted trees; and mosses were starting to cover the rocks.

New fences sprung up as well and within these we planted, cut bracken around seedlings and shot deer that broke in. Gradually a transformation took place. As the seedlings grew into a thicket, new insects and woodland birds arrived: pine weevils and sawfly to eat the needles and blue, coal and great tits to feed on the insects.

A young plantation on the hillside was joined by another, and another, and another. Everywhere there was wire to keep out the deer. In time, the sharp division between the fenced and unfenced areas became striking as new species colonised the woodlands. Late one spring evening, the sound of a grasshopper seeped into my thoughts; it grew and grew, ever more shrill, until it dawned on me that I was actually listening to a grasshopper warbler. With spring, new migratory woodland birds had arrived – willow warblers, titmice and cuckoos – all filling the air with song.

Outside the fences, large herds of deer roamed the hills, perpetually mowing the grass, dwarf shrubs and seedling trees, leaving a thin carpet of green covering the ground. In winter, some of the deer died outside the fences, desperate to find shelter and eat the newly growing shrubs.

Plantations were growing behind wire, with deer fenced out and woodland fenced in. The thickets formed canopies shading out other vegetation; stands of oak suppressed bracken, leaving a carpet of bluebells; heather struggled to waist height amongst the pines; and birch thinned itself. With the mild, wet climate, it was the beginning of an evolving temperate rainforest.

Then my role took a different turn. I was recruited as a ranger to work for the Trust on a biodiversity project in 2007. My job was to expand on the work we'd done by controlling the grazing to encourage biodiversity to flourish. It still felt like the beginning of something. We'd created some woodland and some species had materialised within it – inside a protective fence – but in the greater scheme of things, what we had done was something small in a very large landscape.

Turning the tide (clockwise from opposite below): views over Coire Dhorrcail during a recent Wild Day; the author bringing down a red deer hind; removing a fence in 2010; the pine marten has made a return to Knoydart

→ continued

PHOTOGRAPH: LESTER STANDEN

PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID LINTERN

I started targeting deer around the first fenced area and gradually the plants outside responded. Birch, willow and hazel seedlings appeared outside the fence. Heather grew amongst them, too. With the first signs of the woodland moving out, it was time to let the deer in to provide them with shelter, food and, in turn, to relieve the pressure on new growth outside. Volunteers took down a fence. Pine martens appeared. I started seeing roe deer and even a woodpecker arrived.

Recent storms have started blowing down and breaking planted trees, creating much needed deadwood for our native forest to flourish. A few pines have regenerated from the parent stands we planted and deer are breaking up the heather in the woodlands, creating openings for seed to germinate. Today, the woodland is expanding with new seedlings appearing without fences. Now it feels like it really is all just beginning.

PHOTOGRAPH: LESTER STANDEN

Coming back to life (clockwise from top): unfenced woodland with stags; woodland regeneration spreading out from the Inbhir Dhorrcail gorge; Knoydart is gradually becoming an even wilder place

About the author
Lester Standen is the Trust's deer officer and Knoydart property manager. He can be contacted at **lester.standen@jmt.org**

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This is our 30th birthday year. Please help make a difference to wild places over the next 30. Get your climbing boots or thinking caps on, and fundraise for us!

"The wilderness has always been close to my heart so I decided on the John Muir Trust" **Andrew Doggett, with Tim Myles completed the gruelling 53km Mullardoch Round, including 12 Munros, in the northwest Highlands in under 20 hours raising over £1,500 for the Trust.**

Former Trustee Rohan Beyts swam 1,100metres through the infamous Corryvreckan that separates Scarba and Jura in the Inner Hebrides. *"I thought it would be an interesting thing to do,"* **she said. It was certainly a great fundraiser, netting a whopping £2,000 for the Trust.**

"Once you've reached 50 you have all the possessions you need, and there are only so many bottles of champagne or whisky you can drink. We were delighted that guests chose to give to the Trust instead." **Tim Raffle's 70s-themed birthday party was a big hit and raised £500 for the Trust.**

Let us know what wonderful things you might be doing to help us, or ask us for ideas.
Contact **Adam Pinder** on **0131 554 0114** or **adam.pinder@jmt.org** and fundraise for us!

Bringing the outside in

Susan Wright reflects on the development of the Trust's new Wild Space visitor centre

PHOTOGRAPH: IAIN ROY

WHEN TRUSTEES APPROVED plans to buy a shop in Pitlochry and turn it into a visitor centre, the challenge hit us – how were we going to bring the outdoors inside in a meaningful way? It's a love of wild places, and our belief that wildness is essential, that defines the Trust. But vast landscapes and the wonders of the natural world are difficult things to encase in four walls.

We knew we'd use photography and film in some way, but we weren't sure how. We knew we'd need some text panels explaining the work of the Trust, but we hadn't thought of a narrative beyond that. It was going to be a visitor centre, but it wasn't going to be a gateway to an attraction or a nature reserve. We wanted it to be different, unique, fun, informative, entertaining and all in a compact space that previously sold discounted outdoor clothing (albeit in a great high street location where we knew we'd be able to interact with a broad section of people).

I was only two weeks into my job as the Trust's head of communications, nearly two years ago, when I learned I'd be overseeing the development of the interpretive exhibition. Thankfully, it would be a year later that we started in earnest; a year in which I'd been able to have countless conversations with Trust staff to understand the breadth and depth of what we do.

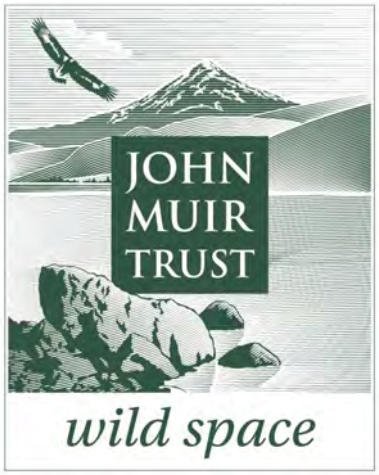
It was easy to spot gaps in the Trust's messaging; the website was (and still is) a deluge of information written in different styles and tones of voice, but the abundance of words didn't give us all we needed for the visitor centre. For example, what has happened to our natural landscapes that we must now spend much time and effort trying to repair centuries of damage, and to protect it from future threats? And what exactly are we doing on the land when we talk about conserving it?

We had addressed some of the gaps in creating our Wild Land Management website, new property leaflets and our first land management report. We had produced new marketing banners and adverts. We had also progressed the visual elements of the Trust brand. All this work, plus several brainstorming sessions, combined to establish what we wanted to tell people with the new visitor centre.

An experienced interpretive writer helped us create a structure for the narrative that would run through the visitor centre. The words themselves were a challenge – for the first time we had to identify our key messages and write them succinctly in plain English. We had to pull together a history of our landscapes to explain the damage that humans have wrought over the centuries, which informs our conservation work. We also had to think about how we could make elements of the narrative interactive (look out for spinning cubes and push panels when you visit).

We needed images to work with these words, to complement them and help tell the story. It took a bit of time before the photography fell into place, but then we found a fantastic panorama picture of Knoydart and Loch Hourn taken by well-kent landscape photographer, Colin Prior. It seemed a fitting primary image, given Knoydart's place in the Trust's history. When Colin said we could use it for free, blown up to a metre and a half long, we were over the moon. More top photographers agreed to contribute their work including Andy McCandlish, Ian Cameron, Danny Green and Pete Cairns who leads the 2020VISION photography project.

PHOTOGRAPH: ANDY MCCA[illegible]



Campbell & Co, the Edinburgh-based exhibition designers, are experienced in developing physical spaces and knew how the Wild Space should feel. It was important that the space evoke the natural world so it was a no-brainer when they suggested making use of windblown, native timber cut by a Glasgow-based social enterprise. The timber provides texture and life to the space, complemented by the use of slate on the reception counter engraved with oak leaves.

An interactive unit featuring audio journeys from some of the Trust's properties (narrated by Trust conservation officer Alison Austin, one of our four founders Nigel Hawkins and recently retired Sandwood conservation officer, Cathel Morrison) was hewn from the same timber, skilfully shaven and shaped into smooth, round edges.

We worked with Dave Tarvit of DX Films to create a key aspect of the exhibit – a short film about wild places and the Trust that incorporates beautiful aerial shots of some of our wilder landscapes (including Ben Nevis and the Cuillin on Skye) and amazing wildlife footage all wrapped up in what we hope is a compelling story.

Have we pulled it off? We don't know yet. But we do know we've packed as much information, interaction and entertainment into a modest space in the heart of Pitlochry as we could – and we follow the wise words of John Muir throughout.

We hope it will prove to be an absorbing showcase for Scotland's fantastic wild landscapes, and help people understand what has been lost and what can be gained for future generations. If people leave with a little more understanding of the relevance of wild places to their lives, an appreciation of nature and ecology, and perhaps a few postcards, we'll have done something right.

Blue sky thinking (clockwise from opposite top): Cul Mor, Cul Beag and Stac Pollaidh from the 'Mad Road'; Wild Space aims to encourage people to connect with wild places; a digital mock-up of the outside signage; look for the Wild Space sign when next in Pitlochry

A WORD FROM THE WILD SPACE MANAGER

"Wild Space is all about front-line engagement – an opportunity to get the message across to a wider audience, as well as Trust members and staff. Visitor centres are designed to be fun, informative and inclusive, and Wild Space can be all those things. Whilst the shop window and exhibition will draw in passers-by, the gallery is likely to attract people with different interests, and the retail offering has to provide a link between the two, giving everyone a chance to spend some money as well as buy into the message of Wild Space.

Ahead of opening on 22 April, my list of things to do is quite long! It includes promoting Wild Space through targeted web-links and tourism partnerships, as well as leaflet distribution across Perthshire; sourcing and ordering shop stock with an ethical pedigree and minimum carbon footprint; finding great artists and photographers with time to put together an exhibition of stunning images in a gallery they haven't yet seen; and recruiting great people to welcome all our visitors. Expectations are high on all sides – no pressure then!

Longer term, one of my ambitions is to set up day-out packages with local providers, bringing to life the link between the High Street Wild Space and local wild places, including Schiehallion.

Opening our first shop window brings so many new opportunities as well as challenges and I'm buzzing with the chance to be a part of it."

Jane Grimley
Wild Space Manager
John Muir Trust

PHOTOGRAPH: JANE GRIMLEY

With thanks
The John Muir Trust would like to thank the Reece Foundation for its generous support to create the Wild Space. We are also grateful for funds from players of the People's Postcode Lottery, the Gannochy Trust and the Craignish Trust.

About the author
Susan Wright is the Trust's head of communications. She can be contacted at **susan.wright@jmt.org**

Outdoors for all

At a time of high-level discussion around our disconnection from nature, the John Muir Award continues to see more and more people from a cross-section of society enjoy positive experiences in the outdoors. **Kim McIntosh** explains

EVERY YEAR, AROUND 900 organisations get involved with the John Muir Award, encouraging thousands of individuals to walk in John Muir's footsteps. And they come from all walks of life. While many of the groups are what might be considered mainstream – from schools and colleges to outdoor education centres and youth groups – it's not just the usual suspects who participate.

Annually, since 2000, some 25% of Award activity has been with groups who may not traditionally engage with wild places: health services, prison and probationary groups, alternative access to curriculum programmes, people with physical and learning disabilities, addiction recovery groups, people from black and ethnic minority communities and those who are long-term unemployed. It's a rich mix of people from almost every possible background and circumstance.

Such organisations use the Award not only to help participants experience wild places, but also to work towards their own goals for the specific people they are working with, be it in terms of developing literacy skills, providing opportunities for socialising, or simply increasing levels of physical activity.

PHOTOGRAPH: BRANCHING OUT

TOWARDS EMPLOYABILITY

For many people who are out of work, building skills, recognition of achievement and real-life experiences – for reference in personal statements, applications and interviews – are invaluable in terms of moving towards employment. Organisations that deliver the John Muir Award tell us they often use it to help participants in this way.

In Wales, Urdd Gobaith Cymru's Routes to the Summit project helps raise the aspirations of young people through the medium of Welsh, with the aim of providing opportunities to gain work-related skills.

As outdoor development officer Arwel Elias explains, participating in the Award has helped created new pathways for young Welsh speakers to gain access to the workplace. "Working towards the John Muir Award as part of our adventurous and environmental outdoor projects, our young people engage in practical and challenging activity, developing skills such as team work and problem solving," he says. "The skills learnt and challenges overcome by completing the Award are easily transferred to the work place. Young people can use their experiences to show employers that they have commitment and motivation, and they can include the Award on their CV."

Similarly, in recent years, there has been a significant increase in use of the Award as a focus for improving mental as well as physical health. Across the UK, organisations are creating programmes of activity based around the Award's Four Challenges (see sidebar, What is the John Muir Award?) to increase physical activity, improve mental well-being and give participants a sense of achievement.

In Scotland, the Forestry Commission's Branching Out programme works in partnership with a variety of organisations in the environmental and mental health sectors. Since 2008, it has used the Award as a framework for the programme's twelve-week-long courses, which include elements of environmental art, nature conservation, bushcraft, green exercise and relaxation.

"The four challenges give us structure, yet allow us to work with different individuals and groups in ways that will challenge them appropriately," explains Kirsty Cathrine, Branching Out programme manager. "Participants are often socially isolated before coming on the project and the share challenge encourages the group to work together, which can be a massive achievement in itself.

"For some of our groups, taking part in the John Muir Award will be the first time they get a certificate, so it can be life-changing for them."

RECOVERING FROM ADDICTIONS

And the Award can also help with recovery of a different nature. Organisations that work with people conquering drug and alcohol addictions tell us that making a difference to wild places is a key to the success of using the Award as part of a recovery programme. Crucially, instead of being the recipient of a service, people are able to positively contribute. As one recent Award participant put it: "It's not just about me; I am doing something that really means something and that makes a difference to this place."

PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID LINTERN

PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID LINTERN

Phoenix Futures, another long-standing partnership, incorporates the Award into its pioneering and UK-wide programme, Recovery Through Nature. "The Award is a motivator for participating in the programme, it gives service users a goal to work towards and is recognition of their achievements," explains Marion Logan, director of operations at Phoenix Futures. In all, more than 600 Awards have been achieved through the partnership, with each one representing a personal accomplishment.

As part of the Award, participants volunteer at the Trust's Glenlude property in the Scottish Borders, where native trees are being planted to celebrate the recovery journey of everyone who has completed a programme with Phoenix Futures. "Conservation work is a great leveler," says Paul, a recent participant, "and that is what makes it such good therapy."

The first tree in the new Phoenix Forest at Glenlude was planted by Lesley from Glasgow who was a hairdresser before she joined the programme. Having recently completed the Conserver John Muir Award – the highest level – and made huge steps to turn her life around, she is now about to begin a two-year apprenticeship with the Forestry Commission. "I've learned lots of new skills and I'm more confident and happier all round than ever before," she reflects.

The idea that outdoor experiences can change people's lives is something of a cliché, but with Lesley it was true, adds Marion Logan. "Doing the John Muir Award has helped Lesley find her interest, and it helped her gain the placement too."

WHAT IS THE JOHN MUIR AWARD?

The John Muir Award is an environmental award scheme that encourages people of all backgrounds to connect with, enjoy and care for wild places. It has a structure, but allows flexibility so it can be used by all sorts of groups and people in a way that is challenging and achievable for them.

There are Four Challenges at the heart of each John Muir Award. To achieve an Award, each participant is invited to:

- Discover a wild place or places, whether close to home or further afield
- Explore its wildness
- Conserve it – take personal responsibility
- Share their experiences

There are three levels of the Award, encouraging a progressive involvement. The introductory Discovery level asks participants to engage in at least four days' worth of activity, which can be over an intensive week or spread over the seasons. The Four Challenges are repeated at each level, with increased involvement and time – at least 8 days at Explorer level and 20 days for Conserver level over a minimum of 6 months.

Up close and personal: Branching Out participants conduct a bluebell survey (opposite); Lesley plants the first tree in the Phoenix Forest at Glenlude (above left), while other Phoenix Futures participants continue the planting

About the author
Kim McIntosh is John Muir Award Scotland inclusion manager. She can be contacted at **kim@johnmuiraward.org**

PHOTOGRAPH: JAMIE GRANT

Sandwood stalwart

Cathel Morrison at work recording seabird populations

Alan McCombes speaks to the recently retired Cathel Morrison – the Trust's outgoing Sandwood conservation manager and its longest serving employee

WHEN CATHEL MORRISON TOOK a phone call in 2001 offering him the post as the John Muir Trust's conservation manager on the Sandwood Estate, he was shocked. "I thought I hadn't a hope in hell of being offered the job," he recalls. "There were 40 other applicants, it was my first ever job interview and I made a complete mess of it!"

He had no formal qualifications either – but he did have something more valuable. Cathel knew this coastline and the surrounding hills like he knew his own living room. He had spent most of his life out on the moors, wrenching a living from the meagre soil on one of the most rugged, storm-battered coastlines in the world.

And he also had deep roots in this remote community at the edge of the ocean. Cathel was born four miles south of Sandwood Bay in 1947, in the post office in the fishing village of Kinlochbervie, where his father drove the mail van. "I've never lived anywhere else – and I've never wanted to," he says. "Every coastline has its own unique character, but this really is a special place."

For eleven and a half years, until his retirement at the end of 2012, Cathel combined his work as a crofter with a passion for the natural world as the Trust's conservation manager on the 4,500-acre estate – one that includes crofting townships, plenty of wild moorland and the startlingly beautiful Sandwood Bay. Few people alive today have made the eight-mile round trek to this tranquil and mystical tràigh more often than Cathel Morrison. He estimates that, during the past decade alone, he walked the path at least 200 times.

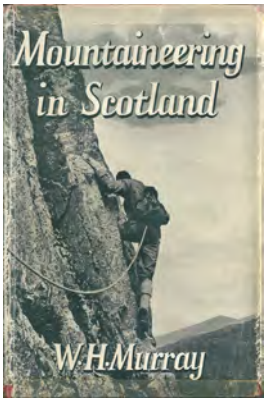
Part of his role involved keeping the coastline in a pristine condition. Sandwood is not Benidorm and most people who visit the beach take care not to leave litter behind. But an amazing amount of debris is washed in from the sea. "I've found a golf trolley and a motor scooter washed up on the beach," he says. "We regularly have to clear old piping and bits of fish farm. A few years ago, we even had to help remove a light aircraft after it had crash-landed on the beach. The pilot had wanted just to touch down on the beach, but it sank deep into the sand. We had to get a team to dismantle the plane and carry it in pieces off the beach."

With Sandwood a Special Area of Conservation, Cathel's workload also involved surveying and monitoring the area's flora and fauna. One day, he might have been on a cliff edge checking the number of chicks in fulmar nests; the next he could be counting water voles, monitoring the great yellow bumble population, or examining the state of the coastal marram grass, whose complex root system helps create and then bind sand dunes together. All tell a bigger story of forces that threaten the ecosystem, from invasive species to industrial fishing, from grazing animals to global warming.

To mark his retirement, work colleagues organised a surprise party for Cathel. There to ambush him as he walked into a local hotel were friends, family and colleagues he has worked with over the years, including his predecessor as conservation manager at Sandwood, Will Boyd-Wallis, and former Trust chief executive, Nigel Hawkins. As the stories flowed back and forth about Cathel's exploits, he confirmed his reputation for being able to turn his hand to just about anything by entertaining the gathering with his artistry on the accordion.

Cathel may be officially retired, but with the fitness and agility of many people half his age, and wild nature in his blood, he will continue to tramp these hills and moors, tuning into the heartbeat of the land, the rhythm of the tides and the music of the seabirds.

About the author
Alan McCombes is the Trust's communications editor. He can be contacted at **alan.mccombes@jmt.org**



Mountaineering in Scotland, WH Murray

Denis Mollison reflects on an influential text – and man – that did much to tempt those with adventure in their blood to explore the Scottish hills

"IT WAS TEN O'CLOCK at night, in Glen Brittle." As darkness and mist closed in, WH Murray's friend Humble suggested a night excursion on the Cuillin Ridge. "On this very spot," I protested, "is to be had a hot meal, a quiet pipe, and an eiderdown sleeping-bag. But I was merely according the flesh its privilege of free speech. The spirit was already aloft, I was pulling on my boots ..."

And of course Humble is proved gloriously right in the 24-hour excursion that follows.

I can still remember exactly where I stood in the Cambridge bookshop when I read the opening page of *Mountaineering in Scotland*; never was 7/6d spent so quickly, or an impulse buy regretted less. This was despite an element of deception in that leading chapter, which described an adventure any bold hill walker could enjoy; for Murray was one of a small group at the cutting edge of Scottish winter mountaineering in the late 1930s, and the book is mainly devoted to their most memorable climbs.

Murray always brought wide sympathies and precision to his writing. But there was something special about this first book: in a prisoner-of-war camp he dug deep into his memories of climbing, and into what they meant to him. And he had to write it twice, for the first version was found and destroyed by prison guards. The second time, there could be no compromise: "I had a mind to say what I'd found of beauty and delight, effort and fun. I would try for truth only, and while knowing that it could never be said, still I would try."

Born in Glasgow exactly 100 years ago, Bill Murray came to mountains suddenly when, at 21, he climbed the Cobbler in winter conditions in his city shoes. Two years later, he and brother-in-law Archie MacAlpine teamed up with the more experienced Kenneth Dunn and the brilliant Bill Mackenzie: "Mackenzie's false start was in the end a psychological gain, for after wandering half an hour on rocks that no mortal was ever intended to climb, he found those that were so intended unusually yielding. Wiry and lean as a courtyard cat, he went as though on midnight tiles, with a vigorous rhythm, up the front of the rib."

To winter climbing this group brought new techniques, including the use of shorter axes and head-torches, and took on exposed face climbs that aroused outrage - "unjustifiable"- in the older generation. But for Murray the difficulties and physical achievements were just a path to more important things: companionship, self-knowledge and beauty.

After the war, he devoted his life to writing, climbing and conservation, writing the influential report *Highland Landscape* that led eventually to the designation of National Scenic Areas in Scotland. He served as Mountains Adviser to the National Trust for Scotland and as one of the first Countryside Commissioners for Scotland, but did not hesitate to criticise these bodies when they lost their way. And he founded the Scottish Countryside Activities Council, the fore-runner of today's Scottish Environment Link.

In March 1984, Nigel Hawkins and I made a trip to persuade Adam Watson and Bill Murray to become Trustees of the new John Muir Trust. We left Adam's house near Deeside late in the evening and started the long journey west to Bill's house on Loch Goil in Argyll.

When we reached the road summit at Glenshee the winter full moon was too much of a temptation. We drank Nigel's thermos using the trig point of Glas Maol as a coffee table – the snow was half a metre deep – in dead calm and bright moonlight, looking across to the higher peaks of the Cairngorms. We traversed to Creag Leacach and were back at the car at 4.30. We slept briefly in a tent pitched on the back road to Pitlochry, recovered over breakfast outside a hotel on Loch Tay, and were at Bill's in time for lunch. With such homage paid to his spirit, he could hardly have refused our request.

Mountaineering in Scotland endures, to tempt others to discover the hills, and themselves, as Bill did.

The reviewer
Denis Mollison is a Trustee of the John Muir Trust and one of its four founders

The Carbon Cycle, Crossing the Great Divide, Kate Rawles
Reviewed by Graham Watson

This is a book about a cycling adventure along the North American Continental Divide, or the Great Divide. But it's also about another adventure – and another 'great divide' – as the author talks to people she meets along the way about climate change, and the challenges associated with it.

It's quite a journey, in both respects. Firstly, it's an epic ride, as the author pedals more than 4,500 miles, crossing the Great Divide around 20 times, enduring desert heat and hypothermic wind and rain. While doing so, she engages with people in a country whose President at the time (George W Bush) is a climate change denier and the largest news outlet, Fox News, doesn't even report on it.

A true adventure, with uncertainty of outcome, mechanical trials and tribulations, and plenty of mental hardship, it's a ride that pushes Rawles to her limit. But it's also a three-month journey through huge landscapes, close encounters with nature (and big trucks), plus stories of the people met along the way – all at a pace that ensures a connection with her surroundings.

I enjoyed this book because the adventure was so much more than the journey. I enjoyed the contrasts between solo travel and encounters with people; of having to reach Anchorage and wanting to make the most of the journey (something I feel that Rawles could never quite reconcile); and because it made me think – of how we live, of what we need, and of adventure and challenges ahead.

Two Ravens Press 2012, £11.99
www.tworavenspress.com
ISBN 978 1906 120634

Fauna Scotica, Animals and people in Scotland, Polly Pullar and Mary Low
Reviewed by Jamie Grant

Elegantly designed with beautiful photography, this is a book about much more than just Scotland's wildlife. It weaves together natural history, myth, legend, poetry and anecdote to tell a rich and eclectic story of our long interaction with the natural world. There are Pictish carvings of mighty boars, tales of mythical white stags and an entire chapter dedicated to 'creatures of the mind' that ends with a light-hearted depiction of the fate of the 'wild haggis'.

The book divides Scotland's fauna into diverse habitats – including mountains, rivers, woods and islands – although with chapters on the tenacious animals that survive in our towns and cities, as well as native breeds of domesticated animals, it doesn't just focus on the species that dwell in wilder landscapes.

I particularly enjoyed the description of the sheep on North Ronaldsay that are restricted to the island's shoreline by twelve miles of drystone dyke. Adapted to live on a diet of seaweed, they wander out after each receding tide to nibble on dulse and laminara "amid groups of slumbering seals".

As well as wildlife, *Fauna Scotica* is populated with the 'countrymen' who depend on animals for their livelihoods. The authors bring us face to face with some of these characters in a chapter on 'wild work', including a taxidermist, sporran makers and Cameron Thomson, the horn carver of Lawers.

This is a coffee table book that many will love dipping in and out of as they learn more about some of Scotland's best loved birds and beasts.

Birlinn 2012, £30.00
www.birlinn.co.uk
ISBN 978 1 84158 561 1

From the Low Tide of the Sea to the Highest Mountain Tops: Community ownership of land in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, by James Hunter, with photographs by Cailean Maclean
Reviewed by Dr Will Williams

With his lifetime involvement with crofting communities, Hunter provides an authoritative reflection on the movement towards community ownership. Part funded by the Carnegie Trust and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, it draws upon an immense wealth of experience from around 20 community initiatives.

Throughout the book, sitting alongside the author's most readable text, are helpful highlighted boxes with extracts from researched references and statements from local people and community leaders. Also provided are summaries of high-profile initiatives such as Eigg, Gigha, Knoydart and North Harris, with the community buy-outs set within the context of absentee landlords, community reaction and response, and evolving government policy and funding streams.

Exploring the experience in areas such as Knoydart and North Harris, the John Muir Trust is firmly positioned as a partner on the road towards sustainable communities, respecting the natural assets and spectacular landscapes of communities.

In the final chapter, the author speculates about more favourable political approaches that might continue the process of community ownership for the benefits not only of communities themselves, but also for delivering public policy priorities and better taxpayer value for money.

Islands Book Trust, 2012, £15.00
www.theislandsbooktrust.com
ISBN 978-1-907443-28-2

PHOTOGRAPH: MARK HAMBLIN/2020VISION

Signs of life and the beginnings of ecological restoration at Little Assynt, by Quinag

A critical view

Fran Lockhart surveys a dramatic landscape altered equally dramatically by people

AS SCOTTISH MOUNTAINS GO, Quinag is in the supermodel class, with hidden secrets that most visitors will never discover. Pre-programmed to follow well-worn paths, we walk to the high peaks and miss out on experiencing those remaining fragments of the luxurious, living cloak that once wrapped itself snugly around Quinag's shapely shoulders.

Green in summer, red, gold and every shade in between at winter's approach, her forests resounded to the call of thousands of birds, and gave life to vast carpets of grasses, mosses and flowering plants that provided food and shelter for grazing animals – in turn stalked by lynx, or disturbed by wolves and bears.

People, too, fitted into the landscape, using the many natural riches that Quinag provided. They grew crops, harvested wood, tended stock, gathered fungi and hunted wild animals. But as a species we're not so good at sharing with others. Gradually, more and more woodland was stripped for fuel and cleared to create open spaces for domestic animals. Sheep began to take over, occupying every strip of land bar the steep-sided gullies and plunging rock faces. Burning became the favoured method of managing the land, destroying species that had never evolved to cope with such harsh, ill-thought out treatment.

Even when the sheep were removed, the ravaged and weakened land couldn't recover sufficiently to provide the native red deer with the habitat they needed to remain the truly wild and resilient beasts that they are. Like the woodland, they have shrunk in size and now live in unnaturally high numbers, even losing some of their instinctive ways.

The tiny remnant forest clinging to the coastal slopes of Quinag has become the battlefield of Ardvar Special Area of Conversation. Here, words – printed in long-winded documents, spouted at endless meetings, or splashed across local newspaper front pages – are the weapons.

Quinag's beautiful cape is now threadbare and tattered, the mountain neglected by those who should have cared for it and the landscape exploited for sport, money and prestige. Long gone are the bird-filled woodlands, reduced now to a lone meadow pipit sounding its alarm call as an eagle soars overhead. The richly diverse swards humming with a wealth of insects are now all but silenced. Instead there is a blanket of stark, over-grazed heath, worn down by the relentless attention of desperate animals seeking sustenance in a depleted larder. At best, Ardvar is given the promise of a protective stitch in the form of a deer fence, threatening to relegate it to the status of a dysfunctional tree museum while the much maligned red deer, blamed for all that is wrong, is fenced out from the little piece of shelter it has left.

Those venturing off the path could be forgiven for overlooking the occasional straggly holly bush that once shared this hillside with thousands of its kind. As a seedling, it escaped the fires and is now only able to survive because it clings to a cliff, just high enough to keep a few branches safe from herbivorous teeth.

Eyes drawn to the endless horizon, unaware of what's been lost in revealing this stark and dramatic landscape, we are lulled into thinking all is well.

About the author
Fran Lockhart is the Trust's property manager for Nevis, Sandwood and Quinag. She can be contacted at **fran.lockhart@jmt.org**

Our inspiration: John Muir, 1838–1914

HE DEMONSTRATED A LOVE OF WILD LAND AND OF THE NATURAL WORLD

"All that the sun shines on is beautiful, so long as it is wild."
The Wild Parks and Forest Reservations of the West

Throughout his life, Muir was drawn to wild places. He revelled in all aspects of the natural world, from detailing the smallest insect to bathing in sublime vistas and experiencing imposing mountain scenery. He would argue with the likes of John Burroughs over who loved nature the most and, although he would spend time away, Muir would always feel the pull of the wild calling him back to the mountains and forests of the American wilderness.

HE ARGUED FOR THE INTRINSIC VALUE OF NATURE

"Surely a better time must be drawing nigh when godlike human beings will become truly humane, and learn to put their animal fellow mortals in their hearts instead of on their backs or in their dinners."
Story of My Boyhood and Youth

At a time when society saw nature's value in terms of the material and economic benefits it offered, Muir presented a different perspective: that the natural world had a value that wasn't dependent on its use by humans and that mankind should occupy a place that was a part of nature, rather than having dominion over it.

HE ARGUED FOR THE RESTORATIVE AND SPIRITUAL EFFECTS OF EXPERIENCING NATURE AND WILDERNESS

"Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul alike."
The Yosemite

In a world where nature's benefits to humans still tend to be expressed in economic terms, Muir's view on the value of wildness offers a relevant and important perspective on our relationship with nature. He argued that experience of nature was an essential part of human existence and that, by visiting wild lands and escaping civilisation, it is possible to recharge mind and body.

HE WANTED TO EDUCATE PEOPLE ABOUT THE WONDERS OF THE NATURAL WORLD AND INSPIRE PEOPLE TO EXPERIENCE IT FOR THEMSELVES

"I care to live only to entice people to look at Nature's loveliness."
Letter to Mrs Ezra S Carr

Despite finding the writing process difficult – he preferred to be in the wilderness, rather than writing about it – Muir felt it part of his life's mission to educate others about the wonders of the natural world. In his writing, Muir tried to convey his love and interpretation of the natural world but also included scientific facts, aiming to advance the knowledge of the reader. In doing so, he hoped to inspire others to experience the wilderness for themselves and to care about the natural world as he did.

HE CAMPAIGNED FOR THE PROTECTION OF WILD PLACES

"Government protection should be thrown around every wild grove and forest on the mountains, as it is around every private orchard, and the trees in public parks."
John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir

Muir's contribution to the conservation movement – in America and across the world – shouldn't be underestimated. He was influential in the formation of several of America's national parks; helped to found the now hugely influential Sierra Club; and was one of the first to suggest that conservation could be justified on the grounds of the intrinsic value to be found in natural places and the spiritual and health benefits that wild places bring to those who visit them. Today, his articles and books continue to encourage people to visit wild places and remain an inspiration for those who fight to preserve such places for future generations.

PHOTOGRAPH: MARK HAMBLIN/2020VISION

Dram, fine, splendid

...need we say more!

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