

JOHN MUIR TRUST  
**JOURNAL**

72 SPRING 2022

- 10 Introducing the Trust's new five-year Strategic Plan
- 18 Seven magnificent walks to enjoy on land in Trust care
- 28 How young people are making a difference for wild places



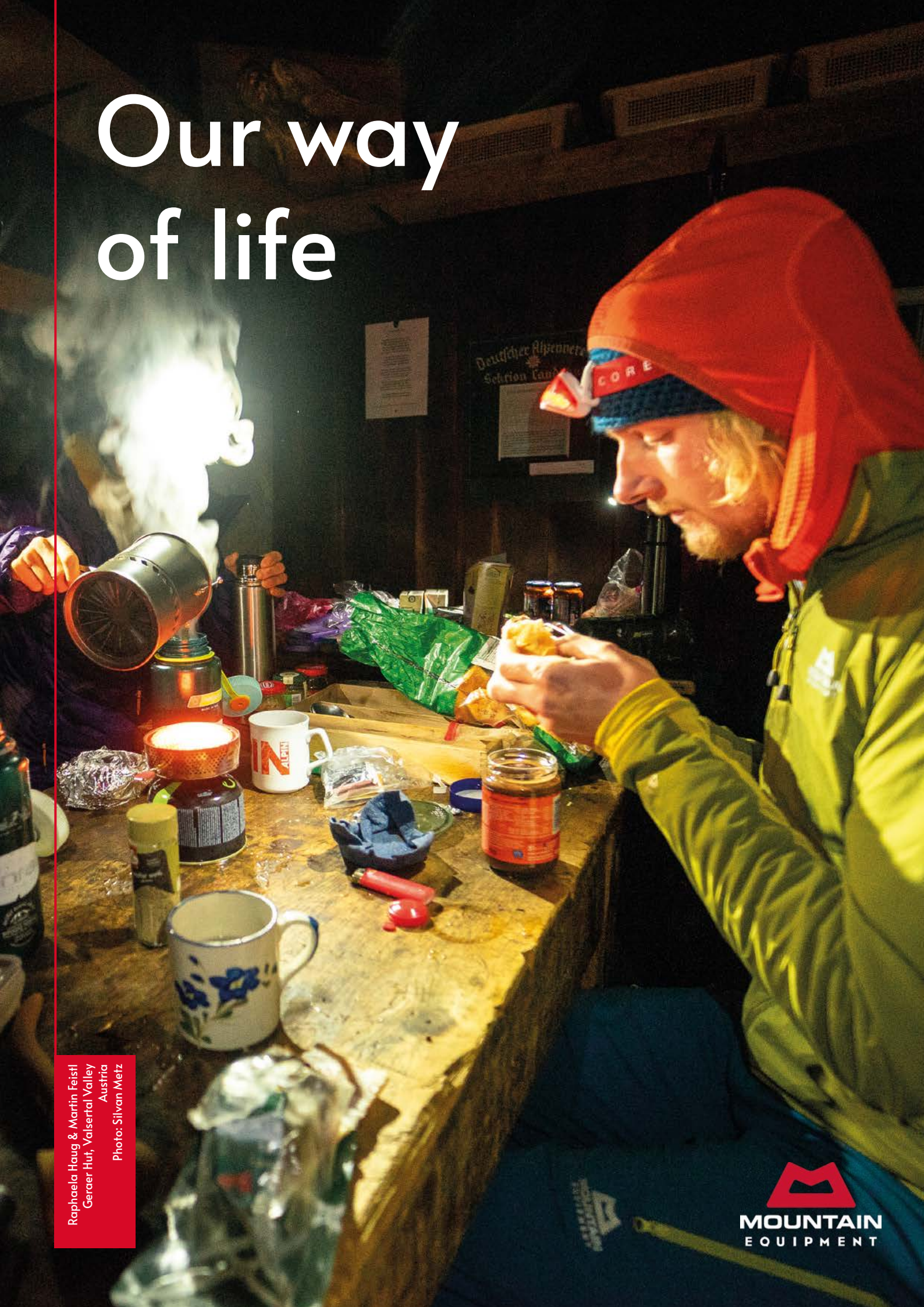
# Water world

The wonders of peatland habitat

JOHN  
MUIR  
TRUST



# Our way of life



Raphaela Haug & Martin Feistl  
Gerger Hut, Valsertal Valley  
Austria  
Photo: Silvan Metz





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PHOTOGRAPHY (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP): WALKHIGHLANDS; ANDREW CAWLEY; LIZ AUTY; NEIL COWIE/RSPB  
COVER: SUNDEW GROWING ON PEATLAND BY MARK HAMBLIN/2020VISION

## JOURNAL 72, SPRING 2022

### Contributing editor:

Rich Rowe

[journal@johnmuirtrust.org](mailto:journal@johnmuirtrust.org)

### Managing editor:

Julie Gough

[julie.gough@johnmuirtrust.org](mailto:julie.gough@johnmuirtrust.org)

### Design and production:

Neil Braidwood

Connect Communications [connectmedia.cc](http://connectmedia.cc)

This journal is printed on Cocoon 100 uncoated stock, a recycled grade paper containing 100% post-consumer waste and manufactured at a mill accredited with ISO 14001 environmental management standard. The pulp used in this product is bleached using an Elemental Chlorine Free (ECF) process. We use a Scottish printer, J Thomson Colour, which has excellent environmental credentials, achieving environmental standard ISO4001 plus FSC and PEFC standards all in 2006.

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The John Muir Trust is a Scottish charitable company limited by guarantee. Registered office: Tower House, Station Road, Pitlochry PH16 5AN

Charity No. SC002061  
Company No. SC081620

## HEAD OFFICE

John Muir Trust  
Tower House  
Station Road  
Pitlochry  
Perthshire PH16 5AN

t. 01796 470080  
w. [johnmuirtrust.org](http://johnmuirtrust.org)

Follow us on:     
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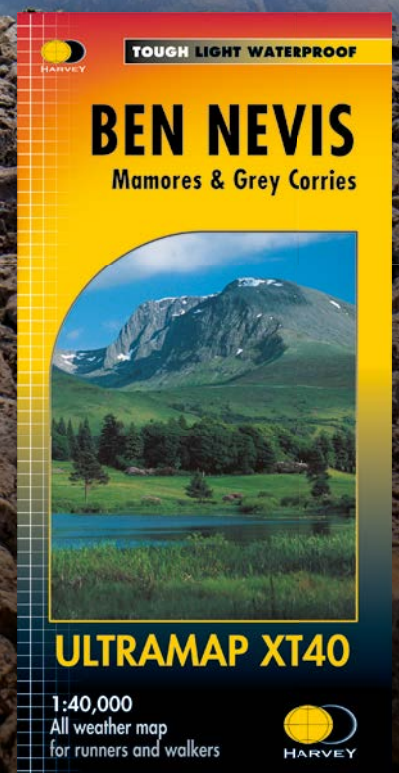
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# Wild places for all

**IN A WAY**, it's very simple. The Trust's new, five-year Strategic Plan, which launches this spring, can be summed up in a single sentence: we believe that wild places are for everyone, wherever they are in the UK.

Our commitment to wild places is guided by three key freedoms. We believe, strongly, that society is enriched when nature has the freedom to repair itself; when people have the freedom to enjoy the benefits; and when communities have the freedom to thrive.



This deep commitment is also guided by three actions. We give wild places a voice by demonstrating exemplary management of the land in our care; by inspiring people to engage and advocate for them; and by evidencing their benefits to society. Our aim is to create a network of sites across the UK to help guide these actions.

These freedoms and actions signify the essence of who we are and what we stand for as an organisation. To help us get started with this transformational change, we have recruited 11 new, talented individuals from

a diverse range of backgrounds. The cover letter from Sophie Edwards that accompanies this issue of the *Journal* provides a flavour of that drive.

For further detail on the new Strategic Plan, the interview with Jane Smallman, our Vice Chair, is a good place to start. Jane reveals more about what we intend to do over the next five years, how we plan to do it and some of the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

And this sense of care for and collective ownership of wild places – not just by the Trust, but by everyone – permeates many of the other pages that follow.

We see it in Rosie Simpson's look at a bid to see the Flow Country in the Northwest Highlands become Scotland's first natural UNESCO World Heritage site and what such a designation would say not just about the importance of peatland landscapes but also the importance of wild places. For they are very much one and the same.


It's there too as Sophie Harrison explores a vision for how wild places can play a key role in a socially and environmentally just transition to net zero carbon emissions in Scotland; and in Toby Clark's look at how a variety of young 'change makers' feel empowered to advocate for their protection.

And, in a very different way, it is most certainly also there in Paul and Helen Webster's choice of seven glorious walks that can be enjoyed on land in Trust care this year.

Perhaps more clearly than any strategy paper can ever achieve, these walks reflect the true power and value of time spent in such magnificent wild places – and why all should have the opportunity to experience them. □

**David Balharry**  
Chief Executive, John Muir Trust





Wind turbines at Stronelaig, near the proposed Glenshero site

# Trust welcomes Glenshero refusal

PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID BALHARRY

## Following widespread objections, a 39-turbine wind farm development in the Monadhliath mountains has been refused planning permission by Scottish Ministers

In November 2020, the John Muir Trust participated in a Public Local Inquiry into whether the Glenshero wind farm should be granted planning permission. The proposed development would have included 28km of new tracks, seven borrow pits and an on-site concrete batching plant in what is a fragile upland area.

The Trust gave evidence in objection to the development to support the Scottish Government to make the right decision on behalf of the public. Other objectors included Mountaineering Scotland, Wildland Ltd, NatureScot, the Cairngorms National Park Authority and Highland Council.

In presenting evidence, the Trust

maintained that the scale of the proposals would have significant impact on the wild qualities of the nearby wild land areas and the Cairngorms National Park.

Scottish Ministers announced on 4 March that it had refused planning permission for the development. In their decision letter, Scottish Ministers stated that they agreed with the Reporter's findings that the landscape and visual impacts would be unacceptable, and that the overall integrity of the Cairngorms National Park would be compromised.

"The decision on Glenshero is welcomed," commented Mike Daniels, the Trust's Head of Policy and Land. "We absolutely recognise

that, for Scotland, net zero by 2045 requires expanding our renewables sector, alongside reducing energy use and increasing the carbon our land naturally captures. Reaching net zero requires thinking carefully about the right renewables in the right place so we protect our precious peatlands, our most important natural carbon store, and boost our biodiversity at the same time.

"This decision helps the Scottish Government in developing Scotland's up-coming fourth National Planning Framework, which we believe can achieve our ambitious energy targets while also protecting the country's most valuable natural assets," he added.

## 2021 Trustee election result correction

When reviewing the Trust's new Articles of Association, the description of how the single transferable vote should work was adjusted. This led to a due diligence check of the results from the Trustee elections in 2021 to ensure the algorithm was being correctly used.

Denis Mollison, one of the Trust's founders and a Professor of Applied Probability, was instrumental in

carrying out the required checks. While the results confirmed that the algorithm was correct, it did identify an error in presentation of the results for which Civica Election Services have taken full responsibility. The Trust has since informed Members, Companies House and the charity regulator of the corrected results.

Find out more at [johnmuirtrust.org/correction](https://johnmuirtrust.org/correction)



# Planning and wild places

## Trust responds to consultation on the Scottish Government's new national planning strategies and policies

The Scottish Government's draft Fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) is intended to be a national plan to guide future development in Scotland that helps the country to achieve its net zero by 2045 goal.

As drafted, the text represents a shift in aspiration and tone from a time when national planning policy was expressed as a spatial expression for economic growth. Now, the Trust believes that priorities must be different in that they also take into account climate, biodiversity, health and inclusion.

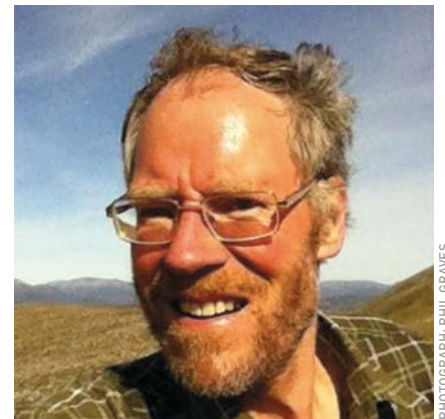
The preparation of the draft began with a 'Call for Ideas' consultation in 2020, followed by a Position Statement on the draft NPF4 published in 2021 and further opportunity to comment. The Trust has engaged with each consultation opportunity and attended meetings with the Scottish Government on NPF4 as a member of Scottish

Environment LINK.

Draft policies in the NPF4 document (Part 3) have been reviewed from the perspective of wild places, improving biodiversity and reducing carbon emissions. The Trust's focus is on policies that require development proposals to demonstrate how they will address both the climate and biodiversity emergencies, for example, through design for nature, innovation, careful siting and construction materials.

In addition to continued protections for sites designated for nature and landscape, there is also a strong need for policies that provide clear protections for wild places such as peatlands and Scotland's Wild Land Areas. These are national natural assets for carbon storage and nature recovery that also support health and wellbeing.

The draft NPF4 was out for consultation until 31 March 2022.



PHOTOGRAPH: PHIL GRAVES

## Tribute: Phil Graves

### Jim Gibson, the Trust's Finance Committee Convenor, shares an appreciation of a fellow Trustee and friend

The death of Phil Graves (above) at the relatively young age of 63 is a great loss to the body of John Muir Trust Trustees. Having worked for some years with his wife, Sue, I knew a bit about his love of the outdoors, his thirst for adventure, his background in financial services and in ecology, as well as his genial and welcoming nature. I was therefore delighted when he was elected as a Trustee in 2019 and when he quickly and eagerly volunteered to join the Finance Committee.

He was faithful in attending Trustee and committee meetings, even from his hospital bed not long before his death. Whether homing in on key figures on the budget papers, commenting on points in the investment manager's reports or explaining the intricacies of the calculations lying behind carbon capture and the road to net zero, he was always attentive, well prepared, ready to contribute from the wealth of his experience, and doing so with grace, humour and relevance.

He was passionately involved with ecology issues in his local community and he brought that passion and care to all his work with the Trust.

Phil was a model Trustee, bringing us knowledge, giving generously of his time and being an example to follow. We remember him with great affection and are the poorer for his passing.



There are calls for NPF4 to reflect the wider importance of wild places

PHOTOGRAPH: MARTIN MACLEOD



Before and after: a boggy mess; laying down the fleeces; a top layer of gravel



PHOTOGRAPHS: JOHN MUIR TRUST

# A new way with fleece

## Trust tests using locally sourced sheep wool to repair Skye path

A popular coastal path in Strathaird on the Isle of Skye provided an ideal opportunity to try a sustainable path repair technique that uses locally sourced materials.

The Kilmarie path is well used by the community, as well as people visiting the Iron Age fort at Dùn Ringill, and a 100m section had become very muddy where it crosses deep peat.

Trust Skye team member John MacRae – who is also a local crofter – repaired most of the section using gravel from a nearby quarry on top of sheep wool to hold the gravel in place. He completed the remainder using gravel on a traditional plastic membrane as a comparison.

John sourced a total of 300 fleeces from local crofts, including from his own flock. In doing so, he followed the guidelines which state that the wool must be sourced as locally as possible, as well as being in its raw state and unprocessed to avoid introducing contaminants. This technique also provides an opportunity to use the fleeces which might otherwise be burned as waste products because their economic value is currently so low.

For the repair, he dug a trench to hold the new surface – as he would for a regular path – but rather than lining it all with geotextile matting, he lined 80m with wool. This was rolled up or folded to create a ‘floating path’ that was then covered with stones. It is hoped that the wool will prevent the stones from sinking into the bog.

John learned a lot about the process as he worked on the repair between February’s storms. “The weather was truly shocking for the majority of the job, which also highlights the fact that wool can be used in very wet conditions,” he said.

“Feedback from the community and the crofter who supplied most of the fleeces has been brilliant. In fact the crofter visited the site several times throughout the repairs and gave it 10 out of 10 when it was completed.”

## Award recognised in learning outdoors report

A recent Education Scotland report has highlighted the learning benefits of wild places to communities and society – especially those who experience disadvantage.

To help them compile the Successful Approaches to Learning Outdoors report, HM Inspectors visited 35 settings and schools across Scotland at the end of 2021.

The John Muir Award featured in several of the report’s case studies that demonstrated effective practice for high quality outdoor learning.

They included how the Trust supported one of the inspection visits to Rashielea Primary School in Renfrewshire by discussing the impact on pupils and highlighting the school’s strong commitment to young

people’s engagement in their own learning.

“The John Muir Award gives us an ideal framework to base the planned developments” commented one teacher. “It empowers children to go out with curiosity and see what they can learn and, most importantly, what they can teach others about what they discover.”



## Obituary: Caroline Wickham-Jones

Caroline Wickham-Jones was a Trustee of the John Muir Trust from 1989 to 1995, during which time she served on the land management committee and information and education committee. Those who worked with her remember Caroline's wonderful enthusiasm and rare ability to communicate and share her expertise.

Caroline was an outstanding archaeologist and a highly effective communicator in writing and broadcasting on a wide range of archaeological subjects. Her primary interest was in the earliest inhabitants of Scotland across sites ranging from Rum to the Aberdeenshire Dee, but particularly in Orkney.

She first became associated with the Trust when she joined our inaugural work party, in Li and Coire Dhorcail, Knoydart, in June 1988.

Denis Mollison, one of the Trust's founders, was delighted to welcome her. "It was immensely encouraging in those early days to find that we attracted so many expert people as volunteers in our conservation work," he said. "Alongside Caroline were Paul Jarvis [ecologist], Andrew Currie [Nature Conservancy Council staff on Skye], Dave Mardon [National Trust for Scotland botanist], Jim Rowbottom

[otters] and Bob Aitken [pathwork]."

Bob Aitken and his wife Penny first met Caroline when they gave her a lift to Kinloch Hourn to join that 1988 work party. "We were slightly dismayed that Caroline wasn't quite equipped for the stiff trek into Barrisdale, but we quickly learned that she took all that cheerfully in her stride," remembered Bob.

"Penny and I set off early to do a path survey, amusing ourselves in passing up Coire Dhorcail to see how many shielings we could pick out with our untrained eyes. Caroline, coming up the corrie later in the day, identified about three times as many as we had – but didn't mock our amateur efforts.

"She underplayed the range and depth of her expertise, though she did admit to being quietly proud of her skill as a flint-knapper," added Bob.



Caroline (far left) with early Trust team members, including Penny and Bob Aitken

PHOTOGRAPH: DENIS MOLLISON



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# Strategic thinking

Following detailed consultation with Members and key partners, the Trust will launch its new, five-year Strategic Plan this spring. **Rich Rowe** asks **Jane Smallman**, the Trust's Vice Chair, about its key elements

## What do you feel are the Trust's main challenges over the next five years?

I feel the Trust has as many opportunities ahead of it as challenges. We need to demonstrate increasing evidence that effective protection and care for wild places helps address the climate crisis and reverse the loss of biodiversity. We also need to do more work with people and communities to help realise the societal benefits of wild places. Overall, we have a chance to develop the Trust in a sustainable way so that it can deliver even more against its charitable purpose.

## How will the new Strategic Plan help you achieve that?

We have identified five strategic objectives (see box) and put in place a programme of work to deliver on each of them – all while ensuring that our staff are clear on what is being asked of them and that they have the support needed to do their work in an effective way. All of the programmes have distinct but interlinked projects within them. This means that we can measure progress over the period of the plan, and modify projects and programmes as needed to meet our objectives.

## How does this new strategic direction differ from the previous one?

The underlying objectives are the same but there is a greater urgency in addressing the climate and

biodiversity crises. There is a recognition among Trustees that there is so much more we can do to lead the debate and advocate for wild places. The time is right to invest more in protecting and repairing wild places and influencing others to do the same.

## And how will it help extend the Trust's reach in terms of campaigning and advocacy?

By putting greater resource into both our campaign and advocacy work, and by increasingly working in partnership with other organisations who share our vision. The strategy sets us up to do more in the policy space across all the constituent parts of the UK.

## One stated objective is to demonstrate "exemplary management" of wild places. What does that mean in practice?

It means managing the land so that nature has an opportunity to restore itself without interference. A good example is our work to restore peatland at Faiolean on Skye. Funded by NatureScot's Peatland Action Fund, it has involved the removal of spruce and smoothing of the ground to restore bog habitats. It's early days, but when I was there last autumn it was looking good. Another example is at East Schiehallion where the combination of deer management and fencing through a progressive partnership across many landowners

PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID BALHARRY







Jane Smallman speaking at a recent board meeting on Skye

is allowing plants and trees to re-establish. I was there in July last year, just as the meadowsweet was coming out, and it was fantastic to see the progress that has been made.

### **What more work is needed to evidence the role of wild places in helping to tackle climate change and reverse biodiversity loss?**

There is plenty of evidence already, but for me it's a question of how to translate that into influential materials and messages that demand action. Some of the proposals by the Trust, for example on a Carbon Emissions Land Tax, have gained real traction with Scottish Government and influential organisations across

the UK. There is always more to be done though and more evidence to gather.

### **What is the Trust's ambition for managing additional land, and where?**

We will continue to look for opportunities to acquire more land, while recognising there are likely to be more opportunities to partner with other organisations that can also help achieve our objectives. We must also continue to demonstrate exemplary management of land we already look after. In terms of where, the answer is wherever we think we can make a difference. We don't have fixed ideas on location.

### **There is wariness in some quarters about green investors buying up land to plant trees. How will the Trust demonstrate that it's not just another 'green laird'?**

The key to this is listening to and working with communities. Our Trustees are clear that this is part of our heritage and central to our credibility. We will continue to be responsive to the concerns and ambitions of people, while being clear on our vision and mission. One of the aspirations of the strategy is to bring forward activities that further demonstrate the economic, environmental and health benefits of wild places to communities and wider society.

### **The strategy includes plans to improve the visitor experience on Trust land. In doing so, is there a danger of harming what you seek to protect?**

Definitely not. Any work we undertake to enhance the visitor experience will be proportionate and sympathetic to the place. That said, we do want to provide greater access to a more diverse range of visitors, with information and facilities that allow them to benefit from our wonderful wild places. We should let

more people know that the Trust is a membership organisation open to all who want to help protect and repair these places. We can do this in a sensitive way so that when visitors enjoy a wild place in our care, they leave knowing how to help the Trust make it and other such places accessible to all.

### **How will the strategy ensure that the Trust is relevant to a younger and more diverse audience?**

Our objective is to inspire people to get involved with the Trust and to realise the benefits of wild places. We already have a wonderful engagement initiative with the John Muir Award, which we will continue to expand. While open to all, the Award is particularly strong when it comes to youth engagement. We will also continue to extend our range of volunteering activities; getting people involved in active conservation is great fun as well as having obvious health and wellbeing benefits. And we will focus much more on working together with other organisations that are already well established in more diverse communities, so that together we can extend the benefits of wild places to a much wider range of people. □

#### **About the interviewer**

*Rich Rowe is contributing editor of the Journal*

### **Our strategic objectives**

- Demonstrate exemplary management of wild places
- Inspire people and communities to benefit from and advocate for wild places
- Influence government and land managers to protect wild places
- Strengthen societal understanding of the value of wild places
- Exemplify best practice in our organisation for all





PHOTOGRAPH: JAMES CARTER

# Going with the flow

With the Flow Country in the Northwest Highlands bidding to achieve UNESCO World Heritage status, **Rosie Simpson** explores how such a designation would help communicate the importance of peatland habitat – and why protecting peatland also protects wild places

**AN EXPANSE** of pools, low-lying land, wide horizons and big skies in Scotland's northwest, the aptly named Flow Country is the world's largest expanse of healthy blanket bog. It's also in the running to be Scotland's first natural UNESCO World Heritage site.

It is the epitome of a wild place. A sweeping landscape of active peatland, around 400,000ha in all, it is home to golden plover, greenshank and red throated diver. Stands of cotton grass dance in the breeze, specialised insect-eating plants thrive in the acidic ground, while the vivid green, orange and red of sphagnum moss – the very building blocks of peatland – squelches underfoot.

If the Flow Country does achieve UNESCO World Heritage status – potentially in 2024 – these peatlands will sit within the legal protection of an international convention that would not only safeguard the future of this wild place but also promote universal recognition of the value of peatlands everywhere.

Such recognition would be a measure of just how far

peatland has come in our collective consciousness. In recent years, its value as our single most important terrestrial carbon store and for its biodiversity, has expanded beyond conservationist and scientific circles as societal awareness of climate change and loss of nature has sharpened.

Crucially, this wider understanding has translated into government policy, with the creation of peatland restoration funds and associated targets. The Scottish Government has committed £250 million over ten years to restore 250,000ha by 2030, while the UK Government plans to fund 35,000ha of restoration by 2025 through Environmental Land Management schemes.

And since 2020, peatlands have been accounted for in the UK greenhouse gas inventory – recognition that emissions from damaged peatlands and carbon savings from peatland restoration are eligible for national accounting under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.





Flow Country  
views, Sutherland

## PEATLAND EXPLAINED

A type of carbon-rich soil, peatland forms over thousands of years from dead plant matter held in waterlogged conditions. A meeting of land and water, more liquid than solid, such landscapes are revered in Celtic culture as being symbolic of the boundaries between worlds.

Found mostly in the northern hemisphere in areas of high rainfall, it is a globally rare habitat, covering just 3 per cent of the Earth's surface. The UK is home to three main types of peatland: raised bogs, found in the Peak District, Scottish Borders and central lowlands of Scotland; low-lying fens, found in Norfolk and elsewhere in the east of England; and the blanket bogs of the Flow Country and the Northwest Highlands.

There are an estimated 2.7 million ha of peatland in the UK, or 11 per cent of the total land area. That percentage rises considerably in Scotland, with blanket bogs and lowland raised bogs covering 20 per cent of the total landmass – and a serious share of the global 3 per cent.

Our relationship with peatland has changed greatly over time and is closely tied with cultural and societal perceptions of land and nature. Through past land management choices, and the view that to be productive, such places needed to be 'improved', the UK has lost

a large proportion of its peatland. Many areas have been drained for agricultural use or for forestry, leaving just 20 per cent of the UK's peatlands in a near natural state today.

From a purely carbon perspective, the difference between healthy and degraded peatland is night and day. As long as peatland remains waterlogged, the vast amount of carbon within it remains stored indefinitely. But when peatland is drained, burned or the overlying vegetation becomes eroded, the peat becomes exposed to the air and dries out. This process of oxidation transforms it from being a vast carbon sink into an equally vast carbon source – with an estimated 23 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emitted annually from the UK's degraded peatlands.

Thankfully, the perception that peatlands are marginal, unproductive lands that must be made useful is losing ground to an understanding that such land is *already* highly productive. As well as its role in storing carbon, healthy peatland is now recognised for its ability to filter and purify water; to reduce flood risk downstream by 'holding' water in upland areas; and as habitat for a rich variety of plants, insects and birds, all specially adapted to living in such a waterlogged land.

## MAKING GOOD

Sadly, while perceptions are changing, the damage already done largely remains. The lengthy process of restoring the UK peatlands cannot start soon enough.

The UK Climate Committee's Progress Report to the Scottish Parliament, published in December 2021, outlined that while opportunities for emission savings from the power sector have largely been exhausted, significant gains can be made in carbon saving through peatland restoration.

All around the UK, conservation bodies are investing time and expertise into restoring peatland on areas of land in their care. They include the Moors for the Future Partnership in England, which is delivering a landscape-scale programme of blanket bog restoration across the Peak District and south Pennine moors – home to some of the most degraded areas of peatland anywhere in Europe.

But as well as restoration, the way forward must also include protection – something that is currently patchy at best. To date, there are pockets of statutory protection for some peatlands, with areas classified as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and/or Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA). Examples in the UK include the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SPA; the Lewis Peatlands SPA; the Fen Bog SAC in North Yorkshire; the North Pennine Moors SAC and the Mointeach nan Lochain Dubha peatlands on Skye, which have a SSSI and SAC designation.

While clearly better than nothing at all, such designations still fall far short of the kind of ecosystem-level statutory protection required for an irrecoverable carbon store of such rare biodiversity value.

Added to this is the unfortunate reality of a UK climate policy that can further threaten rather than protect such vital landscapes, with industrial-scale onshore wind energy developments being sited on and around peatland. This is questionable green energy when the carbon costs of development on peatland are, at best, underestimated and, at worst, unknown, while the permanent natural carbon and rare habitat loss is both certain and irrecoverable.

Attempts have been made to assess the carbon costs of development on peatland. In 2008, the Scottish Government first published its carbon calculator with supporting research. Since then it has updated and revised the tool and guidance, with the latest, web-based version published in 2016.

The policy intention behind the calculator was clear: to give decision makers a better understanding of the carbon pollution caused by a development and to weigh up whether the carbon savings could justify the harm done to the landscape. However, as scientific understanding of how built development impacts the structure of peatland and its carbon storing ability has improved, there have been calls from the scientific

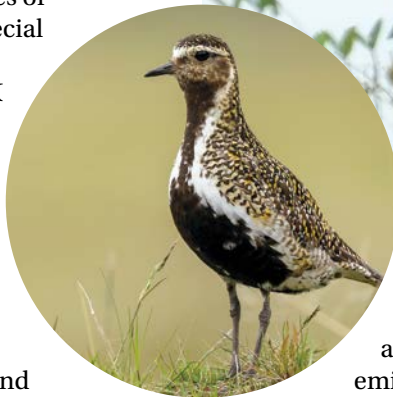
community for the Scottish Government to update the calculator so that it generates a more accurate assessment of a development's overall emissions.

In addition to asking for the calculator to be updated, the Trust has argued that accurate assessments of carbon costs of any development should be a primary consideration in planning decision making.

Cue National Planning Policy and its key role in protecting peatland from industrial development. The Scottish Government's draft Fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) includes a policy on peatlands, stating that "local development plans should protect locally, regionally, nationally and internationally valued soils".

This is a helpful statement. However, its effectiveness is likely to be undermined by a list of exemptions in the draft NPF4 policy for when development on "peatland, carbon-rich soils and priority peatland habitat" can take place – particularly given the absence of an accurate means of assessing emissions from peatlands impacted by development. Exemptions include "essential infrastructure" and "the generation of energy from a renewable source where the proposal supports a zero carbon electricity system and will maximise the function of the peatland during its operational life and in decommissioning".

The Trust would question what counts as "essential infrastructure" and the implied assumption that the function of peatlands can be maximised if the integrity or ecology of the peatland ecosystem has already been compromised by the development. And is there a tipping



PHOTOGRAPH: PAUL TURNER/RSPB





Eyes down:  
exploring the  
dark pools at  
the RSPB's  
Forsinard  
Flows Nature  
Reserve

PHOTOGRAPH: MOORS FOR THE FUTURE



Bog life (clockwise):  
raising the water  
table, Peak District;  
damselfly close up;  
sundew and  
sphagnum; golden  
plover (inset)



PHOTOGRAPH: MARK HAMLIN/2020DIVISION



PHOTOGRAPH: SHUTTERSTOCK

point where restoring what remains of the peatland after development will fail to recover the thousands of years of peat formation that has already been lost by that development?

Proper application of the precautionary principle could support clear policy for protecting what was there in its original state rather than a policy that attempts to make good of the consequences.

## WILD PLACES

Peatlands are wild places, which means that protecting peatland in the UK is also protecting the UK's wild places. This can be seen visually when comparing a carbon map of Scotland with the mapped areas of wild land – there is considerable overlap. It is also evident from the Trust's own work restoring peatland on the land in its care. At Strathaird on Skye, around 35ha of peatland is being restored with funding from the Scottish Government's Peatland Action Fund, while work is also currently underway to scope the feasibility of restoring peatland at Quinag, Sandwood and Schiehallion.

Restoring peatland is hands-on work: it involves blocking drains and creating dams to raise water levels; removing invasive species, including trees that would drain the bog of moisture as they grow; and monitoring peat depths and surveying its condition over time.

Of course, all this work requires knowledge and skills

**“Sadly, while perceptions are changing, the damage already done largely remains. The lengthy process of restoring the UK peatlands cannot start soon enough”**

and people. It's work that takes place in remote areas and brings funding into rural communities, creating local jobs in land management and, potentially, future jobs in nature tourism and recreation.

If successful, the UNESCO World Heritage bid for the Flow Country would likely make the UK's most north-westerly peatlands even more of a must-visit destination for wildlife and nature travellers. As with any sensitive ecology, visitor impacts have to be managed, but the designation could be an opportunity to inspire and inform visitors about why we need to safeguard these wild places for the future.

It would also be a fitting testimony to the earlier campaigns by individuals and organisations who had the foresight to value these peatlands for everything they give us, just as they are. □

### Further information

*We invite you to support the Trust's new Peatlands Appeal. Your support will help us campaign for peatland protection across the UK and restore damaged and eroded peatlands on land in our care. Visit [johnmuirtrust.org/peatlands](http://johnmuirtrust.org/peatlands)*

### About the author

*Rosie Simpson is the Trust's Senior Policy Officer*

PHOTOGRAPH: ALEX HIDE



## A life aquatic

**Rich Rowe highlights some of the specialist plants and animals that make their home on peatland and how they are perfectly adapted to living in such a challenging environment**

**AT FIRST** glance, upland blanket bogs reveal little about the wonders they hold. A sunken landscape, full of hummocks, hollows, pools and lochans, they can appear monotonous and lifeless. But closer inspection reveals a living landscape full of remarkable detail and adaptation.

The colouration of sphagnum and other mosses – the very building blocks of peat – is a marvel on its own. Individually, sphagnum moss plants are small but, much like the tiny organisms that together form a coral reef, they grow in dense, tightly packed carpets to form something extraordinary: a multi-coloured expanse of red, pink, orange and green that is not quite land, and not quite water.

There are other micro-plants here too, all specially adapted to survive

in such nutrient-poor sites. Some, such as sundews, butterworts and bladderworts – the assassins of the plant world – compensate for the lack of minerals in the ground by tapping into other sources.

Particularly striking when seen up close, insectivorous sundews are equipped with spoon-shaped leaves festooned in red, stalked glands that look a little like tentacles. The head of each gland is covered in a glistening, sticky secretion that traps passing midges, ants, beetles and even insects as large as damselflies.

The glands respond to movement, so when an insect lands on one, the other glands bend inwards to hold it fast. The whole leaf then closes up, releasing enzymes and acids that kill and then digest the trapped insect.

The common butterwort has a similarly gruesome – and effective –

approach. Often found growing together, each plant's single, violet-blue flower rises above triangular leaves, all as sticky as glue. Any insect that blunders onto the leaves has little chance of escape; the leaves close together like a slow-motion trap door and the prey is digested within. Once finished, the leaves reopen and the dry insect husk is lost to the wind.

Bladderworts are different again, and even more ingenious. These free-floating aquatic plants catch tiny crustaceans and aquatic insects using a hollow, bladder-like trap. The door of the trap is controlled by sensitive hairs at the entrance – when a prey item touches the hairs, the door opens and the creature is sucked in by a vacuum at great speed.

Once inside, it is digested by





House specialties (clockwise from main): sundew close up; male hen harrier; bog bean; common butterwort; cottongrass

PHOTOGRAPH: NATURESCOT/LORNE GILL

enzymes released by the plant. And when the meal is finished, glands within the bladder absorb all the water from inside to create a vacuum once again and the trap is reset.

Blanket bogs are also home to a handful of other flowering plants that are rather more benign. Crowberry, cross-leaved heather, cloudberry and various heathers all dig in as best they can, while in summer the bright yellow flower spires of bog asphodel and the white of bog bean add splashes of additional colour in and around pools and flushes.

Perhaps most obvious of all are the swaying seas of hare's tail cottongrass that often cover great swathes of peatland. The plant's distinctive, fluffy seedheads, perfectly designed to be carried on the breeze, provide a vital source of food and shelter for a rich variety of butterflies, birds and small mammals.

With few trees, or many woody plants at all, upland breeding birds



**“Bladderworts are different again, and even more ingenious. These free-floating aquatic plants catch tiny crustaceans and aquatic insects using a hollow, bladder-like trap”**

such as dunlin, curlew, greenshank and golden plover build nests using scrapes in areas of dry ground. It sounds risky, but each site is perfectly camouflaged in amongst the vegetation.

In spring, the evocative bubble and trill of these breeding waders carry far over the open ground, sometimes with the sweet notes of skylark – the birds rising and falling with folded wings – adding to the orchestral sound.

But perhaps the most attention-grabbing species of all at this time of year is the hen harrier. In early spring, the ghost-like males take to the sky where they soar, dive and somersault in an acrobatic ‘sky dance’ designed to attract the attention of a female. If she is sufficiently impressed by the male’s performance, they will pair up for the season and raise chicks together.

It’s just one more wonder in a special landscape that gives more and more with each closer look. □

#### **About the author**

*Rich Rowe is Contributing Editor of the Journal*





PHOTOGRAPHY: WALKHIGHLANDS

# Magnificent seven

Ready for a year of exploring? Then let Paul and Helen Webster recommend some of the very best walks that can be enjoyed in wild places managed by the Trust around Scotland

## 1 STEALL FALLS AND THE NEVIS GORGE, LOCHABER

Many people know that Ben Nevis is the UK's highest peak, but did you know that the Trust's land at Nevis also includes the UK's second highest waterfall? This short walk follows a rugged, and recently repaired, path through the dramatic Nevis Gorge – described by the late mountaineer and conservationist W.H. Murray as Himalayan in scale. The steep confines of the gorge suddenly open up as the path emerges onto the beautiful Steall meadow (above). Here, you can test your nerve by crossing the wire bridge over the Water of Nevis, or simply picnic with an incomparable backdrop of the 120m-high falls.







2

### QUINAG, ASSYNT

Assynt is celebrated for its spectacular, isolated mountains – ‘inselbergs’ of heavily eroded sandstone that rise from a bedrock of ancient gneiss. While Suilven is the best-known of all, arguably the finest big hill walk in the region is provided by a round of Quinag (above), a dramatic massif of narrow ridges and crag-girt corries topped by three great peaks. The approach to the first summit, Spidean Coinich, has been much improved by Trust path work in recent years and makes for a great walk in its own right for those not quite ready for the classic round.



3

### LADHAR BHEINN, KNOYDART

Located on the north side of the Knoydart peninsula, the remote Li and Coire Dhorrcail (left) became the Trust’s first landholding back in 1987, as part of a campaign against a proposal by the Ministry of Defence to use the peninsula as a bombing range. Back then, it was a place stripped bare by too many deer, but decades of volunteer planting have led to a spectacular recovery of the native woodland, while Knoydart’s sole community at Inverie on the other side of the peninsula has gone from strength to strength. The corrie itself is little visited, but you can look down into it from the spectacular ridge walk to Ladhar Bheinn – one of Scotland’s very finest Munros.





4

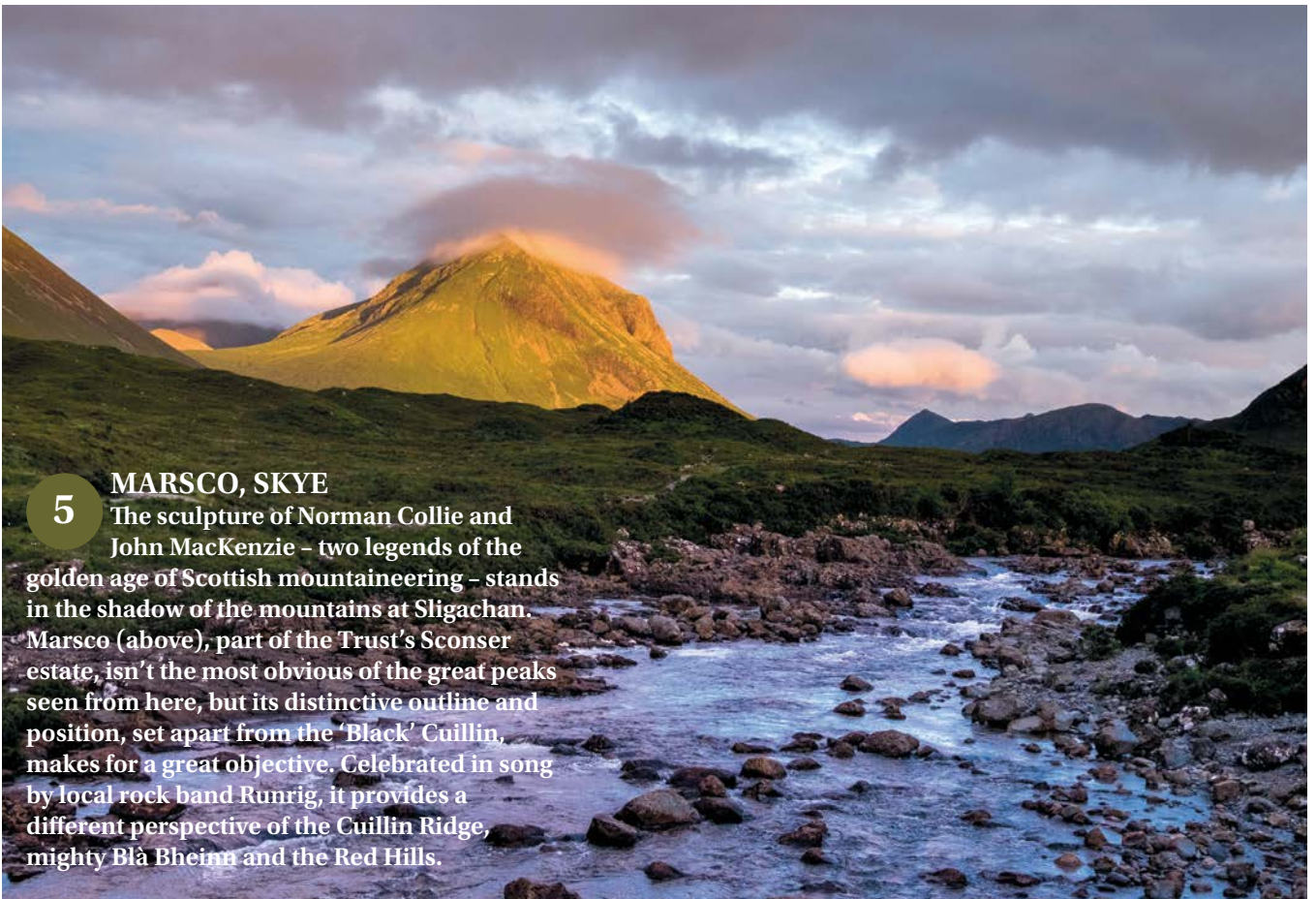
#### ELGOL PENINSULA CIRCUIT, SKYE

This long circular walk (above) on the Strathaird peninsula has become a Skye classic, beginning with a climb over the moors before the first incredible view of the Cuillin on the descent to the lonely bay at Camasunary. A historic path then follows the coastline to Elgol – with an airy, unprotected drop to the sea ensuring that it is breathtaking in the literal sense as well as the metaphorical one. There's a chance to visit the community cafe and shop at the village before crossing to the other side of Strathaird, passing through Glasnakille and crofting landscapes above a quiet coastline.

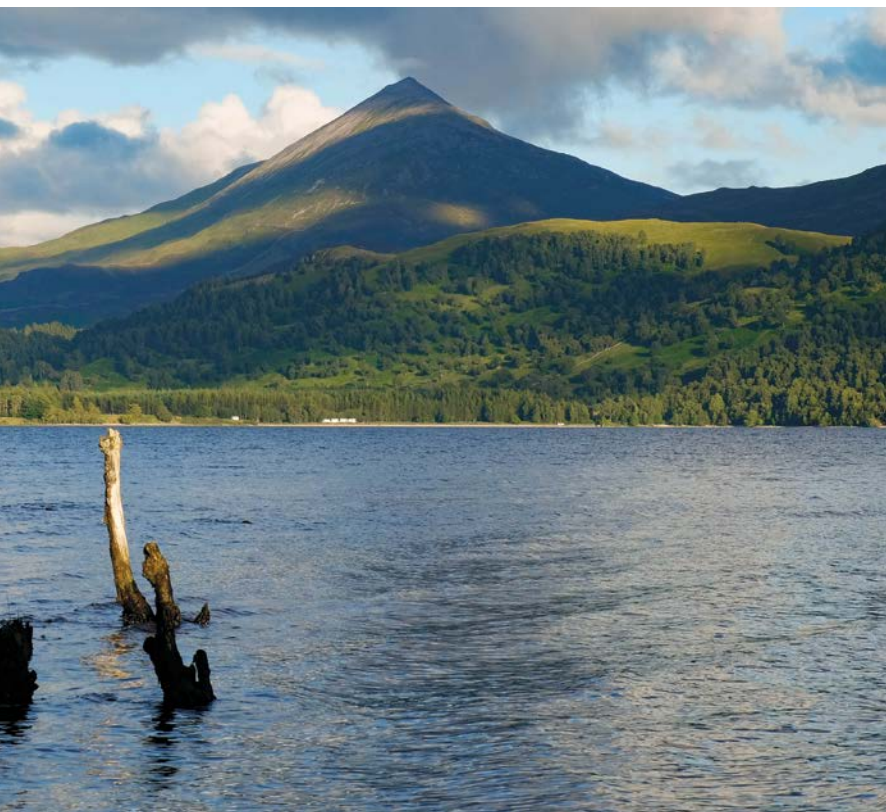
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#### MARSCO, SKYE

The sculpture of Norman Collie and John MacKenzie – two legends of the golden age of Scottish mountaineering – stands in the shadow of the mountains at Sligachan. Marsco (above), part of the Trust's Sconser estate, isn't the most obvious of the great peaks seen from here, but its distinctive outline and position, set apart from the 'Black' Cuillin, makes for a great objective. Celebrated in song by local rock band Runrig, it provides a different perspective of the Cuillin Ridge, mighty Blà Bheinn and the Red Hills.







6

### SCHIEHALLION, PERTSHIRE

Dominating the landscape around Loch Rannoch, Schiehallion (left) is one of Scotland's best loved hills, taking the form of a broad ridge but appearing as a perfect cone when seen from across the loch. The regular shape led to Schiehallion being used in a famous experiment in 1774, when the deflection its mass causes to a pendulum was used to estimate the mass of the earth. Happily for walkers, contour lines were invented during the process. Today, Schiehallion provides a great introduction to walking the mountains, with the normal ascent route from the east – once severely eroded – now a beautifully pitched path following the work of the Trust. Several false tops on the final pull over the rugged summit boulder field ensures the mountain continues to feel wild and challenging.



7

### SANDWOOD BAY, SUTHERLAND

Faith is rewarded on the walk in across empty moorlands when the first magical view of Sandwood Bay is revealed ahead. Regarded by many as the most beautiful beach in Britain, it's justly renowned. Take your time to enjoy the mile of golden sand and dunes, with rocky cliffs and the great sea stack of Am Buachaille to complete the seduction.

#### *About the authors*

*Paul and Helen Webster are the co-founders of Walkhighlands, the UK's most visited walking website. For detailed descriptions and route information for these and hundreds of other walks, visit [walkhighlands.co.uk](http://walkhighlands.co.uk)*



# A path to net zero

**Sophie Harrison** explores the Trust's recently outlined vision for the role of wild places in a socially and environmentally just transition to net zero carbon emissions in Scotland

**CHANGE** can be both exhilarating and frightening. It can create opportunities for some and leave others behind, increase prosperity or magnify inequalities. It can happen *to* us, or it can happen *with* us.

The idea of a 'just transition' to net zero began with a recognition from the Scottish Government that decarbonisation of energy should be managed in a way that protects people who are dependent on the fossil fuels industry. It has since evolved into a broader ambition to ensure that the gains and losses of the transition to net zero should be spread widely and fairly.

As an organisation, the Trust wholeheartedly supports the principle of a just transition that combines environmental and social justice – with the added belief that wild places can play a central role in this for everyone.

In a recently published document entitled *Just Transition and Wild Places*, the Trust has positioned wild places as a catalyst for a just transition alongside a range of practical actions that the Scottish Government and others could take.

Its focus is on six key areas: carbon storage; biodiversity; communities and land reform; rural economy; renewable energy; and landscape, access and recreation. The piece also

explores what a just transition could mean for Scottish rural culture, language, health and wellbeing.

But while it provides a deep dive into specific ideas around each area of focus, the extent to which people's lives are intertwined with nature ensures that they are by no means standalone themes.

And yet, nature has no monetary value. It does not figure in the GDP calculations of economists. If an oil rig closes or the number of flights from a major airport are reduced, GDP figures look worse; but if we lose half our species, it doesn't even register as a blip on the national economic balance sheet.

If it did, Scotland would be a very poor place: in a recent Biodiversity Intactness Index of 240 countries and territories, Scotland is ranked at number 212, with the rest of the UK even further behind.

## LAND REFORM

There are, of course, many competing pressures on the land, with space needed for farming, housing, renewable energy, forestry

and tourism. But right now, each of these sectors operates largely in isolation, focusing on its own needs and prospects. What is needed instead is an integrated approach that focuses on maximising public benefit from the land – an approach that requires significant reform in the way that Scotland's land is currently divided and managed.

From an environmental perspective there is huge value in enabling a much larger number of people to have a direct stake in how the land is used. To drive ecological change on the scale needed to redress centuries of destruction, as many people and as many rural communities as possible must be involved.

But land reform is not just about ownership. Scotland's mountains, moors and wild places are part of a common heritage; they are precious local, national and international assets rather than personal



**“There is huge value in enabling a much larger number of people to have a direct stake in how the land is used”**





overdue reform of deer management, as well as a robust licensing system of driven grouse moors. The Victorian-based model that seeks to maintain unnaturally high deer and grouse densities at the expense of most other species is incompatible with public objectives for nature, climate, rewilding and the economic regeneration of rural areas.

Looking ahead, a doubling of the community land fund in the 2023 Scottish budget, and interest-free loans for prospective community landowners, could provide the impetus for new models of land ownership. This could, amongst other things, help increase nature-friendly farming, as well as stimulate community-owned renewable energy capacity.

### DRIVING CHANGE

Renewable energy and carbon offsetting are in fact already driving land use change across the Highlands. A Scottish Government 'gold standard' accreditation scheme for carbon offsetting, which would

insist on a commitment to transparency, longevity, biodiversity improvement, a community share allocation and community participation, would help ensure that the surging demand for land for carbon removal and wind turbines does not degenerate into a free-for-all that enriches only a small minority of large landowners and companies.

And responsible land ownership is about more than just legal rights. It's also about access. Scotland's mountains may be world-renowned, but for those who live in the most deprived communities, for ethnic minorities, for many women and for people with disabilities, such places remain as mysterious as the dark side of the moon.

Improved rural public transport and an extension of free and discounted bus and rail travel is critical here. So too is offering every young person the same opportunities to connect with nature, regardless of their postcode. This could include outdoor skills education, incorporating navigation, the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and basic landscape Gaelic.

These ideas are not intended as tablets of stone, but rather the start of a wider dialogue. As the climate needle shoots up into the red zone, bold thinking is needed on all fronts to avert global catastrophe. But these ideas, these changes, need to be driven from a table at which everyone has a seat. □

### Further information

*Just Transition and Wild Places*, written by Alan McCombes, the Trust's Public Affairs Advisor, can be read in full at [johnmuirtrust.org/just-transition](https://johnmuirtrust.org/just-transition)

### About the author

Sophie Harrison is the Trust's Media Communications Officer

possessions. As such, all landowners – whether private, public, charity or community – should be encouraged and, where necessary, compelled to behave as guardians of the land, with statutory obligations to the natural environment, to local people and to future generations.

A public interest test for all transfers of land more than 1,000ha based on clear environmental and social criteria could help this shift. So too could long

Rural communities can play a major role in progressing ecological change





# Walk this way

Join Liz Auty as she explores the environmental and economic aspirations behind the Trust's landscape-scale work at East Schiehallion – including efforts at a local level to address the threats of climate change and biodiversity loss

PHOTOGRAPHY: LIZ AUTY

The Foss Loop boardwalk on Dùn Coillich

**OUR** journey, like that of most people who come to Schiehallion, begins at the Braes of Foss car park, owned by our partner, Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS). Built in the 1980s, the car park does not have enough room for all those who like to visit and we are now discussing options for the future of visitor facilities in the area.

When travel restrictions lifted following the first lockdown in 2020, Schiehallion, like many popular sites around Scotland, became extremely busy. At the time, Perth and Kinross Council decided to enforce parking restrictions along the roadside, as overflow parking had prevented large vehicles getting through and had become a safety issue.

In 2021, FLS employed staff to marshal the car park and also

constructed temporary overflow parking. Thanks to funding from NatureScot's Green Recovery fund, the Trust was able to employ a seasonal ranger to support FLS with parking organisation and to engage visitors in the conservation work at Schiehallion.

Covering some 871ha, the Trust's land at East Schiehallion is part of the Heart of Scotland Forest Partnership, which includes Dalchosnie and Kynachan Estate, Garth Wood Wilding, FLS, Highland Perthshire Communities Land Trust (Dùn Coillich), Scottish Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust Scotland and our affiliate partners Grenich and the National Trust for Scotland (Ben Lawers).

With a combined land area that extends for 3,000ha between

Schiehallion and Loch Tummel, all partners have a shared vision of a restored, connected and vibrant landscape – one that benefits wildlife, visitors and the local community through opportunities for employment and enterprise.

## LOW TO HIGH

Leaving the car park, walkers have two options. A left fork leads to the Foss Loop, a 1.5km low-level path that offers striking mountain views and an up-close look at the developing native woodland on neighbouring community land Dùn Coillich. Here, the song of summer-visiting birds such as whitethroat and grasshopper warbler are often heard.

Created in 2019, the route offers an easily accessible way of enjoying the landscape. We had hoped for an



official launch of the route in early 2020 but, with plans curtailed by Covid, the intention now is to host a variety of events this year that will see artists and musicians explore multi-sensory experiences of the landscape.

The end of the loop path sees a return to the car park area, where more than 10,000 native trees have been planted by volunteers within a deer-fenced enclosure. Already, there are good levels of regeneration, with rowan, downy birch and willow all becoming established. In time, these areas of emerging woodland will connect with Dùn Coillich's own developing woodland and the new planting on the neighbouring Kynachan Estate.

Many hill walkers, however, choose to take the right fork that leads to the start of the mountain path which snakes its way to the summit of Schiehallion (at 1,083m).

Following generous contributions to our recent fundraising appeal, contractors undertook major works on the mountain path in the summer of 2020. Stone and aggregate were needed for the repairs, but with all available material close to the path already used, these were sourced from elsewhere on site and then bagged up and transported by helicopter along the length of the path ready for contractors to begin work.

The combination of harsh mountain weather and more than 40,000 booted feet using the route every year means that maintenance will always be needed, but this work should future proof the path for some time to come.

But it's not always about the big repair projects. For many years we have relied on the support of volunteers to maintain the mountain path in between major repair work. However, when Covid hampered our volunteer work parties, Dùn Coillich trainees and rangers from the Scottish Wildlife Trust stepped in to help. It demonstrated once again the value of partnership.

At around 400m, the mountain path passes extrusions of limestone which provide ideal conditions for species-



High life (clockwise): the summit ridge; cowberry, cloudberry, rockrose and thyme thrive in the limestone-rich soils



**“Higher still are specialist plants such as cloudberry – not to mention extensive views across wider Perthshire”**



rich grassland, where flowers such as thyme and rockrose can be seen, and areas of open heath. Higher still are specialist plants such as cloudberry – not to mention extensive views across wider Perthshire.

Construction of the ‘new’ path route to the summit in the early 2000s has allowed much of the eroded peaty areas on the old route to recover. However, this process of recovery is slower above 600m and there is more work to be done to protect these vulnerable areas.

Following a preliminary peat depth survey last summer, significant areas of deep peat were discovered, many of them eroded. This year, the Trust will carry out a feasibility study to look at how these areas might be

restored, while there are also plans to link up with other members of the Heart of Scotland Forest Partnership to work together on a larger scale.

#### **NEXT STEPS**

Overall, there are ambitious and innovative plans for this special wild place over the next few years, including a significant increase in woodland cover. Grazing levels will be reduced to enable mountain woodland to develop, while there will also be significant planting to establish seed sources for species that would take hundreds of years to become established naturally. As much as possible, nature will then be allowed the freedom it needs to recover and thrive.





PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS YORK

Airlifting materials for path repairs

In a recent community consultation on our plans, we received responses that covered a range of views, the majority of which were supportive of increasing woodland cover at Schiehallion. Our use of the word 'restore' was questioned, however – and understandably. It should be said that rather than turning the clock back, the aim is to look forward and

enable Schiehallion to become a place where nature has the freedom to rebalance itself.

It is a similar approach to the one taken by the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) at its Ben Lawers property, also in Perthshire. There, a long-running programme of restoring less common mountain shrub species has seen a gradual transformation of the landscape –

and offers an exciting glimpse of what to expect at Schiehallion. With NTS having recently joined the Heart of Scotland Forest Partnership, their expertise, alongside that of the Mountain Woodland Action Group, is greatly welcomed.

The fact is that the current scale and speed of climate change and biodiversity loss is such that no single organisation or entity can tackle it alone. At the core of both the Heart of Scotland Forest Partnership and the mountain woodland project is a drive for collaborative working, with a sharing of resources and knowledge key to helping achieve our goals.

Our vision is that future visitors will be immersed in an open-structured, wildlife-rich woodland that climbs high into a montane zone full of the low-growing species found in such habitat. And our hope is that, wherever they venture on the hill, all visitors will feel welcome and inspired by the experience. □

#### *About the author*

*Dr Liz Auty is the Trust's East Schiehallion Property Manager*

## Vertical farming

In an intriguing and innovative new partnership, Scottish agritech business IGS will apply its expertise in next generation farming technology systems to support the Trust's woodland regeneration plans at Schiehallion.

IGS's vertical farming technology makes it possible to grow a wide range of crops, from basil and lettuce to seed potatoes and even tree seedlings, anywhere in the world, regardless of the climate, location or space.

As part of its commitment to addressing sustainability and viability

of crop production, IGS has entered a long-term partnership with the Trust that sees every member of the firm's staff gifted a 9m<sup>2</sup> area of land at Schiehallion. Each parcel of land will then be regenerated through the planting of native trees.

This commitment to regeneration using native tree species is also reflected in recent innovations being undertaken by IGS using its controlled environment growing methods.

At its Crop Research Centre in Invergowrie, IGS is trial growing six different varieties of trees,



PHOTOGRAPH: IGS

including Scots pine – one of the species included in the mountain woodland project at Schiehallion.

These trials will utilise IGS vertical farming technology for the production of softwood seedlings all year round.

Although an early-stage project, the anticipated results include a lower

seedling failure rate, higher crop biosecurity and a lower cost per seedling.

Initial indications suggest that growing in a controlled indoor environment can help improve the quality of the seedlings, including optimising their roots and leaves, and reduce the growing time by up to a third.





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# Change makers

**Toby Clark** explores some of the many ways in which young people make a difference for wild places through their involvement in the Trust

**SUPPORTING** people to experience wild places, encouraging them to leave only footprints and feel empowered to advocate for their protection, is core to the Trust's engagement work.

A positive experience in nature so often enables and encourages the behaviours needed for a fairer, sustainable world – including tackling the climate crisis and reversing biodiversity loss. And that's why we work to inspire champions of the future by helping them develop an all-important connection with nature.

In 2021, the Trust renewed a commitment to empower young people to take social action for the environment by signing a UK-wide #iwill Power of Youth Charter. Our belief is that everyone, regardless of background, should have the opportunity to achieve their potential and experience the numerous benefits of having access to wild places.

Here, we showcase the voices of five young people currently engaging with the Trust in a variety of ways, all of whom have a deep desire to protect and advocate for wild places.

## About the author

*Toby Clark is the Trust's John Muir Award Scotland Manager*



PHOTO: LOUIS WARE



PHOTOGRAPH: KATIE DYKE

## Adventure – Katie Dyke

In August 2021, citizen scientist Katie Dyke spent two weeks on the Shiant Islands in the Outer Hebrides where she undertook cetacean surveys that fed into the Whale & Dolphin Conservation Shorewatch dataset. Her solo trip was made possible by funding support from the Des Rubens Bill Wallace Grant – an annual grant, administered by the Trust, which gives people the opportunity to seek out life-changing experiences in wild places.

“Following a magical two weeks of wildlife sightings and a humbling time spent with little distraction, I was reminded of the wonders of the natural world,” reflects Katie. “The trip has given me skills and memories that I will treasure forever.”

Adventure calls: apply for a Des Rubens Bill Wallace Grant before 15 January each year, visit [johnmuirtrust.org/rubenswallace](https://johnmuirtrust.org/rubenswallace)



PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST



### Employment – Julia Grootaers

After completing a BSc with Honours in Animal Biology from the University of Stirling, Julia Grootaers recently joined the John Muir Trust as John Muir Award Scotland Officer – a position part-funded in partnership with Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park.

“Not only do I value the Trust’s mission, vision and purpose, but my job allows me to create networks and connections that would usually be hard to make this early on in a career,” reflects Julia.

“Great emphasis is placed on the value of young people within the Trust and as a result I have been consulted on projects to provide a youth perspective. These opportunities have challenged me, built my confidence and provided a solid basis from which to kickstart my career within conservation.”

And Julia has some key advice for others looking to join the environmental sector. “Start as early as you can with local volunteering, internships and creating your own conservation projects,” she suggests. “Find your tribe and surround yourself with like-minded people who empower and support you.”



PHOTOGRAPH: ANDREW CAWLEY

### Climate – Sarra Wassu

Eighteen-year-old Sarra Wassu was one of 26 young climate change activists photographed in the build-up to COP26 by Glasgow photographer Andrew Cawley as part of a year-long project to find inspiring young people who are trying to make a difference.

Sarra, who has volunteered with the Trust and achieved her John Muir Award, believes that organisations such as the Trust have played a major role in helping raise awareness of the challenges of climate change.

“Now it’s up to us to take action and take the next steps in our life to combat climate change,” says Sarra. “All it takes is for everyone to come together and play their wee part, because together we can make change.”

### Conservation – Cody Mackay

Launched in August 2021, the Trust’s Junior Ranger programme sees students from Lochaber and Ullapool high schools volunteer to contribute to conservation projects in their area and learn more about life working in the conservation sector – all as part of the school curriculum.

It’s fair to say that 14-year-old Cody Mackay (pictured left, middle), one of eight Junior Rangers from Lochaber High School in Fort William, is enjoying the experience. “Every fortnight, we go to Glen Nevis to learn about this wonderland we call home,” he explains. “I believe that becoming a Junior Ranger was one of the best choices I have ever made.”

Over recent months, Cody has learned a huge amount on a range of topics, from bird identification to visitor management, as well as helping run stalls at events alongside Trust staff and other Junior Rangers.

“The wild makes me feel warm inside – bright, happy, but also sad from the fact we take it so much for granted,” says Cody. “Nature is crumbling beneath our feet and if we don’t make changes, we might not see a world in colour.”

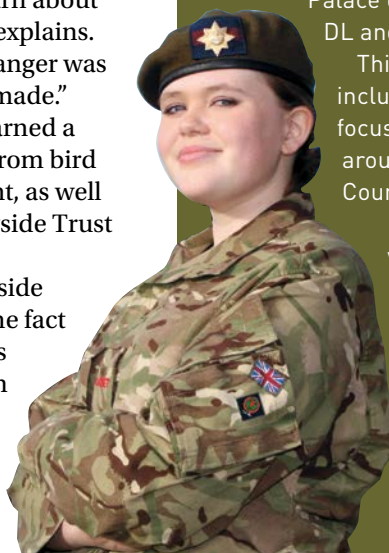


### Achievement – Taylor Ashe

In 2021, 14-year-old Army Cadet Taylor Ashe received the British Citizen Youth Award at an award ceremony at the Palace of Westminster with Lord Dholakia OBE DL and Anthea Turner.

This was to recognise her efforts that included achieving a John Muir Award focusing on a litter and recycling campaign around her home village of Ahoghill, County Antrim.

“During Covid I wanted to make the world a bit better, which I hope I did – we can all do our part,” says Taylor. “Through the John Muir Award I was able to set challenges for myself to improve the environment. I thoroughly enjoyed making my chosen wild place better for everyone to enjoy.”



PHOTOGRAPH: TAYLOR ASHE



Views over part  
of the new  
nature reserve

# Up and running

Following last year's historic community buyout, work to create the new Tarras Valley Nature Reserve at Langholm has now begun in earnest, writes **Jenny Barlow**



**I AM** one of six newly appointed staff charged with driving the development of the Tarras Valley Nature Reserve at Langholm. This follows a community land buyout in 2021 which, remarkably, saw £3.8m raised in just six months to purchase 5,200 acres of ancient woodlands, moorland, peatland and river valley.

Now one of southern Scotland's largest community-led ecological restoration projects, the development of the Tarras Valley Nature Reserve would not have been possible without such support, including from the John Muir Trust and its Members.

The story of Langholm's community land purchase captured the interest of people from around the world during the global pandemic. Providing hope and inspiration, it also highlighted what can be achieved when people come together towards an ambitious shared vision.

Such support has paved the way for a project that, although about ecological restoration, has people at its heart. It is one that will restore nature at a landscape scale, help tackle climate change and support community regeneration through a nature-based approach.

As a team, we will develop and deliver a diverse range of work over the coming year across the core themes of nature, people and climate. This will include an extensive new broadleaf woodland project in partnership with the Woodland Trust, plus plans for a community-owned tree nursery that will grow native seed from our ancient forests to help kickstart further regeneration.

Underpinning all of our activity is a major programme of community participation to ensure that any emerging plans are co-designed, collaborative and reflect the needs and aspirations of the local community.

Kat Mayer, Inspiring Engagement in Nature Project Officer, leads on the community and volunteer programme which aims to bring people of all ages closer to nature and demonstrate the community's sense of ownership over the land in a practical way. This includes weekly volunteer events, outdoor classroom sessions for local schools and continued delivery of the John Muir Award.

And we have a truly ambitious legacy in mind. Our second stage community buyout campaign to

double the size of the reserve is now well under way: we aim to raise £2.2m by May 2022 to bring the remaining 5,300 acres of Langholm Moor into community ownership.

After May, the area will go on the open market at which point it is likely that the price will be beyond the reach of the community. We've already seen an incredible response with hundreds of people donating, but we still have a way to go before this area of land is also safeguarded as part of the Tarras Valley Nature Reserve.

If able to complete this purchase, we would more than double the size of the land in our care and boost plans for community regeneration alongside helping to combat the joint nature and climate emergencies. □

### **Further information**

To donate to the Langholm Moor Second-Stage Community Buyout campaign, visit [langholminitiative.org.uk](http://langholminitiative.org.uk)

### **About the author**

Jenny Barlow is Estate Manager for the Tarras Valley Nature Reserve, Langholm





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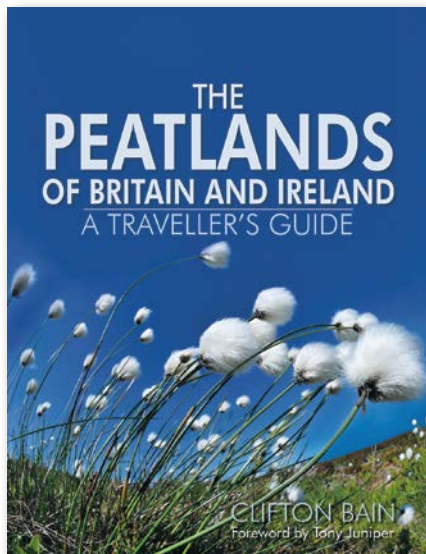
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## *The Peatlands of Britain and Ireland, A Traveller's Guide, by Clifton Bain*

**Nikki Gordon** is absorbed by a travel guide that reveals the life found in a once maligned landscape

**ACCORDING** to Clifton Bain, a long-time Member of the John Muir Trust, “getting people from all walks of life to visit peatlands [is] the best way to create a lasting impression”. It’s simple enough advice, but typical of the many valuable insights found in this latest addition to his highly successful series of books exploring spectacular natural landscapes.

What is immediately striking about this comprehensive travel guide is the quality of the many photographs and illustrations that accompany each chapter – the latter by wildlife artist Darren Rees. All help reveal the true wonders of peatland landscapes.

Often disregarded as areas of wasteland with little or no use, peatlands are enjoying a reversal of fortune as appreciation grows for the myriad benefits they offer for people, for the fight against climate change and for biodiversity.

True to the Trust’s own ethos, the author sets out to inspire, engage and protect, encouraging all to seek a deeper connection with these impressive landscapes, and enhance

our collective awareness of their wider value.

Beginning with descriptions of their historic and modern uses, Bain explores our often complex relationship with peatlands with typical wit and pragmatism, painting a picture of the exploitation of these landscapes and their wildlife.

But he also provides a hopeful description of the benefits of protecting them through successful conservation projects and details of the rich variety of plants and animals that inhabit such places.

I soon found myself absorbed by the various anecdotes that weave through the book, ranging from notes on traditional herbal and mystic properties of bog plants to descriptions of bog bodies preserved in the acidic soils.

A fresh new take on a travel guide, *The Peatlands of Britain and Ireland* is, in turns, practical and literary, pragmatic and erudite. It also provides a delightful combination of ecology, mythology, etymology and archaeology – with the author’s literary artistry leaving the reader itching for a day out on the bog.

**£24.99 (hardback),**  
**[sandstonepress.com](http://sandstonepress.com)**

**About the reviewer**  
*Nikki Gordon is the Trust’s*  
*Carbon Officer*

## Others we like

### *Islands of Abandonment*, Cal Flynn

Cal Flynn’s profound and hopeful book brings to life areas that have been abandoned by people and reclaimed by the wild. From uninhabited islands to ghost towns, empty urban districts and exclusion zones, we discover what happens when mankind’s impact on



the landscape is no more. The section on Chernobyl is particularly powerful given current events.  
**£9.99. [harpercollins.co.uk](http://harpercollins.co.uk)**

### *A Line Above the Sky*, Helen Mort

As someone long drawn to the intoxicating thrill of climbing, Helen Mort’s intriguing mix of memoir and nature writing



## ***Time on Rock: A Climber's Route into the Mountains,* by Anna Fleming**

**Ross Brannigan discovers that you don't have to be a climber to enjoy a book that celebrates the joy of putting hands and feet on rock**

**I FIRST** met Anna Fleming at the Wild Words event that the John Muir Trust hosted at Fort William's Highland Bookshop in 2019. We've kept in touch ever since and I have watched with interest her growing literary success – including publication of her first book, *Time on Rock*.

As a non-climber, I must admit to feeling like a bit of an outsider when approaching this book. This fact was reinforced when Anna polled the room at a book signing I attended in Keswick and asked who in the audience were climbers. It's safe to say, I was in the minority.

I was drawn to Anna's book for many reasons. More often than not, climbing books tend to be written by men, and have an element of 'conquering' about them. Anna's book promised a refreshingly different approach. Other reviewers had also drawn comparisons with the work of the esteemed Nan Shepherd, one of my favourite writers.

*Time on Rock* is split into nine chapters, each named after a type of rock: Granite, Slate and more – including Anna's climbing nemesis, Gritstone. Anna explores her relationship with each type of rock in a geological journey that also brings a new appreciation of the natural world all around.

Initially, I still felt slightly on the outside looking in; there was a lot of 'climbing', which seems obvious for a book about climbing. However, as I read on, I became more and more interested in Anna's relationship with the rock, and particularly with the cultural history connected with each specific type.

This is nowhere more apparent than in the chapter on climbing slate in Wales. Of course, Wales is renowned for its slate mines, but the centrality of slate (or *llechi* in Welsh) in the lives of many who worked and lived in the areas around them is beautifully captured.

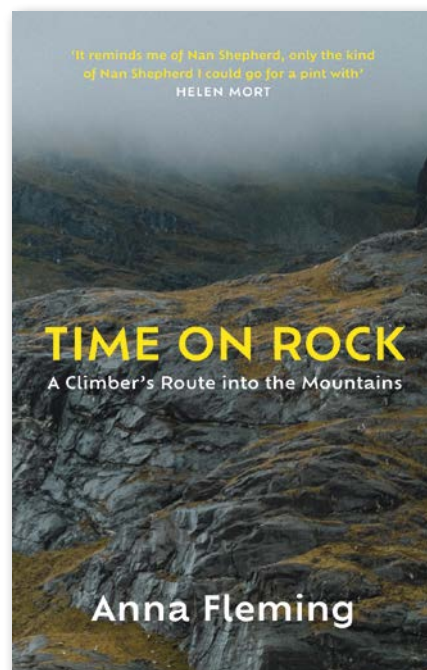
"The division of labour within the quarries followed the language," writes Anna. "Those who worked the rock face spoke Welsh; the capitalists who owned the site and sold the finished slates spoke English. It was therefore proudly asserted that slate spoke Welsh. Unfortunately, none of our crew speaks fluent slate."

As I delved further into the book, Anna pulled me deeper into, and up, the rock. I went with her up slimy chimneys and chossy gullies; watched as she thrutched through a gap in the rock; and sat in awe with her atop a granite climb in the Cairngorms.

*Time on Rock* had a profound impact on how I view rock. It became transformed from simply a hard, blank background canvas to something full of colour, character and history. It may even have convinced me to put on a harness and rope up.

**£16.99 (hardback). [canongate.co.uk](http://canongate.co.uk)**

**About the reviewer**  
*Ross Brannigan is the Trust's  
Engagement Officer*



explores why humans are attracted to danger – and the way that women who are unafraid to take risks are viewed by the wider world. **£16.99. [penguin.co.uk](http://penguin.co.uk) (Ebury Press)**

***Outlandish, Walking Europe's Unlikely Landscapes,*  
Nick Hunt**

This is a book about exploring landscapes that should not be

there – areas of wildness found in Europe yet seemingly belonging to far-off continents. A patch of Arctic tundra in Scotland; Europe's largest remnant of primeval forest in Poland and Belarus; the continent's only true desert in Spain; and the grassland steppes of Hungary. It's both an education and a delight. **£10.99. [hachette.co.uk](http://hachette.co.uk)**





# Caitlin Osfield

Caitlin Osfield, a social anthropology student and Trust volunteer, tells **Nathan Berrie** about her recent dissertation which explores the impact of tourism on experiences of cultural identity on Skye

## Why did you choose to explore this particular topic

I have been interested in cultural identity since I first started studying anthropology as an undergraduate. Having visited Skye several times and knowing that tourism is of huge economic benefit, I was curious to explore the relationship between the two.

## How would you describe cultural identity in the context of somewhere like Skye?

While there are so many different cultural identities in places like Skye, I wanted to look specifically at Gàidhlig cultural identity. The experience of this identity is closely tied to the landscape, land, language and music. The traditional practice of crofting is an example of this. One of the locals I spoke to lived on a croft that had been passed down through many generations and she felt this connected her family and their ancestors to the land. With many croft houses now being turned into holiday lets, this is one reason why some feel that the Gàidhlig culture is being diminished.

## How much did you draw on your own experience of Skye?

Loch Coruisk at the foot of the Black Cuillin is one of my favourite places in the world, so I completely understand how magical the island feels. However, congestion, overcrowding and erosion were all things that I experienced a lot of on my own trips, particularly at sites such as the Old Man of Storr.

## Why are authentic cultural experiences so important?

For visitors, experiencing local culture provides a much deeper understanding of the historical and present experiences of people on the



Caitlin Osfield

**“The ‘tick-box’ tourism so often seen on Skye means that visitors don’t get to fully appreciate where they are”**

island – leading to a better appreciation of the land, language and people. For locals, being able to celebrate and experience their own culture can also be very meaningful.

## Could encouraging ‘slow tourism’ have potential to make Skye a more sustainable tourism destination?

Absolutely. The ‘tick-box’ tourism so often seen on Skye means that visitors don’t get to fully appreciate where they are. With its emphasis on connecting to local culture, slow tourism is an alternative that would no doubt benefit locals as well as tourists. Some of the locals I spoke

to reminisced about the ceilidhs that used to be held in the island’s villages and talked of their love of sharing this experience with tourists and how they would like to bring more of them back.

## What impact did covid have on your study?

Instead of living on Skye over the summer I ended up conducting research and interviews online. It wasn’t all bad though as I was able to gain insight that would have been impossible without the lockdown. Some locals said they loved having the island to themselves and told stories about the issues faced when tourism opened up again.

## Have you been inspired to learn more about Gàidhlig culture and language?

Yes! I took a short Gàidhlig language course last summer with Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the university on Skye. Understanding the pronunciation and meaning behind Gàidhlig words, which are often so central to the culture, was something I felt I really missed out on when working on my dissertation, so it was great to get stuck into this.

## What themes from your research would you like to explore more?

I would love to look further into the connection between cultural identity and the land and environment across Scotland and further afield. I think this would be especially interesting in the context of the climate crisis, with issues such as climate migration becoming increasingly important. □

### About the interviewer

Nathan Berrie is the Trust’s Nevis Conservation Officer





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