JOHN MUIR TRUST
JOURNAL

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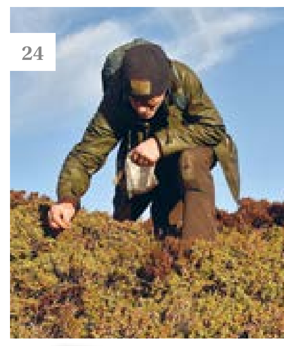
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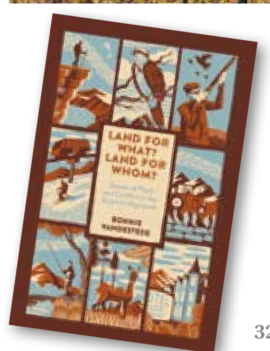

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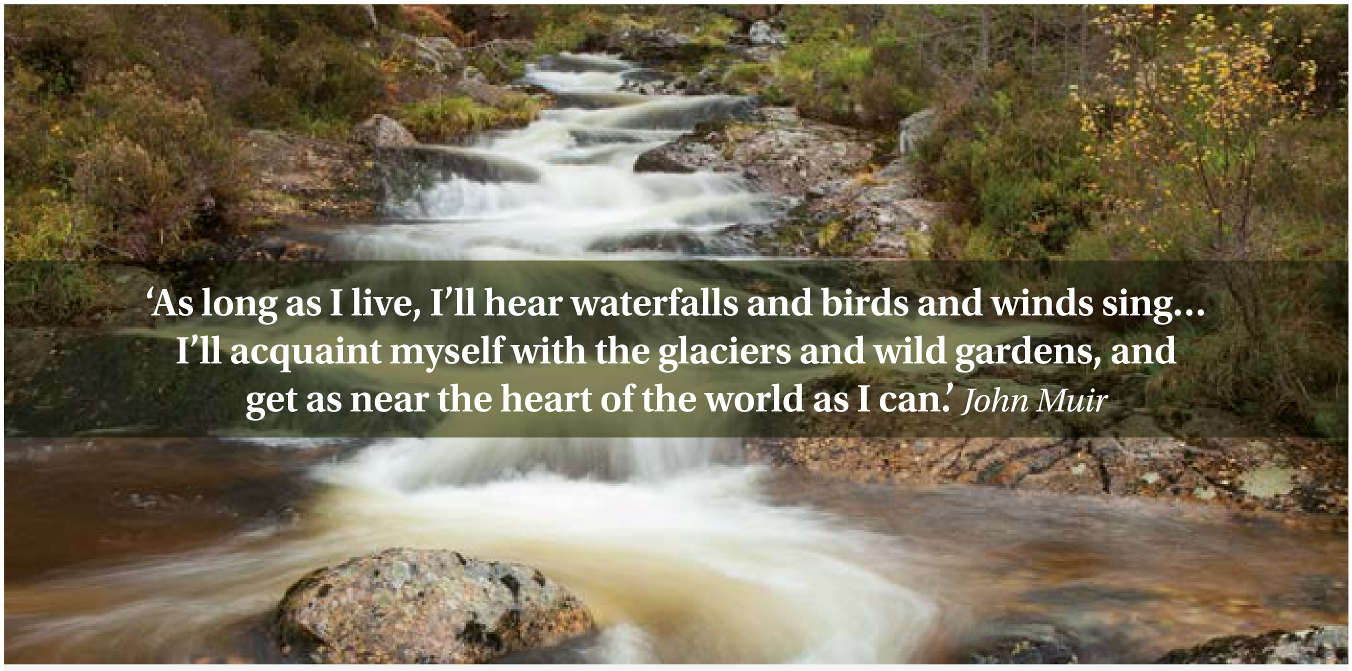


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# Scaling up

PHOTOGRAPH:: JOHN MUIR TRUST

**AS THE** world around us grows ever more turbulent, more people have come to discover, respect and value wild places – those precious but dwindling areas of land that offer escape from the pressures of everyday life. For some they provide adventure and challenge. For others they provide solace and reflection; spiritual places where we can rebalance and regenerate our human spirit and be close to those we've lost.

Wildness is all around, from the green spaces within our towns and cities to the rugged tops of the highest mountain ranges. The value of wild places comes in many forms. They have the potential to make an immense contribution to the twin battle against the climate emergency and biodiversity loss. And in our increasingly polluted and frenzied world, they provide fresh water, clean air and a connection to nature, as well as generating economic activity and supporting livelihoods.

It is not easy to measure or define wildness because we all have different life experiences and perceptions of what we consider wild. Yet to advocate effectively for the protection and improvement of wild places, we need to bring evidence to the tables of power in Westminster, Holyrood and the Senedd, as well as to the wider public and land managers on the ground.

In the coming years, we aim to martial high-quality data and information that paints a clear picture of the condition of wild places. From that data, we intend to compile a register of wild places, listing sites across the UK that can demonstrate three essential 'freedoms': the freedom of nature to evolve and repair itself; the freedom of people from all corners of society to enjoy the benefits; and the freedom of communities to build thriving and resilient economies.

We will engage a wide range of people including you, our members, in setting the criteria and standards for the exemplary management we expect from landowners and managers of wild places.

Alongside that work, we will seek to demonstrate in action what exemplary management of wild places looks like. Our plan is to create a network of showcase sites across the UK that can become a model of best practice in land management. These sites will cover the four nations of the UK, with one in each Wild Place zone (see news item on page six).

We recognise that wild places are diverse in character so we cannot have a one-size-fits-all approach as we increase our presence across the regions and nations of the UK. Our ten-year target is to manage, through ownership and in partnership with other landowners, sites that will allow us to demonstrate innovative and effective land management, and to deliver inspiring engagement activities.

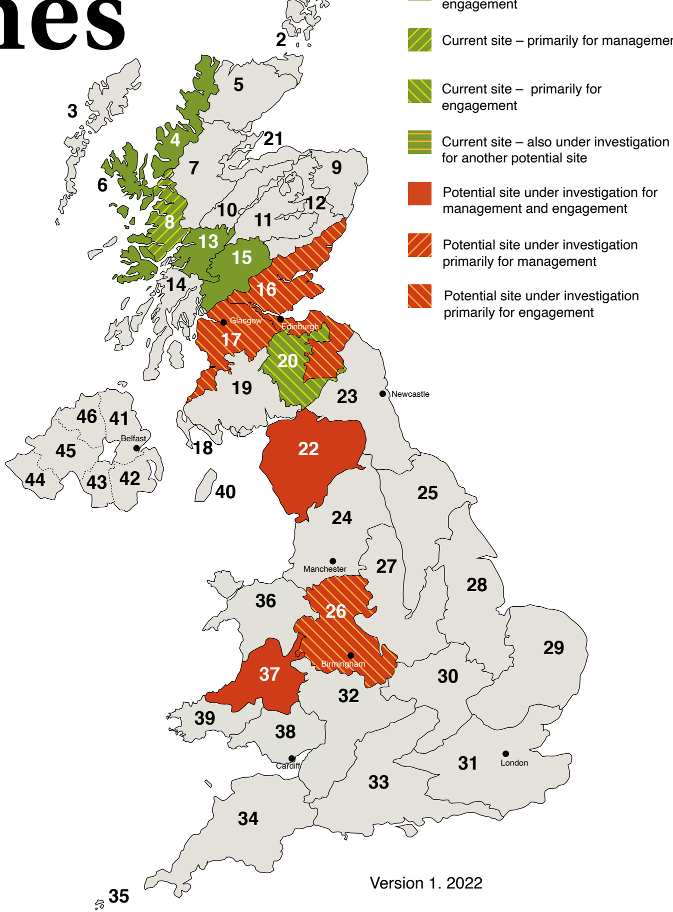
This engagement activity is where we seek to be most innovative in the coming years: focusing on the demographic of communities and visitors to our sites and tailoring our engagement tools so that they are sensitive to local needs and opportunities, helping people from all walks of life on their journey from awareness to advocacy for wild places.

Not only will we need to increase our income to support this growth and deliver this ambitious plan, but we are also working to improve and update our internal systems and processes through a business transformation project. The project will help streamline our transition to a new structure, which will ensure the Trust is resilient and effective for the coming years.

For many people and organisations, these are precarious times. Fortunately, the Trust has not only come through difficult times financially unscathed: we have undergone an exciting period of growth and development, and are now ready to meet the challenges that lie ahead with confidence and optimism.

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

# Wild Place zones

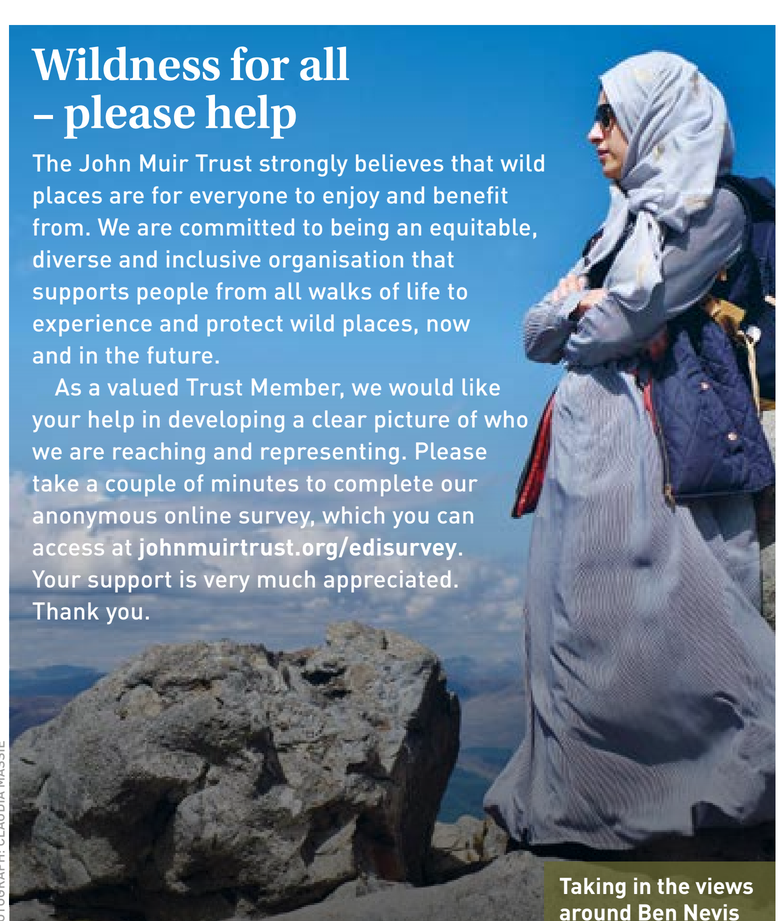



### The Trust outlines a bold new vision for extending its presence throughout the UK

Following the publication of our five-year strategy, the John Muir Trust has articulated ambitious plans to manage – or support partner organisations to manage – land sites across the UK. In order to illustrate that vision (see David Balharry's Welcome on page five), the UK has been divided into 46 zones for internal purposes. In each zone, at least one site will be managed to exemplary standards as a place where nature has the most freedom to restore itself, and/or where people are engaged with and inspired by nature.

To define these zones we have adopted the following approach. In Scotland, 21 Natural Heritage zones were designated by Scottish Natural Heritage (now NatureScot) based on 'biogeographic regions'. These are geographical areas defined by the species found in them, where the animal and plant distribution have similar or shared characteristics.

In England, there are 14 zones based on Biogeographic Zones Living England (2021), published by Natural England. We have created five zones based on geographical and demographic considerations in Wales, and in Northern Ireland the six zones are based on county boundaries.



## Wildness for all – please help

The John Muir Trust strongly believes that wild places are for everyone to enjoy and benefit from. We are committed to being an equitable, diverse and inclusive organisation that supports people from all walks of life to experience and protect wild places, now and in the future.

As a valued Trust Member, we would like your help in developing a clear picture of who we are reaching and representing. Please take a couple of minutes to complete our anonymous online survey, which you can access at **johnmuirtrust.org/edisurvey**. Your support is very much appreciated. Thank you.

Taking in the views around Ben Nevis

PHOTOGRAPH: CLAUDIA MASSIE

PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST

## Way to go

Working together with a specialist contractor, the Trust is exploring the opportunities and challenges of taking on the management of the John Muir Way. The 215km, multi-use path was launched in 2014 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of John Muir's death, Homecoming Scotland and the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow.

It runs from Dunbar, John Muir's birthplace, on the east coast of Scotland to Helensburgh, where he left for America, on the west coast. The path currently attracts around 400,000 walkers every year.

The proposed underground line will largely follow the existing overhead line on the north side of Glamaig on Skye

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS GOODMAN

# Trust responds on Skye power line

The Trust has responded to Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN) Transmission's pre-application consultation on the preferred route and alignment for a replacement overhead power line running from Ardmore on north Skye to Fort Augustus (the 'Skye Reinforcement project').

The line upgrades are considered essential for securing electricity supply on Skye and also to support the UK's ambition to be net zero by 2050 by enabling more renewable electricity capacity to connect to the National Grid.

The Trust reviewed the proposals first in 2020 and again in 2021, each time with a particular focus on the section of line routed around the edge of the Cuillin Hills on Trust land. The proposed route largely follows an existing overhead line of wooden poles.

In our November 2021 response we welcomed the proposed plan to underground the cable for a 14km section on the edge of the Cuillin Hills National Scenic Area.

We believe this option would be appropriate mitigation of the significant landscape and visual impacts that the steel lattice pylons plus associated foundations, tracks and overhead line would otherwise have had on what is a highly valued wild mountain landscape.

However, in our response we also recognised undergrounding does not come without its challenges. We raised questions about the carbon emissions associated with the undergrounding work, the ecological impacts to habitats, the type of construction method used to install the cable and future access around the construction corridor.

In the most recent stage of consultation we have been considering the terms for access rights to Trust land so the cable can be installed. At this stage, the Trust is seeking reassurances that the land area forming the construction corridor for the underground cable is restored to the highest standards, fully respecting that this is a wild area.

We expect the standard to be a condition of planning approval and for SSEN Transmission to honour the conditions.

More information about the project can be found at **ssen-transmission.co.uk/projects/skye-reinforcement**

## Policy round-up

The Trust has submitted responses to a variety of consultations over the summer months:

- The Future of Scotland's National Parks, which invited comments on why national parks are valuable, and what criteria should be used for designating new ones.
- We welcomed an entitlement for every young person to have an opportunity to experience residential outdoor education in the Proposed Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill.
- We contributed our ideas on the vision, mission, strategic objectives and ways of working set out in the Environmental Standards Scotland's draft strategy. Following the UK's departure from the EU, this organisation has been created to monitor effectiveness of and compliance with environmental law in Scotland.
- We worked with Scottish Environment LINK to produce a coordinated response to the Scottish Government's Biodiversity strategy, which intends to halt biodiversity loss by 2030 and reverse it by 2045.
- We would like to think that DEFRA's deer strategy consultation, which seeks views on the key proposals to ensure the sustainable management of deer in England, will take into consideration our significant expertise in the subject.
- Our response to Scotland's Land Reform Bill consultation will support the three core aims of the Bill: increasing diversity of land ownership; land use that is in the public interest; and creating more opportunities for communities to engage in decision-making about local land and share in any benefits.
- In planning-related news, we welcomed the Highland Council's refusal of the Loch Hourn fish farm in June and maintained an objection to Achany extension in May.

→ continued

# Schiehallion partnership celebrates five years

**A ground-breaking partnership aiming to create a wildwood in the beating heart of Scotland has celebrated a milestone anniversary in Highland Perthshire**

PHOTOGRAPH: MARION MCKINNON

This August, the Heart of Scotland Forest Partnership celebrated its fifth anniversary. It marked the occasion with an official opening of the 1.5km easy access Foss Loop path (pictured) which links three Partner properties: the John Muir Trust's East Schiehallion; Dùn Coillich, owned by the Highland Perthshire Communities Land Trust; and Forestry and Land Scotland's (FLS) Foss Forest.

As well as offering visitors an easy access walk through a wild place, the Foss Loop gives people the chance to see the Partnership in action and learn about how it is managing the land. John Swinney MSP and Mark Ruskell MSP opened the route with a ribbon cutting ceremony.

"The Partnership is an example of successful collaboration between community, charity and government organisations to help restore woodland for biodiversity, people and the climate," commented Liz Auty, East Schiehallion Manager and founder of the Partnership.

The day finished with a powerful performance by Perthshire poet Jon Plunkett. Read Jon's poem online at **johnmuirtrust.org/wildmoments**

## Deer welfare

Scottish campaigning animal welfare charity OneKind and the John Muir Trust collaborated on a joint workshop in August. Joining us in Edinburgh to discuss animal welfare relating to deer management were representatives of the Scottish Government and its land management agencies, plus several other conservation organisations and animal welfare experts.

OneKind agreed that there are genuine welfare concerns if no control of deer is carried out due to unnaturally high populations succumbing to winter starvation, poor nutrition and road accidents.

The charity wants to continue working together on the issue and believes that such a collaboration is a vital part of improving the lives of wild animals.

## Reimagining Strathaird

Over 100 people shared their views on potential development opportunities at Strathaird on Skye recently, focusing on innovative solutions that address both global crises and local issues.

The community local to Strathaird was invited to take part in three consultation events at the end of August. The focus was on a site managed by the Trust, which currently hosts a disused fish hatchery, several underutilised buildings and a former church.

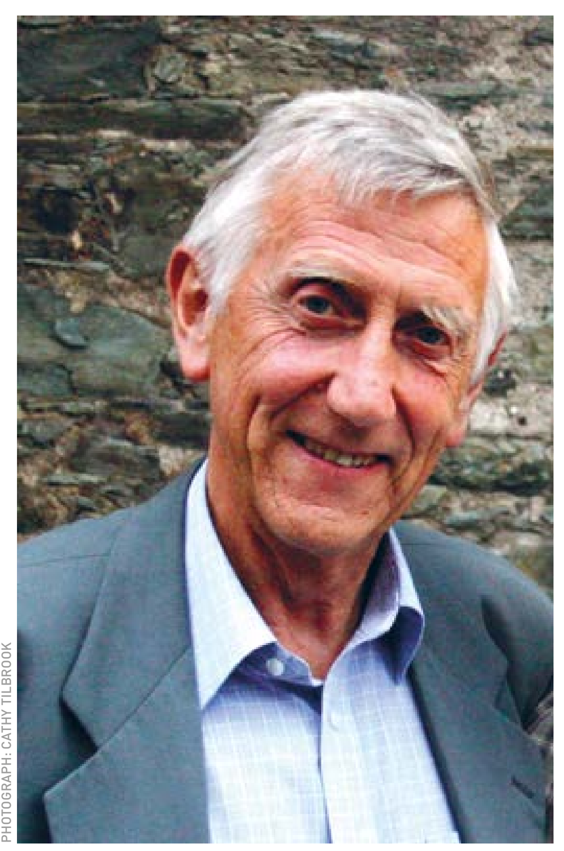
Led by a team of consultants engaged by the Trust to identify development opportunities, each event offered a chance to explore how the local community and the Trust can work together to bring forward a plan that benefits everybody.

The Trust will continue to work closely with local people as work on the project progresses. To support this, we are recruiting a Community Representative who will be part of a working group that oversees the project.

For more on the Strathaird project, visit **johnmuirtrust.org/strathaird**

The John Muir Trust has shared its deepest sympathies with our patron, His Majesty the King, and his family on the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

PHOTOGRAPH: SHUTTERSTOCK


PHOTOGRAPH: CATHY TILBROOK

# Tribute: Peter Tilbrook

**Will Williams shares an appreciation of friend and fellow former Trustee Peter Tilbrook who has died**

Peter was already established in the NW Region of the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) when I joined in 1979 and first met him. I remember his support and understanding for me as new boy at the Edinburgh Headquarters and the beginning of a working relationship that I have very much cherished.

On my retirement in 2000, I discovered John Muir's work on a visit to Yosemite and on my return became a Trustee of the John Muir Trust. It was a great joy to find Peter, happily retired and already a Trustee (1998–2004). Being involved with the Trust was an uplifting joy to us and Peter's contributions were always well considered, founded on a lifetime's experience in nature conservation.

Taking Ben Nevis into Trust ownership brought great satisfaction for Peter. He was poised with the knowledge and experience to advise on how best to reinvigorate nature on this iconic mountain.

As Trustees, we made frequent visits to Trust-owned land. Being in the field with Peter revealed his strength as a conservationist – always modest, humble and respected. He will be sadly missed.

# Tribute: Bernard and Betty Heath

PHOTOGRAPH: DENIS MOLLISON

**Trust founder Denis Mollison remembers the remarkable couple behind the Mountain Bothies Association**

Bernard Heath (1928–2022) and Betty Heath (1932–2021) were two of the Trust's earliest Members. They were always very supportive of our work in wild places, taking out Life Memberships at an early stage and making significant donations to several early appeals. Their whole lives – dedicated to exploring and conserving wild places – were very much in the spirit of the Trust. This is an extract from an obituary I wrote for *The Scotsman*:

"Bernard's idea for the Mountain Bothies Association (MBA) was simple, and perfectly fitted to Britain's wild places. Many countries had mountain huts, but these were usually built for that purpose and maintained by public bodies. In contrast the MBA would only work on existing buildings – part of the human history of the landscape – and the work would be done entirely by volunteers: the idea being that those who use bothies should maintain them.

Bernard's trust in people shone through in another successful guiding principle, that the Association would not ask for any property rights; it would rely on building good relations with bothy owners, simply asking for permission to maintain a building 'for the time being'. Startling evidence of the effectiveness of this approach is that all the 15 earliest renovated bothies, on all of which Bernard led, are all still maintained by the Association after more than 50 years.

Betty met Bernard at the MBA's inaugural meeting in 1965 with the words 'and here's your first woman member' and helped with the completion of the MBA's first project at Tunskeen. Love flourished at one of the MBA's largest projects, the rebuilding of Camban in Glen Affric in 1969, and they were married the following March.

Their very success in attracting help, particularly volunteers with professional skills, led to a dilution in their role, but they continued for the rest of their long lives to supply materials, support and inspiration from their home in Thurso.

In 1991, shortly after the MBA's 25th anniversary, they received the unusual recognition of both being awarded British Empire Medals."

# Owning up

**In the wake of the Langholm Initiative's second successful community buy-out in the south of Scotland, Sophie Harrison explores how land ownership – in all its guises – might evolve in the coming years**

PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID LINTERN

**IN AUGUST** this year, the Langholm Initiative in Dumfries and Galloway completed its second ground-breaking community buy-out, bringing an additional 5,000 acres of former private grouse moor under local stewardship for the development of the Tarras Valley Nature Reserve – a vehicle for regenerating both nature and the local economy.

Langholm's achievement has been widely celebrated and backed by the Scottish Government. It has already created six full time equivalent jobs – a meaningful contribution in such a rural area. But as we explore solutions to the climate, biodiversity and now also the cost-of-living crises, is community land management the silver bullet? Or should it remain just one ingredient in a necessary mix of private, public and third sector land ownership models?

Rich potential: the new Tarras Valley Nature Reserve at Langholm

## BUYING BACK

Interest in Scottish land has rocketed over the past few years. A study by Scotland's Rural College and estate agencies Savills and Strutt & Parker found that prices for sporting estates were up 88 per cent in 2021 compared with 2020, and that the amount spent in 2021 was up 119 per cent on the previous year.

The current Duke of Buccleuch has some 200,000 acres to his name – much of it in Scotland. Buccleuch's recent sale of Langholm Moor to the local community for £2.2m made headlines, most of which celebrated the Langholm Initiative's incredible achievement, having crowd-funded a second major community land purchase in as many years.

But some also paid tribute to a private landowner who recognises that times are changing. "This column hasn't given much space to congratulating large landowners,"

→ continued

wrote journalist David Ross in *The Press and Journal*. "But Buccleuch is due credit for recognising local community interests, rather than leaving it to the market to produce the highest bidder."

The John Muir Trust was the first organisation to back the Langholm Initiative's bid for an initial 5,000 acres of Langholm Moor, which successfully concluded in 2020. The Trust then joined with many others to help close the gap on the recent second stage purchase, effectively doubling the size of the proposed Tarras Valley Nature Reserve.

As well as charities, foundations and corporate bodies, individuals from all over the world donated to the cause. "Around 3,000 people made individual donations," continued Ross. "That they all, literally, bought into the community's dream of 'rewilding' grouse moors and woodland into an important nature reserve is a significant endorsement. It underlines the enthusiasm for seeing Scotland's land used differently."

## LEGAL CHANGE

While demand for sporting estates from would-be 'green lairds' continues to increase, so too does the community and wider public appetite for greater diversity in Scotland's land ownership – something that the Scottish Government could be putting legislation in place to support.

In July, it opened a consultation ahead of a new Land Reform Bill that will be introduced by the end of 2023. Proposed measures include a requirement for the owners of large-scale land holdings to give notice to community bodies of their intention to sell; and a public interest test for the transfer of large-scale land holdings, meaning it will be harder for a private sporting estate with no tangible benefits to community or climate to be sold to someone who intends to continue using it in that way.

PHOTOGRAPHS: NICK EDGE/ADOBE STOCK (GOLDEN PLOVER), MARK HAMBLIN/2020VISION (HEN HARRIER), HOWARD WOOD/COAST (LOBSTER), HOWARD WOOD/COAST (SCALLOP)

"It's a positive step, but it doesn't go far enough," comments Ailsa Raeburn, Chair of Community Land Scotland. While the new Land Reform Bill might help address some of the current barriers to community buy-outs – such as land being sold off-market – it does not limit the amount of land an individual can hold, nor how much they can ask for it.

The £6m price tag the Langholm community paid for their combined total of just over 10,000 acres was controversial locally. After all, Buccleuch is one of the wealthiest people in Scotland and inherited the land from distant ancestors who were given it by Royal Charter centuries ago. The purchase has raised questions about whether there could be a price cap on future land sales to local communities.

**"Proposed measures include a requirement for the owners of large-scale land holdings to give notice to community bodies of their intention to sell"**

"There should be a limit," believes Ailsa. "We've seen this working in other countries and there's no reason it can't work in Scotland too."

But why, when many private philanthropic landowners have the financial means (and often corporate responsibility) to invest in the land and local economy, are so many communities pushing for a more diversified land ownership pattern?

"When a community owns land it addresses their specific needs," says Ailsa. "Philanthropic landowners have their own agenda – be it tourism or carbon capture. Although they may consult the community, they have their own ideas about how they want that land to be used.

"Community ownership looks at what this specific community needs to thrive, from protecting biodiversity to providing services people need. It takes a much

House specialities: golden plover and hen harrier, Langholm Moor; lobster and scallop, Lamlash Bay, Isle of Arran

broader, longer-term and democratic approach to land management."

## BIODIVERSITY BOOST

Islanders on the Isle of Arran have exemplified this more holistic, longer-term thinking. In 2008, they established Scotland's first community-led No-Take-Zone (NTZ), a 2.67km$^2$ area in Lamlash Bay where fishing is excluded throughout the year. Decimated by years of trawling and scallop dredging, the bay was effectively a 'marine desert'.

"We can see the NTZ as a form of marine rewilding but it's not excluding people – it's helping them benefit from a healthy marine ecosystem," explains Jenny Crockett of the Community of Arran Seabed Trust. "If you let nature be nature, it's amazing what can reappear and that's exactly what's happening in Lamlash Bay."

The NTZ now serves as a nursery for juvenile fish, with four times the number of lobsters and king scallops than surrounding areas. As a result, local fishers catch larger lobsters in the surrounding waters.

"That's when the fishermen start to benefit, because these larger, healthier animals are spilling over to areas where they are allowed to be caught and there are still enough in the NTZ to be seeding future stocks," says Crockett.

In all, Scotland has seen hundreds of successful community buy-outs, with more than 562,000 acres of land now under community ownership. The Trust is proud to have supported six of them in Knoydart, Harris, Lewis, Assynt, Carrifran and now Langholm.

To date, there have been no equivalent land purchases made by communities in England or Wales. This is because of three main reasons, according to Ailsa Raeburn. The first is that communities in England and Wales aren't empowered with the legislative right to buy land, as they are in Scotland with the Land Reform Act (passed in 2003). They also do not have access to the funding that the Scottish Community Land Fund or Highlands and Islands Enterprise offer.

And the final reason is that concentration of land ownership is far more acute in Scotland. "It's a monopoly system that really impacts the sustainable development of local areas," contends Ailsa.

## RESPONSIBLE OWNERSHIP

Land reform is not just about ownership, however. It is also about embedding responsibility within that land ownership. Much like Community Land Scotland, the Trust believes that there are strong environmental and social justice reasons for challenging the historic pattern of land ownership. Our mountains, moors and wild places are part of our common heritage: precious local, regional, national and international assets rather than just personal possessions.

> **"The Trust believes that all landowners – private, public, charity, community – should be encouraged to behave as guardians and stewards of the land"**

The Trust believes that all landowners – be they private, public, charity or community – should be encouraged to behave as guardians and stewards of the land, with statutory obligations to the natural environment, to local people and to future generations.

A recent community consultation event on land in Trust care at Strathaird in Skye exemplifies this commitment to understanding the needs of local residents and businesses, while also striving to deliver specific objectives as a wild places charity. The Strathaird site has huge potential to support people from all walks of

→ continued

**"Whether community-owned or not, there is a growing awareness that landowners have a major responsibility to 'think global, act local' in their stewardship"**

life to access and enjoy wild places, and to ensure that communities have the freedom to thrive alongside them. It is also a golden opportunity to celebrate culture and heritage, support the local economy and address specific local challenges.

Meanwhile, the Trust's *Just Transition and Wild Places* booklet, published earlier this year, outlines a suite of ideas to support communities in and around Scotland's wild places (see feature on page 16). Some of these ideas are reflected in the Land Reform Bill.

"The Trust would like to see a doubling of the Scottish Land Fund for community buy-outs, and interest-free, long-term loans from the Scottish Government to prospective community landowners," explains Alan McCombes, the Trust's Public Affairs Advisor.

"We would also like to see the Scottish Land Commission explore new models for community land ownership and a revision of the planning system to give communities more say over decisions that affect the local environment."

## DRIVING CHANGE

Overall, and whether community-owned or not, there is a growing awareness that landowners have a major responsibility to 'think global, act local' in their stewardship; to drive ecological restoration for climate and biodiversity, while involving as many people from local communities as possible in plans and decisions.

There is a word in Gaelic – *dùthchas* – which describes the unity between land, people, nature and culture. In Welsh it is known as *cynefin*. Both speak to a belief that people are as much part of wild places as the plants, insects, birds and other creatures that inhabit them.

These wild places have significant potential to help tackle the crises we face as a society. But if we are to realise this, it perhaps makes sense for land ownership to be guided more by *dùthchas* or *cynefin*, than by title deed.

***About the author***
*Sophie Harrison is the Trust's Media Communications Officer*

Talking change: Community consultation at Strathaird (top, middle); returning life to the landscape, Langholm Moor

PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST

PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST

PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID LINTERN

*Cheryl and Conor*
IN-STORE EXPERTS

# Climate control

**The drought and wildfires that afflicted so many parts of the UK this summer have put the sustainable management of wild places into sharper focus than ever, writes Rich Rowe**

PHOTOGRAPH: RICHARD WHITCOMBE/ADOBE STOCK

Fire starter: the aftermath of a recent grassland wildfire in Wales

FOR many, the summer of 2022 will be hard to forget – maybe even a turning point in our recognition of just how much the climate is changing. First, the soaring temperatures, which peaked at a record-breaking 40ºc in southern England, with "even Scotland", as weather forecasters were fond of saying, hitting temperatures of more than 35ºc.

It was not just the sustained heat, but what came with it: official droughts declared from Cornwall to East Anglia and the East Midlands and, later, hosepipe bans imposed across many parts of the UK. After the driest summer in half a century, water companies suggested it would take weeks' worth of rain for stocks to be replenished.

But it was perhaps the terrible wildfires that focused attention the most. By mid-August, there had been 745 wildfires in the UK – more than three times the total figure for the whole of 2021.

It is perhaps unfair to suggest that those in urban centres pay relatively little heed to a hillside ablaze on what might be considered a remote part of the Scottish Highlands or high up on moorland in the Peak District. However, when a wildfire devastates an area of housing on the outskirts of London, as was the case in the village of Wennington in July, people tend to sit up and take more notice.

Frighteningly, the Wennington fire started when a garden compost heap burst into flames after spontaneously combusting in the heat. It was a day when hundreds of grassfires and other blazes broke out around the capital – with reports that it was the London Fire Brigade's busiest day since the Second World War. Little wonder that fire chiefs are calling on UK cities to prepare for many more such incidences of wildfires in the future.

And yet all of this was still nothing on a par with the terrible damage done by the wildfires that raged across the Gironde region of southwest France or the devastating blazes that have almost become the norm in parts of California.

## ECOLOGICAL CHANGE

The changing climate is bringing very real physical changes on the ground. This year, stressed by prolonged spells of hot and dry weather, trees shed their leaves early in an attempt to retain moisture – an early-onset autumn that has been seen in many parts of the UK.

Conversely, and more generally, in the Lake District rainfall patterns appear to have changed. "We get more heavy rainfall events and this can have implications, particularly for footpath erosion which can result in a significant increase in financial costs for repair and maintenance," notes Pete Barron, the Trust's Property Manager at Glenridding Common.

And there are other, subtle

ecological changes too, says Pete: bracken is beginning to grow earlier and can often be well advanced by May; ticks are found year-round rather than being seen off by cold winters; while up on the higher fells more regular freeze thaw is proving a challenge for the survival of some high-altitude plants as they are less protected by snow cover.

Further north in the Cairngorms, a combination of warmer summers and lack of woodland cover along the River Dee catchment – a key spawning ground for Atlantic salmon – are resulting in near fatal water temperatures being recorded in the river.

With little or no woodland and understorey vegetation to stabilise the ground, this vital freshwater habitat is further compromised by dramatic erosion of the riverbanks; chunks of deep peat that should be capturing and storing carbon are instead being washed away, forming dissolved organic carbon which has to be removed in water treatment processes.

Fortunately, it is now more widely understood that fully functioning ecosystems play a vital role not just in carbon capture and sequestration but also in providing a host of other ecosystem 'services' that meet our increasingly pressing needs: clean water, pollination, biodiversity, water retention and more.

But much is required if such ecosystems and wild places are to deliver on their immense potential to contribute to the UK's climate and nature recovery targets. Habitat restoration is a must given that native woodland cover has been severely depleted, while around 80 per cent of Scotland's peatlands are classed as degraded. The sustainable management of the UK's wild deer population would allow some of that restoration to take place.

But for the Trust, what is needed above all is a fundamental change in approach to how land – and wild land in particular – is managed.

## JUST TRANSITION

It is exactly this kind of sweeping change that the Trust explores in its recently published *Just Transition and Wild Places* booklet – a look at how people and wild places can help achieve net zero in Scotland in a way that benefits all. The ideas are presented as the start of a wider dialogue around transforming how Scotland's wild places are used, owned and managed.

But why such a specific focus on Scotland? It's about land use and unrealised potential. As a country, Scotland is not overly blessed with agriculturally productive land: enclosed farmland accounts for just 20 per cent of its landmass, compared with 55 per cent in England and more than 40 per cent in both Northern Ireland and Wales.

→ continued

What Scotland is blessed with, however, is an upland landscape of mountains, forests, moors and heathland that cover 44 per cent of its landmass (more than double the percentage of Northern Ireland, four times that of Wales and nine times that of England). Together, these vast areas – some 55,000 square kilometres in all – have the potential to sequester carbon on an immense scale, while also maximising benefits for biodiversity and communities.

And trees in particular are on the minds of many. Upmarket land agents have reported a boom in the land market, with wealthy clients snapping up Scottish sporting estates (see Owning up, page 10). But unlike in days gone by, the attraction is not deer or grouse but instead an insatiable demand for land suitable for tree planting.

While this sounds like good news, caution is required. When looking at the rise of what have been dubbed 'green lairds', it is worth noting the experience of onshore wind developments. In the heady early days, the idea of clean, green energy was understandably popular. But over time, some downsides became clear: the buying up of large areas of land for private profit, with communities shut out from the benefits; soaring land prices; and the industrialisation of fragile landscapes and associated ecological damage.

"We think governments have a responsibility to ensure that the surging demand for land for carbon sequestration does not degenerate into a free-for-all that enriches a small minority of big landowners and companies," notes Alan McCombes, the Trust's Public Affairs Advisor and a co-author of the booklet. "Nor should it exclude local people, harm biodiversity or perpetuate concentrated land ownership patterns."

PHOTOGRAPH: ADOBE STOCK

PHOTOGRAPH: VIESTURS LARMANIS/ADOBE STOCK

PHOTOGRAPH: ANNE COATSEY/ADOBE STOCK

Cruel summer (clockwise): a dried-up reservoir, North Yorkshire; wildfire damage; low water at Haweswater, Lake District; straw-like grass in a London park; Atlantic salmon

**"Allowing businesses to continue polluting in return for planting trees – or 'offsetting' – is not an option"**

## ETHICAL FUNDING

Maximising Scotland's potential for natural carbon sequestration is vitally important but the Trust is not alone amongst conservation bodies in expressing concerns over how it is achieved. For instance, simply allowing businesses to continue polluting in return for planting trees – or 'offsetting' – is not an option.

Nor is it in the public interest to have densely planted Sitka spruce plantations spread across Scotland's hillsides. Sitka grows fast and can provide valuable low-carbon timber, so will remain a component of forests for the foreseeable future.

But balance is needed. When planted on a large scale, with no other tree species to provide diversity, their dense canopies shut out daylight and turn the land into almost ecological deserts. Worse still, when sited on unsuitable soils, they can release decades of stored carbon during planting and felling.

So while carbon funding from both the public purse and private investment is crucial, it must be managed in a way that instils public and community confidence. "By putting in place a robust framework, the Scottish Government could help steer rural Scotland into a transformational new era with land

PHOTOGRAPH: ABDUL SHAKOOR/ADOBE STOCK

PHOTOGRAPH: ADOBE STOCK

at the heart of ecological, climate and economic regeneration," notes Alan.

For its part, the Trust has developed the idea of a Carbon Emissions Land Tax (CELT) as a means of accelerating the pace of land management change among Scotland's largest landowners. The concept proposes placing all landholdings over 1,000ha (2,500 acres) into a tax band based on actual and potential carbon emissions – a potentially powerful lever to transform land use, especially in areas of marginal agricultural productivity.

The fundamental principle behind CELT is that landowners who run their estates without considering urgent public objectives of mitigating climate change and restoring biodiversity would be placed in a higher tax band.

Already, the proposal has won the overwhelming backing of Scotland's Climate Assembly and is steadily gaining ground among climate scientists, economists and politicians of all persuasions.

To ensure compliance with devolved powers, the Trust has envisaged that the tax would be collected and distributed by local authorities – raising valuable additional revenue for councils to put towards climate initiatives.

## POSITIVE MOVEMENT

The Trust has proposed CELT as a potential fiscal measure to help drive land use change as the Scottish Government consults on its new Land Reform Bill, which is due to be brought before the Holyrood Parliament in 2023.

The bill has three core aims: to increase diversity of landownership; to bring about changes in land use; and to allow communities a stronger say in decision-making over local land use (plus a share of future financial benefits). The consultation document states: "Land has a fundamental role to play in how we respond to the climate crisis and biodiversity crisis. Its potential to contribute to our national priorities of a just transition to net zero, and to nature restoration, can hardly be overstated."

Such objectives are broadly in line with the Trust's own values. As such, we have responded constructively to the extensive consultation process, supporting most of the specific proposals in principal, and offering suggestions to ensure that the procedures expected to achieve these ambitions are clear, robust and fair.

Overall, it appears from this consultation, and others, that government policy making in Scotland is aspiring to keep pace with wider public understanding of the impacts of climate change.

One thing's for sure: after the summer just gone, the signs have become impossible to ignore. It really is time for land, not just in Scotland but across all four nations of the UK, to be allowed to deliver on its rich potential. ◘

***About the author***

*Rich Rowe is contributing editor on the Journal*

PHOTOGRAPH: MARY-ANN OCHOTA

# Comfort zone

**Mary-Ann Ochota reflects on her own journey to feeling comfortable in wild landscapes – and what equality in the outdoors really looks like**

PHOTOGRAPH: DANOZ/ADOBE STOCK

THE other weekend I was walking with friends near the Quiraing (pictured) in north Skye – a landscape that is wild, spectacular and rightly famous. Dishevelled, fragrant and happy, we'd hiked north from Portree, wild camping along the Trotternish Ridge. As we descended to the car park and the start of a newly upgraded footpath network, there was a moment of culture shock – from pathless terrain to tarmac, from bivvy baggers to bus tourers. The other people on 'our' hills were suddenly clean.

Many looked dressed for town, and it didn't look like they were going to stray much further than a few steps from the sightseeing bus taking them on a highlights reel of Skye. One person had a sketchpad in hand, while most were clutching an array of cameras and phones. There were many languages, many ages, many ethnicities. I was struck that the people milling around that car park – in all their glorious diversity – were all potential members of the Trust.

For some – including many Trust members, I suspect – a place within easy reach of a tarmac road, a snack van or toilet block doesn't really count as a wild place. But for others, travelling to an island off the northwest coast of Scotland, up a snaking hairpin road and then out to a viewpoint to gaze at extraordinarily sculpted rocks formed by post-glacial landslides will be a mind-growing, horizon-exploding experience of natural beauty.

For them, perhaps it will be the first step towards a lifetime of connecting with wild places – even the first step towards becoming a defender of and advocate for them.

Many of those at the viewpoint possibly didn't realise that they were looking at a degraded landscape, not a pristine one. There should be a mountain treeline and wooded glens, supporting diverse insect, bird and mammal populations. The grassy tops aren't 'naturally' like that – they only look like that because they're so heavily grazed by sheep. For all the natural beauty, there are also human harms visible in the frame.

For the people in the car park to become advocates for nature, they need to understand the crisis our wild places face and feel confident to raise their voices and demand that nature be given the freedom to repair itself. And the first step on that journey from awareness to advocacy is to connect to nature in meaningful ways.

## REMOVING BARRIERS

Some of those people may have looked over to us sweaty, midge-bitten backpackers and felt a tinge of envy. I certainly did when I first saw people on hillwalking adventures with kit I didn't own, using skills I didn't possess. Back then, I knew enough to know that if I wandered into somewhere like the Cairngorms, I wouldn't know how to wander safely out. So, I stayed away, unsure where to begin or how to find a community of friendly people I could learn from.

In the grand scheme of things, though, my journey into feeling comfortable in wild landscapes was an easy one. I wanted to go walking. I had disposable income to buy boots, a map and a place on a navigation course. I am able-bodied. I'm cis-gendered (where my identity aligns with the sex and gender I was assigned at birth). I'm mixed race but in most circumstances I'm not visibly different from the majority. I'm also middle class enough and my mental health sufficiently robust for me to walk into any room feeling like I'm probably entitled to be there.

But for many people there are multiple barriers to engaging with wild places. And it's an even longer journey to feel empowered to fight for their protection and

Long and winding road: more is needed to ensure that all can experience wild places such as here on the Isle of Skye

restoration. The Trust has a role to play in helping everyone in that busy car park find their way into the wild. We also need to reach the hundreds of thousands of people who don't know where Skye is, or that wild places exist and can be visited.

If you don't have a history of finding the outdoors a familiar or positive place, or don't have a sense of identity or belonging linked to the UK's natural landscapes, then it's no surprise that you might not stop at the car park, let alone head into the hills.

But that's not fixed. You can be the first – in your family, in your community – to build familiarity with the outdoors and a sense of belonging. Around those pioneers, there are wider communities who will take inspiration. Role models matter – they unlock the potential for people to feel confident to try the same thing too.

## TRUST ROLE

The Trust already works with diverse community groups who are introducing wild places to new audiences. But more can and must be done. Next time you see a school or youth group out in the hills or at an outdoor education centre, ask yourself: are these kids – in terms of ethnic diversity or socio-economic background – a representative selection of all the other people you'll see today in the hills? No? Then we have a leaky pipeline: we don't yet have effective support in place that can transform a child's once-in-a-lifetime experience into a lifetime of experiences. That's crippling to our mission

**"The Trust already works with diverse community groups who are introducing wild places to new audiences"**

to protect wild places, and profoundly unfair to that youngster.

The Trust's facilities need to accommodate all people's needs. Of course, not all wild places will be easy to access, but there should be landscapes that are managed to an exemplary standard and showcase our approach to nature, people and community in a way that can be enjoyed by everyone.

Our promotional material must represent the diversity we see in wider society, embracing all abilities and disabilities, and all backgrounds. Our vision for how wild places are experienced shouldn't be prescriptive or restrictive (except when there's a conflict with protecting nature). We must also be mindful of assumptions that associate experiencing wild places with physical exertion or challenge. Wild places can be just as much about gentle, accessible stillness; about gathering and play, retreat and contemplation.

And our vision for restoring nature must be built in partnership with communities living in those wild places. It must never be visitors and outsiders instructing from on high.

## NUMBERS GAME

In crude terms, it's about numbers. If there are more people who care about wild places, we have a more powerful mandate to lobby those in power. The message needs to reach youngsters who might advocate for Brazilian rainforests but not know that the UK's peat bogs need them too. It needs to reach people on low or no incomes, people struggling with poor mental and physical health, and people who don't know anyone else who wants to go for a walk.

To achieve that, we need to play our role in helping them find the wild. You love and protect what you know. Yes, having more people in wild places creates challenges for managing visitor pressure. But it also creates opportunity. For thriving local communities and an engaged, informed and passionate public.

Those people in the car park on Skye and elsewhere – including the ones in shiny white trainers taking selfies – are the key to protecting wild places. Now and into the future.

***About the author***
*Mary-Ann Ochota is a broadcaster, anthropologist and John Muir Trust Trustee*

# Gathering pace

**Rich Rowe asks Mike Daniels, the Trust's Director of Policy, about recent positive developments around the sustainable management of deer – and not just in Scotland**

PHOTOGRAPH: ADOBE STOCK

### Why is sustainable deer management so important?

Deer are a totemic animal in Scotland with their image appearing everywhere, from tea towels to tea rooms. They are magnificent native mammals (or at least red and roe are – the others have been introduced) and have played a key role in habitat change. It is this role combined with the lack of natural predators and a particular type of hunting that has encouraged huge numbers to build up and made their management so important in Scotland and, increasingly, in England. At too high densities they cause environmental damage. Heavy grazing and browsing prevents tree regeneration, reduces the carbon capture ability of the land and decreases biodiversity – reducing 'natural capital' for nature and local communities.

### In spring 2021, the Scottish Government accepted most of the recommendations in a report produced by the independent Deer Working Group (DWG). What has happened since?

Good question! Progress has been slow, but we are hopeful it is picking up pace now. When the Scottish Government responded to the report just before the elections in May 2021, it pretty much agreed with all the recommendations. Since then, we have been pushing the Scottish Government and NatureScot to start implementing them. Now, in autumn 2022, they are finally starting to look like they will.

### Any specific signs that the Scottish Government is about to give clear direction on deer?

It recently published a draft Scottish Biodiversity Strategy which makes it clear that deer are a key challenge to biodiversity. In addition, incentives for peatland restoration and woodland creation are recognised as being hampered by excessive deer impacts. These and the DWG commitments have finally driven government to set up a 'project board' across departments to take action. Lorna Slater, Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity, has publicly stated that change needs to happen, while NatureScot has said this needs to happen "at pace and at scale". All encouraging noises. We now need concrete action.

### So, might meaningful change be imminent?

Legislatively it will take a few more years for changes to come into force. Culturally though changes are happening quicker and the motivation and incentives for landowners and land managers to manage deer sustainably is increasing. In some places, change may happen relatively quickly, while

Deer departed: there is now growing momentum behind the sustainable management of deer (main); Mike Daniels (inset)

in others it will take longer. But change is definitely coming.

### Given that many of the recommended actions in the DWG report do not require legislation, what immediate change(s) would you like to see implemented?

There are several. Clear messaging that we need to control deer numbers; the enforcement of existing powers such as for the government, through NatureScot, to intervene in the public interest by carrying out a cull and then charging the landowner; better collection of data and impacts; and clear messaging around what numbers are acceptable. It would also be useful to require landowners to state what their sustainable deer management plans are for the year ahead and then compare them to what they actually deliver. If they fail to meet them then their right to manage deer needs to be questioned and ultimately, perhaps, transferred.

PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID BALHARRY

### What about some of the longer term and more complex interventions?

Banning lead ammunition. Removing close seasons for male deer. Giving NatureScot much clearer and easier powers to intervene in the public interest. And tying future agricultural subsidy to being conditional on having sustainable deer management in place.

### While deer have often been considered a 'Scottish problem', DEFRA recently launched a consultation on deer management in England. How significant might that prove from a UK-wide perspective?

It highlights that the deer problem is finally being recognised elsewhere. England has the chance to learn lessons from Scotland and put clear, effective and enforceable regulations and incentives in place. The consultation certainly talks in these terms, which is encouraging.

***Further information***
*For more detail, see our FAQ on deer management at **johnmuirtrust.org/deer***

***About the interviewer***
*Rich Rowe is contributing editor of the Journal*

# No stone unturned

**Romany Garnett looks at a remarkable project that is helping to tell the story of Quinag's landscape and wildlife like never before**

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS PUDDEPHATT

THERE is something very satisfying about getting to know a place intimately. Why one type of vegetation lies in a particular gully; why areas of bracken often have piles of stones; what these stones indicate and why water voles use one area over another. All these factors interact and, as more layers of knowledge are gathered, connections can be made.

And there are many ways of knowing. It could be understanding the prevailing winds and how they dictate the stunted growth of trees. Or perhaps it is understanding the location of springs that feed into burns and where the many watersheds sit on the hillside. When spending time, slowing down and absorbing the essence of a place, a deeper understanding starts to seep into the skin, teasing the mind and triggering the senses.

Such has been the experience of the Quinag Wildlife Project, which sprang from a discovery that the numerous studies, surveys and scholarly articles about this special part of the Northwest Highlands were scattered far and wide.

A collaboration between the Assynt Field Club and the John Muir Trust, the project was made possible thanks to a grant from Coigach & Assynt Living Landscape (CALL). Work began in late 2020 with the aim being to assemble and make available as much information as possible about the landscape and wildlife of Quinag, as well as the human activities – past and present – that affect them.

## TOP TO BOTTOM

From rocky shoreline to mountain top, the 3,699ha Quinag estate includes a wide range of habitats. Covering marine, freshwater, woodland, moorland and grassland, the land is as diverse as it is striking.

Quinag itself is the backdrop for many who live here. One of Assynt's many alluring hills, it is popular not only with walkers but also naturalists and ecologists. Little wonder that so many studies have been made of its wildlife, geology, landscape and more down the centuries.

Ian Evans, a lifelong naturalist who retired to Assynt with his late wife Pat 30 years ago, is the driving force behind the Quinag Wildlife Project. Currently a Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) recorder for West Sutherland, Ian's interests extend into many areas of conservation and wildlife.

With CALL funding, the project was able to recruit Eilidh Summers to trawl through and pull together data from multiple records and surveys spanning many decades.

Requests for information drew enthusiastic

Hillside harvest: gathering juniper berries

responses from a wide range of contributors. There have been surprises, unknown sources and a growing interest in the project. "It is something that has widened to include all aspects of the Quinag landscape," notes Ian.

## EXPERT INPUT

As part of its record gathering, the project commissioned expert-authored articles on a range of subjects, including a full gazetteer of Gaelic place names by Gemma Smith, whose fascination with Assynt led to her current PhD at the University of Glasgow. "My PhD project looks at shieling landscapes across Northwest Sutherland," she explains. "Although Quinag is not one of the case studies in my thesis, it was useful to look closely at the place names of another area in the region to observe the patterns of settlement and land use."

Gemma's resulting *The Place-names of Quinag* shows how, historically, Gaels would not have seen the mountain as belonging to them, but themselves and their beasts as belonging to the mountain. Even the name Quinag itself – A' Chuinneag, 'the milk pail' – demonstrates that they viewed it as a source of sustenance and life. As the numerous shieling names also show, Quinag was a resource shared by the various bailtean that nestled in its shadow.

For Gemma, the main challenge of her research was deciphering the spellings of place names in some records. "Many were made by non-Gaelic speakers who have just spelled things phonetically in English, and they can sometimes take a while to work out!" she says.

Similarly, historian Malcolm Bangor-Jones prepared a complimentary account of the past ownership of the estate, the scattered structures and enclosures on it, such as walls and ditches, tracks, roads and sheilings, and other aspects of its landscape history.

He discovered, for example, that in 1818 the livestock on Achmore comprised "14 Milch Cows, 8 Heifers, 10 Stots, 4 Horses, 700 Hoggs and Wethers, 1000 Ewes with their Lambs, and 30 Goats". The latter number is an important indication that some sheep farmers also kept goats during this period.

## SPECIALIST SUBJECTS

The oldest records from Quinag are of higher (or vascular) plants made by Archibald Gray in 1886. The Argyll botanist listed more than 30 species, including parsley fern, which was not rediscovered until 2002 when Claire Belshaw found it on the eastern wall of the Bealach Cuinneige.

In all, some 5,000 records covering 431 species of higher plants have been found – all of which have been extracted from the BSBI database by Andy Amphlett. Much was learned when the area was surveyed at tetrad level (a two-by-two kilometre square) by Pat and Ian Evans and Gordon Rothero in the course of fieldwork during the 1980s and 1990s for their book, *Flora of Assynt*. It was the first published account of any area in the Highlands surveyed and mapped at such a level.

A bryologist by profession, Gordon Rothero, whose main areas of expertise are in Scotland's temperate rainforest and montane habitats,

→ continued

provided a comprehensive account of Quinag's 337 species of mosses and liverworts, based on more than 3,000 records. His article for the project mentions the nationally rare liverwort *Anastrophyllum alpinum* and highlights the interconnectedness of rock and vegetation.

"In the south-east corner of the site, the influence of the limestone to the east and a few scattered Fucoid Bed rocks provides the habitat for some typical calcicoles," he writes in language that will be rather more familiar to botanists than non-specialists.

The area's wildlife has also been a particular focus. Dr Shona Marshall of the West Sutherland Fisheries Trust provided an account of freshwater ecology and the six local species of fish: salmon, brown/sea trout, Arctic charr in Loch Assynt, eels, three-spined sticklebacks and minnows.

And with golden eagle, ptarmigan and ring ouzel all known to breed on Quinag, the project turned to Doug Mainland, a founder member of the Assynt Field Club, for ornithological insight. A keen birdwatcher and licensed bird ringer, Doug has written an account of his personal experiences on the project – with his passion for golden eagles especially evident.

"A visit in late May to check hatching success found the nest empty, which was a big disappointment. I found out later, from a contact… that an egg thief's house had been raided… and diaries he kept had been found and removed. An entry in his diary for 1992 recorded that he had taken two golden eagle eggs from a nest."

Quinag is also a stronghold for water voles, with Professor Xavier Lambin of the University of Aberdeen having researched the animals on Quinag for the past 25 years – work which also identified the presence of a further 17 species of mammals.

When this work was kindly made available to the project, the team was interested to learn that nitrogen levels in the narrow corridors of land occupied by water voles were found to be higher and more fertile due to the soil microbe activity. This research illuminates the complexity of the effects of individual species upon habitats.

## PERSONAL PLEASURES

For Eilidh Summers, the project's data inputter, some of the findings of most interest to her were the glimpses into past land use and human impact on Quinag. "I think the more we understand our surroundings, the better we can connect with the land around us," notes Eilidh.

"Records show us those areas most in need of protection – areas of high biodiversity, rare habitats and species and vulnerable communities. How the landscape and biodiversity changes over space and time also informs us how best to manage the land."

Quinag life (clockwise from main): a lush corner; gathering beech nuts; Gordon Rothero searching for bryophytes and liverworts; dark green fritillary; juniper berries

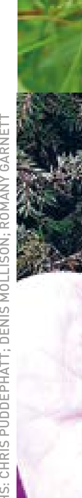
Although funding for the project has now finished, it remains an ongoing endeavour, with the hope that all information gathered will be digitally mapped in the future.

As Ian Evans explains, entirely new areas are still being explored. "Local naturalists and photographers are currently recording the hill in detail and the large amount of information so far located on other aspects of its wildlife is still being assembled," he says. "And we have only just begun to explore the inspiration that the hill has afforded to writers and artists.

"Overall, we seem to have engaged a community of interest whose enthusiasm for this small area of the Highlands has exceeded our wildest expectations."

***Further information***
*Visit assyntwildlife.org.uk*

***About the author***
*Romany Garnett is the Trust's Land Development Manager (Quinag & Sandwood)*



PHOTOGRAPHS: CHRIS PUDDEPHATT; DENIS MOLLISON; ROMANY GARNETT

# John Muir Award at 25

**As the Trust celebrates the 25th anniversary of the John Muir Award, Toby Clark reflects on the impact of what has proved a pioneering environmental engagement initiative**

IT was in 1995 when the Trust first commissioned a study of young people's involvement with environmental organisations in Scotland. Little did we know then that it would lead to the launch of the John Muir Award in Dunbar two years later – or how far it would come in the ensuing 25 years.

Then, as now, the aim of the John Muir Award was to encourage people to connect with, enjoy and care for wild places that are relevant to them. Established to ensure that people's circumstances do not serve as barriers to experiencing and taking action for wild places, the Award was designed for delivery through outreach partnerships with a diverse range of organisations – youth groups, schools, clubs, outdoor centres and service providers. It was an approach that found appeal among adult and family audiences as well as young people.

Today, nearly half a million people have achieved their John Muir Award, meeting its four challenges:

> "I may not have been the most responsible person in the past, but through working with other volunteers and [towards] the John Muir Award, I feel I've become part of the responsibility of conserving nature in all its glory."
>
> **Mark, John Muir Award participant and Place Woodland volunteer**

**Discovering** wild places accessible to them; **Exploring** them in ways that are relevant and meaningful; doing something to **Conserve** wild places; and **Sharing** their experiences with others.

Standing the test of time, the John Muir Award continues to offer a simple and accessible framework for people society-wide to realise the benefits of wild places through enhancing learning and the school curriculum; inspiring climate and biodiversity action; promoting health and wellbeing; and encouraging responsible outdoor access.

We now look forward to the next 25 years...

**473,522**
**John Muir Awards achieved across the UK**

ILLUSTRATION: EMIL BLUM/ CALUMMA.DESIGN

## Awareness to Advocacy

The Trust is working hard to increase the number of people taking action for wild places. We're producing new information for school and youth groups on the benefits of wild places for nature, people and communities. While we continue to grow our John Muir Award initiative across the UK, we have also introduced Junior Ranger programmes working with pupils at schools at Nevis and on Quinag this year and also Schiehallion next year. For much more on current and future plans, visit **johnmuirtrust.org/john-muir-award**

Who achieves a John Muir Award?

50% children (under 12)
43% young people (under 25)
6% adults
1% families

**28% of Awards**

were achieved by participants experiencing some form of disadvantage

**Over 13m**

participant hours, enjoying, connecting with and caring for wild places

**10k+ people**

trained to deliver the Award and connect people with wild places

"The John Muir Award provides a context for understanding where, how and when environmental learning takes place. My narrative analysis research revealed its value in giving people space to learn about accessible wild places. The memories of these encounters stay with participants, providing a foundation for future environmental connections, as revealed in my interviews with previous John Muir Award participants."

**Dr Ria Dunkley, Senior Lecturer Geography, Environment & Sustainability, University of Glasgow**

"The John Muir Award is a cost-effective way for Natural Resources Wales to support opportunities for meaningful nature connection activities at scale throughout Wales. The Award is accessible to a diversity of audiences and the John Muir Trust is experienced at working with groups that are often underrepresented in nature conservation."

**Sue Williams, Lead Advisor for Health, Education and Natural Resources, Natural Resources Wales**

"The Parliament... commends the John Muir Trust on 25 years of running the John Muir Award; understands that it has encouraged over 451,578 people from all backgrounds across the UK to enjoy, connect with and care for wild places through a nationally recognised environmental award scheme, and considers that nature connection encourages healthy pro-environmental behaviours, which it believes are essential for a fairer, sustainable world, including tackling the climate crisis and reversing biodiversity loss."

**A motion by Paul McLennan, MSP Scottish National Party**

# My year – a ranger's story

**Lisa Bergerud on the highs and lows of her second year as a seasonal ranger at Glenridding Common**

Summit special: coffee and scones (main); Lisa above Red Tarn

WHILE 2021 was about teens, twenty-somethings and TikTok all talking about escape, friendship and secret pools in which to swim, this year has been about YouTube, a broader age range of visitor and the return of international travellers. All come for the must-see sites: Helvellyn's ridges and Red Tarn. And the 2022 buzzwords? Wild camping and wild swimming, with a common thread of mental health.

But what about personal highlights? That has to be my summit camps – the sunsets, the sunrises and a most special moonrise. I am quite taken aback by how busy the summit can be at night. I've seen large-scale guided walks, mountain bikers, groups of runners and, one night, a gaggle of seven tents full of first-time wild campers. All were surprised to find a ranger eating scones, drinking coffee and chatting away merrily to them.

Red Tarn is the usual camping destination, with the highest tent count on a single night reaching 22. There is always litter, scorch marks and worse.

And it appears everyone wants to chat when you're holding a litter picker. People want to know what's in the bag and are quick to say it wasn't them or that they picked up a sweet wrapper on their way there. Most are surprised that I collect banana skins and fruit peel. But when they see 20-plus banana skins in a pile – and that's just from one day on one path – and discover that they don't decompose quickly, all agree not to throw them away any more.

Last year I kept a count of underpants that were abandoned at Red Tarn after a swim. Thankfully, despite the increase in swimmers, there's been a decrease in pants this year. Maybe that's due to the change in age demographic? I also collect a significant amount of used toilet paper and wipes on a daily basis. This isn't just a problem on Helvellyn, of course; it's a necessary bodily function and not everyone can hold all day. But leaving paper in a wall or hiding it behind some bracken isn't the right thing to do. It makes me wonder. Should we have a John Muir Trust carry-out bag for people to use, offer trowels at the tarn, or are there just better ways to educate people about wild pee and poo?

PHOTOGRAPHS: LISA BERGERUD

**"Red Tarn is the usual camping destination, with the highest tent count on a single night reaching 22"**

Sadly, a few weeks ago I found myself on the summit talking to a couple who were clutching an urn, about to scatter the ashes of a loved one. I took them to see the many existing piles of ashes; unfortunately, they don't tend to blow poignantly into the wind, instead they often just remain in a pile that people walk over or sit on. Some are visible for months. I encouraged the couple to leave only a small amount somewhere discreet.

Memorial stones and plaques are left weekly. Someone even built a cairn on the summit, with an urn still within it. The cairn was built from stone pulled from the recently worked on footpath. Had the person who wanted to be laid at rest there really wanted their beloved summit damaged?

My days are as varied as the weather, and it is a privilege to work at one of the world's must-see locations. Just don't get me started on drones...

***About the author***
*Lisa Bergerud is the Trust's seasonal ranger at Glenridding Common*

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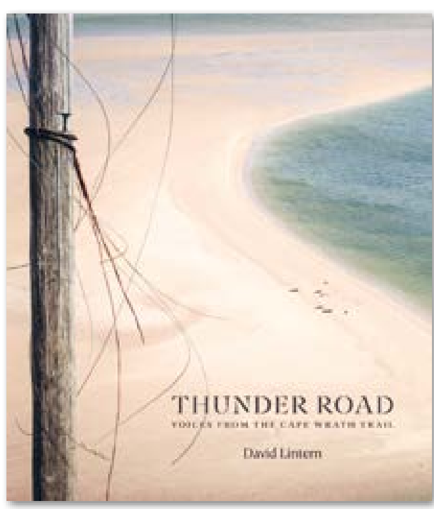



## *Thunder Road: Voices from the Cape Wrath Trail,* by David Lintern

**Toby Clark is touched by the beauty and hope of a book about people and place, both past and present**

THE Cape Wrath Trail is an unmarked route covering roughly 240 miles between Fort William and the most north-westerly point of mainland Britain, Cape Wrath. At a personal crossroads in 2021, photographer, journalist and author David Lintern walked the trail, recording the visitors, residents and places he experienced along the way through conversations and photography.

After a single page of acknowledgments, these images and voices from the trail begin. There is no preface or introduction offered. The book avoids passing judgement on its contributors. Pictures and text lift easily from pages, uncluttered and with space to breathe.

Words speak of community, language, well-being, employment, love, recovery, migration, repair, tolerance. One voice talks of goodness in “the native regeneration taking hold”, leaving a comfortable ambiguity of who or what is regenerating.

The photographs are almost exclusively portraits of people, open landscapes or windows looking in or out – a reminder, perhaps, that although views across society differ, we are often looking through the same lens.

An afterword offers the author space to summarise his experience of walking the trail and bring readers closer to the book. He talks about his aim to “contain some of the contradictions” between culture and communities, people and wild places.

Post-publication, the author expanded on this theme, describing the striking front cover image which captures the “broken lines of communication between ‘edge’ and ‘centre’, the curve of the wires mirroring lines in the sand, nature and culture, the whole deal”.

There is beauty and hope in *Thunder Road*. It captures a walk of active listening and seeing as a cornerstone of building understanding.

But there is also an underlying sense of sadness and loss. From an opening image of a faded memorial tablet to a final remote red flag, the book points us towards an urgent and ongoing need to deconstruct colonial mythologies of wild places through listening to the voices of our past.

“I experienced the trail not as wild or remote, but as lost and emptied, a place of ghosts,” writes David.

All proceeds from sales of the book are donated to the refugee efforts currently underway in Ukraine and Afghanistan (via the Disasters Emergency Committee).

***£14.00***
***duskpress.com***

***About the reviewer***
*Toby Clark is the Trust’s John Muir Award Scotland Manager*

## Others we like

***Puffins, Life on the Atlantic Edge,***
**Kevin Morgans**
“If you hear a growling from underground, sounding like a muted chainsaw, don’t be alarmed. It is only a puffin calling from its burrow.” So Kevin Morgans captions one of an extraordinary collection of images that tell the story of perhaps the most recognisable and best loved of all UK birds. The product of many years hunkered down on remote cliffs around the British Isles – Skomer, the Farne Islands, Fair Isle, Shetland and more – this is an exquisite book about a seabird that tells us much about the worrying state of our seas. **£29.99. sandstonepress.com**

## *Land for what? Land for whom? Senses of place and conflict in the Scottish Highlands,* by Bonnie VandeSteeg

**Chris Loynes feels connected with many of the issues raised in a detailed ethnographic study of life in the Cairngorms**

MY partner and I own eight acres of upland wood pasture in the Lake District. We manage it for our own recreation and for conservation. Our neighbouring land consists of fields grazed by a local farmer, a common with grazing and conservation activity and the wooded grounds of an outdoor centre.

So, I resonated with Bonnie VandeSteeg's book in which she also explores the senses of place of the recreators, conservationists, business and landowner communities of the Cairngorms. A year spent on the ground with people sharing their values and visions has allowed her, as an anthropologist, to paint a rich picture of different communities.

What emerges are diverse views that all have a deep sense of place and value for wildlife and community seen through the different lenses of ownership, nature, work and recreation.

The book then takes a second look at some well-known local conflicts over land use, deer management and the ski resort. What the author uncovers is a clustering of certain communities around polarised views led by those who have power as incomer conservation/recreation interests and local landowners. She argues that the system of stakeholder engagement around formal enquiries and informal expressions of view has been ineffective at resolving conflicts or engaging all those who deserve a voice. Stakeholder consultation, she writes, encourages antagonism and misrepresentation, creating groups unwilling to listen or compromise.

In fact, VandeSteeg's conversations uncover a much more nuanced and complex range of views about the landscape and its future that are silenced by the dominant positions of the stakeholder groups.

The author notes that the power of the conservation community has increased since gaining the resources to take a stake in land ownership and employ local people.

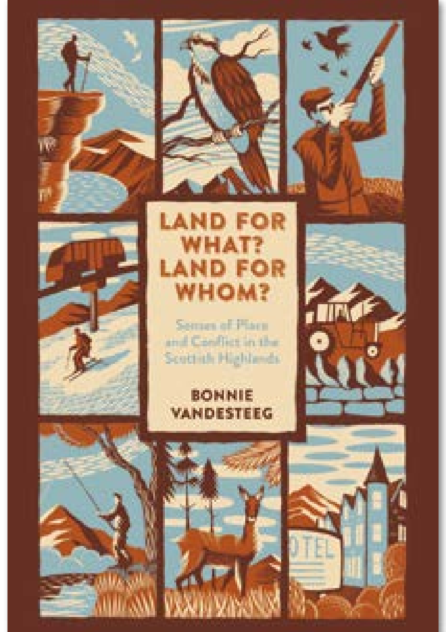
VandeSteeg also comments on the approach taken by the Trust which she sees as fostering an inclusive approach to the land. Whilst her comparisons between Knoydart, for example, and the Cairngorms might be a little stretched both historically and for scale, these are interesting perspectives as the Trust scales up its aspirations to work with partners on landscape-scale change.

I would have liked a stronger discussion around current land ownership systems plus the impact of national and international polices, but nevertheless this book provides a detailed insight into the challenges involved in embracing change.

Beneath the conflicts, it offers a hopeful view that there are those working at an interpersonal level to resolve the future of the Cairngorms, for people and for nature.

***£7.99***
***landforwhatlandforwhom.org/home***

***About the reviewer***
*Chris Loynes is a former Trustee of the John Muir Trust*




***Marram, Memories of Sea and Spider Silk*, Leonie Charlton**
Blending nature and travel writing, this meditative memoir sees the author and a friend travel from Barra to Lewis, riding on their Highland ponies. It's an exploration of love, both for the Hebridean landscape and a fraught mother/daughter relationship. **£9.99. sandstonepress.com**

***The Outdoor Swimmers' Handbook*, Kate Rew**
Written by the founder of the Outdoor Swimming Society, this meticulously researched book provides all the information needed to embrace the joy of swimming safely in rivers, lakes and sea. It is also full of delightful accounts of swims in astonishing places, often with remarkable people. **£22.00. penguin.co.uk (Ebury Publishing)**

# The Alba Cross

**Ross Brannigan catches up with two young environmentalists who are about to embark on an exciting project – a human-powered journey across Scotland highlighting work being done to protect wild places along the way**

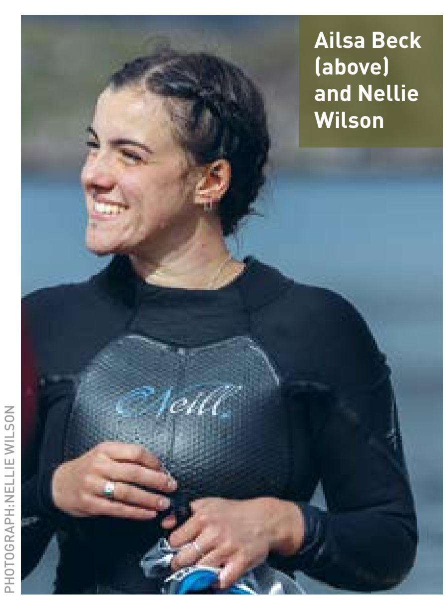
## First things first, who are you guys?

We are both environmental graduates: Ailsa Beck, an undergraduate from the University of Stirling, and Nellie Wilson, who has a Masters in Sustainable Development and Social Anthropology. We met through the Scottish Outdoor Young Team (a network of likeminded 18 to 35-year-olds who take part in a variety of outdoor activities). We realised that we made a great team when we worked together for the Impact Marathon on Mull earlier in the year. It was through the pressures and joys of that work that our dreams for this project began to emerge. Whilst employed full-time on various jobs over the year, we have been working hard to organise what we hope will be a beneficial project for ourselves and for wider communities interested in both adventure and the environment.

## What is The Alba Cross exactly?

It's a human-powered journey – swimming, cycling, kayaking, walking and canoeing – from Ullapool (Nellie's hometown) to Stonehaven (Ailsa's hometown). We have designed the route based on a variety of interesting land-owning entities along the way, including John Muir Trust sites, community owned land, private ownership and National Trust areas. We aim to spend one or two days working on each site, joining in with conservation efforts specific to each area. Our conversations with the people behind these projects will form several short, documentary-style films to showcase the positive work each site is engaged in. As we travel, we will record podcasts that

PHOTOGRAPH: NELLIE WILSON




PHOTOGRAPH: NELLIE WILSON

Ailsa Beck (above) and Nellie Wilson

focus more in-depth on topics related to adventure and accessibility in the outdoors. At the end of the journey, we will release a film following the ups and downs of our physical challenge, and everything in between.

## What do you hope to achieve?

We are not necessarily beginning this journey with a specific agenda or with expectations of the work being done and how people will feel about contentious issues. We would like to encourage discussion around environmental issues that affect us all, inspire people to get in touch with projects in their local area and enjoy the outdoors no matter what the barriers – all while contributing a positive impact to their surroundings. We also hope to promote diversity in the outdoors and show that natural spaces are for everyone.

## You have received funding from the Trust to help with the journey – how will that help?

This generous funding will enable us to purchase the equipment we need to produce our podcast series and help with the logistical costs of the journey – plus relieve some of the pressure on us and our team. Without this kind of support, our passion project would not be possible, so a massive thank you to the Trust.

## How can people follow along?

People can follow us on Instagram (**@thealbacross**) and Facebook (The Alba Cross). We can also be found through The Alba Cross or Trails for Change on Spotify, with podcasts covering issues related to adventure and the challenges faced by individuals when accessing the outdoors.

***Further information***
*For additional project content, including podcasts, blog posts and images, visit **ailsabeck.wixsite.com/trailsforchange***

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

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