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## **'Your wee bit hill and glen': the cultural politics of the Scottish Highlands, c. 1918–1945**

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**‘Your Wee Bit Hill and Glen’: The Cultural  
Politics of the Scottish Highlands, c. 1918-1945**

by

Hayden Lorimer

A Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the award of

Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University

September 1997

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the struggles for moral, cultural and political control of the Scottish Highlands during the period, c.1918-1945. Using library and archival material it demonstrates how a range of contesting landscape narratives, each based on an amalgam of myth, ideal and reality, were constructed for a region holding a peculiarly intense significance in the Scottish and British consciousness. By dissecting four inter-related debates about where, and to whom, the Highlands belonged, the thesis considers several overarching themes; questions of nationhood, citizenship, tradition, modernity and the division of power in society are all addressed. Firstly, it examines the creation of a sophisticated landowning mythology to counter increasingly vociferous public opposition to the elite sporting industry. Secondly, it explores how this landowning hegemony was threatened by the rise of a populist outdoor movement, and asserts that only through steady institutionalisation and the discrete involvement of reactionary interests was the vibrant recreative community emasculated. Thirdly, it analyses conflicts over the conceptualisation of the Highlands as a location suitable for modern industry, infrastructural improvement and economic development. Examples of proposed hydro-electric power schemes are used to frame key arguments of opposition and promotion. Fourthly, it investigates the campaign mounted to re-appropriate the Highland land resource as a means to inspire agrarian and cultural revival. The role of Scotland's nationalist literary community is determined as crucial to the creation of a sophisticated, if ultimately idealistic, ruralist mythology. Despite the emergence of these oppositional narratives the thesis contends that the persistence of a feudal, sporting tradition in the Highlands reflected both the immutability and ingenuity of the established landowning hegemony. Significantly, dominant cultural constructions of Highland landscape and identity originating during the inter-war period retain much of their power to the present day.

## Acknowledgements

I am particularly indebted to Dr. Mike Heffernan, one-time undergraduate tutor and latterly doctoral supervisor...1989 seems a very long time ago. Throughout the last four years I have been grateful for Mike's enthusiasm, patience, guidance, understanding and banter. I hope my research fairly reflects this contribution.

Invaluable help and advice along the way has come from Charlie Withers, David Matless, Charles Watkins, Christopher Smout, Denis Cosgrove, Jim Hunter, Ewen Cameron, John Mackenzie, Brian Osborne, Michael Wigan and Louise Livingstone.

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Enormous thanks are owed to my Mum, Dad and brother Elliott for allowing me the freedom to follow my own track. Without their great generosity, their love and unceasing good humour, none of this would have been possible; just remember folks, 'it's aye better than the dole'!

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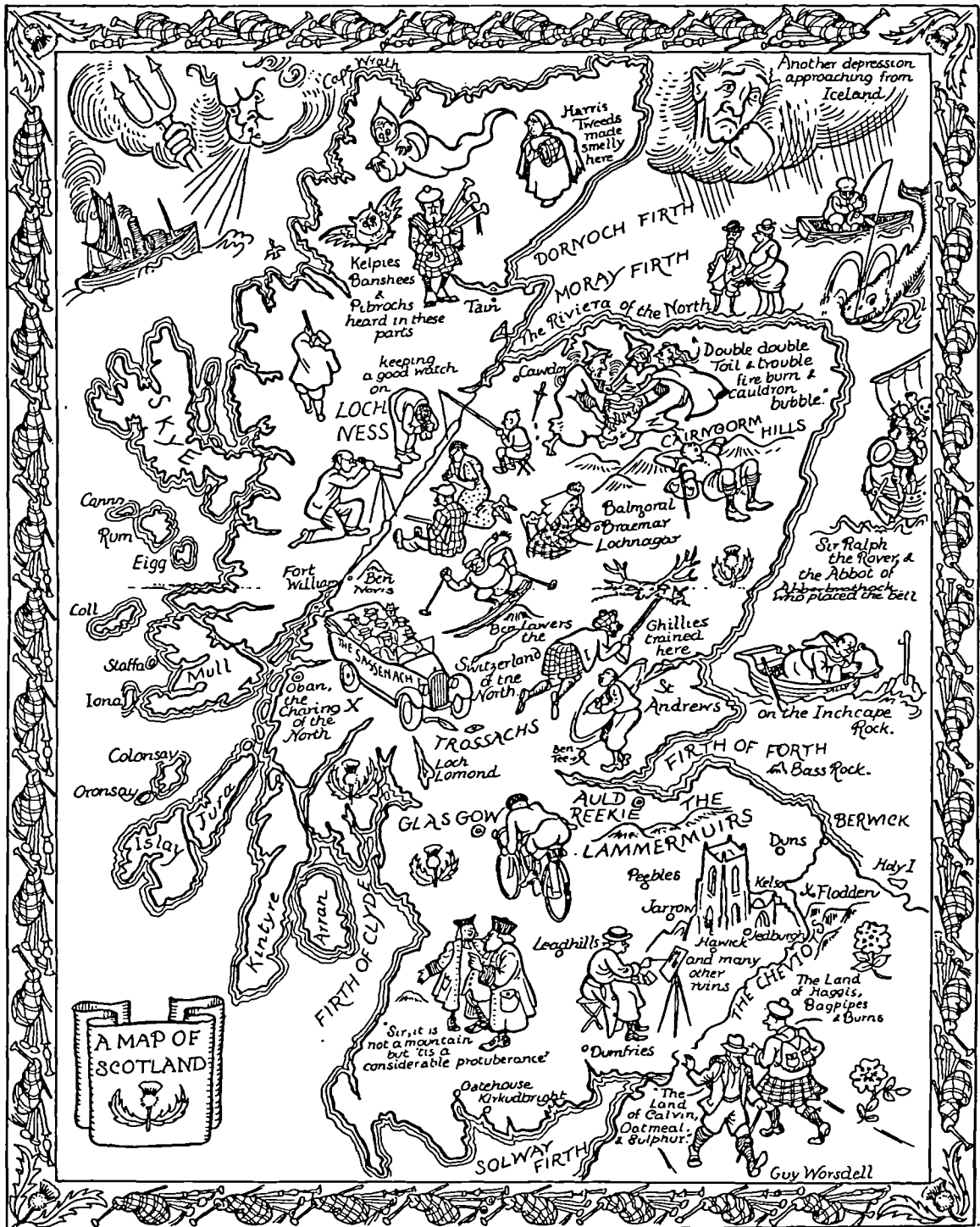
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## **List of Abbreviations**

ACCS - Association of County Councils in Scotland.  
APRS - Association for the Preservation of Rural Scotland.  
BAC - British Aluminium Company.  
BFSA - British Field Sports Association.  
BOAS - Board of Agriculture for Scotland.  
BOC - British Oxygen Company.  
CLA - County Landowners Association.  
CPB - Caledonian Power Bill.  
CPS - Caledonian Power Scheme.  
CPRE - Council for the Preservation of Rural England.  
CPRW - Council for the Preservation of Rural Wales.  
CRB - Convention of Royal Burghs.  
ECM - Executive Committee/Council Minutes.  
GESC - Grampian Electricity Supply Company.  
GDB - Glencoe and Dalness Boxfile.  
HCB - Hebridean Cottage Boxfile.  
HDL - Highland Development League.  
HEP - Hydro-Electric Power.  
IYHA - International Youth Hostels Association.  
MCFB - Mountainous Country Fund Boxfile.  
NLS - National Library of Scotland.  
NPS - National Party of Scotland.  
NRC - National Reserve Conference.  
NSHEB - North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board.  
NTS - National Trust for Scotland.  
PPS - Property Protection Society.  
PRO - Public Record Office.  
RSGS - Royal Scottish Geographical Society.  
SEFS - Scottish Estate Factors Society.  
SLPF - Scottish Land and Property Federation.  
SMC - Scottish Mountaineering Club.  
SNP - Scottish National Party.  
SRO - Scottish Record Office.  
SRWS - Scottish Rights-of-Way Society.  
STA - Scottish Tourist Association.  
SYHA - Scottish Youth Hostels Association.  
WSAC - West of Scotland Agricultural College.  
YHAGB - Youth Hostel Association of Great Britain.

# Introduction





## Placing the Highlands

*'Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power.'*<sup>1</sup>

(Stuart Hall, 1990)

*'How is one to approach the Highland landscape without prejudice or predilection? The mind does not take an impartial view of anything: it mixes reality with association, and sometimes association is the more important. Of the many inherited visions of the Highlands, which is the reality?'*<sup>2</sup>

(Hugh Quigley, 1936)

The origins of this thesis can be traced back to a glorious Spring day in 1989 and the summit of an unremarkable hill lying just to the south-west of Poolewe in Wester Ross. Surveying an impressive Highland panorama for the first time, I found immediate inspiration in a simple appreciation of an empty and rugged wilderness. Senses attuned, a more contemplative inspection of the scene left me with a probing interest in the landscape's apparently hidden human aspects and histories. These contrasting sensibilities have continued to inform me ever since, acting as a constant reminder of the complexities and ambiguities inherent to any conceptualisation of the Highland environment. They provide I think, an appropriate grounding for a project as concerned with landscapes of the mind as with topographic realities, and which deals in myths, narratives and imagined traditions as its main currency.

This thesis examines the struggle for symbolic and physical control of the Scottish Highlands during the inter-war period.<sup>3</sup> Emphasising the Highlands peculiarly intense significance in the political and cultural life of Scotland, and on a wider scale Great Britain, it dissects the myriad debates initiated about where, and to whom, the region belonged. Engaging with recent research by the likes of Anderson, Colley and Schama, the Highlands are presented as an arena for contesting imagined narratives.<sup>4</sup> Attention focuses on how these narratives were

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<sup>1</sup> Hall, S. (1990) 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in Rutherford, J. (ed.) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, p. 222-237; 225.

<sup>2</sup> Quigley, H. (1936) *The Highlands of Scotland*, London: B.T. Batsford, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout the thesis I employ the phrase 'inter-war' when referring to events occurring between the years c.1918-1945. Although not chronologically accurate in the strictest of senses, it was selected for ease of purpose in the written narrative.

<sup>4</sup> Anderson, B. (1992) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso; Colley, L. (1992) *Britons: The Forging of a Nation, 1707-1837*, London: Yale University Press; Schama, S. (1995) *Landscape and Memory*, London: Harper Collins. See also: Hobsbawm, E. and Ranger, T. (eds.) (1983) *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Wright, P. (1995) *The Village that Died for England*, London: Jonathan Cape.

manifested in different landscape visions, each an amalgam of myth, ideal and reality, and each intersected with critical issues of nationhood, citizenship, tradition and modernity. The strained, and occasionally acrimonious, relations which existed between those constituencies who chose to represent different landscape visions are used to explore the dynamics of power, status and authority in inter-war society. Ultimately, by reconfiguring approaches to the Highland past, the thesis questions the comfortable cultural identities and established conceptualisations of landscape which continue to impinge on contemporary debate.

Never having strayed far from the forefront of Scotland's collective consciousness, in recent years the Highlands have become the subject of considerable intellectual interest. A post-Enlightenment chronology, in which each distinctive period or watershed event occupies a recognised niche in historical research, runs smoothly from Jacobite uprisings through the subjugation of native Gaelic culture to land clearances, emigration, diaspora abroad and social protest at home, all the while tracked by the evolution of tartanised romanticism, shot through with the legacies of Ossian, Scott and Balmoral.<sup>5</sup> A greater understanding of these cultural currents has revealed a distinctive set of referents commonly associated with the Highland people and landscape which have been appropriated into popularised expressions of Scottish national identity. In a development of this critical theme, modern constructions of the Highlands have been the subject of extensive investigation; most notably the choice of imagery used in film and media; the marketing and promotional policies deployed in heritage and tourist industries; the politicisation of landscape as a national wilderness resource; or alternatively, as the chosen location for community-based organic revivalism.<sup>6</sup> Compared with the attention heaped on early modern, romantic and contemporary eras, (the first pair characterised by popular folk memory, the latter by post-modern representation), the inter war years have been left rather stranded, a lacuna in otherwise populated terrains.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> During the past few years a rush of books have appeared on Jacobitism, the 1745 rebellion and its aftermath. Deeside's regal associations ensure a steady stream of descriptive accounts. Meanwhile the works of historians such as Jim Hunter, John Prebble and David Craig remain as popular as ever.

<sup>6</sup> McArthur, C. (ed.) (1983) *Scotch Reels: Scotland in Cinema and Television*, London: British Film Institute; Aitken, S.C. (1991) 'A Transactional Geography of the Image-Event: the Films of Scottish Director, Bill Forsyth', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 16 p. 105-118; Gold, J.R. and Gold, M.M. (1995) *Imagining Scotland: Tradition, Representation and Promotion in Scottish Tourism since 1750*, Aldershot: Scolar Press; McCrone, D. Morris, A. and Keily, R. (1995) *Scotland - The Brand: The Making of Scottish Heritage*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; Toogood, M. (1995) 'Representing Ecology and Highland Tradition', *Area*, 27 (2) p. 102-109; Toogood, M. (1996) 'Nature and Nation: Ecology and the Representation of the Highlands', *Scotlands*, 3 (1) p. 42-55.

<sup>7</sup> Iain Robertson's recent work on social protest in the Highlands during the inter-war period is a notable exception. Robertson, I.J.M. (1996) *The Historical Geography of Social Protest in*

There exists, I believe, a compelling argument for defining the inter-war period as a crucial juncture linking 'old-world' constructions of the Highlands and modern day interpretations. The thesis conceptualises the period as a temporal axis along which popular imaginings of space multiply. The emergence of now familiar Highland enmities - the elite field sportsman's vision vying against that of the recreational walker, the landscape preservationist's caution jarring with the industrialist's pragmatism, the laird's traditionalism clashing with the re-colonist's revisionism - marked a social transformation from basic feudal bi-partisanship to a prevailing condition of polyvocality. Besides these contesting cultures of landscape, conflicting identities were also forged according to imagined, or starkly imposed, orderings of space. With the juxtaposition of tradition and modernity came the delineation of 'insiders' and 'outsiders', Highlanders and Lowlanders, natives and foreigners. It would be erroneous to suggest however, that the Highlands of 'old' or 'new' worlds were either mutually exclusive or hermetically sealed. Inevitably, the meanings and identities attached to landscape were fluid, characterised by a considerable degree of fusion and overlap.

My assertion is that an era which has traditionally been overlooked by Scotland's historiographers in favour of more obvious treasures, actually represents a crucial bridge in the dynamic construction of the Highland image. As such the thesis represents an attempt to use the inter-war period to draw together themes and ideas raised in the perennially popular histories of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and discourses emerging from research on contemporary trends in the production and consumption of Scottish identities.

### Thesis and Chapter Outline

This introduction seeks to place the thesis within the context of recent developments in historical and cultural geography, as well as established approaches to the study of Scottish, and more particularly Highland, history. My discussion of research methodology deals variously with ideological allegiances, textual strategies and ethical considerations. All inform my search for an effective means to present a historical narrative characterised by competing voices and opposing landscape visions. A final section briefly contextualises Scotland's cultural, political, economic and social condition between the wars.

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*Highland Scotland, 1914-c.1939*, Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Bristol; Robertson, I.J.M. (1997) 'The Role of Women in Social Protest in the Highlands of Scotland, c. 1880-1939', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 23 (2) p. 187-200.

While obviously being integral to the overall structure of the thesis, chapters one, two, three and four are written as essays around a theme, and as such are self-substantive pieces of work. These four central chapters are intersected by five common themes. Similarly, a number of prominent personalities, institutions and organisations cut across the entire narrative. The four thematic chapters each examine specific visions for the Highlands, primarily through the eyes of chief protagonists but also through those of key detractors. The scale of inquiry adopted in one chapter may vary from another, but a sensitivity to this difference is maintained throughout. While a central tenet of the thesis demands that the Highlands be treated as an imagined totality, and as such a geographical creation which does not require exact cartographic definition, on a number of occasions the lens of enquiry closes in on a localised case study. These historical vignettes, woven into the wider tapestry of the text, demonstrate the manner in which broad social trends and cultural currents were played out at the community level.

Chapter One investigates the landscape vision which dominated the real space of the Highlands during the inter-war period. It considers the persistence of a feudal landowning tradition and the sophisticated cultural construction of a wilderness environment devoted to elite field sports, most notably deer-stalking. The chapter discloses how institutional and civic mechanisms functioned in the subtle transformation of a vast wild game reserve into a powerful, iconographic emblem of Scottish nationhood. Chapter Two is concerned with the growth of a culture of populist outdoor recreation closely associated with the Highland environment. Professing new moral, national and political imperatives, Scotland's burgeoning urban-based hiking and hostelling community, mounted a challenge to the restrictive conditions of public access imposed by the sporting elite. Having examined this counter-offensive, the chapter goes on to explore the politics of the protracted campaign for the designation of a national recreative space. Chapter Three broadens the search for visions resistant to, or compatible with, the dominant sporting motif. It reveals how tensions were aroused by the concurrent veneration of the landscape and its native inhabitants as treasured relics in need of protection and as motors for a modern industrialised economy. Examples of proposed and completed hydro-electric power schemes are drawn upon to interpret the repeated clashes between traditionalists in search of stasis and those constituencies striving for modernity and progress. Chapter Four addresses debate surrounding the re-appropriation of the land resource for its conversion to small-holdings and silviculture, and subsequent assimilation into a broad-based rural economy. It reveals how traditional demands for land reform were reworked in relation to the flowering of modern Scottish nationalism and a vein of rural

realism most fluently expressed in the writings of a newly politicised Scots literati. Through these media an arcadian code of citizenship was presented as the basis for a viable modern lifestyle.

The main body of the thesis can in fact be conceptualised as a simple grid, four chapters interlocked with five unifying themes. Working at a range of scales, gradually panning out from the personal to the universal, the latter are laced discretely into the narrative and can be summarised as follows; a deconstruction of modern citizenship identities created among the Scottish population; a critical examination of the roots and division of status, power and authority in Scottish inter-war society; a consideration of the continued importance of myths, traditions and imagined communities in constituting collective identities; an attempt to problematize the trenchant spatial order of core and periphery in the political culture of Britain; and finally, an examination of the hybrid identities constructed around varying notions of nationhood, national identity and patriotism.

### Too Long in this Condition? Scotland's Historical Geography in Context

In 1937 Professor Alan Ogilvie of Edinburgh University, arguably Scotland's most influential geographer of the inter-war period, highlighted an acute need for the country to understand itself. The manifesto which he laid out for the discipline, though wide-ranging, held little truck with historical geography which he viewed as a backwater of the discipline.<sup>8</sup> For the next four decades it appears that among the geographical rank and file Ogilvie's words were heeded with alacrity. Scotland does not enjoy a long tradition and pantheon of venerable practitioners to compare with that enjoyed in England and Wales. Barring isolated contributions in the form of descriptive regional geographies and a belated attempt to replicate the Hoskian landscape model, few precedents were set during this intervening period.<sup>9</sup> The paucity of material was conceded by the select band of pioneers who in the 1970's began to address this neglected field.<sup>10</sup> However,

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<sup>8</sup> Ogilvie, A. (1937) 'Our Ignorance of Scotland with some suggestions', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 53 p. 387-394. Two salient pieces on the sub-discipline had appeared in the years previous to Ogilvie's pointed commentary: Kermack, W.R. (1912) 'The Making of Scotland: An Essay in Historical Geography', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 28 p. 295-305; Kermack, W.R. (1913) *A Historical Geography of Scotland*, Edinburgh: W and K.A. Johnston.

<sup>9</sup> O'Dell, A.C. (1939) *The Historical Geography of the Shetland Islands*, Edinburgh: W. and K.A. Johnston; O'Dell, A.C. & Walton, K. (1962) *Highlands and Islands of Scotland*, Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson; Caird, J.B. (1964) 'The Making of the Scottish Landscape', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 80 p. 72-80; Millman, R. (1975) *The Making of the Scottish Landscape*, London: B.T. Batsford.

<sup>10</sup> See, Parry, M.L. (1980) 'Introduction: The Course of Rural Change in Scotland', in Parry, M.L. & Slater, T.R. (eds.) *The Making of the Scottish Countryside*, London: Croom Helm, p. 17; Whyte, I.D. & Whyte, K.A. (1981) *Sources for Historical Geography: An Introductory Guide*, Institute of British Geographers Historical Geography Research Series 6 p. 3; Turnock, D. (1982) *The Historical Geography of Scotland since 1707: Geographical Aspects of Modernisation*,

with their own contributions limited to examinations of Scotland's agrarian or relic landscapes and rural settlements in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the research parameters remained narrow and restrictive.<sup>11</sup> Subsequent demands made for a broadening of horizons to take in urban and industrial realms, for a wider temporal ambit, and for a fresh commitment to methodology and analytical approaches were only partially heeded.<sup>12</sup>

Concurrently, at geography's critical frontier the promotion of a brand of revisionist humanism was reflected in the new sensitivity shown towards meaning and human agency. The realisation that landscape was no passive backdrop to change or social progress became a central tenet of the discipline's much heralded cultural turn, expressed through an increased awareness of the subjective experience of space.<sup>13</sup> The traditionally small community with an interest in the historical geography of Scotland have been slow to react to these theoretical developments, although now well established.<sup>14</sup> Several examples do exist of work which have kept abreast of the evolving critical agenda. Withers, Pringle and more recently Robertson and Stevens have engaged with notions of landscape and identity construction to considerable effect.<sup>15</sup> These examples apart it seems prescient to note a recent summary, by Beveridge and Turnbull, of the prominent contributors to discourse on Scottish cultural identities as 'historians, sociologists

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Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. xi; Whittington, G. and Whyte, I.D. (1983) *An Historical Geography of Scotland*, London: Academic Press, p. vii.

<sup>11</sup> See for example: Whittington, G. (1975) 'Was There a Scottish Agricultural Revolution', *Area*, 7 p. 204-206; Whyte, I. (1978) 'Agricultural Revolution in Scotland: Contributions to the Debate', *Area*, 10 p. 203-5; Whyte, I.D. (1978) 'Scottish Historical Geography - A Review', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 94 p. 2-26.

<sup>12</sup> Greater critical awareness was demonstrated in: Parry, M.L. & Slater, T.R. (1980) op cit.; Whittington, G. & Whyte, I.D. (1983) op cit; Dodgshon, R.A. (1981) *Land and Society in Early Scotland*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

<sup>13</sup> Olwig, K. (1984) *Nature's Ideological Landscape*, London: Allen & Unwin; Cosgrove, D. (1984) *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, London: Croom Helm; Cosgrove, D. (1985) 'Prospect, Perspective and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 10 p. 45-62; Cosgrove, D. & Daniels, S. (1988) *The Iconography of Landscape*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Philo, C. (compiler) (1991) *New Words, New Worlds: Reconceptualising Social and Cultural Geography*, Aberystwyth: Cambrian Printers.

<sup>14</sup> See for example: Whyte, I. & Whyte, K. (1991) *The Changing Scottish Landscape, 1500-1800*, London: Routledge.

<sup>15</sup> Withers, C.W.J. (1988) *Gaelic Scotland: The Transformation of a Culture Region*, London: Routledge; Withers, C.W.J. (1992) 'The Historical Creation of the Scottish Highlands', in Donnachie, I & Whatley, C. (eds.) *The Manufacture of Scottish History*, Edinburgh: Polygon; Withers, C.W.J. (1996) Place, Memory, Monument: Memorializing the Past in Contemporary Highland Scotland, *Ecumene*, 3 (3) p. 325-344; Pringle, T.R. (1988) *Prophet of the Highlands: Sir Edwin Landseer and the Scottish Highland Image*, Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Loughborough University of Technology; Pringle, T.R. (1988) 'The Privation of History: Landseer, Victoria and the Highland Myth', in Cosgrove, D. & Daniels, S. (eds.) *The Iconography of Landscape*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 142-161; Robertson, I.J.M. (1996) op cit; Robertson, I.J.M. (1997) op cit; Stevens, A. (1996) 'Visual Sensations: Representing Scotland's Geographies in the Empire Exhibition, Glasgow, 1938', *Scotlands*, 3 (1) p. 3-17.

and political theorists (together with a journalistic appanage)'.<sup>16</sup> The omission of geographers is surely not coincidental and therefore speaks volumes. In the light of Rose and Routledge's recent call for a fresh consideration of Scotland's geographies and Wither's recognition of the need for an understanding of the history of geographical knowledge in Scotland, it seems timely to make an intervention on behalf of geography in the interdisciplinary forum currently investigating the nature and construction of the country's multiple identities.<sup>17</sup>

Within this broader intellectual framework the work of sociologist David McCrone has critically recast established conceptions of Scottish nationhood and its various cultural manifestations. By questioning the previously dominant paradigm of a single, homogenised expression of national identity and suggesting the existence of a pluralised, fragmented and inherently unstable cultural condition, he has opened up an expansive intellectual agenda.<sup>18</sup> Citing the prevailing condition of postmodernity as the spur to inclusive definitions of Scottishness, McCrone has been joined by a growing band of cultural commentators.<sup>19</sup> This push for pluralism has been supported by many of Scotland's most prominent historians. New understandings of provincial identities have been called for, alongside oral histories and studies of previously marginalised or minority communities.<sup>20</sup> A specific plea made for specialised studies of national identity is one this thesis attempts to address.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Beveridge, C. & Turnbull, R. (1997) *Scotland After Enlightenment: Image and Tradition in Modern Scottish Culture*, Edinburgh: Polygon, p. 94.

<sup>17</sup> Rose, G. & Routledge, P. (1996) 'Scotland's Geographies: Problematizing Places, Peoples and Identities', *Scotlands*, 3 (1) p. 1-2; Withers, C. (1997) 'Scotland's Geographies: Themes in the History of Geographical Knowledge in Scotland', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 113 (1) p. 3-5.

<sup>18</sup> It is McCrone's contention that 'while media representations of Scotland are often simplistic and distorted, the search for a pure, national culture as an alternative is doomed to failure in a complex, modern multi-national world'. McCrone, D. (1992) *Understanding Scotland: The Sociology of a Stateless Nation*, London: Routledge, p. 13; see also, McCrone, D. (1989) 'Representing Scotland: Culture and Nationalism', in McCrone, D. Kendrick, S. & Shaw, P. (eds.) *The Making of Scotland: Nation, Culture and Social Change*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p. 161-174.

<sup>19</sup> During the past twelve months the fragile future of the British constitution has resulted in a seemingly endless paperchase for the interested observer scanning the press. Plurality, bilingualism, re-invention, fluidity and self-parody are the 'postmodern' watchwords which have littered a blur of newspaper pieces detailing what it means to be proud, young and Scottish/Welsh/Irish/English. For one of innumerable examples, see: *The Observer*, 20 July 1997 p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> Barrow, G.W.S. (1991) 'Introduction', in Mitchison, R. (ed.) *Why Scottish History Matters*, Tillicoultry: Saltire Society, p. xi-xiii; Mitchison, R. (1991) 'The Purpose of this Book', in Mitchison, R. op cit. p. vii-x; Harvie, C. (1991) 'Modern Scotland: Remembering the People', in Mitchison, R. op cit. p. 77-87; Morton, G. (1992) 'No History Please, We're Scottish and Welsh and Irish and English and British and Ukanian', *Scottish Affairs*, 1 p. 116-120; Patterson, L. (1993) 'Editorial: Scottishness', *Scottish Affairs*, 4 p. 1-4; Smout, T.C. (1994) 'Perspectives on the Scottish Identity', *Scottish Affairs*, 6 p. 101-113.

<sup>21</sup> In recent years, several notable contributions to this genre have appeared: Ash, M. (1990) 'William Wallace and Robert the Bruce: The Life and Death of a National Myth', in Samuel, R. and Thompson, P. (eds.) *The Myths We Live By*, London: Routledge, p. 83-94; Pittock, M. (1991) *The Invention of Scotland: the Stuart Myth and the Scottish Identity*, London: Routledge; Colley,

It is worthwhile briefly tracing the genesis of McCrone's doctrine in two seminal works. Tom Nairn's interpretation of a stunted and neurotic Scottish identity, happily immersed in the caricatures of Tartanry and Kailyardism, and resultantly consigned to a parlous state of 'sub-nationalism' remains a powerful one.<sup>22</sup> Applying this critique to representations of Scotland on the cinema screen, McArthur took a similarly dim view of the country's dominant cultural traditions.<sup>23</sup> Both presented these regressive tendencies as serious impediments to expressions of maturity in nationhood. A more refined reading of Scottish mythologies has since evolved. McArthur has retreated from his provocative stance, confessing that cultural currents such as Highland romanticism have been mistakenly presented as static and fixed in their make-up.<sup>24</sup> The recognition that cultural signifiers, tartan for example, are instead characterised by an inherent instability of meaning is a hugely significant one. Recently donned to positive and alternative effect, the kilt, has become a cultural portmanteau denoting political opposition to the constitutional framework, and ironically, a means to distance the wearer from undesirable xenophobic stereotypes.<sup>25</sup> Adding another accretion of meaning to this contested history my own work demonstrates how the kilt was associated with constructions of modern citizenship, new moral imperatives and a burgeoning public interest in body culture. This simple application of an evolving theoretical discourse delivers salutary lessons to those, like myself, investigating the roots of modern Scottish culture. It reinforces the need for cognizance of a multiplicity of identities and constructions of place. Equally, it acts as a timely reminder that to leave *idées reçues* unchallenged is only to further confirm their security.

### Considering Geography, Landscape and Power

Ineluctable truths are of some relevance when attention switches to the hoary, and seemingly unavoidable, matter of determining the spatial extent of the Highlands. An orthodox treatise on any period in Highland history might well begin with a

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L. (1992) op cit.; Kidd, C. (1993) *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity, 1689-c.1830*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>22</sup> Nairn, T. (1977) *The Break-Up of Britain*, London: New Left Books.

<sup>23</sup> McArthur, C. (1982) 'Scotland and Cinema: The Iniquity of the Fathers', in McArthur, C. (ed.) *Scotch Reels: Scotland in Cinema and Television*, London: British Film Institute, p. 40-70; see also, McArthur, C. (1982) 'Introduction', in McArthur, C. op cit. p. 1-6; Craig, C. (1982) 'Myths Against History: Tartanry and Kailyard in Nineteenth-Century Scottish Literature', in McArthur, C. op cit. p. 7-17.

<sup>24</sup> McArthur, C. (1993) 'Scottish Culture: A Reply to David McCrone', *Scottish Affairs*, 4 p. 95-106.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 97; Beveridge, C. and Turnbull, R. (1997) op cit. p. 65-66; Giulianotti, R. (1993) *Model of the Carnavalesque? Scottish Football Fans at the 1992 European Championship Finals in Sweden*, Manchester: Manchester Institute for Popular Culture, (Working Paper No. 6).



concise cartographic definition of the area under investigation.<sup>26</sup> In the theoretical context of this particular work the creation of such a wholly ambiguous boundary is entirely unnecessary. Since the Enlightenment, the Highlands have been as much an imaginary space as they have a material one.<sup>27</sup> During the 1930's myths, creations and invented traditions were equally inspirational to the patrician sportsman sequestered in a remote shooting lodge and the energetic tenement youth gazing out towards mysterious peaks visible from Glasgow's west end. Neither held a monopoly on the imagination and neither had identified a 'real' or 'essential' Highlands. The geography of the region began and ended in the mind's eye. Stephen Daniels has highlighted these multiple and simultaneous conceptions of landscape, discouraging attempts to seek definition, 'to resolve its contradictions', preferring for us to 'abide in its duplicity'.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, given the perennially unstable relationship between nationalisms and territories - the roots of the modern nation have regularly been expressed with reference to a mythical heartland, (often a more effective rallying point than concrete expressions of statehood) - it becomes impossible to map different experiences of space in a conventional sense, making the tradition of defining a precise study area seem all the more inappropriate.<sup>29</sup>

Other theoretical developments must also be addressed in the new geographical search for meaning, notably a sensitivity to metaphor and analogy. Interpellating the cultural construction of space, geographers have recently noted how landscapes can be conceptualised as sets of texts, represented on paper, in painting, on maps, in verse, or more conventionally on the ground itself, and read accordingly.<sup>30</sup> These representations act in combination, as inter-textual

<sup>26</sup> The Highland line has been drawn according to a number of different criteria, including administrative boundaries, topographical characteristics, linguistic heartlands and geological faults.

<sup>27</sup> Samuels and Thompson have urged historians to loosen rigid categorisations between myths and reality. 'When we do encounter myth', they argue, 'our first instinct, it seems, is to devalue it, to rob it of its mysteries, to bring it down to earth'. Samuel, R. and Thompson, P. (1990) 'Introduction', in Samuel, R. and Thompson, P. (eds.) op cit. p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Daniels, S. (1989) 'Marxism, Culture and the Duplicity of Landscape', in Peet, R. & Thrift, N. (eds.) *New Models in Geography*, Vol. 2 London: Unwin Hyman, p. 196-220; 218; see also, Duncan, J. & Duncan, N. (1988) '(Re)reading the Landscape', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 6 p. 117-126.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen Daniels has noted how landscape has articulated versions of English national identity. Daniels, S. (1991) 'Envisioning England', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 17 (1) p. 95-99; Daniels, S. (1994) *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States*, Polity Press: Oxford. Meanwhile, Duncan and Ley have pointed out how the ostensibly rational, scientific practice of cartography cannot be separated from the cultural, social and political relations of the society to which it is rooted. Maps are not apolitical, in their very creation and depiction they are loaded with meaning. Duncan, J. and Ley, D. (1993) 'Introduction: Representing the Place of Culture', in Duncan, J. and Ley, D. (eds.) *Place/Culture/Representation*, London: Routledge, p. 1-24.

<sup>30</sup> Cosgrove, D. and Daniels, S. (1988) op cit. p. 1; Barnes, T. J. and Duncan, J. S. (1991) 'Introduction: Writing Worlds', in Barnes, T.J. and Duncan, J.S. (eds.) *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape*, London: Routledge, p. 1-17; Quoniam, S.

signifiers, helping us, the interpreters, to form convictions and to construct our own version of 'reality'. Empirical sources of information can be usefully combined with evidence previously discounted due to its inherent bias or presumed irrelevance. While my work is responsive to the messages bound up in previously unconsidered 'texts', I am also conscious that competing ideologies are not restricted to metaphorical domains. The thesis does not therefore, eschew evidence of actual changes to the physical geography of the Highlands. The environment was not simply an arena of symbolic contestation but one of social action. The artificially maintained wilderness of the sporting estate, the ordered recreative space of the national forest reserve, the sublimity of the hydro-electric experience in mountain surroundings and the experimental arcadian small-holding, all left very real imprints and these shall not be ignored.

It is imperative that none of these processes of inscription are treated as though they occurred in isolation. Landscapes after all, do not exist in a vacuum but are continually encoded with relations of power.<sup>31</sup> While cultural geographers have revealed how conscious attempts to dominate meaning have made full use of a range of textual, (if at times consciously ephemeral) media, of consequence too is the adversarial struggle to 'master space' recently ascribed to in political geography.<sup>32</sup> Although references to the 'intrinsically geographical practices of disciplining, subjugating, exploiting and developing places' hint at a more brutally invasive and physical tradition, the notion of territorial mastery as a means of control is still worthy of attention.<sup>33</sup>

The Highlands were the arena for a dynamic process in which oppositional forces sought to redress perceived imbalances in the distribution of power and authority by fashioning entirely new equilibria. That one landscape vision occupied a position of dominance over those constructed by rival groups, introduces an as yet unexamined political dimension to the scene. The imposition of a value system based on sporting and feudal securities was keenly disputed and resolutions, conciliatory or otherwise, had to be sought. I have found the notion of hegemony, originally developed by Antonio Gramsci, a useful means to articulate these themes. The recognition in Gramscian theory that cultural and social forces impinge on dominant and subordinate classes in society, in addition to the

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(1988) 'A Painter, Geographer in Arizona', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 6 (1) p. 3-15.

<sup>31</sup> Cosgrove, D. (1994) 'Terrains of Power', *Times Higher Education Supplement*, March 11 p. 24.

<sup>32</sup> Gregson has warned of the dangers geographers court when discourse retreats into the enclosed space of pure academic discussion and divorces itself from reading a world of human environments. Gregson, N. (1993) 'The Initiative': Delimiting or Deconstructing Social Geography?', *Progress in Human Geography*, 17 (4) p. 525-530.

<sup>33</sup> Agnew, J.A. and Corbridge, S. (1995) *Mastering Space: Hegemony, Territory and International Political Economy*, Routledge: London, p. xi.

political and economic agencies traditionally associated with Marxist thought, is compatible with my own analysis of the tussle for control in the assembly of a new Highland order.<sup>34</sup> While the application of hegemonic theory is pressed no further here, the idea is explored consistently throughout the text.

### Author and Authority: A Case for Conflicting Voices ?

Having established that debate on the Highlands was characterised by competing voices each contributing to moral, political and cultural dialogues, the effective representation of these voices, and the articulation of their visions, raises a number of methodological issues. While considerable store has been placed in the construction of a thesis which follows no single dynamic and does not seek to create a totalising, chronological history, working in such a pluralist spirit is not unproblematic. My position, as author, and as executor and narrator of divergent landscape ideologies, presents a number of ethical dilemmas, most notably the identification of a satisfactory resolution on the politics of (mis)representation and a considered stance on the place of personal politics in research.

An informed understanding of individual biases, political dispositions and public or private agendas among latter-day personalities, organisations and institutions aids the development of any historical synthesis. To achieve this the authority of historic texts and their authors must continually be placed in question, while explanations must be sought for the absence, as well as the presence, of certain knots of information. By taking personal commentaries at face value or automatically assuming descriptions to be objective 'truths', without careful consideration of the political or social context in which they were created, the researcher runs the risk of confirming historical hierarchies of power and further suppressing submerged narratives. The apparent absence of native opinion on many of the developments proposed for the inter-war Highlands is an issue which I encountered during archival investigations. Did the lack of evidence suggest local apathy, a shortage of outlets for written comment or reflect deeper social inhibitions and economic dependencies inherent to the feudal landowning system? Even with the identification of useful material I had to question the extent to which it was constitutive or reflective of indigenous feeling. Only through consistently problematizing archival sources, resisting the temptation to prioritise without enquiry and by carefully considering wider discourses such as dominant

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<sup>34</sup> Duncan and Duncan have noted that when landscape ideologies are 'constructed by interpretative communities...they frequently, but not always, reflect hegemonic value systems'. Duncan, J. and Duncan, N. (1988) *op cit.* p. 120. I am also informed by James Joll's acknowledgement that 'it is easier for the non-Marxist to conduct a dialogue with Gramsci than with any other Marxist writer of the twentieth-century'. Joll, J. (1977) *Gramsci*, London: Collins, p. 112.

national mythologies, imagined cultural traditions and popular literary trends, could effective conclusions be drawn. Assumed gradations of authority in historical evidence are not the only matter with which the researcher must contend.

While in theory, distance from the period in question might well afford me, the researcher, a degree of authorial impartiality, several other determinants impinge on historical analysis. As author I am obliged to be self-reflexive and problematize my own positionality and politics within the context of the thesis. Cultural geographers have begun to address this 'crisis of authority' which afflicts much work in the discipline by challenging the authenticity of traditional research practices such as the assumed objectivity of scientific methodology and 'fieldwork' techniques. The recent trend for geographers to immerse themselves within their research has informed my own understanding of the issues raised in representing 'reality', the instability of accepted 'truths' and the presumed authority of the author.<sup>35</sup> Prescient too has been the deconstruction of the writing process by Cosgrove and Domosh who note how, as practitioners, 'we are obliged to share authority with both subject and reader, but equally cannot evade the authority of authorship'.<sup>36</sup>

While the idea of evasion can have rather negative connotations, Crang has considered one means to transpose, or at least diffuse, authority in geographical writing through the practical application of the concept of 'polyphony'. As a compositional textual strategy polyphony prioritises no voice or single stream of thought, instead devoting page space to all denominations. A polyphonic text can, by being multivocal rather than univocal, reject meta-narratives and the search for rhetorical truths, both objectives which have tended to pre-occupy geographers in the past.<sup>37</sup> When used as a steering textual trope, polyphonic writing seemed of some relevance to this project, firstly to determine a fluent narrative structure and secondly to unravel some of the difficulties faced in representational politics. Obvious parallels exist between the theory and my conceptualisation of a concrete historical situation. While the four central chapters

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<sup>35</sup> Pyle, S. (1991) 'Practising Interpretative Geography', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 16 p. 458-469.

<sup>36</sup> Cosgrove, D. and Domosh, M. (1993) 'Author and Authority: Writing the New Cultural Geography', in Duncan, J. and Ley, D. (eds.) op cit. p. 25-38.

<sup>37</sup> Crang has argued that the term 'polyphony', which originates in the world of music and can be defined as 'many sounds' or 'many voices', has had its two major components retained during transfer to the sphere of social science: 'that it combines simultaneously many equally weighted lines or voices each of which has an independent merit (each of significance in itself); but it does so within a coherent texture where the lines or voices are interdependent. It is this tension of unity and disunity, independence and interdependence, that supposedly provides the creative space in which polyphonic textual compositions can be constructed'. Crang, P. (1992) 'The Politics of Polyphony: Reconfigurations in Geographical Authority', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 10 p. 527-549; 530.

deal with specific visions and work at an independent level, all are intersected by familiar personalities and themes, and are interdependent with contemporaneous landscape ideologies. The dissonance between voices articulating different visions is itself presented as a creative force, identities being formulated in direct relation to each other. Thus in accordance with the central tenet of polyphony, the chapter structure re-creates the simultaneity and interplay of contesting perspectives.

However, polyphony can only partially divest authorial control. For example, the categorisation of a homogenous landscape vision was not arbitrary and necessitated my participation. Having considered Crang's discussion of ethnographic techniques such as co-authorship and the inclusion of dialogue as a means to secure a position of impartiality, it becomes clear that as a textual strategy polyphony does have limitations when applied to historical research. To compose different historical narratives without analysis and critical comment would be self-defeating. Instead, when the narrative demands it, I demonstrate understanding, admiration, humour, (dis)respect, disbelief and deprecation in appropriate measure. While, almost inevitably, my own moral stance will emerge between the lines, I have consciously refrained from directing the reader towards a specific narrative or history. Indeed, although many of the issues which emerged during the inter-war period resonate to the present day, any direct personal statement is withheld until the conclusion. This political disclaimer aside, it is hoped that the text allows a multiplicity of contesting and yet interlocking voices to be heard and a series of iconographic landscapes envisioned.

In clarifying the politics of representation it is worth noting that the internal dynamics of the research process, (involving the choice of source materials and availability of archives, their necessarily selective transcription, the subsequent interpretation and editing of collated information and finally its assimilation into a broad framework), while being framed by externalities such as the constraints of time and budget, require a host of subjective judgements to be made by the author.<sup>38</sup> While the implausibility of an objective stance has already been accepted, the addition of the researcher's own interpretation of historical events, and further glosses added by a consuming readership, can culminate in texts 'escaping' from their authors, leaving original meanings heavily diluted. Ironically, the misrepresentation of opinion, and the removal of analysis from a specified context, is something which I, as a relative novice, have experienced during the course of my doctoral research.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> A synthesis of the problems to be encountered with regards the collation of evidence and its interpretation can be found in: Baker, A.R.H. (1995) 'The dead don't answer questionnaires: researching and writing historical geography', (unpublished essay).

<sup>39</sup> 'Landowners "use deer stalking to control Scotland's heritage"', *The Guardian*, January 8 1997 p. 5; Hawkes, N. (1997) 'Deerstalking "a Highland myth"', *The Times*, January 8 p.6. An attempt

While editorial decisions and a degree of self-censorship are absolutely necessary, an ill-informed piece of work, or worse still, obvious examples of misrepresentation, can be avoided if the same issue is approached successively through a range of different sources. The steady accretion of evidence enables the production of a well-rounded and multi-layered narrative. As I discovered, this can gather momentum through logical progression, at other times by exploring links offered by prosopographical investigation and on innumerable occasions by happening on information through speculation or sheer chance. To ensure as comprehensive a survey as possible conventional sources were trawled but attention was also paid to less conformist texts from popular culture. Organisational archives provided an excellent point of departure and merited a number of return visits. Cross-referencing the holdings of voluntary organisations such as the National Trust for Scotland, Association for the Preservation of Rural Scotland, Scottish Land and Property Federation, Scottish Youth Hostels Association and Scottish Rights of Way Society was a thoroughly profitable, if painstaking, business. Other sources traditionally associated with historical research - parliamentary reports, annual reports, private memoirs and letters - were gradually introduced. The inter-war period also proved notable for an impressive array of published material on the Highlands with a breadth of scope which helped open entirely new avenues of enquiry. In dealing with prominent events, (the hydro-electric debates being the most notable example), provincial newspapers such as the *Oban Times* proved particularly useful. Their juxtaposition of national debate and local gossip allowed valuable insights to be made into complex political situations. All the while collated empirical information was supplemented with evidence from photographs, cartoons, magazines, advertisements, promotional material, novels, puns and poetry which revealed new angles, and subversive twists, on familiar events.<sup>40</sup>

### Telling Tales: The Geographer as Storyteller

Of critical importance at the outset of this research project was a decision on the scale of arena into which the thesis would be pitched. Working to an expansive agenda and operating on the margins of a number of allied disciplines, the geographer is I think, perfectly equipped to assume the mantle of storyteller. If

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to redress misrepresented arguments was made, with no little humour, in: Johnstone, A. (1997) 'Stalker and walker fight a land war', *The Glasgow Herald*, January 9 p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> Traditional sources are listed in: Whyte, I.D. and Whyte, K.A. (1981) *Sources for Scottish Historical Geography: An Introductory Guide*, Institute of British Geographers Historical Geography Research Series 6. An excellent example of the profitable use to which materials from popular culture can be put is: Samuels, R. (1994) *Theatres of Memory, Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, London: Verso.

dangerous pretensions towards grandeur are carefully avoided, then such a multi-faceted approach can open out broad vistas, allowing the widest of connections to be made. The adoption of this schema breaks clear from a tradition of historical research which, while without question producing scholarly pieces of work, often follows such a tight temporal or spatial rationale in the quest for incremental additions of knowledge that much potential worth is left unfulfilled. Indeed, while I could quite conceivably have written an alternative version of this thesis by limiting myself to a social and environmental history of one specific locality in the Highlands, this strategy might well have constrained the search for more sweeping themes at the level of Scottish and British society.

Personal preferences also held sway. Although rhetorical, Chris Harvie's contention that 'history is about the writer as much as the subject' is one with which I wholeheartedly concur.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, his case for new research on Scotland to be 'civic oriented, and of much more than antiquarian value to the community' is entirely laudable.<sup>42</sup> In attempting to make an engaging contribution to historiographies of the Highlands, I am further informed by Samuel and Thompson's call for a new sensitive approach to myths. The challenge to foster an 'active relationship between past and present, subjective and objective, poetic and political' encouraged my creative use of stories, tales, fables, memories, images, rumours, 'half-truths', 'untruths', anecdotes, and the activities and eccentricities of vivid personalities.<sup>43</sup> Fortunately, the inter-war Highlands were short of none of these. At the risk of laying myself open to accusations of narcissism, a small piece of anecdotal evidence demonstrates, I think, the rewards to be reaped from telling stories and through that the cyclical nature of the research process. Following a, very brief, mention of my research in the *West Highland Free Press* I received a request for a copy of a recently delivered paper. Having dispatched the latest draft I was both touched and heartened by a letter of thanks and reminiscence which soon returned from Mrs Ishbel Campbell, an elderly lady of crofting descent living in Glen Roy, Lochaber. For this small piece of correspondence alone, the efforts of research seemed entirely worthwhile. It is not my intention here to depict narration as either a benign or whimsical activity, but to express the hope that in producing a doctoral thesis a wider audience can still be appealed to. At the same time, in assembling such a chronicle it is necessary to remain constantly on guard as hidden dangers await Scotland's ingenuous storytellers.

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<sup>41</sup> Harvie, C. (1991) op cit. p. 82.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 86.

<sup>43</sup> Samuel, R. and Thompson, P. op cit. p. 5.

In an examination of plurality and postmodernism in relation to Scottish identities, Colin McArthur has expressed doubts over the ability of the Scots populace to bury the ghost of cultural traditions past. While playfulness in the form of irony, parody, re-invention and other reflexive impulses might increasingly characterise our representations of cultural currents such as Tartanry or Kailyardism, McArthur fears that 'the autonomy of individuals' has been exaggerated and still places considerable store in forces lurking deep 'in the Scottish discursive unconscious'.<sup>44</sup> Demonstrating this argument he points to seemingly rational commentators who, when dealing with the past, 'succumb to powerful and historically deep-seated pre-existing narratives which shape the tone and substance of their work'.<sup>45</sup> 'We tend to be written by the dominant Scottish narrative rather than ourselves writing stories about Scotland', McArthur has pointedly remarked.<sup>46</sup> In matters Highland, he identifies an all-consuming 'elegaic discourse', expressed in historical threnodies evoking images and metaphors of loss, mourning, solitude, silence and glorious defeat.<sup>47</sup> There is, I think, considerable capital in McArthur's cultural critique and his unapologetic attempts to subvert traditional accounts of popular history.<sup>48</sup> A fine line exists between impassioned storytelling and a single-track lament. Highland narratives, free from plaintive and emotional language, liberate the author and present opportunities for the reconfiguration of accepted truths. I have tried therefore, to produce a considered text which does not confuse dramatic and melodramatic effect.

While the foregoing methodological provisos might hint at a storyteller tiptoeing gingerly through the text, there are some more robust and less problematic authorial contributions worthy of comment. Amid the recent clamour for plurality in writing, Beveridge and Turnbull have stressed how progressive responses to trying urban conditions in Scotland, most notably social histories of popular cultural movements, remain as yet unexplored.<sup>49</sup> A specific plea made for

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<sup>44</sup> McArthur, C. (1993) op cit. p. 101; 105.

<sup>45</sup> McArthur, C. (1994) 'Culloden: A Pre-Emptive Strike', *Scottish Affairs*, 5 p. 97-126; 98.

<sup>46</sup> McArthur, C. (1993) op cit. p. 102.

<sup>47</sup> McArthur cites John Prebble's hugely popular historiographical works as texts which employ the elegaic discourse. I sense that similar tendencies are present in David Craig's more recent reconstructions of popular Clearance memories. See: Prebble, J. (1967) *Culloden*, London: Penguin; Prebble, J. (1968) *Glencoe*, London: Penguin; Prebble, J. (1969) *The Highland Clearances*, London: Penguin; Craig, D. (1990) *On the Crofter's Trail: In Search of the Clearance Highlanders*, London: Jonathan Cape.

<sup>48</sup> See, McArthur, C. (1994) op cit.

<sup>49</sup> Beveridge, C. and Turnbull, R. (1997) (eds.) op cit. p. 53-55. The authors' claim that leading historiographies of Scotland have been dominated by tropes of urban malaise and human deprivation, although on occasion splenetic, is worthy of attention. A critical finger is pointed at the works of established historians: Mitchison, R. (1982) *A History of Scotland*, Methuen: London; Checkland, S. and Checkland, O. (1984) *Industry and Ethos: Scotland 1832-1914*, Edinburgh: John Donald; Harvie, C. (1987) *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes*, London: Arnold. The most



an investigation into 'the outdoor revolution' of the inter-war years is one which my work addresses directly.<sup>50</sup> My examination of recreative culture, and the investigation made into campaigns for rural re-colonisation, also correspond with Withers' request for fresh inquiries to be made into new analytical sites of geographical discourse.<sup>51</sup> Popular geographical knowledges, in these cases the means by which people came to know the landscape and their country, are not necessarily linked to recognised academic or educational institutions. During the 1930's the Highland landscape was envisioned as a natural laboratory of learning available to thousands keen to explore and understand Scotland. In such a manner, I hope to amplify forgotten or marginalised voices.

Identifying a means to articulate previously stifled voices is also a matter of concern for James Hunter, the Highland historian. When 'dealing with landscape and environmental issues as they specifically affect the Highlands' Hunter has noted a tendency among fellow historians to 'dwell much more on essentially external perceptions of the region than on how it has been - and still is - regarded by its own inhabitants'.<sup>52</sup> This disregard for the Highland population's cultural inheritance, he claims, has driven a deeper schism between established constructions of 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Conscious of McArthur's warning about romanticised laments but aware too of inadvertently upholding a tradition of 'othering', in designing my research methodology I was determined to present native opinion equably.<sup>53</sup> This task was not simple and remains a thorny issue. While unexamined sources most probably exist, I was often unable to uncover detailed local comment on issues affecting landscape and environment.<sup>54</sup> The urge to articulate the value-systems or cultural histories of a particular social grouping need not necessarily lead directly toward the popular theme of working-

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vituperative attacks are saved for: Smout, T.C. (1986) *A Century of the Scottish People, 1830-1950*, Glasgow: Collins.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 53-55. See also: Lorimer, H. (1997) 'Happy Hostelling in the Highlands: Nationhood, Citizenship and the Inter-War Youth Movement', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 113 (1) p. 42-51.

<sup>51</sup> Withers, C.W.J. (1997) op cit. p. 4-5.

<sup>52</sup> Hunter cites the following paper as a prominent example of research which has fallen into this trap: Smout, T.C. (1991) 'The Highlands and the Roots of Green Consciousness, 1750-1990', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 76 p. 237-263; Hunter, J. (1994) 'Everyone Who Matters is Dead and Gone, (unpublished paper) p. 16; see also, Hunter, J. (1995) *The Other Side of Sorrow: Nature and People in the Scottish Highlands*, Edinburgh: Mainstream.

<sup>53</sup> I am alert to the fact that multiple social and cultural identities existed within my broad conception of a native Highland population. Certain island communities viewed themselves as separate and distinctive from the mainland population while two divergent religious faiths were a powerful means of personal and collective identification. Related remarks are included in: Agnew, J. (1996) 'Liminal Travellers: Hebrideans at Home and Away', *Scotlands*, 3 (1) p. 32-41.

<sup>54</sup> Jim Hunter has suggested, in conversation, that this lack could be attributed to a range of factors; the loss of the Highlands' 'angry young men' through out-migration and war losses; that by the 1930's a pervasive mood of melancholic resignation had taken hold of the population; and that economic dependence often repressed forthright comment on matters such as the system of landownership.

class under-representation. My investigation into the cultural politics of Highland landowners and their exclusive tenantry emerged because there appeared to be few treatments placing this distinctive community in the spotlight. The validity of common cultural presumptions about the laird and the gentleman-sportsman needed to be tested.

To set the scene for the chapters to follow, the final section in this introduction briefly places inter-war Scotland in its political and cultural context.

### Where From Here ? In Search of a New Scotland

If the publisher George Malcolm Thomsen's discomfort with 'these flustered, disillusioned, unscrupulous and out-at-elbows 1920's', was typical of the views of many critics and commentators in post-war Scotland, a decade previously, the mood had been a great deal more optimistic.<sup>55</sup> During the war several Scots had been at the forefront of critical thought on new structures and orders in social organisation, combining sociological, scientific and geographical knowledges to considerable effect. As editor and contributor to 'The Making of the Future' series, the renowned polymath Patrick Geddes was the inspiration behind this intellectual reaction, devising an expansive agenda for the social, political and economic reconstruction of Britain and Western Europe.<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile in the context of protracted conflict, the geographers Marion Newbigin and Alan Ogilvie were busily occupied critically re-thinking Europe's geo-political map. All were in a position to contribute to a developing discourse on the future of the nation state and the common civic identification with nationhood in modern society. On occasion, the focus of these geographers' work was turned back on Scotland itself.<sup>57</sup> Influential in the emerging and pan-disciplinarian school of British regionalists, their concerns lay in the interdependent relations fostered between people and environment.<sup>58</sup>

If it was translated at all, the confident and progressive nature of this counselling seemed to rapidly dissipate in post-war Scotland. As Finlay has noted, during the 1920's and 1930's Scottish society was laid low by an acute crisis of

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<sup>55</sup> Thomson, G.M. (1927) *Caledonia or the Future of the Scots*, London: Kegan Paul, p. 9.

<sup>56</sup> Branford, V. and Geddes, P. (1917) *The Coming Polity: A Study in Appreciation*, London: Williams and Norgate; Branford, V and Geddes, P. (1919) *Our Social Inheritance*, London: Williams and Norgate. See also: Fleure, H.J. (1918) *Human Geography in Western Europe*, London: Williams and Norgate; Branford, V. (1923) *Science and Sanctity: A Study in the Scientific Approach to Unity*, London: Williams and Norgate.

<sup>57</sup> See: Maddrell, A.M.C. (1997) 'Scientific Discourse and the Geographical Work of Marion Newbigin', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 113 (1) p. 33-41; Newbigin, M.I. (1917) 'Race and Nationality', *Geographical Journal*, 50 p. 313-335; Newbigin, M. (1920) *A New Geography of Scotland*, London: Herbert Russell.

<sup>58</sup> Matless, D. (1992) 'Regional Surveys and Local Knowledges: the geographical imagination in Britain, 1918-1939', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 17 p. 464-480.

identity.<sup>59</sup> The ontological concerns of a small nation in a changing global order were many. The threat of increasing economic and political dislocation in British and imperial contexts was troubling.<sup>60</sup> No less problematic was the prospect of an economy enormously reliant on heavy industries laid bare to the unselective forces of depression and increased foreign competition. The downgrading of Scotland's martial contribution, perceived as one of its great contributions to British statecraft, further eroded masculinist bravado on the international stage. A fear that the nation, with a population already depleted through war losses, was losing its youth to the Dominions, where the citizenry were comparably vibrant in outlook, only added to the old-world gloom.

Internally, society was undoubtedly on the move, although few felt that this was for the better. With the influence of the church on the wane, it seemed to conservative observers that the cornerstones of society were being placed increasingly in question. In the towns and cities of the central belt standards of living had sunk to an appalling level. Dilapidated, congested and squalid tenements often represented the only available form of accommodation. New building programmes were slow to progress and inadequately funded. In combination these factors produced Britain's most acute housing problem. These housing conditions were perfect breeding grounds for familiar social evils. Poverty, disease and deprivation were rife. The steady flow of Irish immigrants into this appalling situation only increased tensions and deepened sectarian divides, particularly among the industrial communities of the west. In the countryside, matters were little better. Depopulation continued apace in many districts, the Highlands and Islands suffering worst. With a complete absence of social and economic opportunities in rural regions, many rural labourers had little choice but to emigrate. Meanwhile, the continued lack of government investment and simple economics left Scottish agriculture dwarfed by the grain fields of the Dominions.

Amid this turmoil of activity, none of it apparently working in Scotland's favour, politicians and intellectuals were prone to expressions of angst and bouts of introspection. Multi-disciplinarian essay collections were a popular outlet for opinion on the possible means to reconstruct shattered national confidence.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Finlay, R. J. (1994) 'National Identity in Crisis: Politicians, Intellectuals and the 'End of Scotland', 1920-1939', *History*, 79 (252) p. 242-59; Finlay, R.J. (1994) 'Controlling the Past: Scottish Historiography and Scottish Identity in the 19th and 20th Centuries', *Scottish Affairs*, 9 p. 127-142.

<sup>60</sup> Finlay, R.J. (1992) 'For or Against? Scottish Nationalists and the British Empire, 1919-1939', *Scottish Historical Review*, LXXI p. 184-206.

<sup>61</sup> David Cleghorn Thomson noted that 'books and articles about her (Scotland's) welfare and estate are once more in vogue'. Thomson, D.C. (ed.) (1932) *Scotland in Quest of Her Youth*, Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, p. 1.

Besides treatises on possible political, economic and infrastructural improvements, these texts tapped deep into the nation's collective psyche. Aesthetic and cultural conditions were surveyed, with reflections on artistic, literary and architectural developments. During the 1930's Routledge books commissioned a handful of writers for their 'Voices of Scotland' series while the Batsford publishing house produced several texts on Scotland's landscapes and aspects of national identity.<sup>62</sup> George Malcolm Thomson's first musings on Scotland's plight were a number in the 'Today and Tomorrow' series. Meanwhile, David Cleghorn Thomson's edited volume 'Scotland in Quest of Her Youth' coincided with a number of provocative radio broadcasts. The open forum on Scotland's possible future was intriguingly divisive. Some pessimistic voices doubted the future viability of the country in its present state.<sup>63</sup> Traditionalists from the bastions of Scots conservatism stood foursquare in defence of the British constitution.<sup>64</sup> A spectrum of futures was discussed among a small but disproportionately vocal nationalist lobby, some of whom looked further afield to continental Europe for their templates.<sup>65</sup>

As this crisis of identity hung over an unsettled population, debate was set to run and run. While for some commentators the nation's destiny hung delicately in the balance, for others impending cultural and political collapse could be averted by a return to traditional and familiar values.

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<sup>62</sup> The Routledge series contained the following titles: Muir, E. (1936) *Scott and Scotland: The Predicament of the Scottish Writer*, London: Routledge; Gunn, N.M. (1935) *Whisky and Scotland: A Practical and Spiritual Survey*, London: Routledge; Neill, A.S. (1935) *Is Scotland Educated?*, London: Routledge; Power, W. (1935) *Literature and Oatmeal: What Literature has meant to Scotland*, London: Routledge; Linklater, E. (1935) *The Lion and the Unicorn: or, what England has meant to Scotland*, London: Routledge; McClure, V. (1935) *Scotland's Inner Man: A History of Scots Food and Cookery*, London: Routledge. Although commissioned and written, Hugh MacDiarmid's 'Red Scotland' was never actually published. The Batsford books were as follows: Batsford, H. and Fry, C. (1934) *The Face of Scotland*, London: B.T. Batsford; Blake, G. (1938) *The Heart of Scotland*, London: B.T. Batsford; Scott-Moncrieff, G. (ed.) (1938) *The Stones of Scotland*, London: B.T. Batsford; Scott-Moncrieff, G. (1939) *The Lowlands of Scotland*, London: B.T. Batsford; Quigley, H. (1936) *The Highlands of Scotland*, London: B.T. Batsford.

<sup>63</sup> Thomson, G.M. (1927) op cit; Haldane, E. (1933) *The Scotland of Our Fathers: A Study of Scottish Life in the 19th Century*, London: Alexander Maclehose.

<sup>64</sup> See for example: Dicey, A.V. and Rait, R.S. (1920) *Thoughts on the Union between England and Scotland*, Macmillan: London; Rait, R.S. (1924) *The Parliaments of Scotland*, Maclehose, Jackson and Co: London; Duke of Atholl (1932) *A Scotsman's Heritage*, London; Stirling-Maxwell, J. (1938) 'Scotland To-Day: Ancient Romance and Modern Resource, *Country Life*, LXXXIV (2165) p. i-iv.

<sup>65</sup> Grieve, C.M. (1927) *Albyn or the Future of Scotland*, Kegan Paul: London; Gibb, A.D. (1930) *Scotland in Eclipse*, London: Humphrey Toulmin; Thomson, G.M. (ed.) (1930) *The Kingdom of Scotland Restored*, London: Humphrey Toulmin; Bell, W. (1930) *Rip Van Scotland*, London: Cecil Palmer; Thomson, D.C. (ed.) (1932) op cit; MacEwen, A. (1932) *The Thistle and the Rose: Scotland's Problem Today*, Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd; Power, W. (1934) *Scotland and the Scots*, Edinburgh: Porpoise Press; Thomson, G.M. (1935) *Scotland - That Distressed Area*, Edinburgh: Porpoise Press; Scott-Moncrieff, G. (ed.) (1935) *Scottish Country*, Edinburgh: Wishart Books; Torrence, J. (1937) *Scotland's Dilemma: Province or Nation?*, Edinburgh: Belhaven Press; Maclehose, A. (1937) *The Scotland of Our Sons*, Glasgow: Maclehose; Burns, T. (1937) *Plan for Scotland*, London: London Scots Self-Government Committee.

## Chapter One

### Reconstructing the Monolith: Sporting Preservation and the Highland Lairdocracy



THIS DAY A STAG MUST DIE?

## Introduction

This chapter examines the evolving cultural construction of the Highland feudal landownership system and with it the continued existence of an exclusive geography founded on the retention of a distinctive, yet artificial, sporting environment. Although already occupying a position of considerable dominance in rural society, faced with mounting public opposition, the sporting ideology had to be defended. The events of the inter-war period are shown to be critical in defining a powerful role for the landowning community in modern society and the associated re-invention of the emptied, wilderness landscape as a Scottish landscape icon.

The first half of the chapter explores the legitimization of the Highland sporting estate and its specific cultural codes and hierarchies. The region's modern environmental history and context having been established, attention focuses on the various ploys used by the landed elite and privileged sporting tenantry to propagate a selective myth of their own historicity and legitimacy amid the Highland landscape. The 'lairdocracy's' referents varied in source and scale, ranging from the imperial down to the local, and from communal ethics to the morality of the individual.

The work demonstrates how a melange of romantic legend and imagined tradition were deployed in defence of the existing division of land, its primary use as a boundless wild game reserve and the much revered sporting way of life. Central to the entire experience was deer-stalking, a pursuit with patrician and regal associations, and indulged in by some of the most powerful figures in British society. The celebratory mythology of the upper-class sportsman is drawn upon to illustrate how the selective appropriation of native Gaelic folklore and mysticism lent probity to this cliquish activity. A detailed examination of sporting literature reveals how greater sanction could be sought through the pervasive cult of masculinity nurtured among stalking's masonic participants. The pursuit of the red deer was a *rites de passages*; leading to manhood, to civility, to imperial adventure and military excellence. Informed by recent post-colonial literature, the chapter examines the arguments posited by Highland lairds and their feudal associates that the strict social hierarchy fundamental to the game industry was useful as a civilising force in a peripheral or 'backward' society. The relations fostered between a dominant sporting fraternity and dependent local communities reinforced established assumptions concerning the region's perceived condition of marginality and its social history of benevolent paternalism.

The second half of the chapter details the emergence of economic, and more particularly, environmental arguments in support of the sporting landscape. Advocates pressed the fiscal advantages accrued from sporting practices with

vigour, despite a definite downturn in post-war economic fortunes. The creation, however haphazard, of modern sporting land management regimes and adoption of scientific method was another response to changing times. Crucially however, the establishment of an institutionalised landscape preservation and heritage appreciation movement provided the most effective vehicle for landowning opinion. Over several sections the work demonstrates how, by directing the organisational policies of the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) and Association for the Preservation of Rural Scotland (APRS), leading representatives of the landed elite identified an opportunity to re-fashion their public appearance in the face of mounting criticism over the monopolistic control of Highland property rights. Critical to this discussion of societal reconfigurations and the search for influence in modern public life are relations linking power, authority and knowledge. Embedded in Scottish civic society and making emotive appeals to patriotism and a common sense of nationhood, the NTS and APRS constructed a specific vision for the landscape. Ultimately, the persuasive rhetoric of the lairdocracy would evolve into their sophisticated self-portrayal as social stewards for the countryside. The artificially barren and de-populated deer forest became an iconic symbol of Scotland's protected natural environment. The emergence of this beneficent and custodial form of human ecology through the socially restrictive channels of the sporting industry, and its refinement in the popularised heritage and preservation movement, is the major theme drawn through the chapter. As will become apparent, the protean disguises assumed by the lairdocracy retained, for a considerable time, a pervasive air of impenetrability.

While orthodox representations of the landed and the titled have tended to dwell upon their supposedly stoical, trenchant nature and unchanging qualities, this chapter is informed by recent considerations of their societal position which have contributed to a more complex, and disputed, picture. Thompson's contention that the elite have demonstrated remarkable levels of resilience and endurance during the course of the twentieth century stands in contrast to Cannadine's celebrated theses tracing their swift and inevitable spiral of decline.<sup>1</sup> With specific reference to Scotland, McCrone and Morris have since stressed the evolving and transforming nature of the laird's powers, arguing for a more subtle consideration of events than has previously been displayed.<sup>2</sup> In a similar vein, the work of Callander, Wightman

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<sup>1</sup> Thompson, F.M.L. (1990) 'English Landed Society in the 20th century: Property Collapse and Survival', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, XL p.1-24; Thompson, F.M.L. (1991) 'English Landed Society in the 20th century: New Poor and New Rich', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, I p.1-20. Cannadine, D. (1990) *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, London: New Haven; and Cannadine, D. (1990) *Aspects of Aristocracy*, London: Croom Helm.

<sup>2</sup> McCrone, D. and Morris, A. (1994) 'Lords and Heritages: The Transformation of the Great Lairds of Scotland', in Devine, T.M. (ed.) *Scottish Elites*, Edinburgh: John Donald, p. 170-189.

and Cramb has highlighted the continued existence of feudal relations in Scotland's modern landownership system and the generic traditions which it has retained.<sup>3</sup> Developing these themes and tracing back the roots of present day seigniorial power this chapter uncovers the cultural construction of a community which has often been ignored in favour of Highland narratives looking at history from the bottom-up.<sup>4</sup>

The use of the term 'lairdocracy' in the text should not be mistaken as an attempt to homogenise the varied membership of the Highland feudal elite; a sensitivity to difference remains critical to the flow of the chapter, and indeed the thesis. Nevertheless in a considered analysis of the assumed title of 'laird', McCrone and Morris cogently conclude that ambiguities over the nomenclature of proprietorship actually represent 'an important ideological resource for landowners'. Their choice of language partially explaining the manner in which 'they have sought to legitimate themselves in a society which has frequently been very hostile towards them'. It is noted that 'in much the same way as at the British level, the term "aristocracy" emerged as a status description from the early nineteenth-century, glossing over legal distinctions between the peerage and the wider class of landowners...the umbrella term "lairds" serves important ideological purposes, binding the small landowner to the mighty lord.'<sup>5</sup> The common identity of the 'laird' provided Highland landowners with a powerful public image, affording them the timeless qualities of tradition, unity and fortitude.

### Romantic Myths and Realities

Cultural geographers have recently claimed that, 'Places in the Western World are socially constructed with a considerable intensity of nostalgia as consciously and unconsciously we create and recreate them with a sense of history. History is not just the traces of the past, but is the outcome of a dialogue between the present and the past: the present itself being many-voiced'.<sup>6</sup> The manner in which we choose to imagine, remember and forget are crucial to this social construction of place. Such

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See also, McCrone, D. Morris, A. and Keily, R. (1995) *Scotland the Brand: The Making of Scottish Heritage*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Callander, R.F. (1987) *A Pattern of Landownership in Scotland: with particular reference to Aberdeenshire*, Finzean: Haughend Publications; Wightman, A. (1996) *Who Owns Scotland ?*, Edinburgh: Canongate; Cramb, A. (1996) *Who Owns Scotland Now ?*, Edinburgh: Mainstream.

<sup>4</sup> Notable exceptions can be found in: Cameron, E.A. (1994) 'The Political Influence of Highland Landowners: A Re-Assessment', *Northern Scotland*, 14 p. 27-47; Cameron, E.A. (1993) 'Ideology, Politics and the Highland Land Issue, 1886 to the 1920's', *Scottish Historical Review*, 72 p. 60-79; see also, Cameron, E.A. (1992) *Public Policy in the Scottish Highlands: Government, Politics and the Land Issue, 1886-1920's*, Unpublished PhD thesis, Glasgow University.

<sup>5</sup> McCrone, D. and Morris, A. (1994) op cit, p. 171.

<sup>6</sup> P. Shurmer-Smith and K. Hannam, (1994) *Worlds of Desire, realms of power: a cultural geography*, London: Edwin Arnold, p.45.



traits should not be restricted to contemporary scenarios however, for they have been prevalent throughout much of modern history.

It is also prescient to note how these cultural processes have been characterised by dynamic struggles waged for power, authority and legitimacy. The importance of 'tradition' in the social definition of a hegemonic culture was notably scrutinised by Williams who stated that, 'From a whole possible area of past and present, in a particular culture, certain meanings and practices are selected for emphasis and certain other meanings are excluded or neglected.' This process, as part of a wider social and cultural organisation, sought to ensure the dominance of a particular class. The link with the past offered 'a sense of predisposed continuity' and in turn 'a historical and cultural ratification of a contemporary order.'<sup>7</sup> Developing the theme, Hobsbawm has highlighted the invented nature of such traditions and posited the suggestion that they can belong to three overlapping genres, namely 'those establishing or symbolising social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities; those establishing or legitimating institutions, status or relations of authority; and those whose main purpose was socialisation, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behaviour.'<sup>8</sup> Although Samuels has since asserted that Marxist notions of a 'false consciousness', 'which ruling elites impose on the subaltern classes' have been overplayed in historical research, the merit of Hobsbawm's tri-partite categorisation remains apparent in a consideration of the inter-war situation in the Highlands and the assumed social role of the lairdocracy.<sup>9</sup>

In an attempt to legitimate their presence, ahead of several oppositional 'others', in the landscape and culture of the region, the landowning community and associated sporting lobby contrived to establish a highly selective reading of Highland history. By developing the Victorian predilection for the romantic and the mythical, this sporting elite appropriated, and in so doing, politicised an imaginary terrain of dreams, folklore and tradition. That they were able to do so is an achievement which requires some contextualisation, as their seizure of history was due in part to the relative paucity of historiographical research into Scotland's distant past.

Smiles has highlighted the rejection, by eighteenth and nineteenth century historians, of British ancient history in favour of the more cultured and sophisticated classical civilisations.<sup>10</sup> He cites Hugh Robertson, the most eminent

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<sup>7</sup> Williams, R. (1977) *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.116.

<sup>8</sup> Hobsbawm, E. (1983) 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions', in Hobsbawm, E. and Ranger, T. (eds.) *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.1-14.

<sup>9</sup> Samuels, R. (1994) *Theatres of Memory, Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*. London: Verso, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> Smiles, S. (1991) 'The Poetics of Pre-History', *Landscape Research*, 16 (2) p.3-7.

historian of the Scottish enlightenment, who in 1756 argued that 'Nations, as well as men, arrive at maturity by degrees, and the events, which happened during their infancy or early youth, cannot be recollected, and deserve not to be remembered'.<sup>11</sup> The lack of interest in the archaic past displayed by Britain's academics left the field of inquiry open to antiquarian enthusiasts who harboured no such elitist preconceptions. Their highly subjective suppositions allied to scanty archaeological explorations resulted in the development of a poetic and imaginative approach to the Celtic past. As Smiles has stressed, 'antiquarian method itself encouraged a close identification with the fragility of remains, the passage of time, the loss of human endeavour, in short, the pathos of the past'. The evolving taste for creative histories of heroic cultures was well illustrated by the huge popularity of the Ossianic epic during the late eighteenth century. These narrative traditions were augmented during the mid-nineteenth century by the romanticisation of the sublime Highland landscape and its inhabitants. Britain's educated classes sought a wilderness within their own bounds and living evidence of their primeval origins.<sup>12</sup> Referring to the literary, artistic and anthropological output of those who he deemed to be affected by this condition of "Balmorality", Pringle has claimed that:

*'For the specifics of historical events to be veiled successfully by a constructed past which celebrates sectional interests, the specifics of location, place and environment wherein these events occurred must similarly be veiled by the construction of a mythical geography. Both history and geography are re-presented in myth.'*<sup>13</sup>

The creative potential of Scotland's historic past was not exhausted by a dalliance with the Victorian monarchy and the novels of Sir Walter Scott. The subsequent exploitation of the Highlands as a vast wild game reserve provided further opportunities for cultural appropriation. The mythical, those narratives attached to unknown or folkloric histories, were perfect for manipulation by an elite class. By re-writing history on their own terms the sporting cognoscenti succeeded in associating themselves with the immemorial and immortal qualities of the natural Highland environment. Antiquity became a passive object open to exploitation by an informed elite who could allude to linkages between their own ancestry and the great civilisations of both northern and southern Europe. In such a manner both a legitimated identity and powerful level of social status could be gleaned from the archaic past.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Withers, C. (1992) 'The Historical Creation of the Scottish Highlands', in I. Donnachie and C. Whatley, (eds) *The Manufacture of Scottish History*, Edinburgh: Polygon.

<sup>13</sup> Pringle, T. (1988) 'The Privation of History: Landseer, Victoria and the Highland myth', in Cosgrove, D. and Daniels, S. *The Iconography of Landscape*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 142-161;

An initial illustration of this invented tradition can be found on the frontispiece of *The Celtic Monthly* (see figure 1). Within a legend depicting a rugged landscape of mountains, a Caledonian pine-skirted loch and a Pictish stone cross, lies the subtitle of the publication, 'an illustrated magazine for Highlanders'. Below this, covering the remainder of the page is an advertisement for army uniform and camp kit. In it, standing with military bearing, is the moustachioed figure of a British army officer. While the native menfolk of the Highlands certainly retained a long and distinguished history of martial service in the empire, most did not rise above the ranks of the lowly foot soldier. The imagery employed by this magazine was obviously targeted towards an altogether more eminent, select and aristocratic 'Highlander'. Thus rather paradoxically, large tracts of the populist Gaelic past became a territory upon which patrician designs were mapped out. The rhetoric of the clan as community, of a pervasive Gaelic heritage and an intuitive understanding of this distinctive culture was clung to by a lairdocracy long since divorced from such organic intimacies and a select tenantry harbouring whimsically romantic preconceptions. These traditions were enhanced and given their greatest depth when refracted through the Highland sporting experience, an activity replete with iconographic referents. Since the 1840's, reading room guidebooks had beckoned the prospective patrician huntsman into a deer stalking dream-world, an imaginary Highlands lain thick with quasi-historical and ethereal legend. However, before initiating a detailed examination of the Highland sporting experience some degree of historical contextualisation is required.

#### The Highland Sporting Estate: A Short History, 1870-1945

*'Then there's Glenraden with a real Highland grandee living in it - Alistair Raden - commanded the Scots Guards. I believe, in the year one. Family as old as the flood and very poor, but just manage to hang on. He's the last Raden that will live there, but that doesn't matter so much as he has no son - only a brace of daughters. Then, of course, there's the show place, Strathlarrig - horrible great house as large as a factory, but wonderful fine salmon-fishing. Some Americans have got it this year, very rich and said to be rather high-brow.'*<sup>14</sup>  
(John Buchan, 1925)

The penchant of the moneyed classes for the modern sport of 'deer stalking' was bestirred thanks largely to the enthusiastic regal patronage afforded the pursuit from the 1840's onward. Fashion, acting in combination with the sharp downturn in fortunes suffered by the sheep farms which had cleared the native population from the land earlier in the century, left the Highlands fortuitously vacant for major

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<sup>14</sup> Buchan, J. (1925) *John McNab*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, p. 23.

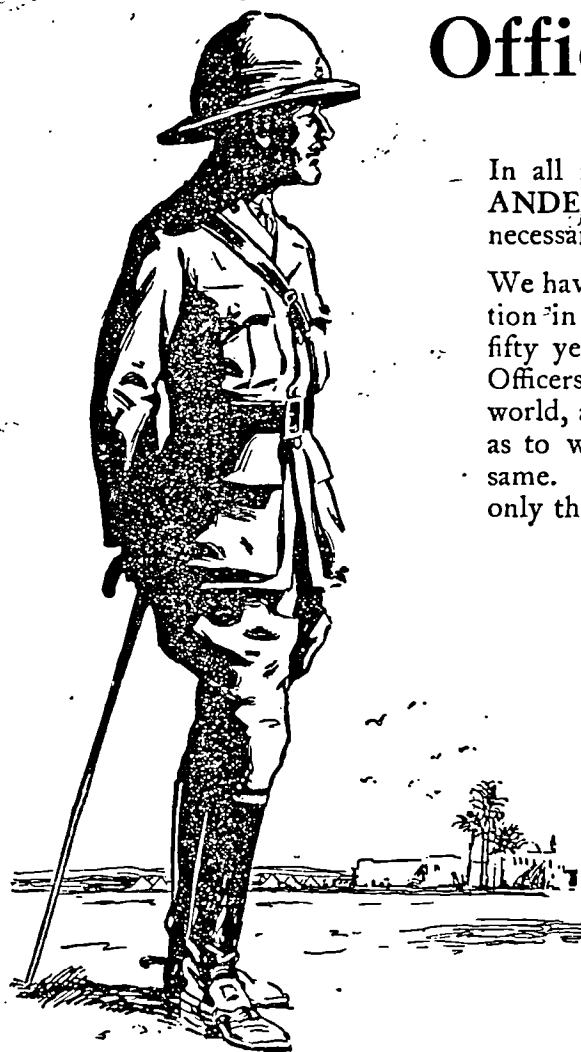
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Figure 1 - The Aristocratic Tradition

sporting expansion.<sup>15</sup> Faced with particularly stiff foreign competition in wool and mutton markets during the 1870's, the commercial sheep farmers were obliged to cut their losses and end their all too brief sojourn in the north, one commentator recounting how they took flight 'like doves out of their windows.'<sup>16</sup> As an immediate consequence of the departing agricultural tenantry the expansive bounds belonging to the mighty magnates of the nobility were turned over to sporting land management regimes. Among the largest were those belonging to the ancient houses of Atholl, Sutherland, Lovat, Argyll and Breadalbane. Meanwhile vast tracts of land fell under the hammer to high ranking military sorts or alternatively to representatives of an avaricious 'nouveau riche'. In the case of the latter, aspiring Lairds were eager to make tangible the profits accrued from industrial success and to attain the status and cachet afforded by incursions into the Highland property market.<sup>17</sup> Typical was John Cobbold of Ipswich, head of an established firm of brewers, who sank a small fortune into the purchase of Corrievarkie, Craganour, Rannoch and Talladh-a-Bheithe deer forests, these holdings comprising some 54,000 acres.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, in 1879 John Bullough a Lancastrian entrepreneur, having accumulated great wealth as a textile machinery manufacturer, indulged himself by acquiring the island of Rhum.<sup>19</sup> By the 1930's the plutocratic presence was well established, tobacco profits had allowed the Wills' dynasty to snap up Killilan and Glomach estates, Tom Sopwith the airplane magnate owned land on the Ardnamurchan peninsula, Ronald Vestey bought much of Assynt with money made in the frozen meat trade while Alexander Gibb's engineering contracts paid for the upkeep of his Gruinard property.<sup>20</sup>

Authorities on hunting stated quite definitively that the proper pursuit of a prize as shy and retiring as the red deer demanded empty hillsides, and plenty of

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<sup>15</sup> For specific details on, and a range of historical interpretations of, the Highland Clearances see: Richards, E. (1982) *History of the Highland Clearances Volume 1: Agrarian transformation and the evictions, 1746-1886*, London: Croom Helm. Richards, E. (1985) *History of the Highland Clearances Volume 2: Emigration, protest, reasons*, London: Croom Helm. Bumstead, J. (1982) *The People's Clearance 1770-1815*, Edinburgh: John Donald; Craig, D. (1990) *On the Crofters' Trail: In search of the Clearance Highlanders*, London: Jonathan Cape; Hunter, J. (1978) *The Making of the Crofting Community* Edinburgh: John Donald.

<sup>16</sup> Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the condition of the Crofters and Cottars in the Highlands and Islands. (Napier Commission) 1884, Q. 41 p. 939.

<sup>17</sup> The social and economic details of this shift from sheep to deer are covered in: Orr, W. (1982) *Deer Forests, Landlords and Crofters: the Western Highlands in Victorian and Edwardian Times*. Edinburgh: John Donald.

<sup>18</sup> *The Scottish Field*, LIII (314) Feb. 1929 p. 45.

<sup>19</sup> A foretaste of the power wielded by this new class of landowners can be found in the decision reputedly taken by Bullough, a strict teetotaler, to blithely add the letter 'h' to the spelling of Rhum so as to avoid any intemperate associations. Keay, J. and Keay, J. (eds.) (1994) *Collins Encyclopaedia of Scotland* London: Harper Collins.

<sup>20</sup> Gunn, H. (ed.) (1925) 'Appendix 1 - The Deer Forests of Scotland', in *The Book of Empire Big Game*, London: Simpkin, Marshall and Hamilton; *Oban Times*, 1934 January 27 p.5; *Oban Times* 1937 July 24, p. 5.

them.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, the conversion of rough uplands and lower pastures to 'deer forest' was rapid and comprehensive, spurred on by the demands of a spendthrift elite. The scramble for the Highlands left the region's land resource carved up along sporting lines, stalking's royal imprimatur ensuring the emergence of a zealous new tenantry. Lessees of the forests, normally hailing from the English upper-class, the military caste or those burghers of commercial society whose personal wealth would not extend to outright purchase, hastily signed up to long-term or annual rental agreements. Parliamentarians also developed a love for the Scottish mountains in September. The only cabinet meeting to have been convened outside 10 Downing Street was held, for convenience sake, at Inverness Town Hall in the autumn of 1921.<sup>22</sup> It was truly said that shooting was part of the constitution since parliament never sat until November, when the monarch returned from Balmoral and senior Commons and Lords from the deer forests. Not content simply with land and power, aristocratic and bourgeois egos jostled over the size and relative opulence of newly constructed shooting lodges. For example, during the 1880's £40,000 was spent on the construction of Inverlochy House, over £70,000 at Duncraig and £12,000 on residences at Balmacaan and Torridon.<sup>23</sup> Wide vistas of hills and heather were broken only by an appropriate oasis of civility. The choice of gothic or baroque styles for these castellated structures reflected a taste for monumental architecture in a monumental landscape. One notable entry in a reputable land agent's portfolio detailed the lease of a 'well-furnished' lodge set amid 40,000 acres of prime Sutherland stalking ground. For the 1915 season with rent set at £5000, the tenant was guaranteed private use of the following facilities, 'a large dining room, large drawing room with French window opening on to veranda, smoking room, front hall, 13 bedrooms, 10 servant's rooms, housekeeper's room, servants hall and complete offices'. This offer was supplemented by an 'annexe for manservants containing 7 bedrooms, sitting room, bathroom. Garage for 3 cars. En-tout-cas tennis court. Fruit and vegetable garden' while also being 'inclusive of the wages of 9 keepers and stalkers'.<sup>24</sup> The late nineteenth and early twentieth century lay witness to many more examples of gross indulgence and the absolute saturation of the region in sporting mammon. Bridges

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<sup>21</sup> St. John, C. (1878) *Sketches of the Wild Sports and Natural History of the Highlands*, London: John Murray; Ross, J. (1925b) 'Deerstalking in the Scottish Highlands', in Ross, J. (ed.) (1925a) *The Book of the Red Deer*, Simpkin, Marshall and Hamilton: London, p. 1-25; and Edwards, L. and Frank-Wallace, H. (1927) *Hunting and Stalking the Deer*, London: Longmans.

<sup>22</sup> I am grateful to both Elizabeth Garland of the APRS and Professor John MacKenzie for this information.

<sup>23</sup> Wigan, M. (1991) *The Scottish Highland Estate: Preserving an Environment*, Shrewsbury: Swan Hill Press, p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> Walker, Fraser and Steele (1915) *Scottish Register for Grouse Moors, Deer Forests, Salmon Fishings, Mansion Houses and Mixed Shootings to let and for sale*. Edinburgh, p. 11.

were thrown over rivers, roads driven to bothies set deep within the remote fastness, pony-paths constructed and endless miles of march fences erected.<sup>25</sup> The desire to stalk was so great that by 1912 the land area under deer forest had reached a peak of some 3,584,966 acres, comprising 201 major estates.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, hunting was no longer limited to the pursuit of deer as fishing, angling and grouse shooting became attractive ancillary entertainments. The demand for grouse moors rose sharply in pre-war years, their popularity explained by the prospect of sport for numerous guns over a lengthy season.<sup>27</sup> Certain estates offered a wide range of birds for the keen shot, including blackcock, ptarmigan, capercailzie, pheasant, snipe and wildfowl. Specialist hotels with riparian ownership rights sprang up in the region's most secluded reaches to cater for the connoisseurs of rod and line.

The golden age of deer forest expansion ended with the outbreak of hostilities in Europe during the summer of 1914. The martial traditions upheld by many of the sporting elite and among the Scottish aristocracy meant that attention swiftly swung from the prospects of a fruitful season on the hills to more grave events in France and Belgium. Further to this, the prolonged nature of a war which most presumed would be over by Christmas brought with it management problems for estate factors in the Highlands. Numerous forests lay unlet throughout the four years of conflict, several others were not stalked with any great assiduity. Even so, scanty resources had to be marshalled for the execution of the major deer culls ordered by government decree in 1916. Despite the absence of a reliable clientele, the scarcity and late delivery of ammunition, the want of petrol and the small number of able-bodied men and ponies left to serve in the forests, higher culls than normal were recorded during this period.<sup>28</sup> Furthering the war effort many forests

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<sup>25</sup> In the course of twelve years before the Great War, Sir John Ramsden spent £180,000 on infrastructural improvements at Ardverickie, Inverness-shire. Sir Archibald Birkmyre, owner of the Dalmuinzie estate, used revenue from his jute empire to build a two mile light-railway which would transfer sporting parties from his mansion house in Glen Lochy to the shooting grounds above. Elsewhere, and on a far grander scale, the Sutherland family famously sank £300,000 into the construction of a railway which would open up their sporting holdings north of Helmsdale. Richards, E. (1973) *The Leviathan of Wealth: The Sutherland Fortune in the Industrial Revolution*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; 'Club Notes' (1923) *Cairngorm Club Journal*, X (60) p. 269-70; Wigan, M. (1991) *op cit*, p.24.

<sup>26</sup> Of these estates there were nine which singularly exceeded 40,000 acres, the forests and their owners were as follows: Mar, 110,000 - Duke of Fife; Glendhu and Reay, 80,970 - Duke of Sutherland; Blackmount, 80,000 - Marquis of Breadalbane; Ben Armine, 67,080 - Duke of Sutherland; Corrour, 56,521 - Sir John Stirling-Maxwell; Strathconan, 52,000 - Captain Christian Coombe; Letterewe, 46,700 - Marquis of Zetland; Glen Avon, 42,000 - Duke of Richmond; Pairc, 41,913 - Major Duncan Matheson. SRO GD 325/1/82

<sup>27</sup> Departmental Committee - Board of Agriculture Departmental Committee, *Report on Deer Forests*, British Sessional Papers, Cmd. 1636 1922 Vol. VII p. 263-354; 285.

<sup>28</sup> The Venison Supply Committee, set up by the Board of Agriculture, initiated culls which accounted for 12,000 beasts in 1916 and 17,500 in 1917-18; the second haul providing some 2,450,000 lbs of meat. Two exceptionally cold winters in 1918 and 1919 continued to keep deer numbers down: Hart-Davis, D. (1978) *Monarchs of the Glen: a history of deer stalking in the Highlands*, London: Jonathan Cape.

were re-stocked with cattle and sheep, numbers of the former increasing from 5504 to 6759 between 1916 and 1920, and the latter from 58,983 to 106,831 during the same period. By 1919 a slight drop was recorded in the acreage permanently held as deer forest, their total extent covering 3,432,385 acres.<sup>29</sup> The loss of 152,581 acres was attributable to the restoration of 11 forests to pastoral use and the acquisition of one property by the newly established Forestry Commission for their timber plantations. The cessation of hostilities on the continent was also to bring its attendant problems.

Rash government promises made in the first flush of war quickly came home to roost. Flanders heroes returning home to take up their own small-holding found themselves sorely disappointed. Very little of the Highlands was available, far less fit, for heroes. As a consequence pressure was brought to bear on the government who in an act of conciliation appointed a deer forest committee. Led by Sir John Stirling-Maxwell the laird of Corrour with Sir Donald Cameron of Lochiel by his side the committee began their work in November 1919. Charged with inquiring into 'which, if any, of the deer forest lands might profitably be put to other uses', they held twelve sittings, heard evidence from 287 witnesses, inspected 56 deer forests and circulated a questionnaire to estate owners and tenants. Progress ground to a halt in January 1921 when, having spent the less than princely sum of £3000, the committee were ordered to conclude their investigations by a frugal Treasury. The resulting departmental report provided few recommendations of any real substance. A measured critique, it advised no further expansion of deer forests but only chose to consider cattle and sheep rearing, with sylviculture in moderation, as possible alternatives. Although capable of candour, an inquiry dominated by two hugely influential representatives from the lairdocracy was never likely to challenge the ownership status quo.<sup>30</sup>

The wartime drop in acreage and a set of anodyne recommendations from a toothless government inquiry barely registered with the traditional landowning families. However the sanctity and security of their Highland sporting retreats was rocked by what many viewed to be a far more duplicitous and discriminatory threat. The peerage, by far the largest stakeholders in Scotland's land resource, had been targeted for some time by Liberal parliamentarians seeking greater accountability, equity and democracy in British society. Government taxation in the form of 'estate

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<sup>29</sup> Of that total, 1,168,520 acres lay at or below 1000ft, 834,257 acres between 1000-1500ft and 1,387,098 above the 1500ft contour. Departmental Committee (Cmd. 1636) op cit, p. 280.

<sup>30</sup> The Report was not shy of debunking the mythology behind certain management techniques on the sporting estate: 'The idea that a deer forest must be entirely sacred to deer appears to be quite modern, and based to a large extent on the ignorance of the habits of deer and confusion between the art of creating and the art of maintaining a forest. To induce deer to settle on new ground it must be left quiet, but their progeny bred on the same ground are not so easily driven from what they regard as their home' Departmental Committee (Cmd. 1636) op cit. p. 282.



duty' had been enacted as early as 1898, although acute financial pressures only appeared with the imposition of increasingly burdensome levies on land ownership. In 1907 treasury coffers were swelled when an additional unearned income surcharge was declared payable on land rents, while Lloyd-George's budget of 1909 saw to it that the financial vice tightened still further.<sup>31</sup> Tom Johnston, another adversary of the ancient noble families, sought to shatter the commonly held belief that they held 'their privileges and lands at the earnest behest of Divine Providence; that their wealth has been justly earned; and that their titles are but rewards for honest service to the state'.<sup>32</sup> Following the war those in high income brackets suffered considerably while local taxes and rates also rose steeply. The gravity of the situation was made evident when the Marquess of Aberdeen's estate bill swelled from £800 in 1870 to £19,000 in 1920.<sup>33</sup> In 1925 a substantial increase in estate duties was again approved by parliament. Death duties paid on heritable property by those with rights of succession represented a final, and at times insurmountable, fiscal encumbrance for the nobility.<sup>34</sup>

Unsurprisingly, aristocrats found conditions of penury among their own caste a particularly unpalatable truth. Infuriated by this slew of seemingly punitive statutes, embattled grandees were forced to scour mansion attics for heirlooms which could be auctioned to recoup the required funds. Among those in financial difficulty was the Duke of Atholl who sold off items of the Murray family jewellery several times during the 1920's.<sup>35</sup> Debts, not an unprecedented irritant in patrician circles, now swelled to quite unmanageable proportions necessitating drastic and previously unimaginable measures. The solvency of old estates and their traditional core areas could only be guaranteed by the sale of marginal lands (see figure 2).<sup>36</sup> Notably upon his father's death in 1928, the prodigious holdings of the incumbent Duke of Richmond and Gordon in the Cairngorm mountains and Banffshire were broken up for ease of sale. From 1925 through to 1930 the Duke of Montrose made available real estate in Perthshire, Stirlingshire and Dumbartonshire to meet death duties on succeeding to his title. The gathering trend had been set in tow during

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<sup>31</sup> Callander, R.F. (1987) *Ibid*, p.84.

<sup>32</sup> Johnston, T. (1909) *Our Noble Scots Families*, Glasgow: Forward Publishing, p. x.

<sup>33</sup> Lord and Lady Aberdeen (1925) *We Twa*, London: Collins, p. 323-4.

<sup>34</sup> Due to the large proportion of peers or heirs to seats who lost their lives in military service, death duties took on a particular significance in the aftermath of the Great War; of the 225 relatives of Scottish peers in the armed forces, 42 were killed. Hutchison, I.G.C. (1994) 'The Nobility and Politics in Scotland, c.1880-1939', in Devine, T.M. (ed.) *op cit.* p.137. Tom Atkinson saw the war as an unfortunate watershed in the life of the Scottish sporting estate. He recounted how after 1918, 'not only was money more scarce, but somehow the very spirit of the great estates seemed to have been buried, with so much else, in Flanders mud'. Atkinson, T. (1988) 'Foreword', in Cameron, A. *Bare Feet and Tackety Boots: A Boyhood on Rhum*, Barr: Luath Press, p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> Hutchinson, I.G.C. (1994) *op cit.* p. 138.

<sup>36</sup> Estimations have been made that between 1918 and 1921 one fifth of all Scottish land, some 4 million acres, changed hands. *Ibid*, p. 138.

## Off the Beaten Track with the Rifle



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Figure 2 - Forests for Sale or Rent

Source: *Country Life* (1930)

1918 when, of all the great magnates, the Duke of Sutherland reduced his 'northern latifundia' by 350,000 acres.<sup>37</sup> Cameron of Lochiel rid himself of 110,000 acres in Inverness-shire while the Marquess of Breadalbane sold estate around Loch Tay to reduce his holdings by 100,000 acres. One commentator sorrowfully pointed out the marked differences in the sporting scene between the Marchioness of Breadalbane penning her celebration of stalking in 1907 and the same book's re-publication in 1935, 'changes have come with winged feet; the Marquesses lands no longer stretch to the Atlantic, Taymouth Castle is now a hotel and the dear courageous lady is no more'.<sup>38</sup> The shedding of excess baggage did not stop here, Lord Lovat even disposed of his private fancy, a herd of shorthorn cattle, in addition to 100,000 acres of land.<sup>39</sup> In 1931 social paragraphers speculated over the possible appearance of Lord and Lady Strathcona and Mount Royal's prestigious Glencoe and Dalness forests on the market.<sup>40</sup> Despite these problems the landowning and sporting axis stood their ground, 'whatever happens to the rest of the world, Scotland is not coming of the heather standard'.<sup>41</sup> New customers could always be found and war profiteers were prevalent among those who took advantage of these sales.<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, property formerly held by a single laird fell into multiple ownership as shooting syndicates, a logical solution to spiralling maintenance costs, became more prominent in the Highland landownership pattern. William Dalziel-Mackenzie, the owner of Inchbrae in Ross-shire, leased his lodge and part of the forest to Henry T.L. Young of London and the remainder to J.C. Williams of Caerhays Castle, Cornwall. Likewise, the proprietorship of Kildonan forest in Sutherlandshire was shared by Brigadier-General T.E. Hickman, Colonel Sir C. Burn and Miss P. Ratcliffe.<sup>43</sup>

Unwelcome financial hardship among Britain's aristocratic elite also left the way clear for intrusions into the property market by foreign investors and commercial companies. During the 1920's Achanault and Strathbran estate in Ross-shire belonged to Captain A.T. Bignold-De Cologan, (the Marques de Terre Hermosa), and was leased to Dr. Frederick Mead of Harvard University, U.S.A. Compatriots of Mead regularly shot at Arverikie and Erchless in Inverness-shire

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<sup>37</sup> Cannadine, D. (1990) op cit. p. 108.

<sup>38</sup> Anonymous review for: Breadalbane, A.G. (1907) *The High Tops of Black Mount*, Edinburgh: Blackwood, in *Oban Times*, 1935 April 13 p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> The sale of the livestock alone was rumoured to have recouped Lovat some £17,000. Lindley, F. (1935) *Lord Lovat: A Biography*, London: Hutchinson, p.241.

<sup>40</sup> *The Scottish Field*, LX (356) August 1932.

<sup>41</sup> 'H.B.C.P.' (1933) 'The Call of the Heather' *Country Life*, LXXIV (1905) p. 57.

<sup>42</sup> Editorial 'A Playground for War Profiteers', *Northern Times* 1935 August 22 p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> Gunn, H. (ed.) (1925) 'Appendix 1 - The Deer Forests of Scotland', in *The Book of Empire Big Game*, London: Simpkin, Marshall and Hamilton.

and Hunthill in Forfarshire.<sup>44</sup> For the slightly less well-healed, trans-Atlantic sporting package holidays first pioneered by the Cunard Shipping Company, became a popular vacational option.<sup>45</sup> Attractive all-inclusive itineraries were assembled to lure American huntsmen to travel in search of the 'northern exotic' and the self-made men of Empire to return for a brief swank among Scotland's fashionable field set.<sup>46</sup> The popularity of Yankee *arrivistes* varied among the traditionally insular sporting community. 'Abarach' opined regretfully that thanks to charlatans like 'Tom, Dick and Harry shouldering their rifles...one does not always happen to get the same class of sportsman as formerly'.<sup>47</sup> Striking a more upbeat note, one patriot sensed the opportunity for some jingoistic jousting since, 'the sharp intervention of American sportsmen has made John Bull and some of his continental contemporaries awaken to the fact that if they are going to retain a hold on the deer forests they must pay a little more for their sport'.<sup>48</sup> Rather more fanciful, and financially moribund, plans were also hatched by the Scottish Tourist Association (STA) to widen the limited appeal of 'high-society' sports by amalgamating them into an ersatz Winter Wonderland experience.<sup>49</sup> The organisation attempted to promote villages such as Ballater, Braemar, Newtonmore and Kingussie as alternative Alpine resorts where hind stalking could be combined with ski-ing, fishing, tobogganing and skating.<sup>50</sup> The sentiment of the project was supported by the new breed of less reverential sportsman who foresaw a future for the Highland estate as part of Scotland's burgeoning tourist industry. Towards the late 1930's these dissident voices flagged grouse shooting as the region's greatest

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, Appendix 1.

<sup>45</sup> The Company rented the Gaick deer forest located near Kingussie from Sir George Macpherson Grant for the 1929, 1930, 1935 and 1936 seasons. *Oban Times*, 1939 January 14 p. 5. Hugh MacDiarmid, the poet, critic and unashamed rhetorician, claimed that 'some...visit us in due season to shoot grouse, stalk deer, and fish our salmon rivers - and the Cunard Company has a third of Scotland in its pocket for the gratification of their hobbies'. MacDiarmid, H. (1934) 'The Modern Scene', in MacDiarmid, H. & Grassie Gibbon, L. *Scottish Scene, or the Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn*, London: Jarrolds, p. 39.

<sup>46</sup> What began as a speculative venture catering for a specialist niche in the tourist market quickly gained momentum. Cunard were soon competing with, amongst others, Canadian Pacific ('finest steamers, fastest trains, best hotels') and the Bibby Steamship Line for the international sporting clientele. Captain Frank Bibby's investment was obviously a profitable one as for some time he himself held the lease on the 39,000 acre Mamore deer forest in Lochaber. *The Scottish Field*, LI (302) February 1928 p. 76.

<sup>47</sup> Correspondence, (1928) *The Scottish Field*, LI (302) p. 74.

<sup>48</sup> 'A.R.' (1928) *The Scottish Field*, LI (302) p.76.

<sup>49</sup> After vociferous lobbying by Rt. Hon. Tom Johnston in Westminster, the STA was founded in 1930 as a non-trading subsidiary of the British Travel Association, working under the aegis of the Scottish Office. The organisation was charged with the task of 'fostering, stimulating and developing the tourist and holiday traffic of Scotland' in combination with business interests, local authorities and civic advertising committees.

<sup>50</sup> Scottish Land and Property Federation (SLPF) / Finance and Advisory Committee (FAC), Vol. IV 1931 December 7. For further evidence of the promotion of field sports see: Scottish Travel Association (1933) *The Scottish Fishing Guide*, Edinburgh: STA.

sporting prospect. Deer stalking for all its majesty was portrayed as an anachronistic pursuit, unsuited to the modern age and only favoured by those hardy few still in search of sport in its purest form.<sup>51</sup> Lord Latymer was unconvinced by such a contention; he saw deer stalking as an essential component in the new global big game market and his sporting manual included chapters offering advice on the buying, renting and managing of a Highland forest.<sup>52</sup> Even more sure of stalking's future was Sir Iain Colquhoun who simply failed to believe 'that this grandest of all sports will ever cease to appeal to a man with an ounce of poetry or romance in his being'.<sup>53</sup>

Despite the very real problems associated with dwindling wealth, and what were viewed as rather vulgar but nevertheless unavoidable moves toward diversification and commercialisation, the decline of the traditional sporting community should not be overplayed. Throughout the inter-war period deer stalking retained a loyal and aristocratic following. For many lairds and tenants the steps made toward financial retrenchment were relative. Their residences remained sumptuous, their social calendars full, their larders luxurious and their shooting invigorating. Society periodicals were still filled with advertisements for the all traditional trappings of a sporting, patrician life; 'House of Stewart' furniture, Winchester rifles, Burberry gabardines, pedigree dog kennels, artistic taxidermists, game and poultry merchants, dealers in Cuban cigars and specialists in the construction of shooting lodges, stables, pavilions and recreation rooms. A seasons guest list including regal or political luminaries was in no way extraordinary. The Duke of Portland's shooting records for Braemore and Langwell estates reveal that in the late 1920's he played host to, among others, King Albert of Belgium, Prince Chichibu of Japan and Lord Kitchener.<sup>54</sup> Indeed on occasion aristocratic wealth was plentiful enough to roll back the years towards the undoubted style and farcical over indulgence of the previous century; one entertaining example of this form of sporting largesse should suffice. When in 1928, the Duke of Sutherland entertained King Alfonso of Spain at Dunrobin Castle, the monarch created a considerable scene by arriving off the Scottish coast in one of his country's battleships. Upon reaching Dunrobin pier he was met by a Guard of Honour of the 5th Seaforths, the county territorial battalion, of whom the Duke was Honorary Colonel. 'Dapper, roguish and wearing an immense pair of striped bloomers', the sartorially

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<sup>51</sup> 'H.B.C.P.' (1938) 'The Realm of Sport', in a souvenir Scottish Supplement to *Country Life*, LXXXIV (2165) p. v-vi. See also, Pollard, H. (1937) 'A Philosopher on the Moors', *Country Life*, LXXXII (2117) p. 162-163.

<sup>52</sup> Lord Latymer (1935) *Stalking Deer in Scotland and New Zealand*, Edinburgh: Blackwood.

<sup>53</sup> Colquhoun, I. 'The Future of Deer Stalking', in Ross, J. (ed.) (1925) *op cit*, p. 109-115; 113.

<sup>54</sup> Bentinck, W.J.A.C.J.C. (1933) *Fifty Years of Sport and More in the Highlands*, London: Faber and Faber, p. 127 and Appendix IV.

challenged guest of honour was joined by the Marquess and Marchioness of Londonderry and the party was whisked by car into the hinterland.<sup>55</sup> Reaching remote Loch Choire they were ferried by boat to the far end of the water for a hunt. Alfonso's unorthodox attire proved little handicap as he managed to bag seven stags. This packed programme were rounded off with a short trip on the Sutherland family's private railway engine. The Duke fondly remembered how his guest's exaltation with the days events led him to telegram King George V who was in residence at Balmoral, with full details of his sporting haul.<sup>56</sup>

Direct or diluted representatives of ancient Highland blood-lines, among them Atholls, Lovats, Lochiels, Campbells, Colquhouns, Sutherlands and Portlands, stood foursquare in defence of their most treasured pastime. Land, the prime resource of the Highland sporting estate, was still in abundance. The holdings of the Scottish nobility were so capacious that the losses incurred during the 1920's were relative only to the great tracts which remained in their possession when widespread stability was regained toward the late 1930's. These patrician thoroughbreds were afforded robust backing by stalwarts of 'the country scene' and fawning aspirants to the sporting fraternity. The parvenu lairds remained wholly supportive of the cause, if slightly more guarded and circumspect in their approach.

Despite public expressions to the contrary, reinforced by heady avowals of their own durability, to an ever increasing extent the members of this sporting and landowning confederacy were aware of their own vulnerability within modern society. Financial insecurity having left the soft underbelly of the peerage exposed it was perhaps inevitable that moral legitimacy was sought all the more ardently through entrenchment in mythology. Meanwhile, for the laird or tenant with no historical attachment to the region, a sophisticated Highland sporting heritage represented an effective anchor, helping explain their otherwise incongruous presence. Although deer forests had suffered a relative downturn in fortunes, stalking retained the imprimatur of the true Highland sport. As the next section demonstrates, to every laird the red deer remained unquestionable monarch of the glen, while the quest to 'blood oneself' through the sacrifice of this elusive quarry provided the greatest stimulus to the sporting imagination.

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<sup>55</sup> Hart-Davis, D. (1978) *op cit.* p. 218.

<sup>56</sup> Gower, G.S.L. (1957) *Looking Back: the Autobiography of the Duke of Sutherland*, London: Odhams, p.126.

### The Cloak of Authenticity: Hunter-Bards and Tainchells

*'Is it the country itself with its varied and rugged scenery, or the wild animals that they still rove untamed in their fastness of mountain or moor, or the people blended of Celt and Saxon and Viking, that have dowered this part of the island with such associations of sport and romance ? For here the red deer still show their stately forms on the sky line of lofty hills or in the bracken clad recesses of remote corries, near boisterous torrents that pursue their rough and tortuous course to the sea...'<sup>57</sup>  
(John Ross, 1925)*

*'Stalking has always been for me the quintessential Highland sport...Deer horns split the stones of the first neolithic monuments, antler picks mined for flint to make man's first heavy tools. To shoot one of these well-proportioned, delicate, beautifully camouflaged and adapted animals is a serious business which gives rise in the rifle to thoughts of his own impermanence and tenuous adherence to life. Set against some of the world's oldest and most weathered mountain ranges, these intimations of mortality can reach a pitch of almost painful acuteness. The hills are eternal, and man is fiery and fit for a brief time.'<sup>58</sup>  
(Michael Wigan, 1991)*

The two extracts which open this passage are separated by almost seventy years, yet they bear more than a passing resemblance to each other in both sentiment and style. They stand as proof positive of deer stalking's enduring appeal and the tenor of its literary plaudits. Deer hunting retained a long history as a pastime and a livelihood in the Highlands, and around it had developed an elaborate native lore. This treasure trove of oral balladry and apocryphal narrative was seized upon by stalking enthusiasts who found the region's iconic landscape imagery a hugely beguiling feature. During the inter-war period vivid treatments of hunting history were popular additions to the flourishing genre of sporting literature. For literary romanticists the hunt was an atavistic rite uniting the noble Highland savage and his natural environment. Tales of mystical figures, hunter-bards and 'free-foresters' so eloquently described in the stalking texts, held the modern patrons of Highland estates smitten. Having arrived at the shooting lodge, firmly ensconced in a leather arm-chair, decanter of scotch by his side, the enraptured reader was regaled with tales of how these maverick poachers would endlessly wander the mountains in search of supreme tests of strength, guile and ingenuity.<sup>59</sup> These were men of a

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<sup>57</sup> Ross, J. (1925b) op cit. p. 206.

<sup>58</sup> Wigan, M. (1992) 'Introduction', in Satterley, G. *The Highland Game: Life on Scottish Sporting Estates*, Shrewsbury: Swan Hill Press.

<sup>59</sup> The defining publication was penned by William Scrope in 1838 and was based on many sporting seasons experience at the Duke of Atholl's Bruar Lodge. Scrope, W. (1897) *The Art of Deer Stalking Illustrated by a Narrative of a Few Days Sport in the Forest of Atholl with some Account of the Nature and Habits of Red Deer and a Short Description of the Scottish Forests: Legends; Superstitions; Stories of Poachers and Freebooters Etc. Etc.* (first published 1839)

natural rhythm, inspired by neither titles nor material wealth but simply the challenge of furtively gralloching a nobleman's prize stag from under his very nose. Legend told of how the free-foresters were harboured by the clans from the threat of prosecution or punishment, in much the same way that they baffled excisemen over their distilling and smuggling of illicit whisky. It appeared of little consequence that the miscreants had committed crimes against the landowning class, their indiscretions were accomplished with suitable brio to impress and amuse latter-day sportsmen.<sup>60</sup>

Blessed with an innate poetic genius, the hunter-bards lyricised their experiences of the wilderness landscape upon which they tracked the red deer. In them the region had a spiritual legacy to rival the Iliad and Beowulf, a vivid landscape memory imprinted with Ossian, Fingal and poet-marksmen such as Domhnall-Mac-Fhionnlaidh, Lonavey Mackeracher and Duncan Macintyre of Ben Dorain. John Buchan, novelist, Conservative MP and later Lord Tweedsmuir, was doubtless inspired by these roguish champions and those he met while stalking the bounds of Ardtornish estate, his regular Autumnal haunt, when he wrote 'John Macnab'. The satirical tale, published in 1925, was in part a eulogy to the abilities and character of the traditional Highland poacher.<sup>61</sup> One enthusiast wrote unashamedly of being physically enveloped by the Celtic nether world:

*'The mist breaks and changes into strange shapes - shapes of mighty hunters and dogs pursuing the mist of boars along the skirt of hills. The wild shouting of the wind becomes the hunting cry of Oscar, and the belling of Bran. Time has become nothing, and without a word being before us on paper, we are surrounded with all the*

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London: Edward Arnold. Scrope's celebratory and imaginative style was quickly the trademark of many new sporting histories and instruction manuals. See for example: Robertson, W. (1865) *Forest Sketches: Deer Stalking and other Sports in the Highlands Fifty Years Ago*, Edinburgh; MacRae, A. (1880) *A Handbook of Deer Stalking*, London: Blackwood; Grimble, A. (1886) *Deerstalking*, London: Chapman and Hall; Crealock, H.H. (1892) *Deer Stalking in the Highlands of Scotland*, London: Longmans; Grimble, A. (1896) *The Deer Forests of Scotland*, London: Kegan Paul; Gathorne-Hardy, A.E. (1900) *Autumns in Argyllshire with Rod and Gun*, London: Longmans; Smith-McCombie, W. (1904) *The Romance of Poaching in the Highlands of Scotland*, Stirling: Eneas Mackay; Hart-Davis, H.V. (1904) *Stalking Sketches*, London: Horace Cox; Hartley, G.W. (1912) *Wild Sport and Some Stories*, London: Blackwood; Fraser, H. (1923) *Amid the High Hills*, London: A. and C. Black; McConnochie, A.I. (1923) *The Deer and Deer Forests of Scotland: Historical, Descriptive, Sporting*, London: Witherby; Chalmers, P.R. (1931) *Mine Eyes to the Hills: An Anthology of the Highland Forest*, London: A. and C. Black; McConnochie, A.I. (1932) *Deer Forest Life*, London: Alexander Maclehose. The 'Forest and Moor' columns of *The Scottish Field* were for many years a source of stalking yarns, anecdotes and white lies, spun by the likes of Alex McConnochie and Harry Mortimer-Batten. Alexander McConnochie even included a chapter providing material appropriate to 'after-dinner speeches' in one of his texts. McConnochie, A.I. (1924) *Deerstalking in Scotland*, London: Witherby, p. 169-205.

<sup>60</sup> The attraction has not dimmed with time, for a modern day example see: Whitehead, G.K. (1980) *Hunting and Stalking in Britain through the Ages*, London: B.T. Batsford, p. 87.

<sup>61</sup> Buchan, J. (1925) op cit.



*poetry of the deer forest of the ancient days - the poetry of Ossian. It is there seething and swimming around you.*<sup>62</sup>

The urge to draw parallels between the lusty characters of legend and their own kind was a strong one for a community desperately in search of historical authenticity. However, it was not only the ghosts of adventurous nomads which haunted fireside dreams. The epic deer drives, or '*tainchell*', orchestrated by the great Highland clans were breathlessly recounted in the pages of stalking anthologies.<sup>63</sup> Organised on a vast scale, reputedly involving hundreds of clansmen on horseback and packs of hunting dogs, these incredible manoeuvres would sweep the deer herds down from the remote, wooded hillsides into a carefully selected natural bowl. Thus entrapped, the deer were ritually slaughtered under a hail of arrows fired from the taut bows of the Clan chieftains. Alternatively the prey could be steered into a network of walls and fences which funnelled into a high enclosure, or elrig, where 'in a bedlam of murderous fury hardly palatable to modern-day sensibilities the deer were dispatched by the Highlanders at close quarters'.<sup>64</sup> The Highland lairds saw themselves as the rightful inheritors of these barbaric traditions, civilised descendants of a primitive Gaelic nobility. Significantly, the Duke of Sutherland invoked the spirit of centuries past when he meticulously planned a tainchell for the aforementioned visit of Spain's King Alfonso. The shooting party having assumed their positions in a suitable *bheallach* at the head of Loch Choire, had the herds of the entire Klibreck hill range driven towards them. Despite an unfortunate change in wind direction which scattered many of the deer back through the massed line of beaters the Duke felt the occasion to have been carried off with suitable panache.<sup>65</sup>

When placed amid the tension and atmosphere of the hunt, encircled by his very own amphitheatre of precipitous mountain and crag, the refined country gent was only a short, but ultimately crucial, step away from these blood-stained characters of old. The twentieth-century sportsman could enjoy the same base emotions while pursuing his quarry in a less frenzied manner. Modern stalking was distinctive in several ways, the gentleman moved in isolation or in the company of a local stalker, the pursuit was carried out on foot, while one's hunting honour was assured by a reliance on stealth to get within rifle range of the deer. This form of sport differed enormously from the tainchells but as the momentum gathered behind the Victorian deer forests, stalking was rapidly subsumed into the culture of the

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<sup>62</sup> Graeme, A. (1927) 'Friends for September Tracks: The Red Deer, the Hunter and You', *Scots Magazine*, VII (6) p. 436-442.

<sup>63</sup> 'Tinchel' was regularly used as a variation on the spelling.

<sup>64</sup> Wigan, M. (1991) op cit, p. 21.

<sup>65</sup> Gower, G.S.L. (1957) op cit. p.126.

Highlands. By the 1920's the process of assimilation was complete. Lord Willoughby de Broke stated quite definitively that:

*'The stalker has to go out on foot, find the deer with his glass, and stalk them by his knowledge of the ground and by his ability to take advantage of the wind, in exactly the same way as his ancestors stalked them on the same hills since time immemorial.'*<sup>66</sup>

The prey in this grand and venerable game did not escape the process of deification. Deer were attributed an antiquarian heritage and impressively regal genealogy among the species of the animal kingdom. George Eyre-Todd noted how:

*'with his branching crown of antlers, his stately step, his love of the clean spaciousness and freedom of the bens, and his refusal to herd at ease with stall-fed beasts, the red deer on his native heath looks exactly what he is, every inch a king.'*<sup>67</sup>

Allan Cameron described his Highland red deer as:

*'the lineal descendants of the great European stags that crossed the dry floor of the North Sea when the ice sheet rolled from Britain, and possessed the old Caledonian forest, in company with the wolf and the boar, the bear and the beaver, the white bulls and the Stone men.'*<sup>68</sup>

He lamented how, 'the march of civilisation has destroyed their forests, ploughed their pastures, circumscribed their bounds, and made them a lesser race than their mighty ancestors', but argued that 'their pedigree is none the less unimpeachable, and the successful sportsman spills the blue blood of prehistoric times'.<sup>69</sup> This relatively measured treatment of the deer's migratory history was not matched in other stalking texts where the quarry was regularly imbued with an unworldly sublimity. The Duke of Portland's hunting reminiscences were troubled by descriptions of mysterious and supernatural happenings on the hill.<sup>70</sup> Elsewhere, tales of accurately fired bullets passing straight through their targets and of cornered deer inexplicably vanishing into the misty ether were not uncommon and were recounted in all seriousness. Particular stags gained infamy for their sheer size or

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<sup>66</sup> Willoughby de Broke, C. (1922) *The Passing Years*, London: Constable, p. 231.

<sup>67</sup> Eyre-Todd, G. (1925) 'Some Royal Hunters of the Highland Deer', in Ross, J. (ed.) (1925) op cit. p. 63-75; 63. Even species of hunting dog could be accorded a patrician blood-line: Anon (1929) 'Dogs for the Gun - the spaniel - A Canine Aristocrat' *Oban Times*, November 9 p. 3.

<sup>68</sup> Cameron, A.G. (1923) *The Wild Deer of Scotland*, London: Blackwood, p. 1-2.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>70</sup> The Duke did appear to have been gifted a particularly vivid imagination. His belief in the existence of the Loch Ness monster was unwavering, indeed on one notable drive north he met an excitable group of locals by the lochside. They had, he recorded without a hint of suspicion, sighted the beast only five minutes before his arrival. Bentinck, W.J.A.C.J.C. (1937) *Men, Women and Things: Memories of the Duke of Portland*, London: Faber & Faber, p. 313.

reclusiveness, some for their obdurate nature in failing to enter into 'the spirit of the game', while others won notoriety for levels of cunning which betrayed almost human characteristics.<sup>71</sup> Mythical monarch among them all was 'The Muckle Hart of Benmore' which was 'grassed' by the distinguished sportsman Charles St. John, a scarcely believable seven days after his Herculean chase had begun. The Duke of Portland chose to memorialise events from folk-memory formerly on his Sutherland estate. In 1924 he organised the erection of a cairn to mark the approximate spot where the last wolf in the county was killed by the hunter Polson, 'in or about the year 1700'.<sup>72</sup>

Highland landscape and wildlife were entwined in a sporting mythology founded on the need for historical legitimacy. Cultural sophistication and even greater validity could be attained through the creation of a distinctive lifestyle to compliment the deer stalking tradition. The codes, values and ethics of the patrician community appealed to age-old notions of stability, fortitude and honour. Sporting rhetoric stressed how rigorous activities based on the hill bred specific qualities among its participants, helping foster physical, national, sexual and racial attributes.

### Sporting Privations: Masculinity and Empire

Delving deep into the vaults of Gaelic folk-lore, the sporting community disinterred another precious cultural artefact to bolster their defences, the cult of manliness. The gentleman stalker breathed new life into stories and legends which celebrated as their central theme, feats of outrageous heroism, bravery and stamina. Where most saw acts of extreme folly, and at times outright stupidity in the face of grave danger, the 'testoteronic' sportsman saw the quintessence of outdoor sport. He revelled in native tales which told of virile Highlanders tackling unwounded stags with nothing more than a knife for protection, of their protracted chases stretching over several days and of snatched sleep in the heather, braving the elements wrapped in nothing more than a rough plaid (see figure 3). Such a doughty profile became the model to which upper-class gents should aspire. Its manifestations often stretching to quite ludicrous lengths in the arcane guides penned to enlighten any unsuspecting, virginal soul about to set foot in a Highland deer forest.

In his seminal text 'The Art of Stalking', William Scrope did a great deal to engender this code of manhood, while also promoting Scotland as a fashionable stalking location. Among his many hints, which betrayed a certain eccentricity, he

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<sup>71</sup> In one of his many stalking essays Alexander McConnochie assumed the persona of a stag and recounted a life's events on the hill; the experiment was no great literary success. McConnochie, A.I. (1932) 'The Autobiography of a Stag', in *Deer Forest Life*, London: Maclehose.

<sup>72</sup> For his information the Duke was reliant upon the imaginative writings of William Scrope.



ON LEAC NA CARNACH  
“ Indifferent whether he plunged the knife  
into the throat of the beast or the  
photographer ”

Figure 3 - The Native Hunting Hero  
Source: *Country Life* (1934)

urged the urbane reader to remove from his scalp any 'hyacinthine curls' as 'a man so shorn, with the addition of a little bog earth rubbed scientifically over the crown of his head would be an absolute Ulysses on the moor, and perfectly invincible'.<sup>73</sup> The perfect exponent of Highland field craft should, Scrope maintained, be endowed with several other invaluable attributes:

*'To run like an antelope and breathe like the trade winds...to rejoice in wading through torrents, and be able to stand firmly on water worn stones unconscious of the current...to swim he should not be able because there would be no merit in saving himself by such a paltry subterfuge.'*<sup>74</sup>

The muscular standard had been set, and seventy-five years later the same idiom was employed by Sir Iain Colquhoun, deer forest owner and 7th Baronet of Luss, as he mused over various issues affecting the inter-war stalking scene (see figure 4). A fervent advocate of outdoor living, Colquhoun fired a broadside at an emerging young generation unwilling to pass their Highland *rites of passage*. He railed against those who were:

*'fundamentally soft, and not the least ashamed of it...if they are wet and cold, and unwilling to suffer further discomfort, they do not hesitate to let the ghillie know...when our young men cease to find pleasure in overcoming hardship, when they find no joy in scornfully refusing to admit the weariness of the flesh or in taking the last ounce out of themselves, then personally I have little use for that "sensible" type of sportsman. He had better confine himself to the low ground or the drawing room.'*<sup>75</sup>

Females it seemed were little better than these callow youths. Those who did excel at stalking, like Alma Breadalbane and Lady Evelyn Cobbold, were celebrated as quirky anomalies.<sup>76</sup> Those who did not were left in the lodge to ponder the positioning of taxidermic monstrosities which were terribly 'awkward to harmonise with modern schemes of decoration' and how best to cope with the disturbances

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<sup>73</sup> Scrope, W. (1897) op cit. p. 99.

<sup>74</sup> This superhuman bearing was all the more admirable when the reader considers the levels of alcoholic consumption which Scrope advised for an evenings entertainment, preceding a day on the hill. He advised that, 'the best part of a bottle of champagne may be allowed at dinner; this is not only venial, but salutary. A few tumblers of brandy and soda water are greatly to be commended, for they are cooling. Whiskey cannot reasonably be objected to, for it is an absolute necessary and does not come under the name of intemperance...ginger beer I hold to be a dropsical, insufficient and unmanly beverage: I pray you avoid it!' Ibid, p. 97-100.

<sup>75</sup> Colquhoun, I. (1925) op cit. p. 112

<sup>76</sup> Although he claiming to be 'an intense admirer of the modern woman for her spirits, camaraderies and complete self-confidence', Colquhoun blamed 'Eve...the masculine modern woman' for 'encouraging an effeminate type of man'. 'Decline of the Scot', *Glasgow Herald*, 1930 January 23 p. 3.



# The Scottish Field

DEVOTED TO MANLY SPORT AND OUT-DOOR LIFE.



Photo, *Sport and General*,

Figure 4 - Sir Iain Colquhoun (centre)

Source: *The Scottish Field* (1931)

which sport made to 'domestic time-tables'.<sup>77</sup> The androcentric nature of the tradition was all too apparent when discussion turned to the overall role of women in sport. Colquhoun priggishly observed how:

*'The rifles are off to the hill long before the ladies appear for breakfast, retiring as a rule about half-way through dinner, dead tired. Afterwards, having refused to play bridge, they make a spasmodic series of unintelligent remarks, and having obtained early permission from their hostess, yawn themselves gratefully to bed.'*<sup>78</sup>

These insights into appropriate displays of masculinity and morality came from a man who habitually went out to the hill barefoot and insisted upon serving as personal stalker to the many guests and patrons of his Loch Sloy estate. The privations enforced by a hostile, isolated environment were integral to one's enjoyment of the sporting experience. Masochistic pleasures, it seemed, could be found in the most unlikely of surroundings. *The Scottish Field*, a publication 'devoted to manly sport and outdoor life', bubbled effusively over the robust example set by the owner of Strathconan deer forest, Captain Christian Coombe. Despite being a septuagenarian he was said to stalk with great verve and no little elan, his running tally of 1485 stags according him the title of 'greatest living sportsman in the Highlands'.<sup>79</sup> Dawn starts with a Purdey rifle tucked under the arm and the rich smell of gun oil and saltpetre in the air, obviously kept the lead in a man's pencil.

Magnifico could also become philosopher. One's understanding of abstract themes, the meanings of life, death, evolution and natural selection were, it seemed, heightened by the hunt. A devotee described how, 'hard exercise in the keen, stimulating air which seems to have swept in over mountain peaks from the very roof of the world' was 'a medicine for mind and body'.<sup>80</sup> The physical act of killing was believed to act as a purgation, for as one zealot stated 'it is good that man should, for a month in the year, return to a life of sophisticated savagery'.<sup>81</sup> The ultimate form of possession for the repressed hunter in every male came with the quarry's death. Followed by a ceremonial blooding, the 'gralloching' of the beast and the subsequent display of its head as a trophy, this ritual was replete with

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<sup>77</sup> 'C.F.' (1934) 'The Land of the North' *Country Life*, LXXVI (1957) p. 58; 'H.B.C.P.' (1933) op cit. p. 58.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 110. One rather more considerate gentleman reminded his fellow sportsmen that 'grouse and deer may be the central excuse for your excursion, but need not be pressed to the point of losing all the habits of civilisation and immuring your women-folk in dull and draughty keep'. 'H.B.C.P.' (1933) op cit. p. 59.

<sup>79</sup> *The Scottish Field*, 1933 LXII (370) p. 170.

<sup>80</sup> 'H.B.C.P.' (1933) op cit. p. 57.

<sup>81</sup> 'C.F.' (1934) op cit. p.59.

explicit and implicit connections to human sexuality (see figure 5).<sup>82</sup> Even the unwelcome intrusion of twentieth-century society into the sportsman's private world failed to dampen his primeval, red-blooded urges. 'What if we see in the same glass both the stag we have selected and the oncoming line of tourist cars?', asked Fitzherbert, respected stalking correspondent for *Country Life*. He hesitatingly consoled his readership by observing that:

*'this certainly makes us feel we have travelled far since the Muckle Hart of Benmore. But later, as we sit at the roadside, our stag beside us, waiting for the pony or even, maybe, for the van, we can gather consolation from the knowledge that actually the stag was all the more difficult to secure because of the advance of modern conditions'.*<sup>83</sup>

Certain other precepts had to be observed by followers of the cult of masculinity. The spirit of sporting fair-play decreed that, only by 'naturally' overcoming the difficulties placed before him by the wilderness, would the self-respecting 'rifle' feel his struggle to have been truly worthwhile. Technical innovations such as the high-velocity rifle and the telescopic sight were shunned by the more devout disciples of the cult of masculinity. Stalking was after all, a test of field-craft and not long range marksmanship.<sup>84</sup> The use of motor cars for transportation to remote shooting grounds or to carry prizes from the forest was initially frowned upon.<sup>85</sup> Even the use of new camouflage techniques had been felt by some to contravene the unwritten rules of the game.<sup>86</sup>

Stalking while affording the vainqueur considerable personal gratification could also serve a higher, national purpose. Seeking further cultural embeddedness and collective security, certain aficionados portrayed the sport as a breeder of good British stock. Like one's years spent at Eton or Harrow and an Oxbridge college,

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<sup>82</sup> For more detailed discussions of the links between game-hunting and expressions of sexual identity see: Thomas, K. (1983) *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1800*, London: Penguin, p.146; Mackenzie, J. (1988) *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservatism and British Imperialism*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p.42-43.

<sup>83</sup> Fitzherbert, C. (1938) 'Deer-Stalking Days', in souvenir Scottish Supplement, *Country Life*, LXXXIV (2165) p. ix.

<sup>84</sup> The report of the 1922 Deer Forest Committee attempted to find a constructive solution to the increased popularity of modern innovations like the high velocity rifle. It claimed that the presence of sheep on the hillside, while satisfying demands for a more productive use of the land resource, would give the deer a more sporting chance. Departmental Committee (Cmd. 1636) op cit. p. 282.

<sup>85</sup> Lady Evelyn Cobbold, a proprietrix never hidebound by sporting convention, caused quite a stir with a photograph of her head stalker bringing home five hinds from Glencarron lashed on to the back of a two-seater Calcott. Hart-Davis, D. (1978) op cit. p. 217.

<sup>86</sup> The American magnate Walter Winans, owner of some 250,000 acres of West Highland deer forest before the war, became something of a pariah among the stalking set due to his rather individualistic approach to the sport. Prone to hunting on horseback and fascinated by the art of camouflage he once ordered his favourite white mare to be dyed grey so as to make her less conspicuous on the hillside. This episode among many others is described in: Winans, W. (1908) *The Sporting Rifle*, London: Putnam.





THE GRALLOCH.

Figure 5 - Stalking Ritual  
Source: McConnochie, A.I. (1924)

like membership of the Carlton or Brooks, like ownership of a London town-house, autumn seasons in the Highlands were a perennial component in the Establishment package. Sir Iain Colquhoun firmly maintained that many a formative lesson in British manhood had been taught upon a rainswept hillside.<sup>87</sup> Major John Ross, a famed Bisley rifle-shot, developing the theme argued that stalking conferred to its participants many of the values required for an imperial career. He proudly stated that, 'the sporting rifle has followed - often preceded - the Empire flag', while declaring 'the spirit of sport...a band of comradeship amongst all the branches of the British race'.<sup>88</sup> Hugh Gunn, a native of Sutherland who went on to achieve relative fame as an imperial administrator, adopted a similar stance in an essay entitled 'The Sportsman as Empire Builder'.<sup>89</sup> He noted how:

*'The chase of the red deer and other sport had much to do with the spirit which stimulated the explorer and the pioneer...for whenever exploration and the opportunity of the hunter have been combined, from the polar regions to the heart of the tropics, the sporting Briton has never failed to play a foremost part'.<sup>90</sup>*

This same spirit had also enabled the spread of trade, commerce and enterprise to these 'unknown and pagan lands'.<sup>91</sup> Such stark triumphalism was common among a community whose membership had long gorged themselves on the fruits of empire. The same qualities of lustiness, resilience and independence displayed by the imperial adventurer, or indeed administrator, were also deemed to be a requirement of the big-game hunter. The Highlands were a perfect training ground for the peripatetic aristocrat with his sights set on the jungle or veldt (see figure 6). When caught in a nasty pickle on the African savannah the footloose Duke of Sutherland, a renowned shot throughout the Colonies, doubtless cast his mind back to days spent on the marches near Dunrobin Castle. The pages of 'Geordie' Gower's autobiography were liberally peppered with snapshots of his imperial prizes, among them lions, rhino, ibex, tigers, elephants, bison and gazelle.<sup>92</sup>

Meanwhile the close links between martial and sporting pursuits were noted by several stalking protagonists, among them the Professor of Celtic at Edinburgh University who suggested that the 'great hunts served the Gaelic nobles as an excellent preparation and discipline for warfare' in much the same way as the

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<sup>87</sup> Colquhoun, I. (1925) op cit. p. 112.

<sup>88</sup> Ross, J. (1925) 'Preface', in Gunn, H. (ed.) op cit. p. 1.

<sup>89</sup> Gunn was involved in the establishment of the University of the Cape of Good Hope, the Grey University College, Bloemfontein and the University of Western Australia, Perth. He was also editor of the twelve-volumed 'The British Empire: a survey'.

<sup>90</sup> Gunn, H. (1925) 'The Sportsman as Empire Builder', in Ross, J. (ed.) op cit. p. 137-161; 138.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p. 137.

<sup>92</sup> Gower, G.S.L. (1957) op cit.

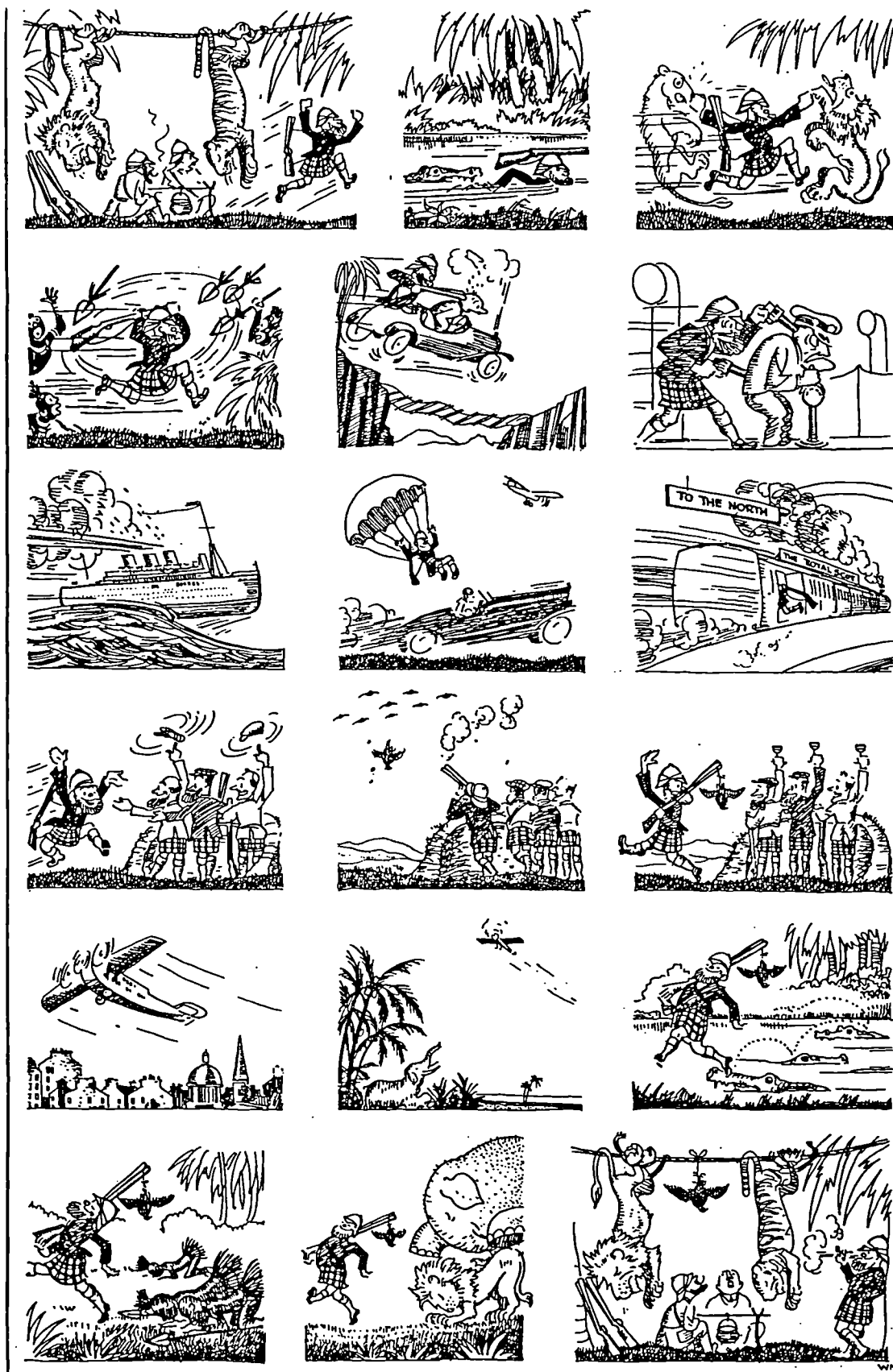


Figure 6 - The Irresistible Call of 'The Twelfth'

Source: *The Scottish Field* (1934)

British army benefited from 'our modern autumn manoeuvres'.<sup>93</sup> Lord Lovat was the first to recognise how deer stalking could hone a nation's menfolk for military service, be they potential officer class or merely humble sapper. At the turn of the century the ancestral chieftain of the Fraser clan, a man 'who possessed too many deer forests not to turn out a fine stalker' and who 'never failed to play the game', raised a militia to fight in the Boer War from the ranks of local Highland men employed as ghillies, keepers and stalkers.<sup>94</sup> Having acquitted themselves honourably, the 'Lovat Scouts' were to become a permanent and celebrated fixture in the British army. Younger sons of the peerage and baronetage were granted titular positions in the regiment while the ordinary rank and file were lauded for their immaculate displays of fieldcraft. These were 'Highlanders who could use a telescope, a pony, and a rifle equally well, and all the same strictly obey orders'.<sup>95</sup> John Ross, indulging in military bombast, described his pride on hearing the 'strains of the bagpipes played by a kilted Highlander proudly arrayed in the tartan that his broadsword had made known in every quarter of the globe, from the mud fields of Flanders to the jungles of Cathay'.<sup>96</sup>

Expressions of the sporting cult of masculinity were various, ranging from individual glorification to communal and national celebration. Each provided justification for the conversion of the Highlands into a vast game reserve. Standing lock, stock and barrel above any other sport, diversion or pastime, deer-stalking, it seemed, served higher purposes to the state. Besides the progress stalking facilitated in the far flung corners of empire, the sport was also felt to bring advances on the home front. The game industry imposed a distinctive social structure and sense of order on a region which, in the popular consciousness, remained primitive, backward and wholly marginal to British affairs. The steadying hand of the feudal laird would ensure only the gradual and controlled arrival of modernity while ultimately bequeathing to the local inhabitants a civilised outlook on life.

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<sup>93</sup> Watson, W.J. (1925) 'Deer and Boar in Gaelic Literature', in Ross, J. (ed.) op cit. p. 75-101; 77.

<sup>94</sup> McConnochie, A.I. (1933) 'Tribute to Lord Lovat', *The Scottish Field*, LXI (364) p.143; Bentinck, W.J.A.C.J.C. (1933) op cit. p. 140.

<sup>95</sup> McConnochie, A.I. (1933) Ibid, p 143. Detailed information on the formation and military record of the Lovat Scouts can be found in: Lindlay, F. (1935) op cit. and Keay, J. and Keay, J. (eds.) (1994) op cit.

<sup>96</sup> Ross, J. (1925) 'Deer Stalking in the Scottish Highlands', in Gunn, H. (ed.) Op cit. p. 206.

'They are British, just as you are'

*Ghillie: "It might be not so hard to get a wee staggie, or to sniggle a salmon in one of the deep pots."*

*Lord Lamancha: "No, we must play the game by the rules. We're not poachers."*<sup>97</sup>

*(John Buchan, 1925)*

*"You did not exactly miss him, sir, but he flew above your shot."*<sup>98</sup>

In the previous section comparisons were drawn between certain social and cultural dimensions of hunting in the British empire and those of the domestic sporting experience. This common thread is continued in a consideration of the relations which evolved between the landed elite and local Highland population. The desire of plutocratic sportsmen to ape the traditions of the ancient Gaels was not matched by a similar admiration for their contemporary ancestors. Instead the inter-war Highlander was commonly viewed by the patrons of the deer forests with a mixture of amusement, pity and disdain; an obsolete artefact left stranded on the anthropological shelf of curiosities by a rapidly developing British kingdom. 'Is not the Highlander a strange and wonderful compound?', taunted 'Simplicitas':

*'with a temperament which swings from fey heights to black deeps, revelling in ancient superstition on Saturday night and starched into his pew on the Sabbath...struggling with an inferiority complex in contact with the sophisticated Southern'.<sup>99</sup>*

More than one sporting blunderbuss argued that the much vaunted independence of spirit, so evident in the histories of previous centuries, had evaporated in recent times only to be replaced by a pervasive air of torpor, indolence and indifference.<sup>100</sup> Of the few natives who retained any level of respect among the gentry most were stalkers and ghillies hired by the sporting estates for their wealth of outdoor experience and intimate knowledge of local geography. Such veneration was however, limited strictly to activities on the hillside and was heavily tinged with romantic images of a Highlander who no longer, (if he had ever), existed.

More prescriptive critics argued for a reiteration of traditional feudal values, those of loyalty to the triumvirate of laird, king and country. It was no accident that in a publication presenting the views of the establishment on aspects of Scottish nationhood the Duke of Atholl, in his position as editor and pedagogue, chose to

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<sup>97</sup> Buchan, J. (1925) op cit. p. 44.

<sup>98</sup> Morrison, W.S. (1929) 'On Highland Politeness', *Scots Magazine*, XII (2) p. 86-96; 88.

<sup>99</sup> 'Simplicitas' (1925) 'Tir Nan Beann (Land of the Hills)', in Gunn, H (ed.) op cit. Appendix III.

<sup>100</sup> Spence, L. (1931) "Captain Kettle" in the West Highlands: A Race of Beggars and Spongers' *Scots Independent* February p. 53; 'Highlander Himself to Blame' *Scots Independent* 1938 November p. 7.

write an introductory piece on the subject of 'Courage and Loyalty'.<sup>101</sup> Similarly in 1920, faced with the threat of political unrest among his flock over the availability of land for crofting, the Duke of Sutherland used a speech in the Lords to appeal for calm. 'Scotland', he reminded the House:

*'is not Bolshevik. It's (sic) people are loyal to a man...perhaps in the great industrial centres there are cases here and there of disloyal people, but in the rural areas, where the trouble has been taking place, the people are most patriotic and loyal, and most of the men served in the war, and served well'.*<sup>102</sup>

From where did such oracular statements spring ?

Their ancestors having been infamously betrayed by the Clan chieftains-cum-landlords the Highland population of the late nineteenth-century were offered guidance and firm leadership by a newly anglicised aristocracy. By the turn of the century with the deer forests nearing their zenith, large numbers deprived of any other means of survival found gainful service at the 'Big House'. Although the traditional lairds cited *noblesse oblige* as their primary concern, it is arguable that the burgeoning job market had rather more to do with the modern sporting estate's need for an impressive staff of underlings than an awareness of duties owed to loyal kith and kin.<sup>103</sup> Eric Linklater sought to shatter what he viewed as a thin veneer of sincerity, claiming that natives were retained merely 'to minister to cosmopolitan pleasure, to assist strangers down steep slopes, to carry their guns and rifles and to put their roads together'.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless Allan Cameron maintained that, 'for the Highland crofters who still clung to their native glens', sport and its associated lifestyle had 'opened up new avenues of remunerative employment when the tide of their fortune was at the lowest ebb'. If this was not recompense enough, stalking had 'enlisted their young men in a permanent occupation for which they had an inherited aptitude, and which touched their hearts on a peculiarly responsive chord'.<sup>105</sup> A culture of dependence rapidly evolved with entire settlements reliant upon the fortunes of the Laird and the estate for their upkeep. Indeed, Lord Lovat's biographer was at pains to highlight the human dilemmas which the peer had been forced to endure when rationalising his estates, for 'in deciding what to sell he was guided by his abhorrence of anything like selling his "people". He knew them all personally; they were his friends and he

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<sup>101</sup> The Duke of Atholl (1932) 'Introduction: Courage and Loyalty' in, *A Scotsman's Heritage*, London: Alexander Maclehose, p. 7.

<sup>102</sup> SRO AC 67/172.

<sup>103</sup> A bottom-up view of life on a Highland sporting estate can be found in: Cameron, A. (1988) *op cit.*

<sup>104</sup> Linklater, E. (1935) *The Lion and the Unicorn: or, what England has meant to Scotland*, London: Routledge, p. 88.

<sup>105</sup> Cameron, A.G. (1923) *op cit.* p. 63.

would not voluntarily hand them over to some unknown purchaser'.<sup>106</sup> Despite the cut backs in staff enforced by the financial difficulties of the 1920's, the Laird's shooting lodge remained the economic focus of many localities during the inter-war period.<sup>107</sup> Campbell Nairne was far from impressed by their haughty presence in Perthshire's glens, noting that while 'in other counties the land is sapped by the fungoid excrescences of bungalow-builders. Our parasites are the big houses'. Tucked privately into secluded reaches, serviced by specially constructed roads and thereby shielded from reality, these symbols of affluence and social dominance sat imperiously amid the surrounding countryside (see figure 7).

Concurrently, for the extended membership of the inter-war landed elite an archaic genealogy was by no means a pre-requisite for the adoption of such esteemed status. By bathing themselves in a benign and nostalgic light, a distorted version of the Clan ethic was revived by a new class of self-appointed surrogate chieftains. Illustrative in this context is the example of 'The Blighty Association', a philanthropic trust founded in 1916 for the purpose of training maimed ex-servicemen in the art of handloom weaving. The organisation, with its headquarters in Edinburgh, a 'Blighty Hut' selling wares in Ballater and a produce agreement with Burberry's, was patronised by the royal family and supported in its aims by notables from the sporting and landowning community. While it would be churlish to impugn the charitable sentiments of the Association, the thought of disabled Highland men weaving 'the famous Blighty tweed, the ideal fabric for all sports garments' so it could warm chilly shoulders at the grouse butt, engenders in the present-day observer a certain unease.<sup>108</sup> Yet such public expressions of empathy, understanding and beneficent authority over a suitably appreciative local population provided a further immutable link with paragons from the Clan lineage.

The vast disparities in power, prestige and wealth between local employee and laird of the deer forest produced a social protocol based upon passivity, deference and continual 'cap-touching, courtseying, fetching, carrying and currying

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<sup>106</sup> Lindley, F. (1935) op cit. p. 241.

<sup>107</sup> Notwithstanding other estate workers, J.M. MacDiarmid claimed that in 1927 only 880 men were employed directly in the Highland deer forests: MacDiarmid, J.M. (1928) *The Deer Forests of Scotland and How They Are Bleeding Scotland White*, Scottish Home Rule Association: Glasgow, p. 10.

<sup>108</sup> Equally discomfiting was the Association's first fund raising exhibition in London which comprised a display of 'stag's heads and forest trophies'. Appendix 1 in, Ross, J. (1925) op cit. Such schemes did have earlier precedents. During the late nineteenth-century several aristocratic patroness', among them Lady Seaforth and the Duchess of Sutherland, identified markets for local Highland craft work. Lady Fowler, another madam bountiful, sold two-thirds of the tweeds from Loch Broom by private correspondence. Grant, I.F. (1925) 'Highland Rural Industries' *The Edinburgh Review*, 241 (491) p. 167-85.





Figure 7 - The Imperious Shooting Lodge  
Source: Blake, G. (1938)



favour'.<sup>109</sup> According to the young, radical politician Tom Johnston, the autocratic landowner suffocated all vibrancy and spirit in the countryside. The laird sat omnipotent 'dictating to men and women how they shall comport themselves alike in the great and trivial matters of life', his true objective 'to crush and grind the soul, the manliness, the backbone and the independence out of rural Scotland'.<sup>110</sup> In its polished form the exploitative and paternalistic code provided the landowning elite with further opportunity to hone the myth of their own historicity. A classic guide to deferential behaviour can be found in McConnochie's 'Hints to Young Stalkers' in which the sage imparts much sound advice upon a promising apprentice:

*'As a rule the sportsman prefers a stalker who has something pertinent to say, but the gushing stalker is a nuisance. While being invariably polite, the stalker must avoid the too frequent use of the word "sir"; let it always be used however after "No" and "Yes".'*<sup>111</sup>

Further notes on etiquette were provided by Sir Iain Colquhoun who warned the stalker that his family's livelihood was dependent upon him performing a range of custodial roles all at once:

*'it is no less his duty to instruct in the art and give his "rifle" an interesting and enjoyable day than to bring home a stag. Let him then make his "rifle" his friend. Point out to him the different hills and give him the English equivalent for their Gaelic names. Show him the cairn where the litter was killed in the spring and tell him the legends of the glen as he passes through it, and let him not forget the grand old tales of the days of clan warfare, for every stone on the hill has its story'.*<sup>112</sup>

Only when discussion turned to the masonic world of hillcraft were the native stalkers unquestionable leaders in the field. Their honour unimpeachable, knowledge encyclopaedic and judgement intuitive, common Highlanders were transformed into supermen when surveying the skyline for deer (see figure 9). Flat out in the heather thinly-veiled impertinence and 'couthy' humour were even permissible, especially if the stalker was accompanying a guest with a less than accurate aim (see figure 8). The laird of Luss was particularly effusive on the subject, reminding fellow sportsmen that:

*'steeped in the lore of the hill, you have a man whose mind is still untouched by the vulgarity of a commercial age, a man, who, during*

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<sup>109</sup> Johnston, T. (1909) *Our Scots Noble Families*, Glasgow: Forward Publications, p. x.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, p. x.

<sup>111</sup> McConnochie, A.I (1923) op cit. London: Witherby, p. 31.

<sup>112</sup> Colquhoun, I. (1925) op cit. p. 111. Other articles detailed various means by which the 'rifle' could gently entice his stalker into useful and stimulating conversation. Fitzherbert, C. (1937) 'Amateurs and Professionals in the Deer Forest' *Country Life*, LXXXII (2116) p. 139.



SPORTSMAN (after missing stag).—"What do you think's to blame for that Duncan?"  
 STALKER.—"Weel, it's no my blame, for I brought ye wi'in fifty yards o' the beast. The stag's no to blame, for he stood broadside on to ye. An' the rifle's a good vin. So I'll just leave it to versel'."

Figure 8 - Sporting Relations on the Hill

Source: *Country Life* (1933)



"ALL MEN ARE EQUAL ON THE HEATHER."

Figure 9 - Comrades

Source: McConnochie, A.I. (1924)

*the long winter evenings has had time to think things out for himself and has not neglected his opportunities. With his natural grace of manner and independent character the Highland stalker, to me, stands alone as the finest type of "Nature's gentlemen".*<sup>113</sup>

The myth of the noble savage had been transported intact to the twentieth-century.<sup>114</sup> Unfortunately, there also existed a rebellious element who disappointed the sporting purist by straying from the righteous path laid before them. While the *gralloching* of prize stags was clearly illegal, of far greater importance was the poacher's criminal disregard for 'the rules of the game'. Uninvited guests risked incurring the wrath of the capricious landowner. Hector Mackinnon, prosecuted under the original Game Act of 1832 for trespassing on Lord Strathcona's Glencoe estate 'in search or pursuit of deer', was representative of those brigands who chose to employ their god-given skills in an inappropriate manner.<sup>115</sup> Traditional sportsman were outraged by the modern poacher's dismissive attitude toward the romance of history and the established *esprit de corps*.<sup>116</sup> In what was considered the height of poor form, 'motorised bandits' killed not for honour but for financial gain, used the latest in firearms technology and took their prey near roads which provided the means for a quick getaway.<sup>117</sup> However these few miscreants apart, local stalkers remained firmly rooted in the folk memory of the region, enthralled the ageing gent and impressionable patrician pup alike. Harry Mortimer-Batten was not alone in fondly remembering how a gruff but warm-hearted ghillie had deputised for his oft-absent father during a privileged sporting childhood.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid, p. 113.

<sup>114</sup> Having read the accounts of early sportsmen writers such as John Colquhoun, W.A. Adams, Osgood Mackenzie and Charles St. John, Michael Wigan has recently claimed that 'some Highlanders...understood and sympathised with the roving sportsmen whom they now encountered and found the sporting era more acceptable than the regime of sheep graziers it replaced. Sportsmen brought benefits to a wider range of people and sought pleasure rather than profits'. Wigan, M. (1991) op cit. p. 25.

<sup>115</sup> *Oban Times*, 1928 August 20 p. 5.

<sup>116</sup> Whitehead, G.K. (1980) Op cit. p. 87. The poaching fraternity also had its sympathisers who argued that 'game was made for the poor as well as the rich, and that God made birds of the air and fish of the sea for all'. Editorial 'The Romance of Poaching' *Northern Times* 1936 September 3 p. 4. Neil Gunn, novelist and alleged a poacher of some repute in his native Caithness, was more sentimental, listing: 'the three freedoms the Highlander has lost: to take a stag from the hill, to take a salmon from the river, and to take his own drop of whisky, without payment or tax. The memory haunts him through innumerable modern talks of wild poachings and illicit distillings. A day on the hill, food for the larder, and a dram - or two. Life might have been hard often, but it had its compensations'. NLS Dep. 209 Box 8 (24) 'Deer Stalking in the Highlands' (undated typescript) p. 16.

<sup>117</sup> Elsewhere in the empire the entrenched British sporting credo was also in need of protection. Indigenous African and Indian tribes were vilified for their use of "unsporting" and "cruel" methods in game hunting. Traps, spears and nets were certainly not *de rigueur* in Happy Valley. Meanwhile, spurious arguments were used to support the imposition of restrictions on the use of firearms by natives. Mackenzie, J. (1988) op cit. p. 299-301.

<sup>118</sup> 'Stravaiger' (1938) *Mountains of the Morning*, London: Moray Press.

Tokens of affection and respect accepted, each player knew his place. The relations between stalker and master replicated the established colonial code of 'wallah' and 'bwana' common to more distant killing fields. If hunting was an integral part of the culture of imperialism then the identity of the Scottish Highlands were inextricably bound up within its racial and geographical hierarchies. Sport represented one of several avenues to usher marginal peoples into the protective embrace of the British empire. As an informal mechanism for social administration the game industry conferred to the native populace wealth in 'appropriate' measure while also imparting upon them a bearing which would ease their path toward enlightenment. This belief harboured a blithe ignorance of the frictions which existed in the Highlands along lines of class and nationality. In a patronising and blinkered reading of events, Lord Willoughby de Broke detailed how:

*'...if you have killed a good beast, everything is all right. The whole establishment, from the head forester down to the junior housemaid, is delighted. They are British, just as you are. And all good British people love field sports, even if they have never been to the field. They are innately sensitive to the thrill of the chase. It is in their blood'.<sup>119</sup>*

Just as the people of the Highlands were felt to benefit from the sporting industry's beneficence so too, it was argued, did the landscape itself. As a modern form of land-use the sporting estate was equipped with powerful ecological and economic arguments.

### Developing the Sporting Discourse for a Modern Audience

The need for the landowning oligarchy to legitimate, and in such a way perpetuate, their role in Highland society was paramount during the inter-war period. For the first time their previously oligarchic control over the land resource was threatened by vociferous public opposition. Thus far, the chapter has dealt with the responses devised by the landed and sporting elite to counteract such an offensive, namely the creation of a reactionary geography based on exclusivity, enclosure and artifice. The remainder will, to adopt the parlance of many a combative laird, demonstrate how these challenges were not simply countered by a 'rear-guard action'. The sporting community's culture of self-aggrandisement required further refinement. Among the resplendent costumes which filled the patrician wardrobe, the most expertly tailored outfit offered a compelling identity, that of the Laird as tweed-clad

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<sup>119</sup> Lord Willoughby de Broke (1922) *The Passing Years*, London: Constable, p. 230. It is interesting to compare this tranquil vision of social relations on the sporting estate with the much darker version offered by the Highland novelist Neil Gunn. Gunn, N. (1932) *The Lost Glen*, Edinburgh: Porpoise Press.



custodian of the countryside. With concerns mounting among the bourgeoisie over the future of 'natural' or pastoral landscapes and the protection of their floral and faunal diversity, it was perhaps inevitable that the lairdocracy would fit themselves out with a sophisticated environmental credo as part of a multifaceted defence stratagem.

By making vocal their commitment to landscape and nature preservation the landowning elite could portray themselves as modern representatives of a continuing tradition. Their rationale was simple, an adherence to the tenets of rural preservation was only natural for a class whose prime source of wealth lay in the land itself. By maintaining millions of treasured acres in what was claimed to be their natural state, the sporting industry stood as testament to this pledge. Moreover, convenient historical precedent was provided by the distinctive land management regimes which had been developed in association with the royal hunting parks of ancient Scotland. In truth, as products of the late-nineteenth century, the deer forest and grouse moor remained unproven environmental experiments, their legacy stretching no further than two generations of sportsmen. Modern endorsement could also be sought through scientific experimentation, braiding conservationist values and traditions with a new desire for precision and exactitude. Advocates of the sporting land ethic were remarkably assured; ecological sustainability it seemed, arose directly out of historical authenticity and public self-proclamation. However, it is not the objective of the following sections to assess the environmental or scientific validity of these claims, rather to examine their cultural construction and representation.<sup>120</sup>

While an evolving, if arcane, knowledge of genetic science and natural history was a useful weapon when combined with powerful ecological arguments on land and soil capability, the image of countryside custodian required a popularised and institutional dimension. Taking up the well-worn adage that 'attack is the best form of defence', certain representatives of the landowning elite also elected to assume a more enlightened and pro-active role. They did so by locating themselves at the very fulcrum of inter-war debates on landscape amenity, heritage preservation and modern nationhood. This critically important gesture would ease the conversion of the azoic sporting environment into a treasured cultural representation of the Scottish landscape while confirming the metamorphosis of the

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<sup>120</sup> The devastating long-term ecological consequences of field sports on the region's natural environment and land resource are reviewed in: Lister-Kaye, J. (1994) *Ill Fares The Land: A Sustainable Land Ethic for the Sporting Estates of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*, Occasional Paper No. 3 Scottish Natural Heritage. See also: Smout, T.C. (ed.) (1993) *Scotland Since Prehistory: Natural Change and Human Impact*, Aberdeen: Scottish Cultural Press; Darling, F.F. (1955) *West Highland Survey: An Essay in Human Ecology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

once vilified laird into a paragon of civic patriotism. At a more abstract level the sections which follow demonstrate how, through the construction of a compelling imagined tradition, the landowning elite continued to carefully exploit the nexus between power, authority and knowledge. Ultimately, an awareness of these powerful social forces would allow this dynamic community to identify their own distinctive resolution to the dialectic between feudal hegemony and modern democracy in Scottish society.

### Blinking With Science: Amateur Ecology and the Sportsman

John Mackenzie has noted how on the imperial stage the act of killing, a ritual integral to all good sport, was legitimated by the participant's schooling in natural history and science. The sportsman prided himself on 'his understanding of the quarry, its environment and its anatomy, while 'his knowledge of firearms and ballistics added an extra scientific dimension'.<sup>121</sup> The gentleman 'rifle' of the Highlands was no different in this respect, he knew all facets of life on the hill and was aware of their place in the greater scheme of things. Indeed, as Seton Gordon the respected natural historian was keen to point out, the art of deer stalking could quite conceivably be combined with studied observation.<sup>122</sup> Harry Mortimer-Batten found no obvious contradiction in the two great loves of his life, hunting and nature study in the Highlands, instead he felt them to complement each other wonderfully.<sup>123</sup> Sportsmen with artistic inclinations could also be accommodated, although as Vincent Balfour-Browne bellowed from the pages of one commendation, 'the pleasure of outwitting a deer for the sake of making a drawing of him is but very small beer compared to the joy of outwitting a deer because one wants to kill him'. Painting or drawing one's quarry was, he argued, much like 'the image of war without the guilt'.<sup>124</sup> Although some advice was offered on mixing

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<sup>121</sup> Mackenzie, J. (1988) op cit. p. 300.

<sup>122</sup> For one example in Gordon's corpus of natural history see: Gordon, S. (1936) Black Corries: An Autumn Stalk, *Country Life*, LXXX (2077) p. 497.

<sup>123</sup> 'Stravaiger' (1938) op cit. On occasion, the hunter's admiration for the nobility and grace of his quarry was so overwhelming that having won the pursuit he might find himself forced to allow it to escape unharmed. One anonymous sportsman recounted his emotions at the culmination of a three-day chase: 'The rest was butchery. I had come over the ridge on my belly and looked at him through a bush. I had only to raise the rifle and he was done, when a revulsion of feeling came over me. Why should I kill him? I had won, won hands down, and I would exercise my prerogative of mercy, so I stood up and took my hat off to him. *The Field*, 1924 June 12 p. 18.

<sup>124</sup> Balfour-Browne, V.R. (1925) 'With Sketchbook and Rifle', in Ross, J. (ed.) op cit. 47-57; 57. See also: Armour, G.D. (1933) 'Minor Interests in a Deer Forest', *Country Life*, LXXIV (1919) p. 450-452.

photography with sport, in the Scottish Highlands the camera never threatened to supersede the glamour of the gun.<sup>125</sup>

While validation could be sought through natural history, the sports of forest, moor and cover were also felt to have themselves contributed heavily to the upsurge of interest shown in the related subjects of zoology and ecology. Unfortunately, the natural sciences were often only dabbled in by the Laird or sportsman with idle time on his hands, resulting in a bastardised and cranky sub-discipline.<sup>126</sup> Inspired by a quasi-Darwinian ethic the sporting elite were prone to stumble blind into the uncharted reaches of genetic engineering, experimenting with deer species as a means to improve the quality of their sport. Crude and ill-advised tests were attempted involving the introduction of continental park stags and North American *wapiti* to certain estates in the hope of improving the Highland stags conformation and antler physiology (see figure 10). King George V introduced deer from the Windsor estates to Balmoral, Lord Trent did likewise at Borrodale in Ardnamurchan while the Duke of Portland, an enthusiastic amateur scientist, had several species transported north from his home estate at Wellbeck Abbey as a means 'to secure fresh blood'.<sup>127</sup> An exhaustive collator of statistical ephemera, the Duke was also persuaded in the twilight of his sporting career to assemble a lavish, and largely pointless, taxonomy of his forest trophies.<sup>128</sup> Some estates masqueraded as open-air biological laboratories, locations for species improvement projects, experimental feeding systems, disease eradication programmes and new game management regimes, all in the name of sport.<sup>129</sup> Meanwhile, those species in the Highland ecosystem unfortunate enough to be classed as 'vermin' or 'raptors' were at the mercy of the idiosyncratic sporting environmentalist. Estate

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<sup>125</sup> Buxton, A. (1937) 'Stalking with a Camera', *Country Life*, LXXXII (2113) p. 72-73. During the 1930's photography became increasingly popular among the sporting community in Africa, particularly when measures initially introduced for sporting preservation were transformed into those promoting game conservation. See: Ryan, J. (1997) *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire*, Oxford: Reaktion Books.

<sup>126</sup> The accounts of sporting scientists which dealt with animal behaviour were replete with subjectivities, asperations and wild guesses. McConnochie's musings on the red deer are a case in point, information was arranged under the following headings: 'Age - Smell - Curiosity - Blind Stags - Twins - Herds - Deterioration - Fatalities - Wind - Sanctuary - Venison - Hummels and Switches - Hart - Shooting - Sympathy - Belling'. McConnochie, A.I. (1923) op cit. p. 6.

<sup>127</sup> *Oban Times*, 1939 June 24 p. 5; Cameron, A. (1938) 'Peninsula Progress - Lord Trent's Ardnamurchan Experiment', *Scots Magazine*, XXX (2) p.104-109; Bentinck, W.J.A.C.J.C. (1935) *The Red Deer of Langwell and Braemore, 1880-1934*, Edinburgh: Blackie and Sons, p. v.

<sup>128</sup> Also included in the publication was an essay by Robert Adam on 'The Flora of Caithness' and an ornithological record for Portland's Sutherland estates.

<sup>129</sup> For some typical examples of the research undertaken see: Fitzherbert, C. (1937) 'A Deer Forest Problem', *Country Life* LXXXII (2118) p. 191; 'Grouse' (1937) 'Grouse Shooting Prospects', *Country Life*, LXXXII (2113) p. 71; Maxwell, G. (1938) 'The Use and Abuse of the Deer Dog: A Topic for the Hind Stalking Season', *Country Life*, LXXXIV (2189) p. 664; Wallace, F. (1938) 'The Improvement of Deer: Colonel Horlick's Experiment at Ardverikie', *Country Life*, LXXXIV (2165) p. 56.



IN THE LARDER. GOOD WEIGHT (20/6), POOR HEAD.

Figure 10 - Sporting Science  
Source: McConnochie, A.I. (1924)



factors having given instruction on which 'marauders' were to be hunted down, considerable pride was taken by a staff who managed to 'keep a clean beat'. The tallies of the most prolific gamekeepers were reported in full gory detail by the local Highland press, often accompanied by photographs and measurements of particularly sizeable specimens.<sup>130</sup> Foxes, wildcats and eagles were tolerated in most deer forests as they kept down the numbers of grouse, a naturally noisy bird which could prove the scourge of a patient and stealthy stalker. However, on the shooting moor the same species was mollycoddled, its predators eradicated with clinical and quite frightening efficiency. Some less choosy landowners simply opted for unselective slaughter.<sup>131</sup> Local challenges to the accepted practice were few and normally fell upon deaf ears. Those who warned that 'Nature keeps strict accounts' and to 'recklessly interfere with her with impunity' was a dangerous game indeed, were seldom heeded.<sup>132</sup> When species of 'vermin' such as the peregrine falcon were threatened by extinction legal measures had to be introduced to control the extermination programmes. These were greeted with derision by many Highland sportsmen who, as late as 1935, were still campaigning for yet more gamekeepers to be employed.<sup>133</sup> Whatever one's management regime, support could always be guaranteed from the British Field Sports Association (BFSA). Faced with increasing public revulsion at stalking as a form of leisure, in 1931 this organisation was formed to counter anti-sporting propaganda. The Dukes of Portland and Sutherland served as vice-presidents, the latter apparently finding no contradiction in his parallel presidency of the Sutherland branch of the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.<sup>134</sup> Such compassion allied to a complete knowledge of the prey's character and behaviour could do little to

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<sup>130</sup> For examples see: *Oban Times* 1928 June 16 p. 7; *Oban Times* November 17 p. 2.

<sup>131</sup> During the 1920's 'Vermin Clubs' were formed in Argyll, Ross-shire and Inverness-shire by groups of estate proprietors, shooting tenants and farmers. Their stated objective, 'the prosecution of vermin', continued a brutal tradition established by the likes of Edward Ellice, MP. In the years between 1837-40 Ellice's staff were directed to mount an outrageous assault on the wildlife of Glen Quoich and Glen Garry to improve the land's sporting potential. The death toll is worth recounting in all its gruesome glory: 198 wildcats, 67 badgers, 48 otters, 27 white-tailed eagles, 18 ospreys, 15 golden eagles, 275 kestrels, 63 goshawks, 285 common buzzards, 371 rough-legged buzzards, 3 honey buzzards, 78 merlins, 63 hen harriers, 5 marsh harriers. For further details on vermin culls in the sporting industry see: Departmental Committee, (Cmd. 1636) p. 285; Gordon, S. (1933) 'The Highland Stalker', *Country Life*, LXXIV (1927) p. 688-689.

<sup>132</sup> *Oban Times*, 1935 June 19 p. 5. See also, *Oban Times* 1935 June 12 p. 3. Ian Macpherson was similarly disgusted by gamekeeping practices: 'You need but visit a shooting lodge to see the vermin board with its wild cats and hawks hung up with a nail through their head to realise how and what wild creatures are being preserved'. Macpherson, I. 'The Central Highlands', in Scott-Moncrieff, G. (ed.) (1935) *Scottish Country*, Edinburgh: Wishart Book, p. 199-215; 212.

<sup>133</sup> Letter to Editor, 'First-Hand Knowledge' *Oban Times*, 1934 April 14 p. 3; 'Vermin and Game in the West' *Oban Times* 1935 March 9 p. 3.

<sup>134</sup> The northern chapter was further blessed by the presence of the Duke of Westminster, owner of Reay deer forest, as its vice-president. *The Scottish Field*, 1932 August LX (356); *Northern Times*, 1936 June 4 p. 2.

convince Ian Macpherson of stalking's worth. His description of events on the hill serves as a timely and shocking reminder of sporting realities:

*'I have seen a stag shot through the guts with his feet tripping in his entrails. I have seen a sportsman kill a hind and two calves and wound no one knows how many more while he blazed madly at a herd of deer less than a hundred yards away'.<sup>135</sup>*

Sorcerer's apprentices in the sporting laboratory seldom seemed to have their subjects fully under control. During the inter-war years, many estates were faced with a catastrophic population explosion among their deer herds, a situation attributable to a combination of unlet forests and unsuccessful management schemes.<sup>136</sup> Sir Iain Colquhoun, Cameron of Lochiel, Lord Lovat and Lord Dalhousie were prominent among the lairds who, as representatives of the SLPF, liaised with the Board of Agriculture to produce possible solutions to the encroachment of deer onto agricultural land.<sup>137</sup> A master of conciliation, Colquhoun felt the complaints of farmers and smallholders, 'although exaggerated and too highly coloured, to have a very definite foundation in fact'. They were unlikely to have rejoiced on hearing Colquhoun's assurance that it would not be long before 'the grand old sport of deerstalking will appear in something approaching its true perspective'.<sup>138</sup> Likewise the poor of Fort William, for whom the Christmas gift of surplus venison donated by local lairds Sir John Stirling-Maxwell and Cameron of Lochiel must have stuck in the craw.<sup>139</sup> Meanwhile, the aristocrats in the House of Lords demonstrated the extent of their sympathies during a debate on the need for a Deer and Ground Game (Scotland) Bill in 1939. Having taking the floor the Marquess of Zetland chose to ignore the issue of a new protocol on deer control and instead indulged his fellow peers with some traditional stalking nostalgia. His account of a spell of leave in 1916 during which he bagged twenty-five Highland stags in six days, was greeted with bawdy cheers and laughter.<sup>140</sup> Paradoxically, when the interests of the nation were at stake it appeared that deer numbers could be brought under control with miraculous ease. In 1940-41, on the

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<sup>135</sup> Macpherson, I. (1935) op cit. p. 212. Others reviled by the sporting tradition in the Highlands ranged from the deeply conservative, H.V. Morton, to the radically indignant, Eric Linklater. Morton, H.V. (1928) *In Search of Scotland*, London: Methuen; Linklater, E. (1935) op cit.

<sup>136</sup> *Scots Independent*, 1928 November p. 8.

<sup>137</sup> SLPF/FAC vol. 3, 1929 24 September; 1930 3 January; SLPF Notes for Members (1) 15 p. 15. During 1929, as a result of conflicts with the agricultural and crofting communities, a Federation committee sat to discuss matters pertaining to deer numbers in the Highlands. Among those involved were Sir Hugh Shaw-Stewart who had sat on the Royal Commission (Highlands and Islands) in 1892 and Lochiel who had been a member of the Departmental Committee appointed to inquire into Scotland's Deer Forests in 1919.

<sup>138</sup> 'Too Many Hinds', *The Scottish Field*, 1928 December LII (312) p. 269.

<sup>139</sup> *Oban Times* 1937 December 25 p. 8.

<sup>140</sup> Anon (1939) 'Scotland Month by Month', *Scots Magazine*, XXXI (1) p. 526.

instructions of the Department of Agriculture, the recently established Inverness-shire Deer Committee organised the culling of some 7000 hinds to provide venison for the war effort.<sup>141</sup> Conversely, overabundance was hardly a problem for the grouse enthusiast. Bird numbers dropped at an alarming and inexplicable rate throughout the inter-war period. Disease and the heather beetle were suggested as possible causes, while a migration survey was carried out under the auspices of the BFSA by the Duke of Buccleuch, Sir John Stirling-Maxwell and Harry Mortimer-Batten.<sup>142</sup>

Critics felt the problems to be of a far more fundamental nature, claiming that the sporting incubus had already caused the Highland environment irreparable damage. Unconvinced by the recent trend for experimentation, J.M. MacDiarmid claimed that lairds 'were never leaders in technical progress', failing to 'equip themselves by scientific training for the important work of land management'.<sup>143</sup> Ian Macpherson saw only a cadaverous landscape with 'signs of neglect and decay and ill-guiding everywhere patent'. He described how, 'the accumulated fertility of the land is used up but nothing is returned', how 'broken deer fences let in droves of switch-horned stags to raid the farms' and how it was possible to trace 'their tracks, broad swathes of dead torn-up heather amongst the moors'.<sup>144</sup> The inexorable spread of bracken over land which had previously been grazed by livestock was another matter of growing concern to agriculturists. Lower hill slopes left derelict under sporting management regimes were being suffocated by a species of vegetation which the *Oban Times* feared was rapidly becoming 'the biggest landowner in the Highlands'.<sup>145</sup> Despite the questions of competence raised by these ecological crises, the lairdocracy continued to effectively propagate the notion that, when it came to matters in the countryside, their knowledge was foremost. If the declamations were to be believed this pre-eminence knew no bounds, the sporting community were also professed experts in the field of land capability and sustainability.

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<sup>141</sup> During this period the Committee was chaired by two prominent lairds, Cameron of Lochiel and Theodore Brinkman. *Oban Times*, 1940 March 23 p. 3; 1941 March 8 p. 5.

<sup>142</sup> Academic input did begin to creep into sporting experimentation during the late 1930's; agriculturists, forest zoologists and botanists were commissioned by the BFSA to complete research on the management of heather moors. *Oban Times*, 1938 August 6 p. 6.

<sup>143</sup> MacDiarmid, J.M. (1928) op cit. p. 11.

<sup>144</sup> Macpherson, I. (1935) op cit. p. 212.

<sup>145</sup> Editorial, 'Bracken: The New Owner of the Land' *Oban Times* 1937 June 26 p. 5.

Making 'the desert to blossom like a rose'

*'Deer forests have been the subject of much fanatical and ill-informed attack...it will be an ill day for the Highlands of Scotland and the manhood of a large section of the people of the country when and if that sport is sacrificed either to ignorant prejudice or to the selfishness of those who would have an easier and less sporting form of deer shooting nearer their own doors.'*<sup>146</sup>  
(Duke of Atholl, 1924)

As self-styled guardians of the rural landscape, landowners and their elite tenantry argued that the sporting use of the Highland land resource was the only plausible option available. All other alternatives fell short on ecological or economic grounds, or indeed a combination of both. Sporting rhetoric intimated that by preserving the land in its 'rightful state', and protecting it from unnecessary modern development, the lairds were actually Scotland's noble stewards, lovingly moulding the Highland environment in their own image.<sup>147</sup> As early as 1919, the SLPF had taken cognisance of how 'encroachments on the principle and rights of private ownership in land' were being 'camouflaged under such general phrases as "the national interest", "the national welfare" and "the equal rights of every man in the soil of his country"'.<sup>148</sup> A lesson learnt, the lairdocracy began to skilfully commandeer the slogans of their opponents.

Crucially, the invention of a 'traditional' sporting land ethic required the effective erasure of the highly emotive Clearances folk-memory from the popular consciousness. While the events of history could not be abrogated, the key perpetrators could be exonerated of their crimes. The place-image of a once peopled landscape was de-politicised and hollowed out, its myth replaced by one of a sporting paradise occupying a natural mountain wilderness.<sup>149</sup> The claims of Clearance injustices were viewed with acerbic cynicism by certain critics, one *Scotsman* editorialist denouncing them as 'part of a series of historical delusions with which the minds of a section of the Highland people cling with all the Celts tenacity of memory for grievances that are of little importance'.<sup>150</sup> The SLPF were similarly doubtful over the validity of the crofting communities *cause celebre*. The organisation firmly supported the version of Highland history forwarded in the

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<sup>146</sup> Duke of Atholl (1924) 'Introduction', in McConnochie, A.I. op cit. p. 5-8; 8.

<sup>147</sup> The same rhetoric, based on a distinctive sporting definition of preservation, was employed by the British aristocracy in colonial Africa during the inter-war period. Neumann, R.P. (1996) 'Dukes, Earls and Ersatz Edens: Aristocratic Nature Preservationists in Colonial Africa', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 14 p.79-98.

<sup>148</sup> SRO GD 325/1/242.

<sup>149</sup> During the 1920's Scottish estate advertisements appeared in society periodicals with an interesting line in supplementary information, they detailed, 'no crofters' or 'only a few crofters'. MacDiarmid, J.M. (1927) op cit.

<sup>150</sup> *Scotsman* 1914, 5 January p. 5.

report of the government inquiry into Scottish deer forests. On the question of the 'so called clearances' it stated that:

*'it is not to be supposed that a movement so widely spread, or one in which many otherwise kindly and generous men took part, was so selfish or unscrupulous as it has been represented, or so invariably opposed by those who are regarded as its victims'.<sup>151</sup>*

Alternative altruistic histories identified huge merits in the sporting landscape, noting how 'it drew, as by an irresistible magnet, the boundless stage of southern wealth and enterprise to the stony heart of our northern desert'. If A.G. Cameron's account was to be believed then the sporting industry had helped sculpt a faithful rendering of the Garden of Eden, it 'cut roads, threw up bridges, improved harbours and promoted railways; it rebuilt homes and created new ones; it replanted forests, it made the desert to blossom like a rose'.<sup>152</sup> Compelling statistical data could be found to substantiate these grandiose claims. In evidence given to the Board of Agriculture's 'Deer Forest Committee' of 1919, Douglas H. Cairns, spokesperson for the SLPF, demonstrated how in most Sutherland and Ross-shire parishes revenue recouped from sporting subjects made up between 50-75 per cent of the area's total assessed rateable value.<sup>153</sup> Despite the financial problems which had beset the landowning community throughout much of the inter-war period, in 1937 the SLPF still managed to find credence in the argument. In a memorandum sent to the Hilleary Committee, appointed to inquire into economic conditions in the Highlands and Islands, the Federation provided figures to show the contribution of the sporting industry to the rateable value of a typical Highland parish. From the £10,081 total calculated for Contin in Ross-shire, some £6920 arose from a combination of deer-forests, grouse shootings, salmon fishings, mansion house and lodges, a further £1147 from hotels while the remaining £1596 was attributable largely to agricultural subjects.<sup>154</sup> Although the trend was one of steady decline, in 1939 the percentage of rateable value contributed by sporting subjects in several Highland counties was still considerable; in Sutherland the figure stood at 25 per cent, Inverness-shire 21 per cent, Caithness 20 per cent and Angus at 10 per cent.<sup>155</sup> The message remained clear and candid, while economically the Highlands may not have had their troubles to seek, this was hardly the fault of the chivalrous landowner nor his charitable sporting tenantry.

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<sup>151</sup> SRO GD 325/1/54.

<sup>152</sup> Cameron, A.G. (1923) op cit. p. 11.

<sup>153</sup> SRO GD 325/1/67.

<sup>154</sup> SRO GD 325/1/415.

<sup>155</sup> SLPF (1956) *The Land of Scotland - A Statement of Policy*, Edinburgh: SLPF.

For those who dismissed the case for the defence as a disingenuous ploy evading the major issue in hand, that of widespread atrophy caused by the inequitable distribution of property in the region, the sporting community also had an answer. During the inter-war period, land agitation was branded the preserve of those with no working knowledge of the Highland environment. Iain Colquhoun felt that the criticisms raised by 'our Socialist friends' were 'so uninformed and showing such a complete lack of knowledge of local conditions that they are hardly worth answering'.<sup>156</sup> Radicals demanding land nationalisation and Liberals in search of practicable re-settlement programmes were, it was argued, divorced from the realities of agricultural life in such a hostile habitat. Thin infertile soils, an adverse climate and underdeveloped infrastructure meant that sporting estates were the only truly viable land-use.

Indeed the traditional landowning fraternity were probably still buoyant having secured a telling pre-war propaganda victory against the British anti-landlord lobby. The events are worth recounting in some detail. In 1913, during his infamous and vituperative 'Land Campaign' David Lloyd-George had incited considerable controversy among the Scottish lairdocracy with a speech given, rather ironically, to a gathering of farmers in Swindon. He made vocal his desire 'to populate the waste glens of the Highlands...by re-forestation of hillsides, protecting glens, getting back the population who will have winter employment in looking after the forests and summer employment in cultivating the valleys'.<sup>157</sup> Problems arose however, over the Liberal chancellor's somewhat erroneous and under-researched claim that much of Scotland's three million desolate acres could be quickly reclaimed for agricultural and silvicultural practices, beginning with some £400,000 government investment. These rather sweeping statements with regard to the grazing and cultivation value of deer forests were met with fury and rancour by the landowning community. Acting rapidly and thereby bringing public debate to the fore, the Duke of Sutherland made an unprecedented offer. He declared 200,000 of his holdings in the far north-west available for state purchase, priced at £2 per acre.<sup>158</sup> The possible sale sparked heated correspondence in the letter columns of the press and precipitated a more general discussion of the merits of

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<sup>156</sup> Colquhoun, I. (1925) *Ibid*, p. 112.

<sup>157</sup> *Scotsman*, 1913 October 31 p. 8; SRO GD 325/1/82.

<sup>158</sup> Sutherland's proposal was swiftly followed by an offer of a further 100,000 acres in Wester Ross at the same price by Mr. W.E. Gilmour and of an undisclosed acreage in Lewis by the island's major proprietor Major Duncan Matheson. It would not be conspiratorial to suggest that these offers were made with an eye on financial rationalism, rather than on public reconciliation. The Duke of Sutherland was known to be particularly keen to offload some of his more marginal and barren acres. *Scotsman*, 1913 November 4 p. 6; *Scotsman* November 5 p. 8; SRO GD 325/1/82; Leneman, L. (1989) 'Borgie: A Debatable Gift to the Nation?', *Northern Scotland*, 9 p. 77-82.

sport as the principal form of land-use in the region. Notable contributions from the epistolary were made by Lord Wemyss, Sir Hugh Shaw-Stewart who decried Lloyd-George's 'exuberant imagination based on a travesty of facts' and Captain Mark Sprot who protested vehemently at the sentiments of speech made to 'Wiltshire yokels' and the mere thought of 'pouring £400,000 of our money into the bogs of Sutherland'.<sup>159</sup> Uncharacteristically the Welsh firebrand was forced into an ignominious public climb down when it was revealed that he had never actually visited a Highland deer forest and that the funds for any possible purchase could not be found by a Treasury preoccupied with the programme for national armament.

Amid the furore, the Duke of Atholl gleefully applied salt to weeping reformist wounds by citing his well-publicised social experiment of 1909; the *Scotsman*, never less than a reactionary organ, recounted the events in full. Wearing by growing public criticism of the sporting community the Duke, then holding the title of Marquis of Tullibardine, had invited a group of working-class men hailing from the cities of the central belt to spend a day surveying his estate uplands. Among them a joiner, a tanner and shuttle-maker, these delegates 'from the very class whence the demand for small holdings rises', were challenged to locate any areas which could be reclaimed for agricultural practices. Even with their quest sweetened by the prospect of immediate ownership of any identifiably fertile ground, the finale of the Duke's own nursery rhyme portrayed a munificent Marquis glowingly unsurprised to find their search to have been a fruitless one.<sup>160</sup> Such was the ability of the Highland laird to leave opponents smarting after their misguided attempts to induce aristocratic humiliation.

No opportunity was missed by the landowning lobby to assert themselves and remind their adversaries of sport's enduring propriety. In his address to the 1925 annual general meeting of the SLPF, Viscount Novar recalling several months of incessant rain felt that:

*'the weather conditions of the summer definitely refuted the Socialist theory that we are blessed with the best of climates, and that it was only the stupidity of the farmer and the villainy of the laird that*

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<sup>159</sup> *Scotsman*, 1913 October 15 p. 12; *Scotsman*, October 25 p. 10; *Scotsman*, November 4 p. 6; *Scotsman*, November 5 p. 8; SRO GD 325/1/82.

<sup>160</sup> *Scotsman*, 1909 23 August 23 p. 5; *Scotsman*, 1913 October 28 p. 7; SRO GD 325/1/82. The incident is also described in: Murray, J.G.S. (1958) *Working Partnership: Being the Lives of the Duke and Duchess of Atholl*, Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson; and, Merlin, S.P.J. (1909) *Report on the Deer Forest of Atholl*, (privately published by the Duke of Atholl). For a very different reading of the Duke's propaganda scheme, in which he was accused of being highly selective over the quality of land which the observers were invited to inspect, see: Anon (1909) 'The Atholl Deer Forest Excursion: Tullibardine's Attempted Bluff', *The Thistle*, October p. 228-231; see also, Anon (1911) 'The Infamy of the Highland Deer Forests', *The Thistle*, October p. 154-156; Anon (1912) 'The Deer Forest Question: A New Defender', *The Thistle*, September p. 138-140.

*prevented agriculture flourishing, and corn from growing on the stony summits of Highland hills'.<sup>161</sup>*

Similarly, an in-house article on the new British agricultural atlas was used by its reviewer to sardonically note how:

*'those who wax eloquent about the waving cornfields that ought to clothe the slopes of Schiehallion, or the flocks of sheep that ought to fatten on the rain-swept sides of Ben Nevis, would do well to study this latest effort in the geographer's art, before striving to teach the practical farmer that there are untold agricultural El Dorado's in the wilder and more inhabited parts of the island'.<sup>162</sup>*

Awaiting a government report outlining new means of regional economic development, Cameron of Lochiel was similarly condescending:

*'I have no doubt that after that Committee present its report we shall see the millenium. We shall see our hillsides bearing golden wheat, our gardens growing strawberries, plums and perhaps grapes and fat herring coming into our lochs to fill the pockets of the fisherman'.<sup>163</sup>*

The use of the land for stalking and shooting by the elite was lent an absolutist legitimacy by their self-professed, intuitive awareness of both its potentialities and limitations. This intimacy was noted by the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres who felt:

*'the urban mind too prone to think of landscape in terms of a week-end, perhaps as a bucolic interlude between home and a seaside resort, whereas our relation with the world around us is profoundly concerned in the welfare and integrity of the countryside as such'.<sup>164</sup>*

Such rhetoric demanded that the private landowner as heir to generations of experience, every accretion of inestimable value, should remain in his rightful place. The laird was steadfast and sure amid a society characterised by change and contradiction. This reading of events could be accepted as 'given' at the highest of levels. For instance, the report of the 1931 Addison Committee enquiring into the national park idea, and blessed with more than one landowner among its number, stated that:

*'The more remote Highland districts and Southern Uplands are, for the most part, protected by their isolation and by their present use as*

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<sup>161</sup> SLPF AGM vol. 3, 1925, 25 March.

<sup>162</sup> SLPF Notes for Members, 1 (8) p. 10.

<sup>163</sup> *Oban Times*, 1937 July 3 p. 5.

<sup>164</sup> Earl of Crawford and Balcarres (1930) *The Personality of English Scenery*, Privately Published, p. 5.



*sheep farms and deer forests. The principal dangers which threaten them are excessive road development, which, if carried too far, would profane their solitude, and hydro-electric schemes, which tamper with the rivers and lochs and bestride the country with pylons and cables'.<sup>165</sup>*

Outlining the future of Scottish land-ownership in 1943, the SLPF's stance had altered little over the course of two decades, appealing to traditional feudal and patrician codes, 'compulsory acquisition of all land by the state is contrary to British traditions and ideas of freedom...and the happiness of this country depends on the enterprise of the individual'.<sup>166</sup> Such beliefs in the rights of the private landholder, while firmly held, were not antithetical to a sense of national commonality brokered through the natural landscape. Civic and patrician appeals for landscape preservation, nature conservation and heritage protection were made to the entire populace by organisations, carefully presented as national institutions. To locate this social movement, attention must temporarily turn from the empty shooting grounds of the north to the courtly Georgian elegance of Edinburgh's new town.

#### Not So Humble Beginnings: The Scottish Heritage and Preservation Movement

The Association for the Preservation of Rural Scotland (APRS) held its inaugural meeting on the 12th April 1927 at a townhouse in Rutland Square, Edinburgh. Many of its officials were present at nearby 3 Forres Street for the first gathering of the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) on the 10th November 1930. The west-end setting was entirely appropriate for two voluntary bodies which would from the outset, parade themselves as bastions of modern democracy, aesthetic civility and national pride. Throughout the course of their existence these organisations have occupied a position at the heart of Scotland's civic establishment. Official histories reinforce this image of the APRS and the NTS, detailing how from their inception these were politically quiescent bodies enthusiastically concerned with heritage preservation, public education and the creation of a moral code of good citizenship.<sup>167</sup> In these texts, and indeed in the popular consciousness, there has evolved an unchallenged hagiography of altruistic benefactors; an imaginary

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<sup>165</sup> cited in, Rhynd, J. (1931) 'Scotland's National Park: The Parliamentary Committee Report, What is the Next Step', *Scots Magazine* XV (3) p. 167-177; 168.

<sup>166</sup> SRO GD 325/1/471.

<sup>167</sup> Hurd, R. (1939) *Scotland Under Trust*, London: Black; Prentice, R.J. (1971) *Conserve and Provide: A Brief History of the National Trust for Scotland*, Edinburgh: Waterson; Crawford, I. (1986) *Held in Trust: The National Trust for Scotland*, Edinburgh: Mainstream; Russell, G.S. (1990) *The Formative Years, 1929-1939*, Edinburgh: NTS; Calder, J. (1990) *Scotland in Trust: The National Trust for Scotland*, Glasgow: Richard Drew.

longroom adorned with the portraits of public servants whose long-standing and steadfast service on local committees, executive councils and working groups was crucial in the safeguarding of many national treasures for the Scottish population at large. It is the purpose of this section to explore, contextualise and deconstruct this celebratory narrative and its associated imagery. By politicising the early Scottish heritage and preservation movement, a rich and revealing seam of social, cultural and economic motivations can be unearthed. For those grandees who held high office, the public manifesto did not always match the private agenda. Specific concerns and regional biases lay concealed amid the pleasantries and platitudes of civic, organisational culture. The landscapes of the Highlands and Islands very quickly became their prime concern, yet what has all too frequently been construed as compassion may have been in large part political manoeuvring. The versions of citizenship and nationalism brokered by the heritage and preservation movement stand as evidence of the stifling effect of hegemonic power.

Before these themes can be developed fully, it is necessary to develop a prosopographical understanding of the Scottish preservation movement. A simple examination of the work carried out by the APRS and NTS would itself prove insufficient. Only by dissecting organisational frameworks, tracing linkages across the civic network, investigating membership breakdowns and considering the movement's intellectual and institutional backdrop is it possible to expose 'the workings of a political machine' and to identify 'those who pull the levers'.<sup>168</sup> In combination with information included in the first section of the chapter, informed conclusions can be drawn on the variety of approaches adopted in organisational propaganda and on those figures who emerge as the power-brokers within, and indeed beyond, the bounds of one single body. As Lawrence Stone has stated such an approach allows the researcher 'to make sense of political action, to help explain ideological or cultural change, to identify social reality, and to describe and analyse with precision the structure of society and the degree and nature of the movements within it'.<sup>169</sup>

The idea for a voluntary organisation devoted to the preservation of Scotland's rural realm was first conceived by the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland, while their working concept was further developed by the Edinburgh Architectural Association during the course of 1926. The major driving force behind these preparatory proceedings was the renowned town and country planner, Frank Mears. Having spent several years in the employ of his father-in-law, the celebrated polymath Patrick Geddes, Mears was well versed in the progressive

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<sup>168</sup> Stone, L. (1981) *The Past and the Present*, London: Routledge, p. 45.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, p.46.

doctrines of modern planning and architecture.<sup>170</sup> His interest in the future of the country's rural landscapes was matched by mounting concern over their vulnerability among the membership of artistic and intellectual organisations in Edinburgh's established civic network. Safeguarding the amenity value of Scotland's cherished locales was to become a unifying cause. Professor Alan Ogilvie and John Bartholomew of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society and Professor Francis Bailey of the Cockburn Association were joined by representatives of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the Royal Scottish Academy at the Association's first meetings. Others notable attendees included Arthur Russell and the Rev. A.E. Robertson of the Scottish Rights of Way Society, Sir John Gordon-Gilmour of the SLPF, Thomas Hamilton of the Scottish Estate Factors Society and Miss Isobel Grant the curator of the West Highland Folk Museum.

Typically, new voluntary organisations with their sights set on a position of prominence in public life sought patrician patronage, the APRS was no different in this regard. Invaluable dignity and gravitas could be gleaned from the appearance of members of the peerage or baronetage in positions of high office. Accordingly, the 28th Earl of Crawford and Balcarres was appointed Honorary President, the 12th Earl of Haddington as President and Sir John Stirling-Maxwell the 10th Baronet of Pollok as Vice-President. Meanwhile, having served only a short period as chairman of the recently formed executive council Lord Constable was forced to retire from the post through ill-health. He was quickly replaced by Sir Iain Colquhoun the 7th Baronet of Luss. These notables were among those to gather monthly at 3 Forres Street, a headquarters shared with the Scottish Mountaineering Club and later the NTS.<sup>171</sup>

Indeed, in the case of the NTS, the personnel were as familiar as the surroundings. The same aristocratic coterie came to dominate the Trust's upper tier. Having been intimately involved in the formation process, the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres, the Earl of Elgin and Kincardine and Sir John Stirling-Maxwell were made vice-presidents while the indefatigable Sir Iain Colquhoun assumed the position of Chairman of Council.<sup>172</sup> To their collective weight was added the inestimable presence of the 8th Duke of Atholl who was elected President. R.J. Prentice fondly recounted how "Bardie" and his noble colleagues were 'not merely

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<sup>170</sup> Mears was involved with Geddes in the 'Cities and Town Planning' exhibition held in Edinburgh during 1911 and the associated Civic Survey of the city in the same year.

<sup>171</sup> Cox noted a comparable membership base in the CPRE: 'a predominantly metropolitan centred movement composed of a small but influential group of intellectuals, artistic and literary luminaries and members of the landed aristocracy'. Cox, G. (1988) 'Reading' Nature: Reflections on Ideological Persistence and the Politics of the Countryside, *Landscape Research*, 13 (3) p. 24-34; 31.

<sup>172</sup> Sir John Stirling-Maxwell was also Chairman of the Royal Fine Arts Commission of Scotland and the Ancient Monuments Board.

resolute...they were as diverse in their interests, experience and vocations as in their personal attainments'. He saluted a group of men who stood 'like archetypal figures of an extraordinary period in British history'.<sup>173</sup>

Stability, continuity and tradition were to become the bywords of the Trust, infusing its every aspect. In committee long-service was the key. Colquhoun served at the same post from the Trust's formation until 1946, Atholl similarly until 1942, after which he was replaced by Stirling-Maxwell, who having been vice-president for thirteen years served a further fourteen as president. 'Uncle' Arthur Russell was Law Agent from 1932 until 1951, the new incumbent in that year was his son George. Captain E.D. Stevenson worked as secretary and treasurer from 1933 until he was called into service in 1947. In administration reputation was paramount. The Trust banked at the West End branch of the Royal Bank of Scotland, an account which remains to the present day, while audits were kept for thirty-two years by the accountancy firm Messrs. Bryson and Craig, situated only four doors down at 7 Forres Street.<sup>174</sup> In image patrimony was all. Sir D.Y. Cameron, the King's Limner in Scotland, designed the Trust seal while in 1934 a petition was submitted to the Parliamentary Privy council for Royal Charter.<sup>175</sup> In geography, addresses were highly significant. Annual General Meetings were well enough attended to be held at the City Chambers. In 1945, following a long residence in Forres Street the Trust moved its headquarters to Charlotte Square. Tenancy in No. 5 of the north row, recently rehabilitated by Lord Bute, placed the organisation in Scotland's institutional heart. No. 6, Bute House, was the official residence of the Secretary of State for Scotland, No. 7, the Georgian House, included a flat used by the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

The NTS courted an exclusive and high-brow membership. Careful plans were made to enrol suitable luminaries from the fields of commerce, law, arts and learning, in addition to leaders of the church and local municipalities.<sup>176</sup> A letter drafted by the APRS inviting expressions of interest was waved in front of appropriate faces and posted in appropriate places during the summer of 1930.<sup>177</sup> The drive for patronage through Trusteeship was highly successful. Judging by the turnout, annual general meetings became a recognised event on the society calendar. Lowland and Highland lairds were joined by a profusion of Lord Provosts, Lord Lieutenants, Countesses, Majors, Colonels and Very Reverends.<sup>178</sup> Rather

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<sup>173</sup> Prentice, R.J. (1971) *op cit*, p. 2.

<sup>174</sup> Archibald Bryson was also the Trust's first subscriber. Russell G.S. (1990) *op cit*. p. 7.

<sup>175</sup> NTS/ECM vol. II 1934 April 18.

<sup>176</sup> APRS ECM vol. I, 1930 22 July.

<sup>177</sup> The signatories of the letter were Crawford and Balcarres, Stirling-Maxwell, Colquhoun and Haddington. NTS ECM 1930 August 6.

<sup>178</sup> NTS AGM vol. I, 1932-1952.

quaintly, dignitaries at APRS annual gatherings were cordially invited to attend an 'at home' following the more formal proceedings.<sup>179</sup> The appropriate tone having been set, Trust and Association meetings became popular additions to Edinburgh's genteel civic circuit. Provincial get-togethers nurtured further social links among the concerned classes. The reformation of a county chapter of the APRS in Inverness was marked by a garden party at the country seat of Baroness Burton. Major Evan Baillie of Dochfour, the laird of Cluanie and Glenshiel deer forests, presided over events while speeches were made by the Master of Polwarth and Professor Francis Bailey. I.R.J.M. Grant, laird of Inverwick, was appointed chairman of committee and the Mackintosh of Mackintosh, owner of Coignafern and Inshreach estates, assumed the position of President.<sup>180</sup>

Through the well-ordered channels of their local branch network the APRS recruited members of the landed gentry and the sporting set. Early successes in Inverness-shire and Dumfries-shire were followed by the establishment of committees in Stirlingshire, Cowal, Moray and Nairn, Skye, the Borders, Ayr, Dumbarton, Lanark, Renfrew, Argyll-shire and Fife.<sup>181</sup> Indeed, the threat posed to the scenic amenity of Inverness-shire led to the formation of sub-branches in Kingussie, Fort William and Highland capital itself.<sup>182</sup> VIP's blessed with the glamour of prestige also offered access into the avenues of power. Having been in existence for only four years the APRS boasted members on almost every county council in Scotland and representatives on approximately half of the country's road boards.<sup>183</sup> Local politics remained the domain of several Highland lairds. Sir Iain Colquhoun and Cameron of Lochiel, both APRS heavyweights, were the chairmen of Dumbartonshire and Inverness-shire county councils respectively; the latter having succeeded the Mackintosh of Mackintosh who stepped down in 1930 after twenty-five years in the chair. The Maclachan of Machlachan, another Association stalwart, served over forty years on the Argyllshire county council, some twenty of them as its convenor.<sup>184</sup> The title of Lord Lieutenant was one to which Lochiel rose in 1935, joining the Duke of Sutherland, who himself had been a patron of the Association throughout the decade. Less formal mechanisms were equally seductive.

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<sup>179</sup> APRS ECM vol. I, 1930 March 26.

<sup>180</sup> APRS ECM vol. III, 1937 October 6.

<sup>181</sup> APRS ECM vol. I, 1930 May 21; July 22; 1931 September 30; vol. 2, 1933 May 31; September 27; November 29; vol. III, 1937 June 2; 1938 February 2; 1939 May 3. Each chapter proudly paraded its own patrician or member of the lairdocracy as President. Colonel Archibald Stirling, Lady George Campbell of Strachair, Lord Moray, Lord Haddington and the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres were among these luminaries.

<sup>182</sup> APRS ECM vol. II, 1937 June 6.

<sup>183</sup> APRS ECM vol. I, 1930 November 7; 1931 September 30.

<sup>184</sup> *Oban Times*, 1930 May 10 p. 5.

The burgeoning preservation movement and well established landowning lobby shared a great many members.<sup>185</sup> These key players learned to draw upon the various strengths, connections and images offered by the APRS, NTS and SLPF. While the memberships of the APRS and NTS were not based solely upon the landed elite, nor were they wholly representative of Scottish society. Throughout the inter-war period the organisations remained the domain of the educated and enlightened, with the city of Edinburgh providing the geographical focus. When striking out into virgin territory, lantern talks and lectures were delivered to conservative audiences. Clan Societies, Highland Associations, Rotary Clubs, universities and meetings of the Scottish Womens' Rural Institute were favourites, guaranteeing the sympathetic listener.<sup>186</sup> Countryside clean-up projects were organised. With the co-operation of the Farquerson family, Invercauld woods were cleared of litter after the annual Braemar Highland Gathering.<sup>187</sup> Photographic exhibitions displaying the work already underway were another means of spreading the good word.<sup>188</sup>

A simple breakdown of the membership figures for the APRS at the end of the 1930's is revealing. Among the 642 life and annual members, 186 hailed from Edinburgh and East Lothian, 108 from Glasgow and surrounding districts, 81 from the Borders with the Highlands and Islands accounting for a further 58 members. Among the 58 Highland members of the APRS, 38 held titles or were part of the region's social elite.<sup>189</sup> This represented by far the highest ratio in any single region, the total figure for the entire country standing at 167. The preponderance of what could accurately be labelled the 'old guard' was meaningful in another sense. The membership was characterised by its ageing demography. The death notices which appeared in Association records with quite startling frequency mark the

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<sup>185</sup> The NTS and APRS could count the following personalities from the patrician community among their membership: Sir Donald Cameron of Lochiel, Sir Iain Colquhoun, Sir John Stirling-Maxwell, the Duke of Atholl, the Duke of Buccleuch, the Master of Polwarth, Lord Hamilton of Dalziel, Sir Robert Gordon Gilmour, Major Strang-Steel, the Earl of Leven and Melville, Sir Henry Fairfax-Lucy, the Earl of Moray, the Earl of Elgin and Kincardine, Earl Cassillis, the Mackintosh of Mackintosh, the Duke of Montrose, Sir Hugh Shaw-Stewart, Sir J. Douglas Ramsay, Lord Lovat, the Marquis of Ailsa, George Erskine-Jackson and the Earl of Home.

<sup>186</sup> APRS ECM vol. I, 1930 February 18; 1931 January 28. The tone of the message could also be tempered to suit the audience. In a speech made to business interests keen to initiate rural development Sir Iain Colquhoun stressed that the Association were not just a bunch of 'old fogeys' with a 'thou shalt not do this attitude'. A publicity talk given a month earlier was more traditionalist in accent, pointing out the aesthetic evils of petrol pumps, advertising hoardings and modern building materials. *Glasgow Herald* 1930 April 26 p. 7; *Glasgow Herald* 1930 May 15 p. 17.

<sup>187</sup> APRS ECM vol. I 1930 November 7.

<sup>188</sup> NTS 'Exhibitions' Boxfile; APRS ECM vol. I, 1929 March 7; 1931 July 29.

<sup>189</sup> Residences listed as lodges, castles and Houses were assumed to denote a privileged proprietor. APRS *Annual Report for 1939*, Edinburgh: APRS, p. 25-44.

passing of a generation of elder statesmen to whom modern developments in the countryside were a harbinger for greater ills.

While the NTS boasted a slightly larger membership list than the APRS it was by no means a mass movement. This was not what some citizens had visualised. Prior to the Trust's formation, one potential member Alan Graeme had stressed that 'It must be composed of Scots, and of representatives of every class of Scots'.<sup>190</sup> James Rhynd's suspicions were immediately raised by the policy of selective recruitment:

*'it would be of great help if the Secretary would immediately state in the public press whether a subscription (the amount might be stated) can be sent by Scots desiring to become members of the Trust, since there can be no question of the limitation of numbers. Every Scot has a right to be a member'.*<sup>191</sup>

By 1939, little had changed. The Trust was still a small fraternity of limited social composition, numbering 1304 associates, of whom 148 were Life members.<sup>192</sup>

#### Appealing to the Nation: But For Whose Benefit ?

Presiding over the fifth annual general meeting of the APRS in 1933, Sir John Stirling-Maxwell took the opportunity to clarify the two constitutional objectives of the organisation and to stress its broadening remit. They were:

*1) 'to arouse and educate public opinion for the protection of rural scenery and the amenities of County Districts and Towns and Villages in Scotland from unnecessary disfigurement or injury, and for the promotion or safeguarding of the welfare of the countryside and to take action to further these objects.'*

*2) 'to act either directly or through its members as a centre for giving or obtaining advice and information upon matters affecting the preservation of such scenery and amenities and the welfare of the countryside.'*<sup>193</sup>

Some nine months previous, Stirling-Maxwell had spoken at the equivalent occasion for the NTS, declaring that:

*'the Trust served the nation as a sort of cabinet into which could be put some of its valuable things where they would be perfectly safe*

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<sup>190</sup> Graeme, A. (1929) 'Scotland's Need for a National Trust', *Scots Magazine*, XI (1) p. 7-8.

<sup>191</sup> Rhynd, J. (1931) op cit. p. 176. A donation of '10/- or more' was suggested as the requirement for membership. Russell, G.S. (1990) op cit. p. 5.

<sup>192</sup> By way of comparison, in 1950 numbers had risen to 2400, by 1960 membership had surged to 17,500 and in 1970, doubled again to 34,250.

<sup>193</sup> The emphasis used in the text was included in the records of the meeting. APRS ECM vol. II, 1933 April 11.

*for all time and where they were able to be seen and enjoyed by everyone.*<sup>194</sup>

While membership might have been a 'closed shop', the rhetoric was directed towards the populace at large. Statements of this nature appealed to the sentiments of the public and politicians alike. Enthusiasts and patriots saw modern, progressive notions of national and civic responsibility being embraced by the traditionally circumspect and conservative elite. Nationhood had been identified as the new *lingua franca*.<sup>195</sup> When the Master of Polwarth declared 'rural Scotland as being the real Scotland', his selection of vocabulary was carefully premeditated and certainly no glib assertion.<sup>196</sup> Impressed by such patriotic vigour Robert Hurd saluted the leaders of the NTS as pioneers who 'have set their hands to the worthy task of patiently safeguarding the valuable natural and historical features of this country, without which much of her essential character would pass away.'<sup>197</sup> The Earl of Wemyss and March reflecting on over fifty years as an NTS member noted how 'the chequered history of Scotland is inter-twined with the families associated with so many of the Trust's properties'.<sup>198</sup> The landed and the titled, in collaboration with Edinburgh's urbane polity, appeared to have identified a new and worthy outlet for their much vaunted altruism. While lionised readings of civic history have rapturously concluded the story at this juncture, it would not be unduly conspiratorial to delve deeper in search of less honourable intentions. This section examines how the promotion of a distinctive sense of Scottish national identity through the heritage and preservation movement provided a powerful and unwavering defence for the Highland lairdocracy.

One of the prime motivating factors behind the formation of a National Trust for Scotland was a fear abroad in the APRS that without speedy intervention the momentum which they had established behind the voluntary preservation movement might be snatched from their hands. Central government was being placed under increasing pressure to make interventions into the land market as a means to secure large portions of the British countryside for general public use and enjoyment. Highland landowners certainly did not relish the idea of the establishment of 'national parks' or 'forest reserves' in which their input would be diminished or power base threatened. Besides which, fear reigned that with the turbulence being

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<sup>194</sup> NTS AGM vol. I, 1932 June 29.

<sup>195</sup> Hutchinson has recognised that 'whereas for perhaps 150 years up until the last quarter of the nineteenth-century Scottish aristocrats had seemed hell-bent on total anglicisation, they increasingly strove from the 1880's to re-position themselves within the currents of Scottish identity then emerging'. Hutchinson, I.G.C. (1994) op cit. p. 145.

<sup>196</sup> APRS AGM vol. I, 1934 March 3.

<sup>197</sup> Hurd, R. (1939) op cit, p. xii.

<sup>198</sup> Earl of Wemyss and March (1990) 'Foreword', in Calder, J. op cit. p. 7.



experienced in property ownership at the time, any moves toward nationalisation could well precipitate a landslide. A far more palatable solution to the demand for recognition of a national recreative space was for land to be acquired and held in perpetuity by an independent trust. Better still, a *national* trust which had been created, and would therefore be run according to the rules set down, by the benevolent lairdocracy.<sup>199</sup> Well versed in the subtleties of semantics it was the Duke of Atholl who advised the Trust's law agent to insert the *bon mot* 'for the nation' into the organisation's formal statement of objectives, 'in order to prevent any possible suggestion that the places in question are being preserved for the benefit of the landowners'.<sup>200</sup> Acquisitiveness and the jealous defence of property could also gain more populist and less covert expression.

The minutes of the APRS executive for 1929 refer to a generous and unprecedented offer made by the owner of the Loch Dee estate near Newton Stewart, that the land be handed over to the association for 'some public function'.<sup>201</sup> Lacking the legislative power to accept either land or property for the purposes of collective ownership, APRS superiors were left frustrated having had to let this opportunity pass. More critically, the experience made evident the vulnerability of Scotland's heritage features to poaching by the National Trust which had taken an interest in the proceedings. It would have been entirely legal for the English based organisation to own prize heritage features or tracts of land north of the border, as it already did in Wales and Ireland.<sup>202</sup> This potential threat acted as a catalyst for the APRS executive who hastily initiated discussions on the possibility of creating a separate and distinctive National Trust for Scotland. Sir John Stirling-Maxwell and Lord Lovat were prominent among those patriots who, fearing their homeland would 'be invaded' from the south, met with the Secretary of State for Scotland to seek his counsel.<sup>203</sup> At the first AGM of the new organisation, the Duke of Atholl could not resist a quick quip in reference to this situation, commenting on the work of 'The English Trust, or rather as we must call it, the National Trust'. The APRS executive was equally prepared to stand its patriotic ground. Tempers rose in 3 Forres Street over the CPRE's plans for the

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<sup>199</sup> Sir Iain Colquhoun, Sir John Stirling-Maxwell and Major Strang-Steel each expressed their unease at the prospect of direct government involvement in the acquisition of land on behalf of the public. APRS ECM vol. II, 1934 October 3.

<sup>200</sup> NTS Sir Iain Colquhoun Boxfile, cited in: Iain Colquhoun to Arthur Russell, 1931 June 16.

<sup>201</sup> APRS ECM vol. I, 1929 May 3.

<sup>202</sup> Formed in 1895, the National Trust owned several properties in Wales and Kankurk Castle in County Cork, Ireland. Hamer, S.H. (1929) 'The National Trust in England', *Scots Magazine*, XI (5) p. 359-365.

<sup>203</sup> APRS ECM vol. I, 1929 October 8.

division of a Carnegie Grant to the British preservation movement.<sup>204</sup> On another occasion, Sir D.Y. Cameron expressed his anger over the design of new bridges on the Great North Road being constructed through the Highlands. He felt them to be 'entirely out of keeping with Scotland' and, querying why a native architect was not being consulted in the scheme, found it 'appalling that an Englishman be let loose on our Scottish scenery'.<sup>205</sup> Frank Mears happily informed a later meeting that an Edinburgh architect and engineer had been appointed for the Ballachulish-Inverness road project, 'whereby Scottish interest would be safeguarded'.<sup>206</sup> These were affirmations of a fierce pride held in the unique character and distinctive history of the Scottish landscape.

Undoubtedly the Trust's most notable acquisition during the inter-war period was 20sq.miles of mountainous country centred on Glencoe. A popular locale for climbers and the scene of a major road building project, the Glen was the scene of considerable activity during the 1930's. The purchase, funded by private donation, was celebrated as a victory for Scotland and the entire populace.<sup>207</sup> 'Few interventions have drawn such universal approval' trumpeted Robert Hurd, 'for in a sense Glencoe is sacred ground, and the mere possibility that it might be commercialised genuinely horrified many Scots'.<sup>208</sup> Elsewhere, in a grandiose statement the *Oban Times* declared the NTS to be 'saving Glencoe from Modernism'.<sup>209</sup> A national asset, redolent with imagery from Highland history, provided physical evidence of the patrician commitment to rural preservation and to civic honour.<sup>210</sup> The symbolic significance attached to Glencoe is a recurrent theme in chapters two and three, where campaigns for the area's preservation are studied in greater detail. Other Trust properties betrayed this same vein of modern patriotism, among those added to the roster were the Glenfinnan monument, the Culloden and Bannockburn battlefields and a Hebridean blackhouse used as a Highland folk museum. Much was made of the trusteeship of the Glenfinnan

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<sup>204</sup> Having requested the monies be split two-thirds for England and Wales and one-third for Scotland, the APRS discovered that plans were afoot for a division commensurate with population size. Eleven eightieths of £10,000 over a period of five years was deemed unsatisfactory. The disagreement was eventually resolved with the APRS apportioned £2000, the CPRW £1000 and the CRPE £7000. APRS/ECM vol. I 1930 March 26; 1930 July 22.

<sup>205</sup> APRS/ECM vol. I 1928 July 25.

<sup>206</sup> APRS/ECM vol. I 1930 January 14.

<sup>207</sup> Patrician fears over the future of the Glen had been raised when several small parcels of land were sold by Lord Strathcona to Lambert & Co. an unknown firm of builders and contractors from Bournemouth. A swift assurance that it was merely their intention to re-sell the property did little to quell rumours over the possibility of inappropriate building taking place on the estate grounds. *Northern Times*, 1935 May 2 p. 4.

<sup>208</sup> Hurd, R. (1939) op cit, p. 1.

<sup>209</sup> *Oban Times*, 1936 February 8, p. 5.

<sup>210</sup> Sir Iain Colquhoun proudly informed the APRS executive that he had 'received letters from persons of Highland lineage in America strongly desiring that Glencoe be safeguarded'. APRS ECM vol. II, 1935 February 6.

Monument which commemorated the Jacobite rising of 1745. Among those representing the ancient Scots nobility at the formal ceremony of acceptance were the Duke of Atholl, Lord Lovat, Sir Iain Colquhoun and young Lochiel.<sup>211</sup> Taking their lead from earlier enquiries made by the APRS, the Trust council also expressed an interest in preserving the last remnants of Caledonia's ancient pine forests.<sup>212</sup> The tired shibboleths and prim conservatism of Scotland's traditionalist lairdocracy were given fresh impetus by new expressions of nationhood. Inheritance and *patrimoine* once more gained widespread public acceptance as the best means of preserving the natural environment and its heritage features. Indeed, the language of loyalty could even be extended to the residences of the landed elite.

In an annual Trust address which extolled the virtues of continuity and permanence, Sir Iain Colquhoun noted how with 'property after property being sold on account of high taxation and death duties' they were passing 'into the hands of strangers who know not the people and however well they manage the property, can only possess the body, but lack the soul.'<sup>213</sup> He went on to outline his future vision for the organisation, comparing its role and function with that of '*La Demure Historique*' which had done so much to ensure the preservation of the ancient chateaux of France.<sup>214</sup> In a speech detailing the terrible threats posed to 'Scotland's architectural heritage' by modern trends, the Marquess of Bute demanded a preservation crusade 'for the sake of our national culture'. He warned the Scottish populace to guard against apathy for 'unless the country as a whole demands that the spoilation should stop, then the scenes of despoilation of the old days will be nothing to the scenes of desolation of our time'.<sup>215</sup> Small recompense for the struggling aristocrat arrived with a 1930's finance act which categorised those properties donated to the national trusts of Great Britain exempt from the increasing burden of death duties.<sup>216</sup> When a decade later organisational finances stretched to the funding of a 'Country Houses' scheme, Sir Iain Colquhoun maintained that the Trust should tread carefully. He warned the Law Agent that some executive members had 'made the mistake in stressing the advantages that owners get from the scheme and not mentioning the benefit such a scheme would be to the

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<sup>211</sup> *Oban Times*, 1938 August 20 p. 3.

<sup>212</sup> APRS/ECM vol. II 1933 May 31; NTS Caledonian Forest Boxfile.

<sup>213</sup> NTS AGM vol. I, 1934 October 19.

<sup>214</sup> For comparative information on the French organisation see: *Country Life*, 1936 LXXIX (2035) p. 54; Duc de Noailles (1936) '*La Demure Historique*', *Country Life*, LXXIX (2044) p. 296.

<sup>215</sup> Marquess of Bute (1936) *A Plea for Scotland's Architectural Heritage: A Speech delivered in Edinburgh*, Edinburgh: NTS, p. 16.

<sup>216</sup> The first property acquired by the NTS was Crookston Castle, kindly donated by Sir John Stirling-Maxwell. *Glasgow Herald* 1931 June 19 p. 7.

nation'.<sup>217</sup> The Duke of Atholl meanwhile identified a very different threat to the social and cultural order of the countryside, he warned that 'owing to the disintegration of large estates, there was a grave danger that many places of natural beauty and historic association would be acquired for building purposes.'<sup>218</sup> While conceding that thousands of new rural homes were urgently required he argued sagaciously that 'there were places which, owing to their beauty, accessibility and general amenity, should be regarded as national possessions in the widest sense.'<sup>219</sup> Rather cloyingly 'Bardie' then adopted the 'mither tongue' to declare himself sure 'that his fellow-countrymen would take a pride in "minding their ain bairns"'. With more than a hint of aggression, he warned those advocates of unconsidered development:

*'that they must not underestimate the feelings of those who lived in a countryside full of beauty and tradition and who had to stand by with folded hands as they watched the destruction of all they held dear.'*<sup>220</sup>

The rhetoric of collective national responsibility, so eloquently deployed by the patrons of the heritage and preservation movement was a milestone in their defence of the established order and the sporting land ethic. The protection of the rural landscape was gradually transformed from a marginal issue, only of interest to planners and a few civic leaders, to a patrician-led project which called upon the unity and identity of the modern nation. The lofty figures of the APRS and NTS worked diligently to create a separate voluntary preservation framework for Scotland, clearly distinguishable from any British equivalents. However as the previous section has shown, to judge this riposte as either belligerent or bellicose in the face of an imperialist threat would be to misconstrue the actions of those involved. Theirs was an articulation of sentimental, or perhaps more specifically, *environmental nationalism*. In this regard Tom Nairn's identification of a common trait in the evolution of a recognisable Scottish identity is certainly of relevance.

Unlike other modern states, and due to the anomalous historical situation caused by the constitutional union with England, Nairn has argued that 'Scotland could not simply be adapted to the new, basically nationalist, rules of cultural

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<sup>217</sup> NTS Sir Iain Colquhoun Boxfile, personal correspondence to Arthur Russell, 1943 March 14.

<sup>218</sup> NTS AGM vol. I, 1936 October 21. The Duke of Portland was another aristocrat who lamented property being 'sold to individuals, most of whom have had little or no connection with the land'. Bentinck, W.J.A.C.J.C. (1937) Op cit. p. 313. Likewise, Sir John Stirling-Maxwell who lamented how the 'work of centuries (was) undone in a few weeks', when a hereditary demesne 'passed into the hands of the estate breakers, whose one idea naturally was to realise as much money as he could by stripping the place of every valuable asset and selling the land without restriction to anyone who would buy it'. *Glasgow Herald*, 1930 March 5 p. 4.

<sup>219</sup> NTS AGM vol. I, 1936 October 21.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

evolution. But since the country could not help being affected by this evolution, it produced something like a stunted caricatured version of it.<sup>221</sup> The result, 'cultural sub-nationalism', was defined as a condition which:

*'was cultural, because of course it could not be political; on the other hand this culture could not be straight-forwardly nationalist either. It could only be "sub-nationalist", in the sense of venting its national content in various crooked ways - neurotically rather than directly.'*<sup>222</sup>

Viewed by Nairn as a crippling affliction, Scottish sub-nationalism gained expression in cultural currents such as 'Tartanry', 'Kailyardism' and, it could be posited, the modern heritage and preservation movement. The unique sporting ecology of the Highlands, the region's feudal geography and associated architectural legacy were presented as the quintessence of rural Scotland, to be preserved by Scots for Scots. Yet this was a chimera of nationalism, with no bite, and in fact, no teeth to bear. From its inception the preservation movement was subsumed into the institutional culture of Unionist civil society. Its noble patrons were conscious that the project should not be misconstrued as, or indeed allowed to mutate into, an assertion of political nationhood. Cessationist tendencies may have been abroad elsewhere in society with both home rule and independence lobbies gathering momentum, but the sporting lairdocracy remained one of the last great bastions of the British establishment.

While the NTS and APRS can be subjected to the broad sweep of cultural and historical theory it is equally useful to investigate these bodies at a more personal level. An exploration of day-to-day events and organisational practice within the heritage and preservation movement provides an invaluable insight into structures of power, the type of characters who occupied key positions and ultimately the purpose they served.

### Mechanisms of Power and Control

While it was only politic for the APRS executive to highlight their holistic concern for the welfare and prosperity of the countryside, seldom did their initiatives stray from the aesthetic, the visual, and therefore, what a select few critics would pinpoint as, the superficial. This narrowing of intent was clearly evident in the various sub-committees formed to monitor what the association deemed to be the nefarious effects of modern development on rural amenity. Groups were assigned to deal with problems relating to 'ancient monuments and buildings', 'roads and

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<sup>221</sup> Nairn, T. (1977) *The Break-Up of Britain*, New Left Books: London, p. 155-156.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid*, p. 155-156.

bridges', 'public hoardings and advertisements', 'landscape and town planning' 'the squatter nuisance' and 'river pollution and smoke abatement'. While the threat to Scotland's landscapes was in no way comparable to that which existed south of the border, the APRS was well aware of the speed at which obtrusive developments could spring up in a treasured Highland glen or impinge on a pristine vista. Having noted how industrial towns had 'lost their self-respect' and now represented 'nature out of control', Sir John Stirling-Maxwell feared 'the townsman who brings his sordid surroundings with him to the countryside'.<sup>223</sup> The SLPF rallied to the call, quoting from an early APRS propaganda leaflet to remind its membership that, 'hideous petrol pumps, glaring advertisements and similar monstrosities should no longer be tolerated. We want to get away from the advertiser's hoarding when the last row of houses is past, and the natural beauties of the countryside unveil themselves'.<sup>224</sup> The admonitory tone having been set, the APRS began to score what were to become typically fastidious victories against unseemly development. Enquiries were made into the architectural style of residential housing constructed in Glen Branter, the use of red Belgian tiles on Forestry Commission cottages in the Ben More estate on Mull, a tea shop opened adjacent to the Glenfinnan Monument, the plans for tree-planting along the Aberfoyle-Trossachs road, the erection of a garage by the LMS Railway Company near the seafront at Kyleakin, the possibility of painting electricity pylons green in the Pass of Killiecrankie and more generally the 'possible promiscuous erection of hostels' in the countryside.<sup>225</sup> Ever vigilant, the provincial membership network ensured that complacency was not an accusation which could be levelled at the fledgling association.

Meanwhile among those occupying high office in the APRS the most influential figure was unquestionably the chairman of council, Sir Iain Colquhoun. To fully understand the mechanisms of power within the organisation and its clandestine control over Scottish rural affairs, it is necessary to examine the role played out with such mastery by the proprietor of Luss estate. Various described as someone 'who personified the romantic notion of the Scottish laird and soldier' and 'whose keen interest in sportsmanship is greatly appreciated', Colquhoun followed a distinguished army career by devoting himself fully to the public life of inter-war Scotland.<sup>226</sup> Chief of the Colquhoun clan, onetime Grandmaster freemason of Scotland, Lord Rector of Glasgow University and High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland were but a few

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<sup>223</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 1930 March 5 p. 4.

<sup>224</sup> SLPF Notes for Members, 1927 1 (15) p. 21.

<sup>225</sup> SRO GD 325/1/395; APRS ECM vol. I, 1930 November 7; vol. II, 1933 June 28; vol. I, 1930 January 14; vol. I, 1931 February 25.

<sup>226</sup> Prentice, R.J. (1971) op cit, p. 4; *Oban Times* 1934 October 15 p. 3.

of his civic titles. Such a man was not without influence and in his capacity as chair of the APRS executive he wielded this power astutely. Perfectly aware of the subtle balance to be struck between public pronouncement and private pledge, Colquhoun acted as an amiable and avuncular go-between carefully bonding the Scottish preservation movement to the country's patrician community.

As a permanent fixture on the civic circuit, Colquhoun was in regular contact with fellow landowners. Through him it seemed private problems could be aired, tactics discussed, fingers pointed and government mandarins contacted. One year's high-society arm-twisting will illustrate the point. Among the innumerable tasks completed during 1930-31 Colquhoun re-assured the executive in their first faltering steps, informing them that in matters pertaining to rural amenity he had the ears of Lord Leven and Melville and the Dukes of Argyll and Buccleuch.<sup>227</sup> The Duke of Atholl was a regular correspondent in the following months over the threats posed to the sporting landscape by hydro-electric power developments.<sup>228</sup> Working in conjunction with Cameron of Lochiel action was taken over roads in Skye and the erection of road signs on the chieftain's land in Inverness-shire. Meanwhile the dynamic duo attempted to persuade the Shell-Mex Company to paint their garish red petrol pumps a softer green throughout the Highlands.<sup>229</sup> While on one of his regular visits to London, Colquhoun promised the executive that he would 'make personal enquiries into the possibility of royal patronage' for the association.<sup>230</sup> He could also call in favours, on one occasion asking the Duke of Montrose to initiate a debate in the House of Lords on advertisement control in the Scottish countryside.<sup>231</sup> The executive were never entirely privy to the political manoeuvring which took place behind the scenes, apparently quite content to leave confidential memoranda in 'his hands in order that the expert information contained therein might be turned to account at a favourable juncture in the course of private negotiations at present proceeding'.<sup>232</sup>

The *entente cordiale* so carefully brokered by Colquhoun was rarely troubled, although on occasion the most blimpish of lairds could balk at conciliatory APRS announcements which were deemed too populist in accent. In 1930, a handful of recalcitrant SLPF members requested a formal acknowledgement of the association's commitment to the 'real' rural cause. 'Was its future policy', they pointedly enquired:

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227 APRS ECM vol. I, 1930 October 14.

228 APRS ECM vol. I, 1930 November 7.

229 APRS ECM vol. I, 1931 March 25; May 31; see also, *Glasgow Herald* 1930 April 26 p. 7.

230 APRS ECM vol. I, 1931 March 25.

231 APRS ECM vol. I, 1931 January 28.

232 APRS ECM vol. I, 1931 March 25.

*'to be in the direction, not so much of preserving the rural amenities of Scotland, as of making them available to dwellers in the towns, without due safeguards for the protection of the amenities, and of the interest of dwellers in the country'.<sup>233</sup>*

As someone whose interests straddled both organisations, the missive was dispatched to Sir John Stirling-Maxwell, who in his reply strongly urged the Federation not to withhold its support as he 'considered the objects of the APRS were not only desirable, but necessary' and 'felt that the SLPF could render valuable assistance in guiding the policy of the APRS'.<sup>234</sup> Such contretemps aside, and a mutually acceptable pecking order established, the majority of landowners quickly began to appreciate the value of a vocal and vital preservation movement.

Like Stirling-Maxwell, Sir Iain Colquhoun was a laird first and foremost, his love of Highland stalking has already been well documented and he was firmly in favour of the continued sporting use of the region's land resource. These interests surfaced sporadically in APRS and NTS committee meetings, often when the sporting corner was in need of defence. For example, when faced with persistent attempts by an isolated 'radical' to place the widespread government ownership of land on the Association's agenda he led a polite but resolute campaign of suppression.<sup>235</sup> When Mr. Gilbert Lang attempted to enlist the help of the APRS in promoting new village communities and land settlement projects, Colquhoun stepped in to point out the 'very large political and financial questions' involved in such an exercise, 'whatever their merits' he cannily added.<sup>236</sup> More esoterically, following the Trust's purchase of Glencoe and Dalness, he kept a continued interest in the health and numbers of the estate's deer herd.<sup>237</sup> Finally, it was surely not coincidental that the legal practice which the APRS executive faithfully turned to when petitions of opposition to rural development had to be drawn up, were the firm also synonymous with the 'Scottish Register for the Lettings and Shootings of Scotland'.<sup>238</sup>

The struggle waged by the APRS to impose their traditionalist aesthetic on a Scottish populace increasingly beguiled by the wonders of modern technology and unashamed consumerism was an unenviable one. The emergence of the car as a

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<sup>233</sup> SLPF Minutes of Extraordinary Meeting of General Committee vol. III, 1930 June 30.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> APRS ECM vol. I, 1930 January 14; 1932 March 30; April 27; vol. II, 1934 October 3.

<sup>236</sup> Upon being rebuffed Lang was obviously far from pleased having addressed a letter to Colquhoun which the organising secretary claimed to be 'couched in somewhat extraordinary terms'. It is interesting to note that at some later juncture, a rather amateurish attempt had been made to remove the records of this episode from the association's minute book. APRS ECM vol. II, 1933 June 28.

<sup>237</sup> NTS 'Glencoe and Dalness' boxfile, no. 1.

<sup>238</sup> The company in question were Messrs. Walker, Fraser and Steele of 74 Bath Street, Glasgow.



utilitarian form of transport was an innovation met with a mixture of guarded acceptance and apprehension among rural preservationists. Motor transport opened up unknown environments and new experiences to a Scottish workforce no longer so heavily constrained by restrictive employment regimes. With every trip north the rich and famous found their Highland playground more crowded than before. The emergence of a new breed of charabanc owner keen to explore the great outdoors had certainly ruffled sporting feathers. 'J.M.' writing in *The Scottish Field* condemned 'a class of people who do a great deal of harm to sport of all kinds - deer, grouse and fish suffer from these would-be mountaineers.'<sup>239</sup> Sir Iain Colquhoun meanwhile informed fellow members of the APRS executive of how he:

*'had been struck by the fact that complaints from stalkers had been coming from the most distant parts of the north, rather than from accessible areas further south, showing how the public was now penetrating the most remote of districts.'*<sup>240</sup>

The need to control the public's recreational use of the countryside was paramount among the landowning fraternity. Critically the preservation movement provided the laird with an acceptable and revamped public image, distanced from emotive issues such as land ownership and thereby ensuring their complaints a sympathetic hearing. The specific concerns of the heritage and preservation movement with regard industrialisation, public access and recreation are examined in much greater detail in the chapters which follow.

## Conclusion

*'The Scots undoubtedly stole a march on the English when they arranged that the red grouse was only to be found sparsely distributed on northern English grouse moors and relatively plentiful in Scotland. They also kept their salmon rivers as clean streams while we made industrial sewers of most of ours. They did not exterminate the red deer; and lastly they invented golf. These represent four perfectly compelling reasons for going to Scotland, and there are others which are no less good, if not of the first importance. They have not soiled their mountains with hoardings and posters. They have excellent motor roads; and lastly, the comfort and good cooking of Scottish hotels are a standing example of what can be done to develop a contented and remunerative tourist traffic.'*<sup>241</sup>  
(*Country Life*, 1932)

The sociologist David McCrone has claimed that 'cleared estates have come to represent landscape in Scotland just as soldiers in kilts inform our image of what it

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<sup>239</sup> *The Scottish Field*, 1933 LXII (372) p. 294.

<sup>240</sup> APRS ECM vol. II, 1933 November 29.

<sup>241</sup> "H.B.C.P." (1932) 'The Flight to the North' *Country Life*, LXXII (1853) p. 90.

is to be a Scot', while Robin Callender has argued that during the course of this century 'lairds appear to have succeeded in converting their own and their nation's history into commodities whereby they can save themselves'. The resonances are obvious.

Without doubt, a great deal of the work carried out in the name of preservation during the inter-war years, whether it involved the acquisition of threatened property, the scrutiny shown the spectrum of rural based development or the careful prescription of social and cultural mores, was entirely meritorious and as such continues to inform modern day sensibilities. The NTS and APRS were voluntary bodies patronised by many liberal-minded and enlightened citizens whose credentials and motives were indubitable. Nevertheless, the agendas of the two organisations were determined and constructed by an exclusive cabal who stood to lose heavily if changes to the established social and cultural order of the Scottish countryside continued unabated. Certainly broad-minded but also politically astute these representatives of the landowning elite having taken cognisance of what they viewed to be inevitable trends opening up previously undisturbed rural domains to the general population, positioned themselves within the evolving mechanisms of the decision-making process. Largely concerned with the aesthetic, the vernacular and the conveniently vague concept of scenic amenity the APRS and NTS skilfully swerved the more pressing and practical rural issues of the day. Yet as a politically influential lobby, bolstered by a national and populist mandate, the heritage and preservation movement offered the Highland lairdocracy their most promising opportunity to retain hegemony in their rural strongholds and quite possibly a share of power in modern Scottish society.

While certain concessions arose as a corollary of this positional manoeuvre, the sporting land ethic and its sophisticated mythology survived unscathed. The history of deer-stalking, its links with Gaelic culture, its venerable traditions and participants, its aristocratic and regal associations all became traditions of which the nation could be proud. The image of a natural Highland wilderness, so ardently defended by the sporting community, was itself central to the notion that there existed a truly Scottish landscape worth preserving. The sporting laird with his intuitive knowledge of the Highland environment, his organic ancestry and his romantic *joie de vivre* was a constituent element in an increasingly attractive, and persuasively marketed, package. As one patrician obiturnist noted 'an honourable man, a dutiful laird, a progressive landowner, an exemplary representative, an unhesitating patron, and a thorough sportsman are characters of the Highland gentleman'.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> 'Obituary for the Mackintosh of Mackintosh', *Oban Times* 1938 October 19 p. 5.

The preservation movement fitted snugly into a mutually supportive relationship with the lairdocracy's landscape and lifestyle, each suitably blessed by a convenient and archaic heritage. Its standard-bearers occupied a quite unique societal position and in so doing set a precedent which would become the patrician leitmotif in future years. Quite undaunted by the need for a radical change in approach involving much greater levels of public acceptability, while at the same time reliant upon the age-old appeal of characteristics such as stoicism, loyalty and tradition, the new model laird sat at the very heart of inter-war debate on the Highlands. It will come as no surprise therefore, to find a clutch of familiar names and faces appearing in the chapters which follow.

## Chapter Two

### 'They to the Hills': Nationhood, Citizenship and the Outdoor Movement



## Introduction

The central motif of the thesis, one of contesting cultures of landscape, is developed in this chapter through an examination of the Scottish outdoor recreation movement. An initial distinction should be made with regard the term 'outdoor recreation' which is understood as a branch of leisure pursuits very different from the exclusive sporting practices dealt with in the first chapter. The activities in question here, hiking, rambling, hostelling and mountaineering, became hugely popular among Scotland's urbanised working-class communities and in particular the youth of inter-war period. This chapter charts their discovery of, and growing appreciation for, the Highland environment while at the same time considering a number of critical themes.

The first half of the chapter presents a social exploration of the outdoor movement, dissecting the contrasting national and citizen identities which were constructed for, and by, its participants. Having placed the Scottish inter-war outdoor movement within a historical context, explained its constituent elements and outlined the strenuous opposition consistently mounted against calls for greater public access to the countryside, the chapter focuses on the key role played by the Scottish Youth Hostels Association (SYHA) in formalising the interests of the popular recreation movement. Although in a social history of modern Scotland, T.C. Smout recognised the formation of the SYHA as one of several 'deliberate assertions of national identity' to occur during the inter-war period, the idea of the organisation defining a civic sense of nationhood or indeed embracing broader political ideologies was not fully developed.<sup>1</sup> Engaging with recent re-assessments of geographical education's role in the forging of citizenship identities during the last century, this work demonstrates the use of pedagogic devices in the countryside as an effective medium for inculcating recreationists with chosen moral or political standards and created knowledges.<sup>2</sup> A detailed examination of hostelling rhetoric and the prescribed outdoor lifestyle shows how the targeting of subjects in their formative years provided perfect opportunities for useful lessons to be taught on all aspects of modern citizenship, patriotism and nationhood. Direct experience of the great outdoors was believed to help foster an organic knowledge of the self and the homeland. Further informed by Rycroft's assertion that public access can be

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<sup>1</sup> Smout, T.C. (1990) 'Patterns of Culture', in Dickson, A. and Treble, J.H. (eds.) *People and Society in Scotland, Volume III 1914-1990*, Edinburgh: John Donald, p. 261-268.

<sup>2</sup> Driver, F. & Maddrell, A. (1996) 'Geographical education and citizenship' *Journal of Historical Geography* 22 (4) p. 371-373; Gruffudd, P. (1996) 'The countryside as educator: schools, rurality and citizenship in inter-war Wales' *Journal of Historical Geography* 22 (4) p. 412-423; Matless, D. (1996) 'Visual culture and geographical citizenship: England in the 1940's' *Journal of Historical Geography*, 22 (4) p. 424-39; Matless, D. (1995) 'The Art of Right Living', in Pile, S. and Thrift, N. (eds.) *Mapping the Subject: Geographies of Cultural Transformation*, London: Routledge, p. 93-123.

'defined as both a physical and a discursive process, a process which demands the correct cultural and material equipment to experience the countryside', SYHA information bulletins, membership guidelines and instruction books are examined to illustrate the emphasis placed on personal health and fitness, on appropriate behaviour for the byway, and proper respect for the beauty of the rural realm.<sup>3</sup> Ostensibly benign, these appeals for social responsibility, whether literary or artistic, are shown to have been reliant upon pastoral, passive and idyllic referents, while defining not only a wide-ranging civic consciousness but a quiescent vision for the Highland landscape. Through such media a variety of stratagems could be deployed to control and regulate levels of public access to treasured hills and glens.

Attention also focuses on the power-brokers who discreetly constructed this discourse of citizenship within Scotland's burgeoning outdoor community. With close reference to the prosopographical examination of the sporting and landscape preservation axis included in chapter one, the motives of the key figures involved in establishing a conservative code of outdoor conduct will come under scrutiny. Rather than relying upon the familiar images of acrimony and confrontation between deer-stalker and hill-walker the chapter will outline a far more complex and interwoven set of relations between these modern recreative movements. More dissonant and marginalised voices existed within the broad parameters of the outdoor movement. Critically informed by literature on the revival of *volk* cultures in continental Europe between the wars, the overtly nationalist approach adopted by youth organisations such as Clan Scotland and the Scottish Watch will also be given due consideration.

The second half of the chapter details how the politics of power and patronage, and associated mechanisms of authority, were made evident in one specific recreative debate, the possible creation of a National Park in Scotland. While histories of the national park idea in Britain are legion, rather disappointingly, the approaches adopted have been less varied. Cherry, Cullingworth and Blunden and Curry take the most popular route, placing the park concept within the context of an evolving town and country planning framework.<sup>4</sup> Shoard's stance is rather more refreshing and iconoclastic, while Sheail offers an invaluable and scholarly insight into the national park archive.<sup>5</sup> All are notable for concentrating their efforts on the debate in England with less detail provided on the

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<sup>3</sup> Rycroft, S. (1995) 'Access and Alignment: A Passport to Rutlandshire', in Watkins, C. (ed.) *Rights of Way: Policy, Culture, Management*, London: Pinter, p. 129-141.

<sup>4</sup> Cherry, G. (1975) *Environmental Planning, 1939-1969*, London: HMSO; Cullingworth, J.B. (1988) *Town and Country Planning in Britain*, London: Unwin Hyman; Blunden, J. and Curry, N. (1987) *The Future of the British Countryside*, Blackwell: Oxford.

<sup>5</sup> Shoard, M. (1987) *This Land is Our Land: The Struggle for Britain's Countryside*, London: Paladin; Sheail, J. (1976) *Nature in Trust: The History of Nature Conservation in Britain*, London: Blackie.

Scottish experience. Sheail's reading of events is the most enlightening. By concentrating on the government wranglings and parliamentary committee musings which guided the national park debate for much of the century, he offers an insight into the truly divisive and political nature of opinion. This approach is expanded upon here to include the views of the civic associations and outdoor organisations whose role was critical to events north of the border.

The vexed question of landownership in Scotland, and more specifically the Highlands, made the politicisation of the national park project an inevitability. Although initially, the decision to designate a considerable tract of land as public property appeared to lie with central government, the purposes, possible location and maintenance of any such park were discussed at length by outdoor recreation lobbyists, the landowning and sporting community and the landscape preservation movement. An analysis of the principles which underlay different proposed schemes, and the reaction to them, helps reveal subtle nuances in understandings of modern citizenship, nationhood and recreative culture during the period. Most tellingly, and with close reference to organisational archives, the chapter demonstrates how each national park project posed contrasting questions for the embattled lairdocracy in their fervent defence of the sporting land ethic. Attention focuses on the input of the landscape and heritage preservation lobby in the debate, as an effective vehicle for progressive landowning opinion. Quite crucially the work shows how, as successive governments delayed over statutory approval, the APRS and NTS seized the opportunity to lead and define the national park agenda on their own terms. Possessions held on behalf of the citizenry by a respected voluntary organisation and its august office-bearers, represented a viable and popular alternative to outright purchase by the state. Rather more insidiously such a mechanism prevented the power, status and authority traditionally associated with the landownership straying too far from its roots in the British establishment.

The central role played by the National Trust for Scotland in the purchase and management of Scotland's first 'national park' at Glencoe is used to illustrate this point. The firm emphasis placed on the retention of the area's wilderness characteristics despite its promotion as a recreative asset would set the standard for Trust policy into the 1940's and beyond. Glencoe was terrain for the committed mountaineer. With the establishment of the Argyll Forest Park in 1937, the Forestry Commission was less concerned with restrictive and elitist notions of appropriate outdoor or climbing experience. Nevertheless, the Commissioners were unashamedly prescriptive in their formulation of an outdoor manifesto which would neither threaten landed interests or alter the public's impression of the countryside as a place in which to tread carefully. Ultimately, the chapter reflects the vibrancy and colour of a progressive civic phenomenon but also makes clear the part played

by the outdoor movement in cementing the established order and traditionally dominant personnel in Highland society.

Before any of these themes can be enlarged upon it is first necessary to trace the origins of the modern Scottish outdoor movement as well as the physical, legal and ethical barriers its supporters would have to surmount in their quest for room to roam.<sup>6</sup>

### 'Cribb'd, cabin'd and confin'd': Early Responses to the Access Question

In his presidential address, delivered in 1889 at the inaugural dinner of the Scottish Mountaineering Club (SMC), Professor C.G. Ramsay positioned the interests of his fellow gentlemen members within the broader context of Scottish history:

*'the marvel is not that our club is formed, but that it was not formed before. The mountains of Scotland are not new; they have been frequently looked at; frequently admired; sometimes even climbed before. The love of scenery and of hills is implanted in the heart of every Scot as part of his very birthright; our mountains have been the moulders of our national character.'*<sup>7</sup>

All those who climbed, he continued, were bonded by 'the love of nature in every form and especially of the hills'.<sup>8</sup> The Victorian adventurer astride a lofty peak looked 'down on every side upon a scene untainted by work of man, just as it came fresh from the Creator's hand'. The membership of the SMC, it seemed, could congratulate themselves on having chosen a pastime which was utilitarian, patriotic, spiritually enriching and historically enduring.

However, once the speaker strayed from his metaphysical musings and began to deal with the practical realities of his sport then a rather more accurate version of the inchoate Scottish mountaineering scene emerged. What Ramsay's universalist philosophy had failed to reveal was that the walkers and climbers of the late nineteenth-century were a select few hailing from the higher echelons of Scottish society. Sketching out a pen-portrait of the modern mountaineer, he noted

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<sup>6</sup> While the chapter deals with the modern aspects of outdoor recreation, Rennie McOwan has recently stressed how studies of 'Gaelic literature, of poetry, story, song, prayers, anecdotes and blessings' demonstrate that prior to the 19th century a comparable tradition existed. He notes that 'we are not talking about the drove roads, the sheiling patterns, common grazing, and other factors which might nowadays be termed commercial...We are talking about activities which we would nowadays consider to be "recreational" - strolling, roaming, travelling on foot, relishing landscape, praising its beauty and a strong sense of possession'. McOwan, R. (1997) 'Access to the hills a right, not a concession'. *West Highland Free Press*, 1997 January 24, p. 9-10. Rather broader, but comparable, remarks are made in: Hunter, J. (1994) *Everyone Who Ever Mattered is Dead and Gone: an essay on the cultural significance of nature and landscape in the Scottish Highlands*, Occasional Paper, Sabhal Mor Ostaig: Skye; Hunter, J. (1995) *The Other Side of Sorrow: Nature and People in the Scottish Highlands*, Mainstream: Edinburgh.

<sup>7</sup> Munro, H. (1890) 'The President's Address', *The Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*, 1 p. 1-11.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3.



that his man 'will not despise a good novel in a day of rest; and none like he can enjoy a good dinner and a good glass of wine in his capua when he has done good work upon the mountain.'<sup>9</sup> These characters, the products of academic and bourgeois society, spent long leisurely Summers exploring the Alps, only returning from their continental sorties to pioneer exciting Winter routes on remote Scottish peaks. Theirs was a manly tradition, the Club comprising the tiny, self-appointed minority of the population who could claim to combine supreme physical fitness with an appreciation of landscape aesthetics and a desire to outwit Nature in her most challenging seasonal garb (see figure 11).<sup>10</sup>

Besides the SMC another outdoor organisation did exist. Established one year earlier than its Glasgow University based counterpart, the Cairngorm Club drew its membership from Aberdeen's established Liberal community.<sup>11</sup> Frequenting the mountains of the eastern Highlands, these politicised enthusiasts followed a rather more radical agenda. Increasingly angry at the stranglehold placed on their activities by deer forest owners and led by their president James Bryce, M.P. for South Aberdeen, the members campaigned for wholesale changes in the legal rights of access to the mountains.<sup>12</sup> Through the ranks of the Cairngorm Club there evolved a breed of walker who professed a healthy disregard for the triflings of autocratic landowners. Most notable were the 'stravaigers' who made up the small raiding parties which slipped furtively into the wilderness to claim a handful of forbidden peaks before returning home unseen and untraced.<sup>13</sup> These mountain

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Detailed, and very revealing, accounts of these Alpine expeditions and Scottish adventures can be found in the journals of the Scottish Mountaineering Club dating from its first publication in 1890. Also useful in this regard is: Birnie, F. (1996) *Text and Context in the Construction of Images of Nature: The Scottish Mountaineering Club 1889-1899*, Unpublished undergraduate thesis, Department of Geography, Edinburgh University. These walkers, climbers and mountaineers can be viewed as a somewhat robust legacy of the Romantic period; an era characterised by a new awareness of the sublimity of wilderness areas and the opening of the Scottish Highlands to an awe-struck Victorian audience. Withers, C. (1992) 'The Historical creation of the Highlands', in Donnachie, I. & C. Whatley (eds.) *The Manufacture of Scottish History*, Edinburgh: Polygon. See also: Smout, T.C. (1983) Tours in the Scottish Highlands from the 18th to the 20th centuries, *Northern Scotland*, 5 (2 ) p.99-122.

<sup>11</sup> The Cairngorm Club had its origins among a group of walking enthusiasts who in June 1887, on returning from a hike onto the plateau to light a beacon celebrating Queen Victoria's fiftieth jubilee, paused at the Shelter Stone of Loch Avon and decided to formalise their interest. The constitution laid down in January 1889 stated the Club's intention to encourage mountain climbing in Scotland; to procure and impart scientific, literary and historical information on the mountains; to consider the rights of access to Scottish mountains; and to issue a journal. Murray, S. (1987) *The Cairngorm Club, 1887-1987*, Aberdeen: Cairngorm Club.

<sup>12</sup> Between 1885 and 1906, Bryce made eight unsuccessful attempts to push his 'Access to the Mountains (Scotland) Bill' through parliament. Not content with simple linear access on designated footpaths, the bill attempted to secure for the public 'the right of free access to uncultivated mountains and moorlands, subject to proper provision for preventing any abuse of such right'. Cited in: Shoard, M. (1986) op cit. p. 112.

<sup>13</sup> In so doing the stravaigers built upon a tradition of public protest first exercised by the Scottish Rights of Way Society earlier in the nineteenth-century. Beginning its work in 1845 as the Edinburgh Society and concentrating its efforts on the open lands surrounding the capital city the organisation sought to protect 'the public against being robbed of its walks by private perseverance



Figure 11 - The Lone Mountaineer  
Source: Moray Postcards, Elgin

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and cunning'. Extending its remit in 1847 the 'Association for the Protection of Public Rights of Roadways in Scotland' became embroiled in an infamous dispute with the 6th Duke of Athole over rights of access on the ancient drove road through Glen Tilt. During a protracted and much publicised lawsuit, historic evidence demonstrating the public's continued use of the route verified an inalienable right of access. Stephenson, T. (1989) *Forbidden Land: The Struggle for Access to Mountain and Moorland*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p.120-123. Defeat in the courts did little to discourage the cantankerous Duke from continuing to challenge walkers who entered the Glen. In 1850 he was rumoured to have sustained a black-eye after a lively dispute with two Cambridge undergraduates. The Scottish Rights of Way Society functioned intermittently during the next few decades. Active members, armed with signposts, marked out disputed footpaths at several locations throughout the Highlands. Aitken, R. (1975) 'Stravaigers and Marauders', *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*, XXX p. 351-358.

'guerillas' quickly attained cult status, their secretive escapades wrapped in mystique. In 1892, inspired by the struggle for freedom, Sir Walter Beasant immortalised their efforts:

*'Then 'tis time to claim, in a nation's name,  
that men are more precious than herds;  
Let us rise and say that a right of way is more  
than a sportsman's bag,  
That we'll ramble and climb thro' the heather  
and thyme, tho' we frighten the fearful  
stag;  
And we mean to have back our mountain  
track, and we make our meaning plain.  
So gentleman thieves, by your gentle leaves,  
we ask for our own gain.'*<sup>14</sup>

After 1909, Tom Johnston the young Labour radical, championed the cause pillorying those who 'have barred us by barbed wire fences from the bens and glens'.<sup>15</sup> The provocative approach adopted by these campaigners did little to endear the Cairngorm Club to the many traditionalists among the outdoor community.<sup>16</sup> Reactionary in their politics, the SMC hierarchy instead opted for diplomacy and amicable negotiation when questions of access arose. Professor Ramsay recounted that:

*'I and my friends had no desire to see the proposed Club mixed up with any attempts to force rights-of-way. We did not desire the Club to become a stravaiging or marauding Club, insisting on going everywhere at every season'.*<sup>17</sup>

The aura of scientific enquiry and earnest muscular christianity which surrounded SMC activities could ensure special access dispensations from less obdurate landowners, the constitution requesting expressly that members 'respect propriety and sporting rights, and endeavour to obtain the co-operation of proprietors' during their expeditions.<sup>18</sup> By 1917 this supine approach to access was firmly established, H.P. Macmillan claiming that by respecting landowning rights SMC members had

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<sup>14</sup> 'The Mountain Ways', *Scots Independent*, 1931 March p. 76.

<sup>15</sup> Johnston, T. (1909) *Our Noble Scots Families*, Glasgow: Forward Publishing, p. viii.

<sup>16</sup> Although some individuals bridged both organisations, relations had been strained from the outset. The SMC were quick to belittle the membership of the Cairngorm Club as provincial cousins too fond of picnicing as opposed to serious mountaineering. Anon (1890) 'The Cairngorm Club' *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*, I p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Among the early office-bearers, Professor Ramsay was remembered as a bourgeois academic, Professor Veitch and Gilbert Thomsen as unquestioning appeasers while Hugh Munro, (famous for his tabulation of all Scottish mountains over 3000ft), was himself a landowner and active in the political life of Angus on the Unionist side. Ramsay, J. (1897) *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*, IV p. 88. It should be noted that the SMC committee were careful to ignore the actions of several clandestine stravaigers within their own ranks.

<sup>18</sup> The advantages of a conciliatory approach were outlined by several SMC stalwarts in: Parker-Smith, J. (1891) 'The Access Question', *Blackwood's Magazine*, August p. 259-272.

found reward in 'the generous treatment which they had invariably received from the proprietors of the Scottish mountains'.

Such quiescence overlooked the continued expansion of Highland deer forests and the near tyrannical regimes imposed by many of their owners, supported by nineteenth-century sporting estates legislation. In 1912 the Edwardian passion for game-hunting had resulted in the devotion of almost 3.6 million acres to the pursuit of red deer, in 1919 this figure had only decreased by 150,000 acres. The complete dominance of sport in the land-use pattern, reinforced by the conservative attitudes of those who upheld it, created a number of serious problems for the prospective walker in the Highlands. Reminiscing on these trying times Edwin Royce noted caustically how:

*'Deer are elusive beasts and, animated doubtless by the spirit of fair play, our plutocratic sportsmen were soon demanding the exclusion of the rest of the world from their expensive deer forests. One part - the sanctuary - is never entered except under very unusual circumstances. Paths, roads even, were closed, rights of way interfered with and a species of terrorism instituted, all in the interests of sport'.<sup>19</sup>*

This exclusive geography was rigidly enforced by the factors, ghillies and keepers in the lairds' service. Woe betide the unsuspecting recreationist who strayed into the domain of these formidable types since verbal assaults were, on occasion, backed by the threat of physical violence or possible injury. During the 1890's Walter L. Winans an American millionaire and the proprietor of over 200,000 acres in Strathfarrar and Kintail had employed a large number of men to act as sentinels over his land. They took to their task with unflinching determination. One notorious legal case ended with the prosecution of a crofter after his child's pet lamb had gambolled over the deer forest boundary. Elsewhere, the Duke of Leeds, owner of much of the Cairngorms before the turn of the century, attempted to close the Lairig Ghru pass, barred the Luibeg route to Ben Macdui and stopped a ferry boat from plying sightseers over the River Dee near Braemar.<sup>20</sup>

As the sporting boom peaked in the first two decades of the new century, the landowning community went to inordinate lengths to retain their privacy. Spurious arguments were commonplace. Cameron of Lochiel argued that 'only a

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<sup>19</sup> Royce, E. (1945) 'Bens and Glens and the Lairds', in Joad, C.E.M. (1945) *The Untutored Townsman's Invasion of the Country*, London: Faber and Faber, p. 247-252; 250.

<sup>20</sup> The claim that 'children in the Braemar area subsisted on tinned milk because the local fodder was required for deer' remains unsubstantiated. Royce, E. (1945) op cit. p. 251. On occasion, local communities made clear their disapproval of restrictions on public access. In Braemar, the villagers tore down an offending wooden fence each night using the 'material for a ceremonial bonfire with musical accompaniment', only for it to be replaced the following day. In 1891, an English shooting tenant was reputedly stoned in a village in Strathglass after he had attempted to close a right of way. NLS Acc. 5862 (13) Tom Johnston, Speech made to Scottish Rights of Way Society, 1952.

very surly sort of fellow' would harbour a desire to climb the peaks within the deer forests because 'the most beautiful and fascinating' were located beyond their bounds.<sup>21</sup> Asked to comment on recreative conflicts by the 1922 government enquiry into deer forests, Robert Blair, factor to the Duke of Atholl, skilfully feigned naivety while being politic with the truth:

*'I am not sure that I correctly apprehend your meaning. If it be intended to enquire whether unrestricted access to the grazing and forest grounds of the Highlands is compatible with their present uses, I can only give a decidedly negative reply. Reasonable access by recognised routes to favourite hills, especially those in the vicinity of the villages, is seldom questioned, but complaints from graziers about undue disturbance are more readily made than by sportsmen'.*<sup>22</sup>

Draconian tactics were not uncommon. Edwin Royce recounted with incredulity an incident when he was harassed for his presence on a *road* in Glen Cona, Morvern.<sup>23</sup> Signs were erected threatening trespassers with prosecution or warning them to beware of stray bullets.<sup>24</sup> Feud cottagers were forbidden from taking in passers-by, or from providing them with refreshment.<sup>25</sup> Commercial establishments such as the Sheil Inn on Loch Duich were closed down to keep climbers out of Kintail. Several others were simply deprived of their licence while some, like the Cluanie Inn in Glen Moriston, were banned from accepting visitors who had arrived by foot.<sup>26</sup> More prohibitive still were the actions of Sir George Bullough who for the first half of the century refused public access to Rhum. The island's mountains were attainable by only the most intrepid of peak-baggers after the reclusive proprietor served the Caledonian MacBrayne ferry company with an edict to prevent passengers making landfall at Kinloch.

Agitation for land reform, having fluctuated during the early years of the modern outdoor movement, was restricted in the immediate post-war years to a few

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<sup>21</sup> Cameron of Lochiel (1896) 'Deer Stalking', in Macpherson, A.H. (ed.) *Red Deer. Natural History*, Edinburgh, p. 65-196; 187.

<sup>22</sup> SRO GD 325 1/67 (Statement of evidence to be given by Mr. Robert Blair, Old Blair, on behalf of the SLPF before the Deer Forest Committee, January 1920). The subsequent report detailed how, 'The value of certain forests adjacent to tourist centres is considerably depreciated by the frequency of disturbance during the stalking season'. In contradiction to the claims of many walkers it was stated that: 'In most forests no objection is taken to tourists and hill climbers at other times of the year, and those who take the trouble to ask for leave are usually given every facility'. SRO GD 325 1/54, SLPF Summary of Report of the Deer Forests Committee.

<sup>23</sup> Royce, E. (1945) *Op cit.* p. 250.

<sup>24</sup> The threat of prosecution for 'trespass' was, and still remains, an empty one in Scotland as the law differs markedly from that in England and Wales. Simple trespass, walking about on somebody's land without a gun or rod is not a criminal offence. What the owner of the ground can do is proceed with a civil interdict to prevent any individual from repeating the act.

<sup>25</sup> The Report of the Deer Forest Committee meanwhile contended that walkers were 'often, when necessary, offered accommodation'. SRO GD 325 1/54, SLPF Summary of Report of the Deer Forest Committee.

<sup>26</sup> NTS Kintail Boxfile No. 2, Percy Unna to Arthur Russell, 1943 March 27.

solitary voices. Ironically, chief among this select breed of protagonists was an Englishman. The redoubtable E. A. Baker famously claimed in 1923, that of the 543 Scottish peaks to attain the 'Munro tops' standard, nearer five than four hundred (*were*) situated in this forbidden land'.<sup>27</sup> In such an environment, he asserted, the mountaineer and tourist alike would 'find themselves cribb'd, cabin'd and confin'd'.<sup>28</sup> Baker was grounded in the best stravaiging traditions, proudly professing to having no 'superstitious reverence for legal rights', while gleefully admitting that with certain climbing comrades 'under stress of circumstances we committed some lawless things...such as might have tempted a proprietor of the right stamp to put a shot through us in mistake for a deer'.<sup>29</sup> Over the years for the want of proper accommodation he claimed to have slept in some strange locations, 'some of them sacred to the prevailing cult and today perhaps not to be violated by the profane'.<sup>30</sup>

Through his presidency of the Birmingham based Rucksack Club Baker championed the ongoing 'access to the mountains' campaign. He tenaciously hounded the landowner, finding:

*'no exaggeration in saying that the deprivation which the British people sustain by the closing of the Highlands is a social evil of the same kind and dimensions as would be the closing of the Alps to the people of Europe'.<sup>31</sup>*

In place of deer forests Baker favoured the establishment of national parks, his radical vision made possible by the establishment of a Home Rule parliament in Edinburgh.<sup>32</sup> The inclusion of these inflammatory ideas in his publication 'The Highlands with Rope and Rucksack' met with a guarded reaction in the SMC journal. The book's reviewer felt that, 'of the introductory chapter and the vexed questions raised therein it were best not to say too much', conceding that, 'There is, of course, right in what is said, but the suggested remedy is pressed too confidently'.<sup>33</sup> Although not overly perturbed by Baker's renewed attempts to gain open access to the mountains, the SLPF, in league with the Property Protection Society (PPS), made clandestine and unscrupulous plans to block the bill's path

<sup>27</sup> Baker, E.A. (1923) *The Highlands with Rope and Rucksack*, London: Witherby, p. 31.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 32. Indeed, as late as 1932 around ninety peaks in the county of Ross-shire were deemed all but inaccessible. Coghill, D.H.S. (1932) 'Our Derelict Highlands', *The Scots Independent*, June p.119.

<sup>29</sup> Baker, E.A. (1923) op cit. p.52.

<sup>30</sup> Baker, E.A. (1932) *On Foot in the Highlands*, London: Alexander Maclehose, p. 19.

<sup>31</sup> Baker, E.A. (1923) op cit. p. 21.

<sup>32</sup> Baker's views were not restricted to the tourist industry. He was well aware of the 'grave economic problem' in the Highlands and had suggestions on forestry, industrial developments, small-holdings and the alleviation of agricultural unemployment and widespread poverty. Ibid p. 21-50.

<sup>33</sup> Review for 'The Highlands with Rope and Rucksack', *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*, XVI (96) p. 320.

through parliament.<sup>34</sup> The landowning-parliamentary axis was mobilised for a bout of filibustering. The Duchess of Atholl in the Commons and the Duke in the Lords contacted the appropriate party minions who could prevent the motion from even being read (see figure 12). To the Federation's dismay the best laid plans of hapless 'Bardie' went awry and the bill received an unexpected second reading.<sup>35</sup> The peer, doing his best to allay growing fears north of the border, clarified the situation:

*'I had got it blocked, but when the Duchess and I were in Scotland, it went through. I do not think it has the slightest chance of passing, partly on account of the House of Lords. There is nothing to be frightened about in it, as I have information that the SMC are dead against it, so are all the sheep farmers, and it is a club called the Ruicksack (sic) in Birmingham, of which Dr Baker is a shining light, that supports it to a certain extent'.<sup>36</sup>*

The Duke held the chief protagonist in no great esteem and outlined the need for a traditional stance to counter his radical propaganda:

*'This Dr Baker has written a lot of poisonous stuff on the subject and presumably will continue to do so, and I fancy literature on the subject at the next election will be prepared by him. Now it is just as well to be ready with answers to the arguments, which of course we know beforehand, as they are still the same old ones'.<sup>37</sup>*

The entire episode serves to demonstrate how, when the situation warranted, the landed elite could invoke the full weight of Britain's constitutional machinery in their defence.

Indeed, the overall situation merits summation. During these early decades the outdoor recreation movement was both cautious in politics and elitist in spirit. The few legal skirmishes which arose over prominent rights of way, though well-

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<sup>34</sup> The Secretary of the Property Protection Society, writing to his counterpart at the SLPF, George Erskine-Jackson, outlined the situation as follows: 'It is unlikely that the present government will give facilities for the Bill, and it will therefore not obtain a second reading if it is steadily blocked. It is not so easy, (as formerly), to arrange for blocking now that we no longer have Sir Frederick Banbury in the House of Commons. Mr George Balfour, MP for Hampstead, is in some degree taking Sir Frederick Banbury's place. I am not acquainted with him, and although I am promised introductions to him I would rather approach him first in Connection with some Bill with which I am better acquainted than this. I venture therefore to suggest that you should arrange for a short statement of your objections to the Bill to be placed in his hands by the Duchess of Atholl, or some other Scottish member, either directly or through the Conservative whips'. SRO GD 325/1/198, R. Bellevres to George Erskine Jackson, 1924 May 19.

<sup>35</sup> The secretary of the PPS explained how this situation had come to pass: 'You will have seen that this Bill got its second reading on Wednesday last. I was not at all surprised, as I knew that such things will happen after the retirement of Sir Frederick Banbury from the House. I had ascertained that this Bill was being regularly blocked, but on Wednesday there was an unexpected early collapse of the Government business and Private Members got chances'. SRO GD 325/1/198, R. Bellevres to G. Erskine Jackson, 1924 July 1.

<sup>36</sup> SRO GD 325/1/198, Duke of Atholl to G. Erskine Jackson, 1924 July 1.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. Acting on this advice the SLPF contacted the Surveyors Institution, the Country Landowners Association, the Land Union and the Scottish Estate Factors Society prior to the second reading of the Bill, in which incidentally, it was yet again rejected. SRO GD 325/1/198.





Figure 12 - The Duke of Atholl  
Source: *The Scottish Field* (1933)



intended and much publicised, did little to dent the lairds' bravado. Even when combined with the chicanery of a handful of renegade climbers and the protestations of isolated insurrectionists, these actions represented mere chippings from the impressive landowning edifice. The defence of the exclusive sporting landscape was resolute and could be instigated in sites of constitutional democracy through the mechanisms of the polity. The inchoate interests who sought greater freedoms on the hillside would only find unity and cohesion towards the end of the decade when their long-standing enthusiasm was fired by a specific project and the wider public support it received. The campaign for a National Park will be examined in the second half of the chapter. However, it is first necessary to pan wider and trace the evolution of the populist outdoor movement and its close identification with the Highland landscape. Only by sheer force of numbers it seemed, could the serenity of the lairdocracy's exclusive geography be boisterously disturbed.

#### Citizen Rambles: The March from the Tenements

*'Never was the need for rambling clubs and groups so insistent as today. A quiet interlude in the jarring noise and grime of city life is almost imperative to those of us who have our being in big industrial areas...Bonnie Scotland calls us, let us join the Ancient Order of the Knights of the Road.'*<sup>38</sup>  
(John Francey, 1930)

*'Proceeding out from Glasgow on the humble push-bike we always camped at the same spot above Sugach farm at the head of Loch Long, and at the time we felt like pioneers, for camping was in its comparative infancy and we never saw a tent north of Luss.'*<sup>39</sup>  
(C.E. Andreae, 1975)

While the Alpine crowd flexed their muscles on seldom frequented peaks to the north, inspiration for a more populist outdoor movement arose with the formation of several hiking and 'out-of-door' clubs in the West of Scotland. Drawing on the legacy of Hugh MacDonald, 'Glasgow's pioneer Rambler', and the cycling craze of the 1890's, groups such as the Glasgow Fellowship used weekends to explore the city's green environs.<sup>40</sup> The refreshing prospect of a trip into the countryside lay in

<sup>38</sup> Francey, J. (1930) 'The Rambling Club', in Beith, A. (ed.) *The Ramblers Annual: Official Handbook of the Glasgow and West of Scotland Ramblers Federation*, Glasgow p. 75-76.

<sup>39</sup> Andreae, C.E. (1975) 'Early Days', in 'The Formation of the Junior Mountaineering Club of Scotland', *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*, XXX p. 312-315.

<sup>40</sup> In 1854 Hugh Macdonald published a book, illustrated with thumb-nail sketch maps, which offered the healthy citizen a different ramble for each Saturday in the year. During the early 1920's, due to popular demand, these were re-printed weekly in 'The Evening Citizen'. MacDonald, H. (1854) *Rambles around Glasgow*, James Hedderwick: Glasgow; see also, MacDonald, H. (1861) *The Firth of Clyde: a series of descriptive sketches of its watering places, scenery and associations*, James Hedderwick: Glasgow. The earliest example of organised rambling in Scotland may be that of the employees of Messrs. Glenfield & Kennedy Ltd. in Kilmarnock. This group gathered as early as 1872 and was formally instituted as a society in 1884. Begg, M.T. (1910) *An Old Time*

direct contrast to the penurious living conditions which a great many Scots were forced to endure. Rambling, alongside cycling, climbing, ornithology and amateur photography became the preserve of the many working folk inclined to escape temporarily from the tenement streets and their quotidian drudgery. For an industrial workforce no longer so heavily constrained by restrictive employment regimes and blessed with a modern transport network, new environments and experiences lay just beyond the city limits.

As Brotchie proudly enthused 'to reach those haunts of ancient peace is easy, thanks to the enlightened civic outlook which has given to the citizens the finest tramway in the world'. Using 'tentacles which stretch far outwith the tang of commerce' it was possible to visit the Campsie hills, the Ballgeich moorlands and the Loch Lomond Park at Balloch.<sup>41</sup> As its new proprietors the Glasgow City Corporation were keen to stress the therapeutic effects of a visit to the 'green braes of Balloch':

*'Within its bounds there are tree-shaded walks...little sandfretted bays where children may inhale health and happiness, wanton waterfalls in a fairy dell embowered in green bracken, and over all there is the cooler air that lends life to the lungs and colour to the cheek of the city dweller'.*<sup>42</sup>

The rapidly improving road network north and south of the Great Glen, combined with the increasing number of bus companies targeting the tourist market soon meant that more exotic locations were not outwith the blue-collar worker's budget.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, the Firth of Clyde, serviced by fleets of paddle steamers,

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*Ramble*, Glasgow. By the first decade of the twentieth-century the cycling movement in Scotland was organised on a national scale. The National Union of Cyclists, Clarion Cycling Clubs and Cycling Touring Club had mass memberships. The latter published a yearbook and had built up a network of recommended accommodation throughout the country. These resting houses were simple and modest in price but incapable of coping with large demand. Anon (1895) *Whirls of the Wheel: cycling rambles around Glasgow*, Glasgow: Strathern and Freeman; Prynne, D. (1976) 'The Clarion Club, Rambling and the Holiday Associations in Britain since the 1890's', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 11 p. 65-77; Smout, T.C. (1990) op cit. p. 261-268. Seaside holiday resorts were also popular with the more distinguished perambulator. Eadie, C. (1906) *Rambles around Oban*, Glasgow.

<sup>41</sup> Brotchie, T.C.F. (1923) *The Borderlands of Glasgow: Official Tramway Guide to the Romantic and Beautiful Countryside Around the City*, Glasgow: Corporation of Glasgow, p. 5; see also, Brotchie, T.C.F. (1910) *Some Sylvan Scenes Near Glasgow*, Glasgow: Aird & Coghill.

<sup>42</sup> Purchased in 1915 for £30,000 the 815 acre property was to become a hugely popular public park. First published in 1920, the official park guide was already in its fourth edition by 1923. Brotchie, T.C.F. (1920) *The Braes of Balloch: Official Guide to Loch Lomond Park*, Glasgow: Corporation of Glasgow. An earlier acquisition had been less of a success. In 1906, the City Corporation was bequeathed the Ardgoil estate on the shores of Loch Long by the late Lord Rowallan. Although it had been in the Corporation's hands for several years, the property lay idle. James Rhynd noted that 'it has been comparatively little used, and no serious attempt has been made to render the bulk of the area accessible or to develop it for recreation' Rhynd, J. (1931) 'Scotland's National Park: The Parliamentary Committee Report What is the Next Step?', *Scots Magazine*, XV (3) p. 169.

<sup>43</sup> The expansion of organised group tourism and the rise of the middle-class motoring holiday in the Highlands are examined in: Gold, J.R. & Gold, M.M. (1995) *Imagining Scotland: Tradition,*

was also laid open to the vast recreative market. Villages such as Arrochar, Inverary and Lochgoilhead were transformed into recreative spaces for the jovial and at times raucous day-tripping crowds revelling in the sense of freedom afforded by journeys 'doon the watter'. A visit to Arrochar left two young aspiring 'tramps' somewhat downcast, however their multi-hued description of events evokes all the chaos and clutter of an enticingly joyful scene.<sup>44</sup> Having arrived at the gateway to the Highlands, Alistair Borthwick and his climbing comrade found themselves like members of 'an Everest expedition which, having turned along the wrong glacier, finds itself on Brighton pier'.<sup>45</sup> They witnessed a scene of considerable bustle and untidiness where:

*'A steamer had disgorged several hundreds on to a pier and was pounding down Loch Long for more; a squadron of empty buses was drawn up outside the principal hotel, awaiting passengers whose attention was divided between high teas and beer; and the local merchant's barrow was besieged. A tinker with bagpipes blasted his way along the water-front, followed by a small and rapacious daughter exhorting pennies. Sandwich papers littered the shore where groups of women, by sheer force of character making this alien spot a Glasgow park, alternatively ate, gossiped, and turned to scold children who caught crabs among the rocks. The dominant smell was equal parts of salt sea, dusty tar and petrol.'*<sup>46</sup>

Hardier souls willing to venture higher found 'mountains scarcely touched by the tide-marks of humanity at their bases, as aloof and untouched as the desert which hems in the airport of Timbuktoo'.<sup>47</sup> Goatfell and Cir Mhor on Arran, the Trossachs, Ben Lomond, the 'Arrochar Alps' and the Cobbler were the most popular and accessible peaks for the rambling groups which had become nuclei for the 'wender, ascender and suspender' (see figure 13).<sup>48</sup> Principal among them was the Glasgow and West of Scotland Ramblers Federation which, having been established in 1928 as an umbrella body, had within three years attracted 29

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*Representation and Promotion in Scottish Tourism since 1750*, Aldershot: Scolar Press, p. 122-135. The 'Scottish Motor Traction Company' along with 'London and North Eastern Railways' and 'London, Midland and Scottish Railways' were quick to offer reduced rates and special services for the hiker. See: Scottish Youth Hostels Association (1934) *SYHA Annual Handbook for 1934*, Edinburgh: SYHA; *Scottish Field*, 1939 August p. 24.

<sup>44</sup> The common use of the term 'to tramp' would appear to have evolved during the inter-war years as a romantic evocation of the Romany lifestyle. Even Ramsay Macdonald saw fit to describe himself as 'an old tramp who has covered many and many a mile of Scottish roads and Scottish moors'. Macdonald, R. (1932) 'Foreword', in *SYHA Annual Handbook for 1932*, Edinburgh: SYHA, p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> Borthwick, A. (1983) *Always a Little Further: A Classic Tale of Camping, Hiking and Climbing in Scotland in the Thirties*, London: Diadem, p. 3-4.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p.4.

<sup>48</sup> Hall, T.S. (ed.) (1929) *Scottish Ramblers Yearbook: Being a Collection of Useful Information for Wayfarers*, Edinburgh p. 8.

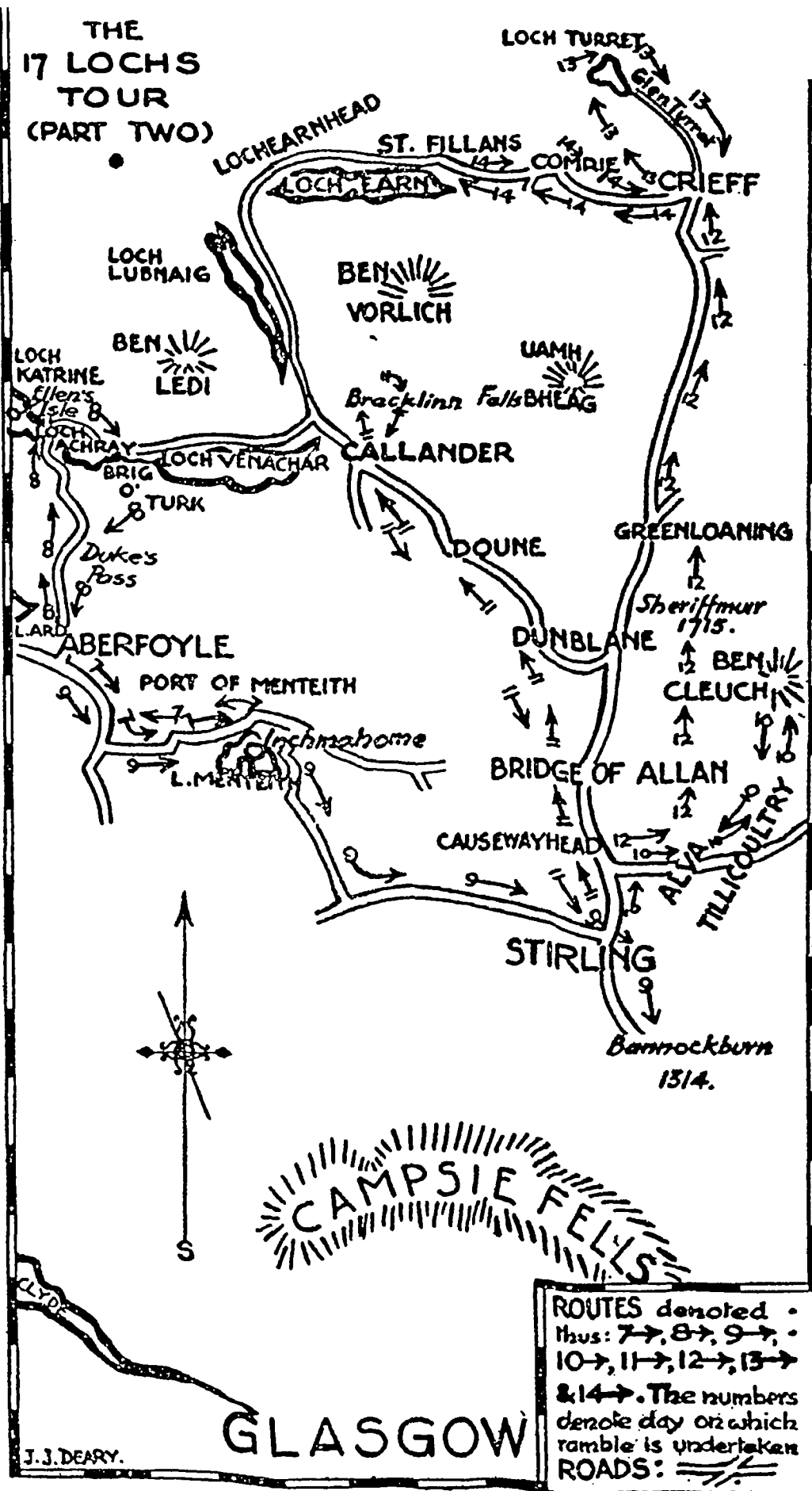


Figure 13 - A Whole New Walking Wonderland

Source: Hall, T.S. (1933)

affiliated clubs and a total membership numbering 3000.<sup>49</sup> With Tom Hall, the president at the helm of the now re-named Scottish Ramblers Federation (SRF), the organisation's approach was brash and energetic.<sup>50</sup> An annual handbook was produced, countryside awareness and anti-litter campaigns initiated through an education committee and mass tramps co-ordinated for the erection of mountain-view indicators (see figure 14)).<sup>51</sup> The Federation also cultivated links with provincial rambling clubs in England, one of the most active being the Manchester Rambling Federation. The radical edge displayed by this group was not matched by its northern counterpart. Although never insurgent, neither were the SRF ready to be steam-rolled by the landowning lobby, Alex Beith pointedly declaring that 'we conduct our row in an orderly manner'.<sup>52</sup> It was Hall, among others, who realised that ramblers being less mobile than cyclists or motorists, were in greater need of cheap accommodation in remote locations. Accordingly, in 1929 a decision was taken to establish the Rucksack Club Ltd. This public company managed to raise a limited amount of capital through subscriptions from clubs and individuals which was put to use in constructing simple wooden huts at Kinlochard and Arrochar.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Among the many colourful groups which made up the federation were the Roving Rollicking Ramblers, the Glasgow Health Culture Society, Die Deutsch sprechenden Wanderer, Glasgow Workers' College Rambling Group, the Plebs, the Tramps and the Scottish Socialist Art Circle.

<sup>50</sup> Hall, an experienced hiker hailing from Falkirk, was well aware of the 'commercial opportunities in the new outdoor market. Besides being the author of several rambling guides and updating the works of Hugh Macdonald, he edited the SRF handbook which also included prominent advertisements for 'Tom Hall's Wayfaring Holidays Throughout Europe'. Hall, T.S. (1934) (ed.) *Scottish Ramblers Yearbook*, Edinburgh; Hall, T.S. (1928) *Tramping in Arran*, Edinburgh: J.S. Bain; Hall, T.S. (1929) *Citizen Rambles*, Glasgow: James Hedderwick & Sons; Hall, T.S. (1933) *Tramping Holidays in Scotland: Five Walking Tours*, London: Country Life; Hall, T.S. (1935) *Firth of Clyde Holidays Haunts*, Glasgow: James Hedderwick & Sons: Glasgow. By 1934 with councils and committees in Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh the SRF sent two representatives to the National Council of Ramblers. This controlling body sought to further the objects of ramblers throughout Britain.

<sup>51</sup> Ramblers were invited to participate in a 'Spring-Cleaning Day' organised for several well-frequented routes. Federation notes appeared weekly in the *Daily Record*, which advertised itself as the newspaper 'of the open-air enthusiast'. *SYHA Annual Handbook for 1932*, Edinburgh: SYHA, p. 50. Together with staff from the Record, federation members constructed mountain view indicators on the Castle Rock in Dumbarton, at Lomond View on Auchengillan Hill and the summits of Goatfell on the Isle of Arran and Ben Lomond. In the last of these examples the mass tramp involved 700 people who, following the day's exertions, retired in celebratory mood to the Rowardennan Hotel where they jovially toasted their achievement. These efforts matched those in the north-east where, as early as 1917, an indicator had been built by the Cairngorm Club at Brimmond Hill on the outskirts of Aberdeen. Cruikshank, J. (1917) 'Mountain Indicator on Brimmond', *Cairngorm Club Journal*, IX (49) p. 1-7. In July 1924, 256 Cairngorm Clubbers unveiled an indicator on Lochnager, and another on August 1925 when 136 were present for a short ceremony on Ben Macdui. Murray, S. (1987) op cit. p. 17. An indicator had been placed on the summit of Ben Nevis by 1927.

<sup>52</sup> Beith, A. (1930) (ed.) *The Rambler's Annual*, Glasgow, p. 16. One year later the Federation stated its general policy as 'the preservation and promotion of the rights and privileges of ramblers, with due regard for the interests of those who live on or by the land'. Beith, A. (1931) (ed.) *The Rambler's Annual*, Glasgow, p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> Although relatively successful in achieving its aim of providing walkers with budget accommodation, the assets of the Rucksack Club were to be swallowed up by the Scottish Youth Hostels Association in 1931. Scottish Youth Hostel Association / Executive Committee Minutes (SYHA / ECM) vol. 1 1931 November 14.



For those of a truly daring nature, who found tramping rather too sedate, climbing offered an exhilarating alternative. A sizeable climbing community evolved in Glasgow during the late 1920's, attracting among its number a curious mixture of eccentrics, mavericks and nature mystics. Several informal clubs were formed, of these the Ptarmigan, Creag Dhu, Tricouni and Lomond were the largest and most popular, the Peaheid and Scrubbernutt the most renegade in their activities. Reaching the mountains in any mode of transport available, using thread-bare or improvised equipment and building an encyclopaedic and arcane knowledge of the landscape to be cautiously revealed around the camp-fire or in a rough 'howff', these characters revelled in the best 'stravaiging' traditions.<sup>54</sup> Political radicalism was not uncommon among their close-knit ranks which drew heavily from the unemployed, the disenfranchised and those who felt themselves generally marginalised in society.<sup>55</sup>

Formalised youth movements also found their inspiration in the Highland landscape. The Boy Scouts, Boys Brigade and Girl Guides were well versed in nature lore and the skills required of the independent explorer. 'The Scottish Watch', established in 1931 by its 'Chief', Lieutenant-Colonel M.B.H. Ritchie, hoped tramping, among other outdoor activities, would instil 'in the minds of the rising generation a love of their native land and a realisation of their great heritage'.<sup>56</sup> With its motto 'Scotland Yet' a carefully worded membership card required any signatory to 'pledge loyalty to Scotland for her freedom through my

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<sup>54</sup> Quite incredible feats of endurance were demonstrated each weekend by these irrepressible characters. The mountains could be reached on foot by taking the 'pipe track' which followed the route of the Glasgow Corporation water-pipe line from the city outskirts to Loch Katrine. Several bothies and 'howffs' were located along the way. Buses, trams and ferries were taken when budget allowed, rides hitched when the opportunity arose, while it was not unknown for Bob Grieve and his compatriots to row a borrowed boat up fourteen miles of Loch Lomond from Balmaha to Tarbet. They could claim, with no little pride, to have 'slept in every barn or bothy and climbed every mountain within 2/6 of Glasgow'. Maclean, I. (1996) *Mountain Men: The Discovery of the Hills by Glasgow Workers during the Depression*, in Kay, B. (ed.) *The Complete Odyssey: Voices from Scotland's Recent Past*, Edinburgh: Polygon, p. 79-89; 80.

<sup>55</sup> Bob Grieve recounted how his initial interest had been fired: 'I was serving an apprenticeship and when it expired, which was early in '32, the Depression was coming to its peak and I was dismissed because the office I was in was only keeping married men...and therefore I was on the dole for a period...I spent quite a lot of time moving about on hills and I met some curious and interesting people, living on very little. Chaps from the shipyards and engineering shops of Glasgow'. With such men Alistair Borthwick sat through the night discussing 'anything from football to philosophy'. Maclean, I. (1996) *op cit.* p. 82. The tales of Tom Weir, a grocery apprentice with the Cowlares Co-operative, among Glasgow's vibrant working-class climbing fraternity are included in: Weir, T. (1980) *Highland Days*, Edinburgh: Canongate; Weir, T. (1994) *Weir's World: An Autobiography of Sorts*, Edinburgh: Canongate; see also, Hutchison, A.G. (1975) 'The Beginning of the Junior Mountaineering Club of Scotland' *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*, XXX p. 309-315; Speirs, W.B. (1975) 'The Glasgow Section: Climbing in the 1920's' *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*, XXX p. 316-318; Murray, W.H. (1975) 'The Glasgow Section, 1935-1940', *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*, XXX p. 318-322.

<sup>56</sup> NLS Dep. 239 Box 13, *Angus Herald* 1931 July 24. The Scottish Watch was open to all over the age of 16 and claimed its mandate to be non-political and non-sectarian. Hall, T.S. (1934) *op cit.* p. 16.

membership of the Scottish Watch. That I may have the honour, to the best of my ability, to represent the entity of Scotland as a nation'.<sup>57</sup> While the command that members only salute to the Lion Rampant more than hinted at a veiled political agenda, the nationalist flag was unfurled without equivocation by 'Clan Scotland'. As youth wing of the National Party of Scotland, the Clan was led by its 'Chief', J.L. Kinloch, and his energetic assistant Wendy Wood.<sup>58</sup> Wood felt that through vital pursuits such as hiking the organisation could reverse a trend where 'Scottish youth was being deliberately educated away from ideas of national and individual freedom'.<sup>59</sup>

The disparate elements of this burgeoning culture each worked to their own specific agenda. Among the outdoor fraternity were political activists, free-spirits, educationalists, entrepreneurs, latter-day environmentalists, and a great many more in search of the simple freedoms offered by the countryside. Exuberant, sometimes disorderly, on occasion anarchic, the urban crowds were striding out into the great unknown. The arrival of a unifying and overarching influence on the scene was to provide an acceptable, civic identity for the movement. It is to the role of the Scottish Youth Hostels Association which the chapter now turns, using it to illustrate how the notion of a distinctive national environment came to be linked with the youth and outdoor movement and the search for modern expressions of national identity. Attention focuses on the institutionalisation and possible emasculation of Scotland's outdoor collective. The agenda of the SYHA, founded on the tenets of social obedience, apolitical patriotism and modern citizenship, was defined discreetly by a familiar coterie of patrician benefactors. Their contribution, which official histories depicted and the popular consciousness constructed, as indubitable and philanthropic, is subjected to closer examination.

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<sup>57</sup> NLS Acc. 7980 No. 25.

<sup>58</sup> Dissatisfied with the ultimate aims and methods of the Scottish Watch, Wood 'defected' to Clan Scotland where she could fully involve herself in nationalist and pacifist propaganda. Power, W. (1937) *Should Auld Acquaintance...An Autobiography*, London: Harrap, p. 158. Wood regretted the attempts of the Church and the Daily Record newspaper to appropriate the Watch as 'its use as a national force would be weakened or controlled', furthermore 'if 't showed signs of becoming nationally aggressive, it would probably be broken or diverted'. Wood, W. (1938) *I Like Life*, Edinburgh: Moray Press, p. 243; see for example: Kinloch, J.L. (no date) *Clan Scotland - Apprentice Builders of a Christian World: Specially Dedicated to Educationists, Politicians, Ministers*, privately printed.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 240.



## 'I Have Found a Haven': The Scottish Youth Hostels Association

*'Of the many movements in Scotland in this century, probably no other so inspired the dynamic creative force of the young people as the SYHA.'*<sup>60</sup>

(Alex Beith, 1959)

*'The hostelling movement is a good movement. It enables that new youth, which modern civilisation has imprisoned in the town, to escape into a world in which there is incredible beauty and peace, happiness and revelation for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.'*<sup>61</sup>

(Lord Lothian, 1935)

On the 2nd September 1930, George Lansbury, an elderly social idealist and seasoned Labour radical, gave a speech in Glasgow on the subject of 'hostels for hikers', in which he highlighted the need for cheap accommodation in remote locations.<sup>62</sup> Only through the provision of such facilities, he argued, could hiking be made a viable recreative pursuit for the Scottish working classes. The spirit of his speech found favour with Dr. Alan Fothergill, who in a letter to *The Scotsman* warmly applauded the ideas which had been presented.<sup>63</sup> Adding to the correspondence, Mr. A.D. Smith put forward the practical suggestion that he would donate £5 towards the establishment of a Scottish youth hostel organisation if his offer was matched by 99 other like minded benefactors.<sup>64</sup> Although the target was never fully reached, this initial scheme was to ensure the enthusiastic involvement of a number of Scots during the formative years of the hostel movement, including Fothergill and Smith who would become Honorary Secretary and Treasurer respectively. Following a number of preliminary meetings, the Scottish Youth Hostels Association was formally inaugurated on the 13th February 1931. Agreement was reached on its chief constitutional objective, stated as a commitment:

*'to help all, but especially young people of limited means living and working in industrial and other areas, to know, use, and appreciate*

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<sup>60</sup> Beith, A. (1959) *Youth Hostelling in Scotland: The First 25 Years*, Edinburgh: SYHA, p. 7. Other officially sanctioned histories of the organisation include: Moir, D.G. (1944) *Youth Hostelling in Scotland*, Edinburgh: SYHA; Coburn, O. (1950) *Youth Hostel Story*, London: National Council of Social Service; see also, Moir, D.G. (1933) *Scottish Youth Hostels*, *Cairngorm Club Journal*, XIII (74) p. 132-38.

<sup>61</sup> Lord Lothian (1935) 'Foreword', in *SYHA Annual Handbook for 1935*, Edinburgh: SYHA, p. 3.

<sup>62</sup> The concept of the *Jugendherbswerk*, or youth hostel, originated in Germany. The earliest association, founded in 1909 by Richard Shirmman, was based in Westphalia. Booth, M. (1923) 'The German Youth Movement', *The Hibbert Journal*, XXII (3) p. 468-478.

<sup>63</sup> *The Scotsman*, 1930 September 9, p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> *The Scotsman*, 1930 September 17, p. 9. For other correspondence on the youth hostel issue see: *The Scotsman*, 1930 September 10 p. 9; September 11 p. 7; September 12 p. 7; September 13 p. 10; September 15 p. 7.

*the Scottish countryside and places of historic and cultural interest in Scotland, and to promote their health, recreation and education, particularly by providing simple hostel accommodation for them on their travels'.<sup>65</sup>*

During its formative years, the SYHA itself was enormously reliant upon those with philanthropic or paternalistic tendencies. Lord Salveson, one of its key sponsors and 'a brilliant pioneer of more than one movement of rare benefit to the community', was made the Association's first President.<sup>66</sup> He was joined in the highest office by Sir John Stirling-Maxwell, the laird of Corrour (see figure 15). Other dignitaries included Sir John Sutherland, appointed vice-president, and Lord Keith, the vice-chairman.<sup>67</sup> Sir Iain Colquhoun, the laird of Luss, was quick to assimilate the organisation into Scotland's polite civic circuit. Meanwhile, the Earl of Breadalbane and the Sir Donald Cameron of Lochiel were among the notables from Scottish landowning society who took a keen interest in the internal workings of the nascent organisation and the activities of its membership in their personal fiefdoms. These figureheads were ably supported by a large body of assiduous enthusiasts spread throughout the country who were willing to undertake much of the early toil.<sup>68</sup>

Financing the creation, or conversion, of the buildings to be used as hostels was the most pressing problem faced by the Association. It was obvious to the National Executive that the vast majority of the burgeoning membership would be incapable of paying heavy annual subscriptions, so work pushed ahead 'relying not so much on money as on enthusiasm'.<sup>69</sup> The intense bouts of voluntary activity which enabled the rapid development of the first hostel, at Broadmeadows in the Borders, were mirrored by 'work parties' at a host of other locations throughout Scotland during the next few years.<sup>70</sup> The chain of five Border hostels was completed on 1st August 1931.<sup>71</sup> The second hostel to open was at Loch Ossian in a converted boathouse bequeathed to the Association by Sir John Stirling-Maxwell,

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<sup>65</sup> SYHA 1st Annual Report 1932, in SYHA Archive, Annual Reports 1931-55.

<sup>66</sup> Moir, D.G. (1944) op cit. p. 6.

<sup>67</sup> Lord Salveson held his position from 1931 to 1942, while Sir John Stirling-Maxwell was the longest serving of the original office-bearers, sitting on council from 1931 until his death in 1956.

<sup>68</sup> District committees were established in Edinburgh on February 26th 1931, Glasgow on April 3rd, a full National Executive by mid-April, Aberdeen on May 31st and Dundee by September 24th. SYHA/ECM vol. 1.

<sup>69</sup> Borthwick, A. (1947) 'The Scottish Youth Hostels', *Scottish Motor Traction Magazine*, May p. 35-39; 36.

<sup>70</sup> Dr. Fothergill identified the row of dilapidated cottages near Yarrow as suitable for use as a hostel. A short lease with an option to buy was arranged with a local farmer. The properties were then renovated by association members during local holidays and on weekends. After only two months work, the hostel was taking in its first guests. Moir, D.G. (1944) op cit. p. 8; SYHA/ECM vol. 1. 1931 August 2.

<sup>71</sup> Guest of honour at the opening of Langhaugh on Manor Water, the fifth Border hostel, was William Adamson, then Secretary of State for Scotland.



Figure 15 - Sir John Stirling-Maxwell and Lord Lovat  
Source: *The Scottish Field* (1929)

while another was built upon land donated by Sir Iain Colquhoun at Inverbeg on Loch Lomondside.<sup>72</sup> Meanwhile, a series of discussions between Dr. Fothergill and the powerful Forestry Commissioner, Colonel Sir John Sutherland, resulted in the letting of unused Commission huts at Fort Augustus and Auchterawe.<sup>73</sup> This hostel, the ninth to be opened in four months, was the first of a cluster which were soon to constitute the hugely popular north-west Highland chain. Despite its relative remoteness and associated problems of access, D.G. Moir proclaimed that 'From a relatively unknown region it became the mecca in later years of thousands of members from Scotland and from all over the world.'<sup>74</sup> After this tremendous burst of activity, tribute was paid in the first annual report to:

*'that great unnumbered body of persons known and unknown, within the Association and outside it, who have urged the hand-constructed wagon of our enterprise along the roads and by-ways of our country by putting their shoulders to the wheels'.<sup>75</sup>*

In line with the increasing number of available hostels, membership was also to swell. In October 1931, the nine Scottish hostels were available to 1130 members, by June 1933, 7082 members had thirty-one hostels around which to plan their tramps. Six years later the burgeoning membership had levelled out at around 18,000, and the hostels sixty-four.<sup>76</sup> Unsurprisingly given the tradition of hiking on the west coast, almost half of these hostellers were Glaswegians.<sup>77</sup> On an international scale, the SYHA was ranked fifth largest youth hostel association, while if population size was taken into account, Scotland's membership was second only to Germany.<sup>78</sup> The hostel buildings which the members frequented varied enormously in architectural style and grandeur but less so in the spartan comforts they offered at the budget price of one shilling per night. The hostel at Glen Nevis was a large Norwegian timber construction, the weary hiker reaching Carbisdale

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<sup>72</sup> Sir Iain Colquhoun was happy to open the hostel at Inverbeg, having already used his civic connections to make sure that its design was approved by the APRS.

<sup>73</sup> SYHA/ECM vol. 1. 1931 August 2; October 10.

<sup>74</sup> Moir, D.G. (1944) op cit. p. 11. An early indication of the popularity of the north-west chain arose when the Carn Dearg hostel, located on the shores of Loch Gairloch, was declared the busiest in Scotland during the summers of 1932 and 1933.

<sup>75</sup> SYHA 1st Annual Report, SYHA/ECM vol. 2.

<sup>76</sup> The many independent rambling and tramping groups throughout Scotland were granted affiliation to the SYHA. Amicable relations were maintained throughout the decade with the SRF which as another affiliated body found its role being steadily subsumed by the parent organisation.

<sup>77</sup> In 1937, the regional membership of the SYHA was as follows: Aberdeen - 905; Dundee - 1362; South-West - 472; Edinburgh - 4669; Glasgow - 8106; Other (including Highland) - 1002. The total number of 'bed-nights' spent at hostels located within these same regions during 1937 were as follows: Aberdeen - 10,374; Dundee - 14,151; South-West - 7035; Edinburgh - 25,832; Glasgow - 50,351; North-West Highland - 28,390. *Youth Hostelling and Cycling News*, 1938 October 1 p. 11.

<sup>78</sup> 'Binnien Mor' (1943) 'Saga of the Scottish Youth Hostels: Rise and International Successes', *Scots Independent*, May p. 3.

could spend the night in a 19th-century castle while at Badbea, shelter was to be found in a disused shepherds cottage. At Uig on Skye, hostellers endured fitful slumber in a shed covered by corrugated iron, at the Kyle of Lochalsh they were accommodated in a row of disused military Nissen huts and at Ullapool, in the village hall 'with a Saturday night dance going on next door - and the rasp of fiddles keeping you awake'.<sup>79</sup> The completion of regional chains for the Trossachs, Angus, Deeside, Speyside and the Great Glen produced a comprehensive national network. The steady accrual of these properties, combined with the verve and gusto of a still expanding and ever willing workforce, meant that by 1944 the number of hostels levelled out at 57 and the membership a record high of 38,885. The SYHA was representative of, and symbolic figurehead for, a considerable body of societal interest.

#### Increased Access for the Compliant and Affiliated Youth ?

The public standing of the SYHA was assured once the organisation was ensconced within Edinburgh's flourishing civic community. Reciprocal relations were fostered with the APRS, NTS and the Saltire Society, all members of an informal guild of societies working towards landscape preservation and outdoor enjoyment.<sup>80</sup> The APRS, initially cautious of the approaches made by the populist hiking movement and by the 'possible promiscuous erection of hostels' in rural settings, became enthusiastic supporters of the SYHA ethos.<sup>81</sup> If the hostelling movement set out to construct an appropriate code of behaviour for those visitors to the countryside 'who carry with them in large degree the spirit of the towns', then it would overcome some of the problems already attended to by the APRS.<sup>82</sup> The SLPF endorsed this view, its membership having long bemoaned how in the summer months their properties were disturbed by 'the week-end crowds who pour

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<sup>79</sup> Borthwick, A. (1947) op cit. p. 36.

<sup>80</sup> APRS/ECM vol. I 1931 March 25. Dr. Alan Fothergill was SYHA representative on the executive of the APRS. APRS/ECM vol. I 1931 October 28. The architect Frank Mears sat on the SYHA Building Committee. APRS/ECM vol. II 1933 June 28. Mears went on to design the Loch Eck youth hostel. A scale-model of the structure was exhibited in the Hall of Youth at the 1938 Empire Exhibition held in Glasgow. *Scottish Youth Hostel and Cycling News*, 1938 July 5 p. 19.

<sup>81</sup> Having warmly welcomed representatives of the Scottish Rights of Way Society and the Scottish Mountaineering Club into the committee fold, the APRS executive were unsure how to react to the interest shown by the Glasgow and West of Scotland Ramblers Federation. The CPRE were eventually consulted on their attitude towards rambling groups. APRS/ECM vol. I 1929 March 7; APRS/ECM vol. I 1931 February 25th.

<sup>82</sup> APRS Propaganda Leaflet, 1927. Lord Polwarth had been quick to note the need for progressive public education on litter disposal. APRS/ECM vol. I 1929 December 13. Although on occasion, the tone adopted by Association members hinted at a more derisory attitude toward the city dweller. After litter problems in the suburbs of Edinburgh, the organising secretary informed the committee of how he would 'endeavour to get the press interested, particularly that section of it which reached a certain class'. APRS/ECM vol. II 1933 July 26.

out of the streets and alleys to camp or roam over the fields and hillsides'.<sup>83</sup> Landowning propaganda warned of how the pestilential hordes left 'the sides of glens and lochs famed for their natural beauty littered with filthy paper, empty bottles and general garbage. Then there is the serious danger from fire when these careless picknickers set themselves down in plantations or heather'.<sup>84</sup>

While there was certainly substance in these claims, they also betrayed the landowners' continued desire for sporting exclusivity. This was made apparent by the 7th Duke of Richmond and Gordon, an arch complainant, who in 1924, felt himself forced into selling his Glenmore property due to repeated cases of public 'trespass'. The estate factor described how:

*'in recent years large numbers of tourists have been in the habit of going by motor-cars and charabancs up to Glenmore Lodge, and picnicking there, wandering over the forest during the stalking season and even bathing in the loch in front of the lodge'.<sup>85</sup>*

The erection of notice boards, he despaired, had little effect in 'checking the abuse of privileges given to the public'.<sup>86</sup> 'Perluto', a particularly vitriolic sportsman, claimed, somewhat colourfully, to have stood aghast at:

*'the sight of a troupe of modern fairies practising folk dancing in the midst of a patch of nice young heather, or the spectacle of "Papa, Mama and little Jock" enjoying an alfresco luncheon on the summit slopes of some of the best holding ground on the 12th of August'.<sup>87</sup>*

All this, he warned, was 'quite likely to become as common as sheep are at the present time'.<sup>88</sup> Meanwhile, the Duke of Atholl appeared no more amenable to the idea of free access to the uplands than he had been six years previous. When recreationists were meek and supplicant few problems arose, when they transgressed demarcated boundaries the Duke's ire was inevitably raised. Yet his pronouncements on the subject still appeared to be made from a position of some ignorance:

*'So far as the great expanses of moorland and mountain in such places as the Highlands of Scotland are concerned, I can say with*

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<sup>83</sup> SLPF (1927) *Notes for Members*, I (10) p. 21. Although less accusatory, similar concerns were voiced within rambling circles that the movement might be 'breeding mediocrity' within its ranks. Disappointment was expressed at the inability of some 'hikers' to use a compass, to learn of natural history and geography on their travels and at their 'unpleasant rowdiness'. 'V.J.R.A.' (1931) 'The Future of Rambling', in Beith, A. (ed.) (1931) op cit. p. 33.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>85</sup> Anon (1924) 'Access to Glenmore', *Cairngorm Club Journal*, XI (62) p. 118-119.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p. 119. The Duke had not been entirely sympathetic to the desires of the public. For several years prior to the sale he had barred visitors from using the Sluggan road, a disputed right-of-way in the district. Baker, E.A. (1923) op cit. p. 33.

<sup>87</sup> 'Perluto' (1930) Letters to the Editor, *The Field*, CIV (4033) p. 552.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p. 552.

*confidence that there is not the slightest desire on the part of the general public to go on these hills'.<sup>89</sup>*

His oft-repeated and judicious claim that 'the cases in which *bona fide* mountaineers are prevented from having access on reasonable occasions to mountains worth climbing must be few and far between' was backed by an accusation that those in search of change were 'but a few cranks and political agitators who go round looking for trouble and are not pleased unless they find it'.<sup>90</sup> These, the views of a civic figure who would, only twelve months later, assume the presidency of the National Trust for Scotland. An SLPF memorandum dating from 1928 detailed the landowning lobby's objections to the same proposed legislation and offered a similarly skewed reading of public requirements. While detailing how 'scientific and mountaineering clubs are seldom, if ever, refused a request to go to definite places', the rather quaint contention stood that 'tourists seldom want to go off the high road except for a picnic up a burn, near a road'.<sup>91</sup>

During the 1930's, resistance to increased access through statutory reform was still entrenched.<sup>92</sup> However, landowning attitudes were infused with a greater

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<sup>89</sup> Duke of Atholl (1930) 'A Crank's Measure Which Will Injure Farming, Sport and Rateable Values', *The Field*, CIV (4030) p. 417. Sir John Stirling-Maxwell expressed empathy with the Duke over the difficulties of land access. *Glasgow Herald*, 1931 April 4 p. 8.

<sup>90</sup> The Duke had more to say on these would-be insurgents. His comments were symptomatic of a period when landowners, whose primary interests were undoubtedly sporting, sought to align themselves with the general agricultural lobby: 'Some of the promoters are people who would not wish to hurt a fly and yet they are prepared to disturb the very places where sheep bring forth their lambs. At other times their presence would so disturb the sheep that not only would the sheep deteriorate in weight, but the farms would have to employ additional shepherds to collect the scattered flocks once more upon their own grounds. These are the reasons why farmers and agriculturalists oppose the Bill'. Ibid, p. 417. The subtle substitution of sheep for deer was wholly apparent to Edwin Royce of the Ramblers' Federation who issued his own retort: 'The implications here are not only absurd but misleading... the charming picture of the sportsman and farmers standing shoulder to shoulder has no shadow of foundation. On the contrary, the sporting fraternity have made desperate efforts to exclude sheep from their preserve'. On the second point, while conceding that the SMC had no official complaint to make of inaccessibility, Royce argued that 'its members enjoy opportunities and privileges as regards access not accorded to lesser breeds'. Royce, E. (1931) 'Access to the Mountains: The Duke of Atholl and the Ramblers' Federation', in Beith, A. (ed.) op cit. p. 51-52; see also, *The Times* 1930 February 13 p. 8. The Scottish Rights of Way Society followed the SMC's lead on the 1930 Access to the Mountains campaign. The secretary, Arthur Russell stated that they did not and would continue to reject any Bill as such moves were deemed 'beyond the province of the society'. SRO GD 335/66, *The Scotsman* 1929 November 28.

<sup>91</sup> SRO GD 1/201, Access to the Mountains Bill (1928) List of SLPF Objections, Internal Memorandum.

<sup>92</sup> The Federation membership's antipathy toward the Access to the Mountains Bill did not wane during the decade. The Duke of Buccleuch, having described its intents as 'highly objectionable', was included on a sub-committee established to counter the Bill's introduction to Scotland. SLPF/ECM vol. IV 1937 October 19; vol. V 1939 January 17. The committee's message was grave: 'no regard is had to the fact that a public right so created will seriously prejudice interests of great consequence and will even affect the economic position of large districts in Scotland...It is not to be expected that sportsmen will show the same desire for sport in this country if the sport is to be depreciated and if they are to be disturbed in the exercise of the sporting rights'. SLPF (1939) *Notes for Members*, II (33) p. 1-9. An internal memorandum drafted between the SLPF, National Farmers Union and the Chamber of Agriculture in Scotland claimed that the Bill's object was 'not,



sense of reality. Concern grew over the damage being done to estates near industrial areas and the increased availability of the motor-car to the general population. Accordingly, the Scottish Estate Factors Society (SEFS) campaigned for wider powers of prosecution on cases of trespass. In conjunction with the SEFS, the SLPF set up a conference on the subject, inviting kindred societies to attend.<sup>93</sup> Although the grievances aired were numerous, the proceedings closed with a commitment to establish a concord on access and conduct with the SYHA.<sup>94</sup> This avenue was explored at a later joint conference attended by representatives of the landowning lobby, the outdoor recreation movement and the APRS.<sup>95</sup> Despite the tensions caused by a few recalcitrant factors still demanding a trespass law in line with that found in England, assurances were given that it was not the recreation societies themselves which were causing concern 'but the unenlightened, uncontrolled townsman'.<sup>96</sup> This imposed construct of different castes within the outdoor movement can be viewed as a subtle means of control. The logic ran that the educated and responsible citizen knew where to tread while the inattentive dawdler was a menace to both rural society and economy. Similar rhetoric was evident in the comments of one sporting expert who:

*'felt that it is not hikers that are the backbone of the trouble, but the bus parties of day-trippers that fly about in motor cars and buses. They are a class of people who do a great deal of harm to sport of all kinds - deer, grouse and fish suffer from these would-be mountaineers'.<sup>97</sup>*

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as might be supposed from the title, to afford access to the mountains. The Bill will give every person the right to walk, and be upon, all uncultivated mountain and heathland, moorland and downland, in short every bit of uncultivated land in the country'. SRO GD 325/1/347.

<sup>93</sup> Attending the conference were representatives of the Scottish Estate Factors Society, Scottish Land and Property Federation, Highland Agricultural Society, Royal Scottish Forestry Society, the Scottish Chamber of Agriculture, the National Farmers Union of Scotland and the Scottish branch of the Land Agent's Society. This occasion provided another opportunity for the major landowner to present a united front with the most minor agriculturalist. SLPF (1933a) *Notes for Members*, II (21) p. 21-27.

<sup>94</sup> Disturbance of stock by dogs was a key complaint, although it was reported that 'one exasperated tenant solved the problem by shooting every dog caught in the act, his total bag amounting to no less than 15.' The effectiveness of this approach was resounding, 'He is troubled no more!' Damage to fences and dykes was also cited, one factor claiming that over 4000 trippers had been counted passing over his estate property in one day. Difficulties over fire, the litter nuisance and aimless wanderings over deer forests and grouse moors were also covered. SLPF (1933a) *op cit.* p. 22.

<sup>95</sup> The outdoor lobby was represented by the Scottish Mountaineering Club, the SYHA, the Scottish Ramblers Federation, the Boy Scouts and the Girl Guides. SYHA/ECM vol. IV 1933 May 27.

<sup>96</sup> SLPF (1933b) *Notes for Members*, II (23) p. 1-9. The representatives of the SLPF at the conference made for a powerful consortium, the delegation comprised Sir Iain Colquhoun, Sir Donald Cameron of Lochiel, Sir Hugh Shaw-Stewart, Sir John Stirling-Maxwell, Lord Novar and the Earl of Leven and Melville. SLPF/ECM vol. IV 1933 January 12. APRS minutes recorded that the mood among delegates had been amicable, such that 'a mutual understanding had been manifested'. APRS/ECM vol. II June 28. The eventual outcome of the conference was a memorandum of suggestions which was sent to the Secretary of State for Scotland.

<sup>97</sup> 'J.M.' (1933) Letters to the Editor, *The Scottish Field*, LXII (372) p. 294.



The conference did see some concessions to the changing times. 'Countryside wardens' were proposed as a means of retaining better order on those estates where numbers were swelling to unmanageable proportions. Sir Iain Colquhoun suggested the possible employment of ex-servicemen in such a role and agreed to test the scheme on his Ardgowan property.<sup>98</sup> Ultimately, the SYHA, as the influential and overarching organisation of the outdoor movement, was targeted as the most suitable medium for the propagation of the landowners' accord to the masses, proprietary rights must remain sacrosanct. The hostel, now an accepted presence in the rural environment, could localise the threat of the estranged urbanite and in such a way become an effective mechanism for didacticism, registration and control.<sup>99</sup>

From such foundations the SYHA membership was guided on a course of social reform by what was commonly presented as a patriarchal strata of aristocratic and metropolitan philanthropists. Using their influence within, and intimate knowledge of, the Scottish landowning community these characters negotiated definite access agreements for hostellers in the Highlands. These flexible settlements allowed the masses to be ushered and chaperoned to suit the whims of the puritanical sportsman.<sup>100</sup> In many instances, the young explorers were encouraged to content themselves by following the road on foot or by bike. Association handbooks and guidebooks included prescribed itineraries which linked isolated hostels into chains.<sup>101</sup> 'J.M.', a keen sportsman, happily observed how in Aberdeenshire 'very few hikers bother to leave the track or wander about the moors. The hiker finds he has enough day's walking to get from hostel to hostel

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<sup>98</sup> Wearing an armband or a simple uniform the wardens could assist estate staff in controlling and directing hikers, picknickers and campers. SLPF (1933a) Op cit. p. 24; SLPF/ECM vol. IV 1933 March 30; APRS/ECM vol. I 1932 July 27. Undoubtedly progressive, Colquhoun was not averse to using an iron fist concealed within the velvet glove. He recommended contacting Chief Constable's in respect to the litter nuisance, as from personal experience 'two or three prosecutions early in the season in any given area would be effective'. APRS/ECM vol. I 1931 April 27. In one public speech he declared that he had given up on educating the present adult generation on the litter nuisance, but hoped that young people would set a better example. *Glasgow Herald* 1930 April 26 p. 7.

<sup>99</sup> Not all lairds were convinced by the merits of the youth hostel. During the early 1930's permission to establish a hostel at Inverary was refused by the Duke of Argyll and likewise by an unidentified landowner near Crianlarich. Lamont, A. (1934a) 'Trespass in Scotland', *Forward*, September 22 p. 8.

<sup>100</sup> The Scottish Rights of Way Society employed similar tactics, negotiating with Lord Glentanar in Deeside and the Duke of Atholl in Perthshire, but was non-committal on the campaign for change. The director William Ferris blandly stated that while awaiting 'the simplification of the law regarding Rights of Way and the passing of the Access of the Mountains Bill...the Society was willing to negotiate with owners who suffer inconvenience through a right of way taking from the privacy of the house, so long as the alternative path offers no inconvenience to the walker'. *Forward*, 1934 September 9 p. 6.

<sup>101</sup> See for example: Morgan, W.P.P. (ed.) (1935) *Scottish Youth Hostels Association: Loch Lomond - Trossachs Guide*, Edinburgh: SYHA; SYHA (1947) *Official Guide to the North-West Highlands*, Edinburgh: SYHA.

without any extra'.<sup>102</sup> When Lady Hermoine Cameron of Lochiel greeted hostellers at the opening of the new Glen Nevis building, her words were carefully chosen, 'Perhaps you do not know how you young people brighten the drab roads. You always have such happy faces that any road you take is the happier for your presence'.<sup>103</sup> Nor surely was it coincidental that when hostelling was given the sanction of the rural establishment in the *Scottish Field*, the article in question was entitled 'The New Road Round Scotland'.<sup>104</sup>

When itineraries allowed the hosteller to stray from the tarmac, strict linear routes were delineated through estate properties. Theory sometimes converted poorly into practice. Lord Davies, the owner of the Coulin estate in Wester Ross, persistently prevented hikers and cyclists from using the 'private' track which ran behind his shooting lodge and linked the Slattadale and Achnashellach hostels. On occasion, when access to a certain hill had been negotiated, members were instructed on the specific paths to be followed, these details often being posted conspicuously on the hostel door. During the sporting season, which on some estates could be construed to run from mid-July until the end of November, all access to the hills was forbidden and some hostels were closed. The hostel at Loch Ossian within Sir John Stirling-Maxwell's Corrour deer forest was out of bounds for the duration of the sporting season. The laird asked that 'black-sheep' among the outdoor community be reminded of such rules by fellow hostellers.<sup>105</sup> Sir Iain Colquhoun reported that a request 'to avoid his deer forest for six weeks in September and October and for a period prior to this, had been observed. His stalkers had reported an almost complete absence of hikers'.<sup>106</sup> The entry in the 1935 SYHA handbook for Lord Davies' treasured domain informed members that, 'all the Torridon mountains should be avoided during the stalking season. The keepers are very strict, and the Forestry Commission desire that our members should not wander in the neighbouring deer forests'.<sup>107</sup>

In the *Scottish Field*, Alex Inkson McConnochie paid tribute to the gifts of conciliation so ably demonstrated by those whose interests bridged the two pursuits:

*'Little more than two years ago the SYHA sprung into being and already gives promise of a bright future. Unless however,*

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<sup>102</sup> 'J.M.' (1933) op cit. p. 294.

<sup>103</sup> *Oban Times*, 1938 July 23 p. 2.

<sup>104</sup> Humble, B.H. (1933) 'The New Road Round Scotland', *The Scottish Field*, **LXIII** (375) p. 253-4; see also: Easton, W. (1933) 'The Joys of Tramping', *The Scottish Field*, **LXI** (363) p. 88-89.

<sup>105</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 1931 April 4 p. 8.

<sup>106</sup> APRS/ECM vol. I 1932 November 30.

<sup>107</sup> Scottish Youth Hostels Association (1935) *SYHA Annual Handbook for 1935*, Edinburgh: SYHA, p. 36.

*conflicting interests are amicably agreed, friction can hardly be avoided. Sir John Stirling-Maxwell is the vice-president - fortunately for hikers, and equally fortunately for deer forest owners and occupants. Sir John takes the broad view of the position, present and future. Hikers will multiply and their hostels increase. It comes then to this, that the hiker has it in his power to inflict heavy economic loss on the Highlands. It follows therefore, that we must avoid the deer forests altogether or be ready to make some compromise'.<sup>108</sup>*

Of a similar mind was Colonel Sir John Sutherland who noted how:

*'The members of the SYHA are conscious of the privileges of the freedom of passage allowed to them by landowners all over Scotland, and are particularly grateful for the consideration shown to them in the Highlands...nor forgetful of the interests of others, especially in the shooting and stalking season'.<sup>109</sup>*

While Sutherland maintained that 'there is room for everyone in the Highlands', for a few dissidents, neither his passive tone or spirit of rapprochement and bonhomie could veil the far-reaching consequences of a such a recumbent approach to public access. The political activist Archie Lamont argued that while:

*'the SYHA makes the scenery of the Scottish countryside more available...it can hardly be claimed for them that they are engaged in fighting for any higher issues. It is their policy to look up to the landed proprietors, no matter whether these individuals are deserving of respect or the reverse, and to take all the rebuffs lying down'.<sup>110</sup>*

Thus, he concluded, the Association 'did not altogether recommend itself to the Scottish Nationalist or Socialist'.<sup>111</sup> The novelist, Eric Linklater, still saw opportunities for insurgency:

*'many of the hikers must be descendants of evicted Highlanders who sought refuge in the Lowland cities and in contrast to those*

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<sup>108</sup> McConnochie, A.I. (1933) 'Deer Forests and Hikers', *The Scottish Field*, LXI (363) p. 103.

<sup>109</sup> *Oban Times*, 1938 July 23 p. 2.

<sup>110</sup> Lamont, A. (1934a) op cit. p. 8.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, p. 8. Lamont was the prospective Nationalist candidate for the Kelvingrove constituency in Glasgow and an avowed revolutionary in the hills. He happily courted controversy, as one confession from a now familiar *contretemps* made clear: 'Last year when Lord Davies was at Coulin, a quite exceptional hiker left the road to have a look through the drawing-room window - or perhaps, I regret to record it, it was a bedroom window - at the spectacle of Lord Davies and his friends. Since then all the thunders of Zeus have been called down upon hikers and cyclists and everyone else within reach. An "order" has been issued that no-one must walk along the road behind Coulin Lodge, and the whole Coulin road is claimed as "private" - though a large part of it runs parallel with an old right-of-way which has been allowed to go back to heather and bog...Even though Coulin Lodge is lying unused the Head Gardener is under instructions to go out and tell cyclists to go back the way they came, and wheel their bicycles for miles over the rocks and heather roots of the track which Lord Davies has condescended to recognise as a "right-of-way". Lamont, A. (1934b) 'Grouse Shooters and Hikers: Scots Nationalist Told to Keep Off the Grass', *Forward*, August 25 p. 3.

*who complain of their behaviour, I find it pleasant to think of them worrying the deer that replaced the sheep that dispossessed their fathers. I should like to see hikers more numerous and brightly shirted than ever on every mountain in Scotland; for if they scatter the grouse and pursue the deer far enough, the Highlands may be available again for their rightful heritors of the earth: who are men'.<sup>112</sup>*

This was most definitely not the party line. Advice of a very different sort was provided by the Association on the type of conduct which was expected of anyone taking to the country. In the following section these codes are dissected as part of a wider investigation into the social life of the Scottish youth hostel and the identities constructed within.

### Happy Hostelling Days! The Path to Responsible Citizenship

*'The SYHA makes a great contribution to good citizenship. It trains for and encourages good wayfaring upon the highway and good conduct on the hillside. It provides facilities for good health and exercise and, in some of the most important and formative years of life, it encourages reverence for the beauties and glories of the Scottish scene.'<sup>113</sup>*

(Tom Johnston, 1944)

*'There appeared to be no class of society to which the appeal of the hostels did not extend; and so they were, and, to my mind, still are the greatest library of ideas and human experience in Scotland.'<sup>114</sup>*

(Alistair Borthwick, 1939)

The intentions of the youth hostel movement were perspicuous from the outset, to breed confident, self-reliant and physically fit young Scots. These objects appealed as much to the patriotic and conservative laird as to the radical political activist.<sup>115</sup> The country gentry and 'brass-hats' were well aware of the benefits conferred by time spent in nature. Understanding the wiles of the wilds, following tracks, navigating in mist, scouting for landmarks, braving biting winds, all were strengths of the battle-scarred sportsman, but also those of the hardened hiker. Echoing the instruction manuals of the masochistic deer-stalker Elizabeth Haldane warned the prospective hosteller in Scotland that:

*'there are real wetting days that it takes a stout heart to face. But when this happens you must become a philosopher and remember that there is no good thing without its contrasting evil, and believe*

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<sup>112</sup> Linklater, E. (1935) *The Lion and the Unicorn*, London: Routledge, p. 96.

<sup>113</sup> Johnston, T. (1944) 'Foreword', in Beith, A. op cit. p. 3.

<sup>114</sup> Borthwick, A. (1983) op cit. p. 133.

<sup>115</sup> The cross-fertilisation of common theories on outdoor culture through movements on the far-right and far-left of the political spectrum is discussed in: Bramwell, A. (1989) *Ecology in the 20th Century: A History*, London: Yale University Press, p. 104-32.

*that the brightness will be all the brighter when once the darker day passes'.<sup>116</sup>*

First-hand experience and organic knowledge were qualities revered by both parties.<sup>117</sup> To take those lacking any sense of purpose from the swelling ranks of the unemployed and to fill them with a pride of both themselves and their nation was a laudable civic project worthy of patrician patronage. The same vein of muscular christianity which informed Sir Iain Colquhoun's philosophy of deer stalking was evident in his patronage of the SYHA.<sup>118</sup> He expressed disappointment that 100,000 young men would spectate at a football match 'when quite half of them would have been far more healthily employed in some game themselves or having a five-mile walk in the country instead'.<sup>119</sup> The logic of Colquhoun's argument was simple, under the correct conditions the satisfaction gained from engendering communal activity could outweigh that enjoyed through private pleasure:

*'As an individual the landowner may lament his losses, but as a Scotsman he can have nothing but thankfulness for the out-of-door movement which is giving to his fellow countrymen and women health and strength and golden memories and a deeper and more understanding love of their native land'.<sup>120</sup>*

Furthermore, among a Scots aristocracy which had suffered the ravages of war shoulder to shoulder with the general populace, there existed a genuine desire to assemble a full-blooded youth worthy of those lost in conflict. Reactions to the decimation of a vibrant generation varied, but by focusing on the physical and moral condition of those who remained, post-war society found a means to

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<sup>116</sup> Haldane, E. (1934) 'Scotland', in *SYHA Annual Handbook for 1934*, Edinburgh: SYHA, p. 35. Neil Gunn, Highland novelist, hiker and stalker, noted that: 'Even out of discomfort in Nature, time can distil a fairly potent brew. And the mind and the character are formed in ways that are peculiar. Only out of such individual experience does strength come and personal peace'. Gunn, N.M. (1939) 'Wayfaring Memories of 1938', *Scottish Motor Traction Magazine*, January p. 65-68; NLS Dep. 209 Box 9 (162).

<sup>117</sup> One correspondent noted how 'an appreciation of the beauty of hill and moor, of lochan and sky, of heather and tree' were sensibilities shared by the walker and stalker. Anon (1938) 'Scotland Month by Month', *Scots Magazine*, XIX (5) p. 321. Harry Mortimer Batten, a long-standing member of the APRS executive, was both a keen stalker and the author of several books on tracking and scouting for children. Mortimer Batten, H. (1920) *Tracks and Tracking: A Book for Boy Scouts and Girl Guides*, Edinburgh: W.R. Chalmers; Mortimer Batten, H. (1922) *Woodlore for Young Sportsmen*, London: Heath Cranton; 'Stravaiger' (1938) *Mountains of the Morning*, Edinburgh: Moray Press.

<sup>118</sup> Besides the strange forms of gratification he found from stalking deer in bare feet Colquhoun's colourful career marked him out as an expert on strenuous physical activity. In 1924 he joined an Oxford University Arctic expedition which crossed part of Spitzbergen, he was a champion amateur boxer during his time as a Major in the army and was awarded the DSO for Gallantry at Les Boeufs in 1916.

<sup>119</sup> Colquhoun, I. and Machell, H. (1927) *Highland Gatherings: Being Accounts of the Braemar, Northern and Luss Meetings*, London: Heath Cranton, p. 26.

<sup>120</sup> *Oban Times*, 1936 November 21 p. 2.

continue anew.<sup>121</sup> In many instances the widespread revulsion felt at the modern mechanisation and rationalisation of death on the Western Front was reflected in a retreat to the rural as the chosen environment for regeneration.<sup>122</sup> Colquhoun spoke of instilling a 'keen civic consciousness' through the public's new found enthusiasm for the great outdoors (see figure 16).<sup>123</sup> Once this code embodying order and responsibility had been established, SYHA rhetoric outlined how the bracing Highland climate would act as a panacea, flushing the pallor from the urbanites face, refreshing the soul, cleansing the spirit and invigorating apathetic limbs. This discourse cemented the link between the self and an identifiable environment. The grandeur of the scenery and the sensations inspired by a national heritage being experienced at first hand would spur Scotland's youth on to great things. Base rock and earth, the very foundations of the nation would create a new and vibrant section of the population (see figure 17).

Besides an attachment to a symbolically national landscape the unpretentious youth hostel was supported by a powerful code of morality. The familiar idyllic image of hostel life developed around the notion that each young visitor to the countryside would be provided with cheap lodging and a healthy measure of liberal austerity. Hostelling was a levelling experience, mixing the sexes, social classes and age groups; it also sought to teach valuable lessons in tolerance, fair-play and democracy. Alistair Borthwick, reminiscing on these formative experiences, wrote favourably of the egalitarian spirit which was present in the youth hostel and how it had helped widen his, until then, narrow horizons. He urged the reader:

*'Imagine yourself sixteen again. Try to remember how much you knew of the world and the people in it. It was not a great deal. You knew your own class - up to a point - and your own friends; but your view was limited. You saw the world as you had been taught to see it at school, as an ordered place working to set rules. You did not know, you could not possibly know, how the other half lived'.<sup>124</sup>*

In the humblest of surroundings lay independence from the steely glare of parents, freedom from the strictures of class, potential for contact with the opposite sex and

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<sup>121</sup> Dr. Alan Fothergill had been a victim of gas attack during the war and was to die at the early age of 37 as a result of associated health problems.

<sup>122</sup> The evolving relationship between machinery and destruction in the Great War and the reaction to these developments is discussed in: Pick, D. (1993) *War Machine: The Rationalisation of Slaughter in the Modern Age*, London: Yale University Press.

<sup>123</sup> APRS/ECM vol. I 1931 April 27.

<sup>124</sup> Borthwick, A. (1947) op cit. p. 38. Borthwick reflected on the company he kept during first stay in a hostel, at Glenbrittle on the Isle of Skye: 'Among the dozen people staying there were two girl cyclists from Motherwell, three Glasgow climbers and two Liverpool ones, a retired schoolmaster, a cinema operator, an engineer, and a man who was spending his leave from the Indian Civil Service in cycling round all the hostels in Britain...The youngest among us was seventeen, the oldest sixty-eight. And we met as equals'. Ibid, p. 38.

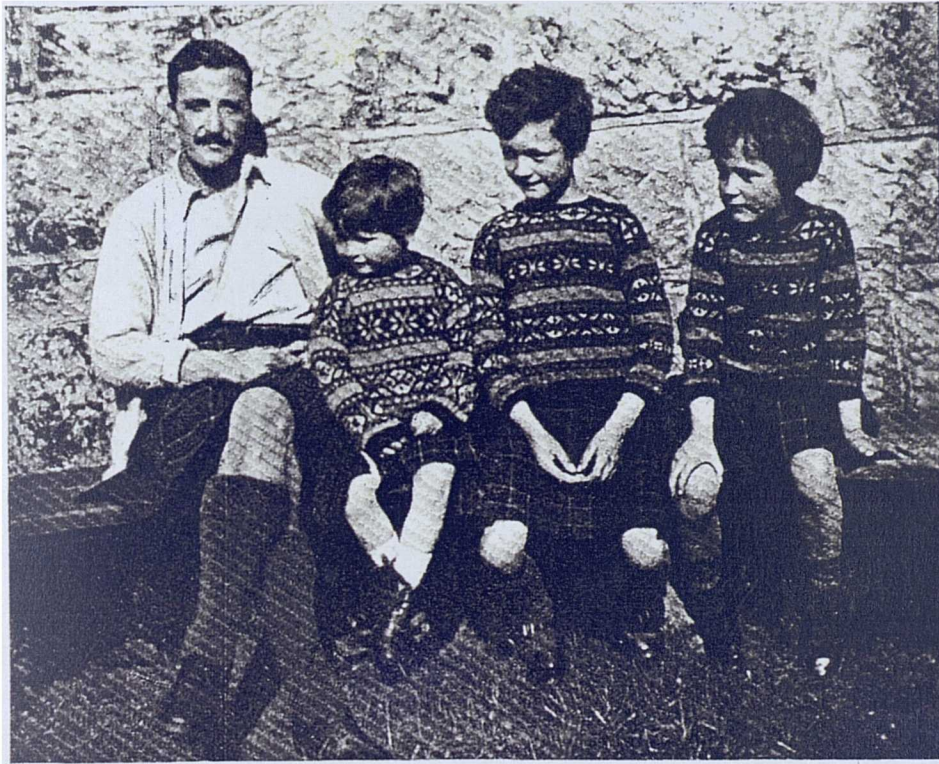


Figure 16 - Sir Iain Colquhoun and his own raw recruits  
Source: Ross, J. (1925)





Figure 17 - The Active and Educated Hosteller  
Source: SYHA (1937)



the chance to immerse oneself in a wholly alien rural environment. For J.M. Barrie, hostelling bottled up the elixir of everlasting youth:

*'Thrown in gratis is all the home talk about what new ground the hiker is to break in the coming Summer, the comparisons of one route with another, the ideal companions, the keeping fit for great tramps, the baths in streams and lochs, the mighty appetites that stir the pot, the revelry of a gypsy life, the comradeships formed, which may be the lasting reward of all'.<sup>125</sup>*

In reality, a more spartan aesthetic was integral to the hostelling experience. Dormitory accommodation was ascetic, bunk mattresses were thin, bedding was carried by the hosteller, kitchen facilities the most basic and a rigorous disciplinary code enforced by the warden.<sup>126</sup> Mucky tykes were halted by signs above the door ordering them to 'Get Them Boots Off' while 'jack-the-lads' were reminded that while 'Horseplay is alright in its proper place, the Hostel is not the place'. For those tempted to overstep the mark, the warden's warning was clear:

*'Any breach of the rules will be reported to the Council, who have autocratic powers to expel immediately the peccant member. In this fashion members will be securely restrained on the safe side of that faint and evasive line which separates liberty from licence'.<sup>127</sup>*

Further rules and local peculiarities were included in the best-selling annual handbook.<sup>128</sup> The code of citizenship would appear to have been incredibly effective, as there were few signs of the moral degeneracy which was felt to characterise urban life being transported into the hostel environment. Of the 54,717 bed-nights spent at Scottish hostels during 1933, only one person was expelled for the possession of alcohol, two for failing to use sleeping bags and three for 'minor breeches of discipline'.<sup>129</sup> The joys of hostel life allied to the healthy competition it inspired and the self-discipline that it required, created rosy-faced characters like those found in Borthwick's description of the end of a day's tramping at Crianlarich. The scene was depicted thus:

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<sup>125</sup> Barrie, J.M. (1933) 'Foreword', in *SYHA Annual Handbook for 1933*, Edinburgh: SYHA, p. 5.

<sup>126</sup> When concessions to comfort were made, these were viewed disparagingly by those hostellers who had grown fond of the prevailing culture of self-denial. The 'Castle vs Cottage' controversy occurred during 1937 when the Association was expanding rapidly and was in desperate need of new hostels. Concern grew among hard-line members that the original 'huskies' were being replaced by 'herds of spineless, comfort-loving morons' who expected hostels 'fit for film lovelies to live in'. *Scottish Youth Hostel and Cycling News*, 1937 January 25 p. 19.

<sup>127</sup> SYHA (1931) *Our Hostels: Prospectus to the Public*, Edinburgh: SYHA.

<sup>128</sup> In 1932, 3000 copies were sold and there was a demand for many more, in 1933 the number had increased to 11,000. By 1936-7 it had achieved a circulation of between 30,000-40,000. SYHA Annual Reports 1-25, 1931-55.

<sup>129</sup> *SYHA Annual Report for 1933*, SYHA Archive Annual Reports 1-25, 1931-55.

*'The hostel is as busy as a hive of bees when you arrive. Some are checking in with the warden, unloading bulging rucksacks from their backs. Some are stubbornly guarding their own pots and pans on the stoves, waiting for an opportunity to jockey them into better positions nearer the centre. The less ambitious cooks are opening sardine tins and spreading a multitude of packages over their corners of the table. The earlier arrivals have washed and fed, and are oiling their boots or consulting their maps for the morrow'.<sup>130</sup>*

The hostel provided the perfect environment in which to hone each facet of the young citizens' character, and no opportunity was missed by the organisation to pass on invaluable information. Newcomers to the Highlands were furnished with information on a wide variety of topics including the requisite standards of behaviour expected on the hill and in the hostel, appropriate etiquette while conversing with 'country folk' and respect for the rural economy.<sup>131</sup> The propaganda would appear to have worked, Sir Iain Colquhoun announcing himself 'very favourably impressed with the good behaviour of the young people using the hostels'.<sup>132</sup> Didactic articles filled the annual handbook, dealing with navigation techniques, route planning, weather lore, geography, botany, geology, bird-watching, archaeology and ancient history.<sup>133</sup> Counselling was even offered on dietary matters, with hikers warned of the many dangers caused by an over-reliance 'on the ubiquitous "hostel-fry" which poisons the air, clogs the intestines, whose food value is relatively small and which makes such demands on fuel and the hostel stove'.<sup>134</sup> The strong emphasis placed on health and fitness was quickly exploited by the commercial interests which advertised in the SYHA handbook.<sup>135</sup> The promotion of products such as Shetland jumpers, Findlay's Corn Solvent, Cadbury's chocolate, Crawford's digestives, Millet's tents, Bartholomew's maps and Elliman's Athletic Rub, through the use of iconic, appealing imagery and persuasive marketing each contributed to new constructions and representations of

<sup>130</sup> Borthwick, A. (1947) op cit. p. 38.

<sup>131</sup> Hostellers were encouraged to 'meet country dwellers in a friendly way and learn to understand their point of view...talk to the foresters, have a look at their nurseries'. *SYHA Annual Handbook for 1933*, Edinburgh: SYHA, p. 31. Rather more fanciful were the exhortations of Elizabeth Haldane who claimed locals would 'delight in getting a listener, especially if he is "ane o' they queer callants frae the south", to whom everything has to be explained in simple language. For he will never believe that the brains of a southerner are constituted similarly to his own'. Haldane, E. (1934) op cit. p. 34.

<sup>132</sup> APRS/ECM vol. I 1932 March 30. Commenting again in 1935, Colquhoun felt that 'the public were becoming more amicable in respect of behaviour in the country than was the case a few years ago'. APRS/ECM vol. II 1935 February 6.

<sup>133</sup> Instructional articles on skills for the outdoors had also begun to appear in popular magazines. Macpherson, D.D. (1930a) 'The Map and the Hill-Walker: Hints for the Holiday-Maker', *Scots Magazine*, XIII (5) p. 348-354; Macpherson, D.D. (1930b) 'The Compass on the Hill', *Scots Magazine*, XIII (6) p. 52-58.

<sup>134</sup> Brown, S.C. and Brown, I.M. (1932) 'Food and Cooking', in *SYHA Annual Handbook for 1932*, Edinburgh: SYHA, p. 21.

<sup>135</sup> During the first years of its existence, 86% of the costs incurred in producing the annual handbook were recouped through advertisements. SYHA/ECM vol. II 1932 January 30.

the youthful body. No longer prudish and retiring, now muscular and clean-limbed, the knowledgeable hiker strode out with a keen mind and a defined body.

The comprehensive SYHA educational programme was supplemented by events such as the 'lantern-talk'. At these social functions, lectures were delivered to the assembled throng by an invited dignitary or local country sage. During the spring of 1937, residents at the Ardgarten hostel enjoyed the varying delights of lengthy discourses on 'Nature and Man', 'the Forestry Commission' and 'black-faced sheep farming'.<sup>136</sup> While the aura of Scots Presbyterianism was an effective restraint on disorderly behaviour in the hostel, traditional music and song were still integral to an evening's entertainment. Accompanied by an improvised and shambolic orchestra or as the lamp-light dimmed, a lone mouth organ, those in full voice drew upon 'the rich harvest of folk tunes and songs which have risen from the Scottish soil, from the very homes of the people' to entertain their peers.<sup>137</sup> Such was the memberships' enthusiasm for singing, that in 1937 the SYHA published its own songbook. This pocket edition included a number of new compositions, many old Scots ballads, several translations of Gaelic airs and finally a guarantee that now 'many a mile will be passed in full-throated harmony'.<sup>138</sup> The sentiment of the adopted 'Hostel Song' was pure and elysian, embodying all the romanticism of the outdoor experience:

*'Oh the Highlands are calling and there I must go  
Though there's mist in the corries, the peaks are aglow.  
Now the Lowlands are beckoning, and I'm off with a will,  
For the track that leads upward and over the hill.'*

*'Come tramping by lochan, by forest and glen,  
Come shoulder your pack, bend your back to the ben.  
Come north to the mountains by crag and by scree,  
Or south to the Lowlands - come tramping with me.'*<sup>139</sup>

While the song lyrics glossed over the strict rules of access to which the happy trumper must comply, at the same time they reflected the genuine excitement afforded by these new found freedoms. The movement certainly did breed hale and hearty types who found ample rewards in the simple joys of the outdoor life. As for

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<sup>136</sup> *Scottish Youth Hostelling and Cycling News*, 1937 February 16 p. 12.

<sup>137</sup> *Scottish Youth Hostelling and Cycling News*, 1937 February 1 p. 15. As one English hiker found to her surprise, on occasion in the remote Highland hostel the strictures could be relaxed: 'Now remember, I was accustomed to English hostel routine: to bed at 10.30 and no grace. Imagine my surprise when I found that at 10.30 the floor was cleared and hostellers started to dance! It certainly seemed a bit uncivilised to my youthful eyes. But it was no other than a typical Scots dance...it ended at two o'clock in the morning'. *Scottish Youth Hostel and Cycling News*, 1937 May 3 p. 22.

<sup>138</sup> *Scottish Youth Hostel and Cycling News*, 1937 February 1 p. 15.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16.

the modern code of citizenship which the Association sought to impart, 'Albainnach' optimistically ascertained that:

*'With the coming of the Hostels Young Scotland has regained its nerve, it has dropped its sedentary habits of life, its dressing up, its sport watching, and adopted vital active outdoor pursuits, camping, tramping, mountaineering, canoeing, cycling'.<sup>140</sup>*

Now he felt it could be genuinely stated that 'to thousands of youthful Scots the noblest prospect is the Great North Road or the Road to the Isles.' Similarly, Power wrote of 'the Scots of the Central Belt who in steadily growing numbers, are finding their way into regions of Scotland their sires and grandsires never knew.' 'The discovery of Scotland', he continued, 'is in some measure a revolt against industrial segregation. It is a pilgrimage from Egypt, which may become an exodus' (see figures 18 and 19).<sup>141</sup>

The emphasis placed by these two commentators upon fostering a distinctive sense of Scots nationhood within the citizenry, makes evident an issue worthy of further investigation. While a single discourse of morality was common to all hostellers, expressions of national pride and fervour were various among the outdoor community. Several will be considered in relation to the dominant narrative on nationhood which was offered by the SYHA. The benign and apolitical celebration of modern Scottish nationhood which would become integral to the hostelling experience did not go unchallenged. The Association trod a careful line between those interests seeking to subsume Scottish interests within a broader anglicised identity and those attempting to mobilise the recreation movement in the struggle for Home Rule or full political independence.

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<sup>140</sup> 'Albainnach' (1940) 'The Scottish Youth Hostels Association', *Scots Independent*, May p. 11.

<sup>141</sup> Power, W. (1934) *Scotland and the Scots*, Edinburgh: Porpoise Press, p. 32.





Figure 18 - Setting Out for the Summits  
Source: Glenmore Forest Guide



Figure 19 - A Hiking Expedition  
Source: Glenmore Forest Guide

## Nationhood, Politics and the Cult of the Kilt

*'the youth of Scotland is expressing so definitely that desire to feel beneath the breast the beating heart of the motherland.'*<sup>142</sup>

(Anon, 1933)

*'Tradition shows that the kilt is essentially a garment of health and the wearer must make up his mind that the body is beautiful honourable and sacred, to be treated with reverence, otherwise the kilt would be more of a jest...trousers trammel the legs and curb the spirit.'*<sup>143</sup>

(W.P.P. Morgan, 1938)

The hugely successful development of the SYHA was marred during the early 1930's by a spell of political machinations with the equivalent organisation for England and Wales. The squabbles which ensued between the two parties, while seemingly inconsequential, illustrate the construction of a dominant, if unchallenging, construction of national identity for the young Scots hosteller.

Formed in 1930 with its headquarters in Welwyn Garden City, the misleadingly titled Youth Hostel Association of Great Britain (YHAGB) was actually only representative of hostelling interests in England and Wales. The formation of a nascent Scottish organisation in the autumn of the same year was a development of obvious interest to the YHAGB, indeed preliminary meetings in Edinburgh were attended by Mr. Edwin St. John Catchpool, its Honorary Secretary. It was in response to the progress being made in Scotland that the mischievous suggestion of status as a regional branch of the wider English organisation was offered. The reaction north of the Border was one of outright indignation and the proposal was ignominiously rejected. As Beith declared, 'Scotland wanted none of it! Energetic and impetuous the first committee were satisfied that they could devise a constitution and organisation to suit the needs of Scotland'.<sup>144</sup> After all, as the volatile Dr. Fothergill peevishly fumed, 'what does Welwyn Garden City know of Snowdon or the Pennines - let alone of the Grampians and Scottish law?'<sup>145</sup>

The air of seniority and superiority exuded by the YHAGB executive was in evidence again the following year, when another attempt was made to belittle the role of the SYHA. The charitable trust of Carnegie United Kingdom Trustees made a grant of £10,000 available to the hostelling movement in Great Britain as a whole. Immediately assuming that the entire sum would pass into their hands the YHAGB offered to build a hostel, up to the cost of £400, at a location in Scotland. Creating

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<sup>142</sup> Anon (1933) 'Scotland Month by Month', *Scots Magazine*, XIX (5) p. 321.

<sup>143</sup> Morgan, W.P.P. (1938) 'The Cult of the Kilt', in *Scottish Youth Hostel and Cycling News*, September 6, p. 7.

<sup>144</sup> Beith, A. (1959) op cit. p. 17.

<sup>145</sup> Fothergill, A. (1933) 'Movements of Hope in Scotland', *Scots Independent*, June p. 116.

even more of an affront, the rider was added that the location could be chosen by the SYHA executive, so long as it was convenient for access from England. A palpable air of mistrust had now developed between the two organisations, the actions of the YHAGB inducing strong language in SYHA committee minutes, their approaches being described as 'definitely dishonourable'.<sup>146</sup> In an attempt to rescind the decision which had been taken without their consent the SYHA sent a delegation comprising Alex Beith and Dr. Fothergill to England for discussions. Beith recounted how:

*'Fothergill's enthusiasm for the SYHA swept him away and he addressed the English National Executive in terms so violent that two of those present refused to stay and listen, and left the conference room through a French window!'*<sup>147</sup>

After a great deal of debate and political manoeuvring, Scotland was apportioned £2000 of the grant. Furthermore, in view of numerous representations made by the Scottish Association during 1931, the YHAGB was also obliged to shorten its title to, 'The Youth Hostel Association'. The SYHA felt the abbreviation to be, 'a definite improvement, but it is to be regretted that a somewhat self-conscious peninsularity has deterred the English Association from assuming an adequately descriptive title'.<sup>148</sup> Emotions continued to run high after this encounter, the acrimonious atmosphere and committee invective spilling over into 1932 when a difference of opinion arose over 'foreign' users of youth hostels. While the YHA refused entry to SYHA members unless they were also members of the English organisation, hostels in Scotland freely accepted English membership as valid for usage in SYHA hostels. In an attempt to clarify the situation Mr. Catchpool of the YHA proposed that membership of each respective body should be based strictly upon nationality. This suggestion was deemed wholly unacceptable by the SYHA.<sup>149</sup> Meanwhile, with well-orchestrated melodrama, correspondents in the nationalist press linked such developments to the continued threat of cultural

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<sup>146</sup> SYHA/ECM vol. I 1931 August 2.

<sup>147</sup> Beith, A. (1937) 'I Knew Fothergill', *Scottish Youth Hostel and Cycling News*, July 13 p. 19. The Association minutes were rather more politic, recording that 'a very frank discussion' had taken place. SYHA/ECM vol. I 1931 August 2. John Francey meanwhile noted how Fothergill's 'strong championship of the special needs of Scotland' had been 'epitomised in a carefully prepared and closely reasoned memorandum, backed by energetic action'. Francey, J. (1937) 'I Knew Fothergill', *Scottish Youth Hostel and Cycling News*, June 15 p. 19; see also, Fasken, R.B. (1937) 'I Knew Fothergill', *Scottish Youth Hostel and Cycling News*, June 8 p. 21.

<sup>148</sup> SYHA Annual Report for 1931, Annual Reports 1-25, 1931 55; see also, 'Binnein Mor' (1943) op cit. p. 4.

<sup>149</sup> Implicit in the minutes of the SYHA executive was a suspicion that the antagonistic policies of the YHA were attributable to an acute concern over the growing popularity of the Scottish hostels compared to those in England. For example, over one third of the visitors to the north-west Highland chain in 1932 hailed from England. SYHA/ECM vol. II 1932 January 30.

imperialism.<sup>150</sup> The dispute was resolved when the YHA finally conceded that Scottish members would be welcomed into their hostels.<sup>151</sup> Some ground-rules having eventually been set, relations between the two organisations improved markedly during the rest of the decade. Nevertheless, the SYHA's vehement defence of an independent position in the face of misplaced autocratic power was proof of a firmly held belief that the Scottish youth hostel experience was a distinctive and unique one.

The frosty relations with the 'auld enemy' were not replicated when contact was made with the many national youth organisations flourishing across the seas. Indeed, the fickleness displayed in affairs with the YHA was rather obviously lacking when attention turned to Germany.<sup>152</sup> Diplomatic problems aside, reciprocal terms of membership were agreed with Northern Ireland, the Irish Free State, France, Belgium, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Poland, Czechoslovakia and New Zealand.<sup>153</sup> The SYHA was also a member of the International Youth Hostel Association (IYHA), its representatives attending the annual conference and youth rally.<sup>154</sup> An internationalist spirit bound the hostelling movement together, promising that youthful friendships would

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<sup>150</sup> 'Scottish Youth Hostels', *Scots Independent*, 1932 June p. 115; 'Binnein Mor' (1943) op cit. p. 4.

<sup>151</sup> SYHA/ECM vol. II 1932 January 30; vol. II 1932 March 31; vol. III 1932 September 11.

<sup>152</sup> The decision to grant reciprocity of membership to the *'Reichsuerband Fur Deutsche Jugendherbergen'* was a contentious one within the SYHA executive. Dr. Fothergill's disgust that terms were to be agreed upon with an organisation directly linked to the Nazi regime prompted him into resigning his post as Honorary Secretary, having stated that it 'was quite impossible for him to continue'. The minutes dramatically recorded that 'at this point however the meeting disintegrated'. SYHA/ECM vol. IV 1934 February 24; Beith, A. (1959) op cit. p. 26. Although a motion was tabled to reverse this decision at the following meeting the majority of the executive 'took the view that rejection of the proposal would lay the SYHA open to the charge of political bias'. Moir, D.G. (1944) op cit. p. 13; SYHA/ECM vol. IV 1934 March 9; see also, *The Times*, 1934 March 19 p. 11. Dr. Fothergill was to die only a year later. The SYHA kept up a culpable silence on the German situation for the remainder of the decade. The 1936 annual handbook contained an invitation to visit Germany for the 11th Olympic Games and when touring the country to stay in the hostels. A similarly benign stance was up taken by the SRF who re-assured its members that 'foreign visitors are given as warm a welcome as ever to the New Germany and no Britisher need have any qualms in visiting the country or of staying in the hostels. If your passport is in order, you will be accepted as a Britisher has always been accepted - with every courtesy and consideration'. Hall, T.S. (ed.) (1934) Op cit. p. 27. Even when Germany temporarily left the IYHA in 1937, the SYHA maintained reciprocity in a separate agreement with Berlin. Indeed, as late as 1938 the following commendation appeared in the pages of the official SYHA newspaper: 'If your heart is in the hostels you must endeavour to get hold of a copy of this month's issue of *'Jugend und Heimat'*, official organ of the German Youth Hostels movement. Even if you can't read a word of German the pictures of interiors and exteriors of German youth hostels will present Scottish hostellers with a new world of possibilities in hostel construction and architectural decoration'. *Scottish Youth Hostel and Cycling News*, 1938 September 27 p. 8. Having spent a holiday in southern Germany as late as the summer of 1938, Neil Gunn the novelist and hiking enthusiast, returned excited by the progress which had been made in architecture, planning, health and infrastructure. Gunn, N.M. (1939) op cit. p. 65-68.

<sup>153</sup> SYHA/ECM vol. IV 1934 March 9.

<sup>154</sup> The SYHA sent representatives to the 1933 IYHA Conference, held in Godesburg, Germany. Fothergill and Beith had requested that 'their strong dissent from this decision might be minuted'. SYHA/ECM vol. IV 1933 September 16.



transcend boundaries throughout Europe and beyond. Scots hostellers were taught that an innate pride in their own national heritage should be matched by an admiration for the landscapes of other peoples. The mood of fraternity was caught by 'Albainnach' who described how, 'There is an almost pungent national flavour about the Scottish Hostels; the good neighbourliness; the entire absence of snobbery and the refreshing simplicity make a strong appeal to the progressive mind'<sup>155</sup> To its supporters, the SYHA managed throughout the 1930's to successfully combine the antiquarian societal bulwarks of democracy and utilitarianism with the dynamism and energy of the modern movement. However, the Association's determined defence of their uniquely Scottish hostelling experience was strictly limited in its intents. While the broader church of democracy and freedom was cautiously defended on the international front, internal British politics were deemed too unsavoury a province for the SYHA membership. Commentaries on possible changes to the constitutional framework were not entertained, nor would they have been welcomed by the Association's patrician hierarchy. Although always fiercely patriotic, during the 1930's the SYHA evolved into another civic organisation content with the comfortable forms of sub-nationalism already favoured by the APRS and NTS.

This stance was reinforced through a variety of media which promoted the idea of an inalienably 'Scottish' adventure, cultural but never political, to be enjoyed by native and foreign visitors alike. In SYHA literature, the iconic Highland landscape of sun-blessed peaks and glinting lochs was the central referent. Annual handbook covers used this design as the background for a young man and woman who gazed down upon the homely hostel, a tiny haven in the glen. Orderly and clean-cut these 'typical' Scottish hostellers were clad distinctively. Both were rucksacked, the short-back-and-sides male wore a shirt and kilt while the svelte female donned a beret, blouse and plaid (see figure 20).<sup>156</sup> The kilt, as Scotland's national dress and the Highlander's preferred outfit, was promoted as the perfect garb for hikers.<sup>157</sup>

The campaign to restore the kilt as a popular item of dress, rather than a source of vaudeville amusement, was given a considerable boost by the outdoor movement. Eachann Piobair encouraged young people to wear something 'far healthier than trousers', while the Reverend John Kennedy demanded that in the

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<sup>155</sup> 'Albainnach' (1940) op cit. p. 11.

<sup>156</sup> Some female hikers felt that their outdoor fashions could go even further to include breeches and shorts. 'Feminina' (1930) 'What's Wrong with Rationals?', in Beith, A. (1930) op cit. p. 45.

<sup>157</sup> A provocative investigation into the disputed history of the kilt and its popularisation as a national icon can be found in: Trevor-Roper, H. (1983) 'The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition in Scotland', in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.) *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 15-43.

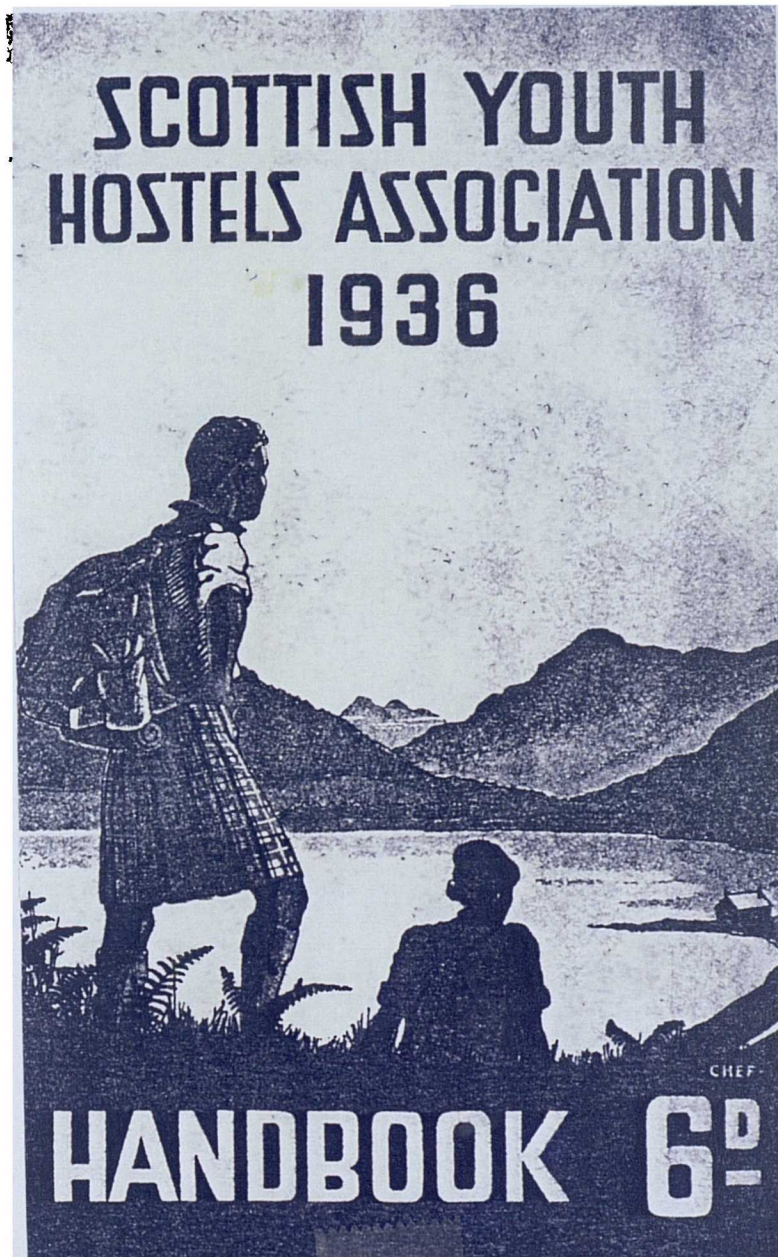


Figure 20 - Icons for a New Scots Citizenry  
Source: SYHA (1936)

case of boys under the age of fifteen 'an immediate ban be put on sophisticated adult garb'.<sup>158</sup> Special advertisements for kilts appeared promising the walker 'complete freedom and delightful coolness under the hottest sun' and that 'extra weight needed, should the thermometer fall' (see figure 21).<sup>159</sup> One SYHA member rejoiced in the knowledge that:

*'Once we arrive home from work, off come hats, collars, ties, those symbols of economic servitude, and on go the garments of dignity and ease, open-necked shirts, the kilt or shorts, and off we go into the wide open spaces to breathe once more the air of freedom'.<sup>160</sup>*

W.P.P. Morgan exhorted the troops into taking no half-measures, informing them that:

*'Even to-day in the Highland regiments the wearing of underpants is considered an insult to the garment and regarded as a crime against health...Under garments are quite unnecessary even for conventional decency. Thousands of soldiers went through England and Europe during the War without pants and they shocked no-one'.<sup>161</sup>*

Advertisements for Scott's porage oats, included in SYHA handbooks, depicted a rugged Highland Games competitor resplendent in his kilt. The product was marketed as 'The Food of a Mighty Race', which would 'Make your children as hardy as Highlanders' (see figure 22). Here stood the Scots body beautiful, clad in national costume, partaking in vigorous traditional activities.

Safe transactions were less in evidence among those groups whose agendas' bridged recreative and political realms. Rhetoricians and activists in the Nationalist community were equally keen to assemble a tartan task-force. The battle against Oxford Bags was led by J.L. Kinloch, 'Chief' and pedagogue of Clan Scotland, the youth wing of the nascent National Party of Scotland. The organisation's legend, banded by a tartan ribbon, made these intentions clear, depicting two kilted males admiring nature at first hand. The image was the epitome of inter-war nationalist envisionment creating an inextricable link between '*blut und boden*' (see figure 23). It was backed by an equally muscle-bound message, Kinloch warning that 'if you are a slacker, a softie or a cadger, don't join Clan

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<sup>158</sup> *Oban Times*, 1930 February 1 p. 3; Kennedy, J. (1933) 'The Dress of Scottish Schoolboys', *Scots Independent*, December p. 28.

<sup>159</sup> *SYHA Annual Handbook for 1935*, Edinburgh: SYHA, p. 18; see also, *Oban Times*, 1939 February 18 p. 7.

<sup>160</sup> *Scottish Youth Hostel and Cycling News*, 1937 May 18 p.18.

<sup>161</sup> Morgan, W.P.P. (1938) op cit. p. 7. Such valour in the line of enemy fire was soon to become a thing of the past. In 1940, the Highland press reported a decision taken by the War Office that 'for technical reasons', such as the garments 'unsuitability in gas attacks', the kilt was to be banned during active service. It was also noted how this decision had been 'met with consternation by Highland military men'. *Oban Times* 1940 January 27 p. 5.

# HIKE in a KILT



"Give to me the life I love," quoth R. L. Stevenson—long before this modern cult of hiking, but the idea was there: "the jolly heaven above me and the by-way nigh me." A sunny day, an open road, the whole day before you — you stride along, happy in the knowledge that you are suitably dressed. And what more ideal outfit than a kilt? It gives complete freedom and delightful coolness under the hottest sun, and gives just that extra weight needed, should the thermometer fall.

Call to-day and see our range of Stag Brand Tartans for all Clans, their Septs and Dependents, or write for Patterns and Quotations.

**Girls' and Boys' Hiking Kilts**, 12 years upwards,  
from 32/6 ; Best Quality, 57/6

**Maids' and Youths' Hiking Kilts**, 16 years upwards,  
from 39/6 ; Best Quality, 70/-

**Ladies' and Men's Hiking Kilts**, 42/6 ;  
Best Quality, £4, 10/-

**A. CAIRD & SONS LTD.**

DUNDEE 17-25 Reform Street

PERTH - 145-159 High Street

Figure 21 - Clothing for the Hygienic Patriot  
Source: SYHA (1939)

## Make your children as hardy as highlanders

We all know the Highlander to be a sturdy strapping fellow, brawny and muscular. But do you know why? Because from his childhood one of his most important foods has been oats—the nourishing Scottish oats of his own countryside, building his body and giving him energy and stamina.

Give *your* children the same sure foundation of health and strength. Give them porridge every morning, made of Scott's Porage Oats—Scottish to the last grain. They will love it; and it will make fine boys and girls of them.

THE QUICK-COOKING QUALITY OATS

# Scott's Porage Oats



Scotland's Best

2 lb. packet 10d.

1 lb. packet 5½d.

Scott's Porage Oats packets contain  
¼lb. more oats than similar sized  
packets of imported oats

PREPARED BY

A. & R. SCOTT LTD., COLINTON, Midlothian

Figure 22 - The Highlander's Model Physique

Source: SYHA (1939)

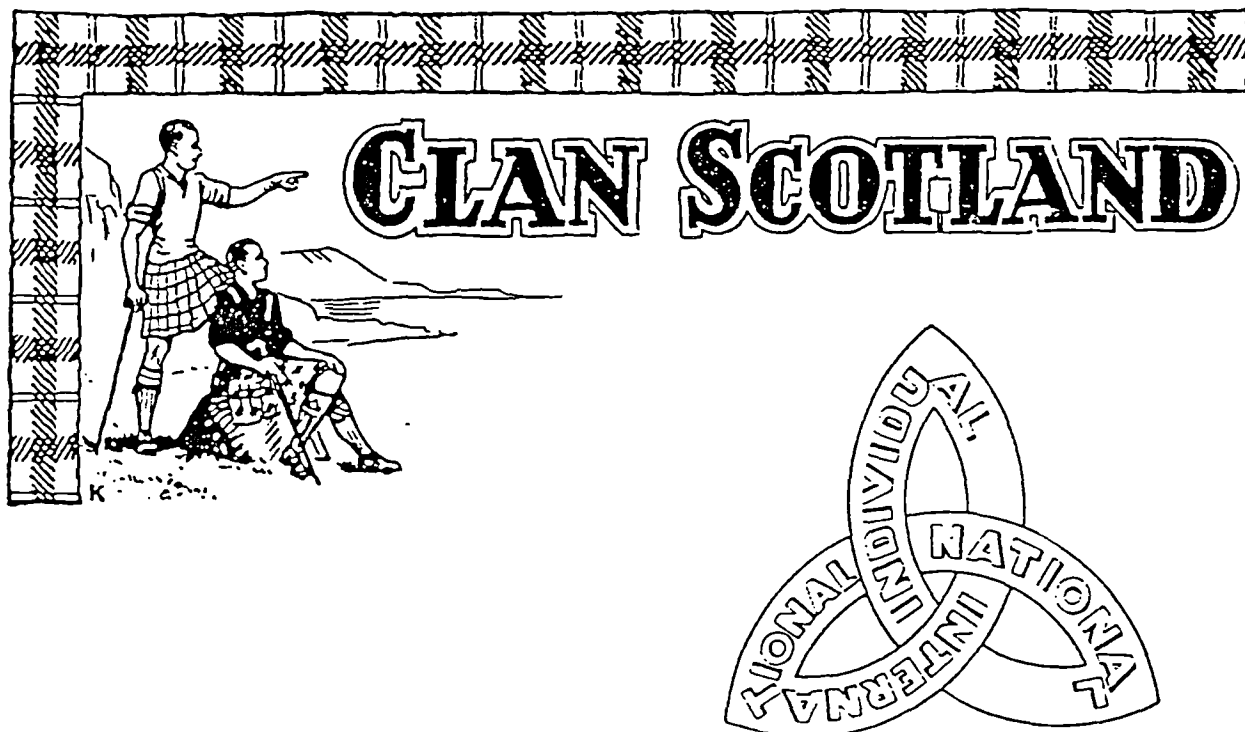


Figure 23 - Clan Scotland Insignia  
Source: *Scots Independent* (1933)

Scotland. We don't wish you'.<sup>162</sup> As Chief he maintained that 'Every lad and boy who wears a kilt is doing a service to Scotland' and was anxious that the garment should become a symbol of nationhood rather than a sign of party affiliation.<sup>163</sup> He therefore encouraged all Scottish Scouts, Rovers and Cadets to rally to the cause. On occasion however, the claims made on behalf of the kilt came dangerously close to replicating the farcical imagery which was supposedly being countered. Teetering towards folkloric fantasy, Kinloch contended that those brave enough to venture into the hills in national costume would find their enjoyment of the experience 'strangely enhanced'.<sup>164</sup> Having attended international youth celebrations such as the North European *Neuralia* Kinloch had also noted how the kilt was the subject of much foreign admiration. Indeed, in the summer of 1931:

*'the famous chimes of the clock in the Belfry of Bruges were silenced for an hour, so that the strains of the Kilmarnock school band should not be interrupted...In 'La Grande Place' the pipers marched up and down with the braggart step of free-limbed Highlanders...Groups of other kilted schoolboys walked about the square, representatives of the race that had never been conquered by the Medieval hordes who imposed their trousered barbarism on the rest of Europe'.*<sup>165</sup>

Contemporary continental admiration was such that at a conference on the body and physical culture, Scandinavian hygienists declared the kilt the 'healthiest form of dress yet devised' for youth movements.<sup>166</sup>

The search for potent badges of identity went beyond the finery of costume. The Clan Scotland organisational hierarchy was based on a sporran-full of vague 'Celticisms'. Kinloch's highly imaginative, revisionist reading of British history

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<sup>162</sup> Kinloch, J.L. (1933a) 'Clan Scotland', *Scots Independent*, June p. 124.

<sup>163</sup> 'The Chief' (1933) 'Clan Scotland: Wear the Kilt!', *Scots Independent*, December p. 28; see also, Kinloch, J.L. (1933b) 'Clan Scotland', August p. 156; 'The Chief' (1934b) 'Clan Scotland', *Scots Independent*, July p. 140; Kinloch, J.L. (1934d) op cit. p. 197.

<sup>164</sup> Kinloch, J.L. (1934b) 'Clan Scotland', *Scots Independent*, June p. 122.

<sup>165</sup> Kinloch was disappointed to find that paradoxically 'a Scottish schoolboy walking down the ancient Grassmarket in Scotland's ancient capital, proudly swinging his kilt as he did in Oslo, Copenhagen, Stockholm or Bruges, is mocked by a jeering crowd of Scots boys'. 'The Chief' (1933) op cit. p. 28; see also, Kinloch, J.L. (1934c) 'Clan Scotland', *Scots Independent*, September p. 173. He could also cite more encouraging signs of a rising nationalist sentiment among the Rover Scouts. A decision by the Scouting hierarchy to ban the wearing of the Balmoral by Scottish members, in favour of more orthodox headgear, was highly unpopular. Kinloch, J.L. (1934a) 'Clan Scotland', *Scots Independent*, January p. 44. 'Baden-Powell's blunder' is also recounted in: Wood, W. (1938) op cit. p. 246. Further progress was made at the international Rover Scout Moot held at Monzie Castle, Crieff. In a typical Highland setting and amid 'the constant dirl of the bagpipes' the kilt was much in evidence. Among the 4000 attendees from 42 countries the reaction to the host's attire was almost completely positive, unfortunately traditional rivalries did surface: 'The overseas rover smiles appreciatively, but the Englishman! His annoyance found expression on one of the early days in a mock pipe band parade. Their weird attire created a diversion, but no effective reaction'. *Oban Times*, 1939 August 29 p. 3; see also, *Scottish Field*, 1939 August p. 30.

<sup>166</sup> 'The Chief' (1934a) 'Clan Scotland', *Scots Independent*, February p. 58.

informed prospective members of how, 'the genius of the Scottish people was working towards nationalism based on a federation of Clans, and that the movement was jolted out of its natural course by the alien introduction of Norman Feudalism'.<sup>167</sup> Yet, he contended:

*'The Clan ideal has never died. Scots throughout the world are proud to be known as the most "clannish" people on earth, and the Clan ideal is one of the most persistent ideas in Scottish history. It is instinctive in our race, and will again be an inspiration when it is brought into conscious life'.*<sup>168</sup>

Accordingly, the national Clan was subdivided into district Clans led by an appointed 'Chieftain', while these groups were themselves made up of smaller 'Septs' comprising approximately a dozen 'Clansmen'.<sup>169</sup> The Clan badge was based on the Triquetra, a design used in ancient Celtic art. Adapted to include the three main precepts of modern nationhood it interwove the realms of the individual, national and international (see figure 23).<sup>170</sup> As Chief of Clan Scotland Kinloch was closely involved in the production of *The Claymore*, a weekly boys' paper. Its purpose, he explained, was 'to give our boys a Scottish outlook, and to cast the glamour of fantastic adventure over modern Scotland'.<sup>171</sup> This search for inspirational heroes appropriate to the young active Scot was one to which Augusta

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<sup>167</sup> Kinloch, J.L. (1933d) 'Clan Scotland', *Scots Independent*, November p. 12.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, p. 12. Initially, Kinloch visualised the Clan as 'a trained and disciplined team of Election Winners'. Kinloch, J.L. (1933a) op cit. p. 124. He was happy to cite the Italian Fascists, Nazis in Germany and Communists in Russia, as 'all show the power which comes from organised action. All these have a power which shocks die-hard Scots, who have prided themselves on their individualism. Whether we like it or not, it must be evident to everyone that the day of haphazard individualism is past. even America has abandoned it. If Scotland does not rise to the new idea of scientifically organised society, then Scotland will be left behind as a derelict nation. Kinloch, J.L. (1933c) 'Clan Scotland', *Scots Independent*, September p. 172. This strict political vein was later shelved for a more populist remit. Among the target age-group of 15-25 year old males, direct political affiliation to the National Party of Scotland was no requirement for membership. As Kinloch explained: 'Politics is a difficult science and can only be learned through a wide knowledge of life. We do not therefore expect young people to be precocious politicians and no political pledge is expected. The Clan is in this sense non-political. All we expect from young members is a belief that Scotland is a nation, not a province, and that they are anxious to make themselves good citizens of the Scottish nation'. Kinloch, J.L. (1934d) op cit. p. 197. Keen clansmen could still be encouraged to spread the Nationalist word. By carrying the *Scots Independent* in their rucksack while on tramping expeditions, activists could distribute copies to inquisitive country types. Kinloch, J.L. (1934b) op cit. p. 122.

<sup>169</sup> The strongest membership base was to be found in the West of Scotland where Clan Kilmarnock, Clan Gourock, Clan Shettleston, Clan Hillhead, Clan Govan, Clan Yoker, Clan Fenwick, Clan Greenock and Clan Dalry were the best supported district branches. The Highlands were represented by Clan Badenoch. Cycling, hiking and physical culture septs existed within these groupings. Among the other vital, outdoor activities encouraged among young Clansmen were traditional Highland gatherings, dancing and shinty. Taylor, W.O.G (1934) 'Hail! Shinty a National Game', *Scots Independent*, June p. 122-23.

<sup>170</sup> 'The Chief' (1934a) op cit. p. 58.

<sup>171</sup> 'The Chief' (1934b) op cit. p. 140. Kinloch described how in the pages of *The Claymore*: 'The heroes are Scottish boys and men, not the products of the English public school; the adventures are round our coast; the aviation notes show what is being done in Scotland, and the camping notes are suitable for Scottish boys'. Kinloch, J.L. (1933e) op cit. p. 44.



Lamont was sympathetic. Her contention stood that the imagination of Scottish Boy Scouts, 'will play with greatest zest around the traditions and lore of their own land, and their best incentives to action will be found in the stirring deeds of their own forefathers'.<sup>172</sup> Not for them the 'Red Indian jargon and backwoodsman tradition of foreign lands' but tales of 'Fingal and his warrior bands, the Fiann, whom legend has linked so closely to many places in the West Highlands'.<sup>173</sup> Neil Gunn agreed, claiming that:

*'Omar's book and boughs have their equivalent in Scotland; indeed Scotland is richer than Persia in them all, for she has an environment of exquisite quality and variety. And out of that environment you have got to make your dreams'.*<sup>174</sup>

The rise of the innocuous patriot and the overt nationalist among the ranks of the outdoor movement was symbolic of a widespread rejuvenation of Scottish nationhood, the various organisations acting as a focus for a new breed of passionate Scot. Their message was crystal clear. A bright and healthy future for Scotland's girls and boys was not to be found in the grime and decay of the industrialised Clyde-Forth conurbation, but lay instead in the adopted homeland of the patriotic hiker, the Highlands.

#### The Extent of Change in the Outdoor Movement

The Scottish outdoor movement of the inter-war period was an outstanding national phenomenon. The reality of what had actually been achieved was grasped by Alistair Borthwick:

*'Eight years ago, fresh air was still the property of moneyed men, a luxury open to the few. With a hundred faces and places fresh in my mind, I find this fact difficult to believe, yet it is true. Eight years ago there were only a few Choochters and Hamishes on the roads; and the Highlands, where to-day the youth hostel chains link the most remote straths, were a desert of deer-stalking. Hiking was a hobby of an enthusiastic handful and climbing was a rich man's sport.'*<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Lamont, A. (1931) 'Boy Scouts and the Gaelic Tradition', *Scots Independent*, March p. 77.

<sup>173</sup> The Scottish Girl Guides fared little better. Lamont was distressed to find that: 'all through 1930 they have been so busy studying the map of England in the diary which the English headquarters of their organisation provides them, that the relative positions of Scotland and Ireland must be something quite outside their ken, so meantime they must be content to ignore Scotland, and like good obedient children, adopt Robin Hood and Dick Whittington as their heroes'. *Ibid*, p. 77.

<sup>174</sup> Gunn, N. (1933) 'Boy, What are Your Dreams?', *Glasgow Boys' Brigade Bulletin*, September p. 6; NLS Dep. 209 Box 8 (15).

<sup>175</sup> Borthwick, A. (1939) *op cit.* p. 215.

This was the lifeblood which coursed youthful zest over the hills and vitality through the glens. The walkers, climbers and ramblers of the 1930's had become aware of an inalienable public right to stride out on mountainous terrain, which ten years previously they hardly knew existed.

A large proportion of this new breed were also sharply politicised, hailing from the Glaswegian industrial provinces which had bred a Scottish tradition of socialism and its ideological relation, contemporary nationalism.<sup>176</sup> The hiking and climbing fraternity having drawn heavily upon those worst affected by the Great Depression boasted young men and women well versed in the doctrines of Red Clydeside.<sup>177</sup> Tom Weir fondly remembered one comrade who:

*'was unemployed and spent most of the time outdoors, going back to Glasgow from Tuesday to Thursday to sign his name at the Labour exchange. Politics entered my life at this time too, for Ritchie was embittered against a government that had no work to offer, and rather than walk the streets he walked the hills'.*<sup>178</sup>

In a brief history of Scottish climbing during the inter-war period Wedderburn pointedly compared the old school figures who 'would start out from some convenient hotel which they had reached the previous evening in comfortable time for dinner...clad in caps, tweed knickerbocker suits...discussing the while the latest bits of Alpine gossip', with their protégés:

*'the youthful pair starting out late, after making breakfast, from their tent or Youth Hostel which they had reached late the previous night...wearing ragged Grenfell breaches and a miscellaneous and historic array of sweaters...while Jimmy's exploits of last weekend or perhaps dialectical materialism are possible topics of discussion.'*<sup>179</sup>

The cultural and political differences were striking, merely accentuating the changes in class background which had accompanied developments in the outdoor movement. Unwilling to stand on ceremony and unimpressed by the social codes and mountain traditions established by the Scottish Mountaineering Club, these characters sought both individual freedom and communal independence in recreative, moral and political spheres. Identities linked to aspects of nationhood

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<sup>176</sup> Converts to radical politics were not limited to Scotland's central belt, one English hiker recounted how well informed she had become during trips to the Highlands in the 1930's: 'I read about the Clearances and much about modern problems in those areas. In a quiet way I became a Scottish Nationalist, for I could see that something had to be done to help the west of Scotland, and maybe only a parliament in Edinburgh would take a real interest'. Allan, M.E. (1989) *The Road to the Isles and Other Places: Some Journeys with a Rucksack*, Cheshire: Bemrose Press, p. 23.

<sup>177</sup> Anon (1933) 'Scotland Month by Month', *Scots Magazine*, XIX (5) p. 322.

<sup>178</sup> Weir, T. (1980) op cit. p. 21.

<sup>179</sup> Wedderburn, E.A.M. (1939) 'A Short History of Climbing: From 1918 to the Present Day', *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*, 22 p. 82-84; 84.

and citizenship were shaped and moulded for the prospective outdoor enthusiast in every Scottish girl and boy. In this manner the Highlands became an ideologically loaded terrain, in addition to being one suited to physical endeavour. Differing shades of patriotism and nationalism abounded within this recreative culture, but all found common ground in the link made between the self and an identifiably national environment.

The iconic position of the Highlands at the heart of both Scotland's historic identity and the country's contemporary culture of physical activity fuelled demands for the statutory designation of a recreative space within the region. Throughout the inter-war period the outdoor lobby demanded a specific location, perhaps a range of mountains, to which it could secure itself. The chapter will examine these requests and the contrasting expressions of nationhood with which they were charged. Attention focuses on the ambiguities which existed over the possible nature, extent and purpose of such a National Park as well as the type of visitor which it should attract. Unsurprisingly, reaction to suggestions of public ownership were as mixed as they were complex. The attitudes of the state, of semi-autonomous government bodies such as the Forestry Commission, of private landowning interests and landscape preservation bodies, not all necessarily antithetical to certain configurations of the national park idea, are subjected to close examination. Vested interests anticipated that, working in combination with the accepted institutions of the recreation movement, the designation of such an area could further embed the evolving discourse of order, morality and good citizenship.

#### 'A Scheme that Strikes the Imagination': A National Space for Recreation

*'the mountains and uncultivated moorlands, the primeval solitudes still lying vacant and useless, can yield infinite possibilities of healthy enjoyment and the spiritual pleasure of contact with nature and natural beauty. And that is a true utility, an item of no trifling importance in the national wealth.'*<sup>180</sup>

(Ernest Baker, 1928)

The inter-war campaign for the establishment of a national park began in the pages of the *Scots Magazine* during 1928.<sup>181</sup> A general interest publication with a large and diverse readership, the magazine offered the perfect forum for informed debate.<sup>182</sup> Ernest A. Baker set the ball rolling in a characteristically colourful and

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<sup>180</sup> Baker, E.A. (1928) 'The Cairngorms as a National Park', *Scots Magazine*, X (1) p. 1-6; 5.

<sup>181</sup> The idea of a national park in Scotland had been mooted as early as 1909. Having visited the pioneering parks in North America, Charles Stewart suggested the designation of an island such as Jura or Rhum as a preserve for wild scenery and indigenous animals. Stewart, C. (1909) *In the Evening*, London: Murray, p. 51-64.

<sup>182</sup> J.B. Salmond, the Editor, invited views, suggestions and expressions of influential opinion on the subject for publication in subsequent editions.

controversial piece detailing his proposals for 'The Cairngorms as a National Park'. As a geographically distinct and substantive montane plateau rising to over 4000ft, containing several of the highest peaks in the country, the last remnants of the Great Wood of Caledon and a unique sub-Arctic ecosystem, the Cairngorms were flagged as the prime location for state purchase and designation.<sup>183</sup> Discursive articles followed from natural historians, academics and nationalists, alongside comment from a multitude of politicians and a photographic supplement. Not all found consensus on the broader significance of such a park for the modern patriot and nation.

Having previously declared his support for the Scottish Home Rule movement as a means to redefine the recreational use of the Highlands in post-war society, Baker continued to frame his arguments by referencing wider social orders and making nods towards the nationalist agenda. His rallying cry for the creation of a Scottish national park came loud and clear, drawing upon the patriotism of the readership:

*'The Scot who ascends Ben Macdui and looks abroad over the oceans of peaks and glens running in vast waves, west, south and north, will inevitably ask himself some pertinent questions. Where are the natural boundaries of his national park? To what economic or social use are these potential playgrounds being put? Are they paying their way? Are they promoting in any manner whatsoever the greatest happiness of the greatest number? What is being done with Ben Nevis and the vast Aonachs, what of the distant hills of Skye, and with many a beautiful mountain range nearer home'.*<sup>184</sup>

Did the germ of these thoughts lie with the small boy captured atop a summit in the magazine's photographic montage, 'Behold the Cairngorms' (see figure 24)? G.D. Hardie, MP for Springburn, wanted an end to a time when 'our people claim Scotland as their native land and yet have to buy or beg their own for either children's or adult's freedom'.<sup>185</sup> Tom Johnston was typically combative, stressing that 'the Park must be for all the people, and not for a few plutocrats only'.<sup>186</sup> In securing the Cairngorms for themselves, Baker felt the 'the Scottish nation' would 'set a splendid example', and one which could be replicated in the rest of Britain.<sup>187</sup> Ruairidh Erskine of Mar, the ageing Nationalist provocateur and publicist, was similar in disposition deeming it wholly appropriate that the ancient

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<sup>183</sup> McConnochie, A. (1928) 'The National Nature of the Cairngorms', *Scots Magazine*, X (2) p. 178-185; see also, Gordon, S. (1928) 'Place-Names of the Cairngorms', *Scots Magazine*, IX (5) p. 321-326.

<sup>184</sup> Baker, E.A. (1928) op cit. p. 6.

<sup>185</sup> 'Scottish MP's and the National Park', *Scots Magazine*, X (5) p. 337-40; 338.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid, p. 338-339; see also, NLS Acc. 9752 f.79, T. Johnston to J.B. Salmond 1928 December 15.

<sup>187</sup> Baker, E.A. (1928) op cit. p. 5; see also, Baker, E.A. (1929) 'National Park for Scotland? The Cairngorms and the Nation', *The Observer* June 2 p. 11.



### YOUNG SCOTLAND'S RIGHT.

A boy on a Cairngorm top gazes across his national heritage. In these days when the appreciation of nature is meaning so much more to young people, the opening-up for them of an area like the Cairngorms would be of inestimable value.

Figure 24 - A National Plea  
Source: *Scots Magazine* (1928)

Caledonian forest 'should be a National Sanctuary - a sort of serpentless Eden'.<sup>188</sup> Meanwhile, Alan Graeme braided together personal war loss, armistice commemoration and the search for a modern Scots identity in his spiritual evocation of the national park ideal. He recounted conversations with one comrade, a stalker from Mull who:

*'copped it one autumn night in the mist in Haig's Gap at Armentiers...he often talked about hills, or rather about "the hill". We never spoke of that hill in a spiritual sense. It wouldn't do. But for me his feet are walking on the hill in the two minutes, and he is one with all their wonder'.*<sup>189</sup>

The Cairngorms, with their rich natural heritage, represented a suitable memorial for such men. Graeme alluded to this cause in poetical terms:

*'November mists set out on their silent wanderings over their old roads: with them comes the silent booming of old tales: running of heroes and dogs: singing of poets: sweeping music of a nation's being: magnificent moving of a nation's mourning. Thus these November hills'.*<sup>190</sup>

A national possession would also be an organic source for racial, cultural and linguistic regeneration. For Graeme it promised a new dawn:

*'I believe in the Gaelic Mod and I believe in the belief of the spiritual value of keeping alive the Gaelic tongue, but I am of the opinion that we must go back further still, right back to the originals, and that in the country which made the tongue, young and fresh as it was when the tongue was made, lie the real helpful spiritual values, which should be absolutely free to everybody'.*<sup>191</sup>

Similarly, W. Wright, parliamentarian for Rutherglen, who saw in the park an opportunity for the furtherance of a greater political project, encouraging Scotland's 'every effort to retain what remains, and to recover all that has been lost of a distinctive character, including its own National Parliament'.<sup>192</sup>

For some, a potential Scottish renaissance was largely unimportant, instead they choose to stress the internationalist appeal of the national park project. J.W.

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<sup>188</sup> Erskine, R. (1929) 'The Claim for a National Park', *Scots Magazine*, X (6) p. 416-420; 419. The Honorary Stuart Erskine, Jacobite sympathiser and 2nd son of the 5th Lord Erskine, took the decision to style himself as Hon. Ruairaidh Erskine of Mar (Ruairaidh Arascain is Mhairr) around the turn of the century. Publishing under this pseudonym he instigated a life-long campaign for the revival of the Gaelic tongue and the entire 'Celtization' of Scottish culture. Hanham, H.J. (1969) *Scottish Nationalism*, London: Faber & Faber; Harvie, C. (1994) *Scotland & Nationalism: Scottish Society and Politics 1707-1994*, London: Routledge, p. 23-24.

<sup>189</sup> Graeme, A. (1928) 'Hills of Home: The Spiritual Claim for a National Park', *Scots Magazine*, X (2) p. 89-96; 89.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

<sup>192</sup> 'Scottish MP's and the National Park', *Scots Magazine*, X (5) p. 340.

Gregory, Professor of Geology at Glasgow University and President of the Geological and Geographical Sections of the British Association, felt national parks to be 'indispensable institutions in progressive modern states'.<sup>193</sup> Influential 'expats' like John Buchan and patrician admirers such as the Earl of Cassillis had already inspected the parks setting precedents in former colonies and argued that the mother country should follow suit. Meanwhile, the notion of the park as a British treasure and resource was developed by E.A. Baker, who by 1932 had apparently dropped his demands for Scottish devolution. For Baker, the park had become a potential experiment in modern living for a changing British society. Reflecting on the first four years of campaigning he noted how, 'The whole of Great Britain was stirred by that great project; and it is being realised as never before that all the inhabitants of this island have a stake in the future of the Scottish Highlands'.<sup>194</sup> He spoke for 'the thousands of Englishmen whose hearts were in the Highlands. They loved Scotland as much as the Scot - for other reasons, of course - but quite as much' and saw huge importance in the challenge a Cairngorm national park would lay down to the Alpine countries which continued to dominate the European outdoor tourist market.<sup>195</sup> An obvious affinity existed with Ramsay Macdonald who supported the scheme as both a proud Scot and a loyal Briton.<sup>196</sup> Keen interest was also expressed by the National Trust for England and Wales which had secured some of the best climbing ground in the Lake District during the immediate post-war years. The Trust's organising secretary declared that 'the formation of a National Forest Reserve...would undoubtedly receive the warm approval of Northern and Southerner alike'.<sup>197</sup> The extent to which any National Park would belong to Scotland or Great Britain, in either a physical or symbolic sense, would remain an issue throughout the 1930's. However, if opinion differed over possession of the Cairngorms as an expression of nationhood then for long periods confusion reigned when attention turned to the purposes of such a property.

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<sup>193</sup> The notion of the state owning a large expanse of land on behalf of the population was a relatively modern one. The National Park had its origins in the United States of America where in 1872 Yellowstone Park was reserved by Congress. The success of this venture soon led to the establishment of other parks throughout America, their example quickly being followed in Canada, Australia and South Africa. Gregory, J.W. (1928) *The Claim for a National Park*, *Scots Magazine*, X (3) p. 173-177; 173.

<sup>194</sup> Baker, E.A. (1932) *op cit.* p. 190.

<sup>195</sup> SRO GD 335/40, Notes of the Scottish Rights of Way Society from the 'National Reserve Conference' held at the Highlanders Institute, Glasgow on June 4th 1929 (NRC). Baker suggested the Isle of Arran or the mountains bordering Loch Lomond as possible alternatives to the Cairngorms. Baker, E.A. (1932) *op cit.* p. 24-25. For further comment on Arran as a possible National Park see: Graeme, A. (1929a) 'Scotland's Need for a National Trust: A Definite Beginning for the Cairngorm Park', *Scots Magazine*, XI (1) p. 7-9. Loch Benevian in Glen Affric was suggested in the national press as a further option. *The Times* 1930 January 24 p. 18.

<sup>196</sup> Ramsay Macdonald, J. (1929) 'Why I Support the Cairngorm National Park Scheme', *Scots Magazine*, X (4) p. 251-252.

<sup>197</sup> Hamer, S.H. (1929) 'The National Trust in England', *Scots Magazine*, XI (5) p. 359-365; 365.

### Natural Solemnity, Orange Peel and Jazz Bands: Cross Purposes in the Park

*'The greedy arm of industrialism has stretched along many a Highland glen and robbed it of its dignity and solitude. Transport, its handmaiden, thunders and rattles to serve mushroom villages, herding the wildlife of our country within limits which stunts its growth and threatens it with extermination. The rare jewels of our flowers are being touched by the icy finger of death, which slowly searches them out while an unmindful people hurry by.'*<sup>198</sup>  
(*"Cromak"*, 1930)

The idea of a 'National Park' was picked over, repackaged and dismantled with some zeal in the months following Earnest Baker's seminal article. Press interest was intense, causing public expectation to mount. The timing of events seemed all the more prescient with the appearance of several prominent Highland estates on the land market.<sup>199</sup> However, progress was never likely to be rapid when, amid the welter of conjecture, even the most suitable epithet for any designated property was a subject of considerable debate. Ruaridh Erskine of Mar felt the term 'Park' to be disagreeable, bringing to mind 'heavily liveried Park-keepers, cut-and-dried roadways, meticulous little paths with carefully artificialised borders, and commands, painted on white boards, not to pull flowers and to keep of the grass'.<sup>200</sup> Tossing his own personal preference into the hat, he declared that, 'We Scots know what is intended by a "Forest"; and if English and other strangers who visit us are at present less well informed...it should not be long before both were more perfectly instructed'.<sup>201</sup> Several MP's were of the opinion that 'Domain' was a more appropriate term, while the title 'Reserve' was bandied about by, among others, the Scottish Ramblers' Federation.<sup>202</sup> Sir Iain Colquhoun preferred the combination 'Forest Reserve', a view he made public at a special Conference which was convened at the behest of the APRS in June 1929.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> 'Cromak' (1930) 'Scotland's Need: A National Reserve', in Beith, A. (ed.) (1930) op cit. p. 68.

<sup>199</sup> The impending sale of the Duke of Montrose's lands around Loch Lomond was viewed with particular interest. Graeme, A. (1929b) 'This Freedom: National Parks, Natural Prejudice and Industrial Projects', *Scots Magazine*, XI (4) p. 251-255; APRS/ECM vol. I 1930 May 21.

<sup>200</sup> Erskine, R. (1929) op cit. p. 416.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid, p. 417.

<sup>202</sup> 'Scottish MP's and the National Park', *Scots Magazine*, X (5) p. 337-340; 'Cromak' (1930) op cit. p. 68. Alan Graeme argued that the title 'National Domain' had two great strengths: 'First, the very size of the place wipes out the "back-green" idea, which seems to arise even in cultured minds, whenever you speak of a park. The second fact is the question of "freedom" in a national possession. It must be an area of "freedom" in the best sense of the word. Nature and man must be equally free'. Graeme, A.E. (1929b) op cit. p. 252.

<sup>203</sup> APRS/ECM vol. I 1929 June 6; 'Park or Forest', *Glasgow Herald* 1929 June 5 p. 3. The APRS was spurred into action after having been contacted over the prospect of 'a suitable public body' being offered custodianship of the 9000 acre Loch Dee estate in the Galloway hills. While the Association did not have the power to hold land, committee discussions were initiated on the possible creation of a National Trust for Scotland which could accept such gifts. APRS/ECM vol. I 1929 May 3; vol. I 1929 July 2.



The purpose of this event was twofold, to decide whether a designated area was desirable and if so, what form it should take. The delegates, numbering over fifty and representing a wide range of interested societies and the press, were quickly made aware of the sensitivities inherent to the subject. Although Colquhoun had agreed to chair the gathering he was keen that the APRS should not 'appear as show organisers but merely a clearing house for ideas'.<sup>204</sup> Diverse in content and lively in comment, the proceedings bore eloquent testimony to the spectrum of informed opinion, while also revealing tantalising glimpses of the seam of hegemonic power which intersected Scottish civic society during the inter-war period.

As his opening shot Colquhoun chose to read aloud passages of a letter received from Sir John Stirling-Maxwell in which the respected laird offered his thoughts on the Cairngorm Park idea. As befitting its patrician author, the communication was measured and stately in metre, appealing for a more considered and less frantic appraisal of the options available:

*'The root idea is, I take it, to secure a tract of hills where nature will remain forever undisturbed and which every citizen will have a right to visit. This ideal which in itself contains aims rather difficult to reconcile, has been overlaid with so many suggestions for motor roads, funicular railways, camps, winter sports, hotels at high altitudes etc. that the nature reserve with which the movement started has gradually degenerated into a tea garden'.*<sup>205</sup>

Several of the more imaginative suggestions to which he so pointedly referred had been made by parties present at the Conference.<sup>206</sup> Stirling-Maxwell's own

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<sup>204</sup> SRO GD 335/40, NRC. Given that the area proposed by some for a Cairngorm park included major sporting holdings belonging to the Mackintosh of Mackintosh, J.P. Grant of Rothiemurchus, the Duke of Richmond and Gordon, the Duke of Fife, Colonel A.H. Farquerson of Invercauld, the Earl of Seafield and George Macpherson Grant of Glenfeshie, a sensitive approach was deemed only appropriate.

<sup>205</sup> SRO GD 335/40, NRC.

<sup>206</sup> As a keen skier and former President of the Scottish Ski Club, Professor J.W. Gregory believed that 'a motor road from Aviemore to a shelter hut or hotel on one of the many suitable sites at the foot of the northern slopes of Braeriach would render fine snowfields available for winter sports to those who could not afford the long and costly journey to the Alps'. Gregory, J.W. (1928) op cit. p. 177; see also, Gregory, D.W. (1929) 'Ski-ing in Scotland', *Scots Magazine*, XII (3) p. 170-175. The Scots Magazine's photographic supplement also highlighted the 'great ski-ing slopes' in the Cairngorms. Ruaridh Erskine of Mar had proposed a new scenic tourist road partially dissecting the massif, running from Inchrory to Braeriach in the very 'bowels of the hills'. Erskine, R. (1929) op cit. p. 418. While E.A. Baker was sensitive to the fact that, if 'the Cairngorms become a great public playground; precautions will, of course, have to be taken that the alterations are entirely for the better', he was happy to suggest 'a few climbers' huts or mountain hotels on the Swiss model'. Baker, E.A. (1928) op cit p. 2. Stirling-Maxwell was not the only correspondent to find fault with Baker's plans. Alan Graeme noted the comments of one 'lady whose opinion is of importance', which were far from complementary: 'The Cairngorm author is surely very illogical. He destroys at once with the Commercial Hotel Building...the very thing he professes to revere and admire, which is the Silence, the Solemnity, the Dignity of the mighty kings which tower in their grandeur towards the sky...Just think of the feelings of the wild creatures that he most kindly wishes to preserve - the eagle, the hawk, the deer, the wild cat, the

recommendations were far more conservative in spirit, he maintained that the prime object of the park should be to preserve a portion of the Highlands in primitive condition. Without specifying any definite location, his letter made mention of a tantalising prospect, that the Forestry Commission might well make some of its unplanted land available for this purpose.<sup>207</sup> He argued for strict controls on public usage, while 'the National Reserve should be open to everyone...it is no part of the object to attract crowds or make access easy, still less to cater for those who are merely out for a picnic'. In keeping with the wilderness ethic to which he strongly adhered, Stirling-Maxwell stressed that camping be strictly controlled, accommodation provided for 'a limited number of people' only and 'in keeping with the main object' of nature preservation.<sup>208</sup> Sir Iain Colquhoun was equally circumspect on the role of the recreative masses in any national park. While he saw 'no use in making scoffing remarks about *charabanc* crowds who were a very decent lot', he felt that with 'practically the whole of Scotland' to tour around they would have no 'grievance at all if they were excluded from this small area which was under discussion'.<sup>209</sup> Harry Mortimer-Batten of the APRS agreed, proposing a sizeable location where a hierarchy of access could be established to suit different classes of recreationist.<sup>210</sup> The rhetoric of sectionalism was kept up by John Bartholomew of the RSGS who declared himself glad that opinion was turning against the term 'park', 'as it rather denoted orange peel and paper bags'. The Reverend A.E. Robertson of the APRS and Arthur Russell of the Scottish Rights of Way Society contended that the best means to plan for, acquire and maintain any

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grouse and ptarmigan! Maybe by 'preserve' he means 'stuff'. Do you think that even the delicate flora would survive uprooting for 'rock gardens' or that the wild creatures would be hypnotised by the strains of a jazz band? The author pleads for the Good and the Joy of wild life, and sport for the majority, and let the minority 'go hang'. Can he really be innocent enough to think that the majority of 'sportsmen' in Switzerland, St. Moritz, and Venetian Lido go there to climb the snowy peaks for love of adventure, or bathe in the blue Italian sea in search of strange jellyfish and such like? Would it not be absolutely a sin to spoil for the minority, the beauty, grandeur and solitude of the Cairngorm mountains'. Cited in, Graeme, A.E. (1928) op cit p. 92; see also: *Times* 1929 October 8 p. 13; *Times* 1930 September 10 p. 13.

<sup>207</sup> Of the 540,663 acres of Scottish property purchased by the Commission during the 1920's, 344,590 acres were classified plantable, the remainder unplanted.

<sup>208</sup> The idea of a centrally positioned hostel was given little credence, as it would 'destroy the essential romantic loneliness of the Park'. SRO GD 335/40 NRC.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid. These prejudices over the appropriate class of citizen also existed among more traditionalist factions of the outdoor community. One prominent member of the Cairngorm Club (quite probably Alex Inkson McConnochie) made clear his concerns: 'It would not do to have any Tom, Dick or Harry running about the mountains. What would happen to the deer? They are one of the charms of the Cairngorms. We don't want to lose them. Even if the range were opened out to the public, I don't think there would be many more climbers than there are at present'. Cited in, Graeme, A.E. (1928) op cit. p. 91.

<sup>210</sup> The margins of the park would be available for ordinary camping and caravanning, an inner zone would cater for educated outdoor enthusiasts offering them accommodation in 'artistic Canadian cabins for morality, liberty and a happy holiday amid nature'. Meanwhile the central sanctuary would only be walked through for the study of nature with 'camping and loitering' prohibited. Professor Gregory agreed with the sentiments of the proposal but doubted whether a location suited to all three purposes could be found. SRO GD 335/40 NRC.

property was through a National Trust for Scotland rather than the intervention of central government.

The first note of nonconformity was struck by Peter Thomsen, a schoolmaster from Leith, representative of the YMCA and unusually radical member of the APRS executive. He favoured state ownership, conditions of open access for charabancs and Summer schools for nature study on the park fringes in which the Boy Scouts and other youth organisations would take a lead.<sup>211</sup> Thomsen felt the spirit of Stirling-Maxwell's letter to be undemocratic in that 'he did not really want Heaven to be crammed', whereas 'Personally he did want Heaven to be crammed'. 'It ceases to be heaven then; it becomes Hell', was the sharp interjection of the chairman. Thomsen's retort was equally barbed, for he did not see:

*'how they could expect the support of the nation for a thing of which they said the fewer people who got there the better. That meant that they should not go too many hundred miles away from Glasgow. It ought to be a place where people who did distribute orange peel could go and learn not to distribute orange peel'.<sup>212</sup>*

Professor Francis Bailey, of the Cockburn Association, was inclined to agree with Thomsen, finding too much of 'the intensive purpose of the naturalist' about the discussions and too little representation of 'those who simply enjoy tramping the hills'.<sup>213</sup>

This brief dialogue reveals many of the tensions which, over the course of several years, would inhibit the progress of the park ideal from blue-print to reality. While professing enthusiasm on the public stage, both landowning and metropolitan patriarchs were wary of approving a scheme as yet untested and lacking true coherence or shape. While the Conference demonstrated the full panoply of learned opinion it also made evident problems of scale and possible collisions of interest between recreational provision, nature preservation and landscape protection. Of even greater significance was the civic leaderships' apparent fear of both the unwashed masses and the likelihood of direct state involvement. The most tangible outcome from the proceedings was the

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<sup>211</sup> Thomsen's idea of schools for nature study was based on his experiences of an American model developed by the Museum of Natural History, New York and the New York State Parks Department.

<sup>212</sup> SRO GD 335/40 NRC.

<sup>213</sup> Further support was offered by Mr G. Mclean, representative of the 'Come to Scotland' movement, who saw the scheme 'as a means of creating a spirit of unity among the population of the country in its entirety'. SRO GD 335/40 NRC.

establishment of a Forest Reserve Committee to consider more fully the options available and seek further consultation.<sup>214</sup>

### Barriers to Progress and Possible Salvation

*'Ramblers prepared to face any weather are increasing in numbers and becoming better organised, and it seems desirable that the possibilities of the forestry areas for healthy recreation should be explored...with a view to making them available under suitable conditions.'*<sup>215</sup>  
(James Rhynd, 1931)

Although efficiently managed by the APRS, the Forest Reserve Committee had managed to convene only once when, in September 1929, the general clamour for an officially sponsored *investigation was satisfied by the formation of a* parliamentary inter-departmental committee. Under the chairmanship of Christopher Addison, the parliamentary secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, its mission was to 'consider and report if it is desirable and feasible to establish one or more National Parks in Great Britain'.<sup>216</sup> Including among its number Sir John Stirling-Maxwell as representative of the Forestry Commission, the committee sat for nineteen months, making tours of inspection in Glen Affric and the Cairngorms between taking oral evidence from 34 groups and written statements from a number of societies and individuals. These were nearly all positive in sentiment.<sup>217</sup> Sir J.

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<sup>214</sup> Sir J. Douglas Ramsay, an APRS member and landowner in Banffshire, was appointed chairman of the Committee and the following societies were permitted to appoint one member: Scottish Estate Factors Society, Scottish Mountaineering Club, Royal Scottish Geographical Society, Association of District Committees in Scotland, Association of the Preservation of Rural Scotland, Cairngorm Club, Scottish Rights of Way Society and the Glasgow and West of Scotland Ramblers Federation. APRS/ECM vol. I 1929 June 6.

<sup>215</sup> Rhynd, J. (1931) p. 169.

<sup>216</sup> British Sessional Papers, 1930-31 vol. XVI p. 282. A number of voluntary organisations, including the CPRE, had mounted their own campaign for park designation south of the border. Among the locations targeted were Dovedale in Derbyshire, Cannock Chase and the Sussex Downs. MacEwen, A. and MacEwen, M. (1982) *National Parks: Conservation or Cosmetics?*, London: Allen and Unwin. The APRS was quick to draw Addison's attention to 'the fact that at a conference of the learned, artistic and field societies and clubs of Scotland...a resolution was passed for the setting up of a committee with precisely similar objects to those envisaged by the Prime Minister's committee on National Parks'. In correspondence with the APRS, Addison sought to allay fears of replication or obsolescence, providing the assurance that 'great importance would be attached to their views and those of the Forest Reserve Committee'. APRS/ECM vol. I 1929 November 6. The Forest Reserve Committee reported in January 1930. In the interim the APRS had also established its own National Park sub-committee.

<sup>217</sup> Presentations in favour of the National Park idea were made by Professor J.W. Gregory, Professor W. Wright (Regius Keeper of the Royal Botanical Gardens), J. Ritchie (Keeper of the Natural History Department, Royal Scottish Museum), the Lord Provost of Edinburgh, Sir A. Grierson, the Association of District Committees in Scotland, Councillor Henry Alexander of Aberdeen Town Council and Alan Ogilvie of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society. Rhynd, J. (1931) *op cit.* p. 171. Of particular note was Ogilvie's testimony based on the assertion that 'such areas are needed not only for wholesome recreation but to afford to those using them an opportunity for improving their geographical education'. To this end the RSGS suggested a folk park 'to illustrate the type of human life in the past in the particular environment of the Highlands'. In a property containing a high plateau he also identified 'the opportunity for the re-

Douglas Ramsay and A.E. Robertson gave evidence on behalf of the APRS. Having continued to make private enquiries over the possibility of a National Trust for Scotland, the Association advised the purchase of a recreational park through voluntary subscription with custodianship to be taken up by such a body.<sup>218</sup> While this approach already had its influential advocates in civic society, who could orchestrate enthusiastic coverage in the national press, Peter Thomsen continued to tramp a lonelier path. Having expressed his entire disapproval of the plans put forward by the APRS executive, he submitted his own evidence to the parliamentary committee calling for national parks to be created through the widespread control of the land resource by the state.<sup>219</sup>

Among the few objectors to the basic principles of the national park were the Association of County Councils in Scotland and the Convention of Royal Burghs (ACCS/CRB), whose conclusions demonstrated little willingness to attune to modern day sensibilities:

*'The representatives of these bodies are not aware of any demand in Scotland for National Parks, or of any particular district in Scotland which lends itself to the requirements of a National Park...A demand for free access exists all over Scotland. The formation of a national reserve would not meet this demand. The public do not respect the privileges they already receive'.<sup>220</sup>*

The major stumbling block for the ACCS/CRB was the sizeable financial losses which would be incurred by any change in the established pattern of Highland land-use, 'visitors are incompatible with shooting rights in sporting areas, and the blotting out of the rateable value of sporting estates is strongly deprecated'.<sup>221</sup> A constituent part of their traditional battle armour, the same argument was mobilised

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establishment of a high-level meteorological station in Scotland, (after the regrettable loss of Ben Nevis), for research on atmospheric electricity, terrestrial magnetism and auroral phenomena'. SRO GD 335/40 National Parks and Nature Reserves in Scotland: memorandum of evidence prepared by the Council of the RSGS, January 1930.

<sup>218</sup> Bailey and Robertson mentioned Scots based abroad as a possible source of funding and generous subscription. APRS/ECM vol. I 1930 January 14.

<sup>219</sup> Thomsen was supported in his campaign by Henry Mackintosh, also of the APRS executive. Minutes recorded their feeling that 'the possibility of purchase of a Recreational Park through voluntary subscription as very improbable, funds being exceedingly difficult to obtain'. APRS/ECM vol. I 1930 January 14. Professor Bailey was another APRS committee member who chose to contribute an additional report.

<sup>220</sup> British Sessional Papers, 1930-31 vol. XIV p. 364. Even further wide of the mark were the Association's comments on modern trends in outdoor life: 'the camping practice is deprecated by Local Authorities, and is not conducive to public health. The provision of hostels is not favoured. It would be difficult to make the hostels self-supporting, and the genuine tramp would prefer to make his own arrangements'.

<sup>221</sup> British Sessional Papers, 1930-31 vol. XVI p. 364. James Rhynd reluctantly agreed with this assertion: 'As the principal sport, deer stalking, is incompatible with the use of the land as a National Park, it would not be practicable to acquire servitudes for the purpose. The land would, therefore, have to be acquired outright. The cost would be heavy, and the value for which payment would be made, i.e. sporting value, would be lost when the area was converted into a national park'. Rhynd, J. (1931) op cit. p. 170-71.

by those proprietors of Cairngorm deer forests who feared the affects of any park designation. The landowners were partially assured by central government's obvious unwillingness to shore up the local economy as an immediate means to recoup lost revenue. Harsh fiscal facts left the Park project confronting a formidable impasse. The findings of the parliamentary committee provided few solutions. The Addison report recommended that 'assistance be provided by improving the opportunities of access for pedestrians to areas of exceptional natural beauty' through the establishment of a separate park authority for Scotland. However it only managed to clarify the situation on the ground as it already existed:

*'A large part of Scotland is a potential park, and the main problem is how to render it more accessible (especially to those who cannot afford an expensive holiday) without unfairly disturbing the economic uses to which much of the area is at present devoted'.<sup>222</sup>*

The committee somehow contrived to flirt briefly with the possibility of radical change within the confines of the existing status quo. Meanwhile, relegated to the appendices of their report was perhaps the most viable proposition for statutory recognition of a recreative space for the nation.

Tentative suggestions made as early as 1924 by the state-run Forestry Commission concerning the Cairngorm area had since evolved into a firm proposition.<sup>223</sup> The Commissioners offered to conduct an experiment on the 8000 acres of unplatable hinterland which they had acquired in Glenmore, situated on the northern slopes of the Cairngorms, by establishing a National Park. If control of the park was entrusted to the Commission then, they believed, effective measures could be implemented to ensure that commercial plantations would not be endangered. Within the property marches there were already several existing rights-of-way, an unused shooting Lodge available for conversion into a hotel or hostel, fishing facilities on Loch Morlich and perfect camping grounds among the Scots Pines bordering its shores. While the Commission memorandum to Addison noted the necessity of lower grounds being subject to patrols and the enforcement of strict controls on visitor behaviour, it was 'not expected that for some years the numbers adventuring among the higher tops and the corries would be very considerable'.<sup>224</sup> A comprehensive budget was even drawn up. If central government agreed to an

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<sup>222</sup> British Sessional Papers, 1930-31 vol. XVI p. 285; p. 23.

<sup>223</sup> The Cairngorm Club had expressed hope that some of the land being purchased by the Forestry Commission might be put to recreational use. Covetous eyes were fixed on the Highland estate at Glenmore, bought from the Duke of Richmond and Gordo who was only too glad to rid himself of the troublesome property. Anon (1924) 'Glenmore: A National Forest?' *Cairngorm Club Journal*, XI (62) p. 81-86. In 1929, Sir John Stirling-Maxwell had reminded the APRS that Commission hinterlands 'might be disposed of in connection with National Park developments'. APRS/ECM vol. I 1929 May 3; see also, Graeme, A.E. (1929a) op cit. p. 7.

<sup>224</sup> British Sessional Papers, 1930-31 vol. XVI Appendix XI.

initial outlay of £9000 followed by an annual expenditure of approximately £1500 for maintenance, then the Commission estimated the project to be financially watertight. While the equation was simple, £1 per acre of land, in distant Whitehall, treasury and cabinet remained unconvinced. The British economy was severely depressed stimulating a host of acute social problems in the densely populated industrial heartlands. These fundamentals took precedence in the work of parliament. To the undoubted relief of the feudal nobility whose lands bounded the Dee, Spey and Don, for the time being the National Park project was laid to rest in government circles.

Reports and memoranda may well have been consigned to dusty shelves in Westminster offices, but tacit approval was given to the continued activities of Scotland's civic community. The fact that no actual mechanisms for park establishment were offered by the Addison report may well have been the signal for the APRS to proceed with their enquiries. Little impetus was lost by the Association which had actually begun planning for the establishment of a Scottish equivalent to the National Trust soon after the initial Forest Reserve Conference in June 1929. During the course of 1930, negotiations with the Scottish Office ran in tandem with consultations held between Association representatives and the National Trust.<sup>225</sup> Following a series of preliminary meetings dating back to November 1930, an announcement appeared in the national press on the 1st May 1931, the very day the Addison Report was published:

*'The National Trust for Scotland for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty Ltd. is the title of one of the registrations in Scotland this week under the Companies Act. The objects of this new company are to promote the permanent preservation for the benefit of the nation lands and buildings in Scotland of natural beauty or historic interest, and, as regards such land, to preserve, as far as practicable its natural aspect and features of animal and plant life. The Trust has been formed to acquire by gift or purchase or to feu or to lease land, buildings, and other property, and, if so thought fit by the Trust, to devote to the use of the public for purposes of pleasure, recreation, or instruction any open spaces or other land or any building or personal property held by the Trust'.<sup>226</sup>*

<sup>225</sup> An APRS deputation comprising Lord Lovat and Alexander 'Sandy' Harrison, (the organising secretary and future president of the SMC), met with William Adamson, the Secretary of State of Scotland in this regard. Follow up meetings took place in Edinburgh and London. APRS/ECM vol. I 1929 October 8; 1929 November 6. S.H. Hamer's offer of the services and experience of the National Trust in the development of a parallel body in Scotland, was enthusiastically taken up. SRO GD 335/40, NRC; APRS/ECM vol. I 1929 June 6.

<sup>226</sup> *Scotsman*, 1931 May 2 p. 2. APRS representatives had met with William Adamson to discuss NTS registration under the Companies Act. APRS/ECM vol. I 1930 May 21. The decision to establish the Trust by these means was taken on the grounds that the two possible alternatives, constitution by Royal Charter or Act of Parliament, would be too complex in nature and slowed by bureaucracy and parliamentary debate. In 1935, status under the Companies Act, which had always been regarded as provisional, was amended. The Trust was dissolved and immediately reconstituted by Act of Parliament by means of a Provisional Order. The National Trust for Scotland Order Confirmation Act was passed on 20 December 1935. Russell, G.S.

As a statutory body the Trust could declare lands inalienable, holding them in perpetuity on behalf of the nation. Furthermore, its contribution to the evolving discourse of civic morality and social responsibility in Scotland had now been drawn up in law. The outdoor recreation movement could rely upon a respected, urbane institution to acquire the national space which thousands of itching feet were hankering after. All the more assuring was the commitment made to traditional landscape and nature preservation. Within weeks a circular promoting the first ordinary general meeting of the NTS had mentioned the offer of a large area in the Western Highlands. No matter that it had been turned down because 'only a small portion seemed appropriate for the purposes of Trust', the future appeared to promise much.<sup>227</sup> The doubts expressed by Thomsen over the chances of private donation were quickly shown to be unfounded when among the first gifts carefully banked by the NTS was a single bequest of £5000.<sup>228</sup> Unbeknown to almost the entire executive, even greater riches would soon fill the Trust's coffer.

As the Trust found its footing, the executive of the APRS continued to explore the boundaries of the National Park idea. The sub-committee which had worked to these ends in 1931 was re-convened in 1934.<sup>229</sup> New investigative documents were submitted, counsel sought and surreptitious glances cast at estate sale columns.<sup>230</sup> Unresolved tensions re-surfaced over the compiling of an updated report. Peter Thomsen felt the submitted draft far too chaste, re-iterated his demands for direct government intervention and described any designated area under 200 square miles as 'miserably inadequate'.<sup>231</sup> Minutes recorded the stern response of Sir John Stirling-Maxwell who informed the meeting that as a member of the Addison Committee he:

*'had entered on the enquiry with much enthusiasm but that as it had progressed, it had become more clear that the creation of National Parks rather tended to defeat their own object. His committee had*

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(1990) *The Formative Years, 1929-39*, Edinburgh: NTS, p. 7; Prentice, R.J. (1971) *Conserve and Provide: A Brief History of the National Trust for Scotland*, Edinburgh: NTS.

<sup>227</sup> NTS Archive, Formal Circular preceding OGM 1931 June 'The National Trust for Scotland for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty Limited'; NTS/AGM vol. I 1931 July 21.

<sup>228</sup> APRS/ECM vol. I 1931 October 28.

<sup>229</sup> The membership of the National Park sub-committee was as follows: Sir Iain Colquhoun, Sir John Sutherland, the Master of Polwarth, Reverend A.E. Robertson, Sir J. Douglas Ramsay (former factor to the King on the Balmoral estate), Professor Bailey, Major Strang-Steel, Harry Mortimer Batten and Peter Thomsen. APRS/ECM vol. II 1934 April 4.

<sup>230</sup> Both Francis Bailey and Peter Thomsen penned detailed, and very different, studies into the park idea. Both were presented to the group. Bailey, F. (no date) 'The Purpose and Requirements of a National Park' (APRS memorandum) NTS National Park Boxfile; Thomsen, P. (1934) *National Parks for Britain: A 25 Years Plan*, Leith: Privately Published; see also, Thomsen, P. (1934) 'National Parks for Britain: A 25 Years Plan', in *The Report of the British Association for the Advancement of Science*, p. 411-17. Douglas Ramsay reporting to the committee commented that 'it is very hard to fix a definite price on land at the moment due to the conditions of fluidity, amount of land on the market and yet lack of recent purchases'. APRS/NPC vol. II 1934 July 13.

<sup>231</sup> APRS/ECM vol. II 1934 October 3.



*come to the conclusion that protection of beautiful country was preferable to the acquisition of land in the form of National Parks'.<sup>232</sup>*

Back-up came from Major Strang-Steel and Sir Iain Colquhoun who were adamant that no government money should be involved, the latter adding that 'it would be desirable to delete references to the possible acquisition of particular areas' from the report.<sup>233</sup> Further diluted, the Report was passed at the next meeting, despite a motion of rejection from Thomsen who can only have been further incensed when a final decision was taken not to issue any copies to the press.<sup>234</sup> With the APRS cannily biding their time, fending off the offensives from Thomsen the fifth columnist, moves were afoot elsewhere in Edinburgh's West end.

#### Glencoe For Sale! - Wilderness Ethics, Conditions of Access and 'The Anonymous Donor'

During the early months of 1935 some of the first NTS endowments were used to purchase several small portions of land around the Clachaig Inn at the southern end of Glencoe, with a view to enlarging the property in the future. Undoubtedly acting on inside information supplied by the grandees at the helm of the organisation, these newly acquired lots left the Trust in a perfect position to swoop when, later the same year, Lord Strathcona placed his Glencoe estate on the land market. Such a major holding was still outwith the limited means of the Trust, but help was at hand from an unexpected source. Percy J.H. Unna, the President of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, declared an interest in the scheme to his personal friend and confidante 'Uncle' Arthur Russell, the Trust's law agent.<sup>235</sup> Driven by a long-standing desire to safeguard the best climbing areas in Scotland, Unna, guaranteed his own sizeable contribution towards the Glencoe purchase and inspired many

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid. Similar clashes had occurred sporadically in the aftermath of the Addison Report. Thomsen pressed for a fresh resolution in March 1932 but his request was rejected by Bailey and Colquhoun who disagreed with him on the role of government, suggesting the National Trust for Scotland as 'a more suitable holding and administrative body'. APRS/ECM vol. I 1932 March 30. One month later another attempt by Thomsen was forestalled, this time by Colquhoun, Bailey and Sir Robert Gordon-Gilmour, representative of the SLPF on the APRS executive. On this occasion, a lack of finance, no clear policy from government and continued public misunderstandings over the purpose of a National Park were cited to uphold the case. APRS/ECM vol. I 1932 April 27; see also, APRS/ECM vol. II 1934 February 7.

<sup>234</sup> APRS/ECM vol. II 1934 October 7.

<sup>235</sup> An Englishman of Danish extraction, Unna was of good establishment stock. Educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge, a highly competent Alpine mountaineer, he served in the Royal Navy as a Lieutenant-Commander during the First World War after which he amassed considerable wealth working as a civil engineer in West Africa. McOwan, R. (1976) *The Man Who Bought Mountains*, Edinburgh: NTS, p. 1-2.

other affluent members of the SMC and Alpine Club to donate the remainder.<sup>236</sup> Late in 1936, Lord Strathcona's neighbouring Dalness deer forest also came on to the market. The beneficence of the climbing community, and more specifically Percy Unna, again came to the fore and the asking price was quickly met. By some margin the most generous contributor to the cause, Unna impressed upon Russell the importance of his own anonymity in the project.<sup>237</sup> The Dalness transaction consolidated the Trust's status as a major land bank for the nation. By April 1937 property covering a triangular area of some twenty square miles was in their hands. This impressive mountain core included Bidean nam Bian, the highest mountain in Argyll, the Aonach Eagach, Buachaille Etive Beag and Buachaille Etive Mor with its Crowberry Ridge, famed among SMC circles. As Sandy Harrison excitedly remarked, the area would 'afford unrivalled ground to the mountaineer, giving in summer hill-walking and in winter snow-covered ridges and gullies full of ice and snow; and to the rock-climber rocks and crags of the very best'.<sup>238</sup>

Unna's secret commitment to the project was cemented when he had Russell draw up a seven year covenant in the Trust's favour which would eventually amount to over £20,000. This money, he specified, should be used to cover the upkeep of the new property and, more importantly, be utilised in future purchases. Erring on the side of caution when it came to making intrusions into the land market, the Trust made no major withdrawals from their steadily accumulating 'Mountainous Country Fund' for several years.<sup>239</sup> When in 1944 the Kintail estate

<sup>236</sup> It seems highly likely that Unna had given Russell some prior notice of his commitment to the entire scheme. Otherwise the Trust's, apparently random, incursion into the land market would have been wholly illogical. Unna had already been involved in unrealised plans to buy, and present to the nation, the Cuillin mountains on Skye as a memorial to the climbers who perished during the First World War.

<sup>237</sup> A voluminous correspondent Unna sent Russell this, one of his daily bulletins: 'To make sure that the further Glencoe push shall be treated seriously, I enclose cheque to start with. Please treat it as anonymous, not disclosing name to anyone'. NTS Glencoe and Dalness Boxfile No. 2 (NTS/GDB 2) Unna to Russell, 1936 December 7. The frequency of Unna's communiqués during the purchase procedures obviously came as something of a shock to J. Logan Aikman, the Secretary of the SMC, who informed Russell with just a hint of frustration: 'I am getting on average three letters, two telegrams and two phone calls from Unna daily'. NTS GDB (2) J. Logan Aikman to A. Russell, 1937 April 10.

<sup>238</sup> Cited in, Hurd, R. (1939) *Scotland Under Trust*, Edinburgh: Black, p. 9-10.

<sup>239</sup> Russell attempted to clarify the benefactors intentions for this money in the following letter: 'In future it would appear as a separate item in the Balance Sheet perhaps under the title of 'Highland Property Purchase Fund' or should it be 'Mountainous Country'. Perhaps the latter meets your intention more fully than Highland as I gather you have in view wild mountainous country rather than a stretch of the Highlands nearer the Highland Border which might be more suitable as a playground for the larger cities and easily accessible to them'. NTS Mountainous Country Fund Boxfile No. 1 (NTS/MCFB 1) A. Russell to P.J.H. Unna 1943 March 26. Unna's long-term ambition was for the Trust to amass and consolidate parcels of land until any holding had reached a target of 50,000 acres. The Cairngorm mountains were for some years his favoured site for expansion but his heart appeared to lie with the Skye Cuillins. During March 1943 he cajoled Russell, 'What about approaching the Johnston family, to see whether they are willing to sell Coruisk? It is not much good for stalking and would form a start with the Coolins. But there is no violent hurry, provided you keep on the watch for something suitable'. NTS/MCFB (1) P.J.H. Unna to A. Russell, 1943 March 22. Five days later he reinforced the point: 'I think the Coolins,

in Wester Ross was put up for sale an approach was made. However, in a gesture which Unna liked to think of as his own personal gift to the Trust, the £12,500 fee was covered outwith the existing funding structure. At the express request of the shadowy figure whom the Council only knew as 'The Anonymous Donor', the entire proceedings were carried out in complete secrecy.<sup>240</sup>

In subsequent NTS literature much has been made of Unna's shy and retiring nature. The image created is one of the ethereal and reclusive hillman, happy to confine himself to the backwoods and hilltops. Mysterious Unna may have been, but passive he was not. He held passionate and trenchant opinions on the nature of wilderness environments and their appropriate use and enjoyment by the public. Furthermore, his position as omnipotent benefactor afforded him the power to enact these beliefs by single-handedly determining Trust policy on their mountain properties. Crucially, the Trust's executive council only allowed such a situation to arise safe in the knowledge that Unna's ideas were analogous with their own and the organisation's aristocratic patrons. The politics and philosophy espoused by the Anonymous Donor are therefore of critical importance within the context of the Scottish outdoor recreation movement.

The origin of what were christened as the 'Unna rules' can be traced to a letter sent to Sir Iain Colquhoun, the Trust chairman, in the aftermath of the Dalness purchase. Quoting the circular issued when private subscriptions and donations were first sought for Glencoe, Unna wished the Trust to 'undertake that the land be maintained in its primitive condition for all time with unrestricted access to the public'.<sup>241</sup> 'Primitive' was to be taken to mean 'not less primitive than the existing state', sheep farming and cattle grazing could therefore continue. However, as no

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as the finest scenery in Britain, should belong to the Trust, and if a part could be secured, that would give them a footing which could be extended as chance offers' His message to the Trust was 'to get some more Highland property while the going is good'. NTS/MCFB (1) P.J.H. Unna to A. Russell 1943 March 27. Signs of Unna's growing weariness at the Trust's apparently tardy approach to securing further property arose in 1948: 'So far you do not seem to have had much success in finding land to buy. I believe that you have, in the past, turned down possible land because of the stock that would have to be bought with it...Or are you waiting for the Saddle or for Skye?...Why not see whether you cannot get a bit of the Ben, or of Glen Nevis now?'. NTS/MCFB (1) P.J.H. Unna to A. Russell 1948 March 22. Sensing this frustration, Russell contacted Trust secretary on Unna's behalf: 'Our friend has given us, and is piling up, this money for the purchase of mountainous country and I think it is only fair to him and perhaps politic that the matter should be brought before the Executive and made more widely known'. NTS/MCFB (1) A. Russell to J. Grimond, 1948 April 13.

<sup>240</sup> Shortly before his death in December 1950, Unna handed over 2000 shares in the Wellman Smith Owen Engineering Corporation worth £6000 to the Trust. This sum, combined with previous bequests, was used in the acquisition of Ben Lawers in 1951, part of the Goatfell range on Arran in 1958, the Grey Mare's Tail waterfall in Dumfries-shire in 1959 and the Torridon estate in 1967. McOwen, R. (1976) op cit.

<sup>241</sup> It is interesting to note the wording of Unna's letter to Colquhoun which gives the impression of being representative of a common body of opinion, rather than one individual's agenda: 'it is considered desirable that what are believed to be the views of the subscribers as to the future of the estate should be expressed in writing, and recorded in the minutes of the Trust'. NTS/GDB (2) P.J.H. Unna to I. Colquhoun, 1937 November 23.

great advocate of Highland sport, Unna decreed that deer stalking should cease.<sup>242</sup> His directive went on to specify that the hills should be made no easier to climb; that existing paths were not to be improved or extended, no new ones constructed, no facilities to be provided for mechanical transport, no directional signposts to be erected, paint marks used or cairns built.<sup>243</sup> The construction of hotels and youth hostels was to be avoided if at all possible, while 'no other facilities should be afforded for obtaining lodging, shelter, food or drink; and, especially, that no shelters of any kind be built on the hills'.<sup>244</sup> Compliance would, Unna maintained, 'create a precedent for similar areas in other mountainous districts, not only in Scotland, but also in England and Wales'.<sup>245</sup> That the Trust was able to do so was in large part due to the commodious parameters of its constitution which invested in the Council the power to 'make all such provision as may be beneficial for the management of the property or desirable for the comfort or convenience of persons resorting to or using such property'. And yet here lay a troubling paradox, at the heart of what the Trust happily allowed the press to label Scotland's first 'National Park'.

The spartan simplicity of these land management principles was hardly compatible with the popular vision of a National Park first discussed in the pages of the *Scots Magazine*. Percy Unna's, (and by that token the Trust's), code of access was as restrictive as it was enabling. Unna was only too well aware that in modern society established notions of space and time were collapsing and that the pace of this social and cultural change was impinging upon the traditional outdoor

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<sup>242</sup> Recreative stalking was deemed to be incompatible with open public access. The shooting of deer was to be restricted to that required for keeping down numbers and preventing vegetation damage. The NTS had already disposed of the Dalness shooting lodge as it was in no way necessary to the rest of the property. This after Unna had completed a comprehensive survey of the residence and compiled a detailed inventory for its possible sale as a hotel. NTS/GDB (2) Dalness House Inventory, 1937 January 7.

<sup>243</sup> It was not unusual for Unna to kick over and destroy the cairns he found on his climbing expeditions, so opposed was he to the idea of man-made structures in the Scottish hills.

<sup>244</sup> Unna did concede that should the demand for simple accommodation reach a certain pitch, 'it may have to be satisfied to a limited extent'. If this scenario did indeed arise then he had further advice to impart: 'buildings should be subject to control by the Trust; and it is suggested that no hotels or hostels be built in Glencoe itself, or on any other parts of the property, except, perhaps, in the lower reaches of the Trust property in Glen Etive. It is hoped that the Trust may be able to come to an understanding with neighbouring proprietors as to corresponding restrictions being maintained in regard to land near to that held by the Trust'. NTS/GDB (2) P.J.H. Unna to I. Colquhoun, 1937 November 23. In an earlier, less formal communiqué with Arthur Russell, Unna had conceded 'that if a hostel in Glen Etive will not suffice, it would be best to place the second one right away down from Glencoe, at Clachaig or below'. NTS/GDB (2) P.J.H. Unna to A. Russell, 1937 June 29. Unna's reluctance to allow accommodation facilities into the park was also fired by personal concerns over a decline in moral standards. The suggestion of a hut 'available for both sexes' in Dalness was deemed inadvisable since there had 'already been a divorce case involving three members' of the mountaineering club in question. NTS/GDB (2) P.J.H. Unna to A. Russell, 1937 September 13.

<sup>245</sup> NTS/GDB (2) P.J.H. Unna to I. Colquhoun, 1937 November 23.

experience.<sup>246</sup> If Glencoe had been secured for the nation then no welcome mat was laid out for the public. Self-sufficient, self-propelled and expert in mountain craft, the new 'park' was the domain of the true 'hillman'. Looking back on the period, the Earl of Wemyss and March paid tribute to Unna and his ethic:

*'Behind the munificence of this remarkable man there was a simple motive. He appreciated, as few others did in the 1930's, that we have, in the Highlands of Scotland, one of the last large reserves of wild and semi-wild land in Europe. He apprehended a threat...intolerable pressure on areas from a motorised population, and determined that...the high places would remain for the pleasure and refreshment of the man on foot'.<sup>247</sup>*

This may well have been the case, but Unna and the Trust strategists were well aware that their credo was identifiably exclusive. The Anonymous Donor was keen that all new maps of Dalness prominently display the NTS title 'so as to keep the idea that the scheme is one to provide climbing ground for the SMC out of people's minds'.<sup>248</sup> In 1939, with the contents of his directive still only known by a handful of trustworthies, Unna confirmed to Captain E.D. Stevenson that, 'Sir Iain definitely stated that it would not be safe to make these principles public, as originally suggested, because that would create an outcry on the part of the Scottish hiking associations'.<sup>249</sup> Despite these private concerns, three years later, the agenda

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<sup>246</sup> In reference to the suitability of a Trust purchase on Skye, Unna pointed out that 'something further south might be more accessible from Glasgow, but it won't be long before there are air buses, and then the distance will not make much difference. In twenty years time it will be common to do the Coolin ridge from Glasgow, and back in the day, at low fare'. NTS/MCFB (1) P.J.H. Unna to A. Russell, 1943 March 27. He further illustrated the point in a later letter: 'I merely suggested that, in view of what may happen in twenty years time, when they (*the Coolins*) should be as getable as Rothesay, I should be much annoyed at getting to the top of, say, Greta, as the easiest to spell, and finding that some ass had built a hotel on the top'. NTS/MCFB (1) P.J.H. Unna to A. Russell, 1943 May 29. In his dealings with the landowning community, many of whom were equally resistant to agencies of change, Unna was inclined to use the stability of the Trust concept as a lever for discussion: 'I had a talk with Mr. Alan Lypton today. He is uncle of the three Johnston brothers, who seem to be joint owners of Strathnaird (Coolins). He was horrified at anyone suggesting a sale, but I think it may be that he would not like to lose the chance of being asked to fish. In any case, he was much more horrified at the idea of the government purloining the place for a national park, and building a hotel at Coruisk, to be served by air buses from the Clyde at 5/- Saturday fares'. NTS/MCFB (1) P.J.H. Unna to A. Russell, 1943 June 30. When, in 1947, the results of the second Addison committee on national parks were published, Unna was unimpressed. Concessions to modernity and visitor provision were viewed with particular distaste. He informed Russell that the report 'represented the main threat to the Highlands', as it indicated 'large expenditure on motor roads, paths and buildings'. 'I take it', he continued, 'that when the Trust do use the fund for buying land, it will make every effort to promote local industry thereon, and at the same time see that the motor trade does not get a look in'. NTS/MCFB (1) P.J.H. Unna to A. Russell, 1948 March 22.

<sup>247</sup> Earl of Wemyss and March (1976) 'Foreword', in *The National Trust for Scotland Guide*, Edinburgh: NTS, p. 3.

<sup>248</sup> NTS/GDB (2) P.J.H. Unna to A. Russell, 1937 March 31.

<sup>249</sup> NTS/GDB (3) P.J.H. Unna to Capt. E.D. Stevenson, 1939 May 8. During the Glencoe proceedings the APRS executive had continued to stave off any demands, either internal or external, for a change of policy on National Parks. APRS/ECM vol. III 1937 October 6; vol. III 1938 November 24.

had not changed. Arthur Russell contacted Colquhoun to inform him that at a recent National Park meeting:

*'much of the discussion was quite good with very little of the "cranky element"...Sir John Sutherland led off and spoke well as regards the principles governing the making of national parks, the rights of the landowners and the necessity of keeping anything political out of the picture'.<sup>250</sup>*

The SPLF agreed, pointing out that:

*'Some of the protagonists for national parks have very big ideas as to the size of such parks. This is a small island and most of it is cultivated or grazed, and National Parks like the Yellowstone in America and the Kruger in South Africa, which are largely uninhabited and entirely devoted to wildlife, are out of the question...The Highlands will be particularly concerned with the type of park, of which Dalness is a miniature specimen'.<sup>251</sup>*

Unsurprisingly Peter Thomsen, resident non-conformist on the APRS committee, had been quick to recognise the disparities between his long-standing vision and that being offered by the NTS, pointing out the 'too often forgotten fact that access was as important as preservation'.<sup>252</sup> Whether he was any more satisfied by the events detailed in the next section, and running concurrently with the purchase of Glencoe, is a matter of conjecture.

#### Last Push for the Peak? Ardgarten Forest Park

From the very outset the Forestry Commission's involvement in the National Park debate had been both positive and progressive. Commissioners had featured prominently in the committee frameworks of both the outdoor and landscape preservation movements, most notably Sir John Stirling-Maxwell, Major Strang-Steel, Colonel Sir John Sutherland and Lord Lovat. While nothing had come of the Glenmore forest park proposal, the concept presented a fresh line of inquiry.<sup>253</sup> However it would be naive to assume that the impulse to contribute was borne out of anything other than paternalism. The Commission, a state-run authority, was dominated by landowners, several of them Scottish, who were interested in the

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<sup>250</sup> NTS Sir Iain Colquhoun Boxfile (NTS/ICB) A. Russell to I. Colquhoun, 1942 January 15.

<sup>251</sup> SPLF Notes for Members, vol. III (37) April 1942 p. 26. Contradictory views had been expressed by the Earl of Onslow, President of the Zoological Society of London. In his grand scheme of things, the need for outdoor recreation was superseded by that for nature conservation. Onslow envisaged a vast national game park on the same lines as America's national parks. He suggested a large area of deer forests being given over to the preservation of disappearing species of animals. Anon (1938) 'Scotland Month by Month', *Scots Magazine*, XXIX (3) p. 386.

<sup>252</sup> APRS/ECM vol. III 1939 May 3.

<sup>253</sup> Stirling-Maxwell was chairman of the Commission from 1930-32 and was then replaced in the position by Major Strang-Steel. Sutherland was Assistant Commissioner during the early years of the decade while Lovat had served the Commission in the immediate post-war years.

commercial opportunities offered by large-scale forestry plantations.<sup>254</sup> Certain interpretations of the National Park idea were not entirely compatible with the Commissioners profit-motivated vision for the countryside. Revill and Watkins have stressed how a fine balance had to be identified:

*'It is clear that the Forestry Commissioners were not opposed to the idea of public access, but they and the landowners who supported them were very much opposed to the formation of National Parks run by bodies that would interfere with traditional land management and imperil the large-scale conversion of unproductive land to productive woodland'.<sup>255</sup>*

This stance was apparent in 1934 when Peter Thomsen's militant views were brought to the attention of Sir Roy Robinson, the chairman of the Commission. Sir George Courthope, landowner, forester and Unionist MP, read the transcript of a paper delivered by Thomsen in Aberdeen demanding government acquisition of land for National Parks, and passed it on to Robinson with the following note:

*'Have you seen the enclosed effusion about National Parks? I am sure that you agree that wild schemes of this kind must be nipped in the bud. With this end in view, do you think it would be a good thing to push forward your proposals for recreational facilities in connection with our forests'.<sup>256</sup>*

The location they had in mind, less isolated than Glencoe or Kintail, was not far removed from the major centres of population. A property where the recreative pressures on the land resource were greatest and where experiments on public behaviour were already being conducted. In April 1934, the Commissioners present on the APRS National Park Committee mentioned the latent potential of Ardgarten, their 15,000 acre estate on the western shores of Loch Long.<sup>257</sup> Including the Cobbler and the 'Arrochar Alps' within its bounds the area was already a hugely popular weekend destination for the West of Scotland's climbing and hiking community. Marching with the 'Ardgoil Public Park', owned by the

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<sup>254</sup> Unlike his compatriots, Sutherland owned no estate property, he had however been a factor and land agent during his career. He was also involved in the formation of the Landowners Co-operative Forestry Society with Lord Lovat and Stirling-Maxwell. Seeking to profit from commercial experiments in forestry the Society first functioned in 1910. Activities included the purchase and exchange of plants, tools and fencing materials, and the measurement, valuation and sale of timber. *Oban Times*, 1934 October 20 p. 2; Lindley, F. (1935) *Lord Lovat: A Biography*, London: Hutchinson, p. 161-164.

<sup>255</sup> Revill, G. and Watkins, C. (1996) 'Educated Access: Interpreting Forestry Commission Forest Park Guides', in Watkins, C. (ed.) op cit. p. 100-128; 102.

<sup>256</sup> Public Record Office (PRO) F18 162, G. Courthope to R. Robinson, 1934 October. The work to which he referred was: Thomsen, P. (1934) op cit.

<sup>257</sup> Alternative locations considered included the original Glenmore site in the Cairngorms, Glengarry, just north of Fort William, and Strathyre-Loch Lubnaig in the Trossachs. APRS/ECM vol. II 1932 April 4. See also: SRO FC 7/1.

Glasgow City Corporation, it presented an opportunity to consolidate a considerable holding for a specific recreative purpose. The idea having been floated privately, it was made public in March 1935 when Sir Roy Robinson appointed a 'National Forest Park Committee' to look into the Argyll proposition. Their Report, published later the same year, took into consideration an area covering 55,000 acres, also including the Glenbranter, Glenfinart and Benmore estates (see figure 25). Recommendations were made for the establishment of a National Forest Park comprising the entire area, with open access to the 35,000 acres of unplanted land and limited access to the 20,000 acres of commercial timber.<sup>258</sup> A provisional set of byelaws were drawn up which defined a code of conduct as regards fire risk, sanitation, accommodation, litter pollution and access.<sup>259</sup> With regards the last point, the report suggested carefully designed paths which would invite visitors to 'pass to the uplands through the afforested lands by easy gradients. This would have the effect of keeping people from trespassing on or causing damage to plantations'.<sup>260</sup> The Commissioners went on to indicate that:

*'something should be done to indicate routes which may safely be followed by the normal pedestrian. This would not involve the construction of definite tracks, but would necessitate the marking of feasible routes by occasional cairns or whitened stones, or distinctive waysigns or symbols'.<sup>261</sup>*

This enthusiasm for new means of access provision was tempered by nervousness over a project which represented a step into the great unknown:

*'It is difficult to estimate how many people could make use of the area which is the subject of our report, for recreation, without destroying the sense of remoteness and solitude which is its chief attraction. We recommend, therefore, that the Commissioners should proceed cautiously and refrain from drawing undue public attention to what they are doing'.<sup>262</sup>*

Following the park's 'opening' in 1936, liaison on such matters was facilitated by the National Forest Park Advisory Committee which involved representatives of the outdoor and landscape preservation organisations whose

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<sup>258</sup> Forestry Commission (1935) *Report of the National Forest Park Committee*, London: HMSO.

<sup>259</sup> The byelaws were later published in the official guide to the Park. In his welcoming message to newcomers Sir Roy Robinson stressed that behaviour was paramount and a collective responsibility: 'with whatever object the visitor approaches the Park, he should remember that there are rules, both written and unwritten, to be observed. To all I would say enjoy Nature to the full, but give her such respect that those who come immediately after you will find no cause for complaint or even disappointment'. Robinson, R. (1938) 'Foreword', in Walton, J. (ed.) *Ardgarden: National Forest Park Guide*, London: HMSO, p. 2.

<sup>260</sup> Forestry Commission (1935) *op cit.* p. 5.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.



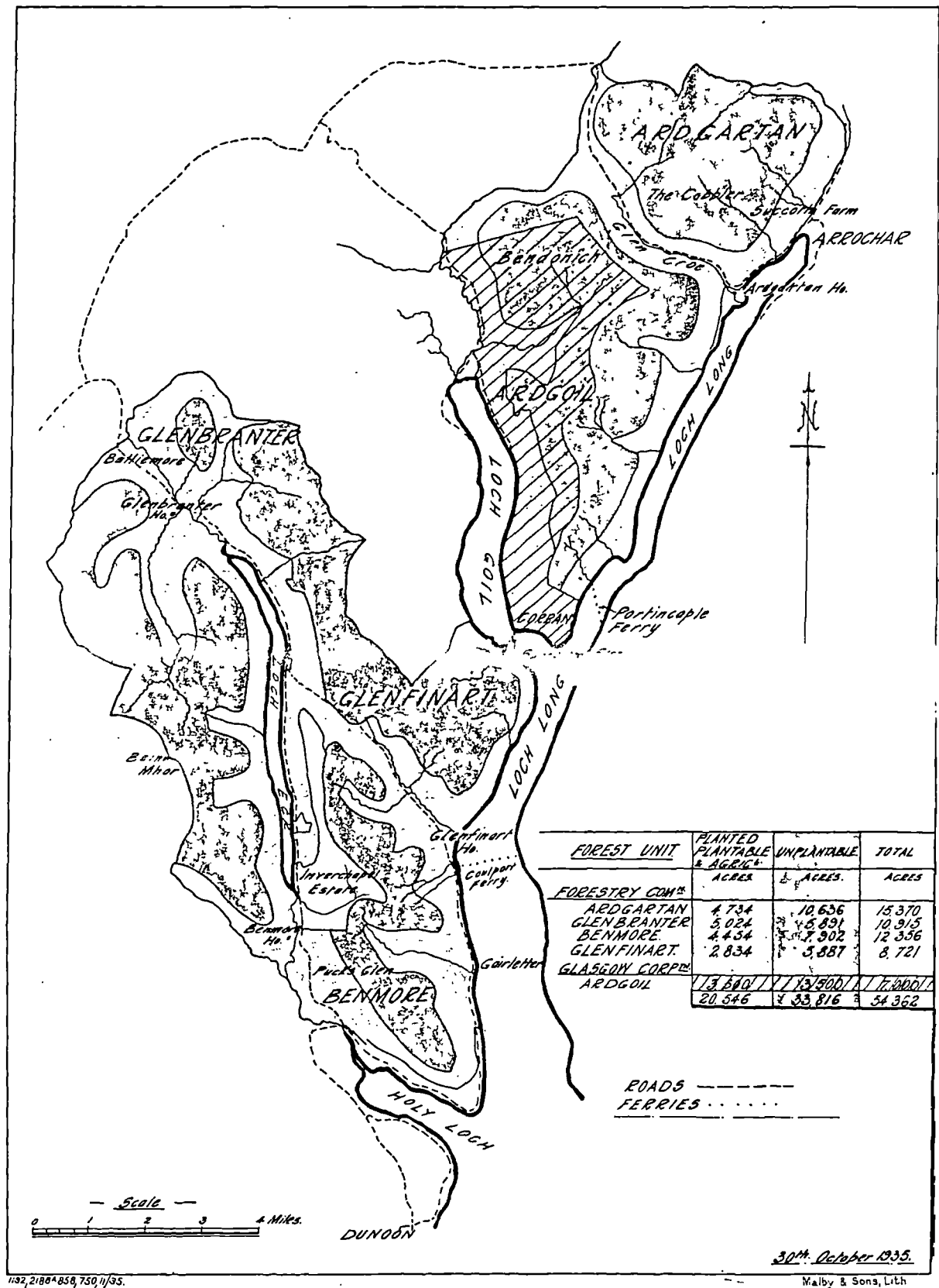


Figure 25 - Ardgarten Forest Park  
 Source: Walton, J. (1938)

interests dovetailed with those of the Commission.<sup>263</sup> Ardgarten House was converted into the Park centre, while in collaboration with the SYHA, visitors were accommodated in youth hostels at Arrochar, Lochgoilhead, Loch Eck, Cove and Dunselma, and on five designated camping grounds.<sup>264</sup> Meanwhile, Benmore House and gardens were converted into a Forestry College with sylvicultural nurseries open to the public. Any vain hopes of keeping the park 'under wraps' were utterly forlorn. The provision of these facilities was an enormous success, overnight stays rose from 13,312 in the first year to 20,419 in 1937 and 29,525 in 1938.<sup>265</sup>

The Park was so well appointed that the International Youth Hostel Association agreed to hold its annual youth jamboree at Ardgarten, in conjunction with the IYHA Conference due to convene at Edinburgh in August 1939.<sup>266</sup> In true hostelling spirit, the plans laid down by the SYHA committee and put in place by the organisation's many unpaid volunteers were meticulous.<sup>267</sup> Unfortunately as the big day approached, powerful forces were intervening. The rapid deterioration of diplomatic relations in Europe forced the cancellation of the Conference and the grand plans for an entire weeks hiking to be curtailed. Nevertheless, the celebration of youth took place over the course of a sun-blessed weekend in late Summer, with 1500 representatives from the youth organisations of Belgium, Denmark, France, Holland, Norway, Romania, Switzerland, Finland, Bohemia, Slovakia, USA, Scotland, Eire and England in attendance.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Professor Francis Bailey was the APRS's representative on the committee. APRS/ECM vol. II 1936 March 4. He was joined by G.D. Cheyne of the SYHA, G. Erskine Jackson of the SLPF and the chair, Sir John Sutherland of the Forestry Commission. SRO GD 1/395 Argyll National Forest Park, Advisory Committee Report, year ending 1937.

<sup>264</sup> It should also be noted that, in 1938, a 'Keep Fit' training school was established at Guisachan House, Glen Affric on Forestry Commission land and with grants made available under the 'Physical Training and Recreation Act' of 1937. Groups from the Boys Brigade, Women's Rural Institute, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides attended the school for two week blocks to partake in Highland dancing, hiking, outdoor swimming and lectures. Anon (1938) 'From a Highland Notebook', *Scots Magazine*, XXIX (6) p. 439.

<sup>265</sup> SRO GD 1/395 Argyll National Forest Park, Advisory Committee Report, year ending 1937; SRO GD 325/1/301 Scottish National Forest Parks, number of visitors to Argyll National Park in 1938.

<sup>266</sup> The event had to be switched from its original planned location of Danzig. Poland's fate was effectively sealed after the Russo-German pact of 1939. 'Binnien Mor' (1943) op cit. p. 4.

<sup>267</sup> Responses to rally invitations were received from fourteen countries. Accommodation was to be provided at two camping grounds and the Ardgarten Hostel, where outhouses and garages had been converted into temporary accommodation. Following the rally, foreign attendees would spend a day ascending the Cobbler. The next five days would comprise a mass hike from Ardgarten, travelling hostel to hostel to reach Hailes House outside Edinburgh and coincide with the culmination of the IYHA Conference. During their stay delegates from the Conference were to be treated to an excursion around Loch Lomond and a visit to the newly constructed Glen Nevis youth hostel. *Glasgow Herald*, 1939 August 18 p. 13.

<sup>268</sup> Despite the impending crisis, the German Youth Hostel Association had responded to their invitation and as late as one week before the rally still expressed their intention to attend. *Glasgow Herald*, 1939 August 26 p. 2. In the event, four redoubtable German students reached Newcastle by ship before turning back. *Glasgow Herald*, 1939 August 28 p. 9.

For many a Scots patriot, the event must have represented the apogee of a decade of achievement. The Highland setting was perfection itself, amid mountain, wood and water, proud and virile youngsters converged, the kilt representing the 'nearest approach to a uniform'. As darkness fell, folk dances, vocal solos and 'hill-billy' choruses were performed on a floodlit stage with 'a full moon shining through the treetops as it rose towards the craggy summit of the Cobbler'. As the finale to the evening a flotilla of canoeists carrying coloured beacons paddled out into Loch Long while a huge bonfire was lit on a nearby promontory, all to spectacular effect. Though the official proceedings then drew to a close, 'it was late into the morning before the sounds of merrymaking and happy fraternisation died down'.<sup>269</sup> With Ardgarten the focus for a new open and accessible Highland landscape, Scotland's youth had demonstrated to their peers how 'man to man the world ower shall brithers be for a' that'.<sup>270</sup> Unfortunately, such innocence and camaraderie was no longer in evidence on the international stage. One week after the rally, Britain declared war on Germany.

### Conclusion

*'To one man a National Park is a place in which to enjoy at small cost healthy exercise and free companionship in the open air; to another it is a place disfigured with litter, ringed around with charabancs and noisy with holidaymakers, to be tolerated only because it helps to keep inviolate the privacy of his own estates; to yet another it is a place where rare plants and animals may thrive and multiply.'*<sup>271</sup>

(Peter Thomsen, 1934)

*'...encourage people to enjoy outdoor life and fresh air, and at the same time respect the countryside and its people as they should...'*<sup>272</sup>

(Lord Haddington, 1939)

An alternative reading of the Ardgarten youth rally of 1939 can be posited, that it represented a resounding victory for the Scottish landowning community and the forces working on their behalf. Between them, the Scottish Youth Hostels Association, the National Trust for Scotland, the Association for the Preservation of Rural Scotland and the Forestry Commission supplied the dominant narrative for the entire outdoor scene. These civic organisations were led by a patriotic, patriarchal and landed elite who succeeded in establishing what would become a twentieth-century aristocratic dynasty. Characters such as Sir Iain Colquhoun, Sir

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<sup>269</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 1939 August 28 p. 9.

<sup>270</sup> 'Albainnach' (1940) op cit. p. 11.

<sup>271</sup> Thomsen, P. (1934) op cit. p. 3.

<sup>272</sup> APRS/AGM vol. III 1939 May 30.

John Stirling-Maxwell, the Duke of Atholl and the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres dominated the positions of high office and as a result were able to exert a large degree of control over policy directions and public sermons. While certainly more enlightened than antediluvian, these personalities were still firmly rooted in the traditions and mythology of the sporting lairdocracy. During their reign the role of these organisations was consistently a passive one. Brokering reconciliation with the oligarchic landowning class hardly represented a dramatic social rupture. Dissidence only stretched to stammering queries over the enforcement of rigorous access restrictions. Common rights, revisions to the system of landownership and its associated social power were most definitely not on the organisational agenda.

Suggestions of collusion are dangerous ones to make. However, during the inter-war period there was undoubtedly a determined attempt made to cover the bases. It is not unreasonable to suppose that the involvement of these upper-class benefactors, although enthusiastic and considerable, had as its ultimate motive the assurance of a continued future for the established rural power structure and associated elite sporting culture. The threat was two fold, direct government intervention in the ownership structure, backed by radical campaigns for land nationalisation, and the growing weight of public expectation.

The widespread 'discovery' of the Highlands was both inexorable and inevitable, a development conceded by Colquhoun in his rectorial address to Glasgow University. Endearingly frank in his appraisal of the situation, and always praiseworthy of the outdoor movement's achievements, he admitted that 'there was no landowner who would not infinitely prefer to exclude the public *in toto* from his lands than to have them there, for there was no doubt that every privilege granted cost him something directly or indirectly'.<sup>273</sup> Yet by sacrificing a little of what was already held, and on their own terms, such progressive representatives of the landowning community could quite plausibly ensure the retention of all that remained. Land management models had been created to suit different Highland locations and thereby assuage the demands for state involvement.<sup>274</sup> Conveniently, the wilderness aesthetic was central to the notion that there existed a Scottish landscape worth savouring. In more remote Trust holdings, like Glencoe or Kintail, this ethic was enforced stringently. In those belonging to the Forestry Commission, located nearer the urban milieu, the principles were slightly more liberal. Each type of property acted as a magnet for its respective user group.

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<sup>273</sup> SRO GD 335/66 Rectorial Address, 'The Landowner and the Public'.

<sup>274</sup> Concentrating largely on events in England and Wales, John Sheail has noted how during the inter-war period 'the government allowed a curious collection of bodies to become responsible for preserving the countryside and providing opportunities for outdoor recreation'. Sheail, J. (1976) *op cit.* p. 78.

Writing in 1928, J.B. Salmond, editor of the *Scots Magazine*, made the following assertion, 'All over the country the enthusiasm for the actual physical beauties and delights of Scotland is spreading. Young people are going into the hills, and finding that they are more than a dress-tartan or a wailing song'.<sup>275</sup> He concluded with a bold assertion, that 'Knowledge in this case certainly means power'.<sup>276</sup> The researcher blessed with the benefit of hindsight might find reason to query this point. Had the establishment not already recognised the threat? Quelling the more radical and overtly nationalist elements of the outdoor movement from an established position within the organisational structure was surely a far easier prospect for the landowner than doing so from a distanced exterior. In such a way, a movement which originated in the heartlands of Scottish radicalism was gradually but comprehensively assimilated into the institutionalised political mainstream. This process effectively diluted the potentially explosive nature of the hiking and hostelling movement.

The Scottish outdoor movement taught its faithful followers that good Scots respected the rights of the country 'folk' and should be enormously thankful for the privilege of walking *their* land. The approaches, agendas and rhetoric of the respective organisations were infused with aspects of patriotism, of civic pride and also the need for national awareness among an educated and healthy population. Yet ultimately, and by no great accident, control and power lay in the hands of those least likely to use the movement as a means to make vocal doctrines inspired by political militancy or nationalism. The lairdocracy had demonstrated both their guile and a veiled tenacity to retain the reins of power in the Highlands.

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<sup>275</sup> 'Books and Other Things', *Scots Magazine*, IX (2) p. 155.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid*, p. 255.

## Chapter Three

### Tradition versus Modernity: A Battle for Highland Hearts and Minds



## Introduction

This chapter examines a series of debates aroused by the collision of tradition and modernity in the Scottish Highlands. During the inter-war period, a region characterised by place-imagery which drew on established ideas of marginality, peripherality and perceived dislocation from the civilised centre of the British state, was swiftly brought to the forefront of economic, social and cultural discussion. Sharply contrasting sentiments were evoked by proposed infrastructural improvements in 'remote' areas and the steady encroachment of modern industrialism, regional planning and a new mood of economic expectation into romantic constructions of Highland life and landscape. The chapter examines how divergent arguments were refracted through the vexed question of modern economic development with due regard for vernacular preservation, and the particularly contentious issue of hydro-electric power. It asserts that ultimately, these clashes over the Highlands' appropriate condition of modernity were themselves rooted in acute concerns over the perceived nature and role of 'Celtic margins' in inter-war British society.

Since the Enlightenment, Scotland's northern and western reaches have sparked the popular imagination. Anthropological voyeurism, nether-world mysticism and tartan bedecked Romanticism, the indulgent passions of the eighteenth-century explorer, nineteenth-century traveller and twentieth-century tourist, have each contributed to a dominant perception of the Highlands as a land cut off from the flow of time.<sup>1</sup> This chapter begins by examining some of the contributions of the inter-war period to these powerful literary and artistic currents. I demonstrate how simple travelogues, mixing historical narrative and regional description, provided the templates for the construction of an imagined geography in which the Highlands represented a distant retreat for modernised Britain. The highly marketable products of the 'Celtic Twilight' school, penned by a procession of benign commentators, are drawn upon to illustrate the widespread culture of escapism abroad at the time. Reactionary and whimsical, these texts are as notable for the issues they failed to discuss as for the myths they effectively propagated. Censurable silences were kept up, especially with regard to the acute social and

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<sup>1</sup> Smout, T.C. (1983) 'Tours in the Scottish Highlands from the 18th to the 20th Centuries', *Northern Scotland*, 5 (2) p. 99-122; McArthur, M. (1993) 'Blasted Heaths and Hills of Mist: The Highlands and Islands Through Travellers' Eyes', *Scottish Affairs*, 3 p. 23-31; Gold, J.R. and M.M. Gold (1995) *Imagining Scotland: Tradition, Representation and Promotion in Scottish Tourism since 1750*, Aldershot: Scolar Press.

economic difficulties long endured by the native population. The chapter highlights how the powerful hold of Twilight imagery over the popular consciousness was bolstered by the activities of the Scottish preservation and heritage movement. Attention focuses on a number of campaigns waged by the APRS and NTS to safeguard versions of 'the Highland vernacular' from intrusive modern development. These attempts to protect, and even to re-produce relic landscapes, are used to highlight how issues of representation, authenticity and imagined tradition lay at the heart of the romanticists' Highlands.

The chapter then changes course by examining the arguments and imagery deployed by those who recognised in industrial expansion the Highlands best opportunity to achieve redress for years of enforced underdevelopment. A solid economic base and new receptiveness to modern technology were viewed by the more pragmatic observer as the means to begin redefining the established relations between the margins and centre of Great Britain. As leaders of the crusade for the introduction of a comprehensive programme of economic measures based on the idea of the region, the work of the Highland Development League (HDL) is examined in some detail, while the receptiveness of the native population to their vision of modernity is also assessed. Key aspects of this new development thinking are shown to have impinged on conventional notions of peripheral identities and challenged the hegemony of British nationhood and citizenship.

The second half of the chapter focuses on undoubtedly the single most contentious issue to affect the Highlands during the inter-war period. Hydro-electric power aroused the greatest controversies and precipitated the most heated discussions on the means to bring about development in the region. Immersed beneath the blueprints for dams, sluices and power-houses are some of the most fascinating political, aesthetic, territorial, environmental and sociological considerations of the period. Against a background of ruthless propaganda, politicians, landowners, sportsmen, rural preservationists, Twilight romanticists, entrepreneurial businessmen and local communities manifested and challenged the dominant cultural construction of the Highlands as an unmechanized and elemental space. The work picks through this web of relationships to reveal the varying degrees of power wielded by each interested party, the covert plans made for collaboration or coercion and the organisational structures employed to further specific causes.

The predicted effects of hydro-technology and its ancillary electrical industries on the Highland environment and its native inhabitants provide the focus



for this discussion. The chapter demonstrates how views on water power in the region were informed by contrasting understandings of the broader nature-culture dialectic.<sup>2</sup> The enthusiasm of modernists for the aesthetics and architecture favoured in hydro-electrical design stood in direct competition with the campaigns waged by preservationists to protect *their* wilderness inviolate. By examining how a distinctive environmental consciousness could be constructed for, or by, a different interest group, conclusions are drawn on the processes at work in the marginalisation or re-centring of a specific place within the popular spatial consciousness. The stated objectives and private machinations of those who participated in these struggles will be investigated, in turn helping determine the dynamics of power, authority and patronage brought to bear on the situation.

While the beauties of the natural landscape were a primary concern, the future of Gaelic culture and civilisation was also deemed to be at stake. Where some progressive personalities saw in *HEP* a *bright new dawn and the potential for* rejuvenation through a neotechnic rural society, more reactionary forces envisioned a plague of psychological and physiological defects which industrial development would visit upon the previously unsullied minds and bodies of the Highland population. By tracing the origins of these hopes and fears the chapter explores the tension which existed between pragmatic economic aspiration and powerful romantic iconography. In a measured consideration of the social and cultural meaning of contesting hydro narratives the chapter demonstrates how, allied to its purely political dimension, water power ultimately became a potent symbol in the struggle for moral and cultural authority in the Highlands during the inter-war period.

It is necessary to stress that the key objective of the chapter, is not to provide a definitive empirical or technical account of the Highland hydro debates, such matters have been well documented elsewhere. Of some note in this regard is Tom Johnston's chronology of the progress made up until 1948. Although comprehensive this treatment is inevitably coloured by the author's intimate political

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<sup>2</sup> The cultural politics and landscape aesthetics of other British hydro-technology projects have been investigated in: Cosgrove, D. (1990) 'An Elemental Division: Water Control and Engineered Landscape', in Cosgrove, D. and Petts, G. (eds.) *Water, Engineering and Landscape*, London: Belhaven, p. 1-12; Gruffudd, P. (1990) "'Uncivil Engineering': Nature, Nationalism and Hydro-Electrics in North Wales", in Cosgrove, D. and Petts, G. (eds.) *op cit.* p. 159-174; Cosgrove, D. Ruscoe, B. and Rycroft, S. (1996) 'Landscape and Identity at Ladybower Reservoir and Rutland Water', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 21 (3) p. 534-551.

involvement in the events under examination.<sup>3</sup> Payne's more recent history of modern water power developments in Scotland while offering a tight and scientifically informed account of engineering endeavour and the dilemmas of constructional design, is hamstrung by its mantle as an official institutional history.<sup>4</sup> Bill Luckin's examination of the three doomed Caledonian Power Bills of the late 1930's is far more rounded, successfully highlighting a number of the human and environmental aspects characteristic to the discussions of the period.<sup>5</sup> However, by choosing to carefully unravel the national dimension which was to become a hallmark of HEP politics, the lens of Luckin's inquiry invariably falls upon Westminster and Whitehall. In so doing, he casts light on geo-political tensions, legislative bargain-striking, war production targets, inter-departmental wranglings and regional rivalry in the national economic planning movement. Without negating the importance of the parliamentary arena to the decision-making process this project, by considering dimensions of the hydro-electric saga which have been left unexplored, redirects the geographical focus back toward the Highlands. The inclinations and biases of the native populace will be addressed, since these were studiously ignored at the time and have failed to resurface since. By veering away from the dominant 'outsiders' narrative of the HEP debates and by intersecting national debate with local dialogue the chapter rigorously questions, rather than conforms to, the dominant conceptualisation of the Highlands as a marginal and passive place severed from the civilised body politic.

#### Britain's Safe Haven: A Place on the Margins

The centrality of place-images and myths in lending meaning to perceptions of space in daily life has been the subject of recent inter-disciplinary research. Shields has highlighted the various levels at which such associations can take place, claiming that the spatialised discourse is 'key to the transformation of purely discursive "imaginary geographies" into everyday actions, gestures, crowd practice, regional identities, the "imaginary community" of the territorial nation

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<sup>3</sup> Johnston, T. (1948) *Hydro-Electric Development in Scotland, Papers of the Greenock Philosophical Society - being the Watt Anniversary Lecture for 1948*. Greenock: Telegraph Printing Works.

<sup>4</sup> Payne, P.L. (1988) *The Hydro: a study of the development of the major hydro-electric schemes undertaken by the Hydro-Electric Board*, Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Luckin, B. (1990) *Questions of Power: Electricity and Environment in inter-war Britain*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 118-138.

state, and geo-politics.<sup>6</sup> This hierarchy of meaning provides a common context for any cultural inquiry but is perhaps particularly appropriate in a consideration of the debates surrounding the Highlands and their appropriate condition of modernity. During the 1930's public attention swung wildly from the frame of the local to the national, concerns varied from the parochial to the universal, equally compelling contestations occurring in village halls as in houses of parliament. The Highlands were attributed meaning at each level and the chapter reflects this sweep, informed by the individual agenda as well as the national. It is also worth highlighting at this early stage the almost hopelessly divisive nature of opinion on the suitability of the Highland environment and its native population to a modern industrial infrastructure, incorporating the latest production practices and technological innovations. Debate, discussion and any form of progress, were complicated by internecine feuding, unpredictable enmities and alliances, and uncharted fractures and fissures.

While Hechter and Chapman have previously examined the relative position of the Celtic fringe in British society, Rob Shield's more recent interest in 'the places on the margins of modernity' mirrors a central theme of this thesis, namely the cultural construction of the Highlands as a peripheral and elemental place.<sup>7</sup> The condition of modernity is notable for spatialised oppositions used to position the familiar on the 'inside' and the Other on the 'outside'.<sup>8</sup> These spatial understandings have been manifested in social interpretations of proximity and remoteness, near and far and the placing of past, present and future. Examining those sites bridled with a marginal identity Shields notes how they are 'not necessarily on geographical peripheries but, first and foremost, placed on the periphery of cultural systems of space in which places are ranked relative to each other'.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the anthropologist Edwin Ardner, has noted how perceptions of remoteness are more than a simple function of geography. The experience of 'remoteness', he claims, is determined by a paradoxical sensory relationship, the area or community in question will be difficult to reach but at the same time appear

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<sup>6</sup> Shields, R. (1992) *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*, London: Routledge; see also, Shields, R. (1992) A Truant Proximity: Presence and Absence in the Space of Modernity, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 10 p. 181-198.

<sup>7</sup> Hechter, M. (1975) *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; Chapman, M. (1978) *The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture*, London: Croom Helm.

<sup>8</sup> Cohen, A.P. (1986) *Symbolizing Boundaries*, Manchester: Manchester University Press; White, H.V. (1978) *The Tropics of Discourse*, London: John Hopkins University Press.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

vulnerable to outside influence. This perceived fragility demands intervention for the sake of preservation, simultaneously endangering the very condition which is treasured.<sup>10</sup>

These complex distinctions made between cultural and topographical marginality critically inform my understanding of the social imagining of the Highlands within British inter-war society. It will become apparent during the course of the investigation that for almost all parties concerned, when attention was drawn to the continued economic plight of the region, marginality was as much a state of mind as a cartographic reality. The essentialisation of Gaelic culture, of the Highland population and the natural environment necessitated their removal from a contemporary context and suspension in a historical vacuum as living relics from a bygone age. An awareness of this cultural construction, with its reliance upon an amalgam of luxuriant mythology, pawky humour and apolitical banality, is critical to an understanding of the place of the Highlands in the popular consciousness. The region very quickly came to represent a safe anchorage from the trials and tribulations of modernity, a liminal comfort zone for the British psyche. The imagined realm of 'bens and glens' offered shelter from the turbulence of post-war society and the insecurities that it bred in the individual citizen and the collective British identity. When modernity intruded into this last safe haven it represented, for the romantically inclined, a final act of sacrilege.

In this regard, it is propitious to note Edward Said's exposition of the myths deployed to bolster European cultural status and territorial ambition as part of the imperial project. His analysis of Orientalism utilises as its central motif the construction of a Self/Other dualism which, in the labelling of the colonial Other as a marginal located at the edge of civilisation, reinforces what he termed the 'positional superiority' of imperialist society. The marginalised Other is crucial to the identity of the dominant force within a cultural system. For while the Self may try and reject the Other for reasons of status and prestige, it soon becomes apparent that the Other is actually a constituent part of the Self. A dynamic relationship of dependence results which is manifested in a fusion of power, fear and desire. The Other may be open to ridicule and eroticization; he or she may be hampered by political impotence but at the same time remain integral to the collective imaginings

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<sup>10</sup> Ardener, E. (1987) "Remote Places": Some Theoretical Considerations', in Jackson, A. (ed.) *Anthropology at Home*, London: Tavistock, p. 38-54.

of the dominant society.<sup>11</sup> These complex themes have since been engaged with in a range of academic disciplines where regional investigations have helped uncover fresh surfaces in the cultural relations fostered between centre and margin. In his most recent treatments of Highland history Jim Hunter has cultivated exploratory links with this body of literature.<sup>12</sup> It is my intention in this chapter to press these still tentative forays slightly further, making evident the paradoxical relations of seduction and repugnance existent in the cultural politics of the Highlands during the inter-war years.

### Documenting the Celtic Twilight

*'Autumn lies over Skye like a lullaby, not the soft lullaby of English stubble fields and rich, fulfilled material orchards, but the sad, wild Gaelic lullabies, with the sea wind and the hill wind in them, which the Hebridean mothers sing to their little ones.'*<sup>13</sup>  
(H.V. Morton, 1929)

Though the works of the 'Celtic Twilight' movement are seldom of a standard to hold the reader enthralled, these leaden texts do provide valuable insights into the manner in which the Highlands were ascribed a synthesis of place-meanings, as well as offering an indication of the market at whom this iconography of 'Scoticisms' was targeted. With the books' intended audience in mind, it seems only logical to illustrate these arguments by drawing upon the 'best-sellers' and 'penny-dreadfuls' of the period. While being wholly representative of the style, I should emphasise that these do remain a handful of examples from a quite vast literature.

At the vanguard of the Twilight world stood figures whose names even managed to hint at the saccharine excesses of the genre. The writings of Alisdair Alpin MacGregor, Mary Ethel Muir Donaldson and Seton Gordon were however, upstaged and outsold by those of an Englishman. The renowned travel writer H.V. Morton undertook two extended car-journeys around Scotland during 1928 and 1932. The accounts of his trips were hugely popular, further swelling the author's

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<sup>11</sup> Said, E. W. (1978) *Orientalism*, London: Penguin; Said, E.W. (1993) *Culture and Imperialism*, London: Vintage.

<sup>12</sup> Hunter, J. (1994) *Everyone Who Ever Mattered is Dead and Gone: an essay on the cultural significance of nature and landscape in the Scottish Highlands*, Sabhal Mor Ostaig: Skye; see also, Hunter, J. (1995) *On the Other Side of Sorrow: Nature and People in the Scottish Highlands*, Edinburgh: Mainstream.

<sup>13</sup> Morton, H.V. (1929) *In Search of Scotland*, London: Methuen, p. 210.

established readership.<sup>14</sup> Introducing the first of these, 'In Search of Scotland', Morton was apparently unaware of the floodgates which he was about to open, noting how 'no book quite of this scope and character has been written since the beginning of the nineteenth century'. Four years later, he cited his inspiration for a second volume:

*'a shower of praise descended on me from every part of the British Empire in the form of letters from Scotsmen and Scotswomen - some of them very angry - asking why I had missed a certain village, glen, hill or loch! I took this to heart and decided that if ever the chance offered itself I would go back and obey where possible these long-distance directions'.*<sup>15</sup>

While fame was assured at home, it could also be sustained by a readership abroad. Morton and his fellow literary lightweights served up a version of Scotland which the Highland diaspora spread throughout Canada, Australia and New Zealand held dear. Ex-patriots, third generation ancestors and naive Jacobite sympathisers were happily seduced by a vision of the old world which dwelt lovingly upon a mythical environment and the Dionysian lifestyle enjoyed by its noble peasantry. Alongside emigrant clansman in the Dominions, 'London Scots', of whom there existed a flourishing and sizeable community, were fervent disciples of the Morton school. Most florid were the descriptions of the Western seaboard and its mosaic of islands which came to represent Scotland in its entirety, a landscape still resonant with tales of regal romance, blood-soaked battlefields and valorous achievement. But first and foremost, this was a place set apart from the rest of Britain, and perhaps, from all else besides.

Typical was an occasion when having transported his readers to Skye, Morton reminded them of their dislocation from reality, 'beyond our ken is a restless place known as Scotland. Much farther away is also a place known as England'.<sup>16</sup> Across the Minch from Skye lay 'the enchanted Western Isles which lie out in the Atlantic and do not seem to belong to this world'.<sup>17</sup> A return to the mainland brought Morton and his wayfaring chums back to a sombre realisation, 'We are indeed back in the world'.<sup>18</sup> Ethereal imagery was an adjunct of

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<sup>14</sup> The presence of 'In Search of Scotland' and 'In Scotland Again' on the shelves of almost any antiquarian or second-hand book shop in Scotland is testimony to both the popularity and enduring appeal of these books.

<sup>15</sup> Morton, H.V. (1933) *In Scotland Again*, London: Methuen, p. vii.

<sup>16</sup> Morton, H.V. (1929) *op cit.* p. 220.

<sup>17</sup> Morton, H.V. (1933) *op cit.* p. 154.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 223.

marginality and the Hebrides became a focus for the unexplained, the supernatural and the fantastic. While to W.A. Mursell they were forever 'The Isles of Sunset' and Seton Gordon 'The Immortal Isles', for Alisdair Alpin Macgregor they were 'The Haunted Isles', his lyrical descriptions skipping fitfully between reality and fantasy.<sup>19</sup> Among Alpin Macgregor's many admirers stood J. Ramsay Macdonald who in the foreword to 'Over the Sea to Skye' assured fellow readers of the book's enviable accuracy.<sup>20</sup> Yet the text detailed a place not just distant from Westminster but one which occupied a different space entirely. A land where, if a politician's sense of time did not stall completely, then it certainly became more elemental than official. Here the make-believe was fused to the half-truths of fables and balladry. *Tir-na-nog*, the mythical 'land of the ever young' and a central component in pan-Celtic folklore, would emerge unfailingly and majestically from a thick bank of sea mist the moment Macgregor graced the archipelago with his presence. In the 'Twilight Highlands' decades could pass, likewise the cataclysmic events of global warfare, but the old ways still endured. Macgregor's works spanned the inter-war years, yet in two decades few concessions were made to either human or technological progress.<sup>21</sup> Seton Gordon, the revered Highland natural historian, trod a similar literary path. Those parts of his texts which dealt with the lives of the crofting communities were idyllic and sun-blessed. The politics of the period - social and economic deprivation, government inactivity, and the intransigence of feudal landownership - very seldom surfaced in his accounts of a land where the turn of the seasons was the greatest force affecting native lifestyles.<sup>22</sup> This timeless appeal was made evident by the enduring popularity of certain travelogues. While

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<sup>19</sup> Mursell, W.A. (1931) *Isles of Sunset: Impressions of the Hebrides*, Aberdeen: Wyllie; Gordon, S. (1926) *The Immortal Isles*, London: Williams & Norgate; Alpin Macgregor, A. (1925) *Behold the Hebrides!*, London: Chambers; Alpin Macgregor, A. (1933) *The Haunted Isles*, London: Alexander Maclehose.

<sup>20</sup> Alpin Macgregor, A. (1926) *Over the Sea to Skye*, London: Chambers. Although described by one excitable reviewer as 'a perfervid son of the Highlands', Macgregor was rather more accustomed to the metropolitan comforts of Harrow-on-the-Hill, London. Aside from his books he penned numerous 'Twilight' articles for society and sporting periodicals. *Oban Times*, 1935 October 22, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that in 1949 Macgregor did manage to execute a remarkable literary *volte face*. Stung by criticism of the Twilight school from the likes of Compton Mackenzie, who mercilessly lampooned Macgregor in his comic novel 'Whisky Galore', he penned a vitriolic attack on the native Hebridean population. Those who had for so long been vaunted as noble paragons in a modern world gone wrong were now vilified and accused of, among other things, alcoholism, laziness, stupidity, fatalism and unnecessary piety. Alpin-MacGregor, A. (1949) *The Western Isles*, London: Robert Hale.

<sup>22</sup> Gordon, S. (1923) *Hebridean Memories*, London: Cassell, p.112 125; Gordon, S. (1929) *The Charm of Skye*, London: Cassell; Gordon, S. (1933) *Islands of the West*, London: Cassell.

first published in 1905, J.A. MacCulloch's 'The Misty Isle of Skye' was still in print and running to a third edition some twenty-two years later.<sup>23</sup>

The natural landscape, simple and organic, several parts rock, water, wood and heather, was the foundation for the liminal, folkloric geography which evolved in these texts. M.E.M. Donaldson took readers on a tour of west coast localities, her journey illustrating the intimacies between natural environment, 'Highland and Clan History, Traditions, Ecclesiology, Archaeology, Romance, Literature and Folklore'.<sup>24</sup> H.V. Morton hauled his audience to the summits of prominent peaks, beguiling them with melodramatic and allegorical evocations of Highland topography. The primeval wilderness set his imagination racing, each new location harbouring untold apparitions. Having explored the 'uncanny' shapes of the Cuillin he remarked that it was 'No wonder the people of Skye are locked away in aloof reticence'. Such was the ridges aura:

*'that a man climbing those awful mysteries alone would have no eyes did he not meet some heathen god crying for blood from hill to hill, or, on entering the darkness of a ravine, did not discover Fingalian warriors crouched against the rock picking great bones of venison, their swords upon their knees.'*<sup>25</sup>

At Loch Coruisk our intrepid traveller was on the lookout for vikings, Norse gods and Valhalla, steaming into Portree his thoughts turned to Ulysses and Jason, while in the great sweep of Sutherland he found 'the very workshop of God'.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, Dunvegan Castle, 'the Iliad of Skye', provided Morton with an excuse to indulge his greatest passion, the 1745 Jacobite rising and its romantic figurehead Bonnie Prince Charlie.<sup>27</sup> At a host of locations throughout the Highlands the ghost of the Young Chevalier drifted eerily past, haunting the author in his spells of solitude. On such occasions Morton's narrative style slipped seamlessly between events separated by almost two centuries, the landscape fusing hero and storyteller, the reader seduced by a vision of this ethereal place, adrift from modernity and punctuated only by isolated historical moments.

The inhabitants of this curious Twilight world, the essentialised Gaels, were depicted as a quaint and 'pawky' race. The contention that they were of distinctive

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<sup>23</sup> MacCulloch, J.A. (1927) *The Misty Isle of Skye*, Stirling: Eneas Mackay.

<sup>24</sup> Donaldson, M.E.M. (1920) *Wanderings in the Western Highlands and Islands*, Paisley: Alexander Gardner, Frontispiece.

<sup>25</sup> Morton, H. V. (1929) op cit. p. 209.

<sup>26</sup> Morton, H.V. (1933) op cit. p. 290.

<sup>27</sup> Morton, H.V. (1929) op cit. p. 213.



racial stock, supported by a range of subjective and anecdotal evidence, was integral to their construction as remote and marginal. Pictish, Norse and Celtic blood-lines were traced by romanticists in search of the essence of Gaeldom. However, eugenics could not explain the strange, spectral abilities with which the race had supposedly been blessed. In Twilight literature the gift of 'second sight', a strong belief in *Tir-na-Nog* the island of everlasting youth and a lilting, if indecipherable, language, set the Gael apart from the twentieth century citizen.

The concomitants of Said's imperial relations of repulsion and seduction could be found in the textual and artistic imagery of the period; slighting parody combined with patriarchal admiration, quizzical incomprehension with gentle empathy and prurient voyeurism with anthropological inquisitiveness.<sup>28</sup> Environmental determinism crept into discussion pieces on the unique Gaelic character. A cocktail of soft sea airs, brisk hill winds and *uisge beatha* contributed to their mystical temperament. Moody, poetic, sensitive, polite, insular, expressive, innocent, earnest, vital, idle, the litany of adjectives clashed as frequently as they complemented each other. Typical was W.S. Morrison who felt that 'few attributes of the Highlander are more remarked upon by natives of the rest of Britain than their politeness which harmonises so well with the quiet and spacious moors'.<sup>29</sup> Here stood a fine specimen, a noble savage for modern Britain, who Morrison felt to have 'carefully nurtured through all the volcanic upheavals of industrialism, a standard of values more accurate than those of this generation'.<sup>30</sup> The Twilight Gael's rejection of material wealth was total, excepting his well-documented partiality for one specific luxury item. Alex Ross offered an aphorism to the uninitiated: 'Whenever you have both money and whisky in your pocket and want to get round a Highlander, always, begin with the whisky, for then you will never have to spend money on him'.<sup>31</sup> Attempting to be jocular, and succeeding only in causing offence, 'Simplicitas' asked of the Highlanders:

*'Where are their great men, their world leaders and world beaters,  
their Fords and Northcliffes, their international footballers, their*

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<sup>28</sup> The hackneyed images of the Highlander dressed 'in speckled drapery to which bits of flora and fauna have been stuck' or as an escapee 'from the murkier sections of nineteenth century illustrated medical dictionaries' are dissected in: Murray, J. (1986) 'Whistlers in the Dark: The Heilan Picture Postcard', in Maclean, M. and Carrell, C. (eds.) *As an Fearann - From the Land: A Century of Pictures in the Scottish Highlands*, Stornoway: An Lanntair, p.88.

<sup>29</sup> Morrison, W.S. (1929) 'On Highland Politeness', *Scots Magazine*, XII (2) p. 86-96; see also, Morrison, W.S. (1927) 'Electioneering in the Western Isles', *Scots Magazine*, VII (6) p. 401-411.

<sup>30</sup> Morrison, W.S. (1929) *op cit.* p. 96.

<sup>31</sup> Ross, A. (1925) 'Access to the Mountains: Both Sides of the Question', *Scots Magazine*, III (1) p. 46-50; 48.

*rugby teams, their cricketers and pugilists, their actors, advertising agents and referees? Where are their policemen? In Glasgow. And their politicians? In opposition. Where are their poems? In Gaelic. Where are their tramways and coal mines, their traffic and civic extension problems, their civilisation and subways and slums. Echo answers.*<sup>32</sup>

However lame the satire, the author succeeded in cementing the familiar liminal identity of an undeveloped and simple people. While rather more respectful, Seton Gordon's confidence in the Gaels' adherence to the tenets of ancient custom did little to break the mould. It still allowed him to claim, in 1949, that 'The Hebridean has a respect for old families, for old traditions. The chief of the clan is still, by the older generation, considered to be the father of the people'.<sup>33</sup> These bonds of ancient kinship masked the omnipotence of the laird in modern Highland society. By celebrating their continued relevance authors like Gordon also consolidated the established social order and its ossified power structures.<sup>34</sup> The persuasiveness of Clan mythology allowed H.V. Morton to state quite unblushingly that, 'There is no servility in Scotland. A man has always been as good as his master. The Celt, unlike the Saxon, never knew the feudal system and never touched his forelock to a baron. The clan was a family, not a social hierarchy'.<sup>35</sup>

Value-laden oppositions were never far distant in Twilight literature, so while the Gael's indubitable loyalty was wholly admirable, his pronunciation of the English language was the source of much amusement and ribaldry. Phonetics were used to emphasise the contortions which the Highland tongue could apparently wrap around the simplest of utterances.<sup>36</sup> Morton compared the 'sparkling cascades of Gaelic' he heard on his travels with the 'slow, deliberate' attempts at English.<sup>37</sup> His account of a rain-swept journey across Mull is replete with anthropological observances and demonstrates the full melange of 'Twilightisms':

*'Now and then over the roads of Mull would come the figure of some ancient dripping man with the rain beads on his beard, on his shaggy eyebrows, and on the ridges of fox-coloured hair which Highlanders grow on the cheek-bones. And he would pause to say,*

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<sup>32</sup> 'Simplicitas' (1925) 'Tir nam Beann: Land of the Hills', in Gunn, H. (ed.) *The Empire Book of Big Game*, London: Simpkin Marshall and Hamilton, Appendix III.

<sup>33</sup> Gordon, S. (1949) *A Foot in the Hebrides*, London: Country Life, p. 17-18.

<sup>34</sup> Seton Gordon's 'establishment' credentials were impeccable, he was a friend of numerous Highland landowners, a perennial speaker at a variety of Clan Gatherings and a confidante of the Royal Family.

<sup>35</sup> Morton, H.V. (1933) op cit. p. 220.

<sup>36</sup> For an example see: MacDougall, G.A. 'The Crofter', *Scots Magazine*, IX (2) p. 49-50.

<sup>37</sup> Morton, H.V. (1933) op cit, p. 180.

*after grim deliberation, with the air of one who has convinced himself of a mighty truth:*

*"Ay-he, it's wet the dee."*

*The recognised reply as, standing in a young river, you lean against the storm, is to shout:*

*"Ay, it is so!"*

*And the old man will splash on, apparently confirmed in his opinion.<sup>38</sup>*

In this cross-cultural encounter, Morton offers evidence of the Highlander's physical hardiness, his purity and simplicity, mild manners, intangible antiquity and finally his idiosyncratic dialect. Unlike Morton, some observers, among them Arthur Gardner, felt inhibited by the impenetrability of native culture. A keen preservationist and enthusiastic landscape photographer, Gardner was troubled that in the Highlands 'so many grand mountains should have been inflicted with such appalling names'. Gaelic vocabulary, he argued, abounded:

*'in sounds that no tongue not brought up to it can produce...(and) words so long and forbidding in appearance that they rouse the same sort of repulsion in the mind of a stranger that the old-fashioned art student feels on visiting an exhibition of Cubist pictures'.<sup>39</sup>*

The analogy was at once incongruous and revealing. While most perpetrators of these myths chose to ignore the inevitable encroachment of modernity into simple Highland lives, some felt the need to speak out.

### Safeguarding the Highland Vernacular

M.E.M. Donaldson, in her self-proclaimed role as doyenne on all matters Highland, rebuked the profiteers who seemed hell-bent on introducing a culture of 'gross materialism and innate vulgarities' to a population of innocents.<sup>40</sup> Warning that modern life's 'falsities' were steadily permeating the 'purities' of Scottish Gaeldom, she noted how the latest lines in clothing were now sported by Highland girls, a trend which meant that 'the dress of native womanhood has suffered the inevitable declension, due to the following of freakish fashions that are entirely Socialistic in their effects'.<sup>41</sup> Equally reprehensible was the use by Gaelic speakers

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 170.

<sup>39</sup> Gardner, A. (1947) *Western Highlands*, London: B.T. Batsford, p. 15-16.

<sup>40</sup> Donaldson, M.E.M. (1927) 'To Such Base Uses: How the Highlands are Spoiled and Desecrated', *Scots Magazine*, VIII (1) p. 1-7.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 3. Donaldson's entry in 'Who's Who' betrays in large degree the eccentricity for which she was to become well-known in the Highlands, it read: 'authority on all Highland subjects;

'of vulgarisms present in Glasgow', the 'practice of tipping by Sassenachs which has fastened on the Highlander an entirely alien character for grasping greed' and the repercussions of boarding-out 'morally contaminated' slum children in rural communities.<sup>42</sup> By highlighting the decline in ancient standards Donaldson made vocal the conservative anxieties of those whose interest lay in the Highland vernacular. Communities may well have been beset with a panoply of social and economic problems but of much greater consequence to the romantic preservationist was the possible erosion of native custom and tradition.

This disquiet over the continued future of 'Heilan' culture was shared by the many members of Highland Associations and Clan Societies at home and abroad. Amid a blaze of tartanry the Clan diaspora kept the Twilight flag flying at lavish balls and dainty ceilidhs. Society protocol demanded that the chieftain's address was followed by Highland flings, Grand Marches, hearty renditions of 'The Skye Boat Song' and other appropriate recitations. Not untypical was a 1937 meeting of the London Highland Club where 'a large and representative Highland audience', presided over by Colonel Ian Campbell of Airds, was entertained by Mr. Lachlan Campbell's lecture 'The Road to the Isles'. The address, replete with 'legends, descriptions and fairies', was interspersed with native ditties sung by Mr. Alex Macrae.<sup>43</sup> Modern lairds under their hereditary guise of Clan Chieftain were particularly susceptible to such potent concoctions of Highland romance. Sir Ian Malcolm of Poltulloch felt the need to publish his 'Songs O' the Clachan', as he felt poetry to have 'fallen on evil times in these days of mechanism and practicality'.<sup>44</sup> Meanwhile, Sir John Stirling-Maxwell's private penchant was for the 'Shrines and Homes of Scotland'.<sup>45</sup>

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ceaseless fighter against all aversions; constantly opposes everything American and Americans generally; the new rich, especially non-Gaelic proprietors in the Highlands; all things pseudo Highland; Clan Campbell; all Protestant sects; smoking; painting of ladies fashionably unclad; most modern tendencies and schools of "thought"; strictly Tory; diet - meat, almost solely; non-teetotal'. Donaldson's crankiness did not escape the attentions of the caricaturist Compton Mackenzie, a man for whom 'the Highland district has no secrets'. An unashamed rumour-monger, Mackenzie happily cast doubt over the nature of Donaldson's relationship with her 'friend' and illustrator Miss Isobel Bonus. NTS 'Sanna Beag' Boxfile; see also, Morton, H. V. (1933) op cit. p. 254.

<sup>42</sup> Donaldson, M.E.M. (1927) op cit. p. 3-5. In the case of the latter Donaldson maintained that such street urchins 'should be segregated in the same way as persons suffering from infectious diseases, for both classes are equally dangerous to the community'.

<sup>43</sup> *Oban Times* 1937 January 16, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Malcolm, I. (1939) *Songs O' The Clachan*, Edinburgh: Moray Press, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Stirling-Maxwell, J. (1937) *The Shrines and Homes of Scotland*, London: Alexander Maclehose.

Much patrician interest in modern economic development for the homeland appeared cosmetic, infused with a familiar strain of romanticism and an occasional eccentricity. In 1934 Sir Samuel Strang, the laird of Amhuinsuidh estate on the Isle of Harris, worked in conjunction with the British Rocket Syndicate Ltd. on experiments to deliver mail to the Outer Hebrides by missile.<sup>46</sup> Harris had also been the venue for Lord Leverhulme's infamous industrial experiments in the early 1920's. His attempt to develop the island economy by employing the local population in a revived fishing industry quickly descending into acrimony and misunderstanding, swiftly followed by collapse.<sup>47</sup> Rather less impressed by modernity was the Earl of Cassilis who as an APRS office-bearer and president of the Edinburgh Ross and Cromarty Association felt that Highland societies should 'be careful to keep away from politics'.<sup>48</sup> Emotive patrician speeches might make passing reference to the need for greater government investment, but the accent was placed firmly on traditional artistry and domestic crafts. 'Highland Home Industries', a private company established between the wars by the bountiful Clan nobility in collaboration with the sporting elite, stands as a case in point. Exhibiting and selling 'native homely produce' to a predominantly aristocratic market, the company counted the Duchess of Gloucester and Viscountess Fincastle among its patrons, in addition to four assorted Countesses and eleven Ladies in waiting. The annual exhibition of tweeds, clothing and handicraft was held in Grosvenor Square, London at a property belonging to Major Philip Fleming, the long-time sporting tenant of the Blackmount deer forest.<sup>49</sup> 'Traditional' Highland Games and Gatherings provided the lairdocracy with another means to prolong the Twilight. Ostensibly a celebration of the democratic clan ideal, allowing clansmen and chieftains the opportunity to fraternise on equal terms, in reality the Games ceremonies were orchestrated expressions of continued feudal power and prestige.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> The inventor of the mail rocket claimed that when fired from Skye it could easily reach North Uist, although at such a range 'an area of about a quarter of a mile would have to be cleared for safety'. *Oban Times* 1934 August 18 p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> For further details of Leverhulme various schemes on Lewis and Harris see: Hunter, J. (1976) *The Making of the Crofting Community*, Edinburgh: John Donald; Nicholson, N. (1960) *Lord of the Isles: Lord Leverhulme in the Hebrides*, London. See also: SRO AF 67 251-254.

<sup>48</sup> *Oban Times* 1937 October 16, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> *Oban Times* 1939 July 29, p. 3; *The Times* 1933 June 19 p. 17; 1933 June 26 p. 17.

<sup>50</sup> The early history and subsequent popularity of Highland Gatherings in the early part of the 20th century is dealt with in: Colquhoun, I. & Machell, H. (1927) *Highland Gatherings: being accounts of the Braemar, Northern and Luss Meetings*, London: Heath Cranton. The tarnishing of the Highland Games' by modernity was an issue dealt with in: Gunn, N.M. (1931) 'Highland Games',

The safeguarding of the Highlands' architectural, agricultural and folk heritage was a crusade which also found favour among the concerned membership of the APRS and NTS. Textual evocations of the Celtic Twilight were all very well but was it possible for the old world to be preserved in perpetuity? Unsurprisingly, M.E.M. Donaldson was an outspoken supporter of the landscape preservation movement. Forthright in her condemnation of the 'base uses' to which the Highlands were increasingly being put, she claimed that in 1927 examples of architectural 'bad manners and Bolshevism' existed in even the most remote glens. Industrial schemes, red-roofed brick villas and the use of corrugated iron in housing design were labelled, 'an offence in Scottish Gaeldom'.<sup>51</sup> Donaldson was equally troubled by 'the ruthless spoiling of beautiful country roads in the process of widening or "improving" them'.<sup>52</sup> These highways were not simply lines of communication speeding charabancs on their way but conduits for the transfer of moral turpitude from the tenements to the sanctity of a bucolic rural realm. The Duke of Argyll complained that with new roads 'people rushed over the countryside so fast that they hardly knew which county they were in'.<sup>53</sup> Arthur Gardner meanwhile hoped 'that the roads will not be straightened out and made into racing tracks, even if their surfaces are improved'.<sup>54</sup> The amenity value of the landscape was also thought to suffer. According to Fitzherbert, *Country Life's* sporting correspondent, 'no-one can pretend that railways and arterial roads can ever become welcome or agreeable features in the Highland landscape'.<sup>55</sup> Though Sir John Stirling-Maxwell might have had some cause to argue. In return for allowing the West Highland railway to traverse his property the laird had a station constructed at the heart of Corrour deer forest to service his stalking guests.<sup>56</sup>

Having already shown themselves capable of petty opposition to infrastructural improvements the APRS, who could count Arthur Gardner as one of

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*Scots Magazine*, XV (6) p. 412-416. Incisive analysis of the role of Highland Games in myth-making and the division of social power can be found in: Jarvie, G. (1989) 'Sport, Highland Gatherings and Cultural Form', *Cenchrastus*, 32 p. 21-23; Jarvie, G. (1991) *Highland Games: The Making of the Myth*, Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh; Jarvie, G. 'Royal Games, Sport and the Politics of the Environment', in Jarvie, G. & Walker, G. (eds.) (1994) *Scottish Sport in the Making of the Nation: Ninety Minute Patriots?*, Leicester: Leicester University Press, p. 154-172.

<sup>51</sup> Donaldson, M.E.M. (1927) op cit. p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>53</sup> *Oban Times*, 1934 October 20, p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> Gardner, A. (1937) The Caledonian Power Scheme, *Country Life*, LXXXII (2136) p. 647-649.

<sup>55</sup> Fitzherbert, C. (1938) 'Deer-Stalking Days', in a souvenir Scottish Supplement to *Country Life*, LXXXIV (2165) p. ix.

<sup>56</sup> Hart-Davis, D. (1978) *Monarchs of the Glen: a history of deer stalking in the Highlands*, London: Jonathan Cape, p. 184.

their strongest supporters, contacted the Ministry of Transport to protest emphatically 'against the idea that the finest glens in Scotland must be cut and carved in order to satisfy a theoretically perfect standard of road construction'.<sup>57</sup> Sir John Stirling-Maxwell happily cited Drumochter, Cairn O'Mount, the Devil's Elbow and Beinn Bhan on the Applecross Ridge as 'wild places which now traversed by roads have become tame'.<sup>58</sup> He and Sir Iain Colquhoun were united in their condemnation of new 'Highland cubist bridges' which were 'entirely out of keeping' with their surroundings.<sup>59</sup> The 'tragedy of working with unsympathetic materials' was demonstrated in these constructions 'bristling with bastions, minarets and scroll work'.<sup>60</sup> While bridges on the Great North Road were the cause of some concern, acute anxieties arose over the earth movements taking place in Glencoe as part of the long awaited upgrading of the Glasgow-Fort William route.<sup>61</sup> Lord Haddington, Lord Constable and their APRS associates noted with some horror that these 'improvements' might enable the tourist 'to rush through Glencoe in safety at 50 or 60 miles an hour'.<sup>62</sup> Sir Iain Colquhoun, having favoured minor alterations to the circuitous coastal route via Oban, was disappointed to find that a site inspection had revealed 'cuttings and bankings of a drastic character' (see figure 26).<sup>63</sup> The construction company were subsequently accused of adopting 'an exaggerated form of engineering', as a means of demonstrating modern construction techniques in their execution of the approved plans.<sup>64</sup> The belated campaign to protect the Glen's natural appearance was backed by *The Scottish Field*, which bemoaned 'ultra-modern' designs 'too pretentious' in character (see figure 27).<sup>65</sup> Ramsay Macdonald also lent his weight to proceedings,

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<sup>57</sup> SRO GD 325/1/395 APRS to Lieut. Col. Wilfred Ashby MP, Ministry of Transport, 1927 October 29.

<sup>58</sup> SRO GD 335/40 Scottish Rights of Way Society, Notes from National Reserve Conference, 1929 June 4. The Central Highlands Road Society and Great North Road Society were both affiliated to the APRS. Their main objects were to protect the amenity of the countryside fringing these routes by 'endeavouring to avert disfigurement caused by badly planned and indiscriminate building'. APRS/ECM vol. I 1929 July 25.

<sup>59</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 1930 January 29 p. 7; *Glasgow Herald*, 1930 April 26 p. 7.

<sup>60</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 1930 April 26 p. 7. An alternative view of the new Highland bridges can be found in: Hurd, R. (1932) 'Building Scotland', in Thomson, D.C. (ed.) *Scotland in Quest of Her Youth*, Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, p. 172-190.

<sup>61</sup> The construction project was of sufficient importance to receive continued attention in the national press. *The Times* 1930 November 8 p. 16; 1932 October 19 p. 18; 1934 October 3 p. 16; October 8 p. 10.

<sup>62</sup> SRO GD 325/1/395 APRS to Lieut. Col. Wilfred Ashby MP, Ministry of Transport, 1927 October 29.

<sup>63</sup> APRS ECM vol. 1. 1932 January 27; vol. 1. 1931 January 28.

<sup>64</sup> APRS ECM vol. 1. 1931 January 28.

<sup>65</sup> *The Scottish Field*, 1928 LI (301) p. 36.





Figure 26 - A Cutting for the New Glencoe Road

Source: White's Postcards



Figure 27 - Old and New Roads in Glencoe

Source: Valentine's Postcards



advocating forms of industrialisation which would not harm the scenery of which he was so very fond. In spite of these protestations, opposition to the scheme proved unsuccessful. Undaunted, the APRS did manage to enforce the removal of an offending drinking fountain positioned at the Glen's watershed to service parched tourists stopping to enjoy the view.<sup>66</sup> As K.C. Ferguson, the organising secretary, warned his fellow committee members, since 'exploitative ventures were very likely to follow the new roads' they should constantly be on their guard for 'exotic types of buildings, hoardings and the like'.<sup>67</sup> Preventative action over the minutiae of rural development was rapidly becoming the hallmark of the Association.

Elsewhere, at the invitation of the Earl of Cassillis, Sir John Stirling-Maxwell addressed a meeting of the Philosophical Institution on 'the industrial threats to the amenity of the countryside'.<sup>68</sup> With few effective planning controls yet in place the APRS took it upon themselves to offer their services as a rural design consultancy with a unique working knowledge of the Scottish landscape. Help and advice were made available to those keen 'to preserve the character and the beauty of our Highland scenery and its dwellings'.<sup>69</sup> A cosy network of relations was soon established. Committee members Frank Mears and Mr. Hall-Blyth, the respective owners of an architectural and construction firm, worked closely with Highland lairds on a variety of building projects.<sup>70</sup> For the moment at least, the Association's subversive influence on projects which sought to modernise the Highland way of life was tempered by their positive contributions to building and landscape design.

The preservation of Highland heritage and the Twilight world could take on other forms. While museums and formal exhibitions were the preference of the more discerning observer, more liberated minds toyed with the concept of living exhibits and displays of native culture. As early as 1931, J.B. Mackay had contacted the NTS to suggest that a National Folk Museum might be combined with a National Park. He visualised a natural loch surrounded by a series of mock

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<sup>66</sup> APRS ECM vol. 2. 1933 January 28.

<sup>67</sup> APRS ECM vol. 2. 1934 December 5.

<sup>68</sup> *Oban Times* 1930 February 8 p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> *Oban Times* 1933 October 28, p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> Among those to consult the panel of experts were the Trustees of the Seafield Estate, the factor of the Breadalbane estate concerning proposed buildings at Bridge of Orchy, the Lochiel estate over the plans for a petrol station at Achintore and Lord Breadalbane himself on the nature of certain public buildings at Killin. Frank Mears also sat, as APRS representative, on the 'Building Committee' of the newly formed Scottish Youth Hostels Association APRS ECM vol. 2. 1933 April 26; June 28; July 26; September 27; 1935 June 5.

villages, each representing a different period in history. The emphasis would be placed on organic lifestyles, with actual demonstrations of domestic chores, native crafts and industries such as boatbuilding.<sup>71</sup> Alan Ogilvie, Professor of Geography at Edinburgh University, made a similar suggestion to the Trust a year later.<sup>72</sup> Prominent in such debate and present on the executive committee's of both the APRS and NTS was Miss Isobel F. Grant, the renowned Scottish historian and founder of *Am Fasgadh*, the West Highland Folk Museum. A tireless campaigner on behalf of this pioneering heritage project, she described it as a place 'to shelter homely ancient Highland things from destruction'.<sup>73</sup> Located in a disused church on Iona and later moving to Laggan and Kingussie, her hope was that the museum would demonstrate to its audience how 'in the Highlands there was no separate 'peasant culture' because society was homogenous and the traditions of the people were aristocratic'.<sup>74</sup> Grant's romantic reading of history was warmly embraced by an inquisitive public. Among those who visited 'The Shelter' in its first season were an exiled Gaelic woman who thanked Grant for 'helping people feel their roots', children who declared the exhibits 'realer than history' and an aged returning emigrant who claimed to 'feel nearer this day to my youth than I have for years'.<sup>75</sup> Spurred on by flourishing folk movements in Scandinavia, Grant also laid out elaborate, but ultimately abortive, plans for an extensive Highland folk park. A series of cottage tableaux would link material relics with rural superstitions, stories and work songs, all the while reminding the audience that 'the glory of the old Highland setting lay in its extreme simplicity allied with a vigorous mental life'.<sup>76</sup> Grant's undoubted expertise had previously been called upon to co-ordinate a 'Highland Exhibition' held in Inverness during 1930.<sup>77</sup> The collection comprised

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<sup>71</sup> NTS 'Folk Museums' Boxfile, J.B. Mackay to NTS Executive, 1931 June 22.

<sup>72</sup> NTS ECM vol. 1 1932 April 20.

<sup>73</sup> Grant, I.F. (1944) *Am Fasgadh, The Highland Folk Museum at Kingussie, Inverness-hire* (Museum Guide), Maclehose: Glasgow, p. 3; Grant, I.F. (1938) 'Am Fasgadh: The Highland Folk Museum', in Scottish Supplement to *Country Life*, LXXXIV (2165) p. x.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>75</sup> NTS 'Folk Museums' Boxfile, I.F. Grant to A. Russell, 1937 February 17.

<sup>76</sup> It was Grant's intention that the folk park be located on the main road between Perth and Dalwhinnie or on the route through Tyndrum and Crianlarich to attract the tourist crowds. She stressed that the setting 'should be of an undulating character. Cottages typical of different localities which would be erected should not be visible together to the extent which they would be in the case of dead flat ground'. The failure of the NTS to support Grant's scheme, as they deemed it outwith their powers and objects, led to her resignation from the organisation in 1937. NTS 'Folk Museums' Boxfile, Executive Committee Memorandum Re: Establishment of a Highland Folk Museum, 1937; I.F. Grant to Capt. E.D. Stevenson, 1936 May 29; NTS ECM vol. 3 1937 April 21.

an impressive array of antiques and curios donated from patrons throughout the mainland and islands. Relics from the 1745 Jacobite rising vied with ancient agricultural implements and latter-day domestic appliances for the public's attention.<sup>78</sup> The accent was placed firmly upon the past, no exhibits were included which dealt with the contemporary Highland situation.

Admirable attempts at social history though they may have been, both the museum and exhibition added further accretions to the myth of an idyllic rural existence while diverting public attention from the harsh realities of modern life. Displays of relics and re-presentations of domestic arcadias to an audience weened on the Twilight opiate blurred the already hazy distinction between Highland past and present. Similar questions over issues of authenticity and the ethnographer's indelible imprint marked a heritage saga which contrived to span the better part of the 1930's.

#### From Callanish to Bellahouston: The Curious Case of the Hebridean Blackhouse

Early in 1933 the organising secretary of the APRS wrote to the NTS executive suggesting the purchase of an original Hebridean 'blackhouse' as a worthwhile conservation exercise. He warned that with new government programmes giving provision for the construction of modern 'whitehouses' to replace these traditional structures, 'in ten years time, if no action is taken, we shall be lamenting a wholesale slaughter'.<sup>79</sup> It was surely within the Trust's remit, he argued, to ensure that 'one spot might be kept forever Hebridean'.<sup>80</sup> Significantly, the native Highlander was far less sentimental about the indigenous abode. For many the

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<sup>77</sup> The landscape preservation movement was also represented by the Mackintosh of Mackintosh, president of the exhibition, and the historian Evan Barron, involved in its organisation. *The Times*, 1930 August 4 p. 8; September 13 p. 8; Grant, I.F. (1930) 'The Forthcoming Highland Exhibition', *Scots Independent*, July p. 119; 'Highland Notes', *Scots Independent*, 1930 October p. 166; N.M. Gunn 'The Highland Exhibition in Inverness', *Scottish Motor Transport Magazine*, (no date), NLS Dep. 209 Box 8 (66).

<sup>78</sup> *The Times* 1930 August 4 p. 8, 14; August 5 p. 8; September 2 p. 14; September 13 p. 8.

<sup>79</sup> The steady work of the Board of Agriculture for Scotland (BOAS) ensured that the number of blackhouses on government owned land fell markedly. For example, at the Kilmuir estate on Skye between 1904 and 1929 the number of thatched houses dropped from 336 to 137, and the number of modern stone-built houses with slated roofs increased from 20 to 304. BOAS (1929) *19th Annual Report*, p. 32-33.

<sup>80</sup> The cottages were felt to evoke 'something definitely Highland and national', while 'from an artistic point of view' they were 'of course, charming...From a constructional point of view they are of great interest, as admirably built to resist wind and weather'. NTS ECM vol. 1 1933 January 18; NTS 'Hebridean Cottage' Boxfile (NTS/HCB) , K.C. Ferguson to Capt. E.D. Stevenson, undated.

blackhouse represented a way of life no longer tenable in a developing society. Lacking in amenities, harbouring bacteria in thatched roofs and unsealed walls, and manifesting the stigma of marginality, the buildings were an anachronism to the progressive thinker.<sup>81</sup>

The NTS, unwilling to bow to the advance of modernity, chose to rise to the challenge of blackhouse preservation. I.F. Grant, Seton Gordon and K.C. Ferguson agreed to make pertinent enquiries in the Highlands and report on their findings. During the winter months the redoubtable Miss Grant scoured the region in search of a suitable property, her roving bulletins mentioned three possibilities, 'all native', near Drumbuie, while 'a friend of a friend' had been thwarted at the Kyle of Lochalsh where good cottages existed 'but the people refuse to sell'.<sup>82</sup> By June 1933, a suitable cottage had been identified at Callanish on the Isle of Lewis by Lieutenant-Colonel John Macrae of Stornoway who agreed to represent the Trust in the negotiations for purchase. Macrae's credentials for the post of agent and executor were however, far from adequate. In correspondence he confessed to never having 'been in a blackhouse, although I have stayed in a crofter's white house'.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, having inspected the premises, he could confidently state that 'it appears to be several hundred years old and though it has undergone a certain amount of internal repairs it could quite easily be put back into its original state'.<sup>84</sup> In a cautionary note he did add that 'it has not quite the old atmosphere -

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<sup>81</sup> M.E.M. Donaldson felt the complete opposite to be the case, arguing that the newly constructed houses were in fact less substantially built, less warm and 'in regard to sanitary conveniences...not in the least in advance of the old'. She was wholly unimpressed by the work of the BOAS and failed to understand the Highlanders' shame at their native architecture: 'This has been stressed in my own experience of going about the Highlands with my camera. Over and over again when I have gone with it up to the door of a thatched cottage to ask permission to take a photograph of the house, the occupant has anticipated me by requesting me not to do so'. Donaldson, M.E.M. (1928) 'Old Houses for New', *Scots Magazine*, IX (2) p. 82-83. A variety of opinions on the future of the blackhouse during the 1930's and 1940's are included in: 'Editorial: No Reprieve for the Blackhouse' *Stornoway Gazette and West Coast Advertiser*, 1952 March 21 p. 5.

<sup>82</sup> Grant regularly toured the region retrieving antiquarian items from junk sales, auctions and tinkers carts in what she termed 'a private effort to meet the emergency'. Combining these activities with her survey, she submitted a detailed report to the Trust in the Summer of 1933. The work, ethnographic in tone, outlined the subtle differences in blackhouse design which existed between island communities, some of which were attributed to micro-climatic factors. NTS 'Folk Museums' Boxfile, I.F. Grant to A. Russell 1937 February 17; NTS/HCB, I.F. Grant to Sir Iain Colquhoun 1933 January 28; I.F. Grant to Capt. E.D. Stevenson 1933 March 9; 'Hebridean Cottage Survey' by I.F. Grant.

<sup>83</sup> NTS/HCB, Col. J.L. Macrae to A. Russell 1933 November 29.

<sup>84</sup> NTS/HCB, Col. J.L. Macrae to A. Russell 1933 November 16. Macrae could confirm that 'the byre and living room walls are old, but the gable is not old, perhaps 30 or 35 years'. He had also inspected another small blackhouse which backed onto the property. It was owned by 'two old women, not long for this world', but he conceded that 'when they die the house will be pulled down'. NTS/HCB, Col. J. L. Macrae to A. Russell 1933 November 29.

i.e. there is little or no peat reek, one can see on entering and ones eyes do not smart or stream as would be the case in the old days'.<sup>85</sup> Despite these doubts over the cottage's archaic heritage, a contract was duly drawn up with the owner, a crofter John Smith, and the sale finalised in December 1933. Demonstrating a level of entrepreneurial acumen seldom afforded the whimsical Gael, Smith had the deal hurried through, offered his services as a caretaker for the original property while also declaring his intention to build a new house closby.<sup>86</sup> In addition to the building itself the Trust also took possession of its antiquarian contents, 'the age of all of which Mr Smith vouches for'.<sup>87</sup> These assurances aside, Macrae felt himself 'not qualified to give an opinion' on their authenticity.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless the contract for the particulars of Black House, No. 14a Callanish detailed, with some drama, a range of items including:

*'One clothes chest over 100 years old. The original owner of this chest was 99 years of age when he died, and his son-in-law the next owner was 80 years old; and the grandson the present owner is 59 years of age. One kitchen set originally in use in the days of the great grandfather of the present owner. One cradle in which at least three generations have been raised'.<sup>89</sup>*

Following the purchase the blackhouse lay idle for two years. Detailed plans were made in committee for its use as a folk museum exhibiting these items and other pieces of 'primitive furniture and obsolete agricultural implements which could be bought in backward parts of the island'.<sup>90</sup> All was not well on Lewis however. A local committee, led by Canon Meadan and Sheriff Mackinnes of Stornoway, having been invited to liaise with the NTS on the project voiced their utter disapproval of its intents. If such buildings were to be preserved then they declared it an insult to the native community to claim that the cottage in question was a typical crofter's house. Feelings ran high, missives were dispatched to the Trust executive while Colonel Macrae, feeling himself to be the villain of the piece, considered tendering his resignation from the organisation.<sup>91</sup> The blackhouse came

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<sup>85</sup> NTS/HCB, Col. J.L. Macrae to A. Russell 1933 December 3.

<sup>86</sup> Colonel Macrae informed the executive that Smith 'would like to build a house 20 or 30 yards away from the "blackhouse" on the croft and as he starts cultivating corn and potatoes in April on the site of his new house he would like to know if there is a chance of selling the old one on an early date'. NTS/HCB, Col. J.L. Macrae to A. Russell 1933 November 23.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> NTS/HCB, Col. J.L. Macrae to A. Russell 1933 November 28.

<sup>89</sup> NTS/HCB, Contract for the particulars of Black House, 14a Callanish. Signed by John Smith, 23rd October 1933.

<sup>90</sup> NTS/HCB, Col. J.L. Macrae to A. Russell 1933 December 3.

<sup>91</sup> NTS/HCB, Col. J.L. Macrae to A. Russell 1935 December 5.

under the scrutiny of several authorities on vernacular architecture, none was impressed. The NTS now secretly suspicious that they had been duped, became increasingly embarrassed by their 'original' Hebridean blackhouse. Relations between Lewis and Edinburgh deteriorated further when it was discovered that local crofters on the lookout for spare timber had acquired several rafters, reportedly brought down from the cottage roof during a spell of bad weather.

Acting to rescue the vestiges of the cottage and their own credibility, the NTS commissioned designs for the property's conversion into a 'genuine' Hebridean blackhouse. These were based on photographs taken by Alexander Williamson of a building in Braga, Lewis which, they were assured, was truly authentic. When consulted over the proposals the local committee procrastinated at great length, arguing that five or six architectural styles existed on the island and that further advice should be sought from the Scottish Land Court. In the meantime the cottage remained open to the visiting public as a folk museum, many left disappointed. Halliday Sutherland declared that 'Everything about that black house was wrong. There were skylights in iron frames on the thatched roof and the walls were cemented'. He greeted with horror, the suggestion by John Smith's wife that they might 'build a bedroom on behind'. If you do he exclaimed 'you will be showing a blackhouse such as never existed from the Butt of Lewis to Barra'.<sup>92</sup> Mr. L.B. Russ, a trust member, was similarly shocked by the building's general state of decay. He informed Sir Iain Colquhoun of what he had found on a trip to Callanish:

*'I thought it was in a dilapidated condition last year, but now...! The hole in the roof lets in a continual stream which now has a tendency to convert the floor into a mud-pie...The fire does not look as if it has been lit for weeks. The interior portion of the house looks as if it housed hens in it. The caretaker vigorously denied the suggestion, although four or five hens walked out as we walked in'.<sup>93</sup>*

This was certainly not the Twilight world which the likes of Morton or Macgregor had brought their readers to expect. Faced with such criticism and fearful of the next farcical development in the project the Trust shelved plans for renovation and agreed that the entire contents of the cottage should be loaned out for use in a mock

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<sup>92</sup> Sutherland, H. (1939) *Hebridean Journey*, London: Geoffrey Bles, p. 214.

<sup>93</sup> NTS/HCB, L.B. Russ to Sir Iain Colquhoun 1938 October 1.

Highland village already under construction at Bellahouston Park, Glasgow, the venue for the 1938 Empire Exhibition.<sup>94</sup>

The gesture were welcomed by the organisers of the Empire Exhibition having promised their international audience a life-size and living Highland spectacle. On completion 'An Clachan' comprised a clutch of blackhouses, an inn, bridge, castle, and smithy huddled around a burn and small loch with its own rowing boats. With painted stage-set landscapes providing the appropriate backdrop, visitors could purchase postcards at a working post-office and send them around the globe from this 'real' Highland setting (see figure 28). During months of construction, infinite care had been taken to replicate the intuitive techniques of the Hebridean craftsman. The costs of importing authentic stone having proven prohibitive, the blackhouse walls were actually painted and tainted moulds of plaster casts taken from original structures. Different architectural styles originating from Lewis, Skye and Argyll were each represented, alongside a prototype modern Highland home.<sup>95</sup> The cottage interiors were furnished with, among other items, the Callanish dowry, the antiquarian origins of which remained highly questionable. The *coup de grace* in this display of kitsch, artifice and illusion were the native Highlanders and Glaswegian Gaels permanently resident on site, decked out resplendently in vernacular costume. These living exhibits were employed to demonstrate a different native craft on the doorstep or hearth of each blackhouse.

Although dwarfed by the imperious, modernist Empire tower, the quaint Clachan nestling in a sheltered hollow vied for the crown of the exhibition's most popular attraction (see figure 29).<sup>96</sup> Paying a visit on the opening day, the King and Queen were particularly charmed by Mrs Mary Morrison, originally from Barra, who entertained them with an old Gaelic song as she worked at her spinning wheel.<sup>97</sup> The Clachan's official inauguration, held in the castle, was graced by several Clan chieftains.<sup>98</sup> All attested to the clachan's authentic atmosphere

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<sup>94</sup> Borthwick, A. (1938) 'The Empire in a Park', *Scottish Field*, March p. 16-17.

<sup>95</sup> Dr. Colin Sinclair was chief architect in the design and construction of 'An Clachan'. Sinclair's design for a modern Highland home took its inspiration from Hebridean blackhouses but 'fulfilled modern standards of light, ventilation and sanitation'. Sinclair, C. (1938) 'The Clachan Rediscovered', *Scottish Field*, March p. 18-19.

<sup>96</sup> 120,000 people visited the Clachan in the fortnight after its inauguration. *Glasgow Herald*, 1938 May p. 8.

<sup>97</sup> *Scottish Field*, 1938 May p. 57.

<sup>98</sup> Sir Donald Cameron of Lochiel, Lady Hermione of Lochiel, Sir Iain Colquhoun, the Duke and Duchess of Montrose and Sir Henry Keith were all in attendance. They were joined by the Lord Provost of Glasgow Sir John Stewart, Dr. Colin Sinclair, J.M. Bannerman and Sir Alexander MacEwen. *Scottish Field*, 1938 June p. 23.

# AN CLACHAN

## The Highland Village in the Heart of Glasgow

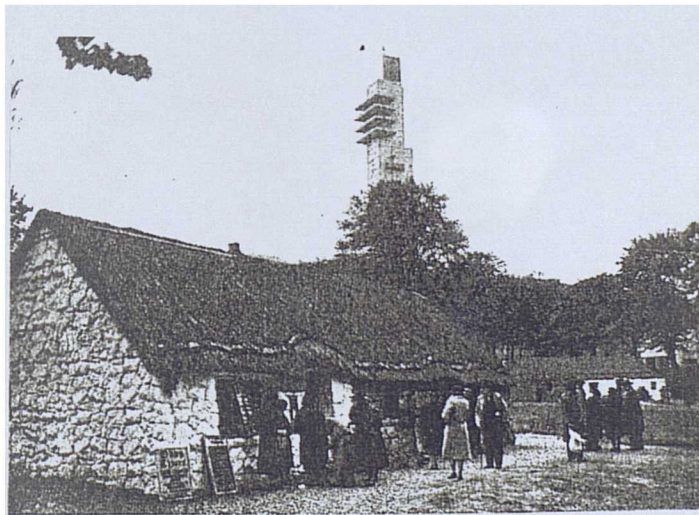


Figure 28 - A Working Exhibit and the Clachan Post Office  
Source: *The Scottish Field* (1938)



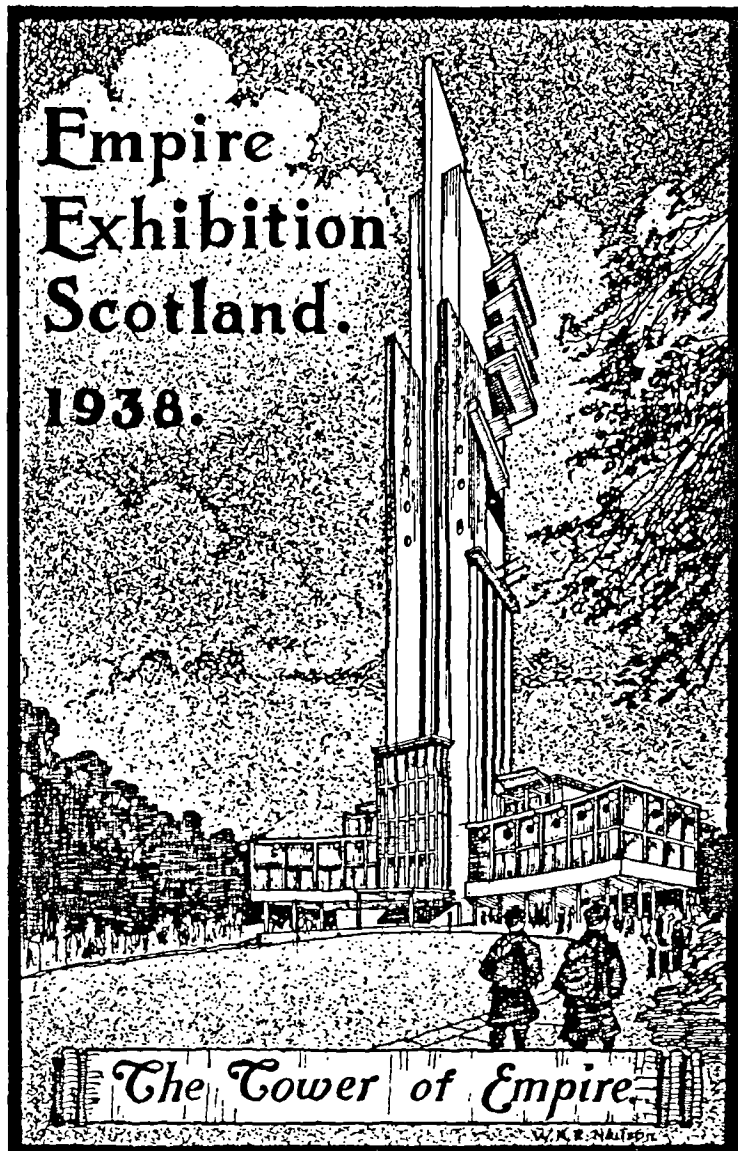


Figure 29 - Modernity at the Exhibition  
Source: SYHA (1938)

although their tour was hampered by the dangerously muddy conditions underfoot. In later weeks the organisers were further bedevilled by spells of heavy rain which transformed the site into an all too realistic quagmire. The inclement weather did not deter the hardy youth hostelling crowd who were given the rather bizarre assurance that:

*'All those who have toured in the West will find that the Clachan is a good reproduction of a Highland seashore village. Cottages, castle, inn and other components make it look very much like the real thing. There is even a burn and a sea-loch'.<sup>99</sup>*

Such was the Clachan's success that, William Russell, the resident postmaster announced his intention to construct a spectacle along similar lines at the World Fair to be held in New York the following year.<sup>100</sup>

In a festival of modernity which targeted as its central theme the merits of industrial prowess and technological innovation, the quixotic choice of 'An Clachan' as the showpiece for the Scottish Highlands is illustrative of the continued marginalisation and essentialisation of the region and its population.<sup>101</sup> Given that an identical spectacle had been included in the 1911 Glasgow Empire Exhibition, the inveteracy of the Celtic Twilight myth was all too evident in Bellahouston Park.<sup>102</sup> In this 'real-life' celebration of what was essentially an imagined place, it did not concern either producer or consumer that the set was wholly artificial, liberally decorated with sham props and adorned with ornamental 'actors' (see figure 30). Meanwhile, the one concession to the future, the modern Highland home, did not feature prominently in publicity photographs or postcards and received only scant attention in press pieces. The allure of the Highland idyll was too great for an audience happy to buy into the romantic mythology of the past. A few dissident voices did speak out. The combative nationalist Wendy Wood called

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<sup>99</sup> *Scottish Youth Hostelling and Cycling News*, 1937 May 17 p. 18. The Clachan would appear to have had something for every one. According to the Countess of Elgin and Kincardine the patriotic female visitor would find much of interest at the exhibit 'for so much of the British empire began from such Highland villages as this one typifies and elaborates'. Countess of Elgin and Kincardine (1938) 'Woman at Bellahouston', *Scottish Field*, May p. 26-27.

<sup>100</sup> Anon (1938) 'An Clachan: The Highland Village in the Heart of Glasgow', *Scottish Field*, September p. 25.

<sup>101</sup> Stevens has recently offered a different textual and iconographic reading of An Clachan, arguing that in the context of the exhibition, and with regard wider aspects of Scottish identity, 'it reconciled notions of tradition and modernity as opposed to highlighting their differences'. Stevens, A. (1996) 'Visual Sensations: Representing Scotland's Geographies in the Empire Exhibition, Glasgow 1938', *Scottlands*, 3 (1) p. 3-17; 12.

<sup>102</sup> 'Highland Home Industries' were another venture to successfully secure a stand at the Empire Exhibition. Their produce, evoking domesticity, rurality and peripherality, reinforced the homely images of 'An Clachan'. *Oban Times* 1938 January 29.



Figure 30 - 'Scotland's Favourite Family' Encounter Some Problems with the Clachan's Authenticity

Source: The Sunday Post (1996)

for a boycott of Valentine's Postcards, thousands of which had been sold at the Clachan post-office, as they reinforced negative national stereotypes.<sup>103</sup> Ernest Turner contrasted the Clachan's impressive architecture with Highland villages where, 'the roof-line is becoming saw-toothed with subsidences...and here and there a window is "blind" with wood'. While the exhibition cash till bulged, in real settlements 'nearly all the inhabitants are pensioners...There are only three or four young married couples. When the inkwells are broken at the school there is no need to replace them'.<sup>104</sup> That Alexander MacEwen, chairman of the Exhibition's Highland Committee, was aware of the dangers inherent to the project there can be little doubt. His warning that 'visitors will make a mistake if they regard the Clachan merely as a subject of antiquarian interest' was included in an official Committee brochure which did attempt to address the contemporary social and economic agenda for the Highlands.<sup>105</sup> However, faced with the choice of an outdoor pantomime or leafing through a rather drearily presented little pamphlet, the public voted with their feet. Well over one million paid a visit to 'the Highland village in the heart of Glasgow'.

As for the original property at Callanish, its fate was sealed in a report made by Sergeant E.R. Drummond for the NTS. Having confirmed that many of the items loaned to the Empire exhibition had either been lost or returned broken, he maintained that 'local interest in preserving the blackhouse is nil. It is not wanted locally, and from talk with the crofters I am sure no funds would be made available to maintain it by local subscription'.<sup>106</sup> Considering the cottages continued viability, he stated that 'there is nothing inside the house; it just consists of the walls, and timber rafters and is open to the sky'. Bringing the curtain down on a truly ignominious chapter in the organisation's history Drummond advised the

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<sup>103</sup> *Scots Independent*, 1939 May p. 8.

<sup>104</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 1938 July 16 p. 4.

<sup>105</sup> MacEwan, A. (1938) 'Foreword', in MacEwan, A. (ed.) *The Highlands and the Highlanders: The Past and Future of a Race*, Glasgow: Empire Exhibition, p. iii. MacEwen's comments, while presiding at the opening ceremony, seem to betray the same ambivalence: 'The black houses which are presented in the Clachan would not pass the test of a sanitary inspector, but they were the homes of an ancient and lively civilisation and the shrine of a spiritual tradition which we will do ill to lose'. *Glasgow Herald*, 1938 May 18 p. 8.

<sup>106</sup> NTS HCB, Report on the Hebridean Blackhouse, Callanish by Sergeant E.R. Drummond and I. Mclean, 1950 October 21. The complete lack of local support was confirmed in: Report on the Hebridean Blackhouse, Callanish by Robert Hurd, 1950 December 6.

Trust to sell 'the rafters and doors for what they will fetch, leave the old walls in place (for they will probably fall in shortly) and write the place off as a loss'.<sup>107</sup>

While the tale of the Hebridean cottage highlights the fine line which separated laudable heritage preservation from the excrescences of gaudy romanticism in inter-war Scotland, it is also illustrative of the bewitching charm of the Celtic Twilight myth. Armchair tourists, casual day-trippers, enlightened observers, devoted preservationists and supposedly pragmatic politicians had each demonstrated their infatuation with, and uncritical acceptance of, the image of Gaelic marginality. An amalgam of literary, artistic, ceremonial and heritage representations contributed to the dominant perception of the Highlands as a *dislocated and elemental place*. The region was habitually portrayed as *peripheral* to the mechanisms of British commerce and industry, unready and perhaps even unsuited to wealth creation, to enterprise and to consumerism. Yet simultaneously it remained crucial to the modern British identity, as a liminal and nostalgic comfort zone for those who felt themselves to be located much closer to the vortex of modernity. These widespread perceptions, reinforced by the actions of patrician power-brokers at the head of the Highland's Byzantine social structure and the regressive tendencies of the nascent heritage movement, presented a considerable barrier to economic development. The chapter will now examine the extent to which these reactionary place-images and romantic myths were threatened by radical voices who made clear the possibilities for industrial expansion in the region, carrying with them the persuasive rhetoric and iconography of modernity.

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid. The postscript to this sorry tale is suitably compelling. The blackhouse has remained in the Trust's possession up until the present day. Its crumbling structure can still be explored by the more inquisitive visitor to Callanish. Yet the organisation refuses to acknowledge its existence, no plaque honours the site and it does not appear on the tourist maps or lists produced by the Trust to advertise their holdings.

## The Long and Winding Road Towards Modernity

*'Developments will not be made by staging amateurish and unwieldy historical pageants. These absurd demonstrations illustrate the sense of bizarre unreality that is encouraged in modern Scotland. We are cavorting clumsily on the sacred sods of Bannockburn while the silence of poverty steals up the Clyde.'*<sup>108</sup>

(*Northern Times*, 1935)

*'Most of the Chiefs and followers seem to view the serious plight of their own country with complete equanimity and indifference. They appear to devote themselves very largely to social and musical functions...I sometimes wonder if it is really possible to bring home to our people the perils which surround their homeland.'*<sup>109</sup>

(*Lachlan Grant*, 1935)

Obviously bestirred by the mood of optimism and opportunity which swept Britain in the months immediately following the cessation of hostilities in the Great War, H.F. Campbell, an Aberdeen advocate, published a wide-ranging book entitled 'Highland Reconstruction'. Having first surveying the field of public administration in the region Campbell argued for the initiation of a number of state sponsored programmes which would help alleviate its many problems associated with land settlement, housing, transport, education and industrial development. Their introduction, he maintained, would ensure 'a sound renewal of the Highland body politic', and help to ground 'a healthy and satisfying citizenship on a firm and enduring basis'.<sup>110</sup> He concluded his treatise with a number of suggestions for the onset of a Gaelic revival, including progress in language, literature, music and poetry, as well as an awareness of the intuitive and organic rhythms of life itself.

The introduction of economic policies which would bestow material and social prosperity on the region was to become the prime objective of a host of like-minded observers and idealists during the next two decades. However, faced with persistent government intransigence and the more extreme examples of treasury parsimony enforced during long years of recession, their doctrines increasingly came to represent plaintive jeremiads. Although enthusiasm for the installation of widespread development policies never dimmed, practical realisation was hampered by the unwillingness of successive regimes to commit themselves to long-term investment or to break what many viewed as the yoke of Scottish feudal landownership. The continued failure of government to grapple with either of these

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<sup>108</sup> Editorial, 'Highland Assets', *Northern Times* 1935 February 7, p. 4.

<sup>109</sup> Grant, L. (1935a) *A New Deal for the Highlands*, Glasgow: Forward Publications.

<sup>110</sup> Campbell, H.F. (1920) *Highland Reconstruction*, Glasgow: A. Maclaren & Sons, p. vi.

two distant objectives is significant in that it helps demonstrate the more than coincidental connections which existed between political privilege and sporting pleasure. To critics the sportsman's enjoyment of the Highland environment seemed entirely dependent upon the artificial ossification of its resource base. The landowners' key concern was therefore his ability to enjoy, or to offer his clients, the quintessential wilderness experience. Accordingly most placed strict controls on all forms of modern development and clinically tempered any plans made for economic diversification. Since this sporting fraternity traditionally included among its number, herds of influential parliamentarians and peers, political pressure for change was seldom brought to bear on friends and acquaintances among the lairdocracy.

Opposition was often restricted to more radical and, as yet, politically peripheral sources. Inspired by a burgeoning nationalist sentiment among the Scottish population, papers such as the *Scots Independent* and *Scots Observer* became the mouthpieces of indignation and ferment during the inter-war years. They detailed the acute social problems which the sporting industry manifested. Unemployment exceeded forty per cent in some districts, depopulation had continued unabated for over a century and a mood of consigned depression was felt to have permeated previously vibrant communities. Archie Lamont, William Power, Iain Gillies and 'Farmer's Laddie', the *Scots Independent's* Highland correspondent, used their columns to campaign for the implementation of practical policies dealing with land settlement, afforestation, transport, fishing, rural industry, water power and co-operative marketing. The reformist voice railed against roads which 'would not do credit to Afghanistan', at deer forests which 'bleed Scotland white', at the 'scandalous negligence' of the interests of island fisherman and long destitute crofting communities and 'the crying disgrace of vast neglected water resources.'<sup>111</sup> The local Highland press, while capable of fawning deference towards the traditional lairdocracy, was also on occasion the source of vituperative criticism. With calibrated condescension the *Northern Times* labelled absentee landowners as 'kilted loafers', the worst being those war profiteers who were using 'blood money' to assemble their own personal fiefdoms.<sup>112</sup> This was the emotive rhetoric of the common Highlander informed by modern sensibilities, a citizen seeking gainful employment, practical housing appropriate to the age and an

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<sup>111</sup> *Scots Independent* April 1931 p. 86; May 1933 p. 103; December 1928 p. 20.

<sup>112</sup> Editorial 'Kilted Loafers' *Northern Times*, 1934 May 31 p. 3; Editorial 'A Playground for War Profiteers' *Northern Times* 1935 August 22 p. 4.

acceptable standard of living. Unhindered by dewy-eyed sentimentalism, these Nationalist and Socialist provocateurs sought to embrace the white heat of modern technology and science head on. Monthly issues of the *Scots Independent* included details of research undertaken in a variety of fields, including the commercial exploitation of peat stocks, the extension of electricity supplies into the region, the potential for electro-chemical and metallurgical processing plants, the development of canning units and similar light industries and even the possibility of mining the sizeable potash-felspar deposits located in the far north-west of the country.<sup>113</sup> Few such feasibility studies got beyond the drawing board. Aside from hydro-electric developments, the *Oban Times* rather pitifully counted the major industrial successes of the 1930's as the small canning factory located at Tobermory, a shark oil refinery in Campbeltown, a limestone quarrying scheme initiated by Lord Trent on the Ardnamurchan peninsula and the well-established slate extraction enterprise in Ballachulish.<sup>114</sup> To this list could be added a crushing plant and quarry situated at Onich on Loch Leven.<sup>115</sup> While provision for the expanding tourist market was accepted by many critics as an integral part of the cathartic development programme, some hard-line contributors viewed tourism as a mere seasonal palliative to the employment problem, its jobs merely a version of 'transmogrified ghillieism'.<sup>116</sup> Although important, these differences did not weaken the pragmatists' desire to embrace modernity in all its luminescence. The progressive rationale evolved further with the adoption of regional planning as a conceptual framework around which Highland development could be structured. Although the notion of a unitary authority with a holistic remit had previously been toyed with it

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<sup>113</sup> With regards the mineral potash-felspar, there were estimated to be some 140,000 and 12,000 tonnes respectively in the districts of Laxford and Durness. Broken down, potash could be spread as a fertiliser while felspar was used in the manufacture of china and porcelain. Reid, D.M. (1928) 'Our Waste Lands: How to Use Them', *Scots Independent*, March p. 75.

<sup>114</sup> *Oban Times*, 1938 December 31 p. 5; 1939 July 15 p. 5.

<sup>115</sup> Anon (1938) 'From a Highland Correspondent', *Scots Magazine*, XXX (1) p. 48.

<sup>116</sup> *Scots Independent*, 1933 June p. 125. Contrasting attitudes to the tourist industry can be found in: 'Highland Notes', *Scots Independent* August 1930 p. 138; January 1931 p. 38; November 1931 p. 12; Kinloch, J.L. (1934) 'Prosperity from Holiday-Makers', *Scots Independent* April p.147; *Oban Times* 1928 April 21 p. 5; Anon, 'Motor Traffic in the Highlands' *Oban Times* 1929 October 26 p. 2; Editorial 'The 'Come to Scotland' Movement: Three Factors for Success' *Oban Times* 1930 May 31 p. 5; Editorial 'The Hotel Industry: It's Importance to the Highlands', *Oban Times* 1939 March 18 p. 5; Macaindreis, A. (1939) 'Tourists Come to See?', *Scots Independent*, May p. 8.



only gained widespread support during the 1930's, thanks largely to the unceasing work of Dr. Lachlan Grant.<sup>117</sup>

### A 'New Deal' for the Highlands ?

*'For centuries now the Gaels have been without an effective organisation, a people without a soul, a collection of disjointed units, crying out in a babel of individual voices for the scraps from the rich man's table.'*<sup>118</sup>  
(Neil Macgregor, 1936)

From his medical practice in Ballachulish, Dr. Lachlan Grant encouraged the likes of Neil Macgregor, a native of Kinlochleven, to involve themselves in the activities of the Highland Development League (HDL), arguably the most vocal development lobby group to emerge during the inter-war years. A native of the region, a firm believer in the merits of muscular Christianity and temperance, and as a man of medicine someone 'naturally attracted to the study of diseases of the social organism as well as the human', Grant had for several years ploughed a lonely, but unwavering, furrow.<sup>119</sup> To his considerable dismay two landmark speeches on the subject of modern Highland regeneration delivered to the Clan MacColl society in 1933 and 1934 fell upon deaf ears. A series of letters sent to Ramsay Macdonald proved equally unproductive.<sup>120</sup> Undaunted he re-packaged his manifesto for economic salvation and launched it as the 'New Deal for the Highlands' early in 1935. His inspiration lay on the other side of the Atlantic, where to great critical acclaim President Roosevelt had introduced his epochal 'New Deal' for heartland America. Infused with the spirit of modernity, Roosevelt's sweeping welfare reforms promised funding for a host of ventures including infrastructural improvements, agricultural mechanization, the re-location of light industries to rural areas and the establishment of co-operative marketing organisations. However, the

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<sup>117</sup> Two early attempts to apply the regional idea to the Highlands were: Day, J.P. (1918) *Public Administration in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*, London: University of London Press; Campbell, H.F. (1920) op cit.

<sup>118</sup> *Northern Times* 1936 June 11 p. 5.

<sup>119</sup> Grant, L. (1935b) 'A Review of Highland Life - Our Land and People First' *Northern Times* May 16 p. 5; see also, Grant, L. (1938) *The Grand Ideal of Life: Keeping Fit*, Glasgow; Grant, L. (1936) 'The Woman of the Future' *Northern Times* April 23 p. 2; Grant, L. (1936) 'The Great Principle of Temperance' *Northern Times* December 31 p. 3.

<sup>120</sup> Macdonald agreed with Grant that 'we must really get new life into the north' but side-stepped direct involvement, claiming 'my trouble is not to get people who agree with me, but who have got the practical sense of making proposals which will produce results.' Copies of this correspondence are included in: Grant, L. (1935a) op cit.

real spark to Grant's imagination was the programme's flagship project, the leviathan water-power developments centred upon the Tennessee valley. Government funding for the generation of cheap electrical power within a defined region opened up all manner of exciting possibilities, accordingly Grant envisioned a smaller version of the scheme for his homeland.<sup>121</sup>

Although published in modest pamphlet form his wide-ranging plans and suggestions were quickly seized upon by the local Highland press and hailed as the path toward future prosperity.<sup>122</sup> The need for central government to make a comprehensive scientific survey of the region's resources, development potential and possible economic base formed the crux of the New Deal doctrine. Only on the completion of this task would it be possible to devise a viable regional plan. That plan, Grant argued, should seek to reverse the recent trends of Highland history, those of economic stagnation, depopulation and soaring unemployment. His radical agenda demanded the re-peopling of the landscape and the development of an economy more in tune with the demands of the modern market and open to industrial investment. Powers of compulsory acquisition would open up the many thousands of idle sporting acres to agriculture, fishing, afforestation, tourism, light industry, mineral extraction and the production of hydro-electric power. He also advocated a thorough recasting of the education curriculum for the Highlands and the establishment of a regional radio broadcasting station. Ultimately, Grant's aim was for the Highlands and Islands to 'reap the full benefit of what research, science and invention have made possible', and all this as an integral part of the Scottish nation.<sup>123</sup>

Encouraged by the steady stream of plaudits for his work, and the success of a preliminary assembly, Grant agreed to stage a 'New Deal Rally' in Glasgow early in 1936. It was at this event that the Highland Development League (HDL) was formally instituted.<sup>124</sup> Established as a practical means to assuage mounting discontent over the deteriorating economic condition of the region, he declared it his hope 'to make this movement a weapon which will be the dominant factor in the

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<sup>121</sup> The Tennessee Valley Authority was placed in charge of an area the equivalent size of England and Wales. As a public corporation it sold power to individual consumers, farmers and other co-ops, municipalities and large industrial users. Johnston, T. (1948) op cit. p. 4.

<sup>122</sup> The initial print run of the pamphlet ran to 6000 copies. Slightly abbreviated versions of the text quickly appeared in the following papers, *The Northern Times*, *Highland News*, *The Stornoway Gazette* and *The Ross-shire Journal*.

<sup>123</sup> 'The Great Highland Problem: Interview with Lachlan Grant', *Northern Times* 1936 April 9 p. 8.

<sup>124</sup> *Northern Times* 1936 January 23 p. 7.

public life of the Highlands'.<sup>125</sup> While the organisation welcomed support from activists across the political spectrum this open invitation did not prevent Grant, as the first president, from ensuring that the League's agenda was avowedly nationalist in tone. With a weighty sense of purpose he declared that:

*'if we Scots are going to try to put the world right we must start at the city of Jerusalem ...the land of the Gael. The preservation of everything Celtic and national depends on our freedom to control and manage our own affairs as we think best.'*<sup>126</sup>

This separatist stance ensured the unstinting support of a number of prominent figures from the radical fringes of Scottish metropolitan and cultural life. William Power, Hugh Quigley, George Scott-Moncrieff, Angus Clark, Hector MacIver, John Bannerman and Alexander MacEwen were among those notables who lined up behind Grant.<sup>127</sup> Ably supported by practical men in the field, of whom the Rev. T.M. Murchison of Glenelg, the Rev. John Mackay in Skye and the Rev. Thomas M. Donn in Sutherland were the most dedicated, the League began to establish a network of local Highland branches.

During 1936 further recruitment rallies were held in Perth, Inverness, Campbeltown, Stornoway and Edinburgh. Riding a wave of enthusiasm Lachlan Grant was hailed as a figure 'famous throughout Gaeldom' as he preached his new economic gospel to receptive congregations.<sup>128</sup> He also continued to address Gaelic, Highland and Clan Associations, in the hope of debunking the Twilight imagination and securing influential support.<sup>129</sup> His criticism of their reactionary agenda was certainly forthright:

*'The Mod, the singing of Gaelic songs at concerts, the historical collections at our museums, the too often abortive work of the*

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<sup>125</sup> *Northern Times* 1936 January 16 p. 7.

<sup>126</sup> Grant, L. (1935a) op cit. p. 22.

<sup>127</sup> William Power was the editor of the Scots Observer and one-time vice-president of the Scottish P.E.N. group. A prominent member of the London Scots Self-Government Committee, an economist with a public utility corporation with a keen interest in all aspects of planning, Hugh Quigley was also a fervent advocate of hydro-electric power. George Scott-Moncrieff wrote volubly on issues of modern Scottish nationhood and was intimately involved with the Saltire Society. Angus Clark, Grant's brother-in-law, was one-time president of the Highland Club of London. Hector MacIver was a nationally inclined novelist. John Bannerman was a Scottish rugby internationalist and had served as President of *An Comunn Gaidhealtach*. Sir Alexander MacEwen was leader of the Scottish National Party during the late 1930's, an enlightened educationalist and a prominent servant of Inverness County Council over the course of three decades.

<sup>128</sup> *Northern Times* 1936 March 12 p. 2.

<sup>129</sup> Perhaps deployed as a sop to satisfy these audiences romantic inclinations, Grant's spouse Catherine normally followed the formal speech making with a performance of Gaelic airs. *Oban Times* 1936 March 12 p. 2.

*Gaelic classes, the musty products of our savants study - if these are the best blooms in the garden why all the bother about its cultivation?*<sup>130</sup>

Grant was adamant that those 'people professing cultural enthusiasm should be in the forefront of the economic fight for the rehabilitation of the Highlands'.<sup>131</sup> None in the romantic movement escaped criticism. He was equally scathing toward the 'Big Shots' of the APRS, parodying their constitutional objectives in a direct challenge, 'The absence of the people, the silence of the hills and glens, the deserted cottages, the procession from country to wretched urban slums - are not these "likely to affect adversely the future of the Scottish countryside" ?'<sup>132</sup> While the concern over rural amenities was deemed 'a step in the right direction', he reminded the Association that 'one cannot preserve any area satisfactorily without in the first place, taking steps to preserve the people who live in it'.<sup>133</sup>

There can be little doubt that the New Deal movement fired the public imagination, it having become apparent that the much celebrated peripherality of the region was no buffer against the deepening wave of global recession. The sporting industry, long championed by landowners as the mainstay of the Highland economy, was struggling to retain its traditionally spendthrift clientele. Lengthy and increasingly militant articles detailing the region's continued economic and social plight appeared regularly in the local press.<sup>134</sup> Meanwhile, chapters of the HDL sprang up in Inverness, Oban, Campbeltown, Portree, Salen, Glenelg, North Uist, Stornoway, Ballachulish, Kinlochleven, Fort William, Lairg, Golspie, Dornoch, Helmsdale, Strathhalladale, Carlisle, Glasgow and London.<sup>135</sup> These local and

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<sup>130</sup> Grant, L. (1934b) 'Our Highland Heritage' *Northern Times* December 13 p. 5.

<sup>131</sup> *Oban Times* 1937 October 9 p. 4. Grant's opinions were mirrored by a supportive Skye crofter who queried the worth of Highland gatherings: 'What do they amount to? What is the boast of their success? Where are the fruits? Many sport the kilt for a few hours and call their children Ruairidh, Calum or Mhairi. Another day and all is forgotten'. *Oban Times* 1934 January 20 p. 5.

<sup>132</sup> Grant, L. (1934b) *op cit.* p. 5.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>134</sup> Editorial 'Depopulation and Degradation' *Northern Times* 1935 April 25 p. 4; Editorial 'Cry of the Highlands' *Northern Times* 1935 May 9 p. 4; Editorial 'Parting of the Ways in the Highlands' *Northern Times* 1936 January 30 p. 4; Editorial 'To Reconstruct the Highlands' *Northern Times* 1936 May 14 p. 4; Editorial 'The Condition of the People' *Northern Times* 1936 December 17 p. 4.

<sup>135</sup> Little information exists on the membership numbers for these branches, although the figure of 670 for the Oban section in 1938 is illustrative of a healthy level of grassroots support. Branch outings were also a popular diversion. The Glasgow branch of the HDL organised trips to visit experimental farms where new agricultural and scientific methods were being tested. Through these provincial groups links were also fostered with The Sea League; the object of this organisation being the lobbying of government on behalf of Scottish fishermen and the Scottish fishing industry. *Oban Times* 1938 September 24 p. 2; *Oban Times* 1936 July 2 p. 4.

provincial branches attempted to empower and politicise the working communities who had been previously ignored in the sporadic debates over the region's future. Reverend Mcleod of Kilmuir roused a meeting on Skye, informing them that, 'in the past Highlanders had gathered together to die, but now they were gathering together to live'.<sup>136</sup> If local activism spread, argued Thomas Murchison, then romanticists might peer through the mist and find something very different from:

*'our soft voices and our weather-beaten faces, our natural courtesy and our primitive manners, our indolence and our religious fanaticism, our attractively tragic history and our curiously plaintive music, our thatched huts and our drinking and poaching propensities.'*<sup>137</sup>

The propaganda of the HDL was unflinching too. In attempting to appeal to the Highland populace and Scots in general, spokespeople engaged with various aspects of political and cultural nationalism. Encouraged by the pan-European trend toward nationalist expression William Power informed readers of the New Deal that the 'fiery cross' of the HDL would 'set the heather alight in all directions' poignantly reminding them that 'heather is not just confined to the Highlands'.<sup>138</sup> Grant meanwhile deployed identifiably Darwinian and corporeal imagery to frame the practicalities of League policy. He viewed the Gaels as a distinctive people and, there having already been 'too much playing at being Highlanders', demanded the development of 'an ardent race consciousness'.<sup>139</sup> New Deal rhetoric was replete with phrases to stir the Gaelic blood. Speeches and articles were strewn with apocalyptic references to the decline of 'Highland stock', to 'racial heritage', 'racial suicide', 'racial extinction', and 'the sacrifice of spirit' among the 'strong, virile and physically fit'.<sup>140</sup> Grant was still aware that his hard-headed realism required a dash of spirituality, thus the emotive search for 'racial integrity' to help staunch the 'blight knowing at our racial vitals'.<sup>141</sup>

The pro-development lobby was not without its own internal frictions and differences, partially attributable to the variety of political stances which flourished under its banner. For some the rush to embrace modernity would not come without costs. The Rev. T.M. Donn found some empathy with those conservative thinkers

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<sup>136</sup> *Oban Times* 1936 April 18 p. 3.

<sup>137</sup> Murchison, T.M. (1937) Reality and the Mod, *Scots Magazine*, XXVIII (1) p. 21-26.

<sup>138</sup> Power, W. 'Foreword', in Grant, L. (1935a) op cit. p. 3.

<sup>139</sup> *Northern Times* 1936 May 21 p. 3.

<sup>140</sup> Grant, L. (1934a) Op cit. p. 4.

<sup>141</sup> *Northern Times* 1936 June 4 p. 2; Grant, L. (1934a) 'Our Wonderf l Heritage' *Northern Times* March 4 p. 4.

who, while ready to 'admit that social ills such as depopulation are detrimental to culture', felt 'that progress has likewise a baneful influence'.<sup>142</sup> Their reasoning ran that:

*'a multitude of so-called improvements have taken place such as smooth, wide roads as at Glencoe, increased and speedier transport facilities by road, rail, sea and air, rapid delivery of newspapers, the advent of cinemas and radio-broadcasting but their cumulative effect had been the disturbing of Highland life and habits'.*<sup>143</sup>

For others, the plaintive note struck by League propaganda was too despondent in tone. The begging bowl was no permanent solution to the region's ills. The *Oban Times* argued that at times 'the compassion is almost oppressive' and that too 'little reliance is placed upon the effective qualities of the Highlanders themselves'.<sup>144</sup> Given the opportunity, the ability of the native population to extricate the economy from its state of torpor was undoubted, but concern was voiced over the contributions of speakers and pamphleteers who:

*'indulged too much in reciting the former grievances of the Highlanders, and imputed defects to the people which are actually the attributes of climate, soil and situation. The Highlands are not so fertile as the Lowlands, but that is not to say that the Highlander is a less competent individual than his Southern neighbour.'*<sup>145</sup>

The critique was an incisive one. No matter that it was unintentional, the rhetoric of the pro-development lobby was prone, on occasion, to slip into the same essentialising idiom so effectively employed by the Celtic Twilight writers. Following a debate on the Highland economy in the House of Lords, the *Oban Times* cautioned peers Elgin, Alness and Strathbogie for presentations too 'endangered by sentiment and tinctured by gloom'.<sup>146</sup> Lachlan Grant was seldom guilty of adopting this romantic trope, indeed he was willing to move to the other extreme and commit a form of heresy to induce the required reaction. Increasingly frustrated by the tepid response shown the HDL by sections of the native populace,

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<sup>142</sup> Donn, T.M. (1936) 'Highland Development and the Gaelic Renaissance', *Northern Times* August 13 p. 5. The Reverend from Invershin, Sutherland published two other doctrines on the Highland situation Donn, T.M. (1936) 'The Possibility of Highland Development' *Northern Times* July 16 p. 2; Donn, T.M. (1936) 'The Church and Highland Development' *Northern Times* December 10 p. 3.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>144</sup> Editorial 'Conditions in the Highlands' *Oban Times* 1937 December 25 p. 5.

<sup>145</sup> Editorial *Oban Times* 1939 July 1 p. 5.

<sup>146</sup> The paper also noted that these speakers 'had either no native connection with the Highlands or if they had, had transferred it to the south'. Editorial *Oban Times* 1939 August 22 p. 5.

he cited the Highlanders apparent lack of unity and indifference to their own affairs as a major hurdle to be overcome.<sup>147</sup> He warned the apathetic that if 'the spirit of the race is largely broken', then all would be left 'on a par with the crooners who sing of our "misty islands"'.<sup>148</sup>

### Progress of Sorts

Internal dissension aside, the main task facing the HDL lay in the struggle to convince a London-based parliament of the region's acute needs when more densely populated areas were suffering from industrial depression. The Highlands were forced to jostle into line with South Wales, Clydeside and Tyneside in the hope of securing immediate government intervention. Useful propaganda points were won with a pavilion display at the Empire Exhibition while Lachlan Grant, unshakeable in his convictions, continued to snap at the ankles of those in power. Upon discovering that Neville Chamberlain had spent a sporting holiday in the north he demanded of a rally in Oban if they perceived it strange:

*'how their rulers when shooting or fishing did not ask themselves why these regions were so lonely. Did the Prime Minister pause in his "casting" to reflect on the cause of its remoteness, its depopulated condition and the silence of the glens'.*<sup>149</sup>

Perhaps the League's greatest achievement in this regard was the instrumental part it played in successfully lobbying for the creation of a consultative Highland Economic Committee. State recognition of the regional dimension in economic development went some way towards meeting the HDL's demands. Functioning under the auspices of the Scottish National Development Council, a quasi-statutory body established in 1936, the 'Hilleary Committee' gathered evidence from a wide variety of sources, its panel taking hearings at a variety of locations throughout the Highlands and Islands.<sup>150</sup> Particularly noteworthy was the reaction of the APRS who, their social conscience having apparently been pricked, were quick to join those offering advice. Frank Mears confessed to the Association

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<sup>147</sup> *Oban Times* 1938 May 7 p. 2.

<sup>148</sup> *Oban Times* 1937 October 9 p. 4.

<sup>149</sup> *Oban Times* 1938 September 24 p. 2.

<sup>150</sup> The committee was chaired by Major Edward Hilleary, a Lovat Scout, a long-standing member of the Inverness-shire district council and for forty years the English laird of Edinbane estate on Skye. The rest of the committee comprised Flora Macleod of Macleod the owner of Dunvegan estate on Skye, Major Hon. Robert Bruce, Murray Morrison the vice-chairman of the British Aluminium Company, Norman MacIver and Joseph Duncan.

executive that he 'had felt for some time past that the subject of economic development should be investigated'.<sup>151</sup> K.C. Ferguson the organising secretary was rather less convinced, reasoning quite inexplicably 'that it was a great mistake to regard the Highlands as being in a bad state. The Highlands were never more prosperous than they are today'.<sup>152</sup> Rather more compelling were the contributions of the HDL which included innovative plans for a modern version of the clachan settlement as a means to re-people deserted glens and revive existing townships. Approximately thirty families were deemed adequate for the creation of a viable collective which could offer its inhabitants material, social, educational and marketing advantages.<sup>153</sup> Given the Hilleary committee's predominantly feudal composition it was hardly surprising that such radical re-settlement schemes were shied away from. Nevertheless their report, which represented the first government survey of the region for over fifty years, was liberal in tone. Running to 200 pages it included plans for a central marketing agency, employment training centres, demonstration crofts and tourism projects.<sup>154</sup> Unfortunately, the central issue of a separate authority for the region was fudged, the report requesting the appointment of a single Commissioner who could produce a further report on the Highland situation.<sup>155</sup> The *Oban Times* gave vent to increasing local frustration, 'there have been surveys and surveys, and the Highlands and Islands have not the slightest need for another survey'.<sup>156</sup> The proposals did receive praise in many quarters. Tom Johnston the future Secretary for State applauded its findings as the most comprehensive appraisal of the region's needs to date. James Macleod, the president of the Crofters Union, offered cautious praise but pressed for an entire

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<sup>151</sup> APRS ECM vol. 3 1938 July 6. The major concern of the Highland Economic Committee speedily assembled by the Association was that people were no longer being brought up with expertise in a particular rural trade. Suggestions tabled at one meeting included grass drying, artificial silk and furniture crafts and the possibility of reviving industries which had declined such as paving stones, lime, Skye marble and Mull granite. APRS ECM vol. 3 1939 January 26.

<sup>152</sup> APRS ECM vol. 3 1938 July 6.

<sup>153</sup> *Oban Times* 1937 December 11 p. 5.

<sup>154</sup> Scottish Economic Committee (1935) *The Highlands and Islands of Scotland - A Review of the Economic Conditions*, London: HMSO.

<sup>155</sup> The 'single Commissioner' mechanism was favoured by the landowning community, quite possibly because it was deemed it easier to control one individual than the personnel of an entire authority. In a thinly veiled attempt to promote someone from within their own ranks, the SPLF advised that 'his name must carry weight and confidence and he will require to be not only a person of strong character and sympathetic towards the aims of the enquiry, but also a person who can view the problems to be solved with detachment and without preconceived ideas or political bias'. SLPF ECM vol. V 1939 July 27.

<sup>156</sup> Editorial *Oban Times* 1939 July 15 p. 5.



Highland Commission to unite the work of separate government departments.<sup>157</sup> To reinforce the calls for quick implementation of the Report's findings, representatives of six Highland county councils, several London Highland Associations and Glasgow Highland Societies joined a group of Scottish MPs on a lobbying trip to parliament. One mischievous correspondent noted that one group were conspicuous by their absence, finding it 'a strange anomaly indeed that no Highland chiefs joined in the deputations who "marched" on Westminster'.<sup>158</sup>

Such vigour and ebullience was short lived. In 1939 a typically dogmatic Treasury announced that, having digested the report's many recommendations, it could find room in the ledgers to apportion a sum of £65,000 annually for five years to facilitate implementation. This was a pitiful sum, even accounting for the massive strain being put on government finances by the programme of rapid re-armament.<sup>159</sup> HDL council reports showed admirable restraint recording that 'the offer was disappointingly small and ridiculously inadequate', adding that campaigners like Grant 'gave forcible expression to these views'.<sup>160</sup> Murdo Stewart of the Lochaber Crofters Union described how his membership 'viewed with dismay...the failure to deal with the re-peopling of land now under deer and game', while Alexander MacEwen, president of the Scottish National Party, blamed successive governments for 'moral cowardice and mental laziness'.<sup>161</sup> Ross and Cromarty district council condemned 'the continuation of half measures' while all four Highland MPs expressed their displeasure at the pittance on offer.<sup>162</sup> Sir Ian Malcolm, the laird of Poltulloch estate, expressed very different frustrations and in so doing made evident the schism existent between many landowners and those in search of reform:

*'as a resident proprietor in Argyll, one of the "crofter counties", I feel humiliated at the organised outcry raised by London socialists, Fife and Clydeside communists and Scottish "Nationalists" against the programme for the immediate relief of distress in the West Highlands of Scotland. It cannot be said with truth that any*

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<sup>157</sup> *Oban Times* 1939 February 11 p. 7.

<sup>158</sup> Anon (1939) 'Scotland Month by Month', *Scots Magazine*, XXX (6) p. 401.

<sup>159</sup> By way of comparison, £65,000 was equivalent to fourteen and a half minutes war expenditure during the 1939-45 conflict. In Newfoundland, Canada the British government had already appointed a special commission and made loans and grants amounting to some £17,000,000.

<sup>160</sup> Highland Development League (1950) *Reports by Council, 1938-48*, Glasgow: HDL, p.10.

<sup>161</sup> *Oban Times* 1939 September 2 p. 2; p. 7; see also, 'Highlands Policy Condemned', *Scots Independent*, 1939 September p. 7; MacDonald, J. 'Death Sentence for the Highlands?', *Scots Independent*, 1939 September p. 8.

<sup>162</sup> *Oban Times* 1939 August 26 p. 3; August 12 p. 5.

*represent the area in question, and the West Highlands will not be grateful for their intervention.*<sup>163</sup>

Quite obviously stung by this attack J.M. Bannerman of the HDL responded in kind:

*'he (Malcolm) is "humiliated" that even in our "distress" we dare to be discontented with the crumb which has fallen so precipitously from the government table. What kind of people are we, infers the letter, that we do not go down on our knees and grovel thankfully for these crumbs. True Highlanders are not really dissatisfied with the blindness and niggardly quality of the government programme, further infers the letter. Those who truly represent the Highlands like the "resident" proprietor, are quite satisfied.'*<sup>164</sup>

Final ignominy for the HDL was to arrive with the outbreak of war in the Summer of 1939. No funding had yet been made available and owing to the extenuating circumstances all payments were postponed until further notice.

The failure of lone crusaders, local communities and voluntary organisations to secure a satisfactory package of measures for the development of the Highlands is illustrative of the low priority continually afforded the region in parliamentary affairs. Unfortunately, the ignorance, dilatoriness and short-sightedness displayed by so many members was for long periods masked by financial expediency. However, there does exist a sub-text in which Twilight aesthetics and the Highland vernacular were deployed to divert calls for direct political intervention. Limiting the development dialogue suited the ends of those elected representatives, hereditary peers, sporting lairds and landscape preservationists who viewed the rush to reach the portals of modernity in a very different light from Lachlan Grant and the HDL. Fearful for the future of *their* Highlands, especially if a place on the periphery of British life was discarded in favour of an industrialised identity, traditionalists bolstered their position with fresh arguments offered by conservationist escapism. The fruits of twentieth-century technology, ingenuity and industry, already enjoyed by the rest of British society, were somehow deemed unsuitable for either the Highland people or their environment. The essentialisation of 'the Gaelic world' was a central component in the preservationists' armour, affording protection from a modernist mentality, the

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<sup>163</sup> *Oban Times* 1939 August 19 p. 5.

<sup>164</sup> *Oban Times* 1939 August 26 p. 3; see also, 'A Highland Laird's Gratitude', *Scots Independent*, 1939 September p. 3.

evils of consumerism and the profit motive, all factors which were felt to threaten the very purity of the Celtic margins.

Informed by these mounting tensions between traditionalist and modernist ideologies, the remainder of the chapter examines the introduction of water power schemes to the Highlands and with them a tranche of proposed ancillary industrial projects. It investigates the construction of sharply contrasting landscape narratives, pitting sublime visions for hydro-technology in the glens against fearful predictions of environmental degradation and social collapse.

### 'Prosperity by Organisation and the Energy of Nature': The Early History of Hydro-Electric Power in the Highlands

*'No measure relating to the Highlands for many years has involved such a confusion of interests or been more violently or partially debated; and from the contradictory views expressed on either side, it is almost impossible, even for those most directly concerned, to form a proper estimate of the scheme'*<sup>165</sup>  
(Alison Stewart, 1938)

*'Calcium of carbide indeed makes strange bedfellows: the lion and the lamb are downright ordinary compared with Tory sportsmen and Socialist doctrinaires.'*<sup>166</sup>  
(Special Correspondent, 1938)

On the 19th August 1930 the Duke of York arrived in Fort William to bestow his blessing on a new factory and hydro-electric plant constructed by the British Aluminium Company in the lee of Ben Nevis. The proceedings were marked with an official ceremony in which the royal dignitary was presented with the first aluminium ingots to have been cast at the plant. On each was engraved the Gaelic axiom 'rath le rian is neart nan dul' along with its English translation 'prosperity by organisation and the energy of nature'.<sup>167</sup> To the enthusiastic local crowd and ready workforce no inscription seemed more apt. The plentiful water supplies and mountainous relief of Lochaber, for so long viewed as an economic handicap, were now being put to a positive use. With lochs dammed, pipelines laid on steep hillsides and turbines installed at their base, the disparate forces of the wilderness were being harnessed for the production of electricity. This sublime agent coursed

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<sup>165</sup> Stewart, A. (1938) Caledonian Power: A Gamble to Avert a Tragedy, *Scots Magazine*, XXVIII (6) p. 433-440; 433.

<sup>166</sup> Special Correspondent, (1938) From a Highland Notebook, *Scots Magazine*, XXIX (2) p.145.

<sup>167</sup> *The Times*, 1930 July 30 p. 13.

unseen and unheard to power a modern smelter from which emerged a composite of infinite use, ready for transportation to a burgeoning global marketplace.

The generation of hydro-electric power (HEP) in the Highlands began during the last years of the nineteenth-century. In 1896 the British Aluminium Company (BAC) based a small smelting works at Foyers on Loch Ness which operated on a water-powered electricity supply. Their interests in the region were furthered at Kinlochleven, where in 1909 a much larger plant was opened. This scheme necessitated massive constructional and engineering works in the hills surrounding the settlement. The damming of what would become the Blackwater Reservoir, the shifting of hundreds of tonnes of earth and the setting of pipelines down the 900ft drop to the factory below provided employment for some 2000 navvies. By the mid-1920's, an even more adventurous project was underway at Fort William, the intention being to impound the vast heads of water held in Loch Laggan and Loch Treig.<sup>168</sup> The BAC contracted Balfour Beatty Ltd. to carry out their plans for the driving of a fifteen mile pressurised tunnel to convey the waters of the Nevis and Mamore ranges to the power house and aluminium factory eventually opened by the Duke of York. This was a quite vast undertaking for which the engineers needed to construct a light railway line which ran parallel with the route of the tunnel. Small trains transported building materials from Loch Linnhe into the mountain fastness, while also servicing the 3000 men posted at work camps along the way.<sup>169</sup> During the early 1930's further feats of hydro-technological innovation were accomplished at Rannoch and Tummel in the Central Highlands. The signature achievement of this scheme saw 250 men posted at work camps 1400ft up either side of Ben Udlaman, under which they were blasting a tunnel to convey the waters of Loch Garry into Loch Erich.<sup>170</sup> The project had been devised by the Grampian Electricity Supply Company whose intention it was to sell power to the newly created national grid for public use.<sup>171</sup> While these water

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<sup>168</sup> Under the Lochaber Power Act of 1921 the BAC were granted parliamentary powers to develop all the available power within the drainage basins of the Treig, Spean and Upper Spey rivers. Thomsen, P. (1941) *The Glen Affric Power Scheme: A Highland point of View*, Glasgow: HDL.

<sup>169</sup> The progress of the scheme was reported on regularly: *The Times* 1930 January 4 p. 10; February 21 p. 22; March 6 p. 8; March 29 p. 18, 19; July 30 p. 13, 16; 1931 March 21 p. 9; 1934 November 7 p. 13.

<sup>170</sup> Progress reports on construction appeared in: *The Times* 1931 June 24 p. 20; 1933 March 14 p. 18.

<sup>171</sup> The Grampian Electricity Supply Company was a subsidiary of the Scottish Power Company Ltd. Chairman of the latter and a director of the former was Mr. George Balfour, a Member of Parliament and an original partner in Messrs Balfour and Beattie, the public works contractors for the Lochaber Power Scheme and the Rannoch-Tummel Power Scheme. Elsewhere in Scotland, the

power schemes offered individual companies the chance to amass considerable profits, some doubt remained over the importance of the HEP process to the national economy.<sup>172</sup> Foyers produced only 5000 kilowatts of continuous power, Kinlochleven generated 22,000, Lochaber 80,000 and Rannoch-Tummel a further 30,000. In 1921 the report of the Water Power Resources Committee estimated Scotland's natural HEP asset to be 293,800 Kw.<sup>173</sup> While improved production processes would later prove this estimate to be hugely conservative, at the time it equated to a mere 1% saving in Britain's annual coal use.<sup>174</sup>

These reservations hint at the first notes of discord over HEP's introduction to the Highlands, and there does exist a parallel tale of rejection, obstruction and failure. Between 1928 and 1941 no fewer than six bills were introduced to parliament by private companies only to be aborted after their first reading. Their common intention, to locate industrial plants in the region and to power them by HEP, was repeatedly thwarted by vociferous opposition. The objections of landscape preservationists were combined to great effect with those of Highland romanticists and sporting enthusiasts. Militant socialists, in search of a comparable programme of public investment, fomented further resistance and completed the unlikeliest of coalitions. While in 1929 the specific targets of the Grampian Electricity Supply Company (GESC) were the waters of Lochs Affric, Mullardoch and Morar, it was the intention of the West Highland Power scheme and its subsequent incarnation as three separate 'Caledonian Power Bills' (CPB) to dam many of the lochs lying to the west of the Caledonian Canal, thereby generating enough electricity to locate a major calcium carbide factory at Corpach near Fort William. As promoter of the CPB's, the British Oxygen Company (BOC), promised up to 5000 temporary jobs during the lengthy constructional phases, while on completion the plant itself would employ between 300-500 people. The

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Lanarkshire Hydro-Electric Power Company continued to produce a small amount of energy from the Falls of Clyde. Further south-west the Galloway Water Power Company dammed Loch Doon, Clatteringshaws Loch and constructed five small stations along the River Dee in a scheme to supply the Central Electricity Board.

<sup>172</sup> Throughout the 1930's the BAC reported very healthy profits for its Kinlochleven and Lochaber plants as the global aluminium market burgeoned. For examples see: *The Times*, 1930 March 1929 p. 19; *Oban Times* 1936 April 18 p. 2.

<sup>173</sup> This same figure was cited by both Professor Francis Bailey and Mr W.T. Halcrow at the 1934 conference of British Association for the Advancement of Science. Bailey was President of the Engineering Section of the BAAS and Emeritus Professor of Electrical Engineering at Heriot-Watt University. He was also vice-president of the Cockburn Association and an active member of the APRS executive throughout the inter-war period. Halcrow was a civil engineer of considerable repute.

<sup>174</sup> Thomsen, P. (1938) *Scottish Water Power and in particular the Caledonian Power Scheme in relation to the Development of the Highlands*, Edinburgh p. 11.

catchment area for these schemes was far larger than any of their hydro antecedents, covering some 300 sq. miles of mountainous country, while the constructional programme involved a range of landscape alterations. Had any of the bills been successful the promoters would have gained control of 43 named rivers and expanses of water, including Lochs Loyne, Garry, Quoich and Cluanie. Five dams were to be constructed, the largest being 60 feet in height, along with four power stations which would be linked to the industrial plant at Corpach by a network of pylons and overhead cables (see figure 31).<sup>175</sup> The end product, calcium carbide, was increasingly in demand for oxy-acetylene welding processes in engineering while its derivatives were of crucial importance in the munitions industry.<sup>176</sup>

The revival of the GESC's plans for Glen Affric in 1941 and their subsequent parliamentary rejection proved to be something of a watershed. Spurred on by his consuming interest in Highland affairs, Tom Johnston as newly appointed Secretary of State for Scotland, successfully lobbied for the appointment of a government committee of inquiry which would investigate the potential for further water power development in the region. The report of the Cooper Committee, delivered in 1942, strongly advocated the formation of a new public service corporation.<sup>177</sup> The North Scotland Hydro-Electric Board (NSHEB) would have singular jurisdiction over electricity production and supply for consumers in its own distribution area, with the surplus being sold on to the national grid. When Lord Cooper's findings were presented to parliament as the Hydro-Electric Development (Scotland) Bill in 1943 the mood in both Houses had altered immeasurably. Attitudes towards HEP had been coloured by wartime experiences

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<sup>175</sup> The power stations were to be built at Kinlochour, Ceannacroc, Invermoriston, Invergarry. Dams would raise the heights of Loch Garry, Loyne, Cluanie and the river Moriston by 17, 40, 49 and 42ft respectively. Other necessary developments included the drying of 20 miles of river, the digging of 12 miles of tunnel and laying of several miles of pipeline, the construction of 22 miles of new road to replace those flooded by high water loch levels and the setting of 68 miles of overhead transmission cables, 32 of which would be located in the Great Glen.

<sup>176</sup> When combined with atmospheric nitrogen, calcium carbide yields calcium cyanide, a useful nitrogenous fertiliser. Cyanide when treated with steam yields ammonia and with the addition of sulphuric acid produces sulphate of ammonia, another useful fertiliser. Alternatively, by mixing ammonia with nitric acid it was possible to produce a full range of explosives. Indeed in 1920 under the aegis of the Nitrogen Products Committee both the Ministry of Munitions and Ministry of Reconstruction had endorsed HEP developments in the Highlands. Thomsen, P. (1938) *op cit*, p. 11.

<sup>177</sup> The committee, led by Lord Cooper the Lord Justice Clerk, included Neil Beaton the chairman of the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society, John Cameron a public servant on the Land Court, the industrialist Lord Weir and James Williamson the chief engineer on the Galloway Water Power Scheme. Soundings were taken from the public at a number of different venues around Scotland, while a range of voluntary organisations were involved in the consultation procedure.

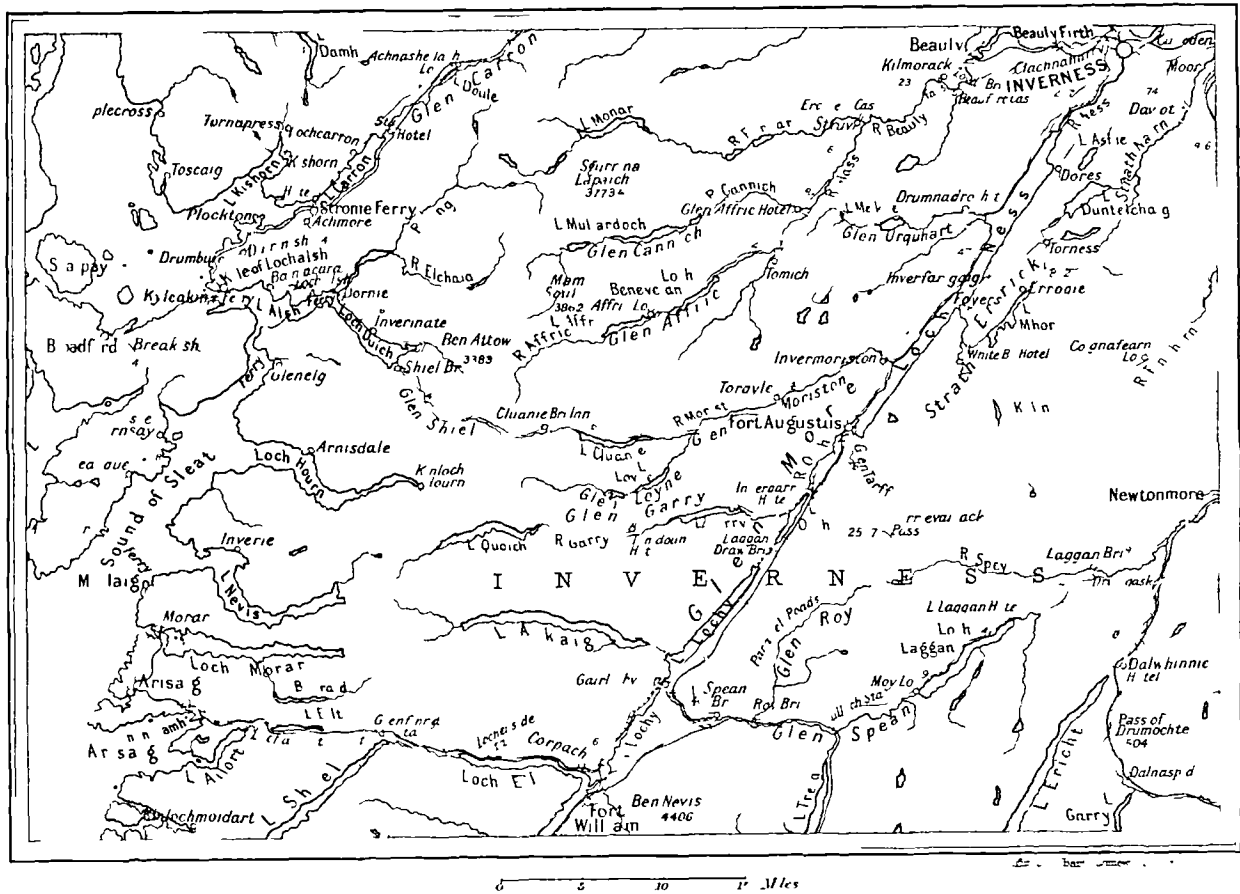


Figure 31 - District Affected by the Proposed Caledonian Power Scheme  
Source: APRS (1938)

and the perceived need for post-war economic reconstruction on a grand scale.<sup>178</sup> Thanks largely to Johnston's canny skills of negotiation and diplomacy allied to a steely determination, and although objectors remained strong in both number and opinion, the Bill passed through both the Commons and Lords.<sup>179</sup> Early in 1945, the NSHEB announced just over one hundred individual hydro-technology projects which would affect water courses from the Mull of Kintyre to the Shetland Isles. While there would be many more barriers for the NSHEB to surmount during peace time, the creation of the new authority marked the end of a protracted period of invidious and vengeful political feuding.

During the inter-war period, opinion on the possible development of Scottish water resources fragmented over a number of key issues. Most thoroughly chronicled have been the disagreements over the rights of sovereignty in the exploitation of national resource stocks and the economic prudence of attracting strategically important industries to the Highlands while more densely populated and politically influential regions were left in a comparable state of destitution.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> These sentiments were made clear in one Highland editorial: 'The influence of the war on our methods of life has prepared us for more general planning of utility undertakings'. Editorial 'Glen Affric Scheme Rejected - Government Scheme Promised', *Oban Times* 1941 October 20 p. 5.

<sup>179</sup> Full details of Johnston's pivotal role in the 1940's hydro debates can be found in: Payne, P. (1988) op cit. p. 36-49; see also, Pottinger, G. (1979) *The Secretaries of State for Scotland, 1926-76: Fifty Years of the Scottish Office*, Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press. A personal account is included in: Johnston, T. (1952) *Memories*, London: Collins.

<sup>180</sup> On the first point, Scottish nationalists and militant socialists united to condemn private enterprise, arguing that single industries would not benefit the region in the long-run serving only to keep the native population tied to the reins of an yet another coterie of English paymasters. 'Farmer's Laddie' (1928) 'Rural Notes', *Scots Independent*, February p. 58; 'Juniper' (1930) 'The Highlands and Electricity', *Scots Independent*, June 1930 p. 103; 'Highland Notes', *Scots Independent*, 1931 November p. 12; MacLaurin, R. (1937) 'The Caledonian Power Scheme', *Scots Independent*, April p. 1-2; Quigley, H. (1943) 'Selling Scotland Out', *Scots Independent*, February p. 1. The CPB's and Glen Affric schemes were depicted as insidious attempts to gain monopolistic control of the Highland's natural resource base. Rapacious and ill-conceived they would relegate the region to the status of a powerhouse for the South. Thomsen, P. (1938) op cit.; Thomsen, P. (1941) op cit. Glasgow: HDL. Activists for political independence queried the probity of potential developers and financiers, demanding to know of them: where the electricity would be used, whether it would be supplied to local communities and at what cost? This anti-imperialist rhetoric was counterpoised with reminders from realists among the nationalist and socialist ranks, of the increasing desperation felt by a Highland citizenry too long starved of employment or hope. One *Oban Times* editorial stressed the potential gains to be made from electro-chemical and electro-metallurgical industries. Pioneering projects would bring infrastructural improvements, modern innovations and a means to stem the steady flow of out-migration. Furthermore they offered the region an all too rare opportunity to contribute directly to the national economy, aluminium and calcium carbide were after all 'big scale industries, directed by big men and backed by big capital. Their operations require continuous foresight and scientific skill. They are industries of no mean grade'. Editorial, 'The Great Highland Industry: Aluminium and its Applications' *Oban Times* 1937 April 10 p. 5; Editorial, 'Calcium Carbide: The Source of Acetylene Gas - its importance to modern industry' *Oban Times* 1937 December 4 p. 5. Regards the second point, while most commentators agreed that with diplomatic relations deteriorating in continental Europe a domestic supply of calcium carbide was wholly advisable, the chosen location for its production was far



The failure of the BOC to secure parliamentary approval for three successive drafts of their power bill reflected these fissures which had opened up along regional and national lines. When the first bill was turned down in March 1936 by 199 votes to 63, 22 Scottish MP's voted in favour and 16 against. At the fall of the second by 188 votes to 140 one year later, 47 Scottish members were for, leaving a rump of 11 against. The third and last, read to parliament in March 1938, was defeated by 227 votes to 141; on this occasion 43 Scots representatives supported and 18 chose to reject.

These collisions of interest also surfaced when attention turned to the problematic issue of amenity and a universally acceptable landscape aesthetic. A familiar problem in contemporary environmental thought, the search for common ground between utility and amenity was a novel one in inter-war Britain. Surprisingly, this aspect of the HEP debates has received scant consideration although, as the remainder of the chapter will demonstrate, it impinged heavily on debates over the appropriate balance to be struck between tradition and modernity in Highland life. While the narratives of the 'insider' and 'outsider' collided at a number of levels, the discourse within Highland society was far from cohesive. Attention will focus first upon those who came out in opposition to the hydro bills on the grounds of landscape preservation.

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more problematic. In 1937-8 Sir Thomas Inskip, the Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence, campaigned for a twin-pronged production strategy with calcium carbide plants located in South Wales and the Highlands. Inskip was unwilling to entertain the prospect of Britain entering a major war while still reliant on imports from Norway or Canada. Meanwhile the case for South Wales was pushed by an axis of Welsh and English MP's during the reading of the second CPB. Having been granted 'Special Area' status by central government in an attempt to promote industrial restructuring, the region was deemed by many lobbyists to be in greater need of economic investment than the West Highlands. With a denser population, more unemployed workers and a plentiful supply of coal to fuel thermal power stations (which could arguably produce the required electricity at much cheaper rates), South Wales was an attractive alternative. Peter Thomsen pointed out that while the 1937 Report of the Unemployment Insurances Committee recorded rates of 40.6% in Ross and Cromarty compared to 29.2% in Glamorgan and Monmouth, in absolute terms the numbers for South Wales far outweighed those for the Highlands. Besides this, he estimated that the probable cost of power at the proposed Corpach plant would be 0.273p per unit, while steam power using coal bought at 15/- per ton cost 0.173p per unit and at 20/- per ton still only 0.204p per unit. Thomsen, P. (1938) *op cit.* p. 31. Similar arguments, highlighting the dependence of mining communities on the welfare state while abundant stocks of coal lay idle, were used by a minority of Scottish MP's to construct an equally compelling case for Lanarkshire at the reading of the third CPB.

## Mounting a Defence Against 'Pernicious and Iniquitous' Development

*'Some of the world's most lovely scenery is our land's priceless heritage, and we are its trustees. This generation has betrayed that trust as no generation ever did before, and we shall most richly merit the curse of posterity if we permit the destroyer any further to mar the perfection of beauty of our Highland glens.'*<sup>181</sup>  
(Anon, 1935)

Addressing an HEP protest meeting in Glengarry, Dr. Evan Baillie the editor of the *Inverness Courier* described the general aspects of the Caledonian Power Scheme as 'pernicious and iniquitous'.<sup>182</sup> While at once reflecting the unfortunate intrusion into the hydro debate of the parochial and inveterate civic rivalry which existed between Fort William and the Highland capital, his views were also representative of the provocative rhetoric cultivated by the rural preservation lobby. As this section makes clear, the objections of the landowning elite and the romantically inclined middle-classes could be afforded an extra gloss when refracted through the detached and respected gaze of the APRS and NTS. During the 1930's, rural preservation propagandists found little difficulty in envisioning near apocalyptic scenarios for the Highlands should the industrialisation of the hills and glens continue. Monumental HEP technology was, they argued, fraught with dangers, some economic, some sociological and a great many environmental.

Very early in the organisation's existence, the membership of the APRS had identified water power as a critical issue on the modern rural agenda.<sup>183</sup> The patrician grandees occupying positions of high office were well aware of the political sensitivities likely to be aroused by a public declaration of disapproval, although their eventual decision to vigorously oppose large-scale HEP would set the motif for years to come.<sup>184</sup> The report of an APRS sub-committee, penned hurriedly in 1929 with a glut of schemes pending, is illustrative of the attitudes then

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<sup>181</sup> *Scotsman* 1935 November 29 p. 8.

<sup>182</sup> *Oban Times* 1937 January 23 p. 3.

<sup>183</sup> The first mention of electricity schemes in APRS minutes appeared in 1928 when concerns were expressed over the difficulty of obtaining information on the intentions of certain companies rumoured to be promoting schemes. APRS/ECM vol. I. 1928 May 31.

<sup>184</sup> With the reading of the first Glen Affric Bill fast approaching, Sir Iain Colquhoun used a trip to London to canvass opinion among members at the House of Commons. Meanwhile Lord Haddington advocating a cautious handling of the situation advised against a letter of opposition being sent to the press. Only after careful consideration did the Executive agree to an open declaration of their position. Arrangements were then made for a deputation comprising Sir John Stirling-Maxwell, Sir D.Y. Cameron, Sir Iain Colquhoun and Professor Francis Bailey to meet the Secretary of State for discussions. The same party colluded with Sir Harry Hope and Sir Archibald Sinclair in organising a presentation to a non-party meeting of Scottish MP's. APRS/ECM 1928 vol. 1. December 7; 1929 January 17; 1929 February 7; 1929 March 7.

prevalent among the rural preservation lobby.<sup>185</sup> The primary concern was the disturbance likely to be caused to scenery, particularly the manner in which HEP tampered with the natural flow, cadence and grace of Highland water courses. It was claimed that seasonal fluctuations in the levels of reservoirs and raised lochs would leave shorelines black, barren and unsightly. Peter Thomsen, a long-time member of the APRS executive, made florid claims with regard the visual and ecological effects of damming Loch Garry:

*'In Summer when the water level has fallen some 30-40ft, road, jutting promontories and an island will reappear, not as they were, but covered with a noisome slime, the remains of the former vegetation, with here and there the blanched and leafless skeletons of trees, that cannot live submerged for more than half a year, projecting from the ooze'.*<sup>186</sup>

The authors of the 1929 report fretted over the flooding of flat land surrounding lochs, leaving steep hillsides running directly and unharmoniously into the water. As a consequence, new roads would have to be cut into the landscape, shadowed by steel pipelines and concrete aqueducts. When developers announced that some rivers would be run dry, the resultant gravel beds were deemed both offensive and unnatural. Grave fears were expressed that much loved waterfalls, such as the Falls of Glomach and Tummel, would lose much of their water and with it their essential character. Thomsen was equally perturbed by such plans, dreading the contractor with rights:

*'to tunnel, to dump the excavated rubbish where he pleases, to fell the timber where it is in his way, to quarry for what stone or sand he needs for his huge dams, to build his light railways, to set up his concrete mixers and stone crushers, to plough up roads with his heavy lorries - all as he will'.*<sup>187</sup>

For the committed preservationist, pressure tunnels, dams and sluices were a perversion of nature's intuitive rhythms, transforming historic lochs and rivers

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<sup>185</sup> SRO GD 335/41. Report of the Sub-Committee of the Association on the Hydro-Electric Schemes, viz. Galloway Water Power, West Highland Water Power, and Grampian Electricity supply especially as regards effects on scenery, disturbance of life of inhabitants, safeguarding of their rights, strengthening of Amenity clause, financial prospects and economic position, February 1929; (APRS/SCR). Written by Professor Francis Bailey, Mr H. Hall-Blyth and Mr A Wilson the findings of the report were warmly received by the executive committee. APRS/ECM vol. I. 1929 February 7.

<sup>186</sup> Thomsen, P. (1938) op cit. p. 40.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid, p. 40.

into the instruments of modernity.<sup>188</sup> To Arthur Gardner the replacement of a rushing Highland torrent with a stony river-bed was nothing less than a sacrilegious act (see figure 32). He appealed as an Englishman for the citizens of Britain to recognise their predicament, 'we cannot afford to go on fouling our own nest in this way for the sake of short-sighted financial gains'.<sup>189</sup> Framed by the notion of an identifiably British landscape heritage these 'national' concerns were impressed upon the public conscience. Collective responsibility was paramount, for as the readership of *Country Life* were warned, unfortunate industrial precedents had already been set:

*'We have allowed Manchester to destroy the charms of Thirlmere and Haweswater, and Glasgow to replace the lovely shores and silver strand of Loch Katrine by a concrete parade. Are we now to permit the still grander glories of Loch Quoich and Loch Hourn to suffer an even worse fate to supply power for a carbide factory? Let all good men rise and demand from our rulers that these priceless treasures of our inheritance be made safe for all time from the ruthless speculations of engineers and commercial adventurers'.<sup>190</sup>*

Gardner's commitment to the cause extended to the contribution of several personal snapshots for use in an anti-HEP propaganda pamphlet.<sup>191</sup> Produced by the APRS before the reading of the second CPB and re-issued at the time of the

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<sup>188</sup> The NTS regularly referred to the loss of 'typical Highland river scenery' in their defence of specific holdings during the 1940's. One member of council, the Very Reverend Dr Charles Warr, declared that, 'such schemes, if carried out would spell ruin for places which were traditionally associated with folklore and songs, all of which were part of the tradition of Scotland'. NTS/ECM 1944 June 14. This emotive rhetoric was adopted by the Trust during their opposition to the one of the NSHEB's first proposed projects, on the River Tummel near Pitlochry. In a letter sent to the Chairman and Amenity Committee of the new hydro board the loss to the Trust was labelled 'a loss to the nation itself of something intangible which cannot be compensated or ever restored or made good again'. NTS/ECM 1944 July 26; see also, NTS HEP Boxfile, Letter from Arthur Russell to Lieutenant-Commander Laurie, NSHEB 1944 June 22. Similar sentiments had been expressed by the NTS executive prior to the publication of the Cooper Report and after the initial announcement of the NSHEB's intentions. NTS/ECM vol. VI 1941 June 17; vol. VII 1944 June 14.

<sup>189</sup> Gardner, A. (1947) *Western Highlands*, London: BT Batsford, p. 5. This book amalgamated Gardner's two previous landscape treatments, *The Peaks, Lochs and Coasts of the West Highlands* and *Sun, Cloud and Snow in the Western Highlands*. His other publications dealt with vernacular architecture and sculpture. For an unabashed traditionalist, Gardner's argument that HEP would soon be rendered obsolete by the refinement of atomic power was perhaps only political posturing, masking a desire to forestall immediate development. The shadow of atomic power already loomed large in British society, cropping up in the wartime parliamentary debates on Highland HEP. See: *Parliamentary Debates Hansard*, House of Lords 137 (27) p. 1187.

<sup>190</sup> Gardner, A. (1937) op cit. p. 649. Similar fears were expressed by another distant observer, Mr John Chaston the Honorary Secretary of the Mid-Northamptonshire Town and Country Planning Committee, Letter to the Editor (1938) *Country Life*, LXXXIII (2140) p. 103.

<sup>191</sup> APRS (1938) *The Caledonian Power Scheme*, Edinburgh: APRS: Edinburgh. Photographs were also donated by Peter Thomsen and A.E. Robertson of the Scottish Mountaineering Club. APRS/ECM vol. II 1936 April 1; 1937 March 3; vol. III 1938 January 11.



Figure 32 - The River Spean After the Construction of the Laggan Dam in the  
Lochaber HEP Scheme  
Source: APRS (1938)

third, this collection of photographs depicted how industrialisation and hydro-technology could bludgeon the natural environment into submission (see figure 32).<sup>192</sup> At considerable expense copies were circulated to all members of both houses of parliament in the hope of colouring political opinion. As debate intensified the rhetoric of the landscape preservation propaganda machine became all the more emotive. Absolute desecration was predicted by Thomsen who, having witnessed 'the tohu-bohu at Kinlochleven, which is capable of discharging four different types of smoke into the air at the same time - such that it catches the breath down at the narrows five miles away', wrote portentously of factories running the length of the Caledonian Canal and of how:

*'their wharves and jetties, their cranes and corrugated iron sheds and heaped up drums and barrels, will take the place of wooded and heather clad shores, smoke and acrid fumes will pollute the sweet air, bungalows and rows of workman's houses will string between the factories, and a jumble of sagging overhead wires swaying from pylon to gaunt pylon will cage in the whole'.*<sup>193</sup>

Literary excesses aside, the APRS reasoned that 'during the period of construction there will be much disfigurement of the area and dislocation of local industries and life'.<sup>194</sup> Gloomily they predicted that:

*'this period may extend over ten years and cause a loss and disturbance to the countryside which will leave its effect for many years more, so that although temporary in a sense, it will entail hardship to the present inhabitants for a substantial part of their lives'.*<sup>195</sup>

The rural society and cherished lifestyle to which they alluded was familiar and feudal. The sporting community with its backbone of patrician lairds must have been particularly pleased by the Association's assertion that new HEP schemes would mean:

*'over a large stretch of country the letting of sporting subjects will almost cease, with loss of employment to keepers, fishermen and others. As the proprietors will scarcely be able to maintain their*

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<sup>192</sup> The executive declared themselves happy with the pamphlet, although one anonymous dissenter expressed the view 'that some of the photographs tended to exaggerate the adverse effects of hydro-electric undertakings upon amenities'. APRS/ECM vol. II 1937 April 7.

<sup>193</sup> Thomsen, P. (1943) *The Cooper Report and the Hydro-Electric Bill*, Edinburgh: Neil & Co. p. 15; Thomsen, P. (1938) op cit. p. 40.

<sup>194</sup> SRO GD 335/41 APRS/SCR op cit, p. 3.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

*estates in the accustomed manner, the results will be serious for them and all dependent on them'.<sup>196</sup>*

The message was clear, if property was allowed to slip free from the landed establishment the industrial profiteer was waiting to pounce. During 1937 the Association had noted with some anxiety the number of estates bordering the proposed CPS catchment which were being put up for sale.<sup>197</sup> As the next section demonstrates, in these fragile and fluid times the re-assuring image of the traditional Highland steward again came to the fore.

#### Reluctant Opposition ? Safeguarding Sporting, Recreational and Local Interests

*'Please resist the further industrialisation and despoilation of our beautiful Highland hills and glens.'<sup>198</sup>  
(A Celt to his Fingertips', 1938)*

*'There are hundreds - probably thousands - of Highlanders in Canada and other parts of the world who think of Glengarry...and Glen Moriston as home.'<sup>199</sup>  
(Grand-daughter, thrice removed, of the last Chieftain of the Macdonell Clan - cited by Lord Portland 1937)*

By declaring themselves the mainstay of the Highland economy, landowners reasoned that the sporting experience, founded on a wilderness landscape, could accommodate neither extensive construction programmes nor obtrusive modern structures. Upon learning of plans to divert waters from his land the Duke of Richmond and Gordon referred disparagingly to the promoters of the Lochaber Power Bill as 'poachers'.<sup>200</sup> Sir George Macpherson Grant argued that because of GESC construction work in the vicinity of his Gaick deer forest its stalking value had been 'wholly destroyed'.<sup>201</sup> The Duke of Atholl, fearful that a similar fate would befall his hunting grounds, insisted that when electrical lines crossed his

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid, p. 4. In 1938 it was ascertained by the Association that the annual wages bill in one shooting lodge exceeded £1000. The assumption being that this money would find its way directly into the local economy. APRS (1938) op cit. p. 27.

<sup>197</sup> APRS/ECM vol. II 1937 April 7. Suspicions were raised when some of the holdings held by the Chisholm of Chisholm Trustees were sold to the mysteriously titled 'Highland Estates Ltd'.

<sup>198</sup> Letter to the Editor, *Oban Times* 1938 January 1 p. 3.

<sup>199</sup> Letter to the Editor, *The Times* 1937 March 9 p. 8.

<sup>200</sup> Anon (1921) 'Club Notes', *Cairngorm Club Journal*, X (57) p. 137. Not much later the Duke was to sell his 65,000 acre holdings, which comprised the Glenavon, Glenfiddich and Blackwater estates, complaining bitterly of HEP disturbances and public intrusions.

<sup>201</sup> *Oban Times* 1939 January 14 p. 5.

estate marches they were to be buried underground.<sup>202</sup> At a CPB protest meeting in Fort Augustus, Colonel Evan Baillie of Dochfour concluded his points on the poor prospects for spring fishing by declaring that the scheme 'would do no earthly good'.<sup>203</sup> Sir John Stirling-Maxwell attempted to strike a balance, arguing that 'the reaction of the tourist and sportsman have to be considered' as part of 'any attempt to industrialise the Highlands'.<sup>204</sup> However when conciliatory solutions to landscape alteration were sought, as at Dunalistair Dam in the Kinloch-Rannoch scheme where fish-passes and ladders were designed to accommodate the migratory paths of salmon, the invasion of hydro-technology was still viewed by Stirling-Maxwell as an unnecessary distortion of the natural order.<sup>205</sup> Sir Iain Colquhoun could see nothing more than 'a wanton and irredeemable destruction of natural beauty'.<sup>206</sup>

Official petitions of opposition to water power schemes were dominated by landowning interests, their arguments mirroring in large part those put forward by the APRS.<sup>207</sup> The West Highland proposals of 1929 were rebuffed by the Mackintosh of Mackintosh, Lord Lovat, Arthur Bowlby, Colonel Bruce Baillie, Lady May Emma Cooper of Ceannacroc, Major Henry Birkbeck of Kinlochhourn and the trustees of the Glenmoriston estate.<sup>208</sup> Lady Cooper and Major Birkbeck also lodged their disapproval over the CPB's alongside Colonel Sir Donald Walter Cameron of Lochiel, Major John Bell-Irving of Barrisdale, Major Archibald Hanning Wilde of Corrie Lair, Mrs Chisholm of Chisholm Estates, Captain Grant of Glenmoriston, Russell Ellice of Glengarry and Glenquoich, Baron Lovat,

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<sup>202</sup> APRS/ECM vol. II. 1934 February 7.

<sup>203</sup> *Oban Times* 1937 January 16 p. 3.

<sup>204</sup> Notable in the comments made by the laird of Corrour was the spurious coalition he brokered between the sportsman and holiday-maker, a relationship which previously had provoked little more than tension and ill-feeling. He continued his argument: 'Hitherto the main attraction of the region has been that Nature was completely unspoilt. Dams and power houses may be tolerated, if designed decently; but when it comes to miles of dry river beds and lochs filled and emptied like baths, with acres of black mud exposed in summer and fishing completely destroyed, visitors may hesitate to come to the Highlands and even write them off as they have already written off much of the Ardennes'. Stirling-Maxwell, J. (1938) 'Scotland Today: Ancient Romance and Modern Romance', *Country Life* (Scottish Supplement) LXXXIV (2165) p. v.

<sup>205</sup> APRS/ECM vol. I. 1930 November 7. Association minutes described the completed developments at Tummel Bridge as 'hideous and grievous disfigurements'. APRS/ECM vol. II 1933 September 27.

<sup>206</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 1929 November 2 p. 7.

<sup>207</sup> Chief complaints related to the disturbance to scenery, interference with fishing rights and possible injury to deer forests. More specifically, landowners pointed out that low-lying land near lochs and in glens was essential to winter grazing programmes while the increase in human activity would have a disastrous effect on the behaviour of deer.

<sup>208</sup> *Oban Times* 1929 February 23 p. 5.



Baroness Burton and Lord Belper.<sup>209</sup> Fortunately, these objectors were wealthy enough to light and power their shooting lodges with private generating equipment which operated without 'spoiling the look of the country' (see figure 33). Ian Macpherson undermined the sporting community's self-proclaimed aesthetic sensitivity by noting that the mountains and glens had already managed to subsume these same 'red-brick shooting lodges'.<sup>210</sup>

With obvious common ground identified between the rural preservation movement and the landed and sporting fraternity, a wider network of establishment contacts could be drawn upon when conditions required. It was no coincidence that a concentrated APRS recruitment drive occurred in Inverness-shire during the CPS controversies, nor that several lairds and shooting tenants signed up.<sup>211</sup> Typical was Vincent Balfour-Browne, a roving sportsman and recent convert to the cause, who during a stay at Glen Moriston contacted the SPLF with some classified information:

*'I have had staying with me Captain G.T. Hutchinson, Treasurer of Christ Church, Oxford. He is on the Executive Committee of the Central Landowners Association (CLA). He suggested to me that the SPLF should get in touch with the CLA and should refer to him by name. He will do his best to get the CLA to do something to help the opposition. I may also mention that Captain Hutchinson is a great friend of W. Geoffrey Dawson, Editor of the Times; if he can, he will get the Times to further the opposition also'.*<sup>212</sup>

Here was definitive proof that connections in Highland sport opened doors to the smoking-rooms of the British establishment. Among other recent signatories were Mr I.T. Nelson, once a joint lessee of the 70,000 acres of Blackmount deer forest with Mr Balfour-Browne, and Captain I.R.J.M. Grant of Glenmoriston. The value of friends in high places was evident again some years later when it was recorded in APRS minutes that Allan Arthur, an executive member, had 'made some very

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<sup>209</sup> However as one sage pointed out, only two of the objectors were permanently resident in Inverness-shire, while four were London based and the remainder lived in Derbyshire, Dumfriesshire, Hampshire and Norfolk. Letter to the Editor, *Oban Times* 1937 February 6 p. 2. Specific organisational and institutional objections were also filed by the APRS, the British Field Sports Society, the Scottish Salmon Anglers Association, the Mining Association and three local authorities. *Oban Times* 1936 February 8 p. 7; 1937 February 6 p. 3; 1938 January 29 p. 4.

<sup>210</sup> Macpherson, I. (1935) 'The Central Highlands', in Scott-Moncrieff, G. (ed.) *Scottish Country*, Edinburgh: Wishart, p. 199-215; 208.

<sup>211</sup> APRS/ECM vol. II. 1936 April 1; vol. III 1937 June 2.

<sup>212</sup> SRO GD 325/1/429 V.R. Balfour-Browne to the SPLF, 1937 January 22. Similarly, at a meeting of the APRS executive, Major Strang-Steel announced his willingness to court the favour of Lieutenant-Colonel Spender Clay, MP for Tunbridge, who would 'be a powerful ally in the Commons'. APRS/ECM vol. II 1936 April 1.





**"I heard the other day that you've let your place—is that right?"**

**"Yes, thanks to you!"**

**"To me, why?"**

**"D'you remember telling me about the plant that makes the electricity for your shooting box?"**

**"So that's it. Of course I do. Best investment I ever made. It's made all the difference to the place and it's no trouble to let".**

**"That's just what we think. And though our place must be three times as big as your lodge, the running cost is just what you told me yours was".**

**"About a penny-a-unit with the Diesel engine".**

**"And with periodic visits from the Lister Engineer, any possibility of breakdown is prevented".**

**"Quite so. You and I have all the Electricity we need without spoiling the look of the Country".**

A Lister Advisory Engineer will be pleased to call anywhere without obligation and will make a thorough inspection and give an estimate of costs for an Electric Generating Plant or a Pump to raise water. There is no pressing for the business and you are invited to "think it over and compare". Following the installation an Engineer calls periodically and sees that everything is in tip top order.



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Figure 33 - A Sporting Alternative to HEP

Source: *Oban Times* (1936)

interesting contacts with very large, landed proprietors who were strongly opposed to certain activities of the hydro-electric board; including a landowner from the USA who was also an eminent lawyer'.<sup>213</sup> A concerted effort was duly made to draft the American onto the association's HEP sub-committee.<sup>214</sup> Meanwhile, pre-empting the establishment of the new Board, the hierarchy of the NTS had already initiated its own damage limitation exercise. Having been informed that government would be appointing an Amenities Committee, the Trust secretary contacted the Scottish Office with some subtle hints on the special type of person suited to service:

*'As the matter is so essentially a Scottish one, it is perhaps presumptuous and unnecessary to stress the point that to command the fullest confidence, only Scotsmen should be appointed, who, from their ancestry and birth or long and close association with Scottish and Highland problems are imbued with a true regard for what most appropriately should be preserved in the best interests of the Highlands generally, as well as for what in new construction may be most in keeping with their Highland surroundings'.*<sup>215</sup>

Arthur Russell's intimation was clear, the laird, re-modelled as modern custodian for the countryside, represented the perfect candidate.

At a function held by the London Inverness-shire Association the Earl of Dunmore pointed out to fellow dinners that while 'we want a development scheme for the Highlands', it had be achieved 'without the destruction of an irreplaceable asset'.<sup>216</sup> On the same guest list was Sir Murdoch Macdonald, the only Highland MP to vote against the CPB's. Having opened his speech by hoping that 'for ages to come there should be a Mackintosh in Moy Hall, a Lochiel in Lochaber, a Dunmore in Harris, a Baillie in Dochfour and a Grant in Glenmoriston', MacDonald got around to declaring that 'none of us want to stop progress, but we

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<sup>213</sup> APRS/ECM vol. V 1944 October 14.

<sup>214</sup> It was also the Association's stated intention to recruit the 17th Lord Lovat onto the executive given his family's history of opposition to HEP. APRS/ECM vol. V 1944 November 1.

<sup>215</sup> NTS Archive Hydro-Electric Power Boxfile, Letter from A. Russell to D. Milne (acting on behalf of the Secretary of State for Scotland) 1943 April 21. Allan Arthur was also present on the NTS council. He was in close contact with Lord Samuel throughout the parliamentary debates on the Glen Affric scheme, thanking him for his contributions: 'I am glad to see that you, and other noble lords, are strongly criticising the inadequate powers of the Amenities Committee, which alone can prevent the spoilation for all time of some of our most beautiful Scottish scenery by financial and big business interests'. NTS HEP Boxfile, Letter from Allan Arthur to Viscount Samuel 1943 June 25.

<sup>216</sup> *Oban Times* 1937 May 8 p. 5. Alison Stewart was unconvinced by the landowners' stance accusing them of hiding 'self-interest behind concern for the handful of estate-servants whose way of life will be changed by the Bill'. Stewart, A. (1938) op cit. p. 439.

want to see our normal amenities protected'.<sup>217</sup> Critically however, complexities and contradictions existed among these arbiters of a traditional landscape aesthetic.

Murdoch, the ally of the laird and the preservationist, was one of several objectors whose private investment interests betrayed a rather different attitude to hydro-technology when it was located far beyond Scotland's sporting estates. Before the blossoming of his political career Murdoch worked as a consultant civil engineer, where his most notable achievement was the design for the Aswan Dam on the River Nile. Another imperial entrepreneur was Sir Iain Malcolm, laird of Poltalloch, who invested heavily in the Suez Canal Company. Meanwhile in the same corner of Africa the 8th Duke of Atholl was adding to his portfolio of failed business ventures. As representative of the Docker Heineman Company 'Bardie' met with the Egyptian government and royal family in a doomed attempt to persuade them to raise the height of the Aswan Dam which would allow the electrification of remote hinterlands.<sup>218</sup> Hydro and hunting interests converged on the home front too. During the 1920's the Duke gave the GESC his financial backing, however fragile, to the Rannoch-Tummel scheme. Among the captains of industry who had profited from earlier industrial speculation, Murray Morrison and George Balfour the masterminds behind the Lochaber power scheme, were both keen sportsmen.<sup>219</sup> Sir Alexander Gibb, whose engineering firm was had been contracted on the Galloway Water Power Scheme, was also the owner of the 13,000 acre Gruinard deer forest in Ross-shire.<sup>220</sup> Cameron of Lochiel, distinctive in his position as a laird who was publicly ambivalent over HEP, was not averse to feathering his own nest.<sup>221</sup> Having opposed the first two CPB's, and asked of his

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid, p. 5. Freddie Macquisten MP for Argyll, Malcolm MacMillan MP for the Western Isles, Archibald Sinclair long-standing candidate for Ross and Cromarty and Malcolm MacDonald of the Ross and Cromarty constituency all voted in favour of the CPB's. *Oban Times* 1938 April 9, p. 5.

<sup>218</sup> *Oban Times* 1937 April 24 p. 2. Having experimented with man-carrying kites as a means of military espionage during the Great War the Duke later developed a mercurial talent for bagging financial 'turkeys' which led him to France and Romania in the hope of selling steel houses, to the Argentine with dreams of a modern railway network and to one of the few islands in the West Indies unsuited to sugar cane production, with the express intention of doing just that. Fuller details of Atholl's incredible financial tribulations can be found in: Cramb, A. (1996) *Who Owns Scotland Now? The Use and Abuse of Private Land*, Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, p. 95-114; see also, *The Directory of Directors, 1939*. London: Skinner.

<sup>219</sup> At a society Highland Gathering Murray Morrison declared himself extremely conscious of industrial developments having an adverse effect on sporting values and scenic amenity. *Oban Times* 1934 July 21 p. 7.

<sup>220</sup> Gunn, H. (ed.) (1925) *The Book of Empire Big Game*, London: Simpkin, Marshall and Hamilton, Appendix I 'The Deer Forests of Scotland'.

<sup>221</sup> As convenor of the Inverness-shire county council and clan chieftain of Lochaber, Lochiel obviously felt some public obligation to consider the possibility of industrial development. Conversely, as a private landowner his ire had been raised by the most minor concessions to

county councillors whether it 'was necessary to destroy the lochs and glens in order to provide this power ?', Lochiel struck a deal with the BOC over the third which, had it passed, would have involved the lease of the crucial 170 acres at Corpach required for the carbide plant and workers houses.<sup>222</sup> These matters did not go unnoticed. An earlier tranche of negotiations for compensation payments led the *Northern Times* to question the scruples of Highland proprietors:

*'...the lairds squealed so loud that people began to wonder if the electrical drills were being driven through their bodies and not through rocks in the mountains. Behind the scenes a vast army of lawyers between London and Thurso were busy negotiating how much money they could get for the lairds and themselves for the use of the water rights'.*<sup>223</sup>

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modernity - petrol pumps which were 'hideous and disfiguring' - and more major intrusions such as the BOC's attempts to gain rights of compulsory acquisition over his ancestral demesne. *Oban Times* 1937 February 6 p. 8. While advocating hydro development for its material benefits, Lochiel was well aware of its aesthetic downside. Having quite literally turned his nose up to odorous industrial processes, on one occasion he rather haughtily suggesting to the 1500 employees of the BAC Lochaber plant and their spouses that if they each agreed to plant a tree then they could blot out 'that pipe on the hillside'. *Oban Times* 1935 December 21 p. 2; 1937 September 11 p. 5. In 1930 Lochiel expressed the hope that 'before very long they would probably find that Lochaber would be the greatest centre of the aluminium industry in the world', yet four years later the plant had become 'a good example of a water-power scheme being developed when there was no use for it at the present moment'. While having to accept the presence of some industrial development he declared himself sure that 'the county's principal interests would remain sporting, grazing and agriculture'. *Oban Times* 1930 January 11 p.5; 1934 January 20 p. 5. For other examples of Lochiel's oscillating position on HEP see: *Oban Times* 1936 December 5 p. 3; 1937 December 21 p. 2; 1938 May 14 p. 2; 1940 December 21 p. 3.

<sup>222</sup> *Oban Times* 1938 January 15 p. 5. Lochiel had perhaps found his hand forced by financial necessity. Despite his considerable sporting assets, (during the 1934 season he had six different lessees for the family estates), solvency could no longer be taken for granted. *Oban Times* 1934 July 21 p. 7. In a speech at an international gathering of the Clan, the chieftain discussed the possibility of selling land on the margins of the estate and the possibility of transferring his ownership to a trust fund. *Oban Times*, 1937 November 20 p. 2.

<sup>223</sup> Editorial 'The Prime Minister and the Highlands' *Northern Times* 1934 December 13 p. 4. The payment of compensation to landowners for hydrological disturbances on their property was no new development, the first and most infamous example dating back to the turn of the century. When the Municipal Corporation for Glasgow requested that Loch Katrine be used for the city's water supply, its owner, the Duke of Montrose, made a perfectly fair demand for recompense if compulsory purchase was required. An undisclosed sum was paid. However he then wickedly suggested the possibility of building some villas on his land along the lochs edge, which would pump effluent into the water. To persuade the aristocrat otherwise the Corporation parted with a further £25,000. In 1909, The Duke stooped lower still. When the Corporation applied to raise the height of nearby Loch Arklet by 22ft they were met this time with a £26,000 compensation bill. By disputing the claim the case was sent to tribunal, after which the Corporation were ordered to pay £19,090 plus the cost of arbitration. The demands did not end there as the Duke drew up a quite farcical list of sundry expenses. These were recounted by an incredulous Tom Johnston: 'He stipulated that the Corporation must keep good the nine mile road from Inversnaid to Stronachlader "for all time coming", make and keep up new roads and paths, maintain farm fences, look after the drainage and sewage of his farms in the vicinity, reconstruct his boathouse and lay down proper appliances for his boating excursions (this last includes "beacons" lest he run aground). When it transpired that material would be required to raise the loch level, and that an overhead ropeway was necessary to transmit the material from Loch Lomond to Loch Arklet, the Duke appeared with an

When attention switched to the needs of local communities, statements from the landowning and rural preservation axis were frustratingly evasive. Public criticism of continued opposition could be deflected by lairds who reasoned that decisions were being made in the best interests of feudal dependants. Lord Lovat's biographer took a circuitous route towards explanation:

*'Singularly free from sentimental considerations of beauty or tradition, he was ready to welcome anything, even something novel or disfiguring to the countryside, which he believed would benefit it materially. But if there was a thing he detested it was a scheme ostensibly to forward the objects he had at heart, but calculated in practice to frustrate them and backed by interested motives'.<sup>224</sup>*

Likewise the APRS executive, who argued rather unconvincingly in 1929 that through HEP:

*'the idea of re-populating the Highlands is illusory. Cottage industries are an aid, but not a complete support for people, and the power required, if projects were inaugurated, is insignificant, and could easily be provided by much cheaper small schemes if there should be a demand'.<sup>225</sup>*

By 1937 the organisation was stressing that while not opposed to water power *per se*, it was the vast scale of the proposed schemes which so troubled their membership.<sup>226</sup> Accordingly HEP developments for single glens and small localities were discussed in committee, yet public pronouncements in their favour were few and on the whole far greater effort was expended in opposition than on promotion.<sup>227</sup> Similarly, the interests of crofters and smallholders which, while

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extra claim for £1525 in respect to possible injury to shooting rights. And as a sort of afterthought he decided to ask that the temporary supply of water laid into the hotel at Inversnaid be left undisturbed for all time at no cost to himself'. Johnston, T. (1909) *Our Noble Families*, Glasgow: Forward Publishing, p. 101. Justice was not long in arriving. Within twenty years the Duke's son was forced to sell off these holdings in an attempt to recoup the money required for death duties.

<sup>224</sup> Lindley, F. (1935) *Lord Lovat: A Biography*, London: Hutchinson, p. 247.

<sup>225</sup> SRO GD 335/41 APRS/SCR op cit. p. 4.

<sup>226</sup> APRS/ECM vol. II 1937 April 7.

<sup>227</sup> Professor Bailey, the APRS's resident expert, advocated small-scale technology 'such as would take out of each district the power required for domestic and industrial consumption. The rivers and lochs would not be appreciably affected by such schemes...the construction and generating costs would be lower. Such a policy would develop the Highlands industrially without spoiling them'. APRS/ECM vol. II. 1937 April 7. By 1941, small-scale hydro plants were included in the rural policy manifesto of the organisation APRS/ECM vol. III. 1941 February 4; Letter to the Editor, *Oban Times* 1941 July 5 p. 3. One year later, perhaps sensing a sea-change in parliamentary opinion, Bailey spoke out dramatically on the role to be played by HEP in 'the resurrection of the Highlands'. He confirmed 'that a very large amount of water-power all round the west coast could be obtained at a very low cost indeed, and the whole countryside from Cape Wrath to the Clyde

considered, were seldom pressed with the same vigour as the amenity issue. These priorities were apparent in 1936, when Professor Bailey of the hydro sub-committee noted that although under the plans forwarded for the CPS around twenty crofts in Glenmoriston and Glengarry would be flooded, 'the Association should not protest against this, instead confining their lobby to the matter of rising water-levels and landscape damage'.<sup>228</sup> Ever conscious that their opposition would be deemed obscurantist, Sir Iain Colquhoun used an AGM speech to describe the Association as:

*'a body which freely accepted the principle of, and the need for, development and change, but sought in the process to preserve the face of Scotland in its natural beauty, and to maintain contact with tradition. That attitude was not merely a preservative attitude; it was also a constructive and reconstructive one'.*<sup>229</sup>

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was ideally suited for the supply of power'. Dams below a height of 35ft were now deemed 'unobtrusive, almost invisible', while the previously vilified Kinlochleven works was suddenly cited in support of his case. APRS/ECM vol. IV. 1942 February 3. The haste shown by Bailey in considering the possibility of magnesium and glass being manufactured with the aid of water-power was equally surprising. APRS/ECM vol. IV 1942 April 7. However, not all members were as voluble in their praise. Although an APRS memorandum on the Cooper Report concluded with the vague hope that 'the future Highlanders will become a self-supporting community', the executive would later declare themselves glad that 'the general spirit of the Report had been discarded' in the subsequent Hydro Electric Development (Scotland) Bill of 1943. APRS/ECM vol. IV 1942 December 2. Even then problems remained. The Bill entrusted a quasi-autonomous Board with powers of development, construction and distribution. This, argued the executive, would effectively leave them to use any river and to build power stations wherever they pleased. APRS/ECM vol. IV 1943 February 3.

<sup>228</sup> APRS/ECM vol. II. 1936 December 2. The Association's manifesto pledge to promote community-based water-power projects was never followed up and soon appeared rather hollow. When amendments were invited to the 1943 bill, Peter Thomsen, a renegade to the end, suggested the APRS follow the example set by the HDL and propose a system of loans and grants which could be made to individuals by the hydro board for the construction of small-scale schemes producing less than 100 kw. This would enable the purchase of machinery to supply power suitable for agricultural processes and domestic industries. Technical assistance and additional labour could also be offered by the hydro board, while loans would be set at the same level as those given to crofters for housing by the Board of Agriculture. On completion, schemes could run on a co-operative basis requiring little supervision. APRS/ECM vol. IV 1943 April 7. The executive declined, opting for a much diluted statement. The minutes, in recording Thomsen's disappointment, inadvertently reflected a familiar lament, that the Bill would not contain 'a single amendment which made any reference whatsoever to the betterment of conditions of life in the Highlands'. APRS/ECM vol. IV 1943 May 5.

<sup>229</sup> APRS/ECM vol. II. Annual General Meeting 1937 March 20. Colquhoun's assurances could not prevent Sir Archibald Sinclair, the long-standing Liberal MP for Caithness, from terminating his membership of the Association. His letter of resignation was clear in sentiment: 'It seems to me that the proper function of the APRS is not to set itself up in opposition to economic developments which are in the interest of the Scottish population'. *Oban Times* 1937 April 17 p. 7. Sir John Sutherland was to repeat these concerns in 1941 following the executives' statement of opposition to the GESC proposals for Glen Affric, feeling 'strongly that it was in the interests of the Highlands that as much development as possible should be carried out there'. APRS/ECM vol. III 1941 June 3.

Interestingly, populist support for the opposition lobby could also be engendered through the channels of the outdoor recreation movement, although spokespeople were constantly aware of how far matters could be pushed. Displaying an astuteness typical of a man of the Bar, Arthur Russell, in his role as Secretary of the Scottish Rights of Way Society, pointed out to an English compatriot, 'that the feeling amongst many of us in Scotland is that if the operations are to be of real value to the districts concerned and also to the country as a whole then the question of the preservation of amenity cannot be pressed too far'.<sup>230</sup> Nevertheless, considerable efforts were made to forge anti-HEP links with established organisations. The Reverend A.E. Robertson and Sandy Harrison, both members of the APRS and NTS executives, garnered support among kindred sorts in the traditionalist circles of the SMC. Robertson meanwhile made effective sallies into the political milieu in search of influential patronage.<sup>231</sup> In 1937, Sir Iain Colquhoun showed few qualms when rallying the merry youth hostelling hordes behind the anti-development cause, even though it was his own estate around Loch Sloy which was 'under threat'.<sup>232</sup> The APRS later demonstrated a similarly impressive grasp of political expediency. Having stalled over the idea of National Parks for some twelve years, the executive abruptly decided to back Sir George Courthope's 1941 parliamentary proposal for such a designation in Glen Affric, at that time threatened by proposals from the GESC.<sup>233</sup> Elsewhere, the Forestry Commissioner Sir John Sutherland, already having felt himself marginalised from the APRS, was chastised by his SYHA executive for using a speech to celebrate the opening of the new Glen Nevis Youth Hostel to encourage young members to

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<sup>230</sup> SRO GD 335/41. Letter to Lawrence Chubb of the Commons Preservation Society, 1929 March 1. See also: letter to H.P. McKinty regards the right of way between Glen Affric and Kintail threatened by the GESC Scheme, 1928 December 18; letter to the Clerk, Ross and Cromarty County Council, 1929 November 28.

<sup>231</sup> Having, in 1935, viewed the proposals for Glengarry and Glenmoriston 'with apprehension', Reverend Robertson took affirmative action during the APRS campaign of 1941 APRS/ECM vol. II 1935 December 4. Mr Edward Keeling, MP for Twickenham, was taken on a tour of Glen Affric prior to the parliamentary debate. The visit was felt to have contributed to the effectiveness of his opposition. APRS/ECM vol. III 1941 October 7. For Robertson's earlier comments on HEP see: APRS/ECM vol. I 1930 October 14.

<sup>232</sup> At Colquhoun's instigation the SYHA forwarded the following resolution to the press and developers: 'the Association protests against the proposal to establish a hydro-electric undertaking in the Loch Sloy area on the ground that the undertaking, if carried out, would irreparably damage the amenities of an area of the Highlands which, on account of its beauty, its accessibility to the people of Scotland, and its great and increasing popularity among pedestrians of all classes, should be preserved from industrial exploitation'. While this was all sound, earnest stuff, rather conveniently no mention was made of the loss of the sporting values from HEP development on this Colquhoun's beloved stalking ground. APRS/ECM vol. III 1937 November 3.

<sup>233</sup> APRS/ECM vol. III 1941 November 3.



respect the need for industrialisation in the Highland landscape.<sup>234</sup> More typical was the stance taken up by the SMC committee who, in 1945, saw fit to publish an article on HEP and scenic amenity, which contrived to shy away from 'questions of economics, employment and utilisation'.<sup>235</sup> Unexpected contributions came from those Nationalists who opposed what they viewed as intrusions from southern-based HEP promoters in search of quick profit. 'Binnein Mor' pointed out to hostellers how 'the local youth, unable to get work at home, has to follow the electric current to the slums of England'.<sup>236</sup> While the outdoor recreation lobby appeared unwilling to adopt a more holistic outlook, those in favour of HEP development would argue for a modern environmental consciousness tempered with political and material pragmatism.

#### 'Utility First Then Ornament': A Gauge on Popular Highland Opinion

*'This country, so poor in developed value, gains nothing from passive admiration of its potential wealth. By all means therefore, encourage these capitalists to spend their brains, time and money in launching this enormous scheme...Let the Company sow: the People will reap...Will the 'scorpions' prophesied as attendant on the New Order of Industrialisation, be able to make any worse a mess of Highland land, Highland hearts, Highland spirits, than has been made in the past by the 'whips' of the Old Order.'*<sup>237</sup>

(Alison Stewart, 1938)

While few seemed short of an opinion on HEP in Westminster, in the shooting lodges of Inverness-shire or among Edinburgh's civic coteries, the native population seldom seemed to be consulted for their views. In an examination of the cultural politics of modernisation in the Highlands it is entirely appropriate to attempt to uncover the sentiments of the disenfranchised. By the same token it would be wrong to assume that the frustrations of the local citizenry at their impotence in the decision-making process resulted in a common consensus. Internal divisions and tensions did exist, and enclaves of anti-HEP resistance held firm.

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<sup>234</sup> Fearful that his service on the government appointed Hilleary Committee was incompatible with APRS membership Sutherland tendered his resignation from the Association. APRS/ECM vol. III 1937 October 6; Anon (1938) 'No, Sir John!', *Scottish Youth Hostel and Cycling News*, July 26 p. 1; *Oban Times* 1938 July 23 p. 2.

<sup>235</sup> Editor's comment attached to: Peat, G. and Harrison, A. (1945) 'Water Power Development in the Highlands', *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*, XXIII (136) p. 197-211; 197.

<sup>236</sup> 'Binnein Mor' (1943) 'Scottish Youth, Electricity and Scenery', *Scots Independent*, May p. 3.

<sup>237</sup> Stewart, A. (1938) op cit. p. 439.

In the aftermath of the first failed CPB, Lachlan Grant addressed the members of the Forum Club on the occasion of their 'Caledonian Night'. Breaking with formal conventions he declared himself outraged that parliamentary opinion consistently stood 'contrary to the wishes and interests of the majority of Highlanders'.<sup>238</sup> Despite, or perhaps because of, the presence of several lairds at the meeting, Grant declared that 'sporting interests must be cast aside in favour of the essential interests of the Highland people'.<sup>239</sup> The *Oban Times*, as the regions most widely read newspaper, had for some years been unsure of private, as opposed to public, investment in HEP.<sup>240</sup> Meritorious in its intent, one editorial reminded Highlanders that rather than the promotion of one single industry there existed:

*'the opportunity for the area to have, from its perpetual natural reservoirs, power at the cheapest rate, at a price which would attract a variety of industries, such as will provide profitable employment for an increased population. It is not a fanciful picture'.*<sup>241</sup>

In a subsequent piece the perceived rights of the people were spelt out more explicitly, "'The Glen is Mine" is deeply rooted in the Highlander. He may not have legal ownership in the land, but surely some degree of possession in the natural features may be allowed him'.<sup>242</sup>

Political activists were equally unsure. Despite Lachlan Grant's call for outright support the membership of the HDL were problematically split over the question of private investment.<sup>243</sup> However during 1936, increasingly doubtful of

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<sup>238</sup> Among the most prominent of the landowners was Sir Donald Cameron of Lochiel. *Oban Times* 1936 December 5 p. 2; *Northern Times* 1936 December 3 p. 7.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>240</sup> See for example: Editorial 'The Stream of Changes Flowing from 1928: Inventions and Enterprise', *Oban Times* 1928 December 22 p. 5.

<sup>241</sup> Editorial, *Oban Times* 1935 December 21 p. 5.

<sup>242</sup> Editorial, *Oban Times* 1936 February 29 p. 5. Local logic ran as follows: 'lochs are fed by rain falling on the croft and hill, by streams whose source is at a distance from the loch. Should there not be some direct public benefit for these people, not to put it too finely, whose cultivation has suffered and will continue to suffer from the excessive rainfall'. Editorial, *Oban Times* 1936 February 15 p. 5. A later column accused the BOC of formulating rapacious plans and of making a hugely unrealistic offer to local government over the proposed tax rating value of the industrial developments. Editorial, *Oban Times* 1936 March 28 p. 5.

<sup>243</sup> At the 1937 League AGM opposition to the CPB was passed by one vote. The Reverend T.M. Murchison was among the most outspoken critics: 'It was all very well to say they wanted to attract capital to the Highlands, but they had to consider the motive behind the capital. If landed gentlemen had considered the interests of the Highlanders there would have been no need for the League, and if today they were going to allow big companies with plenty of money behind them to dominate, then in 100 years time there might not be an HDL but some archaeological body trying to discover what kind of thing the Highlands was'. *Oban Times* 1937 March 27 p. 3. Lachlan Grant's 'dogmatic assertion' that the CPS should go ahead was also challenged by W.

the merits to be gained from such a staunchly principled stance, the *Oban Times* began to infuse its editorials with a strain of political realism. As the reading of the second CPB loomed the paper offered its support to the scheme.<sup>244</sup> The subsequent rejection of the bill was labelled 'a set-back for the Highlands' and 'a sad commentary' on British parliamentary electoral mechanisms.<sup>245</sup> The inhabitants of Fort William agreed, 2000 having signed a petition in favour of the carbide plant.<sup>246</sup> Alexander MacEwen, leader of the Scottish National Party, was moved to describe the situation as intolerable when 'a measure desired by the people most closely affected should be defeated by the votes of English members'.<sup>247</sup> Provost Simon Macdonald felt the perpetrators to amount to 'a few wealthy Americans and Sassenachs'.<sup>248</sup> Dr Ian MacIvor of Fort William was more forthright still, decrying those 'Saxon members who turn round and vote against the very things to which they professed lip sympathy'.<sup>249</sup> Among the island communities of the West there was reported to be 'a mixture of bewilderment, consternation and anger'.<sup>250</sup> Reverend John Mackay of Portree pointed out to the Inverness-shire county council that 'there were enough men in Skye and the Outer Isles to supply all the labour required in the factory'.<sup>251</sup> He urged those in power to 'take them off the public

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Campbell-Galbraith, who regretted the flippant dismissal of objectors as 'either sporting interests or well intended sentimentalists non-resident and with a solicitude mainly idealistic'. Letter to the Editor, *Oban Times* 1937 January 9 p. 5.

<sup>244</sup> This support was conditional on the rating rebates question being satisfactorily answered and assurances given by the BOC that cheap electricity would be supplied to Highland districts. The reasons for this change in stance were three-fold. The mounting desperation of the populace at their continued economic plight was increasingly apparent. Furthermore, if it were left to local authorities, natural resources would never be developed since the necessary capital outlay, relative to the rateable value, would be prohibitive. Meanwhile the contention stood that some years would elapse before public opinion would allow government to fund such colossal public works. Editorial, *Oban Times* 1937 January 9 p. 2.

<sup>245</sup> Editorial 'Set-Back for the Highlands; Caledonian Power Bill Rejected', *Oban Times* 1937 March 20 p. 5; see also Editorial, 'Present Opportunity not Gained' *Oban Times* 1937 March 27 p. 5.

<sup>246</sup> In a letter to Murdoch Macdonald MP, Provost Simon MacDonald on behalf of Fort William Town Council, pointed out that 'the inhabitants of the area were anxious - as a 95% petition in favour of the scheme showed - that the additional benefits which the Caledonian Power Scheme would have conferred, should not be lost to the County'. *Oban Times* 1936 May p. 2; *Oban Times* 1936 May 23 p. 2.

<sup>247</sup> *Oban Times* 1937 March 20 p. 5.

<sup>248</sup> *Oban Times* 1937 November 20 p. 4.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid. Similar sentiments were expressed by a range of characters from Scottish political life. Anon (1937) 'Scotland Month by Month', *Scots Magazine*, XXVII (1) p. 1-3.

<sup>250</sup> *Oban Times* 1936 May 1 p. 2. The communities of the western seaboard had a tradition of supplying willing workers to the aluminium plants. In 1936 The Reverend John Mackay noted how, 'within the last two months 70 able-bodied' from the west had been taken on at Kinlochleven. *Oban Times*, 1936 July 11 p. 5.

<sup>251</sup> *Oban Times* 1937 January 16 p. 5.

assistance roll and help them earn an independent living' and 'deliver them from being lackeys and flunkeys to southerners'.<sup>252</sup>

Those who objected to the hydro proposals on the grounds of amenity preservation were accused of romanticisation on a grand scale, 'let them come to the Highlands in January and February and see the conditions under which the people live', challenged Mackay. At a later meeting, attempts were made to explain the balance struck between societal gain and landscape loss in the environmental consciousness of the Highlander. Reverend Mackay stated that 'the prevailing opinion among the densely populated communities in the west was that the works are something in the nature of providential convenience'.<sup>253</sup> The native population were, he pointed out, 'all interested in scenery and the amenities of the countryside. They wanted to keep them and conserve them and they wanted people to live in the glens and valleys, and it was for that very reason they supported these industries'.<sup>254</sup> The CPB, he added to enthusiastic applause, would 'make it possible for many of their people to earn their daily bread in their native environment away from the anxieties and embarrassments which they had lived under for several generations'.<sup>255</sup> *The Oban Times* by now agreed, arguing that contrary to alarmist claims, 'there would be no ruthless disregard of nature's beauty spots. Time would heal the wounds which the construction work might make, just as time has softened the forbidding landscape of the glacial period'.<sup>256</sup> One editorial even celebrated 'the wonderfully unobtrusive entrance into the landscape' of Foyers and Kinlochleven, contending that, 'with time the present "newness" will disappear, and the stone work will yet wear the venerable aspect of an old Highland

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid, p. 5. The same issue of employment arose at a public meeting held in Fort Augustus to consider the CPS. In a lively discussion, Alex Grant, a civil engineer from Inverness, reasoned that the local people had everything necessary for the development of the tourist industry in beautiful scenery, good roads..."Aye, and all the men on the dole" added a rebellious voice from the back of the hall. *Oban Times* 1937 January 16 p. 3.

<sup>253</sup> *Oban Times* 1936 July 11 p. 5.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid, p. 5. On another occasion, Mackay, never short of pragmatism, conceded that while 'Glenmoriston and Glengarry were gorgeous glens, if they contained rich mineral deposits would they have been left undeveloped? Nay, verily there would have been chimneys and slag heaps all over the country from east to west'. *Oban Times* 1937 January 16 p. 5.

<sup>255</sup> Colonel A.W. Macdonald of Blairour disagreed with Mackay, 'The works in Lochaber had not improved the scenery or amenity but employed a lot of labour'. He wanted to make clear 'to the enthusiasts that it was not all jam living near any hydro-electric works'. Provost Simon Macdonald then chose to put these comments in perspective, while Colonel Macdonald lived nine miles from the factory he lived a mile from it and he could say 'that in no way had it spoiled the amenity...the extraordinary works were a marvel of ingenuity'. *Oban Times* 1936 July 11 p. 5.

<sup>256</sup> *Oban Times* 1937 April 17 p. 7.

castle'.<sup>257</sup> Exasperated by the actions of those they viewed as meddling 'amenity addicts', many locals were left pondering the next step.<sup>258</sup>

The entire Highland population was not united over the question of industrial development. The burgh of Inverness remained resolutely defiant throughout the debates. Fearful that the planned diversion of the River Ness would damage the local sewage disposal system, the town council consistently opposed the CPS.<sup>259</sup> Inopportune parochial jealousies were suspected by some to lie at the heart of this campaign, Alison Stewart of Corpach expressing the view that 'there might not be so much Inverness opposition if one of the power stations was nearer the Highland capital'.<sup>260</sup> Divisions ran deep, Baillie Hugh Fraser declaring that 'they in Lochaber are not selling their birthright, they are trying to sell ours, our heritage...we must save the Lochaber people from themselves, because theirs is the short-sighted policy'.<sup>261</sup>

Resistance also surfaced in those settlements which were to be directly affected by the CPS. Protest meetings took place in Glengarry, Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston. Meanwhile, the Reverend James Hill used a sermon at Invergarry to inform his flock that 'this scheme is merely changing the type of landlord...making the directorate of a company the new landlord'.<sup>262</sup> However, media hysteria and the clandestine influence of the preservation movement undoubtedly helped galvanise the anxieties of rural communities. Highly coloured press reports suggested the mass eviction of crofters, drawing parallels with the Clearances and suggesting that 500 houses were to be submerged.<sup>263</sup> In actual fact, only 50 houses

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<sup>257</sup> *Oban Times* 1937 March 27 p. 5.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

<sup>259</sup> The Inverness Town Council argued that the economic future of the region lay with the tourist industry, the prospects of which would be irreparably damaged by large-scale HEP developments. The APRS agreed, stressing the importance of amenity for tourism. Reaction to the idea of dams themselves as a popular visitor attraction was predictably polar. Neil Gunn claimed to have 'never yet seen a dam that hadn't in the tourist season some sight-seers' car drawn up by it'. NLS Dep. 209 Box 8 (55) 'Glen Affric Hydro-Electric Scheme' (undated typescript) p. 2-3. The provision of extra car-parking facilities at the Roughburn and Laggan dams in Lochaber did little to convince Peter Thomsen who drew on the analogy of 'the Bearded Woman at the Fair who attracts no less attention than the Lady of the Trapeze'. Thomsen, P. (1943) *op cit.* p. 16.

<sup>260</sup> *Oban Times* 1936 December 26 p. 2; see also, Editorial 'Defeat of Power Bill - Inverness Pleased, Fort William Indignant' *Oban Times* 1937 March 20 p. 5. One later column, in support of the third CPB, accused Inverness of petty and small-minded squabbling since provisions had been already been guaranteed over the River Ness. Editorial, *Oban Times* 1937 November 27 p. 5.

<sup>261</sup> *Oban Times* 1937 January 23 p. 3.

<sup>262</sup> *The Times* 1937 March 4 p. 7. There were over 100 attendees at the Glengarry public meeting. *Oban Times* 1937 January 23 p. 3.

<sup>263</sup> Considerable stock was placed, by Dr. Evan Baillie of the *Inverness Courier*, in the fact that Glenmoriston was one of the few Highland glens to escape evictions during the nineteenth-century.

were recorded on the valuation role. Meanwhile the BOC had already given assurances that in Glen Moriston flooding would be limited to 15 crofts, in Glengarry two crofters and two farmers would be affected while no houses would be lost to the loch waters. As claims and counter-claims were traded with some regularity, the residents of Glengarry overturned their original decision, voting two to one in favour of the third CPS.<sup>264</sup>

Without disregarding these pockets of local opposition, the main body of the Highland population stood foursquare behind the CPS, backing the idea of controlled, but immediate, industrial expansion energised by widespread hydro-electric development. Ultimately, the practicalities and financial necessities of modern life determined native opinion. Even among the crofting townships of the islands and west coast, the cultural attachment to the land, while not broken, was revised in the light of recession economics.<sup>265</sup> Industrial employment within a working landscape offered new hope to the disgruntled, the disillusioned, the dependent and the landless. Understandable though they may have been, accusations of betrayal and unquestioning sacrifice represented the imposition of romantic values from the ranks of the occasional Highlander and the pages of Celtic Twilight literature onto the native population. In a recorded radio debate, Donald Mackay of the HDL had a blunt warning for those in opposition, 'if the Highlands were more and more to become places for the exercise of hikers and sightseers, without any opening for young men and women then the matter could remain where it was'.<sup>266</sup> Speaking for the people of Lochaber, Alison Stewart confirmed that 'there was nothing in this world that had so raised the conditions of life as electricity...They in Corpach were very anxious to get a factory and also to protect their amenities as far as possible with proper planning'.<sup>267</sup> Contrary to their traditional portrayal as a marginal and mystical race, the Highland population were primed to embrace industrialism and the project of modernity head-on.

With the lens of enquiry trained specifically on the Highland experience the last two sections have laid bare the various frictions and bitter reprisals which

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<sup>264</sup> The flooded land in Glenmoriston would comprise 19 acres of arable and 26 of rough pasture and moorland. Mr Alex Grant, the Inverness civil engineer, having claimed that the BOC had miscalculated suggested that over 200 acres would actually be submerged. *Oban Times* 1937 January 23 p. 3; *Oban Times* 1938 February 12 p. 5; see also, *Oban Times* 1936 December 19 p. 3.

<sup>265</sup> Acting upon rumours of viable coal seams at Braes and Uig on Skye, one crofter called for the urgent industrialisation of the island. *Oban Times*, 1934 February 24 p. 3.

<sup>266</sup> *Oban Times* 1937 May 1 p. 2.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

characterised the water-power debates. The final section of the chapter examines those occasions when discussion managed to transcend the scurrilous rumour-mongering, sibling rivalries and municipal panics over sanitary provision to address higher issues of morality, citizenship and social change.

#### Hydro-Electric Power - Towards a Higher State of Consciousness ?

*'A well designed pylon embodies, in its own ways, as much beauty as a pine tree.'*<sup>268</sup>  
(*Northern Times*, 1936)

*'It is true that if the scheme goes on employment will be given to several hundred Highlanders; but have the promoters and those who are in favour of the scheme visualised the future generations of urbanised Highlanders, whose character will be a mere shadow of that of the Highlander to-day, and whose outlook on life will be more materialistic and sophisticated ? True beauty is more than skin-deep.'*<sup>269</sup>  
(*R.H. Johnston-Stewart*, 1937)

This section demonstrates how contributors to the HEP debates culled information from a range of universalist discourses to inform their thinking on appropriate structures for rural society. Opinions on the psychological and physiological compatibility of the Highlander to the industrial ethic of the twentieth-century were varied, drawing out some of the fears, prejudices and assumptions in the modern British psyche. These in turn, provide critical evidence to inform the chapter's conclusions on the struggles for power and control in the Highlands during a period of rapid modernisation.

Bill Luckin has noted how a universal spirit of 'electrical utopianism' was abroad during the inter-war period, causal links being made between design, architectural form and social behaviour. These leaps of imagination were made by the nationalist ideologue John Kinloch for whom a state-sponsored electricity resource did not simply offer Highlanders the base realities of economic stability but the chance for spiritual rejuvenation through the establishment of a new social order. In the fullness of time Kinloch envisioned disparate rural communities serviced by a public energy supply transformed into garden cities in the glens, 'Art and Nature combining to make them beautiful and healthful habitations for man'.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Letter to the Editor, *Northern Times* 1936 April 2 p. 3.

<sup>269</sup> Letter to the Editor, *Country Life*, LXXXI (2095) p. 288.

<sup>270</sup> Kinloch, J.L. (no date) *The Highlands Wealthy and Prosperous by the Development of Water Power: A Lecture Delivered to the Gaelic Society of Glasgow*, Stirling: A. Learnmouth, p. 4.

Placing his nationalism within the broader church of internationalism, Kinloch rather grandly promised that:

*'this would not destroy the ancient culture of the Gael, but would enable it to rise to a new grandeur - to a new fullness of spirit, so that the Gaelic race might teach the world the power of man and his full stature when the idealism taught by nature is applied to the affairs of life'.<sup>271</sup>*

The novelist Neil Gunn felt that if HEP suggested 'there is more than history and scenic beauty in the Highlands, that the past is facing towards the future, that life is making new things, planting forests, preparing to reclaim waste lands, hoping for richer harvests from soil and sea', then it could generate a new spiritual and visceral energy.<sup>272</sup> Similarly, a number of progressive Scots aesthetes were invigorated by the application of modernist styling to hydro-electric schemes, connecting material structures to holistic notions of human ecology and the push for progress and advancement. The clean lines and surfaces of dam design were felt to merge harmoniously with the natural mountain architecture in the production of pure and refined 'white power' (see figure 34). Hugh Quigley was adamant that if technical engineering was:

*'conceived and executed with the joy and reverence which inspired the builders of the mediaeval cathedrals, not as objects of profit, but as testimony to human faith swelling out to the universal and the everlasting - they may give to beauty a finer sanction and to solitude a nobler rhythm'.<sup>273</sup>*

R.J. Macleish was similarly enraptured by the epiphanic qualities of the Lochaber HEP scheme, he confessed that:

*'it seems an evil thing to some to torture matter, to attack Ben Nevis, to wound, to alter, to destroy it, merely for a few pieces of aluminium ware...I look before me at the feats of engineering which seem to cry of mortality in the presence of this immortal hill: but I*

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>272</sup> NLS Dep. 209 Box 8 (67) 'The Highlands', unpublished typescript (no date) p. 8.

<sup>273</sup> Quigley, H. (1936) *The Highlands of Scotland*, London: BT Batsford, p. 106; see also, Quigley, H. (1925) *Electrical Power and National Progress*, London: Allen and Unwin; Quigley, H. (1936) *A Plan for the Highlands*, London: Methuen; Quigley H. (1942) 'Electrical and Economic Planning in Scotland', in Burns, T. (ed.) *New Scotland: Seventeen Chapters on Scottish Reconstruction, Highland and Industrial*, Glasgow: Civic Press, p. 49-58. Similar sentiments were expressed by WBC Perrycoste who argued that: 'A sound dam is a noble structure; that power houses and their subsidiary buildings may harmonise with the landscape is clearly shown by illustrations in the technical press of Continental schemes; modern architecture can give dignity even to a factory'. Letter to the Editor *Oban Times* 1936 March 14 p. 3.



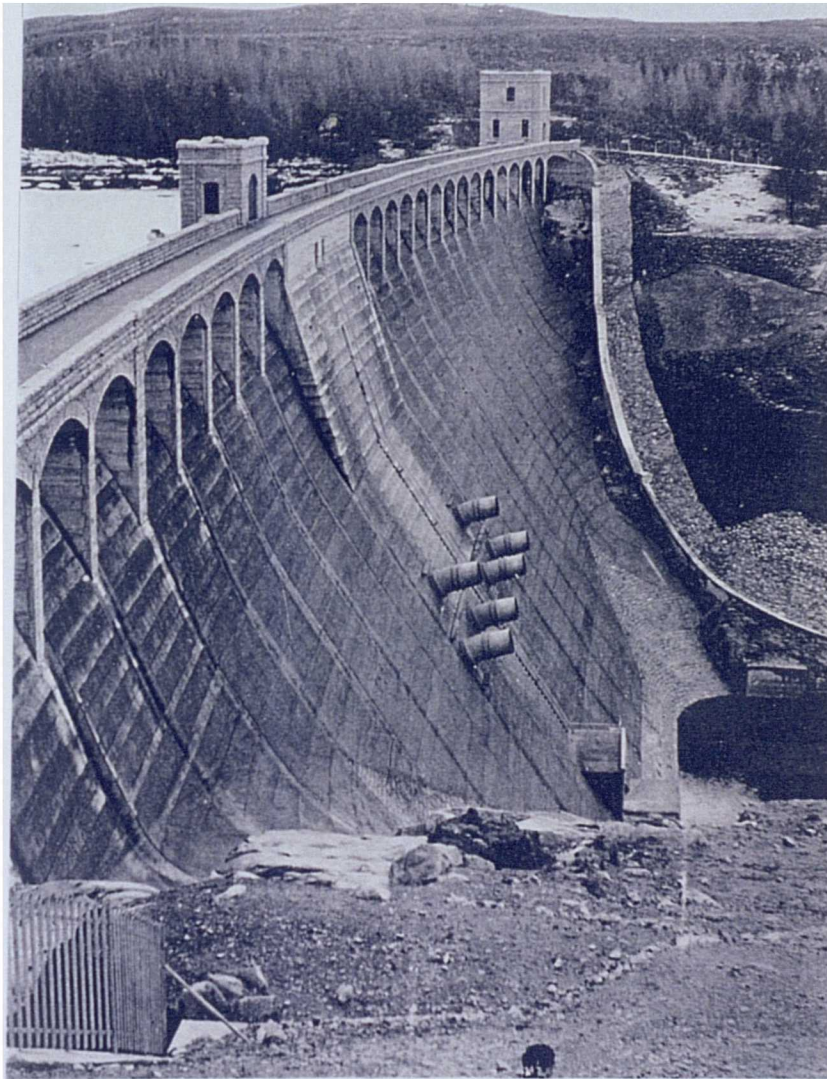


Figure 34 - Hydro Architecture at Laggan Dam  
Source: APRS (1938)

*bow before reality. Ben Nevis is terrible and eternal, but this activity  
I see before me is also a mountain. This is the spirit of man'.<sup>274</sup>*

As a unifying force, hydro-electric power had concomitant resonances in the artistry and ingenuity of modern society and in the sublimity of the montane environment. By challenging the dominant notion of modernity as a discourse on the purity of the machine, enthusiasts began to communicate with the more organic and natural aspects of design. Quigley agreed that, 'Humanity could find a substitute for factories and power stations, but for this moment of communion there can be no palliative or nostrum'.<sup>275</sup> For these enthusiasts electricity promised to light and power the path to Lewis Mumford's 'biotechnic world'.<sup>276</sup>

This same poetic excitement could be bolted to more forthright celebrations of the might of modern scientific knowledge and engineering prowess. In an attempt to raise public awareness and excite a ground-swell of support the *Scots Magazine* treated its readership to fold-out panoramic supplements depicting the Lochaber and Rannoch projects. Drawing upon a rich heritage of Scottish industrial achievement, the illustrations for these exciting undertakings were immersed in the schoolbook drama of tunnel, railway and dam construction, while offering a tangible sense of speed, mobility and scale. What patriot could fail to be impressed by a tunnel wide enough to drive a city bus through and long enough to dwarf modern national landmarks such as the new Tay Bridge (see figures 35, 36 and 37)?<sup>277</sup> The transfer of technical plans from blueprint to mountainside would prove a great deal easier than the conversion of pioneering social evolutionist thought into reality.

Blessed with eternal optimism, Dr Lachlan Grant believed that theory could be converted to reality and the Highlands represented a perfect space for modernist experimentation. The utopian concept of a harmonious industrial existence had

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<sup>274</sup> Cited in: Graeme, A. (1929) 'This Freedom: National Parks, Natural Prejudice and Industrial Projects' *Scots Magazine*, XI (4) p. 255.

<sup>275</sup> Quigley, H. (1949 edn) *The Highlands of Scotland*, London: BT Batsford, p. 106.

<sup>276</sup> Lewis Mumford was himself influenced by the Scots social evolutionist, Patrick Geddes. As early as 1915 Geddes had written admiringly of how Norwegian society had been transformed by the 'unending streams' of 'white coal' which ran from the mountains. This faith in the power of electricity had helped establish 'a new patriciate' on the 'comparatively exhausted land' of 'older discouraged peoples'. Given the prescriptive and graphic nature of Geddes' comments, it is curious to find so little evidence of his work being used in support of the proposed developments for his native country. Geddes, P. (1949) *Cities in Evolution*, London: Williams and Norgate, p. 27.

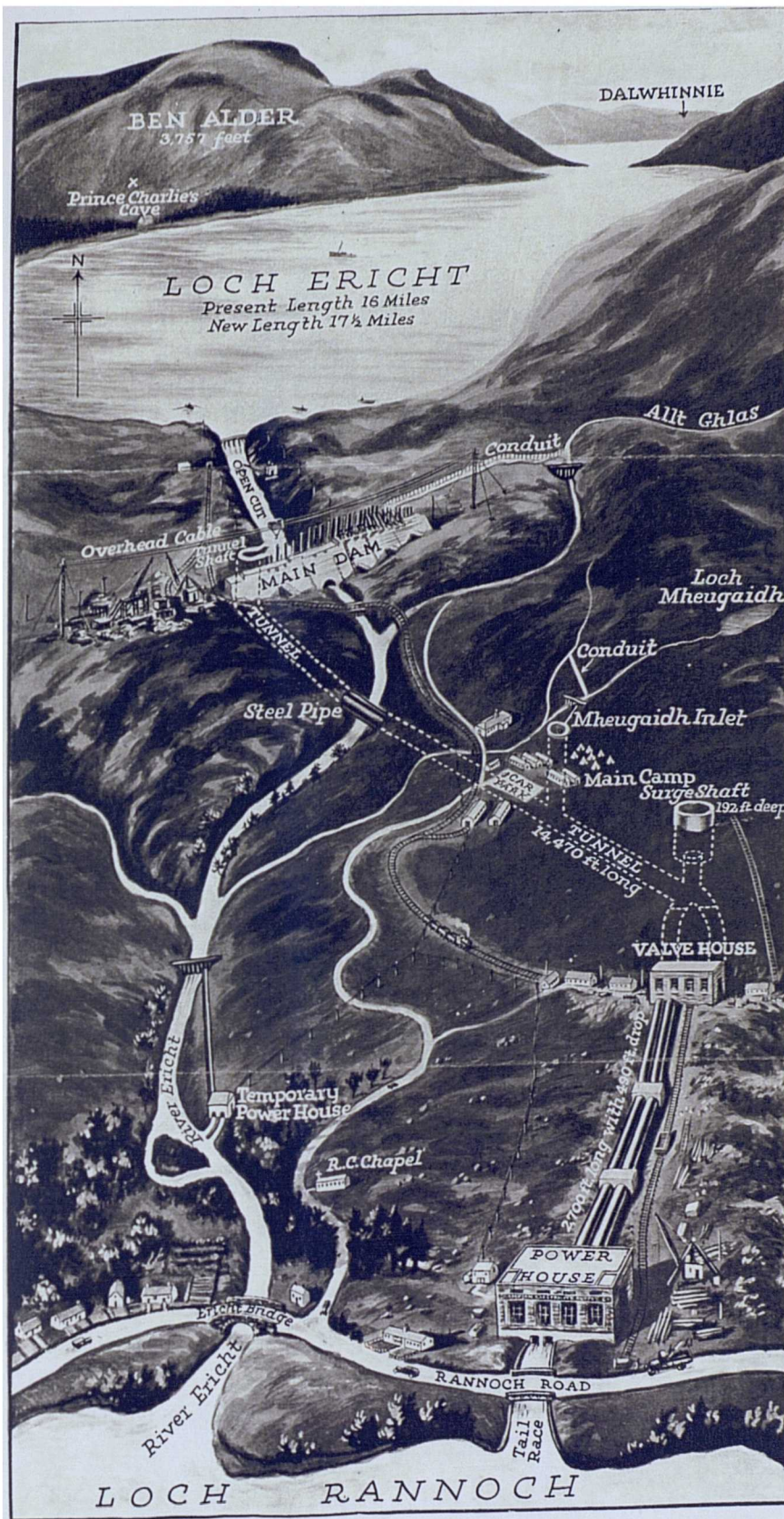
<sup>277</sup> These emotions were much in evidence in: Graeme, A. (1929) 'The Lochaber Power Scheme: Some Details of its Meaning and its Magnitude', *Scots Magazine*, XI (6) p. 401-404; Graeme, A. (1930) 'The Waters of Badenoch: Some Notes on the Grampian Electricity Scheme', *Scots Magazine*, XIII (4) p. 241-245.











## The Grampian Electricity Scheme.

A Panoramic View of the Loch Ericht Development Area

Figure 37 - Harnessing Nature's Power

Source: *Scots Magazine* (1930)

already been applied in Kinlochleven, the region's first '*urbe in rus*'.<sup>278</sup> Not without its problems during the early years, 'Aluminiumville' as some would christen it, had all the machismo of a frontier town.<sup>279</sup> Greater order was achieved by the boom settlement of the 1920's, although the stigma of lawlessness proved harder to shake off and grimy taints remained despite repeated scrubbing (see figures 38 and 39).<sup>280</sup> Unfortunately the work camps associated with the new Lochaber scheme, although much improved, kept the unruly navvy in the public eye.<sup>281</sup> Meanwhile reports on atmospheric conditions were wildly divergent. Those fixated with olfactory phenomena fretted over chemical miasmas. Industrial enthusiasts meanwhile declared:

*'the most favourable aspect of such industries carried out through  
the hydro electric plant is their cleanliness - no smoke stacks*

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<sup>278</sup> *Northern Times* 1935 January 17 p. 7.

<sup>279</sup> During the early construction phases of the BAC scheme 1500 Irish navvies were 'herded into crowded and unhealthy camps...and basic environmental desiderata were flouted when the enterprise spread outwards into untouched countryside'. Luckin, B. (1990) op cit. p. 118. A more graphic account of these working conditions can be found in Patrick Macgill's personal account of life as a navvy at Kinlochleven. Having hitch-hiked from Glasgow, he and a companion, stopped on their approach to the village to survey the scene: 'We sat on a rock, lit our pipes and gazed on the Mecca of our hopes. A sleepy hollow lay below; and within it a muddle of shacks, roofed with tarred canvas and built on driven piles, were huddled together in bewildering confusion. These were surrounded by puddles, heaps of disused wood, tins, bottles and all manner of discarded rubbish. Some of the shacks had windows, most of them had none; some had doors facing north, some south, everything was in a most haphazard condition and it looked as if the buildings had dropped out of the sky by accident and were just allowed to remain where they had fallen'. Macgill, P. (1914) *The Children of the Dead End: The Autobiography of a Navvy*, London: Herbert Jenkins, p. 176. Further tales of deaths, injuries, long-shifts, gambling, heavy drinking, fighting and ill-health fill Macgill's account of the months which followed his arrival. Alistair Borthwick recounted how of a Saturday evening, the men wound their perilous way over five-miles of bog in the Feidh Glen to frequent the Kingshouse Hotel. Local legend had it that the 'local stalker used to go up with a pony in the spring and dig the fallen from the snowdrifts...One man was found as late as 1936. "There was moss on the bones", said the stalker, "and a bottle in his hand". Borthwick, A. (1947) 'Inside Scotland', *Scottish Motor Transport Magazine*, January p. 7. See also, Handley, D. (1970) *The Navvy in Scotland*, Cork: Cork University Press.

<sup>280</sup> Healthy profits were reported by the British Aluminium Company throughout the inter-war period. *The Times*, 1930 March 29 p. 19.

<sup>281</sup> Every work site had sleeping huts and drying sheds for clothes. A central mess, recreation rooms, stores and canteens added a greater degree of civility. Medical care was provided at a camp hospital located between Loch Treig and Fort William and a clinic for infectious diseases was established near the base camp. Payne, P. (1988) op cit. p. 11. Despite these measures, deaths and serious accidents were not uncommon during the construction of the company railway line and in the blasting of tunnels. 'Pocheen' was brewed by many workers in illicit stills at remote points along the line. These were hidden from the Customs and Excise men who came to search parts of the route after reports of drunkenness at work. *Oban Times* 1928 November 10 p. 5. One worker, David Calder, recounted how: 'Fersit camp used to be a busy place on Saturday nights because all the drunks were coming back from Fort William. They used to run a special train to get rid of them and it left Fort William at 10pm. They just shoved them off at Fersit halt and into the camp'. Cited in, Howat, P. (1980) *The Lochaber Narrow Gauge Railway*, Huddersfield: Narrow Gauge Railway Society, p. 28.



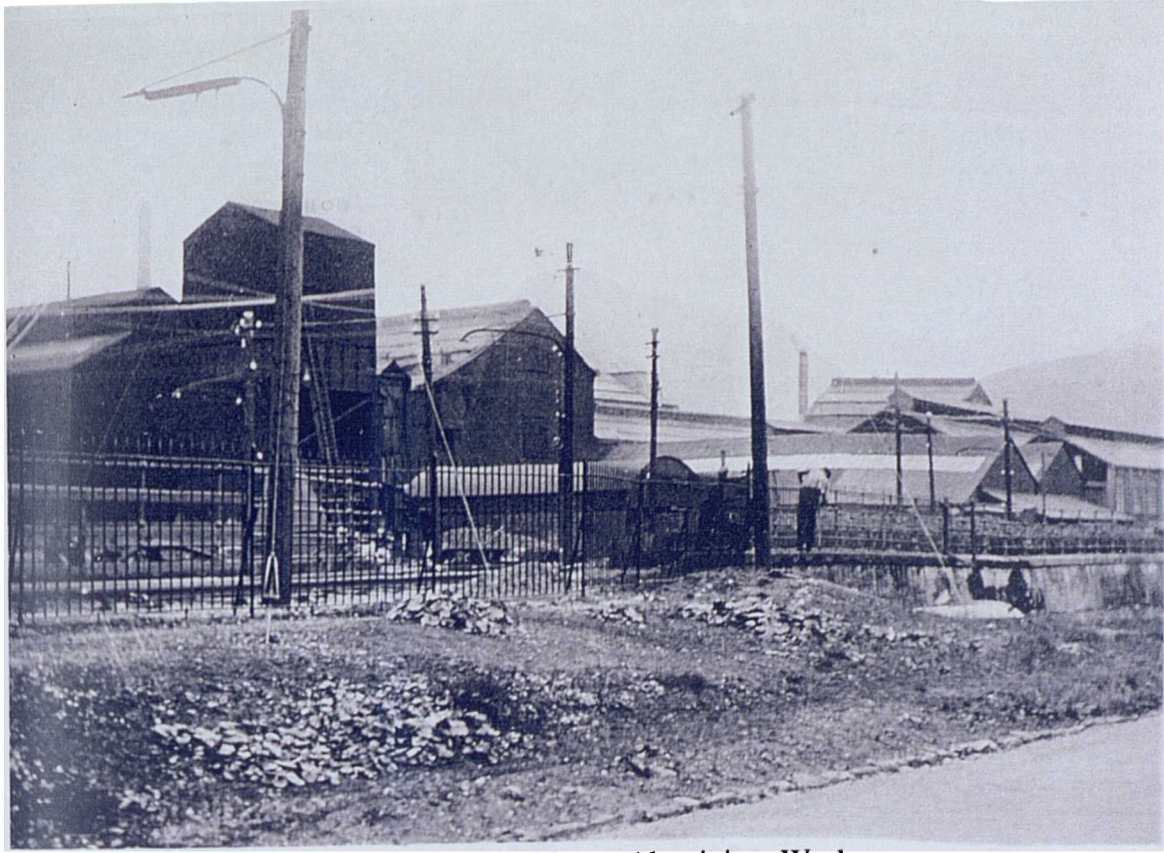


Figure 39 - The Kinlochleven Aluminium Works  
Source: APRS (1938)

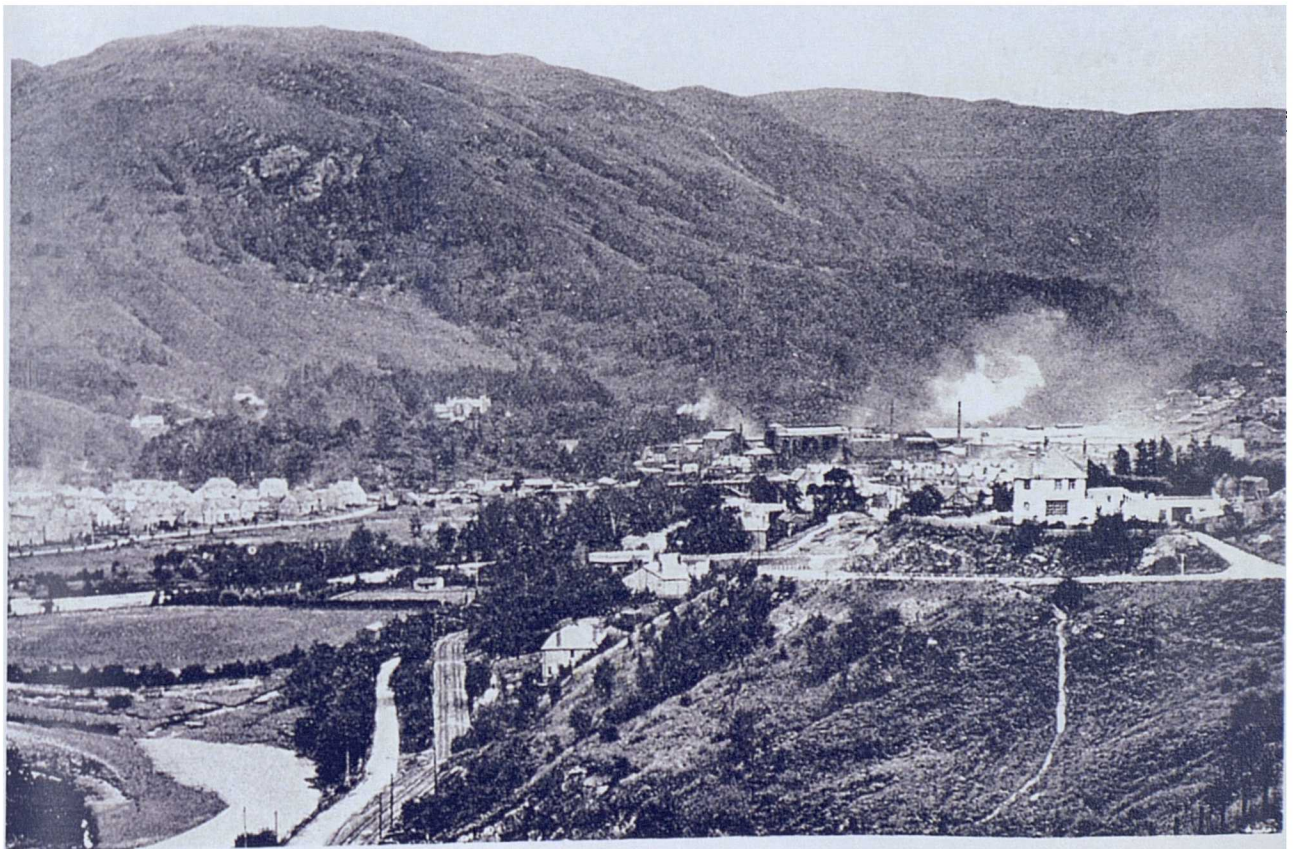


Figure 38 - Kinlochleven, A Small Pocket of Industrialism in the Highlands  
Source: Blake, G. (1938)

*belching forth, darkening and dirtying the neighbourhood. That is an incalculable advantage. Had the Highlands been a coalfield its glens would have been as forbidding as the South Wales valleys are now'.<sup>282</sup>*

By 1935 Lachlan Grant felt able to refer affectionately to Kinlochleven as 'our little progressive city amongst the hills'. As a general practitioner he could state authoritatively:

*'that the public health of the employees and their families is of a much higher standard than it would be if the industry was situated in the present crowded industrial south...the rural surroundings, regular wages, cheap rents, good housing, modern sanitation and the recreational amenities, which the Company provide, play their part in the satisfactory social welfare of the people'.<sup>283</sup>*

Although Luckin's work challenges this image of philanthropy, plentiful evidence does exist of the BAC's social conscience.<sup>284</sup> In Kinlochleven, besides the provision of workers housing, the Company contributed generously to the construction of a new church and established the Kinlochleven Village Improvement Society.<sup>285</sup> Inverlochy, a 250 house development specially constructed for the workers at the Lochaber plant, had its own improvement society to tend the plentiful trees, shrubs and green areas on site.<sup>286</sup> At its opening, Murray Morrison of the BAC declared the settlement 'a garden city second to none in Britain'.<sup>287</sup> Domestic bliss in a residence furnished with 'all mod cons' was a

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<sup>282</sup> Editorial 'The Great Highland Industry - Aluminium and its Applications: Foresight Brought In', *Oban Times* 1937 April 10 p. 5.

<sup>283</sup> *Oban Times* 1936 December 5 p. 3.

<sup>284</sup> While the town was reputed for its dark aspect due to the steep and unrelenting hills which surrounded it, no evidence has been found to substantiate the claim that 'a company housing scheme was built in such a way as to deprive employees of sunlight'. Luckin, B. (1990) op cit. p. 118. It may originate in a statistic linking 80% of child ailments in the town to a lack of sunlight, ultimately leading to the introduction of a 'sun-ray clinic'. Blake, G. (1938) *The Heart of Scotland*, London: BT Batsford, p. 15. George Scott-Moncrieff was another liberal-minded commentator with little good to say of Kinlochleven as an industrial experiment. Scott-Moncrieff, G. (1938) 'The Scottish Scene' in Williams-Ellis, C. (ed.) *Britain and the Beast*, London: Readers' Union, p. 266-278; 276.

<sup>285</sup> *Oban Times* 1934 April 12 p. 3. Besides providing an official fund to hold benefactor's donations the Village Improvement Society may have also acted as a convenient siphon for the company's own financial interests. In 1938 the Society, by now trading as a limited company, purchased the 38,000 acre Mamore estate from the Fairfax-Lucy family. Both Sir Henry and Lady Fairfax-Lucy had been members of the APRS executive since its inception in 1928 and had campaigned against large-scale HEP projects in Inverness-shire. Anon (1938) 'Scotland Month by Month' *Scots Magazine*, XXVII (1) p. 1-3.

<sup>286</sup> The BAC also constructed a hostel to house 250 men in Fort William. *Oban Times* 1928 October 29 p. 5.

<sup>287</sup> *Oban Times* 1937 September 11 p. 5. Further praise can be found in: Hurd, R. (1932) op cit. p. 172-190.



hugely attractive prospect. As 'Juniper' pointed out, while the Highlander might well be 'interested in Gaelic and music and tartans and charming things of long ago, these by no means cloud his interest in the material things of today'.<sup>288</sup> Realists grasped the magnitude 'of this strange fluid agency, understood but indefinable' which could provide 'strong and clear light...helping banish the candle with its feeble flame and save the oil lamp daily toil'.<sup>289</sup> The *Oban Times* was suitably impressed, calling for the establishment of other self-supporting communities where a healthy citizenry were 'freed from the necessity of eating tinned foods, condensed milk and other food substitutes of poor nourishment'.<sup>290</sup> Beyond the home, hopes for the provision of municipal bowling greens, tennis courts and golf courses, although yet fanciful, built on the tradition of sporting fixtures between the Lochaber and Kinlochleven workforces.<sup>291</sup> Even in the temporary workcamps of the GESC construction project at Tummel, conditions were far in advance of those previously endured in permanent Highland accommodation. Over 500 men were housed in electrically-heated timber huts enjoying a licensed canteen, a recreation hall, medical facilities, a sports ground, a library, a billiard room, a church and regular film shows.<sup>292</sup> Industrial investment, public or private, brought with it all the trappings of modernity.

Some observers were less convinced. Not so much by the expansive nature of HEP as a social project, but by the starkness of its technology for which they could only muster a begrudging admiration. Campbell Nairne was among this school, realising that, 'we ought to be pleased now that the hydro-electric enterprises and their frightful works are realities. It had to be, and one accepts the spoilation of the country...as the toll levied for progress' (see figure 40).<sup>293</sup> Yet he found it equally difficult:

*'not to feel numb with horror at your first sight of the black pipes that lance the side of Schiehallion. Nor is that all. There is the power station across the river, dwarfing the pitiful span of the Wade Bridge below it, a glass-fronted hulk galvanised by the soundless shudder of its transformers. Far and wide over the hills deploy the armies of*

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<sup>288</sup> 'Juniper' (1930) 'The Highlands in the New Scots Parliament', *Scots Independent*, August p. 135.

<sup>289</sup> Editorial, *Oban Times* 1936 February 29 p. 5.

<sup>290</sup> Editorial 'Industrialisation in the Highlands' *Oban Times* 1937 May 22 p. 8.

<sup>291</sup> Football and tug-of-war challenges were laid down regularly between Lochaber and Kinlochleven. An annual sports day was also organised for the children of the Lochaber workers. See for example: *Oban Times* 1928 May 19 p. 5; 1937 June 26 p. 3.

<sup>292</sup> Payne, P. (1988) *op cit.* p. 22.

<sup>293</sup> Nairne, C. (1935) 'Perthshire', in Scott-Moncrieff, G. *Scottish Country*, London: Routledge, p. 243.

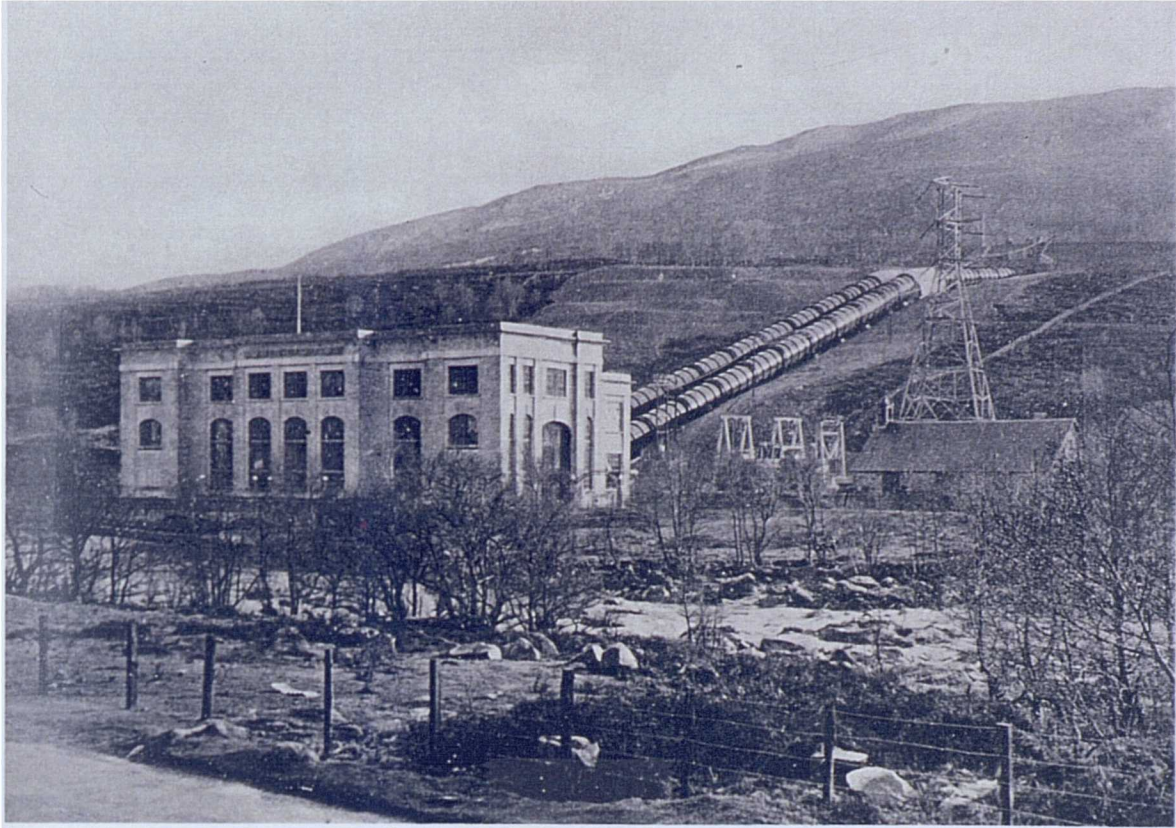


Figure 40 - Power House and Pipe-Pine at Tummel Bridge  
Source: APRS (1938)

*pylons and...one could wish that uniformity of design had not been so diligently studied in the creation of the village for the workers. The miner's row has a queer look in Rannoch'.<sup>294</sup>*

Nairne's ambivalence arose out of what he perceived to be the incongruity and harshness of 'urban' architecture and the industrial ethic in a natural setting. The playwright and novelist George Blake felt that 'the orderly mind' would reject 'the improbability of geometrical rows of modern dwellings in a place designed by Nature for secret gatherings of clans and dark deeds with the claymore'.<sup>295</sup>

Paradoxically, while Blake's interests in the social and psychological impacts of industrial decline and depression in Scottish society were mirrored by other radical and romantic nationalists, they also struck a chord in establishment circles.<sup>296</sup> During the construction of Kinlochleven's aluminium plant a pathological fear of the Irish navy, or at least those of Irish descent hailing from Clydeside, had spread through Scotland's conservative circles. Not only did this Irish diaspora dominate the job market, but they were deemed to have a nefarious influence on Highland communities previously cosseted from vice and immorality. Reserved Presbyterian opinion maintained that alcoholism, lawlessness and illegal squatting, the sole preserves of the Irish, would soon infiltrate pure and simple Highland minds.<sup>297</sup> These concerns were not assuaged during the construction stages at Lochaber when Balfour Beatty relied heavily upon a migrant workforce.<sup>298</sup> Nevertheless, of the 359 employees eventually taken on by the British Aluminium Company in the actual plant, some 246 were native Highlanders.<sup>299</sup> Behind the need to gain assurances of local employment in any

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid, p. 208.

<sup>295</sup> Blake, G. (1938) op cit. p. 15.

<sup>296</sup> Blake's novel 'The Shipbuilders', published in 1935, explored these same issues.

<sup>297</sup> Early in its existence the APRS organised a sub-committee whose task it was to examine the 'squatting nuisance' in the countryside. APRS/ECM vol. I 1930 April 2.

<sup>298</sup> The Rev. Dr. MacKinnon of Spean Bridge claimed that 85% of those who worked on the dam and tunnels in the Lochaber scheme were Irishmen 'introduced specially for that purpose, and their pay went for the most part across to the Free State'. *Oban Times*, 21/12/35, p. 2. In 1939 Sir Henry Fairfax-Lucy of the APRS declared that 'the trouble with Fort William district was that there were as many people going in as there were going out. There was a large influx of Irish, and it was probable that half of the population of the burgh was Irish'. APRS/ECM vol. III 1939 April 2.

<sup>299</sup> The full employee breakdown was as follows: 54 natives of Lochaber, 80 of Inverness-shire, 72 of other Highland counties, 82 Lowland Scots, 38 'temps' from Spean Bridge and Roy Bridge, 13 Englishmen, 17 Irishmen, 2 Welshmen and one American boy. *Oban Times* 1935 December 21 p. 2.

future scheme lurked discomfort over a deeper malaise, the possible revival of Catholicism among the Highland population.<sup>300</sup>

Peter Thomsen, distinctive in retaining interests which straddled the work of APRS and HDL executives, harboured fears of a more fundamental nature still. Amid the furore surrounding the Caledonian Power Schemes he implored the public to consider how:

*'The Highlander has since time immemorial been shepherd, farmer in a small way, hunter, forester or fisherman. In these open air occupations in a mountainous land and a changeable climate he has grown physically strong and hardy...contact with natural beauty and solemn grandeur has fostered the imagination, born in him with his Celtic blood, and inclined him to serious thought tinged with mysticism'.*<sup>301</sup>

Thomsen then asked his amateur anthropologists to take this Highlander:

*'native born and bred, from his croft or his fishing smack and send him to a factory at Corpach to tend furnaces which are the hottest on earth, set him to manipulate the mixers of lime and coke, or to grind calcium carbide in an atmosphere reeking with acetylene gas, to work among volts of sulphuric and nitric acid - all this with long hours, often on night shift, year in year out - and give him 11 1/2d per hour or some such sum to feed himself and his family and the physical vigour he brought with him will soon have passed. Teach him to eat and sleep to a timetable, to muster at the summons of the factory, to work as one of a gang and his manly independence, his sense of personal worth, his dignity and courtesy will follow his physical vigour on the road to extinction'.*<sup>302</sup>

Carrying with them the unmistakable stamp of environmental determinism, these ideas were given a sympathetic hearing in the correspondence pages of *Country Life*:

*'It is a national tragedy to allow this magnificent country to be given over to American-style industrial development: country which for*

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<sup>300</sup> Such fears were expressed in a number of publications on Scotland's position in post-war society. See: Thomsen, G.M. (1927) *Caledonia or the Future of the Scots*, London: Kegan Paul, p. 10-11; Gibb, A.D. (1930) *Scotland in Eclipse*, London: Humphrey Toulmin, p. 51-53; Ogilvie, A.G. (ed.) (1928) *Great Britain: Essays in Regional Geography*, London: Johnston. Finlay has noted the perceived threat among the Scottish bourgeoisie of uncontrolled Irish immigration. Finlay, R. (1994) 'National Identity in Crisis: Politicians, Intellectuals and the "End of Scotland" 1920-1939', *History*, 79 (256).

<sup>301</sup> Thomsen, P. (1938) op cit. p. 38.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid, p. 38-39. Although the evidence is anecdotal, it is amusing to note in the light of Thomsen's arguments over racial deterioration after exposure to harmful industrial processes, that the long-time record holder for the Ben Nevis hill race, Ewen Mackenzie, was an employee of the BAC at their Kinlochleven plant.

*centuries has been the environment of the Highlander and which has played and is playing a great part in the formation of his character. This character is rightly justified and valued all over the world for its sterling qualities, such as strong physique, hardiness and high ideals'.<sup>303</sup>*

With the shadow of the factory production-line looming large, the myth of the noble savage was being given a fresh twist. By 1949 the chairman of the NTS still felt able to question the suitability of the native populace to employment in the developing service sector:

*'As for the Highlanders: they may be doomed in any case...I doubt the Highlander's desire or ability to be the manager of a big hotel, a first-rate restaurateur, golf-course attendant, or A.A. Scout, and if he takes on these roles satisfactorily I doubt whether he will retain his peculiar virtues'.<sup>304</sup>*

The predictions were cataclysmic. Unprepared for the psychological and physiological demands of modern industry, the Highland citizenry would suffer a loss of individual honour, the breakdown of the domestic unit and the sacrifice of the Clan's archaic communal code. With the exposure of the new technocracy as a false dawn and the antithesis of all that Gaeldom held dear, the essentialisation of the Highlander was complete.

### Conclusion

The cultural historian Stephen Kern has highlighted how in the push to attain a condition of modernity, nations, regions and localities have demonstrated different attitudes towards time and space. His examination of the major cultural undercurrents prevalent in the years before the First World War illustrates how changes in thinking about and experiencing these abstract philosophical categories were manifested in a *concrete historical situation*.<sup>305</sup> By investigating the encroachment of modernity into traditional constructions of the Highlands, this chapter has begun to uncover the panoply of anxieties, tensions and visions which framed popular understandings of the temporal and the spatial in inter-war Britain.

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<sup>303</sup> Letters to the Editor, *Country Life*, LXXXI (2095) p. 288; see also: *Country Life*, LXXXIII (2138) p. 47.

<sup>304</sup> *Newsletter of the NTS*, (2) 1949 April, p. 8.

<sup>305</sup> Kern, S. (1983) *The Culture of Space and Time, 1880-1918*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Contestations over the identity and role of the Celtic margins within the British state were themselves grounded in broader post-war ontological anxieties. In the aftermath of global conflict, myriad theories evolved on the future of democratic society and the manner in which it should be structured. The modern idea of the nation state and the region were challenged by contrasting cultures of localism and internationalism. Within this context, the Highlands as a distinctive place and the Highlands as an identifiable time, were crucial to configurations of the spatial and the temporal in the British consciousness. Traditional categories fixed the region's position as Britannia's liminal comfort zone while the dynamism and energy of industrialism and the project of modernity raised question marks over such established conceptions.

Those who revered the Highlands as an elemental place and a playground for sporting *rites de passage*, revelled in a land made distant by mythology and vivid imaginings. It was of little consequence that this represented nostalgia for a past that never was, since the romance of Celtic Scotland had always been based on an amalgam of myth, reality and ideal. What did matter were straight roads serving new industries running on electricity created by water-power. All eroded the very essence of peripherality and other-worldliness which visitors found *so alluring*. A landscape and lifestyle seemingly untroubled by haste and punctuality, governed only by the seasons, the sun and the moon would instead be answerable to whistle, clock and bell. When sunlight was replaced by the fluorescent light of factories running solidly for 24 hours, the natural divisions of day and night would soon disappear. The Gaels, attributed their animistic code of human-environment relations, would be caught in the glare of a mechanized armageddon. For them the conditions of the Twilight contract were clear, while they remained in a simplistic state, as an exotic and 'fetishised' Other, the fascination of Britain's enlightened classes would not pall. However, should they attempt to grasp modernity then their very appeal would be tarnished, repugnance and disdain rapidly replacing fascination. After all, to where could the tired mind and body escape if Tir-na-Nog came to resemble Tamworth?

The lobby in favour of industrial development for the Highlands was not blessed with this same unity of purpose. HEP aroused passionate rivalries over the rights of public and private interests to exploit natural resources, while opinion showed few signs of coalescing on the expedience of ancillary electro-chemical and metallurgical industries in a rural setting. However, those aspects of development thinking infused with a modern universalist spirit did manage to unite disparate

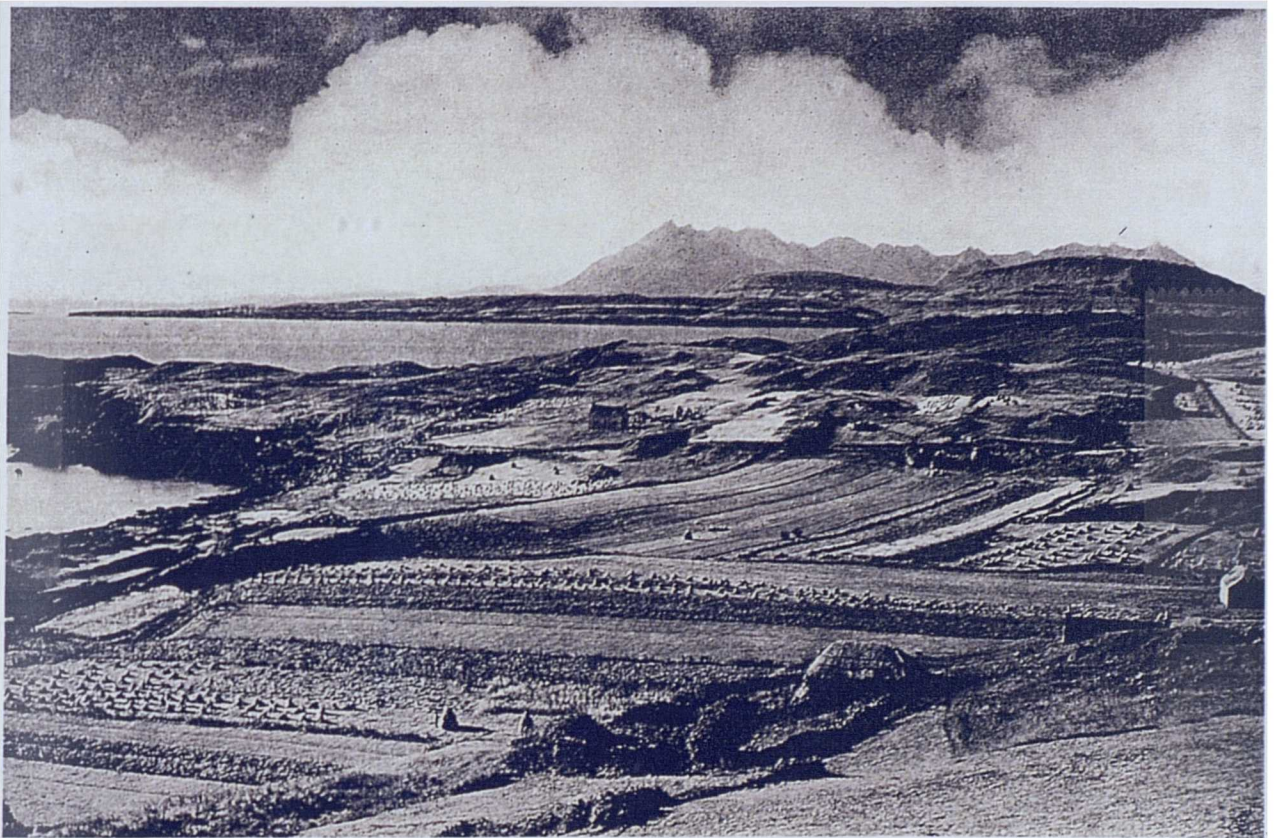
constituencies. Visions of the Highlands as an exemplar for the evolving regional idea, all within the context of European *technology-kultur* had a broad humanist appeal. With progressive communities overcoming and ultimately utilising their demanding physiographic surroundings to impressive effect, a geography of Britain and Scotland could be imagined in which the margins were given new impetus and identity, their chance to re-define social, economic and cultural relations with the core.

One final observation concerns the continued dominance of established cultural constructions of the Gael and the Highland landscape. While among the ranks of reactionary landowners or the rural preservation lobby the rhetoric of anti-industrialism was unwavering, the greatest paradoxes lay with advocates of new economic development. There was a duality to the politics of modernity which meant that many nationalists, secessionists and radicals were just as capable of invoking the racial stereotypes and imagery of the Celtic Twilight as their opponents. Few observers, it seemed, could detach themselves far enough from this emotive conflict to see that Highlanders were neither any more, or any less, suited to the travails of twentieth-century society than any other European people. These same tensions between tradition and modernity are of obvious relevance in the final chapter to follow.



## Chapter Four

### A Life on the Land: National Revival and the Campaign for Rural Re-Colonisation





## Introduction

*'It was as if Alba was waiting once again for the birth of a man,  
and all the mighty bens stood listening for the first cry of the babe  
that was to be a poet.'*<sup>1</sup>  
(Fionn Mac Colla, 1932)

This chapter adds a further layer of meaning to the contesting cultures of landscape envisioned for the Highlands between the wars, by examining the campaign mounted for a re-appropriation of the land resource on behalf of the public and its promotion as a location for community-based rural revivalism. Conscious that during the course of the past century the 'land question' has developed into one of Scotland's most emotive *causes celebres*, I demonstrate how the events of the 1920's and 1930's represented an important shift in rhetorical emphasis, reconfiguring conventional expressions of popular resistance, dispossession and dislocation. Having been previously specific in its intents, with a localised and singular objective of basic re-possession, the Highland land issue evolved into an expansive and cosmopolitan forum with myriad political and cultural aspects.<sup>2</sup> The historical and cultural legitimacy of the people's claim for the land gained vital expression through a mythopoeic discourse linking possible countryside reform to wider questions of modern Scottish nationhood, the prospect of Celtic cultural revival and constructions of modern citizenship.

The chapter begins by tracing the emergence of a politically motivated nationalist discourse in the push for mass programmes of re-settlement after the war and the various responses by the state and Highland landowners to demands for radical reform. It details attempts by the newly established Board of Agriculture for Scotland and Forestry Commission to cope with a backlog of land claims, and the public criticism to which these authorities were subjected. Crucially, the subsequent expansion of the land agenda and the emergence of less orthodox forms of protest and militancy are attributed to the efforts of a flourishing nationalist intelligentsia.

As part of the sprawling national project since recognised as Scotland's Renaissance movement, a loose collective of novelists, poets and critics worked towards twin objectives; developing a vein of politicised rural propaganda and

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<sup>1</sup> Mac Colla, F. (1984) *The Albannach*, (first published 1932) London: Souvenir Press, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> While Hunter has demonstrated how the Highland land wars of the late-nineteenth century were sharply politicised and occurred within the context of Celtic pressure for Home Rule, their *modus operandi* was often localised, vying landless community against autocratic landlord, with the sole objective of land re-possession. Hunter, J. (1976) *The Making of the Crofting Community*, Edinburgh: John Donald. It is also worth noting Finlay's contention that while strong nationalist feeling was not represented at the electoral ballot box during the inter-war period, it was expressed by a variety of other means and in a diverse range of fields. Findlay, A. (1994) 'National Identity in Crisis: Politicians, Intellectuals and the 'End of Scotland', 1920-1939', *History*, 79 (256) p. 242-59.

reworking traditional literary representations of the Highlands.<sup>3</sup> Framed within the context of inter-war nationalist politics and with close reference to biographical material, this chapter demonstrates how writers such as Hugh MacDiarmid, Neil Gunn and Fionn Mac Colla cultivated a mythology of organic and cultural revival. Their commitment to this cause gained both physical and symbolic expression. During the 1930's the literary migration to the Highlands and Islands as a place of work was backed by a new genre of rural writing. The literati's representations of the region, based on a gritty realism, are explained as a reaction to the perceived dislocation of Celtic Twilight texts. Care is taken to demonstrate how this literature invoked powerful motifs of social, economic and cultural crisis as a necessary precursor to subsequent demands for reconstruction and re-colonisation.

Informed by a burgeoning pan-European discourse on the future of the region and the small nation, and by the rise of popular folk movements, the rural re-colonisation campaign struck out into unbroken country; challenging established core-periphery relations in Scotland and Britain; breaching the schism driven between expressions of cultural and political identity; and investigating economic alternatives to the capitalist mode of production.<sup>4</sup> These visions constructed for a new rural future, and their international referents, are examined in some detail. The chapter reflects on how the search by Celtic revivalists for a quintessential regional identity to act as the foundation stone for fresh expressions of nationhood and citizenship, required the drafting of new accords between the forces of tradition and modernity in Highland society. It concludes by considering three separate attempts to convert the plans for a new rural geography into reality. An experimental farm for Highland agriculture, a Celtic college and island folk school embodied many of the educational and spiritual imperatives of the re-colonist vision but were also sites of familiar contestation and conflict.

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<sup>3</sup> Hagemann has observed how the Scottish Renaissance movement: 'can be, and has been, defined in various ways: with reference to a person (Hugh MacDiarmid), a genre (poetry), a language (Scots), a period of time (the 1920's, the inter-war period or the twentieth-century as a whole), a quality judgement (a rise in the level of literature, or culture in general), a theme (Scottish reality, or Scottish myths), or a political attitude (nationalism)'. Hagemann, S. (1995) 'Bidin Naitural': Identity Questions in Scottish Twentieth-Century Renaissance Literature', *Journal of Scottish Literary Studies*, 21 (1) p. 44-55; 44. Hagemann deems the most inclusive of definitions to be that of Duncan Glen who reckoned the literary revival to be only one, if the most successful, aspect of the Renaissance movement: 'The young Scots who returned to Scotland after the 1914-18 war were concerned with reviving "Scotland - the Nation"; Scotland which was culturally, economically and socially bankrupt; Scotland which had lost not only its political independence but was being swallowed economically and culturally by its larger and controlling partner'. Glen, D. (1964) *Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance*, Edinburgh: Chambers, p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> The evolution of the regional idea throughout Europe, with interesting reflections on the situation in Scotland, is traced in: Harvie, C. (1994) *The Rise of Regional Europe*, London: Routledge.

Given the eclecticism which characterised the personalities of the Celtic revivalist and rural re-colonisation movement, and the variety of referents they relied upon, my investigative approach is suitably diverse. Evidence is drawn from a rich corpus of non-fictional texts (regional guides, travelogues, landscape appreciations), in addition to literary works, political columns and social commentaries. The chapter should not be construed as an attempt to unify the thoughts of poet and polemicist Hugh MacDiarmid, with those of the novelists Neil Gunn and Fionn Mac Colla or the cultural critics George Scott-Moncrieff and William Power. After all, these personalities, and numerous other literary commentators, had their own distinctive take on the Highlands and reading of the broader agendas affecting Scotland. Neither is what follows an exhaustive account of the lives and works of such hugely complex figures, this task has already been completed by more erudite scholars.<sup>5</sup> My approach, although inevitably selective, is designed to highlight a number of important themes. It is an attempt to identify a common body of ideas, inspirations and objectives which inspired the campaign to re-acquaint the citizenry with the land and their organic roots. Arguably outstripping the contributions of either geographers or planners, Scotland's Renaissance community identified a fruitful synthesis between literary and political realms to create a new geographical understanding of the Highlands.<sup>6</sup> If success is measured in terms of an immediate and widespread application to the region, then the returns were admittedly poor. However, the greatest resonances of the inter-war 'back-to-the-land' campaign can perhaps be found in more contemporary Highland debate. Before detailing any of these developments it is necessary to contextualise the early campaign for land reform and to trace the roots of nationalist involvement.

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<sup>5</sup> The list of books and essays, ranging from detailed literary criticism to popular biography, is vast and still growing, some of the most enjoyable and insightful are included here. For a general treatment see: Craig, C. (ed.) (1987) *The History of Scottish Literature: Volume Four, Twentieth-Century*, Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press. For Neil Gunn see: Price, R. (1991) *Neil M. Gunn: The Fabulous Matter of Fact*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; MacCulloch, M. (1987) 'Neil M. Gunn: Tradition and the Essence of Nationalism', *Cencrastus*, 26 p. 29-33; Burns, J. (1983) 'Neil M. Gunn: Celebration of the Light', *Cencrastus*, 11 p. 29-33; Hart, F.R. & Pick, J.B. (1981) *Neil M. Gunn: A Highland Life*, London: John Murray. For Hugh MacDiarmid see: Bold, A. (1990) *MacDiarmid: Christopher Murray Grieve, A Critical Biography*, London: Paladin; Scott, P.H. and Davis, A.C. (1980) *The Age of MacDiarmid: Hugh MacDiarmid and his Influence on Contemporary Scotland*, Edinburgh: Mainstream; Glen, D. (1964) op cit. For Fionn Mac Colla see: Herdmann, J. (1983) Fionn Mac Colla: The Art and Ideas of a Highland Novelist', *Cencrastus*, 13 p. 11-14; Morrison, D. (ed.) (1973) *Essays on Fionn Mac Colla*, Caithness: Caithness Books.

<sup>6</sup> Withers has highlighted the links which can be drawn between representations of the geography of Scotland and the country's literary heritage. Withers, C.W.J. (1984) 'The Image of the Land: Scotland's Geography Through Her Languages and Literature', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 100 (2) p. 81-95.

## The People's Plea for Land

*'Ye remnant of the brave,  
Who charge when the pipes are heard  
Don't think, my lads, that you fight for your own  
'Tis for the good of the land.*

*And when the fight is done,  
And you come back over the foam;  
"Well done!" they say, "you are good and true"  
"But we cannot give you a home."*

*For the hill we want for the deer  
And the glen the birds enjoy;  
And bad for the game is the smoke of the cot  
And the song of the crofter's boy.'<sup>7</sup>  
(MacKenzie MacBryde, n.d.)*

*'The scene is laid of Skye: two islanders in a boat pulling easily  
towards home when one sees an object floating on the waves:-  
"What's that there, Donald?"  
"Och, Ian, it's maybe a bit board."  
"Board? Why board, Donald? You'll be thinking it is the Board of  
Agriculture, whatever."  
"Not at all, not at all, it can't be - it's moving."<sup>8</sup>  
(Scots Independent, 1930)*

A rather thin joke and the lyrics of an indignant bard make clear the feelings of the many thousands of Highland servicemen who, on returning from foreign fields, found no easy solutions to their long-standing hunger for land. The demands for land re-distribution were already well established. In the years prior to the First World War, Liberals and Socialists had pressed for the introduction of legal mechanisms to facilitate land settlement through the purchase of sheep farms, grazing lands and sporting estates. Tom Johnston was among the most vocal critics of the Highland landownership system, accusing lairds of driving 'the people from the soil, huddling them in stinking cities, bereft of opportunities for the only trade they know, agriculture'. From here began an inevitable spiral of decline:

*'And so the poor rate rises and competition among city labourers  
for vacant situations becomes keener and wages fall. And so  
misery and drunkenness and destitution and physical degeneration  
eat like evil ghouls at the very fibre of our national life. And all  
because forsooth, His Grace of Sutherland gets bigger rents for  
sheep farms than for crofts, and because His Grace of Atholl must*

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<sup>7</sup> Cited in: MacDiarmid, J.M. (1927) *The Deer Forests of Scotland and how they are Bleeding Scotland White*, Glasgow: Scottish Home Rule Association.

<sup>8</sup> *Scots Independent*, 1930 October p. 166.

*have freedom on his August moors and solitude in his embattled keep*'.<sup>9</sup>

The stormy passage of Lord Pentland's Small Landowners (Scotland) Act through parliament in 1911 represented considerable progress for those in search of reform. The legislation promised any new tenant security of tenure, the right to bequeath a holding, a fair rent set by an outside body and compensation payments for improvements made to a holding should the tenant decide to leave. Good theory seldom converted into practice. The Board of Agriculture as executors of any proposed re-settlement scheme had inadequate powers of purchase and an unrealistic budget. Furthermore the Land Court, as official arbitrary body, regularly became ensnared in protracted negotiations with reluctant and recalcitrant landowners which could drag on for months, if not years.<sup>10</sup> In 1919, the Land Settlement (Scotland) Act was introduced as a means to strengthen the position of the Board of Agriculture for Scotland (BOAS). Powers of purchase were increased and more funds made available. Leneman has noted how this improved framework weakened the 'stance of those whose rank and privilege was key in pre-war days' and, when combined with mounting public support for more radical initiatives, promised a new dawn for many expectant Highlanders.<sup>11</sup> Again

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<sup>9</sup> Johnston, T. (1909) *Our Noble Scots Families*, Glasgow: Forward Publications, p. ix. For an equally scathing attack see: Anon (1914) 'The Wrongs of the Highland People: The Case of the Crofters', *The Thistle*, May p. 72-74. An alternative rural economy based on a system of small holdings had begun to be discussed during the war: MacDonald, T.D. (1916) 'The Highlands: Considered in Relation to the Economy of Small-Holdings, Part 1', *The Scottish Review*, 39 (83) p. 375-401; Macdonald, T.D. (1916) 'The Highlands: Considered in Relation to the Economy of Small-Holdings, Part 2', *The Scottish Review*, 39 (84) p. 539-556; Day, J.P. (1918) *Public Administration in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*, London: University of London Press; Campbell, H.F. (1920) *Highland Reconstruction*, Glasgow: Alex Maclaren, p. 105-111.

<sup>10</sup> The House of Lords, a bastion of the sporting establishment, insisted that certain alterations be made to the 1911 bill before it gained approval. Among these was a clause ensuring that no land be taken for small holdings without compensation being given for depreciation of its sporting value, i.e. the destruction or lessening of the sporting value of land reserved for deer. If agreement was eventually reached on a certain estate then critics of the scheme noted how 'the matter of compensation is now managed so that landlords get a false and fictitious value for their land and the settlement of the Highland people on Highland lands is so restricted as to be rendered largely inoperative'. Anon (1914) 'The Wrongs of the Highland People: The Case of the Crofters', *The Thistle*, May p. 72-74. One example of the injustices which prospered under the emasculated act is sufficient. In 1914 it was reported that a landlord had been the recipient of some £2000 compensation for loss of sporting values on land recently peopled by crofters. The sport in question was not deer stalking, as might have been expected, but the shooting of wild geese, which 'it was alleged, would cease to be an attractive sport if crofters were allowed to settle'. Anon (1914) 'The Working of the Small Holders' Act', *The Thistle*, September p. 167.

<sup>11</sup> Leneman, L. (1989a) *Land Fit for Heroes? Land settlement in Scotland after WW1*, Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, p. 25; see also, Leneman, L. (1989b) 'Borgie: A Debatable Gift to the Nation?', *Northern Scotland*, 9 p. 77-82. The work of the BOAS in the Hebrides is covered in: Hunter, J. (1976) *The Making of the Crofting Community*, Edinburgh: John Donald, p. 184-206. See also: Cameron, E.A. (1996) *Land for the People?: The British Government and the Scottish Highlands, c. 1880-1925*, East Linton: Tuckwell Press.

<sup>12</sup> Leneman has noted how BOAS procedure involved: 'interviewing and assessing the suitability of applicants; inspecting potential farms and then providing those acquired with buildings, fences, roads and water supplies, all of which took time. Financial constraints also operated. Prices after

however, such optimism was short-lived as familiar difficulties surfaced on both sides of the parapet. The Board's scanty workforce were quickly left floundering amid an administrative quagmire, their task made no easier by the actions of landowners whose public pronouncements of support were seldom mirrored in private negotiations.<sup>12</sup>

The transfer of new property was interminably slow. Between 1912 and 1924 the Board had acquired 51 estates of varying size which amounted to an acreage of 350,370 acres. Of that total 148,338 acres had been sub-divided into holdings. During the same period, 3631 applications for new holdings or enlargements had been settled, but a further 10,020 remained on the Board's books, of which 2534 were entitled to preference as ex-servicemen whose applications had been received prior to 1921.<sup>13</sup> The validity of these figures was disputed by the SLPF who raised queries as to, 'how many of these applicants are still alive, how many are still in this country, and how many of them have even the limited means necessary to take up a small holding?'.<sup>14</sup> Unsurprisingly,

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the war rose so rapidly that within five months of the passing of the Act the funds allocated for land settlement were already used up'. Leneman, L. (1989a) op cit. p. 25. The agricultural capability of some of the Board's new land holdings was also highly questionable. The 12,000 acres of Borgie farm and 16,000 acres of Shinness farm, respectively gifted and sold to the Board by the Duke of Sutherland in 1916-17, were relatively infertile holdings. Much of the land was only suitable for timber plantations, leading to plans for new smallholders to divide their energies between agriculture and forestry. The Highland Land League were among those to accuse the Duke of shedding the unwanted margins from his vast estate for profit or under the guise of philanthropy, all this while the better land in neighbouring straths remained in his hands. They recounted with some bitterness how, during the infamous Sutherland Clearances, the lands at Borgie had been declared, 'too poor for small tenantry' by the Duke's ancestor. Leneman, L. (1989b) op cit. p. 78. The Duke's own criticisms of the Board's work can be found in: Gower, G.S.L. (1957) *Looking Back: The Autobiography of the Duke of Sutherland*, London: Odhams, p. 84. Lord Lovat's biographer went as far as to concede that though the peer sold his three 'best farms near Beauly' and a sheep farm at Glasnacardoch in Morar for the purposes of land re-settlement, he was 'reluctant to part with any low ground'. He apparently welcomed 'anything in the government bills which he believed would put more people on the land and enable them to stay there in decent comfort, criticising most of the proposals as inadequate and unlikely to achieve their object'. Lindley, F. (1935) *Lord Lovat: A Biography*, London: Hutchinson, p. 250. Sharply contrasting views on Lovat's apparent philanthropy can be found in: Leneman, L. (1989a) op cit. p. 78; Hutchinson, I.G.C. (1994) op cit. p. 146.

<sup>13</sup> SLPF (1924) *Notes for Members*, 1 (1) p. 10. The annual figures for new holdings created in the immediate post-war period were as follows: 1919 - 282, 1920 - 227, 1921 - 415, 1922 - 433, 1923 - 322, 1924 - 269, 1925 - 102. Leneman, L. (1989) op cit. p. 37. In 1927 a further 92 applications were granted, in 1928, 71 holdings and 46 enlargements of existing holdings were created by the Board. Munro, J. (1929) 'Land Hunger in Scotland: The Failure of London Government', *Scots Independent*, November p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> SLPF (1927) *Notes for Members*, 1 (10) p. 27. One of the Board's most ill-advised incursions into the land market was again in Sutherland. Having paid £12,000 for Eriboll farm in 1922 and a further £45,100 on the sheep to stock it, the BOAS could find no takers for the land. The lack of response was attributable to the £367 required of any new crofter moving on to the new holdings. Despite several attempts to re-define these figures, the farm was eventually re-sold to a private interest for £10,724 in 1926. The SLPF was particularly unimpressed, 'Poor old Eriboll! It should have a 'T' in front of its first letter!'. SLPF (1927) *Notes for Members*, 2 (10) p. 23. Criticism of this purchase came from commentators of all political hues. For nationalist criticism see, Coghill, D.H.S. (1932) 'Our Derelict Highlands', *Scots Independent*, June p. 119.

frustration at the Board's appalling record, and the intransigence of the landowners with whom they dealt, rose among local communities, particularly on the western seaboard and among the islands where congestion was greatest and social conditions the most wretched.<sup>15</sup> Some close to breaking point, threatened immediate and direct action. John MacLean of Scalpay, Harris informed the authorities of his willingness to commandeer the lands at Island Glass lighthouse, 'Please take this as a warning to the lightkeepers, as its the like of me that fought for it (*the land*) not lightkeepers'.<sup>16</sup> Malcolm Morrison and his fellow crofters of Geocrab outlined to the BOAS how:

*'The first petition was lodged with you in the Spring of 1912. The second on the summer of 1919. Our patience has not as yet been rewarded in hearing a satisfactory reply to our requests. On more occasions than one you have sent leaflets which quoted "are you still desirous for small holdings?". All replies to queries were answered in the positive'.<sup>17</sup>*

On the mainland, John Pennet found himself similarly disenfranchised:

*'It gives me great surprise that the Board is not prepared to make a Small Holding on Glenfinnan Deer Forest on Froach Bheinn. All I can do know is that the boys and myself will take the law in our own hands and buy lambs and put them on Froach Bhienn... Surely the government do not want their ex-servicemen to be worse off than here, and their old parents to die in flour bags'.<sup>18</sup>*

In certain cases these threats of social protest were carried through to their logical conclusion. Though the violent events of the 1880's were not to be repeated, land raiding again became a popular tactic with insurrection commonplace on North Uist, Harris, Lewis, Skye, Benbecula and in Sutherland during the early 1920's.<sup>19</sup>

Landowning reaction to the hunger for property redistribution was predictably entrenched. The findings of the 1922 Deer Forest Committee were applauded by the SLPF who agreed with the contention that stalking grounds

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<sup>15</sup> A grimly evocative description of these conditions can be found in: SRO AF 67/156, D. Shaw to the Board of Agriculture for Scotland (BOAS), 1923 January 26. Evidence of the reactionary position taken up by one particular landowner can be found in: *The Scotsman*, 1923 March 28 p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> SRO AF 67/156, John Maclean to the BOAS, 1922 December 15.

<sup>17</sup> SRO AF 67/156, Malcolm Morrison et al. to the BOAS, 1923 January 11. Donald Stewart of Struan, Skye explained his own position in simple terms, 'I require the land, as I had to go five miles to plant potatoes for the last eight years'. SRO AF 67/148, Donald Stewart to the Secretary of State for Scotland (SOS), 1920 January 23.

<sup>18</sup> SRO AF 67/156, John Pennet to the SOS, 1924 August 8.

<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to note how the land raids, besides mobilising a sense of local solidarity, were also expressions of Scottish nationhood in the face of imposed and alien authority. A raid at Lochmaddy by the self-styled 'Comrades of the Great War' involved a procession led by a piper and 'the dancing of a Scotch reel' after the land claims had been staked out. *Aberdeen Free Press*, 1920 February 16 p. 4. The symbolic importance of land raids and their contemporary commemoration are considered in: Withers, C.W.J. (1996) 'Place, Memory, Monument: Memorializing the Past in Contemporary Highland Scotland', *Ecumene*, 3 (3) p. 325-344.

afforded little, if any, scope for small-holdings.<sup>20</sup> The Federation also courted controversy by proposing emigration to the Dominions as a plausible solution to conditions of congestion:

*'There are many people who go about saying, "Why spend money on settling people overseas? Why not spend it on settling them at home? ". The answer is patent. In the former case you are putting settlers on the land - and generally good land - which is unoccupied and crying out to be peopled, in the latter case you are generally turning one occupant out to make room for another. There are no vacant prairies in this country to colonise. The land in this country is limited and it is occupied already'.*<sup>21</sup>

D.M. Reid the Scottish Nationalist and experimental crofter, countered these claims calling on the government to act before further 'passage money' had to be found for 'our people to ship off to Canada'.<sup>22</sup> Similarly under the banner of 'Our

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<sup>20</sup> Despite having inspected 56 deer forests, the Committee felt themselves unqualified to generalise on the possibilities for small-holding creation: 'We can only say that most of those we have visited are quite unsuitable for the purpose, unless the small-holdings were combined with some additional profitable occupation, such as silviculture or sea-fishing, on which the small holders and their families could rely for an income at seasons when the holdings do not require their attention'. Departmental Committee (1922) *Report on Deer Forests*, British Sessional Papers, Cmd. 1636, vol. VII p. 263-354. The SLPF added that local estate workers 'usually crop a few acres and graze considerable stock on the forests' and therefore 'nothing will be gained by displacing these men who represent a compromise between small-holdings and sport'. SRO GD 325 1/54, SLPF Summary of Report of the Deer Forests Committee.

<sup>21</sup> SLPF (1927) *Notes for Members*, 1 (10) p. 22. Earlier, the Federation had blamed the modern urban experience for a perceived moral and physical decline in the Scots population who had previously been prepared to search for opportunity overseas: 'Our people are becoming less adaptable and less fitted for a life on the land in the Dominions than their fathers were...We are spending millions on education. Are we turning out a population that can make good, not only on the farms and in the factories of this country, but also on the sheep-stations, the cattle-runs and the virgin wheat-fields of the Dominions?'. SLPF (1926) *Notes for Members*, 1 (6) p. 14. Some years previous, J.L. Kinloch had been inclined to agree, claiming that the British Empire was the true beneficiary of Scots emigration: 'There is comparatively very little soil that can be profitably worked in the Highland glens, and the amount that there is does not increase. There is not enough to go round. But in Canada there are hundreds of acres to be had for a song. What wonder that a young farmer should decide to take them? Would it not rather be a wonder if he did not take them? Should we think any better of him if he chose to stay at home, scraping the scantiest of livings out of a patch of oats, when there is a fortune waiting for a man on British soil across the seas? Of course he goes abroad, and takes with him possibly, a keeper's daughter for his wife, whereas at home he probably would not have been able to keep a wife at all...The Highlands lose a poor man, Canada makes a rich man; the gain is to the Empire. It is taking a narrow view of the future of a race to look only at the loss to the Highlands; what the Empire gains Scotland gains too...If there is good land waiting for them at home, by all means let us keep them at home. But he is not a statesman who looks at British territory overseas and then tries to tie a Scottish farmer to the plough toil among the rocks of a deer forest'. Kinloch, J.L. (1914) 'The Truth About Deer Forests', *Everyman*, January 9 p. 424.

<sup>22</sup> Reid, D.M. (1928) 'Our Waste Lands: How To Use Them', *Scots Independent*, March p. 75; see also, 'Farmer Laddie' (1928) 'Rural Scotland', *Scots Independent*, April p. 87; *Scots Independent*, 1928 September p. 160; *Scots Independent*, 1930 October p. 166; D.M. Reid (1943) *The Problem of the Highlands: A survey of the position as it affects the North-West*, Stirling: Eneas Mackay. Reid's message was backed by George Scott-Moncrieff who felt that emigration had 'for too long been the Scot's resort in the face of defeat'. As far as he was concerned, 'the Scot in Australia is an Australian; the Scot in London is a Cockney'. Scott-Moncrieff, G. (1935) 'Introduction', in Scott-Moncrieff, G. (ed.) *Scottish Country*, Edinburgh: Wishart Books, p. xvii. Andrew Dewar Gibb was similarly placed, noting that: 'There is certainly no people in the world



Land and People First', Lachlan Grant urged the Highland population to resist any temptation to emigrate.<sup>23</sup> The Nationalist lobby castigated a succession of coalition, Labour and Unionist governments for what was perceived to be a dilatory approach to the land question.<sup>24</sup> As yet a marginal political force their agenda was radical, calling for a comprehensive programme of rural reconstruction based on the results of a national survey of land.<sup>25</sup> More critically still, nationalists were alone in stressing how 'sporting interests must take a secondary position to production and the means of livelihood on the land. No land, therefore, should be allowed to be reserved exclusively for deer or other game' (see figure 41).<sup>26</sup>

In 1927 parliament appointed the Nairne Committee to investigate the progress which had been made with the small-holding problem.<sup>27</sup> Their findings were mixed in tenor. While acknowledging the social benefits afforded newly settled communities the report re-affirmed the Board of Agriculture's claims that, with all available land suitable for re-distribution in the Outer Hebrides exhausted, the native population had shown themselves enormously reluctant to move elsewhere in the region. Traditional attachment to place appeared to be of little consequence to the Committee who, with quizzical detachment, observed how:

*'In the Highlands you are dealing with a community which has never been industrialised and resists every attempt at industrialisation. The Highlander insists on being given land in his own district and would rather have a hopeless patch on his own native heath than a fair holding in a strange glen'.<sup>28</sup>*

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whose boasts about themselves are so ill-conceived as those of the Scottish people, but to brag about the loss of your finest stock when that stock is instantly replaced by the offscourings of your neighbours, is to carry braggadocio to the verge of madness'. Gibb, A.D. (1930) *Scotland in Eclipse*, London: Humphrey Toulmin, p. 51.

<sup>23</sup> *Northern Times*, 1936 January 16 p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> 'Farmer Laddie' (1928) 'Rural Notes', *Scots Independent*, January p. 39.

<sup>25</sup> The need for a regular survey of land resources based on the American ten year model was also stressed in the Liberal Party's report into 'The Scottish Countryside'. In this publication concern was expressed that: 'At the present moment much that should be common knowledge is vague and uncertain. No one knows how many acres of land are lying idle because of lack of drainage or proper liming; how much of the present deer forest area could profitably be put to better use; how much land not suitable for food production could be used to grow timber; how much land now lying waste could be reclaimed; where foreshores could profitably be turned into arable land; to what extent mineral resources, particularly of the Highlands, could be exploited; what water powers now running to waste could be economically harnessed for industrial purposes; how far the natural resources of the country could be used for the encouragement of rural industries'. Cited in, 'Gallovidian' (1928) 'Aspects of Rural Reconstruction', *Scots Independent*, November p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8; see also, 'Gallovidian' (1928) 'Rural Reconstruction: Small Holdings and Farms', *Scots Independent*, December p. 20; 'Gallovidian' (1929) 'The Decay of Scottish Rural Life: National Reconstruction Remedy', *Scots Independent*, May p. 87.

<sup>27</sup> The Committee took its name from the chairman, Sir John Gordon Nairne, a landowner in Galloway.

<sup>28</sup> Cited in, SLPF (1928) *Notes for Members*, 1 (12) p. 19. Nationalist reaction to this controversial statement can be found in: 'Farmer Laddie' (1928) 'Rural Scotland: The Land Settlement Report', *Scots Independent*, September p. 164.



Lady Hermione; "Isn't it just too divinely lonely!"  
Sir Hugo; "Yes—not even a crofter's cottage to spoil the landscape."

Figure 41 - 'The Glorious Twelfth': Nationalist Reaction to the Land Issue  
Source: *Scots Independent* (1933)

Tardy though they may have been, towards the end of the decade the Board had begun to make inroads into outstanding Hebridean land applications.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, on the vast estates of the mainland matters remained largely unaddressed. By 1929, 7322 applications remained unattended, of that number 3163 were for new Highland holdings and 3285 for enlargements.<sup>30</sup> Identifying an effective rallying point, nationalist propagandists claimed that among the cases pending, were those of a thousand men from the 51st Highland Division, still awaiting their reward for loyal service some ten years after the armistice.<sup>31</sup> Even for those who had secured tenure, the problems did not cease. In 1935, Reverend Thomas Murchison, a champion of crofting and smallholding rights, was distressed to still see:

*'in all districts, good men sinking into difficulties, labouring for less than nothing, becoming discouraged, many wishing they had never settled on the land for which they were once clamouring, and to which their deepest instincts and sentiments still bind them, their debts piling up, their credit refused them, their families suffering, their stock failing, their young people forced to join the unhappy masses in the city'.*<sup>32</sup>

Given that the demand for land continued unabated, some observers were less sure of true intents. With reference to Lord Lovat's apparently pragmatic rejection of unrealistic Highland re-settlement schemes, Sir Fraser Lindley hinted that the demands of 'Englishmen' for land might be little more than a passing fad or an unfortunate reaction to recent wartime experiences.<sup>33</sup> The APRS identified their own arcane objections to the appearance of unsightly and ramshackle buildings on isolated plots of re-settled land.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, to the considerable interest of the SLPF, the Nairne report had asserted that these land claims would gradually peter out:

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<sup>29</sup> Hunter, J. (1976) op cit. p. 206.

<sup>30</sup> The cumulative BOAS figures from 1912-1928 were as follows: applications received - 22,955; applications settled - 5,123; applications withdrawn - 10,510; applications pending - 7,322. Munro, J. (1929) op cit. p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Murchison, T.M. (1935) 'The Small Holding Problem', *Northern Times*, June 27 p. 2; see also, Murchison, T.M. (1938) 'Wanted - A Broader Outlook: The Highlands Today and Tomorrow', in MacEwen, A. (ed.) op cit. p. 91-108. Prior to the establishment of the Hilleary Committee in 1938 Murchison had organised a petition, signed by 693 crofters, calling for a government enquiry into the question of economic development in the Highlands. *Oban Times* 1935 May 30 p. 4. Attached to the petition was an 18,000 word memorandum, penned by Murchison, detailing the needs of the crofting population. SRO AF 66/59.

<sup>33</sup> Lindley argued that the general urge to get back to the land could be attributed to a number of curious manifestations, namely that: 'primitive interests assert themselves as the result of fighting, or that years of open-air life make men loath to revert to sedentary occupations, or that the herded existence of camp and trench give rise to a longing for solitude and quiet, or, possibly that some obscure and deep-buried love of the soil and countryside is raised by the squalor and horrors of war'. Lindlay, F. (1933) op cit. p. 248.

<sup>34</sup> APRS/ECM vol. II 1935 February 6.

*'Owing to the changed outlook of the younger generation, they anticipate that the pressure of population is likely to ease. They state that there is a marked tendency for crofts to be held by old people instead of by young married couples rearing families, and they hazard the expectation that the holding may become "of a homestead for the older people than a nursery for the young"'.*<sup>35</sup>

### A Future in the Forests?

While the work of the BOAS had been attacked consistently throughout the 1920's, the activities of the Forestry Commission, the other major state-funded authority to invest heavily in the Highlands, did not escape criticism. Pre-war optimism over the potential returns to the local economy from large-scale forestry plantations and the utilisation of modern scientific research techniques was clouded in the first two decades of the Commission's work.<sup>36</sup> Attempts to debunk the commonly held belief that deer stalking grounds presented the greatest opportunities for forestry expansion rankled with the reformist lobby. 'If Sir John Stirling-Maxwell is so keen on afforestation and so certain that forestry will be a boom and a blessing to the British nation', queried one observer, 'why did he not...show his patriotism by planting Corrour deer forest with seedlings and saplings?'.<sup>37</sup> Another critic looked to the continent for examples of good silvicultural practice, 'Afforestation is the backbone of Sweden's financial position, and are the Highlands any worse than that country?'.<sup>38</sup> Statistics for 1926 detailing the proportion of plantable land in holdings acquired by lease, feu or purchase since 1919 did not improve the public mood. These revealed that, of the 178,437 acre total, only 77,409 were suited to forestry. Furthermore, due to the effects of altitude, exposure and poor soil quality, only 18,000 of the 70,000 acres of specially selected Highland deer forest were available for planting.<sup>39</sup> The 10th annual report of the Commission stated that 'it is only under exceptionally favourable circumstances that deer forests form good subjects for afforestation'.

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<sup>35</sup> SLPF (1928) op cit. p. 20. The Nationalist press were scathing towards the findings of a report with a remit only to 'deal with questions of procedure within the present acts' and whose authors safeguarded themselves by 'discreetly disassociating the social aspect from the economic'. 'Gallovidian' (1928) 'Land Settlement in Scotland: A Government Report', *Scots Independent*, August p. 148.

<sup>36</sup> Alongside Lord Lovat and Sir John Stirling-Maxwell, Seton Gordon the renowned natural historian, declared his enthusiasm for modern forestry as a viable and profitable land-use in the Highlands. Gordon, S. (1914) 'Forestry at Novar', *The Scotsman*, February 2 p. 9, *The Scotsman*, February 9, p. 9; Gordon, S. (1914) 'Science and Nature: Forestry and War', *The Scotsman*, October 13 p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> 'Mamore' (1928) Letter to the Editor, *Oban Times*, August 25 p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> 'Farmer Laddie' (1928) 'Rural Notes', *Scots Independent*, January p. 39.

<sup>39</sup> SLPF (1926) 'Afforestation in Scotland', *Notes for Members*, (1) 7 p. 6; see also, SLPF (1925) *Notes for Members*, 1 (4) p. 21.

Four years later the Commissioners confirmed that as little as 15-17 per cent of deer forest land was of a quality suited to planting.<sup>40</sup> By 1931, having taken full advantage of instabilities in the land market, the Commission had increased its holdings to 540,663 acres, making it the largest single landowner in Scotland. Of this total 344,590 acres had been classified as plantable.<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, the Commission found itself forced to fall back on hill grazings, and in some cases, it was claimed, arable land, to ensure that specified planting targets would be reached.<sup>42</sup>

While the SLPF were generally supportive of the progress being made, complaints came from sheep farmers and from those representing the interests of the landless native population and prospective small-holders. The Nationalist press blamed the distant 'London government' for an ill-guided purchasing policy. In Lochaber, the contestations over appropriate land-use were particularly acute. The Commission was accused of having purchased ten perfectly good farms, all of which were well stocked and equipped, with the intention of planting them out.<sup>43</sup> More galling still was the close proximity of a captive market at New Inverlochy, the settlement established for British Aluminium Company employees. Fort William's predicament was clear, 'Here we have a growing community being encircled by plantations, the farms that should supply them with milk and meat turned into forest...What folly! What Blind, unbounded folly, with fertile glens all around capable of supplying their needs'.<sup>44</sup> 'Why', demanded the correspondent, 'when farming is at a low ebb, do the Forestry Commission select the paying farms for their activities? Why not the poorer farms, why not those that are far from their markets, why not, for a change, some of the deer forests?'.<sup>45</sup> Bedevilled by controversy, the Board of Agriculture was accused of complicity in

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<sup>40</sup> Cited in, *Oban Times*, 1930 August 23 p. 5; *Oban Times*, 1934 October 2 p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> SLPF (1931) 'Afforestation by the State', *Notes for Members*, 2 (19) p. 11-14.

<sup>42</sup> By the year ending December 1931, the Forestry Commission had planted 163,000 acres, its target had been 175,000.

<sup>43</sup> 'Lochaber' (1929) 'The Afforestation Policy of London Government: A Protest from Lochaber', *Scots Independent*, May p. 86-87. Protests were also voiced by a Highland farmer over the Commission's actions at Fiunary, Argyll. Having acquired between 12 and 15 family farms, covering close to 30,000 acres and including 2000 acres of arable land, the Commission were prevented by deed of conveyance from allocating any of the area for land settlement. Campbell, P. (1934) 'Afforestation in the Highlands: A Possible Menace to Agriculture', *Scots Independent*, June p. 124. For further nationalist criticism of the planting programme see: *Scots Independent*, 1928 January p. 39, p. 47; 'Farmer Laddie' (1928) 'Rural Notes', *Scots Independent*, February p. 58.

<sup>44</sup> 'Lochaber' (1929) op cit. p. 86.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 87. These points were accepted by Hugh Quigley, a progressive nationalist and strong advocate of the afforestation schemes: 'The complaint now is that the Commission has not been courageous enough to plan extensive areas of the Highlands or to push their planting programme high enough up the hillsides. It has also been accused of enclosing areas which might, with a little care, have been brought into good condition as arable or grazing land'. Quigley, H. (1949) *The Highlands of Scotland*, (4th edn) London: B.T. Batsford, p. 6.

passing on good property to the Commission and several landowners of surreptitiously re-lining their pockets. The Highland press joined the clamour, sniping at the agency for its apparent inability to plant on sporting estates:

*'Almost every obstacle in nature can be conquered by man. Let us therefore hope, that avoiding all arable or agricultural lands...the Commissioners will set themselves to solve the problem of making a deer forest tree-bearing. The Commission is to receive £9 million during the next decade. This should provide a goodly sum for experiment on the deer forests of the Highlands'.<sup>46</sup>*

MacCallum Scott was sympathetic to this line of argument, finding it 'easy to understand how afforestation was regarded, not merely with apathy, but with active hostility, by these champions of the crofters, and advocates of new small holdings'.<sup>47</sup> He also accepted that these lobbyists 'had an immediate task and resented...an attempt to draw a red herring across the trail', but was equally keen to point out that, 'the Highlands had never been an afforested country within their memory or that of their fathers, and they had lost all tradition of the relationship of forestry to a peasant population'.<sup>48</sup> Hugh Quigley came to similar conclusions, suggesting an entirely new visual aesthetic for the Highlands, since 'to bring the landscape back to cultivation...might cause a new type of landscape to emerge altogether'.<sup>49</sup> Regenerating native pinewoods, lower slopes clothed in birch and larch and, it should be added, regimented blocks of forest would close in wide vistas and eliminate the immensity of barren mountainous terrain. According to Ian Macpherson, this was no bad thing, 'it is a country which requires woods. The crests of the hills surge magnificently from forests without whose covering the hills look bleak, base-heavy, lacking in grace and proportion'.<sup>50</sup> Arthur Gardner was rather more ambivalent, wishing that 'the Forestry people could be induced to act more in the spirit of the eighteenth century landlords, to whose planting the England we love owes so much of its beauty'.<sup>51</sup>

Although many of the grievances relating to the Commission's early work were well placed, they also masked rising employment figures on new plantations and holdings under preparation. Tom Johnston remembered how in his time working for the agency he had displayed two photographs on the office mantelpiece:

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<sup>46</sup> *Oban Times*, 1930 August 23 p. 5; see also, *Oban Times*, 1935 August 24 p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> MacCallum Scott, A. (1926) 'Afforestation and the Highlands', *Scots Magazine*, IV (5) p. 372-379; 373.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p. 373-374.

<sup>49</sup> Quigley, H. (1949) *op cit*. p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> Macpherson, I. (1935) 'The Central Highlands', in Scott-Moncrieff, G. (ed.) *Scottish Country*, Wishart Books: Edinburgh, p. 199-215; 212-213.

<sup>51</sup> Gardner, A. (1948) *Western Highlands*, London: B.T. Batsford, p. 8.

*'The first of five employees, all of whom were engaged on the 9000 acre estate of Inchnacarroch in November 1919 when it was a sheep farm: the second was of the 70 men who were employed as forestry workers on precisely the same land area in May 1926 when it was in the possession of the Forestry Commissioners'.<sup>52</sup>*

Another example of good practice was the 20,000 acre Glenmore estate which had previously employed only ten men, but under new ownership had seen the workforce increase to seventy-five. Several of these labourers had been allotted their own forest holdings with attached dwellings.<sup>53</sup> Following Scandinavian, German and Canadian models which combined agricultural and silvicultural work under scientific management regimes it was hoped that an acceptable standard of living could be maintained:

*'afforestation is just the means which will restore a large population to the soil, and which, besides giving full occupation to many skilled woodsmen, will provide the ideal auxiliary occupation which will make small-holdings profitable where at present they spell starvation'.<sup>54</sup>*

Not all the forest holding experiments were successful. At Borgie in Sutherland, the settlers divided their efforts between the 6000 acres of forestry plantation and their own small plots. Unfortunately, the land was poor, the small-holders poorer and the location remote from agricultural markets. In 1930, the scheme had been wrapped up and written off as a loss.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, by the turn of the decade the government's provision of small-holdings had come to an abrupt halt.<sup>56</sup> Having peaked at 3850 in the winter of 1930, the Commission's payroll balanced out at approximately 3000. By September 1930, 777 tied forest workers' holdings had been created, on which 953 men were occupied and 3573 people resident.<sup>57</sup>

Despite the shock of the new - a commercially orientated approach to timber production, stark coniferous monoculture, the lack of provision for amenity preservation - combined with certain ill-advised land purchases which

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<sup>52</sup> Johnston, T. (1952) *Memories*, London: Collins, p. 188-189.

<sup>53</sup> Despite accusations to the contrary, Forestry Commission policy stated that no arable land was to be planted with trees. Any arable land acquired was to be reserved and equipped for small-holdings. Their fixed target was the creation of five small-holdings for every 1000 acres of afforested land. Each holding was to comprise at least 10 acres of cultivable land, plus grazing areas, and was to be of a quality which would enable the holder to keep a cow and grow potatoes or any other suitable crop. It was not the intention to make the holdings self-supporting, as the holder was to be guaranteed work in the forests for 150 days a year. MacCallum Scott, A. (1926) op cit. p. 378-379; 'Farmer Laddie' (1927) 'Rural Notes', *Scots Independent*, December p. 18.

<sup>54</sup> MacCallum Scott, A. (1926) op cit. p. 375.

<sup>55</sup> Leneman, L. (1989b) op cit. p. 77-82; Coghill, D.H.S. (1932) op cit. p. 119.

<sup>56</sup> Lamont, A. (1934) 'Croftland in Wales: Compared with those in Scotland', *Scots Independent*, November p. 198.

<sup>57</sup> Among the Forestry Commission employees were some of the unfortunate evacuees from St. Kilda. SLPF (1931) *Notes for Members*, 2 (19) p. 11-14.

aroused suspicion among crofters over 'a deep-laid plot between the Government and the landowners', the Commission did begin to assimilate itself into the economic life of the Highlands.<sup>58</sup> Early proof that lessons were indeed being learnt came when the *Oban Times* encouraged its readership to 'Trust the Trees'.<sup>59</sup> While landscape aesthetics were of obvious importance to the Highlander, it was the economic aspects of the Commission's work which were foremost in the observer's mind:

*'There was a loch I had long wanted to visit, so I made for it, and I was recompensed by...a sight of some of the finest larches I have ever seen, splendid trees, girthy, dead straight, and of exceptional height. All around was a welter of mountain-tops, most of them over 3000ft. Never before had I seen so clearly what afforestation might mean to the Highlands. Economic problems...there might be, but that timber of unusually high quality can be grown in our wilds there surely is no doubt'.<sup>60</sup>*

Displaying a forester's pragmatism, G.K. Fraser gave little credence to the 'arty objections which are raised to all forms of Highland development'.<sup>61</sup> 'The well planted forest is not art', he reminded faddists, 'it is intended as new life for the hill country, and the major objections to it arise from the growing pains of new development...In time they will become an accepted and welcome form of Highland scenery'.<sup>62</sup> As an expert practitioner Fraser felt that, after a quarter of a century of systematic afforestation, the facts were apparent. The processes of land preparation for timber production, subsequent harvesting and treatment in ancillary factories provided 'a larger number of rural centres of population than any other form of land utilisation applicable to Highland conditions'.<sup>63</sup>

In the next section, the chapter's focus moves beyond the immediacy of localised native protest and functional expressions of nationalist sentiment on the land question, to track the ideological and intellectual background of the vision for rural re-colonisation twinned with national revival.

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<sup>58</sup> Macilleidhuibh, D. (1943) 'Government Futility in the Highlands', *Scots Independent*, November p. 7.

<sup>59</sup> Editorial 'Trust the Trees: Nature's Safeguard', *Oban Times* 1936 September 5 p. 5.

<sup>60</sup> Gunn, N. (1940) 'Memories of the Months:...and the rains came', *Scots Magazine*, XXXIII (2) p. 445-448.

<sup>61</sup> Fraser, G.K. (1947) 'Forestry in the Highlands', *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*, XXIII (138) p. 384-397; 394.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, p. 395.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, p. 384. Fraser identified de-population as the crux of the Highland situation: 'Surely if such developments are the alternative to the absorption of the best children of the Highlands into the southern economic system, there can be no doubt as to the choice between the isolation of one man to each 1000 acres of sheep or deer and the revival of the village community of some dozens of families centred in a forest industry in one glen'. *Ibid*, p. 395.



### Celticized Nationalism: From the Highlands to Europe and Back Again

*'I am all for the new nationalism, but at the moment it presents to me a maelstrom boiling and bubbling with the cross-currents of rival and frequently fantastic theories, schemes and notions, riotous with tumultuous personality and convulsive with petulant individual predilection.'*<sup>64</sup>

(Lewis Spence, 1928)

*'...his nationalism was never any one thing, never exclusively economic, or political, or cultural, but all the elements gathered together into one continuing way of life.'*<sup>65</sup>

(Neil Gunn, 1941)

This section considers the objects of the literary Renaissance within the wider context of modern Scottish nationalism and a pan-European discourse of regionalism. It introduces several of the key personalities who functioned under a Celticized and fundamentalist wing of the evolving nationalist movement and examines their attempts to cement a strong ruralist aspect in new constructions of nationhood, with the Highlands as the focus of these efforts. An exploration of the accepted place of myth and imagined tradition in grounding this movement is also initiated.

Scotland's literary Renaissance of the inter-war period was founded on an understanding that the intellectuals' role in modern society was a problematic one which could not be set apart from the political arena. From the tensions inherent to this approach, nationalist writers, poets, artists and critics were encouraged to draw their very vitality and energy. During the 1920's Christopher Murray Grieve, a Borderer by birth but steadily gaining infamy under his Celticized pseudonym of Hugh MacDiarmid as a poet, polemicist and *bon viveur*, did most to generate this atmosphere of creativity and empowerment (see figure 42). By necessity as much as by choice, MacDiarmid's early literary work had been combined with first-hand experience. Aged twenty, he had been recruited on to the 1912 Fabian Land Inquiry Committee, contributing information on possible reform in the Scottish countryside. Following military service and flitting around rural Scotland in search of Lloyd-George's country fit for heroes, he was awakened to the plight of a dwindling population, the campaign for greater rights of public access and the acute need for economic reconstruction. During this itinerant period, a spell of employment on the shooting lodge staff at Kildormie estate in Easter Ross, offered an insight into the dominance of the sporting

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<sup>64</sup> *Scots Independent*, 1928 March p. 59.

<sup>65</sup> Gunn, N. (1941) 'Sir Alexander MacEwen: Philosopher, Patriot and Beloved Leader', *Scots Independent*, August p. 7.



Figure 42 - Hugh MacDiarmid (C.M. Grieve)  
Source: Bold, A. (1984)

industry in Highland society.<sup>66</sup> For several years a rising star in the political firmament and a force in the radical press, MacDiarmid's omnipresence in nationalist affairs was no accident, illustrative of an unswerving determination and a gift for blatant self-promotion.

In 1927, as the stylised leader of the Renaissance movement he set down a new agenda for Scotland. Claiming that it had taken the 'full force of the war to jolt an adequate majority of the Scottish people out of their old mental, moral and material rut', he demanded that the country regain its independent political and cultural position within Europe.<sup>67</sup> Although guilty during his career of intellectual plagiarism, philosophical contradiction and rabid anglo-phobia in equal measure, MacDiarmid's thinking was undoubtedly sophisticated, securely grounded within an internationalist tradition. Adopting the Spenglerian doctrine, detailed in 'The Decline of the West', that the future of modern civilisation and culture lay with small nationalism, MacDiarmid encouraged Scotland to rid itself of the taint of English imperialism, 'the Renaissance movement regards itself as an effort in every aspect of the national life to supplant the elements at present predominant by the other elements they have suppressed, and thus reverse the existing order'.<sup>68</sup>

The new narrative to challenge this dominant British hegemony would rise, MacDiarmid speculated, through the gradual formulation of a 'Scottish Idea' complementary to Dostoevsky's 'Russian Idea' for a form of rural-based nationalism combining cultural and political expression.<sup>69</sup> For this purpose he further developed the concept of the 'Caledonian Antisyzygy', a term first used by Gregory Smith, Professor of Literature at Glasgow University, to describe the uniquely jarring qualities of the Scottish psyche. The Antisyzygy was a mixed blessing, a schizoid ability to dwell in contradiction, to find equal comfort in ideas which swayed 'from the sublime to the ridiculous, from the real to the fantastic, from the sacred to the profane', which at the same time presented a cultural impasse.<sup>70</sup> By applying this paradigm to the entire sweep of the nation's being

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<sup>66</sup> Grieve described life on the estate as 'the most incredible mixture of phantasy and reality'. Bold, A. (ed.) (1984) op cit. p. 44. He drafted, but never completed, a book recounting his experiences entitled 'Oddman Out: Notes From a Highland Pantry'. Ibid, p. 124-125.

<sup>67</sup> Grieve, C.M. (1927) *Albyn, or Scotland and the Future*, London: Kegan Paul, p. 6. The Renaissance manifesto was also laid out in: MacDiarmid, H. (1934a) 'The Modern Scene', in MacDiarmid, H. & Grassie Gibbon, L. *Scottish Scene or the Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn*, London: Jarrolds, p. 47-55.

<sup>68</sup> Grieve, C.M. (1927) op cit. p. 6-7. MacDiarmid counted among his literary friends, Denis Saurat, Ezra Pound, K.S. Sorabji and Sean O'Casey, each of whom were advocates of Spengler's theories on nationhood and culture. Grieve, C.M. (1927b) 'Wider Aspects of Scottish Nationalism', *Scots Independent*, November p. 3; see also, Harvie, C. (1994) *Scotland and Nationalism: Scottish Society and Politics 1707-1994*, London: Routledge, p. 103.

<sup>69</sup> Grieve, C.M. (1927b) op cit. p. 3; see also, Grieve, C.M. (1927a) op cit. p. 45-46.

<sup>70</sup> Maxwell, S. (1980) 'The Nationalism of Hugh MacDiarmid', in Scott, P.H. and Davis, A.C. (eds.) *The Age of MacDiarmid: Hugh MacDiarmid and his Influence on Contemporary Scotland*,

MacDiarmid revealed Scotland's 'obsession with the past manifested in the present through divisions of judgement between the head and the heart'.<sup>71</sup> This reluctance to pass over former glories tainted the Scots' modern self-image and led, he argued, to cultural and political paralysis, culminating in the continued inability to break free from the bondage of British sovereignty. MacDiarmid's rationale ran that only when the past was used to challenge traditional constructions of Scottish nationality, transforming it from a negative impulse to a positive force, replacing futile and sterile nostalgia with dynamic theory, would the Antisyzygy reveal its full creative force. The past had to be awakened to a future that was open, fostering a common belief that the country's identity was an evolving and dynamic entity. Ultimately, by searching beyond the constraints of the British Isles for its markers and referents the new psyche would become pluralised, characterised by numerous manifestations, yet all falling beneath the broad banner of 'Scottishness'. This expansive dialogue with national history and heritage appealed to other representatives of the flourishing literary scene and MacDiarmid found ideological comrades in the novelists Compton Mackenzie, Fionn Mac Colla and Neil Gunn. As the latter stated, 'the more varied and multiple your nationalism, the richer and profounder your internationalism'.<sup>72</sup> Figureheads for a select community of activists, their cosmopolitan rhetoric would soon find most fluent expression when applied to the modern day predicament of the Highlands. Encouraged by the rise of popular *volk* cultures in Scandinavia and Northern Europe, the notion of a Celtic heartland as the focus for a new nationalism was quickly grasped. The modern reconstruction of rural society, in observance of cultural heritage and community ethics, offered a vision of symbiotic recovery for region and nation. Seldom affected by false modesty, MacDiarmid argued that from this grand collision of Scottish and European ideas might emerge a template for Western culture.

The overt eclecticism and created nature of this national vision was not viewed as a weakness by its main advocate. Unlike other contributors to contesting narratives for the Highlands, MacDiarmid the solipsist, made no secret of his intention to construct a selective mythology to suit the evolving Renaissance ideology. This forthright approach is rather skated over in Smout's curt dismissal of MacDiarmid's 'back-to-the-Picts' myth-making as 'inherently

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Edinburgh: Mainstream, p. 202-223; 211. The dual identities of Grieve and MacDiarmid, interchangeable in politics and literature, were themselves a personal expression of the Antisyzygy.

<sup>71</sup> Pittock, M.G.H. (1991) *The Invention of Scotland: The Stuart Myth and the Scottish Identity, 1638 to the Present*, Routledge: London, p. 136-137; Maxwell, S. (1980) op cit. p. 202-223; Ascherson, N. (1980) 'MacDiarmid and Politics', in Scott, P.H. and Davis, A.C. (eds.) op cit. p. 224-237.

<sup>72</sup> Gunn, N.M. (1931) 'Nationalism and Internationalism', *Scots Magazine*, XV (3) p. 185-188.

absurd'.<sup>73</sup> In 1931 MacDiarmid's claims for any imagined community were relative, its creative energy key, its immediate conversion into reality a lesser imperative:

*'It does not matter a rap whether the whole conception of this Gaelic idea is as far fetched as Doestoevsky's Russian idea...The point is that Doestoevsky's was a great creative idea - a dynamic myth - and in no way devalued by the difference of actual happenings in Russia from any Doestoevsky dreamed or desired'.<sup>74</sup>*

Some years later MacDiarmid identified a similar cultural and political potency in Jacobite mythology:

*'There can be no minimising the high significance of a Cause (however romantic and unreal it may seem to those 'practical people' who have brought us to so sorry a pass) which retains such unexhausted evolutionary momentum as to reappear with renewed vitality after being suppressed for a couple of centuries of unparalleled change'.<sup>75</sup>*

Of the 'practical people', the detractors and disbelievers, who viewed the search for synthesis between cultural and political nationalism as the province of literary eccentrics he was typically slighting, 'The great mass of 'common-sense people' have no ground whatever to gibe at the impracticable visions of any poet; they are straining at a gnat of fantasy while they swallow a whale of far more stupendous - and harmful - irrationality'.<sup>76</sup> MacDiarmid's was an explicit recognition that in the art of myth-making, could be found a creative impulse to broaden previously restrictive social and cultural parameters and to reconceptualise the traditional territorialisation of space.

While seductive myths offered a powerful means to engender popular appeal, the message still had to be mediated to the citizenry. The Renaissance was alive to the conservative Scots insistence that literature, 'should be wholly divorced from realities, especially politico-economic realities, and produce in a blissful vacuum with no concern for the crucial problems of their country'.<sup>77</sup> Little heed was paid by nationalists desperate to deploy their pens as swords, cutting a swathe through repressive literary conventions. An unashamed *agent*

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<sup>73</sup> The historian sided, retrospectively, with Muir's 'Orcadian good sense' in his infamous quarrel with MacDiarmid during 1935-36 over the means to instigate a Celtic renaissance. Smout, T.C. (1979) 'Introduction', in Muir, E. *Scottish Journey*, London: Mainstream Press, p. xviii.

<sup>74</sup> MacDiarmid, H. (1931) 'The Caledonian Antisyzygy and the Gaelic Idea', *Scots Independent*, April p. 16-18.

<sup>75</sup> MacDiarmid, H. (1945) 'A Scots Communist Looks at Bonny Prince Charlie', *Scots Independent*, August p. 1.

<sup>76</sup> Bold, A. (ed.) (1984) op cit. p. 782.

<sup>77</sup> MacDiarmid, H. (1934a) op cit. p. 52-53.

*provocateur*, MacDiarmid found the most effective means of putting policy into practice was to write poetry, essays and letters ‘hitting out all around the wicket’, placing ‘the cat among the pigeons’ and ‘carrying the War into the enemy’s camp’.<sup>78</sup> Neil Gunn, lionised for his novels dealing with Highland life and for many years MacDiarmid’s literary confidante, had also identified in the Nationalist project a spur for all new authors, declaring that ‘There is such a lot to be written about Auld Scotia at the moment, too; rather vital, modern stuff, it seems to me’.<sup>79</sup> In a similar vein William Power, onetime president of the Scottish Centre for Poets, Playwrights, Editors, Essayists and Novelists (PEN), reflected on how he had spent many years trying ‘to organise cultural interests towards a national end, or national interests towards a cultural end - it’s all the same thing...to help in the restoration of national culture in Scotland was my central aim’.<sup>80</sup> Far from remaining passive, nationalists held true to their commitment of a politicised literature throughout the inter-war years and beyond. In 1940, Neil Gunn continued to argue that for a writer to deny either nation and culture was to risk severe emotional or psychological damage, all had to recognise their own stake in Scotland’s struggle for independence.<sup>81</sup> Two years later MacDiarmid’s views on the status of the intellectual remained unflinching, the touchstone by which he measured any writers worth still the same:

*‘We are living in such a grave, such a dark, such a dangerous epoch, and the artist who is not willing to participate in its course, i.e. as a leader of men, seems to me to be feelingless and senseless, and I cannot acknowledge his talent’.*<sup>82</sup>

None could be content to indulge simply in political and cultural metaphysics.

During the late 1920’s and early 1930’s, making a determined effort to eschew accusations of unnecessary abstraction, MacDiarmid, Mackenzie and Gunn were prominent in promoting a brand of cultural and political activism. Mackenzie, the senior figure in the trio, argued that ‘to fuse thought with action’ was the means to ‘recreate the nation’.<sup>83</sup> This pledge was reflected in their involvement with the newly established National Party of Scotland (NPS). Not all

<sup>78</sup> Bold, A. (ed.) (1984) op cit. p. 232. In a later letter MacDiarmid detailed his willingness to ‘hit below the belt’ to achieve both political and literary aims. His warning to opponents over fond of the conventional was clear: ‘The shots in my locker are far from spent and it will become increasingly difficult to bottle me up in any way’. Bold, A. (1984) op cit. p. 252.

<sup>79</sup> Pick, J.B. (ed.) (1987) *Neil M. Gunn: Selected Letters*, Edinburgh: Polygon, p. 6.

<sup>80</sup> Power, W. (1937) *Should Auld Acquaintance...An Autobiography*, London: Harrap, p. 156.

<sup>81</sup> Gunn, N. (1940) ‘Why are Writers Nationalists?’, *Scots Independent*, November p. 7.

<sup>82</sup> MacDiarmid, H. (1942) ‘Scottish Arts and Letters: The Present Position and Post-War Prospects’, in Burns, T. (ed.) *The New Scotland: Seventeen Chapters on Scottish Reconstruction, Highland and Industrial*, Glasgow: Civic Press, p. 136-151; 136.

<sup>83</sup> *Pictish Review*, (1) 4 p. 86. Similar views were expressed in: Mackenzie, C. (1932) ‘Safety Last: Glasgow University Rectorial Address’, in Thomson, D.C. (ed.) *Scotland in Quest of Her Youth*, Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, p. 43-68.



among the skeletal party framework were convinced by this approach to politics. From the outset, in 1928, the NPS was stricken by internal dissension. Led by MacDiarmid, a band of revolutionary young bloods pressed for the immediate displacement of an older ruling order they claimed to be a haven for home-rulers, Kailyarders and anglo-Scots who dated from the flurry of loose nationalist affiliations which formed, amalgamated and foundered during the first half of the decade.<sup>84</sup> Keen to devise an entirely new political and intellectual agenda, the Renaissance radicals were matched against this influential conservative faction equally set on cultivating a consensus among the traditional Scottish establishment.<sup>85</sup> Without over generalising, a marked difference could also be identified in the geographical focus of these competing interests. Quite critically, while those of a fundamentalist and literary persuasion were focusing their attentions on fostering a modern sense of nationhood in the Celtic regions, the moderate centrists turned to Scotland's populated, urban and industrial heartland for support. Relatively quickly, political realism won out over cultural idealism and the latter course was selected. Policies were grounded on solid Scots pragmatism and the need to establish conciliatory terms with the country's institutional power-brokers. With Roland Muirhead appointed chairman and the reliable but uninspired John MacCormick assuming the post of secretary, the Party mould was set. Already alienated, the fundamentalist faction retreated further into the margins when in 1934 a merger was agreed between the NPS and the moderate home-rulers of the Scottish Party. Now including the Duke of Montrose, Andrew Dewar Gibb and Sir Alexander MacEwen among its number, the resultant Scottish National Party (SNP) worked to a limited agenda for the remainder of the decade.<sup>86</sup> Choosing to participate in the parliamentary process but making little electoral headway, the SNP accentuated demands for devolution and underplayed the campaign for full political independence. *The Renaissance*

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<sup>84</sup> For details of the nascent nationalist movement in the immediate post-war period see: Hanham, H.J. (1969) *Scottish Nationalism*, London: Faber and Faber; Brand, J. (1978) *The National Movement in Scotland*, London: Routledge; Finlay, R. (1994) *Independent and Free: Scottish Politics and the Origins of the Scottish National Party, 1918-1945*, Edinburgh: John Donald; Harvie, C. (1994) op cit.

<sup>85</sup> During the first months of the party's existence MacDiarmid felt that the momentum might well be swinging towards the radicals camp. In a letter to Compton Mackenzie he described how: 'The party is being steadily remodelled on effective lines - we are increasingly attracting clever young people and getting rid of the old fogies'. Bold, A. (ed.) (1984) op cit. p. 393. As someone who placed himself in the no-man's land between the two opposing camps, the novelist Lewis Spence felt the party's outlook would be restricted by 'grey-bearded Kailyarders' but was also concerned by the aggressive mood of 'hysterical youngsters who write and speak of us as if we are already moss-grown antiquities'. *Scots Independent*, 1928 March p. 59.

<sup>86</sup> Like the Highland councillor Sir Alexander MacEwen, the Duke of Montrose was a convert from Liberalism. Dewar Gibb, Regius Professor of Scots Law at Glasgow University had stood as a Unionist in two elections. Finlay, R. (1994) op cit.

literati were hugely underwhelmed by these machinations. In a damning indictment of the party hierarchy MacDiarmid saw only:

*'men of a calibre far below that required to become influential in any of the older parties; most of them were in fact connected with the older parties and failed to achieve even petty local significance. They include no intellectuals, and their "literature" is incredibly puerile. They are, in fact, so far from being Scottish Nationalists in any true sense of the term that it is precisely their psychological types, this footling mentality, which Scotland requires to transcend altogether before it can launch any thorough-going movement commensurate with its grave needs'.<sup>87</sup>*

Having declared in verse that he would 'hae nae hauf-way hoose, but aye be whaur extremes meet', MacDiarmid had already made patent his lack of respect for the middle-ground. The programme he devised to fill the void in nationalist politics reflected this conviction.<sup>88</sup>

Reacting to what they viewed as timorous, myopic politics hidebound by orthodoxy and convention, the literati attempted to foment rebellion and insurrection within the party framework. During the second annual conference of the NPS in Glasgow a series of clandestine meetings were attended by delegates from the militant left wing of the party in connection with a 'Sinn Fein Movement for Scotland'. Fionn Mac Colla, another Highland novelist on the verge of literary breakthrough, was one of the attendees. Convened in the back-room of a nearby hostelry, his notes from the cabal reveal a growing frustration with a party majority 'desperately anxious to avoid master ideas and fundamental issues'.<sup>89</sup> Accusations were aimed at Anglo-Scots, English educated and governed by the confines of English party politics, who were too keen on simply lifting policies from Labour and Liberal manifestos. Mac Colla also sensed the Highland-Lowland divide among the party ranks. Having noted that the 'political policy of those who are vitally concerned with Gaelic culture will be entirely different from the policy of those who are indifferent to, or ignorant of this', he demanded to know, 'into which category does the NPS fall? It cannot shirk issues of this sort'.<sup>90</sup> The rebels already had their response, it was outlined as follows, 'There exists in Scotland an organisation called *Clann Albain* (Sons of Scotland),

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<sup>87</sup> MacDiarmid, H. (1934a) op cit. p. 55. In relation to the Scottish national movement, Harvie has noted how 'the inter-war period was characterised by the fielding of a reserve team in Scottish politics'. Harvie, C. (1977) *Scotland & Nationalism: Scottish Society and Politics, 1707-1977*, London: Allen & Unwin, p. 47.

<sup>88</sup> MacDiarmid, H. (1926) *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, London: Blackwood Press.

<sup>89</sup> NLS Dep. 239 Box 13, (handwritten notes among the electioneering material of Tom Douglas MacDonald, 1930 May 10). It is interesting to note that in his autobiography Mac Colla claimed that 'As far as I know *Clann Albain* was totally imaginary'. Mac Colla, M. (1975) *Too Long in This Condition*, Thurso: Caithness Books, p. 93.

<sup>90</sup> NLS Dep. 239 Box 13, (handwritten notes, 1930 May 10)



pledged to do everything possible to overthrow the existing government in Scotland and substitute an Independent government'.<sup>91</sup> Apparently active for two years, it was claimed that the group was being run on a militaristic basis not unlike a Fascist movement, and was quite prepared to move beyond the confines of the constitutional framework to achieve these ends.<sup>92</sup> To entice potential recruits, tentative pan-Celtic links were hinted at, while an uglier side to this militancy emerged through a strain of virulent Anglophobia. Fond of invoking the mystery of 'cloak-and-dagger', the Clann's office-bearers reputedly kept their identities secret from the membership; Mac Colla was in no doubt that Hugh MacDiarmid was the arch-conspirator and ringleader.<sup>93</sup>

The Clann's notional campaign was both highly risible and extravagant in spectacle. Besides the overthrow of Westminster, they unveiled grand plans for the occupation of Edinburgh Castle and more immediately, a campaign of land-raiding in the Highlands. The first target was revealed to be the Isle of Rhum, *verboten* territory since its establishment as a vast deer forest by the Bullough family during the late nineteenth-century.<sup>94</sup> The origin of these ideas can be traced to 1923, when MacDiarmid exhorted the ex-servicemen of Scotland to undertake a scarcely credible mass land march into the glens:

*'Every unemployed young Scotsman should get out of the cities and get to the Highlands - to the vast spaces which they are forbidden to enter on pain of interdict - and squat there. Infinitely better than the dispatch of contingents of hunger-marchers to London would be the trek...to insist upon the immediate redemption of the Land Settlement promise'.<sup>95</sup>*

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<sup>91</sup> NLS Dep. 239 Box 13, (handwritten notes, 1930 May 12). Alan Bold gives the translation of *Clann Albain* as the 'Children of Scotland'. Bold, A. (1990) op cit. p. 274.

<sup>92</sup> In 1929 MacDiarmid envisioned a central role in a future Scotland for '*Clann Albann*', a militaristic neo-fascist auxiliary of the National Party. Grieve, C.M. (1929) 'Scotland To-morrow: Fifty Years Hence', *Scots Independent*, June p. 103; see also, MacDiarmid, H. (1930) 'Clann Albain and Other Matters', *Modern Scot*, 1 p. 7-10. Writing to Compton Mackenzie in the same year, he claimed that 'the party is steadily eliminating the modernist, compromising democratic element, and all the young people are coming round to the realisation for the need of - and readiness to institute - a species of Scottish Fascism'. Bold, A. (ed.) (1984) op cit. p. 394.

<sup>93</sup> NLS Dep. 239 Box 13, (handwritten notes, 1930 May 16). Seeking to stir up controversy at the NPS conference MacDiarmid had, without Compton Mackenzie's permission, leaked carefully worded details of *Clann Albain* to a representative of the *Daily Record*. *Daily Record*, 1931 January 3 p.5. This caused Mackenzie considerable embarrassment and ultimately led to a brief investigation by the Special Branch. Bold, A. (1990) op cit. p. 283.

<sup>94</sup> NLS Dep. 239 Box 13, (handwritten notes, 1930 May 16; 'Fantastic Plans of Scotland's Secret Society - Mystery of the Isles: Land Raid on the Isle of Rhum', 1930 May 17).

<sup>95</sup> The fantastic land-raiding coup might culminate with 'the British Navy massed outside Stornoway, blockading the island, while thousands of squatters simply sat tight', this MacDiarmid trumpeted 'would be a sight for the gods'. Slightly more rationally he declared it time 'for a Scottish Fascism to oppose the anti-national forces which are robbing Scotland of the finest elements of its population - and at the same time denying the Scottish people access to millions of acres of the finest scenery in Scotland, and setting the spirit of English plutocrats before the vital needs of the country'. Grieve, C.M. (1923) 'Plea for a Scottish Fascism', *Scottish Nation*, June 5 p. 6-7.

Inspired by the agrarian policies being implemented by the Mussolini regime to re-invigorate the Italian countryside, Scotland's makeshift *Il Duce* adopted the fascist maxim 'The land for those who work it', and called for extremist measures so as to 'expropriate those proprietors who fail to cultivate their property to advantage'.<sup>96</sup> No less fantastic were the plans hatched for the retrieval of the Stone of Destiny from Westminster Abbey, its resting place since the Union of the Crowns in 1707. During this escapade in 1934, MacDiarmid, assuming the role of Border reiver, did actually reach his destination. Unfortunately, and rather predictably, monies to be used in the hiring of a fast car to ensure the Stone's speedy passage north from London found their way over a pub counter and the plot was foiled.<sup>97</sup> Another idiosyncratic convert to the renegade cause was Wendy Wood. South African by birth, a Jacobite sympathiser and co-founder of the Scottish Watch youth organisation, Wood was no fan of orthodoxy or inaction. While attending the 1932 annual rally of the NPS at Bannockburn she instigated an infamous breach of the peace in nearby Stirling Castle by tearing the Union Jack from its flagpole and replacing it with a Lion Rampant.<sup>98</sup> Wood's account of the 'assault' on the garrison was a masterpiece of melodrama and historical reductionism:

*'I looked across at the great hills jagged and blue against the sky, and the brave castle on the rock, its topmost turret flying the ensign of our slavery, the sign of the degrading Union, the flag that broke India, broke Ireland, the flag I had seen in the Boer War, there it was, flying jauntily over the castle that had been held by Wallace and the Bruce... "That flag will come down" was the culmination of my speech'.<sup>99</sup>*

Declaring her preparedness for the loss of life and accompanied by a seventy strong crowd, Wood brushed aside the castle guard in the shape of a 'Cockney guide', pulled down the offending item and to the sound of great cheers raised the

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<sup>96</sup> Grieve, C.M. (1923) 'At the Sign of the Thistle: Programme for a Scottish Fascism', *Scottish Nation*, June 19 p. 10. For more approving nationalist comment on the Fascist land programme, see also: *Scots Independent*, 1928 November p. 1; *Scots Independent*, 1934 February p. 56. Although he would later accept that this dalliance with fascism was naive, MacDiarmid's radicalism in relation to the land issue never dimmed. Encouraged by what history now records as the last Highland land raid at Knoydart in 1948, he demanded justice for the heroic ex-servicemen who had taken part and for a renewed national campaign of re-settlement. MacDiarmid, H. (1948) 'Knoydart Land Seizures', *National Weekly*, 1 November 28 p. 1-2; MacDiarmid, H. (1949) 'The Lessons of the Knoydart Inquiry: Need for National Action', *National Weekly*, 1 January 1 p. 1. See also: Fraser Grigor, F. (1996) 'The Seven Men of Knoydart: The Story of One of the Last Highland Land Grabs', in Kay, B. (ed.) *The Complete Odyssey: Voices from Scotland's Past*, Edinburgh: Polygon, p. 71-79.

<sup>97</sup> The highly amusing details of this bungled attempt can be found in: Muir, W. (1968) *Belonging*, London: Hogarth Press, p. 164-5; Bold, A. (1990) *op cit.* p. 366-367.

<sup>98</sup> A crowd of 4000 was reported to have attended the rally: 'M.V.J.' (1932) 'Scotland's Day: A Record Demonstration', *Scots Independent*, August p. 148; see also, 'The Flag at Stirling Castle: A Historic Incident', *Scots Independent*, August p. 152.

<sup>99</sup> Wood, W. (1938) *I Like Life*, Edinburgh: Moray Press, p. 250.

new standard.<sup>100</sup> The grandees of the NPS were quick to castigate the fundamentalists' heroine for her part in what was viewed as a cheap and vulgar publicity stunt.<sup>101</sup> Meanwhile, to Wood's obvious satisfaction, an alarmed MP suggested that in light of the action, it might be sensible to post an English regiment at the Castle as a means to impose proper order.

Although concocted with an appealing twist of eccentricity, these fundamentalist stunts seldom developed beyond mischievous bar-room fantasies, their threatened tribal terrorism more a charade, their gestures only sensationalist. And yet, the underlying ideology was illustrative of the passion felt by this peripheral camp within the nationalist movement. Madcap schemes were matched, in appropriately incongruous fashion, with advanced and innovative thought. This passion, braiding together reality and fantasy, was undoubtedly a creative force, producing as it did some of inter-war Scotland's most innovative cultural and political thinking. The political aspects of the Renaissance have since borne the brunt of retrospective criticism for their inherent idealism, however to dismiss the project entirely is to lose sight of a number of critical contributions. The most incisive incursions were made into Scotland's own marginalised space, the Highland realm, a territory where appropriately enough, imagined communities already held sway. MacDiarmid's clarion call to end over a century of cultural and political sterility, was heeded by a new school of literary ruralists. Eccentric or otherwise, the next section is devoted to a consideration of their merits as serious commentators on the future of the Highlands.

### Country Life: Highland and Island Style

*'A modern virgil may sing the praises of a country life and a Labour leader may draw the plaudits of a city crowd by shouting 'Back to the Land' but how many of the readers of the former, or hearers of the latter, have the slightest desire or intention of giving up the pavement, and the picture house for the farm road and the fields.'*<sup>102</sup>  
(SLPF, 1926)

To adopt the parlance of many a canny Scot or indeed, a sceptical landowner, what did novelists, poets and other literary types know of the Highlands? If they felt qualified to discuss such matters, where did their credentials lie? On what

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<sup>100</sup> Wood recounted how at this point: 'I held the wad of red, white and blue in my hand. I saw again, Boer prisoners, I thought of Ghandi facing death, of Conolly, of Pearse, of Burmese driven to wander, of frightened Arabs, of broken faith with Egypt'. Ibid, p. 251.

<sup>101</sup> Having had her actions backed by Compton Mackenzie, further letters of support 'with regimental insignia crossed out' were received from as far afield as Australia and America. *Cumann Na mBan*, the movement for Irish Republican Women, also passed on their congratulations. Ibid, p. 251.

<sup>102</sup> SLPF (1926) *Notes for Members*, 1 (6) p. 14.

experience did they base their criticisms of the sporting economy and their suggestions of schemes for the re-colonisation of the land? Ultimately, how deep did their devotion to the rural cause run? It is to these oft-posed queries which this section turns, examining the literati's use of a symbolic 'return to the land' to tap the social and political zeitgeist of 1930's Scotland.

As with so many aspects of the Scottish nationalist and Renaissance movements, the irresistible presence of Hugh MacDiarmid acts as a useful focus, whence discussion can radiate. His nationalist credo born out of a closely felt affinity with, and intimate knowledge of, Scotland's rural regions, MacDiarmid made a decisive move to the Shetland Islands in 1933. This would prove conducive not only to creative output but to the development of his thinking on the place of 'marginal' areas in modern society.<sup>103</sup> Sequestered on Whalsay, living by simple means, the poet added to his knowledge of the many hardships suffered by crofting-fishing communities and the injustice of this existence compared to that enjoyed by their feudal superiors.<sup>104</sup> MacDiarmid was not alone in his desire to inhabit those areas popularly perceived as peripheral in Scotland's geography. Many leading lights from the Celticized literati took up residence *in situ*; Compton Mackenzie lived on Barra; John MacNair Reid the essayist and novelist stayed on Eigg; Kenneth Macleod and John Lorne Campbell, both Gaelic scholars, on Gigha and Canna respectively; Eric Linklater moved back to his native Orkney; Naomi Mitchison, the novelist, left England for Carradale on the Mull of Kintyre; Wendy Wood settled in Moidart during the 1940's; meanwhile Neil Gunn, Fionn Mac Colla and the poet Sorley Maclean spent much of their lives at locations dotted around the Highlands.

Like MacDiarmid, Gunn's commitment was unimpeachable. An intimate knowledge of the fishing and crofting communities on the Caithness coast, burgeoned into an expansive interest in all aspects of life in the Highlands. His articles, columns and papers, of which there were a huge number, touched every base from practical fisheries policy to the transcendental spiritualism of landscape.<sup>105</sup> This expertise and familiarity was reflected in Gunn's many novels

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<sup>103</sup> MacDiarmid's greatest passion lay with islands. In the company of W.D. MacColl the Scottish Nationalist and Gaelic revivalist, he undertook a tour of the Western Isles in 1937. Ostensibly a research trip for his text 'The Islands of Scotland', the pair hopped between Eigg, Skye, South Uist, Barra, Mull and Iona before returning to the Shetlands. MacDiarmid had also helped a colleague who was involved with a H.M. Geological Survey of the Shetlands to map out the islands' innumerable skerries and islets.

<sup>104</sup> Writing to Neil Gunn in 1933, MacDiarmid described the effect of a new environment on his psyche: 'I am gradually finding myself - a new self. That is why I am here...I am rowing about on lonely waters; lying brooding in uninhabited islands; seeing no newspapers and in other ways cutting myself completely away from civilised life'. Bold, A. (ed.) (1984) *op cit.* p. 250.

<sup>105</sup> See for example: NLS Dep. 209 Box 8 'The Family Boat - It's Future in Scottish Fishing' (typed transcript, no date); 'The Gael Demands - That the Croft Survives' (printed copy, no date); Gunn, N.M. (1939) '...and then rebuild it': An Economist's Scotland of Tomorrow', *Scots*

and short stories which accurately documented the social conditions, class tensions and cultural paradoxes of modern Highland society. His involvement gained official expression after 1945 when, alongside Naomi Mitchison, he served for many years on the Highland Panel. This consultative board, established by the new Labour government, advised the Scottish Office on schemes for rural reconstruction.<sup>106</sup> Mitchison herself proved to a powerful addition to the rural revivalist school. Having taken up residence at the 'Big House' in Carradale in 1939 she proved herself to be a most unorthodox proprietress.<sup>107</sup> Founding a local branch of the Labour Party, later campaigning for the SNP, fraternising with the Kintyre fishermen, serving on the County Council, staging theatre productions at the village hall and doing almost everything in her power to improve the lot of the Carradale community she made for an unlikely local heroine.<sup>108</sup> Wendy Wood proved to be another character of indomitable spirit. Her war years were spent working a croft in Glen Uaig, Moidart.<sup>109</sup> From this Highland retreat she and her husband published nationalist propaganda highlighting the merits of a rural existence. Their occasional pamphlet 'The Lion Rampant' claimed to represent 'the Scottish nationalism of the countryside and the village, which reveals an entirely different mind from that of the crowded towns and industrial centres'.<sup>110</sup>

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*Magazine*, XXXII (3) December p. 173-178; Gunn, N.M. (1944) 'Planners and People', *Daily Record*, October 5 p. 2; Gunn, N.M. (1944) 'Questions for Scots', *Daily Record*, November 24 p. 2; Gunn, N.M. (1940) 'On Tradition', typescript for *Scots Magazine*; Gunn, N.M. (1941) 'My Bit of Britain', *The Field*, August 2 p. 136-7.

<sup>106</sup> Fond memories of service on the Highland Panel are recounted in: Mitchison, N. (1986) *Naomi Mitchison: Saltire Self-Portraits*, Edinburgh: Saltire Society. Mitchison transferred some of these recollections into her sardonic novel which dealt with the Highland fisheries problem: Mitchison, N. (1997) *Lobsters on the Agenda*, (1st published 1952) Colonsay: House of Lochar.

<sup>107</sup> Mitchison was a child of the aristocratic, but progressive, Haldane family; her father John Scott Haldane was a distinguished physiologist and philosopher while her brother was the reputed scientist J.E.B. Haldane. Having moved in London's artistic and intellectual circles during the 1920's and worked actively with the Labour Party and Fabian Society she then married Dick Mitchison, the future Labour MP. Mitchison, M. (1979) *You May Well Ask: A Memoir, 1920-1940*, London: Fontana. Having bought Carradale as the family home she documented events there during the war as part of the Mass Observation project organised by the Social Research Organisation. A small proportion of her vast output is included in: Sheridan, D. (ed.) (1986) *Among You Taking Notes: The Wartime Diary of Naomi Mitchison, 1939-45*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>108</sup> Mitchison described her unorthodox approach to running the Carradale property: 'As far as possible we had thrown open what had been strictly private estate roads and paths. The bay was now everyone's. We began to have camps including, that summer, a YCL camp from Glasgow'. Mitchison, M. (1979) op cit. p. 219. The house became a haven for all manner of visitors, including war refugees, evacuees and Free French.

<sup>109</sup> This move to the Highlands was, in a sense, enforced as the couple were under police investigation for their objection to Scotland's involvement in the war.

<sup>110</sup> MacAindreis, A. (1946) 'Editorial', *The Lion Rampant: From a Croft in Moidart*, I (1) p. 2. 'Mac' made it clear to his readers that the source of the publication was truly rustic: 'The editorial office is not a room on the top stair of a city tenement, it is under the thatched roof of a Highland cottage. The view is not of smoking chimney stacks, but of sentinel hills; the sounds are not of traffic roar, but the rush of the burn and the lowing of cattle or the bark of a dog'. Ibid, p. 1. The pamphlet offered an eclectic range of articles including Spenglerian philosophy, Jacobite history,

Encouragement and advice was imparted to young pioneers who wished to settle empty land in the glens, while existing community-based initiatives in the Highlands were advertised.<sup>111</sup> Moray Maclaren paid tribute to the couple as 'soldiers in the battle of the land of the West Highlands...rebuilding, not the ancient, not the contemporary, not the future, but the perennial way of life'.<sup>112</sup>

Although the extent and nature of these writers' contributions to local welfare, politics and community life certainly differed, Louis MacNeice's depiction of this trend as an untenable weekend jaunt for the bohemian set was unflattering. The poet made clear his misgivings after a journey to the Hebrides:

*'The Scottish Lions all fly off to the islands - Compton to Barra,  
Linklater to Orkney, Christopher Grieve to the Shetlands. A  
hermitage on Thule - every so often you broadcast about it. Failing  
political balkanisation let us balkanise ourselves in our armchairs  
and rake in the royalties'.*<sup>113</sup>

The critique was misplaced, 'Celticization' had been inspired, however idealistic, by a deep-seated urge for change rather than short-sighted material benefit. As a gesture, it was replete with symbols.

Often living in straightened financial circumstances, apparently unafraid to dirty either hands or feet, the literati hoped for a fusion of interests between the common masses and an intellectual elite. In the campaign mounted for rural re-colonisation, moral legitimacy and cultural authenticity were invoked through a professed intimacy with the native people, local history and traditions. Eschewing cerebral detachment, re-colonist rhetoric and imagery was aimed at the elemental passions of the national populace. As the hearthstone of a Celticized Scottish nation, any revival of native culture - literature, music, art, language and lifestyle - would have to start with an enervated Highland population. This much was evident in MacDiarmid and Gunn's 'Gaelic aristocratic idea', which envisioned an intellectual tradition among the rank and file, helping constitute new citizenship identities. Gunn later elaborated on this relationship, 'It may seem that I have been concerned with the few who start things going, a sort of creative elite. I do not underestimate their value, but neither do I fail to realise that...the ultimate

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afforestation policy, Renaissance literature and the need to staunch the flow of emigrants to the Dominions and industrial settlements.

<sup>111</sup> *The Lion Rampant* threatened to list specific areas of derelict land which could be possessed for establishing crofts and small-holdings. Details of vacant crofts and other opportunities for starting businesses and rural occupations were included. The 'Highland Communities' group, based in Edinburgh and presided over by Ronald Taylor, used the pamphlet to promote a utopian vision of co-operatives in the glens. Their propaganda was aimed at youth hostellers and other committed outdoor types. *The Lion Rampant*, I (3) p. 6.

<sup>112</sup> Maclaren, M. (1946) 'Foreword', in Wood, W. *Mac's Croft*, London: Frederick Muller, p. 10; see also, Wood, W. (1952) *From a Highland Croft*, Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd.

<sup>113</sup> MacNeice, L. (1938) *I Crossed the Minch*, London: Longmans, p. 71.

makers and creators are the crofters themselves'.<sup>114</sup> John Hutchinson has identified this argument as a familiar one in the history of cultural nationalism, claiming that: 'intellectuals have established cultural forums in which to challenge ossified political and cultural elites and to inspire a rising educated generation to campaign to 're-create' the idea of the nation as a living principle in the lives of the people'.<sup>115</sup>

Highland environment, as well as culture, was integral to identity construction. By offering to instil a knowledge of the self through a new found intimacy with the most fundamental signifier of national belonging, the land, the rural re-colonists again worked at an elemental level. Contrived or otherwise, the intellectual migration north and west bristled with the mythology of an intimate union between people and land, demonstrating the wonders of an organic existence. This reading of these elaborate means of identification is further informed by hegemonic theory. Williams has noted how, in the construction of a counter-hegemonic narrative, much of the work is historical involving, 'the recovery of discarded areas, or the redress of selective and reductive interpretations'.<sup>116</sup> Central to the re-colonisation crusade were the twin demands for a re-distribution of the Highland land resource and the radical revision of a hollow history. These claims were reliant on the imagery of a dispossessed people and were invoked at a time when the folk-memory of the Clearances was still vivid. Refracted through the lens of modern nationalism, a traditional narrative was afforded unfamiliar and unexpected aspects.

Besides the place of 'tradition', Williams' analysis of cultural hegemony establishes two other distinctive media to be used to challenge a dominant hegemony, namely institutions and formations. As yet a marginal constituency, the rural re-colonisation lobby matched Williams' definition of a 'formation' as a conscious movement inspired by literary, artistic, scientific or philosophical tendencies, often with 'an oblique relation to formal institutions'.<sup>117</sup> For a radical literary community who found themselves either resistant to, or dislocated from the major institutions of Scottish civic society, initiating a structured campaign of

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<sup>114</sup> Gunn, N.M. (1956) 'Living in Scotland Today', *Scottish Field*, February p. 53; NLS Dep. 209 Box 9 (90).

<sup>115</sup> Hutchinson, J. (1987) *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism*, London: Allen and Unwin, p. 14. Gramsci's thoughts on the relationship between intellectuals and populace are also worthy of note: 'History and politics cannot be made without passion, without this emotional bond between intellectuals and the people-nation. In the absence of such a bond the relations are reduced to contrasts of a purely bureaucratic, formal kind; the intellectuals become a caste or a priesthood...If the relations between intellectuals and the people-nation, between leaders and led, is the result of an organic participation in which feelings and passion become understanding and thence knowledge...then and only then is the relation one of representation'. Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, London: Hamish Henderson, p. 418.

<sup>116</sup> Williams, R. (1977) *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 116.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, p. 117.

opposition was to prove far from straight forward. While almost all declared themselves Scottish nationalists, some had been expelled to, and many preferred to frequent, the militant margins of what they viewed to be a restrictive political forum. Furthermore, it was claimed by several key contributors that the Renaissance project had, for several years, been starved of publicity by a conservative national media. Reliant on the provincial press, local newspapers and short-lived periodical titles to convey their message, during the 1920's the circulation of material at times verged on 'samizdat'.<sup>118</sup> Meanwhile, several Renaissance heretics chose to vilify post-Reformation Scots Presbyterianism for its stultifying effect on cultural expression in modern Scottish society. Finally, by being critical of university and school curricula for a failure to acknowledge the Gaelic language and other regional dialects the movement was set apart from the Scottish educational and academic establishment. Combining a compelling cultural tradition with these wide-ranging institutional objections, the nationalist literati challenged the Highland's dominant culture of landscape and with it the established structures of hegemony.

The personal experiences of the new literati were critical in demarcating the Highlands as the preferred venue for social renewal and a rejuvenation of Scottish nationhood. However, before any programme of re-seeding and new growth could begin, comfortable myths had to be debunked and uncomfortable facts faced. As MacDiarmid stated, the task in hand was to impose a 'sense of actuality' to the Highlands, to institute a new style of representation based on gritty rural realism.<sup>119</sup> With the literary touch paper now lit at a series of Celtic locations, the muirburn could begin in earnest.

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<sup>118</sup> MacDiarmid and Mackenzie were among the frequent contributors to a flush of transient political and literary journals including *The Modern Scot*, *The Pictish Review*, *The Scottish Nation* and *Scottish Review*. Accepting Hugh MacDiarmid's melodramatic tendencies, he railed against 'the extraordinary censorship that was exercised by all the leading Scottish newspapers, the pressure that was put upon us to desist from our propaganda, and the means whereby we finally got behind the backs of the dailies - and their ubiquitous allies in the schools and universities, in the pulpits and on the platforms; and utilizing the local papers dinned home the vital facts'. This was a constituent element of the 'slow, patient, subterranean policy of education' which was being pursued. MacDiarmid, H. (1934) op cit. p. 53-54; see also, Grieve, C.M. (1927) *Albyn, or Scotland and the Future*, London: Kegan Paul, p. 83-85; Grieve, C.M. (1928) 'The Fight for Scottish Interests: Some of the Obstacles', *Scots Independent*, March p. 69-70. Having celebrated Grieve as 'the most powerful intellectually and emotionally fertilizing force Scotland has known since the death of Burns', Compton Mackenzie noted the great irony that owing to the 'peculiar conditions of literature today few poets can have had such a small body of actual readers'. Mackenzie, C. (1933) *Literature in My Time*, London: Rich and Cowan, p. 238.

<sup>119</sup> MacDiarmid, H. (1939) *The Islands of Scotland*, London: B.T. Batsford, p. 7.



## Home Truths: The Kailyard and Twilight Turned Sour

*'The land was too old. Scarred and silent, it was settling down into decay. The burden of its story had become too great to carry'.<sup>120</sup>*  
(Neil Gunn, 1932)

Among the revisionist literary school, the Kailyard and Celtic Twilight traditions were treated as endemic blights, the consequences of which went far beyond textual mis-representation. They were guilty as charged for popularising the Highlands as an ethereal place pre-destined in its marginality and inhabited by a contented, but ultimately primitive, people. Renaissance punches were not pulled. Compton Mackenzie claimed that the Kailyard had 'mortgaged Scottish literature to indignity'.<sup>121</sup> MacDiarmid meanwhile, was entirely dismissive of modern-day 'penny-dreadfuls' which were bringing about the 'Tibetization' of the Hebrides:

*'I have no patience whatsoever either with the olla podrida of old wives' tales, day trippers' ecstasies, trite moralisings, mawkish sentimentality, supernatural fancies, factual spinach and outrageous banality which fill most books on this subject or with the type of descriptive matter generally churned out'.<sup>122</sup>*

The novelist and critic George Blake was similarly placed, finding inherent dangers in bucolic evocations of iconic landscapes, arguing instead for a kaleidoscope of referents:

*'if it (landscape) is a clue to the Scottish spirit, it is no more than a clue, and we shall find richer veins in history, dynastic and economic and theological, in geology and ethnology, even in the weather itself...we seek in short... "the idiom" of national life'.<sup>123</sup>*

The public's apparently insatiable appetite for the Romantic oeuvre could be partially redressed if ostensibly benign landscape appreciations were actually loaded with candid comment on contemporary Highland life. With the nationalist J.B. Salmond at the helm of the *Scots Magazine*, the populist magazine became another possible avenue for publicity.<sup>124</sup> During the 1930's politicised documentaries, sobering travelogues and pragmatic regional descriptions challenged conventional understandings of the Highlands. Edwin Muir's account of a journey around Scotland by car arose out of this agitation for a modern agenda founded on realism. On embarking the writer expressed his intention to

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<sup>120</sup> Gunn, N.M. (1932) *The Lost Glen*, Edinburgh: Porpoise Press, p. 58.

<sup>121</sup> MacKenzie, C. (1933) op cit. p. 238.

<sup>122</sup> MacDiarmid, H. (1939) op cit. p. vii.

<sup>123</sup> Blake, G. (1934) *The Heart of Scotland*, London: B.T. Batsford, p. 1-2. Blake's text was written as a companion and comparative publication to: Batsford, H. & Fry, C. (1938) *The Face of Scotland*, London: B.T. Batsford.

<sup>124</sup> Editor of the magazine, Salmond had been involved in preliminary meetings on the formation of a Scottish national party at MacDiarmid's house in 1928.

provide an honest impression of his native land, 'not the romantic Scotland of the past nor the Scotland of the tourist, but the Scotland which presents itself to one who is not looking for anything in particular, and is willing to believe what his eyes and his ears tell him'.<sup>125</sup> While Neil Gunn's trip around the western seaboard by boat was as much a personal odyssey as an effort to document social realities, his account of events was peppered with pithy points reflecting a deep-seated desire to address matters affecting contemporary Highland life.<sup>126</sup> As the editor of an eclectic volume, 'Scottish Country', George Scott-Moncrieff made an admirable attempt at stake out the evolving literary and physical terrain for rural realists:

*'It argues no sound vision to have an eye only for the lesser celandine and its kind: the land to us must have wider import than it had to the composers of pastorals. It is not that our appreciation is less, but that industrialism, economic exigencies, the enormous grain-fields of Canada, have put a different status on our countryside and its consideration. With our cities, and with all our life, the countryside is in a state of flux: its future uncertain'.<sup>127</sup>*

A greater awareness was required of the widespread conditions of decay, and in some cases complete dereliction, prevalent within the Scottish countryside. That a watershed had been reached was made clear by the dry aside which Scott-Moncrieff aimed at the APRS. 'We are beyond the scope of councils for the preservation of rural amenities', he claimed, more appropriate would be, 'a council for the preservation of Scotland herself'.<sup>128</sup> Unlike the English countryside where the menaces were those 'of bungalows and trippers, of centralization and the neglect of agriculture', north of the border concerns were of a far more fundamental nature, striking at the very heart of the nation's existence. As John Hutchinson has pointed out such evocations of crisis are themselves necessary components in the rhetoric of reconstruction employed by intellectual elites. Inter-war rural realism can therefore be viewed as the penultimate stage in

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<sup>125</sup> Muir, E. (1979) *Scottish Journey*, (first published 1935) Edinburgh: Mainstream Books, p. 101.

<sup>126</sup> Gunn, N. (1938) *Off in a Boat*, London: Faber & Faber.

<sup>127</sup> Scott-Moncrieff, G. (1935) 'Introduction', in Scott-Moncrieff, G. (ed.) op cit. p. xvi. This book was written as a complementary publication to 'English Country', edited by H.J. Massingham, which had appeared the previous year.

<sup>128</sup> Scott-Moncrieff, G. (1935) op cit. p. xvii. Only when national plans were being initiated for post-war reconstruction during the 1940's did the APRS begin to properly address the social problems suffered in the rural regions. At the 1941 annual general meeting Alan Ogilvie delivered a speech on 'Highland Development' in which he hinted at the changes afoot: 'The Association exists for preservation in Rural Scotland of what is really worth preserving; but surely also for promoting the welfare of the rural population'. APRS/ECM vol. III 1941 May 26. At the following year's AGM, Frank Mears took up the revisionist banner when he confessed that he 'had never been quite happy about the name of the Association. "Preservation" suggested that they were tying to hold tight on to something that was very good and that all that they needed to do was stick with it'. APRS/ECM vol. III May 28.

the mythology of cultural nationalism which normally forms 'a set of repetitive "mythic" patterns, containing a migration story, a founding myth, a golden age of cultural splendour, a period of inner decay and a promise of regeneration'.<sup>129</sup>

Scott-Moncrieff's literary compatriots drew from a deep well of portentous images in an attempt to shake central government from its stupor and alert urban Britain to a blight in the 'Celtic margins' of which they were barely aware. Concerns over emigration, unemployment and a top-heavy demographic structure, each confirmed by statistical data, were combined with less tangible anxieties over a 'pellagra' afflicting the entire Highland 'race'. This section examines how several motifs of Highland decline were invoked by the literati; racial degeneration linked to rural depopulation, the separation of communities from the land, the repressive influence of religion and finally, the demise of Gaelic as a living language.

For a range of progressive commentators, a Highland landscape devoid of human inhabitants was little more than an empty vessel. The anger and resentment which had characterised popular accounts of the Clearances mutated into a discourse of decline which, in its attempts to shock, could border on the fatalistic. Depopulation was attributable, it seemed, to no single source. Scott-Moncrieff pointed an accusatory finger at the gaudy melange of Romanticisms created during the mid-nineteenth century, 'Although without actual violence, the depopulation of the Highlands has continued steadily ever since under the protection of Balmorality'.<sup>130</sup> Andrew Dewar-Gibb cited a litany of injustices which had now borne their bitter fruit, 'Emigration, evictions, clearances, famine, sports, deer and landlordism at its worst'.<sup>131</sup> William Power traced the perceived crisis of identity among the native population back to the Great War which had robbed many localities of an already depleted male population. With the angry young men of successive generations having been lost either to the wheat fields of the Dominions, the factories of the Central Belt or the trenches of the Western Front, it appeared to the edgy observer that only the bare bones of a population remained (see figure 43). A land of bachelors and spinsters where the busiest ferry was 'to Iona and those who use it go to commune with the dead'.<sup>132</sup> The residual rump of youth instilled Power with little confidence of a speedy recovery, 'A group of them I saw in Sutherland...They were like young horses, yet with a curious half-cynical self-consciousness'.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Hutchinson, J. (1987) op cit. p. 13.

<sup>130</sup> Scott-Moncrieff, G. (1932) 'Balmorality', in Thomson, D.C. (ed.) op cit. p. 69-86; 82.

<sup>131</sup> Dewar-Gibb, A. (1930) op cit. p. 51.

<sup>132</sup> Gunn, N. (1937) 'Ferry of the Dead', *Scots Magazine*, XXVI (6) p. 411-415; 412.

<sup>133</sup> Power, W. (1937) op cit. p. 193.



Figure 43 - The Ageing Highland Population  
Source: Blake, G. (1938)

Even in an emptying landscape social problems abounded. George Malcolm Thomson chastised the menfolk for their general apathy and unwillingness to incite political unrest, they were the unconcerned inhabitants of 'the land of the mountain and the shrug'.<sup>134</sup> Neil Gunn was especially perturbed by two trends which threatened to shatter the traditional community ethic in rural society; the increasing reliance shown by the men of certain localities on unemployment benefit as a means of relative prosperity and the Highlands' unenviable mantle as the region with the highest pauper lunacy rates in Scotland. With the departure of the rising generation, the British Medical Association found that the old and infirm were being left stranded 'unable to stand up to the strain of daily life on the sea coast or among the hills'.<sup>135</sup> In his account of modern life on Skye, George Scott-Moncrieff sensed communities on the verge of capitulation, 'There is a sense of gloom and defeat in this island whose natural development has been aborted. Historians tell us that Scotland is an unconquered country: actuality disagrees'.<sup>136</sup> Following the much publicised evacuation of remote St. Kilda in 1931, fears of an entire Hebridean exodus mounted.<sup>137</sup> In the outlying islands, Louis Macneice found dilapidated villages, a fleeing youth and an ageing population. In conversation with a native, the poet felt the condition to be terminal, 'Like many of the islanders he speaks slowly and sadly and his face is set in a fatalistic melancholy'.<sup>138</sup> Even on the mainland, Hugh Quigley was saddened to report that the average Highland town:

*'has all the appearance of defeat, in the listlessness of the individual members of the population, in the repellent slums in which they live, as well as in their unwillingness to exercise any right of independent criticism against traditional obscurantism'.*<sup>139</sup>

Much of the language used to invoke this imagery of decline was reliant on vague, scientised intimations of racial degeneration. For several decades the ethnic distinctiveness of the Highlander had been the subject of contentious, arcane and largely futile hypothesising. Concoctions of Gaelic, Celtic, Pictish, Norse and Saxon bloodlines were legion. No better informed, was debate over the

<sup>134</sup> Thomson, G.M. (1927) *Caledonia or the Future of the Scots*, London: Kegan Paul, p. 34. Thomson was one of the founders of the Porpoise Press, a stable for several Renaissance authors.

<sup>135</sup> Cited in, Gunn, N.M. (1937) 'Gentlemen - The Tourist: The New Highland Toast', *Scots Magazine*, XXVI (6) p. 411-415. The pauper lunacy rate for Inverness, Ross, Sutherland, Moray and Nairn was twice that for the congested industrial district of Lanarkshire.

<sup>136</sup> Scott-Moncrieff, G. (1935) 'Skye', in Scott-Moncrieff, G. (ed.) op cit. p. 215-231; 230.

<sup>137</sup> The decline of the once flourishing St. Kildan community to a core of 36 and their subsequent retreat from the island stronghold is touchingly recounted in: Maclean, C. (1992) *Island on the Edge of the World: The Story of St. Kilda*, Edinburgh: Canongate Books. The possibility of a widespread evacuation of the Highlands was mentioned in: Gunn, N.M. (1939) '...and the rebuild it': An Economist's Scotland of Tomorrow', *Scots Magazine*, XXXII (3) p. 173-178.

<sup>138</sup> MacNeice, L. (1938) op cit. p. 58.

<sup>139</sup> Quigley, H. (1949) *The Highlands of Scotland*, London: B.T. Batsford, p. 9.

existence of a geographical and racial fault line dissecting Scotland, and separating Highlander from Lowlander. The 'two nations' theory was raised regularly by opponents of political nationalism, presenting the cultures of Scotland's north-west and the south-east as poles asunder. The practicality and rationality of the commercialised Lowland Scot was juxtaposed against the impracticality and whimsical nature of the innocent Gael; respectively, the head and heart of the Caledonian Antisyzygy. The novelist George Blake conceded that 'the clash of them is indeed a contemporary problem...it is enough that the dichotomy is there and still unresolved'. Having travelled the country from south to north, Edwin Muir felt able to declare that, 'No two sets of people could be more temperamentally incompatible'.<sup>140</sup> Predictably, while accepting that a schism might well cleave the two regions, Hugh MacDiarmid announced that this separation was only a temporary condition which would be followed by the 'Celticization' of all Scotland. Scott-Moncrieff, ever the patriot, agreed, pointing out that 'the real difference lies...at the Scottish border'.<sup>141</sup> However divisive, common to all comment was the potentially unedifying rhetoric of racial purity.

Just as Lachlan Grant and the HDL found it effective to couch the subject of decline in racial terms, likewise several Renaissance savants. Whatever the Highlander or Gael's ethnic relation to the rest of the population, they were habitually characterised as a unified people whose influence had for some time been sadly on the wane, but who remained of crucial importance to the survival of Scotland and the Scots. More critically still, granted with a distinctive 'consciousness' or 'spirit', any appeals on behalf of the Highlander could be made in emotive terms, citing possible extinction and the loss of a unique and venerable human species.<sup>142</sup> A brooding sense of racial perdition hung over Neil Gunn's early Highland works. Most notable in this regard was 'The Lost Glen', the author's second novel which he described as 'the first honest attempt...at introducing the Highlands as they are today'.<sup>143</sup> Centred on a community where economic survival was limited to menial service at the sporting hotel or on the estate of an absentee American landlord, the tale was one of anger, injustice and

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<sup>140</sup> Muir, E. (1979) op cit. p. 3.

<sup>141</sup> Scott-Moncrieff, G. (1935) op cit. p. xii. The historical case for Scots-wide unity was put in: *Scots Independent*, 1934 April p. 81; see also, Grant, A. (1934) 'Highlands and Lowlands', *Scots Independent*, April p. 100-101.

<sup>142</sup> Ironically the very same qualities which had been stressed by the native population's patrician paymasters were invested in them, at opportune moments, by rural revivalists. The appeal of masculinist and imperial imagery was not lost on the literary radical. 'Dane M'Neil', Neil Gunn's nationalist alter ego, was quick to note the Gaels' 'personal daring and courage' and their distinctive part played 'in the wars of Europe' and 'in making history at home'. M'Neil, D. (1931) 'The Gael Will Come Again', *Scots Magazine*, XIV (5) p. 325. Noting that 'the economics of the day are all against the survival of the Highlander on his native heath', George Blake predicted that 'he will cease even to be an auxiliary in the imperial business'. Blake, G. (1938) op cit. p. 26.

<sup>143</sup> Pick, J.B. (ed.) (1987) op cit. p. 7.

seemingly terminal decline. Part of the township was described in suitably lugubrious terms:

*'a huddle of grey houses, straw thatched, lying to the earth with an aged decrepitude that humped their backs. Seven of them all told. No life stirred urgently, nor cry of child...It was not that the spirit was dead but that it had passed. There was no longer any meaning in living there. How terrible, how awful, the slow movement of time, with its grey sterile hand.'*<sup>144</sup>

The existence of an intangible and emotive link, thought to fuse native Highlanders to the natural landscape, was a subject repeatedly stressed by Gunn and a range of fellow Renaissance writers. That the people's entire history and heritage could be told in terms of the land was, for many, proof positive of a mystical union, at once earthy and astral. That this unique 'bond', 'spirit', 'intimacy' or 'consciousness' had been in decline for some time was also accepted almost universally.

It should be noted that discourses highlighting the dangers inherent to a betrayal of the intuitive rhythms and organic knowledges cultivated between blood and soil were not distinctive to modern Scotland. Since the nineteenth-century, throughout Britain and northern Europe valedictions had been written for the agrarian class, once the fulcrum of nationhood. However, the disjointed relationship between contemporary Highlander and environment did have certain peculiarities. If the native people's much documented loss of the land and continued exclusion from it was not injurious enough, critics like Edwin Muir felt the sporting industry's perversion of that ancient relationship was indeed a damning finale. Rather than using the landscape for agricultural purposes as desired, Gaels were forced by financial necessity to tread the same ground to render 'the slaughter of wild creatures more easy or convenient to the foreign owners of the shooting lodges'.<sup>145</sup> The novelist Iain Macpherson could see little future for those consigned to positions of subservience:

*'They are defeated, the country lost, they live like beggars in a land owned by strangers who hate them for what they represent, the past. And so the past is great in their hearts. The past is all that they can possess of their own home.'*<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Gunn, N.M. (1932) op cit. p. 58-60. Such home truths were not popular among those constituencies for whom the Highlands were simply a joyously carefree holiday destination. Gunn's explained the harsh criticism he had received for 'The Lost Glen' in succinct terms, 'Too political, I'm afraid; a trifle too concerned with the Highlands as they are; not enough romantic tartan'. Pick, J.B. (ed.) (1987) op cit. p. 9.

<sup>145</sup> Muir, E. (1979) op cit. p. 203.

<sup>146</sup> MacPherson, I. (1935) 'The Central Highlands', in Scott-Moncrieff, G. (ed.) op cit. p. 208.

As witness to a landscape and culture in its last death throws, Macpherson found warning signs everywhere apparent, empty crofts broken up, houses torn down and the few remaining inhabitants of barren glens left hollow and weary. These problems were no longer limited to the traditional crofting areas of the western seaboard, the blight was creeping silently ever eastwards. Having visited the once thriving settlement of Badenoch in the Spey Valley, Macpherson recounted a conversation with a local blacksmith whose 'voice spoke sentence of death to himself and his craft and the country folk after them'.<sup>147</sup> Grieving for a sense of attachment to the land now lost, for the corporate spirit which vanished with it and the obsolete skills of the country tradesman, Macpherson had left the man 'waiting for work to come, watching his croft die, his work done by botchers, his skill having lost its reward, and the smiddy fire, glowing heart of a country alive in all its embers, burn more seldom and lie more often dark and cold'.<sup>148</sup>

The novelist Lewis Grassie-Gibbon could do little to raise the gloom. Heavily influenced by diffusionist anthropology, he was convinced that the decline of civilisation had begun centuries before when the intimacy which had characterised primeval relations with the land was initially broken.<sup>149</sup> His heroes came from the youth of the world, 'dark men, and tall, without gods and kings, class or culture, writers or artists, free and happy, and all the world theirs. Scotland woke and looked at them from a hundred peaks and stared a shy virgin's amaze'.<sup>150</sup> The social freedoms enjoyed by these peoples of the golden age had been sacrificed in the headlong rush for 'progress'. Grassie-Gibbon's *Old Scotland* had been lost, the modern countryside was characterised by change, and all of it unfortunate. Deforested, diseased, left out to pasture, or worse still bracken, the land had shed so much of its attraction and that he wished the youth who now left it in their droves no ill. Neil Gunn too, was fearful of what modernity might bring, 'After sheep, deer; and after deer, tourists. It is the ascending order of our age of progress. For those who know the deep humanism of a past age, there will be regret at the gradual passing of the human stock that

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid, p. 211.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, p. 211. The gradual decline of traditional rural trades is also mentioned in: *Scots Independent*, 1930 August p. 138. By the 1940's, the demise of land-based trades and cottage industries was not lost on institutions such as the APRS. The Council of the Association declared that 'something must be done to get more people to work on the land, for if agriculture flourished the villages would flourish' APRS/ECM vol. III 1941 May 26.

<sup>149</sup> Campbell, I. (1994) 'Introduction', in Grassie-Gibbon, L. *The Speak of the Mearns*, Edinburgh: Polygon, p. 1-14; see also, Gunn, N.M. (1938) 'Nationalism in Writing: Tradition and Magic in the Writing of Lewis Grassie-Gibbon', *Scots Magazine*, XXX (1) p. 28-35.

<sup>150</sup> Grassie-Gibbon, L. (1934) 'The Land', in MacDiarmid, H. & Grassie-Gibbon, L. (eds.) op cit. p. 292-306; 298; see also, Grassie-Gibbon, L. (1934) 'The Antique Scene', in MacDiarmid, H. & Grassie-Gibbon, L. (eds.) op cit. p. 19-36.



was bred out of it'.<sup>151</sup> Hugh MacDiarmid glimpsed different dangers in the 'shameful, catastrophic, neglect by Scotsmen of their own country', protesting at a society which had 'come to regard the country as a site for development or a recreation for the towns'.<sup>152</sup> However, even the patriotic recreationist was not oblivious to the political shadow which fell across the wilderness environment. Tom Weir described how: 'That artificial desolation which I have exulted in, creeping year by year beyond the zones originally devastated by the 'clearances', fills me with dismay'.<sup>153</sup> All told, the people's continued separation from the land was being mourned by increasing numbers.

If the unavailability of land for cultivation was a decisive factor pushing the young generation towards the city, the desire for a secular existence was also deemed contributory to this trend. In the opinion of Fionn Mac Colla, the greatest burden with which the Highland people had been saddled in an increasingly unfortunate history was their religion. He was not alone in this opinion. Sorley Maclean, the Gaelic poet and native of Skye, ranked the Church of Scotland alongside the landlords of the Clearances in his order of social evils.<sup>154</sup> Charged with inhibiting a once vibrant cultural tradition and creating a hugely restrictive social environment, criticism of Scots Calvinism was intense. The dismay of the novelist Eric Linklater, at 'the cultural blight of Presbyterianism' was shared by George Scott-Moncrieff, Alexander MacEwen and Lewis Grassie-Gibbon.<sup>155</sup> Images of an earnest, God-fearing creed served only to reinforce entrenched stereotypes of the Highlander. The starched congregation striding expectantly Kirkward on the Sabbath to be thundered at from the pulpit for their innumerable sins were popular objects of caricature, a marginal and repressed people set apart from modern British society.

Mac Colla claimed that, since its inception at the Reformation, the church's guiding doctrine had been based on the idea that 'human nature is absolutely, radically and irredeemably evil'.<sup>156</sup> The arch enemy of Scots

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<sup>151</sup> Gunn, N.M. (1935) 'Caithness and Sutherland', in Scott-Moncrieff, G. (ed.) op cit. p. 59-77; 76.

<sup>152</sup> MacDiarmid, H. (1939) op cit. p. 44. Such was William Power's desperation with the situation that he argued for a rapid programme of re-settlement on the grounds that an empty Highland landscape was in fact an unacceptable military danger. *Oban Times*, 1938 September 24 p. 2.

<sup>153</sup> Weir, T. (1948) *Highland Days*, Edinburgh: Canongate, p. 179.

<sup>154</sup> 'Sorley Maclean: Poetry, Passion and the Political Consciousness - an interview', *Scottish International* 1970 10, p. 10-16; 11.

<sup>155</sup> Linklater, E. (1941) *The Man on My Back*, London: MacMillan, p. 225. See also: Scott-Moncrieff, G. (1932) op cit. p. 86; NLS Acc. 6113 'The Future of the Gaelic Movement' (undated speech manuscript, delivered in Inverness to *Comunn na h'Oigridh*); Grassie-Gibbon, L. (1994) *The Speak of the Mearns*, Edinburgh: Polygon, p. 169; Grassie-Gibbon, L. (1934) 'Religion', in MacDiarmid, H. and Grassie-Gibbon, L. (eds.) op cit. p. 313-327.

<sup>156</sup> Mac Colla, F. (1984) op cit. p. ii. See also, Mac Colla, F. (1967) *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*, Edinburgh: MacDonald.

Presbyterianism continued his theological ransacking by running with this puritanical logic:

*'if the nature of man is totally and radically corrupt and evil, it followed as an ineluctable corollary that everything that emerges from that nature and is an expression of it, such as the whole creative life of man - such as specifically the entire body of the poetry, music and literature of the Gael - was in itself evil and therefore as a first priority requiring to be stamped out'.<sup>157</sup>*

The result of all this unnecessary self-denial, claimed the critics, was an insular and sullen society inhibited by stifling prohibitions and negations. This was the world encountered by William Power in the far north-west where:

*'The older men on the crofts have lost mental resilience and sunk into a narrowly formalistic kind of religion that bespeaks decadence. Hovering slowly on the horizon, in their black clothes, against an apocalyptic background, they seemed like ghosts'.<sup>158</sup>*

Just such a Highland community provided Mac Colla with the setting for his first and most important novel. Written while the author was in his twenties, 'The Albannach' was a searing social commentary on desolate times and an attempt to 'treat life in the *Gaelhealtachd* in a realistic manner'.<sup>159</sup> An austere work, the novel's central character, Murdo Anderson, was the chief protagonist of Mac Colla's own philosophy revolting at the prevailing religious culture of 'Nay-saying' among his fellow crofters. According to Mac Colla, while religion might account for the modern Highlanders' sombre countenance, then the loss of their native tongue had a considerable part to play too. Not all observers were in agreement with this assertion.

Faced with a mounting campaign for the provision of Gaelic as a medium for education in his electoral constituency of Inverness-shire, Sir Murdoch Macdonald's declaration that 'The English language has conquered in the same way that a motor vehicle supersedes a horse and cart' was both insensitive and inopportune.<sup>160</sup> Attempts to revive an already moribund dialect were, he claimed, 'fantastic and undesirable'.<sup>161</sup> Mac Colla found this attitude illustrative of a continuing campaign waged by the state's educational and political institutions to ensure the slow fossilisation of the language. For the nationalist to simply accept

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid, p. iv.

<sup>158</sup> Power, W. (1937) op cit. p. 193.

<sup>159</sup> Mac Colla, F. (1984) op cit. p. i. Elaborating on this theme, Mac Colla cited his work 'as a radical criticism of the life-negating and culture-destroying 'religion' being imposed upon the Gael, but it was a criticism I felt intitled to make, with all the fierceness and anger, as being myself at that time 'one of the family'.

<sup>160</sup> *Oban Times*, 1937 November 20 p. 4.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

the inexorable decline in the number of Gaelic speakers as the price paid for progress would be 'thoroughly pleasing to those, our rulers, who intend the extinction of Scottish culture and autonomy; it means to surrender our language as a living and dynamic centre of national resistance and creativity'.<sup>162</sup> For a number of years Mac Colla's literary mentor had been equally unbending. During the 1920's, in an attempt to stem the tide of Anglicization and as part of his sprawling cultural project, Hugh MacDiarmid mounted a personal linguistic campaign. This involved the use of a synthetic form of Scots in poetry, the promotion of vernacular dialects and a concerted push for Gaelic to be restored to its proper place in Scottish society.<sup>163</sup>

It was while acting on these same instincts that Mac Colla had written 'The Albannach'. Described as a means to 'breakthrough the barrier of ignorance' suffered by a 'benighted public', the novel was part-polemic against the continuing assimilation of Gaelic culture into Anglicised society.<sup>164</sup> Highlighting the confrontations between *two languages and cultures in a Highland community* and the wider context of Scotland, it demonstrated the popular association of the English language with progress, modernity, civilisation and 'getting on'. Gaelic by comparison was an uncouth tongue, its great heritage of oral tradition, folk memory, literature, music and song left to rot in history's musty recesses. Similarly, Mac Colla's political essay '*Cuis Na Canain*' linked the Gaelic question to the absence of appropriate citizenship identities for the young. He castigated the language reforms included in the government's 1918 Education Act as woefully inadequate. Gaelic remained a non-compulsory subject on the curriculum of Highland schools, no official standard was set for the pupil while neither teacher or inspector was required to hold any language qualification. The hugely unsatisfactory result, he claimed, was Gaelic taught on equivalent lines to a dead or foreign language. As the nationalist spokesman Alexander MacEwen pointed out, no links were being made between the native tongue and modern rural existences, 'the young people of the Highlands want to share in the thought, culture and amusements of their own age. They don't want to be fed with antiquarian and sentimental *rechauffes*'.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Mac Colla, F. (n.d.) *Cuis na Canain*, cited in MacDiarmid, H. (1934a) op cit. p. 50. Ruaridh Erskine of Mar, MacDiarmid's own instructor and one of Scotland's original Celtic revivalists, expressed similar views in one of his last publications: Erskine, R. (1931) *Changing Scotland*, Montrose: The Review Press, p. 25-34.

<sup>163</sup> These intentions are made clear in: MacDiarmid, H. (1934a) op cit. p. 51. William Power backed MacDiarmid's linguistic schema, confessing his own regret that he 'had not learned Gaelic, the original tongue of my land, the language in which its hills and glens and streams are named'. Power, W. (1934) 'Something I Want to Say: Scotland and Adult Education', *Daily Record*, September 5 p. 13.

<sup>164</sup> Mac Colla, F. (1973) 'Mein Bumpf', in Morrison, D. (ed.) op cit. p. 9-14; 14.

<sup>165</sup> NLS Acc. 6113 'The Spirit of the Gael', (undated typescript).

These barriers to progress must have been encountered by the poet Sorley Maclean who spent his entire working life as a schoolmaster in the north-west Highlands. Having grown up in the community of Braes on Skye, with its proud history of social protest and left-wing militancy, he was intensely aware of the bonds fusing local community, environment and culture. Acquainted with Mac Colla during their time at Moray House teacher training college in Edinburgh and for many years a close friend of MacDiarmid, the fate of Gaelic became something of an obsession for Maclean during the 1930's.<sup>166</sup> Haunted by his time spent on Mull, an island with 'the terrible imprint of the clearances everywhere on it' and 'always the steady, inexorable decline of Gaelic', Maclean used his poetry to address the deteriorating human condition in the Western Highlands, reflecting the literati's four motifs of rural decline, while radiating out into the troubled affairs of inter-war Europe and the international arena.<sup>167</sup>

The litany of sorrows recounted by Scotland's rural realists did not make for pleasant reading. Indeed, many could have been forgiven for concluding that the Highlands throaty death rattle was but a husky breathe away. However, in accordance with stated intentions, root-and-branch reform had been enacted in literary representation to reveal the modern Highlands to a dangerously ambivalent, or at best pre-occupied, British population. Ultimately, their receptiveness to this message would be tested by the promise of revival, for as re-colonist propaganda made clear, the long process of regeneration lay directly ahead.

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<sup>166</sup> Nicolson, A. (1979) 'An Interview with Sorley Maclean', in Ross Roy, G. (ed.) *Studies in Scottish Literature*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, p. 23-37; Maclean, S. (1980) 'MacDiarmid, 1933-1944', in Scott, P.H. & Davis, A.C. (eds.) op cit. p. 15-21.

<sup>167</sup> *Chapman* 16 IV (4) p. 30; see also, *Somhairle Macgill-eain: Sorley Maclean* (1981) Exhibition Catalogue, Edinburgh: NLS. Maclean's work was viewed by many as a modern antidote to the somewhat staid and traditionalised forms of Gaelic poetry. For some time cultural organisations such as *An Comunn Gaidhealtachd* and the Scottish Text Society had been assailed for encouraging an archaic approach to language.

## To 'Quicken the Spirit': Fundamentals for a New Highland Order

*'...it is time to stop shuddering and to welcome the glorious difficulties of rebuilding.'*<sup>168</sup>  
(George Scott-Moncrieff, 1932)

*'...at the last count it is our land and there alone we can know ourselves for what we are.'*<sup>169</sup>  
(J.R. Allen, 1935)

Introducing a suitably optimistically titled text, 'Scotland in Quest of Her Youth', David Cleghorn Thomson, the broadcaster and writer, objected to the popularly held belief that the country's progeny were 'born to be administrators, bank managers, accountants and "prancing proconsuls" but are seldom imaginative creators'.<sup>170</sup> Founded on the tenets of conservative good sense and pragmatism, Scottish society had for too long 'undervalued the value and importance of dreaming'.<sup>171</sup> The most determined efforts to redress this imbalance during the inter-war period were made by the Celtic revivalists of the Renaissance.

The grand dream of re-colonisation was put with uncharacteristic simplicity by Hugh MacDiarmid when he expressed a passion for 'the reunion between Scotland and Scotsmen', describing how this could 'only be achieved by the restoration of the land not as a series of beauty spots but as a soil for growing things' (see figure 44).<sup>172</sup> Greatly influenced by his experience of life in the Shetlands and the Highlands, MacDiarmid offered a sustained assault on the marginalisation of the rural realm, providing a fluent argument for the re-orientation of Scots lifestyles. He described how having made a Hebridean landfall, 'we are more or less completely removed from the megalopolitan madness in which the great majority of European people are so incessantly busy'.<sup>173</sup> Yet the shift away from the modern day core was no retrograde step. Challenging standard readings of history, the MacDiarmid doctrine countered that literature, art, music and philosophy had found their greatest expression in the ancient Gaelic culture of these islands, pre-dating urbanisation and the industrial and scientific revolutions.<sup>174</sup> If the inaccuracies of previously accepted accounts were properly recognised, MacDiarmid prophesied that 'the very basis of our

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<sup>168</sup> Scott-Moncrieff, G. (1932) op cit. p. 86.

<sup>169</sup> Allen, J.R. (1935) 'The North-East: The Cold Shoulder of Scotland', in Scott-Moncrieff, G. (ed.) op cit. p. 3-25; 25.

<sup>170</sup> Thomson, D. C. (1932) 'Introduction', in Thomson, D. C. (ed.) op cit. p. 1-9; 6.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>172</sup> MacDiarmid, H. (1939) op cit. p. 44.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, p. x.

<sup>174</sup> MacDiarmid cited such cultural treasures as the tradition of *piobaireachd* pipe music, a wealth of ancient Gaelic poetry and the remainders of a once vast body of early Scottish literature. Each contributed to the Ur-Gaelic initiative.



Figure 44 - The Restoration of the Land  
Source: Quigley, H. (1936)



conceptions of British history and culture would be torpedoed and very different conceptions take their place'.<sup>175</sup> His vision was clear, in time the subversion of accepted spatial configurations might even lead to a popular identification with the Celtic core.

According to revivalists such a change in Scotland's geography would not require either economic regression or the adoption of a luddite mentality. While Neil Gunn was wary of the 'world-wide gathering of mechanistic forces' and the 'tyranny of the iron wheel', he confirmed that fruitful union could be still achieved between the forces of modern science and rural tradition.<sup>176</sup> Likewise George Scott-Moncrieff who believed that the Scottish population were still essentially a rural people but stressed that a drift back to a Virgilian vision of nature was an unrealistic and unhelpful objective. Instead he flagged a new social movement:

*'...there are those of us who believe, not in a return to the land, one cannot return, but in going forward to the land, accepting and making use of the irrevocable changes that have been wrought in the world, but learning from the far-reaching mistakes of the industrial revolution and adapting our country life'.<sup>177</sup>*

To the progressive ruralist, technology was not the problem in twentieth-century society, the source of so many ills was its application in the urban environment. As Alexander MacEwen stressed however, there were limits to the rural landscape's capacity for change, he reminded new prospectors that 'you cannot plant theatres, cinemas and *palais de danse* in every glen'.<sup>178</sup>

During the course of the 1930's, as the economic recession tightened its grip on industrial settlements, the momentum built behind the campaign for rural re-colonisation. Advocates contrasted greatly in their background. Dugald Semple, radical campaigner for vegetarianism, freedom in religion, organic farming and land nationalisation, claimed that 'as a nation, we would certainly be better if more of us were living on the land, even without machinery, than to continue this awful hell of a civilisation'.<sup>179</sup> Town lives led to 'false pleasures and artificial living', and only with a return to nature, to agriculture and horticulture could modern social problems such as 'soulless mass-production, our unemployment and craze for speed breaking', be properly addressed (see figure

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<sup>175</sup> MacDiarmid, H. (1939) op cit. p. ix; see also, Grieve, C.M. (1928) 'Neo-Gaelic Economics - II', *Scots Independent*, February p. 53-54.

<sup>176</sup> NLS Dep. 209 Box 8 'The Hidden Heart', (undated typescript) for *Scots Magazine*. These sentiments were echoed in: Quigley, H. (1949) op cit. p. 9.

<sup>177</sup> Scott-Moncrieff, G. (ed.) (1935) op cit. p. xvi.

<sup>178</sup> NLS Acc. 6113 'The Spirit of the Gael' (undated typescript).

<sup>179</sup> Semple, D. (1933) *A Free Man's Philosophy*, London: Daniel, p. 83.

45).<sup>180</sup> Meanwhile, an editorial in the traditionally circumspect *Glasgow Herald* conceded that the Highlands might well offer 'a way of living that is a valuable alternative to, and corrective of, the rush and noise of urban life'.<sup>181</sup> A city existence had other pernicious effects on the population, Lachlan Grant believed that 'back-to-the-land is a pressing need of the times, and one of the essential steps in combating physical degeneration'.<sup>182</sup> Office or desk based jobs were presented by some as unhealthy for both body and mind, William Power was sorry to admit that 'Most of us are slaves of the lamp', having 'lost touch with Nature, with the soil; with the interesting and elemental things in life'.<sup>183</sup> The Scottish Crofting Association suggested that with the ever increasing mechanisation of factory production lines and the subsequent rationalisation of the industrial workforce, the future lay on the land. Those without work in the Central Belt could be profitably relocated in the *Gaedhealtachd*.<sup>184</sup> Nationalist propagandists proposed that redundant miners and disenfranchised townspeople might also consider the small-holding option.<sup>185</sup>

Given the concerns of a beleaguered, neurotic and confused Scottish society, this reaction to tenebrous tenement culture was perhaps inevitable. As a corollary of this crisis in confidence, the re-colonisation lobby began to gain a measure of civic acceptance. William Power was a founder member of the Saltire Society which, in 1936, began campaigning for a 'new Scotland with a vigorous intellectual life, drawing on the past for inspiration to new advances in art, learning and the graces of life'.<sup>186</sup> Although avowedly non-political, the organisation attracted the support of the nationalist artistic and literary elite.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> *Scottish Youth Hostel and Cycling News*, 1937 February 16 p. 12; Semple, D. (1933) op cit. p. 83.

<sup>181</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 1936 December 17 p. 10.

<sup>182</sup> Grant, L. (1938) *The Grand Ideal of Life: Keeping Fit*, (reprinted from the *Northern Times*, 1938 February 3) Ballachulish: Highland Development League, p. 3.

<sup>183</sup> Power, W. (1934) 'Something I Want to Say: Scotland and Adult Education', *Daily Record*, September 5 p. 13. See also: Power, W. (1934) 'Something I Want to Say: Youth's Heritage', *Daily Record*, September 19 p. 13.

<sup>184</sup> Finlay, P.M. (1933) 'The Recolonisation of Scotland: An Appeal to Nationalists', *Scots Independent*, May p. 103.

<sup>185</sup> 'Gallovidian' (1928) 'Aspects of Rural Reconstruction: Small Holdings and Farms', *Scots Independent*, December p. 20; 'Observer' (1929) 'Rural Reconstruction', *Scots Independent*, May p. 86; 'Gallovidian' (1929) 'The Decay of Scottish Rural Life: National Reconstruction Remedy', *Scots Independent*, May p. 87-88; 'Juniper' (1930) 'The Highlands in the New Scots Parliament', *Scots Independent*, October p. 160; NLS Dep. 209 Box 8 (50) Gunn, N.M. (n.d.) 'The Gael Demands that the Croft Survives', (typescript).

<sup>186</sup> NLS Acc. 9393 Annual Report of the Saltire Society for 1939, p. 2.

<sup>187</sup> George Malcolm Thomson was the inspiration behind the Society while Eric Linklater and William Power were both honorary presidents. Also included on the membership list were Robert Hurd, George Scott-Moncrieff, Sir Archibald Sinclair, Joe Grimond, John Grierson, Augusta Lamont, John R. Allan, Alistair Borthwick, Miss Isobel Grant, Tom Johnston, Roland Muirhead, Hugh MacDiarmid, Neil Gunn, Alexander MacEwen, Compton Mackenzie and Edwin Muir.





Figure 45 - Town Lives Lead to False Pleasures  
Source: Blake, G. (1938)

Among its many activities the society took a keen interest in possible rural futures and the work of the planning movement.<sup>188</sup> Professor Alan Ogilvie and Frank Mears were prominent in working towards the creation of a national social and economic atlas and a comprehensive survey of rural resources.<sup>189</sup> Many Saltire members had sympathies with George Scott-Moncrieff who advocated a return to basics, building the national economy around an organic tradition:

*'If we are to find any salvation we shall find it in our country, as a small nation with a wealth firm-set on agriculture and fisheries and a balance of population that once knows an earth clean of paving stones and a sky clear of factory smoke'.<sup>190</sup>*

If the soil was the natural base of a national life, in a further reversal of accepted logic, revivalists claimed that the path to salvation lay on the spiritual plane as well as through material means. Hugh MacDiarmid put the country's modern predicament down to 'the incoherence of our meaning...what the Hebrides - and Scotland as a whole - need above all is a revolution in morale, a return to our roots, a re-discovery of deep realities we have neglected'.<sup>191</sup> Mirroring the search for unity among the ranks of the Scottish National Party, regeneration could only be achieved when the separation of cultural interests and economic necessities in life ceased and was replaced by a search for synthesis. MacDiarmid waved away the reproaches of mainstream politicians who claimed that rural idealists were 'putting the cart before the horse'.<sup>192</sup> He was scathing of business plans and economic projections which paid little, if any, heed to the natural strengths of the Highland population, since none were 'likely to succeed that do not issue out of the native spirit'.<sup>193</sup>

The rhetoric of racial unity, so powerful in depictions of rural crisis, was being mobilised to equal effect in grand schemes for revival. The Highlanders, and more specifically the Gaels, were invested with a consciousness and cultural heritage capable of raising all Scotland from its general state of torpor. If rural communities could be awoken to their intuitive sense of place and cultural heritage then the future promised much; depopulation, racial decline, religious

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<sup>188</sup> In 1939 the Society stated that: 'It is the break with tradition caused mainly by the Industrial Era, which smote Scotland with especial violence, that one must ascribe the meagreness of her social amenities; the gloom of her cities, the decay of scholarship; the lack of imagination and invention that characterise Scotland today'. NLS Acc. 9393 Annual Report of the Saltire Society for 1939, p. 2. For further information on the work of the Society in planning and rural affairs see: NLS Acc. 9393 File No. 341 Notes from 'Scotland Tomorrow' Conference held in 1941.

<sup>189</sup> NLS Acc. 9393 File 762, Sheppard, A. (n.d) Memories of the Saltire Society (unpublished speech draft).

<sup>190</sup> Scott-Moncrieff, G. (1935) op cit. p. xvii.

<sup>191</sup> MacDiarmid, H. (1939) op cit. p. xvii.

<sup>192</sup> Tom Johnston and, rather ironically, Sir Alexander MacEwen (prior to his conversion to cultural nationalism), were cited by MacDiarmid as key critics of this approach.

<sup>193</sup> MacDiarmid, H. (1939) op cit. p. 4.

inhibition, the loss of language and the lengthening shadow of slow rural death would all be arrested.<sup>194</sup> The revival of this sensual, untouchable and intangible spirit - the Gaelic consciousness, the Ur-motives - was to become something of a mantra for the inter-war Highlands. Neil Gunn hinted at this latent spirit in typically transcendental terms:

*'...by the time a man has footed the track to Cape Wrath, where there is no habitation other than the lighthouse, and looked down upon the rocks that take the Arctic on their bows, he may feel that men's faiths or creeds, economic or religious, change with the centuries, that his wants and desires change with the days, but with certain deep racial forces persist with extraordinary strength, and that the end of this great country is not yet'.<sup>195</sup>*

Alexander MacEwen, a strong advocate of community-based organic revivalism, felt that 'if the race is to survive there must be a re-creation of spirit, the adoption of old ideas and traditions to modern conditions. The past can only survive in the life of the present'.<sup>196</sup> In full rhetorical flow MacDiarmid interwove identities based on localised communism and a more expansive sense of nationhood, arguing that:

*'no nation ever remained strong whilst it neglected its land and no nation ever renewed its culture without restoring its cultivation. Till we are determined upon achieving that physical condition of social sanity we shall not even become aware of the spiritual and moral obstacles that keep us from it. Our one decline in capital efficiency is in the most basic of all - in the earth'.<sup>197</sup>*

Surprisingly, the chief critic of MacDiarmid's Highland myth-making emerged from within the ranks of the Renaissance literati. Edwin Muir was troubled by the poet's promotion of Celtic culture as Scotland's saving grace, contending that modern economic systems were the root cause of the country's problems and that these would not be solved by murky and amorphous racial mysticism. While he refuted neither the antiquity or authenticity of Celtic civilisation, he doubted the plausibility of a resurgent culture sweeping through the entire country. For Muir history did not work in the Highlanders' favour. A

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<sup>194</sup> Neil Gunn was quick to remind an often circumspect and reserved rural population of their true worth: 'Don't let sneers about provincialism damp your interest and enthusiasm in your own district, your own people, their work and their ways. These may matter far more than many things in the bigger world'. N.M. Gunn (1944) 'Exciting Horizons', *Daily Record*, September 15 p. 2.

<sup>195</sup> Gunn, N. (1935) 'Caithness and Sutherland', in Scott-Moncrieff, G. (ed.) op cit. p. 76.

<sup>196</sup> NLS Acc. 6113 'The Gael in Modern Life' (undated typescript). MacEwen was also prone to describing the crusade in more lyrical terms: 'The language and music of the Gael are the language of the earth and the music of the seas - they cannot be divorced from the islands of the west, from the wind and the mist, from the colour of the rock and sea, from all the whisperings of the ages. They are part of a life, and unless that life is rich and vigorous, it will lose its best characteristics'. NLS Acc. 6113 'The Future of the Gaelic Movement' (undated typescript).

<sup>197</sup> MacDiarmid, H. (1939) op cit. p. xviii.

long-standing tradition of internecine feuding between Clans and Septs was cited as proof of an inability to coalesce into an effective and unified force. Developing his critique Muir claimed that this supposedly sophisticated culture and civilisation had:

*'left behind it an astonishingly meagre record of its existence. A little poetry, a number of lovely songs, some beautiful pipe music, hardly any sculpture or architecture, no painting, no philosophy, no science, and no sign of that conceptual intelligence which welds together and creates great and complex communities'.*<sup>198</sup>

Even if, as revivalists claimed, all Scotland had once been Celtic then, he concluded 'there was something in the Celtic civilisation which prevented it from developing as others have done, and kept it from achieving nationality or even from having the burden of nationality imposed permanently upon it'.<sup>199</sup> The cold water which Muir dashed on MacDiarmid's fiery cross only temporarily dampened the campaign for national regeneration centred on a new life for the Highlands. As the next section demonstrates rural revivalists' were well armed with an eclectic range of radical ecological and socio-political doctrines to bolster their arguments.

#### Eclectic Blueprints for the Rural Revolution

*'The work of his hands was like the green points pushing out from the brown earth, or like the sap rising in the stems of the trees. Like them was his earth labour, quiet and sure, not hesitating, a natural thing, and good. For them the morning came and the evening, and for him.'*<sup>200</sup>  
(Fionn Mac Colla, 1932)

For many rural revivalists, the creative impulse which fired expressions of modern nationhood, folk memory and cultural tradition was encapsulated in the European *volk* movements of the inter-war period. The search for referents and models which could be applied to the Scottish Highlands led to some unlikely locations. Hugh MacDiarmid expressed great admiration for the residents of the

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<sup>198</sup> Muir, E. (1979) op cit. p. 230. Hugh Quigley argued that proof of a unique consciousness could be identified elsewhere. Although he accepted that: 'If one were to measure the contribution of the Highlands to creative art in religious buildings and memorials, communal buildings or sculpture, painting and illuminated MSS, one would find some difficulty in discovering anything of real value', this lack of obvious examples was 'not enough proof of the inability of the Highland spirit to produce things of great beauty'. Instead he looked to Highland literature, small local industries such as weaving, wood-working and carpet-making. 'In those things', he claimed, 'the love of simple but good design and of lovely, if sometimes subdued, colour, blends in the appreciation of fine music to a depth of emotional expression such as does not exist anywhere else'. Quigley, H. (1949) op cit. p. 9.

<sup>199</sup> Muir, E. (1979) op cit. p. 231.

<sup>200</sup> Mac Colla, F. (1984) op cit. p. 237.

Faroe Islands who had inspired their own social and economic renaissance around the turn of the century. Isolated, rocky, almost barren of vegetation the Atlantic archipelago appeared to offer the native population little grounds for optimism; the harsh mountain environment forcing them onto the narrow strips of habitable land located along the coastlines where it was possible to eke out an existence. Salvation came with the happy combination of a powerful fishing fleet and a vibrant Home Rule movement. In the first case, profitable lessons were learnt from the Shetland Islands on the treasures to be trawled from the seas.<sup>201</sup> In the second, having ceded power to Denmark for several centuries, almost total autonomy was regained by the island population. As a result Faroese society had been re-invigorated both culturally and economically. While native language and traditions were centrally placed, equally appealing to MacDiarmid was the presence of scholars, poets and men of letters in the new parliament and political leadership.<sup>202</sup> Similar precedents were being set in mainland Scandinavia. In Norway, popular cultural nationalism had been revived through a linguistic and literary revival. The creation of the *Landsmaal* (land-speech) from a range of rural dialects by Ivar Aasen during the mid nineteenth-century had been greeted with considerable enthusiasm by the Norwegian population.<sup>203</sup> MacDiarmid particularly admired the work of Arne Garborg, one of several writers to use the dialect to address modern social and cultural problems in rural Norway.<sup>204</sup> The poet hoped for similar levels of success at home through a Gaelic revival, and more particularly the brand of synthetic Braid Scots which he was championing. Eric Linklater praised these attempts to revive the 'drowned Atlantis of Scots', arguing that if 'the balance of life were to swing from the town to the country, then the dialects might well be worth saving'.<sup>205</sup> The divergent effect of these two environments on their respective tongues was obvious to the native Orcadian, 'A rural dialect is nourished by its own fields and is a language in a nutshell. An urban dialect is merely the detritus of a language and is worth nothing. Its idiom is debased, its habitat the kitchen and the pavement'.<sup>206</sup>

Hugh MacDiarmid's voracious reading habit meant that his hunt for exemplars was wide-ranging, leading him into the field of agricultural

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<sup>201</sup> MacDiarmid claimed that each one of Kaupstadur's 3700 inhabitants enjoyed the benefits of electricity, central heating, telephones and radio.

<sup>202</sup> MacDiarmid, H. (1934b) 'The Sea', in MacDiarmid, H. and Grassie Gibbon, L. (eds.) op cit. p. 283-284; MacDiarmid, H. (1939) op cit. p. 2-4.

<sup>203</sup> *Landsmaal* subsequently became the second official language form in Norway. Bold, A. (1990) op cit. p. 148.

<sup>204</sup> Maxwell, S. (1980) op cit. p. 205-206.

<sup>205</sup> Linklater, E. (1935) *The Lion and the Unicorn: or, What England has Meant to Scotland*, London: Routledge, p. 117.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid, p. 117.

experimentation. Unsurprisingly, he was inclined towards the distinctive vein of inter-war thought which dwelt longingly in North European peasant ideology and the spiritualism of the soil. MacDiarmid was aware of the circle of English agricultural philosophers who had formed progressive ecological organisations such as the Soil Association and revivalist groups such as the Rural Reconstruction Association and Kinship in Husbandry. That these groups also included among their number several members of the Anglo-German Fellowship hinted at a more questionable aspect to modern agrarian science. Most prominent of all the Teutonic sympathisers was Lord Lymington whose interest in soil fertility, erosion and pollution, evolved into a vein of back-to-the-land propaganda heavily tinged with racial theory.<sup>207</sup> In the late 1930's the aristocrat founded the 'English Mistery', a body 'organised into separate Kin of anything from ten to thirty people, a sort of cell system designed ultimately to permeate and set the standards for districts, villages, and crafts and trades'.<sup>208</sup> Seeking to realise the myth of an essential English yeomanry the vision was a mirror image of the Renaissance revivalists Gaelic land-based peasantry. Lymington's belief that 'the times are at hand when we may have the opportunity to recreate the class of husbandmen as men or master, which can alone restore blood to the body politic, long since leached by unfettered industrialism', chimed with MacDiarmid's own thinking to such an extent that he declared it 'round these standards that the men of the islands, and of Scotland as a whole, must rally or perish'.<sup>209</sup> MacDiarmid keenly cited the work of the German organicist Rudolf Steiner on bio-dynamic agricultural methods and Sir Albert Howard's work on tank farming and hydroponics at his 'Indore' institute of agricultural research in India. Also of relevance to any agricultural revival in the Highlands were the crop husbandry and farm productivity techniques promoted by Professor George Stapledon at Aberystwyth and the ideas of Sir John Orr.<sup>210</sup> Dugald Semple shared this enthusiasm although had none of MacDiarmid's nationalist inclinations. His fervour was for humanity's moral use of technology in a life which would become 'a happy blend of pen and plough, soil and science, and soul and society'.<sup>211</sup> Semple's vision of a new social and agrarian order based on individual effort and voluntary co-operation was shared by a number of the Scottish rural

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<sup>207</sup> Bramwell, A. (1992) *Ecology in the 20th Century: A History*, London: Yale University Press, p. 112-124; Griffiths, R. (1980) *Fellow Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany 1933-39*, London: Constable, p. 317-329.

<sup>208</sup> Earl of Portsmouth (1965) *Knot of Roots*, London: Geoffrey Bles, p. 127-8.

<sup>209</sup> MacDiarmid, H. (1939) op cit. p. xviii.

<sup>210</sup> MacDiarmid, H. (1939) 'Scottish Nationalism and the Land Question', *Scots Independent*, August p. 3. The work of Professor George Stapledon is discussed in: Gruffudd, P. (1994) 'Back to the Land: Historiography, Rurality and the Nation in Interwar Wales', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 19 p. 61-77.

<sup>211</sup> Semple, D. (1933) op cit. p. 84.



intelligentsia.<sup>212</sup> Grassic-Gibbon's communism surfaced in his hopes for the emergence of a 'green international' on the global scale. Naomi Mitchison saw a brighter economic future when modern co-operative enterprise was introduced to the Highlands. Taking advantage of traditions in share-fishing, crofting and weaving syndicates, the control of food production, clothing, transport and other essential services could be centralised.<sup>213</sup> Neil Beaton the President of the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society was particularly encouraged by pioneering schemes introduced on the islands of Eigg and Raasay.<sup>214</sup>

This guild ethic and spirit of corporatism was central to the Social Credit doctrine devised by the Scots economist Major C.H. Douglas which heavily influenced thinking among the rural revivalists.<sup>215</sup> Douglas suggested an alternative and creative use of credit where it would be controlled by a state monopoly which would issue each household with a profit-sharing stake in the economy, their 'national dividend'.<sup>216</sup> Embraced wholeheartedly by Hugh MacDiarmid, this radical fiscal theory became a central tenet of the nationalist Renaissance.<sup>217</sup> As a leftist doctrine it appealed to ruralists who placed the emphasis in Scotland's new economic order on guild socialism, the domestic crafts movement and the central role of farmer and entrepreneur. Lewis Grassic Gibbon, Neil Gunn and Edwin Muir were all excited by the potential of Social

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<sup>212</sup> Citing Henry David Thoreau, Buddha, Ptolemy and Ghandi as his influences, during the 1920's Semple established a 'Simple Life Fellowship and Colony' near Kilmarnock. It survived for only a short time. He also developed his own model health garden where he employed organic farming methods.

<sup>213</sup> Mitchison, N. (1947) 'Exodus from the Highlands', *Scottish Motor Traction Magazine*, February p. 23-25; see also: Mitchison, N. (1942) 'Rural Reconstruction', in Burns, T. (ed.) op cit. p. 92-107.

<sup>214</sup> Beaton, N. (1942) 'Co-Operation in Scotland', in Burns, T. (ed.) op cit. p. 74-81.

<sup>215</sup> Douglas challenged Jean Baptiste Say's classical economic law which assumed that in any monetary system, supply matched demand, or that money pumped into production remained in circulation to create purchasing power with no financial loss incurred. He argued that credit which could be put to productive use was instead devalued and lost through interest and usury which were the mechanisms of finance capitalism.

<sup>216</sup> When Douglas applied this thinking to his homeland he estimated that the amount would be £300 per household, per annum. Douglas, C.H. (n.d.) *The Douglas Scheme for Scotland*, (no publisher).

<sup>217</sup> MacDiarmid having been a regular reader of the *New Age*, described by Tom Steele as 'the cradle of modern avant-garde in Britain', then wrote a column for the weekly in the 1920's after its transformation to the Social Credit doctrine. The editor A.R. Orage who was converted to the cause after meeting Douglas in 1918 left MacDiarmid in charge of the journal after 1922. Bold, A. (1990) op cit. p. 180-181; Steele, T. (1989) 'From Gentleman to Superman: Alfred Orage and Aristocratic Socialism', in Shaw, C. & Chase, M. (eds.) *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 112-127. MacDiarmid also wrote regularly for the *New English Weekly* which Orage founded in 1934. For other articles dealing with Social Credit see for example: Grieve, C.M. (1927) 'Neo-Gaelic Economics', *Scots Independent*, December p. 21-22; Grieve, C.M. (1928) 'Neo-Gaelic Economics - II', *Scots Independent*, February p. 53-54; MacDiarmid, H. (1934c) 'Representative Scots: The Builder - Major C.H. Douglas', in MacDiarmid, H. and Grassic-Gibbon, L. (eds.) op cit. p. 148-158; MacDiarmid, H. (1931) 'Social Credit: The Hope of the World', *Modern Scot*, 1 p. 12-19.

Credit.<sup>218</sup> Muir in particular was a keen Douglasite claiming that 'Scotland needs a hundred years of Douglasism to sweat out of it the individualism which destroyed it as a nation and has brought it where it is'.<sup>219</sup> Despite his rejection of Celtic revivalism Muir hinted that practical agrarian improvement might still be possible in the Highlands. Having witnessed the success of Orcadian farmers and how 'the progress in the science of cultivation has since made them a happy and productive community', he noted how a rural population might 'well have done the same for the wide glens of Sutherlandshire'.<sup>220</sup>

Appropriately enough, it was often fictional prose which most effectively captured the revivalist spirit, reflecting the eclecticism of influence and optimism for a Celtic renaissance as the apex of a modern national culture. Neil Gunn and Fionn Mac Colla ended their respective texts 'The Lost Glen' and 'The Albannach' with evocative visions for a holistic rural revival. While their tone was generally dark and melancholic, depicting Highland communities on the verge of collapse, both novels concluded with the hope of a new energy coursing among the people and over the land. Images of light, fertility, dynamism and the natural cycles were each invoked to convey the consummation of a modern relationship. The residents of the Lost Glen had a fresh dream for a rural economy:

*'larger crofts, the outrun for sheep and cattle, co-operative marketing, the forest communities, the roads and steamers, the fishing creeks, the loch and river and hill for those whom they drew...Not a renewal of the old, but the old carried forward, evolved into the new, and the creative instinct at work once more, and all the more powerfully for being free of the increasing nightmare of city civilisations'.*<sup>221</sup>

This progress was swathed in a renewed awareness of the cultural heritage of the Gael. At the Albannach's finale, the central character Murdo succeeds in stirring his once dormant community to action through music, poetry and language:

*'...this evening, something was beginning, and those his people, stirred beyond themselves, moved with gestures symbolical, not insignificant, across the face of the growing future...By a score of tracks and paths, out of sight, the folk were moving home. A faint noise of their going came after a little to the listening ear. The noise grew and sharpened, filling through the silence. By and by the moor was full of movement, footsteps in the heather, voices'.*<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Muir, E. (1935) *Social Credit and the Labour Party*, London.

<sup>219</sup> Muir, E. (1979) op cit. p. 234.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, p. 198.

<sup>221</sup> Gunn, N.M. (1985) op cit. p. 340. For the remainder of his literary career Gunn's enthusiasm for 'the life and the joy and satisfaction that come from making or creating things in our own land' was undiminished. Gunn, N.M. (1944) 'Awakening of a Nation', *Daily Record*, December 27 p. 2.

<sup>222</sup> Mac Colla, F. (1984) op cit. p. 334-336.



If their own propaganda was to be believed, the literati had scorched a path through traditional cultural constructions of the Celtic fringe and the way was now clear for the Highlanders to lead all Scotland toward a vital expression of nationhood. Finding his synthesis between cultural and political nationalism, MacDiarmid's clarion call to a young generation was at once utopian and utilitarian:

*'The brightest hope for the future seems to me to lie in colonisation of estates in the homeland, by groups of young men and women, such as are prepared to face the hardships borne by pioneers in other parts of the Empire, in order to obtain the health and freedom of open-air life upon the ground where they were born. Some of those who feel the attraction of a more natural way of living will have probably begun to recover, in their souls and nerves, by practice of a craft, the rhythm of a creative life. To thatch a roof, and lay a fire, to plough, to harrow, to sow and reap, to bake bread, to tend young lambs and clip a rising fleece, to spin, dye and weave for household and township, is to enter organically into the actual making of the world'.<sup>223</sup>*

The task at hand was to convert this arcadian vision into reality. As the final section demonstrates, the challenge of instigating a rural revival anchored to the Gaelic tradition fired the imagination of agriculturists, nationalists, revivalists and sentimentalists alike.

### Constructing Reality from the Dream of Fields: Organic Education for the Highlands

*'It is one of Time's perfect ironies that the land of Columbus may send a mission to the island of Columba.'<sup>224</sup>*  
(H.V. Morton, 1933)

*'Is it not strange, even pathetic, that the proud pioneering Gael whose language is dying, with his traditions, and picturesque dress and devastating claymore should be left playing a mournful dirge on his warlike bagpipes waiting as a humble supplicant on a Highland hillside for a morsel of that ethereal sustenance which has been lavished on England, Wales and Ireland during the last century? Is it because he required an interpreter?'<sup>225</sup>*  
(Hugh Gunn, 1931)

An examination of three different attempts to put re-colonist theory into practice, this section reveals how tensions arose when Celtic revivalists found themselves

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<sup>223</sup> MacDiarmid, H. (1939) op cit. p. 135-136.

<sup>224</sup> Morton, H.V. (1933) *In Scotland Again*, London: Methuen, p. 167.

<sup>225</sup> Gunn, H. (1931) *The Distribution of University Centres in Britain: A Plea for the Highlands of Scotland*, Glasgow: Airlie Press, p. 169.

reliant on the financial backing of benefactors more inclined towards a Twilight vision of the Highlands. On a broader forum, it considers how proposed projects became vehicles for different expressions of national, youth and agrarian citizenship.

In January 1926, someway distant from the Highlands, John L. Gerig, the Professor of Celtic in the Department of Romance Languages at Columbia University wrote to Richard M. Montgomery, the President of the American Iona Society offering his support for a newly proposed scheme. In conjunction with representatives of *An Comunn Gaidhealach*, the New York based society of Scottish ex-patriots had recently declared their intention to erect and endow a Celtic college devoted to the instruction of Gaelic and the collection and preservation of records of the Gaelic language and civilisation. The location they favoured for the college was the island of Iona, situated beyond the westernmost point of Mull and an ancient seat of culture and learning actuated by the spirit of St. Columba. Angus Robertson, the Gaelic scholar, ex-president of *An Comunn* and strong supporter of the scheme, excitedly claimed that from such a divine spot it might be possible for students to glimpse Tir-na-Nog.<sup>226</sup> Professor Gerig thought the project entirely appropriate given the developing academic interest in other ancient European languages and civilisations.<sup>227</sup> Fearing that the disappearance of an entire culture was already well underway, Gerig warned that 'unless speedy and vigorous action be taken, it will not be long before this deplorable condition will be a *fait accompli*. The Gael with his bagpipes, tartans and songs will then have forever vanished into the history of the dead past'.<sup>228</sup> The scale of the project being undertaken, requiring some two million pounds of

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<sup>226</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 1931 March 14 p. 6.

<sup>227</sup> Gerig's major interests being anthropological and linguistic, he noted how in France there had been a revival of the spirit of regionalism in the provincial universities. At Rennes, Breton history, language and culture could be studied, while at Toulouse, Provencal language and literature were the chosen expertise. Spain had a university entirely devoted to preserving the records, customs and language of the Basque. Gerig described how, in Switzerland, the scholars Gauchat, Tappolat and Muret were compiling an exhaustive 'Glossaire des Patois de la Suisse Romande'. Elsewhere, in Italian and German universities enthusiasm for the study of dialects was considerable. Meanwhile in the USA, funding from government and the Smithsonian Institute enabled students to record the rapidly disappearing Indian tribes. As for the study of Celtic traditions, Gerig noted that any progress being made was solely attributable to foreign universities. In 1881, the French government had established the first chair of Celtic in Europe at the College de France while 'at the same time it sent at its own expense the first incumbent of that chair on a mission to the British Isles to prepare a catalogue of all the Celtic manuscripts yet in existence in the national libraries of England and Ireland'. Professors of Celtic were later appointed at Berlin and Rennes universities. Gerig also claimed that courses in Celtic were offered at Harvard, Columbia and the Washington Catholic University earlier than they entered the curricula of any Scottish university. Furthermore, while the courses on Celtic at Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh were only sporadic, none were available on Scottish Gaelic. The texts of Gerig's letter is included in: Gunn, H. (1931) op cit. p. x-xiii.

<sup>228</sup> Cited in, Gunn, H. (1931) op cit. p. xvii.

investment, meant that for the remainder of the decade, efforts were devoted to fund raising campaigns and the courting of affluent patrons.<sup>229</sup>

In Scotland itself, initial reaction was generally unfavourable as fears rose over the possible creation of a shrine to all things tawdry. Certain commentators reacted with hostility to what they viewed as American interference on a grand scale. Chief among them was M.E.M. Donaldson who described the proposal to teach Scots their own mother-tongue as 'fatuous and impertinent'. She gave full vent to her feelings in a typically xenophobic tirade:

*'The total of all the spoilings that the Highlands have already experienced would be as nothing to the utter ruin that a settlement of Yankees would effect, with their gross materialism and innate vulgarities...the patriotic Scottish Gael would do best to pray with all his native fervour, "From the crafts and assaults of the devil: from plague, pestilence and famine: and from invasion and damnation by Americans, Good Lord deliver us!"*'<sup>230</sup>

Neil Gunn was rather more measured in his critique, declaring the Highlanders to have, 'had enough of that western, blue-rolling, rhetorical, impractical, sentimental, Celtic-twilight nonsense to last us for a century or two, and certainly until we (have) rigged up some half-decent way of getting bread and butter'.<sup>231</sup>

Meanwhile, back across the Atlantic these concerns were apparently being addressed. Plans were made for the College curriculum to take on a technical aspect which would help 'the Highlander adapt to the new economic situation'.<sup>232</sup> With this change in emphasis native enthusiasm abounded. The *Oban Times* recognised in the plans the opportunity for a model institution to encourage young Gaelic scholars to adopt traditional lifestyles based on the land and prosper from a wealth of native knowledge. The paper's editorialist suggested that the college:

*'should preserve and develop the cultural life of the Gael, and at the same time, make it possible for him to live in his own country by helping him to live in his own country by helping him to till the soil and to fish the sea and to encourage profitability in home industries'.*<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Angus Robertson took annual trips to the United States in search of sponsors. Thanks to the efforts of colleagues like Dr. John H. Finlay, the assistant editor of the New York Times, Grant was even granted an audience with President Calvin Coolidge. *Glasgow Herald*, 1929 November 4 p. 12; 1931 February 9 p. 13; 1931 July 1 p. 9.

<sup>230</sup> Donaldson, M.E.M. (1927) "To Such Base Uses": How the Highlands are Spoiled and Desecrated', *Scots Magazine*, VIII (1) p. 7.

<sup>231</sup> Gunn, N. (1938) op cit. p. 218. For further criticisms of misplaced American sentimentality see: *Glasgow Herald*, 1929 November 9 p. 10.

<sup>232</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 1929 November 4 p. 12.

<sup>233</sup> 'The Iona College: For Success the Foundation Should be in the West', *Oban Times*, 1929 November 16 p. 3.

Lachlan Grant of the HDL agreed that efforts should be focused on addressing modern socio-cultural problems as opposed to preserving ancient lore and tradition.<sup>234</sup> Adopting the visceral imagery of which the organisation was so fond, John Bannerman envisioned a college which would 'conserve that nucleus of Celtic thought and culture, not only intact, but make it a pulsating living centre - a creative one of new blood and new sinews instead of one merely eating itself up in slow decay'.<sup>235</sup> Ever mindful that an appropriate balance should be struck, Hugh MacDiarmid reminded those with urgent demands for any institution to 'subserve immediate utilitarian purposes' that they should not ignore appealingly 'wild-cat notion of breeding poets and spiritual solitaires'.<sup>236</sup> The publicity surrounding the scheme even aroused H.V. Morton's interest, who applauded 'those who believe that the Celt has a message for this blundering world' and welcomed 'the re-kindling of Iona's lamp'.<sup>237</sup>

Progress was far from rapid. For several more years further financial contributions were sought, advice imparted and plans laid out.<sup>238</sup> In the twilight of his career Hugh Gunn, a native Highlander with a history of success in educational administration throughout the British empire, contributed to *debate on* what was now being envisioned as Scotland's fifth, and the Highland's first, university.<sup>239</sup> Placing great store in a language revival as a means to rejuvenate the native population, Gunn acknowledged the propaganda work of the Iona

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<sup>234</sup> Grant, L. (1934) 'Our Highland Heritage', *Northern Times*, December 13 p. 5.

<sup>235</sup> *Oban Times*, 1930 May 17 p. 2.

<sup>236</sup> MacDiarmid, H. (1939) op cit. p. 27-28. In his 1929 utopian vision of a Scotland 'Fifty Years Hence' MacDiarmid imagined the creation of 'Scots Colleges Movement' which would replicate the work of the Workers' Educational Association, but with a distinctly Scottish emphasis; a curriculum based on Gaelic, Scots, Scottish history, literature and music. Furthermore, 'all the ablest of the younger Scottish school of writers, artists, musicians and historians' would be employed as lecturers in these provincial establishments. The new educational framework would not neglect the local community either with 'study circles' meeting in every town and village in Scotland. Grieve, C.M. (1929) op cit. p. 103-104.

<sup>237</sup> Morton, H.V. (1933) op cit. p. 167.

<sup>238</sup> Drawings of the proposed college were made by Dr. Colin Sinclair, who later went on to design the Highland Clachan for the Empire Exhibition. Negotiations took place with Professor R.S. Rait of Glasgow University and a trustee of the 'Iona Cathedral Trust'. An Iona College Committee was established in Scotland with two sub-committees to work under the remits of the college curriculum and site inspection. *Glasgow Herald*, 1935 October 24 p. 24; 1935 November 7 p. 11.

<sup>239</sup> Described by Professor W.J. Watson of Edinburgh University as 'a true hearted son of the north and a native Gaelic speaker', Gunn was born at Rogart in Sutherland, the county in which he would later take up two separate posts as a school headmaster. Having been appointed an HM Inspector of schools in 1898 he left for South Africa after the outbreak of the Boer War only one year later. As a member of the legislative council of the Orange River Colony he organised education in the refugee camps. This work led to his appearance on the governing council of the University of the Cape of Good Hope and appointment as organiser of the Grey University College, Blomfontein. In 1907 he represented South Africa at the first Imperial Conference on Education, held in London. Gunn later moved continents to help found the University of Western Australia in Perth, a task he took on with considerable zeal, visiting all of Britain's universities by means of preparation.

Society but, siding with constituencies who harboured rather more parochial interests, preferred Inverness as the site for any development.<sup>240</sup> As an avowed imperialist he identified the great paradox in the success enjoyed by Scots abroad while their families struggled at home:

*'Is there anything pestiferous amid the beautiful valleys, and rivers and lakes and mountains of the North that Nature has rendered it abhorrent to the glory and glamour of learning? Has the Gael...been destined to absorb the ambrosial viands of the Gods only beyond his mountain ranges or in remote lands?'*<sup>241</sup>

It was also Gunn's insistence that any rural educational framework should make provisions for 'a closer recognition of the calls of the local life and the development of the wealth of the sea and land'.<sup>242</sup> Infused by a spirit of utilitarianism the curriculum would 'be brought into closer contact with the lives of the people, and the idea dispensed with that only the abstruse and the alien elements are worthy of University attention'.<sup>243</sup>

By 1935, some nine years after the initial proposition had been made, the Iona Society published the report of a visit made to the Scotland by their envoy, Colonel A.R. Fordyce. The proposals contained little information of a definite nature, and even less to encourage those in search of practical solutions:

*'What we do provide and endow, shall comprise the study of Celtic theology and religion, in the light of modern needs, as embodied in the spiritual achievements of the Celtic church, and in the inspirational motifs of Celtic literature, with its suggestive records of enlightened polity and humanizing social outlook.'*<sup>244</sup>

Tensions between the realms of the secular and the sacred, surfaced in the organisation's re-statement of aims, these being:

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<sup>240</sup> Gunn suggested that satellite branches of the university be established throughout the Highlands, at sites such as Oban, Stornoway, Portree, Lairg, Wick and Dunkeld. Each centre could work towards reversing the established trend of decline in numbers of Gaelic speakers; the 1921 census having shown the figures to stand at 57% in Ross and Cromarty, 50% in Sutherland, 48.4% in Inverness-shire and 32.8% in Argyll. It was his hope that 'all the educational authorities, with an unprejudiced mind, would no doubt strive to make it (*the language*) a living force in their midst, and would have adequate direct representation on its Governing Council. So would all bodies interested in the traditions, poetry, music and folklore of the North, whether local or overseas, and all scientific societies interested in local industries or in developing the wealth of our seas and coasts'. Gunn, H. (1931) op cit. p. 83.

<sup>241</sup> Drawing on his sporting and military knowledge Gunn saw the irony in Americans being left to recognize 'the virtues of this region which has carried the martial renown of Scots and Highlanders to every part of the world, to have immortalised the "thin red line" at Balaclava, and "Jessie's dream" at Lucknow, and to be classed by German leaders as the most dangerous of their foes'. Gunn, H. (1931) op cit. p. 35.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

<sup>244</sup> Fordyce, A.R. (1935) *American Iona Society Incorporated - Report of Visit to Iona and Scotland*, p. 7.

*'the revival of interest in, and return to, the spiritual activities of the Celtic church, the study of Celtic concepts generally, together with Celtic languages, Literature, Music, Arts, Crafts and collateral subjects, and to promote these ideas, through the establishment of a centre or centres under the corporate name of the American Iona Society'.<sup>245</sup>*

While the realities of economic recession in America meant that by the mid-1930's financial benevolence was in short supply, ultimately the Society's inability to combine a meditative and monastic function for the college with the technical curriculum desired by local spokespeople was the rock on which the project foundered.<sup>246</sup> Despite the failure of this protracted campaign, a small scheme initiated within sight of Iona, on Mull's western coast, was offering renewed hope to those who saw merit in organic education and a widespread return to the land.

Remote and in a state close to dereliction, Burg farm was situated atop Mull's magnificent cliff scenery. Set in 2000 acres of land the property was gifted to the National Trust for Scotland by Mr. A. Campbell Blair in 1935.<sup>247</sup> Preliminary plans for its use as a bird sanctuary were considered but shelved. Following an extensive survey of the site by Dr David Russell, a lecturer at the West of Scotland Agricultural College (WSAC) and member of the Trust's executive, a commendably progressive decision was taken. The estate was to be used as a model of modern agricultural practice for the western Highlands.<sup>248</sup> Accordingly, Russell was authorised to continue his investigations into reconditioning the farm and its policies.<sup>249</sup> Anthony Hurd and Lord Eltisley described the property's decrepit condition, prior to improvement, in a radio broadcast:

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>246</sup> Somewhat ironically, by 1938 Iona had become the centre of a Church of Scotland settlement for the training of ministers. Macleod, G.F. (1938) 'A New Community for Iona', *Glasgow Herald*, April 26 p. 8. Ever the conspiratorialist, Hugh MacDiarmid was convinced that the College debate had stained, with the Church of Scotland seeking jealously to guard Iona as their own 'peculiar preserve'. MacDiarmid, H. (1939) op cit. p. 28. Neil Gunn meanwhile doubted whether the new community would be able 'to rise above a narrow sectarianism'. NLS Dep. 209 Box 9 (107); see also: Box 9 (82) and (159).

<sup>247</sup> The property had been offered to the Trust as early as 1931. In considering its suitability as a Trust holding the executive council had noted what they claimed to be the Burg's reasonable accessibility, its potential for adaption as a plant or animal sanctaury, its rocky, terraced headland visible from Iona and historic fossil 'MacCulloch's Tree' situated on the shoreline. A further variable arose from the Trust taking on a farm unit and with it liabilities in respect of the Small Landowners (Scotland) Act and sheep stock valuations. Having mused over all of these matters the Committee were strongly of the opinion that the offer should be accepted. NTS ECM vol. 1 1931 November 18.

<sup>248</sup> The West of Scotland Agricultural College had also established a demonstration poultrycroft on Islay while the Macauley Institute for Soil Research owned a demonstration peat farm on the Isle of Lewis. *Oban Times*, 1935 October 5 p. 6; *Oban Times*, 1930 November 22 p. 4.

<sup>249</sup> NTS ECM 1936 December 16.

*'Many small crofts have disappeared altogether. One old lady on Mull recalls that when she was young there were fifteen "smokes" to be seen from Burg. All these hearths and homes have gone. The men will never come back. They've gone to Glasgow, to Canada and to the ends of the earth'.<sup>250</sup>*

A farm development programme and cropping experiments were underway early in 1937. Russell and his team were to work toward multiple objectives; combating the bracken menace from surrounding lands, to rid the farm stock of disease and to improve the crop yields on arable land.<sup>251</sup> The NTS expressed the hope that if successful, the scheme would 'open up the possibilities of further action on similar lines in other districts', adding that it might yet 'prove to be an important contribution to the problem of depopulation in the Highlands'.<sup>252</sup>

Sharing operational responsibility with Principal Patterson of the WSAC and working in collaboration with the original tenant newly appointed as Trust manager, Russell worked steadily to achieve these aims.<sup>253</sup> Late in 1938 the experts were able to reveal a satisfying set of results (see figures 46, 47 and 48):

*'All the oats and hay had been stacked and thatched by the 25th of September and the lamb stock had increased by 50 per cent. Eighty acres of bracken have so far been treated, and at the demonstration day on 28th July, which had been attended by 70 local farmers and others, five bracken cutters had been at work, and modern methods of cultivation had been explained'.<sup>254</sup>*

Russell was pleased that the pioneering work on NTS property was setting a precedent for Highland small-holders to follow. He reported how:

*'The crops in Mull averaged 2ft high, but the Bell oats at Burg were over 5ft and some were 6ft 6". The result was that farmers round about were immensely impressed by the difference between*

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<sup>250</sup> NTS Burg Boxfile, Extract from Broadcast by Anthony Hurd and Lord Eltisley, 1939 June 29.

<sup>251</sup> Grant aid amounting to £1000 was provided by the Pilgrim Trust for the improvement work. NTS ECM 1937 February 17. A further £300 a year for a spell of three years was agreed upon by the Trust to cover any losses during the period of restoration. NTS ECM 1939 February 22.

<sup>252</sup> NTS Burg Boxfile, Application to the Pilgrim Trust for Funding, February 1937.

<sup>253</sup> In an interim report after the first year of work Russell detailed how bracken breaking had been undertaken with the use of two Holt machines and sheep then grazed on the cut land; lime and slag had been applied to arable land which had been fenced off; stock had been inoculated; some improvements had been made to the service roads; an agreement had been made with the Forestry Commission for 10 acres of land to be planted out with conifers; heavy losses were reported among the sheep stock over the course of the winter. NTS Burg Boxfile, Interim Report on the 1st Years Operations at Burg Farm, Mull. D. Russell to T. Jones (secretary of the Pilgrim Trust) 1938 January 20. Three months later, Russell could report that 10 acres had been ploughed and cultivated, and oats and potatoes planted. Furthermore, a new fence had been built along the cliffs, construction of a sea-front jetty initiated and a derrick finished. Plans to ship in lime by bulk via Loch Scridain had been hampered by severe winter weather. NTS Burg Boxfile, D. Russell to D. Leadbetter, 1938 April 19.

<sup>254</sup> NTS ECM 1938 October 28; *Oban Times* 1938 August 6 p. 5. The progress made on the Burg property is also detailed in: Hurd, R. (1939) *Scotland Under Trust*, London: Black, p. 21-26; MacDiarmid, H. (1939) *op cit.* p. 39.





Figure 46 - Burg:  
Tackling the Bracken  
Menace

Source: Hurd, R. (1939)



Figure 47 - Burg: A Year Later  
Source: Hurd, R. (1939)



Figure 48 - Harvest at Burg  
Source: Hurd, R. (1939)



*the crops at Burg and those on their own farms, and were making enquiries as to the species of crops to be planted and the types of manure to be planted'.<sup>255</sup>*

By the 1940's the Burg was able to make a modest contribution to wartime food production, while the targets for stock-carrying capacity had also been met. Hurd and Eltisley stressed how the project was demonstrating how 'many hundreds of farms in the Western Highlands could be brought back to a more productive state, without any lavish expenditure'.<sup>256</sup>

The measured progress on Mull ran in parallel with the formulation of an altogether more adventurous plan in the mind of the prominent Scottish nationalist Sir Alexander MacEwen. Having spent much of his career in local government administration, MacEwen had by the late 1930's risen to the position of President of the Scottish National Party, during which time he developed a close relationship with Neil Gunn.<sup>257</sup> Gunn recounted how, in his later years, MacEwen had 'moved far from the orthodox tenets of Liberalism towards a fundamentally co-operative conception of economic life'.<sup>258</sup> Rather than forcing a divide between the economic and cultural aspects of Highland life, as he and many others had done previously, MacEwen went in search of synthesis, 'To keep alive Gaelic music, literature and tradition is one of the most potent means of maintaining a peasant population provided that it is not divorced from the actualities of life'.<sup>259</sup> 'The only thing that will save us is passion', he declared:

*'a passionate love for our country and for all that it implies. All great things and great men are nourished on passion. Poetry,*

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<sup>255</sup> NTS ECM 1938 October 28.

<sup>256</sup> NTS Burg Boxfile, Extract from Broadcast by Anthony Hurd and Lord Eltisley, 1939 June 29. The progress made at Burg farm spurred other groups into planning their own agricultural endeavours. In 1940 the London Scots Self-Government Committee suggested the establishment of a state agricultural farm in Argyllshire. In combination with the mineral extraction industries located on the Lorn coastline such a development was thought to offer a favourable alternative to the small-holding option: Fraser, N. (1940) 'Highland State Farm: Why Not a Practical Experiment', *Scots Independent*, December p.2.

<sup>257</sup> A practicing lawyer in Inverness, MacEwen entered the Town council in 1906 as a prominent Liberal. Between 1925 and 1931 he served as Provost and as a Gaelic speaker was Chairman of the Islands Committee of the County Council. During this period he was also chairman of the Scottish Self-Government Party.

<sup>258</sup> Gunn, N. (1941) *op cit.* p. 7.

<sup>259</sup> NLS Acc. 6113 'The Spirit of the Gael' (no date) unpublished typescript. The same message was repeated for the sentimental Scot, 'Crowded and money-making mods will not make up for empty glens and deserted hearths'. Elsewhere MacEwen stressed that: 'This separation of cultural and economic interests must cease. The language and music of the Gael are the language of the earth and the music of the seas - they cannot be divorced from the islands of the west, from the wind and the mist, from the colour of the rock and sea, from all the whisperings of all the ages. They are part of a life, and unless that life is rich and vigorous, it will lose all its best characteristics. Yet you cannot have a vigorous life when the boats lie rotting on the shore, and the remnants of a once independent race crowd the doors of the labour exchange'. NLS Acc. 6113 'The Future of the Gaelic Movement', (no date) typed manuscript of a speech given in Inverness to a youth group, possibly *Comunn na h'Oigirigh* (League of Gaelic Youth).

*music, heroic deeds. The future of the Gaelic movement depends on whether National Passion is dead or only asleep'.<sup>260</sup>*

During his final few years MacEwen transferred these broad themes to one of his favourite topics, public education. As chairman of the Inverness County Council, Education Committee, he expressed a concern that popular techniques in modern schooling was directing pupils away from their natural exploratory instincts. He asked of school leavers at age sixteen:

*'What do they know of the history of their own country - the real history, not the dates of kings and queens and battles, but some understanding of how people lived and thought, of their own folk traditions, their art, architecture and literature? Do we do anything to train their taste or to quicken their habits of observation and a love for the countryside'.<sup>261</sup>*

The answers MacEwen found to these problems combined what he had learnt from Gunn of the intimacies and transcendental qualities of landscape with the Danish model of modern education, the folk high school. Founded by Nicholas Grundtwig, these centres catered for male and female youths by focusing activities on the home, farm and workshop rather than the constraining classroom. In such a manner, by developing 'the spiritual and moral character, no less than the mental and physical powers', it was possible to inculcate students with the principles of rural citizenship.<sup>262</sup> As matters stood the only example of such activity in the Highlands was the work of *Comunn na'h Oigridh*, the children's movement founded in 1934 under the auspices of *An Comunn Gaidhealtach*. Placing the emphasis on native customs and traditions, the entire proceedings of this organisation were carried out in Gaelic.<sup>263</sup> According to John Bannerman lessons should not necessarily be limited to those of school age, he felt the most crucial time to engender an interest in the land and its close links to native culture was when young men and women left formal education.<sup>264</sup> Hugh MacDiarmid, proud of his own encyclopaedic knowledge of Scotland's geography and

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<sup>260</sup> NLS Acc. 6113 'The Future of the Gaelic Movement', typed manuscript. See also: NLS Dep. 209 Box 24 'Is Gaelic Culture Declining: An Appeal by Sir Alexander MacEwen'.

<sup>261</sup> MacEwen, A. (1938) *Scotland at School: Education for Citizenship*, London: Oliver & Boyd, p. 16.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid, p. 14; see also, MacEwen, D. (1938) 'An Educational Experiment: The Danish Folk High Schools', *Scots Magazine*, XXVIII (4) p. 302-307.

<sup>263</sup> By 1937 the League of Gaelic Youth could count 85 branches or *Feachdan* and 2741 members. Of these, 30 *feachd* were located on the mainland with the rest spread throughout the islands. The annual camp was held on Lochaweside, at the Sonachan estate belonging to the League's guiding spirit, George Marjoribanks. *Oban Times*, 1935 October 22 p. 3; Marjoribanks, G.E. (1937) 'The Gaelic Youth Movement', *Scots Magazine*, XXVIII (1) p. 37-42.

<sup>264</sup> *Oban Times*, 1930 May 17 p. 2. William Power was another advocate of vocational training for adults: Power, W. (1934) 'Something I Want to Say: Scotland and Adult Education', *Daily Record*, September 5 p. 13; see also, Jamieson, R. (1937) 'Scotland's Fifth University: The Work and Aims of Newbattle Abbey College', *Scots Magazine*, XXVIII (3) p. 225-230.

topography, had long declared his intention to use poetry and prose to shame all Scots into a proper knowledge of themselves through their country.<sup>265</sup> Concerned that much of the landscape remained 'a terra nullius' to the common citizen he called on other native poets and artists to contribute to a new 'spiritual geography of Scotland'.<sup>266</sup>

To fill the educational void MacEwen envisioned his own version on the Danish theme. His proposed Highland agricultural and technical colleges would be progressive institutions catering for native Highlanders, but also making provision for Scotland's hikers and hostellers whose experience of the rural realm was limited to the weekend. The fostering of organic knowledges was to be the curriculum's key objective, 'Nature study, the flora and fauna of the district, striking features of land and sea, the clouds by day and stars by night, afford opportunities for training eye and ear'.<sup>267</sup> In line with his belief that 'language is the key to thought and ultimately to character', the colleges would promote a bilingual education, employing Gaelic speakers as instructors.<sup>268</sup> Cultural courses on Scottish history, geography, literature, natural history and music would be offered in combination with a practical syllabus to include gardening, woodwork, mechanical drawing, navigation (in maritime districts), simple book-keeping for farm, dairy or poultry businesses, home crafts and domestic science. A relaxed social atmosphere was to be encouraged, made all the more convivial by evening ceilidhs, traditional dancing and Highland sports.<sup>269</sup>

While it was estimated that financing a pilot college would cost approximately £10,000, rather predictably the search for a source of finance remained the most obvious barrier to progress. A number of prospective investors having failed to make any formal commitment, MacEwen was doubtless elated to hear of a decision taken by *An Comunn Gaidhealtach* at the organisation's annual general meeting of 1937. After years of prevarication over the ethical dilemmas associated with activities which were deemed to cross the bounds of cultural expression, the executive committee agreed unanimously to set up a Highland folk school.<sup>270</sup> Suggestions of attached small-holdings and of incorporating

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<sup>265</sup> Morgan, E. (1980) 'MacDiarmid and Scotland', in Scott, P.H. & Davis, A.C. (eds.) op cit. p. 198. Commenting on popular perceptions of the Hebrides, MacDiarmid pointed out how: 'Little or nothing is known of their island economies of crofting and fishing...so little indeed that the average Scotman had no conception at all of the economic history, present conditions, and problems and potentialities of these islands'. MacDiarmid, H. (1934b) op cit. p. 280.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid. p. 280.

<sup>267</sup> MacEwen, A. (1938) op cit. p. 21.

<sup>268</sup> NLS Acc. 6113 'The Spirit of the Gael' (undated typescript). MacEwen's thoughts on the necessity of a linguistic revival are also detailed in: *Oban Times*, 1937 October 30 p. 7.

<sup>269</sup> MacEwen, A. (1938) op cit. p. 20; NLS Acc. 6113 'The Spirit of the Gael', (undated typescript).

<sup>270</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 1938 January 15 p. 7.

agrarian and scientific experimentation into the venture were being considered, as were possible links with the Workers' Educational Association. Communities in Lewis, Skye, Ardnamurchan, Kintyre and Corpach had expressed an interest in hosting a college while various avenues for funding support were also being explored.<sup>271</sup> In 1938, the historian and Gaelic scholar Sir John Lorne Campbell tabled a formal offer that the island of Canna, of which he was the proprietor, be used as the site for MacEwen's first institution.<sup>272</sup> Remarkably, the last component in the project appeared to have fallen into place when, on being guaranteed half of the profits made from the 'An Clachan' showpiece at the Empire Exhibition, *An Comunn Gaidhealtach* intimated that the money would be used on establishing the folk school. With all seemingly set fair, to MacEwen's huge disappointment the League then proceeded to withdraw its promise of funding from a venture which the more conservative elements of its membership might well have construed as overtly political. Even MacEwen's vastly reduced costing of £2000 did nothing to sway the decision.<sup>273</sup> An official explanation given by the organisation's finance committee, that the Canna proposal was unviable due to the island's isolated position, did not pass without criticism or suspicion.<sup>274</sup>

Harsh lessons were being learnt by those in search of a new rural future. As chapter two has already demonstrated, while the idea of acquainting young people or dislocated communities with their surrounding countryside as a motor to education, identity and patriotism seemed gloriously simple, the reality was very different. It was becoming apparent to the re-colonist lobby that if institutional support or private donation were the only means of securing the necessary investment, then projects ran the risk of having their original intents irreparably altered. Meanwhile, the assimilation of progressive teaching techniques into state schools seemed a forlorn hope. For the moment, a modern rural education in preparation for a life spent close to the land remained a distant prospect.

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<sup>271</sup> *Oban Times*, 1938 January 22 p. 3.

<sup>272</sup> *Oban Times*, 1938 October 10 p. 4; 'From a Highland Correspondent', *Scots Magazine*, XXX (2) p. 128; MacDiarmid, H. (1939) op cit. p. 40-41.

<sup>273</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 1939 March 18 p. 9.

<sup>274</sup> *Oban Times*, 1939 February 4 p. 5; *Oban Times*, 1939 March 18 p. 3.

## Conclusion

*'The door of the Fionn is always open'*<sup>275</sup>  
(Hugh MacDiarmid, 1939)

Rather appropriately, a summation of the achievements recorded by Scotland's nationalist intelligentsia during the inter-war period reads like a very mixed mid-term report. Like all other alternatives posited for the Highlands, their hopes for a rejuvenated landscape and native population were not without internal conflicts and contradictions. In attempting to influence popular understandings of modern national and citizen identities, the rural re-colonisation project was just as reliant on a distinctive mythology and imagined sense of community as the feudal vision for the Highlands which was so vituperatively opposed.

By seeking out mythopoeic connections between the life of the mind and the life of the land, the Celtic revivalists presented their work as a new living, breathing map of the Highlands and Islands, tracing for native communities a series of routes out of the spiral of decline. This prospect excited the nationalist critic Alan Graeme:

*'It is the idea that the Highlands is a place not only worth being born in, but a place worth living in, worth creating in, and not simply worth gillieing in, that the modern Scottish novelist is at long last turning - and for that make us truly thankful'.*<sup>276</sup>

Many of the revivalist's arguments were afforded their assurance of timbre and apparent moral and cultural legitimacy through historical association. A close link with the native Highlander's *mythistoire* - traditions, folk memories and organic knowledges of the soil - was the base from which the vision of new rural future could spring. The writer professing roots very deep in tradition but also striving for modernity made for an alluring figure. Ironically, while the landowning community and rural re-colonists established themselves as oppositional forces, the social standing of their chief spokespeople betrayed certain commonalities. However hard each school of thought tried to emphasise the idea of ancient unity and kinship, in truth both were imposing their ideas on the common populace from 'above' and 'outside'. While two hugely divergent geographies had been created for a potentially receptive audience by elite communities, the most obvious difference lay in the power which they could bring to yield on the physical landscape.

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<sup>275</sup> MacDiarmid, H. (1939) op cit. p. 136.

<sup>276</sup> Graeme, A. (1931) 'The Modern Novelist and the Scottish Highlands: Neil M. Gunn's Accomplishment', *Scots Magazine*, XVI p. 401-407; 402.

The rural re-colonisation project was notable in other respects. Given the mounting frustration in Highland townships and radical Scottish society at the lack of progress being made towards land reform by central government, the tryst with nationalism was perhaps inevitable. However, during the inter-war period heightened patriotic sensibilities ensured that expressions of cultural nationhood and the new agenda offered by constitutional change eventually became synonymous with the land question. The vision of a culturally revived, agrarian Highland society as the crib for an independent nation, recast the traditional rhetoric of social protest and native disinheritance by panning out into the broader ideological context of modern Europe. This was undoubtedly a rousing intellectual venture. Nevertheless, although seemingly daring in their *volkish* search for a quintessential Celtic identity the revivalists were not above invoking essentialised, and conservative, images of landscape and people. New national mythologies, however libertine, were never entirely divorced from the cultural blight of Highland Romanticism.

Judging the success of the inter-war campaign for a re-colonisation and re-conceptualisation of the Celtic margins is a difficult matter. His thoughts infused with war-time pragmatism, Robert Hurd asserted that, 'Dreams may be dreamed and plans planned, but there is little chance of realisation unless the land is brought under effective control'.<sup>277</sup> Having spent two decades working predominantly outwith the recognised mechanisms of political power, Scotland's literati were unlikely to have achieved this alone. Nevertheless, their lobbying was increasingly influential in Scottish civic society. The promise of institutional support was a tantalising one for this counter-hegemonic force. Most encouraging were the activities of the Saltire Society which was showing itself receptive to the idea of rural reform with a cultural conscience. Plans to map and survey the national resource were combined with an enthusiasm for native artistic and intellectual endeavour. *Meanwhile, as plans and policy were formulated for post-war society*, the membership of the London Scots Self-Government Committee found the idea of Highland re-patriation both persuasive and utilitarian. With government investment in light industry, scientifically-informed agriculture and new housing focused on small townships, Thomas Burns envisioned the 'gradual transference to them of from 500,000 to a million men, women and children from the Lowland heavy industries where unemployment will be terrible as soon as the armament work ceases'.<sup>278</sup> With the Committee President, Tom Johnston,

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<sup>277</sup> Hurd, R. (1942) 'Planning and Building: An Architectural Survey', in Burns, T. (ed.) op cit. p. 59-73; 68.

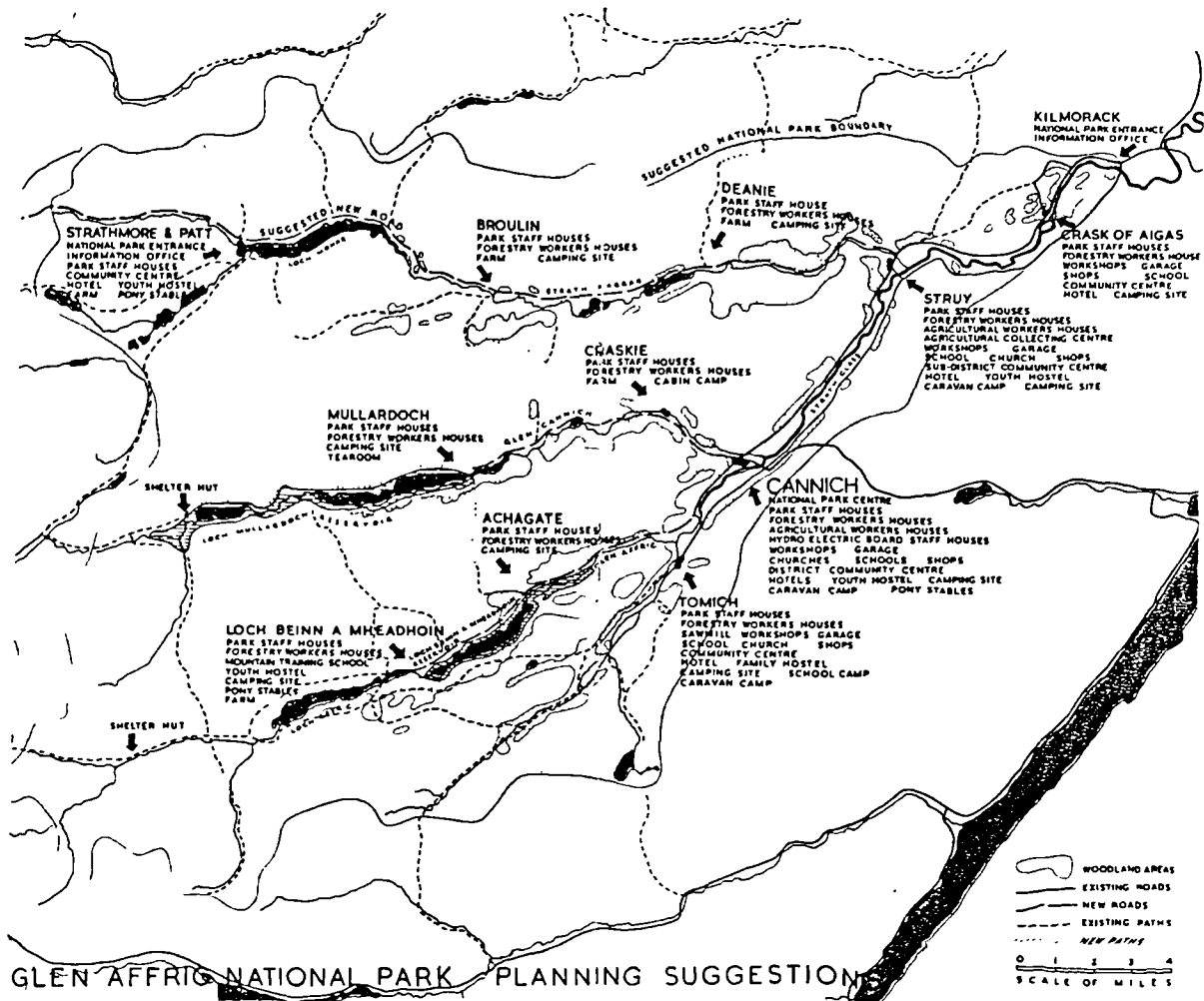
<sup>278</sup> Burns, T. (1942) 'Giving Government Back to the Scottish People', in Burns, T. (ed.) op cit. p. 13-25; 22.

continuing to express his firm commitment to the Highland cause, while closing in on his political goal of appointment as Secretary of State for Scotland, the possibility of state-funding was becoming rather more credible.

MacDiarmid and his literary comrades would undoubtedly have been wholly unsatisfied with such a narrow definition of success. If through their efforts they had achieved nothing else, then the dominant paradigms in Highland literary representation had been vigorously challenged. Fictional and non-fictional writing based on a distinctive vein of rural realism, broke with established Celtic conventions. Shot through with spiritualism and intellectualism in appropriate measure, these inter-war texts mediated a very different and refreshingly eloquent iconography of landscape. While Gunn and MacDiarmid would later accept that in the process much of their creative force had been spent, the path lay clear for a new generation of politicised artists and activists and environmentalists. It is not surprising to find that aspects of the literati's holistic human ecology have informed radical re-colonisation campaigns right up until the present day. Nationhood, cultural revival and rural citizenship remain strong forces in the land debate. Although open to derision, the spirit of fundamentalism initiated among the ranks of the literary community was also inspirational to those who would take up the fiery cross during the intervening period. For them the great task of reconstruction still lay ahead, since ultimately, the revivalists struggle to achieve a new cultural and economic synthesis in Highland life remained unrealised.

## Conclusion

## Highland Hegemony Retained ?





*'A picturesque wilderness is a wilderness still, no matter how many deer and grouse it harbours.'*<sup>1</sup>  
(Ian Macpherson, 1935)

The word 'conclusion' is problematic in the structure of this thesis. Given the work's theoretical basis, with a heavy reliance on ideas of pluralism and polyvocality, it would be entirely inappropriate to posit an essentialist account of the Scottish Highlands, c. 1918-1945. Instead of seeking to provide definitive answers, it is more apposite to regard this section as an open, cross-disciplinary forum which offers fresh thoughts and raises further questions.

The discussion has two general aims: to re-engage with key methodological and theoretical issues first aired in the introduction; and to highlight connections between past and present in the Scottish Highlands. I meet these aims by addressing six themes under the following headings: firstly, the structural issue of authorial choice and possible alternative narratives in the thesis; secondly, the question of varying scales; thirdly, the importance of understanding constructed national and citizen identities; and fourthly, the related complexities inherent to a common notion of dissonance and contestation. Several of these themes are exemplified by a discussion of the government national park report of 1947 which then follows. The fifth theme to be examined is the division of power, patronage and politics in Scottish society. Informed by the events of history, the discussion then ends with some personal reflections on contemporary developments in the Highlands.

Firstly, while this thesis presents a critical account of contesting dialogues on landscape and identity, I recognise that still more positions, voices and visions existed during the inter-war period. Most notably, the evolution of a scientifically and ecologically informed approach to the Highlands is a substantive subject area which as yet remains largely unexplored. Although, initially included in the thesis structure, ultimately this additional 'geography' had to be passed over due to the limited time-frame available for completion of the project. By the same token, conscious attempts were made to incorporate aspects of this distinctive landscape ideology into the existing thesis structure. For example, attempts to foster a popular, holistic understanding of natural landscapes were discussed in chapter two, the possible use of national parks for nature conservation was a topic covered in chapter three, while the concept of a broader discourse on human ecology was subject to detailed exploration in chapter four. It is also worthwhile noting the existence of a range of 'texts' which, although wholly relevant, were either referred to only in passing or could not be included within the remit of the project.

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<sup>1</sup> Macpherson, I. (1935) 'The Central Highlands', in Scott-Moncrieff, G. (ed.) *Scottish Country*, Edinburgh: Wishart, p. 208.

Further accretions of meaning could have been added to each chapter if the varied representations of the inter-war Highlands in cinema, documentary films, theatre, painting, novels and other literary treatments had been examined. An exploration of these artistic currents would have produced a very different, but equally valid, thesis. These areas still represent potentially rewarding subjects for future academic inquiry. Accepting the work's partial nature, the four central dialogues still coalesce into a rounded and coherent treatment of events.

Secondly, the stated intention of this thesis was to engage with the varied social, political and moral debates concerning the Highlands at an expansive scale. While seeking to interpret conceptualisations of the Highlands within wide national and international contexts, I remain aware that disparate and very different identities were created, and could be re-constructed, at the local or provincial level. It has not been my intention to gloss over different experiences of economic events or cultural trends in distinctive Highland locales such as Easter Ross, Lochaber or South Uist, or of the differing levels of exposure which certain communities might have experienced to them. Indeed, a very effective treatment of only one of these specific geographical locales could well have been written. Nevertheless, if the dynamics of cultural politics work at a wide range of scales, in this work the lens of enquiry has been trained on the myriad interpretations of Highland landscape and identity which existed in Scottish and British collective consciousnesses. In such a way it has been possible to begin to de-stabilise unitary 'truths' about the place of the Highlands, and the Highlands' 'place politics', within the broader milieu of inter-war society. Ultimately therefore, the major theoretical contribution of this text has been to re-define some of the accepted cultural and historical meanings attached to the Highlands in the context of evolving geographical knowledges of Scotland. This has been achieved while grappling with some of the difficulties faced in constructing a multi-representational narrative structure.

Thirdly, one of the thesis' primary concerns has been an examination of the cultural construction, expression and consumption of different readings of patriotism. Threading together a multitude of examples from popular, political and institutional arenas it has demonstrated how the Highlands - as a distinctive place, as a landscape and as an imagined ethnic heartland - were continually exploited by a range of interest groups seeking to articulate their chosen vision of modern nationhood. Replete with images and referents, the region represented a highly effective, and emotive, medium upon which to encode the rhetoric and iconography of contesting national identities. Only a brief examination of modern advertising techniques, political propaganda and promotional material for leisure opportunities in Scotland demonstrates the remarkable durability of these place-

images and identities. Similarly, the Highlands were drawn into evolving dialogues on identifiable public codes of morality, citizenship and control. The countryside, and more particularly the mountainous uplands, swiftly became a location in which to mould a new post-war generation, variously responsible, respectful, vigorous, knowledgeable and independent. The origins of many of the civic charters and public access agreements which determine contemporary popular relationships with the Highland landscape can be traced back to the outdoor codes and social mores drawn up during the inter-war period.

By exploring the related themes of nationhood and citizenship, this work has demonstrated how through a proliferation of novel ideas the Celtic 'peripheries' were at once opened up to, and centrally placed within, an evolving intellectual tradition. Having problematized the position of the Highlands in Scotland, Britain and the international arena, various inter-war groups sought to construct entirely new geographical knowledges and moral imperatives. Debates were informed by a spectrum of pan-European discourses, considering the place of small nationalism, regional planning, artistic expression, architectural design, youth movements, folk traditions and physical culture in modern society. Furthermore, the creation of new *individual and collective citizenship identities* reflected the concerns of a rising nationalist sentiment. Critically, for a growing band of commentators a closer affinity with the states of Northern Europe and Scandinavia promised to be more culturally and politically rewarding than an accepted place in the failing British imperial axis. These manifestations of political and cultural nationhood, first fostered between the wars, have continued to inform nationalist sentiment and cessationist protest during the remainder of the century.

Fourthly, the theme of dissonance and contestation has assumed prominence in this examination of the differing cultures of landscape constructed for the Scottish Highlands between the wars. Each of the new geographical visions created for the region and its inhabitants was either antithetical to, or problematic for, the dominant seigneurial, sporting ideology. Campaigns for greater recreative access, modern industrial development, and agrarian re-colonisation challenged the ruling social strata, its distinctive structures of political and economic organisation and created *mythistoire*. To counter this landed hegemony effectively, opposition camps were equally reliant on their own amalgams of myth, reality and ideal. None could function without appealing to imagined constructions of nationhood, citizenship or tradition. Nor was legitimisation through the emotional armature of Highland romanticism or an essentialised interpretation of native Gaelic culture and history the sole province of the lairdocracy. On occasion opposing identities and narratives were informed

by exactly the same stereotypical referents. The intrusion of twentieth-century modernity into the region implanted doubts and uncertainties in the minds of all observers. Inadvertently or otherwise, even those who claimed to demystify the liminal imagery of the Celtic fringe and to deal in the Highlands *vérité*, contributed to the ongoing construction of Britain's noble savage.

Nevertheless, this realisation does not preclude me, as author and observer, from reflecting on the motives and purposes which inspired the cultural construction of Highland myths. While it could plausibly be argued that the mythologies surrounding a return to the land or a new industrial spirit were no different in value to that deployed in defence of the sporting landscape, this would, I think, establish a false equivalence. The former were collections of myths motivated by a common urge for inclusivity while the latter was an eclectic mixture of imaginings bound by the compulsion to retain exclusivity. All were necessarily selective readings of history, all were produced for public consumption, but whereas the lairdocracy were attempting to secure the interests of the few, oppositional narratives sought to empower the many. In the light of this assertion, it would surely be disingenuous not to attach greater merit to an imagined geography founded on the idea of a more equitable re-distribution of power, property and the means of wealth creation in Highland society.

While previous chapters have demonstrated how the assault on the established hegemony forced representatives of the Highland lairdocracy into making a series of conciliatory gestures, they have also made clear the obvious tensions which cut across oppositional narratives. A final, direct statement of my own political sympathies should not mask these obvious faults and frailties. The decades between the wars may have been notable for the emergence of new counter-hegemonic forces, but much of their energy and revolutionary zeal was dissipated in rivalries over the relative merits of the alternatives being offered. Far from presenting a unified front, the hydro-electric enthusiast was just as likely to clash with the committed recreationist as with the deer-stalking aristocrat. Similarly, among those promoting new economic practice for the native citizenry and the rural landscape there existed a welter of conflicting opinion. For many years these conflicts hindered the progress made towards the ultimate goal of a radically revised landowning structure.

This theme of dissonance and contestation is well illustrated by a specific historical example. Notably, it was only in the context of post-war reconstruction and experimentation that the failure to identify a holistic strategy of opposition to the existing Highland power structure was properly corrected and the creative efforts of previously distinctive counter-hegemonic forces coalesced to produce a hybrid landscape vision. Perhaps the greatest testament to the myriad struggles

and deliberations of the inter-war years arrived late, in 1947. Requested by the Scottish Office to consider the possible provision for national parks in Scotland, the Ramsay Committee produced, in a short document, one of the most far-reaching appraisals of the Highland situation. Working under the aegis of the Department of Health the committee's remit went beyond the previously restrictive objects of nature conservation to take in many aspects of social planning, a fact reflected in its diverse membership.<sup>2</sup> It is worthwhile briefly considering their recommendations.

Declaring themselves entirely conscious of the social problems afflicting the Highlands and the acute need for economic development, the committee advised that land be acquired by agreement or compulsory purchase to establish five major national parks, open without charge and covering some 3000 sq. miles.<sup>3</sup> Financed by the post-war National Land Fund, the parks would be run by a separate Commission, and aided in their work by elected local advisory committees, the Board of Agriculture for Scotland, the Forestry Commission, the newly created North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board and the Scottish Tourist Board. Radical in themselves, the plans took on a visionary aspect when, in a report addendum, they were applied to the Glen Affric area. Embodying the tenets of social democracy and modern planning, the proposed project sought to combine public education and open access to the countryside with local community development and productive land management techniques. A startling array of amenities and infrastructural improvements were mapped out for Glen Affric, Glen Cannich and Strath Farrer; these included new roads, car parks, walkers' paths, bridle-ways, pony-stables, youth hostels, camping and caravan sites, small hotels, cabin camps, mountain shelter huts, emergency telephones, a guide service, visitor centres, village halls, restaurants, tea-rooms, libraries, a field museum and sailing boats for hire.

The accent was placed firmly on education for good citizenship. Plans were set down for organised classes in natural history, local history, folklore and crafts, all led by university lecturers and followed by evening ceilidhs. Active participation would also be encouraged at demonstration crofts and arboreal nurseries, a mountain training school, instructional film shows, and a painting and photography studio. Technology and engineering displays would be laid on at

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<sup>2</sup> Chaired by Sir J. Douglas Ramsay of the APRS, the committee also included John Bannerman and the Reverend Thomas Murchison of the HDL, D.G. Moir of the SYHA and Frank Fraser Darling, the emerging expert on the human ecology of the Highlands. *Report on National Parks and the Conservation of Nature in Scotland*, British Sessional Papers, 1947 Cmd. 7235, Edinburgh: HMSO, p. 1-56.

<sup>3</sup> The five suggested areas were: Loch Lomond-Trossachs; Glen Affric-Glen Cannich-Strath Farrer; Ben Nevis-Glencoe-Blackmount; Cairngorms; Loch Torridon-Loch Maree-Little Loch Broom.

dams and hydro-electric power stations. The very keenest could volunteer for work parties which would maintain the path network or stay in crofting townships to learn lessons on rural community life. All facilities would be open to the enlarged local population who were to be employed in the already established forestry plantations, sawmills and HEP plants. New opportunities would also arise on experimental agricultural holdings or in rural industries combining traditional, native expertise with modern marketing techniques. Meanwhile the sporting staples of grouse-shooting and deer stalking would virtually cease. Fishing permits were to be made available to all. All this human activity was to take place in a sylvan setting, each glen the focus for native woodland regeneration programmes. By nursing back Scots pine and birch trees, the last remnants of the ancient wood of Caledon, to cultivate a new rural aesthetic, the iconography linking landscape and nation would be everywhere apparent. Recovery, fertility and new growth were the shared ideals created for trees and for people. This synthesis, assembling key elements from a plethora of individual visions, marked a notable watershed in the creation of a modern populist geography for the Highlands.

None of the committee's major recommendations were acted upon by government. While the NSHEB and Forestry Commission received praise as regenerative forces working to halt social decline and depopulation in a few select communities, the expansive vision for five designated parks, linked symbolically by the spirit of national recovery and physically by a web of long-distance footpaths, sadly remained unrealised. The prospect of wholesale interventions in the land market by the state, armed with rights of compulsory purchase and first option on property surrendered in payment of death duties, met with traditional opposition. The leap of faith required by government to impose such a scheme was still too daunting even in the progressive political and social climate of post-war Britain.

Fifthly, power and patronage were key to the three decades of debate which marked out the Highlands as one of Britain's most contested, and ideologically loaded, territories. Throughout this tempestuous period, one presence remained steadfast in the face of all competition. To its opponents the landowning community was fast coming to represent an insurmountable edifice. Though they had chipped away at the base of this imposing structure, none had succeeded in loosening any of the foundation stones. Indeed it seemed that, whenever required, new decorative facades could be applied to the exterior to match the prevailing public mood. Nationhood, patriotism, conservatism and environmental ethics were all deployed to telling effect. The sporting wilderness jealously guarded by a feudal elite had been transformed into a naturalised part of

Scotland's landscape heritage, protected by a creed of benevolent patrician custodians. In this history of continuities, power was effectively re-produced and tradition given a critical modern twist. By entering enthusiastically into Scotland's burgeoning civic realm, the landowning lobby could allay fears of rural ossification. The new model laird led by example, heading relevant government inquiries, supporting voluntary organisations, patronising charitable trusts, chairing executive committees and above all, making clear his willingness to shoulder the national burden of environmental responsibility. Through this ostensibly benign process the Highland landscape was internalised and created in the laird's own image. The realisation that hegemony could never remain stable but had always to demonstrate dynamism by assimilating sources of resistance and being recast through different institutional or organisational media, stands testimony to the ingenuity and durability of the Scottish lairdocracy. New equilibria would continue to be identified by necessarily public-spirited and enterprising representatives who crucially set the tone for the remainder of the century. Despite the relatively brief history of the Highland tradition which had been so ardently defended, the struggle waged by the landowning elite provided irrefutable evidence of the immutability of an established British social and cultural life.

Sixthly and finally, as I complete this thesis exactly fifty years after the publication of the 1947 National Park report, the contemporary situation seems at once foreign and familiar. While I am conscious that an attempt to construct an over prescriptive conclusion to a historical piece could be considered intemperate, a number of parallels must inevitably be drawn between past and present. It seems entirely credible that many of the templates for contemporary environmental, political and aesthetic opinion on the Highlands can be traced back to contestations first played out between the wars. The years spent on this research project have been concomitant with a period of considerable flux in the Highlands and on successive occasions contemporary developments and controversies have reflected events from the past. Most notable have been attempts at local community empowerment through co-operative land purchases and forest-based industries, the profitable use of heritage features in the landscape, the possible privatisation of Scottish water resources, the establishment of a university for the Highlands and Islands and of course, the repeated sale of sporting estates to private, foreign interests. Some of the disputes continue in replica form. The same tensions over access rights persist between the deer stalker and hill walker. Meanwhile, all have occurred within the context of heightened patriotic sensibilities, questions over the future of nationhood and latterly a

referendum on Scottish devolution. Although the point may seem trite, lessons can indeed be learnt from history and few debates are without precedent.

Reviewing the state of the Highland landscape at the mid-point of this century the Ramsay Committee asserted that, 'to many who see before them a silent tale of decay of land and people the present wilderness of these places has little charm'. As we now approach the end of the millennium, this message and the iconography of desolation which it conjures up, retain the same potency. Although recent portents are certainly encouraging, the reins of power have not yet been wrested from Scotland's elite landowning community. Indeed, while the formerly narrow ownership base may be more cosmopolitan in nature, dynastic lairds scarcer on the ground and the tenantry as likely to be corporate as patrician, the sporting rhetoric continues to demonstrate an enviable resilience. The aura of political, regal and aristocratic patronage can still afford a precious gilt. Tuning in the radio to 'Today in Parliament' on the last day before the summer recess remains a revealing activity. This year, (like so many others before), at the mention of the forthcoming season's sport in the Highlands a stentorian rumble of anticipation echoed around the House of Lords. Stamped with history and tradition's imprimatur, the bond of identification between the nation and a natural empty landscape is now sold to a domestic audience and global tourism market. Despite the obvious paradox, a passion for Scotland's beautiful wasteland has become the cultural norm. When modern-day commentators happily subscribe to the idea of a Scottish wilderness ethic in coffee-table photo-montages they further inscribe the now traditional sporting narrative on the collective conscience. Significantly, when paying tribute to the work of the NTS in the Highlands, Ian Crawford noted how it was not the 'splendour of buildings or precious relics of the past' which caught the eye but:

*'an incomparable and unique landscape, virtually untouched by man, with the deer moving on the mountain tops and the eagles soaring on the thermals in the blue sky - that sense of openness and space that only wilderness brings'.<sup>4</sup>*

To attain a more equitable system of land-ownership and help foster a sustainable broad-based rural economy will require a radical re-conceptualisation of entrenched attitudes to the Highland environment. The predominant sporting aesthetic must be replaced with new perspectives on amenity, development and re-population in the countryside. If this is achieved, then geographies first conceived between the wars will finally have made the transition from imagination to reality.

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<sup>4</sup> Campbell, I. (1986) *Held in Trust: The National Trust for Scotland*, Mainstream: Edinburgh, p. 94.



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