

nevis

WINTER JOURNAL | ISSUE 3



BEN

GLEN

PROJECTS

PEOPLE

VOLUNTEERING



FRANK CONWAY

[FACEBOOK.COM/NEVISLANDSCAPE/SHOP](https://www.facebook.com/nevislandscape/shop)



WINTER JOURNAL

FOUR DOWN. ONE TO GO.

WORDS Freja MacDougall

IMAGES Rare Breed Productions



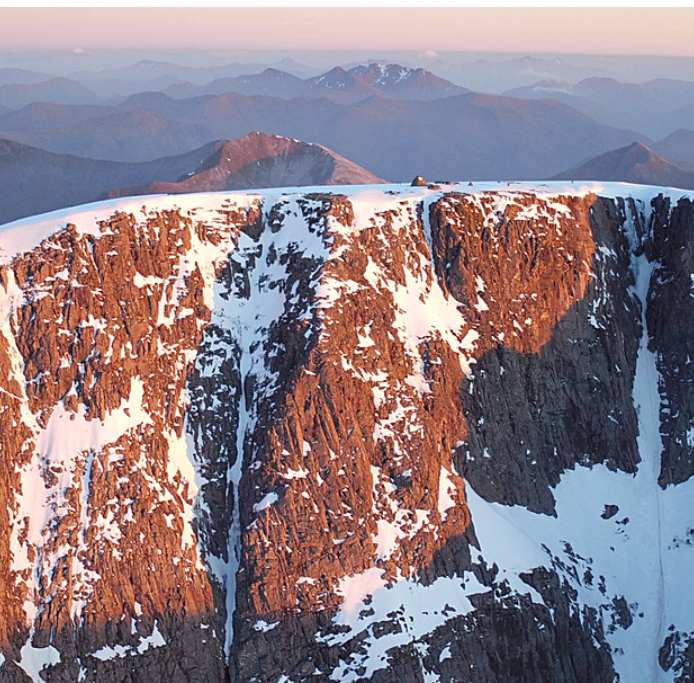
Our team, trainee rangers, volunteers and partners have had a big year.


It's pretty normal for folk to take a moment and think about the previous twelve months at this time of year, it also happens to be the first month things have calmed down around here and given us a chance to crunch the numbers.

Since April our team have run just over eighty events, our volunteers have given us six thousand hours of their time and together with our partners we have completed four more projects with our biggest, most ambitious project (The Ben Nevis Mountain Path) due for completion before the project year is out.

Winter for us means path work, number-crunching, report writing and getting ready to head into our final project year which will no doubt be bigger and better than the last.

A massive thank you to everyone who supports the work of our charity, we hope you all had a fantastic festive season and are ready for a brand new year here in the Nevis landscape.



A woman with blonde hair tied back, wearing a grey and white striped sweater, is sitting in a black folding chair. She is looking towards a large window on the left side of the frame. The room has a wooden wall on the right side, which is covered with a corkboard displaying various photos and documents. The lighting is soft and natural, coming from the window. The overall atmosphere is calm and contemplative.

**"BECAUSE OF ITS
REMOTE
LOCATION AND
THE DISTANCE
FROM HOME,
OUTLANDIA HELD
THE POTENTIAL
OF LOSING
ONESELF IN THE
WILDERNESS."**

LASMA POISA
ARTIST IN RESIDENCE 2017

PROJECT OUTLANDIA

Nevis Landscape Partnership and London Fieldworks are delivering LP.C5 Outlandia, a venture supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and one of Nevis Landscape Partnership's nineteen projects. Outlandia is currently recognised as a unique and nationally significant element of the Nevis landscape alongside Ben Nevis and its rich history of inspiring both scientific and artistic exploration; provoking new ways of thinking. The intellectual and artistic heritage of the area is tangible and accessible by this project and its outputs which, to date, include; forty artist residencies, a week-long series of radio broadcasts, academic publication entitled Remote Performances in Nature and Architecture and REMOTE CENTRES; Performances from Outlandia exhibition at Edinburgh Arts Festival.

The space, imagined by London Fieldworks, is a field-station for use by artists; local, national, international; a meeting place, a hideout, a shelter, a studio, a cabin in the forest, a platform for artists to be in residence and for others to stumble across and wonder about its contents. Outlandia encourages creative interaction between artists and the land, its history and its people. It is an off-grid space to disconnect, a sustainable sculpture and a major contribution to contemporary arts development in Lochaber.

Since its completion almost a decade ago Outlandia has hosted local, national and international artists of all backgrounds, ages and disciplines and maintains a presence via this project, online media, social networks, word of mouth and chance encounters via its various intersections. Plans are in place for a collaborative Outlandia exhibition in the summer of next year celebrating the project and all who have enjoyed Outlandia.



Nevis Landscape Partnership are the key holders for Outlandia and facilitate the sharing of resources with anyone who wants to know more about the space and artists in residence regarding the local area, our environmental projects and our partner organisations. If you are an artist and wish to use Outlandia contact London Fieldworks with a proposal.

www.outlandia.com

www.londonfieldworks.com

POLLDUBH

WORDS DOUGIE SINCLAIR

For over seventy years Glen Nevis has proved itself as an excellent venue for all grades and all disciplines from the easiest beginners routes to some of the hardest in the country. Polldubh has it all.

Over the years there has been a continuous effort to keep the crags clear of encroaching vegetation but every now and then there needs to be a major removal of trees, mainly birch, which seems to be the most successful method.

Nevis Landscape Partnership will be removing many of the birch from the approaches and the surrounding areas to the main crags from Sheep Fank all the way to Road Buttress. This will open them up to the breeze and the sun so they dry quicker and become less vegetated. Visibility from, and between, the crags will also be greatly improved.

Through our **Future Forests** project we are planting native tree species, mainly Scots Pine, away from the climbing areas. The enclosures are in place and many trees are in the ground away from crags with a view to continue planting in inaccessible places.

The simple aim of our work in Polldubh is to improve the experience of climbing in Polldubh, from greater access to wider appreciation.

We hope to improve, but not change, the character of the paths in the area and promote the regeneration of The Caledonian Forest however there has to be a long-term plan.

There is now a necessity for a group to be set-up specifically to look after this nationally important climbing area. The consent of the landowner will be required to keep the crags clear and there may even be a case to be made for controlled grazing. Our work is, hopefully, just the start of a long-term commitment by users of the area, not just recreational climbers but large organisations such as Outward Bound, Abernethy Trust, Glenmore Lodge and various mountain guides and university mountaineering/climbing clubs who massively benefit from this priceless resource.

Join the discussion and come along to **The Climber's Summit** this winter. This brand-new event embraces the local climbing community and looks to deliver a diverse programme to nurture innovation and ensure the event is informative, interesting and exciting. The evening will offer focused talks from professional climbers Robbie Phillips & Dave MacLeod, short films and a panel-led discussion. For more information and your tickets head to Fort William Mountain Festival's website, we'll see you there!

Dave MacLeod

The New Polldubh

The Polldubh crags in Glen Nevis are an archetype of climbing. Although no single crag on the hillside above Lower Falls is a huge multipitch wall, each is full of brilliant rock climbing pitches which are so numerous, even a passionate local such as myself has not found my way round all the possibilities. Following the latest round of development since 2000, there is also a huge variety of established boulder problems to compliment the hundreds of trad climbs.

A number of things make Polldubh worthy of note among the countless places all over the UK which have good outcrop climbing. Chief among them for me is the rock. Polldubh's sliver of mica schist, slowly baked between the Ben Nevis and Mamores granites have weathered into a brilliant mix of rough textured high quality rock. Intricate and varied in nature, and not like mica schist anywhere else I've been. On the climbs it lends 'thank goodness' incut edges and flakes on otherwise airy slab climbs. On the boulders it offers fantastic grippy crimps on which to bear down.

The second big aspect is of course the scenery. The upper tier buttresses of Polldubh have a vista onto the mamores that no-one could tire of, but also a sense of solitude and quiet you can't easily find on crags that take 15 minutes or so to walk to. These buttresses are my favourite; Sky Pilot, Secretaries Crag and Black's Buttress among others.

CONTINUED OVERLEAF





As a teenager visiting regularly from Glasgow, I worked my way through many of the hardest routes in Polldubh. We often came in winter too for fantastic week-long trips, winter climbing on the Ben if it was white, training furiously in the climbing wall if it was wet, and cragging in Polldubh if the sun came out. There is of course nowhere else in the UK where you can do this without having to drive around. We are so lucky to have it and this is not lost on me, hence my decision to move here when I had the choice as professional climber to live anywhere in the world.

Even before I moved, I had already noticed the potential for extensive bouldering. As a Glaswegian, I was brought up in climbing on the Dumbarton boulders, and so I was perhaps unusual for my generation in viewing bouldering as the core climbing discipline, and everything else following behind. We organised ourselves with tarps for the boggy landings, boulder pads and wire brushes and set about expanding on the handful of problems already opened on the Heather Hat Boulder and Sky Pilot by Cubby and a few others.

The combination of such intense obsessions with climbs, and the day to day experience of living them out in the lovely, ever changing scenery of Glen Nevis is what makes this place so special. In the autumn of 2017 it was my task to try and capture some of this on film for a new piece about Polldubh. I wanted to capture the contrast between the lighthearted nature of the crags - accessible, short, friendly - and the intense experiences climbers have on them, either through their beauty or because they've pushed themselves hard on the test-pieces. Thankfully there is a keen new generation of young climbers I could film and show off both these excellent climbers and the climbs themselves.

I also wanted to show off the variety of climbing on offer - deep water soloing, bouldering, bouldering at night, scary bold trad, well protected trad, fun easy climbs and fun generally. One interesting thing was that although I largely filmed young climbers with a background in indoor climbing, all of them had moved to Fort William for the climbing, and all were all-round outdoor athletes in a range of sports and climbing disciplines.

For example, Kevin Woods reeled off 7s on the Heather Hat roof back to back, despite complaining of tiredness from a combination of his drumming commitments on the music scene, and from trying to complete his 1000th Munro ascent before the onset of winter. Although I was always extremely sceptical of the idea that climbing's traditions were being lost with the rise of indoor climbing, shooting the Polldubh film delivered a bit of a death blow to this hypothesis in my mind.

That said, I do think it is true that the ever expanding range of disciplines that people follow in the hills has somewhat diluted participation in some of them. Trad climbing is certainly one. And unfortunately this has a self-perpetuating aspect to it because of the forces of nature. At one time, the classic trad climbs of Polldubh were well travelled roads, with enough passage of hands, feet and nut keys to remain clean. With this climbing footfall spread far more widely these days, together with the relentless growth of the birch trees around the buttresses, many of the climbs are becoming reclaimed by moss and lichen. All they need is one clean for a few hours to restore them to good condition for many years to come.

Very few climbers do this, for a few reasons.

Those who do not have a background in opening new routes sometimes don't see it as their role to look after the conditions of the climbs in the area. Some are also unsure what is accepted or otherwise with regards to cleaning routes, for example wire brushing the rock and gardening turf and mud from cracks, holds and ledges. A key point here is that many of the classic rock climbs in any area were not in a climbing friendly state before they were cleaned in preparation for their first ascent. Take for example The Gutter (Diff), perhaps the most climbed trad route in Glen Nevis.

Before the first ascensionist cleaned out the entire crack line with an ice axe, it would have been a thoroughly botanical excursion, completely choked with heather and grass. In the film I encourage anyone who enjoys the climbs in Polldubh to take an hour or two at the end of the day's climbing to abseil down a route you'd like to do and give it a wire brush or clean out cracks of holds of earth and turf with an ice axe or even just a nut key. One effort may well be enough to restore them to a state where continued ascents will keep them clean indefinitely. As well as being able to do the route, you'll have a feeling that not so many climbers get to have, of having made a real contribution to the climbing scene.

Nevis Landscape Partnership's "Polldubh" film & a brand-new destination guide to the Glen Nevis Crags written by Dave are now live on UKClimbing.com, check it out and come along to see Dave at The Climber's Summit in February.





©Ruari Watt



©Brian Elliot



©McGowans Ltd Environmental Engineering

BEN NEVIS MOUNTAIN PATH

WHAT A DIFFERENCE £880,000 MAKES.

Written by Dougie Sinclair

In the autumn of 2015 Nevis Landscape Partnership undertook a project to upgrade the lower half of the Ben Nevis Mountain Path, something that is currently ongoing. The budget required for a project of this scale is £880,000.

Major sections of the work are complete and now, as the project draws to a close, we are focusing on sections that require less-serious rebuild. Our aim is to build a robust path that, with necessary maintenance of drain clearing and the odd repair, should last for years. When walking up Ben Nevis today it is very difficult to remember just how dangerous most stretches of path were. This was not due to a poor initial build but simply a lack of frequent care and maintenance and if this issue is not addressed, exactly the same thing will happen to the path again.

The serious upgrades have been carried out by contractors using stone from Bon Awe & Banavie Quarries. In an ideal world, stone from the mountain would be used however available stone is now around the 3500-4000ft level and days when you can fly a helicopter at that height on Ben Nevis in November are few and far between.

By the end of the upgrade almost one-thousand tonnes of stone will have been flown up the mountain to be used in the building and protection of the path. Work has mainly taken place over the winter and, for path-building, the warmer winters have been kind with no prolonged spells of hard frost or snow at the levels we were working at. Winter conditions however are still challenging and far from ideal. We do however manage to avoid the 100,000+ folk walking up the mountain by working at this time of year.

The lower sections have been very successfully repaired by our Trainee Volunteer Rangers, Friends of Nevis volunteers and National Trust for Scotland Thistle Camps. The work carried out by volunteers amounts to well over two-thousand hours and has saved an already expensive project almost £25,000.

This winter, work is well underway. Stone from Banavie Quarry has been flown up the hill for large sections of revetment required to support the path. It is fantastic to see progress before the snow really takes hold, a few sections of the path are almost finished already.

Nevis Landscape Partnership have achieved fantastic results due to a major financial boost allowing us to tackle the repairs all over the mountain and hire professionals. These works have been a result of six years of hard work from The Nevis Partnership, our partners and the contractors and volunteers who have made them happen. The upgrades will only last if the Ben Nevis Mountain Path is maintained, this is our biggest challenge if we do not want the path to once again fall into disrepair and all the hard work of so many people to go to waste.

To avoid the exact same situation time and time again something has to be done and contributions have to be made regularly in order to preserve such a popular and nationally important path.

If you have enjoyed your trip up Ben Nevis why not throw £1 into the Friends of Nevis cairns at Achintee or Glen Nevis Youth Hostel. If everyone who visited the Glen, never mind climbed the Ben, did the same...

Well, you do the sums.

The Ben Nevis Mountain Path Project is generously funded by Heritage Lottery Fund, Scottish Natural Heritage, Highlands and Islands Enterprise. Work has been carried out by McGowans Ltd. Environmental Engineering, Cairngorm Wilderness Contracts, Highland Conservation, Turnstone, Upland Access, PDG Helicopters, Skyhook Helicopters, Friends of Nevis, National Trust for Scotland and Nevis Landscape Partnership's Trainee Rangers.

www.paypal.me/NevisLandscape
www.friendsofnevis.co.uk/volunteer





THE CLIMBER'S SUMMIT

February 22, 2018
Nevis Centre Studio Session

7:00PM - 22:00PM
mountainfestival.co.uk