

nevis

SUMMER JOURNAL | ISSUE 4



BEN

GLEN

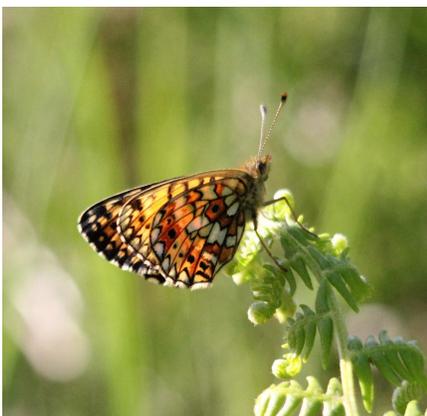
PROJECTS

PEOPLE

VOLUNTEERING



SPRING FEVER



Get Outside.

nevislandscape.co.uk/events

Photo credits: Alex Farquhar, George Park & Richard Mearns



Gach dìleas gu deireadh.

Last but not least.

Welcome to our Summer Journal for 2018.

We are now well and truly into the fifth project year. Recent reflection has showed us how much we have accomplished over the last 4 years, beyond just completing the projects.



Our community engagement through all 19 projects has helped develop partnerships with local businesses, land owners, schools, and organisations. Our minibus has become our mascot, often seen going up and down the Glen carrying people and tools. Volunteer numbers keep going up thanks to Friends of Nevis, the Training Programme, and working holiday groups from the National Trust for Scotland Thistle Camps, Fix the Fells, and the Dirty Weekenders. The well used paths are seeing less erosion; native species and habitats are flourishing, as are the Scots Pine trees for our Future Forests. All in all, the Ben and the Glen are in the best state they have been in for quite a few years and we would like to thank everyone who has helped us achieve this.



To celebrate what we have achieved, we're putting on a festival, Celebrating the Wild. All are welcome, from our partners and volunteers, to locals and tourists of all ages. There will be climbing, path work, tree planting, arts, crafts and more. The event will be held on the 29th of September 2018 around the Lower Falls Bridge. We look forward to seeing you there!

Rowan has been in Norway, there have been musicians in the Glen, and our TVRs have been all over. Jump in to read about everything we've been doing.

WORDS & IMAGES: Iona Skyring



Southwest Norway – A Blueprint for a Wilder Scotland?

By Rowan Doff

I'm standing at the imposing entrance to a valley flanked by high shouldered mountains, eerily similar in appearance to Glencoe.

Three enormous rocky outcrops rise up to my right, while a jagged ridge dominates the skyline to my left, the whole glen drawing the eye inwards as it slowly rises onto the plateau. But something is different. Instead of grassy slopes and bare gleaming rock, thousands of trees cover the valley floor and sides, rising as far as the snow line.

This is in fact Fidjadalen in Southwest Norway, where I recently visited as part of a study tour looking at land use in the region compared to that of the Scottish Highlands. Though the region was heavily deforested by the mid-20th century, a reduction in grazing pressure since has allowed the ecosystem to recover. Today there is a thick covering of birch, rowan, pine, willow and juniper which is characteristic of most rural parts of the area.

As in Scotland however, it's not just farming that prevents woodland growth. Norway is home to large populations of Red and Roe Deer, Moose and Reindeer. All of these are hunted frequently, yet most of this hunting is not carried out by sporting estates or professional stalkers, but by ordinary Norwegians, for whom hunting has been a traditional activity for generations. Hunting licences and quotas are carefully managed by each region in order to maintain healthy deer populations, ensuring high quality game as well as healthier woodlands.

The climate and geology here are strikingly similar to the West Highlands and our ecosystems are made up of the same basic components. It seems clear that with properly managed herbivore populations, Glen Coe, or indeed any part of rural Scotland, could have a healthy woodland ecosystem like Fidjadalen within a generation.

"We've planted over 8,000 trees in Glen Nevis over the past four years as part of the Future Forests project. But there's still work to do if we want to achieve woodland regeneration on the scale seen in Norway."

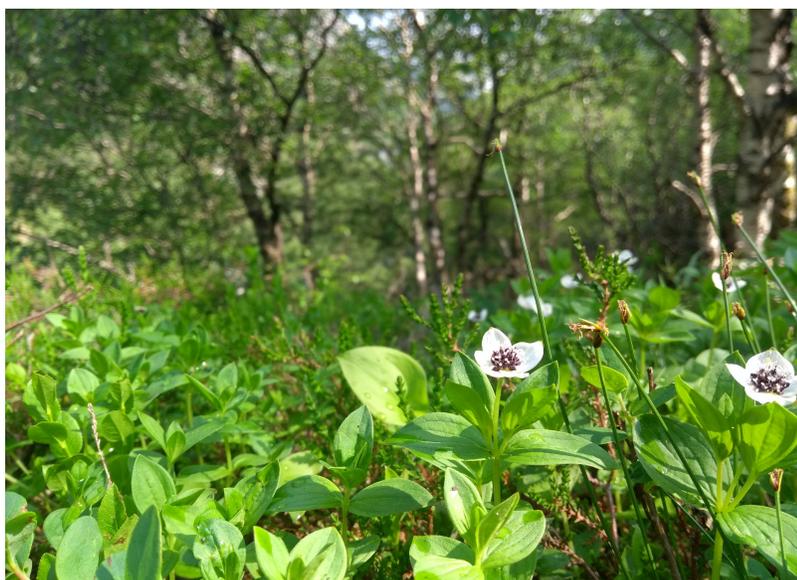
The ethos that everyone is responsible for the countryside underpins Norway's attitude to landscape conservation. Norway has a strong volunteering culture and much of this is organised by the Norwegian Trekking Association (DNT). The DNT has some 260,000 members, with membership fees contributing towards the upkeep of footpaths, marked ski trails and hiking huts across the country. Owners of private 'cabins' - holiday cottages which are popular across Norway - must also pay a 'trail tax' which goes towards maintenance of rural path networks.

This is the kind of visitor payback scheme that is badly needed in the more popular parts of rural Scotland. Tourism is no doubt a good thing, but visitors have their impacts and it is usually down to volunteer groups and charities to fix the damage. The Highlands are seeing ever increasing numbers of visitors and over 200,000 people use the Ben Nevis footpath alone every year. If at least some of the visitor income the area receives could be funnelled back into local conservation projects, groups like the Nevis Landscape Partnership could continue looking after our natural spaces for future generations to enjoy.

Rowan Doff visited SW Norway as part of a study tour developed by ARCH, funded by Erasmus+ and hosted by Duncan Halley of the Stiftelsen Norsk Institutt for Naturforskning (NINA), Trondheim.

If you would like to donate to the Nevis Landscape Partnership, please go to our website:

nevislandscape.co.uk/support/Give/





NEVIS AT NIGHT

WORDS Iona Skyring

IMAGES Graham Niven

We are fortunate enough to live at the foot of the highest peak in the British Isles. Ben Nevis is a Scottish icon, recognised internationally for its cultural heritage and environmental value. The Nevis Landscape Partnership programme was developed to overcome the challenges of managing the important and immense areas of Ben and Glen Nevis, and we have accomplished a great deal since 2014.



In the last year of the programme, there are still a few projects to be completed, so with this in mind, we would like to announce an exciting fundraising event in September. Thanks to event organisers, Abacus Mountain Guides, Light Up Ben Nevis is a guided walk up the Ben that will include music, poetry and light to enhance the natural beauty of the mountain. This will be the first event in the Nevis at Night programme, with two new events that will be added in 2019 and 2020. By participating in this event, you will be helping to raise money for the Ben Nevis Fund that goes towards the conservation and enhancement of the Nevis Management Area.



For all the event details and to register, please go to: nevisatnight.com

Cormac Dolan: Conservation and Creativity

By Iona Skyring

Cormac Dolan is a fulltime student and training to be a mountain leader.

When he's not at university, or climbing the Ben, Cormac is a passionate musician, and a regular star of the Garrison West Open Mic Night.

He recently finished his final year project for the Adventure Tourism Management degree at West Highland College UHI. 'Nature as a Home for Creativity- Music and Nature Project' focused on how the natural environment and conservation can foster musical creativity. As part of the Future Forests project, the Nevis Landscape Partnership helped run a tree planting event for the programme in April, so I sat down with Cormac to find out a bit more about it and what his next steps will be.

When did you start writing music?

"When I moved to Fort William I wrote my first song. So that was about 4 years ago now. I played guitar as a teenager but it wasn't serious."

Do you think moving to Fort William and living in this area has been a big influence for that?

"I think it was due to a lot of things. Before I moved here I was travelling with my best friend who is a musician, so I spent some time singing and jamming with him. We wrote a song together while we were travelling, and he encouraged me to have more confidence in myself and play more music. That stuck with me, so when I moved here, I came with the intention to make sure I was playing guitar as much as I could. Being here gave me the opportunity to be outside with my guitar, going away camping and being able to play and write in these beautiful places. Living in Fort William and the Highlands has definitely been a big part of that, and the songs I've written."



Have you always had an interest in the environment and conservation?

"I would say I've always been sympathetic that way and had some interest, but my course has definitely enhanced it. Learning about conservation and human impact through the course and being around other people who were interested, makes you think about it more. Living in Fort William and volunteering with the Nevis Landscape Partnership also got me thinking more about the environment."

For his Music and Nature Project, Cormac designed and delivered a nature connection course aimed towards song writers and musicians. Over the course of 3 days, the 6 participants were involved in several different activities, both group based and individual experiences, where they could create, write, and discuss music in the natural setting of Glen Nevis. The tree planting event which the NLP helped run earlier in the year as part of our Future Forests Project, made up the first day of the retreat. Cormac says the aim behind this was for it to act as an informal ice breaker activity for the group, and a way for participants to experience a connection with nature and the feeling of giving back to the environment.

“I liked the idea of making a holistic programme that amalgamated all those ideas to be a force for good for people and nature.”

What was your inspiration behind combining music and conservation?

"I wanted to share the experiences I've had like going away camping, going walking, and staying in bothies with my guitar. I found that it brought peace to my mind and allowed me to really access the creative part of my mind without a normal day's distractions. Those experiences really worked for me so I wanted to share that idea and test it to see if the participants got as much from it as I did."

"I also have an interest in sustainable tourism and how to make that work. Volun-tourism has its issues, but I think with conservation work like tree planting, it can be really engaging for people. Maybe you don't get as many trees planted as you would if you were paying someone, but you get people, who otherwise might just be going for a walk, involved and thinking about the area and their impact. Then next time they go, they're going to feel more connected with the area. Anything that connects people to nature is going to be good as it makes them care about it more as they have a sense of stewardship."

Did you get a response from the participants that being out in nature helped them with their writing and creative flow?

"Yeah definitely. Daniel wrote his first song and he hadn't really thought about writing songs before that. Another of the participants said he was quite emotional and he was expressing himself through writing in a way that he hadn't before. I think everyone did something that they wouldn't have done normally. I guess that is to do with me encouraging them, but I think the surroundings definitely helped bring a calmness to their minds and stopped all the chatter that is usually around them."

How was the experience with Outlandia?

"Daniel was the only participant that ended up using the space as the others weren't available. It was a real shame because I think they would have gained a lot from it by having a bit of solo time after the retreat. If I can keep developing the programme I'd love the chance to go to Outlandia again and make full use of it, as I think it's a great space for creativity."

Going forward, what do you think the next step will be?

"In the near future, I like the idea of working with the Nevis Partnership again, maybe doing something different like path work and going up to the CIC hut for a couple of nights."

"Anything that engages people with the area, with nature, and the work that the Nevis Partnership do is an important side to the programme for me. It would be good to run another pilot over the summer as I've had a lot of interest from people who want to be a part of it since I ran the first one."

"I think in the long term, I'd like to develop the idea in Fort William, then go travelling and carry the idea with me and see what other people are doing elsewhere. I'd like to pick up other ideas and learn from that, then I can bring the programme back here."

There are many opportunities to get out in nature this summer at our volunteering and engagement events so if you would like to get involved, please visit our website:

nevislandscape.co.uk/events



What would we do

With the end of the Nevis Training Programme looming, it's a good time to reflect on everything our Trainee Volunteer Rangers have accomplished.

We've had 33 TVR's since 2015, who have seen 7 of our projects completed, thousands of trees planted, many kilometres of path repaired, and hundreds of species of flora and fauna surveyed. It's been all systems go for trainee rangers, Edith and George who started in April, and they've got some great stories to share.

George Park

What an experience! I never could have dreamed of doing everything I have accomplished these last three months.

I wanted to take on this adventure as a trainee volunteer ranger to find a sense of self and see what I was capable of doing. I thought this would be a valuable experience for me, having suffered from some mental health issues, to be able to give something back to our great outdoors. I believe everyone has their part to play in protecting and conserving our environment and I've found my contribution through the Nevis Training Programme.

One of the standout activities during my time was a visit to Caol primary school to work with P1 and P2 students as part of their environment program. We ran a couple of activities based on recycling, sustainability, and our Leave no Trace message. Edith ran a recycling game, and Iona and I did an art activity using materials from the natural environment, and the children loved it.



Working with kids was something I would have never imagined myself being capable of and was very nervous about beforehand, but it was a great experience.

The training and workshops we did were always really interesting and gave me many skills that I would not have found elsewhere. I am hoping I'll be able to use those in future and pass them on to others.

The whole three months were great, but the highlight for me was the path work. It gave me a great sense of accomplishment that I played such a big part in maintaining the well used paths around the Glen and the stand out Ben Nevis path.

Bringing together everything I had learnt over the last three months, Edith and I climbed Ledge Route on our final day. This was challenging, but incredible and worth it for the exquisite views at the top. I had many other amazing experiences like this during my time with the Nevis Landscape Partnership and am grateful for the opportunity to explore and preserve the unique landscapes of Ben and Glen Nevis.



without our volunteers?

Edith Blasberg

The Trainee Volunteer Ranger programme with Nevis Landscape Partnership was amazing.

It would take a long time to tell you the story of everything that George and I have done, and learnt over the last three months. To sum it up though, I've just spent twelve weeks outside, in Glen Nevis, gaining all sorts of skills in conservation work. Hopefully this short diary will give you an idea of a day in the life of a Nevis Landscape Partnership Trainee Volunteer Ranger.

My second day as a TVR was one to remember. After learning about mink, and mixing the clay and sand, we went up the Glen, setting up traps and rafts along the river, to monitor this invasive species. We stopped at the shed to pick up the telegraph poles and owl boxes. Next, we carried all of this to the middle of a muddy sheep field to build new homes for the local owls. Now I get to smile at these boxes when I drive past them. It was an amazing, satisfying day of hard work to start our TVR programme.



I learned a great deal from Nathan Berrie from the John Muir Trust while we were conducting habitat surveys in Steall Falls meadow and Meall Cumhann. We monitored dwarf heath plots and tree transects to gain data for assessing deer habitats. George and I did many similar surveys during our time, collecting species and habitat data to monitor the health of the many ecosystems within Glen Nevis.

As part of the programme, we were able to participate in several other training courses including outdoor first aid, leave no trace, guiding the extra mile, and mountain awareness. We also had training days specific to ecology where we learned about bats, butterflies and moths and plants. This knowledge was an essential part of our day to day work in conducting plant and wildlife surveys in the Glen.

We also spent many days with the path officer, Dougie Sinclair. Path maintenance was a big part of our time with the Partnership. This work is physically demanding, but very rewarding; it is greatly satisfying to walk on parts of the paths that we helped to build!

The program has been a great experience and has given me the essential skills I need to hopefully continue to work in conservation in the future. Thank you to everyone from the Nevis Landscape Partnership.

Six new TVRs have just begun their three month Nevis adventure which you can follow on social media and through the website. If you would like to volunteer, please visit:

nevislandscape.co.uk/events

Celebrating The Wild



September 29, 2018
Lower Falls Area

10:00 AM – 4:00 PM
nevislandscape.co.uk/events