

**THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE : PLANNING FOR A SUSTAINABLE
PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN PEOPLE AND PLACE, OXFORD**

MAY 2000

**SCOTLAND'S CULTURAL LANDSCAPE: ROGER CROFTS,
SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE**

Introduction

Thank you very much Chairman, Good Morning everyone.

I am not going to attempt to give my definition of cultural landscape but I do have some affinity with my fellow geographer, Mechteld Rosser'ion. What I really want to do is talk a little about the distinction between natural and cultural landscapes look at approaches taken in Scotland, identify what I feel is Scotland's contribution to European landscapes, note in passing the mechanisms currently available for protecting and managing landscapes, and then to give my prospective from a wider point of view of the principles for landscapes and suggest the way forward for ning, protecting, managing and promoting landscapes.

Scotland's Landscape: Natural and Cultural?

Scotland's landscape natural and cultural, or natural or cultural? Let us start with the recognition that the natural landscape of Scotland began about 3.5 billion years ago. In Assynt for example it is extremely difficult to find any evidence of human activity of any significance in the scale of the landscape with the bedrock of Lewisian age of 2.5 billion years ago and the rocks of Suilven of something like 650 million years ago.

In fact, the geological underpinning can be easily characterised in our landscape: the topography, the rocks, the tectonic structures, the melding of Scotland from four component parts as it is floated up from the South Atlantic. Scotland's bio-geographical zones are vitally important in the understanding of the landscape of Scotland. Whether you define it as natural or cultural is neither here or there because of the topography, the rock types, the soil types, the slope regime, the climate, the weather etc are all quite influential in how man has then interacted with the natural landscape. We must also remember that interaction has been over a

very short period indeed, as this pollen diagram from the Black Loch in Fife quite graphically shows. Here is the development of natural vegetation in the post-glacial period from 12,000 to around 3500 and then the dramatic change with the coming in of sedges, grasses and other cultivated plants as a result of the clearance of the native vegetation and different forms of cultivation. So, we really talking about a very short period of time, perhaps at the most 5000 years. But of course, the affects are quite dramatic.

We should also recognise that the cultural dimensions of the landscape are widespread and very variable, we do have patterns of use of the modern period imposed on patterns of older use. For instance there is an old field system on the edge of Edinburgh which is now also a golf course, so we need to recognise the dynamism in the landscape that we now talk about.

We also need to recognise that perceptions of landscape vary. Probably all of us would have some affinity with Horatio McCulloch's painting of Glencoe in the middle of the 19th century, but that is not everybody's view of Glencoe. If you are a McDonald or a Campbell you would probably have an entirely different view of it. If you are a Wallace Arnold bus tourist from the lowland plains of England you will probably also have a different view. We must bear these in mind as well, as our views are not sacrosanct on these issues.

What we in SNH have sought to do (and I do not want to go into any great depth, but I am happy to take this up in informal discussion afterwards), is to characterise the landscape, like our colleagues in Countryside Agency have done in England, so that we can recognise the underpinning elements of variety and diversity and also significantly what are the types of changes that would have a positive impact to reinforce or a negative impact to undermine those different landscape characters. The map summaries at the Scotland level 56 landscape character types and it is underpinned by 29 reports identifying over 350 landscape character areas.

Scotland's Contribution to European Cultural Landscapes

I would like now to speculate a little on what I would call Scotland's contribution to European cultural landscapes, I have identified four groups: the distinctive, the commonplace, the doubtful and the de-graded and you will see what I mean as I go through each of these categories.

(1) **The Distinctive**

I think it is very important that we do not lose sight of the **distinctive** but audiences like this are very used to distinctive landscapes and what makes them tick. A quintessential one in a Scottish and, indeed in Western Ireland, is the machair: it would not have existed if we did not have comminuted calcareous shells blown into plain forms evolving naturally and then utilised for cultivation. The two elements together, along with the harvesting of kelp and other resources from the inter tidal area as a fertiliser, means that we have a unique cultural landscape; one I believe that we should consider for submission in the longer term as a cultural landscape type for World Heritage status. I think it fits very well with the criteria. I am still trying to persuade some of my colleagues in Historic Scotland that this is the right approach in principle. But there are some characteristics of agricultural practices which might undermine this system and we need to bear that in mind.

We also have another quintessential landscape in Scotland, the Links golf courses. We have lots of golf courses, but it is the Links golf courses that are important because they are the ones where the natural physiography of sand dune systems combines with the utilisation of these areas over the last 250 years for human enjoyment.

We also have quite distinctive landscapes from the now much maligned landlordism period; for example, Blair Castle, owned now by someone resident in South Africa, with their magnificent policy woodlands largely of non-native trees - hated by nature conservationists loved by cultural landscape experts. These are also distinctive signatures, they are somewhat different from the more planned and designed gardens and landscapes

perhaps in other parts of the UK and they often have a back cloth of the mountains.

We also have also what many ecologists would think as an essentially natural landscape - the blanket bogs or flows of the Caithness and Sutherland which we have just put forward, to my great satisfaction, as a potential site for ascribing on the World Heritage List. But this is not just a natural site because it results from grazing patterns and it results from burning regimes, so we do have a subtle interplay in that area. So that again one I think that is a distinctive type of landscape. And I could mention others like Heather moorland for example.

(2) **The Commonplace**

It is fine to recognise the distinctive, but what about the commonplace? We have, I think, new commonplace landscapes in Scotland as well as in other parts of Britain. For example, an area managed by the State Forestry Commission largely of non-native trees but is regarded now as a commonplace landscape by the people who live and work in this area of Aberdeenshire. It is a valued place which people go to for amenity for recreation purposes - the Lord's Throat and Paradise Woods on the Don: therefore it has a signature. We would not designate it as anything other than perhaps a Forest Nature Park but it is a commonplace landscape which is vital to the local society.

We also have many commonplace landscapes on the coast. I deliberately show this slide of Girdleness and Aberdeen harbour because it does raise all the questions of what we mean by commonplace landscapes. It is very easy for us to talk about rural landscapes but we have to recognise that here is a long-term landscape, particularly the harbour at the mouth of the Dee which has been developed over many centuries. It has great challenges in it because it is now the oil harbour but what will happen in 30 years time when that type of economic pulse declines - what sort of landscape will we have alongside the golf course on the headland?

We also have many other rural landscapes: some with small fields, some with larger fields. Those of you who have been to Battleby will recognise our visitor centre with some of the managed woods around it, but beyond is a pattern of fields and hedgerows some of which have survived and others which have not, this is a very commonplace landscape in Scotland. It is highly valued by local residents, even though it might not be highly valued by those who are looking for biodiversity on agricultural land or those who are looking for more traditional landscapes.

Those commonplace, and therefore familiar, landscapes to the broader population are important.

(3) **Doubtful Cultural Landscapes**

There is then a category I call “doubtful” cultural landscapes and I think there are real challenges. Do we have a category of “energy landscapes” because we have to recognise that there are economic forces for change which are having a very significant impact such as wind farm proposals. We are dealing with this day to day in our work trying to assess the impact on landscape character, on visual amenity, on biodiversity, on diurnal wildlife patterns when this sort of activity is being driven by an environmental imperative at a global scale signed up by the UK Environment Department and promoted very heavily by our Deputy Prime Minister. What view do we take of these new and emerging landscapes of which we have a lot more in 10 years time if we are going to deliver our part of the Kyoto deal on renewables? Or looking back to the past, what sort of view would we take now if we would developing the other form of renewable energies - hydroelectricity? Here is the dam in the Pentlands at LoganLee which looks very nice as part of the landscape now. I often ask myself how my organisation, Scottish Natural Heritage, would have dealt with these sorts of bids for renewable energy involving drowning of valleys, removing of settlements, wrecking biodiversity. And yet some people would say these are now important cultural landscapes. I think they are very

doubtful from a broader perspective but we have to recognise that some people will take a different view.

Many of us will take a view that the deserted landscapes, there are many Scotland and there are many in my own part of England in Leicestershire the deserted villages, is doubtful because of the causes of desertion. Are these important landscapes? Some people regard these as 'the lost land' of the people that are residing in Australia and North America. Yet other people regard these as the vitally important biodiversity areas. We have to be very careful about what view we take of these areas and that is why I have put them in the doubtful category.

As the manifestation of former exploitative industries, the oil and coal industries of the central belt of Scotland between Edinburgh and Glasgow are of interest. Most of us perhaps feel antipathetic to these very doubtful landscapes. Yet, if you talk to the local communities you will find that these are very important landscapes to them because they recognise of it as their heritage, and it links to the occupations of their fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers, and it is therefore an important part of their landscape. But I would doubt if we would classify them as significant but this is a point I will come back to later.

(4) **Degraded Cultural Landscapes**

Then we have the degraded landscapes and I say this partly from an economic point of view and partly because of the suppression of natural environmental systems and processes. Surely we cannot count these landscapes as valued. They can be low social value and low environmental, although they may be of very high economic value. Take, for example, the ski development at Glenshee. Will it survive with the type of climatic change prediction we are looking at even in a half century timescale with higher precipitation, higher temperatures and more winds? What view do we take of these sorts of landscapes?

There is a European dimensions particularly for other countries. What sort of view do we take of new economic activities like aquaculture, very significant in Western Norway - very significant in the Irish Republic and very significant in the Northern Isles and the West Coast of Highlands of Scotland? I deliberately chose this photograph to ask what view do we take of redundant slate quarries beautifully landscaped with Government money? They are surely degraded landscapes from an environmental and ecological point of view. What is their cultural significance? And there is the enigmatic question about the Common Agriculture Policy, the decision-making process which results in the production of products which are not needed but are most highly subsidised per unit area in Europe which create a tremendous landscape impact and arguably create health impacts: oilseed rape.

There are also other landscapes which are still said to be important, for instance the picture of a grouse moor - you can see the grouse butts on it - this is the moor that has the record for the highest number of bags in a shooting season in the SW of Scotland and is the source of tremendous argument between ecologists and sport shooting interests about what caused the decline. A very de-graded landscape because it does not produce the economic benefits which the owner wants, and a very downgraded landscape ecologically. What view do we take of that? Surely we cannot count those in important cultural landscapes in the protection sense.

So I have perhaps raised more questions than I have answered but I think there are a whole number of dimensions there about how we look and perceive landscapes from environmental, cultural, social and economic points of view.

Mechanisms available for Cultural Landscapes in Scotland

So what sort of system do we have in Scotland? We have a formal integrated, statutory based mechanism but it has no political support: the Natural Heritage Area, which was an attempt to try and bring the different elements together. From a formal point of view, we have landscape beauty and amenity in National Scenic Areas

which has a very weak statutory basis and no immediate prospect of new provision despite our submissions to Government. We have an administrative approach, jointly with Historic Scotland, for historic gardens and designed landscapes but that is purely voluntary within planning system. That is why we have sought to develop a whole landscape approach with our Natural Heritage Zone programme linking protected areas with the wider countryside, landscape with ecological and earth heritage parameters. This is rather like the Character Programme and the Natural Areas Programme of Countryside Agency and English Nature respectively.

Principles for Cultural Landscapes

Let me now reflect a little on what I might call some principles for landscapes. I have identified seven from my own experience in Scotland.

- Firstly, as you would expect from what I have already said, **the commonplace is as important as the distinctive**: the essential connection between people and landscape means that those landscapes which are relatively commonplace are very important, particularly for the local residents, compared with the distinctive which is often for the specialist.
- Second, that we must recognise that there are **some landscapes have high economic value but low social and environmental values**: take for example blanket a forestation taking no account of the underlying cultural landscape, no account of the hydrology and taking no account of the wildlife. I believe that we must not be driven into the mindless preservation of landscape types just because they exist, especially as they have arisen as a result of market forces with override other values and this is a classic case in Southwest Scotland.
- Thirdly, we must recognise that **landscape itself is dynamic**: we should recognise that natural changes, particularly in the future in relation to changing climate and its affect on vegetation and soils, changes in social patterns which have an impact on the spread of habitation and on the demand

for recreation, the effect of market forces on the distribution of economic activity and supporting infrastructure, and the effects of technology, are all going to have an impact on the landscape. Take, for example, the pattern of changes in the land cover of Scotland - a manifestation of economic, social and environmental factors over a 40-year period since the late 1940s. There are very complex changes but clearly we are looking at landscape quality and diversity degradation, a loss of heather moor, and the quintessential balance between natural and human activity interrupted with increases in grasslands conifer plantations and increases in bracken etc. As a result we have fragmentation of the landscape, and loss of its diversity in a whole series of ways - loss of hedgerows, loss of hedgerow trees, larger fields, decline in native woodland and increase in plantation woodland.

- My fourth principle is a very obvious one that **values about landscape change**. The perception of Georgian and Victorian landscape painters, like this one by J W M Turner (the Upper Loch Awe on the road to Oban) is liked by some people but we also need to recognise that that is not everybody's perception of landscape. There is an equal quality, for example, in degraded industrial landscapes. If I can challenge you to think of that because on this slide in the background there is a shale bing of the 19th and early 20th century which is now a protected landscape listed by Historic Scotland (quite rightly so given the value, not that Historic Scotland surveyors put on them, but the value local communities put on them). There is value in this landscape an economic sense and there is a value in a social sense because there is new employment in the coal deposits and an opportunity for local communities to re-construct landscape in different ways for their own benefit. We must be very aware of imposing values from a particular stratum in society which may be represented by people like us who have a particular professional bias.
- Fifth, I firmly believe that **a whole landscape approach is essential**: I still believe that there is too much separation between natural and human landscapes, between amenity and ecological approaches, and particularly between artefacts and sites on the one hand and whole landscape

approaches on the other. Our zonation of Scotland for example, is a deliberate strategy to develop integrated approaches to wildlife, landscape, amenity, recreation, access, biodiversity with all the constituent interests. We also need to bear in mind that much valued wildlife has a very high dependency upon cultural landscapes.

- Sixth, I believe that **cultural landscapes are relevant to achieving sustainable development** : we have had very little reference to that so far. We need to ensure that there are integrated approaches to cultural landscapes which recognise the different components of sustainable development: the economic, the social, the cultural and the environmental values. So the character zones type of approach being adopted in many parts of Europe is an important mechanism.
- Seven, **landscape quality should be and has to be a managed asset**: often we spend far too much time deliberating or identifying character and far too little time on the requirements for harnessing or coping with the various forces of change. We need to recognise that there are opportunities for improving landscape quality provided that there is a clear vision and a managed process to achieve that vision.

THE WAY FORWARD

I conclude by identifying a number of practical measures which need to be undertaken if we are going to achieve a greater partnership between people and place for landscape within a European context;

1) Defining cultural landscapes

First, we should consider the definition of cultural landscapes by agreeing technically robust methodologies, ensuring that there is joint effort between all relevant experts and ensuring that there is a inclusive approach which embraces all constituent interests local and others.

2) **Protecting cultural landscapes**

We need to take a new look at the protection of landscapes. International and European approaches in Conventions and Charters are important. However, all too often, they are coercive and dirigiste in their approach rather than encouraging. If they are going to be successful in their application in practice, then they must recognise how the balance between practicality and acceptance, on the one hand, and key principals and responsibilities, on the other hand, are to be achieved. National legislative frameworks should be put in place and certainly, in the context of the UK, have to recognise the devolved administrative responsibilities of, for instance, the Scottish Parliament. Perhaps most important of all in achieving protection of landscapes is the need to have greater leverage on the major factors of landscape change. Here I identify agriculture, forestry, transport and energy as the most critical. Ability to influence European approaches for these sectors, most particularly European Union's Common Agricultural Policy through the effective implementation of the proposed European Union Sixth Environmental Action Programme and the implementation of its Biodiversity Strategy are vital.

3) **Managing cultural landscapes**

In managing landscapes, it is essential that the trends in changes to the landscape are measured over a period of time and that there is full understanding of the causal factors of these changes. It is usually profitable to seek to identify best practice and ensure that it is promoted widely to all constituent interests. Ultimately the beneficial management landscape is best brought about by a mixture of incentive and regulation.

4) **Promoting cultural landscapes**

Finally, promoting the importance of landscape must not be forgotten. We should stimulate much greater education on the importance of landscapes to those who own and manage land particularly as the majority of land is in private ownership. We also need to promote the importance of landscapes to decision-makers in the UK and throughout Europe if we are to move forward. We also need to build on the gradually closer working relationships between professionals from all relevant disciplines which conferences like this can encourage and through joint activity by ICOMOS and IUCN at European and UK levels.

Thank you.