

SHARED STORIES

A Year in the Cairngorms

An Anthology

Edited by
Anna Fleming
Merryn Glover

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CAIRNGORMS
NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
ÙGH DARRAS PÀIRC NÀISEANTA A'
MHONÀIDH RÙAIDH


WOODLAND
TRUST


ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL

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Introduction

MERRYGN GLOVER

It's a very powerful thing to fall in love.

Lynn Cassells, p 77

This book is a story of the heart. It is a collection of writings from very different people with one thing in common: their interactions with the rocky heart of Scotland, the Cairngorms. As you will see, it is what Nan Shepherd called 'a traffic of love'.

The anthology arises from the 2019 project *Shared Stories: A Year in the Cairngorms*. Organised and part-funded by the Cairngorms National Park Authority, with additional funding from the Woodland Trust and Creative Scotland, the project set out to encourage people to write creatively about how we and nature thrive together. As the first Writer in Residence for the Cairngorms National Park, my role was to facilitate this work through a varied programme of activities taking me all over the bens and glens of the Cairngorms and into the company of countless folk. There were open workshops in three locations, drop-ins at the Cairngorms Nature Big Weekend and Forest Fest, and workshops with schools, rangers, health walk groups, educators, land-based workers, outdoor instructors and Park volunteers. We invited everyone to the table and welcomed every voice.

Throughout the year, rich conversations emerged about people's experiences of the natural world of the Cairngorms, whether they were born-and-bred locals, settlers or tourists passing through. Inevitably, there are as many perspectives as there are people. There can be controversy and conflicts of interest across the National Park, but the space for shared creative activity enabled us to exchange views with open-ness and interest, rather than argument.

The groups I attended had some really great insights into the landscape, nature and ways of life that I had not seen before.

BLAIR ATHOLL PARTICIPANT

Most people claim to value nature, to see it as both beautiful and necessary, but most of us have blind spots about the ways in which we threaten it. A key element of the project, therefore, was to address blind spots. Not by exposing ignorance or harmful lifestyles, but by turning the focus the other way and opening our eyes to nature: encouraging us to peer deeply, to pay attention, to discover the complexity and wonder of the world around. We appealed to the senses, going outside wherever possible to tune into the sights, smells, sounds and feelings of a place. Sometimes I spread forest finds across a table – moss, lichen, leaves, stones and branches – and we focused on one small thing. Much like Linda Cracknell in *Weaving High Worlds* on page 46, people discovered infinite dimensions.

Attending the Shared Stories workshops changed the way I appreciated the Cairngorms. I saw a richness of colour and depth of texture that had previously passed me by.

BALLATER PARTICIPANT

But more than just discovery, the project invited people to capture their encounters in words. In trying to find the right words, we are forced to pay even closer attention and move beyond assumptions. What *exactly* is the colour of that sky – here, now? How surprising that this clump of earthy moss smells like medicine, not dirt. And when we make attention a habit – a way of being in the world – we begin to notice how astonishing, how precious and how vulnerable nature is. Alec Finlay in *Conspectus*, page 16 talks of ‘the power of looking.’ We become aware of what is here, what is lost and what is on the brink. It becomes a gaze of love. And, I hope, of committed action. We will look after what we love.

Thank you for opening our eyes and ears.

KINGUSSIE PARTICIPANT

An important thread through *Shared Stories* has been the celebration of languages. In the workshops, we explored the Gaelic, Scots and Pictish place names of the Cairngorms, along with the rich lexicon of local words for the outdoors. Amanda Thomson's *A Scots Dictionary of Nature* was an inspirational source, as you will see from her *sixty two words for rainy weather* on page 62

Early in the year, I invented the poetic form the *Cairngorms Lyric* (page 11) which proved a dynamic tool for enabling all kinds of people to capture a Cairngorms moment while also enjoying language diversity. Folks were delighted to discover they could write the entire Lyric in their own language and I was delighted in turn to hear many different languages joining the *Shared Stories* throng. That is why a Spanish Lyric is included in this collection, along with poems in Gaelic and Doric.

Being able to use my own language makes me feel I belong.

ABERNETHY PARTICIPANT

A fundamental aspect of the project has been the sharing of the stories. This always happened in the workshops, of course, but also spilled out onto eight banners displayed in Local Information Centres across the Park. We held an open mic night as part of the new Badenoch Festival in September, drawing both workshop participants and others to tell their tales. In addition, we encouraged input from anybody, anywhere, who would like to express their Cairngorms nature encounters, and these pieces – from as far afield as the US and Australia – appear on our project blog: sharedstoriescairngorms.tumblr.com It has been exciting, too, to see *Shared Stories* activities in other contexts, such as RSPB's Sarah Walker getting Junior Rangers to write Cairngorms Lyrics at Insh Marshes.

For me, it has been a year of gifts. I have learnt so much from my own traffic with this place and its people and have a head humming with experiences, images and words. Some of these have taken shape in

my blog about the project, Writing the Way, and others are emerging as poems, but much of it will continue to find voice in the years to come, I am sure. For this store of treasure, I am deeply grateful.

This anthology, therefore, seeks to capture the range of voices and experiences that have responded to *Shared Stories: A Year in the Cairngorms*. The work here spans young children to a woman in her 80s; academics to farmers; ‘locals’ to visitors. There are works commissioned from four professional authors and anonymous pieces found amongst papers at the end of drop-in workshops; there are poems and prose pieces; serious reflections and comic encounters; enduring memories and luminous visions.

Throughout, these voices express the shared sense that we, in our humanity, are part of nature and integral to this place. In the earth’s thriving, is our own thriving; in the well-being of the Cairngorms environment, is the well-being of its community. As Samantha Walton says in *Embodiment*, page 22 ‘How rare to be alive to all this’.

We invite you to celebrate with us this shared life – and this shared love – of the Cairngorms.

How to use this Book

ANNA FLEMING

Within these pages, you will find a variety of poetry and prose. There are stories of joy and curiosity, moments of fear and lyrical descriptions of deep reverence.

The book is arranged into four thematic sections. *Approach* features discovery, beginnings and routes into the Cairngorms. *Here* focuses on specific places, including mountains and rivers, and ways of depicting them, such as through place names and stories. *Leaves and Beasties* looks at the more-than-human life in plants, animals, birds and insects. Finally, *Living* explores the texture of daily life in the Park, with writing on weather, adventure, love and neighbours.

While the book is carefully arranged, you can read it in any order. Dip in and out. Find the pieces that speak to you and come back to them.

We would like you to see this anthology as a guide to your explorations of the Cairngorms National Park. Through the words here, you will find company: people who have trodden the path before you; someone else who has gazed on a rowan or an ant; or a person whose experience and perspective lies far beyond your own.

Words come to life when you read them aloud. Read parts with friends, your dog, your family or even a nearby tree. Enjoy the sounds of the words. Feel them shape your tongue. Make your own mountain voice. Take this book out to the hills and woods or bring the Cairngorms indoors.

We hope the anthology helps you to see old things in new ways and new things in different ways. Play with language. Be inspired. Have a go at making your own creative responses to the incredible world we live in.

Suggested activities

Teachers, outdoor instructors, rangers and group facilitators can use this anthology for Outdoor Learning and experiences.

Select a few pieces to read outdoors or in the classroom. Discuss:

- How do the writers capture their experiences?
- What do you find surprising?
- How does one piece compare to another?

Think about the structure of this anthology. We chose the thematic sections: APPROACH, HERE, LEAVES and BEASTIES, AND LIVING.

- Do you think some of the pieces would fit in a different section?
- How else could the book have been organised?
- Can you think of different thematic headings?

Make your own creative responses to the words, ideas and images. Try drawing, painting, collage, dance or acting. For instance, how could you perform Amanda Thomson's *sixty two words for rainy weather*?

Write your own Cairngorms Lyrics.

Use the anthology alongside *Literary Landscapes* – an interactive map and resource on place names, culture, nature and heritage in the Cairngorms. *Literary Landscapes* can be found on the Cairngorms National Park website.

For more activities and resources visit:

<https://cairngorms.co.uk/caring-future/education/>

The Cairngorms Lyric

This is a new kind of poem invented for *Shared Stories: A Year in the Cairngorms*. It is inspired by forms like the Japanese Haiku and the American Sentence, but unique to the Cairngorms. A ‘Lyric’ is a poetic form that expresses personal feelings but includes a wide range of styles and structures.

The Cairngorms Lyric is made up of

- fifteen words*
 - an element of nature from the Cairngorms
 - a word or name of non-English origin (e.g. Pictish, Scots and Gaelic place-names)
- It can be in any language.
- It can be any line length, number of lines, number of sentences and punctuation.
- It can include rhyme or not and can have a title, including or in addition to the 15 words.

You will find a growing number of *Cairngorms Lyrics* online as well as a selection in this anthology, including the connected series *The High Tongue* by Merryn Glover.

Read through the selection in this anthology, follow the steps above and have a go at writing your own!

* 15 words because: the Park was established in 2003.

- It includes **5** local authorities.
- It has **5** of the 6 highest mountains in Scotland: Ben Macdui, Braeriach, Cairn Toul, Sgor an Lochain Uaine, Cairn Gorm
- Its waters flow into **5** of Scotland’s most famous rivers. The Spey, The Dee, The Don, The Tay and The Esk

3 x 5 = 15

APPROACH

A Rocky Beginning

The first time I walked
in the Cairngorms,
I almost didn't.
We took a 'shortcut'
straight up the route
of the ski-lift at Glenshee,
on scudding scree,
and unforgiving shale,
with knees frail
and heart protesting.
I turned back twice,
heaving my breath
in ragged rasps;
not my idea of leisure.
Then staggering,
over the burst lip,
an atlas
unfurled to the horizon,
ancient gods
stretching out their calloused hands,
to greet mine,
inviting me onward
in unutterable tongues.

JANE MACKENZIE

On a blastie morning
we gather to wander
through the woods
watching squirrels at play

ISABELL SANDERSON

Conspectus

ALEC FINLAY

Where are we? It's a question that matters to some people more than others.

There are climbers who will spend days in a fever climbing peaks whose names they don't know. In the pub the hikers tell their route, placing the salt and pepper shaker. Remember to turn left at the fork. Names are what's needed to get you to and from the car park. The riskier a journey is the more names it has. There are traditional poems in the Hebrides which list sailor's landmarks. Each reef and skerry needed a name. Even today Ian Stephen has a love poem that will guide your tiller safely into Stornoway harbour.

I don't walk far. I've never climbed a mountain. Illness produces dark pools of lactic if I go up a minor slope. What I need, what I love, are places to gaze at the landscape. Conspectus.

They are the right places to look out from. They've always existed. I only gave them their name, conspectus, to insist on the importance of viewpoints and appreciate what we gain – especially those of us with constrained walking – if we see with attention.

If, as Emerson says, the eye needs a horizon for its own good, must the line be made by walking? There are traditions that understood the power of looking. Maps of the Highlands name seats, *suidhe*, and chairs, *cathaoir*, where kings, chiefs and saints asserted their power. There are *dumha slega* and *eilreig*, the ancient mounds of the blood rite where Gaels would watch the hunt. Later these became spying hillocks for deer-stalkers. Go to a *dùn* and you'll usually find yourself a good view.

A conspectus is a place where terrain reveals itself. A viewpoint where the landscape makes the kind of sense we need. The eye falls on the *here*, *here*, and *here*, of the hills that surround us. What makes a conspectus exist is saying the names of each summit in turn. All I do is write them down. This conspectus was made at Auchtavan, in upper Glen Feardar, with the help of Gill Russell. It contains the names of wild-cats, Gaelic colours, tits, hags, a priest, a saddle, and a spoon-like crag. Between the names there are stories.

Colour Trend

A conspectus is a reminder that eye-lines travel around a circular field, until they reach where we button up at the back. Colour place-names, arranged into colour wheels, poems, or trends (paths), are a kind of looking that return us to walking.

Bealach Dearg, is the *Red-way Pass*, leading from Invercauld, on by Loch Builg, to Tomintoul. Ballochbuie, from Bealach Buidhe, is the *Yellow-way Pass*. These names belong to ancient drove roads, or, to one continuing drove that stretches on either side of the River Dee. Dearg is named for pinkish red granite, even if it is grey with lichen. Ballochbuie refers to the moorgrass beyond the great wood.

These path names are common-sense judgements of what is underfoot. To the east, past Gairnside, there's another drove, the Ca' Du, *Dark Crossing*, between Glen Conrie and Glen Carvie. Another path of the same name led from Dunandhu to Blairnamarrow, in Glen Conglass. Ca is from *cadha*, a narrow pass. These are things you needed to know. And the dark or black, well, John Milne says they were known as black roads. His translations can be fanciful but, in this case, I agree, as dark names refer to moss or peat roads. They were a warning to take care if cattle were being driven in wet weather.

More helpful advice comes from Peter Drummond, who notes that liath names indicate grey mica schist, which should be sure to stand on. In a wonderful passage of observation John MacInnes gives *glas* as the colour of the land that one walks over between the arable land and the moor, putting the township at one's back. In my first book on place-awareness, *Some Colour Trends*, the English translation I gave for the dark roads was *Peatsmirched-trends*. Imagine cleaning that off your boots.

red	D	yellow
way	H	way
	É	

Coorying behind a cairn
Cold wind hurtling
Eyes squinting
Lashes filtering snow
Grimace, Brace, Go...

NANCY CHAMBERS

Snowy kippen up Cairn Toul.
Blending wi' the snaw,
Bletherin' wi' the imaky-amaky.
Scary, scary!

LUCY GRANT,
SPEYSIDE HIGH SCHOOL

Embodiment

after Nan Shepherd

I've tasted ice
high on the hull of the hill
plunged hands into snow
& counted ten
to taste time
to feel the cold world dreaming

Clouds, grey on the undersides race by
ile flottante
pierced by lunar rays, cosmic radiation
the valley spread around me like a bed
laid with the carelessness of glaciers

The eye is choked
with so much trash
dead men's thoughts
I stand on my head
lift arms high so the light touches my fingertips first
anything to dismiss the tired old ways of seeing

I want more than a sea change
I want freezing wind
a sheet of snow
a wave, an ice storm
something fierce as a hurricane to blast the stony world

The body is like a sheet
the body is a flute
the body is a kind of cool and teasing air
I float, I sing with it, patiently, I dance
eyes flickering to the path whose purpose can be seen for miles
inviting witness
from the greyest reaches of sight, from the sky
from the earth itself

I swallow light, sound
cup the hands round the shell of the ear & hear crystal
the planet's sticky insides melting, reforming
how rare to be alive to all this, & so open

I walk
with my hands
with my tongue
over the purple skin of the blaeberry
touch the skein of the moor's root
with skin that is barely (that is completely) human

SAMANTHA WALTON

First Awake

Morning sun sits atop pine
in bright, clear sky. Woodsmoke
lifts and drifts above; white
wisps captured in icy air.
Hot coffee, held in trembling
hands, mimics the chimney's
morning breath.

Overhead,
a hawk hovers, stills, swoops
then catches. Hunter and prey,
for a moment, captured
against the powder blue.

RONNIE MACKINTOSH

HERE

The High Tongue

MERRYGN GLOVER

A series of Cairngorms Lyrics on the Gaelic names of the Cairngorms mountains

Ben MacDui – Beinn MacDuibh The Mountain of the Son of Duff

High King of Thunder
Old Grey Man
Chief of the Range
Head of the Clan

Cairn Gorm – An Càrn Gorm The Blue Mountain

Rainbow height:

blaeberry
bog brown
red deer
snow white
blackbird
dog violet
moss green
bright

Cairn Toul – Càrn an t-Sabhail
The Barn Shaped Mountain

Storehouse of stone

Boulders shouldering like beasts
in this dark byre

Hail drumming the watershed

Ben Vuirich – Beinn a' Bhùirich
Mountain of the Roaring

Once the haunt of wolves
howling at night

now just their ghosts
in failing light

Carn Ealer – Carn an Fhidhleir
Mountain of the Fiddler

She plays the rock
with the bow of the wind
for the stars to dance

Braeriach – Am Bràigh Riabhach
The Brindled Upland

freckled speckled wind rippled
shape shifting fallen sky
dark light shadow bright
land up high

Beinn a' Bhuird
The Mountain of the Table

Giants gather in clouds of black
for a bite and a blether,
bit of craic.

Coire an t-Sneachda – Coire an t-Sneachdaidh
Corrie of the Snow

Bowl of white light
black rock wind run ice hold
hollow of the mountain's hand

Ben A'an – Beinn Athfhinn
Mountain of the River A'an

in a cleft of silence
hidden loch secret river
 name breathed out
 like a sigh

Am Monadh Ruadh
The Red Mountains

Range of russet hills
forged in fire at first sunrise
old rust rock
glowing still

Braeriach

ANNA FLEMING

How does one know a mountain?

Of all the mountains in the Cairngorms, there is something about Braeriach. It is not the tallest one here – across the Lairig Ghru, Ben Macdui stands a little higher. Bynack More and Ben Mheadhoin have more interesting summits, studded with weathered granite tors that delight hand and eye. Braeriach is vast and subtle. At the top, one does not find a peak, but a widening plateau that rolls out into Am Moine Mhor (the Great Moss) and sharpens at the edges, leading on into the more defined peaks of Sgòr an Lochain Uaine and Cairn Toul. Braeriach means ‘brindled upland’ and, perhaps more than any other single mountain here, the hill encapsulates the Cairngorms.

From Strathspey, Braeriach seems accessible. A coating of snow brings light and shadow, revealing vivid details in Braeriach’s exposed flanks and corries. The mountain advances. But looks are deceptive. Braeriach is a long way. You must allow for eight hours of steady walking, ascending over one thousand metres. On short winter days, this means starting in the dark.

The first time I walked up Braeriach, the mist was down. We spent hours walking in thick, damp cloud, following a trail of disturbed pink granite through grass, lichen and boulders. I was desperate to know the mountain: I wanted to reach the summit and take in the views – but there were no views. With visibility reduced to a few damp metres, I wondered, what makes this Braeriach and not any other cloud-clad hill? What can my body tell me about this place? I noticed the rise and fall of the ground. The gradient eased and I grew cold. A ptarmigan scuttled away, snarling through the rocks. We passed iron-brown tubes scattered among clean, shining metal plates: the mangled remains of an airplane. Wind blasted up gullies and granite buttresses. We found an edge and called it the top.

Last October, I discovered another aspect of Braeriach. One Sunday a surprise snowfall dusted the autumn leaves. The mountains gleamed white. I headed up Glen Einich to the deep glacial loch that

nestles within a towering horseshoe of hills. I walked with longing. Overhead, Braeriach shone. Perhaps I should change my plans, make a detour, push up the slopes, and climb the hill. But the snow was fresh and deep. The effort would be immense.

All was not lost. At the loch, I found Braeriach. The mountain was held in the water. The distant skyline landed at my feet in a perfect mirror image. I studied the surface, reading the hollows, pockets, streams and corries. Each line was sharpened by snow. Then I looked through the mirror. In the crystal water, I saw the rocky surface of a distant planet. Softening my eyes, I allowed the elements to mingle. Water, mountain, snow, stone and sky. Smooth and rough. Dark and light. Reflection and shadow. The mountain was in the loch and the loch was in the mountain.

As I watched, the dark stream-lines began to stretch and bend. The mountain was pulled apart – bars twisted in widening zig-zags before the elastic snapped and the image fragmented. Braeriach retreated. Wind had ruffled the surface.

Recently, I returned for another shot at the problem. This May, surely, I would get the summit views. Surely, this time, I would grasp Braeriach. The forecast seemed fair; the days were long. Down in the strath, green surged across the fields. Gorse burned golden and the hills deepened into indigo. Cuckoos and willow warblers sang from new leafed birch. Yet spring had not reached the mountain. The hillside was bleached brown and yellow. A caterpillar sat on the corner of a stone, clad in a thick coat.

Higher up, the boulder field was half-submerged in a still white sea. The snow formed frozen crusts and eddies around the stones. Higher still, the sun broke through, igniting the crystals. The moment was Alpine. (Pause for sun lotion and sunglasses). Higher again: I reached the summit ridge, and snow blew in. Thick feather flakes flew and swirled on a slight breeze, pattering against my hood. The hills disappeared. All turned white and grey. The flakes hardened into polystyrene balls. I had climbed back into winter.

Time stretched as I paced the drifts, hoping for a clearing. Space

became surreal. I had walked into the immense and remote plateau – but as the storm moved in, I could see and hear only a few metres. I hunkered down inside my hood, hat and mittens. The quiet was eerie. The air was still, yet full of snow. I had met no one all day, but as I waded back to the summit, suddenly someone was right at my heels, crunching the snow behind me. I span around – and there was no one there. Unsettled, I continued.

Back at the summit, I got my window. The snow eased and space expanded. Distance returned. I saw thick cornices hanging over the Lairig Ghru and there was Lochan Uaine, a steely grey mirror below the Angel's peak. Sun light fell on a southern hill. I turned back, and the elements intensified. Sky met ground in a driving flurry of wet snow. Footprints faded. The white-out was bewildering. Everything looked the same. I could be anywhere. I turned around to check the conditions behind me, and was instantly disorientated. In this skyless, groundless, featureless white, I almost went the wrong way.

And so my journeys into Braeriach reveal and frustrate. The mountain advances – I am drawn in; the mountain retreats – I am pushed back. When the mountain is generous, I land and soar. An eye blinks, and the mountain closes in. Braeriach sharpens its teeth and I become a ptarmigan, scurrying for shelter, snarling through the boulders.

It's blastie in the mountains
On the side of the crag
Where the eagle rests.

EMMA JONES,
KINGUSSIE HIGH SCHOOL

Cairngorms seen from Loch Morlich

Today they are
grim, discontent, monochromatic,
looking down with a cold stare.
You are not worthy to face them.

If you are lucky, wind may bring hope.

Suddenly,
a tentative ray of gold, a spotlight
gets their approval, the world's gears shift...

And they bathe in sunlight,
flares of caramel, summer fields, shades of green.
They relax and breathe, a smile reveals all their wrinkles.

Go, the elders are calling!

ANNA FILIPEK

Avon (Ath-fhinn)

The Ford of Fionn, a tale of tears,
glacial melt across the years.

RYAN DZIADOWIEC

Mither Dee

Hotterin an oozin fae the Wells o' Dee,
The river winds lang on her wey tae the Sea.
Ower Braeriach's grim cliff, she louns tae the Glen,
Neath craggy, auld faces o' harsh mountain bens.

Bubblin an chatterin in grey-granite rills,
Swalled wi the peat-burns fae shelterin hills.
Doon at the Linn, roarin thro' the scored gorge,
Then spreadin her fingers afore bonny Mar Lodge.

She hoves doon the Valley fae Braemar tae the Sea,
Past auld Scots pines an bonny, green lea.
Thro' low-hingin laricks an fir-scented tang,
She gaithers her bairns, growin wider an strang.

The hert o' the Valley, aye lo'ed by her ain,
The Dee cuts the land, like a life-bringin vein.
Fyles, roarin in spate or flowin sae calm,
The soon o' her waaters aye like a balm.

The fowk o' the Glen are bit here for a fyle,
Bit eternal, auld Dee flows on mile upon mile,
Teemin her bounty intae the muckle saat Sea,
Like a Mither, aye faithful, this bonny-bit Dee.

MARY MUNRO

Regeneration

Loused fae the darg:
sunrise on weel kent hills,
new trees keekin ower the heather.

NEIL REID

Into the Mountain:

Garbh Choire Mor

NEIL REID

A dished out hollow of snow, sharp, granite scree rising steeply before me, disappearing into a cold grey void.

A crack, a clack, a rattle. Impossible to identify a direction, but it's not the first stone that has fallen while I've stood here, nor will it be the last. I am alone. I *feel* alone. Uneasily so.

Nan Shepherd talks of walking out of the body and into the mountain as a metaphor for heightened focus and perception; here, in the furthest reaches of the Garbh Choire Mor I feel I have walked out of the *world* and into the mountain – literally.

The Cairngorms have many faces and I have loved – and do love – them all: the lush river banks, the birdsong-filled quiet of the pinewoods, the austere beauty of the wind-scoured desert plateau. I enjoy auld mannie naps on the hillsides in summer sun, have stood for an hour in contented contemplation in a winter white-out. The Cairngorms have been mine since I was a child, and I theirs.

But here is different. There is no welcome here, no comfort. To journey into the Garbh Choire Mor is, as truly as is possible, to journey *into* the mountain; a pilgrimage not into its heart, but into an open sore, unhealed, raw edges actively plucking at the smooth waves of plateau which are thus revealed to be surface rather than substance. Here is the interior exposed and it cradles not the crystal water of other corries, but cold, hard ice.

For the 'eternal snows' of the Garbh Choire Mor are no snows at all; they are pressed by weight of winter after winter, when snow may lie to a depth of a hundred feet, hardened by a thousand failed thaws. As insubstantial as snow feels when it drifts out of the skies, vast accumulation and the pressures within the snowpack force a metamorphosis that leaves it as hard and unyielding as the rock on which it lies. One year when the longest-lived snowpatch melted we put a plastic box for a time capsule in the bottom of the hollow the snowpatch has created at the foot of the cliffs. The following

year, when the unthinkable happened again and the snowpatch disappeared once more, the time capsule was recovered – crushed flat by the weight of just one winter’s snows.

The pilgrimage to see those snows of high summer, to stand truly inside the mountain, is a challenge in excess of reaching the tops of most mountains – the bowl of the inner corrie is over one thousand metres above sea level. Leaving the steep-sided confines of Glen Dee, the mountains press in closer and steeper as you climb, channelled towards your goal, the now pathless way becoming ever rougher. Temptation beckons in the spacious Garbh Choire Dhaidh, where the Dee Waterfall feeds a vein of life nourishing pools and lush grasses. But you resist, and persevere up bedrock and boulder into the bare bowl of Garbh Choire Mor. On and on yet, for the boulders climb to an inner recess, a corrie within a corrie, ringed by fractured cliffs.

Labour up this slope and you’re aware of another interior – beneath your feet. The voids between the massive grey boulders fall to unknown depths. It’s common on such slopes to hear water running beneath, but here to the familiar rush is added echo, the sound of vast, subterranean cisterns. Can such things be? Climbing alone, upwards into this innermost maw of unfinished geology, you lose any assurance that it can’t be and balance up, boulder to boulder, as though caverns lie below.

And you breast the lip of this innermost corrie into a dip. If the winter snows have gone from this cauldron then the rocks are covered in black moss. It has the feeling of a trap waiting to be sprung by an unwary footstep, so you do not linger but head on up the slopes of boulder, scree and grit, slipping as the ground steepens and moves beneath your feet. These are not rocks rounded by the millennia: they are sharp, freshly broken from the mountain, raw pink still, and gritty, loosely bound in a matrix of mossy sand and gravel. Feet slide, the slope feels dangerous, unstable.

When you reach your goal, that last fragment of snow, you realise it to be a chimera. That the snow has lasted through another summer is, obscurely, important to you, but the substance of it holds no magic;

it's just dirty ice, dripping into ground that looks freshly bulldozed, stones on the surface a reminder that where you are, under the cliffs, is not safe. Up this close, foreshortening appears to rob the cliffs of their height and makes of them great, jagged teeth, but you are yet more than five hundred feet below the surface of the plateau.

I have crawled between these teeth to escape upward, up through grit and scree, thick, dark moss that hides holds for hands and feet. I have carried on up the granulating scar of Pinnacles Gully, fingers pushing, twisting, prising through moss and wet, red granite grit, seeking solidity in the shifting, unstable gully bed, to thrutch and scrape upward between granite jaws, watching and listening as another boulder slurps out of its mossy socket and cracks and bangs its way downward, bouncing from wall to wall, a smell of brimstone tracking its passage.

Release comes suddenly. A last chockstone, a widening of rubble and tenuous vegetation, then out from damp shadow to a sun-baked plateau stretching out in long, lazy waves of landscape. It's a liberation that lifts the heart, to be back on the surface after a journey into the mountain.

Can I say I love this most remote corner of the Cairngorms? This seeping wound gnawing at the edges of the plateau tests my devotion, in its near lifelessness, its damp chill, its raw unfinishedness. But the Garbh Choire Mor draws me. If I cannot yet love it I am fascinated by it and, even as my stride stretches out across the open plateau, I am plotting a return.

A-slop, a-squelch, a-sploroch.
Wellies tugged back by the peaty yerth.
Playfully we leap on home.

VICTORIA MYLES

Bàideanach

Bàideanach,
an t-àite bàthte,
ainm bhon thùs
a tha fìor san là an-diugh.

Nuair a tha Loch Innis a' sìneadh
gu Bail' Ùr an t-Slèibh
's an Abhainn Gòineig
a' ruith sìos na rathaidean
a' dòrtadh tro Taigh Òsta Silverfiord
's tron dorsan Àrd Sgoil Cinn a' Ghiùthsaidh
gus am bidh an t-Uisge Spè
's Abhainn Gòineig
a' tighinn ri chèile
agus sruthadh mòr ann.

A' toirt air ais an seann thalamh

's cuimhne a chur air daoine
gu bheil sinne ann
ach airson greis.

Bàideanach,
an t-àite bàthte,
ainm bhon thùs
a tha fìor san là an-diugh.

MOIRA WEBSTER

Badenoch

Badenoch,
the drowned land,
a name from the past
that is true today.

When Loch Insh stretches
to Newtonmore
the River Gynack
runs down the street
pouring through the Silverfjord Hotel
and through the doors of Kingussie High School
until the River Spey
and the River Gynack
flow together

taking back the old land

and reminding people
that they are here
but for a short time.

Badenoch,
the drowned land,
a name from the past
that is true today.

MOIRA WEBSTER

LEAVES AND BEASTIES

Weaving High Worlds

LINDA CRACKNELL

High on the blustery, wide-open slopes of Sgòr Gaoith, I was thrust deep into a tangly forest. Long twilled plumes of green rose up, tipped with slightly serrated, greyish filaments. Interlocked amongst them was a graveyard of giant antlers, each branching tine visibly hollow. Dense and impenetrable, even for a knight seeking a sleeping beauty, how had such a thicket appeared on this Cairngorm roof, famous for its lack of trees?

What I was looking at was the tapestry of cushiony moss and lichen under my feet; an undulating spread I'd been bounding down. Dropping onto hands and knees, I'd delved my fingers luxuriously into it and smelt damp labrador and the far-north tundra. Then, miraculously, it transformed through the tiny portal of a magnifying lens handed to me by someone in our group. It was as revolutionary to the eye as the first time I snorkelled over a coral reef having only before marvelled at the sea's reflective surface. I was a wonder-struck astronaut seeing my planet from a wildly new perspective.

It was a November-ish day in late May 2019, and our small group had earlier gathered around a crop of grey lichen with brilliant red caps, 'Devil's matchsticks', striking up out of a nest of hailstones. Cloudberries flowered. Mountain azaleas tickled the grey slopes we climbed with pink pinpricks. We stood on the summit precipice and looked across a yawning gap. Deep within it Loch Einich lay darkly, and we bowed to Braeriach with its skirt of cloud, carved and corried and looming, as if close, in the moist air.

We were walking towards a corrie between here and Glenfeshie where Simone Kenyon's extraordinary dance piece animating Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain* would be performed. Three parties of walkers were to converge, each travelling with a mountain guide and the further expertise of a facilitator who knew land and botany.

I was excited by the tangle of syllables with which Jean named this floor-tapestry. The word seemed fashioned by the spongy mesh of pale greens and greys itself; by its darker and damper depths. The

surface was combed into a dry, feathery paleness that looked frosted from a distance as the great pelt rolled down the flank of the hill.

I asked Jean to put the name in my notebook.

'*Racomitrium*,' she wrote.

I was surprised to find it was a botanical term: Latin.

This was '*Racomitrium* heath', a distinctive Alpine-Arctic groundcover on high, bare hills intertwining mosses, liverworts and lichens. Although, ironically, sheep will not eat it, the common name 'woolly fringe moss' is given to one of its principal constituents, *Racomitrium lanuginosum*, the green plumes I'd seen with pale, serrated tips. *Cladonia* lichens are in the mix too, and I learnt something I surely should have known sooner, that lichen, as well as being a powerful indicator of clean air, is a collaboration between fungus and algae. Although the name *Cladonia* was new to me, the lichen was familiar to my naked eye. I've always associated its multiple pale green branches with very different terrain: the underwater world of corals, or the bronchioles in lungs.

The plants of this heath thread back 450 million years across the Scottish hills and lace them to the high, bare places of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia where reindeers still make their annual migrations, the hollow hairs of their pelts insulating them from harsh winters. Reindeers disappeared from Scotland 800 years ago, although since the 1950s they've been naturalising in the Cairngorms and feeding on hardy 'reindeer moss' (actually a lichen, *Cladonia rangiferina*). The only Sami word adopted into English, 'tundra', summons their hooves, pacing towards me across the tweedy hillside; incredible hooves, splayed to stop them sinking into snow, tendons clicking so they can locate each other in fog.

That day we saw a pair of dotterel, migratory waders smartly liveried with a black and white head and russet bib. Their other plumage disguises them as '*Racomitrium* heath' until they move in lurching bursts. At this time of year, the Cairngorm plateau is their breeding stronghold, where they feed on the heath's crane-fly. The female, the more ornate of the pair, takes the lead in courtship, often then leaving the male to incubate the eggs.

The dotterel's name in Gaelic – *amadan mòintich* – means 'fool of the moss'. Its Latin name, *morillenus*, implies the same, and the common name comes etymologically from a similar meaning in Middle English; think dotard, dotty, Dodo, slurs arising from their trusting nature which makes it easy to get close, and in the past to trap this plentiful 'delicacy', now threatened. A photo reveals three mottled eggs in a nest lined with grey-green *Cladonia uncialis* glowing amidst the plait of darker foliage. As magnification revealed, each antlerish tine is hollow; insulation allowing the eggs to be left unattended in low temperatures whilst the adult bird forages. The dotterel is no fool.

I walk in such places for the wide vistas, and to draw inspiration from being a minute human in a more-than-human place. But walking that day with a shared beat of feet and heave of lungs, with people happy to pool their knowledge, warped me a loom. We flipped the scale, and we named things. Later, curiosity led me to add detail and I interleaved a weft. There was a new and peculiar pleasure for me in linking this new understanding of the intertwining and co-dependency of separate species, with the feel in my mouth of Latin names.

And so a multi-dimensional world took shape from our short, shared pause in the landscape, evoking thickets of fairytale-ish, unfamiliar forest and a wise meshing of threads: fungus and algae collaborating; crane-fly supported by *Racomitrium* heath; dotterel reliant on crane-fly for food and on *Cladonia uncialis* to insulate their nests.

Finally, having learnt all this from close-looking on damp knees, I like to adjust the lens, step back and picture threads spooling out between breeding grounds on the Cairngorm tops and a far-flung archipelago of reindeer-trodden tundra, mountain plateaux; weaving together the dotterel's high worlds.

Redpolls and siskins upside down
in the birkin branches.
In the forest many lifetimes deep.

CAROLYN ROBERTSON

The bird song is nothing compared to the
noise of the scuttling imaky-amaky's small world.

XANDER JOHNSTON,
KINGUSSIE HIGH SCHOOL

Lepus timidus

The photographer is prostrate in prayer,
watching her small winter gods,
their spill of snow on the hill.

Her camera records their flash
and dance, their waltz
to the hymns of the wind.

Run free for yet another year,
ice white, ice bright, ghosts
of twitching nose and itching ear.

LYNN VALENTINE

Robin

JULIA DUNCAN

“A red-throated diver!” he exclaims. I mumble and peer through my binoculars. I see a dark, vaguely bird-shaped blob.

This is trickier than I thought.

“Oh and listen – a sedge warbler. Delightful.”

Is that what that is? In my head, I skip through tracks on my Bird Identification CD. It’s not that they all sound the same, exactly – just, you know... similar.

“Could you go and pop a way-marker in by the Bird’s Nest Orchid?”

Oh. Um. Yes. Orchid. That’s the flowery-shaped one. No? Ok.

I’m one week into my first ever ranger job. I have six months to learn as much as I can and prove my worth. We are sat in the work van amongst cable ties, chocolate wrappers, dried mud and a baffling array of tools. My colleague is a tall, thin, bearded ranger with knowledge that would make David Attenborough doubt himself. He can identify a roadside tree at 50 miles per hour and tell one unremarkable white mushroom species from another in the blink of an eye.

“And for the records – make a note of all the conifer species in the area.”

Conifers. I leaf hurriedly through my tree book. (Excuse the pun.) All of them? Right. Yes.

“While you’re there it wouldn’t hurt to note a few sedges too – you’ll manage that.”

Sedges. Sedges. We did mention them on that uni field trip, but I’d had a couple of pints the night before and maybe shut my eyes for a second or so out in the field. My cheeks flush. I definitely know these things – I just need a minute to think. There’s so much to learn – I’m not sure I’ll ever get my head round it all. I start to feel a bit like when I had that sedge-identification-hangover. Pause. Deep breath.

I slide out of the passenger door and pick up my rucksack from the back of the van. I’m wearing a brand-new waterproof jacket. I was so proud of the ranger logo when I first tried it on. Now I feel like a

kid on the first day of school. I slip my waterproof trousers on over my shiny new boots. My birthday present binoculars are round my neck (“tools of the trade” he tells me) and I have borrowed a fancy waterproof clipboard to note everything down.

“Wait!” he shouts, putting his binoculars up to his face. “What is THAT?”

I might as well not bother, but lift my bins too.

“I’m struggling,” he says.

It can’t be.... I know this. I actually know this. I feel my heart beat faster and the excitement rise as I almost actually shout,

“It’s a robin!”

Ha! A robin. Good old Robin Red-Breast.

He slowly lowers his binoculars and looks at me.

It wasn’t a robin.

Stupid red-throated diver.

“Maybe you should ask for a new pair of binoculars for your next birthday.”

I retreat to the van. This will be a long season.

Four Lyrics

Six-legged critters
scuttle on by
imaky-amaky lookin in my eye
avoiding all the passers-by.

As I look around,
What I see,
A doo flying high
In the empty sky.

The attercap spun round and round,
trying nae to make a sound,
her new web found.

The trees swing to the rain-bird's song,
A muggle approaches
And the song is gone.

ANON,
ABOYNE HIGH SCHOOL

Bone-white moon-bright one foot
In the grave with all else branch and claw
Reaching lark-wards! Jay-wards! Fly-away-wards!
Cought in this ground-sky strangle
Hold.

Red berries, stripped wood, bruised and bent
On castles on churches on cribs and cradles. The
Witch looks at Rowan. Shrugs. Calls it Mountain
Ash and steps right over every threshold she
Never should have crossed.

HAZEL ELEANOR ROSE

Capercaillies
Are good at
Putting their
Eggs in nests near a
River.
Can a capercaillie on
A skateboard drive
Into the
Last
Leaf or
Into an
Elephant?

TAVIA,
9 YEARS OLD

La Mosca de Glen Tanar

Mientras el arroyo pedregoso murmura durante su incesante discurrir
la mosca de Glen Tanar curioseosa.

Glen Tanar Fly

While the pebbly stream mutters through its incessant flow
the Glen Tanar fly noses about.

EUNICE JANSSEN

The Birch

The nude, winter birch branches drip
Like the freshly washed hair
Of a young woman.

As the sun warms
The land, green unfurls
A veil to cover the naked brown.

Dressed and adorned
With leaves of chrysoberyl, peridot and tourmaline,
The tree shivers with pleasure in the summer
Heat.

But autumn's chimes
Turn gems to yellow scraps
Of paper drifting
Silent, on the wind.

KATY TURTON

There is unexpected beauty in the gulliewillie
When the cotton grass comes to life

EILEEN SUTHERLAND

Gean leaves reddening
Swallows chattering before leaving
Frost glistening on rodden berries
Autumn coming on

JANE MACAULAY

LIVING

sixty two words for rainy weather

AMANDA THOMSON

<i>sapless</i>	(used of the weather) rainless, dry
<i>lunkie</i>	sultry: denoting the oppressive state of the atmosphere before rain or thunder
<i>heavy-heartit</i>	(used of the atmosphere) lowering, threatening rain
<i>mare's tails</i>	long streaky clouds portending rain
<i>flobby</i>	(used of clouds) large and heavy indicating rain
<i>goutte</i>	a large drop of rain
<i>saft</i>	used of the weather, damp, drizzly
<i>a stew</i>	a rain so thin it resembles a vapour
<i>a drow</i>	a cold mist approaching rain
<i>a smirr</i>	a fine rain
<i>a smush</i>	a light drizzling rain
<i>a dawk</i> <i>a muggle</i> }	a drizzling rain
<i>to ripple</i>	to drizzle
<i>a skeetlie</i>	a drop, a small shower
<i>a smurrack</i>	a slight summer shower
<i>calledin-o-the-blade</i>	a slight shower which cools and refreshes the grass
<i>a drifling</i> <i>a hagger</i> }	a small rain

<i>laikin</i>	(used of rain) intermittent
<i>a dackling</i> <i>a scrow</i> <i>a dissle</i>	} slight showers of rain
<i>a borie</i> <i>a slud</i>	a clear opening in the sky in wet weather the interval between squally showers
<i>to skiffer</i> <i>to spit</i> <i>to dag</i>	} to rain slightly
<i>to nyatter</i>	to rain slightly with a high wind
<i>to weet</i> <i>weetness</i>	to rain rainy weather
<i>a skarrach</i> <i>scoutherie</i>	a flying shower, a blast of wind and rain abounding with flying showers
<i>a blad</i> <i>a blirt</i>	a squall, always including the idea of rain a sharp, cold shower, with wind
<i>a plump</i> <i>lumming</i>	a heavy shower falling straight down a term applied to the weather when there is thick rain
<i>a blush</i> <i>a plash</i> <i>a slounge</i> <i>a plype</i> <i>a leesh</i> <i>a rasch</i> <i>a down-ding</i> <i>an evendoun</i> <i>a helm of weet</i> <i>a tume of rain</i> <i>a trash o' weet</i>	} heavy falls of rain

<i>hale water</i>	a phrase denoting a very heavy fall of rain, in which it comes down as if poured out of buckets
<i>to lum</i> <i>to dish</i> <i>to team</i>	} to rain heavily
<i>spleutterie</i>	very rainy
<i>to daggle</i>	to fall in torrents
<i>laughing rain</i>	rain from the south west, with a clear sky line
<i>trashie</i>	rainy, as in trashie weather
<i>glashtroch</i>	a term expressive of continued rain, and the concomitant dirtiness of the roads
<i>a landlash</i>	a great fall of rain accompanied by a heavy wind
<i>glousterie</i>	a day in which there is rain accompanied with a pretty strong wind
<i>a steepin'</i>	a drenching with rain
<i>an uplicht</i>	brightening after a shower
<i>to appell</i>	to cease to rain

As we often encounter wet weather in the north, Amanda Thomson has curated words that might be useful from her book *A Scots Dictionary of Nature*, Saraband Books, 2018 [words and definitions collected from John Jamieson's *Dictionary of the Scots Language*, abridged by John Johnstone 1846; *Supplement to Jamieson's Scottish Dictionary*, David Donaldson (ed.), 1887; *Chambers Scots Dialect Dictionary*, 1911]

Caul in the Gorms
Anither dawn brakks
snaw birls in the air
and settles, carefree

GRANT MOIR

The Black Spout

MALCOLM DUCKWORTH

“How do you fancy the Black Spout? I hear you’re a bit of a climber.”

“Who told you?” Liz shouted above the din of the bar.

“Robin from the BBC.”

“I’m sorry,” she said, “I’m busy this weekend.”

“No, no, not this weekend – now!”

“Now?! You’re kidding. It’s Tuesday, it’s 8pm, it’s February: it’ll be full of snow and ice!”

“Yes.” I added, “and dark.”

When I’d mentioned my latest adventure plan to Robin, whom I had climbed and filmed with in the past, he’d shaken his head, grinned and said, “Liz is up for adventure – ask her.” She was a University student and I only knew her in a tangential, hello-in-passing kind of way. We both moved on the edge of the noisy milieu of climbers and media types that frequented this bar.

She leaned in and yelled over the hubbub, “I’ve never climbed a winter gully before and I don’t have an ice axe. Maybe I could borrow my Dad’s old one!”

“No need,” I said, trying to use a reassuring tone of voice. “I have a spare axe and can probably scrounge you a pair of crampons. How stiff are your boots?”

“Not too bendy.”

“Great, they’ll work!”

I finished my drink.

“God am I really agreeing to this – I must be mad.” She smiled.

We left the bar.

The Black Spout is the longest and deepest gully that breaches the Lochnagar cliffs. In winter, it provides a straightforward 700ft snow-climb to the summit plateau. There is no accurate record of first ascent, but Raeburn, one of Scotland’s foremost climbers in the 19th Century, documented an ascent of the ‘Left Hand Branch’ of the main gully in 1893. It has since become a classic winter route.

In summer, the Black Spout can be gloomy and dark. Tenebrous even. Intimidating dripping vertical walls flank the route echoing the ever-present rattle of stone fall – a glacial echo from some ten thousand years past. Winter’s ice silences that ancient voice.

The moon, now well to the south, cast long shadows on the approach path. We crossed the col and entered the moon-shadow black corrie. The darkness hid the vertical rock architecture as we traversed the snow-covered scree apron to the gully entrance. This black primaeval space touched our very DNA.

Our bobbing headtorches found the gully – a 45 degree ramp of ice and hard snow rose ahead of us – visible only in the small circular windows of our lamps. For 700 feet we followed the winter rhythm:

crampon points : ice axe
points : ice axe
point : axe
point : axe

Out of breath, we finished up the 50 degree headwall and the moon found us again, arrested on the plateau.

We stood silently in that moonlit frozen elemental wilderness, a million trillion stars stretching to infinity over our heads. Some 60 miles to the south and east was a faint sodium intrusion – the glow of cities.

“That was absolutely ace!”

The adventure was over.

As we descended to the car, returning to our own sodium glow, a line from a long-forgotten text played over and over in my head:

*“A million stars I have walked through,
A million stars,
A million stars...”*

Shut up, ye blethering haver, Mr Wind!
The wee whistling birds are trying to sing.

CARA MCCUBBIN,
KINGUSSIE HIGH SCHOOL

Living in the Wilds

*In memory of Christine,
a Strathdon artist*

Her gentle tinkering, fixing, pasting
Life full of discarded gems
Recycled in her imagination

Horses, hares, ancient masks
Button kings and queens
A Tribute to a botanical soul
Living on in texture and craft

The spirit in every brush stroke
Flapping of shawls of fish
A shining enamel of Strathdon
With a hint of willo the wisp.

RUTH EDWARD

Sitting on the grey water
under the Cairngorm hills
and hoping for muckle brown trout.

ANON,
PUPIL AT RURAL SKILLS DAY

Glen Ey Interglacial

MIKE WILKES

Where two valleys meet, the flat strath is suddenly covered in hillocks and slopes like the rucked edge of a rug. Boulders the size of cottages are dotted among the folds. Some are set precariously atop small mounds, as if frozen mid-topple for thousands of years. The boulders and rising ground are the remnants of the glaciers that made the glens twelve thousand years ago. The once mighty glacier, drained of its strength by rising temperatures, abandoned its load rock debris on the floor of the glen. Forest, grass, and lichen became their dustsheets.

There are lines and rectangles of raised ground and tumbles of stones here too. These were ditches and walls that separated agriculture on the valley floor from rough grazing amongst the boulders. After the ice, people shaped the land by removing trees and making walls. For centuries, they raised their families, traded their stock and rallied to the standard of their kings. Until, with rising commerce, the township was abandoned and dispersed. In only a hundred years the names of their taighean and croitean are forgotten. Grass and heather took over the sheilings.

The boulders continue to teeter still beside the track. The forest will return in decades to come, and homes may return in hundreds of years, but the boulders will be unmoved for millennia until, eventually, the glacier returns.

My feet squelched through wet mud
“Bore da!”
I cried to the squirrels and birds.

EWIN JONES,
GRANTOWN GRAMMAR SCHOOL

The Dweller and the Guest

There is no wildlife here, he says.
It is a *barren* landscape.
A word he has carried
from a distant classroom
along with *crevasse*,
moraine, *erratic*.

I turn to the mountains
with a stranger's eyes,
beseeching a display.
But the cloud is moody, low and grey.
Our beloved Cairngorms
are not on form today.

Are the ptarmigan shy among the rocks?
Has the hare melded into moss?
The song of the ring ouzel,
conspicuous in silence.
No snow bunting, no dotterel,
no lime-spattered lichen.

My guest takes pity on me.
We have deer on our city lawns,
he confides. Rabbits, foxes,
badgers, voles. Then he goes
in search of carrot cake
and bacon rolls.

Alone now with the chairlift.
Dormant towers looming
from the mist. The snow plough,

fences, discarded wire. Somehow,
this abandoned playground
had made of me a liar.

But then the Shelter Stone leaned
a roar into the deep of A'an,
where shadows of Macdui rose
to take the soul and shape
of one grey man. And when
the Coires' shoulders shook
alive, an angry avalanche
of rock came vaulting down.
I called back my guest. Too late.
He had already left for town.

KAREN HODGSON PRYCE

Winter Roost

ADAM STREETER-SMITH

“Why are we hanging around Grantown?”

“It’s getting late. When are we going home?”

The shops were closing, the light was fading and the kids were whining.

“All will be revealed,” I tried to say enigmatically.

The kids responded with the usual what-are-you-on-about-Dad look.

We found an open café, stocked up on cake and hot chocolate and headed out of the town.

“Will we be back in time for *Strictly*?”

At Loch Garten we fumbled with jackets and hats and filed down the forest path. Other people were already at the shoreline. They stood, hushed, waiting. We nodded in quiet acknowledgement. Behind us, the forest darkened.

We waited, silently staring into the dim mirror of the loch. Then a call echoed over the forest. A murmur spread through the night air. Another call came, responding to the first. The silence was broken. The cries grew louder, more frequent. Volleys of geese erupted above the treeline – wing beats, honks, dark silhouettes – a cacophony of sound and flight burst through the darkness as geese crashed onto the water and broke into chattering squabbles.

I was relieved, ecstatic even, that the greylags had arrived.

“Amazing. Amazing. Just amazing.” I turned to the kids, “Wasn’t that amazing?”

“Yes dad. If we head home now we might be back for *Strictly*”.

I feel free

I feel free
As free as a bee
The yerth is silent
There is no violence
The trees are green
Where nobody has been
The robins have health
While they taste the wealth
The smell of the fire
Doesn't dampen my desire
To feel the breeze
Around my knees

ANON
YOUNG POET AT
FOREST FEST 2019

Love

LYNN CASSELLS

It's a very powerful thing – to fall in love. When I met my partner seven years ago I fell in love. Four years ago I fell in love again. With a place. A place that I now call home. A place where I live, work, eat and breathe. My love of four years ago is my croft, Lynbreck.

When people ask what Lynbreck is like, I describe it as pure Scottishness – a mixture of heathery hillside, woodland, grassland and, of course, bog. It wouldn't be truly Scottish if it didn't have a bog. Nestled on the side of a windy hill, it faces the Cairngorms massif head on. Uninterrupted. The harsh winter winds batter our ancient land holding every year but the lighter summer winds breathe warmth into our bones and life into our croft.

We are a working croft. We raise animals for meat, we keep hens for eggs and bees for honey, we grow vegetables and fruit. Our job is to feed ourselves and our community.

We croft in a way that harnesses the power of mother nature. This is the energy of Lynbreck; this is what I fell in love with. Our livestock regenerate our soils, increasing life above and below ground with every cow pat dropped and every clump of moss snuffled by a pig snout. Our hens wake up every morning with a large wing stretch, a gentle squawk hello and then get busy eating grubs, keeping our land in balance. We are slaves to our animals and in return they give us life.

Lynbreck is a beacon of hope in a world of darkness. It is a happy place built on a love of life, of animals, of nature and of our world. It's a place where money doesn't rule the roost: the measure of success lies in respect, community, friendships and love. It's a place of real life and real living with real stress and real hardship but with real joy and happiness.

If I could bake Lynbreck in a cake, I'd feed it to everyone I meet because I know it would satiate the real appetite that all humans have – a hunger for nature.

Atop the cnoc, the moon is new
And scooping swifts adorn
The inky blue.

CATRIONA CLUBB

Author Biographies

Linda Cracknell writes fiction, non-fiction and radio drama. Landscape, place and memory are key themes in her work. *Doubling Back: Ten Paths Trodden in Memory* (2014) is an account of a series of walks following stories from the personal, biographical or communal pasts. Her fiction includes most recently a novel set in Caithness, *Call of the Undertow*, and she is currently a Royal Literary Fund Fellow at Stirling University.

Alec Finlay is an artist and poet working across a range of media and forms to consider how we relate to landscape and ecology. Through integrative web-based projects and publications, Finlay weaves together generous experiential works, often collaborative, sometimes mapped directly onto the landscape, embedded socially or accessed online. *Gathering: A Place Aware Guide to the Cairngorms* (2018) is an innovative mapping of the Cairngorms landscape in poems, essays, photographs and maps.

Anna Fleming writes non-fiction and poetry about adventure, environment and ecology. Her work has been published in *Waymaking*, *Caught by the River* and on her blog thegranitesea.wordpress.com. As project manager for *Shared Stories*, she has overseen project delivery, including commissioning, editing and producing this anthology for the Cairngorms National Park Authority. She is currently working on a nature-writing book about rock climbing for publication in 2021.

Merryn Glover is a novelist and playwright with work widely published and broadcast on BBC Radio Scotland and Radio 4. Her upcoming second novel, *Colvin's Walk*, is set in the Cairngorms and explores the complex ties binding community and land. As 2019 Writer in Residence for the Cairngorms National Park, she facilitated *Shared Stories: A Year in the Cairngorms*, leading creative writing workshops with people across the Park.

Amanda Thomson is a visual artist and writer who is a lecturer at the Glasgow School of Art. Her interdisciplinary practice is often about notions of home, and explorations of nature, landscape and how places come to be made. Her book, *A Scots Dictionary of Nature* (Saraband, 2018) brings together the deeply expressive vocabulary of the Scots language and the words used to describe land, wood, weather, birds, water and walking in Scotland.

Samantha Walton is a researcher in Modern Literature based at Bath Spa University. She writes poetry, prose and creative non-fiction on a range of topics, including ecology, feminism, trauma and walking. Her next book, *The Living World: Nan Shepherd and Environmental Thought* (Bloomsbury, forthcoming) explores Shepherd's environmental philosophy, and she is currently working on a cultural history of nature and wellbeing, for publication in 2021.

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The Cairngorms Trust

Thank you for donating to The Cairngorms Trust when you picked up this book. Our wonderful communities and natural landscapes are at the heart of our charity. We support community-led nature, cultural and heritage, access and infrastructure projects throughout the Cairngorms National Park.

The Cairngorms is a magical and special place. It inspires many of us to explore its hidden treasures, from the communities, to the abundant heritage and cultural influences, the wonderful wildlife and the stunning natural landscapes. You will read about some of those inspirations in this book.

The Cairngorms Trust supports a number of large community-led projects and smaller projects across the Park. Over 2019–20, the Cairngorms Trust is raising funds for an osprey nest project in Boat of Garten and a path network improvement project in Kingussie.

Further details of the Campaign Projects and Community Grants we are supporting around the Cairngorms National Park can be found on our website www.cairngormstrust.org.uk

Donations from the sale of this book will go towards Cairngorms Trust projects.

If you would like to keep in touch with us to find out about funding applications and projects we are supporting in future years, please sign up to our newsletter on our website at cairngormstrust@cairngorms.co.uk, via email or via our social media pages on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

#lovethecairngorms

We hope you enjoy reading the book and are inspired to explore the beauty of the Cairngorms.

This book is the culmination of the 2019 project *Shared Stories: A Year in the Cairngorms*. Organised and part-funded by the Cairngorms National Park Authority, with funding from the Woodland Trust and Creative Scotland, it enabled the Cairngorms National Park's first ever Writer in Residence – Merryn Glover – to be appointed. Through the project, she encouraged people across the Park and beyond to capture in words how people and nature thrive together. Their voices come together in this anthology to celebrate the many ways in which the Cairngorms are experienced, known and loved.

This book is available by donation to the Cairngorms Trust.

**Am Monadh Ruadh
The Red Mountains**

Range of russet hills
forged in fire at first sunrise
old rust rock
glowing still

CAIRNGORMS
NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
UGHDARRAS PÀIRC NÀISEANTA A'
MHONAIH RUAIDH


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