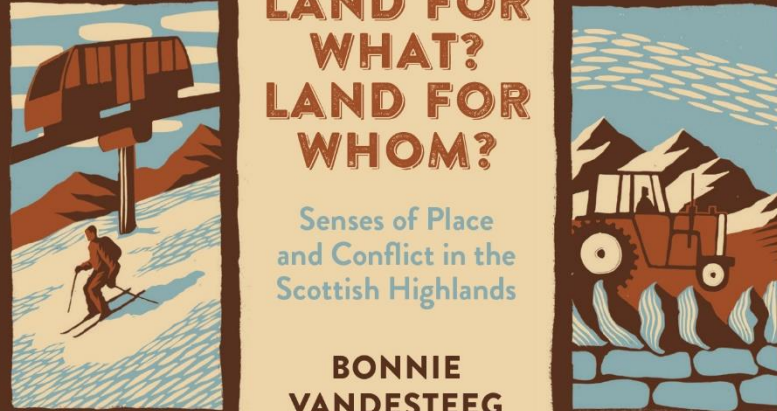




**LAND FOR
WHAT?
LAND FOR
WHOM?**

Senses of Place
and Conflict in the
Scottish Highlands

**BONNIE
VANDESTEEG**



Background to Research

- Interest in mountains and nature cross-culturally
- Anthropology and ethnographic research
- Cairngorms selected as the site of research- key conflicts going on over funicular and national park
- 1999-2000- crucial time in the setting up of the NP with the aftermath of the funicular debate still going on



Methodology

- Immersion in everyday life over a period of time
- Listening and trying to understand
- Engaged directly in a range of activities- meeting people while doing: walking, skiing, climbing, grouse beating, birding, mountain biking, working, shopping



- Organic process- started with camping in Glenmore and then moved to town and got a job in the fish and chips restaurant
- Adapted to the seasons, eg grouse beating and stalking in autumn, skiing in winter



- Met people during these activities who would then introduce me to others eg Strathspey Mountain Club, RSPB Insh Marshes
- Still had to make an effort for somethings, eg getting involved on a sporting estate
- Public events, targeted interviews became more important as time went on, though keeping the grass roots approach



Basis of research: Senses of Place

- Sense of place involves all aspects of experience, physical, emotions, intellect, socio-cultural
- Identified 3 main senses of place- recreation, conservation, livelihood
- In the same place, but see it differently, so can lead to conflict

Recreation

- Views and beauty
- Wildness
- Adventure and epics
- Immersion and embodiment
- Comradeship and sharing
- High ground rather than low ground



Conservation

- Tuning In
- Noticing detail, patience
- Passion for non-human species
- Land-based knowledge and skills
- Awareness of bigger picture, eg ecosystems



Livelihood on the land

- Land as a garden
- Produce something tangible
- Way of making a living
- Culture and tradition
- Focus on certain species, eg livestock, grouse
- Land-based knowledge and skills
- Close-knit community



Livelihood: Town and Village

- Place to work, live and raise a family
- Focus on jobs, housing and facilities for locals
- Low ground, not high ground



Conflicts: In the same space, but not the same place



Deer versus Trees: Glen Feshie Example



Conflict in the Cairngorms

Livelihood

Conservation



Key areas of Conflict

- Funicular
- Housing Development
- Setting up of the National Park



Unfolding of conflict: 1999-2000

- The local people can never be trusted to run a National Park. Anyone who would build a railway up a mountain can't care very much about the environment. They're just greedy.
- We don't want all those conservationists parachuting in from down south and telling us what we can do and can't do. They don't realise that we have to make a living.

- Why is a piece of moss worth more than thousands of people's enjoyment?
- The locals don't value what they have. They never go out in the hills to see what's there.



Key issues in creating conflict

- Different senses of place and difficulty in finding common ground
- The conservation organisations themselves had a negative image amongst many in the local community.
- The process of decision-making is constructed in such a way that many voices are not heard.

- **Only some people are considered to be stakeholders**
- **Issue of what counts as knowledge and the cultural context in which that knowledge is obtained**
- **What is a community? Who belongs? Incomer vs local discourse**

Difficulty in Finding Common Ground

- Caring about a place, both nature and people
- Knowledge and skills
- Need to make a living

However:

- Different history and tradition, culture, and identity
- Awareness of different aspects of place because of different experiences, eg low and high ground
- The social, economic and political context

Negative Images of Conservation Organisations



'A' told me about the conflict between conservationists and locals. The RSPB, out of a million members, has only 70,000 in Scotland and the management of their estates has caused problems. They're seen as outsiders. Friends of hers refused jobs because they didn't want to be associated with the RSPB. She felt the same way.

Local with zoology degree and great interest in the nature and the outdoors

NP Consultation Process: Stakeholder Model Polarises

- Recreation (different sports represented)
- Farmers and landowners
- Conservation- wasn't first included
- Communities
- Business

Many voices are not heard



Not a stakeholder

- He is third generation born in Aviemore. His grandfather was a timber man, his father worked for a hotel and he now works for the railway. He once worked for the Chairlift Company. He thinks the ski area is very badly run and is totally opposed to the funicular. He says a lot of people who work for the Chairlift company are against it. It is a real disaster.
- Aviemore was brilliant when he was a kid. They made their own entertainment but there were also swimming clubs at the pool and he played ice hockey. Now these things are gone. Developers are just interested in making money. They build stuff and don't maintain it.

- Local people have become lethargic and apathetic. He berates them for not getting involved, but at the same time he understands because their voice has not been listened to for so long that they have given up.
- But he loves it here and would not want to live anywhere else. He went down to London and couldn't orientate himself; there were no hills, no natural points of reference. It was difficult to tell which way the sun is going.

Excerpt from research diary

What counts as knowledge

- University/ 'scientific' vs practical
- Farmers and estate workers felt their knowledge was not valued by those with power, eg heather burning article, osprey nests
- Researchers and scientists dismissed for being 'outsiders' and not understanding the land
- Culture and history reinforced the divisions, eg sporting estate vs university, land managers trained on different courses, different knowledge is produced.

Who is 'the local community?'

- Term 'local community' is overused and can be unhelpful (example of Nethy Bridge)
- Communities are divided- hierarchies in all communities
- Communities aren't just geographical- communities of interest
- How long do you have to live somewhere before you are part of the community? And who decides?

Local vs Incomer/Outsiders

- People interested in conservation or recreation were labelled as incomers or outsiders and their voices were silenced.
- One Glenmore Lodge instructor spoke out against the funicular at a meeting and was told he had no right to speak because he was an incomer.

False Dichotomies

- Many locals are not actually anti-conservationist or anti-recreation, but identify strongly with these sensibilities. The difference is that many integrate their interest in nature with an overall commitment to community and may appreciate different aspects.
- Many who are 'incomers' care deeply about the place and the community.

False Dichotomies

- Activities undertaken by different groups is often the same- similar knowledge and experience but packaged differently, eg RSPB workers and Kinveachy
- Public debates exacerbate differences- interpersonal relations can be very different, eg farmers and RSPB warden

Overcoming conflicts: Finding Common Ground

Meeting of Newtonmore Business Association- NP consultation

- The man who owned a local tourist attraction had launched into a torrent of abuse against those who would parachute in from the South to dominate the Park Board. The main enemy were conservationists from organisations like the RSPB and the WWF. When the meeting was over I asked for clarification of his views.

Caring about the Community

We chatted a while and then he pointed out someone well-known for his interest in conservation sitting in a corner of the room. He spoke very favourably about him, saying how much he had done for the area. I pointed out what I saw was a contradiction in his views. I thought you didn't like conservationists. He had a ready explanation: this man was OK. He was different from other conservationists. He cared about the local community.

Interview with leading conservationist in local area

I think what you are picking up on as well is that a lot of it is nothing to do with nature conservation; it's to do with power. In the recent debate about beaver in Scotland, if you were able to really check it through, you would find that a lot of people who are against it or for it know very little about the beaver.

Power

Some of the views as to why they want it or don't want it are not based on the ecology of the animal, they're thinking if Scottish Natural Heritage want it then I don't. If this group don't want it, then I'm for it. So I think any of these discussions, whether in Strathspey or the rest of the world are based on these relationships and power and who thinks they should be in charge.



Who has the power?: The Aviemore Mafia?

Landowners: eg Alvie Estate

Property Developers



Conservation: The Green Mafia?

RSPB



Nature Scotland



Signs of Change

- Education, eg |John Muir Award
- Green tourism
- Local conservation initiatives
- Variety of walking groups
- Wearing many hats- integrating senses of place



Way forward? Power and Inequality

- Change power structures: political and economic, eg land reform and social justice
- Address economic inequality
- Increased participation in decision-making of all who live in the area, as well as those who may live elsewhere but have a commitment to both the nature and people.

Way forward?: Conservation

- Community-led conservation
- Make the most of the genuine interest found through-out the local community- bottom up rather than top-down strategy
- Building a new ship together, not just getting people on board: warden RSPB
- Importance of good interpersonal relationships

Would land reform make it easier to find
common ground?

Does it matter who owns the land?



Conservation Organisations



RSPB, John Muir Trust, Scottish Wildlife Trust,
Woodland Trust, National Trust for Scotland

New trends in 'green' landownership



- **Carbon Offsetting**
- **Carbon Credits**
- **Biodiversity offsetting**

Money to be made!!

Corporations: Brewdog Buys Kinrara



Philanthropists: Andres Povlsen



Environmentalists: Jeremy Leggett

<https://www.highlandsrewilding.co.uk/>



Community Ownership

Langholm Initiative

Great outdoor dream as community tries to

A Dumfriesshire community has put the environment at the heart of its regeneration fightback and is pinning its hopes on one of Scotland's largest landowners, Buccleuch. A once-flourishing textile centre, Langholm has been dogged in recent years by industry decline and hefty job losses. Now the Muckle Toon community wants to harness the panoramic and beautiful landscape

around it to kick-start a new era. And it's banking on a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Community group Langholm Initiative are in "advanced" talks with Buccleuch in a rare chance to buy almost 10,500 acres of Langholm Moor. If successful in raising the cash, community land ownership could create the Taras Valley Nature Reserve. They believe it will deliver community

regeneration, climate change action, ecological restoration, wildlife conservation and develop outdoor tourism, bringing new jobs and visitors to the area. But it comes with a 66 million price tag. Today we take a closer look at the Langholm Moor community buy-out plans and vision for the future.

Active-packed days
Young people get a taste of outdoor activities they could enjoy as part of the Langholm Moor buy-out plans



North Kelvin Meadows



Alternative Model: Conservation Organisations and Community

- Land owned by conservation organisation
- Training with adequate funding
- Managed by community





ADOPT A NEST *to help hornbills*

How funds will be utilised

- Salaries of the IINAP local co-ordinator and nest protectors
- Field equipment for the nest protectors
- Medical expenses for the nest protectors
- Logistics and local travel



Impact on ground

- Protection of hornbills and nests
- Successful fledging of chicks
- Employment of community members
- Building a network of conservation leaders
- Monitoring of hornbills



Community Ownership Challenges

- Hierarchies within communities
- Divisions- personal and/or political
- Different interests depending on economic situation, culture, history, eg sporting estate culture and deer stalking
- Problems of reconciling economic and social justice aims with environmental ones, so local interests vs wider public benefit
- Could become the same as private landowners, just more of them- insular, hostile to outsiders

Why Community Ownership/Stewardship

- Feeling of belonging
- More likely to care and take responsibility for the land, see the bigger picture
- Help to reduce inequalities
- Focus on public good, not private profit
- Context to bring livelihood interests and environmental aims together
- Still conflicts but all in the same space where compromises have to be made



Key Questions

- What can people working in conservation/environment fields do to increase engagement of people in the local communities where they are working?
- RSPB warden, speaking about community engagement initiatives:
“....one of the biggest opportunities and one of the biggest challenges of this initiative: community capacity building – and facilitating a feeling of community ownership for land.”

Key Questions

- How to facilitate social justice as well as achieve environmental aims?
- Does it matter who owns the land?
- What forms of land ownership facilitate both social and environmental justice?

- **B VandeSteege (2021) Land for Whom? Land for What? Senses of Place and Conflict in the Scottish Highlands**
www.landforwhatlandforwhom.org
- **People's Land Policy: www.peopleslandpolicy.org**
- **Sam Staddon: "Conservation is all about having a blether and getting people on board"**
(<https://www.conservationandsociety.org>)
- **K Rettie (2006): At home in national parks: a study of power, knowledge and discourse in Banff National Park and Cairngorms National Park**
(<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/8764204.pdf>)
- **Julian Hoffman: Irreplaceable: The Fight to Save Wild Places**