

WORK OF THE NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND



National Trust for Scotland (NTS) Newhailes Archaeologist Abigail Daly (right) explains some of the treasures of the eighteenth-century designed landscape. Archaeology has been used to explore and reveal some of the remarkable elements of the water gardens. Visitors have unrestricted access to discover many of the features of the 300 year old pleasure grounds. Photograph Robin Turner

The role of the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) is to conserve Scotland's natural and cultural heritage for the benefit of the nation. In obvious terms this involves owning and managing some of the most remarkable places in the country: Culzean Castle in Ayrshire, Culloden and other battlefields, and islands such as St Kilda, for example. The small team of NTS archaeologists is naturally involved in direct management of the cultural features of these places, through development control, survey, and research. But more recently we have become increasingly aware that we need to look outwards as well as inwards. In a nutshell, if we are going to sustain our activities, we need to be more influential beyond the boundaries of our properties, and we must encourage more people to care about what happens to their historic and natural environment.

At a recent meeting with a Scottish ministerial advisory group the question was asked 'What do we need to do to push the historic environment further up the political agenda?' The answer is, of course, to make sure that politicians are

aware that their voters care about their heritage. But people mostly take it for granted – unless something happens that threatens to take it away: a familiar ruin being converted for housing; development eating up chunks of a designed landscape; or a windfarm radically changing the character of a familiar landscape that has evolved over hundreds or even thousands of years.

The NTS is uniquely placed to help Scots appreciate their cultural as well as natural heritage in a number of ways; some traditional, but others more novel. Simply by operating our properties as visitor attractions raises the profile of the historic environment, and having a policy of unrestricted access to the wider countryside ensures everyone can benefit from the fruits of our environmental stewardship. We also have a long tradition of involving people in our conservation work – from the St Kilda Work Parties¹ to archaeological work camps.² We facilitate groups of conservation volunteers who help throughout the year on projects, including archaeological site management and recording.³

Naturally, we put a lot of effort into telling people about our work: talks to local groups; exhibitions and displays; guided walks; newspaper, television and radio articles; and our developing website.⁴ We know, from television audience research and from opinion polls, that vast numbers of people have a latent interest in their archaeological heritage, and there is good reason to believe that our activities will sensitise them and in some cases spur them into action – be it simply visiting a place and seeing it from a different angle, or perhaps getting out there and helping with its preservation. Having opened the door to people's interest we need to keep up the momentum; it is a challenge we are learning to tackle as part of the Ben Lawers Historic Landscape Project.⁵

At Ben Lawers our five-year project is funded by HLF, Historic Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and others, and is run by the Glasgow-based archaeological organisation GUARD. We want to learn more about the origins and development of one of the most beautiful and interesting landscapes in Scotland,



NTS St Kilda Archaeologist Susan Bain describing the World Heritage Site's nineteenth-century settlement to Deputy Environment Minister Allan Wilson. Raising awareness with politicians and government decision makers is an important way to lift the profile of archaeology and the historic environment up the political agenda. Photograph Robin Turner



GUARD Archaeologist John Atkinson assisting children to discover the joys of digging, as part of the Ben Lawers Historic Landscape Project. Engaging the interest of local schoolchildren is a key part of the project; it is often not long before the children drag their parents to the excavations, which most of them find fascinating. Photograph Derek Alexander



Robin Turner, NTS Head of Archaeology (right), taking a break from filming for the BBC TV countryside-based programme Landward. The series is watched by a substantial number of Scotland's farmers, and this programme was used to explain some of the threats to rural archaeological remains. Photograph National Trust for Scotland

but we are also encouraging people to care about the long-term wellbeing of the historic landscape. We do this in a number of ways: through participation in field schools, desk-based research and oral history; through public information exercises like talks, walks, exhibitions and the website; and particularly through involvement of local school children. Not only is it great fun working with youngsters, but it is a key to the future sustainability of the landscape they one day will be in charge of. We hope that many will develop a life-long appreciation

of their heritage – something that used to happen, in the days before television, by story telling and folklore. Involving children involves their parents too, which is helpful for today.

The Ben Lawers project has given us a test-bed for our ideas of involving people, but a new initiative through the Medieval or Later Rural Settlement (MoLRS) Working Group⁶ could revolutionise things – popularising the local historic environment more than at any time in the recent past. The Scotland's Rural Past Project is still

embryonic, but hits the mark with so many organisations that it has a good chance of fruition. The project aims to raise awareness of Scottish MoLRS sites, and to encourage active participation in their conservation and management. Over a five-year period the project will employ a blend of specialists who will help local people to explore and record their local MoLRS sites, which have so strongly influenced the character of the landscapes we have inherited. The project will not only facilitate the work of active local archaeological and historical groups, but will empower local communities – through active management, and by giving them knowledge and understanding to engage in the increasingly influential forum of community-based planning.

In addition to all this people-based activity, the NTS is one of the most active advocates for archaeology and the historic environment in the political arena. We devote time to influencing decision-makers, and to engaging with MSPs as an active voice for the heritage. We have formed strong and positive partnerships with other bodies with similar concerns – government-based organisations like Historic Scotland and the RCAHMS as well as other NGOs and professional bodies through the Built Environment Forum Scotland.⁷

These activities are all part of a cycle of informing, understanding, caring, contributing, protecting and resourcing. Each of these stages is 'for the benefit to the nation' and thus fits in with the NTS mission, but they also benefit NTS at a fundamental level by encouraging people to join: joining because they believe in the fundamental importance of our conservation work as well as for the more obvious benefits of membership. For the NTS, and perhaps for all similar organisations, governmental as well as NGO, this may now be the most important route to ensure our financial sustainability, as well as for the sustainability of the historic environment we are charged to protect.

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for Scotland



¹ Established in 1958 and run every year since: see 'Visiting St Kilda' on www.kilda.org.uk

² www.thistlecamps.org.uk

³ www.conservationvolunteers.org.uk

⁴ www.nts.org.uk

⁵ www.benlawers.org.uk

⁶ www.molrs.org.uk

⁷ www.befs.org.uk