

WHERE LONG SHADOWS FALL

TWO ART INSTALLATIONS IN THE CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK

Compiled and edited by Brian Hill

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The Cairngorms National Park has the largest area of native woodland in the UK, its great forests having evolved from woodland that's been here for thousands of years, an apt setting in which to celebrate UNESCO Year of the Forest 2011. For the funders, this project had two goals: to heighten our awareness of the beauty, power and atmosphere of the forest environment; and through the medium of art to encourage people to make connections with their local rural environment and stimulate a sense of ownership.

Surrounded by the ephemeral voices amongst the rootedness of trees at Glenbuchat, and transported back into a past where the connections between people and nature were implicit at Sòrn, these two installations achieved these goals and more.

Thank you Gill for inspiring us all to treasure such a special place.
Mòran taing!

Fiona McLean,
Cairngorms National Park Authority





WHERE LONG SHADOWS FALL

Where Long Shadows Fall was an arts project set in the Cairngorms National Park, exploring our heritage of wild places and the people living there. The project was funded by the Cairngorms National Park Authority, Cairngorms Local Action Group, Scottish Natural Heritage and Marr Area Partnership. Two outdoor installations were created on either side of the Park: one in Glenbuchat Woods and one in Strathmashie Forest at Laggan.

The idea for the project came about when, in Spring 2011, the Glenbuchat community asked local installation artist Gill Russell to participate in their first community exhibition for North East Open Studios. For funding, the community turned to the Cairngorms National Park Authority. Following more discussion, additional funding helped to expand the project and create a second installation and event on the west side of the park involving the community at Laggan. This project was part of 2011's UNESCO Year of the Forest.

Where Long Shadows Fall was managed by Fiona McLean, Community Heritage Officer for the Cairngorms National Park Authority. The project artist was Gill Russell.



Gill Russell is an installation artist working with light and sound.

She was Artist in Residence at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig in Skye during 2009/10. Her work there culminated in the exhibition, 'Uamh/Cave', at the Royal Scottish Academy in Edinburgh in January 2011. She has worked on a wide range of unusual and innovative collaborative projects with other artists, writers, musicians, poets, astronomers. and archaeologists. For more information, visit Gill Russell's website at cosmicsky.co.uk



THE ANCESTRAL LANDSCAPE

Artists from all cultures have strived for a long time to develop deep connections and harmony with the natural landscape environment. In Western culture, artists such as Monet, Constable and Turner painted outdoors and tried to capture on canvas the elusive and ever-changing skies and weather. More recently, environmental artists such as Robert Smithson (Earthworks) have challenged conventional notions of creating and exhibiting, by graduating from portraying landscape to actually involving it, moving out of the studio and the gallery into the rural and urban landscape itself.

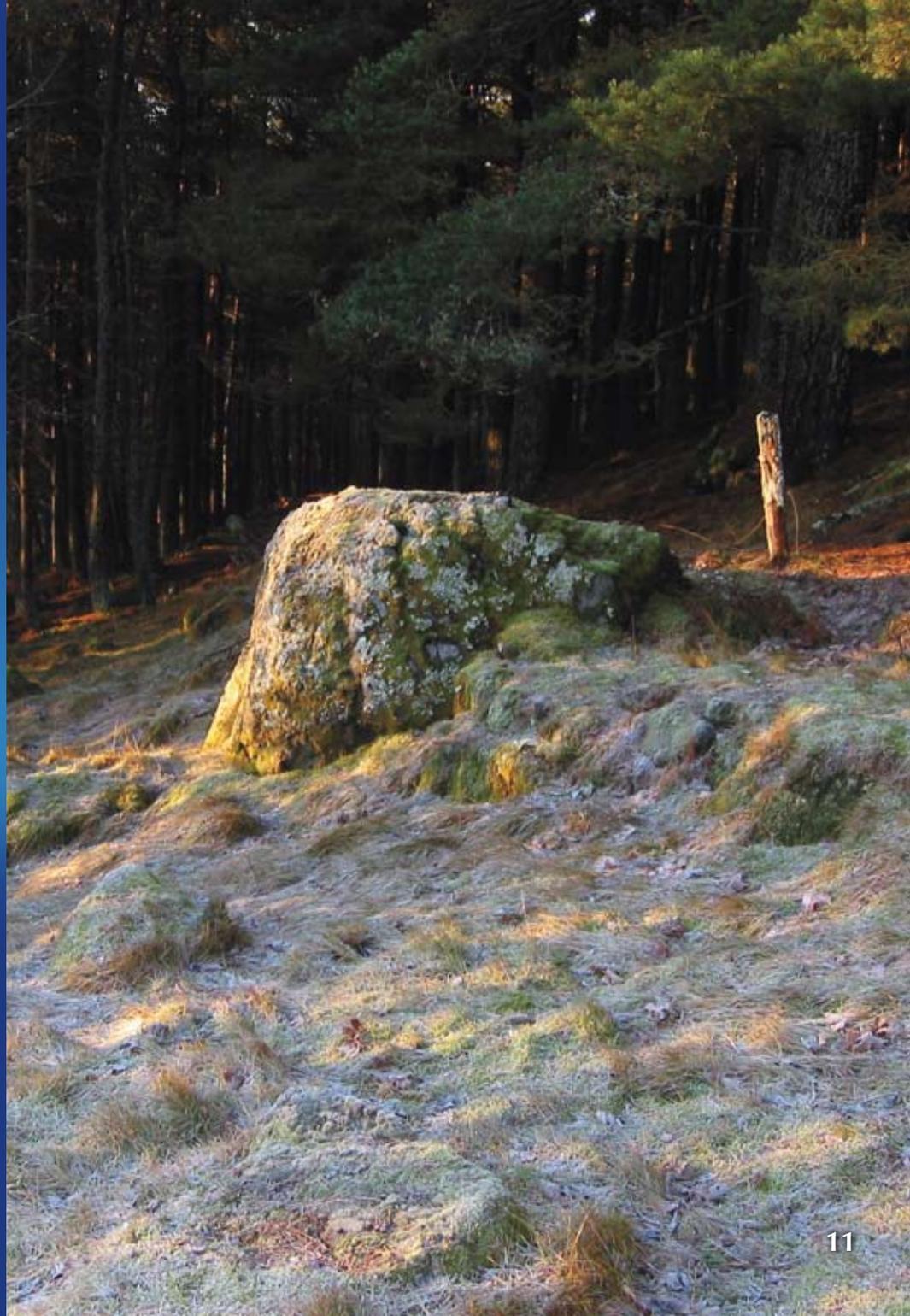
Our early ancestors had a keen awareness of their natural environment, connecting with it in its broadest sense: with the land and sky, and with the cosmic, where the daily motions of sun, moon and stars gave seasonal rhythm to their lives. They were aware also of a transparency between worlds, between the living and the dead, ancestors and lives to come, the physical and the metaphysical, a notion alien to contemporary Western culture. In Britain, and particularly Scotland, there are literally hundreds of stone circles and other prehistoric spiritual sites. Many modern artists have taken inspiration from them, notably Land Art - such as Robert Morris's Observatory and the light artist James Turrell's Roden Crater, an extinct volcano in the painted desert in Arizona which makes reference to cosmic events and sacred sites such as Stonehenge, Newgrange and Maes Howe. Turrell's subtle interventions with light invite the viewer to take part in the work, to 'see ourselves see'. Paraphrasing Tiberghien in her essay Contemporary Metaphysics (Half Life NVA 2007), Tracy Warr writes 'The importance of archaic forms for the Land Art artists stems from the desire to revive... another type of knowledge.'

The large scale landscape works of the NVA Half Life in Argyll drew on our relationship with death and the many prehistoric sites around Kilmartin. Another NVA work, The Storr, in Skye took visitors on a night time journey in the Storr landscape, where the pillars of rock were subtly illuminated and where the visitors encountered Gaelic poetry and singing along the way. As with Turrell's work, in both the NVA landscape works, the viewer co-creates the environment in which they are immersed, generating an exciting dynamic between the work and the spectator.

Gill Russell, March 2012

GLENBUCHAT INSTALLATION

AUDIO INSTALLATION, GLENBUCHAT WOODS, 10TH SEPTEMBER–9TH OCTOBER 2011



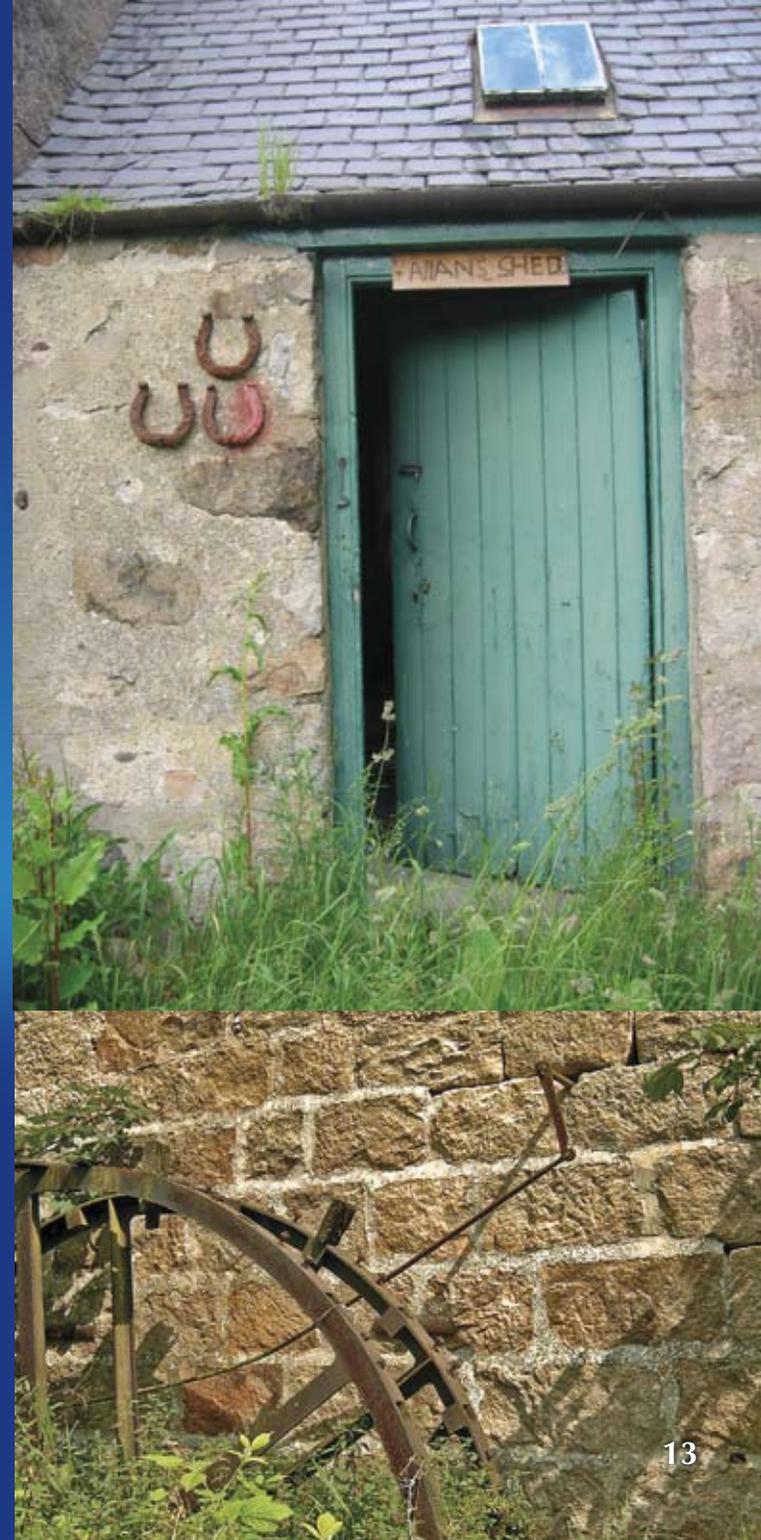


GLENBUCHAT

Forty miles west of Aberdeen, Glenbuchat lies on the eastern edge of the Cairngorms National Park. This small glen is typical of so many along the highland course of the River Don. It is small and picturesque and, if you pick away at its past, steeped in history and tradition. Just as typical has been its gradual decline in recent times. Over many years, the population has fallen and the few people remaining have lived, as ever, on the land, along with a scattering of retired folks. More recently, however, people have been returning and the new population has brought, not just a few more retirees, but younger people and families. These are the people who have begun to make the glen live again.

Amongst the farms and steadings and fields of Aberdeen Angus cattle, others now bring different trades. Glenbuchat's thriving community includes a few artists, adding to other creative makers in upper Donside. But it is the community which carries the traditions of the glen forward, reaching back into the strand of smallholdings and crofts which their long-gone predecessors left behind.

This thriving community re-established and now run the community hall, which was chosen by local artists for their first collective NEOS (North East Open Studios) exhibition in 2011. The Glenbuchat installation work was one exhibit among them and it too had its roots in the place. It took as its content, recorded memories of the original residents and the sounds of the glen itself.







ART IN THE BUCHAT

Some examples of work in the NEOS (North East Open Studios) exhibition in Glenbuchat Hall, of which the *Where Long Shadows Fall* installation was a part. The exhibition in the Hall ran between the 10th and the 18th September 2011.





VOICES

People.

Like people I once knew,
Fathers and mothers,
Spoke to me again.

Voices,

Which time had worn away,
Echoed like memory
In the space between us.

As if the leaves,
Worn September leaves,
Still held on to life
Death-defying in their high trees.

Long-lost souls returned
To their long-drawn place,
Turned imagined footsteps
Home.

Birds of park and wood,
Hoolet, cushat and peewit
Rose out of sight
From a dim-remembered place.

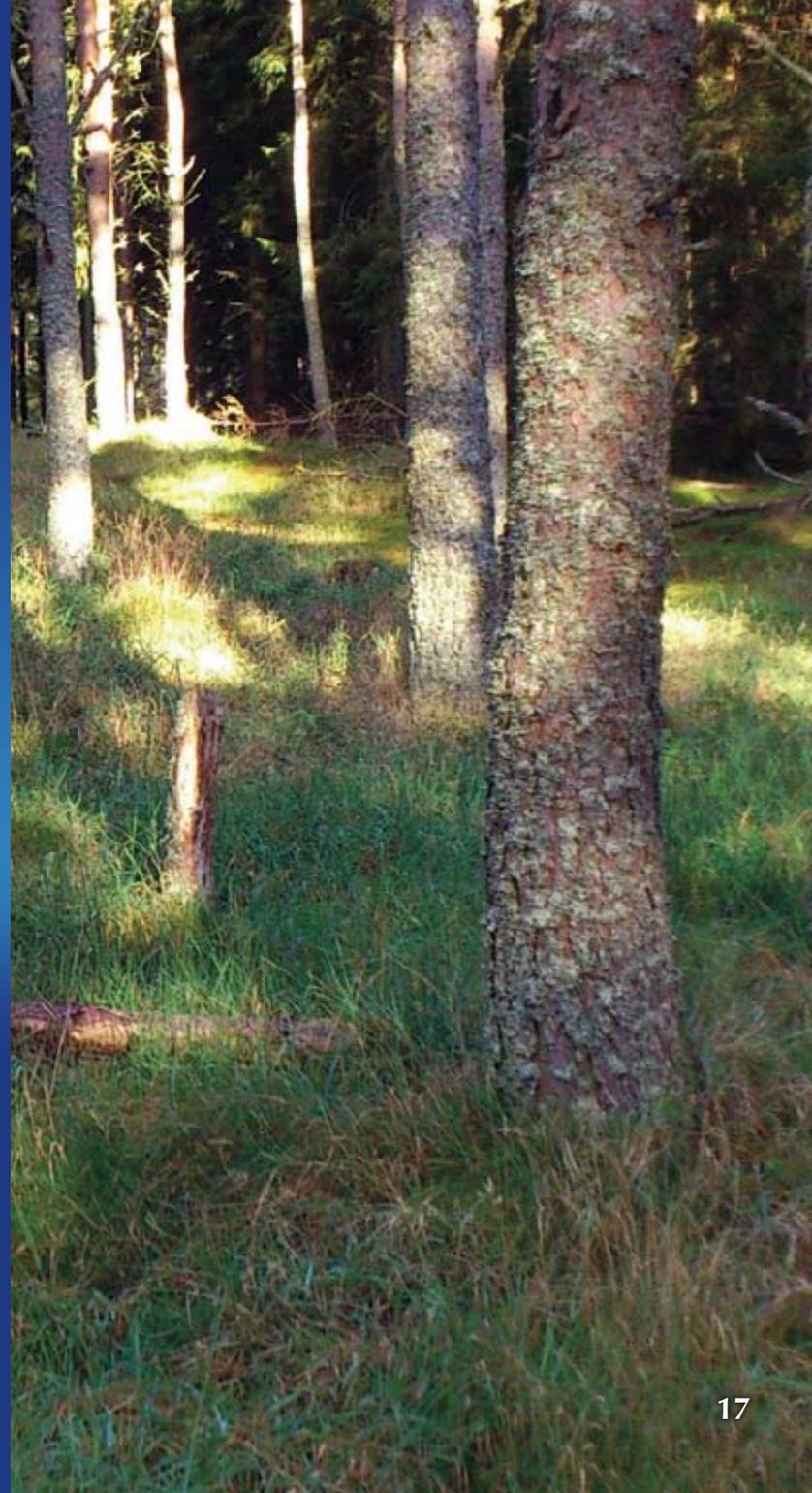
Mist on the far hill
Came like smoke
And went like the clouds
Leaving at sunset.

The wind rose and fell
Twisting leaves into rain
Beech, rowan, aspen, flakes of winter
Long-gone, but coming soon.

Those voices, so old,
So full of heart,
Spoke as if nothing at all
Had withered in the glen.

Those voices, so bright,
Were yesterday for us,
Dust in our fingers,
Falling like the crumbling earth,
The crumbling earth that years become.

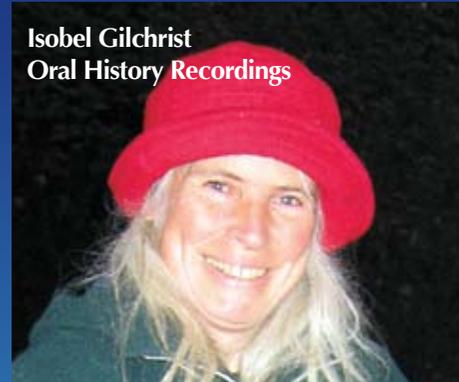
Poem *Voices* written by Brian Hill
in response to the Glenbuchat installation.





THE INSTALLATION

The Glenbuchat Woods Installation was inspired by people's stories of their lives in the Glen, taken from oral history recordings collected in the community by Isobel Gilchrist, and which were used in the Glenbuchat heritage exhibition 'In the Buchat' in 2009.



The stories are rich and vibrant in content, full of memories and laughter. They gave a direct connection with past times, strongly linked to both people and place, really capturing the spirit of the Glen. Gill felt drawn to explore them further in the form of an audio installation. Extracts of voice were interspersed with the natural sounds of the Glen and forest and these were all incorporated into a soundscape along with other imagined sounds.

The site itself was set in the heart of Glenbuchat, near the hall: a circle of hardwood trees with a clearing in the centre. At some time in the past, these trees had been planted there in that circular formation with several species, lime, ash, sycamore, beech and rowan, amongst them. Close by was a house called Sunnybrae which was the place where, in the audio, the story of one person's life was recounted. It was a very peaceful spot.

Where Long Shadows Fall was chosen by Gill as a name for the installation.

"As the earth turns, the sun moves and the shadow moves... casting a temporary ephemeral mark on the landscape... just as peoples lives are lived... their life shadows move over the landscape of place and time."

The audio was channelled through six speakers attached to trees in the circle to give a surround sound. Visitors activated the audio by pressing a button on the signboard.

BBC Radio Scotland paid a visit on site for the programme 'Out of Doors'. They recorded some of the audio installation and Fiona McLean (Project Manager) and Gill Russell (Project Artist) were interviewed. The interview was broadcast twice, on September 17th and 18th 2011.



GLENBUCHAT – CONSTRUCTION

The audio was mixed and created in 6 separate channels using SONAR software and transferred to the 'audio box' hidden in a high treehouse. The audio box was a box of tricks created specially for this project by Audioposts.

The box was linked to 6 waterproof speakers attached to trees by cables strung high in the branches.



A press button switch activated the audio.

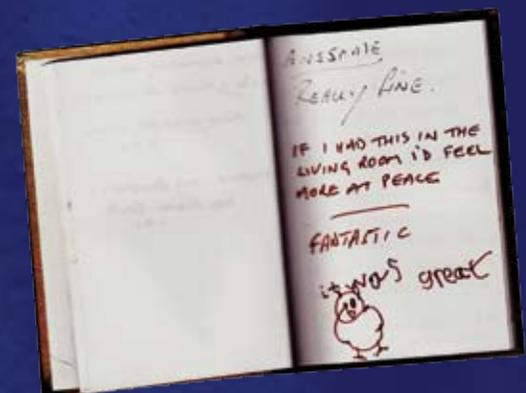
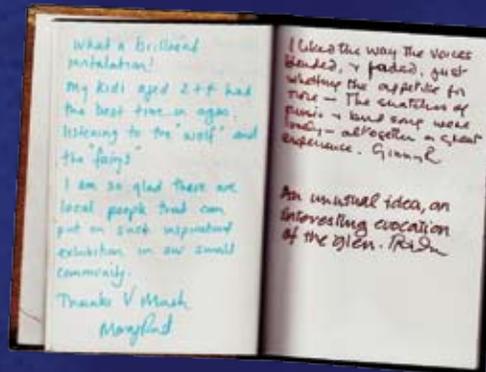
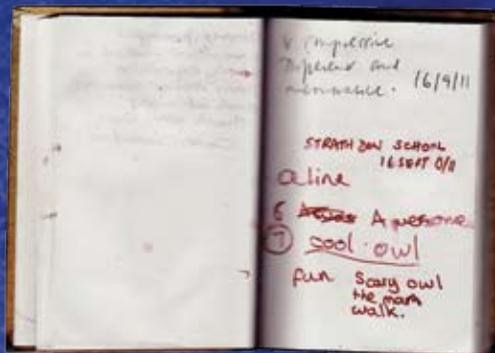
Testing of the sound had to be done in situ to create the final soundtrack.

A STRONG WIND CAN ADVERSELY
AFFECT THE SUBTLE AUDIO. PLEASE
COME BACK WHEN ITS STILL !

The wind was an issue as the background noise level could be a problem, but if it was set too high, then it was too loud when there was no wind.

Volunteers from Glenbuchat community helped create paths and clear the ground of fallen branches and debris to create an open circle for visitors to listen to the audio.

'Quite amazing' 'Awesome' 'Magical, mysterious, moving'
 'Really evocative of the Glen' **'Atmospheric'** 'Evocative'
 'Fascinating' 'Nothing I have heard like it before'
 'A strange and beautiful experience' 'Completely absorbing'
 'Brilliant, great sound effects' 'Very emotionally longing'
 'Very haunting and soothing—beautifully produced'
 'The Glenbuchat voices floating out of the trees -wonderful'



GLENBUCHAT – VISITOR FEEDBACK

'The echoes of all the people of Glenbuchat are here'

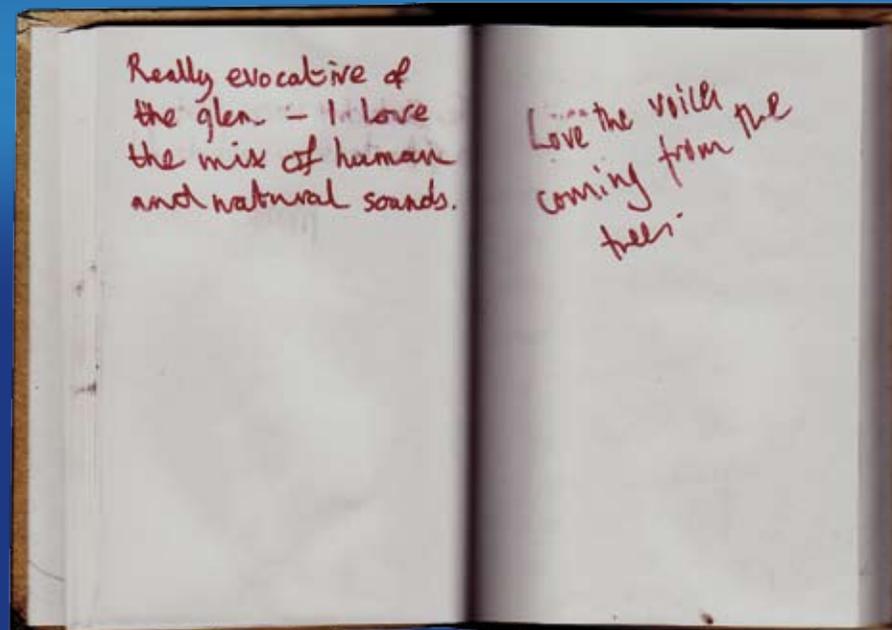
'A moving experience, to be immersed in the present and past at one and the same time and place...

I hear owls every night...

The human spirit encapsulated in vocal recollections...

People I know, people know of and people whose souls inhabit this place in which I live.'

Alan Carr, 11th September 2011



SÒRN

INSTALLATION, STRATHMASHIE FOREST, 17TH DECEMBER 2011–26TH MARCH 2012





HEARTH / SÒRN

Night in the deep forest
Falls on blind eyes.
No-one sees the fading of the light.

Words,
Heard above birds in flight,
Speak in tongues not our own.
Other meanings hide
In their telling.

Fire in the earth
Came blue at last,
As if ice were lying
Just beneath the surface.

In the trees' circle.
A ragged hem of sky,
Two shades paler
Than the black canopy,
Cupped one star
In parting cloud.

What had been snow,
Remnants of sleet and rain,
There, the mist falling
Was dew upon the eyes,
An infinity of moisture
From the pinewood's arms.

In its ring of stones, blue,
With a cold element of stillness,
The patient light shone
As if there was no end to it.

Above, where no-one looked,
Now, the vague forest
Crackled with sounds moving:
The horse from right to left,
The beat of wings
Like eagle
Like moorhen
Like heather cock
With, behind, sounds calling
From forgotten seasons.

Then the singing,
High and cold
As if blue also was its colour.
A song like the sea,
A stream of southbound sea,
With waves and spume
Coming angular across the Minch
Where the blue men, Am Fear Gorm,
Steal the souls of sailors
From ever finding land.

In this forest,
A hundred miles given
To ground,
The haunted voice
Sang of landscapes lost,
Sons and husbands
Pulled down in the deep;
The deep of sea;
The deep of earth.

Cold slid uninvited
Beneath the skin.
Silence came at last
To the woodgrove
Where only dimness
Rose from the hearth-pit.
Light and shadow
On the long-trunked trees.

In this place,
The veil thinned
Between here and nowhere.
Trees, like masts,
Shone with St Elmo's fire
While the ship of night
Heeled before a thousand winds.

Poem, *Hearth / Sòrn*, written by Brian Hill in response to the Sòrn installation.



STRATHMASHIE FOREST

Strathmashie Forest was developed as a community-led project, the result of an active partnership between Laggan Forest Trust and the Forestry Commission. It has led to the improvement of the native woodlands and provision of opportunities for public access. These have been carried out as part of the nationwide Millennium Forest for Scotland, providing a lasting woodland legacy for future generations to appreciate and enjoy.

The project has created waymarked paths through the Laggan woodlands. The Sòrn installation was set up on a short, well-signposted, easy walk starting from the Wolftrax car park.

In the 1990s the Laggan Forestry Initiative began work to develop Strathmashie Forest for local employment. After several years they succeeded in acquiring and redeveloping local housing provision owned by the community. In 1996 however, following a visit from the then Secretary of State for Scotland, they entered into a partnership with the Forestry Commission to manage the forest. In 1998, the partnership was finally agreed and the Laggan Forest Trust came in to being.

Sòrn represents another initiative supported by the community of Laggan, using its natural resources for the benefit of the people who live there.





THE INSTALLATION

When funding was secured to create a second installation on the west side of the Park, Laggan Forest Trust were chosen as partners for their enthusiasm and experience of running community projects and events.

After a meeting in early October, Iona Malcolm, Projects Officer for Laggan Forest Trust, Fiona McLean and Gill chose a site in Strathmashie Forest for the installation.

SÒRN, was to be an outdoor, night-time, light and sound installation which would run through the winter months from 17 December 2011 until 26 March 2012.

Sòrn, explored the connections between worlds, time, land and sky. The forest, a place of shelter and reflection was central to the work. The work comprised a subtle circle of light in a low mound of stones set in a clearing deep in the forest. Surround audio from speakers in the trees created a soundscape in all directions. Gill worked with young people at Fèisean a' Mhonaidh Ruaidh and with tutor, Dave Martin, to record some of the audio material that later fed into the soundscape.

Sòrn made reference to the winter solstice and the returning sun through the circle of light. The cairn of stones represented a meeting place, a memorial, a marker. It was reminiscent of the structures built by our early ancestors who had a keen awareness of the movements of celestial bodies and of a transparency between this world and another.

Standing there, you could hear a collage of sound coming from high in the trees around the clearing. In it were the sounds of voices, Gaelic song combined with music, bells, chimes, natural sound: birds, animals, rain, water and wind.

The name SÒRN, suggested by Fiona McLean, is a loose translation from the Gaelic, meaning 'hearth' or 'chimney'. In this context it describes a sort of transformative or liminal meeting place.



SÒRN BY NIGHT AND DAY

Sòrn was designed to be seen in total darkness as the lighting was very subtle. It was reached by a 5-minute walk along a good forestry track from the Wolftrax Centre, Laggan.

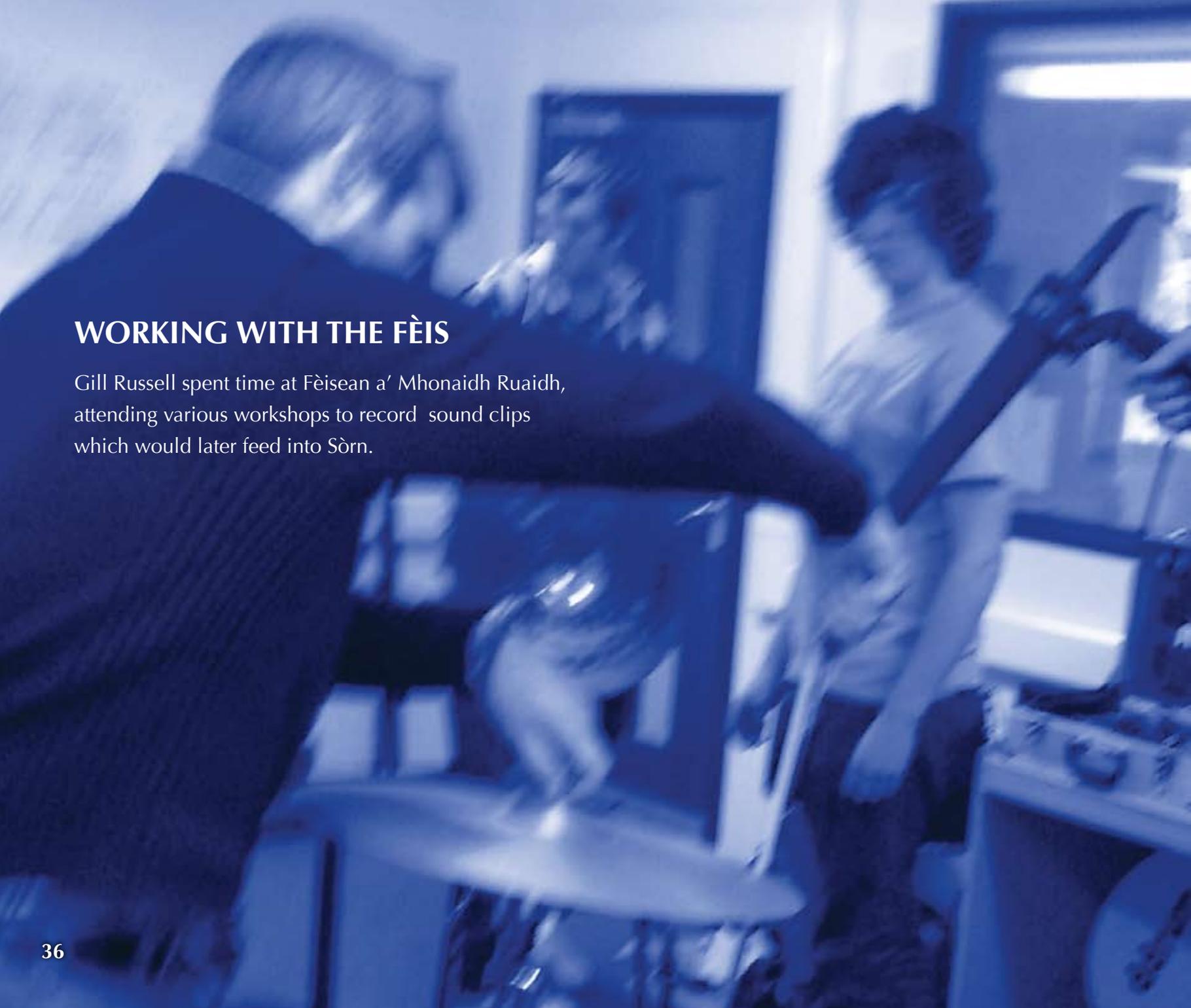




To create the circle of light a large 2m diameter fibreglass 'light drum' with LED lights was sunk in a hole in the ground. It was created in Gill's workshop and much effort was put into trying to achieve an optimum subtle translucency (but, of course, this needed to be tested later in situ). It also had to be strong enough to withstand people walking on it. The circle of stones was gathered by hand from the surrounding forest with help from Laggan Forest Trust volunteers and, using a power barrow they borrowed from Creag Meagaidh Nature Reserve, Gill arranged the stones around the light drum to simulate a cairn.

SÒRN – CONSTRUCTION





WORKING WITH THE FÈIS

Gill Russell spent time at Fèisean a' Mhonaidh Ruaidh, attending various workshops to record sound clips which would later feed into Sòrn.



In the weeks before opening, the Sòrn site experienced the heaviest snow of the winter in 2011. The installation was under snow for most of the early part of December, making the completion of the final (mostly technical) tasks extremely challenging. With no vehicular access to the site, all heavy equipment had to be carried by hand up the track, and kept everyone very fit!



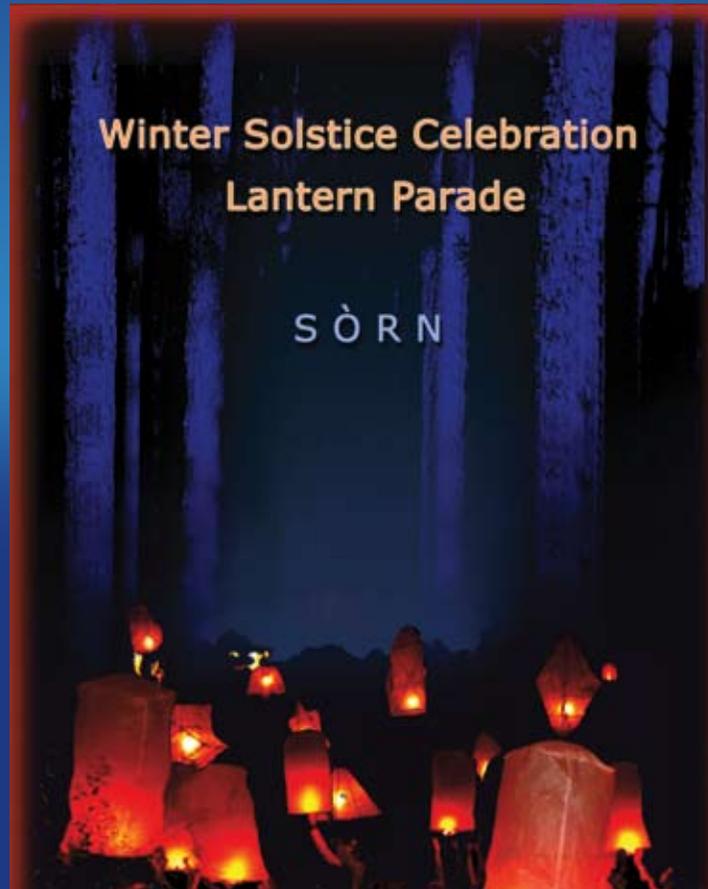
SÒRN AND WINTER WEATHER





SÒRN OPENING AND LANTERN PARADE

Jillian Robertson of Wild Thinking with help from Iona Malcolm of Laggan Forest Trust ran lantern-making workshops with local school children. These were the lanterns used to light the way during the parade on December 22nd to celebrate the Winter Solstice and the launch of Sòrn. Despite the challenging weather on the day, more than 150 people took part.





SÒRN – VISITOR FEEDBACK

“Gill Russell’s Sòrn - a sound and light experience in Strathmashie Forest

Whilst staying in Kingussie at New Year my friends and I visited Sòrn – Gill Russell’s sound and light installation in Strathmashie Forest near Laggan. Eighteen of us made the trip on the evening of New Year’s Day, driving the twelve or so miles to the Wolftrax Centre car park. On the short walk up through the woods most used torches to light the track, I used mine to scan the trees for owls. Reaching a clearing we gathered round a luminous disc that glowed softly from its resting place amongst a cairn of stones. A nearby button was pressed and the show began...

I’d expected a display of sound and light, but in fact sound is the main element, the disc of gentle off-white remained constant throughout. Like a portal into a place of snow. From the trees beside us, behind us, all around us, noises came. Sometimes haunting, sometimes uplifting, always intriguing. A group of women sang in Gaelic, children chanted, bells tolled and chimes rang. A buzzard cried its piercing mew and - most impressive to me - a horse galloped swiftly from left to right, as if it were right behind our backs. In times gone by perhaps a highwayman, or a messenger speeding his important errand through the night. Above all this trees reached up to touch the winter moon.

There were a few comments at first, a laugh here and there, but quickly these silenced as everyone became absorbed. When the sounds had eventually faded away the group headed back towards the car park. I waited, wanting to experience the performance a second time, on my own – considerably more eerie than when surrounded by 17 friends! I made my return along the track without use of my torch, lit only by the moon. My shadow walked before me and snowflakes began pirouetting gracefully through the air.

So, thank you Gill Russell for a beautiful and inspiring experience and a great excuse to get out and explore a forest at night. If anyone’s in the area this winter – don’t miss it.”

Comments from artist, Leo Du Feu, who visited the Sòrn installation at New Year, 2011.
Later published in the Northings website – <http://northings.com/>.



THE LEGACY OF INSTALLATION ARTWORKS IN THE LANDSCAPE

Installation art differs in degree to other forms. Its scale is different, as is its range of media. Then, there is the context: the community and all the other stakeholders in a place, and the landscape itself.

In artworks such as these, installed among trees and forest, the artist acts as 'collector', gathering raw materials, or as 'medium', listening to the forest and the people who live there. A work evolves by distillation; that is the process.

Through relationship and partnership an artist can draw on the lives (past and present) which co-inhabit a place. It's important to represent them, to draw them into a piece of work. Equally important is allowing people to make their own creative connections with the artwork itself.

A community develops ownership by involvement in the creative process. People volunteer their physical labour in the landscape, in site preparation. They contribute to the source materials: stories, images, sounds, songs, words, artefacts, performance. They participate in the events, activities which lead up to the creation of the finished work. They contribute by being open to new connections.

A community, of course, doesn't exist just as a population. It includes those whose roles and responsibilities reach in from beyond an actual

location. These are landowners, public agencies, and all those affiliated to them, whose work gives them stewardship. They may fund an art project or they may be its champions, or those who facilitate it through permission or influence.

Such relationships are complex and challenging. But then, they always have been. Engagement with a community, however, permits relationships to be opened in a new way and redefined more positively. The artwork is a catalyst.

The effect of an artwork, though, is interesting. It brings a creative process which gives those participating a new vehicle for their experiences. The works described here, like many with land and environment as their context, start with the fundamental things. When we reconnect to the environment, to sky, weather and seasons, to day or night, we step out of social conditions. We have the opportunity to let different connections define us.

That opportunity can be personal or institutional. If an artwork can help people take inspiration from their own place and value it more, then, good. If it helps organisations meet communities in a new way, then, even better. If it helps us all see that life and work extends beyond the boundaries we place upon them, then, that is best of all.

Brian Hill & Gill Russell, March 2012



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There have been so many people involved in this project, it's hard to know where to start. Creating installation art relies heavily on inspiration, support, collaboration and the expertise of others.

Special thanks has to go to the community of Glenbuchat where the first seeds of the whole project began to germinate. Without that initial impetus we would never have had the grassroots support upon which to make funding applications. That led to the involvement of our several funding partners: Cairngorms National Park Authority, Cairngorms Local Action Group, Scottish Natural Heritage and Marr Area Partnership.

Staying with Glenbuchat, the scene for the first work, I'm deeply indebted for the volunteers and collaborators there who gave so much time and effort. Particular thanks go to my friend and colleague, Isobel Gilchrist, for her oral history recordings, and for her friendship throughout. Thanks to the artists and makers of Glenbuchat and Donside who made the 'Art in the Buchat' exhibition a reality, especially Frances Crawford who, along with Isobel Gilchrist, organised this first NEOS exhibition.

Also, I'm very grateful for the enthusiasm and commitment of the community of Laggan, where the second work, Sòrn was located. Laggan Community Trust, Fèisean a' Mhonaidh Ruaidh, Gergask School, and Wild Thinking all helped to put the Strathmashie Forest work, Sòrn, on the map.

I'd like to thank Brian Hill of Brian Hill Film and Design for creating and supporting the website which promoted the project and which will remain online as part of the project's continued legacy. Brian has been a long-time collaborator on past projects and contributed his poems 'Hearth / Sòrn' and 'Voices' for publication here and online. Brian also compiled and edited this book.

On a personal note, I'd like to say thanks to my project manager, Fiona McLean, and Iona Malcolm, community projects officer at Laggan Forest Trust, for their support in dealing with project administration and liaison with funders. Last, but certainly not least (since he was the one wielding pick, spade and climbing many ladders), I must thank Chris Tauber, my husband, for all his practical and emotional help and support.

Gill Russell, March 2012

PHOTO CREDITS

Francisco Diego – pages 6, 8, 42, 44

Brian Hill – pages 3, 4, 5, 25, 46

Paul Johnson/Isobel Gilchrist – pages 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19

Matt Tough – page 15

Iona Malcolm – page 41

Murdo McLeod – page 7

Bryan Watson – page 21

Andrew Smith, NorthScotNews.com – pages 26, 32, 40

All other photos contributed by Gill Russell.

*Map of Cairngorms National Park – page 4
(Reproduced with permission - OS License 100040965)*

WEBSITES:

Where Long Shadows Fall – longshadows.co.uk

Cairngorms National Park Authority – www.cairngorms.co.uk

Gill Russell – cosmicsky.co.uk

Brian Hill – filmdesign.org.uk

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Cairngorms National Park Authority, Cairngorms Local Action Group (LEADER), Scottish Natural Heritage, Marr Area Partnership.



CAIRNGORMS
NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY


Scottish Natural Heritage
All of nature for all of Scotland



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