

## The state of campaigning for the great outdoors

### Campaign or Campaigner of the Year

- The BMC - for access campaigns and Mend our Mountains
- Fix the Fells - for maintaining the Lakeland fells
- Friends of the Lake District - for their Pylons Campaign
- #GetOutside by Ordnance Survey for their work to help more people to get outside more often
- #itsgreatoutthere - for their efforts to reach new audiences and get them outside
- John Muir Trust - for their wild land campaigns and the John Muir Award
- Mark Avery - for his campaign against driven grouse shooting
- Nick Kempe - for his work on the Parks Watch Scotland blog
- Patricia Stubbs - for her campaigning against motor traffic in Green Lanes

Reason for choice  
(optional)

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A few weeks ago I

learned that someone had nominated me for the TGO Readers' Award under the category Campaign or Campaigner of the year. I am really grateful that someone appreciated parkswatchscotland sufficiently to nominate me for this. I also think its great that TGO values campaigning and through the awards and its coverage makes more walkers aware that the outdoors is not just somewhere to enjoy but also a politically contested space. For campaigning is politics with a small "p".

I am not, however, canvassing for votes and am not interested in competing against other campaigns or campaigners. The truth is parkswatch – and the whole outdoor movement if it can be described as such – supports most of the aims of those nominated for the TGO awards. We need to work together.

And that is fundamental part of what parkswatch is about, working with other people. While presently I write many of the posts, I have always hoped more people would do so and am particularly grateful to other contributors. Behind the scenes however there is now a large number of people and organisations keen to promote critical debate about our National Parks in Scotland who support

parkswatch in all sorts of ways: providing information, making information requests, tipoffs about what is going on and what needs investigation, suggestions for critical analysis, drafting argument/pieces for potential use, sharing posts on social media etc. Not only this, but people are taking action, everything from submitting complaints and contacting politicians at the individual level to working through organisations. My thanks to each and every one of you. I suspect similar stories could be told for the other campaign/ers nominated for the TGO awards.

While this gives reason to be optimistic about the future, it is worth considering how successful all these campaigns – and the many others not nominated for the awards – have been to date. The truth is there is a long way to go. Yes, all the campaigns listed have had their successes but none has achieved the type of fundamental change that is needed. So, Mend our Mountains and Fix the Fells have addressed some footpath erosion but the issue of how we get sufficient funding for path maintenance work across the British Isles remains. Mark Avery, backed by wonderful organisations like Raptor Persecution UK and a whole network of bird recorders etc, has done a huge amount to raise awareness of raptor persecution but meantime raptors continue to be killed and disappear on grouse moors, particularly in our National Parks, with depressing regularity. Lots of people, like Get Outside, are doing great work to try and re-connect people with nature, but poverty and the slashing of outdoor education provision as part of austerity, not to mention the camping ban in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, offsets all of this work. JMT has done fantastic work on raising awareness of the importance of wild land, but this hasn't prevented the Scottish Government giving the go-ahead to the Creag Riabhach windfarm in a Wild Land Area in Sutherland.

And parkswatch is no different. Certain changes in our National Parks over the last 18 months – from alterations to camping permit areas to restoration of hill tracks – may be partially attributed to critical coverage on the blog. But on the really big issues, such as land-use, whether intensive grouse moor or forest management, or major developments, such as An Camus Mor, Flamingo Land or the Cononish goldmine expansion, there is everything still to go for.

It would be great if next year there was a standout campaign which had achieved fundamental change, whether in Scotland or anywhere else in the British Isles. For any such change to happen however will require change at the political level and in Scotland at present there is very little sign of this happening.

There is a significant contrast between the radicalism of the early days of the Scottish Parliament (the first Land Reform Act, the creation of National Parks, the Nature Conservation Act) and how it and the Scottish Government now operate (with some significant exceptions of course). Resources that might have assisted the implementation of that early legislation and promoted progressive change in the countryside – whether access officers, countryside rangers or staff monitoring biodiversity – have been slashed. There is very little challenge to the way the Scottish Government is micro-managing and centralising public authorities with organisations such as our National Parks and SNH told what they can and cannot do by civil servants – with loss of even more funding the consequence of non-co-

operation. Even the simplest of decisions, such as the re-introduction of beavers, can only be taken after years of bureaucratic obfuscation. The Scottish Government's response to public pressure to change – such as over raptor persecution – is yet more bureaucracy, with handpicked working groups which deliberate for years and achieve nothing. That it has taken over six months for the Scottish Government to announce the membership of the grouse moor review group tells you everything about the current failures of government.

I am optimistic though that this can change. The ideological consensus behind how Scotland and the countryside, including our National Parks, should be managed is breaking down and that provides a great opportunity. To exploit that opportunity campaigners will need to work together and see everything is connected. So, on grouse moors for example, the way they are being managed affects not just wildlife but the landscape. Behind this its the power of landowners which is the fundamental determinant of how land is used, whether for pylons, windfarms or intensive rearing of grouse and its only when campaigns get together and start to address these fundamental issues that we will get real change.

Within this context our National Parks should be demonstration sites for how things could be done differently and a measure of success for parkswatch will be when they start fulfilling that role.

### **Category**

1. National Parks

### **Tags**

1. flamingo land
2. grouse moors
3. landscape
4. paths
5. wildlife persecution

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