

The importance of environmental campaigning – the contribution of Dave Morris

Description

Height of success: Top honour for champion of wild Scotland

'Mountain hero' given lifetime achievement award for dedication to the environment, writes **Mike Merritt**



A LEADING Scottish environmental campaigner has been honoured for devoting his life to protecting and promoting access to the country's wild landscapes.

Dave Morris has been announced as the 13th recipient of the Scottish Award for Excellence in Mountain Culture.

Nominated by the public and his peers as a "mountain hero" who celebrates achievement, accomplishment and the spirit of adventure, Mr Morris joins an impressive list of previous winners that includes Colin Prior, Andy Nisbet, Dr Adam Watson, Jimmy Marshall, Myrtle Simpson, Ian Sykes, and Dr Hamish MacInnes in the Excellence in Mountain Culture Hall of Fame.

The announcement is made as part of the Fort William Mountain Festival.

Mr Morris has devoted most of his life to protecting and promoting access to the wild landscapes of Scotland.

From the Lurchers Gully inquiry in the 1980s to his hugely influential role in the campaign for access in Scotland prior to the publication of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, he has been a stalwart environmental campaigner.



Dave Morris, a lifelong climber, skier and hillwalker, is the 13th recipient of the Scottish Award for Excellence in Mountain Culture

As a director of Ramblers Scotland for many years, he made great use of the media to persuade politicians, landowners and the general public to see the enormous benefit the wild landscapes provide.

On his retirement from this post in 2014, writer Cameron McNeish – winner of Scottish Award for Excellence in Mountain Culture 2018 – described Mr Morris as the "closest thing we have to a John Muir figure ... a wild-country champion who could lift up the eyes of an uncaring public and show them that in wildness lies the hope of the world".

Sponsor Jahama Highland Estates' chief operating officer, Julia Stoddart,

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A tireless campaigner for public access rights and for the environment

said: "We are delighted once again to show our support for the Festival by sponsoring the Award for Excellence in Mountain Culture and congratulate this year's winner Dave Morris, an outstanding recipient.

"A tireless campaigner for public access rights and for the environment, Dave is a seminal figure in the Scottish outdoor access world, and it is right that his dedication and commitment are recognised through the award.

"Jahama Highland Estates is an inspiring landscape that attracts access-takers of all kinds, and we fully support the right to responsible access as enshrined in the Scottish

Outdoor Access Code (SOAC), which owes so much to Dave's work. "The benefits of SOAC to the public have never been clearer than during the pandemic.

"Outdoor exercise has taken a central role in many people's wellbeing during the past year, and Jahama continues to work with local stakeholders to ensure that recreation forms a key part of 'building back better' from Covid-19."

Mr Morris also represented the interests of Scotland on a world stage as the president of the Mountain Protection Commission of the International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation (UIAA) for eight years.

He is a lifelong climber, skier and hillwalker, and has been a particular source of inspiration in the last few years, having battled throat cancer.

Now breathing through a small hole in his throat, Mr Morris has defiantly managed to climb to 20,000ft in the Himalayas, ski mountaineer in Alaska, and climb alpine rock routes in Norway.

Stuart Youniss, chief executive of Mountaineering Scotland, said: "I remember clearly when Dave came to deliver a guest lecture to our student year when I was an undergraduate at Moray House in the early 1990s and I passion and enthusiasm was an inspiration to us all.

"He was one of the key figures responsible for securing the access rights we all enjoy today and he continues to be an influential voice on environmental and conservation issues.

"Few can match his many achievements and this award is thoroughly deserved."

Herald 19th February

Whether you know Dave or have never come across him, the 10 minute video produced by the Fort William Mountain Film festival ([see here](#)), much of which is set in the Cairngorms National Park, should be an inspiration for anyone concerned about the natural environment and access to nature. It shows just what can be achieved through campaigning.

Dave is a close friend and prompted me to set up parkswatchscotland. After two fruitless years trying to persuade the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority not to extend its camping byelaws, rather than accept defeat I decided to go public. It was Dave who suggested that if I was going to set up a blog to expose what was going on, it might as well cover both our National Parks. While occasionally cursing him for the idea, since then he has been a regular contributor and a constant source of support and advice” behind the scenes”.

Here, I would just like to add one story to Dave’s account of his campaigning in the video. I was one of the representatives of recreational organisations that sat with Dave on the Access Forum when it was tasked with negotiating a right of access with landowning interests. After six months of intensive and difficult discussions, the landowning interests finally conceded that the traditional freedoms of access in Scotland for climbers and walkers should be enshrined in law. I remember the moment well, there was a collective sigh of relief as we all thought the negotiations were over.

But as Magnus Magnusson, who was in the chair, started to try and wind up the proceedings Dave insisted on being heard, “what about cyclists and horse riders”? You could have heard a pin drop! My heart missed a beat as I wondered if the landowning interests would storm out of the room. Dave broke the silence with his answer: in Norway people could ride bikes or horses across fields so long as they weren’t doing damage and we should have similar rights in Scotland. Amazingly, one meeting later and it was all agreed, applying the same principles we had used for climbing and hillwalking.

Translating that agreement into law took a lot more campaigning, in which Dave played a key role, but that is another story. The point is anyone who has enjoyed exercising their rights of access in Scotland on horse or bike has Dave to thank.

Dave has never stopped campaigning and it is fitting he should have the last word in this post, a letter that was published in the Herald earlier this week:

YOU report that the Government aims to reduce the impact from agricultural pollution from 7MtCO₂e in 2020 to 5.3MtCO₂ by 2032 (“Emissions target beyond reach without cutting back red meat”, The Herald, February 13). This will never happen while the Cabinet Secretary responsible for the rural economy, Fergus Ewing, insists that farming should carry on as before, with minimum effort to respond to the scientific evidence on the impending environmental catastrophe.

Your article indicates that he has “no intention of reducing the amount of meat produced and consumed in Scotland”. This suggests we have a minister who is out of touch with reality.

Agriculture, in theory, is better placed than any other sector to respond to the climate change challenge. No other sector is so dependent on public funding subsidy but also so resistant to the sort of regulation that other sectors take for granted. On the other hand, if regulations and subsidy are changed, farmers will immediately modify their plans.

Any government can, through the regulatory and incentive process, persuade farmers to change their cropping patterns and livestock rearing by the following season.

We need new ideas at the highest government level. Every farmer requires help to become a real steward of the earth, an ecological restorer, as well as a producer of food and fuel. The simplest way to achieve this is for all future subsidy to be directed towards environmental



Does agriculture need fundamental change?

objectives of which carbon capture and biodiversity protection are of prime importance.

In the lowlands all field margins should be expanded to provide habitats for wildflowers, trees and shrubs. The resilience of nature will ensure that, in the absence of cultivation, artificial fertilisers and pesticides, expanded field margins will provide essential space for insects, birds and mammals, as well as for public access and enjoyment.

Wide margins will also allow for extensive tree planting, using better growing conditions than in more hostile upland areas. Beyond the margins farmers can continue with intensive cropping and livestock rearing, without subsidy, making their own decisions on what the market place requires.

In the uplands farming subsidy should be focused on

woodland development along burns and rivers with stock fencing, as necessary, to exclude sheep and cattle. Quite apart from climate change and biodiversity needs, this woodland development is also essential to mitigate the impacts of downstream flooding.

Environmentally sensitive farming has been pioneered across the UK since the 1980s. Scotland can become the leading European nation in putting environmental considerations into all land use, from seashore to summit.

Now, as we say goodbye to the European Union’s Common Agricultural Policy, we have a golden opportunity to build real environmental objectives into every farm plan.

Mr Ewing needs to take his head out of the sand and tell us how to achieve this.

**Dave Morris,
Kinross.**

Category

1. Cairngorms
2. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

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2. CNPA
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