

Scotland's free trade in land & its consequences â?? Coille Coire Chuilc and Auchreoch

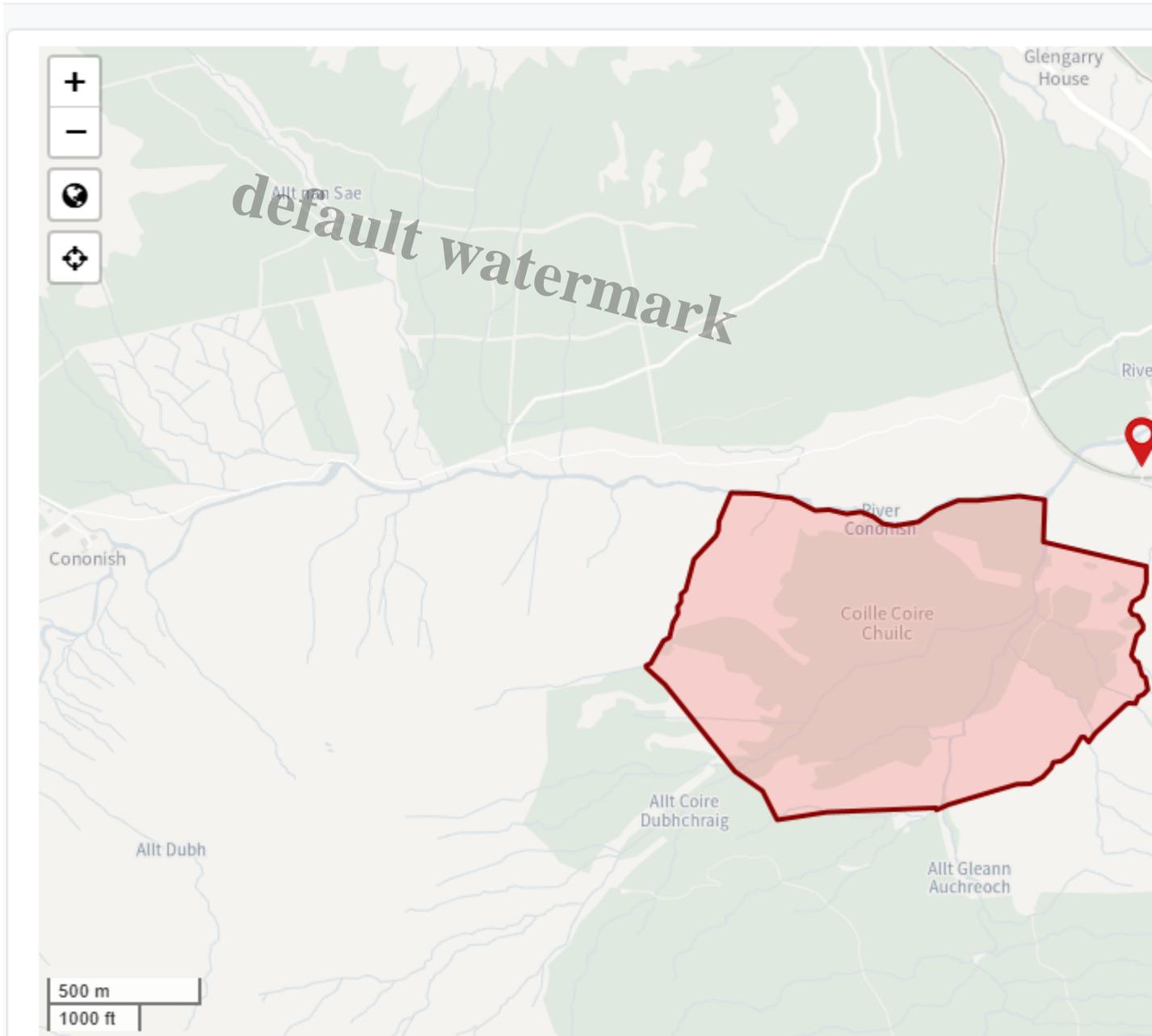
Description



Photo by bridge over the River Fillan (Sign one of map below). Photo credit Harry Barnes

A few weeks ago a reader alerted me that there were new unlawful access signs on the Auchreoch Estate, which changed ownership in January 2025, and that they had seen sheep grazing in the Coille Coire Chuilc. Two land-management failures in one! Unfortunately the reader sent no photos â?? if you see bad stuff, please record it! I was then contacted quite separately by Harry Barnes alerting me to the sign which, besides being contrary to access rights is one of the most misleading and hypocritical I have seen.

Coille Coire Chuilc SSSI



Screenshot of SSSI map annotated by Harry Barnes to show location of the two signs he saw.

â??You are now entering a Site of Special Scientific Interestâ?•

Much as I would like to see SSSIs extended to create large natural regeneration zones around all the surviving fragments of Caledonian Pinewood to enable them to recover, that has never has been the case in Scotland. The two signs Harry saw are located well outside the SSSI. Perhaps whoever erected the signs did not know where the SSSI actually was?.

•Pine and Wildlife Research Team•

Coille Coire Chuilc is still in trouble after decades of failed attempts at conservation ([see here](#)) so if the new owner of Auchreoch has created a •Pines and Wildlife Research Team• that would be brilliant, so long as the people employed have appropriate expertise. Unfortunately, I can find no information about the Team or even how to contact the new estate on the internet (apart from the contact address of the new owner which is registered on companies house).



Sheep grazing on floodplain by track to Coille Coire Chuilc which is visible on the right side of the photo behind the moraine. Photo September 2025 credit Harry Barnes

I asked Harry Barnes, who makes films under the name of Cridhe, if he had seen any sheep INSIDE the fence that surrounds Coille Coire Chuilc and marks the boundary of the SSSI. He hadn't. But he had seen sheep grazing on the land outside the boundary fence, on ground which Auchreoch's sign claims is protected, including the well drained moraines where the Caledonian Forest would extend if given half a chance.

Fences never hold out sheep and deer for long as is illustrated by the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA)'s plan ([see here](#)) to use Â£10k from the Cononish goldmine and a further Â£20k in public grants to erect a new fence around Coille Coire Chuilc. That plan thankfully fell through when the previous owner of Auchreoch, Mr Lewis, put the estate on the market in 2023. A small piece of useful information that emerged at the LLTNPA board meeting on Monday ([see here](#))

was that the new owners of the Cononish goldmine have settled all debts but this means there now appears a real danger that that stupid plan is resurrected. The answer to failed fences is not to erect new fences alongside them but is to control where sheep graze (as they do in Italy) and reduce deer numbers. The £30k would be much better spent on that.

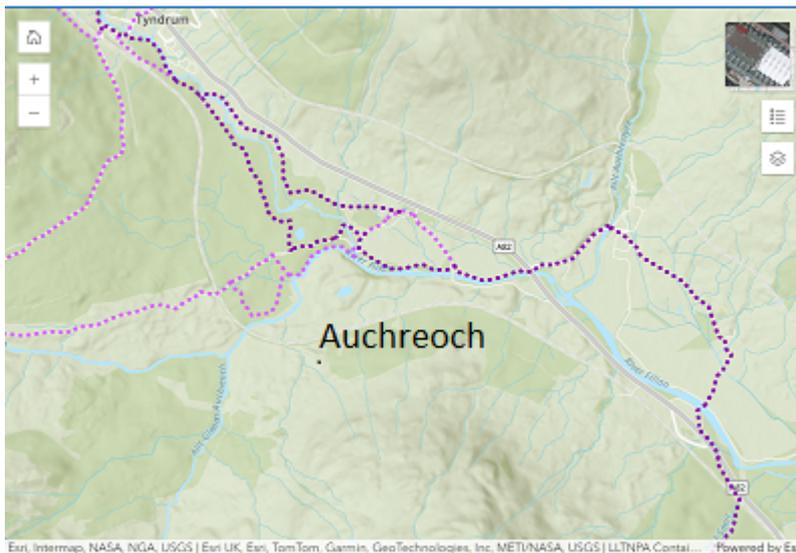
“Remain on designated paths”

Under access rights people have a right to roam over the whole of the Auchreoch Estate and the command to “remain” on “designated paths” is unlawful, whatever the Pines and Wildlife Research Team mean by “designated”. The claimed justification for this, “to prevent disturbance of fragile habitats”, is also nonsense. Anything “fragile” at Auchreoch has long disappeared because of the numbers of sheep and deer, which trample the ground far more than visitors and graze as they go.

But confirmation of this is provided by the Site Management Statement for the SSSI, prepared by NatureScot back in 2010 ([see here](#)), which clearly states *“The most significant factor thought to be inhibiting regeneration is grazing pressure”*: At the end, under other factors this statement says:

“A path through the site is the main access route to the nearby Munros, Ben Oss and Beinn Dubhchraig. Heavy usage of this path has caused localised poaching. This looks unsightly but does not appear to affect the regeneration of pine trees”

LLTNP Core Paths Plan 2023



The boundary of the Auchreoch Estate runs along the River Fillan and Cononish

Under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, designated paths mean the “core paths” created as part of access rights. These were intended as a means of enabling more people to enjoy access rights. There are no core paths on the Auchreoch Estate so the sign telling people to keep to designated paths should be properly understood as meaning “Don’t go anywhere on this estate”.

This helps illustrate why we need far more core paths in our National Parks, as I argued recently in respect to the Cairngorms core paths consultation ([see here](#)). Core paths are not an alternative to the

right to roam, they are a means of reinforcing it. A new core path to Coille Choire Chuilc â?? its far from obvious how to get there partly because of the rivers blocking access â?? might enable people other than hillwalkers (who find out where to go through guidebooks and sites like Walk Highland) to enjoy it. More people might also help keep sheep and deer on the move reducing the damage they are doing to the pinewood..

â??No camping permitted â?? to safeguard wildlife and reduce environmental impactâ?•

Camping is an activity included under access rights and no landowner has no power therefore to say camping is not permitted. We have a right to camp except where camping has been excluded from access rights through byelaws passed by public authorities. The Strathfillan area is not included in the LLTNPAâ??s camping management byelaws. The sign is therefore unlawful and the LLTNPAâ??s Access Team should ensure it is removed as soon as possible.

Besides a site management statement, every SSSI also has a list of Operations Requiring Consent (ORC). These are effectively a list of damaging activities. In the case of Coille Coire Chuilc most of these relate to overgrazing and farming related activities:

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Date: 4 June 2010

COILLE COIRE CHUILC SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

OPERATIONS REQUIRING CONSENT FROM SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE

If you propose to carry out, or permit to be carried out, any of the operations listed below, you must first obtain consent from SNH unless a local authority has granted you planning permission (under Part III of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997) or a designated regulatory authority has given you written permission (under s.15 of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004). If you have such a permission you may proceed without obtaining consent from SNH for the same operation.

<i>Standard Ref. No.</i>	<i>Type of Operation</i>
1	Cultivation, including ploughing, rotovating, harrowing and re-seeding.
2	The introduction of grazing and changes in the grazing regime (including type of stock or intensity or seasonal pattern of grazing and cessation of grazing).
3	The introduction of stock feeding and changes in stock feeding practice.
5	Application of manure, fertilisers and lime.
6	Application of pesticides, including herbicides (weedkillers).
7	Dumping, spreading or discharge of any materials.
8	Burning of any vegetation.

Near the end of the list is the following ORC:

Recreational activities other than those carried out responsibly in keeping with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

This provision is primarily intended to prevent or control any damaging recreational activities that require a landowners consent, such as quad biking. The exception for activities carried out in keeping to the Scottish Outdoor Access Code tells you though that NatureScot sees no need to

restrict recreational activities that come under access rights, including camping, in the SSSI. In other words Auchreoch's justification that no camping should be allowed to protect wildlife and the environment is bunkum.

The only people likely choose to camp within Coille Coire Chuilc are researchers and others with a deep interest in the natural environment who wish, for example, to experience or monitor the wildlife within the SSSI at night. They are unlikely to get much sleep as the ground is simply too rough and either too vegetated or else too boggy to be any good for camping. The only places that the general public are likely to want to camp at Auchreoch are flatter and grassier than Coille Choire Chuilc, such as areas along the river banks. These are the very places that the Auchreoch sign claims is within the SSSI but aren't. The reasonable conclusion is that this sign has nothing to do with protecting the natural environment but is simply a deliberate attempt to restrict access rights.

•CCTV•

As for the site security camera, the main threat to the security of the SSSI and surrounding area comes from the way it is being managed. This appears designed to intimidate since anyone who is not confident of their rights might think there would be consequences if they were filmed walking off path and deterred from doing so. But at least, if there really is CCTV on site, the Auchreoch Estate cannot claim they don't know about the sheep that are preventing the Caledonian Pinewood from regenerating.

The new owner of Auchreoch

Auchreoch was sold in January this year for £500k less than its asking price:

AUCHREOCH, CRIANLARICH FK208RU

Property details

Title number	PTH43196
Address	AUCHREOCH, CRIANLARICH FK208RU
Last purchase price	£2,069,397
Last purchase date	29 January 2025
Land register	Registered
Interest	Ownership What's This?
Property type	Agricultural What's This?

But not before the previous owner, Richard Lewis, had been paid a further Â£13 490.98 in rural subsidy for last year:

Payment Details

Beneficiary Code:

Beneficiary Name: MR RICHARD LEWIS

Town/ City: KILLIN

Postcode: FK21

Year: 2024

MEASURE DESCRIPTION	PAYMENT
Other direct aids - UK funded	£8,225.51
Payments to areas facing natural constraints - UK funded	£5,265.47

Why the Scottish Government continue to reward landowners who appear to have done nothing to protect the Pinewoods for which they are the nominal custodians is a moot question which remains unanswered.

Auchreoch ACF Ltd was incorporated with a share capital of Â£100 just two weeks before becoming legal owner of the property . It is controlled by an Alasdair John Campbell, born in 1977, who is also its only Director. While the data linking people to companies on the Companies House website is not good, a search came up with the following information which appears to relate to the same Mr Campbell:

Company Appointments - Current And Previous

CompanyName	Company Status	Role	Appointed	Appointment Status
AC GOLD ENERGY LIMITED	Active	Director	2014-04-23	CURRENT
AC GOLD BIOMASS LIMITED	Dissolved - no longer trading	Director	2008-09-03	CURRENT
A C GOLD FOREVER WARM LIMITED	Active	Director	2008-08-26	CURRENT
M & S PATERSON (ELECTRICAL SERVICES) LTD	Active	Director	2008-08-26 until 2010-02-18	RESIGNED
AC GOLD ELECTRICAL SERVICES LIMITED	Active	Director	2008-06-12 until 2016-02-24	RESIGNED
ROCK SOLID INVESTMENTS LIMITED	Active	Director	2002-10-21	CURRENT

Companies Controlled

Company	Active from	Level of control
AC GOLD ELECTRICAL SERVICES LIMITED	2016-04-06	Significant influence or
AC GOLD ENERGY LIMITED	2016-04-06	Ownership of shares 7
ROCK SOLID INVESTMENTS LIMITED	2016-10-21	Ownership of shares 7
AC GOLD HOLDINGS LIMITED	2018-03-28	Ownership of shares 7 Voting rights 75 to 100 Right to appoint and re

With the goldmine next door, I was led down a rabbit hole looking for a connection between it and Mr Campbell but I cannot find any. He appears to run electrical and related businesses in the Stirling area which incorporate the word gold in their names. That is always a good way to dazzle people. One of those companies is called AC Gold Holdings which has assets over £5m and through which he controls some of the other companies.

I have not been able to find out whether Mr Campbell has any knowledge or experience that might qualify him for becoming custodian for Coille Coire Chuilc, although the information on the sign suggests otherwise.

The important point here is the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill currently being considered by the Scottish Parliament does not even include measures to vet people wanting to buy large chunks of land like Auchreoch, even when they are in National Parks, even when they include fragments of the Caledonian Forest and even when those fragments have been in poor condition for years because of the way they have been managed (Coille Coire Chuilc was last assessed in 2009 as being in poor condition but the LLTNPA would never have proposed spending Â£30k fencing it if that had changed).

Until we start to control who owns land nothing will change. The starting point for land reform should be that people who are not prepared to do things like take appropriate action to restore nature or respect access rights in places like Auchreoch should not be allowed to buy the land. The new signs on Auchreoch suggest that Mr Campbell fits that category of person but I would be happy to be proved wrong. A public apology for the egregious sign, removal of the sheep and a commitment to restore Coille Coire Chuilc by reducing deer numbers and without new fencing would be a start. It would also be in accordance with the professed wishes of the company on the sign that it is motivated by a wish to protect wildlife.

Were Mr Campbell to commit to that, I would even support the Â£30k the LLTNPA has allocated to fencing being used to help him employ an experience deer stalker full-time to reduce deer numbers to less than 2 per square km. Conversely, if Mr Campbell continues to allow Auchreoch to be managed the way it is, there is no way the estate should be given any more public money. More specifically, the LLTNPA Board Meeting on Monday were told of a potential Â£15m bid to the National Heritage Lottery for "nature restoration" which Gordon Watson, the Chief Executive, stated would include Strath Fillan and Glen Falloch. I am submitting a number of Information Requests on this bid including whether the Auchreoch Estate are one of the partners in the bid but they should not receive a penny of lottery money until the way the estate is being managed is fundamentally changed for the better.

For a great explanation of many of the conservation challenges facing Coille Coire Chuilc and the Pinewood in Glen Falloch, I highly recommend Harry Barnes's video which is just out ([see here](#)). It has some wonderful aerial footage of the two pinewoods, some great phrases "we need to help the Caledonian Pinewoods escape their cages" and some great ideas (although I would have liked it to be more openly critical of the idea that planting of native trees should have any part in restoring the Caledonian Pinewoods).

Category

1. Access rights
2. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. access rights
2. camping
3. Camping bye laws
4. conservation
5. Deer

6. forestry
7. landed estates
8. LLTNPA
9. natural environment
10. NatureScot
11. Scottish Government

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