



Autumn 2005

I was in a very large second hand bookshop

in Northumberland when I came across Arnold Wesker's autobiography. As a young man, his plays, particularly his trilogy, *Chicken Soup with Barley; Roots; and I'm Talking about Jerusalem*, had inspired and moved me.

I bought the book as a way of saying thank you. On the dust jacket he wrote, "I was never an angry young man,but I am an angry *old* man." and it struck me....

Our family holiday this summer involved going to Cornwall to visit my brother and his family who have lived there for many years. It's about 600 miles door to door so we took the opportunity to call on a number of friends, couple of nights here, couple of nights there, on the way down and again on the way back. They were all people that I've worked with over the last 40 years or so. They are all a little bit greyer than when I first knew them but still the same lively, creative, thoughtful and challenging people it has been such a pleasure to know for so long. As we talked about what they were doing now (they all still work extremely hard, if only as volunteers) and shared past experiences, a common theme emerged.

One of them said to me, "I am becoming a stroppy old bugger. I don't apologise for it in fact, I'm working on it!" Others didn't put it quite as graphically but the frustrations of trying to make things happen in the modern world were a common concern.

I thought it might be useful to form a new body called SOBA whose purpose would be to bring enlightenment to those in official positions or elsewhere who insist on reinventing the wheel, fail to learn from experience or to build on existing strengths whilst eliminating weaknesses and then rewrite history if their latest brainchild goes awry.

Anyone interested in joining the Association should send a cheque made payable to '*The Stroppy Old Buggers Association*' etc etc. Sadly, I know it wouldn't work, but having the idea made me feel better! ***What we really need to do, of course, is to increase the membership of SCNP so that we can be more effective in protecting Scotland's finest landscapes and ecosystems. Over to you!!***

Robert Maund
Chairman

Meeting Richard Wakeford

On the 5th October SCNP had a meeting with Richard Wakeford, the new Head of Department for Environment and Rural Affairs at the Scottish Executive. Mr Wakeford has joined the Department within the last year from down south where he had been the Chief Executive of the Countryside Agency in England. We hoped that as he was coming from a culture where National Parks were accepted as a fundamental part of environmental policy, this would rub off on the rest of the Scottish Executive. From our discussion, it would appear that the argument in favour of National Parks in Scotland has only been partly won in the sense that we have enabling legislation and two designated National Parks but there is no move for further inland National Parks until after the quinquennial review of the first two. SCNP did not come away from the meeting in buoyant mood.

Meeting the Minister

On the 19th October we met with the Depute Minister, Rhona Brankin who has recently taken on the job from Lewis Macdonald. Ms Brankin is the third Depute Minister that we have dealt with in the last 14 months and we are desperately in need of some continuity and understanding in depth from Scottish Ministers. It is unrealistic to expect that at a first meeting, ministers will make specific promises and the main thing that we sought a commitment on at this stage, was that when we have our next annual meeting in 2006, she would still be around to meet us!

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park

One of the most contentious issues at present is the review of by-laws and the impact or otherwise this might have on the use of Loch Lomond for seaplanes and jet skis. SCNP is concerned that

systematic lobbying and publicity by vested interests is creating an atmosphere of public support for seaplanes when, to the best of our knowledge, there is no precedent for the use of seaplanes in a National Park in the UK or abroad, unless they are needed as a means of access. The disruption to peace and tranquillity from both seaplanes and particularly jet skis needs to be faced up to as soon as possible, based on a proper assessment of the impact rather than a reaction to carefully managed publicity.

Cairngorms National Park.

The Cairngorms National Park Authority is currently faced with proposals for a replacement of the National Grid which would bring 60 metre high pylons through very sensitive locations in the National Park. It is understood that the application and supporting documentation amounts to 2600 pages. The National Park Authority has lodged an objection and sought more time to address the issues properly. This is clearly going to be a 'cause celebre' for National Parks in Scotland and for other sensitive landscapes in the vicinity of but outside the current Park boundary.

A further issue which will need to be addressed is that Highlands and Islands Enterprise has decided to dispose of its land holdings within the National Park. It is clearly important that the National Park and the public interest is put before any thoughts of selling off this land to development interests. The land could be made available to the Park Authority or to one of several charitable trusts which already have significant land holdings in the area and whose activities are consistent with the National Park's interest.

Scotland's Third National Park

Proposals to create a coastal or marine National Park as part of the strategy for the long-term sustainability of Scotland's coasts and seas are moving ahead. Scottish Natural Heritage has been invited to form a stakeholders group and report to Scottish Ministers by March 2006. Scottish Environment Link has three representatives on this group one of whom is also on the Executive of SCNP which gives us a useful insight into the thinking and keeps us abreast of progress. The almost unseemly haste on this initiative is in stark contrast to the reluctance to advance the cause of inland National Parks in Scotland. It emphasises the problems that have been created under the Scottish National Parks legislation by the absence of any non-political body being charged with the task of advising ministers in an objective and scientific manner. This is not to be read as a criticism of SNH who see their role as responding when in-

vited to do so by Scottish Ministers. This merely confirms that initiatives on future National Parks are more likely to be taken for political rather than environmental reasons.

Awards for All

The Executive has now spent or committed the £3500 grant from Awards for All and SCNP is now the proud possessor of two laptop computers, two digital projectors, a slide scanner and appropriate software. The intention is to keep one set on the East and one on the West and be in a position to give talks to local interest groups, Round Table, Rotary, Community Councils etc to promote the cause for National Parks across Scotland. Two presentations are in hand and will be added to in the months ahead. Once ready, this service will be promoted on our web site and hopefully, through LINK.

Beware of the Wild Men, part 3.

Following the research conducted on behalf of CNP in England and Wales, the Westminster government has announced that the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Bill will include powers for National Park Authorities to make traffic regulation orders to control the use of non-essential routes by motor vehicles. This has been made necessary by the growing use of off-road vehicles and motorbikes on ancient green routes in the countryside which has proved damaging to several National Parks. SCNP has drawn the attention of the Minister to this step and has suggested that appropriate powers should be available in Scotland so that, just for once, we might be ahead of the game (and Jeremy Clarkson followers) rather than seeking powers after significant damage has been done.

SCNP Executive.

Since the Summer Newsletter, your Executive has met on the 12 July, 13 September, 11 October and is scheduled to meet again on the 24 November. We have had a very useful discussion with Drennan Watson of the Cairngorms Campaign and look forward to close collaboration and mutual support.

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