6. Landscape aesthetics, conservation and public access before 1940

The story of Scottish forestry during the twentieth century is not only one of forest expansion and timber production, but also one of tourism, recreation and landscape conservation. This is a significant aspect of the interaction between the Forestry Commission, the general public and other stakeholders such as local landowners and conservation organisations and its influence on forestry policy. The story begins during the Romantic period in the late 18th and early 19th centuries when poets, travellers and naturalists discovered both pleasure and scientific interest in British woods long before ecologists and conservationists in the middle of the twentieth century. This nineteenth century ‘delight’ in woods and forests led inexorably to the development of tourism and recreation in wooded parts of Britain such as the Scottish Highlands, the Lake District and the Forest of Dean. It is therefore surprising that provisions for amenity and improvement and maintenance of the beauty of the landscape were initially not included in the objectives of forest policy. The Forestry Commission did not regard this aspect as necessary and they believed that afforestation in itself would improve the beauty and amenity value of the landscape, and therefore it was an explicit part of forestry that did not need any mention. The term amenity was used in a broad sense to describe the aesthetic and recreational aspects of the landscape as well as conservation of wildlife and natural beauty.

Although amenity was not initially an explicit part of forest policy, an amenity stipulation was formulated soon after the creation of the Commission. During a meeting of the Commissioners in 1921, the Assistant Commissioner for Scotland, John Sutherland, mentioned that the amenity stipulation of the commission was used to keep scenic hilltops free from planting. Because the amenity stipulation was voluntary and not compulsory, it was not sufficient to deal effectively with the problems that the Forestry Commission was about to experience in the Lake District in England. The following case study of the clash between conservationists and the Forestry Commission in the Lake District in the 1930s was the first time that the Commission encountered serious opposition to their

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1 In the context of this book the use of ‘organisation’ refers to NGOs and ‘body’ refers to government organisations.
4 TNA: PRO F1/2 Minutes meeting 5 April 1921.
planting policies. In addition the conflict in the Lake District instilled an idea in the popular perception of the general public about the harmful visual effects of forestry on the landscape in Britain. This perception would inform and shape opposition to forestry in Scotland in the last three decades of the 20th century.

During the 1920s the Forestry Commission purchased considerable areas of land in the central Lake District for the purpose of creating plantation forests. The creation of these forestry plantations alarmed conservationists, visitors and some local people when they saw the impact on the landscape. The resistance to conifers in the Lake District was not new and dates back to the time of William Wordsworth in the early 19th century. Wordsworth’s *A Guide Through the District of the Lakes in the North of England* struck a chord with the English upper and middle classes and attracted a growing number of people to the Lake District. Wordsworth’s guide put the landscape and natural beauty of the Lake District in the national consciousness of the English and by doing so the region became a national asset. Wordsworth first formulated this notion almost 200 years ago:

> Persons of pure taste throughout the whole island . . ., testify that they deem the district a sort of national property, in which every man has a right and interest.\(^5\)

Although Wordsworth valued the open landscape of the Lake District, he correctly believed that the landscape had been more wooded in the past:

> Formerly the whole country must have been covered with woods to a great height up the mountains.\(^6\)

Wordsworth concluded that this was a long time ago and he did not regret that the forests had disappeared. In his opinion the woodlands were replaced by a more diverse and attractive landscape:

> The plough of the first settlers having followed naturally the veins of richer, drier, or less stony soil; and thus it has shaped out an intermixture of wood and lawn, with a grace and wilderness which it would have been impossible for the land of studied art to produce.\(^7\)

Wordsworth voiced concern about any development that could damage or disrupt his beloved Lakes landscape. Among the threats he saw was the planting of non-native tree species in the Lake District. He wrote on this subject that:

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7 Ibid., p. 44.
Other trees have been introduced within these fifty years, such as beeches, larches, limes &c., and plantations of firs, seldom with advantage, and often with great injury to the appearance of the country.\(^8\)

He was one of the first public figures to object to this development, and he would not be the last.

It was the acquisition of land in Upper Eskdale by the Forestry Commission that triggered the mounting concern about forestry in 1933. The direct result was the establishment of the Friends of the Lake District in 1934. The founders of this organisation believed that the essence of ‘Englishness’ was to be found in the landscape: its fields, hedgerows, hills and lakes. They found their inspiration in Wordsworth’s vivid descriptions of the landscape and the beauty of the lakes and the rugged mountains surrounding them.\(^9\) They also asserted the belief that the ideal landscape of the Lake District was not heavily wooded but a mix of pasture, light shrub and herbaceous cover intermixed with broadleaf trees. In order to preserve this landscape, the Friends of the Lake District, with help of the National Trust, tried to persuade the Forestry Commission to limit the creation of conifer plantations in the Lake District, to plant hardwoods where possible and to safeguard rights of way.\(^10\) The widespread nature of the controversy is illustrated by the flurry of correspondence that appeared in *The Times* newspaper, for example a letter by novelist Hugh Walpole, who lived in the Lake District, protesting against the planting of spruces and larches in Eskdale.\(^11\) Member of Parliament for Hexam, Colonel Douglas Clifton Brown, summarised the basic objections against plantation forestry in the Lake District, in a speech which he prepared for a parliamentary debate about afforestation:

> There is the danger of grave damage to the peculiar beauty of the Lake District by monotonous planting of conifers; there is the danger to the organic life of a historic part of England by displacement of its native sheep-farming and traditions; there are dangers to free access in a holiday area of great renown.\(^12\)

In addition to these objections it was felt that the non-native species were out of place and that broadleaves were more suitable for planting in the Lake District. It was further argued that the erection of deer fences around the forests prevented public access to land that had been open to the public by courtesy of farmers and landowners. Finally, forestry displaced the sheep and forced farmers

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8 Ibid.
11 Ibid., p. 15.
12 Cumbria Record Office: WDSO 117/2/6/1/1/5, Parliamentary letters on afforestation in the Lake District, Amendment by Col. D. Clifton, final draft sent to the FLD, 24 January 1938.
to abandon farms that had been in their families for generations.\footnote{13 Friends of the Lake District, \textit{Annual Report 1936}, p.6.} Clifton’s statement suggests that sheep farming and its way of life was an integral part of the Lake District.

In 1935 the Forestry Commission purchased an additional 2800 hectares in Eskdale and Dunnerdale. To protect the area the Friends of the Lake District offered to buy back the land in question, but the Forestry Commission did not accept this because they were committed to meeting their planting targets. Frustrated by this failure the Executive Committee of the Friends of the Lake District decided to organise a petition against the proposed afforestation scheme.\footnote{14 Ibid., p. 5.}

Early in 1935 a Joint Informal Committee of the Forestry Commission and the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (hereafter CPRE) was set up. The Commission was willing to join such a committee because planting in the Lake District had become a political issue and could no longer be ignored. The purpose of the Joint Committee was to consider how the interests of timber production and amenity could, as far as possible, be reconciled. In its final report the Joint Committee recognised that large-scale afforestation and the preservation of areas of natural beauty were both important for the nation. It was further stated that at some locations preservation should be the primary consideration.\footnote{15 Forestry Commission, \textit{Afforestation in the Lake District. Report by the Joint Informal Committee of the Forestry Commission of the FC and the CPRE} (London: HMSO, 1936), p. 3.} In the summer of 1935 an agreement was reached between the CPRE and the Forestry Commission. The Commission agreed to refrain from planting 178 hectares of upper Eskdale provided that the CPRE and other conservation organisations paid £2 per 0.4 hectare (1 acre) in compensation for not planting that area. The friends of the Lake District were not satisfied with this result, as they considered that the agreement would do little to safeguard the amenity of the valley in question. They decided therefore to carry on with the petition to convince the Forestry Commission to refrain from planting any of the purchased area.\footnote{16 CPRE, \textit{Annual Report 1936}, p. 6.}

Between 18 July and 3 September 1935, 13,000 signatures were received, of which 2,500 were persons resident in Cumberland and the Lake District. It was indicative of the widespread feeling that the Lake District afforestation scheme had aroused that the signatories included people from all over the United Kingdom. However, the number of signatures from Scotland was low: out of the 334 influential public figures mentioned in the petition, admittedly a sample of only 2.6 per cent of the total number of signatures, only two were from Scotland.\footnote{17 H.H. Symonds, \textit{Afforestation in the Lake District. A Reply to the Forestry Commission’s White Paper of 26th August 1936} (London, 1936), pp. 79-92.} Although a small and sketchy sample the lack of signatures of public figures from Scotland is an indication that the issue of tree planting hardly
stirred the upper classes north of the Border during the 1930s. Furthermore, there was no similar organised opposition to the creation of conifer plantations by the Forestry Commission in Scotland until more than three decades later.

In June 1936, following the petition, the Friends of the Lake District sent a deputation to the Forestry Commission to underline their demands. The deputation was composed of prominent signatories of the petition that was received by the Forestry Commissioners in the autumn of 1935. The deputation was headed by the Archbishop of York, chairman of the Friends of the Lake District, and included the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University (Rev. F.J. Lys), the Bishop of Peterborough, and a number of MPs. Also included were Rev. H.H. Symonds, who was to become Treasurer of the Friends of the Lake District, and John Dower, a member of the Friends of the Lake District Committee, and author of an influential report that led to the creation of National Parks in England after the Second World War. Dower prepared a map showing areas that should be protected from planting and was used as the basis of an uneasy new agreement that was finally reached by the informal Joint Committee in July 1936. It was agreed that the Commission should not acquire any land for afforestation in the central 777 square kilometres (300 square miles) of the Lake District. Although the Forestry Commission had tried to avoid any outside interference with its planting programme they finally had to give in to public pressure.

The legacy of the conflict over afforestation in the Lake District was considerable. It instilled a general dislike for non-native conifers and a preference for native broadleaf trees in the general public and conservationists in particular. The Lake District conflict made clear that beauty of the landscape would become an important issue for state forestry in the decades to come. In the late 20th century it gave also rise to the perception among nature conservation interests, such as the Nature Conservancy Council, and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, that the issue of visual impact of forestry plantations was also an early feature north of the border. However, the cultural appreciation and attitudes to forestry and forests in Scotland were quite different from those south of the Scottish border and, like in England, the origins go back to the Enlightenment period and are embodied in the writings of Sir Walter Scott. To understand the initial lack of resistance to monoculture forestry plantations we must now consider the origins of the different perceptions of nature, landscape and land use in Scotland by examining the writings of Sir Walter Scott and comparing it to the Wordsworthian view of nature. In addition, Sir Walter Scott’s writings

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on forestry set the tone for debates surrounding Scottish forestry for the next 150 years as he contended that commercial enterprise and stewardship of the landscape could co-exist.

**Sir Walter Scott’s woodlands**

Like the Lake District, Scotland is a country of lakes and mountains but that is where the resemblance ends. One reason of the significant differences is the scale of the Scottish landscape which is so much bigger than the Lake District. While the Lake District is roughly 2000 square kilometres in area, Scotland covers 78,780 square kilometres, of which more than 50 per cent is situated in the Highlands and Islands. There are 277 mountains in Scotland that rise above 915 metres (3000 ft) compared with the Lake District, which has only four. The Scottish lakes are also much larger than in England and Wales with Loch Lomond and Loch Ness at the top of the list, which are the largest freshwater lakes in Britain. Wordsworth also observed this difference in scale when he wrote that the Lake District is so special because the landscape differs so much over short distances, distances so short that they are easily accessible for walkers. On the other hand he noted that:

> In Scotland and Wales are found, undoubtedly, individual scenes, which, in their several kinds, cannot be excelled. But, in Scotland, particularly, what long tracts of desolate country intervene! So that the traveller, when he reaches a spot deservedly of great celebrity, would find it difficult to determine how much pleasure is owing to excellence inherent in the landscape itself. And how much to an instantaneous recovery from an oppression left upon his spirits by the barrenness and desolation through which he has passed.\(^21\)

Scotland was, in his opinion, a country with some beautiful mountain scenery separated by large tracts of ‘barrenness’ and ‘desolation’. In this situation what can be better than planting the barren land with trees to make it more beautiful? However, this was not what Wordsworth meant by ‘barrenness’ and ‘desolation’. In Wordsworth’s view, that was necessary to create the remote spots of beauty and loneliness where the tired urban dweller sought to escape in the safe tranquillity of a non-human landscape. Wordsworth regarded nature as quite different, and often even opposite to, the cultivated world humans had created for themselves. The only connection of nature with the human world was that of a spiritual and moral source for those busy urban dwellers visiting these areas. Wordsworth did not claim to speak for the common urban

6. Landscape aesthetics, conservation and public access before 1940

dweller but for members of the cultured and well-educated middle and upper classes who, in his view, had the sensitivity to appreciate natural beauty. In his poems Wordsworth translated nature and natural landscape into moralising and spiritual symbols. In this way the landscape became something transcendental and far removed from the more utilitarian outlook of the countryman who lived from the land.\(^{22}\)

Sir Walter Scott’s view of landscapes as well as the natural world was rather different from the Wordsworthian view in that it was more utilitarian. Being a landowner himself, Scott saw the landscape through the eyes of a countryman, a farmer, a hunter and a forester. On the other hand there is Scott the storyteller, the historian who views the landscape as the product of past human action. In Scott’s view a landscape becomes an interesting place only through human action, which invests the landscape with a meaning. Scott admires the landscape in which heroes like Rob Roy and others had lived and acted such that just seeing the landscape with all its historical elements stimulated his imagination. This attitude made it possible for him to accept changes in the natural landscape made by humans. To him, features created in the landscape in the past, such as castles, mills and farmsteads, represented a tradition and historical continuity. Nature in this view was not a transcendedal world in which humans were visitors, but part of the human world itself.

In the Scottish context Sir Walter Scott’s view of nature does not seem to be an isolated case but is part of an older tradition. In the centuries preceding Scott, the people living in the Scottish countryside, especially the Highlands, did not attribute any aesthetic or scenic value in the modern sense to their landscape, because they were not particularly keen on the idea of wilderness for its own sake. On the other hand, neither were they intimidated by the Scottish landscape. According to Smout most of the Scottish landscape in the 17th and 18th centuries was perceived by local people as a delightful place ‘rich in natural resources for use, with excellent hunting grounds’ but at the same time had no scruple ‘to describe it as beautiful’.\(^{23}\) The landscape was delightful because it was useful for human purposes. In this respect this attitude preceded the improvement movement that developed during the Enlightenment period. The Improvers regarded nature as a resource that was waiting to be exploited and in this view nature was ‘untamed’ and ‘wasted’. But nature could be altered so that


it would serve human purposes better. A landscape that was not improved was in this view regarded as a ‘waste land’, a waste of opportunity to make better use of its resources.\textsuperscript{24}

With this knowledge in mind we are better able to understand the context in which Sir Walter Scott wrote an unpublished treatise on forestry, \textit{Sylva Abbotdiensis}, in which he described the forests of his estate and his ideas about how to improve them. The improvement movement was largely a movement of landowners, of which Scott was one. According to David Daiches, planting trees was for Walter Scott ‘an absolute passion … all his life’.\textsuperscript{25} This passion reflects the delight side of the improvement movement.

Another of Sir Walter Scott’s works on forestry includes his October 1827 review of Robert Monteath’s \textit{The Forester’s Guide and Profitable Planter} for the \textit{Quarterly Review}. This was not a book review in the modern sense and, with most reviews of the time, this piece is \textit{de facto} an essay on Scott’s ideas, in this case on forestry, that cites Monteath’s book in support of his own views. The essay included all elements of the inconsistent forest policy and practice that developed during the 20th century. This essay clearly reflects Scott’s utilitarian attitude to forestry and the landscape in general and Scott proposed to plant the upland moors of the Scottish hills to make better use of them. In his view forestry was not spoiling an untouched landscape, but improving, in good improvers’ fashion, wasteland, turning it into a source of income and pleasure for future generations. Scott asserted that upland areas of wasteland ‘may be converted into highly profitable woodland, without taking from agriculture the value of a sheaf of corn, or even greatly interfering with pastoral occupation’.\textsuperscript{26} Scott was aware that food production took precedence over forestry and thought that forest expansion should be limited to the uplands.

Scott’s attitude towards the newly imported trees from North America was surprising and out of step with most of his contemporaries. He doubted the viability of growing non-native conifers on a large scale in Scotland and believed that North American conifers were inferior to the local Scots Pine because, in his opinion, native trees were better adapted to the local climate and soil. For this reason Scott concluded that Scots pine should be planted wherever possible.\textsuperscript{27} Scott was also concerned that use of the native Scots Pine in plantations would

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p. 20.
decline because the imported tree offered a quicker financial return. As a result he believed that the use of monoculture plantations of North American conifers would change the appearance of the Scottish landscape and Scott observed:

Other plantations [...] in order that they might not trespass upon some edible portion of grass land, have come to resemble uncle Toby’s bowling-green trans- ported to a northern hill side. Here you shall see a solitary mountain with a great black patch stuck on its side, like a plaster of Burgundy pitch, and there another, where the plantation, instead of gracefully sweeping down to its feet, is broken short off in mid-air, like a country wench’s gown tucked through her pocket-holes… These abortions have been the consequence of a resolution to occupy with trees only those parts of the hill where nothing else will grow . . . with ‘up and down and snip and slash’, whatever unnatural and fantastic forms may be thereby assigned to their boundaries.28

This concern of ‘a great black patch stuck’ to the hillsides precedes similar 20th century concerns by more than a century. In his essay Scott draws attention to the need to reconcile aesthetic concerns with the ideals of optimised commercial timber production. He insists that the only way to successfully plant the uplands is by adopting an overall programme that connects upland plantations to existing woodlands on more fertile grounds by planting continuous sweeping tracts of woodland and forest that follow the shape of the landscape.29

He concluded his essay with the practical advice to landowners:

…that improvement by plantation is at once the easiest, the cheapest, and the least precarious mode of increasing the immediate value, as well as the future income of their estates, and that therefore it is we exhort them to take heart the exhortations of the dying Scotch laird to his son: ‘be aye sticking in a tree, Jock - it will be growing whilst you are sleeping’.30

The latter is a paraphrased quote from Scott’s novel The Heart of Midlothian and it is perhaps no surprise that the forerunner of the Royal Scottish Forestry Society was strongly influenced by it, and adopted it as its motto in 1852. They took Scott’s advice to improve the land by plantation of forests very seriously and promoted the expansion of the forests in the Highlands to improve the economic use of the land, a policy that would later be adapted by the Forestry

29 ‘Planting the Nation’s ‘Waste Lands’”, 592-93.
Conquering the Highlands

Commission. Unfortunately, the call to pay attention to the aesthetic aspect of forestry by Sir Walter Scott was largely ignored by the Royal Scottish Forestry Society and the Forestry Commission.

Scott’s influence on the founders of the Forestry Commission was slight, but it is not difficult to see the impact of his work on the popular perception of the Scottish landscape. With the publication of *Lady of the Lake* in 1810, Scott did for the Trossachs in Stirlingshire what Wordsworth had done for the Lake District in England. Robert Cadell, an Edinburgh based bookseller and publisher closely associated with Sir Walter Scott, observed that the publication of the *Lady of the Lake* inspired many to visit the Trossachs:

… crowds set off to the scenery of Loch Katerine, till then comparatively unknown; and as the book came out just before the season for excursions, every house and inn in that neighbourhood was crammed with constant succession of visitors.\(^{31}\)

Although Sir Walter Scott was critical of the use of non-native conifers, dislike of conifer plantations amongst visitors to the Trossachs is not evident, despite the creation of large conifer plantations in the last 150 years.\(^{32}\) These visitors were in search of the landscape that Scott had created in his poem and later novels, and which became the archetypal Scottish landscape with rough mountains, and tranquil lakes surrounded by trees. Because trees were an integral part of Scott’s landscape visitors expected trees to be there and it did not matter much what kind of trees these were. Scott appears to have remained a lone voice with his concerns about the visual impacts of non-native conifer plantations on the Scottish landscape. Serious opposition to the development of forestry plantations in the Scottish Highlands only emerged in the second half of the 20th century. In the meantime discussions about the visual effects of forestry on the landscape remained confined to internal discussions within the Forestry Commission and amongst the conservation organisations in the inter-war period.

**Public access**

Demand for access to forests was another aspect of forestry that was not considered as a part of modern forestry when the Forestry Commission was created. In spite of that, during the 1920s the number of people visiting the forests increased, and it was in recognition of this fact that the Forestry Commissioners obtained

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powers in the Forestry Act of 1927 to make regulations governing the admission of people to State Forests. A few years later the Government appointed a National Parks and its task was ‘to consider and report if it is desirable and feasible to establish one or more national parks in Britain’. The two main objectives of the parks were to be ‘the preservation of natural characteristics, including flora and fauna, and the improvement of recreational facilities’. The Forestry Commission, as an important landowner in rural areas, was represented on the National Parks Committee and was ‘quite friendly to the idea’ of creating a national park for recreational purposes. It was a means for the Commission to sell off unplantable land or to turn it into useful areas for recreation, and in the process making some money from tourism. The Commissioners stated in a preliminary comment to the National Parks Committee Report that ‘the Forestry Commission might be prepared to hand over some 3,237 hectares of Glen More Forest in the Cairngorms under provision that the plantations of the Forestry Commission may not be endangered through admission of the public’. The Commission did not allow any interference with the creation and maintenance of its forests, in order to safeguard the standing timber reserve. It also wanted to protect the forests from fire or other damage caused by visitors. The National Parks Committee accepted this, probably to appease the Commission keep it involved with the national park movement, because it was the largest land-use agency in Britain at that time.

In April 1931 the Report of the National Parks Committee was presented to Parliament and concluded that a system of small parks and reserves should be created in Britain. The objective to be achieved by these parks would be to safeguard areas of outstanding natural beauty and to improve the means of access for tourists to these beauty spots. Finally, a national park system could be used as an instrument to introduce measures for the protection of vulnerable flora and fauna.

Because of the economic difficulties at the start of the 1930s, caused by the deep international recession, no action was undertaken to implement any of the recommendations of the report. In the meantime the first large-scale conservation conflict over the planting activities of the Forestry Commission in the Lake District reached a climax. The whole Lake District episode had damaged the reputation of the Forestry Commission, which it attempted to restore by setting up its own National Forest Park Committee, with the task ‘to advise

35 TNA: PRO F19/9, National Forest Parks, correspondence and papers, 1925-1931, Preliminary comments, 17 Sept. 1929.
how the surplus and unplantable land in the forests [...] may be put to a use of public character’. 37 The Committee, headed by John Stirling Maxwell, who served as chairman of the Forestry Commission between 1929-1932, advised the Forestry Commission to create National Forest Parks for the purpose of outdoor recreation. It was recommended that the parks should be established mainly on unsuitable land for forestry, but production forests would be included in the lower parts of the parks. The report did not mention nature conservation because the Forest Park Committee did not regard this as part of the duty of the Forestry Commission. The Forest Park Committee referred to the report of the National Park Committee:

…we feel that it is desirable to indicate that this term, [National Forest Parks], is deliberately intended to denote something different from a National Park as described in the Report of the National Park Committee’. 38

In fact the Forest Park Committee did not adopt any of the recommendations of the National Park Committee’s report, except for the objective of improving recreational facilities and access for hikers. This attitude is not surprising considering the fact that the Forestry Commission was only set up to create a forest resource and not to act as a nature conservation body or national parks agency.

As soon as the forest park report was published the Forestry Commissioners took action and implemented the findings of the National Forest Park Committee immediately by creating the first National Forest Park in Argyll in 1935. This park is located on the west coast of Scotland on the banks of Loch Long and contains some spectacular mountain scenery and it contained some facilities like campsites. The Argyll Forest Park was an immediate success and during the first year over 13,000 overnight stays were recorded. The next year the number of visitors exceeded 20,000 and it continued to rise in subsequent years climbing to over 32,000 in 1941. 39 With the creation of the National Forest Parks the Commission realised that it had created a powerful tool to improve its popularity. During a general discussion on forestry policy in 1938 it was stated that the National Forest Parks were ‘a good bid for popularity’ and that it aroused interest ‘in all grades of society’. 40

38 Ibid.
39 TNA: PRO F18/817, National Parks, Preliminary draft section of Post War Reconstruction Report, p. 2.
40 TNA: PRO F18/142, General Discussion on forest Policy, 1 December 1938, p. 5, 7.
Map 6.1: A 1935 map of the proposed Argyll National Forest Park. The shaded area was not owned by the Forestry Commission.

Encouraged by the success of the first forest park the Forestry Commission felt confident enough to state in the Post-war Forest Policy report in 1943 that a minimum of ‘one new Park might be established every year for the next ten years’.\footnote{Quoted by John Sheail, ‘The Concept of National Parks in Great Britain 1900-1950’, Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 66 (Nov., 1975), 41-56, p. 46.} This rate was somewhat optimistic and by the early 1960s only eight forest parks were in existence in Britain, of which four were located in Scotland. On the other hand the Forestry Commission was so impressed with the public demand for access to their forests that they decided to provide better access to many more of their forests. But in an internal memo of 1967 the Forestry Commissioners reminded all forest site managers that although public recreation was now regarded as important, it would always be secondary to the primary aim of growing timber.\footnote{Robert Lambert, ‘“Therapy of the Green Leaf”: Public Responses to the Provision of Forest and Woodland Recreation in Twentieth Century Britain’, Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 16 (2008) 4, 408-427, p. 415.} This left the Forestry Commission open to criticism in respect to the appearance of their plantations, the geometric blocs of conifers, from increasing numbers of visitors during the 1960s and 1970s. Visitors of the state forests expected more diverse forests than the boring monotony of dense conifer plantations, which often obscured pleasant views.\footnote{Christopher Hall, ‘The Forestry Club’, Ecos, 3 (1982) 1, pp. 10-13.} But this criticism from the general public was preceded by concerns within the Scottish conservation organisations that came into being in the inter-war period.

**The Scottish conservation organisations**

The formation of the Scottish conservation organisations in the inter-war period must be seen in the wider context of developments that took place in society as a whole. Firstly there was a growing national awareness in Scotland and a feeling that the natural and historical heritage of the country had long been neglected. It was felt that something had to be done to correct this and to safeguard ‘the valuable natural and historical features of this country’.\footnote{Robert Hurd, Scotland Under Trust. The Story of the National Trust for Scotland and its Properties (Edinburgh: NTS, 1939), p. xii.} Secondly the number of visitors in Scotland was growing due to an increase in car ownership. A survey of the number of cars passing through the town of Stirling in the 1920s illustrates this. At the beginning of the decade in 1921 there was an average of 375 cars passing through Stirling each weekday, but four years later this figure had trebled.\footnote{‘Motor Traffic Passing Trough Stirling’, Callander Advertiser, August 29, 1925.}

In the spring of 1930 a series of articles appeared in the *Callander Advertiser* under the title ‘Scotland’s Glory’ describing attractive day tours through the scenic landscape of the Trossachs and the Loch Lomond area. The author of the
series, Richard Williamson, recommended a visit to the Trossachs as 'one of the most charming day's outings'. He regarded Perthshire's mountains, lochs and moors not only as a Mecca for tourists, lovers of nature and rambles, but also for the motor enthusiast.

Another factor that helps to explain the emergence of organisations promoting outdoor activities and landscape conservation in the 1930s is an ideological one. In the first decades of the 20th century rural life became increasingly linked with physical and moral welfare. This ideology developed fully in the 1920s when back-to-the-land ideologies sprang up all over Europe. Illustrative in this respect is the growth of the Scout movement of Sir Baden Powell during this period, the creation of the Scottish Youth Hostel Association and the Ramblers Association. The idea common to all these organisations was to create a better society that avoided the evils of urban life and industrialisation such as pollution, overcrowding and crime. The emerging outdoor organisations were vehicles of reform with the mission to bring the countryside closer to urban people. But many of the emerging conservation organisations of the inter-war period were not as egalitarian as these recreational organisations mentioned above and were mainly an affair of the upper classes.

The connections between the founders of the Scottish conservation organisations and the Forestry Commission were very close. Influential landowners were involved in the creation of all these organisations and a considerable number of them had also been key players in the efforts to establish the Forestry Commission. The first and initially most prominent of the amenity and nature conservation organisations to be established in Scotland was the Association for the Preservation of Rural Scotland (hereafter APRS). The APRS was the brainchild of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland and conceived by the Edinburgh Architectural Association. The driving force behind the idea was Frank Mears, one of Britain’s leading planners at the time, who was to become the Association’s first secretary. In 1926, the year that the Council for the Preservation of Rural England was established, Mears wrote a letter to the Scotsman suggesting the formation of a similar organisation in Scotland. The reactions were overwhelmingly positive and the Association was formally constituted on 4 July 1927. The APRS was a federation of Scottish societies and private individuals interested in safeguarding the countryside from despoliation. This ‘protection of rural scenery and amenities of country towns and villages’ was mainly focussed on built structures and roads. It called for

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49 APRS, Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland, Edinburgh 1928.
a harmonious blending of houses, bridges and roads into the rural landscape. It is not surprising that an organisation that was first conceived by a group of architects would focus on buildings and roads, but soon the concerns of the APRS expanded to include the pollution of water and air and the impact of forestry on the landscape.

When the APRS was founded it had some prestigious board members and among these were a considerable number of influential landowners (Table 6.1). The honorary president was the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres, who was also a founding member of the National Trust for Scotland. The president of the APRS was the Earl of Haddington, and John Stirling Maxwell, the third chairman of the Forestry Commission, became vice president. From 1931 Stirling Maxwell was the representative for the National Trust at the APRS council and he was also involved in the Glasgow Tree Lovers Society. Another Forestry Commissioner involved in the APRS was Major Strang Steel, who was member of the APRS council for a period of two years during the mid-1930s.

Other landowners involved in the Association for the Preservation of Rural Scotland included the Duke of Atholl and Sir Ian Colquhoun, Baronet of Luss. The latter was chairman of the APRS during the early years and played an important role in the formation of the National Trust for Scotland, of which he became the first chairman in 1931, a post he held until 1946.

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<tr>
<td>Earl of Crawford &amp; Balcarres</td>
<td>Honorary President</td>
<td>Founding member</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earl of Haddington</td>
<td>President</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Stirling Maxwell</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>Representative NTS at APRS Council</td>
<td>Member, Honorary President 1951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Strang Steel</td>
<td>Member APRS Council</td>
<td></td>
<td>Commissioner 1931-1949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian Colquhuoun, Bart of Luss</td>
<td>First Chairman 1927-1931</td>
<td>First Chairman 1931-1946</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke of Atholl</td>
<td>Founding member</td>
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Table 6.1: Founding members of the Scottish conservation organisations.

Source: Author’s research.

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50 A letter exchange in the Glasgow Herald in April 1932 drew together a number of people whose common link was to make Glasgow ‘greener’. This group formed a Tree Planting Committee, under the aegis of the existing Civic Society. In the autumn of 1933 the Committee reformed itself into an independent organisation: the Glasgow Tree Lovers Society. John Stirling Maxwell, was made Honorary President in 1951. See: Twenty Second Annual Report Glasgow Tree Lovers’ Society, 1953-54, ‘Coming of Age Report, 1933-1954’.

51 Russel, Formative Years, p. 2.
From the start of its existence the Forestry Commission regarded the APRS as an important stakeholder, and formal contacts were soon established. The APRS became the cradle for the National Trust for Scotland and its creation was a direct result of attempts by the English National Trust to become the principal conservation organisation in Scotland. In 1929, the owner of the Loch Dee Estate in the Galloway hills offered his estate to the APRS, but the Association was not constituted to hold or manage land and the matter was discussed with the secretary of the National Trust (England). Although the Trust was entitled to hold land in Scotland, there was a strong feeling in the APRS Council that Scotland should not be ‘invaded’ by the National Trust. It was this incident that gave birth to the National Trust for Scotland.

By mid 1929, the APRS realised that it was high time that Scotland formed its own National Trust. In particular John Stirling Maxwell was vehemently opposed to the National Trust extending its influence into Scotland, and is thought to have been the principal spokesman for the movement to create a Scottish National Trust. In his position as Vice President of the APRS and Chairman of the Forestry Commission he was able to influence the stance on this matter in both organisations. When it became clear that the English National Trust was trying to extend its work to Scotland he took action in support of the APRS. In the autumn of 1929 Stirling Maxwell organised a meeting with the APRS council to discuss the use of Glenmore Forest, near Aviemore, as a possible national park. The Assistant Commissioner for Scotland, John Sutherland, attended this meeting and recorded that the Commission appeared to be sympathetic towards the idea to co-operate with the APRS. It was during this meeting that Stirling Maxwell recommended forming a National Trust for Scotland based upon the same principles as the existing Trust in England and with powers to hold land.

However, the Government was resistant to a National Trust being established in Scotland because there was a view that the creation of another Trust would take energy and money away from the effort to establish national parks. But the Government lost the initiative in Scotland where the idea of a National Trust was spreading. The National Trust for Scotland was established on 10 November 1930 and was incorporated in May 1931.

During the 1930s there were occasional informal contacts between the Forestry Commission and the APRS on issues of amenity planting. In general, the APRS was moderately critical of the lack of interest in landscape and amenity issues on part of the Forestry Commission. During the annual meeting of the APRS in 1934, John Stirling Maxwell said that the Commission ‘paid little attention

52 Leaflet, *The First 70 Years of the APRS*, Edinburgh 1999; Russell, *Formative Years*.
53 TNA: PRO F18/596, Glen More correspondence, 1929–1966, Minute by the AC for Scotland, John Sutherland, meeting with APRS, 16 October 1929.
to the amenity side of its work'. He added that when he was a Commissioner ‘amenity had never been discussed at any meeting’ and Stirling suggested that the time had come that the Forestry Commission paid some attention to the amenity side of their work.\textsuperscript{54}

The APSR turned their words into deeds and inspected some of the work of the Forestry Commission, mainly focussing on minor elements in the landscape. These elements included fences erected by the Forestry Commission and trees planted along roadsides and whether these fitted aesthetically into the landscape. On the whole, their criticisms did not affect the planting programme of the Forestry Commission in any significant way. Illustrative is the case of tree planting along the road between the Trossachs and Aberfoyle in Perthshire. The Forestry Commission had planned to plant trees on either side of the road and fence these off to protect them from deer, and the APRS offered to inspect the fences and to comment on the tree species used. This led to agreements that kept viewpoints (not official lookouts) from the road free of trees and to refrain from the use of certain exotic tree varieties in these locations. During the same year concern was also expressed that forestry operations around the village of Strathyre in Perthshire would cause the destruction of attractive stands of timber and obscure the landscape from some viewpoints. A party of APRS members was invited by the Forestry Commissioners to inspect the effect of forestry operations on the landscape around Strathyre. The visit resulted in another agreement between the Forestry Commission and the APRS that secured the preservation of certain stands of pine and deciduous trees around Strathyre for aesthetic purposes.\textsuperscript{55}

The APRS also received the occasional complaint about the negative impact of forestry operations in the Highlands. In the summer of 1933 an APRS member, Hugh Gardener complained about the extensive operations of the Forestry Commission and the effect on Highland scenery. During a meeting of the APRS council, the view was expressed that blanket afforestation of large areas with conifers was undesirable in Scotland. Surprisingly, after some consideration it was decided that no further action was to be taken on Gardener’s letter, because it was believed that the Forestry Commission took care of amenity where possible and in line with the economics of afforestation.\textsuperscript{56}

Sometimes complaints were sustained, for example in the case of APRS member Mr. Seton Gordon from Inverness, who reported that the Forestry Commission was ring-barking birch and allowing them slowly to die amongst the young conifer plantations.\textsuperscript{57} Forestry Commissioner Major Strang Steel responded to

\textsuperscript{54} ‘Forestry and Amenity’, \textit{The Scotsman}, Mar 15, 1934, p.10.
\textsuperscript{56} Archives APRS: Minutes Council meeting APRS, 27 September 1933.
\textsuperscript{57} Ring-barking is the practice of remove a ring of bark around a tree trunk in order to kill the tree.
the APRS in a letter encouraging the Association to draw the Commission’s attention to complaints concerning ring-barking so that they could prevent foresters from killing trees.\textsuperscript{58}

The two complaints mentioned above are the only objections to forestry recorded in the \textit{Annual Reports} or minutes of the APRS during the 1930s. Similarly, the National Trust for Scotland archives in Edinburgh does not contain a single letter of complaint about forestry during the first decade of the Trust’s existence. The issues of concern mentioned above were pretty insignificant and on the whole the impact of forestry on the landscape was simply not an issue for the conservation organisations and the wider public in Scotland during the 1930s. We can only speculate why this was the case but it is likely a combination of the effects of the depression and the view that forestry would bring jobs to the Highlands. And indeed, the APRS Council was convinced that forestry would bring economic advantages:

\begin{quote}
Appearance, to a certain extent, may be scarified, but a countryside re-populated and turned to greater economic account seems preferable to vast areas of relative sterile moorland.\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}

An additional factor in the absence of opposition to afforestation is caused by the fact that rural landowners, who made at least part of their living from the land, dominated conservation organisations in Scotland. It was not in their interest to wage campaigns against forestry operations despoiling landscapes of outstanding beauty, as was the case in the Lake District. In contrast, the leaders of conservation organisations in the Lake District, such as the Association for the Protection of Rural England and the Friends of the Lake District, were outsiders, people who had settled in the region or who were visitors from urban areas. For these reasons, public objections to forestry only gradually emerged in Scotland after the Second World War.

\textsuperscript{58} Archives APRS: Minutes Council meeting ASPRS, 5 January 1938.
\textsuperscript{59} APRS, \textit{Annual Report 1934}, p. 14