

12 August 2015

Ian Ross OBE, FICFor, FRSA
c/o Senior Management Unit
Scottish Natural Heritage
Great Glen House
Leachkin Road
Inverness
IV3 8NW

Dear Mr Ross

GLEN ROY NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE

We are writing to urge the SNH Board to approve the retention of Glen Roy as a National Nature Reserve.

We write in our capacity as deputy chairs of the Geoheritage Specialist Group of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas and lead authors of the 'Geoconservation' chapter in the recently published IUCN *Protected Area Governance and Management Handbook*. The Geoheritage Specialist Group was established to provide specialist advice and guidance on all aspects of geodiversity and geoheritage in relation to the establishment and management of protected areas, and the values of geoheritage for scientific, educational, cultural, aesthetic, ecological and ecosystem service reasons. These values of geoheritage are also being recognised by UNESCO in the expected formal adoption of Global Geoparks as a UNESCO programme at the 38th session of the General Conference in November 2015.

Scotland has a remarkable geodiversity for its size, with a geoheritage value that is widely acknowledged at an international level. Glen Roy is a key part of that geoheritage. **It is an international flagship site for Scotland that fully deserves the NNR accolade.** Its scientific value is incontrovertible. It played a key part in the development of geoscience in the 19th century, providing compelling evidence to enable the Swiss geologist, Louis Agassiz, to promote the ice age theory. It also influenced the development of Charles Darwin's geological ideas about sea level change and its role in explaining species distributions of island faunas, although his interpretation of the origin of the Parallel Roads was in fact wrong as he later acknowledged. Today, Glen Roy still continues to have significant scientific value, recognised for example in a forthcoming special issue of the *Proceedings of the Geologists' Association*, a prestigious international journal. This value is not abstract, specialised or local - there is a great deal to be learned from the past about dealing with contemporary challenges of climate change, rapid landscape evolution and the catastrophic glacial lake drainage that is now happening in parts of the world where glaciers are in rapid retreat, such as in the Himalayas and in the Andes. But Glen Roy is not only important for science and education, it is and will and should also be a source of inspiration and wonder about the landscape and the extraordinary forces that have shaped it. In this respect the Parallel Roads of Glen Roy are exemplary landforms, and the story of the glacial lakes and their catastrophic drainage, so strikingly displayed in the landscape, is one that has excited the public imagination for many decades.

We acknowledge that the geoheritage of Glen Roy will continue to be protected as an SSSI, but the argument goes way beyond that. At a time when international bodies such as IUCN and UNESCO are highlighting the wider values of geoheritage, the proposal to de-notify Glen Roy NNR appears at odds with international and indeed Scottish effort to recognise and celebrate geoheritage as an integral part of nature. In our experience, Glen Roy is remarkable on an international level and deserves to be much better known in our own country and promoted through innovative and visionary interpretation and public

engagement in ways that can enable the public to reconnect with the landscape. Its location in the Lochaber Geopark provides ideal opportunities for collaborative developments in this direction.

We have re-examined SNH's NNR Principles very carefully and unambiguously conclude that Glen Roy fits well with them. We therefore urge SNH to retain the NNR accolade as a means to enhance its recognition and to inspire people to rediscover a sense of wonder about the shaping of the landscape in this special place. In doing so it will also encourage more people to visit the site and the wider area with the concomitant benefits that this will bring to the local communities and businesses.

Yours faithfully

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