

CORROUR

A HISTORY



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By Lisbet Rausing

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of Corrou, A History of a Sporting Estate
by Lisbet Rausing and David Brian Dick.

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*In 1998, David Brian Dick and I interviewed Corrou estate staff and their
children, and members of the Maxwell MacDonald family.*

*We also read scholarly monographs and journal articles on the region, and
walked the landscape searching for clues to its history.*

I would like to thank the following people, who shared memories and photographs for the first book on Corroul, which forms the basis of this shorter and illustrated book:

Donald MacPherson, gamekeeper 1929-57
Andrew MacPherson, son of Donald
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John James, kennel boy and driver 1942-46
Anne Maxwell MacDonald, daughter of Sir John
Donald Maxwell MacDonald, son of Anne
John Maxwell MacDonald, son of Anne

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*The River Ossian meanders
north through the
Strathossian valley and
into Loch Ghuilbinn*

Photograph:
© Juan Pablo Moreiras / FFI



FOR BEN



There is a hallucinogenic beauty about the Highlands

INTRODUCTION

One magical summer in the early 1980s, my family rode across the Highlands. We had grown up reading Gavin Maxwell, and we were enchanted by the landscape.

The West Coast place names reminded us that these were lands our ancestors had settled. The name of Torlundy, outside Fort William, echoes Sweden's many Torlunda, and Lochaber too once had sacrificial groves, where Tor, the Norse god of war and thunder, was worshipped. Somerled, the 12th-century king of the Kingdom of the Hebrides was descended from Norsemen and was the ancestor of the Five Chiefs of Clan Donald. He is now known to have some half a million patrilineal descendants. If you are a MacAlister, a MacDonald or a MacDougall, the chances are that through your forefather Somerled you have Norwegian ancestry. No wonder Nordic people feel at home in Scotland.

Even the name of Somerled's wife, Ragnhild, has the familiar ring of Scandinavian women's names

such as Ragna, Hildur or Gunhild. But of course, lineages and histories in the Highlands and Islands are complex, layered and contested. “Somered” means “summer traveller” in Norse—an uncanny reminder that the Vikings so enjoyed their summer raids they named their sons after them.

Fifteen miles east of Ben Nevis in the Western Highlands, beyond and above Roybridge, Corroul is ninety square miles, bounded by three large, old hydro dams—Loch Treig (west), Blackwater Reservoir (south) and Loch Laggan (north). The railway came in 1894. Corroul has its own station, four stations down from Fort William on the West Highland line. After dining in London, a city of ten million people, visitors can go to sleep in a sleeper car, and wake the next morning in the vast, empty, almost hallucinogenic beauty of the Highlands.

Corroul has six munros (mountains higher than 3,000 ft)—Stob Coire Sgriodain, Beinn na Lap, Chno Dearg, Sgòr Gaibhre, Càrn Dearg and Beinn Eibhinn, the tallest, at 3,615 ft. The railway station, four miles from the lodge and estate village, is the highest in Britain, at 1,340 ft. Many “munro collectors” ascend Beinn na Lap last. The station inn sees many a “final munro” celebration.

In 1891, the estate was bought by Sir John Stirling Maxwell, a botanist, forester, politician and philanthropist. He ringed Loch Ossian with, effectively, an arboretum, and planted a 60-acre rhododendron garden with specimens collected for him by plant hunters in the Himalayas. A benevolent employer, he ensured that Corroul’s staff houses were beautifully and solidly built. They even had indoor bathrooms, which were exceptional at the time. In 1896 he built a lodge, which burnt down in 1942. It was pleasantly plain, eschewing Scottish baronial fancies. As a tenth baronet, Sir John had no need for fantasies.

Corroul lodge in c. 1900,
built by Sir John Stirling
Maxwell in 1899



In 1995, Corroul was sold to my family by his grandson, Donald Maxwell MacDonald. Though we felt at home in Lochaber from the start, at first, we didn't know what we were looking at. Only gradually, thanks to new Scottish friends, did we learn that Corroul was an ancient common—high altitude, summer cattle-grazing land for the people of the glens. My mother Märit recognised this as the fäbodsmarker she grew up with before the War, in Jämtland and Hälsingland, Swedish counties at the northernmost edge of farmed Europe. She still remembers “little cows running around in the forest”.

Slowly, we pieced together the cultural landscape of Corroul. From deep antiquity on, it was a vast wood pasture, with ecosystems arrayed by altitude, and therefore highly diverse. Yet by 1995, just 96 acres of its 57,000 acres were wild woods. The altitudinal tree line had vanished altogether. Even understory vegetation such as heather, bilberries and cowberries were largely gone. Spongy and mossy little hummocks and knolls, joyfully diverse and colourful, had given way to hard-trampled ground, covered by deer grass or, at best, by heather.

Corroul had some luck though, as it swerved and careened towards modernity. On the open hill, its peat bogs were not drained and ditched. Nor was heather habitually burnt. Nevertheless, overgrazing had led to extensive erosion gullies across the open hill peatlands. And between 1966 and 1984, the Forestry Commission ditched and drained the lower hillside, erasing 8,500 acres of landscape history. It took just 18 years to destroy a millennia-old Celtic landscape. What had been a complexly mosaic, savannah-like landscape, with sessile oak, downy birch, rowan, alder, aspen, wild cherry (gean), willows, ash, holly, hazel and juniper (all with their associated flora, fungi, insects, mammals and birds) was replaced by a radically simplified cropland that was never thinned and where deer were never culled.

These giant fields of three or four exotic conifers—mostly lodgepole pine and Sitka spruce—were abandoned after planting, and large areas are now diseased, dead or windthrown. Across lower Corroul, stunted, yellowed conifers show the folly of planting on deep peat bogs. We found a few last ancient oaks in these gloomy conifer croplands, their spreading branches seemingly embracing the now-lost, sunny communal pastures they once guarded.

There are ruined shielings across the Highlands. There, in the summers, clan women milked cows and made cheese, while in the glens below the men harvested hay to feed the stock through the long winters. This traditional vertical transhumance, where livestock seasonally migrate up and down mountains, was once common across Europe's mountain regions. It is still practised today in the Alps, the Pyrenees, the Carpathians, the Caucasus, and the Norwegian-Swedish fjäll mountains. In continental Europe, transhumance is joyfully ritualised, with flower-bedecked cows, celebratory processions, and church blessings. Yet it is no longer practised in Scotland. Why? What happened to Corroul, cared for since the beginnings of time by the MacDonalds of Keppoch?

In brief, from 1707 on, and under the new Parliament of Great Britain, Scottish customary overlordships, once a polite acknowledgment of time-worn hierarchies of honour, hardened into absolute property rights. The clans lost out, as land became detached from customary uses and responsibilities, to become a tradable commodity. By 1834 the Duke of Gordon was able to sell the Loch Treig estates, including what is now Corroul. In the following decades, the now alienated land took its typical Highland turn, to sheep-run and deer forest. The land was over-grazed, both because there was too much stock, and because the stock was left on the land all year round. Over-grazing prevented trees



Corroul has no driven grouse shoots, grouse are walked up (shot over dogs)

Photograph: Ken Smith

from regenerating, and diminished the diversity of the ground flora, leaving ever fewer plants.

Add to this the, common across the Highlands, and remarkably thorough and uniquely British, extermination of all fauna, except one or two favoured game species (at Corroul, red deer and grouse). Corroul's game books from the late 19th and early 20th centuries record how, to use the vocabulary of the time, "sportsmen" at first recorded vast bags of "vermin" and then, in later years, nothing, as wild fauna became exceedingly rare or locally extinct. God's creatures were shot, snared, trapped and poisoned—golden eagles and sea eagles, alongside all other birds of prey including owls; foxes, stoats, weasels, pine martens, wild cats and otters; red squirrels, rabbits and mountain hares; capercaillie and black grouse; black swans, waders, ducks and geese; even jays, ravens and the other crows.

When my family came to Corroul in 1995, there was little left to shoot. A few generalist mesopredators hung on, such as foxes and hooded crows. They were still fiercely persecuted, at a marginal cost in man-hours that had no relation to the additional income from an extra hill lamb or two (or even the cost of lambing sheds).

Apex predators have long been eradicated across the Highlands. Lynx and brown bears had already disappeared from the medieval landscape, and wolves were shot out in the 18th century. Other keystone species vanished too. Until the 1520s, beavers hung on. Indeed, it is believed that the valley now flooded for Loch Treig, on Corroul, was their last British stronghold. It is heartening to see them now returning to Scotland.

Another essential ecosystem engineer and British native, the wild boar, is returning to

Lochaber too, though the Scottish shooting fraternity has renamed it “feral pig” and many argue it needs to be eradicated, despite it being an excellent game species and a vital component of the woodland ecology.

At Corrou, my family’s most important mentor was Dick Balharry, then chair of a conservation charity, the John Muir Trust. In 2007, Dick helped us draw up a management plan that focused on whole habitats, on allowing natural processes to take their course, and on being guided by habitat response. We made a baseline assessment of habitats then and have measured progress since. At first, we worked only on land. But in 2015, we also started to survey fish, aquatic invertebrates and aquatic plants.

Today, we do not “control” predators or “vermin.” We have reduced deer numbers from around 20 per square kilometre to around five. This allows ground flora and trees to regenerate and improves the animals’ health and welfare. We do not feed our deer in winter, but nor do we want starvation to regulate their numbers. We leave gralloch and some carcasses on the hill for eagles, ravens and pine martens. And in 2006, to rest the land, George Nairn at Fersit agreed to remove his flock of 350 ewes (with lambs). Today, his beef cattle—mothers and calves—roam Corrou in summer, recalling the transhumance of the past.

Some native wild woods are reverting naturally, for example among our windfallen exotic plantations and along the railway line. Where seed banks are poor, or soils exhausted, we plant new native woodlands. And where we fell commercial conifers, and have replanting obligations, we replant with native Scottish trees—at the time of writing, the Forestry Commission rules dictate

*A few ancient oaks remain
amongst the conifers*

Photograph:
© Juan Pablo Moreiras / FFI





Corroul welcomes tens of thousands of walkers every year

Photograph: Ken Smith

we must plant instead of allowing wild woods to grow back naturally. We are restoring peat bogs and we have reintroduced red squirrels.

We could not restore Corroul's ecology alone. We are hugely grateful to our partners and friends, including the John Muir Trust, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Lochaber Fisheries Trust, Tom Christian and the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, John Hammond and the Rhododendron Species Conservation Group, Ron Greer, Bill Mason, Gary Servant, Ian Strachan, the Forestry Commission Highland Conservancy, Roy Dennis, David Hetherington, Jonny Hughes and Hugh Raven. The Corroul team deserve huge praise too. They rise to all challenges (and remote estates have a fair few) with professionalism, domain expertise, and a positive, constructive spirit.

When we arrived in 1995, we were surprised to learn that Scottish people were banned from roaming, what to many was their ancestral clan land, and to all Scots, their homeland. We could not understand our fellow landowners' arguments as to why "all men's rights" must be opposed. Instead, another new-found friend, Dave Morris, then head of the Ramblers' Association, helped us to think through Corroul's path networks and how we could best welcome people. Today Corroul welcomes tens of thousands of walkers each year.

We were pleased by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. It echoes Sweden's allemansrätt, which since medieval times has ensured that everyone is welcome to walk the land, to picnic, camp, swim, climb trees, pick berries, collect firewood, and the like. Children need to be free range too!

All Corroul estate buildings are renovated and maintained. We rebuild and restore our cottages

using traditional methods and local materials and improve their energy performance. We retain the historic groupings of buildings. Around them, we garden naturalistically, without pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, chemical fertilisers or peat. We offer our dozen estate workers and their families high-quality housing, either in Corrou village or closer to schools, at Moy and Luiblea, a 12-mile drive away.

We let the lodge and eight holiday cottages, offering visitors the opportunity to explore Corrou's glorious landscapes. Since 2016, we also offer three en suite rooms in the newly renovated old Signal Box, located on the station platform, next to the Station House, where we run an inn and a shop. The Signal Box gives people with limited mobility and without cars a chance to holiday in a remote wilderness.

We always wanted to protect Corrou's future independence and stability. After all, industrial fortunes come and go. And it is not healthy or safe for a local community to be subsidised from elsewhere. For years, we saw no prospect of doing so. It worried us, since estates like Corrou are hugely expensive to run. But now, we have built four hydro-electric "run-of-river" schemes. They will never make a fortune, but thanks to British governmental green subsidies, they help pay the estate's costs. We don't know how they will be taxed in the future, but hopefully, they will allow Corrou to stand on its own two feet, paying for our environmental work, welcoming visitors, and providing good jobs in the local community.

Corrou is my family's greatest joy. We hope to have the good fortune to help protect and care for it for many generations yet, together with its stakeholders, in a transparent spirit of co-operation, trust and respect. We are grateful to Scotland for having welcomed us, and we will always remember with especial gratitude the first people who offered us friendship, Patrick Gordon Duff Pennington of Ardverikie, and Richard and Janet Sidgwick.

*The Signal Box and
Station House Inn at
Corrou station*



A SPORTING ESTATE IS BORN

In February 1834, the Duke of Gordon sold his Loch Treig estates to John Walker for £45,000 (equivalent to £5.5 million in 2017). In addition to what became Corrou, they comprised Inverlair (to the west of Loch Treig) and land north of Spean Bridge at Blairour, Tirindrish and Achaneich.

Almost certainly, the new owners did not call their land Corrou. Contemporary records list “John Walker, Esq. of Lochtreig” as the third greatest landowner in the parish of Kilmonivaig. He had bought the estates as an investment—the family’s main interests were in their Dumfriesshire estates at Crawfordton and

Stewarton, which had been purchased by Walker's father, James, a rich West India merchant. Empire and slavery financed Corrou's transformation from a *de facto* common to an "enclosed" sheep run and shooting estate.

Some people who showed interest in buying Highland estates from the Duke of Gordon were remarkably ignorant of the land on offer. One Englishman, asking about the Glenfeshie forest, offered "to convert this large estate into more valuable and profitable purposes . . . I have a method of reclaiming land . . . as to render it forever afterwards greatly superior". The Duke's factor calmly replied that:

The land cannot be improved for the purposes of agriculture by any effort of science or industry. Though termed a forest, it consists of a range of extremely high hills covered with masses of rock on the tops; and with gravel and moss; and is only valuable for the pasture grass it contains skirting the bottoms of these hills.

Corrou too was unsuitable for cultivation. In 1831, no more than 50 acres—less than 0.1 percent—was arable, on lower ground, at Fersit and Torgulbin. But sheep farming paid, and John Walker let some grazing to shepherds, though a contemporary map describes ground ranging

from "poor uneven worthless broken moss" between Loch Treig and Loch Ossian, to the top of Corrie Creagach's "very high yield good greenish summer pasture".

Corrou lay on one of the main cattle-droving routes from the northwest to the cattle markets at Crieff and Falkirk, where several hundred thousand sheep and cattle were sold each autumn. The cattle were small and black—today's shaggy, red Highland cattle are a 19th-century crossbreed—and a drove might number more than a thousand, stretching for over a mile. Herd dogs helped the drovers. On arrival at the market, the dogs ran back home alone, the drovers having arranged for inns along the way to feed them.

The drovers travelled ten to twelve miles a day, their journeys ranging from 100 to 200 miles. They supplemented their oatmeal, onions and whisky by bleeding the cattle to make black puddings. A favoured overnight stop was at Loch Treig head, now submerged beneath the 1930s hydro dam. It was sheltered with good grazing, before bleak Rannoch Moor the following day.

Military roads laid by the English in the 18th century often followed the drovers' routes. But they hurt the cattle's feet. The drovers liked the new bridges though—if not the tolls. The droving

The 5th Duke of Gordon

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routes are abandoned now. But you can still see them: green, grassy tracks winding their way through the heather.

The Corrou route is thought to have been used by Corry—John Cameron of Corriechoillie. He lived by Spean Bridge and was remembered long after his death in 1856 as "The Man", a local boy made good. A goat herder as a boy, he became one of the Highlands' largest sheep farmers and cattle dealers. Donald Cameron, 22nd Lochiel, took pride in having a tenant of his own name who was just as successful as the Lochaber newcomers—the Border Scots sheep farmers renting Highland grazing. Stories about "The Man" told gleefully how he humiliated Englishmen and officers, and manipulated the cattle markets.

During the 19th century, a problem emerged, akin to the fights between homesteaders and cowboys in the Wild West. Landowners began demanding ever steeper passage payments, or "grass mail". ("Mail" is an ancient term for rent. The word "blackmail" is also Scottish and refers to protection money that Lowland lairds paid Highland clans not to steal their black cattle.) A dispute over grass mail between John Cameron and Lord Breadalbane went all the way to the House of Lords. Cameron lost. But at least this lanky, lynx-eyed Highlander



The ruins of the original hillside lodge near Càrn Dearg still exist

Photograph:
© Andrew Abbott

had the glory of claiming in the House that he was the greatest cattle owner in the world, other than Prince Esterhazy.

Revival of the Deer Forests

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, sheep runs spread throughout Scotland, and with the sheep competing for grass, red deer may have declined in estates such as Corroul. But later, sheep ranches became sporting estates. Samuel Johnson and James Boswell were still clear-eyed about the Highlands in the 1770s. Later literary figures such as James Macpherson, William Wordsworth, Robert Burns and Robert Southey romanticised the Highlands, and Prince Albert's love of deer stalking made Highland field sports fashionable. "Invented traditions", to borrow the apt phrase of historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, began to proliferate.

Until 1831 the privilege of shooting game was restricted to the squire and his eldest son. Later, "any certified person" could do so, either on his own land or anywhere else with the landowner's permission. Most people couldn't afford to shoot anyway. But the old law had excluded newly wealthy manufacturers, merchants and bankers. Now they were

permitted to enact the symbolic and masculinist practices of "gentlemen". Their money helped to finance deer forests, though most continued to be owned by the aristocracy.

In the 1840s, Corroul was mostly sheep pasture. But one-third was deer forest, from Lochan a' Chlaidheimh in the south, to Loch Ossian in the north. By 1851, there were three keepers at Corroul. Robert Lawrie lived with his sister and nephew at Fersit farm, Angus Kennedy and his family lived at Loch Treig, and John Macintosh and his family lived at the original lodge, high on the hillside between Corroul and Rannoch train stations. When primary school became compulsory in the 1870s, this little community set up a schoolroom at Loch Treig. The census of 1881 records that there were ten pupils.

In 1857, Corroul was inherited by George Walker (later Colonel Sir George). He improved the original hillside lodge and built a comfortable new lodge beyond Corroul's boundaries. He planted European larch at Inverlair (felled during the Great War) and smaller woods at Fersit and Torgulbin. The main native woodland on Corroul estate was a small birch wood with some rowan, alder, willow and bird cherries. It still grows at Leitire Dhubh, on the south shore of Loch Ossian.

Corrour's principal 19th-century sports were grouse shooting, with as many as two thousand brace in a good season, and trout fishing. The best fishing was in June, July and August. Loch Ossian contained lots of trout, and in Loch Treig, fish of 2-9 lbs were not uncommon. "By trolling, big fellows are got," a sporting guidebook advised, "and the fly makes a good basket of little ones". Twenty pounds was a fair basket, "but many a day the sportsman must be contented with much less—the trout being rather capricious".

Sheep farming still paid, and by 1861 a family of shepherds lived at Lubruarie and Craignach. During the 1880s, however, wool prices collapsed. Farmers went bankrupt, and landowners found it difficult, if not impossible, to let their land. If no new tenant could be found, the landlord was obliged by the terms of the lease to buy the outgoing tenant's livestock.

This was the position Colonel Walker found himself in, when *The Times* advised him in October 1883 to abandon his sheep runs. "But Lochtreig is such a country that should he choose to turn it into a deer forest, he may get any rent he pleases". Acting on this advice, Walker greatly expanded the deer forest, from 15,000 acres in 1883 to 35,000 by 1891. The 30 stags available for shooting in 1891 was far short of the 150 taken off the hill a century later in

1998. But Walker was able to increase the shooting rent. In 1873, Spencer Lucy had paid him £553. But in 1885 a new tenant, Hugh Tennent, paid £1,000, rising to £1,400 after 1886 (equivalent to £173,000 in 2017).

Other marginal sheep farms on high and uncultivable land were being converted to deer forests too. Indeed, farm land was as well. Deer ate crofters' crops, and sportsmen shot in their fields. The Highlands and Islands Royal Commission of 1892, set up to inquire into deer forests, recommended a halt to expansion. Yet deer forests continued to grow until the Great War.

Some landowners and their sporting tenants also sought to stop ramblers and naturalists visiting their land. The Scottish Rights of Way Society, founded in 1845, successfully fought legal battles to protect the public's right of way in Glen Clova, Glen Tilt and other hills. On Glen Tilt, the Duke of Atholl and his ghillies once tried to eject some botany students and their professor from his land. But as the *Oban Times* reported on 15 August 1891:

The students put their venerable professor in a safe place where he could not see what was going on, and where a trusty escort absorbed him in botanical research; and then the main body proceeded to give

Trout fishing is a principal sport at Corrour

Photograph: Ken Smith



the Duke and his ghillies such a severe thrashing that his Grace, though clad in all the tartan panoply of a Highland chief, turned tail and ran home in terror like a frightened cockney bagman.

Then there was deer driving, when a large herd was rounded up and driven past the guns, rather as grouse is today. Towards the end of the century, the American millionaire Walter Winans rented around 200,000 acres of forest to "stalk" this way. Many people considered this unsporting, because the deer had little hope of escape.

Advice for Stalkers

The popularity of field sports spawned a whole genre of writing that offered guidance. William Scrope's romanticised *The Art of Deer-Stalking* (1838) was among the first such books. The stalker should "be able to run like an antelope" for miles. When preparing to fire, his hand should be "at times wholly without a pulse".

And he should go hungry. "Can a man with a full stomach dash up Ben Derig? Vain hope! He would sink down gently in the first bog". Scrope wrote before the boom years of Highland sports, with grand shooting lodges, large shooting parties and sumptuous meals on mountain and moor. For



"Royal" stags have antlers with twelve points or more

Photograph: Philip Dean

James Glass Bertram, writing in 1889 under the pseudonym "Ellangowan", the luxury was too much:

On moors, where extravagant luncheons are sent to the heather, the dinners are of course in keeping—they are also costly. Some men seem to have come to the moors of Scotland in order to live more extravagantly than they do at home, and in consequence they have messengers always coming from the station with fine things for the table ordered from London or Edinburgh. These men make no change in their mode of life, and, except that being in search of sport they are more in the open air than when in London or Manchester, the "racket" goes on just as it does at home.

A hearty breakfast in a shooting lodge included corned beef and sheep's-head pie, grilled ham, potted meats, kippered herrings and finnan haddies (cold smoked haddock), porridge and oaten cakes, as well as freshly baked scones with marmalade, heather honey, brambleberry jam and cream.

Having so breakfasted no sportsman will require very much in the shape of lunch, and that species of refreshment cannot be too light or too simple . . . what is most wanted is an hour's rest, a drink of

good pure water, and a smoke by lovers of the weed. The best time for luncheon is when the heat has sent the grouse into deeper cover than usual, say between one and two o'clock. An hour's cessation from work will then be grateful . . . As to what should be provided in the way of liquor, opinions differ very much, a mixture (half and half) of cold tea and milk, without any sugar, is often recommended by old stagers, "whisky-and-water for me" is the motto of others.¹

Shooting a "Royal" Stag

Before Mamore forest was fenced in the mid-1880s, Corrou's "unusually stout, wild, rough and black" stags serviced all the adjoining forests. Hinds from the Black Mount, Ben Alder and Ardverikie found mates here, "so that no forest could possibly be better placed for incessant change of blood".

In the 1870s, the head stalker, Allan MacCallum, kept an early morning look-out over "the flat", for Black Mount rutting stags. More than once, alerted to their presence and "forced into a hasty toilet", Spencer Lucy "merely pulled on his knickerbockers and hurried a covert coat over his nightshirt, whilst thrusting his stockingless feet into his 'hardy brogues,'" so presenting, as his

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friend Augustus Grimble recorded, “an appearance at which we had many a hearty laugh”.

Looking out from the original old lodge one day in September 1881, Grimble saw a herd of more than a hundred deer moving across the slopes of Beinn a’ Bhric and set off after them with the stalker. Once within half a mile of them, they made out “a most undoubted ‘royal’”, which Grimble was determined to shoot:

Never yet had I had a chance at such a one, and have him I must, so would shoot at no other, and intended chancing a shot at him at three hundred yards in preference to firing at another one at eighty, however good he might be.

We counted more than forty stags and judged there were double as many hinds—truly a splendid sight. In about an hour the hinds began to rise and feed, and in a short time all but two small “staggies” followed their example and fed away from us over the hill and out of sight.

The question now was, could we venture to creep across the flat without being detected by these two little “beasties”? We determined to try; and then began one of the longest, most tedious, and wettest of creeps I have ever had to undertake. The flat was simply a morass, and no hillock or watercourse to shelter us higher than two feet or deeper than one.

Eventually the quarry is within sight:

There are several good stags trotting off and offering fair shots at about one hundred and twenty yards, but my prize—my “royal”—is so covered by others I could get no possible chance at him. “Take that one; you’ll get no other,” says Donald, as he points out a good shootable beast; but I was so angry that I would not and sat watching them all go right away with the rifle on the “royal” and resolved to take any chance at him, however poor.

At last his head and neck is clear, and crack! crack! both bullets are sent after him, much as if shooting a grouse, but with no other effect than to put the whole herd into a violent gallop. It was an impossible shot, and though knowing it, a feeling of utter disgust took possession of me.

I mechanically reloaded, not with any intention of shooting again, but from pure force of habit. An old hind was leading the herd, and suddenly, for no reason that could be made out, she turned sharp to the left, taking the whole lot with her, and they began to gallop past us broadside on, about two hundred yards away. We instantly recognised the altered position of affairs. Again, hope runs high as Donald whispers, “Steady, sir; that’s him, last but three”.

I bring the foresight about two feet in front of his chest and press the trigger; the “royal” falls

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Stalking in the early 19th century – image taken from The Art of Deer Stalking by William Scrope

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Stalking in the 21st century

Photograph: Philip Dean

Sir John and his ghillie, after a successful stalk, in c. 1900



stone dead in his tracks, without so much as a struggle. Overjoyed at this, the other barrel was emptied at the best stag to be seen clear of the rest, and he also fell mortally wounded. We rushed in at once, but the “royal” needed no attention, and I stayed to admire him while Donald gave the coup de grace to the other one.

The big stag was struck in the very centre of the heart, and though of course it was where the bullet was intended to go, I could not help feeling it was very lucky to have placed it so exactly; for he was going as hard as he could gallop.²

After a leisurely lunch on the hill, Grimble realised that he would have to get the beast home that night. The following day was Sunday and since the Sabbath was closely observed, the stag would have been left to the foxes and eagles until Monday. Donald was sent to fetch a pony and ghillies. The 21-stone beast was eventually brought home just before 10pm, after falling off the pony three times.

Next season, after an unsuccessful day’s stalking, Grimble and Spencer Lucy were making their way back to the lodge when they heard shots in the distance. The host assumed they were a shooting party from Rannoch Lodge and decided to invite them to Corroul for the night:



An early hill vehicle, introduced as a replacement to ponies, to remove stags from the hill

Photograph: Ken Smith

Accordingly, intent on hospitable thoughts, we struck off to the left, and in a short time we were within a mile of the two shooters, who were getting plenty of sport, as shots were very frequent. Then we again took another spy and became somewhat puzzled, for we saw no keeper with them, and yet it seemed impossible that a couple of poachers would be so daring as to come and shoot grouse over dogs in broad daylight and within hearing of the lodge.

However, our suspicions were raised, and from this moment we proceeded to stalk the shooters, and so well did we do it that neither of them became aware of us until we were within thirty yards of them, when, lo and behold! we found ourselves face to face with Lucy's butler.³

The Journey to Corrou

In the 1830s, the horse-drawn coach from London to Edinburgh or Glasgow took 42 hours. Travel to more northerly estates meant further long coach or boat journeys—the mail coach from Edinburgh to Inverness, for instance, took 18 hours. The railways changed everything. By 1848, the journey from London to Edinburgh or Glasgow was 17 hours. By 1873, a direct journey from London to Struan, the station nearest to Corrou, took just over 14 hours—and these were now sleeping cars. But at 1,700 ft,

the original old lodge was the highest house in Scotland, and very remote. After alighting at Struan, the traveller still faced a 30-mile journey west. The first part was by coach, along Glen Errochty and Loch Rannoch, to Rannoch Lodge at the head of the loch. So far so good, but the final eight miles were an ordeal. In 1881, Augustus Grimble was met at Rannoch Lodge by a couple of ghillies:

One of them leading a strong pony with a saddle on, the other at the head of another pony harnessed to a very small two-wheel cart. They salute, and one of them hands me a note from his master. It is simply to say, "Come on as fast as you can; my mare, Maggie, knows the way, so if it gets dark throw the reins on her neck, and she will bring you safely, and you will be here long before the luggage-cart".

As it happens this particular day, the sun is setting in a mass of orange-sky. As I face to my destination in the west, the hills in their deep shadows look black, cold, and distant; the air is chilly, and I feel stiff after the twenty-six-mile drive and the long journey from London. A short way ahead the pony track seems to disappear, and altogether an "uncanny" feeling comes over me.

However, Maggie is mounted, and off she goes at a pleasant trot, and men and cart and luggage are quickly lost to view. Soon the trot becomes a walk; there are rocks, big stones, bogs and holes,

but Maggie steers clear of them all, and directly the going is once more good, she breaks into a trot again of her own accord, till by the time a couple of miles are covered I place implicit faith in her good sense, and abandon all to her guidance.

And so, one jogs along, uphill and downhill, and the hoofs of the pony fall silently upon the soft track. On either hand a dark sea of heather, overhead the stars were just beginning to show, and facing me rises the jagged outline of an amphitheatre of black hills against the deep crimson sky, still lit with the glow of the setting sun.

In about an hour I begin to wonder if Maggie can have gone the wrong way and feel half inclined to stop and wait for the cart. At last I do so, and listen for it, but in vain. The mare shakes her head impatiently, and on she jogs again, carrying me safely through a roaring burn. Another half-hour passes, I strike a light and look at the watch, and begin to feel sure I have lost the way; then another half-hour goes by, and just as I am quite certain of being a waif and a stray, a sudden shine of lights, and a smell of peat-smoke, and Spencer Lucy's strong and cheery voice calling out a welcome, puts a pleasant end to all uncertainties, and in a few more yards the journey is ended.⁴

In 1888, plans for the West Highland Line were finally approved. Earlier plans had been

opposed by the owners of the 1863 Highland Line between Perth and Inverness, who feared competition. A proposal to run through Glencoe was opposed by local landowners. The agreed route across Rannoch Moor and through Corroul closely followed a drove route proposed by the engineer Thomas Telford in 1810. Colonel Walker sold 128 acres of Corroul for tracks and sidings.

To find solid ground on Rannoch Moor, the engineers would have had to dig well below the level of the marshy moor—an impossible task. Instead, they decided to float the tracks across the bog. They laid alternate layers of turf and brushwood, until there was a solid surface above the top level of the bog. Railway cuttings along the route were also used, and thousands of tons of ash. During the construction, athletic competitions were organised at Loch Treig for the workmen. The games included races, putting the light stone, putting the heavy stone and tug-of-war. In some games, such as the 200-yard race, locals were separated from the navvies; the prizes for the locals were 10s, 7s 6d, and 5s, while those for the navvies were 7s, 5s, and 3s.

The new railway would make Corroul directly accessible. But in 1891, before it was complete, Colonel Walker sold the estate to Sir John Stirling Maxwell. The 25-year-old Sir John knew that at Corroul, he could create a gentleman's paradise.

The West Highland Line running through Corroul station in the 1930s



A PATRIOT AND HIS ESTATE, 1891–1918

In May 1891, Corrour changed hands. Sir John Stirling Maxwell of Pollok was the elder son of Sir William Stirling Maxwell, owner of the Pollok estate in Glasgow and the Keri estate in Perthshire. On Sir William's death in 1878, both had been left in trust. In 1887, when John came of age, he was to choose between them, leaving the other to his brother Archibald. He chose Pollok. His father also left him a large sum to buy a country estate. Sir John looked at estates at Strathconnan and Knoydart but decided they were too remote. Four years later, just before his 25th birthday, he bought Corrour and Fersit from Sir George Walker for £63,750



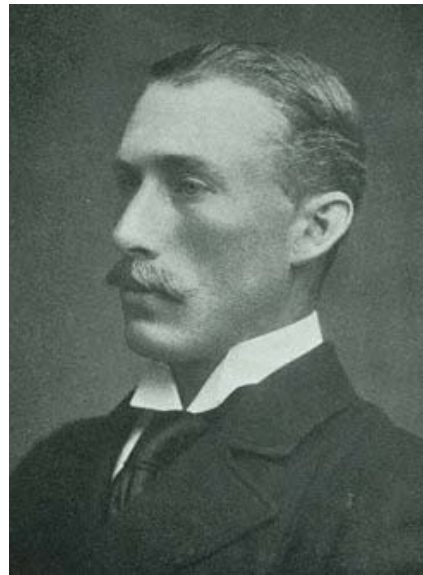
Left:
Corrou lodge, built in 1899, was sandwiched between the game larder, school house and chapel

Right:
Sir John Stirling Maxwell, 10th Baronet, owned Corrou from 1891, to his death in 1956

(equivalent to £7.7 million in 2017).

The original lodge was small, with one four-windowed room serving as drawing room, dining room, library, smoking room and gun room. It was also close to the western march of the estate, and inconvenient for stalking. So, in 1893, Sir John purchased Beinn a' Bhric, adjoining the estate to the south-west, for £15,500 (equivalent to £1.9 million in 2017). The vendor, Donald Cameron, 24th Lochiel, was frankly pleased to sell this remote parcel of his land, while for Corrou it greatly improved the shooting. Sir John was improving Corrou's sporting in other ways, too, buying boats for fishing on Loch-na-Lap and Loch Treig (where a new pier was built). He now planned a new shooting lodge at the centre of the estate. But first he constructed a new wooden house for servants at the original lodge. Built immediately in 1891, it included something rarely offered to servants: baths and WCs. Workers' cottages were also renovated and rebuilt, new roads and tracks were created, and a long-term programme of afforestation around Loch Ossian was begun.

There were five keepers on the estate. Sir John wanted them evenly distributed, close to their beats. "People need to be planted with no less care than trees", he said. In a few years, he implemented this and built strategically located stalkers' houses.



The head keeper, Dugald Macdougall, was conveniently located at Corrie Creagach at the east end of Loch Ossian, near the new lodge site. John MacDonald lived in a cottage at Caimb, but in 1893 a new house was built for him at Luibnaclach, close to the railway. This was less remote than Caimb, but still close to the Beinn Bheac beat. In 1970, the cottage was sold, with 26 acres. Later it was destroyed by fire—the ruin can still be seen, a mile and a half south of Corroul station.

Donald MacDonald, who had lived at the hillside lodge, was also moved, to Strathossian, south of Loch Ghuibinn, formerly occupied by shepherds. Sir John extensively improved the house, built a fence to keep deer out of the garden, and constructed three new bridges. A decade later, a stable was added, and by 1906 the total spent on Strathossian was £1,174 (equivalent to £135,000 in 2017).

George Ross was the keeper at the head of Loch Treig, where a new cottage was built for him in 1898 at a cost of £539 (equivalent to £67,000 in 2017). The old keeper's house was later used as a schoolroom. In 1934, both buildings were drowned when the Loch was raised as part of a hydro-electric scheme.

These expensive changes made sense because the West Highland Line opened in 1894, connecting the estate to Fort William in the west and Glasgow

to the south, and thence to London by overnight sleeper—a help to Sir John when he was elected a Conservative MP for Glasgow in 1895.

Passing through the estate a mile and a quarter from the west end of Loch Ossian, the railway made Corroul accessible for the first time. Trains stopped at “Corroul siding”, though it was not classified as a station and didn’t appear on railway timetables for four decades. Informal, yes. But workmen and materials for Sir John’s new lodge no longer had to come on ponies by the path from Rannoch, but could come by rail (and by coach from there).

Arriving by train, Sir John’s guests were met by a coach and horses and driven along a newly constructed road to the west end of Loch Ossian, and by launch along the loch to the pier at the lodge at the east end. In 1902, Sir John even commissioned Matthew Paul & Co. Ltd of Dumbarton to build a steam yacht, *Cailleach*, at a cost of £1,325 (equivalent to £155,000 in 2017), for the greater comfort of his visitors.

Sir John’s Lodge and its Garden

Designed by Frank College of the Glasgow firm Wharr & College, Sir John’s lodge was completed in 1899. It was built of local Rannoch granite, with

The rear of Corroul lodge, with the turret that housed the small, round staircase





Sir John with his family,
in the drawing room at
Corroul Lodge, in the
early 1900s

slate roofs and nine chimneys, and it was much larger than the earlier lodge. Its “rather muscular form of Scottish classicism” harked back to the early 19th century. At the back, a small, round staircase tower sat in the middle of the main house, contrasting awkwardly with its rectangular counterpart on the servants’ wing. But Sir John did not aim at a building that was beautiful or distinguished—it was to be comforting, comfortable, practical and solid.

Around the house, in a shallow bow, were clustered numerous smaller buildings in the same idiom: the game larder, chapel and so on. In photographs, the lodge looks like a mother gathering her little ones around her. In 1929, a brochure for tenants described its four public rooms, 14 bedrooms and three bathrooms. Inside, the lodge was lined with Rannoch pine, plain in places, panelled in the drawing and dining room. Stags’ heads hung on the walls and there was a good number of bookcases. In the sitting room, a low sofa stood opposite a huge granite-and-brick fireplace with three family coats of arms.

The gardens were designed by L. & J. Falconer. Sir John and his wife, Lady Maxwell, née Ann Christian Maxwell, were both intimately involved. It was Sir John, for instance, who proposed the curving steps (still extant) leading from the terrace to the “alpine garden”. He had

helped fashion the famous gardens at Pollok House near Glasgow, after making drawings of the flower gardens and parterres of Badminton, Knole and Grimsthorpe. The Corroul gardens could hardly hope to compete with Pollok, although Sir John’s father-in-law, Sir Herbert Maxwell, wrote in his 1908 book *Scottish Gardens* that, because of the coal smog of Glasgow, gardening there was just as difficult as gardening in the Highlands. Corroul and Pollok, he wrote, were examples of “what combined skill and resolution may accomplish in the most forbidding environment”.

As Sir Herbert saw it, “there is no more desolate region in all Scotland” than Corroul. Yet “in the very heart of this wilderness, at the unpromising elevation of 1,250 ft,” Sir John and Lady Maxwell had put in a flower garden.

In alpine gardens and rockeries, the effort of make-believe is almost always distressingly obvious . . . But it is otherwise at Corroul. No need to pile rocks in laborious imitation of a ravine; they lie here naturally in profusion as they were thrown down ages ago by the retreating glacier; and as for environment, let the broad flanks and towering crests of Càrn Dearg, Beinn Bhreich and Beinn Eibhinn suffice for that, with the fair expanse of Loch Ossian at their feet.⁵

Sir John and his wife planted bell-flowers, globe flowers, primulas, speedwells and dianthus. Norwegian saxifrage, lining the granite stairs, “tosses its great cloud of white blossom” with a luxuriance that Sir Herbert had never seen equalled. There were snowdrops, wood sorrel and gromwell, and along the shores of the loch, the Stirling Maxwells added iris and spiraea. For local shelter, they used *Pinus montana*, a decorative dwarf pine. The gardens also harboured native wild flowers: heather, blueberries, cornel, field orchids, bluebells, digitalis, wintergreen and forget-me-not. If Pollok was “a green oasis round which Glasgow flowed like a dark and rapidly rising tide,” Corrou was a jewel in the Highlands, with “a buffer zone of absolutely bare open hill” for ten or fifteen miles around.

Sir John had largely completed his improvements to Corrou by 1904. Then, in the Liberals’ general election landslide of 1906, he lost his seat, ending his Parliamentary career. From now on, he would dedicate himself to Scotland and particularly to landscape and buildings. Corrou became his outlet and laboratory as idealist, gardener and patriot.

Forestry, at Corrou and Beyond

Sir John was a cultured man and a knowledgeable naturalist. He wrote a history of Scottish architecture, chaired the Scottish Ancient Monuments Board, and was vice-president of the Scottish National Trust. Having inherited paintings by Goya and Velazquez along with the Adam-built Pollok House, he served as a trustee of both the Wallace Collection in London and the National Galleries of Scotland. He was also a fine amateur watercolour artist, who painted in many lands. At Corrou he captured scenes such as *A Group of Aspens Growing by a Lonely Burn*. He wrote:

Next morning, I got out the paint box and went straight for the contrast of aspen and heather. It meant nothing till the slate blues of the sky and distance, and ambers of grass and fern were added.

He treasured the diverse flora of the Highlands and wrote an avifauna of Corrou.

Already when Sir John acquired the estate, very little native woodland remained. The only trees surviving, he recalled, were birch, rowan, black alder, aspen, bird cherry and some willows:

The birches are for the most part distorted by snow, and some have assumed very curious and

Sir John and Sir Herbert Maxwell, in the alpine garden at Corrou lodge, in 1905



picturesque shapes. Salix reticulata occur frequently, and occasionally juniper. On Loch Treig side a few stunted ashes and hollies survive.

Because of the high deer densities in the 20th century, the juniper and aspen died out, as did the Loch Treig ashes and hollies. The then “frequent” birches and willows are now exceedingly rare.

Within a few years, Sir John became devoted to forestry. He planted at Loch Ossian and Fersit and became a pioneer of afforestation in Scotland. “My father was always happiest among the trees,” recalled his daughter, Anne Maxwell MacDonald. “Our mother called him a tree frog!”

After Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge, Sir John travelled extensively on the continent, on attachment to the Colonial Office. He had talked to foresters from the Basque mountains to the Belgian *hautes fagnes*. Back in Scotland, he wondered if deer forest and sheep runs could be used more profitably for forestry. In 1907 he wrote that it was admitted by everyone that plantings in the high moorlands would not pay “unless they are made on a considerable scale and managed in the most economical and scientific manner”. But with sufficient investment, he thought, the Highlands could repopulate, with communities of foresters, “independent, yet firmly

attached to the soil, and handing on its occupation from father to son”.

Planting began in 1892, at an altitude of 1,270 ft, on the shores at the north-east end of Loch Ossian and the islands at the south-west end. The work was done mainly under contract. It was superintended until 1905 by John Boyd from Pollok, later a forester for the Crown, and then by Simon Cameron until 1938. Gradually, trees enclosed the north-east end of the loch, reaching 1,700 ft.

Loch Ossian is Great Britain’s highest tree plantation. Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) appeared to be the obvious choice for planting, because its roots can be found all over the estate, and it was used extensively until 1914. But “after 20 years growth falls off, needles do not persist, and the trees suffer terribly from snow-break and blasting”. So, Sir John “reluctantly decided to abandon Scots pine altogether in higher plantations, because the snow is too much for its brittle wood”. Austrian, Corsican, lodgepole, Swiss Stone and other species of pine fared no better.

Altogether, Sir John planted 71 species of conifers around Loch Ossian. On a smaller scale, he tried birch, rowan and sycamore. Oak, beech and sycamore began thriving after 1925–26, “when the hares, which damaged them, suddenly vanished”. But only Sitka spruce did well,



Sir John was devoted to forestry and became a pioneer of afforestation

Photograph:
© Juan Pablo Moreiras / FFI

prompting Sir John to suggest that it opened “an entirely new prospect for the Highland forester”.

Since saplings were vulnerable to grazing deer, about a third of the cost of planting was for fences. Each plantation was fenced into small areas known as compartments, and their aspects, types of soil and species of trees planted were noted. This meant that the progress of Boat House Plantation, Birch Clumps, The Knobbies, Strathossian Plantation and the rest—ranging from two-and-a-half to 38 acres—could be carefully charted.

A good deal had been learnt by 1902, when a new plantation was begun at Fersit. Most of Corrou is above 1,200 ft, with sometimes extreme winter conditions. Fersit is sheltered, and only 800–900 ft above sea level. Trees grow well, but the area also provided low-land winter grazing for deer, which Sir John realised must be maintained. Unfortunately, the Forestry Commission did not think in his holistic terms of mixed land-use, and later planted all of Fersit with spruce and pine.

In his technical manual *Loch Ossian Plantations: An Essay in Afforesting High Moorland* (1929), Sir John looked back nearly forty years to his early plantations, “intended to improve the landscape and afford shelter for deer” but “begun without much consideration”.

Little or no drainage was provided, he explained, and the trees were planted by a system called notching. This involved cutting a slit in the ground, raising the turf, pushing the plant into the slit, spreading the roots out horizontally under the turf and finally stamping the turf down. But growth was then very slow, because the dense peat prevented air, and water flowed freely around the young trees’ roots.

In 1905, however, Sir John had learned of the Belgian system of turf planting, which drains the soil. Trees are planted, their roots dropped vertically into inverted turfs of peat supplemented with sand or gravel, and spaced evenly between straight drains. The trees grew faster in thus destroyed peat bogs. Sir John made other experiments, too, and introduced the practice of first planting seedlings in “turf nurseries” prepared with slag and minerals, and only later transplanting them permanently.

In a speech not long before the Great War, Sir John noted how few woods Britain had. In Russia, 40% of the land was covered with trees; in Austria-Hungary, 30%; in Germany, 26%; in Sweden, 48%. In Britain it was a mere 4%. In a series of long articles in *The Times* in 1916, he wrote that war had “found us worse provided with timber than any other country in the world”.

In peacetime, the argument for afforestation

in Scotland was that jobs would enable people to settle in depopulated or uninhabited lands. The Great War made timber production urgent. With morale at its lowest point in 1916, *The Times* lent its voice to Sir John's appeal:

If the country were to become, by any conceivable chance, wholly dependent upon its own timber production, there would not be 1,000 acres standing at the end of 12 months.

In 1917, Sir John was appointed Assistant Controller of Timber Supplies for Scotland.

A 1918 tract by Sir John's forester John Boyd, *Afforestation*, was in line with Sir John's thinking, if more single-minded and commercial. "The interests of sport and game, in so far as they clash with the national interests of forestry, must be relegated to their fit and proper place," he wrote. Rabbits "must be exterminated"; black grouse "must be reduced from their status of game to that of vermin"; red deer, "where they are not likely to be of some financial value, must be ruthlessly dealt with", and so on. Only the "comparatively harmless" red grouse might safely be given "reasonable scope as a game-bird for sport . . . grouse-moors may bring in substantial rents".

Sir John had argued that afforestation was such a large and costly undertaking that state

involvement was essential. "Patience is a virtue not alien to forestry". Boyd, too, called for extensive state forests as well as loans and subsidies to private owners. Or, he asked scathingly, "are we prepared to admit that the Germans can accomplish more than us?"

These arguments, and war's further ravages, in 1919 led to the creation of the Forestry Commission. It planted 46,000 acres in Scotland in its first ten years. Sir John chaired the Commission from 1929 to 1932, and at various dates also the Empire Forestry Association, the Royal Scottish Arboricultural Society and similar bodies.

At Corrou, with his painterly eye, he planted for beauty as well as for science. "The charm of the autumn and winter landscape", autumn colours, and "shelter and ornament" all mattered to him—though not always to his unruly charge, the Forestry Commission. His technical knowledge was first-class—*The Times* called him "one of the first living authorities" on forestry—and his motivation was patriotic. Sir John studied and experimented for decades to help his country.

Self-evidently he was a Scotsman. After all, he held Pollok in the 23rd generation and carried the name of the line's founder, Sir John Maxwell. But Sir John was a British patriot too. In 1918, he warned his compatriots against creating a purely Scottish Forestry Commission:

Sir John had a painterly eye and planted for beauty as well as for science

Photograph: Philip Dean



I am as keen as any Scotsman can be to keep our end up, and to have all our rights, but I do think this wish to stand alone in forestry is no more sensible than it would be to have our own Post Office.

Sir John worked disinterestedly and rationally for the greater good. At Corrou, he created a "university in situ", an experimental forestry station for the Highlands. The Forestry Commission's research officers had "made good use of these plantations", he wrote in 1929, "and their visits have been a great help to us. Lucky the hobby which finds such justification and encouragement in these difficult times".

Field Sports and Finances

As a young man, Sir John also loved shooting. In old age, he remembered that to begin with at Corrou, he had "nothing in view except the development of deer stalking and grouse shooting". His father-in-law remembered these days fondly:

We had shot and fished together; I had killed many stags in his forest, we had travelled together (a crucial test of fellowship) in Greece, Italy and France; but never had it entered my thoughts that

any closer tie could ever be woven between us. It came therefore as a surprise as complete as it was delightful when, in the Autumn of 1901, he asked my approval.⁶

The new Lady Maxwell was “a quiet person but very capable”. She was to run the Glasgow Red Cross during the Great War. She was fond of gardening and bird-watching but didn’t like house parties. When Sir John invited friends for ten days’ stalking at the end of the season, she hoped the wives wouldn’t come, and in due course, the couple began to visit the estate by themselves.

Married life and his increasing interest in forestry gradually drew Sir John away from shooting. In any case, as his daughter Anne remembered, he had always approached it with the eye of a naturalist:

If my father was out shooting, sitting in a butt, he'd be looking at the flowers and everything else . . . the grouse were sort of by the way.

Nonetheless, he knew that field sports at Corroul paid better than forestry.

Deer stalking and grouse shooting in Scotland reached the peak of their popularity just before the Great War. In 1912, deer forests covered more than 3.5 million acres of Scotland,



Extract taken from
the *Inverness Courier* on
Thursday 11 October 1849
illustrating the huge bags
taken at this time

an increase of 1.5 million acres since 1883. At Corroul, the red deer were fed with hay and Indian corn every winter between 1898 and 1939. The number of stags shot increased from 25 in 1892 to 100 in 1907. The Great War initially reduced this figure. But more game were shot in 1917 and 1918 for food. In 1917, 411 deer were shot; 146 were stags.

Other game bags on the estate had steadily increased before the Great War, too, from 760 in 1891 to a peak of 10,444 in 1912. It was mainly grouse, rabbits and hares. There were also black grouse, snipe, ducks, woodcocks, golden plover and roe deer. The keepers were paid extra for killing “vermin” such as foxes, otters, weasels, crows and hawks, which attacked game or ate birds’ eggs.

Sir John enjoyed bird-watching. He recorded his sightings on Corroul of birds—many now locally extinct—such as tawny owls, golden eagles (three pairs then nested at Corroul), herons, cormorants, whooper swans, rooks, mallards, teals, skylarks, cuckoos and ptarmigan (numerous then). After 1912, however, the game bag, excluding deer, declined dramatically. Rabbits and hares had been shot in unsustainable numbers, so their populations crashed. So did grouse after 1916. The previous diversity and abundance of wildlife became only a memory, as

the estate, like all the Scottish Highlands, was catastrophically shot out.

Like other sporting estates, Corroul generated little money if not let to a shooting tenant. The only other trickle of income was from letting the grazing rights for sheep. In years when Corroul was not let to sporting tenants, the expenditure came from Sir John’s pocket.

In the early years of the 20th century, Corroul cost him well over £5,000 (equivalent to £570,000 in 2017) a year on average. In 1906–07, for example, when the costs were £6,152, Sir John contributed £5,700. A balance of £318 was carried over from the previous year, and income from all other sources amounted to only £134. The largest single item in the accounts that year was sporting expenses, amounting to £1,299 (equivalent to £148,000 in 2017). This included keepers’ and ghillies’ wages, guns, ammunition, the upkeep of ponies and dogs, and corn for the deer. Rates and “Public and Parochial Burdens” amounted to nearly £300 (equivalent to £34,000 in 2017), including a proportion of the minister’s stipend and maintenance of his manse. Sir John was paying for almost everything needed to maintain an isolated community of twenty or twenty-five people.

Wages remained relatively stable—£60 (equivalent to £6,700 in 2017) a year for the head

keeper, for instance—until wartime inflation forced them up. Sir John also instituted pensions and life assurance for the estate workers. In addition to their free housing, keepers were given coal (a sign of a lack of firewood). They were also allowed to keep livestock, such as cows and chickens. Single men, mostly ghillies or forestry workers, lived in the bothies.

Sir John was a generous and kind-hearted employer. But his factor, George Malcolm, was prepared to take a firm line. In 1912, Sir John abolished the keepers' practice of accepting tips from shooting parties, instead paying them a £15 (equivalent to £1,600 in 2017) allowance. All but one sent grateful letters to the factor. But the Loch Treig keeper, George Ross, wrote two letters of protest. The factor replied that stalkers did not have a right to tips and was irritated at having to write a second time: "The whole system is immoral, and indeed I believe illegal." He went on:

[Sir John] is a kind and patient master, and I think it is a poor return of his kindness for you to criticise and complain about his kindness to you in this respect . . . Sir John saw your former letter, and he did not like it . . . I will send him your last letter if you wish me to do so, though I advise you not to have this done.'

Customs die hard in the Highlands however, and by 1933 tips had come back.

Sir John was often able to let much of the shooting at Corroul before the Great War. The shooting in the Fersit quarter, for instance, was let to Edward Cross in the 1890s, and in 1904 the shooting of the whole estate was let to W. J. B. Pease of Pendower for £2,500 (equivalent to £290,000 in 2017). The estate continued to be let now and then in succeeding decades. The popularity of deer stalking and grouse shooting before the Great War led to very high sporting rents. In good years, Corroul came close to breaking even. In 1910-11, the rent received was £3,000 (equivalent to £336,000 in 2017), while Sir John's net contribution was £1,140. When the £924 spent on forestry is deducted, the estate made a loss of only £216 (equivalent to £24,000 in 2017). After the Great War however, shooting rents dwindled.

More broadly, an estate such as Corroul, with its generosity to local people, depended on low taxes. Soon, estates were to be crippled by land taxes, shooting rates, labour taxes and death duties.

Stalking remains very popular at Corroul

Photograph © Juan Pablo Moreiras / FFI



TROUBLED YEARS, 1918–1945

During the Great War, many of Corrou's estate workers joined the armed forces, and four were killed. Interest in field sports diminished, and rents collapsed: from £3,500 in 1911 (equivalent to £390,000 in 2017) to just £500 (equivalent to £50,000 in 2017) in 1915.

Meanwhile, owners of deer forests were urged to take in cattle. Deer, too, were needed as food, and in 1916 the government set up the Venison Supply Committee. In 1917, 411 deer were killed at Corrou. Later, there were too few bullets and too few men to stalk. Nor could the estate supply war timber, despite Sir John's

interest, though the European larch at Inverlair was felled. Cattle grazing was more successful. By 1918, the estate took in 120 cattle from May to November, at 10s 6d (about £30) a head. It also supplied wool for the war effort, producing 845 lbs of blackface ewe's wool in 1917.

Before the war, when men or boys were readily available, "vermin" were vigorously pursued. Estate workers were paid extra for killing red deer and roe deer within the pine plantations, and foxes, wild cats, birds of prey, hooded crows, otters, stoats and weasels whenever they found them. Rabbits, now extinct at Corrou, were shot too—some 2,500 in 1911, and 4,600 in 1912.

The Estate in Transition

After the armistice, field sports grew fashionable again, and Corrou's rental climbed back to a peak of £3,000 (equivalent to £160,000 in 2017). In the 1920s, the estate was let to Henry Carnegie Phipps, son of Andrew Carnegie's partner Henry Phipps Jr. (Carnegie himself was at Skibo Castle, the place he built himself near Dornoch Firth). Another paying guest was Phipps's brother-in-law, the American financier Bradley Martin Jr., a great book collector.

But the game bag was declining, and in 1926

it dropped abruptly. Two unlet seasons followed. After the American stock market collapsed in 1929, rents at Corrou tumbled to just £300 (equivalent to £20,000 in 2017) in 1932.

The lower game bags in the 1920s were probably due to over-shooting. Corrou had been producing large bags for thirty years. But by 1926, excluding red deer, it was down to 571 from a peak of 10,444 in 1912. Grouse and hares dwindled, while the number of stags killed remained relatively constant.

After the war, Lloyd George's coalition government appointed Sir John to chair a committee on alternative uses for deer forests. Its report of 1921 classified deer forests into four categories, from those "fit for no other purpose" to those "capable of bearing a full permanent stock of sheep or cattle" (which it recommended they should do). Corrou was deemed "capable of carrying a light summer stock only".

The report also made suggestions on heather burning, fox killing and deer forest taxes. Any extension of deer forests, it added, should be forbidden by law. No legislation followed. But deer forests still did not expand.

Sir John was aware that Corrou's grazing was limited, there was very little arable land, and forestry was constrained by soils, climate and the need to retain winter grazing for deer. Even the



Foxes are no longer shot at Corrou but they were for nearly two hundred years

Photograph: Ken Smith

sheep he introduced to Corrou initially made a large loss, and barely ever broke even.

Forestry on the estate resumed in earnest at Loch Ossian in 1920. The main species planted were Sitka spruce and Norway spruce. Thirty-five years later, Sitka spruce was producing half of the estate's wood. Of the broadleaved trees that were planted on a smaller scale, beech, sycamore and oak did well, where sheltered. Despite the superstition that it is unlucky to cut down rowan, at Corrou rowan was used extensively for firewood.

The Forestry Commission was fascinated by Corrou's plantations. They were well-established and contained a variety of species growing in unfavourable conditions with varying degrees of success. In 1926 and 1934, it commissioned reports on Corrou's ground preparation, methods of planting and fertilisation.

The 650-acre plantation at the north-east end of Loch Ossian was almost complete by 1939. From the lodge, it extended nearly two miles along the north side of the loch and a mile along the south side. Broadleaf trees like wild cherry were mingled in.

About three-quarters of a mile from the lodge, on the south shore of Loch Ossian, Sir John also began establishing a 60-acre rhododendron garden. It is the highest rhododendron plantation in Britain, and careful planting was essential.

Many of Scotland's rhododendron gardens are on the west coast, where they thrive in the milder seashore climate. At Corrou, Sir John chose a north-facing slope, where the opening of the buds was delayed until the worst of the frosts were over, and where trees on the slopes above provided shelter.

He had first introduced rhododendron seedlings to Corrou in 1910. After the war, to get rarer seeds, he subscribed to the Forrest expeditions to Yunnan in 1925 and 1935, and Kingdon Ward's expedition to Assam and Tibet in 1935. His grandson, Donald Maxwell MacDonald, spoke of their success:

These plants came all the way from the Himalayas where the air was as pure as you can imagine, and suddenly they were made to grow up in the pollution in Glasgow, and they did not like it at all. But at Corrou, no problem.

Expertly tended by Donald, the garden still flourishes today.

The railway remained the estate's lifeline. Almost everyone and everything arrived by steam train, with its first and third class Pullman carriages (second class did not exist). The tracks were maintained by surfacemen. They lived in small houses beside the line, and each had a

The view from the 60-acre rhododendron plantation established by Sir John

section to look after. Donnie MacNichol, son of Corrou's stationmaster, Archibald MacNichol, described how:

There was great rivalry as to who would have the best section. They had to walk the line every day before the first train to check its condition and that no rocks had fallen. On Loch Treig side there could easily be a rock come down.

In 1921, a telephone line was installed. A hundred larch poles ran from the lodge to the station. Archibald MacNichol, stationmaster from 1908 to 1941, was paid £5 per annum "for attending the telephone". He was also signalman and sub-postmaster, and took bookings for the youth hostel. In shooting season, lodge guests and their provisions arrived by train, and their telephone calls and telegrams also passed through the station.

In 1921, Sir John signed an agreement with the North British Aluminium Company, which was building a smelter at Fort William powered by hydro-electricity. Loch Treig and Loch Laggan were dammed. Tunnels took water from Laggan to Treig and then under the mountains to Fort William.

Sir John agreed to let the company raise Loch Treig by 30 ft, and abstract or divert up to 600,000 gallons of water a day from the Allt

Chaorach Mor and Allt Chaorach Beag burns, which flow into the River Treig, just below the loch, near Fersit. Corrou retained the right to use water from these burns, and to fish on Loch Treig. The estate was paid £13,000 (equivalent to £600,000 in 2017) plus compensation for any damage caused to forestry.

During the construction, Corrou's factor, Colonel B. H. Shaw Stewart, ensured that a cattle creep that had become submerged was replaced at the company's expense. He allowed a telephone line from Fersit to the south end of the Laggan dam (at a symbolic rent of a shilling a year) on condition that "where the line passes over the open moor, telephone wires shall be provided with an adequate supply of anti-grouse safety discs".

A mile and a half of the West Highland railway line alongside the loch had to be moved uphill. In 1934, the water finally rose over the house and the sheep fanks at the head of Loch Treig.

Life in Sir John's Lodge before the Second World War

The shooting lodge at Corrou was a large house with many servants. But photographs show an unpretentious home, where books lay about and



Archibald MacNichol, the stationmaster from 1908 to 1941, standing by a train at Corrou station



Ghillies fetched carcasses from the hillside using ponies

dogs wangled their way into drawing rooms. Sir John's daughter, Anne Maxwell MacDonald, remembered it as friendly and informal:

Of course, we ate grouse when there were grouse and venison when there was venison, but nothing out of the ordinary . . . Life was just like life anywhere else . . . everything to do with Corrou and Pollok was very ordinary. Not at all what people think happened in big houses. You might just have well been living in a cottage only there was this enormous staff, which I always thought was so absurd.

The butler and housekeeper remained all year, and when Sir John was in residence, half the staff of Pollok would come with him. When they went off on holiday, the other half took their places. Before the Second World War, there were a dozen or so servants, perhaps three housemaids, three kitchen staff, a cook, a hall boy and a couple of footmen, a chauffeur and a nursemaid. The children had a resident teacher, and the "bothy lads" had their own housekeeper. Outside help included the head gardener and the garden labourer, a dozen seasonal forest workers, shepherds, deer stalkers, under-keepers, ghillies and a kennel man, the stationmaster and surfacemen for the railway, and occasional road builders. When Sir John was in residence, the

estate must have numbered a hundred or so people, including wives and children.

When the estate was let for shooting, the family, butler and the housekeeper moved out of the lodge. Shooting guests often brought their own loaders and valets, and probably other servants too.

As a child at Corrou, Sir John's daughter, "Miss Anne", lived in the nursery, behind the green baize door, along with the servants' rooms in the rear wing. The children were, "never, never allowed to ring a bell" for servants:

You had to go and find the person, which I think they hated because of course you were running about in the way. But then we were always great friends with the staff. We had tremendous fun with them.

She and her cousin rode all over the estate:

We rode the whole way down the side of Loch Treig one day . . . I think we had four black striped balls—boiled sweets—and that's all the food we ate! . . . We had two marvellous ponies . . . extremely determined animals, and we could ride them wherever we could make them go . . . It was mostly bareback!

Before the Second World War there were lots of ponies at Corrou. Each beat had two to fetch

in the carcasses, and others for grouse shooting. “The stalkers in those times had cows; there were several lots of cows—and we loved it if we could go around on the ponies and bring the cows home!”

The lodge had a vegetable garden looked after by a gardener. The keepers also had vegetable plots. At Strathossian, the MacPhersons grew cabbages, leeks, onions, shallots, brussel sprouts, parsley, rhubarb and raspberries, as well as potatoes and turnips.

Estate workers also kept livestock. “We had two calves every year without fail,” recalled Neil MacKinnon, the son of the principal forester. From the milk, they made butter, cheese and a semi-matured cheese called “crowdie”. Estate families were also allowed to fish in all but a few of the very best spots, which were reserved for guests or tenants at the lodge.

Neil MacKinnon arrived in Corroul from a croft in Skye when his father, Ewan, was appointed forester in 1938. His family thought their house was palatial!

Running water, bath, hot and cold water, amazing, and a garden . . . It was Buckingham Palace . . . the isolation did not mean anything to us because we didn't go anywhere anyway: we had come from Skye.

The lodge and all the workers' cottages had electricity generated by a small dam on the Corrie Creagach burn. John James, the young handyman, recalled “sitting in the bothy on a freezing night, with a snowstorm raging outside”, when the lights began to dim. “That was my cue, on with the boots, pullover and wet weather gear, and off to the hill, hurricane lamp in hand”. All too often “someone would shake me out of my dreams early on a dark winter morning to tell me that there was no power”. If breaking up the ice failed to maintain the power, a diesel generator was started up.

At Strathossian, the gamekeeper Donald MacPherson and his family had hot and cold running water, a bathroom, an inside toilet, a large sitting room and three bedrooms. But the lighting was still by paraffin lamp, recalled his daughter Marion:

When it was lit, and we were sitting at the table doing our homework, the heat from the paraffin lamp would get too much and we used to have to slide back from the table . . . When you went upstairs to bed you carried a little golden paraffin lamp with a little shade.

Strathossian also had a milk house, back porch and scullery, as well as a barn, byre, stable,

Marion MacPherson with her mother, walking the three miles through Strathossian valley to school, in c. 1939



cart shed, midden, tool shed, stick shed, peat shed, hen house and dog kennel. As Marion put it, there was much to be grateful for: “A good solid house, a secure job, and good food”.

For the single men in the bothies—under-keepers, ghillies, kennel boys and the forestry workers—life was almost as comfortable, though the men came and went.

The principal bothy was near the head keeper’s house and built of stone and lined with wood. It was dominated by one long room, with food lockers lining one wall and a dining table down the middle. There were also two bedrooms, a drying room, a bathroom and toilet, and an entrance hallway. The housekeeper washed for the men and kept the place clean.

They cooked on a coal-fired iron range or a small electric cooker with a grill. From the shop in Fort William, the men bought bread, potatoes, oatmeal, barley, Spam, margarine, cheese, bacon and jam. Milk, eggs, trout, venison and rabbit came from the estate. Communal venison soup was made in a large pot, lasting for two or three days.

Before the First World War, many at Corroul spoke Gaelic—the keepers infrequently, and the surfacemen and seasonal forestry workers as a matter of course (being crofters from Skye or Harris). But the children grew up English-speaking. When John Boustead spent three

months working on the estate in 1947, Gaelic had fallen silent.

Highlanders saw three distinct countries in Britain: the Highlands and Islands, the Lowlands, and England. Their respect for people was graduated, with the English or “Sassenachs” at the bottom of the heap. City dwellers were even more contemptuously referred to as city slickers. John Boustead remembered that Sandy Thompson, the stationmaster since 1941, was a Lowlander. But Pollie, his wife, a former Cameron, was of Highland stock. “That was important in those days, as anyone who was not a Highlander was not accepted so readily in the society. If you spoke ‘the Gaelic’, it made all the difference”.

Work at Corroul was hard. As principal forester, Ewan MacKinnon was responsible for pruning, felling, thinning, planting, drainage, and the repair of gates and fences. By the 1930s, some of the trees planted by Sir John were reaching maturity, so thinning of the plantations began. The foresters felled trees with a cross cutter and cut the branches with an axe. Ponies dragged the wood. There were no safety rules and no helmets. Only during the Second World War did a portable engine and bench begin to be used—cutting the timber into 6 ft lengths before it was sent to Glasgow for use as pit props in coal mines.

There were no tractors or other mechanised

farm machinery either. John James explained:

The hay was cut by scythe, and there was a horse-driven cart for carting dung to the fields and hay from them, and a horse-driven wooden rake for collecting the hay when it was ready for stacking.

During the shooting season Donald Lawrie, the Fersit keeper, walked from Fersit to Corroul, leaving around four in the morning. He stayed out with the shooting parties all day, sometimes not returning until midnight. His son Michael remembered when the hinds were shot in winter: “I’ve seen him coming off the hill in the frosty weather and taking the trousers off and them standing up themselves—frozen”.

As a boy, Michael helped skin the hinds that were brought back to Fersit, while the men skinned the stags. The carcasses were then sent up by pony to Corroul. Venison was regularly sent on to Sir John’s Glasgow home. He also gave venison to estate workers and local people.

Corroul was a world unto itself, with a shop, a library and even a primary school. The little shop was at the steading at Corroul, and sold biscuits, cigarettes and other small items. Orders were sent by train to the grocers in Fort William, who sent back boxes of supplies. The account was settled every six months, when wages were paid.

In winter, the MacPhersons were so isolated at Strathossian that Sir John provided skis, so that Donald could ski to Corroul and carry their grocery box home on his back.

One of the bothies contained a small library with books of its own and a shelf for ten books from Fort William library, which were regularly changed. The issuing of books was strictly supervised by the housekeeper.

In the late 1930s, a quarter-size billiard table arrived in the forestry workers’ bothy. This went down very well with the young men, though the rules of snooker eluded most of them, so they stuck to billiards.

Until well after the Second World War, people on the estate mostly made their own entertainment. When not making snares in the evenings, the bothy men often played instruments such as chanter, melodeon, mouth organ, fiddle and violin. But Sundays were kept holy. No music, radio, fun or frolic. Not even whistling was allowed.

Duncan (or “Robbie”) Robertson, head keeper from 1918 to 1945, was a noted fiddler. Donnie MacNichol remembered:

He would come in with his fiddle, put one leg on a chair, out with the fiddle and he would give us a tune. Without a word he slapped it in the case again, and out. We used to love that, it was great.



The children created their own entertainment on the estate and made a badminton court at Strathossian

John James recalled playing the squeeze-box, while the stationmaster's wife Pollie and their daughter Janet played the fiddle:

We sat in the stationmaster's cottage, the room lit with a Tilley lamp, and talked and played music till the "wee sma' oors" . . . We sometimes were up until three or four in the morning when the "Ghost Train"—a goods train—would come through from Glasgow.

Mr Walker, the Strathossian keeper after the MacPhersons, skilfully played the pipes, diddle, dulcimer and three-keyboard button accordion. In the forestry bothy, a two-row button-key accordion lay around ready for use. The seasonal foresters were typically good fiddlers and singers. "They were quite tuneful," said Neil MacKinnon, "because a lot of these fellows came from the islands".

Eventually, Sir John supplied a Cosser wireless, which had remarkably good reception considering Corrou's mountains. The bothy men listened to the news on the radio, and occasional Gaelic concerts. John James remembered "hearing an announcement through it that an atom bomb had been dropped on Japan. I had no idea what an atom bomb was".

On one occasion, one of Sir John's tenants,

Colonel Rankin, invited the estate workers to a film show about his shooting parties. Though it was hardly a blockbuster, everybody went home happy. An outing to the pictures in Fort William was a rare treat. In his three years at Corrou, Robert MacIntyre went three times.

Now and again though, the ghillies did leave the estate for a night out. Taking the train to Rannoch station, they spent a couple of hours in the hotel bar there, before catching the last train home. Neil MacKinnon remembered them returning, doing sword dances with sticks beside the stables. But if these outings left them in a cheery state of mind, there doesn't appear to have been much of a problem with alcohol on Corrou in those days. Social norms and poverty held back drinking.

When they were about sixteen, John James and William MacKinnon decided that they, too, would travel to the Rannoch station pub. "Neither of us had ever been in a pub before, but we went in and ordered a 'pint'. The publican asked us how old we were, and we bravely lied". Feeling guilty and embarrassed, the boys, "gulped down that pint as fast as we could and got out quick" to catch the next goods train home.

Apart from the school Christmas party, festivities at Corrou were very rare, although a dance in 1939 was long remembered. And John

Boustead remembered going to a dance in Fort William in 1947:

We cycled to Fersit. The road in those days was a track with deep ruts—we couldn't turn the wheels. We then cycled down the railway line to Tulloch, took the train, went to the dance, stayed the night, and came back on Sunday. Apart from the night at the dance, we didn't think about drinking. We weren't involved with temperance, it's just the way we were.

Children at Corrou

For children, Corrou was a paradise, with almost endless opportunities for play, although a lack of opponents ruled out team games and organised sports. John James came to Corrou at 14 to work on the estate but had ample time for rock-climbing and deer-stalking “just for the fun of it”. He enjoyed “gorging blueberries with the MacKinnons and swimming in the loch at a lovely pebble beach,” as well as “converting the rowing boat to sail and dashing down the loch in what seemed to be a minor gale”.

John James and the MacKinnon boys would also go “guddling” trout (tickling them on the belly to catch them). “What a thrill that was to put your arm gently in the water and touch the trout

swimming quietly under the bank”.

At Strathossian, the children splashed about in the burn, building dams, sailing little boats, paddling and swimming. Strathossian had a badminton court in the yard, and Donald MacPherson even made a small putting green. “We played hide-and-seek, kick-the-can, soldiers, cowboys,” his daughter Marion remembered; “we wandered the hills, explored the burns, went sledging”.

During the Second World War, the MacPhersons took in three young evacuees, their cousins Hamish, Robert and Ian MacIntyre from Dalmuir, near Glasgow. Robert remembered the contrast with home:

We had never seen a bath in our lives in the tenements. And the wildlife was a thing that we had never experienced before. There used to be butts on the side of the hill where they used to stand, shouting and whistling and chasing to get the grouse to fly in that direction. And we also used to see them coming in with the deer strapped over the horses. We saw plenty of deer, but we also saw otters, fox, weasels.

Once, Hamish saw a stoat mesmerising a rabbit. “It went for the back of its neck”. Another time the boys found hawks nesting on a rock face.

William and Neil MacKinnon, the sons of Ewan MacKinnon, the estate forester, in c. 1945



Together with their Uncle Donald, they pulled the nest down and killed all but one of the chicks, which they took home. The hawk chick died, but they successfully reared a raven called Jackie.

One day, the boys found a wildcat in a gin trap when they were returning from school:

It kept hissing at us and it was trapped by its paw. The only way we could kill it was with a piece of heavy twine from our school bag. We made a loop in it, put it over the cat's head and choked it. It took two of us to carry it home—one with the string and the other one with the tail because it was big and heavy. It was two feet long, bigger than a domestic cat.

The skin was sent away to be stretched and dried, and eventually graced the back of a chair. “These gin traps are illegal now,” Robert observed. “When you think back they were cruel things, a bit of steel clamping over and breaking a bone in their leg . . . At the time we didn't think anything about it”.

By the 1940s, sightings of wild animals at Corrou had grown rare. The MacIntyre boys were taught to distinguish animals by their droppings and learnt to kill “vermin” when helping the keepers. They nailed the heads of their kills to a board outside the house. Robbie, the head keeper, came to count the heads and pay the boys: red and roe deer, nothing (but the boys

could keep the carcasses); fox 10s; wildcat 5s; and 2s 6d for the others.

Hamish described how their Uncle Donald dealt with a family of foxes:

He took the two terriers, the dog and the bitch, and put them into the den. The vixen was there with her cubs and she fought with the dogs for hours and hours. Then the dogs dragged them out. Uncle sat there for a couple of days waiting for the dog fox to come back, then he shot it. A dog fox, a vixen, and their cubs were all killed.

More usually, keepers would wait till the vixen was out and then put a terrier down to kill the cubs. "One terrier, Fruachan, took about three months to recover from a mauling he got down a den. He had to be dug out as he was too badly injured to get out himself".

Because of their taste for trout, otters too were thought of as vermin. Robert MacIntyre recalled walking to the loch one day with his cousin Andy:

I had never seen an otter in my life before. As we were walking down, we saw an otter. Andy knew what it was, and the otter jumped into the pool, just down from the house. We went up to the house to tell my uncle and he came down with the dogs and a gun. When the otter was coming out of the



Deer antlers are treasured trophies

Photograph: Ken Smith

pool—it was shallow both ends—uncle lifted his gun up. But, you know how an otter's got a lovely wee face and he couldn't shoot. The dogs went in after it. One of the dogs had the otter, their mouths were locked together, and they were fighting.

Marion MacPherson loved playing on the moors in the moonlight with her cousins, Robert and Hamish. They played moonlit ice hockey on the frozen bog at Strathossian, beneath the silhouettes of the mountains. "On one occasion Robert fell through a hole in the ice three times. The last time he was put to bed as he had no more dry clothes to put on".

At home in the winter evenings, Marion's "mother knitted for all the family, my father made rag rugs and patchwork quilts, we did jigsaws. My parents often joined in with our games". Even Robert and Hamish learnt how to knit: "We used to knit balaclavas".

Winters could be fearsome, summers idyllic. For the rest of his life John James remembered "lying back on a knoll in the heather, looking down the loch on a warm summer evening, and smoking a pipe of 'black twist'". Was it the beauty and tranquillity that carried him away? Or the nicotine? He wondered, decades later, adding that the sense of peace was unforgettable.

Corrou's isolation meant that a school was

essential. Attended by all the children under twelve, it was situated in the School House, beside the lodge. The teacher lived there. The station-master's children and the Fersit children went to school at Spean Bridge or Fort William. Older children were sent to secondary school in Fort William and stayed in lodgings.

Marion and Andrew MacPherson daily trekked three miles from Strathossian to school, and back again.

In winter, if we thought the weather was closing in as we went up to Corrou we were to turn for home, or if my father thought we should turn he would fire a shot in the air as a signal.

During one cold winter in the Second World War, the Strathossian children were unable to walk to school for five or six weeks. When better weather returned, the teacher asked them to make up the lost time by going to school on a Saturday.

The winter school day was from 10am to 3.30pm, giving the children time to walk home before darkness closed in. Occasionally, Marion, Andrew and their cousins travelled to school by a horse-drawn sledge. Andrew remembered how on other days Sir John would drive to the school at three o'clock and let the teacher know he was going down to Strathossian and could save them

a three-mile walk. “He would say to me, ‘get in the car. There you are, that’s better than school work’.”

Teachers in small rural schools were rarely university-educated. But Sir John paid a high salary to secure teachers with degrees. When he could, he offered estate children work at Corroul after they finished school. Andrew MacPherson worked as a ghillie, then looked after a herd of cattle and did the lambing at Loch Treig.

“We were very, very lonely,” Andrew MacPherson realised when thinking back. As children, they may have felt that they had many visitors. Marion recalled how “relatives came up for their holidays and uncles would help my father with the hay”. But the isolation could be extreme:

We used to get snowed in at Strathossian for three months. The deer fence was six feet high and the snow was up to that in 1932. There was no way a wheel would move, and there was no way a person like my mother would ever walk the three miles to Corroul.

At War Again

In the summer of 1939, Ewan MacKinnon and his team were building a road from Strathossian to Fersit. Working with picks and shovels, they had

built half a mile of it. Then, in September 1939, the work suddenly stopped, never to be resumed.

His son, Neil, remembered 1939 as “the climax of all activity” at Corroul:

Everything went into decline after that . . . The head gardener was called up, that just left the garden labourer, the under-keepers all disappeared, and of course the people who used to come shooting would be in their regiments.

Sir John’s wife died in 1937, and not long after the war began, small strokes confined him to a wheelchair. Nevertheless, he kept his spirits up and retained his formidable intelligence and his old enthusiasm for the forestry at Corroul. Ewan MacKinnon struggled to continue the Loch Ossian plantations, his son recalled:

The forestry kept going right enough, but my father at one time worked on his own. In 1944-45 he was on his own. He just did what he could.

In the inter-war period, Sir John had amassed an impressive collection of cars, considering that Corroul could not be reached by road: a Morris Oxford saloon, a three-ton Fordson eight-cylinder lorry, a small Austin Seven (Baby Austin) and, in 1939, an Austin Twelve

The remoteness of Strathossian, where the MacPherson’s could be snowed in for up to three months



shooting brake, with folding seats to accommodate a couple of stags when necessary. His chauffeur, John Anderson, was called up and 18-year-old John James took over.

Corroul was safe from wartime bombing. There were evacuees at Strathossian and, for a short time, at the lodge. Fighter aircraft on training missions would fly low over the estate, coming suddenly over a hill and frightening people and animals alike.

Cath McKellar began teaching at the school, “taking her little daughter in the pram”. Her husband Jim, the gardener, served in the Royal Artillery. He was killed in 1941. Two years later, in 1943, the school closed. Most children had moved up to secondary school or left the estate.

John James remembered only three shooting parties during the war. He ghillied for them all. “The closest I got to receiving a tip was getting a share of their asparagus sandwiches”. He occasionally helped the keeper cull inferior hinds and stags with poor heads or “hummels” (stags without horns). The carcasses were sent to the Ministry of Food in Fort William. Corroul was protected from the effects of food rationing, because it produced its own vegetables, game, milk and fish. The shops in Fort William kept the ration books and sent down allowances by train.

In April 1942, fire destroyed the lodge. No



The remains of Corroul lodge after fire destroyed it in 1942

one was killed or seriously injured. Following a severe winter, a plumber had been repairing burst pipes when his blowtorch set light to the insulation. Because the interior was pine-panelled, the fire soon spread.

Lessons were in progress in the schoolroom, Marion MacPherson recalled, when there was a cry of “fire” and the teacher ran out. She soon reappeared and sent the children home. “So, we went home to get my father”. But Marion’s family lived three miles away at Strathossian, and that day Donald, her father, was burning heather on the opposite side of Loch Ghuilbinn, four miles from the lodge. “My mother had a big bell which she would ring and also she would wave a big white sheet”. By the time Donald walked back from the Little Hill to Strathossian and up the three miles to Corroul, the lodge had burnt to the ground.

Other estate workers, too, were too far away to help. The forestry workers were on the Beinn na Lap plantation, a couple of miles away by boat. Neil MacKinnon later described how his father was alerted and rushed to the lodge:

The kennel man, who wasn’t always known for his honesty, went to raise the alarm I think, and they didn’t believe him. But he was so insistent that the place was on fire that my father put out in the boat, because you couldn’t actually see the lodge. There

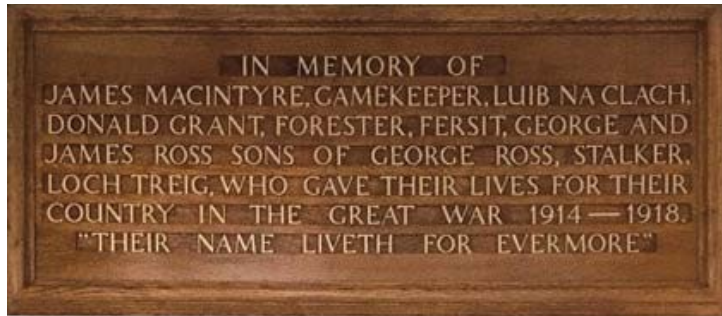
was smoke, so they got the engine going pretty smartly and revved it up as hard as they could go.

When they arrived, little could be done. There was no fire brigade and too few people to fight the blaze:

There were certainly hoses there, and there were fire extinguishers everywhere. On the surface of it, it looked as if the fire precautions were adequate, but there had never been any fire drills, and nobody had ever tested the hoses. They were simply installed and left there, although they did work, but unfortunately the water pressure wasn’t sufficient to get very high.

The school, the chapel and the deer larder survived, because they were connected to the lodge by stone only. Some of Sir John’s Old Master paintings had been sent from Pollok to Corroul for safekeeping during the war. Fortunately, they hadn’t left Corroul station. From the lodge itself, little was saved, apart from books that were first strewn on the lawns, and then stored in the chapel.

On 10 December 1942, an RAF Wellington bomber crashed during a training flight on the summit of Gael Charn, near Ben Alder. The nose crunched straight into the hill, and the tail broke on impact. Of the six-man crew, only Philip Underwood, the rear gunner, survived.



*One of the war memorial
 plaques currently hanging
 in Corroul lodge*

He spent a cold night in the remains of the aircraft, alongside his dead comrades. The next day he followed a burn down the mountain. He first reached the burnt-out lodge, and his hopes were dashed, before he found the head keeper's house. From there he was taken to Corroul station and on to hospital in Fort William.

"The place became a hive of activity," John James remembered. "The keepers, some foresters, and Army and Air Force personnel set off with the ponies". It took them three days to find the wreckage in the mist and rain. The bodies were

taken down in sacks on the ghillies' ponies. Later, when the snow had gone, the keepers surreptitiously visited the site for the 303 ammunition.

Four men from estate families were killed on active service during the Second World War. Then, one evening in March 1943, Donald Lawrie, a keeper on the estate for more than thirty years, was walking home when his gun fired accidentally, killing him as he climbed over a fence.

An era was ending.



*A gralloched deer
 carcass being taken
 off the hill*

Photograph: Ken Smith

FROM SPORT TO FORESTRY, 1945–1995

After the war, Sir John lived in the head keeper's house when he visited. Andy Tait, who succeeded Duncan Robertson as head keeper in 1945, lived nearby in the gardener's house—known as the Doll's House. Sir John, now in a wheelchair, would travel to Corroul with two nurses and a valet. After lunch, his nurses wrapped him up warmly in blankets, and his valet and Andy Tait would take him to inspect the forestry plantations in his wheelchair. Pushing Sir John through peat bogs and between trees was hard work and the men returned exhausted. Occasionally, Donald Maxwell MacDonald remembered, the wheelchair sank



A wooden bungalow was built in 1958, two years after Sir John died, to replace the burnt-out lodge

into the bog, “and grandfather was sitting there quite happily while the chaps were struggling”.

Sometimes the young chauffeur and handyman John James, or the young shepherd, John Beaton, helped to “push him all over bloomin’ woods! . . . Hundreds of trees up there you had never seen before. He used to say, ‘John, what’s the name of that?’ but I hadn’t a clue of the names of the trees”.

After marrying in 1930, Sir John’s daughter Anne and her husband Captain John (Jock) Maxwell MacDonald mostly lived on their estate at Largie in Argyll. But as Sir John aged, they increasingly helped run Corroul. Sir John longed to rebuild the lodge as it had been before the fire—impossible in the austere, high-tax climate after the war. Though he never quite understood the reasons, his family dissuaded him: “We knew what a white elephant it would have been”. A modest three-bedroom wooden bungalow was built in 1958, two years after his death, on the site of the burnt-out lodge. Four further bedrooms were added in 1969.

Game, Wildlife and Sport

Jock Maxwell MacDonald was a trained forester, but never, said his wife, “what I would call a mad

sportsman”. He did shoot—until he lost a leg serving with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders during the war—but at Corroul and Largie, forestry was his main concern. After the Second World War, the estate was rarely let on a formal basis. With no lodge and no indoor servants, it wasn’t possible to entertain large parties anyway. Most shooting visitors were friends of the Stirling Maxwells and Maxwell MacDonalds. Alasdair Thompson and John Beaton ghillied at Corroul just after the war and remembered “toffs from London and all over”: the Flemings and the Fairbanks, Colonel Rankin, Colonel Myddelton, the Fairfax-Lucys, and the Schusters. “It was a beautiful estate to work on. A lot of gentry came up, it was all gentry”.

As Alasdair Thompson remembered it, Corroul peoples’ view of the gentry did not change after the Labour government came to power in 1945. “We didn’t mind at all because we were born and brought up to it . . . In fact, if it wasn’t for the like of Corroul estate, and places like that, a person wouldn’t have a wee job”.

Some visitors stayed in the old keeper’s cottage at Strathossian. Sir John’s friend Colonel Niall Rankin, a regular visitor, stayed in the head stalker’s house. His wife, Lady Jean, a lady-in-waiting to Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, occasionally brought “royal” sandwiches from

Balmoral for the stalkers and ghillies.

The estate partly replaced its lost income from shooting by selling venison. But poaching was a problem. By the early 1950s, poachers could sell a carcass for £20–£30 (equivalent to £650–£975 in 2017). Using searchlights, they would wait on the road from Roy Bridge for the deer to come down, shooting any they saw. The gamekeepers did not chase the poachers themselves but reported them to the police. There were so few cars on the road in those days that the police at Roy Bridge knew the cars to look for as they passed through the village.

John Beaton used to shoot the occasional stag himself, or together with the gamekeeper at Ardverikie, but this was for their own larder. If a poacher shot a single stag, they regarded it as fair game. But if it was several and frequent, for sale, the police were called.

Donald Maxwell MacDonald recalled how, when he was a boy, “we used to have lovely days shooting ptarmigan on a bed of reeds”. Both ptarmigan and grouse gradually declined after the war (even the reed is now gone). But there were enough birds to give good sport until the late 1950s. Maxwell MacDonald remembered grouse shooting with Richard MacKinnon, the Lubnaclach keeper:

My first visits to Corroul on my own without grandfather and without mummy or daddy were to shoot grouse. I had just gone to Oxford, so I would have been about 19 or 20 years old. I used to take a party of friends. We had this wonderful old keeper: Richard MacKinnon was as keen as mustard, and there were quite a lot of grouse. I can remember going out on my own with Richard the day before my guests came (I thought I had to get some practice in). Off I went, over the right-hand shoulder of the station . . . I shot sixteen brace by myself before I ran out of cartridges. If you went over there today you would be quite excited if you saw one grouse.

Alasdair Thompson remembered how he used to go out to the ruins of the old lodge, on the hillside towards Rannoch:

With two wicker baskets, one on each side of the horse. The guests would be shooting the grouse and I would fill the baskets and take them back to the grouse larder at Corroul Lodge . . . I would then hang the grouse on hooks for four or five days. Then they were sent away. You see, the gentry don't like a grouse until the maggots are dropping off it—the head's got to drop off! I don't know why.

As Donald Maxwell MacDonald explained:

In pre-war times there were masses of grouse and there were masses of keepers. I suspect there was no vermin at all. Then the war came, and after that there were rules protecting vermin, eagles and things like that. The problem snowballs—because there are less grouse, nobody can afford to manage the ground for them.

Sentiments, too, have changed. A later head stalker, Ted Piggott, was more conservation-minded:

Let's not murder everything with a tooth and claw to give us a few grouse . . . I've seen the records of the vermin that were shot, “six golden eagles, fourteen peregrine falcons, one hundred and fifty-five foxes” and it goes on and on . . . We can do it differently.

Alasdair Thompson was a ghillie at Corroul in the 1950s:

You carried the rifle for the guest . . . just behind that wee bit. If it was hinds—well it was very seldom they came up for the hinds. If it was stags, you took the horse out and you put the stag on the horse when it was shot, brought it home and took it to the larder. It was bled and gralloched on the hill beforehand.

Once in the larder, you strung it up, took the

trotters off, strung it up on the hooks and you skinned it. You left it there for two days and then you put the saw down the stag's back. Then you took the two haunches down, got the canvas, a needle and string and you strung them up ready for going away to different houses, to Pollok and all the rest. It was all sent away by train in canvas.

The ghillies were fond of their horses, and Thompson didn't tether them. His horses, Tibby and Nelson, “would run around to the loch and they would come back”. He fed them bruised oats—“just like cornflakes”—and loaf sugar from his mother's pantry. Tibby “used to run after me with the motorbike right down to Loch Ossian, and she would graze beside me. They were two lovely animals”. There was another horse, a grey, added John James, “a useless beast for the hill. He had never been broken in and if you tried to ride him you took your life in your hands”.

In the early 1960s, all-terrain vehicles were introduced to recover stags from the hill. The first of these vehicles had tracks, in which stones would become lodged—ponies remained for the stalking season for many years. The estate also had a Bedford lorry and a Fordson to move timber, and Sir John adapted a Land Rover to carry his wheelchair.

Later still, deer were recovered from the hill

by six-wheeled vehicles with handlebars similar to a motorbike, introduced after the failure of the tracked vehicles. But ponies continued to be used until 1992. Thompson missed “one of the old sights. The stags coming home and the ponies, and the peace and the quiet as well, that was so lovely”. But a motorbike makes “a terrible noise” that disturbs the stalking. “The reason that it happened really is that you cannot get people to handle the ponies”. Female ghillies were tried, because they were better with the ponies. But they were not strong enough to lift the stags. And, as Donald Maxwell MacDonald saw it, “girls and stalkers and Corroul don’t mix”.

By the 1970s, the let shoots were often taken by continental Europeans. “Unfortunately, we did not keep the game books up,” Donald Maxwell MacDonald reflected. “Perhaps it is not so interesting when it is all German bankers, you know”.

Sheep and Cattle

In June 1944, the estate bought fifty head of cattle to help with the war effort. Labour shortages meant that 15-year-old Andrew MacPherson became their herder. “It wasn’t very much of a success,” he remembered. “They got into some

terrible situations—stopping trains on the railway and so on”. The cattle were sold four months later at a loss of more than £200 (equivalent to £8,400 in 2017), despite a cattle subsidy of £3 (equivalent to £125 in 2017) per head from the Department of Agriculture. Estate workers owned forty cattle between them, and also received the subsidy. But by 1959, only fourteen cattle were left, despite the subsidy rising to £10 (equivalent to £220 in 2017) per head.

Sheep had been reintroduced to Corroul during the First World War. “There were sheep down the Loch Treig side, sheep in the main, there were sheep everywhere more or less, except Beinn na Lap,” John Beaton remembered. “They were wild as deer. Terrible beasts”. The head keeper Duncan Robertson managed them until 1945. Then his son, also Duncan, who had his own sheep farm at Kinloch Rannoch, took them over. On a day-to-day basis, the Corroul sheep were looked after by the estate shepherd, Hector Beaton, and his son John. They came to Corroul in 1947. The Beaton family lived at Torgulbin and ran a thousand sheep across Corroul, 800 or so for wool and 200 for meat.

The “gathering” took place at a fank, or dry stone walled enclosure, halfway between the railway station and Loch Treig, or by the sheep pens and dip at the start of the loch. The men

Ponies continued to be used to collect stags off the hillside until 1992





Corrou entered into a Forestry Dedication Agreement in 1951 with an aim to surround Loch Ossian with trees

Photograph:
© Juan Pablo Moreiras / FFI

and boys on the estate clipped and dipped the sheep and castrated the lambs. In summer, the men would also trim the matted wool from the sheep's rear end ("crutching"). After the July gathering, the sheep were returned to the hill. They were gathered again for sales before the stalking season began, allowing John Beaton to work as a ghillie. In November, the Beatons would check the hillsides for stray sheep, in case of snowstorms.

Forestry and Research

In 1951, the Corrou estate entered into a Forestry Dedication Agreement. The Forestry Commission paid Corrou grants for maintaining the plantations, felling trees, and planting a further 622 acres at Loch Ossian and 574 acres at Fersit. (It was envisaged that the plantations would eventually surround Loch Ossian.) A new timber road was built along the north shore of Loch Ossian between 1948 and 1952, at a cost of £29,000 (equivalent to £866,000 in 2017). The south side road was improved, and another timber road was built to extract timber at Fersit. But the Torgulbin side of Corrou was still bare. John Beaton remembered "not a single tree, except at a clump of larch at Torgulbin itself". And

at Fersit, there was only a small, private forest belonging to Sir John.

A great deal had been learned on the estate about draining peat bogs, and planting and fertilising trees in the Scottish Highlands. The Forestry Commission, which increased its support in 1961, hoped to maintain Corrou's woodlands "for forestry knowledge through research, education and historical interest" and to "help prescribe yields in Scottish conditions".⁸ In 1952, Jock Maxwell MacDonald began dividing the woods into blocks. Fellings were carried out to create areas of various tree ages. This protected against wind and eased natural regeneration and planting.

Mountains and Severe Weather

The wildlife and rare plants have always attracted ecological tourists to Corrou from far afield. Many species of bird can still be seen in the hills and woods, and around the lochs. In 1929, Sir John recorded more than seventy species in the Loch Ossian plantations. The twenty or more permanent residents included grouse, black cock and ptarmigan, golden eagles and peregrine falcons, three types of titmouse, blackbird, raven, wren, mallard, teal, waterhen and tawny owl. The

summer brought visitors from warmer climates: wagtails, pipits, twite, cuckoo, snipe, sandpiper, curlew and golden plover.

The Stirling Maxwells and Maxwell MacDonalds welcomed mountaineers and ramblers at Corrou. In the 1930s, Sir John converted the old waiting room for his steam yacht at Loch Ossian into a youth hostel. This made the hills more accessible. Many mountaineers revere Corrou for its remoteness—there are no car parks, full of cars, while their owners climb the nearest munro. Even today, in the middle of the summer, during the weekend, and on sunny days, it is possible to climb the 3,615 ft Beinn Eibhinn, the estate's highest peak, with only a few deer for company.

But for all its beguiling beauty, Corrou can be perilous. Winters can be severe in the mountains, and unprepared ramblers can find themselves in great danger. In December 1951, five walkers from Glasgow, Sidney Tewnion, his wife Anne, John Black, John Blackburn and James Grieve, arrived at Corrou station. They intended to walk to a cottage near Ben Alder. The weather was worsening. Joss Gosling of the RAF mountain rescue team recorded in his diary that his tent had been blown down in Glen Nevis earlier that day. Gales of up to 100 mph had been reported in other parts of the country.

Pollie Thompson, the signalwoman at Corrou, advised the walkers to spend the night at the Loch Ossian youth hostel.

But they pressed on, past Corrou, until a blizzard forced them to spend the night in their sleeping bags under the paltry protection of their tent's groundsheet. They then decided to return to Corrou, which they thought was five miles away. Gradually they were overcome by exhaustion and hypothermia. James Grieve was the first to die. The rest of the party slowly continued to within sight of the lodge. But Sidney Tewnion and John Blackburn were exhausted and could walk no further. Anne Tewnion remained with them until they died. John Black went ahead for help, but he too died in the snow. Anne Tewnion, the sole survivor, managed to reach the head stalker's cottage door. Joss Gosling wrote in his diary:

We were awoken at 04:30 and told that four climbers had been killed on Ben Alder (3,766 ft). It is one of the most remote mountains in Scotland and we had to travel to Corrou siding by train as there were no roads, we then walked four miles by Loch Ossian to Corrou Shooting Lodge but on arriving found that we were too late . . . Two bodies had been brought down and the others were on their way. They had tried to walk to Ben Alder cottage

The Youth Hostel, on Loch Ossian, used to be the waiting room for Sir John's steam yacht





*Winters can be severe
and it is easy to get lost
in the rugged beauty of
these wild landscapes*

Photograph: Philip Dean

*but the storm which had caused our discomfort
had caused their end.*

Alasdair Thompson remembered how the last of the victims died:

*Near to where an old tramp died, just beside the
Lawrence burn (Uisge Labhair) . . . it was the
gamekeeper that told me. There is still a stone there
beside the burn; they buried him where he was. The
last one who perished was right beside the
tombstone, the wee headstone.*

At Corroun station, the Thompsons took in the now widowed Anne Tewnton. “She was probably in a state of shock, but we kept her quiet with tea and warmth”. In the meanwhile, the RAF team “returned to the station and escorted the bodies to Fort William mortuary”.

Even for those who know the estate well, the winter weather can be hazardous. Ted Piggott, head stalker during the 1980s and 1990s, once became lost in a blizzard with his wife Theresia. They were walking back from Corroun station when the snow closed in. They continued walking towards the youth hostel—or so they thought. It was only when the clouds cleared for a moment that they realised they had crossed the railway line and were heading onto Rannoch Moor.

Turning towards Corroun, they saved themselves from a probable death, lost on that vast moor. It was impossible for them to reach home, so they were forced to break into the youth hostel, which was closed for the winter. The following morning Ted walked through deep snow to reach Corroun. No one had realised they were missing.

Severe winters affect the railway too. During the worst winters of the Second World War, “trains were delayed very, very much,” recalled the stationmaster’s son, Donnie MacNichol. An old steam engine filled with concrete and pushed by a steam engine, also freighted with concrete, formed an effective snowplough.

During long snow storms, two engines and two ploughs were linked together. With an engine and a plough at both front and rear, it cleared snow in either direction. Once the line was cleared, it was just a case of keeping it clear by running back and forth.

One of the West Highland drivers, David Barrie, once spent four hours digging his snowplough out at Rannoch. When he wrote to his army friends in Egypt about this, they didn’t believe him. “The line can’t be closed, you’ll never stop a steam engine”. His next letter contained a newspaper cutting of an engine stuck in the snow, with the fireman sitting on top of the chimney, level with the snow.

More often, the line becomes blocked by snowdrifts that are long rather than high. Approaching Corroul station from the north, Alasdair Thompson explained, “you come around a corner and it goes into a small cutting and the snow might be eight or ten feet high but two hundred yards long”. This merely slows the plough down. But near Rannoch station the cutting passes through rock. The snow “didn’t get thrown aside because there were rocks to right and left, and it piled up at the front. This is how a lot of trains got stuck”. At Christmas 1947, a passenger train was snowed in for two days at Corroul. Alasdair remembered how his parents, who ran the station from 1944 to 1969, invited in two passengers, a woman and her baby:

They took them into the house and gave them my wee sister’s room. We just shared all the provisions together. Mum shared them along with the dining car because they were running short.

The line can also be affected by heavy rain, and occasionally, it is blocked by boulders. Alasdair remembered one day when the snowplough from Fort William was delayed. By Loch Treig it “struck a seven-ton boulder—it’s still at the side of the line—which the engine rode over the top of, before coming off the rails and

turning on its side”. Luckily, no one died. The train’s crew walked up to Corroul, where Pollie Thompson treated the fireman’s burns.

The railway, though, was crucial, not just for passengers but for commerce. Just after the war, Alasdair Thompson remembered:

The station opened at half past one in the morning for the “ghost train”. Then there were passenger trains, there was one at quarter past nine, the next one back was quarter past four, but during the winter, when the herring season would come, there were fish trains and they were running continuously.

Many years after diesel was introduced, in 1962-63, he still missed the sound of steam: “There is something about steam trains chooging past”.

End of an Era

Sir John Stirling Maxwell died at Pollok House on 30 May 1956, a week before his 90th birthday. His obituaries in the national press paid tribute to his many contributions to national life in Scotland and Great Britain, and his generosity towards the city of Glasgow. He had always understood the value of open green spaces to



Staff often had to clear snow drifts off the tracks at Corroul station



The Hogwarts Express was the last steam train to pass through Corrou, during filming of the Harry Potter films

Photograph: Philip Dean

the city dweller. He granted public access to his house at Pollok and made many gifts of land to the city for recreational purposes, including the 21 acres of Maxwell Park. He was largely responsible, too, for Glasgow's acquisition of Balloch, on the banks of Loch Lomond. On his Pollok estate he was a pioneer of town planning and of good modern housing.

He objected to absentee landlords and detested asset-strippers. There was a distinctly anti-Semitic insinuation when in 1930 he asked whether a landlord should even be legally permitted to spend the wealth of an estate elsewhere:

It also appears questionable whether the speculators who have broken up and stripped so many estates ought to be allowed to carry off to London or Palestine the capital on which the life of the inhabitants to some extent depended. Such proceedings strain to breaking point the whole system of private ownership.⁹

Sir John had many public roles. He entered Parliament as the Conservative Member for Glasgow College in 1895, following a family tradition—his father, Sir William Stirling Maxwell, and other forebears had also represented Scottish constituencies. Sir John's parliamentary career

ended when he was defeated in the Liberals' landslide election victory in 1906. He later chaired the Royal Fine Arts Commission for Scotland and the Ancient Monuments Board for Scotland and helped found the National Trust for Scotland.

Corrou can be a cold and lonely place. But compared to many British working people at the time, Sir John's estate workers lived comfortable and secure lives, sheltered by his generosity and wealth. Corrou was not run as a commercial enterprise, and he balanced its accounts by regular cash payments. "You just did what was required and that applied to everybody—the place was too isolated to stand on ceremony," Ted Piggott remembered. "Sir John himself would say, 'Well, look, I'm going to Glasgow, is there anything you want me to do in Glasgow?' He was a wonderful old man".

As is customary on Highland estates, Sir John gave his men one suit of clothes per year: plus-fours in Corrou tweed. Stalkers on many estates wear their own distinctive tweed as camouflage on the hill. The mixture of grasses and mosses at Corrou combine to produce a luxuriant green landscape, and the green Corrou tweed has been produced since Sir John commissioned it (originally by Anderson & Son of Callander and now by Hunters of Brora). John James wore his plus-fours on the hill, as a uniform. But "for

general work around the estate I wore a boiler suit, boots and a cap". The wages were only average. But Sir John was unusually thoughtful. He arranged pensions, bought insurance, even supplied people with radios. He never tried to claw back small sums by charging for local privileges. "We were allowed to fish; it was a very good estate to work on," John James recalled. "You didn't have to pay for your croft, that was one of the things about the estate. It was up to you to utilise your croft to the best of your ability".

Neil MacKinnon remembered how Sir John "might suggest things but he was never critical of anything. He was just a gentleman you know. He couldn't be anything but a gentleman". When MacKinnon was a child, though, Sir John had been a figure of awe: "He seemed to come across as a sort of prime minister or royal. He always wore plus-fours".

In 1957, a year after Sir John's death, two of the estate's longest-serving workers retired. Andy Tait had spent most of his life at Corroul, rising from kennel boy to ghillie to keeper, and finally to head keeper. Donald MacPherson had been keeper at Strathossian, 1929-43, and at Fersit, 1943-57.

Corroul under the Forestry Commission

On 7 October 1966, the Maxwell MacDonald family sold almost three-quarters of Corroul to the Forestry Commission for £60,000 (equivalent to £1 million in 2017). This corresponded almost exactly to the area that Sir John had purchased from Colonel Walker in 1891 for £63,750 (equivalent to £7.7 million in 2017), and the price was considerably less than the value on the open market. However, of the 41,800 acres acquired by the Commission, 30,414 acres were not plantable. Forestry and deer-stalking were compatible at Corroul. The family intelligently retained the sporting rights, ownership of the new Corroul lodge (the timber bungalow), and some grazing rights. Though the figures disguised it, this was a canny deal.

As part of the sale agreement, the Forestry Commission was obliged to build a new road from Torgulbin into the estate and to repair the road from the lodge to Corroul station. By 1970 or so, the road from Torgulbin reached the heart of the estate. For the first time, Corroul could be reached by car. As Donald Maxwell MacDonald explained:

We never socialised at all before the road was built. We didn't really have dinner parties in the ordinary sense of the word because you were a dinner party.

Corroul valley in c. 1940 with the lodge in the background and the estate buildings in the foreground





Corrou valley in 2018 with the lodge in the centre, hidden amongst the trees

Your house people were the only people you dined with. I can't remember when it was running properly in the big house but certainly we used to take a cook up with us. When we went just by ourselves, which we used to do several times a year, it was totally undomesticated.

By buying Corrou, the Forestry Commission hoped to significantly increase the size of its plantations. Its Acquisition Report found that the "bulk of the plantable land is situated in the valley of the Loch and River Ossian and along Loch Laggan side to the River Treig". It hoped to plant 8,447 acres. It never planted Strathossian, nor did it fully encircle Loch Ossian with trees. But from 1966 to 1981, it planted 6,200 acres, mainly lodgepole pine and Sitka spruce, between Fersit and Torgulbin.

The Maxwell MacDonald family, having always looked after their people, were sad that fewer estate workers were retained by the Forestry Commission than they had hoped. They worried over the shooting, too, as Jock and Anne's younger son, Donald, recounted:

My grandfather used to shoot just over a hundred stags on the whole base. It went on and on like that until we sold it to the Forestry Commission. They brought in the Red Deer Commission, which said

there should be 170. So, there were sixty or seventy extra stags being taken off the same ground year after year after year.

Then suddenly, after a couple of bad winters, there were no deer, and nobody knew why. "So you lost two generations. We had to cut right back with the shooting". After that, stalkers were asked to produce a census of their beat for the season.

As head stalker, Ted Piggott supported the beat censuses, and he found the Red Deer Commission "exceptionally helpful" with its deer counts for the estate and the region, which were conducted with radio and helicopters. "The perfect way to count deer is when you have snow cover," he said. "Nothing sticks out better in the snow than a red deer, because it's black".

Corrou, Ted Piggott said, never had any problem with the Commission, but he disliked the increasing numbers of ramblers at Corrou. "To shoot a stag on a hill in August is extremely difficult, but if there are a load of hill walkers out it becomes not just difficult but damned impossible".

Donald Maxwell MacDonald remembered how in his youth at Corrou he would stop and talk if he saw a hiker. Later, though, "you would not get anywhere if you stopped and talked to

them all". He asked hill walkers to keep to the paths during the stalking season:

There are ramblers who enjoy the country and are usually extremely nice people. And there are people who are only interested in ticking off another munro, and who, if challenged, might reply, "What has it got to do with you?"

After the sale to the Forestry Commission, the Maxwell MacDonalds also advised on the rhododendrons on the estate—to the relief of the commissioners. Under Donald's care, the rhododendrons planted by his grandfather continued to flourish. "The great thing about Corroul is that weeds don't really grow there. Bracken is a terrible problem in Argyll. There is none of that in Corroul," he explained.

But the long-term worry was wind . . . You got a few birch trees blowing down onto the rhododendrons but that did not kill them. They may not have looked so good afterwards, though, so there used to be one day in the spring where we would go and chop down all the trees that had fallen over the rhododendrons and take them away.

There was a more serious, long-term threat, however:



One of Corroul's visitors enjoying the freedom of walking on the estate

Photograph: Ken Smith

Just beyond the rhododendrons, the Sitka spruce were planted, and they were blowing over into the rhododendrons because they had grown too big. So, after a lot of chin-scratching and worrying about it, we decided to cut that line back by at least fifty yards and then plant hardwoods next to the rhododendrons, which would take a long time to grow obviously, and then—just out of reach of the rhododendrons—more Sitka.

Unlike his father and grandfather, Donald was not primarily a forester. Rhododendrons were his great passion. His ambition—in which he was largely successful—was to reproduce every species of the old Corroul rhododendrons somewhere on the estate.

In 1979, Margaret Thatcher won the election. Her privatisation policies gave the Maxwell MacDonald family a chance to buy back Corroul in 1984. By retaining the shooting rights and ownership of the lodge in the original sale, the family had made it difficult for the Commission to sell Corroul on the open market. Donald Maxwell MacDonald remembered the Forestry Commission's tenure as a time when "we enjoyed the place and they paid for it. It was very nice, but Maggie, I suppose rightly, thought this would not do, and so we bought it back". The Loch Ossian plantations were purchased first, in 1982, for

£200,000 (equivalent to £670,000 in 2017), followed by 34,000 acres of deer-stalking in 1984, for £480,000 (equivalent to £1.5 million in 2017).

Thatcher also began the privatisation of the UK telephone network—which was to have its ironies at Corroul. By the early 1980s, the phone line to the estate village had fallen into disrepair. The nearest telephone was the stationmaster's, and the nearest public phones were at Fersit and Tulloch. So, British Telecom was asked to install a new line. When it was a state-owned company, as Donald Maxwell MacDonald remembered, "they just did not want to do it". Engineers came and "hummed and they hawed and kicked tyres and prodded about". Initially they considered a radio link from Rannoch, but that wouldn't work because the hills blocked the signal. Then they proposed laying a cable to Ted Piggott's house—for which they proposed to charge him £20,000 (equivalent to £60,000 in 2017).

But this was just when BT was being privatised. And as Ted recalled:

At exactly the same time, BT had an advert on television saying that you could telephone anywhere in the country. And it had a Highland scene with sheep around a little red telephone. They had forgotten about Corroul, where the sheep had no phone to call their own.

Ted reminded them of this sorry situation and—finding them intransigent—contacted a Sunday newspaper, which ran an embarrassing story. As a private company, BT was keen to improve its public relations. So finally, it did what it had publicly promised to do across the whole country, and installed a line to Corroul for the standard connection fee. “It cost them a fortune,” Ted recalled triumphantly. “Apart from physically getting plant and machinery there, they needed men to dig—it was all mostly hand-dug—to bury the cable.”

“There are two things that changed Corroul out of all recognition,” said Ted. “One was the forestry road going in, and the other was the telephone. They both meant the same thing: communication”. Donald Maxwell MacDonald added that “television made an enormous difference, too”. Corroul could not receive land-based channels until the coming of the internet. But in the early 1990s, satellite television came.

Donald’s grandfather, Sir John Stirling Maxwell, had a telephone in his lodge, a steamboat on the loch, and a gig with gold coach lines around the wheels. In Sir John’s day, too, “when the gentry were here, there were quite a number of telegrams”, said Donald. By his time, the estate had once again grown isolated and remote. “But it was lovely, in one way, when nobody could reach you”.

Back on the Market in 1995

Maintaining Corroul estate was a heavy financial burden. In the mid-1980s, this was alleviated by harvesting part of the plantations on both sides of Loch Ossian. Initially an ugly scar was left, but since then these areas have regenerated, developing into woodland with a variety of species, ages and sizes.

By the early 1990s though, the fabric of the estate was beginning to decline. A number of houses needed repairs. The family considered selling the stalking rights but retaining the lodge at Loch Ossian. Their estate agent however, advised against this course. Retaining what is arguably the most beautiful site at Corroul would make it less attractive to potential buyers. So, in spring 1995, the family put Corroul on the market. In November 1995, the 48,224-acre estate was sold in a single lot for £3,375,000 (equivalent to £6.2 million in 2017).

The lodge looks over the round pond to Loch Ossian and beyond



CORROUR SINCE 1995

In a lecture in 1933, Sir John had stoically contemplated the disappearance of the traditional landowner:

For the most part they are gone. Their houses are broken up, the treasures they contained have gone to other countries, where they are better appreciated. Their woods which made the countryside beautiful have been felled. Such changes are inevitable.¹⁰

But Sir John, a realist, ended on an optimistic note: "It is all to the good that responsibility

should be wider spread”.

Sir John had had a vision, based on study and experimentation, of how to work with the capacities of the land and for the benefit of local people. Britain needed local timber. Sir John grew it, grazed sheep and cattle, and let stalks and grouse shoots.


Nowadays, every year, Corrour receives tens of thousands of visitors—cottage guests, ramblers, climbers, pony-trekkers, picnickers, campers, botanists or bird watchers. The East Highland Way, part of the national coast-to-coast network for walkers, runs through the estate. It is waymarked, but there is no tourist trail, no traffic and no litter. Visitors are welcome to wander and enjoy the freedom from hurry and everyday concerns. For some, the solitude is a balm for the loneliness of the city. Mostly, there is no wifi connection either. And when the satellite dishes fill with snow, there is no television or internet. At times, you only hear a burn purling, or trees rustling. In autumn, stags roar; in spring, birds sing, and at night, owls cry. Corrour is far from cities’ light pollution. Nights are dark beneath the clouds, or else lit by stars and moon, and sometimes, the Northern Lights.

With its mountains and lochs, Corrour seems timeless. And yet, it has profoundly changed over the centuries. And it continues to change. The

estate now has a full-time staff of 12, and employs seasonal workers in the station inn, and to help on the hill, and with the forests, cottages and lodge.

Today we know the world is environmentally degraded. At Corrour, we therefore manage toward long-term ecological and financial sustainability. Ecologically, this means we encourage a return of the diverse flora and fauna that once flourished here. We monitor wildlife, and though we cannot restore an “original” balance of nature, whatever that might mean, we can aim for a dynamic and largely self-governing ecology—though in the absence of top predators for deer, culling and stalking remains essential.

The Forestry Commission, which Sir John once chaired, greatly damaged Corrour’s historic landscapes. Between 1966 and 1984, it erased a vast, complex and ancient wood pasture, planting it over with a monoculture of exotic conifers, which it then neglected. Sir John had discovered that the North American Sitka was the fastest growing spruce. The Forestry Commission added another non-native, the lodgepole pine, because it grows faster than Scots pine and can grow in poorer soil. With hindsight, this was not only an ecological but also an economic mistake—at taxpayers’ expense. Lodgepole pine



The beauty of the land extends to the skies, where the Northern Lights can sometimes be seen

cannot be used as structural timber, so the market for it is limited and the value is low.

During the 1990s, we began to convert these conifer plantations to more varied, mainly native woods. We planted Scots pine and birch, along with other tree species most suited for each specific site. Around Inverlair, for instance, where the land is well drained and sheltered, we planted oak and birch, hazel and alder. So far, we have planted 140 acres of new native woodland and a further 500 acres have been felled and replanted.

We plan to expand the native woodland another 470 acres using natural regeneration, and a further 85 acres will be newly planted. By diversifying the species, ages and densities of the woods, we increase the variety of ecological niches for animals and plants.

Some of the exotic conifer plantations are inaccessible because there are no roads. Even where they can be reached, we fell conifers only where the income from them covers the cost of the replanting we must do by law (not a very wise law, since woods come back by themselves). Even so, Corroul and Inverlair produce on average 16,000 tons of timber annually—some 600 lorry-loads.

With approval from Forestry Commission Scotland we are also converting some inappropriately forested areas back to peat bog.



Left:
The diverse flora and fauna that once flourished at Corroul is now encouraged to return

Right:
Blackcock are found on the estate – in 1929, Sir John recorded over 70 bird species in the Loch Ossian plantations





Corrour has around 350 different rhododendron species and at least one is in bloom every month of the year

This increases biodiversity, stores carbon and reduces erosion. The peat bog is home to rare flora and fauna. Many mosses, liverwort and bladderwort need peat bogs, as do birds, including greenshank.

Scottish National Heritage has kindly given us financial support. So far, we have converted 420 acres to peat bog, with plans for a further 1,100 acres between 2018 and 2023. Elsewhere, we leave the defunct conifer plantations to nature's processes.

As damage to Corrour's ecosystems are gradually undone, habitats can once more welcome insects, birds and mammals. We survey progress for birds, moths, butterflies, invertebrates and fish. The data informs our land management. We also share it with interested neighbours and stakeholders, as well as with scholars from, among others, the James Hutton Institute, the Association of Deer Management Groups, the University of the Highlands and Islands, and the Department of Land Economy at the University of Cambridge.

Foxes, crows and stoats were once considered vermin (so were jays, otters, wildcats, golden eagles, hen harriers and red squirrels). But we don't kill them. We think of only a few non-native species as pests, especially sika deer, which compete (and interbreed) with the red deer.

In 2006, Corrour had some three thousand deer. Over the following decade, we reduced our deer to around a thousand. This has cut calf deaths and winter starvation—on average our deer have grown healthier and heavier. Corrour's deer now damage seedlings and shrubs less, allowing native trees to regenerate (including rare willows and the rare dwarf birch). This helps animals and ground-nesting birds, including black grouse.

Crossbill, an iconic Scottish bird, live in the forests on Corrour. We have peregrine falcon, hen harrier, buzzard, kestrel, merlin and golden eagles. We built nesting platforms for ospreys (so far, without luck). At Loch Ossian, a Site of Special Scientific Interest, there are black-throated and red-throated divers, as well as otters and water vole. Thanks to our pine martens, there are no grey squirrels to crowd out our red squirrels. They relish conifer seeds, and enjoy Corrour.

We also renovate Corrour's buildings for staff houses and cottage lets. When we bought Corrour in 1995, Sir John's lodge at the head of Loch Ossian had still not been replaced after the fire during the Second World War. We commissioned a new lodge, from architect Moshe Safdie, to live in and to let. It was completed in 2003. A three-storey seven-bedroom house of granite, steel and glass, it has a rectangular and a cylindrical tower, incised by glass windows, from

which there are views across a lily pond to Loch Ossian and beyond. The new lodge is bookended by Sir John's single-storey game larder, school house and chapel, forming a little cluster.

To achieve economic and ecological sustainability, we built four "run-of-river" hydro-electric schemes. The 100-kilowatt Creagaich is built on the site of a former, smaller scheme dating back at least to the 1940s. Two larger schemes both yield more than a thousand kilowatts—Uisge Labhair behind the lodge, and Chamabhreac on the southern shores of Loch Treig. A fourth hydro, at Ghuilbinn, uses the flow from an 8 ft diameter pipe to produce 2.8 megawatts. A buried cable runs for some 30 miles to Rannoch, where it connects to the national grid. Together, these hydro schemes power 3,500 homes, making Corrour one of Scotland's larger renewable energy producers.

Renewable energy saves carbon. But it must not destroy the landscape or ecology. Wind turbines at Corrour, for instance, would be highly intrusive. We also built the hydro houses in the local vernacular, to blend in. The smaller turbine houses are crafted from locally quarried Achnasheen stone and look like bothies or cottages. Their construction paid tribute to the Highlands' landscape and history, and helped keep traditional crafts alive. Because Ghuilbinn is

so big, the building there is in the tradition of early-20th-century Scottish power stations.

In 2003, the area of the lodge and Sir John's plantings was listed by Historic Environment Scotland in its *Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes*. We look after Sir John's beloved rhododendron garden with the wonderful help of the Rhododendron Conservation Species Group and Edinburgh's Royal Botanic Garden. In 2012-14, we hired a student to tag and identify 3,200 individual plants. We found the garden has around 350 different rhododendron species. Since 2014, we have run a rolling annual programme to mark a section of rhododendrons, identifying plants for pruning, removal, or encouragement. We discovered the Victorian drains were in poor shape and repaired them.

Most of the rhododendrons flower in May and early June. But at least one can be found in bloom every month. It is said that for rhododendron-fanciers, a visit to Corrour is the greatest treat, short of a trip to Tibet. The garden is a tribute to Sir John's, and his family's, vision, and a living memorial of their care for Corrour. Our family are grateful to them and to all people who lived and live, worked and work, at Corrour. To them all, this book is dedicated.

The rhododendron garden, looking over Loch Ossian, is the highest rhododendron plantation in Britain



NOTES

- 1 Ellangowan [J. G. Bertram], *Out of Door Sports in Scotland* (1889), pp.138–139.
- 2 Augustus Grimble, *Deer-Stalking* (1886), pp.83–86.
- 3 Augustus Grimble, *Leaves from a Game Book* (1898), p.81.
- 4 Augustus Grimble, *Deer-Stalking* (1886), pp.80–81.
- 5 Sir Herbert Maxwell, *Scottish Gardens* (1908), p.100.
- 6 Sir Herbert Maxwell, *Evening Memories* (1932), p.239.
- 7 Glasgow City Archives, TD503.
- 8 D. C. Malcolm, *Corrour Management Trial*, Scottish Forestry, April 1971.
- 9 John Stirling Maxwell, *A Decade of State Forestry and its Lessons*, Scottish Forestry Journal, 1930, p.3.
- 10 *Sportsman with a Love of Gardening*, Country Life, 24 July 1980.

GAELIC HILL NAMES

Beinn a' Bhric	The Speckled Hill
Beinn a' Chumhainn	Hill of the Narrow Place
Beinn Eibhinn	Delightful Hill
Beinn na Lap	Hill of the Marshland
Càrn Dearg	Red Cairn
Chno Dearg	Red Hill
Coire Creagach	Craggy Corrie
Creag Dhubh	Black Crag
Garbh Bheinn	Rough Mountain
Leum Uilleim	Leap of William
Meall a' Bhealaich	Hill of the Pass
Meall Chaorach	Hill of Sheep
Meall Dheargaig	Hill of Little Berries
Meall Garbh	Rough Hill
Meall Glas Choire	Hill of Grey Corrie
Meall Glas-Uaine Mor	Big Green Grey Hill
Meall na Leitire Duibhe	Black Sided Hill
Meall na Lice	Hill of the Stone
Meall na Slingearaich	Hill of the Shells
Meall Nathrach Mor	Hill of the Snake
Mullach Coire nan Nead	Summit of Corrie of the Nests
Sgòr Choinnich	Peak of the Moss
Sgòr Gaibhre	Peak of the Goat
Stob Coire Sgriodain	Pinnacle in the Corrie of the Ravine

GLOSSARY

black game	black grouse
bothy	one-roomed cottage or shack
burn	brook or stream
byre	shelter for cows
cattle creep	archway beneath a railway, just large enough for cattle
croft	small piece of land attached to a house
crowdie	semi-matured cheese
crutching	cutting matted wool from the rear of a sheep
fanks	sheep-cot or pen
ghillie	sportsman or hunter's guide and assistant
gralloch	innards of deer, typically left on the hill
haddies	cold smoked haddock
hummel	stag without horns
loch	lake
midden	place to pile farmyard manure
royal stag	stag whose antlers have twelve or more points
shieling	enclosure to gather stock overnight, on pasture land
staggie	little stag
transhumance	seasonal transfer of grazing animals, often over long distances and up and down hills
trolling	fishing by drawing one or more baited lures through the water

*With no light pollution,
nights are dark in Corroul,
lit only by the stars and
moon, and sometimes the
Northern Lights*

Photograph:
© Juan Pablo Moreiras / FFI



CHRONOLOGY

Before 7000 BC

Formation of the landscape during the last Ice Age

4000-2000 BC

Woods cover more than half of Scotland, including Corroul (as high as 2,000 ft), and peat bogs spread

14th-19th centuries

Corroul held by MacDonald clan as part of the Keppoch lands

1443

Alexander MacDonald, Lord of the Isles, grants Corroul to Malcolm Mackintosh of Clan Mackintosh, so beginning a three-century land ownership feud between the MacDonalds of Keppoch and the Mackintoshes

1688

Scotland's last clan battle, the Battle of Mulroy, fought between the MacDonalds of Keppoch and the Mackintoshes

1700

The MacDonalds of Keppoch sign treaty with the Mackintoshes, agreeing to lease land at a reasonable rent

1834

The Duke of Gordon uses over-lordship status to sell Corroul to West India merchant John Walker for £45,000 (£5.5 million at 2017 prices)

1857

George Gustavus Walker (later Colonel Sir George) inherits Corroul from John Walker

1891

Corroul and Fersit estates bought by Sir John Stirling Maxwell for £63,750 (£7.7 million at 2017 prices)

1893

Sir John purchases Beinn a' Bhric from Cameron of Lochiel for £15,500 (£1.9 million at 2017 prices)

1894

West Highland Line opens new track running through Corroul

1896-99

Sir John replaces lodge on Càrn Dearg with new lodge at Loch Ossian

1919

Forestry Commission is created—Sir John serves as chairman from 1929 to 1932

1921

Telephone line installed at Corroul

1929-34

Loch Laggan and Loch Treig dammed, to produce electricity for new aluminium plant at Fort William

Autumn in Corroul brings a range of colour to the landscape

CHRONOLOGY

1934

Loch Treig raised by 30 ft for Fort William hydro-electric scheme

1942

Sir John's lodge burns down

1951

Corrou enters into Forestry Dedication Agreement (FDA) with the Forestry Commission

1958

Single-storey wood cottage is built on site of burned lodge

1966 – Maxwell MacDonald family sell Corrou to the Forestry Commission for £60,000 (£1 million at 2017 prices)

1982-84

Maxwell MacDonalds buy Corrou back for a total of £680,000 (£2 million at 2017 prices)

1995

Raising family purchase Corrou for £3,375,000 (£6 million at 2017 prices)

1996

Estate cottages (Sgor Choinnich, Sgor Gaibhre, Carn Dearg) are let for holiday use

1999

Station House Inn and shop built at Corrou railway station

2003

Present lodge built

2004

Strathossian, Steading, Chapel and Cook's Flat let for holiday use

2004

New estate cottage, Corrie Odhar, built

2009-10

Rausings buy Corrou Forest, re-establishing Sir John's estate boundaries

2011

School House renovated for holiday lets

2013

Moy Farmhouse and steadings renovated for staff use

2015

Doll's House renovated for holiday lets

2015-16

Rausings commission hydro-electric schemes at Creagaich, Uisge Labhair, Chamabhreac and Ghuilbinn

2016

Old Signal Box renovated as B&B

The new Corrou lodge, designed by Moshe Safdie

Photograph:
© Simon Jauncey

Overleaf:
Since 2015, aquatic life is also surveyed and managed





