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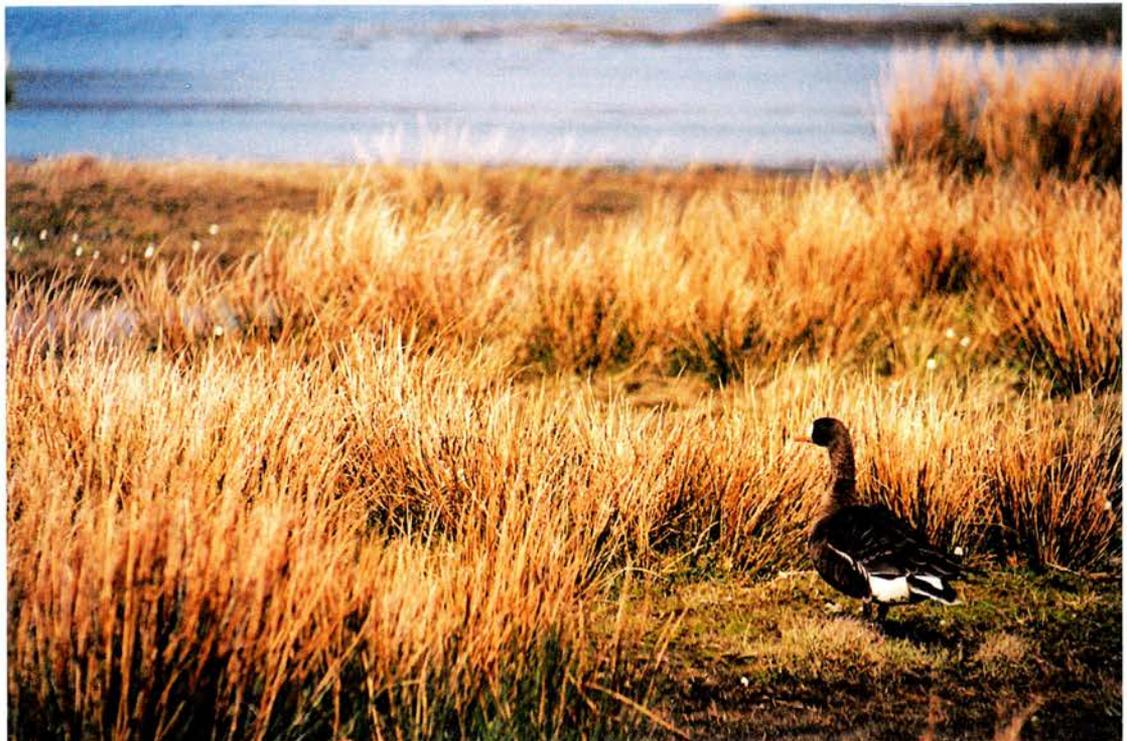


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**Negotiating small differences:
conservation organisations
and farming in Islay**



Submitted by: **Andrew J. Whitehouse**

For the degree of: **PhD Social Anthropology**

Date: **24th September 2004**



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Abstract

This thesis concerns the relationship between two conservation organisations (Scottish Natural Heritage and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) and farming people in Islay, Scotland. The historical discourse of this entangled relationship is constructed from interviews, archival research, meetings and events recorded during sixteen months of fieldwork. The principal contestations concerned designated areas for conservation and crop damage caused by protected geese. This historical discourse developed alongside fluctuations in Islay's agricultural economy and concerns over the future of farming. Five sketches introduce the discourse but the analysis is then developed around three symbols that represented conservation and farming – an RSPB nature reserve, designated areas and the goose problem. Farmers' relations with land, government and other farmers are also described in order to reveal their understandings of change and the outside world – both of which conservation organisations came to represent.

The thesis emphasises a perceptual, fluid and diachronic approach to the negotiation of difference and relations of power rather than notions of belonging and marginalisation. It describes how individuals and organisations explained and negotiated difference and how they utilised symbols both to situate themselves and to develop future strategies. Bateson's concepts of tautology and abduction are then used to tease out the underlying assumptions that underpin these practices. This analysis reveals models of connection between the local/ outside world and continuity/ change and the ways in which these were played off against one another in discourse. Although conservationists were often identified with change and the outside world, this identification was gradually reduced because farmers needed to renegotiate their livelihoods in the light of deteriorating economic conditions and also because conservation came to be more associated with the local and with continuity. Because their power could then seem either more negotiable or more inevitable, the influence of conservationists grew.

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Part One:
Introductions

1.0 Islay itineraries

1.1 *Prologue*

This thesis concerns an investigation into the relationship between two groups. One group consists of the farmers and crofters of the Inner Hebridean island of Islay¹ in the west of Scotland.² The other group consists of the two nature conservation organisations, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), which have operated on the island. There is a degree of overlap between the two groups because the conservation organisations, particularly the RSPB, use agricultural methods in their land management and because some farming people have worked for conservation organisations. As such, the two groups are as much the conceptual categories of discourse as discontinuous social groupings. It is pertinent to consider my route to this research, which is perhaps somewhat longer and more twisted than is usual, and to elaborate on the time I have spent conducting research in Islay. Through this process I aim to contextualise the research and my fieldwork experience and explain my methodology before elaborating on the rationale behind the structuring of this thesis.

1.2 *Route to the research*

My interest in the subject of nature and its conservation, particularly in the Scottish Highlands, began at the age of six when I first took an interest in natural history and particularly birds. Much of my youth was spent birdwatching but my childhood home in the East Midlands never entirely satiated my cravings for new and exciting species and my imagination was drawn to accounts of the bird life to be found in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. I read and re-read descriptions of Shetland, St Kilda, Speyside and Islay in books such as John Gooders' *Where to Watch Birds*. It is impossible to explain the excitement generated in a bird-mad boy by what were little more than prosaic species lists and site inventories but I soon came to realise that such places as

¹ Islay is normally pronounced 'Eye-la'. An Ileach is someone who comes from the island (pl. Ilich).

² See Figure One.

the Hebrides had become, as Frank Fraser Darling put it “a country which had to be trodden” (quoted in Boyd & Boyd 1990: 16). I managed to encourage my parents to take a holiday in Skye when I was ten but, although I later got to Shetland and Speyside, I failed to return to the Hebrides until I began to consider destinations for fieldwork research.

Through my interest in birds I had always been aware of nature conservation and the organisations who were involved with its promotion. I had been a first enthusiastic but latterly rather cynical member of the Young Ornithologists Club (YOC), the junior branch of the RSPB. I followed any conservation issues that cropped up in the newspapers or on television and can dimly remember seeing news reports about a dispute in Islay involving peat extraction, geese and David Bellamy.³ The idea of working on a nature reserve for an organisation such as the RSPB was a compelling ambition for me as a boy but in my teens this receded the more I realised that the job would involve more than just birdwatching all day. However, unemployed and under-qualified, at the age of nineteen I took up the offer of a place on an Employment Training Scheme at an RSPB nature reserve – Strumpshaw Fen in the Norfolk Broads. I worked there for twenty months where I gained what might delicately be termed a realistic understanding of the practicalities, ethos and politics of conservation and particularly the RSPB.

This protracted and haphazard development of an interest was something I drew on during my subsequent academic career, first studying Environmental Management at Manchester Metropolitan University and then Environmental Anthropology at Kent. During this time I increasingly came to feel that conservation was a subject which illuminated many significant aspects of human social life: the interaction with the environment, discourse, knowledge, values, politics, economics, history, identity and so on. As an anthropologist, I began to appreciate that a small-scale study of conservation could supply a rich and diverse set of data that would provide me with the wherewithal to investigate issues of interest across a wide spectrum. By the same hand anthropology, with its special knowledge of human interaction, might also offer insights that could improve or refocus the actions of conservation organisations in areas where they caused friction or were ineffective. I had for some time been aware that the

³ The famous Duich Moss saga. See 4.3.3.

Scottish Highlands were a region where conservation was an issue of considerable moment and, drawn to islands (both as an anthropologist and a birdwatcher), I ruminated on the prospect of conducting fieldwork in various of the Hebrides that my childhood imaginings still stirred my feet to tread.

I thus began my PhD equipped with what I felt was a warts-and-all perspective on conservation organisations and with a considerable desire to spend time living on a Hebridean island. It took me longer to decide which one would be best suited. As well as my academic interests I had to consider certain economic practicalities. I knew that as a self-funded student my fieldwork home would have to be a place where there were some prospects of finding paid work and cheap accommodation. Islay had always been near the top of the list because I knew it as a place where conservation issues had loomed large for two decades and so I suspected that many local people would be forthcoming with opinions on precisely the subject that I wished to investigate. A friend who had visited the island came back reporting an abundance of work and so I decided I would have to see for myself. These claims of a wealth of employment may perhaps have been exaggerated but they encouraged me to undertake a preliminary visit during a crisp midwinter spell in January 1999.

I stayed at a B&B in Port Ellen on the south coast and spent much of the time walking and birdwatching during the calm but cold days. I was also hoping to find out about work and accommodation opportunities. My initial hope was to live in residence on a farm in return for labour but I soon began to feel this was not that likely an option, given the parlous state of the local agricultural economy and my being a farming novice with no local connections. However, I was informed that a woman involved with the Islay Field Centre in Port Charlotte had previously put up students in exchange for work in the Centre and so I resolved that this would be my best initial opportunity to stay on the island. I made contact and was offered accommodation in a cottage on a farm in exchange for a few days work per week at the Field Centre. I would also do a few odd jobs around the farm to provide me with money for groceries. This seemed ideal.

My initial visit also brought me into acquaintance with the island newspaper the *Ileach* which appeared to frequently concern itself with the sorts of issues I felt would be revealing: disputes over conservation designations, legal battles over rights to shoot

geese, concerns over the farming economy etc. The local salience of such affairs seemed to be confirmed in the initial encounters I had enjoyed with various residents. Islay, it now seemed clear, could provide me with the practical necessities and research opportunities that I required and I made the decision to move to the island and begin my main period of fieldwork in May 1999.

1.3 *Journeys in Islay*

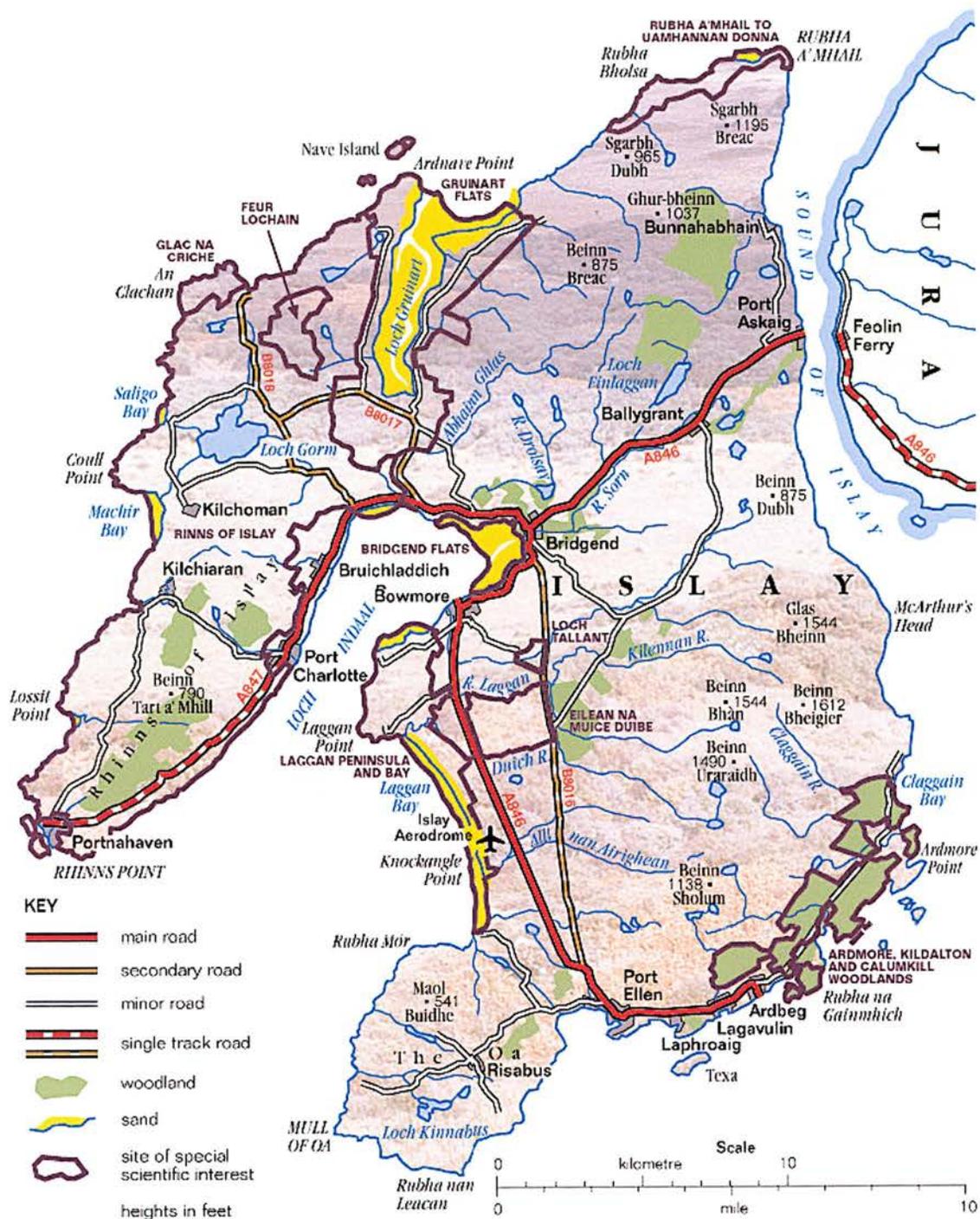
Islay is the southernmost of the Inner Hebrides: the chain of islands that stretch like erratic fingers along the west coast of Scotland.⁴ One normally travels to the island by plane from Glasgow or, as I have done, by ferry from Kennecraig on West Loch Tarbert in Kintyre. Between Islay and Kintyre is the large but sparsely populated island of Jura, whose tall conical mountains, the Paps, dominate the Islay skyline. Islay itself covers around 600 square kilometres (Storrie 1981: 18) described in a rough horseshoe forged by the large Loch Indaal which separates the peninsula of the Rhinns from the main body of the island. The isolation of the island has been leavened by the advent of air travel but the journey from Glasgow to Kennecraig still takes three to four hours by bus only to be followed by a twice-daily two-hour ferry ride to the island. The traveller from the south of England would face a journey longer (and more expensive) than if they were visiting the Mediterranean. However, this isolation can attract as much as repel the visitor and once they arrive they find relatively few aspects of modern consumption are unobtainable. They merely have to wait till late morning to buy that day's newspaper and, sometimes, fresh vegetables.

⁴ See Figure One and Figure Two.

Figure One: *The location of Islay within the British Isles*



Figure Two: Islay⁵



⁵ Taken from www.ileach.co.uk/maps/map.html. Correct 13/05/04.

The Rhinns was the part of the island where I took up residence and for the first year of my fieldwork I lived in a small farm cottage to the south of Port Charlotte. It is worth remarking on the view from the cottage. To the east, across approximately six miles of sea, were the tall cliffs of the Oa. This rugged, almost square-shaped peninsula was not a part of the island I came to know well at close hand but its precipitous west coast formed, with the Rhinns, the outermost reaches of Loch Indaal, around which much of my life on the island took place. A little over thirty miles away to the south the north coast of Ireland could be seen on a clear day, with the island of Rathlin a little closer. From this part of Islay it was Ireland that loomed most clearly and not Scotland.⁶ Only odd flashes of the Kintyre hills were visible from the Rhinns, the rest being concealed by the high ground in the east of the island. The rest of the world would often be out of sight and, if not altogether absent, it could easily drift to the back of one's mind.

The farm was typical of almost all the farms that encircled the coast of the south Rhinns in that it stretched from high hill ground down to the rocky coast.⁷ Some of the fields were improved and a brilliant green whilst others were rough and damp and filled with rushes. During the summer an abundance of wild flowers drifted about all but the most intensively farmed fields. In addition to the more usual beef cattle and sheep, there was a herd of Highland Ponies that lived in the fields around the farmhouse. Most of the hill ground had been sold off in the 1980s and planted with North American conifers, as had happened in much of the south Rhinns at that time. The ground here was difficult to walk being overgrown with willow and bramble and traversed by deep furrows created during the tree planting.

To someone familiar with the English and lowland Scottish countryside and its wildlife, Islay appeared remarkably rich in flora and fauna. In part this was due to the open aspect of much of the land and the proximity of the open sea, which meant that wildlife was relatively obvious. From my cottage, Roe Deer were almost constantly in view and the bird life was profuse, especially in summer when the young birds had fledged and great flocks of finches and pipits would be gleaning seeds and insects from amongst the fields and scrub. This abundance encouraged birds of prey such as Buzzards,

⁶ As in most homes in the south Rhinns, I used to receive Northern Irish and not Scottish television stations.

⁷ See Figure Fourteen.

Sparrowhawks, Peregrines and Hen Harriers. Once a young Golden Eagle took up a brief residence in the small glen by the cottage. What with the colourful drifts of wildflowers and multitudes of insects and amphibians it was easy to imagine that this was the sort of countryside that was once reputed to have existed throughout Britain before, as the discourse of the countryside has it, modern agriculture clasped the land in its sterile grip.

I used to cycle into Port Charlotte to work at the Field Centre and I soon became familiar with the journey along the single-track road. The road was normally very quiet although the traffic built up noticeably during July and August when the holidaymakers were on the island and the farms were at their busiest. I soon became a familiar sight between the farm and the village and found that increasing numbers of people would wave at me as they went by. When I went off the island it always took me a few days to stop checking every car that went by in case it contained someone I knew and whom I would thus be required to wave to.

The wind was sometimes a hindrance to my cycling but during the summer there were often calm days, though these brought their own problems. In most parts of Britain people make small talk by discussing the weather. In Islay they discussed the weather and the midges, and if possible combined the two. It would be common to hear someone say "Lovely day," only to receive a response of "But what about the midges!" These calm, if midge-infested, days of summer were but a memory during my winter spent on the island when the gales seemed almost unrelenting. Sometimes this caused considerable disruption and islanders liked to judge the severity of the winter by the number of times the ferry had remained in port. Despite the wind, the geography of the island meant that it was usually possible to find shelter. The weather forecasts on TV seemed particularly inaccurate, though often the weather would be better than suggested as many rain-bearing fronts blew over to deposit their load over the higher hills of the mainland. Although Islay still receives an average of 130 centimetres of precipitation a year almost none normally falls as snow and frosts are rare (Storrie 1981: 23). The mild winters give a relatively long growing season of 216 days, although in practice the persistent grazing of geese during the winter offsets some of the advantages of this to farmers.

The cycle ride to Port Charlotte provided a more complete view of the expanse of Loch Indaal.⁸ North of the Oa stretches the five-mile long strip of sand at Laggan Bay. Further up the Loch the land juts out into the flattish bogs and moorland of the Laggan Peninsula beyond which are the three highest peaks on the island, Beinn Bheigier, Beinn Bhan and Glas Bheinn which reach up towards 500 metres above sea level. Where the Loch narrows north of Laggan Point I sometimes saw dolphins or porpoises as well as feeding Gannets and terns. To the northeast the Loch fills out towards its head at Bridgend where Islay House, the seat of the Morrisons who own Islay Estate, was always prominent, despite being dwarfed in gravitas by the Paps of Jura beyond.

Successions of landowning families have added their own embellishments to the House during their tenure. The building was begun in 1677 by the Cawdor Campbells who owned Islay Estate from 1615 until the Shawfield Campbells took over by 1726 (Storrie 1981: 109). The Shawfields were great improvers who were instrumental in creating the modern Islay with its varied agricultural holdings and nucleated villages that so distinguish the island from others in the Hebrides. They also developed most of the modern-day Islay House, adding a major section in 1841-42. Soon afterwards the last Shawfield laird, Walter Frederick Campbell, was declared bankrupt and the estate was sequestrated in 1848 and eventually sold to the Morrisons, a family of London drapers, in 1853. The Morrisons presided over the break-up of the Estate, although it still covers 49,500 acres, and they added their own wing to the House in 1910.

A most tangible legacy of the Shawfield Campbell dynasty were the planned villages where three-quarters of the island's population resided (Storrie 1981: 4). Some fourteen villages were established during the late 18th and early 19th centuries with the twin aims of accommodating people from the over-populated rural areas of the island and providing them with non-agricultural labour in fishing, distilling or linen production. Port Charlotte was both a fishing and distilling village but the distillery was closed in the 1930s and fishing had also largely disappeared. The island's creamery was subsequently established in the village but this too closed down during my fieldwork. Two hotels⁹ provided some employment but many of the pretty whitewashed houses became holiday or retirement homes.

⁸ See Figure Seven.

⁹ See Figure Four.

The Field Centre was run by the Islay Natural History Trust and was established in 1983, eventually being situated in the old distillery warehouse. Principally, my work at the Field Centre involved taking money from visitors who wished to look around the displays about the island's wildlife and geology or to buy books or stationery. Sometimes I would advise people on where to look for certain animals or birds that they were particularly keen to see. This required a degree of knowledge of the island and its wildlife and although I had only recently arrived I rather threw myself into the task of acquiring as much expertise in this area as I could. A lot could be gleaned from relevant books and publications and from island residents with similar interests, with whom I was soon acquainted. But at least once a week I would be off on my bike, looking around the island for birds, plants, mammals and insects. It was by doing this that I really began to know the geography and natural history of Islay.

To the south of the farm I found the twin fishing villages of Portnahaven and Port Wemyss in the shelter of the small offshore island of Orsay with its lighthouse. In 1808, Portnahaven was reputed to support 26 families in fishing and the village expanded further during the herring boom of the late 19th Century (Storrie 1981: 123). Since then the fishing had been in decline but unlike other villages there were never many alternative sources of income. As in Port Charlotte many houses were either unoccupied or were converted to holiday homes. A large proportion of residents were elderly and there had been a long tradition of the men folk leaving to join the Royal or merchant navies (Storrie 1981: 189). During my fieldwork Argyll and Bute Council closed down the small primary school in Portnahaven at the same time as upgrading the road into the village. Such municipal priorities seemed to cause a degree of bewilderment locally.

This was one part of the island where I commonly heard the Gaelic being spoken, though even here mostly just by older people. The local Gaelic dialect, reputedly rather similar to Irish, seemed to get drowned out in Bowmore but not in Portnahaven. In the 1991 Census 42.5% of Kilchoman parish (which covers the Rhinns) claimed to speak the language. This figure was exceeded only in Tiree, Skye and the Western Isles and so the Rhinns could be regarded as something of a Gaelic stronghold. To put this into perspective however, in 1951 75.2% of the Kilchoman population knew the language

and in 1891 it was 88.4%.¹⁰ Despite some Gaelic medium education being available in Islay, it rarely seemed the public language of choice for younger people and whilst many may have had a good smattering it seems likely that the decline in usage will continue even if the language is still known. I had good intentions of learning Gaelic myself but sadly these were never realised. As well as providing me with certain insights into the Islay way of life and landscape, I thought it would also help to introduce me to some new contacts. But, given the time it would have taken to achieve competence (particularly given a paucity of people with whom I could regularly practise) and the fact that I could do a lot of good research without the Gaelic, I was lazy and never learnt.

To the north of Portnahaven lay the crofting township of Claddach. This was the only part of the island that fulfilled the popular image of a Hebridean landscape with its scattered whitewashed crofts, small fields of crops and rough grazing. It was a busy place at this time because an innovative new wave power station was being built on the headland and this meant that Willie Currie's fleet of trucks often plied the narrow roads carrying stone from Ballygrant quarry. I used to visit Claddach quite often especially to watch the vast streams of seabirds that could be seen passing just offshore on their way south or to their feeding grounds.

North of Claddach, the western side of the Rhinns presented a more rugged terrain than the east and the farms here had less good arable ground. Much of the land was quite boggy and the abrupt form of Beinn Tart a'Mhill, the highest hill on the Rhinns, dominated. The past held great prominence in the landscape with a stone circle at Cultoon and a ruined chapel at Kilchiaran that commanded glorious views across the quiet bay to the Atlantic.

The high ground that ran the spine of the Rhinns was a land of rough moorland, bog and conifer plantation with occasional patches of scrubby woodland composed of willow, birch, Hazel and Rowan. This was a ground that seemed rarely trod but like many of the more remote parts of the island one often came across ruined buildings, some of which must have been occupied until relatively recent times. Although there was

¹⁰ The other two parishes in Islay tell a similar story of decline. Kildalton, 1891: 87.7% Gaelic speaking; 1951: 67.9%; 1991: 32.8%. Killarow and Kilmeny, 1891: 83.4%; 1951: 66.6%; 1991: 31.1%. In Islay as a whole, only 24.5% of respondents to the 2001 Census claimed to speak the language.

considerable emigration to New York from Islay between 1738 and 1740 (Ramsay 1991: 21) this was mostly of the relatively affluent tacksmen and their families who were disgruntled at the re-organisation of Wadset payments¹¹ instigated by the first Daniel Campbell of Shawfield. The population built up to a peak of 15,772 in 1841 but declined to 7559 in 1881 and thence to 3,457 in 2001. Though there is still a degree of uncertainty about the manner in which people left their lands in Islay, the savage clearances that characterised other parts of the Highlands seem to have been absent.¹² However, the Royal Commission (Highlands and Islands) of 1892 found some evidence of people who were forcibly removed from their crofts in parts of Islay (Booth n.d.). Many people emigrated to the New World or Antipodes but others were moved to the villages where employment could be found in fishing or other industries. Certainly the availability of a variety of trades helped to keep many people on the island during the early part of the 19th Century when other parts of the Hebrides were experiencing considerable depopulation (Storrie 1981: 127). However, the past two centuries have seen an ongoing process of agricultural amalgamation and assimilation that, whilst it may have improved productivity, has progressively reduced the numbers of people working on the land.¹³ In the Rhinns, the losses from agriculture were added to by the decline of the fishing industry. With little employment to hold people emigration has been inevitable and, despite some immigration, the sort of upturn in population recently experienced in areas such as Skye has yet to be replicated in Islay.

The northern part of the Rhinns, beyond the distillery village of Bruichladdich, was centred on Loch Gorm, the largest expanse of freshwater in Islay. Surrounding the deep blue waters of the loch were a number of large farms with good land and also a few smaller crofts. I often visited the broad beach at Machir Bay¹⁴ where signs warned visitors not to swim because of the strong currents. The dunes behind the beach were the favoured gathering place of Choughs, which at the time of my fieldwork were the species of most concern to the RSPB. The Society was worried about their apparent

¹¹ A Wadset was a form of mortgage that was paid by a tenant until an agreed sum had accrued after which the tenant was only required to pay Crown rent and Public dues. Thus they came to regard the land as their own and could earn an income from rent paid by subtenants. In the case of Islay, Daniel Campbell bought the right of redemption on the Wadsets when he purchased the Estate and also insisted on taking rent directly from sub-tenants (Ramsay 1991: 2).

¹² Richards asserts that "Islay has no written documentation, even though it is almost certain that people were evicted" (2000: 286).

¹³ See Chapter Three.

¹⁴ See Figure Six.

decline in Islay – their UK stronghold. Despite these problems, they were still easy to see at Machir Bay (or Kilchoman, as I was instructed the islanders referred to it) although I sometimes encountered visitors who had gone there hoping to see the birds but met without success.

To the north of Loch Gorm the landscape was more rugged and amongst the most spectacular in Islay. In the 1980s a controversy erupted over the sale of this land to a developer who wished to build a luxury holiday complex in this remote part of the island. This dispute had the rare effect of largely uniting local people and conservationists¹⁵ in opposition, although this in turn helped precipitate the designation of much of the Rhinns as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) – one of the most bitter chapters in relations between conservationists and the people living in Islay.¹⁶ But it was easy to see why this corner of the island would be attractive to tourists with its sweeping vistas across to Colonsay and Mull to the north.

Further east the other large sea loch of Islay, Loch Gruinart, extends a sandy finger into the north coast of the island. Here the RSPB had their main land holding¹⁷ and I often used to visit the area to watch birds, particularly the waders out on the mudflats. At the southern end of the loch the thin two-mile wide isthmus called the Gruinart Flats stretches across to Loch Indaal. This area had been transformed into some of the island's best farmland since its drainage in the 1950s. Fluctuating sea levels since the last Ice Age meant that in prehistoric times the lochs of Indaal and Gruinart had joined, isolating the Rhinns as a separate island. Although these two inlets had receded they could still, "complicate communications between . . . the Rhinns, and the rest of the island" (Storrie 1981: 18).

The main road from Port Charlotte to Bridgend ran along the southern edge of the Gruinart Flats, parallel to the impressive raised beach and adjacent to the northern shore

¹⁵ In describing certain people and organisations as 'conservationists' I am not implying that these are the only people with an interest in conserving wildlife. Sometimes when I asked people in Islay about when 'conservation' started to become a prominent issue on the island they would tell me that it had always been important because people in Islay had always cared for wildlife and had always been 'conservationists'. So by conservationists I mean those who work for conservation organisations and by 'conservation' I mean conservation in the formal sense of the various schemes, management practices and designations associated with the 'conservation industry' rather than a more general and widely held concern for the fortunes of wildlife and habitats.

¹⁶ See 4.3.4.

¹⁷ See figures Twenty-two and Twenty-three.

of Loch Indaal. Sometimes I would cycle this route, which was flat though exposed, to look for the ducks, divers and grebes that could be seen on Loch Indaal during autumn and winter. More often I used to travel this way by bus to do my weekly shopping in the island's 'capital' Bowmore. About six buses a day ran into Bowmore, either the post bus or more frequently the big bus. There were only a few regular bus drivers and I soon got to know them. Bowmore had one sizeable supermarket, the Co-op, and a few smaller shops including the 'Countrystore' on the edge of the village, or 'Islay Farmers' as it tended to be called. This was a co-operative that sold supplies to farmers but also various groceries and local produce. I soon found that I could buy most of the provisions that I was used to purchasing on the mainland, although the prices of perishables were often slightly higher.

Bowmore was the first of the planned villages built in Islay and was established by the Shawfield Campbells in 1768 (Storrie 1981: 183). The village was centred on the broad Main Street,¹⁸ which rose up a steep incline from the harbour to the distinctive round church. There were also various shops, two banks and an SNH office where four members of staff were employed to deal with local conservation issues such as administering the Islay Voluntary Goose Management Scheme. Whilst conservation was not one of the island's big employers, in addition to the four at SNH, the RSPB employed around ten people and another five or more worked as consultants or as goose counters. Money also came into the island through various conservation schemes and a substantial amount of wildlife related tourism. As such, conservation and wildlife were economically significant in Islay, although quantifying this accurately was problematic.¹⁹

North of Bowmore, the island's two main roads joined at Bridgend where the landscape contrasted with that of the Rhinns. Along the banks of the River Sorn, which ran northeast towards Ballygrant, were mature mixed woodlands. This part of the island seemed reminiscent of the mainland, though the history of the woodlands indicates that

¹⁸ See Figure Three.

¹⁹ The RSPB attempted to quantify the revenue accrued from tourists visiting the island to see geese (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds & British Association for Shooting and Conservation n.d.). They suggest that in 1988 "winter birdwatching brought revenues of £180,000 to the island" and that "geese are the dominant winter birdwatching attraction on Islay". It is doubtful that the increase in goose numbers since 1988 has attracted any more visitors, however, and I would also suggest that most birdwatchers visit Islay for many more reasons than just to see the geese.

this impression was not easily achieved in a Hebridean climate. The plantings were instigated in the first half of the 19th Century on the instruction of Walter Frederick Campbell. He was reputedly pressurised by his wife, who came from a family of enthusiastic tree planters. Despite their look of grand permanence, the trees took some time to become established and many were lost during winter storms and required replanting.

These contrasts in the Islay landscape were one of the island's most distinctive features. The diverse underlying geology made for a terrain of ever shifting properties and potential but Islay's variety was arguably more a product of human use of the land and the island's relationship with the rest of the world. Margaret Storrie, Islay's biographer, elaborates:

The geographical situation of the island has affected the development of its economy, society, landscape and fabric from archaeological to present times. Relative accessibility to, or isolation from political and cultural centres elsewhere in Highland, Hebridean or Lowland Scotland has affected the ways in which men have influenced and left their mark on Islay (Storrie 1981: 3).

Thus despite the island's remoteness it seemed also to be a place where influences and characteristics from all directions had for centuries coincided and intermingled to produce such modern-day contrasts and diversity. During my time living on the island it struck me in so many ways that it was this juxtaposition of Lowland, Highland and also Irish features that made Islay unique and special. As such, the sharp distinction that has been marked between ethnographies of the Highlands and Lowlands (Nadel-Klein 1997) and also between discursive representations of the two regions and their people (Chapman 1978) was arguably less strongly marked in Islay.

Appropriately, Bridgend was the place where the whole island came together every August for the Islay Show.²⁰ I managed to attend three of these. As well as the agricultural show there would be various fairground attractions and local organisations either trying to promote Islay or, in the case of the RSPB and SNH, to advertise themselves and their role on the island. The Show always highlighted the variety of

²⁰ See figures Nine to Twelve.

people who made their home in Islay. Whilst a large number were from local families there were perhaps just as many who had come to the island from elsewhere. The phenomenon of “White Settlers” is well known in the Scottish Highlands (see Jedrej & Nuttall 1995). People moved to rural communities such as Islay for a variety of reasons, sometimes work, sometimes to retire, sometimes to get away from the rat-race or problems elsewhere. These ‘incomers’ became a significant part of the population in many parts of Scotland and Islay was no exception to this. What was more unusual about Islay was that incomers were well distributed in most spheres of island life. For example, a great many farmers and crofters whom I spoke to were not originally from Islay but had immigrated usually to take up a tenancy or buy a farm.²¹ As such, the categories of incomer and local could not easily be correlated with discrete work identities. In the case of farming, incomers had been coming to the island for a long period of time.²² The distilleries and estates had also tended to employ a proportion of people from elsewhere, particularly in senior positions, but one would often encounter English or other accents²³ in a wide range of situations from the truck driver and the postman to the barman and the cleaner. In this respect, Islay always seemed possessed of great heterogeneity in its population and distinctions between local and incomer, whilst sometimes appearing significant, were not regularly reinforced by distinctions in employment or social class.

Whilst working in the Field Centre I was able to read through some of the material held in the library and files. As well as plenty of scientific articles there was a good archive of the *Ileach* going back to the early 1980s and I spent much of my time taking notes from these. This reading enabled me to learn about the recent past of the island and particularly the expansion of formal nature conservation. My knowledge of this subject was initially quite sketchy but I was able to trace my way through the contemporary representations of the major incidents of the 1980s, which had raised the profile of conservation organisations in Islay if not their standing in the eyes of people living there (cf. Jedrej & Nuttall 1995: 6).

²¹ See 3.5.

²² According to Torrie (1961) six of the larger farms in Kilchoman parish were occupied by incomers at the time of his writing (in 1955).

²³ Of course, accent is not always a reliable clue to a person’s ‘roots’.

The most persistent conservation issue in Islay concerned the Barnacle and Greenland White-fronted Geese that wintered in large numbers.²⁴ They caused problems by being of both conservation importance, at least as far as this was defined in law, and an agricultural pest. Over many years, farmers, conservationists and bureaucrats had argued about the best way to deal with this rather intractable problem. There seemed little that could easily be done to reduce the attractiveness of the island to the geese, which arrive like an overnight snowfall in October and maintain a most forceful presence until leaving swiftly in mid-April. For nearly seven months of the year they are more ubiquitous and numerous than any livestock.

The 1980s were marked by two incidents that provoked angry confrontations between local people and conservationists. In 1985 the Duich Moss saga came to a head when Friends of the Earth protested against a proposal to extract peat from the Moss for use in distilling. Then in 1987 the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) designated much of the Rhinns as an SSSI.²⁵ It appeared from reading the news reports and letters in the *Ileach* that these two incidents had done much to sour the already fragile relationship the conservation organisations had with people in Islay. Relations had since become more settled, though the goose problem remained as prominent as ever and there had been other controversies concerning the designation of another SSSI in southeast Islay and a proposal for a wind farm that was successfully blocked by SNH and the RSPB.²⁶

I had talked to a few people about these conservation issues but after a few months I felt that I needed to start taking a more pro-active approach to my research. I realised that I was not going to ‘encounter’ as much local opinion as I would like in the course of my rather isolated existence at the farm or the Field Centre and so I began to interview people whom I felt would have had regular experience of conservation matters. Like Macdonald I realised, perhaps rather belatedly, that “much social life goes on behind the closed... doors of family homes” (1997b: 17) and that more formal methods were needed to provide an extensive body of material and to allow me in behind the farmhouse door and the SNH or RSPB brochure. I began my interviews with a few people whom I already knew, such as the woman who owned the farm where I lived and the staff in the SNH office.

²⁴ See chapters Four and Eight and figures Sixteen, Seventeen, Eighteen and Twenty-five.

²⁵ See Chapter Seven.

²⁶ See 4.4.1.

During the autumn I received a few visitors and was able to see some more of the island. Although when I first visited Islay, I had stayed in the south of the island I had never really returned there. Like the Rhinns, the south seemed like an island within an island and before good roads were built this feeling must have been accentuated as the extensive uplands and bogs that straddle Islay would have represented a formidable barrier to communications. Two roads ran directly along the flat moss between Bowmore and Port Ellen and past the airport adjacent to Laggan Bay.

Port Ellen itself was a large and attractive village encircling a bay with views across to the Oa to the west, Ireland to the south and Kintyre and Arran to the east. The road continued on through the southeast corner of the island. This stretch of coast provided a contrasting landscape, quite unlike other parts of Islay. The road passed by the famous distillery villages of Laphroaig, Lagavulin²⁷ and Ardbeg and then through strips of woodland that survived along the steep intrusive ridges. Various quiet bays strewn with rocks and skerries indented the coast and here seals could be seen stretching themselves out. Beyond the ancient Celtic cross at Kildalton the road petered out at Claggain Bay where I saw Great-northern Divers fishing on every visit.

I never really got to know the southern part of Islay in the way that I knew the rest of the island. It was often said, with varying degrees of seriousness, that people in the south were different to those in the rest of Islay. The best I heard was that you could tell folk from Port Ellen because they walked the wrong way around the Co-op. In the case of the Port Ellen folk, differences are doubtless relative. As Anthony Cohen explains, “The familiarity of context is a matter of degree” (1987: 45) and Port Ellen folk would likely greet other Ilich as virtual brethren if they met outside the island. But whilst this study is certainly about the people of Islay (and somewhat about the people of the whole Highlands) it is rather more about those from the northern and western parts of the island and particularly the Rhinns. For Islay folk this is an important point to establish.

During the winter I spent some time working at the Dunlossit Estate in the east of the island. The Estate covered 16,500 acres and extended from the main Ballygrant to Port

²⁷ See Figure Five.

Askaig road through the central uplands of Islay to the Torra River. In the north there was much planted woodland, strewn with Bluebells in spring, and a number of tranquil lochs but the bulk of the Estate was moorland. The lower slopes of the hills always seemed rather bleak to me, being mostly grass or bracken. I preferred the higher tops where the heather was more extensive and where numerous clear lochs stretched in a loose band across the plateau. In winter, animals were almost absent from the hills. Aside from a few sheep and Red Deer there was just the odd Raven or, if one was fortunate, a Golden Eagle. The eastern edge of the Estate was planted extensively with dark stands of conifers that were rather more mature than those on the Rhinns and seemed to have done slightly better in this more sheltered landscape.

Dunlossit was one of four large estates in Islay. The others were the main Islay Estate (covering much of the north and centre of the island), Laggan (mainly extending between Bowmore and Port Ellen) and Ardtalla in the southeast. These were owned by various families who had made most of their money elsewhere and were used for sporting purposes, especially deer stalking and Pheasant or Woodcock shooting. Within some of the estates there were a number of tenanted farms but the majority of farms elsewhere on the island (particularly on the Rhinns) were owner-occupied. In most cases tenants had been able to buy up their farms with the break-up of some of the smaller estates in the 1980s.

I normally travelled to Dunlossit by bus. This journey took me along the broad Sorn valley, which cut between the two main upland areas of the island and through some of the best agricultural land. The fields here seemed strikingly rich and green in colour and in the winter these were filled with thousands of geese filling their crops. Out of sight from the road was Loch Finlaggan where the Lords of the Isles held court in the Middle Ages. The historian James Hunter said that the past importance of the Lordship and Finlaggan was a reminder of how the Scottish islands “weren’t always marginal, peripheral”.²⁸ At the head of the valley was the old village of Ballygrant where the large quarry supplied lime for farms and construction. The road travelled on through Keills with its primary school to Port Askaig where a small ferry skimmed across the

²⁸ Quoted from a speech given at The Islands’ Conference held in Islay, *Ileach* Vol. 28 No. 12 21st April 2001.

short expanse of the Sound of Islay to Jura and where the mainland ferry also docked on every other journey.

The weather was rough through the winter and living on an isolated farm with no car and with dark nights meant that I was unable to get out so much (cf. Macdonald 1997b: 14). But I had found a new job in Port Charlotte, working for a local couple teaching their son who had autism. After New Year I had obtained additional funding and so could spend more time on my formal research activities. I began to conduct interviews on a regular basis and also started going along to various events. Interviews were very good sources of data but I wanted to see what happened when different people were gathered together. There were a number of public meetings about conservation issues at this time and these were very illuminating. Seeing people with conflicting views interacting both formally and informally at these events brought out different aspects to the relationship than were evident from interviews. These meetings included an RSPB discussion evening,²⁹ a meeting about the disposal of distillery effluent,³⁰ an Islay Land Use Forum gathering³¹ and a discussion about a proposed goose management scheme.³²

I was thus compiling a body of data based on four main sources. First there were the everyday events that I recorded in my journal. Second was the archival research, particularly from the *Heach* newspaper. Third were the interviews I was now conducting on a regular basis. And fourth were the meetings and special events that I was attending whenever possible. It had taken me seven months to progress on all these fronts but I began to feel that the ethnographic material was starting to accumulate and its richness was ever more apparent.

After a year on the farm, I moved into Port Charlotte for my final summer of fieldwork. I stayed in a small flat along the shores of Loch Indaal where I could watch Otters and terns feeding and sometimes the sortie of a passing Arctic Skua. I felt more conspicuous in the village and got to know quite a few of my neighbours. I was also able to socialise more readily in the evenings, usually in the two hotel bars. During the

²⁹ See 2.2.

³⁰ See 2.1.

³¹ See 7.1.

³² See 8.3 and 8.4.

school holidays the village became much busier and there seemed to be quite a number of people who owned second homes, which they stayed in for months at a time.

This second summer was inevitably the busiest period and I was doing regular interviews, writing them up, going along to events and finishing my trawl through the *Ileach* in the Museum of Islay Life. Most of the interviews were with farmers but I also talked to people working for the RSPB and SNH, estate factors, biologists, writers and a former editor of the *Ileach*.³³ I used a variety of methods to find people to interview. In the case of conservationists it was a straightforward matter of getting to know the people who worked for each organisation and assessing who would be the most suitable interviewees. With farmers I usually looked through the Islay Phoney Book³⁴ for the telephone numbers of people who lived at farms. I would call them up and briefly explain who I was and what I was doing, usually mentioning that I was an anthropology student interested in farming and conservation. If they were agreeable I would arrange a time when I could visit. In a few instances, farmers were recommended to me by others or were regularly mentioned in the local newspaper. In very few cases was I well acquainted with the farmers I spoke to beforehand but there was often a degree of mutual recognition. People had often seen me out cycling and they seemed to know where I had been living. There were some limitations as to which farmers I could speak to because I normally had to cycle or walk to the farm to conduct the interview. Farms away from the Rhinns involved long journeys, particularly if they were far from bus routes, and so this was another reason why I concentrated more on those who lived close at hand. I had been initially quite nervous about contacting farmers because I suspected that a few would be unwilling to speak to me, thinking I was a journalist or working for a conservation organisation. I thought that most would be too busy to give up their time for a curious student with what I assumed was little to offer. But the farmers were all quite agreeable to being interviewed, although sometimes they were understandably guarded at first. I think they appreciated someone who would take time to listen and show an interest in their lives and opinions and the places where they lived and worked.

³³ See Appendix Two.

³⁴ The 'Phoney [sic] Book' was a directory of Islay and Jura telephone numbers and addresses and was published by the Islay and Jura Council of Voluntary Service, the same organisation that published the *Ileach* newspaper. It proved an invaluable resource.

The interviews were loosely structured around a list of subjects that I was interested in covering but I was happy to follow matters that arose. As McFarlane found in his work in Shetland, “interviews were like improvisations, created both by the interviewer and the interviewee” (1981: 122) and I was keen to develop something resembling a ‘normal conversation’, albeit one that touched on subjects I hoped both interviewee and interviewer shared an interest in. This was a process I had to refine and when I initially began conducting interviews I found that some questions I asked seemed irrelevant to the interviewee (if not to the interviewer) or were perhaps too cryptic. From this experience I decided that the best questions were those that were straightforward and would allow the farmer to talk about subjects that they were familiar with. This led to the development of a rough list of questions and topics that I referred to in most of the later interviews. The questions covered the farm and the farmer’s history there, the wildlife that they were familiar with, any involvement they had with conservation organisations and the farmer’s thoughts about agriculture in Islay in more general terms. Many interviews lasted two hours or more and would continue on into a cup of tea or a dram of whisky. Some interviews were tape-recorded but most of the later ones were not. In part this was because some interviewees were unenthusiastic about being recorded but was also because both the interviewee and myself would speak in a more relaxed manner without the tape operating.³⁵ In these cases I would take extensive notes as the farmer spoke and then later wrote up a transcript of the interview. Of course I lost material by doing this but the interviews were generally more relaxed and could be written up more quickly. In some cases where I tape-recorded the interview, the farmer would adopt a different tone once the tape had been switched off and would reveal things that they had been unwilling to discuss during the ‘formal’ interview. On reflection, the different contexts within each interview that were framed by the presence or absence of tape-recorder or notebook provided a more diverse and complex representation of the interviewees and their lives. This range of techniques seemed to provide the most open and flexible methodology.

With conservationists I took a different line, thinking that because they were representing organisations they would be more guarded (or more ‘corporate’) in their

³⁵ I was never given the sort of ‘suitable for radio broadcast’ responses that Macdonald experienced when she tape-recorded interviews in Skye (1997b: 26), although one informant did not wish to be recorded because he was concerned that he would get his facts ‘wrong’. He seemed to think that if I just took notes on what he said then this would render any mistakes less significant.

responses. I felt that occasionally I needed to ask probing questions without making the interviewee too defensive. For each conservationist I interviewed I drew up a separate set of questions but in the main I wanted each to offer their own response to criticisms that I had heard local people make of their organisation and to ask how they saw their job and their organisation's role on the island.

At the end of my fieldwork in September 2000³⁶ I had conducted about forty in-depth interviews,³⁷ including most of the farmers and some of the crofters who lived on the Rhinns as well as a number of farmers from elsewhere on the island. In many cases, I informed interviewees (particularly farmers) that any reproduction of comments from the interviews would be anonymous or under a pseudonym. This means that most of the names, of both farmers and their farms, in this thesis have been changed, although inevitably some individuals will still be recognisable to those who know Islay. I hope that my choices of names do not prove to be the inappropriate suggestions of a naïve *Sassanach*. I have only used names that I am unaware have been 'taken' in Islay, so I apologise for any confusion if I have unknowingly put the words of one person under the name of another extant Islay resident. The names of employees of conservation organisations or other public bodies have been kept because these people are well known, and in most cases the individuals spoke to me as representatives of their organisation. However, on occasions where I have included contentious comments I have sought to conceal the identity of the individuals who made them. It is not my interest to unnecessarily strain what have often been sensitive relationships.

³⁶ I have since returned to Islay on two occasions (August 2002 and April 2003) to conduct further research. The only use I have made herein of this additional material occurs in 8.4.

³⁷ See Appendix Two.

1.4 *The thesis*

On returning to St Andrews I was faced with the problem of formulating a strategy for describing and contextualising a relationship. At first I envisioned a rather broad relationship between conservation organisations and the entire Islay community³⁸ but the focus has since narrowed for reasons I explain below. It had always seemed clear to me that my discussion of the relationship should be comprised of two parts: a contextualising introduction followed by an ethnographic description and analysis. In the first part my intention was to explain the historical particularities of the relationship and of its actors. There was thus a requirement for a classificatory as well as a contextualising text. I needed to establish how both my subject matter and fieldwork experience were distinctive but also how they could be linked to broader discourses both within and without the academy.

As it turned out, this contextualising section has become Part Two of the thesis and is preceded by an introductory ethnographic chapter as well as this more general introduction. The purpose of the second chapter – “Islay sketches” – is to present five short vignettes that serve to introduce the main themes and questions of the thesis and to illustrate the range of methodological strategies that I have described above. From these sketches I draw out three themes: the linkages between sets of relationship (the local – the outside world, continuity – change), the effects that conservation organisations and other ‘outside’ bodies have on social relationships within Islay and the way in which the discourse of conservation is related to practices of social positioning both within Islay and between Islay and the outside world. This is followed by a discussion of how these themes can be related to the wider anthropological literature, particularly various texts covering the anthropology of rural communities in Scotland and the British Isles. I trace the movement from social to cultural and symbolic approaches and I argue for a more perceptual and fluid approach to the negotiation of difference and relations of power. This approach is less concerned with notions of belonging to a community or with the marginalisation of localism and more with the entanglement and negotiation of relationships and perspectives upon them. I

³⁸ My use of the word ‘community’ in this thesis is in the sense of a group of people living within a given area (e.g. the ‘Islay community’) or working within a given industry (e.g. the ‘farming community’). As such it is my shorthand for classifying social groups but I do not intend this to imply particular *kinds* of relationship within a given ‘community’.

conclude by raising three programmatic questions regarding the role of symbols in negotiating and explaining difference, the way in which these explanations are utilised by individuals to understand and alter their circumstances and how the particular pattern of relations between conservationists and farmers in Islay has emerged.

Part Two – “Contexts” – is introduced by a general discussion of how anthropologists have used the concepts of discourse and history and of how these usages relate to the material that I present both in chapters Three and Four and the remainder of the thesis. I draw on Fairclough (1992) for three definitions of discourse – as text, as situated practice and as constitutive of and by relations of power and knowledge – and for the concepts of horizontal and vertical intertextuality. The horizontal axis of connection is evinced by the historicity in what participants in interaction communicate and the vertical through the intersection with wider discourses, such as those of environmentalism. Although relations of power and knowledge are always implicated in environmental contestations, I argue that it is unhelpful to represent these simply as conflicts between divergent cultures or bodies of knowledge because over time contests become so entangled that any gulf in knowledge becomes irrelevant as a cause of dispute. Rather, I point out that, in the case of the ongoing relations between conservationists and farmers in Islay, ambiguities are created and it is towards these that attention should be turned.

I follow my discussion of the historicity of discourse by examining the connections between ethnography and history and outlining the reasons that anthropologists become interested in history. The histories within Part Two describe some of the context that informed the interactions that I encountered and also provide perspectives from which these can be viewed. History thus constrains the present but can be deployed selectively and strategically in response to changing requirements and circumstances. In particular, I propose to focus on how differences emerged and were negotiated within the relationship between farmers and conservationists and on the means through which continuity and change come to be perceived and played off against one another in discourse.

Thus in response to these contextualising requirements, the two chapters that constitute the body of Part Two (Chapter Three – “Farming and estates in Islay” – and Chapter

Four – “The history of conservation and farming in Islay”) are largely historical and their aims are threefold. Firstly, by explaining the history of the relationship and the nature of farming in Islay I have attempted to establish the particularities of the situation that I encountered. Secondly, the chapters describe the different sides to the relationship and how the two nature conservation organisations and the Islay farming community have developed in the way that they have. The description of the former takes a somewhat different form as I portray the RSPB and the NCC/SNH in terms of their involvement in Islay and with the farming community rather than in isolation from it. The description of the farming community and the agriculture infrastructure in Chapter Three makes only passing reference to the involvement of conservation organisations because this is detailed elsewhere within the thesis. Thirdly, writing these histories was an end in itself. There has been little or nothing written that details the recent history of farming or conservation in Islay and, as these subjects have been significant to many people on the island and elsewhere, it has seemed to me a worthwhile service to collate the details into the form of a historical narrative.

After completing the historical chapters I was left to consider how I would approach the writing of the main ethnographic section of the thesis. My initial idea was that I should break down the larger relationship into smaller ‘component relationships’ and to classify these into four areas – land, animals, the Islay community and the outside world. Within each category I listed various relationships that I thought were significant to the whole and then worked through my data with the aim of fitting material under appropriate headings. After a time it became apparent that I would not be able to cover all of the component relationships that I had identified and that there were extensive overlaps between each. I decided that a simpler and more refined focus would be more effective. It was at this point that I resolved to limit my ethnography to the relationship between conservation organisations and farming people rather than including the entire Islay community. Whilst working through my material about the RSPB’s Loch Gruinart reserve I realised that a very workable and evocative approach would be to organise each chapter around a symbol of the relationship and then to describe how these were perceived or negotiated. Three symbols that would offer the necessary ‘window’ into the relationship were the RSPB reserve at Loch Gruinart, designated areas and the management of the goose problem. These three subjects are discussed in chapters Six, Seven and Eight. Chapter Five elaborates on how farmers

relate to their farm and is pivotal in the sense that certain ideas are drawn out that have informed the way many farmers understood change and the interaction with the outside world – two processes with which nature conservation was indelibly bound.

In producing these ethnographic chapters I developed an approach to writing and organising the material that I found helpful in revealing trends, differences and connections within the material. Firstly, I would gather together various quotations in which informants discussed a particular aspect of the symbol (e.g. making their farm a good farm or their personal experience of management agreements). Once I had done this, I would print out a hard copy and make notes in the margin about the sorts of connections that were being made by informants in their explanations. These connections were then summarised, usually at the end of each chapter section. I would then repeat the process over each chapter as a whole to establish broader sets of connection. Although the emphasis was on the connections individuals made, I also found that differences were revealed because each informant situated him or herself in a particular way in relation to the discourse they were drawing on in their explanations. So it was through this method of writing that more general aspects of the relationship between conservation and farming in Islay were revealed. This writing was thus the theoretical process through which the relationship and its discourse became more perceptible and more comprehensible.

After writing the ethnography it was apparent that the focus of the thesis was on the entangled relationships and discourses that emerge between conservation organisations and farming people in Islay and on how these have developed over time. It was a thesis about living in Islay as viewed through the prism of these relations and discourses. Initially, I had envisaged that the thesis would deal primarily with conservation and with how it was implemented in specific circumstances. This interest remains but within this thesis conservation is treated primarily as a local idiom rather than in a broader sense. ‘Conservation’ is rendered as a symbol that is employed in Islay to reveal aspects of relationships, as part of individuals’ situating practices and as a metaphor for other relationships, such as those between Islay and the outside world. The broader implications of conservation and environmentalism are still present within this local perspective but they only occasionally move into the foreground.

This focus on local discourses and relationships and the rendering of conservation as a primarily local idiom has influenced the contextualisation of this thesis within anthropological literature. I found that the issues of identity, localism and power with which I was dealing led me rather more towards the literature on rural British communities rather more than the anthropological literature on environmentalism and environmental issues. It was the former that I compared my own approach with and with which I debated. In particular, I realised that I had developed an approach that differed somewhat to the post-Barthian symbolic community studies of Anthony Cohen and others and also to the more Marxist marginalisation thesis of Jane Nadel-Klein. Whilst I could still see elements of these within the ethnography, I was concerned not to overemphasise their importance because this would lose much of the existential complexity that was both created and experienced by my informants. Rather, the writing of the ethnographic chapters had revealed an entangled set of relations in which differences were constantly revealed, concealed and negotiated. This struck me as a profoundly different sort of ethnography to most anthropological studies of conservation and environmentalism. Most of these have focussed either on 'culture clashes' between Western environmentalists and 'indigenous' groups or on understanding environmentalism as a particular culture in and of itself. Rather less has been written about the entanglement of relations that develops around particular issues over time, although some recent collections have begun to explore these more complex and ambiguous themes (e.g. Bender & Winer 2001; Berglund & Anderson 2003a; Knight 2000). This work deals only a little with how environmentalists understand the human relationship to nature. Instead it concerns individuals living in a particular place who are not divided by a gulf in culture but who know and understand one another rather well. This has meant that the context of the thesis emerges primarily within the anthropological discourse of the rural community rather than within its investigations into environmentalism.

Through the process of writing these four ethnographic chapters certain regularities in the ways my informants explained and discussed the relationship began to emerge. Within the wide variety of situations and conversations that I was describing and analysing, there appeared to be certain assumptions and connections that were consistently hinted at in what people said. I wanted to understand and explain the way these underlying models of connection were operating and to do this I turned to Gregory

Bateson's idea of tautologies – the self-evident models that people use to produce explanations or symbolic classifications. These tautological sets of connection, for example between change and things originating outside of Islay, were used by many individuals to generate explanations for a wide range of phenomena that appeared to fit the same 'rules'. In doing this, my informants were using what Bateson called abduction – the mapping of different phenomena onto the same tautologies. These 'rules' of connection that were shadowed in a wide range of discursive situations appeared to have a great deal of rigidity and durability but my interest was less in this and more in the creative tension that existed between these tautological models and the situating practices of individuals. In their situating practices, individuals would utilise symbols and tautologies to strategically negotiate and explain differences between themselves and others. So although symbolic and tautological regularities cut across the discourse, each individual was able to use these in his or her own particular way in different moments. Bateson's work was particularly helpful in this regard because he placed great emphasis on the tension between tautology and evolution (or the conservative and the creative) and also on the essential situating concepts of difference, relevance and context. Bateson thus allowed me to clarify and develop on the relationships that had been exposed in the ethnography.

In the Introduction to Part Three I describe tautology, abduction and symbols as my three organising themes and I outline how these are implicated in the connections and differences that emerge through the process of writing the ethnography. My use of these ideas is primarily heuristic in the sense that I use them to provide both the reader and myself with explanatory perspectives on the ethnography. In the conclusion I develop on these perspectives and also use the ethnography to turn the focus back onto the organising themes of symbol, tautology and abduction in order to examine their usefulness as a system for understanding discursive and situating practices and relationships of difference.

These ethnographic chapters include extensive quotations. In some cases the quotations are taken directly from recordings but in others they are reconstructed after the event from notes. I have marked the latter with an asterisk (*) to make this distinction clear. It should also be noted that the sections of quotations spoken by myself are italicised. I write the ethnography in the past tense, which is (if you will excuse the pun) imperfect,

as Marilyn Strathern observes:

The problem with tense is that neither past nor present will really do – the latter suggesting timeless issues, frozen in the ethnographic record, the former that they belong to a vanished and no longer relevant era. Neither... conveys the truth since ideas are not so mobile nor so immobile as any such attempt to locate them suggests (1988: xv).

It is ideas and their relative mobility to which this thesis attends and, in order to perceive this, both the reader and the writer will have been required to look beyond the imposed restrictions of grammar.

Figure Three: *Main Street in Bowmore*



Figure Four: *The Port Charlotte Hotel*



Figure Five: *Lagavulin distillery*



Figure Six: *Cattle at Machir Bay*



2.0 Islay sketches

Below are presented five ethnographic sketches illustrating various aspects of the relationship between conservation organisations and farming people as well as Islay life in a more general sense. These provide an indication of the particularities of the relationship and the themes that will be addressed within the thesis. This is followed by an examination of the sketches in the light of other ethnographic works and also by a programme of questions for further consideration.

2.1 *The distillery meeting*

The fame of Islay for whisky exceeds even its renown for conservation controversies. There are seven distilleries on the island (plus a maltings at Port Ellen),³⁹ which are all owned by national or international companies, such as Allied Distillers and United Distillers and Vintners (UDV). Judged purely by the scale of its economy, distilling was the biggest industry on the island. Although each distillery only employed a small number of people, the concomitant effects on employment were substantial – not least in tourism.

In 1999 and 2000 a controversy surrounding the distilleries emerged. This related to proposals to build an effluent discharge outfall at Caol Ila that would serve a number of the island distilleries. The reason for establishing this facility was because the discharged effluent contained concentrations of toxic dissolved copper in excess of the legal limit. The Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) had been working with the distillers on the problem for a number of years. For some of the distilleries, the final solution was to establish a new pipeline that would take the effluent out into the turbulent waters of the Sound of Islay where it would safely disperse.

An initial concern about the proposals was the problem of the increased road traffic from tankers carrying hot effluent to Caol Ila but soon other sentiments were being aired in the *Ileach*. Some claimed that the effluent was actually beneficial to wildlife

³⁹ Three are along the south coast at Ardbeg, Lagavulin and Laphroaig, two in the northeast at Caol Ila and Bunnahabhain, one in Bowmore and one at Bruichladdich.

because it enriched the shallow waters around the distilleries whilst others suggested that the effluent could be converted into products for use in farming rather than flushed out to sea. There were also a few grumbles about the encroachment of the bureaucratic machinery into local problems it knew nothing about. In response to these concerns a public meeting was called and this took place at Bowmore Hall in January 2000.

The meeting was attended by a hundred or so people and was chaired by local councillor John Findlay. Speaking were representatives from SEPA, UDV (who were the main distillers involved in the project) and Argyll and Bute Council. A scientist from SEPA explained that the effluent was highly toxic if undiluted but because it was warmer than seawater it only harmed the planktonic creatures that lived at the surface and not larger animals such as fish that lived further down. He also stressed that the UK government was obliged by the EC to improve the water quality around its coasts and that large fines could be administered if progress was not forthcoming.

The chief environmental scientist from UDV said that his company's aim was to meet the requirements of SEPA without breaking the bank. They had conducted a pilot study at Talisker in Skye and this had shown that the same methods proposed for Islay could work in almost any conditions. Other methods for the disposal of effluent (or 'co-product' as he called it) had been looked at but had proved either too expensive or impractical.

The discussion was then opened up to the audience. It was noticeable that the debate was dominated by the non-local accents of incomers. This was a usual feature of public debate in Islay and one might speculate that the incomers were experiencing 'remote area anxiety' (Ardener 1989a), which encouraged them to throw themselves into social service functions or that the social ties of local people and the subsequent need to maintain harmony constrained them from speaking out (Cohen 1987). Whatever the reasons, the prominence of incomers in public debate in Islay was noticeable and was widely commented upon on the island.

The concerns of the audience related to three issues: the harm that was caused by the effluent, the damage that might be caused by the additional HGVs and the prospects for alternative methods of disposal. The first was discussed only briefly, despite being

prominent in the press prior to the meeting. The assertion from SEPA that the effluent was toxic seemed to be largely accepted, although one local fisherman commented, “I don’t think plankton are of much interest to normal people.” It was widely accepted that the pollution was genuine but also that its effects were minimal and perhaps barely perceived. No one enthused about the prospects of cleaner water around Islay, implying that most considered that the water was already ‘clean’. Rather, the expectation was that the extra vehicles on the roads would cause deterioration in environmental quality and that there would be no *perceptible* improvement in water quality to compensate for this.

On the second issue of the extra traffic, there was a widespread assumption that the extra HGVs *would* be noticed and that this would be a difficult burden for the island to bear. An elderly Englishman complained that he and many others had come to Islay because of the good environment and because children could play in the streets. Clearly angered that his idyll might be destroyed, his sentiments drew considerable applause. The manager of Laphroaig distillery responded to such arguments by saying that nobody had complained when the distilleries had come out of recession and thus caused HGV traffic to increase. “If the distilleries left Islay the ferry would be a tug,” he added, also to a good deal of applause.

The third issue of alternative methods of disposal elicited some strong opinions from certain sectors of the audience. A representative of the National Farmers’ Union of Scotland (NFUS) was keen that the effluent should be used for by-products that could be made into animal feed and sold to the beleaguered Islay farmers. When this was described by UDV as impractical and too expensive the NFUS rep complained that UDV seemed to be intent on spending as little money as possible. The UDV man said that obviously cost was an important consideration to the company. Another proposal was for effluent disposal by boat. A local entrepreneur had designed a vessel that he believed could perform the task. His proposal seemed to be well supported by the audience but was dismissed by UDV, who complained that there would be logistical problems because the weather would often be too bad to dispose of effluent by boat. This was disputed both at the meeting and in the local press over subsequent weeks.

The debate surrounding the disposal of distillery effluent exhibited comparable features

to those involving conservation organisations in Islay, particularly concerning the involvement of the outside world in local events. Firstly, a bureaucratic quango, SEPA, was intent on doggedly enforcing EU environmental law in order that the UK government fulfil its obligations. Secondly, SEPA and the distillers, like many other national and international organisations, were sometimes perceived as disproportionately powerful in comparison to people in Islay. Thirdly, these organisations seemed unappreciative of local opinion and interests and were dismissive of local initiatives to solve the problem. Finally, there were fears about the destruction of the special qualities of island life, such as a safe and peaceful environment. In this issue outside interests and concerns thus appeared to both override and constrain local agency and damage the special qualities of the island. These were all prominent aspects of the discourse of conservation and farming in Islay but similar actions by conservation organisations (particularly during the controversies of the 1980s) generally met, at least publicly, with much stronger and clearer condemnation and suspicion. In this case, there seemed to be confusion and ambivalence. There were concerns but they remained concerns and not condemnation. Even vocal opponents of bureaucracy and outside interference on the island were rather reticent – perhaps unsure of whether the publicly acceptable response should be support for or opposition to the distilleries.⁴⁰

The reasons for the confused response and its difference from the usual reactions to conservation issues stemmed in part from the involvement and actions of the whisky distillers. Whisky distilling was widely perceived as a local industry, although the distilleries were owned by large outside corporations. It was an industry that had been integrated into the island social life and economy for two centuries and as such was seen as an essential part of the place. In fact the island had come to rely on distilling economically, as the manager of Laphroaig sought to emphasise. That said, the whiskies themselves also derived their quality and character from the very specific local conditions and skills and so, although the industry had experienced fluctuations, the distillers needed the island as much as the island needed the distillers. They were not likely to depart on a purely economic whim because the brands from Islay were world-renowned and could not be replicated elsewhere. If one talks of power relations, these

⁴⁰ Ian Mitchell, who had published a book about exactly the same issues in relation to conservation in the Hebrides just prior to this meeting (Mitchell 1999), remained rather silent on the distillery effluent issue. Although he doubtless had his own views, he told me that he only went public on issues where he felt that ninety percent of people in Islay supported him.

might not have been equal but they were certainly reciprocal. As such, there appeared to be a bond of trust between the distillers and the community and a local feeling that the industry had proven itself as an integral and valued part of the island economy. A consequence of this close relationship was the widespread view that the industry and the distillers should be supported because what was good for them was good for the island. In this case, the actions of the distillers might have been interpreted as detrimental to the island, or even bullying, but there was still reluctance to publicly or vehemently oppose these actions, which might after all have brought more work to the island and helped to keep the distillers competitive.

The ambivalence of the response was further heightened by the actions of the distillers. Rather than protest against this incursion on their industry by SEPA, the government and the EU, the distillers had co-operated and worked with the bureaucrats. This was not surprising from substantial companies who were likely to take a hardened economic view of fines or legal action. Small-scale independent operators like farmers were much more willing (and perhaps felt more forced) to make a stand, as they sometimes had done against conservation organisations in Islay. Had the distillers taken the same approach then it would have been straightforward for many in Islay to support them to the hilt. This support would only have been heightened if the distillers had been prosecuted or forced to comply by the more 'outside' centres of governance.

2.2 *The RSPB discussion evening*

The RSPB was one of the two major conservation organisations operating in Islay during my fieldwork. Unlike SNH, which is a government body, the RSPB is a volunteer charity that relies mainly on its million plus members for revenue. The RSPB first established a permanent presence on the island in 1983 when they purchased the 1600-hectare Loch Gruinart reserve from Islay Estate.⁴¹ The initial aim of the reserve was to act as a sanctuary area for the large numbers of Barnacle and Greenland White-fronted Geese that winter in Islay. It was hoped that this would ease the pressure on farmers who regarded the birds as pests that caused serious damage to grass crops. However, the way the Society went on to manage the reserve annoyed many people in

⁴¹ See 4.3.2, 4.3.4 and Chapter Six.

Islay, particularly farmers. In response to their concerns, and also as part of a more general policy to consult with local communities, the RSPB convened a discussion evening at the Bridgend Hotel in February 2000. The Society's stated aim for this meeting was to canvas ideas and opinions that could then be incorporated into the five-year management plan for the reserve.

I arrived at the hotel quite early and two members of RSPB staff from the mainland were still setting up the meeting room. These were Dave Sexton (Head of Reserves for Scotland) and Tricia Bradley (Regional Manager South and West Scotland). Sexton approached me on my arrival, introduced himself and gave me a firm handshake. He was sharply dressed in a suit, an unusual sight in Islay. I was surprised to see these 'big shots' from the mainland and it seemed from this that the RSPB were keen to show people in Islay how seriously they took the meeting and, by implication, community involvement in their work.

After a time, a sizeable crowd of people arrived and the room filled up. The first part of the evening consisted of three slide presentations by different members of staff from Loch Gruinart. Clive McKay, the warden, began by discussing the management of the reserve for wildlife. This was followed by a presentation about farming on the reserve⁴² by Graham Grant, the farm manager. Finally, Julie Stoneman, the assistant warden, discussed the 'people side' of the reserve. A variety of informational literature was handed out to the audience, including a feedback form that invited those attending to give their views about the reserve, what they thought should be changed and ways in which they thought the reserve could contribute to the community.

Clive, who was dressed more casually than Dave Sexton, was keen to emphasise the planning that goes into managing a large nature reserve. Every piece of land had a purpose for wildlife and across the whole reserve the RSPB were able to manage the land for a variety of important species such as Choughs, Corncrakes, Hen Harriers, breeding waders and wintering wildfowl. Land was also managed for geese, although the numbers of Barnacle Geese seemed to have reached capacity. Agriculture was very important to all this and Clive stressed that "without (cows) Loch Gruinart would be a much less interesting place."

⁴² Much of the Loch Gruinart reserve is actively managed using cattle and sheep.

Graham, a sturdy farmer who originally came from the nearby island of Colonsay, continued the farming emphasis. He spoke in a very straightforward way about the farming operation and discussed technical details about livestock husbandry. This ‘farmer talk’ was unpretentious but it still seemed important to the RSPB that they presented their work in a manner that farming people would respect and understand. Graham showed that he was a proper farmer and that he regarded the reserve as a proper farm. He also stressed that modern farming can be good for wildlife. This was important because amongst farmers in Islay there was a widespread view that the RSPB knew very little about farming and had run down what was once a top quality farm.

Julie finished by discussing people and the reserve, which she did in a friendly, light-hearted way. She discussed the appeal of the area to visitors and the involvement with local schools and community events. It was also stressed that the RSPB use local contractors for work on the reserve and that they have trained local people in farm work. A lot of their budget thus goes straight to the community.

After a short break the general discussion began, chaired by Dave Sexton. The first question came from Archie Baxter, an old farmer with an interest in wildlife. He said that the RSPB had stated that the numbers of Barnacle Geese had remained stable at Gruinart over the past ten years. But he suggested that the area had supported comparable numbers for at least fifty years. Given this stability in a core area for the birds, he questioned why there needed to be such a large population of geese on the rest of the island. To this was added a comment from Jack Matthews, an English farmer, of: “Why do we need fifty thousand geese on the island?” From this beginning the discussion soon became embroiled in protracted goose talk.⁴³ In particular, two farmers (Jack Matthews and Colin Wilkie) were keen to press the RSPB on various goose-related questions, most of which were fielded by Dave Sexton and Tricia Bradley. The discussion became heated when an anti-RSPB activist, who had come over from the mainland, attacked the RSPB, alleging that they had achieved little success in managing for wildlife at Loch Gruinart (particularly Choughs) and were unaccountable. But the RSPB had their defenders, such as English hotelier Nigel Deacon who said that as a

⁴³ The goose problem had been the major conservation (and indeed farming) issue in Islay since the 1970s (see chapters Four and Eight).

major employer on the island and one whose business depended on the quality of the environment, he hated to hear the RSPB attacked in such a way. A holidaymaker backed up Nigel by stressing how good the RSPB reserve was for watching a variety of birds, particularly the area of floods that had been created.⁴⁴ Colin Wilkie then got things back on to the geese by arguing that were it not for the geese Islay could be as good for growing grass and for cattle rearing as New Zealand. Nigel countered this by proclaiming that no one wanted to buy the Islay cheese that dairy farmers like Colin were producing.⁴⁵

After the discussion had drawn to a close, many of the participants mingled over tea and biscuits. What was striking was that the differences that had been so apparent during the meeting were either swiftly and enthusiastically put aside or joked about. I saw Nigel Deacon and Jack Matthews engrossed in what seemed a most amicable conversation. Clive McKay was talking with an old farmer who with considerable good-natured humour told him that the Choughs had only started to decline in Islay since Clive had gone around painting their eggs as part of his PhD research into the birds. The farmer joked that he was going to raise this in the discussion but he had decided not to because it would have been unkind. Later on Clive was chatting with Colin Wilkie, whose farm was adjacent to the RSPB reserve. Colin said to Clive, “You can have a go at one another in the meeting but so long as you can have a laugh about it afterwards then that’s okay.” Amicable relations were thus rapidly restored and, even though some local farmers harboured grievances against the RSPB,⁴⁶ this did not necessarily translate into open animosity towards local staff or the Society’s supporters. The only absentees from this banter were the prominent anti-RSPB activists who had attended the meeting. They had all left promptly at the end of the discussion.

Despite the reinstatement of convivial relations, there were reservations as to what had been accomplished. I heard one of the local RSPB staff reflecting on how the evening had gone. He felt that it had been a qualified success but was disappointed that Dave Sexton had done a lot of the talking because Sexton was not somebody who farmers

⁴⁴ See figures Twenty-two and Twenty-three.

⁴⁵ A few weeks after the meeting the Islay Creamery closed down, more-or-less destroying the island’s dairy industry (see 3.4.2).

⁴⁶ At the time of the meeting, Colin Wilkie and Jack Matthews were both fighting the RSPB in the courts over the right to shoot Barnacle Geese on their land.

could easily relate to. He was also frustrated that the discussion had been hijacked by goose talk and that consequently they had been unable to talk much about the management of the reserve.

A few months later I interviewed Clive McKay and asked him what sort of response the RSPB had got to the feedback form that had been handed out. He said, “We had a moderate response.” I said that a lot of farmers in Islay were critical of the way that the RSPB managed the reserve (something the RSPB were aware of) and I wondered if he was surprised that a better response had not been elicited from these strong feelings.

Clive replied:

Yeah we thought we'd get more on that sort of side of things.

Why do you think people didn't bother?

[Pause]

You don't know?

I don't know.

The RSPB's intention was for the discussion evening to provide a way of expressing and influencing their position in relation to Islay. They were keen to show their support for the community and to incorporate local knowledge and values into their reserve management. In the three presentations it was emphasised that the reserve management 'made sense' (Clive), that the reserve was a normal farm run by normal farmers (Graham) and that the RSPB were an important and economically benevolent part of the community (Julie). These presentations thus argued that the RSPB were an integral part of Islay. However the very format of the meeting and the RSPB's intentions for it served to place them at a remove from Islay because a formal meeting with an explicitly separate 'community' was required in order to gather and discuss local perspectives. This reinforced the impression that the management of the reserve essentially served outside concerns and was informed by a different body of knowledge. The two bigwigs from the mainland personified these outside interests. An Islay-based employee had been concerned that farmers would be unable to relate to the mainland RSPB staff (and perhaps by implication the organisation itself) because of their appearance and manner. Perhaps it had been decided that the presence of individuals higher up the organisation would be good for public relations but, as well as reinforcing the RSPB as an outside

interest, it encouraged the discussion of a much broader range of issues than had originally been intended. The opportunity to get at those at the top appeared to be irresistible to two farmers who were engaged at the time in a legal battle with the RSPB over their rights to shoot geese. The RSPB had intended to use their reserves and the discussion evening to influence their situation in relation to Islay but the debate had been taken over by a subject where their position was too intransigent and divergent from the farmers' to allow for this. Interest in discussing the management of the reserves was minimal, even within the confidentiality of the feedback forms.

The meeting highlighted not just the positioning strategies of the RSPB but also of those in attendance. Nigel Deacon, the pro-RSPB hotelier, was keen to emphasise that he was a major employer in the area and a successful businessman and this strengthened his implication that Islay farmers needed to be more in tune with outside interests, something that had not been evident in their marketing of local cheese. The holidaymaker, who had stressed his enjoyment of the Loch Gruinart reserve, served to emphasise the sorts of values Nigel had in mind. Farmers who had been in public dispute with the RSPB over goose shooting were also able to reiterate the imperfections of goose management as it operated in Islay at the time. This corporate representation of the RSPB in Islay thus created a context within which others could express their position on the island. By stressing their perspective on the RSPB, individuals were able to communicate certain values and understandings that were relevant to how they perceived themselves to be socially situated. The reinstatement of amicable relations at the conclusion of the formal discussion allowed for more individuality in how people expressed themselves, although for the anti-RSPB activists who left early the differences appeared to remain irreconcilable.

2.3 *The White-tailed Eagle at Knocklearach*

Whilst I was living in Islay I was mainly known to people for two things – firstly I was a birdwatcher, and secondly I rode around on a bicycle. Often these two activities would coincide. This meant that I regularly got into conversations with people about birds and other wildlife. If I was not riding my bike then I usually travelled by bus and the local bus drivers seemed to be aware of my interest in birds. I sometimes had good

conversations on the subject with a few of them.

On a dreary November morning I was getting the bus up to Ballygrant where I was working. The bus driver was Neil, a local man perhaps in his late forties. I had never really talked much to Neil but I expect he would have seen me birdwatching as he drove about the island. As I was waiting to disembark from the bus, Neil said to me:

Is that White-tailed Eagle still at Knocklearach?"⁴⁷

I don't know. I've not seen it myself but I heard it was seen last week. There's quite a few Golden Eagles around though.

Oh yes. *

I then disembarked from the bus.

There are a few factual points that should be added to this brief account. The White-tailed Eagle is a scarce wanderer to Islay, mainly from the re-introduced population further north, although it bred on the island until at least 1870 (Elliott 1989). Two days previously I had been told by Malcolm Ogilvie, a biologist who lived in Islay, about a White-tailed Eagle at Knocklearach. He said that the bird had been seen by a group of visitors being escorted by Audrey Patterson, the owner of the farm where I lived. Audrey went on to tell me about her sighting the following day. Neither Malcolm nor Audrey indicated that they knew of anyone else having seen the bird.

As can be seen, I was part of a small and informal network of people (mostly incomers) who reported interesting bird sightings to one another. I was not aware of Neil being a part of this rather small group. So a first point of interest in this brief exchange is that bird sightings were sometimes communicated through whatever social networks Neil was a part of. In this case it would be interesting to know what the source of the information about the eagle was for Neil's network. It seems possible that other local people had seen the bird (perhaps even Neil himself) and felt it was significant enough an event to communicate to their friends, who also appreciated its notoriety.

⁴⁷ Knocklearach is a farm a short distance from Ballygrant.

More importantly my exchange with Neil was typical of the sorts of exchange that I had with people in Islay about wildlife. These exchanges tended to be different to those that I normally encountered elsewhere. I was used to being seen as an expert by those I could describe as lay people. If someone wanted to engage me in conversation about birds they would typically ask a question such as, "Have you seen anything interesting?" In such a question the speaker usually acknowledges deference to a greater knowledge of the subject on my part. I was almost never approached in this manner in Islay, except by visitors or by people who actually wanted to turn around the question and tell me about what they had seen. Instead exchanges about wildlife in Islay were characterised by the sort of question with which Neil began: "Is that White-tailed Eagle still at Knocklearach?"

The important point about Neil's opening gambit was what he was communicating about his knowledge and the relationship of that knowledge to my own. He was opening the conversation on an equal footing, quite comparable to my own, even though it was I who was the ostentatious bird enthusiast. Although Neil was just engaging me in idle small talk about something he knew I was interested in he could have begun by asking a more deferential question. But like many I encountered in Islay he preferred to address me from a position of equality regarding our grasp of the subject of wildlife, at least when it was associated with the island.⁴⁸ This he achieved by asking a question that was specific and information-based, rather than a submissive, general and ignorance-based question such as, "Have you seen anything interesting?" The question further helped to keep the two of us on an equal footing because I was restricted in how I could answer. There was less opportunity for me to show off an array of interesting sightings that I might have made. Both Neil and myself appeared keen to position ourselves in relation to Islay and the negotiation of knowledge within this brief exchange allowed this to be expressed. Neil began with an enquiry that proved his knowledge whilst raising questions of my own. I was able to show that I had gained enough contacts to give me access to information about certain events of import on the island. The outside was often seen in Islay as being ignorant of circumstances on the island but I was able to prove some level of commitment and integration (cf. Cohen 1987: 24).

⁴⁸ Wildlife away from Islay was rarely a topic of conversation.

One is left with an impression that this was not an exchange between a layperson and an expert but one between two equals. There were no overtones of submission and domination regarding the subject matter but instead relations were more contestable. Although this was a minor communication between two individuals of no fixed allegiance, it illustrates some of the recurring patterns of exchange that typified relations between local people and conservation organisations in Islay. The contestations and assertions of knowledge that were writ large in the public arena filtered down to inform even mundane and informal exchanges. It is not surprising then that one of the most common complaints heard in Islay concerning conservation organisations was that ‘local knowledge’ of birds and other wildlife was ignored or excluded. Whilst I do not think Neil was exactly equating me with the conservation organisations, I did represent ‘outside knowledge’ that had come into the island. As such, I suggest that Neil, and others I encountered, were trying (perhaps unconsciously) to impress their comparable understanding of local wildlife in their exchanges with me.

2.4 *SNH and the management agreement statistics*

SNH has been the government body concerned with implementing conservation legislation in Scotland since it superseded the NCC in 1992. Much of their work relates to areas that have been specifically designated for this purpose. Whilst there is an array of different designations, the most important in practical terms are SSSIs.⁴⁹ In Islay there are nine SSSIs covering 16,406 ha (around 26% of the island). The significance of the designation to farmers and landowners is that they need to consult SNH if they plan to change the way that they manage their land. If SNH consider this change to be detrimental to the conservation interests that the site has been designated for then they have to compensate the farmer or landowner by entering into a management agreement.⁵⁰ A sum is agreed and paid either on an annual basis or as a one-off payment. The amount is based, theoretically at least, on profit-foregone. Farmers and landowners in Islay have also received money from SNH to compensate them for damage caused to their land by grazing geese.⁵¹ Until the winter of 2000/2001 they

⁴⁹ Other designations tend to be inserted within SSSIs so land outwith a SSSI is not usually designated at all.

⁵⁰ See chapters Four and Seven.

⁵¹ See chapters Four and Eight.

were paid a specified amount of money per goose and this meant that the geese on the island had to be counted on a regular basis to ensure that the farmer received compensation appropriate to the numbers that their land held. Because SNH administered so much land and money in Islay, they established an office in Bowmore that employed four full-time staff in 2000.

When I interviewed farmers in Islay a subject that arose on a regular basis was the money that other farmers were receiving from SNH. Farmers had been able to unearth this information from the annual *Facts and figures* document that SNH published (Scottish Natural Heritage 1999a). This included details of all the individual management agreements and the money each farmer received from the goose scheme. Anyone could pick up the *Facts and figures* document free of charge from the SNH office in Bowmore.⁵²

The goose money was a contentious issue. Some farmers felt that the counts that were made on their farms were inaccurate and thus the payments were unfavourable to them. Hard-done-by farmers would complain about those who were getting several times the compensation yet seemed only comparably hampered by goose damage. Iain Taylor, a farmer from the Rhinns, said to me, "I know a boy who's getting twenty thousand and he cuts silage a fortnight after us." Iain and his family usually received around £1300 a year from the goose scheme. Some farmers also complained that there were others who were not doing a very good job but who had top quality equipment because they were getting more goose money. I occasionally encountered speculation that the more influential farmers within the local NFUS (and thus those at the negotiating table) were engineering things so that they themselves did well out of the goose scheme.

The same grumbles arose against farmers who received money from management agreements. One farmer complained about how the price of draff⁵³ was going up because some farmers, whom he had discovered were getting big handouts from SNH, were able to pay more for it than he was. He added that some had felt sorry for the dairy farmers who had lost their business with the closure of the creamery but now that

⁵² 1998/99 was the first time that the goose count figures had been published. Management agreement payments had been published before but the document had not been free of charge.

⁵³ Draff is a by-product of the distilling industry and is an important supplementary feed for livestock in Islay.

they knew how much some of them were getting from SNH they were less sympathetic. Such payments, it was suggested, were splitting farmers on the island, with there being seven or eight farmers getting over £30,000 a year from SNH, usually as payment for not doing things (e.g. not planting coniferous trees) rather than for actually doing something positive. Alec Watson, an old farmer with a tenancy outside the designated areas, was bothered by what he saw as the unfairness of the management agreement system. “Good luck to those that get it,” he said to me, “but they’re getting it for nothing. The money we get for geese is a lot but you can see the damage for yourself. The SSSI farms are getting money for nothing.” He knew a consultant who had told him to keep in with SNH and the RSPB because that was where the money was. Not surprisingly, one farmer I spoke to who received a large annual payment for a management agreement was annoyed that the information had been published but he realised SNH were a public body and had to do this.

Perhaps because of this newly acquired information, there seemed to be a concomitant change in attitude emerging towards SSSIs amongst Islay farmers, particularly those whose land lay outside the designated areas. Farmers were now starting to wonder if they would do better if they could claim money from SNH, a feeling strengthened by the farming recession at the time. This was in marked contrast to the situation in 1987 when much of the Rhinns was designated to great outcry.⁵⁴ One of the main protests at that time was that the restrictions imposed by the designation would stifle normal productive farming activity and bring down the value of farmland. But many farmers whom I spoke to in 2000 seemed to be starting to see conservation as something they should try to integrate. One who lost his dairy herd with the closure of the creamery said, “I think we’ll try to fit conservation into our system better and through that if we carry fewer, better stock that would be a good way to go. I like wildlife.”

When I talked to staff at SNH’s Bowmore office towards the end of my fieldwork they were very interested to know what farmers had been telling me about the management agreement figures. I said that farmers had been discussing them a lot and that, although there was some misinterpretation, the new information was causing concern and creating a sense of division. The SNH staff wondered if it would be worth having a

⁵⁴ See 4.3.4.

public meeting in which the reasons behind the management agreement payments could be explained.

The above illustrates the principal means through which conservation legislation was implemented in Islay (and elsewhere in the UK) after the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act. Land was formally classified as being of importance for conservation and this effectively meant that government (through the statutory body of SNH) accepted responsibility for wildlife and their habitats within these areas. Because SNH were not normally the managers of designated land they were obliged to enter into compensatory agreements with those who did if there was a proposed change in management perceived to threaten the wildlife for which SNH were responsible. Restrictions were thus placed on a farmer within an SSSI but any loss of income created was compensated. Importantly this meant that the farmer who received compensatory payments should *not* have been making a profit out of the agreement. The compensation payments for goose damage were also calculated on a profit-foregone basis. Despite this, when many farmers saw the details of management agreements and goose money in the *Facts and figures* document they quite readily understood the payments listed for each farmer as income rather than as compensation. Although this can partly be explained by a lack of clarity in the way the figures were presented, it also raises some more interesting questions. A farmer who complains about the greater success of another local farmer in obtaining money from conservation organisations is not just saying something about how he feels about that farmer; he is also articulating concerns about his own circumstances and the outside influences that conspire to make these more difficult. SNH, through their implementation of conservation legislation in Islay, could appear to be just such a manifestation of the values and interests of the outside world.

Within this discourse the outside world could be seen to possess a number of capacities. Firstly, the outside brought constraints on economic activities particularly on much valued agricultural productivity. Farmers within SSSIs needed to ask permission from SNH if they were to change the management of their farm. It was possible that permission would not be granted but in return SNH would compensate the farmer. The money that some farmers were known to receive from this added to a sense of individuation in the farming community or that those paid more were given unfair

advantage. The outside world, with its money and different values, was thus seen to have the potential to create divisions within the community. In addition to these apparently negative perceptions of constraint and divisiveness, conservation also began to be perceived as offering a greater economic potential in the future, particularly in the light of the keenly felt agricultural recession. Productive values could be reimagined as the production of better quality livestock from more extensively managed farms. Consultants were advising farmers to keep in with the conservationists because they were the ones with the money and some farmers whose land was outwith the SSSIs were aggrieved rather than thankful at their exclusion. It was thus expected that the outside values of conservation organisations would have considerable influence over the future trajectory of the agricultural economy in Islay.

Finally, it is worth noting the interest shown by SNH staff in what farmers had said to me about the management agreement figures. Perhaps because they were involved in relationships in which trust was difficult to develop, public bodies such as SNH were usually keen to be seen as open about what they did and how they spent their money. But on a local level the consequences of the sort of openness the *Facts and figures* document provided clearly generated concerns and bitterness. This was something the local SNH officers were aware was happening but they seemed unsure of the exact grumbles that farmers had. The anthropological fieldworker was considered to be in a better position to uncover this information.

2.5 *The Galloway cattle and the RSPB*

Anthony Scott was an Englishman who farmed 2000 acres on the Rhinns. His late father had come to the island in the 1970s after purchasing a large estate. The tenant farms had subsequently been sold off, which had left the family with four farms to themselves where they produced beef cattle and sheep. Like all farmers in Islay, the profitability of his livestock had been tumbling for a number of years.

When I interviewed Anthony he was embarking on a new farming enterprise in conjunction with the RSPB. When I taped the interview he was reluctant to tell me in any detail about this new project but after I switched off the recorder he set about

explaining what it would involve.

Anthony had purchased a herd of Galloway cattle, a traditional breed native to the southwest of Scotland. He was also about to acquire a flock of Blackface sheep that are a hardy breed favoured for rough grazing. This represented a shift away from the more intensive livestock husbandry he had been practising during his eight years running the farm. Like most Islay farmers he had been raising continental breeds of cattle, such as Simmentals, which gained weight quickly and sold for a good price at market. These cattle were usually housed indoors in winter and this required an intensive input of feeds and silage. Anthony also reared sheep indoors because he thought Islay was too wet for the big lowland breeds to be kept outside permanently. The Galloways and the Blackfaces on the other hand would need little assistance to survive outdoors year-round. They had gone out of favour with farmers because they were small and did not fetch as high a price at auction as the larger continental or lowland breeds.

When I suggested to Anthony that Galloways might not sell for much he said, "Well they are because it's all image and (I'm) actually going to sell them to the man that's going to eat them as opposed to taking them to an auction mart." The way he was going to market the meat from the Galloways and Blackfaces was as conservation friendly produce. He had gone into partnership with the RSPB and they hoped to be able to sell the meat through their magazine and website to their million-plus members. In return, Anthony would farm in a manner deemed more appropriate for important bird species, particularly Chough and Lapwing. The native breeds would help with the Choughs because they would be outside all year. Choughs feed on invertebrates found around cattle dung and the RSPB suspected that the birds were declining in Islay because of the trend towards in-wintering cattle. This meant that during the hardest months of the year the Choughs' favoured food source was largely unavailable.

Anthony had chosen Galloway cattle because they were cute and photogenic, being blessed with long, silvery hair, doe-eyes and short, stumpy legs. This would all help with marketing, as would the novelty value. Anthony said he had this vision of well-to-do people at a dinner party drinking Chardonnay and eating beef from his farm. The hosts would be saying where they got the meat from and that they had a leaflet about the place. It was a good conversation piece for suburban middle class couples

entertaining friends.

When I asked Anthony how he had got the initial idea for this venture he told me it had been suggested by Nigel Deacon, the enterprising English hotelier and keen supporter of the RSPB. Anthony had then worked on the idea and gone to the RSPB who he said were very keen to become involved (although he went out and bought the cattle to prove his intentions). He reckoned that the RSPB could be a very substantial market that could take a lot of the meat from the island. Anthony would be finishing the animals himself, something unusual in Islay, because he saw no point in selling a calf for £300 to a man who would then go on and sell it for £1000. He would sell it straight to the man who wanted to eat it for a much higher price than he could get at market.

Anthony said that local farmers had been a bit cynical about what they saw as a wealthy English farmer with his hobby cattle but he thought they might change their minds when they saw how profitable it could be. He was unconcerned by what other farmers thought of him and reflected that perhaps this was because he was an incomer. It would doubtless be better for marketing if he was a real born-and-bred local farmer producing this traditional meat but it was probably because he was *not* local that he was able to take the plunge into such an unusual venture. Anthony also reckoned he was young enough to change his ways. His father had never been keen on conservationists but Anthony had realised that conservation and whisky were pretty much all Islay had going for it. To survive in farming one had to embrace conservation and that was what he had decided to do.

Islay farmers had been struggling economically since the BSE crisis of 1996 and confidence had been dented further by the closure of the island creamery in March 2000. This meant that farmers were looking for new ways of earning money and new markets for their produce. This presented farmers with the problem of how they could change their activities and market their produce differently. Anthony was perhaps in a better position to adjust his operation than most Islay farmers but this was not just because he was better off. He believed that the fact of him being an incomer (and perhaps not too set in his ways) made it easier to experiment and develop new ideas. He was aided by another incomer, Nigel the hotelier, who was keen to encourage those farmers he was friendly with to diversify into tourism and conservation. Anthony

thought that most local farmers seemed to conform to what were, within the Islay context, more conventional approaches to farming. His view, and he was not alone in expressing it, was that innovation usually came to Islay from the outside.

It would be tempting to say that local farmers were conservative, but the irony in this was that Anthony's new innovation was to turn the clock back by using traditional breeds and less intensive methods. Most farmers in Islay had long held the view that one needed to move away from the extensive systems of the past in order to produce more livestock possessing the attributes the market desired. But the agricultural recession had encouraged farmers to re-evaluate the qualities that Islay had to offer and to consider new markets for their produce. Anthony recognised a need to engage with different discourses – those of the suburban dinner party set and the RSPB member – if a productive future in farming was to be secured. The farmer's relationship with the outside world required this kind of re-imagination and conservation organisations such as the RSPB would inevitably be a part of this future.

2.6 *Commentary*

Once I was talking to an English farmer in the bar of the Port Charlotte Hotel. He asked me what my PhD was about and I told him I was interested in the relationship between conservation organisations and local people in Islay. “Which is terrible,” he replied immediately and with some conviction. The sketches presented above, in which the main players were introduced, serve to illustrate that the relationship between these two groups of people was more complex and ambiguous than my friend at the bar had indicated.

A number of features of the relationship can be teased out from these sketches:

1. The relationship between ideas of the local and ideas of the outside world was pivotal. The outside could be constraining, as in the cases of the distillery effluent debate and the SNH management agreements, or innovative, as with incoming farmers such as Anthony. The local could be the rural idyll with a good and safe environment and an intimate sense of community, or it could be conservative and

resistant to new ideas. Conservation organisations provided a means of discussing the distinction between the local and the outside and of representing one's own position in relation to Islay. It should be noted that local ideas and 'local' people and outside ideas and 'incomers' did not have to be associated.

2. The discursive ideas of the local and the outside were connected to ideas of continuity and change, through concepts of innovation and constraint and contrasts between different bodies of knowledge and different values. Change and continuity were thus understood partly in terms of where ideas and practices were perceived to originate.
3. Conservation organisations, like other bodies that are perceived to have arrived in Islay from outside, created tensions in the relationships between individuals. At the end of the RSPB discussion evening, there was a desire to restore personal relationships after conflicts had been publicly exposed. Outside values and money, such as those inherent in SNH's management agreement system, were associated with a sense of division within the farming community.
4. Conservation organisations and farming people understood each other to possess somewhat different (although not mutually exclusive) sets of knowledge and values. Contestations about knowledge were related to practices of social positioning in the island, as in my conversation with Neil the bus driver. For farmers such as Anthony there was a growing realisation of a need to engage with outside discourses and the knowledge and values represented therein.

These notions of continuity and change, the local and the outside world and the ways in which these come to be represented have been the mainstay of most ethnographic studies of rural British and Irish communities. A number of different approaches have been brought to bear on these issues beginning with the pioneering application of structural-functional models by Arensberg and Kimball in the 1930s (1968), moving through the more diachronic approaches of Frankenberg (1957) and Littlejohn (1963) to the appreciation of symbolic boundaries exemplified in the work of Anthony Cohen and others in the 1980s (1982; 1985; 1986; 1987). Below I consider these different styles of describing rural communities and assess the ways in which such approaches might provide insights into the ethnographic material I have presented above.

For Arensberg and Kimball, rural County Clare in the west of Ireland was a community

that arose in relation to the keystone social institution of the family. The characteristic customs and traditions of the community were predicated on this social structure:

Something in the course of events prescribed... by the habitual arrangement of human lives existing in the small farmers' homes and communities has always lain behind the form of custom and the kind of attitude we have encountered (1968: 299-300).

Therefore, the world outside of the community was not integral to its creation and maintenance. The community existed in a steady state in which any change was diffused and the structural equilibrium maintained. Individuals were relegated to being representative "instances of a general condition" (ibid: xxvii) and rural County Clare was treated as a sample for comparison with other rural communities, which would presumably exhibit similar structural characteristics even if the 'local culture' varied.

In the work of Ronald Frankenberg, emerging from the Manchester School of Max Gluckman in the 1950s, a more diachronic combination of structural-functionalism and Marxism was used to model social interaction. In his study of the Welsh village of Pentreduwaith social class assumed as much prominence as the family as an explanatory device. Within this rubric attention was paid to the effects of the outside world on the village and to the role of the largely middle-class 'outsiders' who had moved there. The influence of Gluckman is apparent in Frankenberg's understanding of the role of conflict in the maintenance of social cohesion and of the incorporation of outsiders into the village social structure:

[Pentre people and outsiders] are linked in... ways which both unite them into one society and determine their respective roles within it. Pentre people try to bring outsiders into social activity to solve some of their problems of decision and organisation. Outsiders allow themselves to be so used because of their desire to conform with expected patterns of behaviour associated in the English past with the squire and his tenants. Thus village society in this stage of its history goes some, if not all, of the way towards uniting in a community of interests those who on the national level may be bitterly divided (1957: 64).

So for Frankenberg community cohesion is not dependent upon an unchanging matrix of social relations but on shared interests and ties that render internal divisions as secondary and the potentially conflicting positions of local and outsider as complementary rather than antagonistic. One might perceive the same sort of complementarity in the roles of incomers and locals in the public meetings in Islay that I have described above. In the case of the distillery meeting, there were shared concerns over the problems that the proposed pipeline would bring but it was the incomers, perhaps because they were less burdened by the “problems of decision and organisation,” who spoke out on behalf of the community. Likewise Anthony thought it was easier for him to take the unusual step of going into partnership with the RSPB because he was an incomer and was young enough not to be ‘set in his ways’. Perhaps local farmers would watch with interest to see if this incomer’s socially and economically risky innovation was worth following. But whilst Frankenberg provided a subtle description of this sort of political and social positioning, he said far less about people’s interpretations of ‘the local’ and ‘the outside world’ and avoided elaborating on the ambiguities of these ideas. His approach to the local and the outside was still inherently social (and largely associated with class) rather than cultural. The construction and perception of meaning was not the central concern that it later became in the anthropology of rural Britain and which it remains in this present work. Communities for Frankenberg were primarily still loci of face-to-face and multi-stranded interactions conducted within a relatively small and internally coherent group of people (Rapport & Overing 2000: 63).

This more symbolic tendency began to emerge with James Littlejohn’s study of Westrigg in the Scottish borders (1963). Although still a classic example of the sociological ‘community study’, Littlejohn produced a highly nuanced account of social relations, the meanings that inhered within them and of how his informants perceived these to have changed during their lifetimes. There was still the same focus on social class as found in the work of Frankenberg but more attention was paid to the symbolic markers that differentiated between the classes, such as houses, manner of speech, clothing, eating habits and relations with the wider world. Class was thus rendered as a social milieu that was experienced as a subjective horizon to one’s experience and not simply an objective system within which one’s role is fitted. Differences within and between classes and within the community were thus highly contextual, flexible and

individuated. In this respect Littlejohn prefigured both the critiques of community studies in the 1970s (see Bell & Newby 1974) and the symbolic approach to community of Cohen and others.

The work of Anthony Cohen in adapting Barth's theories of the symbolic construction of boundaries to the study of community, identity and belonging in the British Isles became influential and pervasive during the 1980s. He defines the properties of symbols thus:

Symbols...do more than merely stand for or represent something else...They also allow those who employ them to supply part of their meaning...Symbols [are] shared by those who use the same language, or participate in the same symbolic behaviour through which these categories are expressed and marked. But their meanings are *not* shared in the same way. Each is mediated by the idiosyncratic experience of the individual... Symbols do not so much express meaning as give us the capacity to make meaning (1985: 14-15 emphasis in original).

Symbols in this sense are empty (or partially empty) vessels that the individual can fill with their own meanings. Being a member of a group involves sharing the same symbols rather than understanding the same (implicitly private) meanings. The utility of symbols in achieving this arises from their ambiguity:

Not *all* social categories are so variable in meaning. But those whose meanings are the most elusive, the hardest to pin down, tend to be those also hedged around the most ambiguous symbolism. In these cases the content of the categories is so unclear that they exist largely or only in terms of their symbolic boundaries... Community is just such a boundary-expressing symbol. As a symbol, it is held in common by its members; but its meaning varies with its members' unique orientations to it (ibid: 15 emphasis in original).

So ambiguous symbols allow for group cohesion because they disguise internal differences through the overarching sharing of symbolic forms – “the simple mask adorning the complex face” (Cohen 1987: 201). It is through this sharing of a symbol

and through interaction and comparison with those perceived to be lacking it, that a mental boundary can be described around the group and its members to enhance and engender a sense of belonging. The appreciation of difference, and thus of identity and belonging, therefore tends to be most heightened at the boundary (or boundaries) of the group (cf. Gray 2002), or indeed the self. The individual can appreciate many such ‘concentric’ boundaries depending on the context of the particular interaction.

Various symbolic approaches to community have predominated in the anthropology of rural Britain, and particularly the Scottish Highlands, from the 1970s through to the 1990s. In Malcolm Chapman’s (1978) work he describes how the differences between Highland and Lowland, Celt and Anglo-Saxon, are refracted in literary discourse through a series of mutually reinforcing symbolic dichotomies such as female: male, emotional: intellectual, subjectivity: objectivity, etc. As such any discourse of the Highlands contains essentialising traps, not least the conflation of ‘Scottishness’ with a Highland and Gaelic essence in which notions of identity appear to be ‘forced’ from outside. Whilst more recent ethnographies have sought to consider the complexities and ambiguities of Highland milieus, there has remained a focus on ‘traditional’ Highland symbols of identity – on crofting, fishing, the Gaelic language, the tweed industry, the kirk – and on a shared history of Jacobitism, clans, the Highland Clearances and emigration (see Byron 1986; Cohen 1987; Ennew 1980b; Macdonald 1997b; Mewett 1982; Parman 1990; Stephenson 1984). These have often been represented as the “things that bind” (Cohen 1982: 16) in the face of encroaching threats to the local culture but the contrast this creates at the boundary of the community can serve to heighten what Mewett calls ‘local consciousness’ (1982) – a sense of connection to place and the other people with whom it is shared. The sense of continuity, tradition and belonging that is constructed through the tensions immanent in these diverse relationships provide a stability from which future uncertainties can be negotiated (Cohen 1987: 201-202).⁵⁵ ‘Localism’ is thus revealed as a possible strategy of resistance against the conflicting demands of the wider world (cf. Nadel-Klein 1991).

So returning to the sketches presented above one might consider these as describing interactions at the boundary between the Islay community and the conservation

⁵⁵ See Mackenzie (1998) for an example of how symbols of traditional identity such as Gaelic, crofting and Sabbath observance were employed in a public inquiry to argue against a proposed quarry in Harris.

organisations. These interactions were both indicative and constitutive of this boundary and of the groups on both sides. Sometimes, as in the case of the RSPB meeting, the boundary seemed explicitly 'given' (cf. Ennew 1980a) in the formal arrangements of the meeting: the RSPB were 'consulting with the community'. In the example of the distillery meeting, the boundary is perhaps more ambiguous because the distilleries were clearly local but were internationally owned and financed. At certain moments it appeared as if the distilleries were outside of the community, particularly when they were seen to be co-operating with the government agency, but at other moments the ties of dependency between the distilleries and Islay were also revealed. This raises the questions of exactly what sort of "boundary-expressing symbol" the distilleries were and what sort of boundary was being invoked in this instance. What was being expressed was certainly a relationship of difference but if a boundary was being sought it remained elusive.

At the RSPB meeting the nature of the relationship between the RSPB and the community appeared to vary at different moments and in response to the invocation of different symbols. For example, the utilisation of 'sharp suits', 'cows', 'the bigwigs from the mainland', 'geese', 'Choughs', 'the past', 'bringing money and jobs to the community', 'Islay cheese' and 'having a laugh afterwards' revealed different aspects of the relationship between farmers and conservationists. The employment of 'geese' within the meeting ostensibly manifested an opposition between Colin Wilkie, the farmer, and Clive McKay, the RSPB warden, but because they were able to share in 'having a laugh afterwards' certain of these differences between them could be concealed. From these two symbolic perspectives, the difference perceived between the two men varied. One might speculate that with 'geese' the perception that they were part of different social groups (farmers and conservationists – two of the 'sides' in the discussion) was accentuated whereas 'having a laugh afterwards' emphasised that they were a part of the same relational social group ('people who know each other', 'friends' or 'neighbours' perhaps). However they or I might have determined this, it appears that any differences made manifest were not significant enough to prevent their concealment or reduction later. One could argue that the boundary being expressed varied with the symbol but one might also suggest that different symbols offered different perspectives to the two men on how they were related. This is not to say that they never perceived a 'boundary' at all but that they did not *have to perceive one* (except perhaps surrounding

their 'self') to appreciate the rather complex formations of difference that inhabited their relationship and the "multiplicity of identities that coexist from any single perspective" (Ardener 1989a: 212). In this case (and also in the brief conversation between myself and Neil the bus driver) difference appeared constantly negotiable and symbols were used to reveal certain qualities that formed the basis for this comparison.

The subject of negotiation in relationships invokes notions of power and marginalisation, both of which appear to emerge in the sketch concerning the SNH management agreement statistics. In this, I describe how an outside agency appeared to have a divisive rather than a cohesive effect amongst the farmers whom I spoke to. Farmers who either thought they suffered significantly from goose damage or were unable to enter into management agreements felt resentment towards those whom they learnt were receiving substantial payments. The outside values and practices that were manifested in SNH thus appeared to have the power to effect the atomisation of the 'farming community'. Following Nadel-Klein (1991) one might understand this as part of the marginalizing of localism by outside authorities arising through differential dynamics of power. Management agreements and compensation payments are thus understood as a mechanism for rendering localism and local consciousness as politically marginal (cf. Byron 1986). This 'othering' of the local has, according to Nadel-Klein, not only been produced through the actions of the state but also in ethnographic accounts of the localism of Scottish communities. But in this case a more complex interlocking of the local and the outside world is revealed in which individual farmers' versions of 'localism' were also negotiable and the outside interests embodied in SNH could be construed as terms within which future strategies could be plotted.

Conservation could thus be used as a way of perceiving certain kinds of interaction with the outside world that, as in the case of Anthony, could just as easily appear liberating as constraining or marginalizing. To do justice to this ethnography, one needs an approach that does not rely on unravelling and dividing the protagonists along the lines of a boundary and in terms of power relations that are explicitly marginalizing.

Recently calls have been made for alternative ethnographies of social groups and identity that account for movement, displacement and diversity in the world (Amit & Rapport 2002; Bender 2001). The fluidity of people and ideas that is now so readily perceived both by anthropologists and their informants appears to threaten the

maintenance of durable and coherent notions of community and place and so the question is raised as to how coherent notions of self are created and maintained. This movement of people and ideas and their effects in the world have been recurring themes in Scottish ethnographies. For example, Jedrej and Nuttall (1995) discuss the repopulation of rural Scotland by 'White Settlers' and the consequent 'Englishing' of these areas. In common with other studies, the emphasis is placed on incomers (and also outside agencies) as being perceived as threatening to local culture and local 'ways of life'. Such a sense of fragility and the urgency with which local identities are represented comes to be seen as a defining characteristic of 'remote areas'. According to Ardener (1989a) the west Highlands – “an area in which canonical levels of 'remoteness' are to be found” (ibid: 216) – “from the inside, feel open and unprotected” (ibid: 219). Because of this tension, remote areas are “crucibles of the creation of identity” (ibid: 223) because people who live there are acutely aware that the defining processes of others might absorb them. These processes of representation are as much integral to the relations between the 'remote' and the dominant zone as within, and thus certain paradoxes of remoteness “generate the interaction between the anthropologist and his field, the definer and the defined, the classifier and the classified, the imagined and the realised” (ibid: 221). It is the tensions and negotiations that emerge at particular moments that characterise both the realisations of the remote and its imagination in anthropology.

So this study realises (or perhaps imagines) a distinctive approach to the study of rural Scotland. Rather than focussing on a 'community' and its 'boundaries' from the inside I explore the entangled relations between two groups in one place. The preceding ethnography and discussion raises three programmatic questions that will be explored in the remainder of the thesis:

1. In what ways are symbols employed in the perception, negotiation and explanation of difference in the relations involving farming people and nature conservationists in Islay?
2. How do individuals use these explanations of difference to understand their situation and to formulate strategies intended to change and improve their circumstances?
3. How has this complex and entangled pattern of interaction between farming people

and nature conservationists in Islay arisen and developed?

Part Two attends particularly to the last of these questions as I firstly describe some of the particularities of Islay farming and then outline in more detail the history of nature conservation in Islay.

Part Two:

Contexts

Introduction: History and discourse

In the following two chapters my intention is to elaborate on the context of the relationship between conservationists and farming people in Islay. I attempt to do this through a description of the historical particularities of the relationship and the discourses that have emerged through their interaction. Before continuing onto the descriptions, various points regarding anthropological constructions of discourse and history require clarification.

Over the past few decades, discourse has become a paradigmatic concept in anthropology, at times almost displacing culture as the subject's great organising principle. Like culture, discourse also suffers from a confusion of definitions but, according to Fairclough (1992: 4), there are three inter-related senses in which the term is normally employed. Firstly, discourse is textual in the broadest sense of the term. In this study, the textual can appear to include more than just linguistic genres and styles such as conversations, interviews, formal public occasions and newspapers, but also aspects of landscape that can be perceived as meaningful or representative, for example the RSPB reserve, Duich Moss or Barnacle Geese. Informants sometimes alluded to a 'reading' of these as easily as they might have read a newspaper or a conversation.

The second sense of discourse is as a practice in the sense that individual socially-situated discourses develop their own particularities as a result of preceding interactions and practices and through the combination of other discourses (Fairclough 1992: 3-4). For example, when considering the discursive practices that have developed through the interactions between conservationists and farming people in Islay one might note that discourses of farming, conservation, science, development and global and local politics are invoked as well as historical aspects of the interaction. Although any discourse develops through the practice of social interaction, discourse is often described as if it crystallizes around 'things' or 'social situations', such as a 'discourse of conservation' or a 'discourse of farming'. But what this really entails is that participants in interaction see themselves as connected through a discourse that relates to a particular 'thing'. For example, a 'discourse of farming' develops out of interactions between people who have in common a concern with agriculture. So two farmers who have never met, and

have therefore never interacted directly, can normally still perceive themselves to share a discourse through their mutual interaction with farming. Although participants might perceive farming to exist as an independent 'thing', the discourse of farming is utilised and developed only through the interaction between the two (or more) participants and farming.

Finally, discourse can be a social practice that is both embedded within and constitutive of relations of power and knowledge; in other words, discourses can be understood to develop as competing bodies of knowledge:

Thus the discourse of 'medical science' is currently the dominant one in the practice of health care, though it contrasts with various... 'alternative' discourses... as well as popular 'folk' discourses (Fairclough 1992: 3).

In the case of conservation in Islay, in particular the formal designation of SSSIs, scientific discourses sometimes appeared to be more influential than non-scientific 'folk' discourses (although this is not to say that the latter are not just as influential through more informal channels). This approach to discourse (influenced by the work of Michel Foucault) can appear to render individual actors as constituted by discourse rather than placing them in a more creative role, something criticised by Rapport and Overing:

It is individuals' personalization of discursive structures that causes them to remain alive: here are structures granted contemporary relevance, validity and significance, by being imparted with personal meaning and intent (2000: 124).

So whilst the presence of different and competing understandings and knowledge practices is often apparent within the discourse of conservation and farming in Islay the individual still has room for manoeuvre in forging their own personal meanings, responses and strategies such that "people remain the defining consciousness of social space" (Hastrup 1992: 11).

Within each of these three senses of discourse there are certain horizontal and vertical levels of dialogue, or 'intertextuality' (Fairclough 1992: 102-103). On the horizontal

level there is a historicity in what people communicate that both invokes and reworks ideas of historical communications and events in terms of the requirements of the present interaction. So when farmers and conservationists in Islay discuss the goose problem there are indications of a sequential understanding of how this debate has developed over time and also of an appreciation of how this history might be strategic in the present and the future. Likewise, the debates surrounding the Rhinns SSSI designation appear in part to have been influenced by the preceding dispute over Duich Moss.⁵⁶ But, as well as the horizontal context within this discourse, vertical connections with other texts and discourses tend to emerge. For example, an individual text about the goose problem may include reference to texts concerning the relationship between humans and animals, conservation in Britain, goose biology, the relations between England and Scotland and the farming economy as well as the previous texts within that debate. These horizontal and vertical connections can be established in order to construct the context and meaning of each individual interaction, whilst there can also be a concomitant change in how these other discourses and texts are understood. This entangling of discourses and texts could be perceived as constituting or resulting in hegemonic contestations:

Not only can one chart the possibilities and limitations for intertextual processes within particular hegemonies and states of hegemonic struggle, one can also conceptualise intertextual processes and processes of contesting and restructuring orders of discourse as processes of hegemonic struggle in the sphere of discourse, which have effects upon, as well as being affected by, hegemonic struggle in the wider sense (ibid: 103).

These sorts of contestations and negotiations emerge within the discourse of conservation and farming in Islay and certain constructions have come to be imposed upon this by, for example, government or the EU. But my primary interest is to consider what individuals do with these constructions and how they access and utilise different bodies of information with varying skill in their situating practices in relation to others.

⁵⁶ See 4.3.3 and 4.3.4.

My description of the vertical axis of discourse that emerges in Islay is comparable to the growing body of ethnographic material on environmentalism and environmental disputes. Over the past ten years anthropologists have paid increasing attention to the cultures, discourses and practices of environmentalism and to environmental issues and contests. Throughout there has been an interest in whether social and environmental concerns can be reconciled and in how anthropology can contribute to solving environmental problems and disputes. In achieving this, anthropologists have on occasions offered a critique of environmentalist culture⁵⁷ and certain tenets of environmental discourse. For example both Orlove and Brush (1996) and Milton (1996) have argued for a more anthropologically-informed discourse by questioning the view that the knowledge and practices of 'indigenous peoples' are always environmentally benevolent and that cultural diversity can thus secure the conservation of biodiversity. Following from this anti-essentialism (Brosius 1999: 280-281), anthropological studies of environmental contests have tended to portray environmentalists as experiencing profound difficulties in integrating their aims and understandings with local people and interest groups 'on the ground'. For example, Richards (1992) illustrates the difficulties of translating environmental slogans about saving the rainforest into local languages in Sierra Leone, whilst Einarsson (1993) describes how whalers and anti-whaling campaigners come into conflict because of the incompatibility of their understandings of the human place in nature and the rights of animals. Much of what has been written mirrors the conflict suggested in the anthropology of development between scientific and local knowledge (Hobart 1993) and also by implication the agency of certain discourses (Brosius 1999).

One could easily conceive of the relations between conservationists and farming people in Islay as predicated on conflicting bodies of knowledge, values, practices and discourses. At certain moments this was indeed how it was represented by my informants and through the local media. But I intend in this ethnography to explore the full complexity and dynamism of configurations of power and knowledge that are implicated within the relationship. Because "environmental debates are not merely zones of contestation but zones of constantly shifting positionality" (Brosius 1999: 283)

⁵⁷ Conversely, some anthropological literature on environmentalists has been comparable to the sympathetic studies anthropologists have traditionally made of 'other cultures'. For example Milton has sought to understand the feelings of 'love' that environmentalists have towards nature (2002) and the classificatory practices of conservationists (2000).

it can prove fruitless to frame any such contestation in terms of a clash between contrasting cultures or bodies of knowledge. In Chapter Four it becomes apparent that in Islay the progress of the relationship involved processes of negotiation and familiarisation such that if culture, discourse and knowledge were ever truly contrasting they eventually became entangled to the point where it would be impossible to understand this as a *cause* of dispute. An alternative approach has been offered by Smout (2000), who has argued that disputes over landscapes and nature in north Britain have tended to involve conflicts between ‘use and delight’. In Islay there would appear at first to have been a similar conflict between the use of land for farming and the delight in nature and subsequent desire for its conservation. But this divergence of interests became less clear because conservation could be seen as an important economic use of land whilst farming was the predominant means to generate the delights of nature. The ‘positionality’ of both farming and conservation thus created ambiguity and it is this that has often provided both a mechanism and requirement for differentiation. Any conflict that developed within the relationship came to look more like a form of sociation than separation (Simmel 1955). Through this ongoing interaction “local events evoke political narratives of global scope” (Berglund & Anderson 2003b: 12) and although this study focuses on the “practices which flow out of the everyday life of concrete, committed people” (ibid: 7) there is thus an understanding that wider environmentalist discourses inform these practices.

So the discourse that has developed between conservationists and farming people in Islay can be seen to possess a horizontal historicity and vertical connectedness that is a part of its context as well as its content. The intention of the next two chapters is to describe how this context and content appears in Islay in anticipation of the ethnographic material that is presented in chapters Five to Eight. Hence, what I provide are my own versions of the histories associated with the relationship: those of farming in Islay and of the activities of conservation organisations. The discursive employment of history has already been discussed but the associations between history and ethnography require further elaboration.

The celebrated historian E.H. Carr wrote that:

[History] is a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his

facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past (1961: 30).

He later added that:

The historian . . . is an individual human being. Like other individuals, he is also a social phenomenon, both the product and the conscious or unconscious spokesman of the society to which he belongs; it is in this capacity that he approaches the facts of the historical past (ibid: 35).

This dialogic and socially situated view of history tends to sit well with anthropologists but many would add that “the historian” could be anyone and that history can thus be any rendering of the past in the present and not just an ‘authoritative’ account. This leads us to consider some of the reasons that anthropologists are interested in history. Three are particularly relevant to this study and are addressed below:

1. Anthropologists are interested in how their informants create histories (e.g. Hastrup 1992). What factors influence how stories of the past are constructed?
2. Anthropologists are interested in how their informants use histories in the present and in anticipation of the future. For example, how are histories employed in political discourses and strategies of identity, heritage and tradition (e.g. Chapman 1978; Davis 1992; Macdonald 1997a)?
3. Anthropologists are interested in histories because they can help provide an explanation of the circumstances that they encounter in the field. For example they might answer how customs, identities and relationships originated and developed (e.g. Trevor-Roper 1983).

The two chapters following can be seen as history in a conventional sense – as a linear story of interconnected events (Davis 1992: 20) and ultimately as a description of how the entangled pattern of interaction between farming people and nature conservationists arose and developed in Islay.⁵⁸ As I draw on a wide variety of sources in doing this (newspapers, academic texts, popular books and oral history) the intention is to hint at a diversity of perspectives – at the “Many in the One” (Hastrup 1992: 11). Whilst I am interested in tracing the origins and development of the relationship between farming

⁵⁸ See 2.6 and the third of the programmatic questions.

people and nature conservationists I do not see this account as ‘explaining’ the present that I encountered during my fieldwork. Rather, I am interested in this history as a means to understand the context and constraints within which the interactions have been framed. As such I do not see these histories as causative or determining of the circumstances that I encountered (Davis 1992: 16) but they provide both some of the background against which the material presented in Part Three is enacted and also perspectives from which these enactments can be viewed. As Macdonald puts it:

The past *informs* the present; it adds to and shapes the repertoire of contemporary possibilities. Moreover, the past cannot simply be constructed as we please, either by those ‘on the ground’ or by historians and anthropologists. ‘The past’ is not infinitely plastic (1997b: 31 emphasis in original).

So the creation and utilisation of history can be intertwined in the circumstances of the present whilst remaining constrained by the events of the past. According to Hastrup:

The recollection of events... follows the logic of social significance. Like the narrative of culture, the story of the past... is a selective account of the actual sequence of events, but it is no random selection (1992: 9).

Many of the ethnographic accounts of Scotland have focussed on the selectivity and social significance of different sorts of recollection. For example Macdonald (1997b) considers how her informants in Skye reimagine their Highland and Gaelic histories in order to bolster a sense of identity and distinctiveness in the present. The ‘renaissance’ of Gaelic came about in part because the language could be represented as symbolic of the historical struggle for autonomy and distinctiveness, both of Scotland and the Highlands. Gaelic thus became one part of a historically rooted but reconfigured cultural repertoire employed to create a distinctly Scottish or Highland identity or sense of belonging. Parman (1990) describes how the crofting way of life is represented both by crofters and ‘outsiders’ as anomalous in comparison to modern, industrial Scotland but she adds that it is this anachronism that provides the symbolic flexibility with which the crofting community can be defined from both inside and out. More recently Strathern and Stewart (2001) have concentrated on the role of memory in the creation of identity and a sense of emplacement:

We see memory as the crucial link between ideas of place and the creation of identities. Memory... is something that itself constantly changes, creating its own versions of the survivals and extinctions of symbolic themes (ibid: 278-279).

For example, the growing interest in the Picts could be seen as a way of creating new memories of these ancient people springing from a desire to imagine a Scottish autonomy of a different kind to a Gaelic or anglicised vision.

The sorts of strategic reminiscences that are described in the above ethnographies also emerge on occasions within this work. For example, like Parman's crofters, some farmers in Islay were beginning (perhaps for the first time) to think that their way of life was anachronistic and that it would struggle to survive economically and to attract a new generation. In Chapter Six, both farmers and the RSPB warden used memories of the farm at Aoradh prior to the RSPB takeover to situate and justify their own ways of managing their land. Indeed, conservationists were just as concerned with ideas of the past in Islay as farmers. Conservation requires an idea of past conditions as a baseline from which the present can be evaluated and the future imagined. For example, the reinstatement of 'traditional management' has often been a priority, particularly in farmed landscapes such as Islay. Because conservationists sometimes envisioned Islay and its habitats and wildlife as a remnant of conditions that were once widespread, the modern world (perhaps in the form of conifer afforestation or agricultural intensification) could easily be conceived of and presented as a threat to Islay's landscape survivals. Ideas of the past were thus mobilised by both conservationists and farming people to provide perspectives from which present circumstances and future possibilities could be assessed, imagined and negotiated.

These different perspectives on the past have been highlighted by the historian James Hunter in his history of the relations between nature and people in the Highlands, *On the other side of sorrow* (1995). In this he calls for reconciliation between the social and environmental rehabilitation in the Highlands but he explains that this has proved difficult because conservationists and Highland people have held different perceptions of the human and environmental histories of the region. To the conservationists people

could seem anathema to conservation because they understood much of the Highlands as having existed largely in a state of uninhabited 'wilderness' (cf. Jedrej & Nuttall 1995: 138). Conversely Highland people saw their own history as one dominated by wrongs perpetrated against them by powerful outside interests.⁵⁹ If conservation organisations saw people and nature as inimical, then they appeared to Highlanders to represent a continuation of historical wrongs rather than offering a possibility for their rectification. Although this would represent an oversimplification of the reasons behind some of the problems that arose between conservationists and farmers in Islay,⁶⁰ one can still note traces of these perspectives in the rhetoric. This was particularly so during the 1980s when conservationists often appeared eager to counter proposed economic developments such as the peat digging at Duich Moss.⁶¹ But rather than seeing the relations between conservationists and farming people as simply a clash between nature and development, I am more concerned to understand how differences arose and were negotiated through ideas of the past. In particular, I focus on the different continuities and changes that were both perceived and desired.

According to Marilyn Strathern (1992) change requires continuity in order to be revealed. For example, the continuity of the countryside allows for changes within it to be perceived. Consideration of how much has changed and what sorts of effects these changes have had on something durable (such as nature) then leads to questions of what needs to be conserved. Ideas of the past can thus be concentrated with equal ease upon continuity or change but the two are always played off against each other such that an increase in one also reveals more of the other. In Islay the struggles that developed between conservationists and farming people could be seen as the arrival of a new threat but this also revealed the continuity of struggles with other groups. Conservation organisations could thus be rendered as 'green lairds' displacing the longstanding contestations between tenants and landowners. When conservationists perceived changes in the form of agricultural intensification that was threatening to wildlife, farmers could perceive *in the same phenomenon* a continuity of the values of productive farming. By accentuating the threat caused by this change, conservationists also drew

⁵⁹ It has also been noted by Smout (1993) that Highlanders have long held recognisably 'environmentalist' ideas.

⁶⁰ Conservationists in Islay, as in many other parts of Scotland, were primarily concerned with farmed or actively managed landscapes. As such, people were always important to them, although they needed to be encouraged to do the 'right' things.

⁶¹ See 4.3.3.

attention to the durability of the values that were understood by many farmers to have motivated the change.

So the creation and use of histories, both by my informants in Islay and by myself in this text, can be understood as a process of revealing, concealing, evaluating and emphasising continuity and change. These histories provide certain perspectives on the present and future that can sometimes make these seem inevitable but beneath this apparent constraint or determination there remains the possibility for conceptual and discursive manoeuvre. Just as continuity and change can appear mutually reinforcing so can the determinacy and indeterminacy of history on the present and future. Over the forthcoming two chapters (and also in the ethnographic material presented thereafter) I focus on describing these historical perspectives and on the strategies that have been drawn out from them.

Figure Seven: *Cattle eating silage by Loch Indaal*

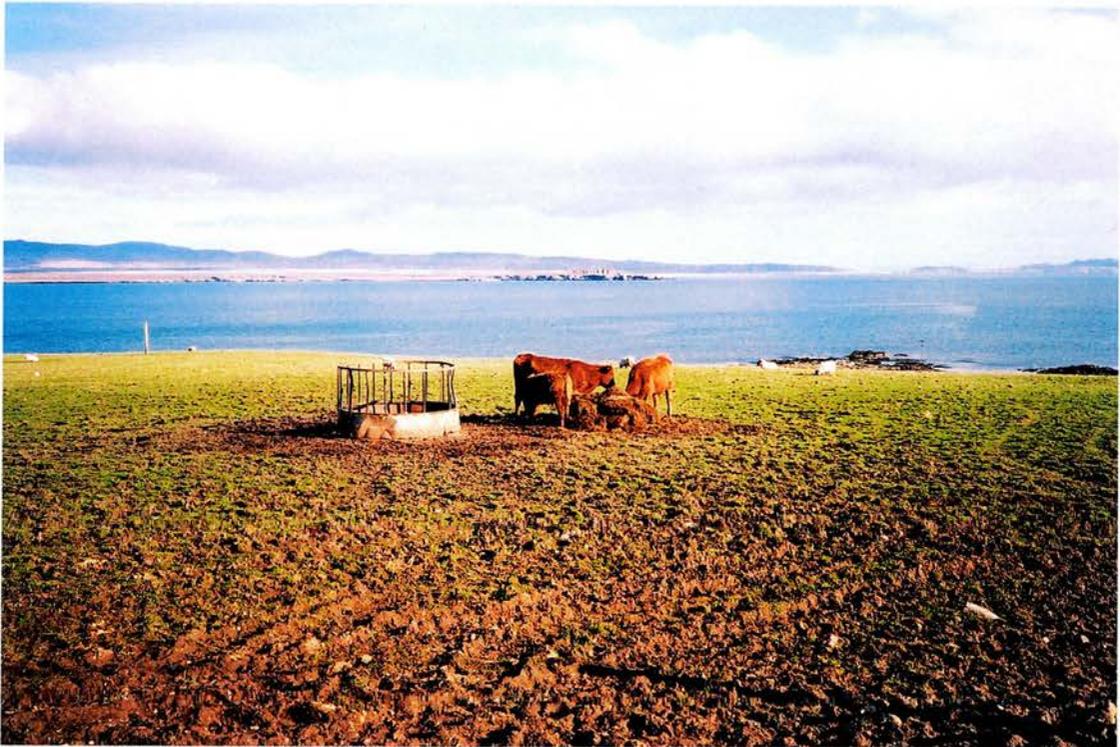


Figure Eight: *The Islay creamery after closure*



Figures Nine – Twelve: *Scenes from the Islay Show*





3.0 Farming and estates in Islay

3.1 Sources and approaches

In this chapter I present an outline of the recent history of farming and sporting estates in Islay. The intention is to contextualise the later chapters by describing the infrastructure, methods and people associated with farming and estate management and how these associations have developed, particularly with reference to the great changes in agriculture since the Second World War. Clearly, a complete history of these issues is a larger task than can be offered in this brief summary. Rather, this is conceived as a sketching out of the varying circumstances of the farmers and those involved with sporting interests.

To accomplish this task I have been able to draw on a variety of sources. Firstly, many farmers gave me oral accounts both of their own farms and of how farming has changed during their time on the island. These have proved invaluable, though sometimes farmers by their own admission were unsure of dates and figures. Other interviews and discussions with estate factors and gamekeepers have also been helpful. The *Ileach* newspaper has covered farming issues since its inception in 1973, including a regular column from the local branch of the NFUS. Two short books have been written about farming in Islay covering the period in question. Cunninghame (1995)⁶² produced a concise account of modern farming practices written to interpret the island's agriculture to interested visitors. Storrie (1988) has written a history of the Islay, Jura and Colonsay Agricultural Association, which also provides some useful material. Her more general study of the island (Storrie 1981) discusses much of the history of the organisation of land in Islay by successive generations of lairds and this aids in understanding how its modern organisation has come about. Fraser Darling's *West Highland Survey* (1955) provides useful material on agriculture and land use in Islay in the years just after the Second World War and illustrates how this differed from elsewhere in the west of Scotland.

⁶² This booklet was written by an Islay farmer's wife and produced by the Farm Interpretation Group, whose membership was predominantly drawn from the Islay farming community.

3.2 *Islay farming before 1950*

According to Margaret Storrie, the modern pattern of landholdings in Islay was largely a product of the lairdship of Walter Frederick Campbell between 1816 and 1848 (1965; 1981). If this offers the impression of rapid change then this is misleading because the reorganisation affected during this period was borne of a gradual and not an abrupt transformation. Nevertheless, by the end of Walter Frederick's lairdship Islay had the varied pattern of landholdings that remain characteristic and exceptional within the Highlands. There are no other comparable areas with such a mix of crofts, smallholdings, estate lands, planted woodlands and medium and large farms. Storrie explains the reasons why this distinctly diverse organisation of landholdings came about in Islay by considering both the role of the laird and the influence and accessibility of the Lowlands. These two factors fostered a gradual process of change in the organisation of many landholdings that meant that different sorts of holding either developed or lingered as the particular circumstances allowed. There was rarely anything comparable to the wholesale and occasionally brutal upheavals that characterised 19th Century agricultural development elsewhere in the Highlands.

Walter Frederick's lairdship coincided with a great rise in the population of Islay (Storrie 1981: 110). In 1824, during the agricultural recession that struck after the Napoleonic Wars, most tenancies in Islay were small and had become increasingly subdivided and impractical. Walter Frederick was keen to increase productivity and efficiency (and thus his own revenue) and this he did by reducing the number of people working on the land and increasing the size of individual holdings. Unlike other parts of the Highlands, the problem of moving people out was easier to effect. The relative proximity of the Lowlands and the port of Glasgow meant that emigration from Islay was easier than from areas further north and more significantly the planned villages within the island were able to provide housing and employment in non-agricultural industries such as fishing and distilling.

The decades after 1853, when the Morrisons acquired Islay Estate, saw changes in the organisation of land on a larger scale with the establishment of a number of new estates on the island. The parish of Kildalton and Oa was sold off to John Ramsay, a friend of

the Morrisons (Storrie 1981: 145-147). This land was broken-up after Ramsay's death in 1892, eventually creating the modern-day Laggan, Kinnabus and Ardtalla estates. Dunlossit in the east of the island was formed in 1860 and has been in the hands of the Schroder family since 1939. There were also changes in the composition of the Islay farming community during the second half of the 19th Century that reflected the continued blending of Highland with Lowland. In 1878 one contemporary writer claimed that:

The larger portion of the old native race of tenantry has also passed away, and their holdings are now mostly occupied by tenants from Ayrshire and the lowland districts, who turn their attention principally to dairy farming (Clerk, quoted in Storrie 1988: 14).

A snapshot of Islay during the later 1940s is provided by Fraser Darling's *West Highland Survey* (1955), which gives an assessment of the ecological circumstances of the Islay people as well as for the other communities of western Scotland. Like Storrie, Darling notes the mixture of Lowland features⁶³ and Highland features in the landscape and he also comments that Lowlanders had frequently come to the island to farm. But despite the quality of land and the size of the farms, the overall impression that emerged was one of agriculture in a neglected state and that the rest of the island's infrastructure was being dragged down with it:

The standard of husbandry is generally low; many stretches of *quondam* arable have been let go and the condition of many houses is deplorable. Social life is at a low ebb (1955: 67).

Darling laid some of the blame for the problems in agriculture on the distilling industry because the distilleries imported all their barley rather than encouraging locals to produce it as a cash crop. Although dairying was as abundant as anywhere in the Hebrides at this time, Darling complained that the cattle were not of a good standard. The main feeding crops grown on the island were hay, oats, turnips and potatoes, although the acreages of all these had been in decline since the early years of the century. Only four acres of barley were recorded on the whole island in 1947.

⁶³ For example, Darling (1955) records many large farms with 101 holdings over 51 acres in extent.

3.3 *Land ownership and tenancy*

Of Islay's 150,585 acres 106,600 were in the hands of six estates⁶⁴ in 1996 (Wightman 1996).⁶⁵ This figure represented a substantial decline in the estates' ownership of Islay although clearly they were still dominant. There were two parts of Islay where estate lands have been sold off. Firstly the area around Port Ellen gradually passed into multiple-ownership after the sale of the Kildalton Estate in 1892. Secondly the Rhinns was broken up from the early 1970s onwards. Much of the Rhinns was owned by Charlie Morrison, a brother of the owners of Islay Estate, who sold his land because of financial difficulties. Most of the area south of Port Charlotte was sold as the Ellister Estate, but after the death of the owner in the late 1970s, the many tenancies were sold – either to the occupying farmers or occasionally for forestry. The Foreland Estate, mostly lying to the north of Port Charlotte, was also sold during the late 1970s and, although it remained substantial, the owners gradually sold off many of the tenancies to the occupying farmers. Islay Estate sold the northern part of the Rhinns to the RSPB and various other private individuals during the 1980s although they still owned a section around Ardnave. The upshot of these changes was that the occupying farmers owned the majority of agricultural holdings in the Rhinns, whereas in the central parts of the island still owned by Islay Estate the majority were tenancies. Some tenant farmers whom I spoke to were keen to buy their own farms from Islay Estate but the Estate was unwilling to sell. There was also some hope amongst farmers that the Land Reform Bill, which was being developed at the time, would create a greater security of tenure. With the exception of Ardtalla, the owners of the larger estates all resided off the island for most of the year.

⁶⁴ The distinction between an estate and other types of landholding is ambiguous, although some landholdings were obviously known as 'estates' whilst others were called 'farms'. 'Estate' was usually taken to mean a sporting estate that included at least some sporting interest. Most of the sporting estates in Islay also included a substantial quantity of agricultural land.

⁶⁵ This included 1800 acres at Craighens listed by Wightman (1996) as being owned by the farmer but which was still a tenancy of Islay Estate during my fieldwork. The acreage for each estate in descending order of magnitude was as follows: Islay Estate, 51,300; Dunlossit, 16,500; Ardtalla/ Kintour, 14,300; Foreland, 9880; Laggan, 8100; Kinnabus, 6800. The acreage owned by the six estates will have declined slightly as some farmers (particularly at Foreland) had bought their farms since Wightman's book was published.

Crofts were relatively scarce in Islay in comparison to other parts of the Hebrides.⁶⁶ Most agricultural land was of such potential that it could be farmed full-time, although many smallholdings were not actually designated as crofts. The only area of Islay in which a significant proportion of agricultural land was croft land was the west Rhinns, particularly around Claddach near Portnahaven. Here the crofts were intended for the fishermen who lived in the village. Most distillery villages also had crofts associated with them and the designation of croft land in the 19th Century appears to have been largely connected with these two industries.

Crofts obtain certain advantages over tenanted farms from the crofting acts of 1886 and 1976, which intended to maintain people on the land in the economically marginal crofting counties. The crofter has security of tenure, can bequeath their tenancy, is able to take any rent review to court and has a right to buy their croft (Callander 1998; Wightman 1996). In Islay, some crofts were little different in size, structure and agricultural potential to the smaller farms and these advantages seemed to grate with a few of the farmers whom I spoke to. One mentioned that it would be preferable if his farm were a croft, presumably so that he could take advantage of the legal benefits. Although rental for crofts was often very low I was told that most crofters in Islay had become owner-occupiers.

The process of amalgamation of holdings has been ongoing in Islay for hundreds of years, often in response to changes in economics and the technology of farming. By the time of my fieldwork there were only 121 agricultural holdings on the island,⁶⁷ and the mechanisation of agriculture enabled farmers to manage substantial areas of land more-or-less single-handedly. It thus became more practicable to acquire additional property whilst drives toward greater efficiency⁶⁸ in the face of diminishing margins and increasing costs further encouraged farmers to possess larger holdings. Some farmers rented a few fields on a short-term basis but others either leased or bought additional farms and other holdings. As a result of these processes, numerous farmers in Islay

⁶⁶ Grant & MacLeod (1983: 569) suggest there were ninety crofts and sixty crofters in Islay.

⁶⁷ Grant & MacLeod (1983: 568) give a figure of 171 holdings in Islay.

⁶⁸ In this chapter I use the word 'efficiency' to indicate an increase in the production of outputs for the same or lower cost of inputs. There is some debate as to whether mechanised modern farming is really 'efficient' in every sense of the word (see Blunden & Curry 1991: 41-45) but this was the sort of improvement in efficiency to which most Islay farmers appeared to have directed themselves (see below and Chapter Five).

managed land more than 500 acres in extent, although there were still holdings of many sizes.⁶⁹ In some cases farmers also sold off land, particularly hill ground for forestry, or they rented out grazing to others. Although the increasing proportion of owner-occupiers amongst Islay farmers was broadly considered as positive, I was also told that the declining number of small, tenant farms inhibited younger people from entering the industry. To acquire a farm, one realistically required a good deal of finance and capital and the incremental growth in scale that was possible in the decades after the Second World War had become more difficult.⁷⁰

Figure Thirteen: *Size of holdings worked by the farmers and crofters I interviewed in Islay*

Area (acres)	Number of farms/holdings
<100	1
100 – 250	2
251 – 500	4
501 – 1000	7
1000 – 2500	3
2501 – 5000	2

3.4 *Farming methods and infrastructure*

3.4.1 The structure of agricultural land

On almost all Islay farms the land was separated into two types. The good land that could be used for producing silage or other crops was known locally as ‘arable’. Presumably this was land that would mainly have been used to grow cereals when this was a more frequent practice. The rough grazing was usually described as ‘hill ground’ or ‘the hill’. Improvement could turn hill ground into arable and this had regularly been achieved over the past fifty years, particularly when encouraged by grants and

⁶⁹ See Figure Thirteen below.

⁷⁰ One farmer suggested that this process of growth was also made more difficult by strictly enforced regulations regarding health and safety, particularly in dairying. The infrastructure associated with dairying thus came to require a much greater initial investment.

subsidies. Arable land that was neglected could just as easily revert to hill ground.⁷¹ The proportions of the two types of land on a farm influenced the type of livestock held. Dairy farmers required plenty of good quality arable land in order to have a large and productive herd sufficient to farm economically. This need for a larger herd was partly fostered by the rising costs of dairy farming but this was facilitated by the increasing mechanisation of milking (Cunninghame 1995). Most of the farms that retained dairy herds up until the closure of the creamery were in the good agricultural lands around Loch Gruinart and the Sorn Valley, with two herds in the Rhinns. A farm dominated by hill ground was more suitable for sheep and beef cattle, which were more tolerant of the extensive rough grazing. Hard, rough ground was more suitable for beef cattle in the winter because they were likely to damage softer ground.

3.4.2 Livestock

Farming in Islay in recent times has been dominated by the production of livestock and the growing of crops has usually been for animal feed rather than being an entirely separate endeavour. This livestock farming has focussed on the rearing of sheep, beef cattle and dairy cattle. The keeping of other animals has normally been on a small-scale, although I knew of one crofter who kept 200 chickens. Some farmers have kept pigs in the past but this has largely disappeared. A few farms, including that on which I lived, had established small herds of ponies. Most farmers whom I interviewed specialised in either beef or dairy cattle and nearly all had at least some sheep. I only interviewed two farmers and a few crofters who only kept sheep. The most important changes that occurred in livestock farming in Islay after 1950 were associated with increasing stock numbers and changes in the breeds used. Increasing specialisation, changes in consumer demand and modern agricultural policies all influenced these changes. The main factors affecting each type of livestock farming are discussed below.

Cunninghame states that, "Islay was traditionally a dairy farming island" (1995: 1) and this had certainly been the case during Fraser Darling's *West Highland Survey* (1955),

⁷¹ See 5.2.

although beef cattle still outnumbered dairy by almost two to one in the late 1940s.⁷² But Cunninghame goes on to report that the dairy industry had long been in decline in Islay with the number of dairy units down to twelve in 1995.⁷³ Cunninghame attributes this decline to government policy and hygiene legislation (such as the introduction of compulsory pasteurisation), which combined to encourage farmers to switch to beef or sheep production. Informants who had remained in dairying did so because of personal preference and because dairying provided a more regular and reliable income than beef cattle.⁷⁴ Farmers supplying the creamery received a monthly payment whereas beef farmers only received income from their cattle on the few occasions that they went to market, when the price they obtained would also be hard to predict. Ayrshires had been the most common breed of dairy cattle used in Islay since the late 19th Century, when there was an influx of lowland farmers to the island (Storrie 1988: 14). They were still being used during my fieldwork but the more productive Friesians had by then assumed dominance.

The first Islay creamery was established in 1942 in Port Charlotte (Cunninghame 1995: 3), although cheese had long been made on Islay farms (Storrie 1988: 14), often to jealously guarded recipes. The advent of the Milk Marketing Board in the 1930s had also helped to stabilise the dairy industry because it guaranteed farmers a price for a perishable product that might otherwise be difficult to sell. A new creamery was opened in 1983 and in 1995 the creamery employed nine people and used three million litres of milk from Islay farms per annum to produce 300 tons of Dunlop cheese, most of which was exported from the island (Cunninghame 1995: 3). The new creamery coincided with the new demands on the dairy industry imposed by the milk quota system. These were introduced by the EC in 1984 as a method for controlling milk production.⁷⁵ Existing dairy farms were given quotas based on the size of their herd and farmers could be fined if they exceeded their quota (ibid. 1995). There was some concern at the time about the effects that the quota system might have on the viability of the creamery because if quotas were lost from the island it would be difficult to produce

⁷² It is assumed that the "Other Cattle" listed by Darling (1955) were beef cattle. Grant & MacLeod (1983: 571) suggest a ratio of beef to dairy of almost five to one.

⁷³ Only seven farms supplied the creamery prior to its closure in 2000, with another supplying the domestic market for milk. Although the number of dairy units and dairy cattle declined, the volume of milk appeared to be the same in 1995 (Cunninghame 1995: 3) as it was in 1980 (Grant & MacLeod 1983: 572).

⁷⁴ See 5.2.

⁷⁵ *Heach* Vol. 11 No. 12 5th May 1984

enough milk to keep the creamery operating economically.⁷⁶ To allay these fears, the milk quota for the Argyll region was ring-fenced so that quotas could not be sold onto farmers in other areas.⁷⁷ Islands with creameries were able to argue that they did not contribute to surpluses because most of their milk went into cheese production.⁷⁸ It was also relatively easy to buy in quotas at that time.

After initial uncertainty, the creamery was successful enough by 1995 for Cunninghame to suggest that its future could be viewed with confidence (1995: 3). But just a year later the creamery closed down because escalating milk prices reduced margins.⁷⁹ Farmers were still able to distribute their milk to the mainland but soon the idea was mooted of a community buyout for the creamery.⁸⁰ The Islay Creamery Company was established by the island's dairy farmers and was able to secure enough funding (including European and Scottish Office grant aid as well as the farmers' own money)⁸¹ to re-open the creamery in the summer of 1997.⁸² The creamery was now in local hands and its re-opening received a good deal of media attention, much of which centred on the fact that Islay Dunlop was once banned in Italy due to its alleged 'aphrodisiac qualities'. But this initial buoyancy was short-lived and on 21st March 2000 the creamery ceased production for the final time.⁸³ This time, Islay dairy farmers were unable to sell their milk to the mainland because of the excessive transportation costs and were forced to sell off their herds.

Many reasons were given for the failure of the creamery. It was argued that the strong pound had brought down the price paid to producers for cheese and this meant that to make any profit the creamery could only have paid below production costs for milk.⁸⁴ One farmer I interviewed told me that the banks had not been prepared to give them a big enough overdraft to cover costs until they were able to make a profit, whilst another argued that if the creamery had been given another year it would have been successful.

⁷⁶ For a discussion of the controversy over the loss of quota from the RSPB's reserve at Loch Gruinart, see 4.4.4.

⁷⁷ Paradoxically, this created problems when the creamery was finally closed because it made it more difficult for farmers to recoup some of their losses by selling their quota.

⁷⁸ *Ileach* Vol. 12 No. 6 9th February 1985

⁷⁹ *Ileach* Vol. 23 No. 10 30th March 1996. Islay producers sold milk on to Scottish Milk who then sold it back to the creamery at market prices.

⁸⁰ *Ileach* Vol.23 No.16 22nd June 1996

⁸¹ *Ileach* Vol. 24 No. 6 1st February 1997

⁸² *Ileach* Vol. 24 No. 13 10th May 1997

⁸³ *Ileach* Vol. 27 No. 10 25th March 2000. See Figure Eight.

⁸⁴ *Ileach* Vol. 27 No. 10 25th March 2000

Others blamed stifling hygiene regulations, poor marketing, inexperience and a low quality, over-priced end product,⁸⁵ whilst a few of the dairy farmers traced the decline of local dairying back to the abolition of the Milk Marketing Board. As one farmer argued, “Maggie Thatcher put a stop to all that.”

As dairy farming declined, the rearing of beef cattle assumed a greater significance in Islay. Beef farming changed a great deal in Islay after the 1970s (Cunninghame 1995: 3) because of the introduction of new breeds of cattle. Previously, traditional local breeds had predominated, but continental breeds, particularly Simmental and Limousin, replaced these. These were favoured because they were faster maturing, larger and had more lean meat in the right areas of the body (ibid. 1995).⁸⁶ One farmer mentioned that Limousin calves were more independent than native breeds and the cows could calve independently. This was significant for farmers who worked on their own on large farms and were thus unable to maintain surveillance on their whole herd. The move to these less hardy ‘continentals’ required the development of on-farm facilities for in-wintering. The continentals had difficulty dealing with the damp winter climate of Islay and most were kept indoors during this time where they were fed on silage, draff and supplements. Despite the need for these inputs and new facilities, I was told that the continentals gave a good return on the right feed and conditions. Some farmers were still keeping Highland or Galloway cattle⁸⁷ and were able to exploit niche markets for beef from these animals, but one farmer told me that calves from native breeds sell for around £300 less than continentals.

Most farmers in Islay sold their beef cattle at the auction mart in Bridgend as store calves, which went on to be finished by mainland farmers. Some Islay farmers had started to finish their own cattle and these were usually slaughtered at the small abattoir in Ballygrant. Others took their cattle to mainland markets where better prices could be obtained for good quality stock.⁸⁸ The improvement in the quality of stock was a driving force in Islay beef farming during recent decades, rendering Darling’s post-war

⁸⁵ Some local farmers expressed this view, including one dairy farmer I interviewed.

⁸⁶ Some farmers cautioned that continentals could be temperamental in comparison to native breeds.

⁸⁷ See 2.5 and Figure Ten.

⁸⁸ See 5.5. It was suggested that the market at Bridgend was not as competitive as mainland markets, particularly as a lot of the buyers were normally proxy bidding. A farmer would pay more for a quality animal in front of him than he would instruct a buyer to bid. One farmer reckoned that the buyers often made informal agreements not to bid against each other and this kept prices lower.

complaints about the standard of animals in need of revision. An isolated farming community such as Islay, with high transportation costs, needed to have something extra to offer the market. The excellence of their stock provided this for most farmers. This improvement was also driven by the changing demands of the consumer to leaner beef and various farmers entered into marketing schemes to promote quality Scottish beef. Despite this high standard of husbandry, Islay farmers were badly affected by the BSE crisis in 1996 and prices at market, as elsewhere, were still deflated three years later when I began my fieldwork. Despite a slight upturn in prices, one farmer told me that the prices he got for suckled calves were only 30% of pre-BSE levels.⁸⁹ The closure of the creamery also had repercussions on beef farming because crosses with dairy cattle were widely utilised to produce good quality calves.

Sheep farming, whilst widespread in Islay farms, rarely seemed to have held the prominence of either beef or dairy farming. This may in part have been due to the rather meagre returns farmers generally received on their sheep but was also perhaps a product of the ubiquity of sheep. Farmers in Islay rarely defined themselves as sheep farmers but as dairy or beef farmers. As with cattle, new non-native breeds came to predominate but the traditional Blackface was still quite abundant, particularly on farms with extensive hill land that was only suitable for this hardy breed. Larger lowland or continental breeds such as Suffolks or Texels were also commonly bred. Sometimes these were kept indoors during the winter and even those left outside were fed on supplements. Significantly, this increased the lambing rates (Cunninghame 1995: 5) and sheep farmers derived most income through selling on store lambs to mainland farmers for finishing. This was still important even after prices for lambs dropped by at least 50% during the 1990s. The sale of fleeces had only ever been a subsidiary income for farmers but during the 1990s prices dropped to such an extent that wool became more-or-less worthless and shearing was only conducted for welfare reasons.

Many farmers complained to me about the threats posed to their sheep by birds, particularly Hoodie Crows and Black-backed Gulls.⁹⁰ These birds attacked young

⁸⁹ Farmers gave me various figures for the drop in calf prices after BSE. All suggested a drop of at least 50% and one farmer mentioned that some heifer calves were selling for only £80 – £90 at the height of the crisis. It was reported that suckled calf prices dropped by at least £120 a head between 1995 and 1996, *Ileach* Vol. 23 No. 20 17th August 1996. A further effect of the BSE crisis was that cattle could only enter the food chain if they were under the age of 30 months.

⁹⁰ I think that generally the threat was from Great Black-backed Gulls.

lambs or ewes that were cast on their backs, pecking out their eyes and leaving them for dead.⁹¹ More recently, farmers started to complain about attacks from Ravens. The increase in this threat appeared to come from the large numbers of non-breeding birds that congregated around Bridgend but some Rhinns farmers told me that they had also begun to experience problems. Ravens are protected under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act and can only be shot under licence. Some farmers were able to obtain licences but were still only allowed to shoot a handful of birds. Controlling Hoodies was less problematic because they did not have the same level of protection but both these and Black-backed Gulls were time-consuming for farmers to deal with.

3.4.3 Crops

Arable farming in Islay changed far more than livestock farming during the second half of the 20th Century. Whilst in livestock farming the main developments were in the breeds used and the numbers of animals held, arable farming was transformed on a more fundamental level. In the 1950s the main cereal crop was oats, root crops were grown extensively and the main use for grass crops was hay. Arable farming was practised on a rotational system to support and improve soil fertility and structure and to control pests and disease. By the 1990s the main (and almost only) cereal crop was barley, root crops were very unusual and most grass crops were normally used to produce silage. Rotation systems had been replaced by much higher inputs of fertilisers that allowed arable land to be maintained as permanent pasture.

The predominant rotation system used in Islay was a seven-year system. This normally began with oats, followed by roots and potatoes and then an under-sown crop of grass followed by three further years of grass only (Grant & MacLeod 1983), although informants mentioned several variations on this. During the years when grazing occurred dung would be added to the soil but this was the only kind of fertiliser used. The crops were used for feed on the farm and leases forbade the farmer from selling off his crops because, as one farmer told me, “you were selling fertility off the farm”.

⁹¹ One farmer, who kept several hundred sheep, estimated that he could lose up to fifty lambs a year from this sort of predation, although it could be hard to tell whether the lamb was already dead when the birds struck.

Although I did not speak to any farmers who still used a rotation system one told me that he had only stopped about a decade previously.

By the 1990s most grass crops in Islay were made into silage.⁹² Some silage was produced before the Second World War but the invention of the buck-rake increased its popularity because it allowed for silage to be produced more efficiently and without the use of hand labour. Two different methods for producing silage were commonly used in Islay. Pit silage was made in large concrete pits covered by polythene sheets, which have been built on many farms. Big bale silage was produced by wrapping grass bales in black cling film and this method became popular on smaller farms or crofts (Cunninghame 1995). Sometimes barley was added to the grass to produce whole-crop silage, which was more nutritious. Hay used to be made more frequently and the most common reason I was given for the decline in haymaking was a perceived change in the climate. The long dry periods during the summer that were required to produce good hay appeared less regularly. Grass for silage only needed to be left for 24 hours before it was gathered in (ibid: 7) and silage was thus a more appropriate product in the fickle Islay climate.⁹³ More recently, hay was usually made opportunistically, when weather conditions allowed, rather than being a planned crop. This happened during the second summer of my fieldwork, when the weather was unusually dry.

Barley grew in popularity in Islay because it produced a higher yield and was a better quality feed than oats. In addition, I was told that it had become easier to store barley during the winter. Some farmers also grew oil-seed rape as fodder. The use of draff as feed was very significant to farming in Islay because it was nutritious and cheap. This meant that farmers did not need to use as much of their land for producing winter feed, something that would otherwise have been essential given the high costs of transporting supplements to the island. Despite this, the drive to increase stock numbers still encouraged farmers to improve land by drainage, ploughing, reseeding and lime application and this was facilitated by government grants until the 1990s. Whilst this intensification of agriculture was very apparent, the farming landscape of Islay was still rather more extensive than one would have found in much of lowland Britain.

⁹² See figures Seven and Fifteen.

⁹³ The damper climate was also given as a reason for the decline in root crop production in Islay.

Pesticides were never widely used and even on good ground, productivity was not always as high as might have been possible.

3.4.4 Techniques and technology

The above changes in livestock rearing and arable farming were facilitated by developments in techniques and technology. As I mentioned, the old rotational systems of farming were retired because artificial fertilisers could maintain soil fertility without the need for periodic reductions in output. Large areas of land were also reclaimed from moor and marsh by improvements in drainage and the increased use of lime. Improvements in plant breeding, the result of long-standing government research, also created more resilient, nutritious and bountiful grass crops.⁹⁴ The result of all these developments, encouraged by interventionist economics, was a much higher productive capacity on Islay farms, notwithstanding the attendant goose problem.⁹⁵ Increased mechanisation enabled this improved productivity to be realised by fewer workers.

Tractor power began to replace horsepower in the years after the Second World War. Up until the 1950s, a stallion would be brought onto the island to mate with the local mares but when this practice ceased it became more difficult to maintain a supply of working horses. Other innovations such as the buck rake and the forage harvester fostered the popularity of silage making. All-terrain quad bikes were a more recent arrival and these allowed the farmer to cover his land and transport materials much more rapidly so that just one man could monitor livestock across a large area in only a short space of time. Some farmers complained to me that the fitness of both man and sheep dog had declined with the introduction of this mode of transport.

3.4.5 Grants, subsidies and quotas

The second half of the 20th Century saw the economics of agriculture in Islay being underpinned by a complex system of grants, subsidies and quotas. The particulars of

⁹⁴ See 5.2.

⁹⁵ See 4.3.2.

the economic infrastructure varied greatly but more significant were the changing (and sometimes conflicting) aims of this system.⁹⁶ Furthermore, the relative importance of financial support to the viability of most farms burgeoned, particularly during the recessions and crises of the 1990s. Whilst this last may have been evident in most parts of the UK, in economically disadvantaged areas like Islay the effects were most pointed.

The interventionist system of grants, subsidies and quotas was of course a bureaucratic creation, initially by the UK government but latterly also the European Union. The post-war aims of the 1947 Agriculture Act to stabilise markets, increase national self-sufficiency, keep food cheap for the consumer and provide a good income for farmers (Marsh 1977: 19; Tracy 1982: 235 - 237) remained relevant to the support system, although eventually these tended to be rather neglected in the debate. These aims were achieved through a system of deficiency payments that guaranteed prices such that any shortfall in the market price would be offset by the government (Newby 1979). With a view to fostering the desired increase in output, particularly of livestock, the 1946 Hill Farming Act enabled farmers to obtain grants towards improving soil fertility, livestock quality and farm buildings and increasing mechanisation (Symon 1959: 262).

More recently, the consequences of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) subsidies in Islay resulted from four broader economic aims. The first of these was to stimulate the production of certain produce using particular methods. Secondly, the production of food in surplus should be limited. Thirdly, agriculture in a disadvantaged area should be maintained. Finally, certain non-economic factors, such as wildlife, needed to be brought within the economics of farming.⁹⁷ Despite these complex aims, most of the subsidies that were taken-up by farmers during the time of my fieldwork were calculated on a headage basis. These included the Beef Special Premium (BSP), the Suckler Cow Premium (SCP) and the Sheep Annual Premium (SAP). The SCP was paid for breeding cows whilst the BSP was for finished beef cattle. Both schemes were introduced in the CAP reforms of 1992 with the aim of supporting less intensive beef production (Gardner 1996: 108-109). Milk production was discouraged both by the

⁹⁶ See 5.3.

⁹⁷ See Chapter Four for a further discussion of environmental schemes.

quota system and because subsidies were not available for dairy farming latterly.⁹⁸ The Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance (HLCA) was also a headage payment that was available in disadvantaged agricultural regions⁹⁹ with the aim of maintaining the agricultural presence. There was concern towards the end of my fieldwork about proposals to change the HLCA to an area payment. I was informed that on some Islay farms, the HLCA provided 30% of the farm income and as such it was not surprising that the expected drop caused by a change to an area payment¹⁰⁰ was being viewed with such trepidation. All these subsidies had broader economic aims for the European Union but for most farmers in Islay they were straightforwardly perceived as essential in maintaining the viability of their own business. Despite this widely acknowledged dependency some argued that it had only been since calf and lamb prices dropped in the mid 1990s that the support system had assumed such significance.

After the War, farmers had also been eligible for grants to improve their land and the facilities on their farm. These had been easier to obtain in the 1950s and 1960s but more recently the Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) provided grants for land and building improvements, livestock breeding and nature conservation,¹⁰¹ although the aim of this scheme was primarily to improve the quality of both farmland and produce rather than to simply increase output.¹⁰² The scheme ran for five years between 1988 and 1992 and approximately £2.5m was given to Islay farmers.¹⁰³ The *Ileach* was optimistic, stating: “The ADP should see both land and stock in good ‘heart’ by 1993 – ready and able to overcome whatever problems and challenges the industry faces in the future.”¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Although no farmers in Islay gave this as a reason for leaving dairy farming. Dairying was always likely to be economic so long as there was a guaranteed market in the form of the creamery.

⁹⁹ Known as Less Favoured Areas (LFAs).

¹⁰⁰ One of the principal aims of the reform of the HLCA was to deter intensive livestock rearing because payments on a headage basis encourage a farmer to keep more livestock. However, this meant that the proposed changes were expected to increase the payments given to substantial estates but reduce those given to hill farmers with smaller holdings, something which Islay NFUS representatives felt went against the *raison d'être* of the scheme.

¹⁰¹ *Ileach* Vol. 13 No. 8 8th March 1986.

¹⁰² *Ileach* Vol. 14 No. 5 24th January 1987.

¹⁰³ *Ileach* Vol. 19 No.10 4th April 1992.

¹⁰⁴ *Ileach* Vol. 17 No. 19 4th August 1990.

3.4.6 Diversification

Diversification became an oft-used term during the 1990s, although Islay farmers had been deriving an income from non-agricultural or non-traditional sources for some time beforehand. The most common form of diversification for farmers was to offer some form of tourist accommodation.¹⁰⁵ Usually this was in the form of bed-and-breakfast or self-catering cottages, but farmers also established campsites and hostels. Others set up various tourist related businesses, such as riding centres, walled gardens and craft centres. One farmer established an oyster farm on Loch Gruinart with funding from the ADP. Another sold peat around the island and others derived income from sporting interests – either by letting out shooting rights or by running shoots themselves.

Although many farmers had diversified, many others had not and I was offered a variety of explanations for this. Some said that tourism was the only feasible option but that they were either unwilling to go in for holiday accommodation or were in an unsuitable part of the island. One tenant farmer expressed the view that it was easier for those who owned their own farms to diversify,¹⁰⁶ whilst another suggested that most farmers who diversified were wealthy beforehand and so they were better able to risk new ventures. I spoke to one farmer who said he would have liked to sell land for a wind farm but that he was deterred from doing so by conservation designations, which had caused the failure of a proposed development on the island a few years previously.¹⁰⁷

3.5 *Farming people*

As mentioned above, Islay has a long history of recruiting farmers from off the island. Of the 24 farmers I interviewed, fourteen had come to the island from elsewhere and two others were the children of immigrants. Six came from the Scottish lowlands, mainly from the Clyde valley and Dumfries and Galloway. Eight had come from England, including almost all of the farmers who arrived from the 1970s onwards.

¹⁰⁵ Of the 24 farmers that I interviewed, seven mentioned having some sort of tourist accommodation on their farm.

¹⁰⁶ Agricultural tenancies in Scotland are specifically *agricultural* and this can inhibit diversification into other endeavours (Callander 1998: 170)

¹⁰⁷ See 4.4.1.

Obviously what drew individual farmers to Islay varied, but there were some notable changes in their reasons over time that reflected the type of person coming to the island to farm. In the three decades after the Second World War many immigrant farmers were young men in their twenties looking to break away from working for their fathers or employers and set up on their own. Islay offered good and affordable farms (mostly as tenancies) and these were of a manageable size for a small operator with little capital. Islay Estate also had a rather elderly population of farmers on its farms and this had caused many to become run down, as reflected in the comments of Fraser Darling. During the 1950s and 1960s an influx of new blood and new methods into Islay farming was an essential condition for the improvements in the quality of land and livestock described above.¹⁰⁸ Most of the farmers that arrived later, during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, were somewhat older men that had accrued more capital. Many were able to purchase their own farms at a time when a number of holdings were available for sale. A few, often those arriving from England, had worked in other industries before coming to the island to take up farming.¹⁰⁹ Internal movements of farmers were also common and five whom I interviewed had moved away from the farms on which they were raised.¹¹⁰ On an island where most farmers were tenants such mobility was always possible and this allowed many young farmers to establish on their own or move to larger or better farms when this was viable or necessary.

Since the farming community in Islay has long been cosmopolitan, perhaps the most profound change affecting it during the second half of the 20th Century was the decline in agricultural employment.¹¹¹ In this Islay was no different to most other parts of the UK. The ongoing process of farm expansion and amalgamation was facilitated by technological developments but these developments also improved labour efficiency. Thus many farm workers gradually became surplus to requirements, particularly as wage demands increased. During my fieldwork I encountered only eight farmers who employed labour additional to themselves and their family,¹¹² although many had

¹⁰⁸ See 3.4.2 – 3.4.4.

¹⁰⁹ These other trades included veterinarians, conservationists and small businessmen. Some Islay men who had been raised on farms took up other trades before returning to take over from their fathers.

¹¹⁰ The family of one farmer I interviewed had been living on the same farm for 120 years but this was exceptional rather than normal.

¹¹¹ See 5.4.

¹¹² In one of these, the employee was on a government training-scheme and the farmer said that he would not be able to afford someone on full wages. In another case the owner, who lived in England, employed the farmer.

employed others in the past. Consequently, Newby's assertion that "the division between farmers and farm workers [in pastoral areas] is blurred by the fact that many of the latter are farmers' sons or other kin awaiting their inheritance" (1979: 77) was largely appropriate in Islay and most farms were run by what he would define as 'family farmers' (ibid: 105). The decline in farm labour was further precipitated by the disappearance of the relatively labour-intensive dairy industry after the closure of the creamery. Fewer farm workers meant that the rural areas of Islay became increasingly depopulated.

A further significant trend was the changing role of the farmer's wife. Increasingly, wives took outside employment whereas previously most had helped with agricultural work or with on-farm activities such as bed-and-breakfast. In some instances, the need for efficiency and greater revenue during the recession stimulated many to seek full-time or part-time salaried jobs, whilst others, particularly the wives of incoming farmers, were already qualified in professions such as nursing or teaching. Farmers themselves were also looking beyond their farms for income. Some started to work as agricultural contractors, doing jobs for other local farmers. One farmer took a job driving a school bus after losing his dairy herd in the wake of the creamery closure.

The drive for efficiency and mechanisation arguably caused a decline in co-operation between farmers. I was often told that it had been normal for farmers to help their neighbours get in their harvest in what appears to have been a well-developed system of reciprocity. When a farmer was ready to harvest his neighbours would appear in the morning ready to help. The farmer knew that he would be expected to do the same for all those who had assisted. A more modern version of this was still going on during my fieldwork, with some farmers sharing machinery and occasionally having arrangements to help neighbours get their silage in,¹¹³ but there were not the well-developed machinery rings that have been established in some other rural communities, such as Orkney. Just as common was the employment of contractors with their own machinery for harvesting, hired in a straightforward market exchange. I was often told that farming had become 'every man for himself'.

¹¹³ The RSPB had such an arrangement with a neighbouring farmer.

3.6 *Representation and organisations*

Whilst in many respects farmers became more isolated and independent on their own farms, the formal organisation of agriculture workers in Islay increased. The farming community was represented by four different organisations that fulfilled somewhat different roles. The local branch of the National Farmers' Union of Scotland (NFUS) represented the political interests of farmers. At the time of my fieldwork the Union had 77-78 members in Islay, about 90% of the farmers on the island. Women played a significant role in the Union and, at the time of my fieldwork, both the secretary and president of the local branch of the Union were farmers' wives. The Scottish Crofters' Union (SCU), which was formed in 1985,¹¹⁴ pursued the political causes of crofters. Most farmers in Islay belonged to Islay Farmers Limited, an organisation established in the 1950s that sold local produce and provided farmers with supplies. The promotion and development of local agriculture was fostered through the long established Islay, Jura and Colonsay Agricultural Association (Storrie 1988), which organised the annual Islay Show at Bridgend every August.¹¹⁵

3.7 *Sporting estates*

Islay first began to hold an attraction to sporting interests in the 19th Century. As a consequence, the management of the large estates on the island became geared as much towards providing game as towards agriculture. Much of the modern Islay landscape was created with this express purpose in mind. This was most apparent between Bridgend and Port Askaig where woodlands and lakes were created during the 19th Century to provide for, amongst other things, shooting and fishing. Although field sports had long been significant in Islay life, the quarry varied as game populations changed.

Grouse shooting was important when both Red and Black Grouse had been abundant. Both these species began to decline in the 1970s (Elliott 1989) and organised shooting ceased. By the time of my fieldwork, most of the sporting operators on the island

¹¹⁴ *Heach* Vol.13 No.3 23rd December 1985

¹¹⁵ See figures Nine to Twelve.

agreed not to shoot either species even on rough shoots unless and until their populations recovered. Pheasants became a more common quarry, although shoots were never as large as on the mainland where huge numbers of Pheasants were captive-bred and released.¹¹⁶ Woodcock were a much sought-after quarry in Islay and the island developed a considerable reputation for this species. The number of birds bagged declined during the 20th Century but they remained common enough to be an attraction into the 1990s. Woodcock and Pheasant shoots were often combined, as both species enjoyed overlapping habitat requirements. Wildfowling had been popular in Islay but increasing restrictions on goose shooting, particularly during the 1990s,¹¹⁷ meant that only small numbers of duck, some of which were released, could be realistically pursued. As grouse numbers declined, deer increased on the hills and stalking became more prominent. Islay's Red Deer are larger than mainland animals and the opportunities for collecting trophy stags brought many to the estates. This variety of sporting opportunities produced a long season. At one time this would have begun in mid-August with the grouse, followed by salmon fishing, pheasant shoots, then stalking. But the demise of grouse shooting and, to a lesser extent, the restrictions on shooting geese¹¹⁸ had the effect of curtailing the cycle of field sports in Islay.

As far as the estate owners were concerned, one of the most important customers for field sports was their own entourage. During my fieldwork, many shoots were still primarily organised for and by the estate owning families, notably on the Dunlossit Estate where the owners were very keen on field sports. On Islay Estate shoots were arranged by the Bridgend Hotel rather than by the owners. To an extent, different kinds of shooting attracted different clientele, something most apparent with the goose shoots, which reputedly drew a high number of Europeans. Although at one time Islay may have been able to sell shooting in terms of the size of bag that could be obtained, this was much less significant after game bird populations declined. Instead, Islay came to offer sportsmen a unique experience amidst beautiful scenery. The quality of the Woodcock shooting, the stature of the Red Deer and the ease of access to the relatively gentle terrain were also significant selling points. As well as the estates, two independent sporting operators established businesses in Islay, both selling rough

¹¹⁶ I was told that some Pheasants were released on Islay Estate but only in small numbers. Some gamekeepers that I spoke to discussed the possibility of releasing birds in the future.

¹¹⁷ See 4.4.2.

¹¹⁸ After 1978 it was possible to shoot Barnacle Geese until 20th February (see 4.2.2).

shooting in the Rhinns. Some farmers sold on the shooting rights over their land to one or other of these.

The organisation and running of the sporting season and the individual shoots has normally been a part of the role of the head keeper and his team.¹¹⁹ Outside of the season their main task was controlling any vermin that might be considered to offer a threat to quarry species. There is evidence that in the past keepers sometimes overstepped the law in this regard, particularly in relation to predatory birds, but this appeared to have largely disappeared by the time of my fieldwork.¹²⁰ Mammals, such as Stoats and Ferrets, presented fewer legalistic problems and Hoodie Crows were also vigorously targeted. In addition to vermin control, it was essential to provide the right habitat for game, although this could be a difficult task. Heather moorland needed to be maintained by burning and woodland cover was required by species such as Pheasant and Woodcock. This meant that existing woodland was added to by planting and by fencing off areas to allow for natural regeneration. During the 1990s, the planting of native hardwoods became popular, both for game and for silviculture, and the larger estates employed forestry teams to manage woodland areas. Much of the work they did was associated with eradicating invasive and over-dominant species, particularly the non-native rhododendrons that proliferated in the eastern parts of the island.

The relationship between field sports and agriculture was often complex. Farmland was potentially an important habitat for game and much of the land on sporting estates came under some agricultural influence. A former factor of Islay Estate told me that one of the most likely causes of the decline in game bird populations in Islay was the improving efficiency of farming. The rundown farms that had been commonplace in the years after the Second World War were very good for game but increasingly intensive farming techniques had contributed to declines in species such as Black Grouse and Woodcock. Estates normally owned the shooting rights on any of their tenant farms and thus could legitimately shoot on a tenancy at any time without the tenant's consent. In practice, the estate usually informed the tenant farmer well in

¹¹⁹ Teams from different estates frequently co-operated on shoot days by helping with beating or other activities.

¹²⁰ See 4.2.1.

advance.¹²¹ This was often necessary as well as polite because it meant that the farmer could avoid disturbing the areas where the shoot took place.

3.8 *Negotiating change and making choices*

In this contextualising description I have collated the accounts of various others into a single version of the discourse surrounding the particular circumstances and changes influencing agriculture and sporting interests in Islay during the second half of the 20th Century. Certain recurring elements within the description are teased out below.

Firstly, agriculture in Islay was characterised by diversity, particularly in the size and type of agricultural units and the background of farming people. There were also durable complementary associations with other local industries, particularly distilling (through the use of draff and the development of crofting for distillery workers) and sport shooting. Diversity was significant because it was connected to the adaptation of farming to changes in the demands of the outside world. The theme of change is explicit throughout the above description, which encompasses observations about the sorts of changes that have occurred, their origins and their effects in Islay.

Change was not understood to have occurred at a constant rate. The gradual changes instigated during Walter Frederick Campbell's lairdship gave way to the apparent stagnation that Fraser Darling described in the middle of the 20th Century. The modernisation and technologisation that followed were viewed positively in certain moments but also created anxieties about the effects that the wrong sorts of change might accrue, particularly on the perceived qualities of Islay's agriculture (cf. Strathern 1992: 42-43). For example, diversity was in some respects reduced, as economies of scale encouraged the further amalgamation of units at the expense of small farms, crofts and smallholdings. Farmers also tended to specialise in either beef or dairy cattle. These various concerns about change crystallised around the relationship between Islay and the outside world.

¹²¹ Although one farmer said that this had tended not to happen in more recent times. Another once had to chase a shooting party away from calving cows.

Change was long considered to arrive in Islay from outside but more recently the locus of change had grown ever more distant.¹²² Policy decisions shifted from the UK to Europe; incoming farmers, with their new ideas and technologies, came from England rather than the Scottish lowlands and some were not even from farming backgrounds; technological advances, promoted through agricultural policy and economic intervention, garnered a shift away from self-sufficient rotational systems and local livestock to more intensive, high-input approaches using continental breeds of livestock and bought-in supplements. Despite this, modernisation was not as pervasive in Islay as elsewhere but the reliance on decisions, knowledge and values established at such great remove created uncertainty. The sort of gradual and largely positive innovations that had once characterised farming in Islay had become less plausible, a sensibility exacerbated by the crises over BSE and the closure of the creamery. The intrinsic qualities of the island, both social and environmental, were harder to reconcile with the ever more detached demands of markets and policy-makers and innovation, technology and financial support were not always effective in bridging this gap, as they had been able to during the post-war modernisation. Although adaptation to the changing demands of the outside world had always been a vital if complicated process in Islay's agricultural industry, by the late 1990s these demands seemed ever more capricious and incongruent.

The effects of these economic changes were also evident in the fabric of the farming community. The hierarchical system of landowner, tenant and farm worker was eroded, particularly in some parts of the island, because mechanisation took the place of most farm workers and many tenants bought up their farms. Whilst this meant that one set of distinctions was less ubiquitous, it was suggested that the Islay farming community had become more individualistic, with an attitude of 'every man for himself'. There were also fears of a loss in continuity and some farmers wondered whether there would be anyone to farm after they retired. Young people on the island lacked enthusiasm for a vocation that seemed to offer little reward for long hours and hard work,¹²³ an opinion that few blamed them for holding. Even those who were interested were put off by the difficulty in building up an enterprise in an industry that had come to necessitate only large-scale endeavours.

¹²² See 5.6.

¹²³ The Islay Young Farmers' Club closed down in the 1990s after more than fifty years of existence.

Despite these concerns, the farmers whom I spoke to were not lacking in strategies for making a living in the future. Some were still keen to build on the changes that had been revealed and emphasised over the previous few decades. This would mean specialising, expanding their land holdings and improving the quality of their stock. Some looked to niche markets for quality Scottish produce or unusual breeds. Others still were considering diversification, seeing tourism and conservation as the most viable sources of income in the future. This latter entailed further involvement with conservation organisations, an involvement that had been fraught with difficulties over the previous few decades. The history of this relationship will be discussed in the following chapter, whilst elaborations on how the above histories appeared to inform the discourses I encountered are forthcoming in chapters Five to Eight.

Figure Fourteen: *A Rhinns farm*



Figure Fifteen: *Cut silage by Loch Indaal*



Figure Sixteen: *Greenland White-fronted Geese*



Figure Seventeen: *Barnacle Geese*



4.0 The history of conservation and farming in Islay

4.1 Sources and approaches

As with the previous chapter, the material presented below offers a historical summary that contextualises the events that I encountered during my fieldwork. In this case, the focus is on the history of the relationship between corporate nature conservation and the farming community in Islay. This chapter does not attempt to offer the last word on this subject but it does provide some detail and interpretation of the events that have shaped the development of the relationship, as well as giving a flavour of the reactions to those events. I begin with the earliest involvement of conservation organisations with Islay during the 1960s and 1970s. The unfolding of events is then divided by two watersheds, firstly the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act and secondly the inauguration of SNH in 1992. This historical account ends in 1999 when I first arrived on the island to conduct fieldwork.

Certain conservation issues in Islay have been rather well documented in one form or another and so I have been able to draw on a variety of sources. The *Ileach* newspaper has proved an excellent source of information (and opinion) concerning conservation since its inception in 1973. This is the main resource I have used for descriptions of the most newsworthy issues. Although individuals with a generally sceptical view of conservation organisations edited the *Ileach*, there was always an eagerness to include opinions, factual information, articles and letters from the conservation organisations within its pages as well as opposition to these bodies. Consequently the paper's political agenda does not prevent it from being a good general source. When pertinent, I have also used the news digest SCENES (Scottish Environment News) and a number of scientific publications, particularly concerning geese. In recent years the conservation organisations have produced a considerable quantity of written material about Islay and issues relevant to the island, although they produced rather less prior to 1992. I have also been fortunate enough to view an archive of the correspondence of Gordon Booth, who lived in Islay between the late 1960s and early 1980s and who was a point of contact for the conservation organisations prior to their establishment of a more permanent presence on the island. This correspondence thus adds to my

understanding of the initial incursions of formal conservation into Islay. Of course, a good deal has been published about wildlife in Islay. The earlier material tends to be more qualitative than the more recent but both are still highly informative. As with the previous chapter, I have also been able to draw on the many interviews I conducted with farmers, conservationists and landowners.

4.2 *Conservation before 1981*

Formal conservation assumed a more central significance in Islay after the passing of the Wildlife and Countryside Act in 1981. But prior to this, conservation organisations were extensively involved in island affairs even if both the RSPB and the Nature Conservancy Council had yet to establish a permanent presence. In particular, the issue of goose damage to agriculture had already assumed prominence before the protective measures of the Act pushed tensions between farmers and conservationists to a higher pitch. During the 1960s and 70s an equally problematic debate concerned the persecution of birds of prey, an activity for which Islay had gained a considerable reputation amongst the conservationists. Issues that later became more significant, such as the designation of SSSIs and the conservation of species such as the Chough, appear to have been relatively minor concerns in Islay prior to 1981.

4.2.1 *The persecution of birds of prey*

The poisoning, trapping and shooting of birds of prey had for some time been a significant part of the management of the sort of sporting estates that covered most of Islay. During the 19th Century huge numbers of raptors were killed on Highland estates in the belief that this would enable game to flourish (Evans 1997; Smout 2000). Whilst these measures often succeeded in their aims, the populations of many birds of prey crashed, with species such as White-tailed Eagle, Goshawk, Red Kite and Osprey becoming extinct in Scotland (Baxter & Rintoul 1953; Evans 1997; Holloway 1996). Further to this persecution, birds of prey had to contend with the attentions of collectors (both of eggs and live birds) and with poor breeding success caused by organochlorine pesticides (Evans 1997; Sheail 1998). Despite bird protection laws and the attentions of

bodies such as the RSPB, the persecution of many species continued largely unchecked through much of the 20th Century. Islay, with its rich and varied landscape, had great potential for supporting good populations of nationally scarce birds of prey, such as Hen Harrier, Peregrine and Golden Eagle. Although some species held out, the Hen Harrier had been extinct as a breeding species in Islay between 1870 and 1960 (Baxter & Rintoul 1953; Elliott 1989; Holloway 1996).

Concerned about the fate of raptors in Islay, J. Morton Boyd (the then Regional Officer for the Nature Conservancy)¹²⁴ visited Islay during February and March of 1966.¹²⁵ His main purpose on this visit was to uncover evidence of illegal raptor persecution and survey the island's goose population. He spent considerable time with Islay Estate staff, including the head keeper. But despite being convinced that both this man and his wife "were inveterate killers" and finding a suspicious live-bait trap on the Estate, Boyd was unable to procure any confession from the keeper, despite subtle attempts to "draw him out". He also felt that the keeper was too set in his ways to be dissuaded from his attitude towards vermin control. Boyd was informed locally that other estates in Islay employed keepers with a similar outlook and this impression was reinforced on Boyd when he encountered but three birds of prey in Islay during four days of searching.

Despite Boyd's pessimistic reports, attitudes toward raptor persecution in Islay gradually began to change. By 1971 Booth could inform the RSPB of "improvements in the attitudes of keepers to birds of prey",¹²⁶ although the fortunes of the island's raptors continued to be a significant matter in correspondence between conservationists and Booth throughout the 1970s, reflecting both their concern and their interest. Whilst conservationists reckoned there were still 'rogue' keepers about, there were others considered to hold less antagonistic views toward birds of prey. A keeper I spoke with told me that when he began keeping in the mid-1970s it was normal to find many dead birds in the morning that had fed on poisoned bait. He regarded the move away from this sort of indiscriminate culling to be very positive because it had just been killing for the sake of killing. Whilst such persecution still went on in some places it seemed that

¹²⁴ The Nature Conservancy became the Nature Conservancy Council in 1973 (Evans 1997; Mackay 1995).

¹²⁵ From "Routine visit to Islay and Jura by the Regional Officer, 28th February – 4th March 1966", a note held at the Islay Wildlife Information Centre.

¹²⁶ From a letter by George Waterston, Assistant Director (Scotland) RSPB to Gordon Booth, 11th August 1971. Held at the Islay Wildlife Information Centre.

by the late 1970s these practices were coming under much greater scrutiny from local residents as well as outside conservationists. For example, the well publicised poisoning of a rare Gyr Falcon in 1979 provoked one resident to write in the *Ileach*, “The laying of poisoned bait . . . is perhaps the most irresponsible way of protection [sic] of shooting stock,” before adding “I wish it could be stopped.”¹²⁷

Local residents and the island’s major landowners were doubtless motivated by an increasing concern for both their own and the island’s reputation. But such changes in attitude were also precipitated by the decline of grouse shooting in Islay after the 1960s,¹²⁸ which removed one of the main incentives for bird of prey control. The selling off of much of the Rhinns during the 1970s and 1980s also took this important area for raptors more-or-less out of keeping. By that time, what had appeared to be an unquestioned relationship between the indiscriminate control of birds of prey and the fostering of game bird populations had finally been ruptured in Islay.

4.2.2 *The emergence of goose problems*

Large numbers of geese have certainly been spending the winter in Islay for centuries. According to Ogilvie “[Barnacle Geese have] wintered on Islay . . . for as long as records exist” (Ogilvie 1992: 241) and Greenland White-fronted Geese have been numerous since at least 1871. Just when the geese began to be considered a problem to farmers is harder to ascertain, though complaints were being made in the 19th Century (Ogilvie et al. 1999). However, it is probably only the improvements in agricultural productivity since the 1940s that have raised the problem to anything more than an irritation for a few.

During the 20th Century, three species of goose wintered in significant numbers in Islay:¹²⁹ the Barnacle Goose, the Greenland race of the White-fronted Goose and the

¹²⁷ *Ileach* Vol. 6 No. 10, 2nd April 1979.

¹²⁸ A keeper told me that grouse probably declined in Islay as a result of habitat changes, particularly a reduction in heather cover caused by sheep grazing and a move away from the growing of arable crops.

¹²⁹ Other species were considered fairly common in the 19th Century namely Pink-footed Goose, Bean Goose and Brent Goose (Baxter & Rintoul 1953).

Greylag Goose. Before continuing, a discussion of the taxonomy of the first two species is pertinent.

The Barnacle Geese¹³⁰ that winter in Islay breed in the tundra of northeast Greenland (Ogilvie et al. 1999). They are often referred to as Greenland Barnacle Geese to distinguish them from the two other populations of Barnacle Geese that nest in Svalbard and arctic Russia. However, whilst they are a distinct population there is no evidence to suggest that they are *genetically distinct* from the other two populations. The Greenland birds migrate via Iceland to winter in western Scotland and Ireland.¹³¹ Islay has become their main winter haunt holding around 70% of the total population of 40,000-45,000 in the late 1990s. Despite this being only one of three populations of Barnacle Geese, it is sometimes said that around 70% of the world's population is found in Islay¹³² and in fact one rarely encounters any figure for Islay's share as a percentage of the actual global population.¹³³

The Greenland White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons flavirostris*¹³⁴ is one of four races of the White-fronted Goose. It differs from the more numerous European White-front in being slightly larger and longer necked, having a longer orange (rather than pink) bill and somewhat darker plumage.¹³⁵ They breed in west Greenland and migrate through Iceland to winter in the western British Isles. In 1992 Islay held around 35% of the 28,000 individuals of this race (Ogilvie 1992), with most of the remainder wintering in Ireland. On occasions, the Barnacle and Greenland White-fronted Geese have been lumped together and described as 'Greenland Geese' though this seems to have been

¹³⁰ See Figure Seventeen.

¹³¹ Scottish Natural Heritage have also got confused over the origins of Scottish Barnacle Geese. In its flagship document "The Natural Heritage of Scotland: An Overview" it is claimed that, "Scotland is of special importance in a British context for wintering Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus*, geese and sea ducks. The Greenland Barnacle Geese *Branta leucopsis* on Islay and the Solway, and the Greenland White-fronted Geese *Anser albifrons flavirostris* on Islay, are notable in this respect" (n.d.: 139). The Solway population of Barnacle Geese in fact breed in Svalbard and not Greenland.

¹³² For example, a Scottish Office News Release of 27th November 1998 states "Current estimates suggest that around 31,000 Barnacle Geese winter on Islay. This represents a substantial percentage, approx. 72%, of the global population of the species."

¹³³ The Islay population was approximately 10% of the global numbers in the early to mid 1990s. The population breeding in Arctic Russia and wintering mainly in the Netherlands numbered 176,000 in 1993 (Snow & Perrins 1998: 188) and 236,000 in 1996, out of the global population of 298,000 (Black 1997: 175-182).

¹³⁴ See Figure Sixteen.

¹³⁵ Rather surprisingly the Greenland White-fronted Goose was not described as a specific race of the White-fronted Goose until 1948 (Ogilvie 1992). Records prior to this are thus not assigned to any particular race but it is assumed that all records from the west of Scotland were of the Greenland form.

done for convenience's sake rather than to imply any genetic relation between the two species.

The Barnacle Goose has been common in Islay since records began although Berry (1939) reported a substantial increase in some parts of the island during the 25 years previous to his writing. In the post-war years the number wintering has been reckoned at around 5000-6000 though figures are rather vague (Ogilvie 1992). Formal counts were begun in 1961 by the Wildfowl Trust¹³⁶ and continued at an increasing frequency thereafter. During the 1960s and early 1970s the numbers burgeoned quite markedly, almost trebling in the ten years from 1966 to 1976.¹³⁷ Ogilvie (ibid) attributes this increase to improved feeding conditions created by agricultural improvements and low mortality, though obviously these two factors are somewhat related. It was during this time that the problems caused to farmers by goose grazing began to receive more attention. In part this was precipitated by the sheer fact of increased numbers but the most significant effect of this was that geese were feeding more widely on the island and thus affecting more farmers.¹³⁸

During the same period White-front numbers remained more stable with 3000-4000 in most years.¹³⁹ This goose seems to have increased during the early part of the 20th century leading Berry (Berry 1939) to note a substantial rise in numbers during the previous thirty years. He remarked, though without evidence, that the White-front seemed "to have supplanted the Greylag" (ibid: 26), which, for no clear reason, declined in Islay through much of the century. Greylags made a comeback in more recent years however, though the origin of these new birds was probably Hebridean and not Icelandic, which was likely to have been the main source of Greylags previously. Though their numbers were not large, Greylags began to maintain a presence throughout the year and so this increase was being viewed locally with trepidation.

The legal status of geese in Islay, and particularly the length of the shooting season, varied somewhat during this period. Barnacle Geese were given total legal protection in 1954 but this was removed just a year later in Islay when shooting was allowed during

¹³⁶ This is a charitable conservation body founded by Sir Peter Scott.

¹³⁷ See Figure Eighteen.

¹³⁸ *Ileach* Vol. 4 No. 21 29th August 1977.

¹³⁹ See Figure Eighteen.

December and January (Booth 1981: 26-27). Elliott (1989: 33) calculates that 400-600 Barnacles were shot annually by the large estates over the next twenty years, though Ogilvie et al (1999) put the figure at 200, at least until the numbers began to rise significantly. However, numbers increased so rapidly during the 1970s that concerned farmers encouraged the implementation of an extension to the shooting season, initially from 1st October to 31st January in 1976¹⁴⁰ and then from 1st September to 20th February (below high water mark) from 1978. This pushed up the numbers killed to 1500 in 1980 and enabled the shooting to be sold more effectively by the estates (Elliott 1989; Ogilvie 1992). Coincidentally there was a collapse in numbers and low breeding success during the late 1970s and early 1980s, which saw the population almost halve in six years.¹⁴¹ It was only during this period that significant numbers of White-fronts began to be shot (Ogilvie 1992).

The initial investigations into the problems caused by the geese were conducted not by conservation organisations but by the West of Scotland College of Agriculture. The Nature Conservancy Council had a rather limited involvement at the time and much of the dialogue concerning the geese went on directly between the NFUS and the Scottish Office. The Wildfowl Trust seemed sympathetic towards the extension of the shooting season¹⁴² and the RSPB, whilst concerned,¹⁴³ was peripheral to the issue during the 1970s. However, the concerns of the conservationists were clearly heightened by the dramatic drop in Barnacle Goose numbers during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Once the Wildlife and Countryside Act was implemented the situation concerning the geese was altered once again.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ *Ileach* Vol. 4 No. 21 29th August 1977.

¹⁴¹ See Figure Eighteen.

¹⁴² *Ileach* Vol. 4 No. 10 28th March 1977.

¹⁴³ Although the RSPB had an interest in the Islay goose problems during the late 1970s (and was no doubt frustrated at its lack of formal involvement in discussions), the issue was never mentioned in its members' magazine *Birds* through that period.

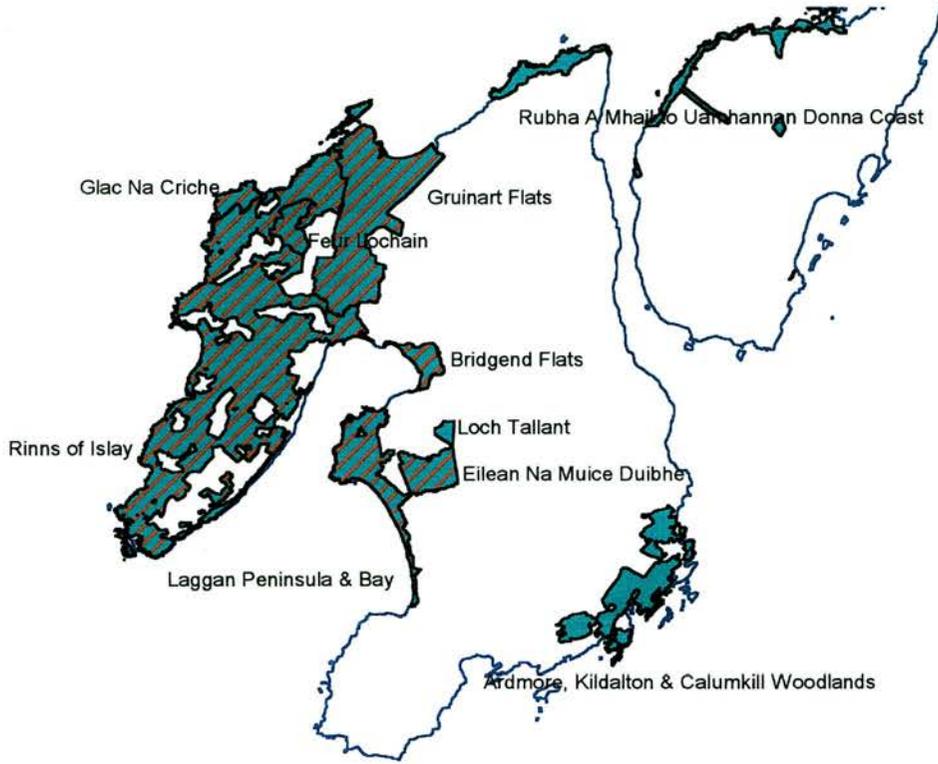
¹⁴⁴ See 4.3.2 below.

Figure Eighteen: *Numbers of three species of goose wintering in Islay in selected years*¹⁴⁵

Year	Barnacle Goose	Greenland White-fronted Goose	Greylag Goose
1961	5800	1300	N/A
1964	8300	2400	665
1966	8400	4700	120
1967	16,500	3320	170
1968	13,300	2250	276
1971	16,600	3400	220
1975	20,200	4150	142
1976	24,000	4210	140
1977	19,600	3300	50
1979	17,300	2900	150
1982	12,800	3250	64
1984	17,345	5256	89
1986	22,000	5669	31
1988	20,200	7588	90
1990	28,000	8297	105
1992	25,202	10,905	61
1993	25,452	11,004	44
1994	26,237	12,350	33
1996	31,044	12,964	146
1998	33,544	12,426	189
1999	35,428	13,871	316

¹⁴⁵ Sources: (Booth 1981; Boyd & Boyd 1990; Craik 1993; Cranswick et al. 1995; Elliott 1989; Galbraith 1984; 1985; Islay Natural History Trust 1995; 1997; 1999; 2000; Kirby et al. 1991; Ogilvie 1983; 1992; Petty 1991). Figures for Barnacle and Greenland White-fronted Geese are November counts (except 1986), though Ogilvie (1992) suggested that his earlier counts for White-fronts were probably incomplete. Greylag Goose numbers are the peak recorded for each year.

Figure Nineteen: *Designated areas for nature conservation in Islay*¹⁴⁶



SSSI and SPA Sites



SSSI Sites

¹⁴⁶ Source: Scottish Natural Heritage, Islay, September 1999.

4.3 *The 1980s Disputes*

4.3.1 The effects of the Wildlife and Countryside Act

According to David Evans the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act:

[W]as a concrete manifestation of how far the conservationists had instilled their message in the national conscience; how far in practice, in cruel reality, Britain was willing to go in the interests of its flora and fauna, its landscape and environment (1997: 164).

Despite representing a leap forward of sorts the Act was something of a disappointment for many conservationists, particularly in view of the lack of protection afforded to areas outside of designated sites. But it also represented a pivotal moment for the movement because it was the first time that bodies such as the RSPB or Friends of the Earth had manifested any substantive political presence. Although it was widely acknowledged as a rather muddled piece of legislation, the Act also helped bring Britain into line with other European Union countries, particularly through the implementation of the 1979 EC Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (the Birds Directive). In Islay the practical impact of this last fact was the instigation in 1988 and 1990 of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) in the most important sites for geese,¹⁴⁶ a move that enabled the EC to become involved in conservation issues affecting SPAs.¹⁴⁷

The Act also returned full protection to Barnacle Geese (which were protected by the Birds Directive) but allowed them to be shot under licence if they were causing agricultural damage (Elliott 1989). These general pest-control provisions had caused concern to the RSPB because they were felt to be too indiscriminate (Prestit 1980). Indeed in the first year that licences were issued in Islay, 1000 geese were shot (Elliott 1989). Subsequently, the procedures were tightened up, with licences being given only when an individual farmer could provide evidence of significant agricultural damage.

¹⁴⁶ *Ileach* Vol.15 No.19 6th August 1988; *SCENES* April 1990. SPA (and also Ramsar) designations have normally been underpinned by SSSI status in order to offer the protection of the 1981 Act (Evans 1997).

¹⁴⁷ Although if a site was a candidate for SPA status because it harboured birds such as Greenland White-fronted Geese (which were protected by the Birds Directive) then this also allowed the EC to become involved. This was what happened in the case of Duich Moss.

The persecution of birds of prey in Islay was not significantly abated by the Act. Indeed between the late 1970s and late 1980s fifteen incidents of the poisoning of protected species came to light (Elliott 1989). In 1991, the Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Act enabled landowners to be prosecuted if they instructed or encouraged their employees to break the laws against wild birds. The Criminal Justice Act of that year also increased the penalties for such actions (Holmes et al. 1995). Since these Acts were implemented raptor persecution disappeared from view in Islay.

The main impact of the Act, and also the most contentious aspect, were the measures concerning SSSIs and other designated areas (Evans 1997).¹⁴⁸ Habitat-based (rather than species-based) approaches had moved to the centre of conservation thinking and it had been hoped that this would be reflected in the new legislation. In particular it was desired by conservation organisations that the protection of habitats should extend beyond nature reserves and into the wider countryside where it was felt that the destruction and neglect of important sites had been increasing. Although large swathes of Britain were designated under various banners, it was considered that these designations had little or no substance in the face of agricultural intensification, forestry and other developments. In regions of Britain where such pressures were severe, designations needed more teeth. Evans argued (ibid) that prior to the Act, SSSIs had been ineffectual and inconsequential with only the pretence of consultation with the NCC offered by planning authorities. Certainly in Islay, it was not until after 1981 that they became an altogether more influential designation, at least after certain loopholes were closed.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act introduced a number of new procedures into SSSIs (Evans 1997). Firstly, a landowner or occupier was issued with an exhaustive list of potentially damaging operations (PDOs). These were frequently referred to in the Highlands as a list of 'thou shalt nots' but rather than being a list of prohibitions these were exhortations for the farmer to consult with the NCC if they wished to carry out any listed activity. The list was so exhaustive because no operations could be added without re-notification of the site and thus the NCC was advised to cover every eventuality (McCarthy 1991). The NCC would then have three months in which to decide whether

¹⁴⁸ See Figure Nineteen showing the areas of Islay under conservation designations.

to agree for the operation to go ahead or to step in and reach a voluntary management agreement with the owner or occupier. In this, compensation was paid on a profit-foregone basis to the relevant party on the condition that they would not carry out the operation. If the owner or occupier refused to enter into an agreement then, although the NCC could not prevent this, they could appeal to the Secretary of State to issue a Nature Conservation Order (NCO). Small fines could be administered in cases of contravention but in reality an NCO just meant an extension to the consultation period. A determined SSSI owner or occupier still had the power to manage their land as they wished, regardless of the consequences for the habitat and its wildlife. In the case of a planning application in or near an SSSI, the NCC needed to be consulted by the planning authority but they had no power to enforce a decision in favour of conservation. So although the NCC now had greater powers of coercion, through their consultancy status and ability to make management agreements, their absolute authority, even within designated areas, was largely non-existent.

But such, albeit limited, powers were often perceived rather differently by people living in areas such as Islay where the threats to habitat were not as obvious as they were in areas with more industry or intensive agriculture. What was arguably a necessary involvement in the Lowlands came to be viewed as inappropriate interference, bureaucracy and even oppression by many in the economically marginal Highlands. However, soon after the 1981 Act, the NCC began to perceive a variety of threats to important wildlife and their habitats in Islay. This is an important aspect of local discourse that I will return to in Chapter Seven.

4.3.2 The goose problem takes hold

The nub of the Islay goose problem was encapsulated by the manner in which Barnacle and Greenland White-fronted Geese were dealt with by the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act. These were two species of considerable importance for conservation but they were also agricultural pests. Thus on the one hand the geese were protected but on the other they could be shot if considered to be causing damage to agriculture. The responsibility for the protection of the geese lay with the NCC but the responsibility for the issuing of shooting licences was the concern of the Department of

Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland (DAFS). Although procedures for the issuing of licences were tightened up after 1982 (Elliott 1989), shooting continued throughout the 1980s at varying, though often high levels.¹⁴⁹ The shooting of Greenland White-fronts¹⁵⁰ caused conservationists more concern given the globally low numbers of the sub-species (Easterbee et al. 1991).¹⁵¹ At this point, a summary of the agricultural damage that the geese have been considered to cause is required.

Both Barnacle and Greenland White-fronted Geese feed on agricultural grasses. The Barnacles tend to clip the tops of the grass with their short bills whereas the White-fronts often take out the whole plant, probing underground with their longer bills. Although the White-fronts probably damage the grass plants more than Barnacles, they often feed in agriculturally marginal areas and tend to associate in smaller flocks.

The removal of grass by geese causes three main problems (Elliott 1989; Patton & Frame 1981). Firstly, grazing in late winter and early spring removes much of the early bite that is important for lambing ewes and previously in-wintered cattle. The farmer thus has to feed his livestock with supplements or silage for longer. Secondly, the quantity of silage that can be cut during the summer is reduced. Thus the farmer requires more silage but is able to produce rather less as a result of goose grazing. Third, the geese select for newly reseeded leys, especially of Italian Rye Grass (Ogilvie et al. 1999). The damage that this causes reduces the persistence of the ley and means that farmers have to reseed more frequently. These problems of grazing are exacerbated by the problem of puddling by the feet, which disrupts the soil structure. The farmer could, of course, reduce his stock numbers in response to all these problems or he could avoid intensifying. However, these solutions were not perceived by most I spoke to as an economically viable option.

Whilst identifying the economic problems that are caused by the geese has been relatively straightforward, the quantification of the loss of income incurred has proved more elusive. Obviously the imperative to do this becomes greater when the question

¹⁴⁹ Ogilvie et al (1999) give a mean total of 792 Barnacle Geese shot in Islay each winter during 1982-91 (range 447-1365).

¹⁵⁰ 76 Greenland White-fronts were shot under licence in 1988, *SCENES* April 1989.

¹⁵¹ The RSPB, NCC and FoE all protested about the shooting of Greenland White-fronts, *SCENES* January 1988. The RSPB claimed that conservationists in Greenland were dismayed that their efforts were being countered by shooting in Islay, *SCENES* April 1989.

of financial compensation is raised, as it frequently was by Islay farmers, and to this end Patton and Frame (1981) produced the first study of the loss of spring grazing and silage to farmers in Islay. But inevitably, any calculation of the loss of income for every farm or the loss of income per goose is likely to produce at best a ballpark figure. As far as issues of compensation are concerned, the more important figures have been the amount of money that could be made available and the amount that most Islay farmers, or at least their NFUS representatives, felt acceptable. During the 1980s and particularly into the 1990s a discrepancy persisted between these figures.

In fact it was sometime after the 1981 Act before compensation began to be paid to most farmers in Islay. Before this, conservation organisations were keen for other methods of managing the goose problem to be attempted. The methods undertaken during the 1980s involved various efforts to redistribute the geese around the island in the hope that they would spend most of their time in designated sanctuary areas rather than on the majority of farmers' land. It was hoped that these measures would enable the NCC to have a more substantive impact on alleviating the financial burden of the goose problem, given its relative impotence outside of designated areas.

The sanctuary areas were based on the three SSSIs that had been designated for their importance to Barnacle Geese (Loch Gruinart, Bridgend Flats and Laggan). A large part of the Loch Gruinart SSSI was purchased in 1983 by the RSPB for the very purpose of establishing a sanctuary area.¹⁵² The RSPB had been interested in buying land in Islay since the early 1970s,¹⁵³ and the purchase of the reserve enabled the organisation to take a more central role in Islay conservation, a position they had clearly sought with some eagerness.

The SSSIs contain all the main roosts of Barnacle Geese and are heavily used by the birds in the early part of the winter. However, once the feeding has become exhausted in these core areas the geese disperse throughout much of the island.¹⁵⁴ Greenland White-fronts are more evenly distributed through most of the winter though there can be

¹⁵² This was as much the initiative of Islay Estate (who sold the land) as of the RSPB. The RSPB also received a grant from the NCC towards the purchase of the reserve (see Chapter Six) on the premise that it be a keystone of the sanctuary system.

¹⁵³ From letters between the RSPB and Gordon Booth held at the Islay Wildlife Information Centre.

¹⁵⁴ Ogilvie (1992) stated that up to 70% of the Barnacle Geese are found within SSSIs in autumn but in late winter below 50% use these areas.

large congregations in stubble fields in the autumn. Since the 1981 Act it was possible for the NCC to offer some protection to the habitat of the geese within SSSIs by entering into management agreements with farmers. This provided a means by which farmers could effectively be compensated for goose damage within these areas if they chose to enter into an agreement. Agreements would prohibit the farmers from shooting or scaring geese (Elliott 1989). Despite some scepticism about how effective this system would be,¹⁵⁵ the initial plan was that the geese would be actively encouraged into the sanctuary areas comprising farms under management agreements and the RSPB reserve. These would be managed to hold as many geese as possible, which in practice meant that they should be farmed quite intensively. With shooting continuing outside of the sanctuary it was assumed that many of the geese would seek refuge. However, the numbers of both Barnacles and White-fronts steadily increased during the 1980s¹⁵⁶ and so, although the sanctuaries continued to hold high numbers, plenty of geese were still using other areas. Many farmers were perturbed because although they were able to shoot geese under licence they did not have the option of applying for financial recompense, despite often facing a similar level of damage to farmers within the sanctuaries.

Between 1987 and 1989 a more formalised system, funded jointly by DAFS and the NCC, was introduced in which a scaring scheme was operated outside the sanctuaries. This involved unemployed residents, paid by the Manpower Services Commission and sponsored by Islay FFWAG (Farming, Forestry and Wildlife Advisory Group), travelling about the island and scaring geese into the sanctuaries. Despite initial claims of success by the Scottish Agricultural Minister Lord Sanderson,¹⁵⁷ the only effects of the scheme were minimal with some reduction in flock sizes and a greater circulation of geese around the island (Ogilvie 1992; Ogilvie et al. 1999). Part of the problem was the low number of people doing the work (and, some farmers alleged, a general lack of enthusiasm from many concerned) but the Estates were also reluctant for geese to be scared at certain times in case it interfered with their shooting (Ogilvie et al. 1999).¹⁵⁸ Like most birds, the geese also became accustomed to the various scaring measures.

¹⁵⁵ Patton and Frame stated that "On Islay, goose refuges would probably aggravate an already serious situation" (1981: 323). Owen (1980 quoted in Owen 1993: 60) also commented that geese tend to be difficult to dislodge once they become established in a cosy refuge.

¹⁵⁶ See Figure Eighteen.

¹⁵⁷ *SCENES* October 1989.

¹⁵⁸ See also *SCENES* January 1988.

Between 1989 and 1992 a second scaring scheme was implemented, which involved paying farmers money to help them acquire their own scaring devices and cover the costs of scaring.¹⁵⁹ This scheme was generally considered to be an even greater failure. Ogilvie et al. (1999) suggested that the main cause of its foundering was a lack of co-operation between neighbouring farmers. Hence although there was still debate about whether a properly organised and funded scaring and sanctuary system could work in Islay, the failures of those schemes which had operated between 1981 and 1992 moved the proposal of a more extensive compensation scheme firmly to the top of the agenda. The escalating goose numbers did not hinder this move.

4.3.3 The Duich Moss saga

Monday 5th August 1985 is certainly the most infamous day in the history of relations between conservationists and the Islay community. How significant the events surrounding the meeting at Bowmore Hall that evening proved in the longer term is more debatable but the meeting itself was undoubtedly a pivotal juncture in the relationship. For some years afterwards the gulf between conservationists and the community broadened to what sometimes seemed an unbridgeable chasm.

The meeting was arranged by Friends of the Earth (FoE), an organisation that had previously had no involvement with Islay. A flyer styled the meeting as “Whisky vs Wildlife (The Imminent Destruction of Duich Moss)”. The intention was to discuss a conflict that had arisen between Scottish Malt Distillers (SMD) and the NCC over peat digging at Duich Moss.¹⁶⁰ The Moss was a large and, at the time, relatively untouched raised bog between Bowmore and Port Ellen. As well as being a fine example of this rather scarce habitat, the area was also important for a variety of localised bogland species and the remote pools in its centre held the island’s largest roost of Greenland White-fronts. Despite this, conservationists had largely ignored the site until the 1980s and no designations existed to afford it any protection.

¹⁵⁹ Islay farmers received £77,000 in grants during 1989/90.

¹⁶⁰ *Eilean na Muice Duibhe* is the Gaelic.

SMD had initially made an application for peat cutting at the Moss in February 1983, although they had leased the site from the Laggan Estate since 1979.¹⁶¹ The peat was to be processed at Port Ellen Maltings for use in the island's vital but struggling whisky industry. Coincidentally, the NCC were considering the designation of the Moss as an SSSI. The Council made SMD aware of their intentions before SMD applied to the local planning board. However, the NCC then stalled on the designation until a month after SMD had put in their application. If the designation had been made prior to the application then the latter would have been unlikely to be accepted and the NCC would have had a stronger case against the development (E. Bignal pers. comm.). As it was, an impression was given to many in Islay that the NCC was using their power not to protect wildlife but to prevent a local development that would have supported a number of much-needed jobs. It seemed to many in Islay as if NCC had only become interested in the site once it appeared to be threatened, something that on its own was not supposed to be a factor in SSSI designations (McCarthy 1991: 111).

Once the designation had been proposed, George Younger, the Secretary of State for Scotland, was obliged to call in the planning application because of the NCC's concerns that the proposed peat extraction would harm the special interest of the site.¹⁶² In July 1984 Younger gave SMD planning permission despite these objections. Other conservation organisations then became embroiled in the dispute because they saw it as a test case both for the Wildlife and Countryside Act and the European Birds Directive. Shortly after permission was granted, the RSPB threatened to take the government to the European Court over the decision. The NCC tabled various conditions that it felt should be attached to the permission and Younger accepted these in December 1984. These conditions on the first phase¹⁶³ of the development included measures to protect the roosting Greenland White-fronts.¹⁶⁴ This did not go far enough for Friends of the Earth, who wrote to Younger in July 1985 and asked him to reconsider. FoE asked that the development be postponed until more was known about the ecology of the Moss and that SMD consider the suggestions of the NCC for alternative sites. SMD responded by claiming that the White-fronted Geese did not roost near the proposed development,

¹⁶¹ *Ileach* Vol. 12 No. 18 27th July 1985.

¹⁶² *Ileach* Vol. 11 No. 19 11th August 1984.

¹⁶³ The first phase would meet the peat requirements for fifteen years after which alterations could be made for the second phase.

¹⁶⁴ *Ileach* Vol. 12 No. 3 29th December 1984.

phase one of which would only affect 7% of the SSSI. They also pointed out that George Younger had agreed that their proposals would not seriously affect the hydrology of the site.

To present their concerns FoE called a public meeting in Bowmore for 5th August. They and the conservation lobby were concerned that the imperfect but vital Wildlife and Countryside Act should be shown to have some teeth in the face of a development that, despite a lack of evidence, was considered threatening to an important site. As became apparent to them at the meeting, this position and the approach that FoE in particular took in making it, was viewed somewhat differently by many in Islay.

Friends of the Earth, being at the time a confrontational organisation that was keen to use any available media opportunities, certainly wanted to make a big show of the meeting. This much is indicated by the presence of both David Bellamy and Jonathon Porritt, two of the highest profile environmentalists in Britain.¹⁶⁵ Exactly what occurred during the meeting itself is rather difficult for anyone, least of all one who was not present, to ascertain. However, that there was the desired media-friendly confrontation is beyond doubt. It was suggested to me that this clash had been orchestrated as much by an Islay councillor who had enlisted the help of some unusually abrasive members of the community as by FoE. The heckling of David Bellamy in particular passed into legend and he has reputedly not visited Islay since. Other conservationists were concerned enough to be given a police escort after the meeting (E. Signal pers. comm.). Over the following weeks and months the meeting and the circumstances surrounding it were widely covered on national television and many newspapers, including some from abroad. It was certainly the highest profile media event in Islay during the 1980s. Some on the island were rather embarrassed by the militant and impolite image that they felt others might have of them. However, the reasons why the conservationists, particularly FoE, created such local animosity are best summarised by Catriona Bell, then editor of the *Ileach*:

They could have worked to find common cause with the local community, but they never tried. They walked into the peat moss and stopped Willie Currie and Iain Brown from working. Suddenly, by that action, on two men who are hard

¹⁶⁵ Ironically, in 1980 Bellamy had visited Islay to take part in a film extolling the virtues of Islay whisky.

working, and respected for it, members of our community they focused the attention of every islander. As there was a threat to Willie and Iain's livelihood, so there could be a threat to the future of every one of US, the people who live on Islay, and who care for its social welfare and its wildlife. The Friends of the Earth had made US their enemy.¹⁶⁶

Given the magnitude of the reaction to the meeting it is perhaps surprising that negotiations between the NCC and SMD continued on afterwards much as if nothing had changed. The NCC still had a statutory obligation to attempt to enter into a management agreement with SMD, and also a desire to show that they were not anti-development *per se*, and a month later more scientific work was conducted to establish clearly what the impact of the cutting would be.¹⁶⁷ However, the RSPB was keen to press the issue in Europe and an EC official visited Islay in October 1985 to assess whether the proposals contravened the Birds Directive. Locally this again provoked the criticism that the conservationists had only shown an interest once they perceived the site to be threatened.¹⁶⁸ Nevertheless it was this European factor that proved to be a turning point. During early 1986, the legality of the proposals came under increased scrutiny by the EC and in April it was announced that the proposals were illegal under the Directive.¹⁶⁹ EC officials met with SMD and the NCC soon after to try to effect a compromise. The most viable option appeared to be to develop an alternative site. The area suggested was at Castlehill, an area a few miles from Duich Moss that was owned by the Forestry Commission. There were concerns from SMD that this site would be more expensive to develop because of higher transport costs and that the peat would not be of a suitable quality. Once tests had been carried out it was clear that the latter was assured but the issue of where the burden of paying for a suitable access road should lie was the greater bone of contention.

The initial estimate for the road was £50,000 to £80,000 and SMD were unwilling to pay this. They also expected to avoid paying for the rights to cut peat because they had not had to at Duich Moss.¹⁷⁰ This meant that the NCC had to buy Castlehill from the

¹⁶⁶ A comment on the public meeting, by Catriona Bell, *Ileach* Vol. 12 No. 19 10th August 1985.

¹⁶⁷ *Ileach* Vol. 12 No. 21 7th September 1985.

¹⁶⁸ *Ileach* Vol. 12 No. 24 19th October 1985.

¹⁶⁹ *Ileach* Vol. 13 No. 10 5th April 1986.

¹⁷⁰ *Ileach* Vol. 14 No. 13 16th May 1987.

Forestry Commission in 1989 and lease it to the distillers under the same conditions that they had at Duich Moss. The distillers retained the peat cutting rights at Duich but agreed not to use them. The NCC also financed the road at Castlehill and agreed with Laggan Estates the management for the whole of the SSSI, including the restoration of areas damaged by the distillers.¹⁷¹ The NCC were pressurised into paying for the agreement by the Scottish Office, who were concerned at the embarrassment and cost that revoking SMD's permission would incur on them (J. McCarthy pers. comm.). The whole process cost the Council £270,094 but both they and the distillers, who never actually had their planning permission annulled, declared the agreement to be a great success for wildlife and whisky. There was however, scepticism from local councillor Donnie MacKerrell who felt that "the people of Islay have been sold down the river."¹⁷² After the agreement was done, Lord Caithness the Scottish Environment Minister suggested that Duich Moss might be declared a National Nature Reserve (NNR).¹⁷³ Eventually this came to pass on 20th April 1993. As well as being an NNR, Duich Moss also had the distinction of being designated as an SSSI, a Special Protection Area under the Birds Directive and an internationally important wetland under the Ramsar Convention. All this for a site that ten years previously received no protection at all and that had changed rather little in the intervening time. Despite this rush for protection, by the late 1990s SNH, with new priorities toward the public use of NNRs, was considering denotifying the site as a reserve (though not as an SSSI or SPA) because of the lack of opportunities for visitor access. Furthermore, it became widely agreed that the initial development proposed by SMD would have had no negative impact upon the roosting Greenland White-fronts (M. Ogilvie pers. comm.). On such fragile strands was an extraordinary chapter of Islay history built.

4.3.4 The Rhinns SSSI designation

The Duich Moss saga brought conservation issues to a head in Islay and heightened the profile of conservationist – community relations on the national stage. However, the

¹⁷¹ *SCENES* May 1989.

¹⁷² *Ileach* Vol. 16 No. 13 13th May 1989.

¹⁷³ *Ileach* Vol. 16 No. 14 27th May 1989. An NNR is managed by the government (i.e. the NCC or since 1992 SNH) although, like many, Duich Moss was still privately owned by the Laggan Estate after this designation.

designation of the Rhinns as an SSSI in 1987 was the single event that created the most unequivocal and unambiguous response within Islay. Thirteen years on, during my fieldwork, I met nobody in Islay who sought to justify the manner in which the NCC carried out this designation (and this included people who worked for the NCC at the time). The *Ileach* certainly reflected the mood when it pronounced:

Hurt, anger, sadness – these are the elements of the reactions of the people of the Rhinns to the SSSI designation announced last week.¹⁷⁴

Below I will consider both this reaction and the thinking behind the designation.

The Rhinns was undoubtedly rich in wildlife, although over such a large and varied area the nature conservation interests tended to be either patchily or diffusely distributed. Aside from the large and increasing numbers of geese that were using the Rhinns, the area was the Scottish stronghold of Choughs, had a high density of breeding birds of prey and many colonies of the scarce and declining Marsh Fritillary butterfly. These last three all require extensively managed tracts of moorland or farmland. The NCC's principal concern was thus the threat posed to these habitats by the increasing acreage of conifer plantations. The Council had also become involved in a controversial holiday development in the area that they had opposed but seemed unable to prevent. In both cases, SSSI designation would strengthen the NCC's hand in opposition, if not guarantee that it achieved its aims. There was also a positive desire that the management of the area should be integrated at the level of the whole landscape (E. Bignal pers. comm.). There were other SSSIs as large as the Rhinns but most were in remote mountainous areas rather than in diverse, relatively well-populated agricultural regions. However, a lack of financial and human resources and legislative authority have thwarted any ambitions that had existed within the NCC to develop the Rhinns as a landscape of integrated conservation management.

The afforestation of the upland areas of Britain with non-native conifer species was a conservation *cause célèbre* during the 1980s.¹⁷⁵ This campaign came to national

¹⁷⁴ *Ileach* Vol. 14 No. 11 18th April 1987.

¹⁷⁵ In 1986 the NCC produced a considerable volume addressing the subject (Nature Conservancy Council 1986).

prominence with the battle waged by the NCC and the RSPB against afforestation in the Caithness and Sutherland flows. The growth in blanket conifer forestry was stimulated by tax concessions given by the government and, because forestry was both well funded and outside the influence of planning authorities, the industry had considerable freedom as to where it could establish plantations. The concern of the conservationists centred on the perceived loss in conservation value of sites that were planted. The dense non-native stands of trees were considered poor for wildlife and ecology in comparison to the moors, dunes and bogs that they replaced (Nature Conservancy Council 1986). Conifer afforestation had been seen to be deleterious to the wildlife interest of regions not dissimilar to the Rhinns, such as nearby Kintyre.

The tax concessions partly explain the development of conifer forests in the Rhinns, an area certainly too windswept to promote good timber growth. The other reason for the siting of the forestry was the break-up of the Ellister Estate in the south Rhinns during the early 1980s. The English proprietor of the Estate, Rodney Dawson, had died tragically young and intestate, and his executors decided to sell much of the hill land to the highest bidder – a position that at the time forestry companies were easily able to fill. This all went on against the wishes of Dawson's widow (J. Dawson pers. comm.) who felt that her late husband, a keen wildlife enthusiast, would have been appalled at such an alien monoculture.¹⁷⁶ Some of the new owner-occupier farmers also saw the opportunities for raising funds that forestry could bring, and sold off portions of their rough grazing. The result of all this was that extensive areas of moorland in the southern half of the Rhinns were either planted with stands of non-native conifers or were earmarked for this. Although the detrimental effects of this type of afforestation on the important wildlife of the Rhinns had not been scientifically established, the NCC, with their knowledge of the effects in similar areas, felt it beyond doubt that forestry would result in the deterioration of the perceived qualities of the area as wildlife habitat.

The proposed holiday development in the north Rhinns was a peculiar tale of over-ambitious plans, local ambivalence and the NCC's attempts to influence the planning application. In October 1985, Islay Estate put three untenanted Rhinns farms, Braigo,

¹⁷⁶ See also letter from Jane Dawson *Ileach* Vol. 14 No. 12 2nd May 1987.

Smaull and Kindrochid, on the market.¹⁷⁷ During 1986 a consortium, initially under the name of Iolair, proposed a holiday village in the area. This was to include 28 cottages, a restaurant, health club and shops¹⁷⁸ in one of the remotest parts of the island. A good deal of local scepticism about the feasibility and desirability of the scheme was voiced in the pages of the *Ileach* and 62 objections were made to the planning authority. However, it was the objections of the NCC that encouraged the Secretary of State to call in the application and establish a public inquiry. The NCC were concerned about the impact on wildlife of increased recreational use of the land abutting the existing Glac na Crìche SSSI. The developers felt they had met the NCC's initial demands and the planning authority had passed the application with these conditions attached. However, it became increasingly apparent that the NCC were not satisfied with this decision and in November 1986 it was proposed that much of the Braigo, Smaull and Kindrochid area would be designated to protect species such as Greenland White-fronted Geese, Choughs and birds of prey. Local concerns about the extension of the NCC's involvement in the area were voiced through councillor Donnie MacKerrell, who somewhat prophetically considered that this might represent the thin end of the wedge. When Sandy Kerr of the NCC was asked at a meeting if there were plans to designate the whole of Islay he allegedly replied: "Some people would like that."¹⁷⁹ Despite the NCC's opposition, Argyll and Bute Council were enthusiastic about the development, as were Islay Estate who at this stage still owned the land. Locally, feelings were (not surprisingly) ambivalent with recognition of the economic benefits but also a feeling that once again control of the island seemed to be in the hands of outside forces, whether they be developers or the NCC.¹⁸⁰ However, because the proposed public inquiry on April 21st 1987 would have forced the NCC to announce the SSSI proposals in any case, they pre-empted this by notifying the area on 8th, just two weeks before the inquiry was due to take place. Once the news came out, the developer's proposals collapsed and the land was eventually sold into farming.¹⁸¹

These are the reasons why the NCC felt they needed to designate the Rhinns. This process was always likely to be controversial and difficult to handle because of the scale

¹⁷⁷ *Ileach* Vol. 12 No. 23 5th October 1985.

¹⁷⁸ *Ileach* Vol. 14 No. 4 10th January 1987.

¹⁷⁹ *Ileach* Vol. 13 No.26 15th November 1986. In fact the NCC had suggested that 25% of Islay was suitable for designation, *SCENES* February 1988.

¹⁸⁰ See letter from Lesley Taylor and Editorial *Ileach* Vol. 14 No.8 7th March 1987.

¹⁸¹ *Ileach* Vol. 14 No. 11 18th April 1987.

of the designation and the number of people affected by it. Such concerns would not be aided by the NCC's precarious reputation in the island after the Duich Moss saga and the controversy over the Iolair development. But the inevitable discontent in Islay over such a substantial designation was magnified by what many local people considered to be a heavy-handed approach to the notification by the NCC. Mackay claimed that the Rhinns designation was "a more contentious issue" (1995: 114) than Duich Moss and, taking into account local anger and the wider repercussions, this still seems a fair assessment.

The period after the Duich Moss public meeting had seen a number of attempts to bridge the gap between conservation organisations and the community. The NCC had responded by employing an Islay farmer as a local officer and the local newspaper organised a highly successful forestry forum early in 1987 in which various organisations and individuals discussed the future role of forestry in the island.¹⁸² But the goodwill fostered by the forum soon evaporated when the Rhinns designation was announced just a few weeks later. Most of the NCC representatives at the forum had apparently known about the proposal but had not told any of the local people in attendance.

The first that most landowners or tenants knew of the designation was when a letter came through the door announcing that their land was to be included and providing an exhaustive, and to farmers intimidating, list of 28 PDOs.¹⁸³ Although this was the normal legal procedure with which the NCC began notification, the underlying reasons for this approach were still a subject of speculation during my fieldwork thirteen years on. One reason suggested at the time (and still being mentioned) was that the NCC were concerned that if people knew that the designation was likely then they might try to damage the land and thus make it unworthy of SSSI status, something which had gone on elsewhere since the 1981 Act (though not in Islay). The NCC of the mid-1980s was dominated by individuals who felt the need for habitat protection above all other concerns (Mackay 1995) and so the Council at that time did not prioritise public consultation regarding SSSI designations to the degree that SNH later became obliged to do. An SSSI designation was legally established purely on its scientific importance

¹⁸² *Ileach* Vol. 14 No. 10 4th April 1987.

¹⁸³ *Ileach* Vol. 14 No. 11 18th April 1987.

and so these credentials were paramount. If the NCC had any substantive authority at that time it was in their judgement of a site's suitability for designation, although as I have already mentioned the designation of the Rhinns was at least in part a tactical decision intended to empower the NCC to act in land use issues affecting the area.

The principal difficulty that the NCC had to overcome in making the designation was the large number (94) of individual owners and occupiers who were obliged to be notified. In particular, this disrupted the important use of informal procedures. When dealing with one or two landowners it was easy for the NCC to discuss a designation informally. In the case of the Rhinns the entire farming community needed to be notified and preliminary private and informal approaches were considered less feasible. This was why the decision was taken to notify all those affected at once through a formal letter of notification and list of PDOs. When asked why local people had not been informed of the NCC's intentions at the forestry forum their regional officer Marion Hughes replied: "We would have liked to inform people earlier, but were unable to do so."¹⁸⁴

The anger created by the manner in which the designation was announced soon gave way to concerns over what its implications on farming and land use would be. Initial alarmist claims, particularly from local politicians, drew on a long-standing Highland discourse. Robin Currie of the Scottish Crofter's Union phrased his reservations thus:

People must remember that this 'notification' is an ultimatum. If it is ignored or not acted upon quickly enough, then it will see life on Islay change completely, and we will be taken over and driven out. In plain language, what the NCC is doing is restricting the livelihood of the people of this island.¹⁸⁵

The implications of this perceived attack upon the island's economy and way of life were also voiced in the House of Commons by MP Ray Michie in her maiden Commons speech:

¹⁸⁴ *Ileach* Vol. 14 No. 11 18th April 1987.

¹⁸⁵ *Ileach* Vol. 14 No. 13 16th May 1987.

The people of Islay are deeply upset and angry and they fear that in the end 65% of the land area of the island will become eligible for designation – if that happens, depopulation could occur on a scale, not seen since the infamous clearances.¹⁸⁶

The intimidating list of PDOs and the perceived power of the NCC to police farmers and enforce these strictures enabled an easy, if exaggerated, link to be made with the past oppression and emigration of Highland peoples. The apparently hard-line and confrontational approach of the NCC no doubt made it easy to believe that its bite would indeed replicate its bark. In all, 33 owners and occupiers objected to the designation.¹⁸⁷

However, the reality for landowners and tenants was not nearly as malevolent. Actual restrictions on agricultural activities were few and many farmers in the area were fully able to exploit the financial opportunities offered by the Agricultural Development Programme (ADP), which ran over the five years subsequent to the designation. Many farmers also realised that they could receive substantial payments for management agreements, particularly if they had been planning to sell portions of their land for forestry. During 1987 and 1988 seven owners or occupiers in the Rhinns received lump-sum management payments totalling £157,740. Others entered into ongoing agreements and received annual payments, which in the year to 31st March 1999 totalled £151,053 (Scottish Natural Heritage 1999a).

Whilst the controversy over the Rhinns designation subsided after the 8311 hectare SSSI was confirmed early in 1988,¹⁸⁸ there were a number of significant repercussions. Calls were provoked for both a separate Scottish NCC¹⁸⁹ and for an independent appeals system for SSSI designations.¹⁹⁰ A further five years down the line, both these requests were answered with the establishment of SNH. The Rhinns saga probably had little effect on the creation of SNH but it perhaps played a more significant part in the

¹⁸⁶ *Ileach* Vol. 14 No. 18 25th July 1987.

¹⁸⁷ *SCENES* January 1988.

¹⁸⁸ *Ileach* Vol. 15 No. 4 9th January 1988.

¹⁸⁹ *Ileach* Vol. 14 No. 12 2nd May 1987.

¹⁹⁰ *Ileach* Vol. 14 No. 14 30th May 1987.

establishment of the independent Advisory Committee on SSSIs.¹⁹¹ The reasoning behind the break up of the NCC and its subsequent reorganisation is complex and has been discussed more fully elsewhere (Mackay 1995). The calls for the reorganisation from within Scotland and particularly from areas such as Islay centred on issues of nationalism and decentralisation. The centralised organisation of the NCC had created internal divisions between regional officers and the scientific officers based at headquarters in Peterborough. Such divisions created confusion in Islay because the NCC appeared to be represented by two, often conflicting, fronts on the island.

The impact of the Rhinns controversy on the day-to-day operation of the NCC and SNH in Islay (and other areas of the Highlands) is probably more significant than the broader national effects. The appointment of a Gaelic speaking Hebridean, Ron MacDonald, as the NCC area officer in 1989 and the establishment of a local office in Bowmore clearly stemmed from criticism the Council received about its distance from the island and poor comprehension of Highland mores. A further important development arising from the whole suite of conservation issues of the 1980s was the instigation of the Islay Land Use Study. This study consulted widely on conservation and land use issues throughout the island and led to the establishment of the Islay Land Use Forum (ILUF). This latter body allowed various land use groups and interested parties to meet on a regular basis to discuss issues of general concern. It is notable that after the instigation of this body there were no controversies in Islay of quite the magnitude of the Duich Moss saga and the Rhinns designation.

A final point to be addressed concerning the Rhinns SSSI is the actual effect that the designation has had upon the wildlife and habitats in the area. As is generally the case with SSSIs, there has been no substantial monitoring of the Rhinns¹⁹² and so any arguments on the effectiveness of the designation are somewhat vague and hypothetical. The major aim of the SSSI was to prevent further afforestation with conifers. This was achieved, but just scant months after the Rhinns SSSI was confirmed the Chancellor, Nigel Lawson, much to the surprise of all, removed the tax concessions that facilitated

¹⁹¹ This latter body is referred to in cases where a scientific objection is made to a designation. There are, at the time of writing, no procedures for dealing with an objection based on any other criteria.

¹⁹² This is likely to be because of funding constraints and other priorities within the NCC/SNH. A survey of breeding birds in the Rhinns was conducted during 1994 (Islay Natural History Trust 1995) but this has not been repeated.

this expansion in the March 1988 budget (Mackay 1995). The only other effect on habitat conservation that was suggested to me was that agricultural intensification was prevented in some marginal land, important for birds of prey and Marsh Fritillary butterflies (M. Ogilvie pers. comm.), although for conservationists this was perhaps a significant outcome. The prevention of the holiday development in the north Rhinns (though it may have foundered anyway) also countered the damage and disturbance that this was likely to cause. Aside from these, the fortunes of wildlife in the area fluctuated with apparent indifference to the designation.

4.4 *Conservation since 1992*

4.4.1 Scottish Natural Heritage

The advent of Scottish Natural Heritage in 1992 promised a more inclusive and people-oriented approach to conservation by the government. In Islay, the most immediate impact of the new organisation was the instigation of the long called-for island-wide goose compensation scheme: the Islay Voluntary Goose Management Scheme (IVGMS). The local office, which had been established during the final years of the NCC, provided a permanent and more coherent front to the public and by the late 1990s the Islay Office was staffed by four people: two Area Officers and two local administrative staff. This presence on the island allowed SNH staff to easily involve themselves on committees and in discussions. Perhaps more importantly, the staff could now be regarded as a part of the community, particularly if they stayed for a long time. As some of the staff came from the island (including a farmer's daughter), this gave SNH (or at least their Islay-based manifestation) a degree of localness that the NCC could never have claimed.

Aside from goose management (discussed below), the first significant issue that SNH became involved with in Islay concerned a proposed wind power scheme at Ben Churlaich south of Bowmore. Laggan Estate, who owned the land, initially proposed the wind farm in 1989 and the developers, Windcluster,¹⁹³ were hoping to sell the electricity to the National Grid. Initial concerns from the RSPB and the NCC about

¹⁹³ They later changed their name to WindProspect.

possible fatalities amongst the Greenland White-fronts roosting at nearby Duich Moss were apparently allayed¹⁹⁴ and planning permission was granted in principle in 1992.¹⁹⁵ The development then seemed to progress smoothly and a planning application was submitted in May 1995 after the developers qualified for a contract to sell electricity.¹⁹⁶ Windcluster had proposed the sale of shares in the project to the community and had shown an awareness of their responsibilities toward wildlife and landscape by consulting with the RSPB, SNH and the ILUF. But, at the same time that the planning application was submitted, the first protest was voiced by Ian Mitchell – a writer living in Lagavulin.¹⁹⁷ His concerns were firstly, that the wind farm would be visually intrusive and secondly, that the people of Islay stood to gain little from the venture. Windcluster countered this by suggesting that many in Islay supported the scheme and had expressed a willingness to invest in it.¹⁹⁸ Subsequent letters to the *Ileach* continued to reflect these divided views. Many local people at the time were clearly enthusiastic enough about alternative energy sources in Islay for a local councillor to feel able to say: “this proposal has island backing.”¹⁹⁹ Yet, as with the dispute over the north Rhinns holiday development, the intervention against the proposal by SNH (supported by the RSPB) proved crucial.

In September 1995 the proposal was given planning permission with restrictions but by April 1996 the concerns of SNH over the impact on geese within an SPA²⁰⁰ forced the Secretary of State to call-in the application and call a public enquiry in October 1996. Despite other arguments being pertinent within the community, the Enquiry centred on the hypothetical threat to the population of Greenland White-fronts at Duich Moss and both SNH and the developers put forward their own predictive models. However the different statistical methods used by each side created a substantial disparity in the

¹⁹⁴ *Ileach* Vol. 16 No. 16 24th June 1989.

¹⁹⁵ *Ileach* Vol. 19 No. 23 3rd October 1992.

¹⁹⁶ *Ileach* Vol. 22 No. 14 17th May 1995.

¹⁹⁷ *Ileach* Vol. 22 No. 14 27th May 1995. There is a degree of irony in Ian Mitchell finding himself in opposition to this proposal alongside SNH and the RSPB, two organisations whom he later devoted himself to opposing.

¹⁹⁸ *Ileach* Vol. 22 No. 15 10th June 1995.

¹⁹⁹ *Ileach* Vol. 23 No. 24 12th October 1996.

²⁰⁰ SNH argued that Greenland White-front mortality would be increased by 2% if the turbines went ahead, *SCENES* October 1996. Malcolm Ogilvie, a goose expert living in Islay, suggested that if the turbines killed 24-25 geese annually then this would place the global population in jeopardy, *SCENES* December 1996.

projected number of goose fatalities.²⁰¹ The Secretary of State was unable to decide whose statistics were most reliable and so he asked for independent experts to be consulted, in this case from Stirling University. The Stirling scientists came down in favour of SNH (Ogilvie n.d.), but the developers asked that they be cross-examined. This meant that the Enquiry was re-opened in May 1998. At this, the developers were so keen to progress that they stated that they would close down the station during sensitive periods if geese actually flew into the turbines. However, the SNH statistics clearly had the ascendancy and when this was maintained through cross-examination the Secretary of State necessarily had to reject the application.²⁰² There have been no further proposals for wind farm developments in Islay, something viewed with regret by a number of people I spoke to on the island. For SNH this proved to be a pleasing victory because it showed that the legislation could be used to protect wildlife once a threat was established. It is worth noting that, unlike in the Duich Moss saga no compensatory arrangements or alternative sites had to be funded. In that case, planning permission was actually granted and the NCC were thus coerced into compensating the developer for the costs of the alternative site. This was to save the Scottish Office from the problems associated with having to rescind the permission that it had previously granted. The wind power scheme, on the other hand, had never received full planning permission.

4.4.2 The new goose schemes

In November 1992 the first island-wide compensatory goose management scheme was introduced by SNH after consultation with local farmers.²⁰³ The scheme covered the whole island but was voluntary²⁰⁴ and, since it was a clear improvement for all farmers outside of the designated SSSI sanctuaries, it was at first broadly welcomed by local

²⁰¹ Ogilvie (n.d.) states that methods used by the developer's consultant had the effect of dividing the probability of goose fatalities by 500, in comparison to the probability projected by SNH.

²⁰² *SCENES* June 1999.

²⁰³ *Heach* Vol. 19 No. 26 14th November 1992.

²⁰⁴ In the first winter of the scheme 80% of all the island's farmers participated, *Heach* Vol. 20 No. 12 1st May 1993. Since then the take-up has been even higher. Ogilvie et al suggest "a near 100% take-up" (1999: 253). Whilst farmers were not entirely happy with the scheme or the amounts they received, they clearly realised it was their best available option.

farmers.²⁰⁵ The scheme, which came to be called the IVGMS, paid each farmer a set amount for every goose that they had on their land. The geese were regularly counted by SNH who calculated the average number for each farm over three winters and from this the appropriate payment.²⁰⁶ The farmer was obliged to manage his land for the geese and to tolerate their presence, meaning that goose shooting effectively disappeared from the island.²⁰⁷ But two aspects of the scheme soon became controversial. Firstly, the accuracy of the counts was questioned and secondly, there were doubts as to whether the payment per goose reflected the real damage caused.

The question of the accuracy of the counts was still a problem during my fieldwork and is perhaps insoluble.²⁰⁸ Farmers who felt their land held large numbers of geese for much of the winter were dismayed when they then received a cheque for a much smaller number of birds than they had anticipated. Inevitably the counts were never going to be completely accurate but to assuage farmers' concerns SNH counted on a more frequent basis. So long as payments were on a headage basis, there was no viable alternative. As such, the count system appeared to be accepted by the local NFUS even though individual complaints from farmers continued.

The initial payment per goose was £9²⁰⁹ and this rose to £10.70 in 1999.²¹⁰ There was never any pretence that these amounts represented a calculation of the actual damage caused by each goose. By 1997 a study by SNH and the NFUS established that the cost per goose was between £14 and £32²¹¹ and the Scottish Agricultural College put the figure at £28 per goose per annum.²¹² Whilst this range is inevitably vague, the lower limit was substantially higher than the payment that farmers received, a discrepancy that surprised no one.²¹³ But SNH claimed that it was unable to pay any more given its

²⁰⁵ Although in 1990 the chairman of the local SCU stated that a compensation scheme would turn "Islay into a goose farm" *SCENES* October 1990: 3.

²⁰⁶ See 8.4.

²⁰⁷ Although during the first winter of the scheme two licences to shoot Barnacle Geese and one to shoot Greenland White-fronts were taken up by non-participating farmers, *SCENES* February 1993.

²⁰⁸ See Chapter Eight.

²⁰⁹ *Ileach* Vol. 20 No. 12 1st May 1993. During the first winter of the scheme £164,000 was paid to farmers as part of this scheme, with a further £124,000 paid to farmers as part of SSSI management agreements for geese, *SCENES* April 1993.

²¹⁰ *Ileach* Vol. 26 No 14 22nd May 1999. The IVGMS cost £407,215 in 1998/99, *SCENES* November 1999.

²¹¹ *Ileach* Vol. 24 No. 23 27th September 1997.

²¹² *SCENES* November 1998.

²¹³ It could also be argued that farmers should not have been paid the full cost of damage but instead compensated only over-and-above the damage that they had previously tolerated.

financial limitations, obligations and priorities. SNH's apparent unwillingness to pay what was considered to be an appropriate amount had caused tensions even in the second winter of the scheme,²¹⁴ and the agricultural recession after the 1996 BSE crisis only heightened farmers' desires to obtain a more equitable payment.

By 1997, goose damage to crops was an issue receiving national attention in the form of the National Goose Forum, which was established to investigate appropriate methods of balancing the need for goose conservation with the agricultural costs thus incurred.²¹⁵ Any longer term solution to the problem was delayed until the Forum reported, something that did not happen until 2000. A further problem arose when the separate SSSI management scheme ended in 1998. The farmers who had participated were eligible to enter the IVGMS but this would mean they would receive rather less compensation.²¹⁶ Two farmers were so disgruntled that they applied to receive licences to shoot Barnacle Geese.²¹⁷ Even though both farms were within areas designated specifically to protect the geese, the Scottish Office gave them licences to shoot fifty geese between them. However, subsequent appeals by the RSPB (the second successful) meant that the farmers never received the licences.²¹⁸

4.4.3 Environmentally Sensitive Areas

An important, if not dramatic, change in the management of agricultural land in Islay was its inclusion within the Argyll Islands Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) from 1992. ESAs were initially developed to protect areas of high wildlife value that were sensitive to changes in management (Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 1989). This was intended to temper widespread concerns about damage to agriculture habitats such as grazing marshes or downland. The first pilot scheme was in the Halvergate Marshes in the Norfolk Broads. However, the principle was adopted by the EC, who saw an opportunity both for environmental protection and surplus reduction, and soon various other regions of the UK were designated.

²¹⁴ *Ileach* Vol. 20 No. 25 13th November 1993.

²¹⁵ *SCENES* July 1997.

²¹⁶ *SCENES* December 1998.

²¹⁷ See 8.3.

²¹⁸ *SCENES* July 2000.

Within an ESA, farmers and landowners were paid to use particular methods of management that supported certain habitats. In this respect, the financial incentives for management were more positive than was normally the case with SSSI management agreements (though see Scottish Office 1998). Farmers within an ESA could voluntarily agree to a five-year management plan that paid them an annual sum to carry out various types of activity. The schemes were also financed and administered by the agriculture ministries and as such represented the first example of grants being given to farmers without being associated with increased production (Evans 1997). Although some conservationists, perhaps concerned at their own loss of initiative to the agriculture ministries, raised criticisms about the effectiveness of ESAs (Sheail 1998), the schemes certainly did much to introduce environmental concerns into the wider farming economy.

Farmers in Islay received ESA payments for a variety of management practices such as late-cutting of silage to help nesting Corncrakes, keeping stock out of herb-rich areas at sensitive times, controlling pest species such as bracken and maintaining dykes. In most cases, the farmer consulted with the local agricultural college to draw up a five-year plan. The voluntary nature of the scheme meant that it never seemed like an imposition to any of the farmers whom I spoke to but some felt that the prescriptions they were paid to carry out were inappropriate. Another source of annoyance was the relatively low ceiling on payments that farmers could receive. It was widely known in Islay that English farmers could receive far higher payments. The Scottish Office set a low threshold of £30,000 over five years and this meant that ESA status rarely had a substantial effect on overall farm management. However, with more widespread goose compensation payments, management agreements and the ESA scheme, many farmers were receiving substantial amounts of money associated with conservation during the 1990s. Although most of these payments were technically 'compensatory', they represented a reliable source of income during an economically difficult period.²¹⁹

²¹⁹ See chapters Seven and Eight.

4.4.4 The RSPB in Islay

An ongoing and profound development during the 1980s and 1990s was the increasing prominence of the RSPB in Islay. Prior to 1983 the Society's main actions on the island had been to protest against the persecution of birds of prey and geese but their involvement was curtailed by the lack of a permanent presence. This changed in 1983 when the Loch Gruinart reserve was acquired from Islay Estate.

Although the RSPB was a largely unknown quantity on the island, there were local concerns about the escalating involvement of conservation organisations in Islay life soon after the acquisition of Loch Gruinart. The Society also got off to a bad start because of the loss of milk production their arrival caused. The farm had previously been a major dairy operation that helped to keep the island's creamery in business. Dairy farmers were concerned that if the RSPB permanently discontinued dairy production then this would render the creamery unprofitable. The difficult decision as to whether to continue was eventually made more straightforward, though no less controversial by the introduction of the milk quota system in April 1984.²²⁰ Two weeks previously the RSPB had sold off the dairy herd and, although they considered recommencing dairying, it eventually became apparent that this would be impractical. Quotas were allocated on the basis of the recent history of dairying on each farm and the quota that the RSPB received was too small for a dairy operation to be viable, particularly as they would have needed to upgrade their facilities.²²¹ The Society was able to lease their quota to other local farmers but the disruption the whole incident had caused to creamery production did not cast them in a favourable light, particularly at a time when conservation was widely perceived to be economically stifling.

During the 1980s the main role of the reserve was to act as a sanctuary for grazing geese, as has been discussed above. But this was followed by certain changes in emphasis. After the IVGMS was introduced to replace the scaring and sanctuary system, the RSPB focused more attention on Corncrakes and breeding waders such as Lapwing and Redshank. These species required rougher or wetter habitats and appropriate conditions were provided on the Gruinart Flats at the southern end of the

²²⁰ *Ileach* Vol. 11 No. 12 5th May 1984.

²²¹ *Ileach* Vol. 12 No. 2 15th December 1984.

loch. These changes, whilst fairly successful in achieving their aims,²²² proved controversial.²²³

The RSPB also became interested in acquiring other land holdings in Islay, particularly areas important for Choughs, a nationally scarce species whose fortunes appeared to be waning in Islay during the 1990s. In 1996 they were given Smaull farm in the north Rhinns, one of the farms that had been at the centre of the proposed tourist development in the 1980s.²²⁴ However, this acquisition did not pass without controversy because the man who had tenanted the farm, a keen conservationist, became embroiled in a battle over rights to the land.²²⁵ To some people in Islay the RSPB appeared to have an ‘over-enthusiastic’ approach to land acquisition that raised the question of how much land they would eventually control on the island. During my fieldwork they acquired another farm, at Upper Killeyan in the Oa, with Choughs again the priority species.

By the late 1990s, the RSPB were clearly a powerful presence in Islay, both because of their influence and their landholdings. They were now able to be more involved in local political processes and committees, whilst their economic strength was emphasised by their effect on employment. The reserves employed around ten people,²²⁶ used many local services and contractors and arguably attracted tourists. The RSPB, together with SNH, could thus claim that conservation was now a significant economic factor in Islay, both in terms of direct and indirect employment and in grants given to farmers and landowners.²²⁷

4.5 *Water under the bridge*

As the above illustrates, there appeared to have been a copious flood of ‘water under the bridge’ by the time I arrived in Islay. The circumstances and discourse I encountered

²²² Corncrakes increased from no males in 1990 to between two and seven during 1995-99. Lapwing increased from 108 pairs in 1985 to 232 in 1997 (down to 174 in 1999). Other breeding waders increased during the same period (source: Loch Gruinart Nature Reserve, Management Plan Review 2000).

²²³ See chapters Two and Six.

²²⁴ *Ileach* Vol. 23 No. 12 27th April 1996.

²²⁵ *SCENES* May 1998. The RSPB eventually won this case.

²²⁶ Some of these were part-time and most of the senior positions were held by people who had moved to the island specifically to take up their post.

²²⁷ In the year 1998/99 £313,798 were paid to farmers as part of the IVGMS. £276,711 were paid in management agreements during the same year (Scottish Natural Heritage 1999a).

was certainly informed by these debates and events but one can also trace in them the changing nature of the contestations over conservation and the associated methods of mediation and coercion.

Prior to the 1980s the only significant involvement that conservation organisations had with Islay came in the form of investigations sparked by concerns over goose grazing or raptor persecution. Whatever their worries, the NCC were unable to obtain any substantive influence over local practices until the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act enabled an increase in their powers through the greater protection afforded to SSSIs and certain species of bird. The NCC thus appeared to threaten the independence of farmers, landowners and developers because it was required that they be consulted about changes in practice within designated areas. These concerns were highlighted in the pivotal dispute over Duich Moss, which suggested to many an antithesis between conservation and development – a perception that proved hard to shake off. In the case of the ongoing goose problem, the 1981 Act also created antagonism because of its ambiguous reclassification of the geese. The conflict between the need to protect the geese and the need for the farmers to protect their crops was not easily resolved, particularly once it became apparent that controlling the movements and numbers of the birds on the island was difficult if not impossible. Despite the acidity of these conflicts, it became increasingly clear to most in Islay that the conservation organisations were not omnipotent and that mediation with them could often involve financial recompense. With the designation of the Rhinns SSSI and the development of the various goose management schemes many farmers began to receive substantial payments as part of management agreements or as compensation for goose damage. This negated many difficulties but sometimes appeared divisive and unfair to farmers who were less favoured. SNH inherited these problems with their formation in 1992 but the new organisation mustered at least the semblance of a desire to incorporate the views of local people into policies, create avenues for dialogue and to learn from the difficulties of the past.

These changes in the type of interaction between conservation organisations and Islay correspond with a greater degree of integration between the two. During the 1970s conservation organisations, although slowly becoming aware of the circumstances in Islay, realised a need to become more involved and to gain a better understanding of the

local circumstances. People on the island also came to notice this gathering attention from outside to the extent that views began to be influenced and new questions were asked of established practices such as the persecution of raptors. The advent of the Wildlife and Countryside Act initially precipitated the division between conservation organisations and the Islay community because the Act and its implementation by the NCC appeared indifferent to local interests, prioritising explicitly outside concerns instead. These concerns seemed to many to constrain independent livelihoods, as in the case of Duich Moss and the Rhinns designation, or threaten local enterprises, as with the loss of milk quota from the RSPB reserve. The NCC and the RSPB appeared unable to understand how to work in a place like Islay and to appreciate its locally perceived qualities, complexities and mores. But after the late 1980s, when the NCC established a local office and the ILUF was formed, the conservation organisations began to develop a more local aspect, though still not necessarily with local values and interests at the forefront of their activities. The number of people directly employed by SNH and the RSPB was well into double figures in the 1990s. Some of these people came from the island or were Highlanders but all had their faces seen in pubs and shops or had children who made friends at the local schools. This process had rendered the conservation organisations more of a known quantity in the island but also more ambiguous. They had a visible local presence but were still outside organisations with what still appeared to some to be outside agendas.

Over these past two chapters my aim has been to describe how farming and conservation have developed in Islay and how the paths of these two groups have gradually become entangled. As such I have drawn out many of the ambiguities that have emerged between the 'local' and the 'outside' and between continuity and change but in the broad brushstrokes of a historical overview rather than fine-grained ethnography. Whilst in part my intention has been to provide a perspective that looks back in time towards these precursors, I would now direct the reader towards the present that I encountered in the field and the future that my informants anticipated in response to the events that I have been describing. It is these individual elaborations on the past and the expectations that they informed to which this thesis now attends.

Part Three:
Ethnography

Introduction: Symbols, abduction and tautology

The material I describe in the forthcoming chapters consists of explanations and negotiations. Farmers explain what their farm was like when they took it over; they explain why they have problems with government and why they think the RSPB reserve is not a proper farm. The RSPB explain how they manage their reserve and why they think farmers are sometimes unable to understand the thinking behind this. Farmers and SNH negotiate a management agreement or a new goose scheme. Through these explanations and negotiations, individuals legitimate their own understandings, values and practices and in doing so situate themselves in relation to others. My interest here is to organise this discursive material and to do this I draw on three organising themes (cf. Cohen 1987: 209-212): symbols, abduction and tautology. Through the writing of the ethnography and thence through the perspectives provided by organising the data through these themes, certain connections and patterns of difference are revealed.

The three organising themes are closely interrelated:

1. Tautologies are the assumptions that are used to provide explanations. Descriptions derived from our experience of the world are mapped onto a set of tautological connections and it is the matching of these that creates an explanation or classification of the world.
2. Abduction is the mapping of different phenomena onto the same tautologies. Through abduction the world comes to appear consistently and sympathetically patterned and organised.
3. Symbols are important in abduction and tautology because they are used to reveal different sorts of connections between things.

I elaborate on these themes below but firstly a more detailed discussion of explanation and negotiation is required.

Returning to the three programmatic questions I posed at the end of Chapter Two, one of my intentions over the following four chapters is to describe how explanations of difference were used by individuals in their situating practices in relation to others and

to formulate strategies aimed towards changing and improving their circumstances. Any explanation brings forth the first of these effects and this implies a negotiation of difference. Gregory Bateson argues that it is through interaction that certain differences affecting the way in which individuals classify themselves and are classified by others are made recognisable:

‘Things’ are produced, are seen as separate from other ‘things’ and are made ‘real’ by their internal relations and by their behaviour in relationship with other things (1979: 57).

So by perceiving and explaining the qualities of another ‘thing’ in terms of differences, an ‘individual’ is asserting both the object’s qualities and his or her own position in relation to these. Furthermore, although difference is necessarily comparative, Bateson argues that “Language commonly stresses only one side of any interaction” (ibid: 56), meaning that to fully comprehend a phenomenon it is necessary (e.g. for the anthropologist) to consider the interactions and comparisons that are unstressed or implicit in what is said. For instance, when a farmer explains why he is unhappy about the way in which the RSPB manage their reserve at Loch Gruinart he is implicitly referring to how he sees his own circumstances, values and knowledge as differing, and so – like any criticism – these comments are a form of comparison. When an SNH officer explains government policy on conservation he or she is also indicating his or her own position in relation to the implementation of that policy. If a farmer explains the strategies that he plans to adopt in the future he is implying an appreciation of certain trends in agriculture and of the possibilities he sees for himself in relation to these developments. So through interaction and explanation, qualitative differences between ‘things’ and between individuals are made manifest, negotiated, legitimated and reinforced. Individuals thus produce explanations through the dialectical combination of their own internal assumptions of the world and their external relations with others.

According to Bateson explanations are descriptions mapped onto tautologies (1979: 76-80). Descriptions contain information (i.e. differences that make a difference to the perceiver) about a phenomenon, and tautologies are sets of self-evident connections between propositions analogous to the transformations used to produce a map (a sort of

explanation). Tautologies do not contain information but are the means by which descriptions of the things, ideas and events that we experience are connected and understood.²²⁸ Because tautologies are treated as axiomatic, they tend not to be the explicit subject matter of discourse.²²⁹ In fact it is usually important that they are not discussed or questioned because their usefulness in producing satisfactory explanations for phenomena could be destroyed by being made visible. So tautologies do not need to be 'true' and may on inspection seem vague or contradictory; indeed it may be useful that they are so. What tautologies provide is a basis on which an explanation of difference can be built so that things, events, ideas and qualities can be situated in meaningful relation to one another and to the participants in interaction. The combining of tautology and description into explanation thus provides the bonus of insight (ibid: 76).

Edwin Ardener (1989b) offers a similar approach to the study of explanations and events that rests on a distinction between what he calls paradigmatic and syntagmatic structures (*p*-structures and *s*-structures). *S*-structures are the observable and contingent structures of events, such as the way that those involved are classified in that particular context. *P*-structures are the more elusive programmatic templates that influence the form of events. These last are analogous to Bateson's tautologies because they are the basic models of connection that underpin understandings of the world. These *p*-structures may be beyond the reach of direct observation but they can be 'shadowed' in language, such as the explanations that are given by informants and registered by anthropologists.

Many of the explanations that I describe in this study are resolved along the axes of time (e.g. continuity and change) and place (e.g. local or outside) and through certain specifications made about how the internal qualities of things are distributed in relation to these axes. Changes are assumed to originate from particular places (such as 'the mainland' or 'Europe'), whilst continuities are linked with others; individuals or groups

²²⁸ Compare with Rapport's (1993: 80) definition of world-views as loops of thought in which different phrases of explanation are connected and contextualised through sets of internal and prior ideas and opinions. It is to these sorts of 'cognitive contexts' that tautology refers but it should be noted that, although tautologies are in one sense 'internal' and prior to interaction, they are also produced through interaction with others. Like any other 'thing', they are generated through both the internal and external relating of ideas.

²²⁹ Whilst tautological models are not often the explicit subject matter of discourse, they are in part produced through discourse, or what Gudeman and Rivera describe as 'long conversations' (1990: 14).

associated with certain places at particular moments are understood to possess certain qualities, such as specific bodies of knowledge and values. These sets of assumptions (exemplified or revealed in a postulate such as ‘things that come from outside bring change’) are the tautologies that transform description into insightful explanation and it is these that I intend to draw out. Therefore I offer an explanation of explanations. Both sets of explanation are the product of processes of mapping (both by my informants and by myself) that enable participants in interaction to orient themselves in relation to others, rendering the world comprehensible and allowing individuals to reflect on how and where they are situated at any particular moment. Some principles of this sort of mapping require elaboration.

Bateson famously employed Korzybski’s aphorism that ‘the map is not the territory’ to contrast mental and substantive processes. In his essay “Form, substance and difference” Bateson commented that:

One such class [of difference] you are all familiar with. Namely, the class of differences which are created by the process of transformation whereby the differences immanent in the territory become differences immanent in the map. In the corner of every serious map you will find these rules of transformation spelled out – usually in words. Within the human mind, it is absolutely essential to recognise the differences of this class” (1972: 464).

The sort of ideational mapping (or transformation of territory) that Bateson has in mind is a process of classification and explanation, a part of the *creatura*, as distinct from the substantive ‘territory’ of the external, physical world, the *pleroma* (cf. Ingold 2000: 16-19). Over the following four chapters it is people’s ideas that I describe, or more accurately their ideas as manifested in discourse.²³⁰ These ideas are derived from those tautological assumptions that produce explanations and negotiations and as such they are immanent in the ongoing interaction between the self and discourse. Bateson also reminds us that the distinction in logical typing between map and territory is not always subjectively distinguishable but that this merging creates the possibility for

²³⁰ I am not denying the reality or relevance of substantive effects but I consider it rather hard, if not impossible, to separate those effects from the ideas through which they are always mediated and recognised.

identification between a symbol (a name or a feature of a 'map') and whatever it is perceived to represent (1979: 27-28).

In applying Bateson's ideas, Rapport suggests that:

Ideation, the processes of perceiving and thinking and communicating about perceiving and thinking, involves a transformation or codification (translation or substitution) which might variously be described as symbolic classification, naming or mapping. We attribute names and qualities to things and so 'produce' them by reproducing them in a world of human experience (1999: 191).

So our ideas of the substantive, external world are decoded and recoded. They are not the physical world itself but our representation and reproduction of that world symbolically (e.g. in the form of a map or a set of names). Maps, explanations and classifications can thus be understood as tautological organisations of particular sorts of meaningful difference (i.e. the information contained in descriptions) in which connections are made by their relevance in context (ibid: 192).²³¹ As such they "serve as existential contexts of [people's] lives" (ibid: 203) and over the next four chapters I attempt to draw out these understandings from their external manifestations in discourse and explanation.

A further aspect of explanation is the process that Bateson calls abduction. This is the perception that different phenomena can be mapped onto the same tautologies – they have similar patterns of connection (1979: 79). Abduction is a product of double or multiple descriptions of the world (ibid: 134) and from such multiple versions a bonus is achieved, comparable to the bonus of depth perception provided by binocular vision. People thus use abduction in recognising the same patterns of connection in different events, things or ideas and this has the 'bonus' of reinforcing and legitimating the tautologies that produce explanations. So a tautology that connects change with things that originate outside of Islay can, through processes of abduction, be used to provide explanations for a wide variety of phenomena – new technologies, new bureaucracy, divisions between farmers, being able to offer a different image of how to farm. It is

²³¹ Context is a problematic term (see Dilley 1999) but, however it is construed, it is integral to understandings of meaning. I understand there to be a dialectical relationship between internal existential contexts and external situational contexts.

thus through abduction – the recognition that different phenomena can be mapped onto the same tautologies – that tendencies, trends and patterns are revealed and future strategies can be formulated and discussed. It can also explain certain regularities between the explanations offered by different individuals because it is the process through which shared understandings of the world are recognised (Rapport 1999: 204). As such, abduction is integral to people’s explanations of the world because it provides a sort of working proof that these are correct and that their tautological rules of mapping are indeed self-evidently true. The world and the individual’s interactions within it are thus rendered as internally coherent, stable, predictable and aesthetic.²³² So abduction is a means by which tautological models of connection can provide ready and satisfying explanations for a wide range of phenomena (cf. Gudeman & Rivera 1990: 15). It is thus an essential process in the organisation of descriptions of the world, including both this thesis and any other academic work (Bateson 1979: 133).

Although abduction necessarily concerns the recognition of similarities in the abstract components of phenomena (ibid: 133), it also provides a basis for the perception and reinforcement of difference (and thus also for one’s situating practices in particular moments). By organising descriptions of the world abduction provides evidence of consistency in patterns of connection or patterns of difference that we come to perceive as we move cognitively from one phenomenon to another and from one situation to another. Over time, the recognition of these cognitive movements become familiar and are reinforced into what Bateson called ‘recursive circuits’ (Rapport 1999: 194-195). But the fact that the relations of difference between individuals tend to be complex in most circumstances means that, whilst there may be consistency, there is also negotiability because of the manifold ways in which difference can be perceived. According to Gudeman and Rivera:

There is an open-ended and shifting quality to this modelling process of perceiving, playing with and constructing similarities and differences (1990: 14).

²³² This does not mean that abduction results in a world in which everything ‘makes sense’ or appears benevolent but it *does* mean that if a phenomenon does not make sense then this can usually be *explained* in a satisfactory way. The policies of government did not always appear to make sense to farmers but such incoherencies and contradictions could be explained as being in the nature of governments or various other bodies that were detached from life in Islay.

For example, at any one moment a farmer could think of an RSPB warden as (amongst many other things) someone with different values and knowledge relating to the management of land and animals, a person who lives in the same area and knows many of the same people, a friend whom they can have a laugh with, someone with a different background and upbringing or as another local farmer who has the same interests in farm animals, the market and recent weather patterns. Which of these become relevant²³³ in any particular moment is dependent upon both how the participants understand the context of their interaction and how they employ symbols.

So symbols – the landmarks and features of our mental mapping²³⁴ of the world – have the capacity to reveal and conceal differences. A symbol can provide a basis for comparison between groups because, as a ‘landmark’ of mental maps, two people can be oriented towards it in different ways. For example, an SNH officer and a farmer might perceive themselves to be contrastingly oriented towards geese. The perception of difference thus involves situating oneself and others within a ‘map’ in which one’s reading of interactive context and usage of symbols create a particular orientation. How difference is made manifest is thus dependent upon the combination of all of these factors, which taken together can be described as situating practices. In the same moment, two people can perceive each other (or be perceived) as different in certain respects and similar in others. The differences that become most meaningful and relevant (which thus ‘make a difference’) are dependent upon context and the invocation of symbols.

I have already suggested in Chapter Two that the perception of difference does not necessarily require an idea of a boundary because difference can be fluid, vague and negotiable as well as hard and fast. Bateson argues that the patterned difference between two or more ‘things’ can, metaphorically speaking, be a continuous quantity or discontinuous number:

²³³ According to Bateson, “A story is a little knot or complex of that species of connectedness we call *relevance*” (1979: 12 emphasis in original). Discourses include their own historical narratives that connect symbols through perceptions of relevance (see Introduction to Part Two).

²³⁴ Note that in a Batesonian sense, a ‘mental’ map is not confined to the body and brain but extends outward into the organism’s environment.

Numbers are the product of counting. Quantities are the product of measurement. This means that numbers can conceivably be accurate because there is a discontinuity between each integer and the next. Between two and three there is a jump. In the case of quantity there is no such jump; and because jump is missing in the world of quantity, it is impossible for any quantity to be exact... Always quantity is approximate (1979: 45 emphasis removed).

Symbolic boundaries create (or perhaps enhance) a sense of discontinuous difference. This is the sort of difference that can be counted as a presence or absence (or more often recognised as something analogous to a differently patterned number) i.e. we inside the boundary have this quality but those relevant others outside do not. The employment of a “boundary-expressing symbol” thus provides a sort of tautology or ‘proof’ for the veracity of the boundary (and the social group or class) that it invokes. In particular cases, it is undoubtedly useful or even necessary to create such a simplified and definite sense of difference. Such a process is necessary to create the notion that we are ‘all the same’ and they are ‘the opposite’ or ‘completely different’, for example. But, despite its obvious utility in creating a sense of clear differentiation, there are also more approximate ways of measuring and perceiving difference, either along a continuous cline that moves through ‘similar’ and ‘different’ or in a complex and heterogeneous appreciation of another’s different qualities. In cases of continuous or clinal difference, there is no need for the creation of fixed boundaries because difference is negotiable and can be relatively easily concealed.²³⁵ This allows for ‘sameness’ between individuals to become more apparent, although difference remains latent. Through the use of certain symbols these latent differences can come to be perceived. So to paraphrase Anthony Cohen (1985: 15), symbols do not so much express meaning as give us the capacity to perceive meaningful differences. Therefore my understanding of symbols and their meaning is related to their facilitation of perception rather than interpretation (cf. Wagner 1986) and the ‘meaning’ of symbols is thus a product of their employment in revealing differences.

²³⁵ A similar distinction is made by Phillips (1986: 144). He describes discontinuous difference as “dichotomous discriminations” and continuous difference as “scalar qualifications”. The former provide a “cultural shorthand” useful for making basic stereotypical distinctions whereas the latter are a “cultural longhand” useful in more intimate or complex social interactions.

This negotiability of difference is also related to the inherent ambiguity of symbols. In this study, the organising symbols described in chapters Six, Seven and Eight allow for the incorporation of different perspectives and create the discursive space that enables individuals to situate themselves in a unique position whilst remaining connected to others. The RSPB reserve is both a farm and a nature reserve and it can thus come to represent different configurations of the relationship between farming and conservation. Management agreements associated with designated areas are both constraining and rewarding and this creates the possibility for farmers to negotiate their own economic position in relation to conservation. The ambiguous classification of geese as both threatened species and agricultural pests has enabled geese to stand for both the underlying formation of ‘the problem’ and the various solutions proposed to deal with it. In these senses, symbols do not so much represent something else as represent a relationship between things. The ambiguity of symbols enables the comparably ambiguous relationships they stand for to be constantly negotiable.

But one should note that the negotiability of the definition of symbols (as opposed to relationships) is not necessarily a straightforward or entirely individual process. The classifying activities of others can influence or inform the ways in which individuals understand symbols. For example, the ambiguous classification of geese is given in law, whilst the way in which the RSPB have actively created a dual identity for their reserve informs how others perceive this landscape and use it discursively. Individuals themselves can be symbols and so can histories.²³⁶ Thus, symbols can also have agency but this does not equate to the power to determine meaning. This thesis is concerned with the classification of the symbolic but it is what individuals do with these symbols that remains paramount. Over the following four chapters I intend to describe how farmers and nature conservationists use symbols to perceive and negotiate difference, how they explain changes in their own circumstances and what they see the future as holding for them. I also intend to draw out certain regularities in the tautological assumptions from which farmers and conservationists develop their explanations and understandings. These are discussed in more detail in the conclusion.

²³⁶ See Introduction to Part Two.

5.0 Farms and farmers in Islay

Prior to considering the relationship between farmers and conservation organisations, I offer a description of the way that farmers explain some other relationships that they are involved in: relationships with their land, with government and the wider world, with other farmers and with the past and the future. This chapter focuses on a small number of farmers and crofters but many others whom I interviewed expressed similar ideas and perceptions.

5.1 *A good farm*

Archie Baxter was 76 years old when I interviewed him at his home in Port Charlotte. I talked to him for around four or five hours over two separate days in February 2000. Archie regularly cropped up at other events and was often to be seen about the village. He spoke in a careful and precise way, sometimes imbued with gentle mirth or a hint of incredulity at the folly of others. There were a number of reasons why I considered Archie to be a particularly good informant. The most obvious was his knowledge of Islay, its history, wildlife, social life and farming. All this was informed by Archie's sharp and analytical mind that could spin a theory as well as a tale. Archie originally came from the mainland and he arrived in Islay to take up a tenancy in the Rhinns when he was in his mid-twenties. I asked Archie when he had taken up the tenancy:

Nineteen Forty-nine.

And that was until Norman came.

That was until Norman came in Nineteen Eighty-three.

And how did you come to farm there? How did you acquire it?

The tenancy? Just there were farms available then. Farms were advertised in Islay and I came up to see it. I came to Howmore, that was Nineteen Forty-seven, and then Howmore was coming up for let. The Estate had it in their own hands at that time and it had been badly run down over a period of years; the previous tenants had got old. They had been in Howmore since Eighteen Eighty – a family. They were persuaded by the Estate to give it up and then the Estate

took it on, re-fenced it and each year re-drained and broke in another one of the fields. When I went there they still had two fields to do.

What sort of state were they in?

Well, the field that was being done the year I went there, at the telephone exchange at this side of the road, was ploughed with a 'Prairie-buster' plough.

And that's quite a big one?

That was a big plough. Completely buried the rushes – it was heavily rushed at that time – completely buried the rushes. And as far as that was concerned it was a complete success. And then of course it went into rotation and eventually was sown out to grass. And then the following year I broke in the last field, which was the one next to the house, right at the far end of the farm; I broke in that. We spent a fortnight clearing the scrub off it.

It was that bad?

Yes. And it was all right once the trees were pulled out; it wasn't too bad with rushes. And we broke that in and that was really the end of it; that was bringing all the original fields back into cultivation.

Graham Campbell and his wife Ellen were tenants of a large hill farm in the centre of the island. Graham had taken over the farm from his father, who was originally from mainland Argyll, in the late 1960s. Most of the farm was rough hill ground and the rest good pasture. Graham told me that they had never grown barley because the ground was too high and too stony. He gave me a quick tour of the farm in his Landrover and I commented to him that his fields on the hill looked very good in comparison with the low marshy ground on a neighbouring farm. Graham was unconvinced saying, "We're grassland farmers in a wet year but in a dry year we suffer." Although he put lots of fertiliser onto his fields the soil was quite thin and prone to drying out.

As we went up the track to the farmhouse, Graham said that it had been impossible to drive up there when he and his father had first arrived in the 1950s. The guy who had got the farm beforehand had been bankrupted; there was no fencing and the land was in a terrible state, although the buildings were not so bad because the Estate had looked after them. Graham's father had needed to invest heavily in fencing and drainage in order to make the farm more productive. Later on, I asked Graham if he thought he had ever got the farm into the condition that he wanted:

Not really, partly because of the difficulties of being a tenant – the Estate won't help with things. We put up all the cattle sheds ourselves, with our own money, and all the cattle and sheep handling facilities. We've done all the drainage and fencing as well. The farm is tolerable but it's not as good as I'd like. Time is the enemy and we don't have the people working for us anymore. But we try and look after the land as if it's our own though. One of the biggest compliments we've ever had was when a friend of ours passed by the farm and he said to us, 'I know there's definitely someone living up there.' So we like to keep the farm and the garden in a good condition. *

Certainly Graham seemed to give a good impression to other farmers – some of whom had mentioned to me that his farm was amongst the best on the island.

In May 2000 I interviewed Iain Taylor, a dairy farmer living on the Rhinns. His father, originally from the mainland, had taken over the tenancy of the farm in the 1960s and eventually the Taylors were able to buy the land in the 1980s. Iain was approaching forty and he and his brother had been working on the farm since leaving school. The family had also acquired another farm a few miles away. Shortly before I interviewed Iain, the family had been forced to sell off their herd of dairy cattle following the closure of the island creamery. I asked Iain what the farm was like when his family first came there. His mother, who was in the room at the time, answered first before Iain continued:

Mother: Run down.

Iain: Aye it was, a lot of rashes.²³⁷ That field in front of the house there – that was all rashes. And there was dockens, kind of waist high down the middle of it. The big field down the back of it – what we call the quarry field – it was, it was all full of rashes. Basically everything from here to Ballygown was rashes and grass in between, kind of rough grass. We've ploughed everything you could conceivably plough and some bits you shouldn't really have ploughed we ploughed as well.

²³⁷ 'Rashes' is a common pronunciation of 'rushes' in Islay.

And reseeded?

Iain: Aye. There was only one fence, a brand new fence from here to the glen. And the sheep just went anywhere and just ran all over.

And how long did it take you to get it into good condition?

Iain: It's only the last three or four years that we've slowed down reseeding and that's primarily due to cost. There's not enough money in the job to reseed every year. It costs a lot of money to reseed – just as and when it's necessary.

A few miles away, on the other side of the Rhinns, Gilbert MacLugash had a large hill farm where he reared beef cattle and sheep. His family had moved there in the 1950s from a farm nearby and, like the Taylors, Gilbert had bought the farm in the early 1980s, with the break-up of the estate of which it had been part. Gilbert was a small man who spoke with thoughtfulness and restraint in a lilting voice softened with Gaelic. I asked Gilbert, as I asked most farmers I interviewed, if he had been able to get his farm into the condition that he wanted:

It was good fifteen years ago but I don't do as much as I should now. I have to cut corners because I'm not getting any return on things. I mean I could drain land but without grants it would take a long time to get a return from it. It's a shame that we're not able to do what we want. A lot of farmers do a lot of work but they don't get a proper return for their efforts. There was a chap at the silage demonstration today and he was saying that if his ancestors could see the way the rushes are growing in the fields now then they'd be shocked. But farmers are not given help to do things properly. This chap said that his father was a man who always wanted to grow two blades of grass where there was one before but he was saying that these days the state of the farms is bad, with all the middens and rushes everywhere. *

Not far from Gilbert lived Gilbey MacArthur, who ran a large croft with his wife. The croft appeared remarkably productive to me, given its exposed location by the Atlantic. Gilbey was a stocky fellow who was more forthcoming with his opinions than many Ilich had seemed to me. As I started to leave at the end of the interview he told me that he had a reputation for "biting the heads off conservation people" (with whom he

perhaps associated me) but that he had tired of doing that because it scarcely made any difference. During the interview, I asked Gilbey why he thought crofting was important to Islay:

It's a way of keeping the countryside alive. There's always people working their wee plots. Farms always tend to be less diverse and a lot'll probably end up just ranched with sheep. There used to be crofts at Ballygown and it was really nice but now it's gone wild. The way things are though, Audrey [the owner] probably gets more money for that than she would from farming it. But the rushes are taking over badly and I hate to see the land untidy like that; I like to keep the countryside tidy. I don't like to see it when there's fences broken and gates open. *

Farmers and crofters in Islay often told me rather similar stories about how they had worked to improve their land and to keep a good farm. Archie, Graham and Iain all mentioned that when their family had taken over their tenancies the farms were in a run-down state and considerable effort was required to improve them. The poor state of these farms was signalled by the presence of rushes, scrub and weeds, broken or absent fences and a lack of drainage. As well as making productive farming more difficult, these were a sign of neglect, caused by either an inability to farm properly or an absence of people working the land and thus "keeping the countryside alive". By ploughing, draining, fertilising and liming their land farmers were able to "grow two blades of grass where there was one before" and to show others that "there's definitely someone living up there". The land thus allowed for improved production²³⁸ and by keeping the farm "in a good condition" farmers were visibly representing their own labour.

Despite having the desire to embody the values of production and labour in their land, farmers sometimes admitted that their farms were not in an ideal state. The Campbells told me that such deficiencies were because "the Estate won't help with things" and "we don't have people working for us anymore". Gilbert admitted that he had "to cut corners because I'm not getting any return on things" and this meant that as farmers "we're not able to do what we want". Gilbey felt that his own croft was just as he

²³⁸ Producing more was not, for most farmers, necessarily about producing a greater number of livestock. What was desired was to produce as many *good quality* livestock as your land would allow without it being damaged.

would like it but he was unimpressed with a farm nearby that had “gone wild” through a lack of productive activity. But it would not have surprised him if the owner “gets more money for that than she would from farming it”. The implication in all of these statements was that if the values of good farming were not represented in their land then this was not because their values had changed but because external factors prevented them from having the opportunity to fully realise these. In particular, changing agricultural priorities had meant that improvements such as drainage were no longer funded well enough to enable a return whilst money from government was more likely to be available if a farmer let their land go wild. Farmers also found it difficult to find enough money to employ workers, making it harder to keep up the appearance of the land, and the estates did not always help tenants with desired improvements to infrastructure. In most cases, these external constraints had become more severe over time and so although a farm such as Gilbert’s “was good fifteen years ago” it had since become impossible to maintain the land in such fettle. According to Gilbey, crofts were the best hope of keeping the countryside alive, diverse and tidy and hence more in keeping with the values that were once more widely expressed in the land through productive human labour. These symbolic representations of the morality of ‘a good farm’ were clearly linked to the wider economics of farming, but this raises the question of the degree to which such values were invoked by the necessities of earning a living from the land.

5.2 *Making a living from the land*

In order to make a living, most of the farmers I interviewed specialised in beef or dairy cattle. An exception was Gilbey who, as he pointed out, ran a more diverse operation on his croft. When I arrived at Gilbey’s to interview him he was out delivering potatoes but, whilst I waited, I talked to his wife, Mary, and she told me that a small operator, such as a crofter, needed to produce a wide range of things in order to survive the vicissitudes of the market. Crofters also tended to produce more for their own consumption than most farmers did, something exemplified in the MacArthurs’ impressive vegetable garden. Mary told me that they also kept 200 chickens, selling the eggs to shops around the island. Apparently the holidaymakers “were mad for their free-range eggs”. When Gilbey arrived back he told me about the croft:

The croft covers sixty acres and most of that's arable. There's a bit of rough ground but most of the land is workable. Crofting has changed a lot since I was a kid. There were very few sheep in those days but more cattle. Everyone had cattle and they all milked a cow. People worked to live rather than to make money. Everyone kept a pig for the winter and they salted the pork. They all grew potatoes and turnips as well. The crops were rotational with oats, then turnips and then grass. These days you have a crop of grass for maybe two or three years and then you reseed.

I don't think potatoes are really viable these days because the weather's been so bad it's ruined the ground. You can buy them cheaper than you can grow them anyway. These big mainland farms are more or less fully mechanised now and you can't find anyone that wants to work lifting potatoes anymore. As well as the potatoes, I grow swede turnips. I sell a few to the shops and the rest are for the sheep. There's also some forage rape I grow for the sheep and we cut three or four acres of silage every year, although it always used to be hay in this area. These days it's not really viable to grow oats anymore.

We cut peat on the croft for our own use. It brings the cost down of heating the house, especially when you consider the price of a few bags of coal. We heat the Rayburn with the peat and that heats the water, which saves a lot on electricity for cooking and water. We could get people in to cut the peats but that would add to the expenses. It's cheap enough if you do it all yourself. We still get our own water from a spring on the croft. It's not fluoridated and we have a well in the glen. The only problem is that when there's a power cut we lose our water as well. We've always used this water but now we're the only people in the township who have our own water supply; everyone else is on mains. The water never does us any harm. *

As with the earlier extract, Gilbey seemed nostalgic for a past, in this case for the ethic of self-sufficiency as the principal aim of the crofter (cf. Cohen 1987: 109). This he contrasted with the over-riding modern pursuit of making a profit. For Gilbey, self-sufficiency was linked to independence, something that remained important to him, but

also to a sense of community in which the value of self-sufficiency was shared. Now, although he and Mary still cut their own peats, they were the only people in their township who did not have to rely on the mains water supply (even if they were forced to rely on mains electricity). They were concerned about money but more in saving it than making it. Gilbey sold his potatoes to the local shops but he reckoned “you can buy them cheaper than you can grow them”, implying that there was little prospect of profiting from their sale. The reasons for this were beyond his control – the worsening climate, the mechanisation of big mainland farms and a lack of willing workers. Through their utilisation of the land and resources, Gilbey and Mary seemed to represent their croft and their way of life as a link with a more independent past. Whilst I doubt they eschewed a reasonable income, they expressed an understanding that the pursuit of profit could be destructive of their values and was thus not something they should prioritise.

In contrast to Gilbey, the Taylors had a large farm and specialised in dairy production but, like Gilbey, they had also diversified into other areas. Iain explained their economic strategies when I asked him why his family had persisted so long at dairying when many other farmers had converted to beef:

Well, we support three families on it and it's what we were brought up to do...It's the stone which the whole business has been built round. We do contract work, we do a lot of haulage, we do [pause]... on our farm – it was built on the back of that. It's a lot of income. We were averaging around seventy thousand pounds and I think last year we were over a hundred thousand, so divide it up by twelve and that's the average monthly income. It's a lot of money but it's a lot of work too. You could bring in a lot of money regular. You have to be dedicated to it and that's what we were brought up to do; it's just part of the job. It was a bone of contention sometimes when we were busy but you never argued on the nineteenth of the month when the cheque comes through. You've got this money coming in every month, so long as you milked the cows.

The Taylors also cut and sold peat and had a bed-and-breakfast business on the farm. I went on to ask Iain if the management of the farm had changed over the years he had

been there:

Aye... I've been working for my father for twenty-three years and when I left school we were milking sixty cows and had two hundred odd yows.²³⁹ And we just worked away. It's progress, or whatever you want to call it – or maybe just wanting to do better. We used to cut silage at the end of June and then take a second cut in August. As time went on we started shutting off ground and trying to get grass early and getting the cows turned out. We'd be putting fertiliser on in the first week of March if we could and we'd cut silage the twenty-first of May – that was the earliest we've ever cut silage. I think it might be the earliest silage anywhere. We'd take three cuts of silage. We're just trying to do well – trying to do our job well and get good quality silage. So it's changed a lot from there – stock as well. It was always Black-faced yows and Black-faced tups – a self-contained flock. But we've turned things on its head with a lot of cross yows and Suffolks; finishing lambs, taking lambs right through till March. In the past they'd be sold in September – you'd be finished – but we don't start selling lambs till November. So, I would like to think we've done not too bad really. Given half a chance we can make a fairly decent job on what isn't that great a ground. If you had a boy come over here from the mainland and you said, 'go up to the Rhinns and have a hundred and fifty milk cows, two hundred odd yows and all their followers and all that', they'd think you'd need a big ranch of a place to run that. This area here, it's good grass growing land if it gets a chance.

The Taylors, with three families to support, needed to make money from their land and their labour. Iain's comments emphasised both a strong work ethic and a highly rationalised approach to farming. They worked hard to improve their land and thus the farm developed. This progress ("or maybe just wanting to do better") was measured quantitatively, in the money coming in from the dairying, the number of silage cuts and the numbers of livestock. Through hard work the Taylors were able to secure a large and regular income from the various strands of their business and this was represented in the increasing productivity of the farming business. This was what Iain and his

²³⁹ 'Yow' is a frequently used pronunciation of 'ewe' in Islay. The number of livestock kept by the Taylors had increased to 120 cows and 475 ewes at the time they sold the dairy herd.

brother had “been brought up to do”. Despite this, he did not feel constrained by his pursuit of a profitable business. I asked him what he liked best about farming:

It’s being your own boss. It’s just a way of life. We’re out sharp in the mornings – we’re out at six. This last six weeks at lambing time it’s been quiet at that time.

If you went elsewhere would you want to stay in farming?

No.

Is there just no money in it these days?

I couldn’t work for someone else on a farm – easier ways of earning a living.

For Iain, working hard and giving his farm a chance to produce had brought financial rewards. But independence and “being your own boss” seemed at least as important to him. The rational pursuit of profit was not a constraint on this freedom but working for someone else (at least someone other than his father) would have been. Iain’s implication was that the hard work was worth it if he was in charge but not if somebody else was.

Gilbert MacLugash told me about how his farming operation had intensified over the previous twenty years:

We’ve more cows than we used to, although the numbers have been fairly steady for some time now. If you go back a long way we would only have had fifty but the number was up to a hundred in Nineteen Eighty and a hundred and twenty in Nineteen Ninety. By improving the land it’s helped us to increase the numbers but that’s mostly been pushed by the need to make ends meet from smaller margins. We have about fifty more sheep now than a few years ago because the poor prices meant we couldn’t sell all we wanted to. *

Most of Gilbert’s farm was hill land but he had a small area of arable land immediately surrounding the steadings. I asked him how he used this area:

At the beginning of the season in the spring, we have ewes lambing on the arable fields around the farmhouse before they’re put out on the hill ground. The fields

are then left for silage, which is cut in early July. We cut thirty-seven point six hectares²⁴⁰ of silage so it's most of the arable. After the silage has been cut the fields are fertilised and we then put cattle on till September. Lambs are put back on and through the winter we hold the ewe hogs. It gives these animals a boost to be on the good ground. I don't bother taking a second cut of silage normally, although I might do this year because I got a poor yield on the first cut. I like to use the grass for the cows instead. In any case, by the time a second cut is ready it would be quite late in the season and there would be a danger of losing it, or of it not being of good quality because there's often bad weather at that time of year. A second cut would be a big gamble.

Do you grow any crops?

No, because it's not practical. I'd have to have a combine and the land around the farmhouse would be the best for crops and I use that for other things. With the bad weather in recent years it makes it difficult to grow crops and so it's more reliable to use the best fields for silage. *

Gilbert seemed less concerned than Iain to produce as much as he could from his land, choosing instead to concentrate on quality – on giving his “animals a boost” rather than getting in a second cut of silage. Because he had less need to produce as much as possible, Gilbert could afford to do this and he had no need to take many risks. Despite this, he was still affected by wider changes in the agricultural economy that have created a need to increase production in order “to make ends meet”. Unlike the Taylors, who were able to increase their earnings from dairying, Gilbert thus appeared content to maintain his income rather than increase it.

At the RSPB discussion evening,²⁴¹ Archie Baxter had raised the issue of the impact of plant breeding on farming and goose populations in Islay. I interviewed Archie just a few weeks after the meeting and this led me to ask if these improvements had meant that he had been able to carry more stock on his land:

Oh yes. The landlords provided the steadings for the farms and they're notoriously penny-pinching so they didn't try anything that was bigger or greater

²⁴⁰ Gilbert was quoting regularly from statistics about the farm that he had fetched when I started asking questions about how his land was divided up.

²⁴¹ See 2.2.

than the farm could carry. But the farms were self-supporting in theory so they could only carry the stock that they could feed on the farm. They only built a byre for the amount of cows that the farm could carry. Well, Howmore had a byre for twenty-three – twenty-three into eighty, three acres to the cow. That's approximately the stock carrying capacity of the majority of farms on the island – three acres to the cow. Most farms, if you go round and find out what the old byre held, the number of cows the byre held, it would come out at three acres to the cow.

And what did it change to – the acreage per cow?

Now? With farms on the island or right around the country? With some of the dairy farms they are at one acre to the cow. But they are using, they are providing the grazing, all the roughage, all the bulk feeding, for the cows with silage. And they're buying in all the concentrates. They might be looking to produce for the maintenance of the cow plus say two calves, two gallons a day from the farm. But there'll be aiming to produce three-and-a-half gallons, four gallons per cow and that balance is brought in concentrates. Today's farms on the island, the dairies found on the island, they're not stocked at a heavy rate. And most dairy farms, practically all of them (in fact all except one), have sheep and a certain number of beef cattle, either separate beef cattle or a by-product of the dairy herd. So carrying capacity has gone up.

Do you think that's always a good thing – that the stock carrying has gone up?

It's not a case of whether it's a good thing; it's an economic thing. If a farm can't, with the traditional stocking, can't give you a living wage then if you're going to stay on that farm then you're going to have to intensify until it does give you a living wage. And you were doing no harm to anything by doing that. The land is still there, and although the appearance of that land may have changed, and the use of that land has changed, the land is still there. And if it is then abandoned it will revert back to what it was. And so, it will be temporary and not permanent because it doesn't take long to go back. If you think of a garden that wasn't cultivated and nothing done, in two years time the only thing that would be left in that garden are the shrubs. And half of them will have been crowded out; only the very strongest will survive. Yes you have to either intensify or get very, very much bigger. Then the poorer the land the bigger it has to get. On sheep farms where, in some of the best hills, they will carry a ewe

to the acre. So you can have a thousand acre place carrying a thousand ewes, which could give a modest income to a man but in the last couple of years probably not – up to two years ago of course. In Argyllshire the stocking on the best of the hill ground will probably be three acres to the ewe. You're carrying three hundred, three hundred and fifty ewes (and that'll not get you much) so you're going to require a three thousand-acre place. The majority of the hill land in Argyll that has still got sheep in is carrying about one ewe to five acres. I'm talking about hill farms here not those attached to arable ground. So, with the new systems of management with injections against disease, the intensity of shepherding doesn't need to be as close as it used to be. So you can get round the five acres. But when they get to your high hills where you're stocking at ten plus acres to the ewe, you can't get round. And those sheep have really got to go out on those hills, everything done to them and put out there and then brought in – then they've got to be ranched on that scale. And it's uneconomic to even ranch on that scale today, because you cannot get men. Because you've got such a big acreage, you can't get enough shepherds to go and gather the sheep in. That's a general intensity – in arable we could handle five to six ewes to the acre on the good grass, with the lambs.

Archie offered here a broad analysis of the changing economics of farming in Islay and Argyll. Like Gilbey he emphasised the prominence of self-sufficiency in the past but this was a different version of self-sufficiency in which the farm “could only carry the stock that they could feed”. This level was partly governed by the estates because they were reluctant to shell-out on accommodation for any more animals than could be supported solely by the farm. This sort of self-sufficiency was more a check on land degradation than the spirited autonomy of Gilbey's reminiscence. Archie conceded that, for better or worse, these constraints had been left behind as farmers worked to increase production in order to provide themselves with a living wage. The once autonomous farm became reliant on brought-in concentrates as much as on home-produced silage and, according to Archie's economic model, the value of self-sufficiency was subordinate to the need for the farm to provide a wage. In order to maintain a standard of living the farmer had to compete and balance an economy of scale with the rising cost of labour. To an extent, less labour was needed for a certain area and a certain number of animals because improvements in veterinary science

lessened the need for intensive husbandry. But the balance was a difficult and delicate one to obtain and only the biggest and best farms could survive, much like the shrubs in an abandoned garden. Archie, a keen gardener himself, linked this metaphor of the abandoned garden to his view that improved farmland would revert back to its previous condition if neglected. The appearance of the land and the uses to which it was put were thus epiphenomena created by human endeavour whilst the real nature of the land persisted beneath and would re-assert itself through abandonment. Hence, although intensification was an ephemeral process, it was borne of the enduring labour of farmers and their need to compete for a living wage.

5.3 *Farmers and government*

In the above, Archie mentioned the constraints that were placed on farmers by the estates but he also discussed the role of government in effecting the changes in the agricultural economy through which he had lived. I asked Archie about subsidies:

Oh subsidies! The marginal land subsidy, have you heard of that? I can't remember how long it went on for. It was brought in during the war.

Was it to support agriculture on marginal land?

Yes. It was to support it and the cost; I think at that time I was probably getting it on oats, it would be on the oats only, probably about forty pounds. It was the price of the ploughing, the cultivation, the fertiliser and the seeds, and then also the grass seed. The subsidy was a rate of fifty percent. There was also a lime subsidy, which was two pounds a tonne – that was lime spread on the ground...

Was there ever the feeling that the subsidies were keeping you in business or was it just a sort of extra?

Yes it was an extra and was perceived as an extra – a welcome extra – but certainly not as keeping you in business. It was allowing you to do more. In the Nineteen Sixties there was the regeneration of hill land. For regeneration, for liming, slagging hill ground. I did some ground; I did the hill behind the house in Nineteen Sixty-two – Sixty-three. I changed the face of that place completely because it was limed, slagged and rye grass and clover was put into and then it was harrowed. And that made a tremendous difference. It increased, it gave me

a very good quality of rough grazing with a lot of clover in it for the next twenty years with a little bit of topping up here and there. It was never all done again but it was topped up a little here and there whenever I had some excess lime or excess slag. Whenever I had anything left over it always went onto the hill. Today that's not politically correct but political correctness seldom is the right thing to do.

The grants for the regeneration of land that Archie spoke of were welcomed by other farmers, such as Graham Campbell and his father, who wished to improve the land on their farms:

My father fenced and drained the land and he spent a lot of money on improving. We had to lime a lot even though we're on the limestone – the soil pH is still very low. In those days there were lots of grants for these sorts of things though and it wasn't so restrictive as these days. Now the Department polices the farmers but in the Fifties and Sixties they were there to help farmers. *

Graham's assertion was that the attitude of the government to farmers had changed to encompass a shift from facilitation to control. This shift was widely appreciated by other farming people such as Mary MacArthur, who reckoned that "everything's got more difficult since all these rules and regulations started coming in." She and her husband Gilbey had been burdened by red tape on many occasions. For example, it had taken them years to get planning permission for their croft house and the authorities were bothered by their water supply, something that annoyed Gilbey:

All these regulations over water are another example of things being imposed on people. Everyone just seems to take it though. I reckon there's someone who sits around Brussels just being paid a big cheque to think up these rules. The Council are no better – they ignore what people really need. They took the skips out of the village recently, and it's not as if they're not used. Then they spent all the money improving a road that goes nowhere. With the money they spent on that they could have kept skips in the village for another ten years *

Gilbey mentioned that he had been away on a visit to the Pyrenees, where he had

encountered a different attitude from the authorities:

We saw all these pigs wandering about in the forest, maybe fifty or more, and we asked people about the pigs. They tried to deny all knowledge of them but it turned out that they weren't really supposed to have them under some regulation or other. The authorities seemed to turn a blind eye to these kinds of things though.

I was watching the recent Question Time programmes where they'd had the party political leaders on. I thought Blair seemed quite smug and sure of himself but I liked William Hague. He was saying that we need to be in Europe but these days you can't do anything without it being decided upon in Brussels. That made a lot of sense to me. I thought he was quite good. *

Brian MacAskill ran a farm with his father in the north of the Rhinns. He was a fairly young man, perhaps in his thirties, with an easy-going manner but he was still unhappy with the levels of bureaucracy in farming:

The paper work and red tape are the worst things. I spend more time at the computer than anything else, registering calves, IACS²⁴² forms, that sort of thing. In the evenings I'm always working inside. *

The way that the subsidy system appeared to be going also worried Brian:

We get HLCA but this is changing at the moment to an area payment. I can see why they're doing this but it still seems wrong. I reckon we'll get three thousand pounds less per year as a result. The HLCA payments should be linked in some way to conservation schemes, although I don't really know how that'd work. The government say they want to help small family farms but they're going about doing it in a funny way. These modulation payments for environmental schemes are okay but the money is mostly going to big farms that don't need it.*

²⁴² Integrated Administration and Control System – part of a system introduced to combat fraud within the Common Agricultural Policy.

Like Gilbey, a recent trip abroad had opened Brian's eyes to how much the attitude of government could be different:

I was on holiday in the south of Ireland recently and the government does an amazing amount for them. Everywhere you go you see the EU signs around saying something or other was funded by European money. They've got new roads built all around the country. It's just our lot don't bother to invest in things so they don't get so much funding from the EU. I always say that I'd happily farm in a less intensive way if there was money for it. I'd drop my cow numbers quite happily – make life a bit easier for myself. *

When I asked Brian what he thought the future was for farming in Islay, he followed on from some of the points he had made earlier:

I reckon that the smaller farms will be swallowed up. I think as well that there's a need to mix conservation and farming together. This is going to be forced by Europe because they'll start to remove subsidies and without subsidies farmers couldn't exist – they wouldn't break even. So Europe will be taking away subsidies and replacing them with green payments. *

Anthony Scott was an English farmer whom I introduced in Chapter Two. He reflected at length on paper work and the subsidy system:

How has technology affected the farming?

Greatly with all the new rules and regulations everything is on computer, which is costing people's jobs and is probably going to cost jobs in the Ministry of Agriculture because we do all our cattle and work now is all done by email. It's a big step forward.

With all the computer work and paper work you have to do, is that taking up more of your time?

It should do and so I don't do it, so I'm always behind. But if I was to stay on top of it – I should really employ a secretary but there's just not the money.

Do you get all the usual subsidies?

Yes.

And how significant is that money?

More than half our turnover comes in a brown envelope.

Has that changed in recent years?

Well all that's changed is that the amount we get per cow and per sheep is going down because of the strength of the pound. So to stand still you have to add more stock.

Have they been roughly the same proportion of your income?

Oh yeah. But to keep at that proportion and therefore to stay in business you have to put more and more cows on. Eight years ago when we came we had three hundred sheep and sixty cows and made more money then than we do at a hundred and eighty cows and six hundred sheep.

That's because of how the prices have gone?

Basically they're in freefall; they've collapsed.

Do you think there's any sign of an upturn?

No, not yet.

From the above one can trace a number of common themes. The decades after the war saw the government as facilitators, providing the farmers with assistance when and where it was required. The system of government grants and subsidies had once been perceived as "a welcome extra". The aims of farmers and government had appeared to coincide and grants were easily available to improve land and increase production. But more recently the relationship between farmers and government had changed so that "now the Department polices the farmers". The government had come to expect more and more from farmers, burdening them with paperwork and restricting the time they could spend working outside. Whilst the carrot had not entirely disappeared, the stick had become more prominent. Sometimes these "rules and regulations" appeared almost wilfully pointless and the effects of government policy at odds with their rhetoric and with the aims of schemes such as the HLCA. Farmers might still be receiving their subsidies (indeed they had become more reliant upon them) but the burden of responsibility on them had multiplied and, as one told me, "a mistake by a farmer is fraud but a mistake by the authorities is a computer error." Another concurred saying, "farming's a way of life but the government has taken the pleasure out of it. You're not allowed to make a mistake with all the red tape. We have to account for all our sheep."

In two cases, farmers noted that the sort of relationship with government that farmers in Islay had once enjoyed had still been apparent from visits they had made to other parts of Europe. In the Pyrenees Gilbey had noticed that the authorities were laissez-faire with local contraventions and, according to Brian, the government in Ireland had been pro-active in securing funds for agriculture and rural infrastructure. Both Brian and Gilbey theorised that decisions affecting them were increasingly being made in Europe with the implication that the British government had surrendered a great deal of control over to the EU. Anthony commented that the way he farmed had been greatly affected by the subsidy system and the relationship of this to the strength of the pound. Increasingly, the things that affected farmers seemed to derive from further a field and their valued autonomy suffered as a consequence. According to Brian, the future would mean more farms amalgamating and Europe replacing subsidies with green payments. The farming landscape in Islay would increasingly reflect the more distant concerns of people that some farmers called 'faceless bureaucrats' or 'ignorant do-gooders'.

5.4 *Relationships within the farming community*

In the above, farming people expressed ideas about the effects of imposed changes from outside Islay on their individual operations. But many also described relationships within the Islay farming community and the changes in these that they had lived through. I was particularly interested in the position of incoming farmers, how they incorporated themselves into the farming community and the innovations that they introduced.

Michael Phillips had a big tenanted farm where he reared beef cattle and sheep. His father had come to the island in the 1950s from southern England. When I interviewed Michael with his wife Janet I asked about the relationships amongst the Islay farming community:

Michael: You hear about things like machinery rings, which would be a good thing but it's hard to get farmers co-operating because people like to be independent. These MPs came over recently to look at the Creamery. Everyone gave the farmers a right fucking bashing. I think people should

see more of a community.

Janet: There are a lot of big characters out there.

Egos might be a good word.

Janet: Yeah, maybe.

Do you think things are quite cliquey in Islay?

Michael: I know what you mean but no more so than anywhere else.

Maybe the difference with Islay is with it being such a small place you get the same people on all the committees.

Janet: These days there are so many retired people coming to live in Islay.

They sell up their places on the mainland and they buy a nice house over here. These people tend to go on all these committees. They start to worry when they find there aren't the same facilities here as on the mainland. They get ill and they start asking why there's no day-care centre. *

I asked about Michael's father Bobby, who had been a very well known farmer in Islay:

Well, he drained the Flats in Nineteen Fifty-five and before that it had just been moss. He was always an innovator. I mean he installed slatted sheds over at Aoradh where the calves were housed in an indoor system. The calves were born in the spring and then they were sold the following April. It worked quite well but it was quite labour intensive. *

Michael also discussed the impact that incoming farmers had made in Islay:

I think farmers who've come into the island have probably had quite an impact, like my father draining the Flats. They had quite an influence on the dairying side of things as well. A lot of the farmers are incomers when you come to think about – like Callum Neill, who used to be our dairyman. They changed a lot of the attitudes towards the Estate. The Estate used to be a big thing and there was a lot of 'tip your hat'. These incomers wouldn't go in for that sort of thing so that maybe changed because of them. *

Brian MacAskill and his father had come to Islay in the 1980s from Wigtownshire. I

asked Brian what his first impressions of farming in Islay were like:

I thought it was like Wigtownshire in the Sixties. I mean we were the first people to have a baler, although Scotts had a precision chop forager. With the ADP scheme all the farmers bought new tractors and put in new silage pits. It all happened over night. Even the estates had had old-fashioned machinery.

How did it feel coming into the island from outside?

I found it easy to settle in. I was never made to feel like an outsider and I've made a lot of friends. I think everybody is up against the same economic battles.

You just do whatever you can to keep your head above water. *

Anthony Scott, who farmed near to Brian, gained a similar impression when he and his family first came to Islay in the late 1970s:

On the farm itself with technology, people are now coming here as they have been in the south for years, testing the soil, telling you what fertilisers to use. It's exactly like farming anywhere else in Britain. But twenty years ago it was the dark ages.

Why do you think that was, that it was so far behind?

Because in those days, twenty years ago, thirty years ago, there weren't the people from the mainland coming here and they never saw it. When we came here we brought with us the first combine harvester, the first four-wheel drive tractor and that was only twenty-three years ago.

A question I would often ask farming people was how they thought the relations among farmers had changed. Graham Campbell gave the following response:

The biggest change over the years has been the reduction in the number of people employed. It's now only twenty percent what it used to be and so it's mostly just a handful of big farmers. There aren't many crofters either. At sales you used to get hundreds of people along and they were big social events.

There were quite a lot at the sale after the Show the other week.

Aye but that was mostly just because of people visiting the Show and tourists. If you go to the next one there'll not be more than about twenty people there at ten

o'clock. *

Later on, Graham gave me some of his complaints about the way farming has gone in Islay:

These days with farming, everyone's out for themselves. It used to be that people would help each other but these days all the money is just ploughed into a few farmers. There used to be a real sort of social life with various gatherings, ploughing matches, sheep shearing and the Young Farmers Club which all seem to have stopped. One other bad thing is that there're a lot of incomers coming into farming on the island. People in the past like my own father or Archie Baxter were okay because they were from farming communities themselves but the newer people have no background at all quite often. *

Like Graham, Gilbert MacLugash had recognised the effects of a declining rural population:

There are fewer people in the countryside now. Around here there used to be lots of smallholders and crofters but nowadays places need to be bigger. There were even schools at Cultoon and Tormisdale because there were so many children in the area but now there's just one school in the Rhinns at Port Charlotte. I think people used to be closer together in a physical sense but I suppose now maybe people don't mix as much. There are a lot of strange names in Islay now when it used to be more of the older families that have always been here. *

Jimmy Carmichael was another old farmer from the Rhinns, who had more-or-less given over the running of his farm to his two sons. He seemed quite nostalgic for the farming community as it was when he was younger, particularly for the way that people co-operated to get the harvest in:

In the Sixties and early Seventies it used to be a lot easier to get help from what I call 'contra-work'. Your wealth in those days was in friendship and even if you had no money you could always get help. I used to go down to Portnahaven and help get the harvest in. When I'd finished one there'd be some old boy saying,

'Oh, it'd be great to get the hay in before the end of the day. It looks like it'll rain tomorrow.' So you'd end up being out there till nightfall, none of it paid. But someone would always ask when you were getting yours in. You'd say 'Oh tomorrow' and they'd all just be there in the morning... In the past the farms used to share their manpower a lot more. These days every farmer wants to do their own thing. There's been a lot of incomers and gradually that's affected things. We've lost the feeling of a crofting commune. It used to be possible to travel the world with all the ex-servicemen there were around. Everywhere had its street corner where people would gather and talk and you'd learn more from this than you ever would in school.

Did people used to socialise around each other's houses a lot more than they do now?

Yes but it was more on the street corner. You didn't always have a pint or a dram though. That's something that's lost from the Highlands nowadays. *

Don Currie, another elderly farmer and a near neighbour of Jimmy Carmichael, gave me a different account of changes in the farming community:

Since all these grants came into farming, it's made farmers much more open and sociable with one another. My father, who was a blacksmith, would be told all sorts of things by the various farmers – what their plans were and the like. But he would never tell me what Jimmy Carmichael next door at Killellan was up to. You only knew your neighbourhood as well because it used to be much more unusual to travel round the island. A trip to Bowmore was a real event, the sort of thing that only happened once a year and you'd have to make a day of it...Farmers certainly used to be more jealous of one another. You never knew what your neighbour was going to do till they were out there doing it. The only things done together were the harvesting and the shearing. Farmers would socialise with one another, although it used to be more in each other's houses or at the halls in those days, but work and social life were kept separate. *

In much of the above, informants described how they thought change had happened in the Islay farming community, or in some cases how change *arrived* in the community. Incoming farmers, such as Bobby Phillips, the MacAskills and the Scotts, brought with

them new methods and new technologies, many of which were then adopted by local farmers. According to Anthony and Brian, it required incomers to introduce innovations and wrest Islay from “the dark ages” where “even the estates had had old-fashioned machinery”. Incomers also affected the social hierarchy by ignoring the deferential “tip your hat” attitudes towards the estates. On the other hand, Graham (the son of an incomer himself) was concerned about more recent incoming farmers because they lacked farming backgrounds and so might not possess the appropriate skills. Retired people who had come to Islay bothered Janet Phillips, perhaps because they were unwilling to bring necessary changes with them and instead expected the island to conform to the mainland. Despite this ambivalence, incoming farmers such as Brian “found it easy to settle in” and were “never made to feel like an outsider” perhaps because, like Archie Baxter, “they were from farming communities” and were thus able to bring useful knowledge with them.

If immigration was employed as a narrative to explain changes within the Islay community then so too was emigration. The farming community was “now only twenty percent what it used to be” and so “there are fewer people in the countryside now”. In the past “people used to be closer together in a physical sense” and there was “a real sort of social life”. Sometimes emigration was only temporary, with ex-servicemen coming back to the island and telling stories of their travels on street corners. To Jimmy Carmichael this was a good way for the outside world to be brought to Islay, unlike the incomers who seemed to disrupt the local sense of community. He thought that “these days every farmer wants to do their own thing” rather than co-operating to help out their neighbours. Other farmers told me that farming had become “every man for himself” or “the survival of the fittest”. Graham Campbell had also considered that the farming community had become more atomised and individualistic, saying that “these days with farming, everyone’s out for themselves”. Conversely, Don Currie remarked that individualism was longstanding and that more recently it had actually become easier to socialise because of the grants coming in from outside. Brian MacAskill considered that the shared economic difficulties faced by farmers had made it easier to settle in and make friends in Islay. This widely held perception of a worsening economic situation in farming was thus employed to explain both the uniting of farmers in adversity and their increased motivation “to do their own thing”.

5.5 *New and old strategies*

Whether the harsh economics of farming fostered a sense of commonality was hard for me to ascertain but it was certainly clear that farmers were ‘doing their own thing’ and adopting individual strategies in response to the prevailing economic conditions and their perception of how these would develop in the future. Iain Taylor and his family had been forced into considering new strategies by the loss of their dairying operation. I asked him how the loss of the dairy would affect the rest of the farm:

If we’re replacing a hundred and odd milk cows with beef cows it’ll be farmed the same way because we need to provide the grass, we need to provide the silage and we need to provide the accommodation. I don’t see a lot changing. We might not just use as much fertiliser now because it’ll not be quite so intensive. If we go to sheep, which it looks like we’re going to be because it’s gonna be too expensive to have beef cows, then there’ll be quite big changes. Basically it’ll just be ranched. We won’t be able to spend much money.

Is there enough money in sheep?

Not really, no. We’ll have to sit down and see. We’ve got to look at the wages – we’ve got three incomes, three families. I wouldn’t say there’s not enough to do but there’s not enough work to pay for the farms. Whether, if – and ‘if’ is a big word in this job right now – if there was work available outwith the farm it would probably be beneficial if one of us went to work somewhere else. But on Islay you’ve got another thirty guys looking for work as well.

Later, I asked Iain how he hoped to see his two farms develop in the future:

It really depends. Ideally we’d like to get back up to a hundred and fifty sucklers here. We’re running nearly a thousand yows between the two farms. The way farming is I can’t see us getting that very easily. I can’t see us getting that with suckler cow quotas. I’m just coming up to forty and I don’t know if it’s worth working a plan out. I’ve grafted for twenty odd years since I left the school and in the last four or five years we’ve lost just about everything. I’ve had offers of jobs from the mainland and a week’s work out there is worth more than a

month's income here.

Iain's uncertainty about the future derived from his experience over the previous few years, during which he and his family had "lost just about everything". The best plan Iain could think of was to return to how things had been in the past when they ran 150 suckler cows but the present circumstances rendered this unlikely. With the events of the recent past shaking his certainty in the future, Iain and his family were left with few choices other than a further tightening of belts and a farm that will "just be ranched". The only other alternative would be to find more secure sources of employment, perhaps on the mainland where work was easier to find and better rewarded.

Whilst Graham Campbell was showing me around his farm he explained how he had changed his approach to selling his livestock:

I go to Huntly market in Aberdeenshire now and I sell the calves to be brought on by farmers on the mainland. It's been the best thing I've ever done. I wasn't happy with the price I was getting on Islay so I took a big double-decker trailer up to Huntly with about fifty or so calves in. The first year I did it I reckon I made several thousand extra on what I would have made in Islay.

Has the reputation of Islay stock spread up there?

It's not Islay stock but good stock that matters. There are more farmers up there looking to buy than in Islay because here it's mostly buyers. The farmer will spend more when he's got the animal in front of him than he would allow a buyer to spend on his behalf. *

Later on, when I was interviewing Graham and his wife Ellen, I asked what he liked best about farming. Graham stalled briefly but Ellen answered for him:

Ellen: He loves his cows, don't you?

Graham: The best thing is going to Huntly and getting the best cattle there.

You're producing something that people want, which takes a lot of hard work, and there's the challenge of keeping up the standard. Cows are everything though. Going to Huntly was the best thing I've ever done. I had been doing big on-farm sales but we weren't happy with the prices

we were getting in Islay. We've been winning prizes the last couple of years at Huntly. We were one of the first local farmers to go into the SQBLA²⁴³ scheme, which is now the QMS.²⁴⁴ I think it helps with the prices because people want to know it's from a good farm. But the problem is you can stick a Scottish label on any meat so long as it's packaged in Scotland. It could be from Argentina.

Ellen: We went to the 'Scottish Produce' tent at the Highland Show the other year and we were so proud to see all the wonderful meat and salmon and other produce that was there. *

Graham and Ellen clearly believed that two things were essential for successful livestock farming. Firstly, quality animals needed to be produced. Secondly, the right market had to be sought. Graham was clearly pleased that he had been able to secure the latter since he took the unusual step of selling his cattle at Huntly market. His view that quality was essential was widely held amongst Islay farmers, of whom many strove hard to gain a reputation for producing excellent livestock. Interestingly, Graham and Ellen were more concerned that their produce was seen as being from Scotland than from Islay. The former was, for them, more synonymous with quality.

I asked Gilbert MacLugash what he thought might be the future for his farm:

It's hard to say but I don't know if there's a future. I'll maybe have to go to a bigger unit but it'll depend on how agriculture goes. There aren't the younger people coming in to farming now. There's no encouragement for farmers to do the things they should be doing. The young ones see it's not the life for them. We didn't think this way when I was young. You thought that if you made a go of it you could make a living but it's not so now. The BSE crisis has taken the confidence out of farming and people need to be confident if they're to go ahead and do anything. But beef is starting to improve and sheep is improving on last year. Milk might be getting better – perhaps it's reached the bottom – so there might be a gradual improvement. People have tended to get out of farming

²⁴³ Scottish Quality Beef and Lamb Association.

²⁴⁴ Quality Meat Scotland.

because their unit is too small. Perhaps things just need to adjust and then it'll sort itself out hopefully. *

Earlier, I had asked Gilbert if he planned to diversify:

I've never gone in for any diversification but maybe the next time a grant scheme comes along I'll do something for tourism. I think this is the way things are going. I'll maybe put up a cottage. *

Like Iain Taylor, Gilbert seemed uncertain of what future lay ahead for both his farm and the industry in general. He suggested that tourism could be “the way things are going” at least now that there was “no encouragement for farmers to do the things they should be doing”. The other possibility that Gilbert offered was to increase the size of his holding, noting that, “people have tended to get out of farming because their unit is too small”. He wondered if the recent problems had simply been a period of adjustment and that the prices for produce would return to something resembling their previous levels.

There are three distinct strands to the strategies and plans for the future adopted by Iain, Graham and Gilbert and I would suggest that these were fairly typical of Islay farmers. The first was to stick with the tried and tested ways of making a living – particularly improving quality and increasing the size of one's landholding. Iain also thought about reducing his costs. The second was to consider new ways of earning money, such as tourism or wage labour. The way that Iain, Gilbert and others described such new avenues was as a necessity that took them away from what “they should be doing” and not as something desirable. The third strategy was to look for new markets and new ways of selling produce. Graham had adopted this strategy with some success and with evident pleasure. This was a form of individualism in farming that was both appealing and effective.

Another innovative strategy was adopted by Anthony Scott and has already been discussed.²⁴⁵ At the time I interviewed him, Anthony had decided to go into partnership with the RSPB to produce and market conservation-friendly meat derived from

²⁴⁵ See 2.5.

traditional breeds of cattle and sheep. Whilst his own scheme was unique, some other farmers in Islay had also decided to market their produce directly to niche-market consumers. One such was Anthony's brother-in-law, Nick Weston, who sold his produce under the label 'the Islay Fine Food Company' (IFFC).

Nick, an Englishman, used promotional literature²⁴⁶ and a website to advertise the label. What was most striking about the marketing material of the IFFC was the use of Islay and its particular attributes to sell the meat and emphasise its quality. The website was strewn with scenic photographs of the island and the naturalness and diversity of the landscape was emphasised in the writing:²⁴⁷

The story of Islay Fine Food Co. starts with the natural beauty and richness of the island of Islay.

The natural resources are the base on which the Islay economy is built. Farming, fishing, distilling and tourism all rely on the raw ingredients the island provides.

Islay is a diamond-shaped Jewel in the Western Ocean [sic], shaped and sculptured by the Ice Age and human influences over thousands of years. The resulting patchwork, of farmland, woodland and peatland set below sweeping hills supports a wide variety of wildlife.

As the last quotation implies, the positive effects of farming on wildlife were highlighted:

The cows freely roam the herb rich machair on the Atlantic coast, enriching the flora and fauna of this internationally important Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI).

The philosophy behind the farming system at Rockside has remained much the same for generations; to maintain a sound, viable farming business, whilst protecting and enhancing the environment.

²⁴⁶ See figures Twenty and Twenty-one.

²⁴⁷ All quotations from www.islayfinefood.com (correct 22/4/04).

This last quotation hints at perhaps the most striking feature of the IFFC marketing – the emphasis placed on local people, their diversity, way of life and values.

Interestingly, the quotation below was accompanied with a photograph of Archie Baxter²⁴⁸ (who was not otherwise involved in the company), as well as one of Nick Weston himself:

The Islay Fine Food Co. helps to support employment in a fragile island community. As everywhere in the world, it is people who make the difference, nowhere is this more so than on Islay. Where generations of islanders have worked side by side with newcomers to enrich the unspoiled lifestyle that is the Western Isles [sic] of Scotland. It is the rich and diverse persona of the Islay community that adds an extra dimension to the Island and its products. There is a pride in place, and an inbred desire to nurture the environment in which they live and work. It is an environment where nature is seen as a generous if sometimes challenging friend and as such, is treated with enormous respect and gratitude.

As suggested by the company name, the marketing stressed the quality of the produce and linked this to the island's whisky industry and particularly to the way that both distilling and farming combined the modern and the traditional:

[Islay] is an island where yesterday and today sit comfortably together: where traditional values complement modern technology in the Island's farming and world-renowned whisky industries: and where visitors can enjoy the unique experience that is Islay.

[The Weston's] enthusiastic approach combining the best of traditional and modern farming methods and employing benchmark husbandry practices has won quality assured status.

What is striking about the marketing strategy of the IFFC is the way that it drew on much of the discourse outlined throughout this chapter. Whilst in other instances,

²⁴⁸ See Figure Twenty-one.

farmers may have been ambivalent or hostile about the relationships between farming and conservation designations, the modern and the traditional and incomers and locals, the IFFC put a positive spin on all these complex and ambiguous relationships. Islay was portrayed as a place that provided natural resources and traditional wisdom and values but also as somewhere that had successfully and seamlessly introduced the new and the modern to enhance local industries. The discourse of farming in Islay, as presented by the IFFC to the outside world, was not essentially different to the discourse within the Islay farming community. Its contrasting representation stemmed from the different ways in which farmers situated themselves: as struggling financially, as uncertain or disillusioned, as locals, as incomers, or, in the case of Nick Weston and the IFFC, as producers of quality foods. This marketing strategy did not so much deny the difficulties and ambiguities of farming in Islay but re-interpreted these same complexities to the outside world as a rural idyll.

5.6 *Three sets of ideas about farmers and their farms*

Within these explanations of their circumstances that farmers provided me with, three sets of interconnected ideas emerge:

1. The morality of the productive relationship that farmers have with their land.
2. Farmers' perceptions of the influence of the outside world in Islay.
3. The ideas that farming people have about the past, the present and the future and the processes of continuity and change that inhabit these.

A farmer's productive relationship with land, whilst ostensibly about making a living, was also a way of expressing both continuity and change. Firstly, productive labour was an aspect of the idea of progress ("or maybe just wanting to do better"). Farmers considered it important to improve their land, to "grow two blades of grass where there was one before" and to produce a greater number of good quality livestock. Secondly, productive labour was explained as a way of maintaining self-sufficiency, independence and a link with the past. The unconstrained productive labour of the farmer could be physically represented in the land through the aesthetic and moral value of a good farm. The degree to which a farmer was able to attain such an ideal was an expression of their

freedom from any external constraints on their ability to farm as they saw fit. For both of these reasons, farmers wished to show that their land was not neglected and that they appreciated the ethics of productivity that previous generations had held. As such, the idealised way of representing one's labour was to minimise the appearance of any symbols of neglect, such as rushes, poor drainage or broken fences and instead keep fields tidy and green and produce a good number of high quality livestock. This ethic of productivity, then, was not only connected with the promotion of change and intensification, it was also associated with the continuity of values that encouraged the maintenance of a surface appearance of productive land. The modern capacity for improvement, if carried through, would give this surface an appearance at variance with the past but such an expression of productive values would doubtless have gladdened the hearts of previous generations of farmers.

This ethic of productive labour was intertwined with perceptions of the outside world and its effects in Islay. Broadly speaking, the outside world was associated with change. If Islay farmers perceived a change, particularly in their economic circumstances, then this could easily be related to something originating from outside. These changes could take both positive and negative forms – positive in the sense of useful innovation and negative in the sense of external constraints. The outside world played an important role in the pursuit of progress through productive labour. Incoming farmers brought with them new ideas and new technologies and the government facilitated development through grants and subsidies. But the ideal of unfettered progress was no longer matched by reality. More recent incoming farmers rarely had the necessary knowledge and background to innovate²⁴⁹ and the government had become more concerned with using its support system to constrain rather than to facilitate. The esteemed principle of the self-sufficient farm had largely been consigned to nostalgia and a farmer's independence was now channelled into the more individualistic approach of "every man for himself", which to some diminished their sense of being part of a supportive farming community. Change from outside, which once seemed negotiable, had become increasingly detached and unpredictable because it no longer simply came and went on the ferry but emerged more forcibly through the distant machinations of government, the EU and global financial markets.

²⁴⁹ This lack of useful new knowledge from outside and the declining heterogeneity of agricultural holdings (see 3.8) appeared to create a loss of diversity and therefore of adaptability to change (cf. Strathern 1992).

It was not then surprising that the response of some farmers to the capricious geopolitics of the farming economy was somewhat fatalistic. Iain Taylor, his family burdened by pressing economic necessities, saw the future as the inevitable continuation of a process of loss that he could only confront as best he could by relying on tried and tested methods or grudgingly diversifying. Gilbert MacLugash, whilst less concerned about his own circumstances, felt that external problems had severed the once self-evident link between productive labour and a good independent livelihood, and this made him question if many younger people would follow him. In these last two cases the growing economic uncertainties gave onto world-weariness or desperation but in Graham Campbell and Nick Weston they provoked a modicum of inspiration. Both men decided to deal with the impersonality of the outside world by taking themselves out into it, attempting to understand its demands and communicating directly the special qualities of their produce. Their novel strategies might not necessarily succeed in the long term but, as the outside world and its powerful influence for change became contingent on ever more distant circumstances, it appeared that farmers in Islay increasingly saw the need to emerge from their remote setting and renegotiate their livelihood.

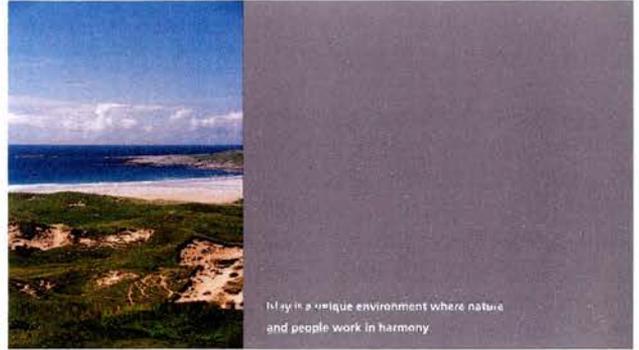
Figure Twenty: *“Superb taste naturally” – the Islay Fine Food Company*

From Islay Fine Food Company publicity material

*Superb taste
Naturally*

The beautiful island of Islay, off the west coast of Scotland, is a place of contrasts; where nature paints a complex picture of rolling fields and craggy hills, dazzling sandy beaches, sparkling streams and crisp, invigorating air. It is an island where yesterday and today sit comfortably together; where traditional values complement modern technology in the island's farming and world renowned whisky industries; and where visitors can enjoy the unique experience that is Islay.

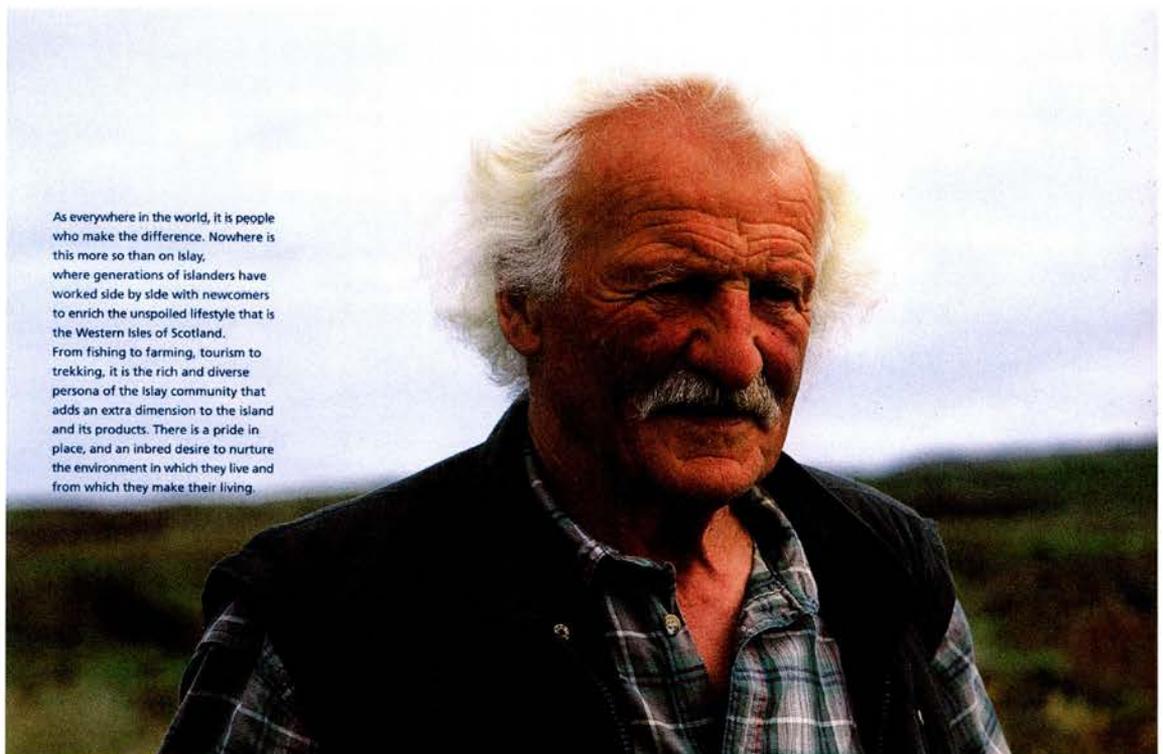
It is in this very special environment that The Islay Fine Food Company has been established, to offer exclusive new Scottish Smoked Beef products to the discerning UK customer... in top hotels, restaurants and gift shops; selected retailers and delicatessens; and direct to those in the general public who wish to buy a premium food product whose quality and source is clearly identified.



Islay is a unique environment where nature and people work in harmony.

ISLAY

Figure Twenty-one: *Archie Baxter advertises the Islay Fine Food Company*



As everywhere in the world, it is people who make the difference. Nowhere is this more so than on Islay, where generations of islanders have worked side by side with newcomers to enrich the unspoiled lifestyle that is the Western Isles of Scotland. From fishing to farming, tourism to trekking, it is the rich and diverse persona of the Islay community that adds an extra dimension to the island and its products. There is a pride in place, and an inbred desire to nurture the environment in which they live and from which they make their living.

6.0 The RSPB reserve at Loch Gruinart

In this chapter, and in the following two, I consider certain places or things that were symbolic of the relationship between conservation organisations and farmers. Chapter Seven relates to designated areas and Chapter Eight to the goose problem. These relationships primarily involved SNH. This chapter describes the ways in which farmers and nature reserve wardens discussed the RSPB's main reserve in Islay at Loch Gruinart. Because the reserve was also a farm, the discourse surrounding it touched on many of the values and relationships outlined in Chapter Five.

6.1 *Farmers' concerns*

I first visited the RSPB reserve at Loch Gruinart²⁵⁰ on a crisp day in January 1999. Having visited many of the Society's reserves elsewhere, I soon recognised certain characteristics. There was the mixture of habitats, from moorland through woodland to marshy fields, and most distinctively, an area of shallow water overlooked by a birdwatching hide. I can scarcely recall any RSPB reserve lacking this signature habitat in some form or other. This particular area of shallow water consisted of three inundated fields on the low-lying Gruinart Flats at the head of the loch.²⁵¹ The fields were studded with rushes between which flocks of ducks and waders fed. Although Islay is a fairly damp place the floods seemed to have a different quality to other wetlands I had seen on the island. Perhaps this was because the fertile land at the head of the loch helped enrich the feeding conditions and attract the abundant waterfowl that I could see from the hide. Although the floods formed only a small part of the reserve, they were its centrepiece – easily visible from the public roads that ran down from Ardnave and across the Flats towards Bridgend. A journey along these roads described a shift from the damp, rushy pastures of the reserve to the green and well-drained fields of neighbouring farms on the Flats, where the farmers grew good crops of barley and silage to feed their cattle during the winter.²⁵²

²⁵⁰ Many people in Islay refer to the reserve as Aoradh, which is the name of the farm on which it is centred.

²⁵¹ See figures Twenty-two and Twenty-three.

²⁵² See figures Twenty-four and Twenty-five.

At the time of my first visit to Loch Gruinart I had only been in Islay for a couple of days and had not considered that the scene I had enjoyed might cause concern or annoyance. But the following day I talked to Amanda Richards, a farmer's wife and the local NFUS secretary, who mentioned how bothered she was by the way that the RSPB managed the land. She told me that before the Society had bought the land it was a well-run and productive dairy farm that was also rich in wildlife. The RSPB had turned this good farmland into a 'bog', not a habitat that she thought Islay needed any more of. She was referring particularly to the flooded fields on the Flats where I had been birdwatching the previous day. Later on, during my main period of fieldwork I encountered similar views, particularly in my conversations with farmers.

Islay Estate had originally sold the land to the Society in 1983 (after the tenant had decided to give up his lease) for the purpose of providing a sanctuary for grazing and roosting geese.²⁵³ The RSPB had also received a grant from the NCC towards the cost of purchase because at the time this was seen as a means of safeguarding goose populations and encouraging the birds away from farmland.

There is difficulty in assessing when local people began to complain about the RSPB's management of the land, although concerns about the acquisition were raised in the local newspaper as soon as it was announced. In 1997 a letter was published in the *Ileach* from "A very Irate Farmer" expressing reservations at the turn of events since the RSPB's takeover, particularly in light of the money that was given by the NCC (and thus by the government):²⁵⁴

As a farmer in Islay I am unable to understand why the RSPB was able to procure such a large proportion of the purchase price for Aoradh Farm from the public purse? [sic]

I understand that one of the main reasons given by RSPB and SNH was to help the farmers on Islay cope with the escalating goose population. I find this difficult to understand when it looks as if the farm is being actively run down,

²⁵³ See chapters Four and Eight.

²⁵⁴ *Ileach* Vol. 24 No. 24 11th October 1997.

with the quality of grass on which the geese are meant to feed being so poor. The farm is a disgrace to a farmer.

The RSPB may have as many geese roosting on their farms as in previous years but they used to feed them as well. Now they have to spread out all over the rest of the island to fill their bellies on well-managed costly grass. Like most organisations farmers are accountable for every pound they receive from the public purse.

The farmers in Islay are all up in arms about the escalating goose population. One way to help a little would be to have 400-500 acres of good grass on Aoradh, the purpose for which the subsidies were given (and continue to be given) from the public purse.

Are readers happy with what the government is doing with their money?

Two-and-a-half years after this letter was written I spoke to Iain Taylor, who was concerned about the increasing numbers of geese coming on to his farm:

A big knock on effect is the Flats, the RSPB reserve. I'm not anti-RSPB or anything like that – I'm just going on what I can see. My father worked at Aoradh in Fifty-eight – Fifty-nine. That was all green ground in the Sixties and they'd get big silage cuts and the geese would come in and they'd land there and they'd stay there; they didn't disperse the same. You see all these fields flooded and that won't grow grass to feed geese. It'll hold plenty of waterfowl but it'll never hold the grass to hold the geese. The RSPB bought Aoradh from Islay Estates their remit was to grow the grass to hold the geese. That came up at the last meeting.

And they changed their policy.

Well, I wouldn't say they changed their policy; it's just that certain people in the management of the RSPB have a bigger clout and they want more wetlands than they do geese but it's a knock on effect. *We* have a lot more geese.

When I talked to Brian MacAskill he told me that he got on well with the RSPB staff

but was concerned that the Society had broken agreements in their management of the reserve:

They bought Aoradh for geese but then they flooded it and let rubbish grass take over. A lot of public money was given to buy that land and it was given in order for it to be a sanctuary for geese. There should be some sort of agreement that makes them stick to what they said they'd do. With an ESA the farmer has to stick to what's in the agreement and if they changed they wouldn't just lose the money, they'd be fined. But they've completely changed the farming policy to attract wading birds and ducks. They should get their money taken off them or they should put in younger grass. *

Two related concerns about the reserve emerge from the quotations above. The first is that the farm was "being actively run down" by the RSPB who were letting "rubbish grass take over," which in turn meant, "it'll never hold the grass to hold the geese". It was suggested that the RSPB were reneging on an agreement to farm the land principally to hold geese and prevent them from spreading out to other farms on the island where they could cause damage to the "well-managed costly grass". This perception, that the reserve was being farmed badly, was connected to another aspect of the RSPB's work in Islay. When I spoke to Graham and Ellen Campbell I asked them what they thought of the RSPB:

The RSPB seem to think that we're all bad farmers and that everyone should farm like they do but when you look at their farm they're shocking. They just grow weeds and this bad farming isn't the way forward for wildlife. They used to have good stock there when Douglas, who's a friend of ours, worked as stock manager. He used to breed very good animals but he's moved off to a better job up north. *

The RSPB had been keen to encourage farmers to emulate the methods employed at Loch Gruinart but given such a derisory perception of their farming this seemed either offensive or just laughable to Graham and Ellen.

Even farmers who were overtly farming for wildlife were conscious of the widely held

antipathy toward the RSPB's methods. Anthony Scott was developing a scheme for bird-friendly farming in association with the RSPB²⁵⁵ and he thought this would impress farmers in a way that the RSPB's efforts on their own reserve never could:

The RSPB say they want people to farm like them but farmers just see it as bad farming. If they drive through the RSPB reserve they see something that's different to what they do but with my farm they'll see something more similar. It won't change visibly at all with the new scheme. I'll just be mowing slightly differently but I'll still be using the same sprays on the cereals and it'll still be farmed up to the edge of the fields. It'll be good farming with these benefits. *

The condition of the land on the Flats had further implications, particularly for a retired farmer such as Archie Baxter, with his great knowledge of how the modern landscape was created:

If it was a tenanted farm they would have been thrown out by the landowner by now it's so bad. And the map we were given at the discussion evening was a lie because it showed a field marked as a silage field, which couldn't have been cut for silage for years. You can tell just by looking at it. There are too many cattle out-wintering in too small an area where they're up to their knees in mud. I don't mind the area that they've flooded. They've obviously increased the number of ducks there. But I don't like what they've done to the Flats. Before they came that area was a good farm with a lot of wildlife. And if you look across at Craighens there's a farm – a *good* farm – which is still in rotation. When you consider all the work that went into creating those Flats back in the Eighteenth Century it's a great shame. It's the easiest thing in the world to destroy something but the hardest to create. *

Don Currie and his wife Margaret, an elderly farming couple, connected their perception that the RSPB reserve was in poor condition with the RSPB's competence in land management. When I asked them what they thought of the RSPB they made the following points:

²⁵⁵ See 2.5.

The RSPB don't believe in controlling anything. There's a sea wall at Gruinart, which had a rabbit warren in it. The RSPB didn't control the rabbits and eventually the sea wall collapsed and flooded the cottage on the Flats... The RSPB haven't got much of a clue about farming and they've never given the farm manager enough influence. They expect to get a crop from fields, which are flooded throughout the winter, which is ridiculous. Those used to be good arable fields. They're thoroughly out of their depth. *

Although the RSPB might have appeared incompetent at farming, it was questioned how significant this was to such a large organisation. I asked Gilbey MacArthur, a crofter, for his opinion of the reserve:

What the RSPB do on their reserve isn't really farming because they're not doing it to make money. They lost something like eighty thousand pounds last year but an organisation like that can absorb that sort of loss easily. I don't reckon they should pick up agricultural grants though. *

Tom Wilkie farmed near the Loch Gruinart reserve and, like the RSPB, he was an incomer to Islay from England. I asked Tom what he thought of the RSPB and after a pregnant pause he said:

When I came to Islay I took on a guy who'd been here for twenty or thirty years and I learnt a lot from him about how to do things. The RSPB asked around and then did the exact opposite. They seem to think that farmers are only interested in farming for money but they live in the countryside because they like it. Farming on the Flats is something you have to work at with the crops but you can do it. *

The above all illustrate a widespread perception amongst Islay farmers that the RSPB reserve was a bad or poorly managed farm, if indeed it could be regarded as a farm at all. Flooded fields, extensive rushes, weeds and bad grass were all signs of bad farming and neglect to these farmers,²⁵⁶ and most had striven for decades to get rid of such things on their own land. What is notable in all the above is that farmers connected the

²⁵⁶ See 5.1.

idea that Loch Gruinart was a bad farm with aspects of their own experience and that these connections served to contrast the RSPB with 'real' farmers. In particular, farmers were considering the sorts of political and economic relationships that both they and the RSPB had been involved with. These included relationships with the government²⁵⁷ and with the estates.²⁵⁸

Farmers had for many years been given grants and subsidies by the government, normally with the express aim of encouraging the farmer to carry out certain practices, farm in a certain way and produce specific products in specific quantities. More recently farmers had become used to environmental agreements for ESA schemes or NCC/SNH management agreements in which they consented to farm using methods that maintained or enhanced wildlife and their habitats. In such cases the farmers thought that if they broke agreements then the payments could stop and they might be fined. Whilst the RSPB never signed an agreement to manage Loch Gruinart predominantly for geese, they were given a grant by the NCC towards the purchase of the farm as a means of helping to secure the local populations of geese. Many farmers clearly considered that the poor state of the land indicated that this role was no longer one of the RSPB's priorities. The apparent inaction against the RSPB for this change of plan was seen by Brian MacAskill and the anonymous letter writer to represent a rather different relationship with the government, and particularly NCC/SNH, than was experienced by ordinary farmers. The RSPB appeared to have been trusted to such an extent by the government that they did not need to be accountable for their use of public money and this during a period when government 'policing' of farmers was perceived to have risen inexorably.

Most farmers in Islay had to deal with the interests of the estates, either as tenants or when buying out their farms. Some farmers told me that as prospective tenants they had had to undergo a rigorous interview with the factor to assess whether they were qualified for the job and had feasible plans for the farm. When they signed a lease, strictures were sometimes placed on what they could do. Archie Baxter mentioned an example of this in relation to crops that were grown as part of a rotation system:

²⁵⁷ See 5.3.

²⁵⁸ See 5.4.

What were the crops used for?

They were entirely used on the farm.

For feed?

For feeding. In fact, you were prevented from selling any of that crop by your lease. The farm lease prohibited the selling of corn because you were selling fertility off the farm.

As Archie also mentioned in the earlier extract, really poor farming could result in eviction, although such practices were rare according to a former factor of Islay Estates with whom I spoke:

Were there ever situations where the Estate felt that a farm wasn't being farmed properly, perhaps because the farmer was too old, and where you felt the need to step in and replace the farmer?

[Nodding as I ask] Quite often but what can you do about it? There was one time I actually tried to remove a farmer because of this. The Estate wanted to remove him and it went to arbitration and the arbitrator found in favour of the Estate. Six months later the farmer died and I was accused of 'killing him'. *

It seems from the above that the estates' potential to evict was real enough but was rarely exercised, their influence over what happened on their tenancies being subdued but watchful. The estates' concern was to get the right farmer, who would be able to manage the land properly and in accordance with the lease, and this would normally ensure there would be no need for any politically awkward intervention.

Like the NCC, the Estate had envisioned the reserve primarily as a goose sanctuary that eased the pressure on the island's farmers but the state of the land appeared to contradict this. In his statement, Archie Baxter argued that if the RSPB had been tenant farmers, as he had been, then "they would have been thrown out by the landowner by now it's so bad". Whilst this implies an acknowledgement of the greater freedom the RSPB had as owners of their land, this did not prevent Archie from making the comparison with the more constrained position of a tenant. The implication in the comments of both Archie and Iain Taylor was that the RSPB were indulgent in their own concerns in spite of both the wishes of the Estate, which had sold them the land,

and of other farmers, an indulgence that was out of the question for a tenant. Gilbey MacArthur indicated that such extravagance was beyond the means of small-scale local operators because they would be unable to absorb the likely financial loss. He added that the RSPB's lack of concern at making a loss precluded him from seeing them as real farmers in any case, although the government seemed not to appreciate this perspective because the RSPB were still given agricultural grants.

The comment of Tom Wilkie is particularly revealing because he raised the issue of being an incomer and a farmer in Islay. Tom contrasted the actions of the RSPB to his own behaviour on arrival. He had asked for advice and followed it but "the RSPB asked around and then did the exact opposite". Tom obviously felt that his own behaviour, listening to advice and working hard at farming the Flats, was the more appropriate, certainly if he wished to farm successfully but perhaps also if he wanted to integrate into the community and be respected as a farmer. Anthony Scott, another Englishman, believed that the respect he was accorded as a farmer gave him an edge over the RSPB when it came to encouraging bird-friendly farming. Farmers would see that his farm was like their own and that it was "good farming with these benefits". To the Curries, the poor state of the RSPB reserve was born of incompetence rather than care and planning. Such negligence had even resulted in a neighbour's cottage being flooded. Views like these meant that when the RSPB suggested to farmers that they take on their methods they were unlikely to get far. In the Campbells' experience this was not even what should be done to encourage wildlife. If a conservation organisation really wants to encourage wildlife then they should employ competent farmers and, as the Curries said, give them some influence. Good farming is the best thing for wildlife, something Amanda Richards indicated to me in an interview:

The RSPB are saying that farmers here are a waste of space and that the environment is the only thing that's important. But the death of agriculture will be the death of the island and the death of a lot of the important species. *

A number of farmers also made an explicit connection between the state of the RSPB reserve and their experience and knowledge of the past. This was the past when the Flats were created in the 18th Century and when the drainage was improved in the 1950s. It was also the past when Iain Taylor's father worked at Aoradh and the ground

was green and produced big cuts of silage. It might also be the past when Douglas was the stock manager and the RSPB actually produced some good quality beasts. These were times that the RSPB did not have access to, did not know of, or had rejected. The present condition of the reserve and the actions that the RSPB had taken since they acquired the land served, in the eyes of these farmers, to separate the RSPB from what has gone on before and, by implication, from the values and knowledge of good farming and good farmers.

So farmers made these comparisons between the reserve and their own experience not simply to censure the RSPB but also to separate the RSPB from themselves. Their criticisms and contrasts were ways of saying that the RSPB were not real farmers and their reserve was not a legitimate farming operation. The RSPB's privileged relationship with government and the estates, their apparently disrespectful behaviour as incomers, their secure financial circumstances and their separation from the past all characterised them as something other to a proper farmer. And by making this separation the farmers also expressed something about themselves and about their position as good farmers, who were constrained by government and their own financial position, who understood how to behave in a farming community and, above all, who appreciated the values of a good farm in Islay. The juxtaposition of the idea that the RSPB reserve was a bad farm with these farmers' own experiences, circumstances and values served as a means to situate the RSPB outside of a farming identity.

6.2 *The response of the RSPB*

None of the above would have come as a surprise to the RSPB staff in Islay, who were all well aware of negative local perceptions of them and their reserve. Events such as the discussion evening²⁵⁹ were intended to respond to these perceptions and to show that the RSPB were willing to listen to local concerns. When the likes of "A very Irate Farmer" wrote derogatory letters to the local newspaper a member of the RSPB staff would normally respond. In that particular case the response came from Mike Peacock,

²⁵⁹ See 2.2.

the Reserve Manager. After explaining their strategy for management and enumerating the substantial goose counts for the reserve, he concluded his letter thus.²⁶⁰

The RSPB is not running down its farm and the quality of grass that we produce remains high. It is also worth pointing out that the RSPB is even more accountable, not only to SNH and the Agricultural Department for funds received but also to our 1 million members and our governing Council. The staff at Loch Gruinart are all proud of our farming and conservation achievements to date.

The RSPB often seemed keen to argue publicly that the reserve was a proper farm, something they emphasised at the discussion evening and also on a guided walk I attended in July 1999. On this the assistant warden Julie claimed that the main difference between the RSPB and farmers was that farmers understandably concentrated on maximising profits whereas the RSPB focused on maximising wildlife. Despite the difference in priorities the RSPB were keen to point out the dual nature of Loch Gruinart as both farm and nature reserve. This was an image that they actively publicised and presented.

I put a number of the criticisms that I had heard from local farmers to the reserve warden, Clive McKay, whom I interviewed towards the end of my fieldwork. Clive's job involved the day-to-day running of the reserve but he also conducted research into Choughs and Corncrakes. Originally from the north of England, Clive and his wife had worked for conservation organisations in the west of Scotland for several years and his association with Islay stretched back to the 1980s.

Clive and I had come to know each other fairly well through mutual friends and our interest in birds. Because of this, Clive knew that I had worked on an RSPB reserve and he also knew that I had spoken to a lot of local farmers about conservation. This knowledge certainly affected the way in which he responded to my questions. For example, Clive sometimes seemed a little perturbed when I asked him questions that someone with my background in conservation should have understood without having to ask. He also appreciated that I would have heard numerous negative comments about

²⁶⁰ *Ileach* Vol. 24 No. 25 25th October 1997.

the RSPB from the farmers whom I had spoken to and so there was little point in him denying that such perceptions existed. Because he represented an organisation I tended to ask Clive more probing questions than I had done with farmers.²⁶¹ My thinking was that, without a penetrative and knowing examination, Clive might only provide me with a public façade of the RSPB's work in Islay rather than a more personal insight. Despite his rather general air of exasperation, Clive seemed to appreciate the opportunity to offer such insights at length.²⁶²

Clive explained the shift in priorities in reserve management as follows:²⁶³

The geese weren't protected on Islay. When this reserve was bought it was the only place that geese weren't being shot. This was bought as a safe haven and as a safe roost site. Since then the goose scheme has come into effect, which has given ninety-nine percent protection for Barnacle and White-fronted Geese right across the island. So, as a result of that, goose numbers have increased across the rest of the island, which takes the pressure off a lot of Gruinart as being the only place on Islay where Barnacle Geese are protected. In the early days of the reserve we were ploughing up fields when Lapwings were nesting to reseed them for geese and we turned things like that around so that now, as well as managing for geese, we're managing for breeding waders, Corncrake, Hen Harrier and Chough.

Could you carry more geese if it was managed more intensively?

We managed much more intensively. When Jack Fleming was the farm manager it was managed much more intensively. The numbers of geese then were the same as they are now... We get thousands of geese every autumn. They all come here. We get eighteen, nineteen thousand geese on this one farm – *it is one farm after all*. They come in and they eat whatever is there that they can find. You can't sustain those numbers over the whole winter. It's a short-term thing but obviously that contributes to our average. Then they tend to move on elsewhere...Birds are going off to places like Sunderland, round Loch Gorm and

²⁶¹ See 1.3.

²⁶² Soon after the interview, Clive moved to a new job with the RSPB in Islay, one more concerned with research than with management.

²⁶³ See also the interpretation boards in the RSPB's visitor centre, figures Twenty-six and Twenty-seven.

they come back to us every night, which is where they feed at night. That's how much we are supporting geese here.

Callum Neill²⁶⁴ was here last year... He was amazed to see what we were doing here. You can't see it from the road very easily. Basically we've taken the pressure off the Flats by improving the hill ground. So now the hill ground supports more grassland, more arable crops, more geese than it used to do. That's taken the pressure off the Flats. But we couldn't have Corncrakes all down on the Flats there if they weren't managing that land... There's lots of geese on the island, there's only eight Corncrakes and we've got five of them on our reserve and we have to cater for everything.

Clive made two points in his explanation of the change in management priorities. Firstly, circumstances elsewhere on the island (the advent of the Islay Voluntary Goose Management Scheme) meant that the need for geese to be prioritised on the reserve was lessened. The geese had become protected throughout the island and there was an increase and expansion in the population. Secondly, this change had allowed the RSPB to concentrate on other species, such as Corncrakes and breeding waders, as much as on geese. By changing the management of the Flats so they were not "ploughing up fields when Lapwings were nesting to reseed them for geese" they were maximising their wildlife output. The Flats provided for these other important birds whilst habitat management elsewhere was primarily aimed at geese. Large areas of land were improved for this purpose to take "the pressure off the Flats by improving the hill ground", which made up for the loss of feeding on the Flats. Despite these efforts it was very difficult for the RSPB to increase the numbers of geese feeding on their land any further because at the start of the winter they were inundated with birds. Most of their grass would be eaten before it could recover and even when they had farmed more intensively on the Flats they had been unable to hold any more geese because they always moved on to better feeding elsewhere after they had worked their way through the RSPB's grass.

Clive suggested that the reason that the improvements on the hill ground had not been noticed was that these fields were out of sight, whereas the Flats could easily be seen

²⁶⁴ A farmer who had previously worked at Aoradh when it was a dairy farm.

from the road. Whilst the Flats might be problematic to some farmers, the RSPB still had to farm properly to hold geese and maximise their wildlife output. The reason the RSPB chose to change the management on the Flats was because this area had a greater potential as habitat for other priority species, such as breeding waders and Corncrakes, than the hill land. Geese will feed on any improved grassland in Islay and this can be created in most situations but on the Flats it was possible to manipulate the water levels to create floods and wet ditches, something important when managing for species such as waders and wildfowl.

I commented to Clive that some local farmers were unhappy with the creation of the floods. He responded:

Yeah, well that's understandable. The history of the site is one of reclamation and that's going back to the Seventeen Hundreds, you know. It used to be a saltmarsh and then it was turned into farmland by Dutch engineers. And Bobby Phillips, the previous farmer here, spent a lot of time keeping his fields nice and green and fertilising them and draining them. And, to a farmer's eyes, his nice green fields were a credit to him, which they were. The fields now are not nice green fields. They've got rushy ditches for nesting Lapwings and Redshanks and they have wet ditches for nesting Lapwings and Redshanks et cetera, et cetera. That's nature conservation and it's not tidy green fields, it's rough looking corners, Corncrake corridors full of nettles – all the sorts of things that have disappeared... We've had to recreate or allow the ground to go back a little bit. So you can understand why people, you know, think it's strange, and we're doing what we can to explain what we're doing better to people so that they understand what it is that we're all about.

I think people, we've realised that people think that these fields are flooding accidentally and it's poor management. It's quite the opposite. Through the consultation process this year we're trying to get it through that every field we have has its own sort of management plan. Every field has its own management regime and that's what we're aiming for each year. Some people think that the floods are full of saltwater from the estuary that has flooded in and that's poisoning the grassland and that's bad management. But it isn't. It's carefully

controlled freshwater that's coming down off the hill that's creating this important lowland wet grassland habitat. I think in England... I think in the south of England if you create habitats like this, the contrast between farmland and the nature reserve is so great in terms of its wildlife that nobody thinks twice about whether you should or shouldn't have done it.

Some of our fields are rushy but a lot of our fields are very green. Most of our fields are green... I think people on Islay know the rest of the island intimately and they know Gruinart intimately and historically. So when they see three fields going to rushes out of thirty fields they just think that's terrible. Those three fields have gone to rushes (and the few fields that are flooded) but it's only a small part of the whole system. The one thing we have done, that I mentioned before, is that we allow the *Juncus* (the rushes) to grow along the ditch sides on the Flats fields because they provide nest sites for a hundred and eighty pairs of Lapwing, which is a fantastic number of Lapwings. There's nothing comparable on the island. It's one of the best sites in Scotland, one of the best farmland sites in Scotland, for breeding waders. So we do that but you can't let *Juncus* go; you can't just let *Juncus* go; you can't just let the fields go. We reseed it on a five-year cycle... And how can our farming be bad when we're producing top quality calves for sale at the local Islay Show and keeping over two hundred and fifty cows?

You might not think it's bad but they do. And would it be better to try and accept that and to try and sell your farming better to them?

I think the answer to that question, Andrew, is that all we need to sell better is to get those farmers up here and explain it to them more fully. That's all. And I quote Callum Neill again as an example because he actually worked here. No one could know better than someone who worked here as a dairy hand with Bobby Phillips. And he was quite happy with what he saw. He could see what we'd done to keep up the productivity of this farm in order that we could keep two hundred and fifty cows – that's a huge herd of cattle. If it was bad farming we couldn't produce those calves.

What it's being suggested that farmers do [is] all advertising and hype – new tractors and new machinery and new fertilisers and new crops and everything

should be beautifully green and like a computer-generated image of green fields with no weeds in, no wet ditches, no rushes. And I don't blame farmers at all but that is the image that they're constantly force-fed and all we're doing is giving a different image. It doesn't always fit in.

But what we're trying to show, our big message that we're trying to show the government, is that the best way of doing it is by farming it in an environmentally friendly way. And I feel that we're on the same side of the fence as the farmers here really. But they see the small differences such as rushy fields and rush-lined ditches and say, 'that's not farming' but I look at the bigger picture.

We are trying to get the message over to people who come to the island – visitors, birdwatchers, you know, people who are interested in wildlife – this is a nature reserve but it looks like a farm. We prioritise our wildlife output rather than our profit but it's not that different to what's going on about. But it costs money. To do it the way we do it costs money and that's what the government should be supporting – those farmers that would like to be doing it the way we're doing it or come more towards the way we're doing it. At the moment there isn't enough money in the agri-environment schemes to be able to do so.

I was interested to know how the RSPB and their staff (such as Clive) learnt about farming and how knowledge of farming in places like Islay came into the organisation:

And where do you get advice about farming from?

Well, we've got a farm manager here, Graham, whose been farming on Colonsay for eight years before he came here. Jack Fleming, who *was* the farm manager here, was a farmer full stop before he came to Islay. He's very knowledgeable. And I speak to local farmers. That's the only place you can find out. It's the same as other farmers really – you learn it from those above you and those that you talk to at markets and all the rest of it.

It's sometimes another criticism of the RSPB that they came to Islay and just got on with farming without asking anybody else, any local farmers, about how to go about it; they just weren't interested in that. Why do you think that perception

exists?

I don't know. I mean I haven't been here long enough, Andrew. When the RSPB came here first they weren't really going to farm the land. They were going to let out the grazing to graziers so they didn't own any stock, which is a major responsibility and quite a lot of financial investment. But we had difficulty getting the stock. People didn't want to graze at exactly the times we wanted them to. So that's the way it goes with letting out grazing rights. So it was decided that we should have our own herd of cattle. At that point Jack Fleming was brought in, who was a farm manager. I can't imagine that Jack didn't speak to people actually. He's an extremely sociable guy who still comes back to the island for the sales here – talks to everybody. I don't know where we haven't... you know I think there are misconceptions Andrew. There are people who think those fields are wet because the RSPB don't know how to keep them dry and people think why don't they ask Bobby Phillips (who isn't alive anymore) but why don't they ask somebody locally that could tell them how to drain those fields. I don't know but I think there's this general misconception that what's happening out there is accidental and that we have no control over it, whereas it is all intentional. And, you know, we had a barn dance at the Islay Show (sorry the Islay *Feis*) and [this woman] was sitting by the barn there and putting all this effort into getting the thing ready, completely voluntarily. And it was the only farm on the island that would let them have a barn for the night. It's the sort of thing we do when we get asked to do and we do it willingly. And she looked out across the Flats and she said, 'Oh it's a disgrace. There used to be a guy employed full-time to clear out those drains.' And you could see where she was coming from. There *was* a guy employed full-time clearing out those drains. We've changed that; we've changed the purpose of them. But we now manage them in a different way that's all. We put in a lot of effort. You know, we actually put in sluices, and we cleared out ditches, and we put pipe systems that we control the water with and let it drain away, or we can hold it back and that's the difference. We hold it back purposefully in the spring and dry it out in the autumn as we did this year for silage making. So we've got the best of both worlds. We want to get agricultural produce out of this ground, keep our cattle and wildlife, and I think we do that. We've got geese in the winter, waders in the spring, Corncrakes in the summer, silage in the autumn and two hundred and

fifty cows fed each winter.

What I would say... this is pretty unique really Andrew. This is a unique place from that point of view. A big working farm achieving all that, producing all those cows. Farmers... when farmers do that they sort of see what we're saying. The proof for the farmer is in the sales. We don't buy in loads of extra feed; we buy in the same as everybody else.

In these passages from my interview with Clive, he showed knowledge of three areas that farmers had sometimes suggested the RSPB were ignorant of. Firstly, he understood and, to an extent, appreciated the history of the site and the manner of its creation. Secondly, he showed that he knew what good farming meant to farmers in Islay and that this was an important contrast that farmers made between the Flats as they were under the RSPB and the Flats as Bobby Phillips had farmed them previously. The fields *had been* "nice and green" but "the fields now are not nice green fields." Finally, he pointed out that the RSPB understood and used the drainage system that had helped to make the Flats such a good farming area. The RSPB had actively maintained, improved and used this system to control water levels for the benefit of both wildlife and farming. In all these cases a contrast between past and present management could be drawn. These differences were explained as being a consequence of the RSPB's nature conservation priorities. Conservation, according to Clive, was "not tidy green fields, it's rough looking corners, Corncrake corridors full of nettles – all the sorts of things that have disappeared". The appearance of the reserve was borne not of ignorance but of priorities. Furthermore, the break with the past that farmers identified was, in fact, a recreation of a different idea of the past and of what had been meaningful and important then. To the RSPB this was "not tidy green fields" but "rough looking corners".

Many of Clive's comments related to the dual identity of Loch Gruinart as both nature reserve and farm. He cited two hypothetical circumstances in which this duality might not have been so pronounced. Firstly, if a habitat akin to Loch Gruinart existed in the south of England then "the contrast between farmland and the nature reserve is so great in terms of its wildlife that nobody thinks twice about whether you should or shouldn't have done it". Therefore, what made Loch Gruinart more like a farm were the farms

that surrounded it. Many of these were also good for wildlife and whilst they were farmed differently to the reserve they were not entirely different habitats with different wildlife. A second scenario could have been created had the RSPB been able to encourage local graziers to co-operate with them in managing the reserve. Clive mentioned that, “when the RSPB came here first they weren’t really going to farm the land”. They had been forced into the “major responsibility” and “financial investment” of having their own livestock because of the difficulty in getting others to farm for them. The reserve was thus more of a farm than was originally intended. Taking on the responsibility and investment of their own herd of cattle meant that they had needed to employ a proper farmer, with his farming knowledge, as their farm manager.

Despite their original intentions, the dual nature of the farm had proved useful to the RSPB. It enabled a message to be conveyed to others about farming “in an environmentally friendly way”. These ‘others’ included government, visiting birdwatchers and local farmers such as Callum Neill. In the case of the farmers, the dual identity of the reserve was used to provide “a different image” from the more pervasive vision of farms that were “like a computer-generated image”. An area of land that was both farm and nature reserve was the best way of selling this to government, whom it was hoped would provide more money for agri-environment schemes, encouraging more “environmentally friendly” farming using the sort of methods employed at Loch Gruinart. These changes to farming would perhaps remove the status of the reserve as a “unique place...one of the best farmland sites in Scotland...for breeding waders” that was also “producing top quality calves for sale at the local Islay Show and keeping over two hundred and fifty cows” because more farms would be similar to Loch Gruinart. This change had failed to materialise partly because of a lack of money from government but also because farmers saw these “small differences such as rushy fields and rush-lined ditches and [said], ‘that’s not farming’”.

For the RSPB, what was crucial was thus a process of education, of explaining their priorities and their understanding of the reserve better so that farmers “understand what it is that we’re all about”. If only all the farmers on the island had come over, as Callum Neill had done, then the concerns of farmers could have been allayed and they would understand the real value and meaning of these “small differences”. The consultation process, involving events like the discussion evening, had been a way of

showing farmers what the RSPB was actually trying to do with the land, “that every field we have has its own sort of management plan” and that the reserve had not been mismanaged through ignorance or negligence. This was the sort of pro-active educating that had bothered farmers such as the Campbells.

In August 2000, a few weeks before I interviewed him, Clive was trying to sell the RSPB’s brand of farming to farmers at an event promoting and advising on Corncrake-friendly silage cutting. Clive was talking to a local farmer and said that in Islay they needed more nettles and rough ground. To this suggestion the farmer cheerfully shook his head. “It goes against the grain doesn’t it?” said Clive in response before adding, “Farmers say it’s not really farming but it’s just environmentally friendly farming.” To Clive this *was* farming but this was tempered by a realisation that nettles and rough ground meant something a little different to most farmers on the island.

During my discussions with farmers I did occasionally encounter some provisional support for the RSPB. One farmer whose land adjoined the reserve was Michael Phillips, the son of Bobby who had farmed at Aoradh prior to the RSPB and who had organised the great improvements on the Flats during the 1950s. Michael told me that there was a lot of resentment towards the RSPB over the Flats:

About thirty men worked with my Dad to drain the Flats. A lot of the work was done by hand. All of them say it’s their greatest memory of farming, when they finished draining the Flats. When you ask them what they think about what the RSPB have done then their faces drop. But then people ask me what I think but it doesn’t bother me. The men got paid for it and it’s the RSPB’s land now. *

Michael added that he was one of the least ‘anti-RSPB’ farmers around and that the RSPB produced very good quality stock that got top prices at sale. Anthony Scott expressed similar sentiments:

My father had no time for RSPB or SNH and would have nothing to do with them. But these people are here to stay and there’s no use having that attitude forever. Life’s too short and I’m young enough to change my ideas. I don’t mind working with them, although as a farmer I don’t like what they do with

their farm because it looks like bad farming. But it doesn't really bother me because at the end of the day it's their land and they can do what they like with it. I might be bothered if they had loads of thistles and docks and Ragwort and it was spreading onto my land but I don't understand why people take it so personally. Farmers come by my farm and they start asking me all sorts of questions like 'Why did you take that wall down?' I'm tempted to answer, 'Because it's my land and I can do what I like with it.' That's more the sort of normal attitude in England but not so much up here. *

In both cases, the farmers seemed at pains to reduce the significance of what the RSPB did with their land. Whilst they noticed this, it was only of concern to the RSPB and its members. Even though both they and others might have perceived the reserve as bad farming this did not represent anything more than the RSPB having a different agenda that they were at liberty to pursue, just as any farmer should be allowed to do as they wished with their land. For Anthony and Michael the difference between farmers and conservationists was secondary to the rights of individual owners and occupiers to follow their own priorities. But despite their own lack of concern regarding the RSPB's management, the duality and ambiguity of Loch Gruinart provided both Michael and Anthony with the discursive space within which to broach their own experience of social constraints and independence.

Throughout this discourse of the Loch Gruinart reserve, knowledge and ignorance have been invoked. Farmers suggested that the RSPB were ignorant of how to farm and of the history of the site. They did not even take the trouble to learn these things from the farmers who had relevant knowledge. All of these deficiencies were evident to farmers because they knew that floods, rushes, bad grass, weeds, rabbits and nettles were indicative of a bad farm and went against the morality of a productive relationship with the land.²⁶⁵ The RSPB thought that farmers were ignorant of certain aspects of the reserve management and that they needed to educate them in order that they knew why the things that were done on the reserve were so important. Clive seemed well aware that the farmers saw the RSPB as being ignorant but some of the farmers (the Campbells, Amanda Richards, Tom Wilkie) also implied that the RSPB considered farmers themselves to be ignorant of farming. These ideas of knowledge difference

²⁶⁵ See 5.1 and 5.6.

were powerful rhetorical devices although it would be far harder to assess whether they were informed by anything more concrete. What is clearer is that farmers and the RSPB situated themselves differently in relation to the landscape of Loch Gruinart and that this diversity of perceptions was promoted through the duality of the farm/nature reserve. The reserve thus became symbolic of the interaction of farming and conservation, the differences and connections between them and the trajectory that relations between farmers and conservationists followed. So long as there remained the “small differences”, of which both farmers and the RSPB were acutely aware, then both the ambiguities and the symbolic freight of the reserve endured as a means of negotiating and representing ideas about farming, conservation and their practitioners.

Figures Twenty-two – Twenty-three: *The floods at RSPB Loch Gruinart*



Figure Twenty-four: *A farm near the RSPB reserve*



Figure Twenty-five: *Geese in flight to the south of the RSPB reserve*



7.0 Designated Areas

The designation of land for its importance to conservation has created perhaps the most significant process through which farmers and conservationists have come into contact in Islay. The entire island is within the Argyll Islands ESA²⁶⁶ whilst most of the Rhinns and the Loch Gruinart and Laggan areas are SSSIs.²⁶⁷ This chapter considers the reasons why designations came to be perceived by farming people as potentially threatening to their way of life and how some were then able to adopt strategies enabling them to operate successfully within the new system. Consideration is also given to how SSSIs have affected and represented relations both within the farming community and between farmers and SNH. A brief example of how designated areas were discussed in Islay during my fieldwork will serve as an introduction.

7.1 *Three meetings*

On 25th July 2000 I attended a meeting of the Islay Land Use Forum (ILUF) in Bowmore Hall. The Forum had been set up in the late 1980s as a way of establishing communication between different land-use interest groups in the wake of the problems that had been encountered during the Rhinns designation.²⁶⁸ I got a lift to the meeting with Norman Brown, a retired farmer who had also worked for the NCC. He went along as an interested individual but most others attended in a representative capacity. Ten people (excluding myself) were at the meeting and the NFUS, SNH and the RSPB were all represented. The chair was Robin Currie, a forceful but quietly spoken local councillor, and, after discussing Scottish Executive proposals for land reform and a new access strategy for the island, the agenda moved on to SNH's plans for Special Areas for Conservation (SACs) on the island. Alan MacDonnell, an Area Officer for SNH, outlined further details of these SACs:

Alan MacDonnell: These three SACs effectively already exist as SACs because the designation goes through two phases. The three sites are at Glac na

²⁶⁶ See 4.4.3.

²⁶⁷ See 4.3.4. and Figure Nineteen.

²⁶⁸ See 4.3.4.

Crìche, Fèur Lochain and Duich Moss and they are designated because of their importance as blanket bogs and for various other reasons. So Duich Moss is important for the depressions in the bog and the associated *Rhynchosporum* communities and its extrophic lakes.²⁶⁹ Glac na Crìche is also being designated for Marsh Fritillary butterflies, dry heathland and vegetated sea cliffs. We don't think this will have any effect on land users because the sea cliffs don't need any management and are not likely to be threatened and the Marsh Fritillaries, which are dependent on bogland, will be protected by the existing peatland protection measures. SNH have entered into consultation with landowners and occupiers but there haven't been any objections yet.

Robin Currie: I understood that there were problems in Nineteen Ninety-five because the EC wanted more reasons why certain areas should be designated as SACs.

Alan MacDonnell: There are various lists under the Habitats Directive, which contain items that are needed if a site is to qualify as an SAC. The EC came to the UK government to say that they're not protecting enough and the government could get fined up to a hundred and fifty thousand pounds a day if this isn't rectified and this'll be paid by the Scottish Executive because environment is devolved for Scotland. To speed up the processing of the SACs, these species are being protected within existing sites rather than just designating entirely new areas.

Robin Currie: There's still the usual problem that unless you're scientifically qualified then your comments are worthless.

Alan MacDonnell: [Nodding briefly] There's also a proposal that certain parts of the Rhinns are likely be made SACs. These new areas will be for the Marsh Fritillary. The areas that it's proposed will be designated will be what are reckoned to be core areas for the species that are important for maintaining the population over a longer period of time.

*Catriona Bell:*²⁷⁰ What sort of impact will this have on farmers?

²⁶⁹ There was some amusement from others at these terms.

²⁷⁰ A farmer's wife, NFUS representative and former editor of the *Ileach*.

Alan MacDonnell: Well farming is the reason why the species is there so this shouldn't affect things and there'll also be positive management agreements available.

Robin Currie: I don't really think it's worth commenting on this proposal yet because it's not in front of everyone. It concerns me though that there seem to be these mounting layers of designation so there'll be no possibility of development. We really need to move forward but I think these designations are a big hindrance.

*Callum Neill:*²⁷¹ Are there going to be payments for the designated areas?

Alan MacDonnell: Well if management agreements were made then obviously there would be.

Norman Brown: Why is it that my bit of land, which has fritillaries, isn't going to be designated?

Alan MacDonnell: The European requirement is only that the core areas are protected so it has to have been identified as one of these core areas.

Norman Brown: I'm just rather disappointed that my land's not considered to be good enough.

Callum Neill: Are there any core areas outside of the Rhinns SSSI?

Alan MacDonnell: No they're all within the Rhinns.

Callum Neill: So why aren't these going to be included?

Robin Currie: I just see these as areas that are barred to development anyway
Callum.

Alan MacDonnell: SNH is supposed to weigh up scientific and socio-economic aspects.

Robin Currie: But the only objections anyone can make have to be scientific.

*John Bricknell:*²⁷² Will the Port Askaig development be affected by conservation designations?

Robin Currie: Yes it will be.

Catriona Bell: Is there an SNH interest in Port Askaig?

Alan MacDonnell: There is an interest but there's no designation. SNH have a wider countryside remit but outside designated areas they have less leverage.

²⁷¹ A farmer and NFUS representative.

²⁷² An Englishman, who represented the Islay and Jura Marketing Group.

*Clive McKay:*²⁷³ You know conservation designations can offer opportunities because they can keep farmers doing what they are doing. Because of the money they can add security and potential for continuity.

Robin Currie: That's your view.

Catriona Bell: It seems to me that these conservation designations are getting heaped up and not spread around.

Alan MacDonnell: Well, the research has shown that the designated sites are all of European quality. There are also areas outside of these that are of good quality.

Callum Neill: What areas had been surveyed Alan?

Alan MacDonnell: Well, we've done the Ballygrant valley [where Callum farmed].

Callum Neill: They didn't come near me!

Robin Currie: They wouldn't have told you even if they had.

Callum Neill: It's just that it's like Norman said – you feel a bit miffed when you don't come up to the standard. *

During this exchange, I was struck by how restrained, low-key and almost light-hearted it seemed. There were different perspectives on the issue of designations but the impression I gained was one of well-rehearsed roles and arguments being played out. Amongst some of the participants there were clear disagreements but also a realisation of the intransigence of others. Points were made but never pushed.

Alan MacDonnell of SNH seemed intent on providing the meeting with straightforward information about the plans for SACs. The manner in which he presented the SNH case was that the designations were necessities of law that SNH were obliged to enforce. European law required the Scottish Executive to protect certain species and certain habitats, and onerous fines could be incurred if no willingness was shown to do this. SNH were simply following the necessary procedures stipulated by their remit to implement conservation law. As an SNH officer, Alan's job at the meeting was to communicate this procedure in a straightforward way. In any case, the designations would not conflict with normal farming activities because it was these that had created the habitats in the first place.

²⁷³ A warden for the RSPB.

Throughout Alan's exposition, Robin Currie (a councillor who had often been critical of conservationists) questioned him about the potential problems inherent in the designation process. In the past the reasons for designations had sometimes been lacking and the appeal system was iniquitous because it excluded counterarguments that were not scientific. Alan gave a quick nod to this latter criticism but it was clearly not his job to debate such a point. Robin later argued that there was little point in examining the designations until the full details were in front of them, implying (perhaps from experience) that the devil would reside therein. His greatest concern, however, was that conservation designations were inherently stultifying to development. It was Clive McKay from the RSPB and not the more neutral Alan who challenged this argument. Clive's view was that designations provided farmers with financial support that kept them farming, something important at a time when farmers had to reconsider their practices. This financial aspect of the designations was of pointed interest to Callum Neill, who was clearly concerned to know what was in it for him. But even though his motives were primarily financial, Callum also expressed disappointment that, on his farm at least, he had not been able to marry conservation and agriculture successfully enough to warrant scientific approval.

Catriona Bell, in her capacity as a representative of the NFUS and as a farmer's wife, was also concerned as to the impact the SACs would have on farming activities. Thirteen years earlier she had been the editor of the *Ileach* newspaper and had commented more forcefully on the designation of the Rhinns SSSI.²⁷⁴

The giving of an SSSI designation should be an accolade, a distinction for people who have encouraged wildlife on their land. Something they would strive to get, and be proud to keep. Instead it is a list of 'thou shalt nots' which puts the owner-occupier in the position of having to ask authority about practically every agricultural exercise. Probably in most cases permission will be given, but is that any consolation for the people who have just rid themselves of a feudal landlord to find that they now have a public one? The former state was made bearable by poaching, the analogy for the present is obvious.

²⁷⁴ *Ileach* Vol. 14 No. 11 18th April 1987

As was said at both the crofters and farmers meetings, it is the people of Islay who are the real conservationists – not the uncouth zealots who want to bag a sighting of a Chough, on its nest, without any consideration for the bird, or the people whose shed it has chosen.²⁷⁵ It is not Norman Brown and Marion Hughes,²⁷⁶ although together they have gained everyone's respect for the way they are doing it, who should be talking to the farmers and crofters. The people at the top of the NCC should be coming to meet the people who have been proved to be at the top in practical conservation, the people of the Rhinns of Islay. Only when all the knowledgeable people get together, can an attempt be made to amend and improve this very bad act, which should protect the guardians of, as well as, the wildlife and countryside.

In the same issue of the *Ileach* there were reports on two meetings held with NCC officials – one with farmers and one with crofters. Peter Smith, then a representative of the NFUS, reported on the farmers' meeting. He was also present at the ILUF meeting:

Much discussion and negotiation will have to take place before final designation and the fact that this will occur over the busiest farming period of the year came in for a lot of criticism. Farmers felt that they had not been treated as responsible people with the secretive and clandestine manner in which the matter had been handled.

There was the reiteration of the farmers' role in the conservation of wildlife and the lack of necessity for the restrictions designation implies. Concerns were raised with Marion Hughes of NCC about the lack of consultation, the advice given, the lack of employment with NCC for local people, the absence of any say in conservation amongst local farmers, and the lack of courtesy shown by conservationists in not seeking permission when entering land.

The *Ileach* included a transcript of the crofters' meeting, which was chaired by Robin Currie. The following are extracts:

²⁷⁵ An opaque reference to an incident involving Clive McKay, who had intruded into a barn on Catriona's farm whilst conducting research into Choughs.

²⁷⁶ The local NCC officers at the time of the designation.

Floor: We have been here with the Chough for hundreds of years. Now the NCC are here climbing to the nests and taking away the eggs. We want the Choughs but we don't want you. The people on Islay are turning against conservation.

Marion Hughes: The Wildlife and Countryside Act was drafted in a hurry in 1981 and can be a rather negative method of conservation. Wildlife in the Rhinns is good.

Floor: Then why not leave it alone? The crofter is the best conservationist.

Marion Hughes: If all is fine on any croft then there is no need for legislation to be implemented.

Floor: We are not convinced that this SSSI designation is necessary despite all you have said. None of us is any the wiser – if we are to carry on the same as we always have then why all this? If it wasn't for the people, the Rhinns wouldn't be like it is now.

Marion Hughes: The people are needed, I agree.

Floor: What this amounts to is an incursion into a way of life.

Robin Currie had his own thoughts on the matter, which were aired in a subsequent edition of the *Ileach*.²⁷⁷

People must remember that this 'notification' is an ultimatum. If it is ignored or not acted upon quickly enough, then it will see life on Islay change completely, and we will be taken over and driven out.

In plain language, what the NCC is doing is restricting the livelihood of the people of this island. The NCC talk about operations which appear likely to damage the special interest. They say that they might 'not necessarily' apply to each individual. One must not believe this bluffing. They are talking about restrictions. Give an inch now when you don't legally have to, and the NCC will take a mile later when you can't stop them.

As Ilich we must put pressure on the NCC and demonstrate as a community and as long-declared conservationists that we oppose this designation.

²⁷⁷ *Ileach* Vol. 14 No. 13 16th May 1987.

The first question that emerges from the above reactions to the Rhinns designation is how did a measure ostensibly aimed at preventing farmland from being converted into forestry come to be so widely perceived as a threat to the farming way of life in Islay? Much of the blame, both at the time and since, has focused on the daunting list of ‘thou shalt nots’ (Potentially Damaging Operations) that the NCC sent out to farmers with the notification. According to Catriona Bell, this action rendered the designation not an accolade for farmers’ and crofters’ custodianship of the land but a set of constraints on the very productive values that underpinned the special qualities that the SSSI was intended to conserve. Farming people had always been the ‘real’ conservationists because wildlife was an inherent aspect of the expression of their productive labour in the landscape. They had visibly expressed their responsibility over the land and wildlife and so it then seemed perverse that their knowledge and values were no longer trusted as a means for conservation. The ‘people’ might be needed but they were no longer the arbiters of what was ‘fine’ for wildlife (or by implication anything else) on their croft or farm.

It is clear from their comments that neither Catriona Bell nor Robin Currie wished for the people of Islay to acquiesce to the Rhinns designation. If the NCC could not understand that the best way to conserve wildlife in Islay was to support the values and way of life shared by a united farming community then those at the top of the organisation who made the decisions needed to come to the island to have this explained. The distance from which this change had been implemented was obviously perceived as fundamental to its ill conception. If designation went ahead then the feudalistic overtones that obstructed independence might even encourage the farmers and crofters to relinquish their long-held conservationist values.

7.2 *Farmers’ views on the SSSI*

Thirteen years later in 2000, I interviewed many farmers who had land within the Rhinns SSSI. In most cases I asked if they had been annoyed by the manner in which the NCC went about the notification process. I put this question to Archie Baxter:

It annoyed us greatly yes. And they haven't learnt a single lesson because the same thing is happening in Berneray²⁷⁸ today. In fact they had the first meeting about it last night. It's, there's absolutely no reason now to have gone and slapped on absolutely out-of-the blue. They did it out-of-the-blue here. They said they couldn't advertise it, the fact that they were going to be doing anything out of it, because people would destroy the conservation element. Which is absolute nonsense. There's only a few farmers and land managers that would do that – a very, very few. And I'm quite sure there are laws in place to stop them or prosecute them when they've done it.

Why do you think, it sounds like they didn't trust people to look after their land.

Why do you think that was?

I don't know. They still don't trust people. They still treat them exactly the same as they did. It's fifteen years now we've had the triple SI – they still don't trust them. They still don't trust other people. This Berneray case is a case in point where they have taken the whole machair²⁷⁹ area and said this is a triple SI and you will not do this, this and this.

When I spoke to Don Currie he told me that many farmers had been particularly bothered by the list of “twenty-eight thou shalt nots” they had received from the NCC when the Rhinns was designated. He and his wife showed me the list of PDOs they had received. This had been presented to the farmers with hardly any explanation as to what restrictions they entailed and what compensation might have been provided. Don said, “They saw something they wanted to protect so they just slapped an SSSI on it.” I asked Don if he thought the NCC had been worse than SNH:

I think they were much worse. SNH have had a difficult time trying to get the farmers back on their side but I think with the help of the money they can now offer they've been able to do this. I still think some of them are sneaky though. There was this farmer in Perthshire who was approached by this man who said he wanted to walk down a glen on the farmer's land. The farmer had thought ‘that's no bother; he'll not harm anyone down there.’ The man went for a walk and not long after the area was designated an SSSI. *

²⁷⁸ An island in the Western Isles where a controversial SSSI was being proposed at the time.

²⁷⁹ Machair is a type of coastal grassland found in the Hebrides.

Later Don raised similar concerns about what had happened on his own farm:

You would see half a dozen men in your field, looking round. They'd never ask. They were very ruthless the NCC... We used to welcome hill walkers on our land because they were someone to talk to. You'd ask them about their lives and they'd ask you about yours. But since NCC came in you start thinking that everyone could be a spy. *

Jimmy Carmichael elaborated that to farmers of his generation the list of PDOs had seemed like a betrayal:

This 'thou shalt not' attitude really annoys farmers like myself, and Don Currie and Willie Taylor. We all came into farming at about the same time and we were all ex-servicemen. To an ex-serviceman that sort of attitude really sticks in the craw. I blame the monarchy in a way. You'd do things 'for king and country' but that was all bollocks. *

Gilbert MacLugash commented that the economic circumstances of farmers had changed since the Rhinns designation and this had fostered a change in attitudes:

What sort of impact did the designation have?

It was a blow at the time because it was a new thing. There was this list of PDOs, which included everything you did on a place. At that time, when they designated in Eighty-seven – Eighty-eight agriculture was in better shape than now. We were getting development grants like the ADP²⁸⁰ and there were good grants for fencing and reseeded but while on the one hand they gave you these grants for improvement on the other they were stopping you from improving. But over the years, with the way agriculture has gone, people have got used to it. These days they're getting us to cut down. *

²⁸⁰ See 3.4.5.

David Sinclair, a big and amiable farmer from the Rhinns, had appeared in publicity material for SNH. He thought that it was a fear of the unknown that caused the initial conflicts:

What did you think when the Rhinns was designated as a triple SI?

It was devastating really, because of the way it was done. People are rather frightened of change and I suppose it wasn't clear at the time where all the change would end. It's not been as bad as people thought though and I think that partnership with conservation is much better. *

According to the farmers with whom I spoke in 2000, the NCC had been an unpopular organisation in Islay at the time of the Rhinns designation. They were variously characterised as distant, devious, mysterious, uncommunicative, dictatorial and mistrustful. The NCC scientists would appear on a farmer's land out-of-the-blue and just as unexpectedly would send a farmer a letter stating that their farm had been designated and providing a list of intimidating PDOs. The passage of time and the advent of SNH appeared to have leavened this view, as farmers realised that the constraints might not be as severe as originally thought and that they could receive reasonable amounts in compensation. Conservation schemes had also come to appear more congruent with the economics of farming, where once they seemed an unwanted check on farm development. Reflecting on the views held at the time of the designation, Gilbert pointed out that the list of PDOs seemed to fly in the face of other government policies that encouraged improvements. The SSSI thus appeared to contradict farmers' views as to the intended future for the industry. David agreed that designation had initially clouded perceptions of the future but that to him at least the growing influence of conservation had established not conflict but partnership for the future in farming. This optimism was tempered by Archie, who reckoned that SNH were showing elsewhere that they were no better than the NCC had been. They still harboured the mistaken view that farmers were a threat to the conservation interest on their own land. Don, meanwhile, thought there had been some improvement but that "some of them are still sneaky".

The positive perceptions of SSSIs that Gilbert and David held were reflected in the way that both had incorporated management agreements with SNH into the running of their

farms. A few months before I interviewed David he had appeared in an article in SNH's corporate magazine (Scottish Natural Heritage 1999b: 8) discussing the conservation schemes on his farm. I asked David how he had got involved with doing this publicity material:

It was really just because I've always been approachable with them.

Has there been any reaction to it?

Any reaction that there's been has been good. I'd like to do as much with SNH as I can. *

The article, entitled "Natural Assets", briefly described David's routine on his farm and some of the things he did as part of the SSSI management agreement and the ESA scheme. The management agreement prescriptions were focussed on maintaining habitats for Choughs whereas the ESA scheme was more directed at management for Corncrakes. David was quoted as saying:

Both the ESA scheme and the management agreement are a huge asset. Basically I am getting paid for farming in a way which cares for the environment, much of which I was already doing. I would recommend these schemes wholeheartedly to other farmers who have the opportunity to enter them.

The article then explained that applying for the ESA scheme was not too arduous particularly if, like David, one employed a consultant to draw up the plan. The conservation schemes were also touted as delivering quality produce, citing the fact that all of David's livestock was in the SQBLA scheme. Finally David was quoted "[mulling] over life as a farmer in Islay":

I'm not in farming for the money. I enjoy the lifestyle. Generations of my family have farmed in this part of Islay – it's in my blood.

When I interviewed David, he offered a slightly different response when I asked him what motivated him to farm for wildlife:

It's just there and it's nice to see it there and you try not to harm it. The financial side comes first though. *

The two points were not necessarily contradictory because for David it would go without saying, and indeed was implied in the article, that it was still essential to procure a living and that making allowances for wildlife should not detract from this. With the ESA scheme, David suggested that the financial aspects were the means through which the co-operation of farmers was enlisted:

I'll do whatever's asked of me for the ESA scheme because it's financially rewarding. It's good for the wildlife, good for farmers and good for visitors so there are no losers. *

David mentioned that one of the biggest changes that the ESA scheme had brought about was that he was not allowed to cut his silage until 1st August as part of the provisions for Corncrakes. According to conservation scientists, Corncrakes require areas of grass to remain uncut to provide cover whilst raising their young and the late mowing made it more likely that any young would reach independence. Many farmers regarded this as a particularly awkward restriction and David himself reckoned that by August the nutritional value of the grass had probably gone. But he had calculated that financially it was still better to cut in August because of the payments from the ESA scheme.

David received around £6000 annually from SNH for his management agreement but despite this he said that he thought that sometimes the demands of the scheme were conflicting and that he was not always adequately compensated for the practical difficulties the agreement created:

One of the funny things with the SNH agreement is that sometimes they want the cattle in an area but sometimes they don't. For the Choughs they want the cattle out but for the orchids (and we're supposed to get a wide variety here) they want the stocking densities much lower. With the bad weather recently I've had to get the beasts in which isn't to SNH's wishes but I'd really need to be compensated for having the cattle out on the hill. *

David was implying that the management agreement could favour some species to the detriment of equally important others and that sometimes his own farming interests still took priority. Later, I asked him if he thought the conservation schemes were beneficial to wildlife:

Well, I think that wildlife is struggling really despite the schemes. Owls, Choughs, Corncrakes are all declining. Geese are slightly down on the farm this year, although I think that's probably something like a poor breeding season. There don't seem to be so many songbirds either and the birds of prey have increased, which the gamekeepers used to keep in check. *

In the article about David's farm, SNH were keen to connect wildlife habitats with quality produce and traditional management, knowledge and values. Farmers like David, who were "not in farming for the money", were being rewarded for continuing existing management practices. This meant that management agreements did not have to be perceived as a constraint on development but as a positive incentive for the sorts of values that farmers like David held because, it was now acknowledged, these values were good for wildlife. Any small changes that might be made to farming practices through management agreements and ESA schemes were fine-tuning and, in any case, were more than adequately compensated. David expressed great satisfaction with the conservation schemes and was held up as a great example of farming and conservation working together harmoniously. The article was not necessarily implying that an amicable relationship between farming and conservation was universal but it *was* illustrating its eminent possibility because the needs of each industry and the associated bodies of knowledge and values were not inherently antagonistic.

When I interviewed David, he did not provide a conflicting account, and was indeed eager to reiterate many of the points he made in the interview. He made it clear that he was keen to have wildlife on his farm and would not deliberately do anything to harm it. However, David made it apparent that the realities of the farming economy meant that his involvement in conservation schemes was contingent upon them being financially rewarding. In the case of August cutting for silage, this was clearly detrimental to his farming operation without the compensation. In fact it was not always clear to David

that the schemes were having any positive effect on wildlife, particularly as the prescriptions sometimes favoured one species over another. Although David understood the aims of the schemes and agreements, he thought that external factors, such as bad weather, poor breeding seasons or increasing numbers of predators, mitigated many of the positive outcomes for wildlife that might otherwise be expected.

Gilbert MacLugash also had three management agreements with SNH, which covered almost the entirety of his rugged hill farm. In 1999 Gilbert received a total of £42,000 in annual management agreement payments (Scottish Natural Heritage 1999a).²⁸¹ Gilbert concluded the agreements in 1988, just a year after the Rhinns SSSI was designated and they were scheduled to run until 2013. I discussed the agreements with Gilbert when I interviewed him:

Do you have a management agreement?

I've got a management agreement not to do reseeded, drainage, liming or phosphate application in different areas.

What's the reason for that?

The reason for it is that the conservationists want to keep the place as it is. This place was good for Choughs so they want to keep the place this way in case it upsets wildlife like the Chough. With the ADP grants you might be destroying the vegetation and that might not be good for the species, which are regarded as being important.

How much of a restriction do you feel all this to be?

It's a big restriction except on the arable, which was kept out of the SSSI but all the rest of the farm is designated. We're not allowed to put stock on some ground so we're not making money out of these areas. By losing out financially they have to compensate me but only for profit foregone so I have to say I'm losing x amount. I suppose in the beginning it bothered me because it was new and none of us were used to it but I think now I've learnt to accept it. If you were an owner-occupier and you were told not to do something it would be annoying. A lot of people were unhappy at the time and I suppose we're not getting encouragement for the things we should be doing so people tend to accept it. It's daft in some ways, like these people from the College who were

²⁸¹ This combined total was amongst the largest given to anyone in Scotland for this type of agreement.

over today. Several years ago they used to tell the farmers they had to get in silage by the Twentieth of June because the nutritional value would tail off after that. Now they come here and tell us not to cut till the First of August. These designations have maybe stalled agricultural development in Islay. You could say it did harm fifteen years ago but now higher production is not needed. *

I also asked Gilbert why he had decided against participation in the ESA scheme:

Well, all of the hill land is in the triple SI management agreement and I couldn't afford to leave the arable land uncut till the First of August. I don't think I should be paid twice for the same things.

Could you put the arable land into the ESA?

I want the arable ground to be free to do with as I wish but most farmers in Islay have the ESA scheme. *

Gilbert had told me that he used his arable land for giving his livestock a boost²⁸² and he obviously liked to use this area of land for the benefit of his agricultural operation. On his best land he had no restrictions from any conservation schemes or designations and this separation of land allowed him to independently pursue productive farming whilst still receiving a considerable 'income'²⁸³ from the conservation schemes. What was once a contradictory situation, with the state encouraging intensification on the one hand and constraining it on the other, had been tempered by the changes in agricultural policy because now farmers were "not getting encouragement for the things [they] should be doing". By separating his land into areas for production and areas for conservation schemes, Gilbert was also able to fully resolve the contradictions of managing his farm within both these sets of parameters.

Brian MacAskill's involvement with SNH and with management agreements had been rather more complicated than Gilbert's. The complication came with a proposed agreement that was never concluded with SNH, but Brian still had one existing agreement. He described what this involved:

²⁸² See 5.2.

²⁸³ Although Gilbert argued that his management agreement was paid on a profit-foregone basis, given the large amounts he received it seems probable that he made some money from the agreements.

We have one on the land below the road. And with that it limits the stocking levels to two hundred sheep on a hundred and fifty acres, which isn't really a problem. They put restrictions on the numbers of boats that can be moored up on the loch and there are also restrictions on spraying there to protect the ducks. There's also some peat cutting areas designated and a prohibition on forestation. We'd thought about an ESA scheme for the top half of the farm but it's no use with the ceiling on payments. *

Although it was somewhat constraining, Brian did not view this agreement as particularly problematic and in 1999 he and his family received an annual payment of £22,000 (Scottish Natural Heritage 1999a). When I asked if SNH had ever checked to make sure they were doing (or not doing) what they had agreed, Brian said that they only did so occasionally. What had affected the MacAskill's relationship with SNH had been a proposal for another agreement:

We had this management agreement that was proposed and that we'd developed with SNH. And we were only going to be giving white drenches for worming cattle and keeping twenty to twenty-five heifers out during the winter.

Who suggested the scheme?

It was suggested by SNH, by Doug Gilbert. The vets had been looking at the drenches and we agreed to keep the land mectin²⁸⁴ free. We all put quite a bit of work in so that the scheme was drawn into a plan. But then when we only really just needed the signatures, SNH pulled out of the agreement.

Why was that?

I wonder if it was because of the RSPB purchasing Smaull. There was a general lack of out-wintered cattle around the loch but maybe SNH thought that RSPB would solve this problem without them having to bother with a management agreement. *

Later Brian explained how this incident had affected his views:

²⁸⁴ This refers to Ivermectin, a worming treatment for cattle. This has the effect of sterilising cattle dung and it was suggested by conservation organisations that the use of this treatment was detrimental to Choughs.

Well this thing with the Chough agreement has maybe spoilt our relationship with conservation organisations a bit. I mean we'd become keen and it had taken a long time to build up that trust after the whole Rhinns designation business. *

So Brian's view of conservation organisations had changed from scepticism to trust and this had encouraged him to consider the same sort of partnership with conservation that David Sinclair advocated. But this newfound enthusiasm had been dashed when SNH appeared to lose interest in the proposal. It seemed to Brian that, despite an apparent desire to work with farmers, SNH preferred an organisation like the RSPB to take on responsibility for conservation in an area. SNH, to Brian at least, still appeared to conclude agreements on their terms only.

Scott Campbell's farm was also largely within the Rhinns SSSI. He was a fairly young man, perhaps in his thirties, and he farmed alongside his father on the shores of Loch Indaal. Unlike many other farmers whose land was included within the SSSI, Scott and his father had not entered into a management agreement with SNH, despite Scott asserting that the designation restricted what they could do. In fact Scott was unhappy about the money that he had learnt other farmers were getting from management agreements. He explained to me why this was:

SNH really don't have too much to do with the farm, although sometimes I wish they did with all the money they're giving to other farmers. I think that's splitting up the farmers on the island. I've just seen this book and it lists all the management agreements on the island and there's seven or eight farmers getting over thirty thousand pounds for not doing things from SNH. It's putting up the price of draff, which means that farmers like me can't compete with all these people getting money from SNH. I mean, there's Johnny and Willie MacFarlane at Staffin and they're getting sixty thousand a year. Everyone was feeling sorry for them when they sent their dairy cattle away but we didn't know then about all this money they were getting. *

Because Scott's farm was within the SSSI he was obviously in a position to obtain management agreement payments, but he told me why this had been difficult for him to

do:

With these SNH payments it makes me feel that land reform would be a good thing. I thought when Labour came into power that this was going to come through but I don't know what'll happen now. It'd be easier to do things if I owned the land and I suppose that might make it easier to get all these payments. It's just so annoying that someone from down south owns your place. *

The SSSI designation appeared to create a dilemma for Scott. He coveted the money that others were receiving from management agreements but he considered that it would be difficult to obtain an agreement himself. He thought that his status as a tenant made it much harder to develop his farm and because of this he could not pose a threat to the conservation interest and thus secure a management agreement. Other farmers were able to utilise the system of constraints within an SSSI to their advantage because they could utilise their ability to farm their land as they wished but Scott perceived himself as constrained from both sides.²⁸⁵ Although these constraints were partly internalised, he saw the system (and by implication SNH) as divisive because it gave great advantages to owner-occupiers, who not only gained significant income from agreements, but could then also out-compete other farmers for draff and other commodities.

I asked Brian MacAskill, a farmer whose partial success with management agreements Scott might have envied, if he thought the SSSI agreements were divisive:

They shouldn't be because if it's considered that what's on your farm is worth protecting then that's just the luck of the draw. Having said that, I'd rather our SSSI land was prime arable. But if there's something that needs protecting then so be it. People shouldn't complain if their land isn't designated. *

Like Callum Neill at the ILUF meeting, farmers might "feel a bit miffed" when they did not come up to the standard, but that was the system and, in contrast to what was said in 1987, it was "just the luck of the draw" if a farmer had wildlife on their farm that needed protection. As such, management agreements should not, according to Brian, be

²⁸⁵ See the discussion of tenant farmers' perceptions of the constraints imposed by the estates in 5.1.

divisive at all. Furthermore, Brian implicitly countered the idea that the productive labour of farmers was directly responsible for the excellence of Islay for wildlife. If a farm was good for wildlife then this was due not to labour but luck.

Unlike Scott Campbell, Iain Taylor was quite happy to have no involvement in conservation schemes. He explained his attitude towards them thus:

We get Corncrakes quite often about the place but we're not in any schemes or anything. We don't go out to destroy it. We're not against environmentally friendly things but we don't join it to get money.

Do you get the ESA schemes or anything here?

No, too much restrictions on your place for what you get for it. We need every bit of ground plus we cut peat commercially. Most of the farm is in the triple SI.

Do you have any management agreements?

No.

Do SNH ever check up on the management of the farm?

They came around once when we were spreading slurry and they asked us to stop it and we said no and he went away.

For Iain, who was desperate to make as much money from his land as possible, the solution was simply to avoid environmental schemes, which he saw as inherently restraining on his ability to make money. With a much higher income needed than farmers like Gilbert, management agreements or ESAs were not an option. Even though restrictions still applied on the sections of his land within the SSSI, he did not see this as a barrier to doing what he thought necessary to increase productivity. SNH were as much of a constraint on Iain's farming as he allowed them to be and even admonishment from a passing officer was considered inconsequential. To a farmer who did not believe he could make money from a management agreement, SNH's authority and powers of coercion were greatly diminished.

Don Currie also hinted at a mischievous response to the restrictions imposed through environmental schemes:

Are you in any schemes for the Corncrakes?

We have the ESA scheme across the track and also the SNH Corncrake scheme in the fields nearer the farm. We have to shut off corners of the fields for the birds for these. We don't need to cultivate the nettles because they do the job well enough themselves! The silage cutting is restricted until August and we're requested to cut in a Corncrake friendly manner. We're not saying we do it though. *

Despite this, Don was still realistic about the financial importance of the schemes. When I asked him what he thought had been the overall effect of the conservation schemes on his farming he said, "It keeps us in farming. Without it we'd be out on our necks." Michael Phillips reiterated this view, telling me that, "Without conservation everyone can forget about it; anyone who resists can say cheerio to it." Even on a 'profit-foregone' basis, many farmers saw conservation schemes as the future for farm incomes.²⁸⁶ Some greeted this grudgingly, others with enthusiasm but perhaps most with pragmatism.

However, not all arrangements that farmers made with SNH were financial. Never one to be dictated to, Archie Baxter had established an unusual sort of agreement with SNH for his small croft within the Rhinns SSSI:

I also made the arrangement that I was going to be cutting wildflowers for our house because if I wanted to bring wildflowers for the house I wasn't going to break the law but I was still going to pick wildflowers. In fact I think I was probably the only person in Scotland that has that because I insisted on it. But my two favourites are Meadowsweet and the red one – what's the red one with the red spike?

Purple Loosestrife?

And Purple Loosestrife. The Meadowsweet particularly – I still bring it into the house during the season because I like a few. But I was blowed if I was going to be told that I couldn't do it. If Norma [Archie's wife] wanted to go and pick Primroses *on my ground* she was going to pick Primroses on my ground.

²⁸⁶ See 8.3 for a discussion of profit-foregone compensation.

For Archie this agreement was about expressing his own control over what he could do on his land. The simple act of picking common wildflowers from his ground was rendered a symbolic act of independence, *even though* Archie had asked permission to continue from SNH. His asking for permission, because it was a voluntary request, was made to seem more of a challenge *to* SNH than an ultimatum *from* them. Would they trust this man, who had lived and worked in this area for most of his life, to carry out this simple act of liberty on his own land?

Archie was generally ambivalent when I asked him how he thought conservation schemes had affected farming in Islay:

Well up to now, I think it's probably done quite a lot of good... There's still a lot of money being spent quite unnecessarily. It is still perceived by the powers that be (whether they be departments or whether they be departments of agriculture or the SNH) that, if you've got something there, fence it and preserve it.

Whereas I don't think that is necessary. I think an agreement to continue the management of the land as it has been managed now, as long as the management hasn't changed materially within the last year or two (which is starting to destroy something), then let that management continue. To go and put a fence in is utterly and absolutely nonsense. An awful lot of water margin has fencing. The water margin is there because the cattle trample water margin – tonnes of it – they fence it off... I can possibly understand fencing off little bits for corridors but quite frankly it's a waste of money. Really even then I think it's a waste of money to put in fences. If you manage your place properly we won't need these special corridors. The amount of fencing that's been on this island for absolutely no purpose at all – to fence off areas just to get a grant for it.

On another occasion Archie told me that he believed that conservation had become self-perpetuating because people now depended on it for a living. The government and the EU were simply generating procedures and bureaucracy in order to satisfy their self-created legislative requirements. Farmers could still play along to obtain grant money but as a system it only made sense in and of itself, bearing little relation to what was needed. The decision-making processes of the conservation bureaucracy, like so many other things, seemed to be at ever-greater remove from local perceptions of reality on

the ground.

For Archie, and for other farmers, the system of conservation designations was still seen as a system of constraints in 2000. However, the predictions made in 1987 that these restrictions represented a threat to a farmer's independence had been disproved by the actions and perceptions of the farmers themselves. The system of consultation, restrictions and compensation that underpinned an SSSI established a new framework within which farmers developed diverse strategies through which they expressed their independence, thus obviating or mitigating the ascendancy of the bureaucratic system. Some, like Gilbert and David, cleverly gained significant financial advantages from management agreements whilst allowing themselves enough room for manoeuvre to continue to farm productively. Others, like Iain and Don, would either openly or surreptitiously overlook the constraints if they proved an inconvenience. Quite why each farmer strategised in a particular way is impossible to ascertain but in part this may have been a response to their perceptions of economic imperatives or of the trajectory of change in Islay farming and government policy. Despite this relative success, other farmers felt excluded from the system and it was they who were most aggrieved. Scott, for example, could potentially have 'played the game' as others did but because he perceived that his ability to develop was curtailed by being a tenant he felt unable to work independently within the constraints of conservation to his own financial advantage. He felt unable to play conservation and development off against one another. Knowing how others had succeeded in doing this meant that to Scott management agreements were a threat to the unity of the Islay farming community. Brian had also been frustrated by his efforts to integrate conservation schemes more fully into the running of his farm. Although he already had a sizable management agreement, he suspected that the financial constraints placed on SNH and on the ESA scheme had reduced the possibility of achieving a more significant income from conservation.

But whatever their success, the designation system had become a known quantity to farmers in Islay²⁸⁷ and, whilst it was still found wanting in many ways, the political dialogue and roles had reified into the routinised rhetoric of the ILUF meeting. The politicians might still have advocated an analogous response to poaching with which to

²⁸⁷ See 4.5.

render the influence of SNH and the conservation system bearable, just as Catriona Bell had done in 1987. But, whilst the strategies of farmers had been more individualistic, they had also been just as subtle and no less defiant.

8.0 The goose problem²⁸⁸

Through much of the 1990s the *Ileach* newspaper regularly included cartoons featuring two geese. The geese went unnamed but one wore a woolly hat, the other a deerstalker. Neither was identifiable to a particular species. It was clear from the way in which the geese were dressed and the manner in which they spoke that the cartoonist did not see them as locals but as incomers. They were probably supposed to be English and well off. The cartoons normally involved the geese making some sort of humorous comment about local events, particularly relating to conservation. Some examples follow:

In an October edition of the paper, the geese are standing next to a sign that reads, "Don't keep off the grass." One goose is saying, "Well, it's *that* time of year again!!"²⁸⁹

At a time when there were rumours of school closures, the geese are outside a school with a "Closed" sign on it. Nearby is a sign saying, "Geese welcome." One goose says, "I'm glad to see they've got their priorities right."²⁹⁰

The geese are observing two sculptures. One is the 'truce goose', a sculpture that was produced to symbolise the establishment of the Islay Voluntary Goose Management Scheme (IVGMS). The other is a pound shaped 'golden goose'. One goose says to the other, "The one on the left [the truce goose] was the conservationists' suggestion ... the one on the right was the farmers'!!"²⁹¹

Four men are running up a mountain as the geese look on. One is saying, "No, it's not DJ training for the next Everest Marathon...it's Magnus Magnusson²⁹² negotiating goose grants with the Islay farmers."²⁹³

²⁸⁸ Part of this chapter was presented in a paper entitled "Conservation, counting and the meaning and morality of rarity in Islay" given at the 2003 Association of Social Anthropologists' conference in Manchester.

²⁸⁹ *Ileach* Vol. 20 No. 24 15th October 1994. See Figure Twenty-eight.

²⁹⁰ *Ileach* Vol. 24 No. 11 12th April 1997.

²⁹¹ *Ileach* Vol. 20 No. 15 12th June 1993.

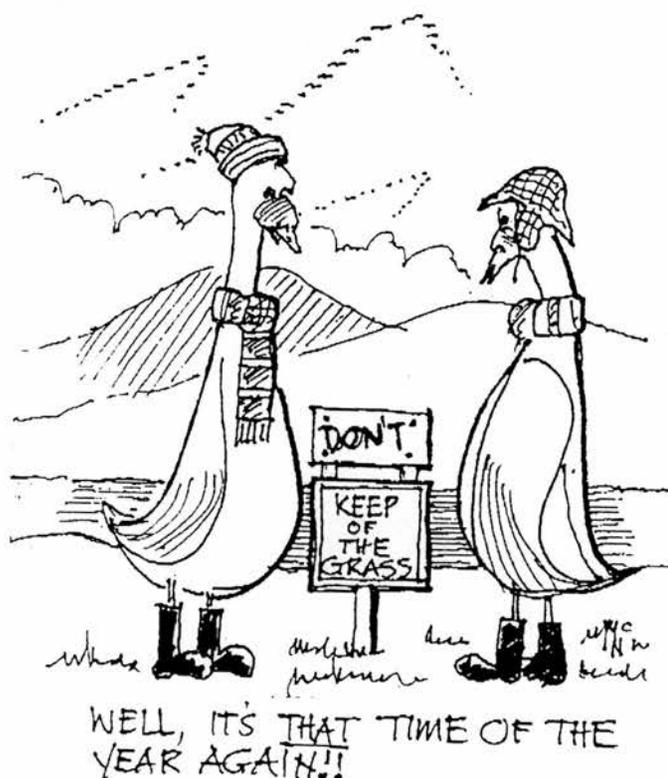
²⁹² Magnus Magnusson was Chairman of SNH at the time and paid a number of visits to Islay to help with negotiations for the IVGMS.

²⁹³ *Ileach* Vol. 21 No. 3 22nd December 1993.

The geese are looking onto a fenced off Bowmore where a sign says, “RSPI²⁹⁵ People Reserve – Keep Out”. One goose is saying to the other, “One must do one’s best to protect endangered species, mustn’t one?”²⁹⁶

The attitude of the two geese in these cartoons was one of amused or concerned aloofness, as if they were rather detached from the everyday interests and concerns of others who live in Islay. Their amusement seemed greatest when they considered the debate surrounding their own fortunes. Clearly these geese were confident that their own position would remain secure. Life for the geese was easy and the height of their philanthropy was to fence off an area to protect those less fortunate than themselves – the people of Islay. The geese inhabited an idyllic island, where all they required was provided and they could enjoy their own leisure pursuits (in another cartoon this included ‘people-watching’ with binoculars and telescopes). They were the incomers who had made Islay into their own sort of rural idyll, with nothing more than a paternalistic nod in the direction of the indigenous residents.

Figure Twenty-eight: *‘The Geese’* from *Ileach* Vol. 20 No. 24 15th October 1994.



²⁹⁵ One assumes ‘Royal Society for the Protection of Ilich’.

²⁹⁶ *Ileach* Vol. 18 No. 6 2nd February 1991.

These cartoons suggest that during the 1990s it was possible to dichotomise the debate about the goose problem along a number of lines: geese versus local people, conservationists versus farmers, outside values and knowledge versus local values and knowledge. This chapter concerns these differences as they have related to the goose problem. The historical dimensions of geese and farming are investigated, particularly the search for political solutions and the ways in which geese have been valued and classified. The discussion of these problems focuses on the strategies of shooting and compensation and the way in which these have been perceived and employed in political discourse. The reasons why these two approaches achieved such a prominence in the debate about geese are also discussed.

8.1 *The origins of the problem*

When I spoke to people in Islay about the goose problem, I was interested to uncover when farmers had first become aggravated about the effects of goose grazing. When I asked a former factor of Islay Estate he replied, “Day one – they’ll bitch about anything.”²⁹⁶ They had apparently even protested when there were only 5000 geese on the island. For some farmers however, problems only began to arise relatively recently. I asked Archie Baxter if he had geese coming onto the Rhinns farm that he occupied up to the early 1980s:

No. We had a few; there was a flock of about forty White-fronts grazed the... area... They didn’t materially alter their numbers – right up for twenty years – up till about Nineteen Seventy. The first time we had Barnacle Geese – I think it was Nineteen Seventy-four when we had five coming in over the winter. And that area was the southern limit of the Barnacle Geese. It was probably the southern limit of the White-fronts too. Almost the southern limit of the White-fronts, although they did go to above Bolsay too. And they just gradually increased from that.

Did you think of them as a problem towards the end of your time there?

²⁹⁶ Rather surprisingly, SNH’s Goose Project Officer thought that geese had only really started to become a problem in the 1990s.

To me they weren't a problem. They were increasing... they were increasing quite a bit by then. We were having, we were looking on them as potentially this problem because we were getting the occasional flock of the Barnacles (two or three hundred coming in) after usually February, March and dropping in then... In Nineteen Eighty-four, Nineteen Eighty-three there were a lot in behind the lighthouse along the road. Barnacle flocks would be coming in there maybe five or six hundred at a time... By that time we were seeing problems. I wasn't particularly worried at that time because... from Nineteen Sixty we'd had a succession of mild winters; except for Nineteen Sixty-three, we'd had a succession of mild winters. And I thought a serious, a bad, winter would reduce numbers in that they wouldn't get back to Iceland. This is why (I hadn't realised) was the benefit of the plant breeders. And nobody else had either. It's only in hindsight that we're seeing it. And it didn't seem to matter what the winters were like, they were just increasing every year.

It seemed to Archie, then, that the population of geese in the Rhinns had crept up, almost unnoticed, from previously small and stable levels. Even when the numbers rose he thought this was only temporary and would be arrested by the next cold winter. It was only later on that he realised that the burgeoning and expanding goose population was really an effect of changes in farming brought about through plant breeding technologies. Later, Archie reflected on the population levels of geese he had encountered when he first arrived in Islay.

When I came in Nineteen Forty-nine there were six thousand Barnacles and two and a half thousand White-fronts. People were quite happy with that. That was the number; that was the carrying capacity of the island; that was the winter carrying capacity of the island. Now there had been six years of war and Islay Estates completely controlled the foreshore on the whole of the island. There was no wildfowling anywhere on the island because the only place on the island that was worth fowling is actually the head of Loch Indaal... There was no wildfowling then because they controlled the foreshore. The only shooting there was the winter shoot when they had about three days on the seawall in the morning. That's all. Now that had been going on for forty years before the war and right up until the late Nineteen Seventies. It was a completely family shoot;

there were no shooting parties, completely for family shoots and that was your numbers. They weren't under pressure from anybody and needn't have been because the Islay Estate wouldn't have allowed it. So the protection that was being heaped on them was quite unnecessary.

The scenario presented by Archie was of a secure population of geese protected by Islay Estate for their own sporting interests. So long as the estates retained their sporting interest the geese were safe. A rather similar account was offered by goose biologist Malcolm Ogilvie when I asked him what factors had been behind the changes in goose populations in Islay since the 1950s:²⁹⁷

The principal has to be the improvement in the food supply. From the Fifties until now there's been a dramatic change in the quality of the grass being provided by the farmers. Several factors have acted in their favour: the fields have got bigger and the grass mixtures have improved. The amount of fertiliser being used has increased hugely – artificial fertiliser, which was here in the Sixties, Seventies and into the Eighties. And the farmers were just growing more and better grass, which fed the geese which meant that they were very probably breeding better than they would otherwise have done. So the population was rising; probably the mortality of the geese through the winter was dropping; breeding success was probably getting better. And throughout the Sixties and Seventies the shooting was very, very light indeed. There was only a two-month season anyway – December and January. Virtually all the shooting was in the hands of the estates and they shot it very lightly – perhaps four parties a winter that shot two or three hundred birds.

Was it controversial or did people want them to shoot them more, like the farmers?

Oh there were big complaints about it from the farmers but they were all tenants. They couldn't do anything about it; they didn't have shooting rights. So the estates carried on in the same old way and shot two or three hundred geese and thought that was super sport for themselves and their family and their friends. The fact that numbers were going up was of increasing concern through the

²⁹⁷ See 4.2.2 and 4.3.2 for further details regarding the legal status of the geese and the agricultural problems that they were perceived to cause.

Seventies but nothing very much was done about it until the late 70s when some of the shooting was acquired off the estates and geese were spreading off the estates too. Shooting went up but it didn't make a huge difference till the end of the Seventies, early Eighties. So good protection, increasing and improving food, was all that was needed to stimulate the population.

According to Archie, the event that transferred responsibility for the geese from the estates to the government was the UK joining the European Union:

There was this conservation boom, all due to integrating with the EU. They had a tremendous increase in all these directives, all these agreements, can't remember the name of them all.

Birds Directive.

Birds Directive, the Helsinki Agreement, and some other agreement. And every one of them has got an opt-out clause but the opt-out clauses are cancelled out by the next agreement. The government had allowed itself to be boxed-in. They can't operate any sensible policy on their own.

They can't be flexible?

They can't be flexible. There's no flexibility allowed now or available now at all. Yes there are opt-outs but never operated. And the RSPB just take the government to court.

So rather than the geese being managed on a local level, the EU directives (and more specifically the UK government's implementation of them) had forced an inflexible and more distant regime of protection. If the government deviated from its accepted responsibilities then the RSPB would be there to take action in the courts.

One of the most significant aspects of the Birds Directive as implemented in the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act was that it changed the way that geese could be formally classified in Islay and thus also the means by which they were managed. Previously, as Malcolm and Archie indicated, the geese had been game to be shot by the laird and whomsoever he allowed to shoot them. As such they were a valuable resource with exclusive ownership of the rights to shoot them. To an extent this exclusivity was beginning to breakdown during the 1970s as Islay Estate in particular began to sell off

land and shooting rights. But in 1981 the geese became protected and could no longer be formally categorised as a game species. Both Barnacle and White-fronted Geese were now classified as being threatened and were thus protected. Shooting geese purely for sport was expressly forbidden. However the legislation *did* allow geese to be shot as a pest species by anyone whose crops were deemed to be seriously affected, regardless of whether they held the shooting rights on their land. This potentially allowed Islay farmers to shoot geese, in most cases for the first time. Paradoxically this also meant that geese were shot much more heavily after they were protected than they usually had been when regarded as a game species. The people who wanted to control them and reduce numbers (the farmers) were now able (at least theoretically) to take action, although the influence of the estates in managing the geese was persistent. It was also this division in the formal classification of geese, as both a pest and as a protected species, which created the possibility for farmers to be compensated for tolerating them. The legislation and the new classification of geese it provided was thus the catalyst for the debate that followed during the 1980s and 1990s.

8.2 *The new debates*

The nature of this new debate was evident just a year after the Wildlife and Countryside Act protected the geese when David Stroud, a goose biologist then resident on the island, wrote a short article for the *Ileach*.²⁹⁸ In this he was critical of the manner in which the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland (DAFS) had gone about issuing licences for shooting geese. These were only supposed to be issued after all other methods of reducing crop damage had been attempted but according to Stroud:

This year, as a fully protected species in British law, the Islay Barnacle Geese can be shot virtually anywhere on the island from their arrival in October to their departure in April. This situation the DAFS regard as ‘an acceptable compromise’. There is every indication that licences are being used to legitimise the continuance of sport shooting for its own sake, since it seems that shooters are operating in fields where the geese are doing little damage and in the absence of any prior attempt at scaring.

²⁹⁸ “Barnacle Goose licences finalised,” David Stroud, *Ileach* Vol. 9 No. 25 1st November 1982.

Complications arose in the issuing of shooting licences because initially DAFS stated that they would only give them to *either* the landlord *or* the tenant but not to both. Many tenants had leases that stipulated a prohibition on shooting geese and so there was frequent concern from farmers that they could not apply or would require their landlord's permission.²⁹⁹ As such, the debate over goose shooting came to highlight divisions and power relations not only between farmers and conservationists but also between farmers and landowners. In defence of their position, landowners were keen to express the role that sport shooting played in managing the geese on their tenants' land, even though shooting *purely for sport* was no longer possible. Richard Scott, a local landowner, argued the following in a critical response to Stroud's article:³⁰⁰

There will always be a sporting element in geese control. Sportsmen are the obvious choice, being the only people having the necessary expertise to carry out the task but it would seem to be a crime in the eyes of conservationists if the shooting is enjoyed at the same time.

In other words, so long as all goose shooting had the primary aim of controlling the geese then it should be fine for the shooters to indulge in the secondary aim of enjoying this task. Frank Morrison, a trustee of Laggan Estate, added a somewhat contradictory argument as to why sporting shoots were essential to managing geese.³⁰¹ He began by suggesting that, "the population [of Barnacle Geese] varies cyclically, dependent ... only very marginally upon how many are shot in Islay," but later suggested:

The cost-effective way of controlling them is to shoot them under the licence system. This has to be done by 'sportsmen', and in a manner which they can enjoy – as they are the only people prepared to pay to do the job.

²⁹⁹ When I interviewed Catriona Bell about her time editing the *Ileach* I asked her about this issue. She said, "In actual fact the tenants *could* always have obtained shooting licences if the geese were damaging crops. But the tenant farmers didn't want to believe the facts if these did not accord with the estates. There's been an issue with this with the new goose scheme proposals and people have been suggesting there would be conflict with the estates over shooting rights. But so long as people are shooting geese as a pest rather than as sport shooting then they don't need to go through the landlord."

³⁰⁰ *Ileach* Vol. 9 No. 26 15th November 1982.

³⁰¹ *Ileach* Vol. 10 No. 11 18th April 1983.

Morrison finished his letter by asserting that, “the landowners have been holding the balance between the farmers and conservationists for years.”³⁰²

In 2000 I interviewed David Boyd, who had been the factor of Islay Estate during the 1980s. I asked him if he thought sport shooting could help to manage the goose population:

I don't think it could because even when they were shooting a lot of geese (perhaps a thousand a year) it didn't make any difference... With tenant farmers, they didn't have time to shoot the geese because they needed to be busy doing things on the farm. I always encouraged the farmers to let me take care of the geese with a shooting party.

Why weren't the farmers happy about this?

Well, that's just the standard landlord/tenant approach. *

So even some time later, there was still a conviction from the estates that it was for the farmers' own good that shooting parties should “take care of the geese”. This was despite an acknowledgement that shooting had generally had rather little effect on the numbers of birds. Hamish MacTaggart, a farmer who served on the Islay NFUS Wild Goose Sub-committee, rejected the paternalistic involvement of landowners in goose management, claiming that, “What the NFU disagreed with in the new legislation was that it gave the responsibility for crop protection to other than tenant farmers [sic].”³⁰³ The Union called for licences to be issued first to occupiers rather than landowners.³⁰⁴

At around the same time³⁰⁵ the RSPB (following from David Stroud's comments) formally complained to the EEC³⁰⁶ that geese were still being killed purely for sport, with birds being shot outside of agricultural areas and licences given to visiting foreigners. Despite these concerns, it soon became apparent that the increased shooting activity during the early 1980s had not reduced goose numbers and was at best only

³⁰² Cf. *Ileach* Vol. 11 No.22 22nd September 1984: “The Ileach is open for letters and comment by the Islay farming community on where they, the little people, stand in this battle between giants – the conservationists and the landowners – in which they are unavoidably involved.”

³⁰³ *Ileach* Vol. 9 No. 26 15th November 1982.

³⁰⁴ *Ileach* Vol. 10 No. 17 11th July 1983

³⁰⁵ *Ileach* Vol.10 No. 8 7th March 1983.

³⁰⁶ “‘Indiscriminate’ shooting a threat to the Barnacle Goose”, reprinted from the *West Highland Free Press, Ileach* Vol. 11 No. 9 24th March 1984.

stemming their increase.³⁰⁷ It was also argued that because shooting was still substantially in the hands of sporting interests, it also had little impact on controlling the distribution of geese around the island. There was a conflict between the shooting to protect crops that farmers generally desired and the sport shooting that estates were keen to see perpetuated under this guise. This impasse prompted calls from conservationists for an organised scaring and sanctuary system. David Stroud took up the case in favour.³⁰⁸

In virtually all respects, [scarers] could provide a greater intensity and regularity of scaring compared with infrequent paying shooting parties, who in practice only shoot in areas of 'good shooting' and at certain times of the day.

The scaring and sanctuary system eventually became operational once Islay Estate sold Aoradh farm to the RSPB and the NCC had concluded management agreements with farmers within SSSIs to compensate them for tolerating the geese on their land. This move represented Islay Estate's attempt to reconcile their increasingly controversial position in relation to conservation and farming by using their influence to assist with this separation of the island into scaring zones and sanctuary zones.³⁰⁹ Farmers outwith the sanctuary zones appreciated this distinction in part because the geese themselves were largely indifferent to which zone they happened to be in. The geese could be shot in the scaring zones but would soon return and continue feeding. Callum Neill described his experience on the land he farmed to the *Ileach*.³¹⁰

First thing every morning last year, I shot the geese on Kilchattan, they moved on to Ardura. I scared them off Ardura and they arrived back in Kilchattan.

Often the only redistribution being effected was within a farmer's own land or perhaps temporarily to a neighbour's. Donald Smith (a farmer whose land was greatly affected by geese) described the operational difficulties and iniquities of the scaring system to me thus:

³⁰⁷ See Table Two in 4.2.2 for changes in the number of geese in Islay during this period.

³⁰⁸ *Ileach* Vol. 10 No. 13 16th May 1983.

³⁰⁹ See 4.3.2.

³¹⁰ *Ileach* Vol. 11 No. 22 22nd September 1984.

You could apply for licences to shoot them in the past. The Estate shooting was maybe once or twice a week, which is not enough to protect the grass. The Estate would just come and shoot the geese, which were eating all your grass and they would take the money from the shooting. But in the end the responsibility for the geese lies with the conservationists. They know if they still need protecting. It's not the farmers' job to keep the numbers down it's the conservationists'. The idea of the SSSIs was that this was the area to scare the geese into but it didn't work... I thought it was unfair when the farms in the SSSI were getting paid for the geese when we weren't but were suffering the same way. We were included within the scaring scheme but this meant that if you went out to scare geese from one of your fields (and they would usually be in the ones most distant from the farm) then they would be back again in half an hour, which was about the time it took you to get back to the farm. And because you would then have to go back out if you wanted to scare them it was a full time job if you wanted to keep the land clear. If you worked all the daylight hours on all the farms then the geese would probably start feeding more at night, especially when the moon was out. I felt we had to give in to the birds. I can't scare them; I can't keep them off the land. Why shouldn't I be getting paid for them? *

There thus appeared to be a contradiction at the heart of the debate over goose shooting in the 1980s in Islay. Shooting was deemed a threat to the geese by conservationists and was claimed as an essential component of pest control by many farmers and landowners. And yet the fairly heavy shooting during this period had rather little effect on the geese, in terms of either reducing or limiting their numbers or controlling their distribution. From the above it appears as if there was even some contemporary awareness of this contradiction. The implication from this is that the issue of goose shooting was important not because of the effect it was considered to have had upon the geese but because of what shooting represented to the different parties involved: the conservationists, the farmers and the landowners and sporting fraternity. The symbolic urgency of shooting was created by the ambiguous classification bestowed upon the geese in the aftermath of the Wildlife and Countryside Act. Confusion over what exactly the Act meant in its dual classification of geese and how the new legislation was to be implemented and policed escalated the contestations further.

For conservationists the threat posed by shooting was less to the geese themselves (although there was greater concern in the early 1980s when numbers were at their lowest) and more to the authority of the Wildlife and Countryside Act. An organisation such as the RSPB may have perceived the Act as imperfect but it was the strongest conservation legislation ever known in the UK and so it was vital that its integrity was not confounded.³¹¹ Although the Act allowed for the shooting of both species of goose it also stipulated that this should be a last resort and for crop protection only. Evidence that shooting continued primarily for sport thus brought the sternest protests from the RSPB because it showed the Act to be weak and confused in its implementation and authorisation. Any queasiness about sportsmen enjoying their shooting was secondary to these concerns even if this might have helped to drum up protests.

Landowners considered the furtherance of their own shooting activities to be a test for their continuing authority on the island and for the value of (and *values* of) sport shooting. The initial confusion over the acquisition of licences allowed for the prolongation of sport shooting under the guise that the estates were acting on their tenants' behalf by protecting their crops. But the growing concerns of farmers over sport shooting's effectiveness in controlling both the numbers of geese and their distribution prompted Islay Estate to sell off land to the RSPB, thus paving the way for a more formalised system of goose redistribution and protection, though nevertheless one still incorporating shooting as an integral component.

For farmers the newfound possibility of shooting geese on their land was curbed by the constraints (sometimes internalised) created through the confusion between their rights in law and their rights as tenants. Obtaining a licence to shoot geese could thus be seen as an expression of self-determination and independence, as much from the landowners as from the legislation and the conservationists who implemented it. But the growing realisation that shooting and scaring had little effect on the geese encouraged farmers such as Donald Smith to "give in to the birds". He and others began to appreciate that the geese were largely indifferent to the actions of people in Islay, either to protect them or to control them. Only the incidental effects of agricultural improvement had an impact on the population and this could only ever be positive. If a farmer wanted to

³¹¹ See also 4.3.3 for the response of conservation organisations during the Duich Moss saga.

make his land less attractive to geese then, because it would also be less productive for livestock rearing, his business would be rendered uneconomic. As such the geese were a force of nature that like the weather and the seasons was beyond the control of the farmer and the shotgun. But, although the geese maintained an inevitable presence, they were not a straightforward given of the farming economy because they were something people had held rights over, in the case of the estates, and that later they had responsibility for, in the case of the NCC and the government. The shotgun had been effective against the geese when the estates held the rights to shoot them and had only been concerned with removing individuals for sport. But the protection offered by the Wildlife and Countryside Act changed the target to a largely unmanageable population and the shotgun then became a political weapon effective only against the integrity of the law. The Act of Parliament had redefined an Act of God into a human contrivance that the government was answerable for.

Once it became clear that the scaring and sanctuary system as operated during the 1980s was ineffective, then the most plausible move remaining under the legislation appeared to be a compensation system that effected voluntary protection for the geese throughout the island.³¹² The dual classification of geese in the Act meant that the protection they received was always conditional on the damage that they caused to agriculture. Any scheme that intended to protect the geese fully would thus need to offer something in return because the protection would always be voluntary and not obligatory. If the geese had been unconditionally protected then the case for compensation would be considerably weakened because farmers would then simply be keeping within the law by leaving them undisturbed. There had always been considerable urgency to compensate for goose damage within areas specifically designated for their protection (some SSSIs and later SPAs) because shooting here would have compromised these designations.³¹³ But once the conservationists had (like Donald Smith) “given into the birds” then making compensation available to all Islay farmers whose land geese affected became almost inevitable. The farmers would not tolerate iniquity whilst the conservationists would not tolerate further erosion of legislative protection. In doing

³¹² Although a universal compensation system took some time to arrive it had been called for many years earlier. An article in the *Leach* Vol. 1 No. 3 3rd December 1973 argued, “It would seem wholly reasonable for an ornithological levy to be raised to be paid back to the affected farmers on a per acre basis.” However, it was unclear who would pay this levy at the time.

³¹³ See the more recent case in 8.3 below.

this, the conservationists, specifically SNH, could also be seen to have acquiesced to the demands of Donald and other farmers that it was they who should take responsibility for the geese. Once the IVGMS was operational and shooting virtually ceased, the role of the estates and the shooting fraternity in managing the geese was greatly diminished.

8.3 *The compensation schemes*

Whilst the principle behind the goose compensation schemes was the same as for ordinary SNH management agreements, there was an important difference in how the losses in income were incurred. With a management agreement farmers were paid on a profit-foregone basis either for not carrying out a potentially profitable activity or for conducting operations that cost them money. Farmers only suffered losses if SNH decided it was necessary and the farmer chose to enter into the agreement. The farmer then received compensation for those negotiated losses. The losses associated with management agreements were *thus a matter of human choice and control*. With the goose schemes the farmers were also compensated on a profit-foregone basis and at least a proportion of what they lost was replaced. But the difference between this and management agreements was that farmers would always have suffered economic losses from the geese *regardless of whether they were compensated or not*. Losses from goose grazing were therefore *a given that was ostensibly beyond human control*, although if the geese had not been protected at all and the farmers were thus able to shoot them then this could have reduced losses slightly (although at best rather little and at considerable expense in time and money). So although both systems replaced lost income, there were important differences in how this income was lost. Despite this, farmers' seemed to have similar perceptions of the compensation offered through each system.

One might assume that if a farmer received compensation for losses that were inevitable and beyond his or anyone else's control then this could be perceived as profit rather than as a replacement for losses. But although some farmers implied that they regarded compensation as a form of income, none expressed any inclination to carry more geese on their land and thus make more money from them. In part this was because they considered the level of remuneration they received to be inadequate. But although this

was obviously better than nothing, the complete removal of compensation had become very difficult to conceive of politically. The reason for this was that SNH had effectively taken responsibility for a problem that they neither created nor controlled. Whilst they did not cause the goose problem, by protecting the geese SNH were acting as surrogates for the birds and were duly required to pay their way. Alternatively, it could be suggested that by protecting the geese SNH and the government had established themselves as a market and, as such, farmers were being paid to produce geese. This argument was put forward by Catriona Bell in an explanation of the farmers' view of the goose problem that she wrote for the *Ileach* in 1998:³¹⁴

It's like...a restaurant owner serving meals which cost at least £14 to prepare. Would he be happy to accept just £10 for them? Would he stay in business long if he did?

If he had a regular clientele for whom he planned and costed menus then, through government policy, had to accept rowdy bus parties arriving whenever they felt like it, messing up the place and increasing his overall costs, would that restaurant owner not feel there should be realistic recompense?

This is the way it is for farmers who grow grass as feed for their sheep and cattle only to see great flocks of geese devour it and pawdle [sic] the fields. The cost of providing grass for one Greenland goose customer for its six month stay is at least £14, and could be as much as £32...So the cheques, which for the average farmer are not 'large', do not come anywhere near covering the farmer's cost.

It takes money, skill and labour to grow grass...and grass is the main and most environmentally friendly source of food for our regular clientele – the quality cattle and sheep for which this island is famous.

So the farmers, using their knowledge and productive labour, were providing food for the visiting geese but were not receiving adequate recompense. Furthermore, they were being *forced* to feed the geese by the government. The implication was that it was only government legislation that made farmers extend their hospitality toward the geese and

³¹⁴ *Ileach* Vol. 26 No. 3 19th December 1998.

that there was an alternative choice that they were being deprived of taking. The government paid the farmers for this work but the geese were never considered to be their “regular clientele”. Whilst farmers felt responsible for the latter, they had no such feelings towards the geese. Nevertheless, an analogy was still drawn between produce in the form of cattle and sheep and produce in the form of geese, although the lack of control over the uninvited “rowdy parties” of geese mitigated perceiving them as desirable in the manner of true domestic animals. Despite this, the ambiguous classification and behaviour of geese still allowed a basis for comparison with farm animals. Don Currie was one who put forward a commonly held theory about the goose population:

To farmers it seems foolish to have so many geese. A shepherd would know how many sheep a hill could feed and if you put a hundred sheep up there and can't feed them it would be stupid. But the conservationists don't seem to see it that way. My father used to tell me that when the numbers of Hares had got very high during the war eventually they all got a disease and died off. I wonder how long it would take for that to happen to the geese. *

Although geese (unlike sheep) could not be controlled by the farmer and (unlike Hares) were able to move freely over long distances, they were sometimes still thought of as subject to the same demographic forces as domestic animals or wild mammals. Perhaps it was the conservationists' perceived lack of understanding of the long-term cycles familiar to older farmers like Don that would prove their downfall.

Tom Wilkie drew a similar comparison that illustrated how different his attitude towards the geese was from the RSPB's:

If a farmer had let the numbers of sheep on his farm increase like the geese have then they'd be in court for overstocking. What the RSPB is proposing is that the geese'll be forced to move elsewhere because of starvation. They'd like to see the ground go black to push the geese away or bring the numbers down. It'd be better and less cruel if they just shot the geese. *

To Tom the way that the conservationists had managed the geese ran counter to the

manner in which a farmer looked after his livestock. The RSPB only seemed concerned with the geese (that they ‘farmed’) as a population and were not interested in the welfare of individual birds. He implied that the farmer, with his demand for welfare and knowledge of managing livestock, would do a far better job if charged with responsibility for the geese.

But it was SNH and not the farmers who took responsibility for the geese on the inception of the IVGMS in 1992. A feature of the scheme was that great emphasis was placed on the counting of geese because farmers were paid a set amount for each goose their land carried. As such, many of the concerns that farmers related to me about the IVGMS in 2000 were to do with the two factors that were used to calculate the amount of compensation they received: the accuracy of the counts and the level of payment for each goose. Iain Taylor was one farmer who felt that the amount of money he received came nowhere near to compensating him. I asked him what sort of sum he thought would cover his costs.

I wouldn’t have that sort of figure in my head; I wouldn’t really know. All I know is that I’d rather not have the geese than have the money. I know that’s not feasible; we’re not going to get it. But the fact of the matter is, if we were getting the right money it still wouldn’t matter because we wouldn’t be getting the right counts. A hundred and fourteen geese is, *is nothing*. I know a boy that’s getting twenty thousand for it and he cuts silage a fortnight after us.

Perhaps because Iain was a farmer under considerable economic pressure at that time, his preferred strategy would have been to have no geese, no compensation and to simply be able to get on with attempting to make a living from farming. Iain also thought that farmers who received far more compensation were scarcely any more affected by geese. SNH had provided details of how much was given to individual farmers in its freely available *Facts and figures* book (Scottish Natural Heritage 1999a).³¹⁵ Although this was done in a spirit of bureaucratic transparency, it also provided farmers such as Iain with contextualised information about neighbouring farms. If two farms were similar in the apparent effects of goose damage but the two farmers received vastly different amounts in compensation, then the validity of the

³¹⁵ See 2.4 and 7.2.

counts on which these amounts were based was brought into question. Whilst Iain was unwilling to consider the compensation he received as income, the farmer who got £20,000 yet hardly suffered any more losses was, in Iain's view, benefiting considerably from the system.

Gilbert MacLugash was also dissatisfied with the counts:

The geese only come down here when they get hungry and I suppose I'd be happier if we didn't have them. I think that the counts are a problem as well. They always seem to come round in the afternoon when the geese aren't often about. We get lots of zero counts so the overall average is only twenty-six.

Does that compensate you enough?

Well, the money doesn't even compensate for the extra feed. I mean I don't hate the geese but even if I only get five hundred for a few days then that still causes a lot of damage. *

Gilbert questioned the timing of the counts, implying that the land of other farmers was counted at more appropriate times than his. He also suggested that, even if counts were conducted regularly and a thorough job was done, potentially damaging numbers of geese could be missed in between visits. There was scepticism as to the fairness of averaging the counts because this brought down his level of compensation to well below what he needed to cover his costs. There is a big difference between twenty-six geese and a hungry flock of five hundred but an average could easily conceal this. This perception that the counts were inaccurate or imperfect was widespread and made it difficult for SNH to be seen as impartial even though counting might have appeared to provide an objective measure of each farmer's loss. This impression of objectivity was further hindered by the low rate of payment given for each goose counted. The amount was lower even than any of the published estimates of losses from goose grazing and so, although the level was based on what SNH could afford, it looked to farmers like Iain Taylor that the payments they received had little to do with any measurement of external realities.

Jack Matthews, an Englishman with a large tenancy in the centre of the island, was also concerned about the count system. In fact SNH's management of the goose problem

bothered him with what seemed an unmatched vehemence. I interviewed Jack in September 2000 and clearly he had prepared well. After enquiring about when he had first come to live in Islay I asked no further questions for the next two-and-a-half hours, during which time Jack provided me with what amounted to a lecture covering the problems he had faced in his dealings with SNH, his theories about the workings of the conservation system and the methods to which he had resorted to improve his situation. Jack's farm was within an SPA and because of this he had been compensated with an SNH management agreement (a hangover from the scaring and sanctuary system) rather than through the IVGMS. In 1998 the management agreement, which gave higher payments, came to an end and Jack and the other farmers in the same position had to enter the IVGMS if they wished to receive any compensation. Jack explained to me why this was a problem:

I've never felt that the counts for this farm were accurate. The counters usually come after the geese (which are here early in the morning) have been scared off. I complained to the counters who said they'd vary their time but they didn't. But it was really this feeling that we weren't being given fair money that led to the decision to shoot. The whole IVGMS wasn't set up for the SPAs and that was why it didn't work for us. We have to reseed every six years and in the IVGMS you can't shoot the geese. *

These inadequacies had encouraged both Jack and Tom Wilkie to take responsibility for the geese into their own hands by asking for licences to shoot geese on their land from the Scottish Executive.³¹⁶ In order to convince others of the damage that the geese caused, Jack had started taking photographs. He showed me a series of pictures he had taken of one of his fields by the shore of Loch Indaal. The first photograph had been taken a few months after reseeding and the grass looked lush and green. He then showed a picture of the same field the following spring. "Where's the grass?" Jack asked me rhetorically about the photograph of a now bare looking field. There were also some pictures of flooded pools and some close-ups showing extensive moss but little grass. Jack told me that he had needed to reseed the field the following year. The combined cost of this reseeding over the two years was £11,000 and he only got one cut

³¹⁶ See 4.4.2.

of silage and a little grazing out of it. The amount of compensation that he received for the whole farm was only £16,000.

What seemed to motivate Jack was the desire to make others realise the scale of the problems caused to him by geese. He was not alone amongst Islay farmers in feeling that the compensation levels on the IVGMS were too low but he took this frustration a stage further in actively seeking to change practices and increase the payment levels. In this he was partially successful. For example, he managed to get SNH to conduct nighttime counts on his farm because he believed that on some nights geese fed and grazed in large numbers. Whilst Jack was perhaps extreme in his approach, the whole debate about goose grazing in Islay was characterised by the attempts of the farmers and their representatives to convince the conservationists and the government of the scale of the problem and the need for appropriate recompense. The conservationists were perceived as responding with inertia or resistance. Donald Smith described one particular problem:

I don't want to point the finger at anyone for the failure of the goose schemes but they just seem to keep doing survey after survey and everything keeps getting stalled. It's just an excuse to prolong the payments because every survey seems to last for three years. *

The years of my fieldwork were marked by notable inaction on the goose issue because of the wait for the National Goose Forum (NGF) to report.³¹⁷ Any changes were held back until then, even though the need for reform had been widely recognised for some years. After a meeting where a new goose scheme was discussed³¹⁸ I spoke to a crofter who had been in attendance:

Over the last few years the NFU have had loads of meetings with that guy Roddy Fairley.³¹⁹ We'd bombard him with all these complaints about the geese and he would just sit there agreeing with us and saying that he couldn't do anything about it. So for a whole evening we would just sit there and talk at him. *

³¹⁷ See 4.4.2.

³¹⁸ See 8.4 below.

³¹⁹ The Argyll and Stirling Area Manager for SNH.

The above offers an explanation for why the goose problem in Islay seemed so intractable. Firstly, the sides had to come to some sort of agreement on the nature of the problem and its extent. Secondly, a system had to be formulated. Thirdly, each system had to be assessed over a period of time. Fourthly, there was a new consultation process that had to be completed and so on, back to the beginning of the cycle.

When Jack Matthews and Tom Wilkie decided to apply for shooting licences, they were in part hoping to cut through this laborious process and get the government to come round to their position. When they initially applied for licences to the Scottish Executive, these were granted for twenty and thirty geese respectively. Despite the insignificant numbers of birds involved, the RSPB appealed against the decision because it represented an attack on the integrity of SPAs and SSSIs. The idea that *any* geese could be shot within an area designated specifically for their protection was deeply problematic to the Society. After a further appeal, the RSPB won the case on the basis of this argument. For his part, Jack told me that he had been driven to apply for licences because SNH had refused him anything other than entrance to the IVGMS and that for this he would get only a third of the compensation than he had received with the management agreement. SNH were unwilling to extend the management agreements until the Goose Forum reported (a decision that angered the RSPB).³²⁰

Anthony Scott, whose late father Richard had written to the *Ileach* in the 1980s to put the case for shooting geese for sport, was also unhappy about the compensation system, particularly due to its effect on the revenue his family had previously received from shooting:

Has the compensation you get through the goose scheme ever been adequate?

No, but there is a realisation that that's all you're going to get. Ten years ago we might have been able to afford to make a protest and not take it but the way it is now we have to take it but it's nonsense. We'd make more money if we were allowed to rent out the shooting than we make from the goose scheme.

Do you think there's a market for goose shooting?

Absolutely, but it's never gonna happen so I'm not going down that avenue because it's not the way forward. And because the RSPB and SNH are so

³²⁰ *Ileach* Vol. 26 No. 2 5th December 1998.

powerful and have got the public behind them then that's just not going to happen...

Did it used to be quite a significant thing on the estate?

Yes, huge. Before the goose ban in Nineteen Eighty or whenever, this house here was the guesthouse for goose shooters and it was full from October till April.

Where did they come from?

Italy, Spain, England, France all over, and it took more money than calf sales and lamb sales. And the trouble with all these schemes is they pay the farmer for his loss of grass, which is fair enough, but what about the estate owners who are losing tens of thousands of revenue?

And when you had tenant farmers were you shooting on their land as well?

Absolutely and they were quite happy because even though they weren't getting the money they get now, they were getting the geese controlled. And they would phone up and say they've got geese coming in on our land and you would send your guests down there to keep them off and shoot them. Everybody's happy.

So although Anthony had become closely involved with conservation organisations, his links with the sporting fraternity still encouraged him to see this as the best solution to the goose problem. It had once provided his family with a very good income and he thought that it was also helpful to tenant farmers. But Anthony acknowledged that this was not a solution that the conservation organisations were satisfied with and because of their influence it was unrealistic to regard sport shooting as "the way forward". He also implied that the parlous state of the farming economy had made the goose money more significant. Even though the amount was "nonsense" it had become too significant a form of revenue for farmers to refuse it.

8.4 *Negotiating the new scheme*

Once the National Goose Forum had finally reported its recommendations in 2000, a number of meetings were held to discuss how these recommendations would be implemented on the island. One such meeting was held at the Bridgend Hotel on April 12th. This was attended by local farming representatives and conservationists and was

chaired jointly by Roddy Fairley from SNH and John Maxell, Scottish Executive Agriculture Officer for Argyll and the Western Isles. The primary aim of the meeting was to decide on the membership of the local management group. Roddy Fairley explained that the NGF had produced a framework for management schemes and that the local group would have to work within these parameters to formulate a scheme for Islay. When the local group had established the basis for a scheme this would be sent to the National Review Body for approval. It was hoped that a new scheme would be up and running by the following autumn when the geese returned.

A principle that the NGF had established was that the goose populations needed to be managed. An important aspect of this, which was explained by Roddy Fairley, was to calculate whether populations of geese were stable and secure and to consider whether they would tolerate certain levels of mortality from shooting. One of the main aims of the strategy put forward by the NGF was to sustain goose populations. A viability analysis of the two main populations in Islay indicated that the numerous Barnacle Geese should be able to tolerate a certain level of shooting without their numbers being reduced (what was termed an 'acceptable risk') but that the Greenland White-fronts could not. As such it seemed that an important aspect of the strategy was to manage goose populations by keeping them at a stable (and therefore predictable) level, rather than having to deal with fluctuations that could cause concern, both to conservationists and farmers, and disrupt any carefully calibrated scheme.

The most important prescription for the new scheme was that it should include a zoning system. At the meeting it was commented that a zoning system had been attempted in Islay before to little effect.³²¹ This was not disputed by Roddy but as with many other points he emphasised that it would be up to the management group to work out the best way of running the scheme within the given parameters. One farmer commented from the floor that the geese went where they wanted to and that zoning systems would therefore be unworkable. However, Roddy proposed that, as well as scaring in certain areas, there could be manipulation of habitat so that some fields would become more attractive to geese and others less attractive. There was also the suggestion that conditions in Islay might be altered so that the geese spent more time elsewhere.

³²¹ This refers to the old scaring and sanctuary system of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

One of the most significant of the proposed changes from the IVGMS was that instead of compensation being based on a head count it would be calculated on the basis of area. At the meeting, Roddy was asked why the basis for the payments was to be changed. It was suggested that this would be less fair than the headage system in which farmers were paid for the geese they were reckoned to have. Roddy responded by saying that the geese moved around a great deal and that any count system was open to being challenged for accuracy. An area payment would get around these problems and it would also be administratively simpler and less expensive than the counts and headage payment system. He thus seemed well aware of both the impracticalities of counting and the concerns that many farmers had about its accuracy. His admission of these problems also indicated that SNH was quite willing to rid itself of its own deficient system.

The approach that Roddy and SNH took toward the new scheme appeared to represent a readiness to accept culpability in the past and, more importantly, to redistribute responsibility for the geese and the running of the scheme. This attitude was highlighted in an exchange between Roddy and two farmers, Michael Phillips and Jack Matthews:

Michael Phillips: So are SNH now agreeing with the NFU's figures on goose damage? It just seems as if your attitude is changing now you're not governed by the resources available.

Roddy Fairley: The local group needs to decide on the management strategy and if it's good then the review body will say 'well done, here's the money'.

Michael Phillips: Are you going to agree with us because it'll make you look like miserable sods in the past!

Jack Matthews: So Roddy's going to say 'We've been totally wrong all these years.'

Roddy Fairley: Yes, I'll say that if you want. The establishment of the Goose Forum was evidence in itself that SNH had got it wrong.

Jack Matthews: Maybe now you've admitted that it might mean giving us some money. *

Roddy's eventual willingness to explicitly admit to SNH's errors amounted to a virtual

washing of hands. Because SNH had been unable to come up with the answers (or perhaps the funding) to sort out the goose problem, it was now a case of handing over to the farmers, under the auspices of an ‘all party’ review body.³²² This responsibility and the knowledge, resources and diplomacy it entailed, had clearly been a burden for an organisation that had always striven to represent itself as neutral and inclusive.

Towards the conclusion of the meeting, nominations for the local group (to be called the Islay Goose Management Group – IGMG) were sought. Well-rehearsed nominations were received for NFUS representatives and also individuals from the SCU and the SLF. Mike Peacock from the RSPB was forced to nominate himself and there followed a debate about whether it was appropriate for the RSPB to be involved, particularly given their apparent opposition to shooting. Mike said that the RSPB would not object to the shooting of Barnacle Geese outside SPAs and John Maxwell stressed that as a major landowner with considerable knowledge of geese they would prove helpful. Their nomination was accepted without further complaints, to which Jack Matthews said, “It’s nice to hear the RSPB think that geese can be shot.”

During the following summer, whilst the new scheme was being negotiated, I asked a number of farmers what hopes they had for it. Anthony Scott was pessimistic:

I haven’t really heard much about it but I think it’s not as good as the old scheme. I didn’t have a problem with the old scheme and I don’t know why they stopped it.

Was it just that you would have liked the old scheme but maybe with a bit more money?

Absolutely. The old scheme was the fairest way. If you’ve got the geese then you get paid; if you haven’t then you don’t. So all this nonsense about area payments is just local politics so that the money can be spread. Where I’m sitting, with the geese numbers I get, I want more money.

Have you always been happy with the counts?

No, but that’s human; it’s impossible and I understand that. So no I’m not happy with the counts but it’s the best of a bad job.

³²² At the meeting it was suggested that the review body at the national level would be comprised of ‘the usual suspects’, probably including representatives from all interested sectors.

Anthony was bothered that the change to a new scheme was not being done for the sake of fairness and accuracy but to placate the concerns of other farmers, perhaps like Iain Taylor, who felt they were not getting their share. The only thing that needed changing, as far as Anthony was concerned, was the rate that was paid for each goose. The anticipated switch to payments based on area would be inequitable in comparison with the existing system, despite the latter's flaws.

Graham Campbell was also sceptical about the proposed scheme:

I reckon we're very harshly done by with the geese. We get such a low count. Everyone thinks that the farmers here get compensated but we only get a few thousand pounds.

Do you think things will get better with the new scheme?

I don't think so; it'll be the same ones getting the money. *

Rather than worrying, as Anthony had, that the new scheme might reduce his compensation payment, Graham expected that the change would simply represent a continuation of the inequities of the old scheme. He implied that others would give little quarter to sympathising with his predicament and that any attempt on his part to protest would be futile.

Over the summer of 2000 the IGMG met several times and produced various sets of proposals for the National Review Body to consider. The stated aims of the proposed management scheme were as follows (Islay Goose Management Group 2000: 4):

- To provide fair compensation for all farmers and crofters on Islay who suffer loss arising from the impact of protected geese;
- To introduce a management framework which will seek to stem the rising numbers of geese on Islay by both increasing mortality and by encouraging dispersal of geese away from Islay, and
- To try and ensure that favourable conservation status is maintained for the geese under the management measures provided in the scheme.

In many respects the new scheme that was proposed harked back to the scaring and sanctuary system that had operated prior to the IVGMS. As with that earlier approach there was an emphasis on attempting to manage the goose populations by controlling numbers and distribution. Whilst the failure of the scaring and sanctuary system was widely acknowledged, what seemed important in the new scheme was that a concerted effort was made to keep numbers at appropriate levels and to keep birds off sensitive areas, such as newly reseeded fields.³²³ This approach contrasted with the IVGMS in which protection had been prioritised. In order to receive compensation, farmers had been required to agree not to take up shooting licences. With the new scheme, farmers outwith the SPAs would be able to apply for licences *and receive compensation*. Farmers would also be paid for the costs of scaring geese from their land if it was agreed this was necessary.

These proposed changes meant that SNH were no longer taking responsibility for the losses incurred by farmers because of the geese. The emphasis had changed from the *singular responsibility* inherent in the protection approach of the IVGMS to the *joint responsibility* of the management approach proposed for the new scheme. The goose problem would no longer be framed within a simple producer/ market or victim/ perpetrator analogy. Instead the responsibility for managing the geese would be assumed by the Islay farming, landowning and conservation communities with SNH acting principally as administrators. If there were any problems with the scheme then local farmers would be involved in a review and, as such, SNH were seen to have neither created nor imposed the scheme unilaterally. They were simply the administrators doing as instructed by both the Islay Goose Management Group and their government bosses.

When I returned to Islay in April 2003 I discovered that the administration of what became the Islay Goose Management Scheme (IGMS) was not something taken lightly by SNH. By that time the scheme had been running for three winters. Although farmers were no longer paid on a headage-basis, the mooted area-based payments (so decried by Anthony Scott) had been shelved in favour of a density-based system. This

³²³ It was acknowledged that any attempts at managing the populations was only likely to be successful in the long-term, if at all (Islay Goose Management Group 2000: 8-9).

required data both from farmers as to how they wished their land to be zoned and from regular goose counts. During my visit I spent two days goose counting as part of the SNH team. Counters normally operated in teams of two and I was partnered with Malcolm Ogilvie, who had been counting geese in Islay for forty years. Each team drove one of six set routes that covered the different parts of the island. Although the routes were set, the starting and finishing points were varied to placate farmers like Gilbert MacLugash who complained that counters always arrived when the geese were absent. Malcolm joked to me that every farmer in Islay said they have more geese first thing in the morning. As we drove along the route we stopped whenever encountering geese or when we came upon a likely vantage point. Small flocks could be counted one-by-one but larger flocks were done in fives or tens. We also noted which field the geese were in.³²⁴ The count figures were handed into the SNH Goose Management Officer, Margaret Mackay, who collated them with other counts in order to calculate the compensation payment for each farmer. For each farm a density would be calculated based on counts conducted over three years. Because the island was counted around twenty times each winter, this meant that compensation payments for each farm would be based on approximately sixty separate counts.

In the IVGMS, concerns as to the accuracy of SNH's counts had been legion and this had contributed to creating the perception amongst some farmers that the scheme was unfair and inequitable. After these admitted failures, SNH's main concern in administering the new scheme (other than to ensure the 'favourable conservation status' of the geese) was to present themselves to the farmers and to the public as scrupulously fair and disinterested. Whilst SNH had always counted the geese in an intense manner during the IVGMS, there were a number of aspects to the new IGMS that had the effect of creating or enhancing this semblance of neutrality:

1. Frequent counting, averaging totals and beginning routes at different points reduced the visibility of human error and variation, or what might be construed as bias. The very intensity of counting was an acknowledgement from SNH that farmers perceived this as a task fraught with imprecision. However, it was still possible for there to be allegations of inaccuracy because of the potentially significant gaps in between counts and because farmers could still compare their

³²⁴ Each field had a code number recorded on a map we were given.

- count with those for other farms and be left wanting for alternative explanations of difference (although see point three below).
2. The primacy of counting as the method to calculate damage was reduced by the introduction of zoning. This meant that, instead of the payment being based solely on the number of geese, the counts were developed into densities and the payment rate was based on the designation of land into zones. Farmers decided for themselves how their own land should be zoned.
 3. Because the calculation of the compensation payment was based on a variety of factors in the IGMS, SNH omitted the average goose count for farms in their *Facts and figures* document. If farmers wanted to compare their own payment with another farmer's then this became more difficult to do because of the increased complexity of the calculation.
 4. In the IGMS the compensation money did not come from SNH's own budget, as had been the case with the IVGMS, and so they would be indifferent to how much was paid. Their only financial responsibility was for the administration of the scheme.

Given the supposed objectivity of enumeration, it is perhaps surprising that goose counting was seen as a weak link in SNH's attempts to establish a neutral and disinterested relationship with all Islay farmers. The problem arose because there was still a discrepancy between the numbers produced from counts and the farmers' perceptions of their own circumstances and those of other farmers. Even though the intensity of counting might have diminished this discrepancy (or was perhaps "the best of a bad job") it could never successfully resolve it. SNH's approach to their involvement in goose management was to establish an impression of a dehumanised administration in which human error and bias were rendered insignificant. This was aided by the development of the calculation process but more significant was the shift in responsibility for the goose problem established through the collaborative approach to the conception and operation of the new scheme. It is no surprise that complaints against the IGMS were absent from the local newspaper because any public criticisms could be deemed an attack on the representatives of the Islay community that had forged the scheme.

The shifts that underpinned the historical approaches to dealing with the goose problem

were primarily in the classification of the geese. This has given on to changes in how responsibility for the problem has been allocated. Initially the responsibility lay with the estates. But, unlike their tenants, the estates regarded the geese primarily as a valuable resource and not as a pest and, because they wielded such influence over their tenants, this situation remained entrenched for decades. The most fundamental change in classification was achieved through the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981. This created a formal division in the way that geese were classified but despite the fact that the Act remained unchanged, the way that these divisions were interpreted and implemented in the various management strategies it produced varied. Initially the attention focussed on shooting as both a management strategy for controlling geese as pests and as a threat to geese perceived as protected and endangered. The scaring and sanctuary system was an attempt to share responsibility for the geese, with farmers and landowners outside of designated areas responsible for scaring the geese and those within paid by the NCC to provide favourable conditions for the birds. The inability of this shared system to have any effect on controlling the goose populations, and the financial inequities that resulted, led to calls for the conservationists to assume full responsibility. This came to fruition in the IVGMS in which all participating farmers were compensated by SNH, effectively as payment for the voluntary protection of the geese. Because this approach was imposed from outside and attached singular responsibility for the geese to SNH it emphasised the dichotomies that had emerged from the local political discourse and in the goose cartoons in the *Ileach*: geese versus local people, conservationists versus farmers, outside values and knowledge versus local values and knowledge. The subsequent development of the IGMS sought to continue the compensation approach but also to redistribute responsibility so as to reduce the emphasis on these dichotomies. The change from a protection-based system to a management-based scheme would be unlikely to have any greater impact on the goose populations but it served to lessen the financial and political burden on SNH and allowed farmers to express a degree of independence within the constraints of a government sponsored scheme.

Conclusion

When I returned to Islay in 2003 to help Malcolm Ogilvie with goose counting, he told me about how once, many years earlier, there was some scepticism from farmers about the accuracy of his counts. To assuage these concerns Malcolm took out two NFUS representatives to show them how he did the counting. As he took them around the island, it seemed to him as if they were more interested in what other farmers were doing with their land than with the geese. Malcolm thought that a lot of farmers tended not to know some parts of the island very well, only their particular bit of it, so they were often unfamiliar with what was going on in other areas. Ironically, one of the main concerns that farmers had about Malcolm's goose counts was that his knowledge of the island was too limited because he was not, at that time, a resident. "But all I needed," Malcolm told me, "was the ability to read a map."

This thesis has been about the reading and making of certain kinds of maps both by myself as an ethnographer and by my informants. In this conclusion I draw together the various aspects of these maps, explanations and symbolic classifications that I encountered in Islay and have described herein. It is these that provide answers to the three programmatic questions posed at the end of Chapter Two. The previous four chapters in particular have exemplified the sorts of explanations and negotiations of difference that arise from the relationship between conservation organisations and farmers in Islay. The writing of the ethnography has revealed how participants in this discourse situate themselves by drawing on symbols and tautological models of connection to reveal, conceal and negotiate difference. These aspects of the relationship have been examined diachronically in order to illustrate how the use of certain symbols has developed and how relations have become more entangled and negotiable.

In order to emphasise the above points, the first part of the conclusion considers the effects that symbols have within the discourse of conservation and farming in Islay. This is followed by a discussion of the tautological models of connection that underpin the explanations and negotiations, and that weave together the different parts of different maps and the movements that take place within them. I then draw together the symbolic and the tautological by examining both the situating practices that are

employed by participants in this discourse and the ways that the relationships involving conservationists and farmers have become entangled. This is followed by reconsidering the place of the ethnography within anthropological literature, particularly the work of Bateson, and by discussing the prospects that arise from this work, for Islay as well as for anthropology.

9.1 *Symbols and their effects*

In Chapter Two I drew on the ideas of Anthony Cohen to point out that an essential quality of symbols is their ambiguity. I then argued against Cohen by pointing out that the sorts of difference that symbols reveal and conceal should not always be thought of through the metaphor of the boundary because difference is more often imprecise, complex and negotiable than clear-cut and discontinuous. Symbolic boundary approaches therefore tend to understate the entangled nature of relationships of difference. I then posed the question of how symbols were used to perceive, negotiate and explain difference in the entangled relations involving farming people and nature conservationists in Islay.

I began to put forward answers to this question in the Introduction to Part Three. Here I argued that symbols represent relationships and that because symbols tend to be ambiguous, they also have the effect of revealing the ambiguities in relationships. The use of symbols thus enables a constant negotiation of difference and, together with the reading of context and relevance, this is integral to situating practices. The perception of difference arises through the dialectic interaction of both situation and situating practices. Whilst there is thus considerable scope for individual agency, symbols can also have agency themselves and their meanings can sometimes be partially given by others. For example, during the course of this thesis I have described how geese, the RSPB reserve, SSSI designations, a good farm and many other things (or ideas about things) were entered into discourse as symbols in particular ways and then used by individuals as part of their situating practices. I summarise some of the most prominent of these symbols below and also include a discussion of how nature conservation is itself a symbol of certain kinds of relationship.

To farmers a good farm was an ideal that they worked towards and that they judged others by. It was a visible symbol that revealed both a farmer's own labour and productive values and his or her ability to wrest a living from the enduring land. It was also a measure of the degree to which a farmer had overcome or resisted the constraints on his or her productive values from government or the laird. As such, a good farm was the symbolic representation of the various contestations of the farmer's life and his or her skill in prevailing in these. It represented the farmer's own relationship with his or her land, with the morality of productive farming and with the outside world. However, the agricultural recession and the arrival of conservation had revealed to some farmers certain differences in the relationship between a good farm and a good livelihood that were not previously apparent.

So the ideal of a good farm and its physical representation could be employed to reveal differences. When the RSPB reserve at Loch Gruinart was compared with a good farm, it could appear at variance. To the RSPB it was both a farm and a nature reserve but to many farmers the small differences they perceived threw into relief the contrasting circumstances, knowledge and values of the RSPB. Both farmers and the RSPB used the dual identity of the reserve as a discursive vessel to think about and explain the relationship between conservation and farming. This brought into view the question of the exact point at which the two ideals of a good farm and good conservation might coincide. A good farm and good conservation were made visible in the land in the same way and so it could seem perverse that the RSPB should manage their land in a way that appeared to farmers as inimical to good farming. The RSPB considered that Loch Gruinart could be regarded as a good farm because even though it had some wet fields full of rushes they were still able to produce good livestock as well as maximising their wildlife output. The appearance of the reserve was also symbolic of how the RSPB's priorities in Islay had developed in Islay and how conservation could be perceived as incompatible with the sort of productive farming that had existed on the site prior to their takeover.

Whenever a farmer negotiated a management agreement with SNH, the relationship between a good farm and good conservation was brought into view once again. The system of designated areas may have been seen as a constraint on the development of a good farm but some farmers were able to play this off against the need for SNH to

ensure ‘good conservation’. Farmers could thus use the tension between the two strategically, although the management agreement system was rarely described entirely favourably either by conservationists or by farmers. Despite this, the declining prospects for good farming during the 1990s meant that some farmers were aggrieved that they were unable to play the system as fully or as successfully as others.

Management agreements and SSSIs could therefore symbolise the differences over time in the relationship between farming and conservation in Islay. The ambiguous status of the money received by farmers from management agreements made it possible to envisage different relationships with government and the outside world. For example, some farmers could appear to be treated advantageously because they received a good ‘income’ from SNH, whilst conservation could also be seen as ‘the future’ for the farming economy – something that revealed the need for farmers to engage with new discourses and adopt different economic strategies.

The dual classification of geese in the Wildlife and Countryside Act as both agricultural pests and threatened species created the possibility for a range of different policies to be adopted and for geese to stand for the relationship between conservation and farming in different ways. Total protection and total pest control existed at either symbolic pole and policies shifted between these through management approaches and protection approaches. In the former responsibility for the geese was shared and farmers were less constrained in terms of how they could control the geese but in the latter SNH effectively took full responsibility for the birds, which were totally protected. Although a reversion to the shared responsibility of the IGMS could be seen as an acknowledgement of SNH’s failure, it also enabled them to attain a greater semblance of neutrality because it meant that they were no longer taking full responsibility for the geese as pests. The dual classification of the geese was thus a metaphor for the duality of farming and conservation and for how this had developed over time. The management approach of the IGMS was a way of reconciling the two poles of protecting the species and controlling the pest and could thus reveal the potential for reconciling the differences between farming and conservation.

The most powerful and pervasive symbol to emerge in the discourse I have described is that of nature conservation itself. The very idea of ‘conserving nature’ could seem a contradiction because nature (the land that is still there, the goose population) was

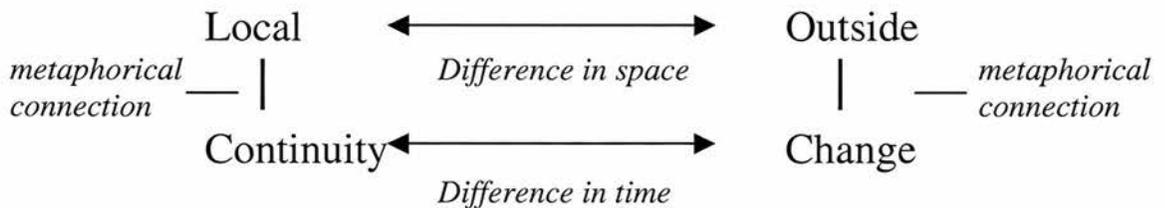
generally conceptualised by farmers as something enduring and resistant to change. The imposition of the idea that nature requires conserving could therefore be perceived as a conceptual shift rather than as the preservation of vulnerable wildlife and habitats. For example, the idea that a good farm could be threatening to nature seemed alien to many farmers and even those who were pro-conservation questioned whether management agreements were always helpful to nature. Nature conservation thus brought to attention the relations between continuity and change, local values and outside values and nature and human activity (for example in terms of wildlife and farming). If nature was not necessarily enduring this also meant that its conservation was not 'natural' but negotiable.

All of these symbols were politically compelling because their ambiguity or duality enabled different aspects of a relationship to be revealed or concealed in particular circumstances. But their ambiguity was not always random or unintentional; these symbols were not created as empty vessels (cf. Cohen 1985). 'Geese', 'the RSPB reserve', 'management agreements' and 'nature conservation' were actively constructed in ways that had a discursive relevance and that informed (though did not determine) their employment in the situating practices of participants in interaction. There was thus a dialectical relationship between symbols, the construction of their meaning and their employment by individuals and organisations. Symbols were both representative of relationships and produced through them. Agency could exist at all levels in a way that entangled power relations rather than rendering them as hierarchical or marginalizing (cf. Nadel-Klein 1991). The discursive use of symbols thus tended towards the ongoing and subtle manipulation and negotiation of small differences and not on the imposition and consolidation of symbolic boundaries. Even symbols that were entered into discourse with explicitly dual classifications (e.g. the RSPB reserve and geese) were not always employed to express difference in terms of boundaries but could also be used to reveal ambiguity or compatibility within the relationships they represented.

9.2 *Tautological models of connection*

Throughout the thesis, attention has focussed on explanations and understandings of the relationship between conservation and farming in Islay and also on the underlying connections that informed these explanations. In the Introduction to Part Three I drew on Gregory Bateson's ideas of tautology and abduction to provide a perspective on these underlying connections and how they were used. Tautologies are self-evident, self-generated (though often shared) models that provide ways of converting experiential descriptions of the world into explanations, maps and classifications. Abduction is the process by which different phenomena are mapped onto the same tautologies. So in the case of the ethnography I have presented, abduction occurred when individuals produced different explanations of different things using the same tautological models. Through abduction these different phenomena could come to seem related, patterned and sensible and trends over time could be perceived and anticipated. Whilst contrasting and often conflicting explanations were described, ongoing processes of abduction meant that recurring, and in some senses hegemonic (Gudeman & Rivera 1990: 15), assumptions and models of connection underpinned this diversity. Therefore relationships were not always explained and negotiated in random ways but were configured within specific connective parameters.

Within the ethnography, the primary tautological model of connection used to produce explanations concerned the relationship between the local (or Islay) and the outside on the one hand and continuity and change on the other. It can be represented as follows:



In this tautology, continuity and the local were connected in a metaphorical sense, as were change and the outside world. The local thus became synonymous with continuity and the outside became associated with change. Difference was generated between the

two poles. Difference over time was produced between continuity and change whilst difference over space developed between the local and the outside world. This tautology essentially concerned the positioning of phenomena, people, events and things and this is why it was so fundamental to situating practices. The tautology was shadowed in discourse by the employment of symbols. Symbols were thus used to perceive meaningful difference in relationships i.e. to position phenomena, people, events and things, which themselves could all be symbols and reveal further differences. The mapping of these symbols onto this tautology was achieved through abduction. Metaphorical connections were also made through abduction because different things can be positioned in relation to the tautology in the same way. This tautological model of connection was common to both farmers and conservationists but each individual or organisation could potentially situate themselves in specific ways by using this model and employing symbols.

For both conservationists and farmers in Islay, discourse involved negotiating and reconciling one's position and those of others relative to this tautology. Change in particular was something that needed to be dealt with carefully in Islay, both when positioning oneself as more 'local' or as more 'outside'. This is not to say that change was never desired in Islay but that it needed to be handled with care. Islay, seen from many perspectives, had special qualities but these special qualities were intrinsically vulnerable. These special qualities could include Islay's diversity, the morality of farming and social relationships or the wildlife and their habitats. Change could appear to disrupt social relations on the island (although less 'tip your hat' might reduce the significance of some problematic power negotiations); it could encourage a move away from a shared value of self-sufficiency towards the more individualistic independence of 'every man for himself'; it might lead to the land being neglected so that it returns to its original state; and it could reduce the diversity of knowledge, landholdings or people and thus reduce Islay's adaptability. Alternatively change could diminish the habitats of Corncrakes, Choughs and breeding waders or lead to a decline in the numbers of geese or raised bogs. These special qualities needed human endeavour to protect them and to render them continuous and, because Islay could sometimes appear to have changed less than the outside world, it also seemed more vulnerable to the wrong sorts of change that did nothing to further the continuance of Islay's special qualities.

There was thus a necessity for change and the outside world to be carefully negotiated in Islay so that any constraints on local qualities or disruptive powers were not overwhelming but could be avoided or worked within. Anxieties arose when new ideas, practices or conditions arrived too swiftly or unexpectedly. More particularly, there were concerns when change appeared to originate at too great a remove from the island and it often seemed that these points of origin were growing ever more distant and impersonal and thus less negotiable. For example, the locus of political influence appeared to have shifted from the laird to the government and increasingly to the European Union. The tautological points thus became emphasised at the extremes and this tended to increase the contrast between Islay and the outside world. As Strathern (1992) mentions, continuity and change tend to be mutually reinforcing such that drawing attention to one also draws attention to the other. Within the above tautological model, the same was also true for the local and the outside because of the pattern of metaphorical connection within the model. If one's position as more 'outside' was emphasised symbolically then this tended to create a dichotomous, discontinuous and less negotiable sense of difference. If change was made very apparent then the outside world came to seem more powerful because change could not be emphasised without drawing attention both to the outside world from where the change would be expected to originate and the special qualities of Islay whose continuance the change could potentially threaten.

Situating practices in Islay therefore tended to involve the de-emphasising of potential conflicts between the local and the outside because this was required in order to avoid the dichotomisation of difference and to facilitate negotiability. This was very apparent in the development of relations between conservation organisations and farming people. When conflicts arose around conservation issues, the problem of distance from Islay was usually pivotal. For example, it was often pointed out that the NCC and the RSPB were based in England, that the government did not appreciate the scale of goose damage and that the Rhinns designation was imposed from afar and revealed to farmers in an impersonal letter and list of constraints. Most of the measures that conservationists employed to ease these anxieties involved reducing the perception of distance from the local and thus facilitating negotiation. So there came to be an emphasis on community consultation, education, local offices and local staff. Likewise, if people in Islay wished to do something about a problem then it needed to be

communicated to the very distant figures at the top of the hierarchy, at least until a local office was established or the bigwigs came to Islay. Just as some farmers sought to reduce the ever lengthening distance to their market by going out into the world and selling the special qualities of their produce, Jack Matthews and Tom Wilkie highlighted the derisory levels of compensation they felt they received for goose damage by applying for shooting licences – a move that led to the goose problem in Islay being the subject of a court battle between the government and the RSPB. All parties in the discourse were thus abducting onto the same tautological model to explain, negotiate, strategise and situate in many different contexts. Contestations over conservation issues and making a living as a farmer during an agricultural recession both involved the favourable resolution of one's own position and the positions of relevant others in relation to the same primary tautological model.

Conservationists were keen to reduce the perception that they were distant from the local because this position made it appear that they were a threat to the special qualities of farming life in Islay and encouraged resistance rather than co-operation and influence. Rather than representing a change originating from outside, conservation needed to be perceived as allowing for the continuity of Islay's special qualities; to do this required conservation to appear more local. This became more achievable because the declining agricultural economy meant that the once assumed link between production and a good livelihood had been eroded and so the economic support provided by conservation could be more readily perceived as allowing for continuity. Farmers could then point out that they were getting paid to do what they were doing anyway and so conservation payments were allowing people to continue farming and to maintain its special qualities when otherwise this might have been impossible. Even though conservation seemed to constrain productive labour or go against 'good farming' this could thus be reimagined as continuity in the evolving context of a more local conservation and the more threatening and distant outside influence of the global farming economy.

So the primary tautology that connects continuity, change, the local and the outside operated as a self-evident, positional theory that was integral to processes that situate, negotiate, classify and explain. Through abduction this model was applied to different phenomena in a way that revealed patterns and trends and was reinforcing of the

tautological model. The pervasiveness and durability of this primary tautology and the possibilities for it to be questioned and changed require further examination. An important feature of this tautology was that it operated on a rather abstract level and as such was somewhat detached from changing circumstances that might have caused the model to evolve. The symbols that stood for or revealed the connections within the tautology were less abstract, and thus more subject to change and negotiation, but even though the employment, positioning and relevance of symbols developed over time, the tautological model within which these processes took place tended to remain. There was thus considerable scope for creativity, negotiability and change at the symbolic level of discourse but this always needed to correspond with the underlying status quo ante that was represented in tautology (Bateson 1979). Tautologies are thus a conservative and selective element in the stochastic process of learning (ibid: 139-174). Through abduction, individuals would fit their experience of a changing context to the tautological models that they already knew and through which they comprehended their world.

This context, within which the relationship between conservation organisations and farming people developed, was constantly evolving and invited a positional response from all those involved. At times this response resulted in conflict (particularly during the 1980s) but more often involved the ongoing negotiation of symbols and the positional differences they revealed, something apparent in the development of the goose problem. The reduction of overt conflict over conservation issues could be described as resulting from the acclimation (Bateson 1979: 147) of conservationists and farmers to one another. The two groups gradually learnt about one another and adapted some of their approaches to the relationship as it became more entangled and patterned. Again this did not result in tautological changes but it did generate change at a less abstract (and arguably more superficial level) because this was needed in order for both conservationists and farmers to resolve their positions in relation to one another. Some of these changes in the use of symbols within the tautological model are discussed in the next section, in which the situating practices of various individuals and organisations are examined.

9.3 *Situating practices*

The primary tautology is a relational model and is thus integral to conceptual positionality. Therefore the explanations, negotiations, classifications and strategies that are built upon it are always situational. An individual's situation is revealed through the use of symbols. Individuals and organisations use the ambiguity of symbols both to situate themselves and to situate others in different ways and at different moments. In this section I describe the situating practices of four individuals (Michael Phillips, Anthony Scott, Iain Taylor and Clive McKay) and two organisations (the RSPB and SNH). I also discuss how these situating practises (of explanation, negotiation, classification and strategy) are built upon the primary tautological model.

9.3.1 Three farmers

Michael Phillips was the son of an incomer, and he saw his father as an innovator who brought new ideas and technologies to Islay that enhanced the possibilities for a good farm. But when people asked him about the RSPB's management of their reserve, which was land that his father had drained, he could see this as just another example of an incomer taking over land and doing something new with it rather than an affront to farming values. Although he understood the work that had gone into draining the Flats and the pride that those responsible felt for this, he would add that the RSPB were able to produce top quality livestock that went for good prices. They might manage the land differently to most farmers but they still showed a capacity for good farming. But, despite being one of the least 'anti-RSPB' farmers around, when Michael was acting as a representative for the local NFUS he revealed a different position in relation to SNH. In discussions about goose management, he described SNH as looking "like miserable sods in the past" because of their intransigence. When Michael was discussing his neighbours, the RSPB, he was sympathetic towards their management of the reserve but when he acted as an NFUS representative in negotiations with SNH he was hostile to their inertia. He had a positive view of incomers (like his father and the RSPB), the innovation they brought and the productive values they showed. But he was negative towards the intransigence of SNH, partly because his role in the NFUS meant that he held a different position in relation to them but also because their inability to solve the

goose problem indicated a lack of concern with farming productivity and livelihoods. Michael's ambivalence towards conservation was highlighted when considering the role of conservation in the future of farming in Islay. To this he reckoned that, "Without conservation everyone can forget about it; anyone who resists can say cheerio to it." Through abduction, Michael thus predicted that farming in Islay and the outside interests of conservation were converging to the extent that he could, perhaps grudgingly, state that conservation would be economically essential for any farmer. So by employing the symbols of 'incomers', 'the RSPB reserve', 'geese', 'farming', 'conservation' and 'the future' Michael was able to reveal a multiplicity of contrasting orientations towards the tautological model incorporating the poles of local/continuity and outside/change.

Anthony Scott was a farmer who had grown tired of having to intensify just to stand still. His family had always been innovators since they had arrived on the island and brought in new technologies that helped to wrest local farming from "the dark ages". It was perhaps because he was different to other farmers that he was able to adapt to what he saw as the changing circumstances of farming in Islay. He understood that, to the outside world, all Islay had to offer was wildlife and whisky and he thought that in the future farming needed to embrace the powerful conservation organisations and work in partnership with them, as he had chosen to do with the RSPB. But unlike the RSPB reserve, his farm was recognisable as 'a good farm' and would be much better at showing how conservation and farming should work together. The partnership with the RSPB was not something his late father would ever have considered but he shared his father's enthusiasm for the role of sport shooting in managing the goose problem. Unfortunately he knew that this was incompatible with the interests of the powerful conservation bodies. Anthony's situating practices (such as his collaboration with the RSPB) thus balanced continuity and change and the local and the outside, which were self-evidently connected to particular values and knowledge. By employing symbols such as 'a good farm', 'the RSPB reserve', 'shooting' and 'his father' he was able to reveal that good farming and good conservation had become compatible but that this was contingent on the agricultural recession and the increasing power of the conservationists. This power was revealed by the impossibility of the return of sport shooting, even though this seemed beneficial for tenant farmers as well as the estates. This meant that Anthony's perception of the power of conservation organisations

appeared to influence his own strategies and perceptions of the future of farming. Like Michael Phillips, he saw the need to embrace conservation in order for farming to have an economic future but he adopted a somewhat different situating strategy in order to achieve this convergence.

Iain Taylor had been brought up to work hard on the farm to get the land into good condition and to build up the business. He and his family needed the land to make them a good living and their desire “to do better” had brought in a good regular income from dairying. By doing this Iain was able to be his own boss and to balance continuity and change through the enduring ethic of progress and wanting to do better. By trying to produce more, Iain continued to change the land that he farmed. But this cherished independence could be compromised by conservation schemes and designations. Iain was not opposed to these per se but, with his family’s pressing economic circumstances, they were best ignored. The outside could help to provide the innovations necessary for progress but conservation was a change that was inimical to progress, productivity and making a good independent living – a feeling reinforced by his experience with the goose scheme. Iain’s strategy was not to negotiate with these constraining factors but to avoid or ignore them. This revealed an opposition between conservation and farming, though not in terms of farming being good and conservation bad but because of their incompatibility – the two could not be reconciled. But Iain’s certainty in farming had dwindled with the closure of the creamery. Having “lost just about everything”, the continued growth of the business lacked the assurance it once possessed. Perhaps because the future was so uncertain, the tried and tested approaches of the past appealed as the most fitting strategy. Conservation and the worsening farming economy had served to make these connections and trends more explicit and open to question and this meant that Iain was finding it more difficult to resolve his position in relation to the tautological poles of continuity and change.

9.3.2 The RSPB

The RSPB were keen to adopt a positive relationship with ‘the community’. They consulted with the community on their management plan, supported community events and put money back into the community by using local labour and services. They also

wanted to show that they were just like other local farmers, the only difference being that they maximised wildlife rather than profit. However, the RSPB's support for local initiatives often seemed to be conditional. When the RSPB established their presence in Islay by purchasing the Loch Gruinart reserve, they were unable to continue dairying and thus provide support for the local creamery; they opposed the development at Duich Moss and the proposed wind farm; the reserve was sold to them as part of an attempt to solve the goose problem but was largely unsuccessful in doing this. The RSPB thus had the problem of reconciling their integration into the local community with their outside interests in wider conservation politics and their membership. Their apparent separateness from 'the community' created a problem for the Society because it reduced the possibility for influence, but it proved hard to resolve, in part because their wider concerns tended to place them in opposition to many in Islay. Their entrenchment on the goose issue emphasised a division from many farmers, to the extent that they were unable to get anyone to elect them to a position on the Islay Goose Management Group.

The Loch Gruinart reserve was used by the RSPB to try to reconcile their position as both local and outside, farmers and conservationists but for others it revealed the incompatibility of these positions. Many farmers considered that the reserve was "being actively run down" instead of being managed for geese, but the RSPB thought that they were still running the reserve rationally and towards clear objectives. It was simply that changing circumstances had meant they prioritised a wider variety of species, including, but not limited to, geese. They had thus given themselves the task of selling environmentally friendly farming both to farmers and the government. The need to educate people about what they were trying to do was therefore essential because this would explain their perspective on farming and conservation more clearly.

As well as being an organisation that was concerned with its own situating practices both in Islay and elsewhere, the RSPB were also a symbol that others could use to reveal aspects of their own position. Farmers could discuss the RSPB's management of their reserve and use it as a means to emphasise both their own attachment to the productive values of farming and the RSPB's separation from this. They could do this despite the fact that the symbolic classification of Loch Gruinart as both farm and nature reserve had been actively created by the RSPB. This duality still allowed the discursive space for farmers to position both themselves and the RSPB in different

ways.

The Society's history on the island illuminated the different relations that they had with government or landowners and (unlike farmers) they appeared to be powerful enough to establish these relationships on their own terms. If the government was not doing what it was supposed to do for wildlife then the RSPB were willing and able to take them to court to protect the integrity of the legislation. But the apparent differences between the RSPB and farmers allowed them to present a different image of how to farm and to show that their efforts at maximising wildlife were not inimical to good farming. "The proof for the farmer is in the sales" and some local farmers were happy to point out the good prices the RSPB's stock achieved. Thus both farmers and the RSPB used the Loch Gruinart reserve as a symbol towards which they were situated in terms of particular sorts of relation. This also revealed individual positionality in relation to the primary tautological model. By saying that they had a good farm and that the RSPB did not, farmers were invoking tautological connections and explaining their own position. For the RSPB their position of difference provided the opportunity to reveal different aspects of the relationship between conservation and farming to the more conventional local or governmental images.

Within the organisation individuals were still able to situate themselves in their own way. Whilst the RSPB were not always respected for their farming, some of their farm managers were considered by farmers to have been good and knowledgeable. Clive McKay was also able to show that he was different from the bigwigs from the mainland because after the discussion evening he found it easy to have a laugh with the farmers. He showed that he could understand that farmers sometimes had different perspectives and that environmentally friendly farming went "against the grain". In order to get the message across, all that was required was to explain what the RSPB did a bit better and to get farmers to see the reserve. Clive took any opportunity to sell conservation to farmers in Islay. For example at the ILUF meeting it was he and not Alan from SNH who emphasised the financial rewards of management agreements. Clive was able to show that he really believed in what the RSPB was doing in Islay and that conservation had a valuable contribution to make. Although he could understand the scepticism of farmers he thought that this was usually the result of misconceptions. As someone who could relate to farmers in Islay, he was well suited to sell "environmentally friendly

farming” and to have a significant influence. Clive was able to reconcile his own position as someone who lived in Islay but worked for an outside organisation. His position was revealed by symbols such as sharp suits, having a laugh afterwards and joking about conservation going against the grain but he was also intent on selling his own perspective (position) as a way of getting positive messages about conservation across to farmers.

9.3.3 SNH

From the moment of their birth, SNH had the difficulty of distinguishing themselves from their predecessors the NCC. The latter were indelibly bound with the conflicts of the 1980s and so comparing SNH with the NCC was a means for discussing how much the relationship between conservation and farming had changed. SNH could be much better than the NCC, or to some they could be ‘just as bad’. SNH could at least claim to be a more local organisation than the NCC, with an office on the island and resident staff – a far cry from the divisions of the 1980s when the scientific officers from England and the local officers sometimes seemed as if they were working for two separate organisations. SNH were thus a symbol that was used to reveal continuity and change in the relationship between farming and conservation in Islay. Like the RSPB, they were intent on situating themselves in relation to the local community and to outside objectives but this was achieved, at least in part, through local staff and offices. Without some sort of local position, SNH would lack influence and instead promote resistance.

As a civil service organisation, SNH were also keen to establish an impression of neutrality and even-handedness. It was not a local officer’s job to justify the legislation or designations that they administered. An SNH officer could even spend years telling farmers that they were right about the goose scheme and that SNH were wrong. The deficiencies were not his or SNH’s fault but were the fault of the legislative and governmental system – a system that they administered but did not create. Officers detached themselves from policy, even when they were involved in implementing it, thus attempting to situate themselves in a more local position whilst still ‘doing their job’. If a development was proposed within an SSSI, the only bias that SNH were

supposed to indicate was in favour of the wildlife and habitats for which the site was designated. They wished to present themselves as public servants and as such they had nothing to hide from the public, a point emphasised by the easy availability of statistics about management agreements and goose compensation. But this created the realisation amongst some farmers that they were not doing as well as others. To them it appeared that SNH were not as neutral as they liked to suggest or that some farmers were in a better position to manipulate the system and receive an income (rather than just inadequate compensation). SNH's neutrality was also threatened with the creation of the IVGMS in which they took responsibility for the geese and the damage they caused. The neutrality could therefore be endangered by the positioning of SNH as either too local or too outside. If they were too local then they might be biased towards some in Islay rather than being even-handed. If they were too outside then they could be swayed to act against local interests by their separate agenda. There was thus a need to balance their role of administering outside legislation with local integration and to offset constraints with facilitation.

Despite these various difficulties, David Sinclair was happy to work with SNH and to be publicised for doing so. Just as the government had once given grants that helped farmers to do more of what they wanted with their land, conservation payments could potentially be seen as supporting both farmers and wildlife. SNH could thus present an Islay farmer in their magazine as an example of how good farming and good conservation sat easily together. Like other sorts of innovation that had arrived in Islay, conservation schemes came to appear more normal and local and thus more predictable and negotiable. In a Batesonian sense, the relations between farming and conservation in Islay could be perceived as a predictable, convergent sequence rather than as unpredictable and divergent (Bateson 1979: 37-42).³²⁵ If SNH were less powerful they could actually be more influential because, rather than provoking resistance, their power was easily contained and incorporated into local practices and perspectives. This desire for predictability was also reflected in the proposals for a new goose scheme. The numbers of geese had once seemed stable but had then begun to fluctuate uncontrollably. Therefore the best option for the future was for all concerned to share responsibility for managing the populations so that these remained stable and

³²⁵ This is not to say that this relationship actually was convergent but that, at certain moments, farming and conservation could be seen as inevitably converging in the future.

predictable. In any case, there was still scope for individuals to manipulate the system in their own creative ways rather than being marginalised by it. Archie Baxter even decided to make an agreement with SNH to pick flowers on his croft, not as an act of submission but as an assertion of his individual agency on his own land. These were the rights that appeared to be most visibly eroded by the conservation system – a system that SNH could be seen to represent and to have powers within.

Within the situating practices described above, the primary tautological model acts as a set of co-ordinates of a map within which relationships and discourse are perceived and conceptualised. The model creates the parameters within which positionality is negotiated and context defined. Symbols are employed to bring relationships of difference (and thus position) into view. These symbols can be anything that achieves this purpose and in many cases they can be defined or partly defined by others and have their own agency. Thus although there is great scope for creativity in the use of symbols as part of situating practices, there are also common symbolic classifications that are powerful and influential. This creativity, powerful though it is, cannot be regarded as entirely independent of the situating and classificatory agency of others or the conservative status quo ante represented in the primary tautological model. In order for situating practices to be successful they need to create influence and negotiability in relationships, to produce strategies that allow for continuity as well as change and to thus reconcile the abstract conceptual poles of tautology. Over time, this constant process of conflict, negotiation and reconciliation created the entangled relations between farming people and conservation organisations in Islay that have been described throughout this thesis.

9.4 *Prospects*

The process of writing of this ethnography has revealed certain features of the relationship between conservationists and farming people in Islay. A deeper understanding of these features has been gained both through the use of Bateson's concepts of tautology and abduction and an examination of how symbols are employed in relation to these. These ideas have given a particular perspective on the ethnography, which has been described in the previous three sections of the conclusion. But in this

final section the ethnography will be used as a starting point for reconsidering these concepts and their utility.

Bateson's ideas have provided a deeper analytical perspective on the ethnography for a number of reasons. Most significantly, the model is stochastic; that is, it combines tautology with the random such that they work together to create new contexts of discourse and relationship without necessarily destroying or changing the underlying ideational parameters. As the discourse of conservation and farming in Islay developed there was an evolution of the context of the relationship that influenced individual positionality and perspectives and also the use of symbols in revealing these differences. New elements were introduced (new classifications, new legislative frameworks, new ideas, new individuals and organisations etc.) but these tended to be adapted (through abduction) to the status quo ante of the primary tautological model because this was integral to understandings of position, difference and thus interaction in Islay. This tautology was that from which positional questions and answers about differences and resemblances were drawn (cf. Harries-Jones 1995: 232). If these novel features could not marry the evolving symbolic and relational context with the primary tautology then they tended to disappear (as did certain ideas for dealing with the goose problem for example). To paraphrase Bateson (1979: 41), they did not last as long as those that lasted longer. New features created conflicts if they did not easily balance the conceptual poles of the primary tautology and this would often lead to the rejection or adjustment of the feature.

On occasions, long established ideas, methods and assumptions were also challenged to the extent that they disappeared from view or came into question. The evolving context of the global farming economy meant that the relationship between a good, productive farm and a good livelihood was questioned; the 'tip your hat' relationship between local people and the lairds largely disappeared with the arrival of less deferential incomers; and the idea that the numbers of birds of prey needed to be controlled also came to be publicly questioned, although the view was still widely expressed in more private contexts rather than disappearing altogether. One might notice that these once self-evident connections are similar to the primary tautological model in that they could have been regarded as 'assumptions' that provided a basis for explanations and positioning. But one can also note that they were rather less abstract than the primary

tautological model that I have described at length. They involved classifications that were aspects of specific and tangible relationships inhabiting the existential contexts of people's lives in Islay and, because of this, I see these assumptions as symbolic manifestations of the primary tautological model rather than as 'tautologies' in themselves. One might refer again to Ardener's (1989b) concepts of *p*-structures and *s*-structures – the former more abstract and programmatic, the latter more contingent and contextual. It should also be borne in mind that the primary tautological model might not have been the only or indeed the most important tautology that informed people's lives and actions in Islay. Indeed one must assume that it was underpinned by tautological connections that were yet more abstract and thus less visible in discourse.

An important way in which the analytical perspective brought to bear on the ethnography develops on Bateson's work is to emphasise the discursive use of symbols in relation to tautological "propositions of belief" (Harries-Jones 1995: 284) and an evolving context. One can see from the shifts in assumptions described above that changes in context meant that symbols such as 'a good farm' or 'tip your hat' tended to reveal different positional relations over time. Shifts in the positioning possibilities of symbols – which operate on the contingent and contextual level of *s*-structures – are always likely because they are an essential aspect of individual situating practices that reconcile the positional contradictions that develop between a constantly evolving context and the tautological status quo ante. A shift in tautology is far more difficult to effect because tautologies are more abstract (and thus independent of context) and conceptual than symbols and are thus more independent of context; a tautological shift is a paradigm shift of sorts. However, one might note that the primary tautological model described here is itself a set of metaphors in which relations between one set of ideas are revealed through another set. There is thus always the possibility for a realignment of these metaphorical connections over a long period of time but it would require a significant upheaval in context, such that new conditions were unable to be reconciled with the tautological status quo ante. In other words, what would be required is the "shifting [of] our whole system of abductions" (Bateson 1979: 134). To observe such a shift and the generation of new tautological models would thus require very long term studies: "We just know too little about the systemic embodiments of ideas, or how they grow, transform themselves and become differentiated" (Harries-Jones 1995: 234).

Finally, comment should be made on the question of the difficulty that conservation organisations have when dealing with change. Change creates problems for an industry that, at least on the face of it, concerns itself with preservation. Conservationists, like people in Islay, believe that wildlife needs to negotiate change carefully – particularly if that change is ‘unnatural’. But this attitude means conflict is always likely between conservation and the interests of others because of the desire of these others for development on their own terms. As I mentioned above, the problem is not so much how to conserve nature but how to conserve ‘naturally’. The separation of conservation into a special area of concern has the tendency to objectify the well-being of wildlife and habitats. Conservation has come to be something that is found in particular places and that moves from one place to another, a process that frequently appeared evident in Islay. I was often reminded of what Archie Baxter pointed out to me – that conservation had become an industry whose main concern was its own self-perpetuation. Wildlife and their habitats and the wider place of human beings in the world can seem peripheral in conservation discourses rather than central, and the ideal of conservation as a product of unregulated everyday practices appears an ever more distant prospect.

If this prognosis seems unduly pessimistic, then I should remind the reader of the many special qualities, however these are construed, that Islay possesses. During my time there, I never encountered anyone – farmer, conservationist, resident or visitor – who failed to regard the island as special in some way or other. My hope is that it remains so to all of them.

Appendix One: List of abbreviations

The world of conservation and farming is a world of abbreviations and this thesis is a reflection of that. Below are expansions of the abbreviations that are mentioned.

ADP: Agricultural Development Programme

A scheme that ran for five years in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

BSPS: Beef Special Premium Scheme

An agricultural subsidy under the Common Agricultural Policy.

CAP: Common Agricultural Policy

The EC's agricultural policy system, including the various subsidies.

DAFS: Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland

EC/ EEC/ EU: European Community/ European Economic Community/ European Union

ESA: Environmentally Sensitive Area

A designation that enables farmers to obtain money for farming in ways considered beneficial to the special environmental qualities of the area.

FFWAG: Farming, Forestry and Wildlife Advisory Group

An advisory body that sponsored the goose scaring schemes of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

FoE: Friends of the Earth

An environmentalist organisation, they organised the infamous Duich Moss meeting in 1985.

HLCA: Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance

An agricultural subsidy under the Common Agricultural Policy that was intended to support farmers living in Less Favoured Areas.

IACS: Integrated Administration and Control System

A system introduced to combat fraud within the EC Common Agricultural Policy. An example of the 'red tape' that farmers sometimes complained about.

IFFC: The Islay Fine Food Company

A company established by Islay farmer Nick Weston to market the produce from his farm.

IGMG: Islay Goose Management Group

A group established to develop a new goose management scheme in 2000. The group had members from various farming and conservation organisations.

IGMS: Islay Goose Management Scheme

The compensation scheme for goose management that has operated since 2000 and that was formulated by the Islay Goose Management Group.

ILUF: Islay Land Use Forum

A body established in the wake of the controversial Rhinns designation, which allowed various land use groups and interested parties to meet on a regular basis to discuss issues of general concern.

IVGMS: Islay Voluntary Goose Management Scheme

The compensation scheme for goose protection operated by SNH between 1992 and 2000.

LFA: Less Favoured Area

An area designated by the EU as disadvantaged for agriculture.

NC: Nature Conservancy

The government conservation agency up until 1973.

NCC: Nature Conservancy Council

Superseded the Nature Conservancy from 1973 until the inauguration of SNH in 1992.

NCO: Nature Conservation Order

Issued by the Secretary of State for the Environment when an owner or occupier refuses to enter into a management agreement with SNH. In reality it represents an extension to the consultation period.

NFUS: National Farmers Union of Scotland

The union that represents farmers in Scotland, which had an active branch in Islay.

NGF: National Goose Forum

Established to resolve conflicts arising between goose conservation and farming in various parts of Scotland.

NNR: National Nature Reserve

A nature reserve managed, though not necessarily owned, by the government.

PDO: Potentially Damaging Operation

A list of these is given to an owner or occupier of an SSSI. They consist of any operation likely to be carried out on the land that could damage the conservation interest. Sometimes referred to in Islay as a list of 'thou shalt nots'.

QMS: Quality Meat Scotland

A marketing scheme for Scottish produce.

RSPB: Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

A large conservation charity that owned nature reserves in Islay.

SAC: Special Area for Conservation

An area designated under the EC Habitats Directive.

SAPS: Sheep Annual Premium Scheme

An agricultural subsidy under the Common Agricultural Policy.

SCPS: Suckler Cow Premium Scheme

An agricultural subsidy under the Common Agricultural Policy.

SCU: Scottish Crofters Union

The union, formed in the 1980s, that represents crofters.

SEPA: Scottish Environmental Protection Agency

The government agency responsible for environmental standards. They were involved in the distillery effluent issue in Islay.

SMD: Scottish Malt Distillers

Organisation that operated the maltings at Port Ellen and who applied to extract peat at Duich Moss.

SNH: Scottish Natural Heritage

The government conservation agency in Scotland since 1992.

SPA: Special Protection Area

An area designated under the EC Birds Directive.

SQBLA: Scottish Quality Beef and Lamb Association

A marketing scheme for Scottish produce.

SSSI: Site of Special Scientific Interest

An area designated as being particularly important for wildlife or geology. These are administered by the government through SNH, although they are usually in private and multiple ownership and management.

UDV: United Distillers and Vintners

A large distilling company that own Lagavulin and Caol Ila distilleries in Islay.

Appendix Two: Dramatis Personae

These are the various individuals who are quoted in the thesis. I also list the sections in which they appear and the dates on which they were interviewed, where applicable.

Archie Baxter

Description: A retired farmer and crofter, who originally came to Islay in the late 1940s.

Appears in: 2.2, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 6.1, 7.2, 8.1, 9.2, 9.4

Interviewed: 11/02/00, 18/02/00

Catriona Bell

Description: Farmer's wife and former editor of the *Ileach*.

Appears in: 4.3, 7.1, 7.2, 8.2, 8.3

Interviewed: 24/06/00

Gordon Booth

Description: A former resident of Islay who was an early point of contact for conservation organisations.

Appears in: 4.1, 4.2

David Boyd

Description: Former factor of Islay Estate.

Appears in: 6.1, 8.1

Interviewed: 20/07/00

J. Morton Boyd

Description: A former regional officer for the Nature Conservancy and renowned Scottish conservationist.

Appears in: 4.2

Tricia Bradley

Description: RSPB Regional Manager South and West Scotland.

Appears in: 2.2

John Bricknell

Description: An Englishman who represented the Islay and Jura Marketing Board.

Appears in: 7.1

Norman Brown

Description: A retired farmer who also worked for the NCC in Islay during the late 1980s.

Appears in: 7.1

Interviewed: 12/01/00, 6/04/00

Graham and Ellen Campbell

Description: A beef farmer and his wife.

Appears in: 5.1, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 6.1, 6.2, 8.4

Interviewed: 25/08/00

Scott Campbell

Description: A fairly young beef farmer, who worked with his father.

Appears in: 7.2

Interviewed: 24/07/00

Jimmy Carmichael

Description: An elderly farmer who had mostly given over the running of his farm to his sons.

Appears in: 5.4, 7.2

Interviewed: 12/07/00

Don and Margaret Currie

Description: An elderly farming couple with a small farm in the Rhinns.

Appears in: 5.4, 6.1, 7.2, 8.3

Interviewed: 29/06/00

Robin Currie

Description: A local councillor also involved with the Scottish Crofters' Union.

Appears in: 4.3, 7.1

Interviewed: 7/07/00

Nigel Deacon

Description: An English hotelier and supporter of the RSPB.

Appears in: 2.2, 2.5

Roddy Fairley

Description: The Argyll and Stirling Area Manager for SNH.

Appears in: 8.3, 8.4

John Findlay

Description: A local councillor.

Appears in: 2.1

Graham Grant

Description: The Farm Manager at the RSPB Loch Gruinart reserve.

Appears in: 2.2, 6.2

Marion Hughes

Description: Local officer for the NCC at the time of the Rhinns designation.

Appears in: 4.3, 7.1

Gilbey and Mary MacArthur

Description: A crofting couple from the Rhinns.

Appears in: 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1

Interviewed: 4/08/00

Brian MacAskill

Description: A fairly young farmer, originally from the south of Scotland.

Appears in: 5.3, 5.4, 6.1, 7.2

Interviewed: 31/08/00

Alan MacDonnell

Description: Area Officer for SNH.

Appears in: 7.1, 9.2

Willie and Johnny MacFarlane

Description: Two farming brothers.

Appears in: 7.2

Interviewed: Willie interviewed on 15/08/00

Margaret Mackay

Description: SNH Goose Management Office/ Goose Project Officer.

Appears in: 8.1, 8.4

Interviewed: 10/04/00, 10/04/03

Gilbert MacLugash

Description: A hill farmer from the Rhinns.

Appears in: 5.1, 5.2, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 7.2, 8.3, 8.4

Interviewed: 17/08/00

Hamish MacTaggart

Description: A farmer who had served on the Islay NFUS Wild Goose Sub-committee.

Appears in: 8.2

Jack Matthews

Description: An English farmer who was particularly concerned about the goose problem.

Appears in: 2.2, 8.3, 8.4, 9.3

Interviewed: 4/09/00

John Maxwell

Description: Scottish Executive Agriculture Officer for Argyll and the Western Isles.

Appears in: 8.4

Clive McKay

Description: The warden of the RSPB Loch Gruinart reserve.

Appears in: 2.2, 2.6, 6.2, 7.1, 9.2

Interviewed: 7/09/00

Ray Michie

Description: Member of Parliament for Argyll and Bute.

Appears in: 4.3

Ian Mitchell

Description: Writer who protested against many of the activities of conservation organisations.

Appears in: 2.1, 2.2, 4.4

Interviewed: 8/09/00

Frank Morrison

Description: A trustee of Laggan Estate in the 1980s.

Appears in: 8.2

Neil

Description: Bus driver.

Appears in: 2.3

Callum Neill

Description: A farmer active in the local NFUS and who had previously worked on the farm that was taken over by the RSPB for their Loch Gruinart reserve.

Appears in: 5.4, 6.2, 7.1, 7.2, 8.2

Malcolm Ogilvie

Description: Bird biologist and environmental consultant specialising in geese.

Appears in: 2.3, 8.1, 8.4, 9.0

Interviewed: 8/11/99, 12/09/00

Audrey Patterson

Description: An Englishwoman who owned the farm on which I lived for a year.

Appears in: 2.3, 5.1

Interviewed: 22/09/99

Mike Peacock

Description: The RSPB's overall manager for Islay.

Appears in: 6.2, 8.4

Michael and Janet Phillips

Description: A farmer prominent in the local NFUS and his wife, a nurse. Michael's father **Bobby Phillips** had come to Islay from England in the 1950s.

Appears in: 5.4, 6.2, 7.2, 8.4, 9.2

Interviewed: 7/08/00

Amanda Richards

Description: Farmer's wife and local NFUS secretary.

Appears in: 6.1, 6.2

Interviewed: 13/09/00

Anthony Scott

Description: An English farmer who went into partnership with the RSPB to produce traditional breeds of livestock.

Appears in: 2.5, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 6.1, 6.2, 8.3, 8.4, 9.2

Interviewed: 5/09/00

Richard Scott

Description: The late father of Anthony Scott, who originally came to Islay in the 1970s.

Appears in: 2.5, 8.2, 8.3

Dave Sexton

Description: RSPB Head of Reserves for Scotland.

Appears in: 2.2

David Sinclair

Description: A local farmer from the Rhinns who appeared in SNH publicity material.

Appears in: 7.2

Interviewed: 21/02/00

Donald Smith

Description: A dairy farmer who lost his herd with the closure of the island creamery.

Appears in: 8.2, 8.3

Interviewed: 24/07/00

Peter Smith

Description: Farmer and a former NFUS representative.

Appears in: 7.1

Julie Stoneman

Description: Assistant Warden at the RSPB Loch Gruinart reserve.

Appears in: 2.2, 6.2

David Stroud

Description: A goose biologist who lived in Islay in the 1980s.

Appears in: 8.2

Iain Taylor

Description: A Rhinns dairy farmer who worked alongside his father **Willie Taylor** and brother.

Appears in: 2.4, 5.1, 5.2, 5.5, 5.6, 6.1, 7.2, 8.3, 8.4, 9.2

Interviewed: 5/05/00

Alec Watson

Description: An old farmer, originally from the mainland.

Appears in: 2.4

Interviewed: 31/07/00

Nick Weston

Description: An English farmer from the Rhinns and the man behind the Islay Fine Food Company.

Appears in: 5.5, 5.6

Colin Wilkie

Description: Farmer and son of Tom.

Appears in: 2.2, 2.6

Interviewed: 7/08/00

Tom Wilkie

Description: Former dairy farmer originally from Yorkshire.

Appears in: 6.1, 6.2, 8.3, 9.3

Interviewed: 7/08/00

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