REVIEW

Robert A. Dodgshon. *No Stone Unturned: a History of Farming, Landscape and Environment in the Scottish Highlands and Islands*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015. Pp 299. ISBN 978 1 4744 0074 9. \$US 135.00.

In nine chapters, the Emeritus Gregynog Professor of Geography at Aberystwyth has developed his career-long interests in the historical and cultural geography of Highland Scotland in a well-crafted perspective that extends from earliest prehistory approximately to the First World War. Whilst the geographical focus is primarily on the western and northern highlands and the offshore islands from Islay north through the Hebrides to Shetland, data from the southern and eastern highlands is also rehearsed more selectively, especially in cases where developments here offer contrasts. If, inevitably, in light of the much fuller documentation available, evidence from more recent centuries is more fully rehearsed, Dodgshon none the less makes judicious use of information culled from field archaeology and the environmental sciences to flesh out the evolving complexities of the interplay between human settlement, land-uses and environmental change over the approximately ten millennia from the initial arrival of hunter-gatherer-fishers onwards. The outcome is a detailed and nuanced view of the changing relationships between agricultural and stock-raising possibilities, land ownership and legal dimensions, environmental variations from the local (such as the advancing waves of sand swamping croplands on Tiree) to the broad-scale (such as the lean-yield years of the 1690s), and the human population. For more recent times in particular the impacts of improved communications and access to both external markets and the destabilizing influxes of external capital are well-considered.

Some elements of the story are relatively well-known in the ecological, archaeological or historical literatures, such as the spread of peatland (and the subsequent deliberate reduction of some

of it), the long-term decline in woodland cover (until its more recent partial recovery), the boom-and-bust of some industries (notably helping during the Napoleonic Wars), and the varying significance of domestic and wild ruminants including goats, black cattle, Blackface and then the bigger Cheviot sheep, and finally red deer. Alongside these are set the changing fortunes of the human populations (so often encapsulated in the concept of ‘the Clearances’). The extra dimension which Dodgshon masterfully integrates into his long-term overview is the variation in the local patterning of the evidence which he is able to set against the broader, but not wholly synchronous, patterns of widespread change that are apparent across his study region.

In a short review, it is impossible other than very selectively to outline some of the main currents and the key variations to which Dodgshon draws attention. Of major importance is his demonstration that the human communities represented in this north-west fringe of Europe were not the timeless prisoners of the more favourable niches within their ‘wet desert’, with their agricultural and other practices all but unchanging from those of their protohistoric forerunners; if locational preferences remain relatively fixed, institutional practices assuredly varied through time. While the farming ‘toun’ is the quintessential settlement form of the region for many centuries, Chapter 6 provides a succinct interpretative overview of the changes to them that occurred over time; and the drivers, both bottom-up (e.g. internal social conflicts) and top-down (e.g. imposed land assessments) that spurred them are elegantly summarized in Figure 6.14.

The volume is generally helpfully illustrated, primarily with images of individual settlements and buildings for prehistory, but maps of settlement layouts and their associated enclosure and field systems for recent centuries are included. In some cases, however, locational information is rather spartan and keys are abbreviated, e.g. for Rosal (Fig 6.1) Arnol (Fig 8.4) or the Pairc district of Lewis (Figs 8.5-8.6), but the accessibility (free) of online resources now easily supplements and clarifies Dodgshon’s remarks, e.g. in the case of the 6 (not 12) – inch OS map for Arnol to which he refers (p. 244).¹ Contrastingly, the extensive use of

unpublished archival material makes footnotes essential; but their use for published sources—some cited in full, some in abbreviated fashion and then only supplemented by a select bibliography—is incomplete and will leave some sources unfindable for the new reader. Only one typographical error of consequence was spotted: the 1882 flashpoint between crofters and the Glasgow police was at Braes, not Breas (p. 277).

Such minor concerns should not be allowed to detract from the considerable significance of this major multifaceted study.

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NOTES

1. Key free online resources are the National Library of Scotland's georeferenced map and satellite imagery collection; and the inventory of sites and monuments (again with extensive imagery) held in the Canmore system of Historic Environment Scotland respectively <http://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/> and <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/archives-and-research/archives-and-collections/canmore-database/>.