

# The Crofting Cultural Landscape

A photographic study of the Balmacara crofting estate

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**By Iain Turnbull**

**Photography Higher - C755 76**

# Negotiated Project

## Section 1 – Project Proposal

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### Introduction

The aim of this project is to record and illustrate by photographic means the crofting cultural landscape of the Balmacara Estate in Wester Ross. The project will seek to illustrate some of the key features, both natural and man-made, within the landscape that is dominated by the crofting tradition of the area. The purpose of this study is not to simply produce twelve romantic images of crofting as typified by the postcards and calendars sold throughout the Highlands and Islands, but to reflect the relationship between man and the landscape and the role of active crofting agriculture in shaping that landscape through the past to now in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This is a landscape that has evolved through time with the influence of mankind being relatively prominent in a rural context, but it is a landscape that in my opinion is at risk of succumbing to neglect as a result of ill-considered agricultural support policies over recent decades. The small-scale agricultural systems typified by crofting have sustained a rich and diverse landscape and associated habitats and species. There are numerous examples of humanity's actions through the field patterns, old buildings and archaeology, and townships. The current political forces in Britain and Europe appear to be focused upon supporting mainstream industrial agriculture, paying little regard for effective support for systems like crofting with inevitable change in the landscape. This project aims to record the landscape before it is lost through a lack of economic viability and inadequate public support.

### Project Timescale

The project will properly commence on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2016 although I have taken some relevant shots already as part of the course work that I intend to include for consideration as possible final images. The deadline for submission is 24<sup>th</sup> May 2016. Within this timeframe the project will involve undertaking research related to the project topic and photographers that have photographed similar subjects or inspired ideas for the delivery of this project. Consideration will also be given to the equipment required to undertake the project, any legal, copyright, consent or health & safety issues that might impact upon the successful delivery of the project. I do not intend to set out specific photoshoot sessions as I will have to react to weather and other circumstances beyond my control. That being said I have identified possible subjects or sites that might provide good quality images pertinent to the project aim. It is possible that some of these shoots may be combined or they may need to be repeated or abandoned in favour of better alternatives as the project progresses.

An approximate timescale for the implementation of the project is set out below in Table 1, although inevitably this may be subject to change due to the vagaries of the weather and other factors that might impact upon available time to carry out the various tasks.

Ref	Action	Timescale															
		16/02/2016	23/02/2016	01/03/2016	08/03/2016	15/03/2016	22/03/2016	29/03/2016	05/04/2016	12/04/2016	19/04/2016	26/04/2016	03/05/2016	10/05/2016	17/05/2016	24/05/2016	
1	<b>Project Proposal</b>																
1.1	Topic Related Research																
1.2	Photographers Research																
1.3	Resources																
1.4	Legality																
1.5	Model Release																
1.6	Copyright																
1.7	Logistics																
1.8	Risk Assessments																
1.9	Access																
	<b>Development &amp; Production (A)</b>																
2	Photoshoots																
2.1	Livestock																
2.2	Crofters																
2.3	Duirinish Barns																
2.4	Field Systems - Drumbuie & Duirinish																
2.5	Grazings																
2.6	Feeding																
2.7	Townships - Drumbuie/Duirinish																
2.8	Townships - Plockton/Erbusaig																
2.9	Deserted Settlements - Scalpaidh/Doire na h-Earbh/Port Ban																
2.10	Machinery																
	<b>Development &amp; Production (B)</b>																
3	Image Processing																
3.1	Selection of Short-listed Images																
3.2	Post-processing of Short-listed Images																
3.3	Selection of Final 12 Images																
3.4	Printing Final 12 Images																
4	<b>Evaluation</b>																
4.1	Reflect on photographic work																
4.2	Reflect on photographic practice																
4.3	Conclusion																
	<b>Final Report</b>																

Proposed Project Programme

## Investigative Research

The term ‘cultural landscape’ is used very specifically by the United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in relation to its designation of ‘Cultural’ World Heritage Sites (WHS) to reflect “*Combined works of nature and humankind, they express a long and intimate relationship between peoples and their natural environment*” (UNESCO 2016). Through their suite of WHS, UNESCO aims to “*reveal and sustain the great diversity of the interactions between humans and their environment, to protect living traditional cultures and preserve the traces of those which have disappeared*”. Probably the most relevant such site in the United Kingdom in relation to this project is St Kilda. However, the term ‘Cultural Landscape’ can be applied in a less formal sense reflecting “*specific techniques of sustainable land-use, considering the characteristics and limits of the natural*

*environment they are established in, and a specific spiritual relation to nature” (UNESCO 2016). The Cultural Landscapes Foundation (CLF 2004) in the USA suggest that they “provide a sense of place and identity; they map our relationship with the land over time; and they are part of our national heritage and each of our lives”. The CLF has defined a range of four different types of cultural landscape:*

- Designed Landscape
- Vernacular Landscape
- Historic Site
- Ethnographic Landscape

The most relevant here is undoubtedly the Vernacular Landscape which can be described as *“a landscape that evolved through use by the people whose activities or occupancy shaped that landscape. Through social or cultural attitudes of an individual, family or a community, the landscape reflects the physical, biological, and cultural character of those everyday lives” (CLF 2004).*

The Balmacara Estate is situated in Wester Ross at the extreme western end of the Lochalsh peninsula. The estate, extending to some 2,550 hectares, has been owned and managed by the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) since 1946. Approximately 75% of the estate is under crofting tenure with eight townships and some 85 croft tenancies (NTS 2008). Hence, the crofting system plays an important role in defining the land use and therefore the landscape of the area. This land has been occupied since the first settlers came to area and there are still occasional remains of those early inhabitants in the form of iron-age roundhouses for example. The land has been farmed in one form or another for decades and man has inevitably left his imprint in many obvious and subtle ways. As a result of this cultural imprint on the land the landscape can be considered to be more of a cultural landscape than a natural one. Today, the principal land-use is crofting agriculture, and perhaps unusually this small-scale low intensity form of agriculture remains relatively active on the estate when compared with many areas in wider Wester Ross, and indeed in the Highlands generally.

So, how do we define the ‘Crofting Cultural Landscape’? The formal guidance on landscape character assessment used by both The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage (Swanwick 2002) uses various terms to define landscape character:

- **Character** - a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse.
- **Characteristics** - Elements, or combinations of elements, which make a particular contribution to distinctive character.
- **Elements** - Individual components which make up the landscape, such as trees and hedges.
- **Features** - Particularly prominent or eye-catching elements, like tree clumps, church towers, or wooded skylines.
- **Characterisation** - The process of identifying areas of similar character, classifying and mapping them and describing their character.

The Skye & Lochalsh Landscape Assessment (Stanton 1996) includes a category referred to as ‘Linear Crofting’ (see box below) which is defined by the repetitive patterns of buildings and fields in a generally linear relationship. Thus lines play an important role in the landscape, be they fences, roads, tracks, buildings or cropping patterns. However, there is much more to the crofting landscape than just the crofts themselves.

Landscape character type 13

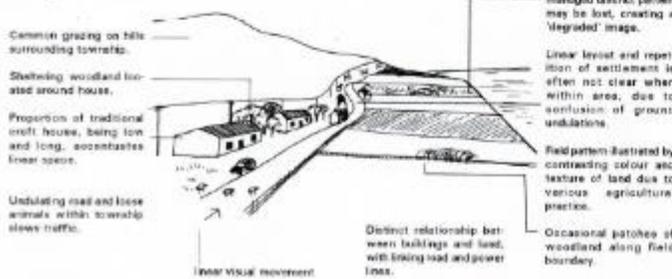
LINEAR CROFTING



key landscape characteristics

This landscape character type is dominated by its **repetitive pattern of buildings and land holdings within the linear arrangement** of a crofting township. This arrangement creates a **linear space** and results in **linear visual movement**.

There is typically a **direct relationship between land use, built structures, and the other characteristics of the landscape**, their arrangement relating to a **linear edge or landform** such as a coastline, watercourse, or valley slopes. These settlements are often linked to favourable microclimate, access and drainage conditions.



The **linear arrangement and repetitive pattern** of this landscape character type is **most clearly seen from an opposite shore or slope**. From such areas, this character type is seen to possess a **simple visual composition of elements**; these tend to be **arranged in horizontal bands**, by lines dividing varying vegetation colour and texture resulting from different land use. The horizontal emphasis and regular arrangement of elements within this landscape often contrasts to the typical sloping or undulating skyline.

Grazing regime illustrated by varying vegetation colour and texture, common grazing tending to be duller green and rough.

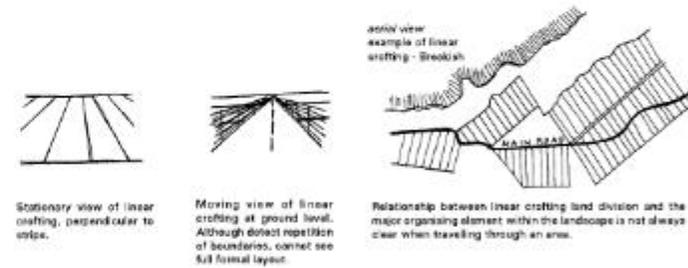
Line of houses often appears as a 'string of pearls' highlighted against dark backdrop, accentuated when the houses are white, and linked by an access road.



The **linear organisation and repetition of elements within this landscape character type tends to be highlighted under certain weather conditions**, particularly low cloud and low light, the sun often seeming to spotlight white houses and metalled roads.



The **clarity of the distinct repetitive pattern** within this landscape, also depends on the orientation and movement of the viewer in relation to the nature of the land division and buildings.



The experience of this landscape from a main road depends on being able to clearly see the landscape pattern, most obviously illustrated by the field boundaries and buildings.

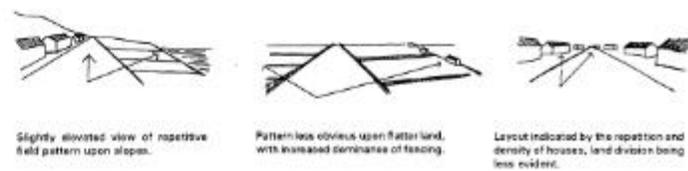


Illustration of Linear Crofting (extracted from Stanton 1996)

Crofting townships consist of typically small areas of better quality agricultural land, used for raising crops, mainly for feeding livestock. Associated with the crofts are the settlements, referred to in the linear crofting landscape category above. These townships can take one of three main forms, nuclear - where the buildings tend to be set out in a cluster, linear – where the buildings are more stretched out along a roadside or coastal strip, and scattered where the buildings do not form a specific pattern but are loosely distributed around the township. The pattern of crofts themselves tends to be defined by the physical landscape, i.e. how much good land there is available and the topography, leading to small oases of improved agricultural land that can be typically organised in linear strips with individuals often having more than one strip, more closely related to the old runrig system, or in individual fields – more of a nuclear structure. Finally, the crofting landscape also comprises much more extensive areas of common grazings, where each crofter has a share and is entitled to graze their livestock. These grazings are typically rough moorland with areas of heather, wet acid grassland, rock, peatbog and scrub woodland and generally surround the crofting townships.

Associated with these wide, general aspects of the crofting landscape are more specific details that one might take particular note of, for example, different breeds of livestock – most notably the traditional Highland cattle; old buildings such as traditional barns; croft houses; and infrastructure such as sheep fanks, drystone walls and fence lines; field/crop patterns; species-rich grasslands; old farm machinery; and archaeology – such as deserted settlements, ruins, lazy beds, etc. Of course, one must not forget the other key ingredient, the crofters themselves. It is these details of the crofting landscape that I aim to capture in images in a documentary style but I also hope to capture a sense of the atmosphere of the place, the people, and the interaction between the two.

The timing of the project, February to May does place some limitations on what is possible since some of the traditional crofting activities, crops and landscape features are not available to be photographed during these months, being mainly carried out during the summer, most notably the growing and harvesting of crops, species-rich meadows and wild flowers, breeding birds, etc. Also, the broad scope of subject matter and features of interest that could be captured would be very difficult to reflect with only 12 images. Therefore, it will not be possible to create an absolute set of images that define the Crofting Cultural Landscape of the Balmacara Estate, but hopefully a representative sample of some of the key features and activities that combine to maintain such a distinctive and evocative landscape can be achieved.

In the following section I have set out some examples of images of crofting areas and subjects along with examples from some specific collections that I feel are particularly relevant to the Balmacara crofting landscape. I have also selected two key and influential photographers whose work, while not necessarily associated with crofting landscapes, I have found to be hugely inspirational and thought provoking in relation to this project. These photographers are Ansel Adams, mainly chosen for his outstanding compositions but also because of the way he emphasises contrast, and Paul Strand, who as well as being a hugely influential landscape and portrait photographer also actually visited South Uist, another crofting area, in the 1950s. His collection of images from that trip is evocative of a bygone era and is hugely relevant to this project.

## Photographers Research

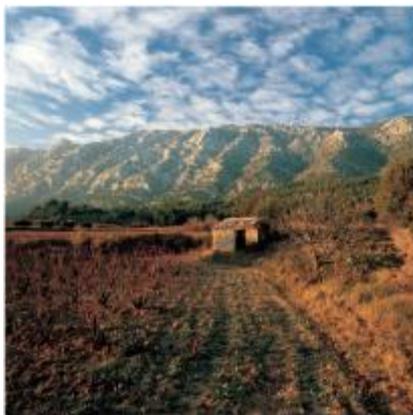
Duncan MacPherson Collection – local images of the Balmacara area, early 20<sup>th</sup> century



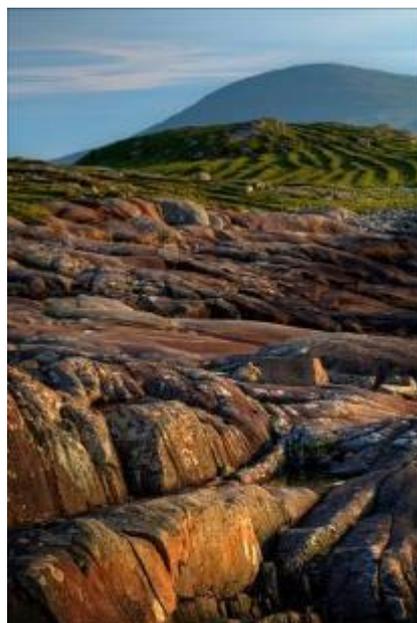
## George Washington Wilson



**Charlie Waite** – various images of land use and landscape, old buildings, etc. from different areas



**Barbara Jones** – local photographer with very vibrant images and lots of HDR





**Steve Mills** – photorealism artist with a collection of oil paintings of old doors and windows with peeling paint and rusty padlocks, typical of the sort found on old croft buildings.

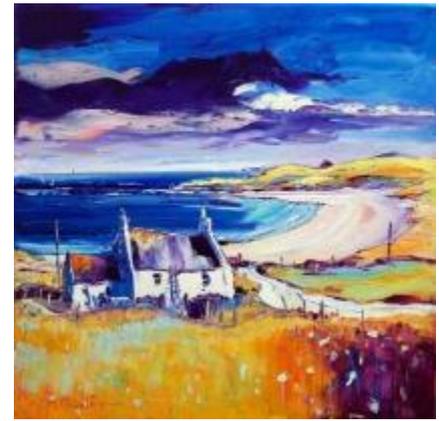


**Cailean MacLean** – Photographer from Skye – mix of images but interesting old tin house in B&W but with rust coloured sections in colour. Also did a photography project for NTS in 1999/2000



**Miscellaneous Crofting Imagery** – typical of the stereotypical images of crofting available from a simple Google search.





## Inspirational Photographers

### Ansel Adams (1902-1984)

*"In my mind's eye, I visualize how a particular . . . sight and feeling will appear on a print. If it excites me, there is a good chance it will make a good photograph. It is an intuitive sense, an ability that comes from a lot of practice."*

While Ansel Adams was not in any way linked with crofting landscapes his interpretation of the iconic landscapes of North America through black & white images is outstanding. He captured the essence of these landscapes, achieving an incredible sense of atmosphere. I have selected a few of Adams' images which I feel are relevant to this project demonstrating his style epitomised by high contrast black and white imagery. Typically Adams used large format view cameras with very small apertures as immortalised by the Group f/64, although in reality he would rarely have used such a small aperture, more likely f/45 to avoid diffraction which arises when a very small aperture is used. Adams was probably best known for his high contrast black & white images of Yosemite but he was also a prominent environmentalist and photographed a wide range of subjects. He was primarily responsible for developing the 'Zone System' for determining exposure and he applied this rigorously to his photography to produce his characteristically atmospheric landscapes. Along with the 'Zone System' his concept of 'Visualisation' (imagining exactly how the shot would appear on the finished print before taking the shot) were perhaps his most defining achievements in photographic technique (Alinder, 1998).

The first two inspirational images show areas of rolling pasture land with distinct fences and dramatic lighting. Both serve to document the landscape but present it in an interesting and engaging manner, focusing on the natural landform and man's influence upon it. Both are good examples of his use of high contrast, the first drawing attention to the natural landform, the folds of pasture land and fences highlighted with dark and light.



Pasture, Sonoma County, 1951



Pastureland, Fence, Hills, Near Altamont, 1946

The third photo demonstrates this capturing of atmosphere even more clearly with the road leading the viewer into the image and its bright wet surface is contrasted beautifully by the very dark timber fence on the right. The clouds mirror the shape of the fence running onto the frame. These three images clearly demonstrate man's influence on a variety of landscapes and landforms.



Road After Rain, 1959

The importance of lines in the landscape and dramatic lighting is emphasised again in the next image, *Sand Fence* at Keeler. The fence and the ridge of the sand dune again lead the viewer into the image and the high contrast shadow area emphasises the shape of the dune. The last image of fences at Tomales is a simpler composition looking straight at an old lichen covered picket fence. This is a much earlier image and is perhaps more documentary, almost still life style in that it does not really interpret the landscape within which the fence sits but focuses upon the detail of the timber and lichens growing on it.



Sand Fence, Keeler, 1948



Fence, Near Tomales Bay, 1936

Adams also photographed buildings, recording for posterity settlements and industry as well as presenting the in an artistic form. Another early image, *Factory Building* from 1932 sets out the distinct shapes of the various buildings against a light sky with the power lines adding a sense of depth and the smoke a sense of motion and activity. The contrasting shades of grey, while not highly contrasting and rendered clearly and distinctly showing subtle tones of light and shade. In *Silverton* the composition is straight-on focusing more on the range of triangular forms of the roofs against the backdrop of the forested mountain. This image is once again more highly contrasted with areas of deep shade and bright white emphasising the different structures.



Factory Building, 1932



Silverton, Colorado, 1951

The final image I have chosen reflects a more detailed study of some boards, probably a fence but possibly a door, with thistles growing at the base. This is again more similar to the fence at Tomales in that it focuses on detail as opposed to a wider landscape. The boards are rendered in fine detail using a large format camera with the thistles defined crisply at the base. The image has a high level of contrast with the dark negative space of the shadow behind the boards defining the individual boards very clearly. The texture of the timber and the thistles is illustrated clearly in the black and white format as well.



Boards and Thistles, 1932

## Paul Strand (1890-1976)

*"Honesty no less than intensity of vision is the prerequisite of a living expression. This means a real respect for the thing in front of... the photographer... this is accomplished without tricks of process or manipulation through the use of straight photographic methods..."*

In 1954 Paul Strand visited South Uist in the Western Isles and in 1962 he published *Tir A'Mhurain: The Outer Hebrides of Scotland*, a book of photographs from the trip accompanied by commentary by Basil Davidson (Strand 2002). The book is partly political in nature as well as representing the relationship between the people and the land. The images were shot straight with little or no manipulation and contrast significantly with Ansel Adams' more striking and emotional landscapes (MacDonald 2012). The images are more documentary in style, with no special attempt to render them artistic, reflecting the very nature of the landscape and the people within it. Strand used a large format camera and the portrait shots in particular demonstrate incredible tonal range and detail. Importantly Strand was adamant that the book was printed in Leipzig, East Germany, being accused at the time of promoting a political agenda but which he argued was because he could only

get the specific type of printing that he wanted there. Strand achieved his sense of place in these images by focusing on the dark areas. He was completely opposed to the use of gloss paper but neither did he use pure matte paper. Instead he opted for a semi-matte paper with carefully layered varnishes or waxes until he achieved “*the vocabulary of blackness*” (The Met 2004).



Tir A'Mhurain



Rocky Shore

*Tir A'Mhurain* translates from the Gaelic as the ‘*Land of the bent grass*’ and is the old name for South Uist (Strand 2002). In the cover image *Tir A'Mhurain* and *Rocky Shore* the coastline of South Uist is the subject, contrasting the sandy bays with the rocky shoreline. *Tir A'Mhurain* includes subtle reference to the people with the inclusion of a house, silhouetted almost on the skyline and ponies on the beach while *Rocky Shore* features the more untamed elemental coast and open sea under a brooding sky. Meanwhile, *Township and Road* (below) illustrates a typical Uist ‘Blacklands’ crofting township with the access road leading the viewer into the shot. The image is redolent of a previous era when thatched roofs were the norm. The scattered nature of the houses is shown very clearly and the image has enormous value as a record of the time and place, as does the *Blackhouse*.



Township and Road



Blackhouse

*Loch a Duin and Bornigh* (below) once again shows a crofting township, this time on the machair illustrating perfectly the open expansive nature of the landscape and the scattered croft housing and huge expansive sky. *Loch and Lillies* on the other hand has what appears to be a more natural subject, i.e. a small lochan with waterlilies and a backdrop of moorland. The moorland will be

common grazings and used as a key part of the management of the crofting township for grazing animals in the summer.



Loch a Duin and Bornigh



Loch and Lillies

Strand also photographed some close-ups of the dwellings, a common theme of his, both thatched and slightly more substantial as represented by *Window & Thatch* and *House at Kilpheder*. These are both very much architectural documentary in style focusing upon the detail of parts of the buildings.



Window and Thatch



House at Kilpheder

One of the most striking elements of his book is the portraits of the crofters and fishermen of the area. These are clearly posed for the camera, as opposed to being taken candidly, but they reflect the characters incredibly well, reflecting the hardship of life on the western fringe of Europe that was the norm for these people. I have chosen a few examples, namely: *Angus Peter MacIntyre* (probably the most famous shot); *Ewan MacLeod* and *Norman Douglas* and *Mrs Archie MacDonald*. These are examples, but a few of those included in the book typify the formal posed nature of the portraits while at the same time capturing a sense of place and hardship experienced by the

subjects. In the case of Mrs Archie MacDonald, according to Basil Davidson who provided the commentary to Strand's images in the book, she represents a direct line back to the earliest Gaelic song tradition, dating back many hundreds of years to the time of the Vikings and beyond (Strand 2002).



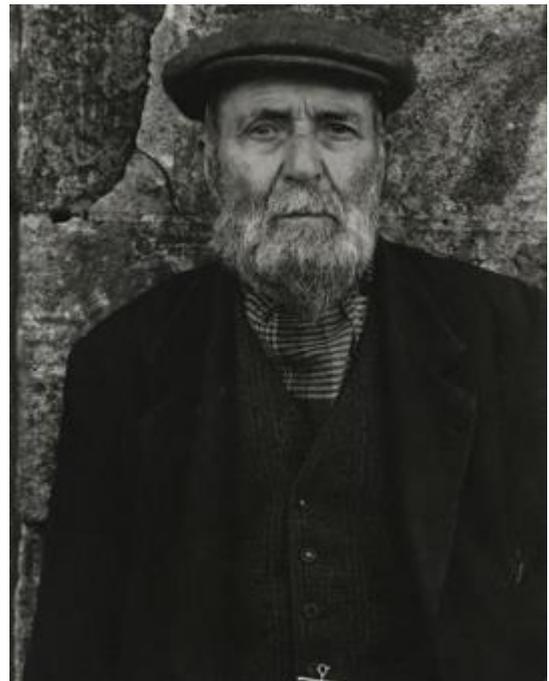
Angus Peter MacIntyre



Mrs Archie MacDonald



Ewan MacLeod



Norman Douglas

In addition to these South Uist images Strand also took several others from trips elsewhere in Europe and America which reflect some of the same values, subjects and styles as the above. I have presented here a small selection of the most relevant to this project in that they record old buildings in some detail.



Barn Window and Ice, Jamaica, 1943



Window and Wisteria, Luzzara, 1953



Houses, Locmariaquer, 1950

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In Botmeur, Finistère, 1950



The Latch, Vermont, 1944

## Resources

A variety of equipment and computer software will be used during the project as described below. It is intended that the photography will be undertaken primarily using digital media as opposed to film (analogue). I will mainly use a Canon EOS 5D Mark I camera but on occasion I will substitute this for a Canon EOS 500D for use with a larger zoom lens when trying to shoot wildlife associated with the crofts as the cropped sensor combined with a Sigma 150-500 f/5-6.3 AF APO DG OS HSM lens will provide greater reach. I aim to use a Bronica ETRSi medium format film camera as well, particularly for any portraiture shots but this will always be backed up by digital shots.

## Equipment

### Digital Cameras



Canon EOS 5D Mark I full frame digital camera  
12.8 mega pixel sensor



Canon EOS 500D APS-C Cropped Sensor  
digital camera 12.2 mega pixel sensor

### Lenses



Tamron 28-300 mm f/3.5-6.3 Di VC PZD lens



Canon EF 20-35 mm f/3.5-4.5 Ultrasonic lens



Sigma 150-500 f/5-6.3 AF APO DG OS HSM lens



RST-7002 Timer Release Cable

## Film Camera



Zenza Bronica ETRSi 120 film camera  
with Zenzanon EII 75 mm f/2.8 lens



Zenzanon MC 150 mm f/3.5 lens

## Filters



Circular Polarizing Filter



Neutral Density Filter  
(various combinations)

## Accessories



Hama Traveller Compact Pro tripod



Minolta Autometer III Light Meter

## **Legality**

The area used for this study is the Balmacara Estate in Wester Ross. The estate is owned and managed by the National Trust for Scotland and I act as manager on their behalf. Hence, all necessary permissions for the photography of the estate have been obtained.

## **Model Release**

It is intended to take some shots of crofters, both at work and in portrait format so models will be used during the project and hence there will be a requirement to obtain releases from the models. Copies of the model release forms are provided at Appendix I.

## **Copyright**

It is not intended to use any photographs by other photographers or included in any collections as part of this work other than as reference or inspirational material in the following sections. In all cases such material is referenced back to the originator and source. Hence, there should be no requirement to obtain copyright permissions for this work.

## **Site/Travel Logistics**

The estate is c. 2,550 hectares in extent and is well served by public roads. The majority of the planned photoshoot locations are either within settlements or close by, although in some cases more remote locations will be used, for example the peat cutting site(s). All sites are close to my place of residence and are accessible by car or on foot although appropriate risk assessments and protective equipment will be required (see later section on Health & Safety).

## **Access**

As manager of the Balmacara Estate, and under the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, access to the countryside and the Balmacara Estate in particular is open and free, subject to responsible behaviour. However, since some of the areas identified for various photoshoots are managed as crofts for agricultural purposes with crops and livestock present, every effort will be made to avoid disturbance to these activities, crops and animals at all times. If specific access is required to any sensitive areas prior consent will be sought from the relevant crofter(s) or land managers.

## **Health & Safety**

There are no seriously worrying risks associated with this project but given the nature of the terrain where the photoshoots will be taking place there is the possibility of varying injuries or illness and a risk assessment has been undertaken for these. Appropriate mitigating measures have been included in this risk assessment and these will be reviewed if required as the project progresses. Any incidents or near misses will be recorded and used to improve the relevant aspect(s) of the risk assessment. A copy of the Risk Assessment is presented at Appendix II.

# Section 2 – Development & Production

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## Photoshoots

While photoshoots had been planned for various topics within the overall theme of the project in reality many of the shoots did not result in images being shot for any single topic. Due to the weather and other time constraints, availability of models and other external factors, such as vehicles parked in unhelpful locations, etc. several anticipated shots did not materialise. Also, when I was out at a particular location I often found additional subjects that piqued my interest as options for possible inclusion in the project.

As a result of this slightly reactive approach to shooting I decided that rather than arrange my images according to the various photoshoots I have organised them according to topic. This approach, in addition to making the assessment of images easier within this project, which by definition had the potential to embrace a range of subject matter, and has the advantage of ensuring that I ought to have covered each of the topics in my original project plan as opposed to potentially having a surfeit of one subject matter and a lack of others.

The vast majority of my images were digital, primarily due to cost factors but also as a result of timescale limitations. I did not have the facilities, nor the skills to undertake film processing, developing and printing myself, so for the few films that I did shoot I had to send them off to be processed. In these cases I used Peak Imaging (<http://www.peak-imaging.com/>) to carry out this task, obtaining negatives and digital versions of the images.

For my digital shots I typically used my Canon EOS 5D camera with a range of lenses as described in Section 1. However, occasionally I used my Canon EOS 500D camera usually because I had gone out to try and capture images of birds or other wildlife and thought I would need the longer zoom reach achieved by using the cropped sensor camera with my larger zoom lens. In all cases I shot in RAW format in order to obtain the best possible quality of image and to retain as many post-processing options as possible. When shooting film my Bronica ETRSi camera uses 120 C41 film producing a 4x6 cm negative. The use of this format was aimed at achieving a larger negative and hence a higher quality image, particularly for the portraiture shots.

I used Adobe Lightroom 6 as my main computer software to import and organise my images, including those obtained from Peak Imaging. Lightroom has an excellent Library function which allows the user to import images from a range of sources, including directly from the camera, computer or external hard drive or other external sources. These images are stored on the hard drive according to the requirements of the user and can viewed, compared, tagged, rated and flagged according to whatever criteria the users wishes to apply. The images can also be sorted into Collections according to subject, style, rating, etc. which facilitates their subsequent management and processing. The images are shown as thumbnails, much like contact sheets, within the Grid View of the Library Module allowing for easy assessment and comparison. The user can select an individual image or groups of images for comparison. Filters can be applied to effectively select only images that meet the required standard or other specific conditions. The figure below shows the standard Library Module interface with the Grid View at the centre, the list of folders and Collections

on the left and the basic image details for the selected image on the right. At the bottom of the figure is the Filmstrip which shows smaller thumbnails of the images in the Collection with the selected image being highlighted. For each image in the Grid View the star rating is shown along with other specific information such as whether it is Flagged, its dimensions, etc.



Screenshot of the Adobe Lightroom 6 Library Module Interface

For the purposes of this project all imported images were arranged into folders according to the date that they were shot. After an initial filtering process (described in the following section) the remaining images were rated and considered against the objective of trying to achieve a body of work representative of the range of subject matter and features of the crofting cultural landscape. At the same time I was keen to try and achieve a sense of the special atmosphere of the landscape and to bring something of the artistic out as well as providing a documentary record of these features.

In total somewhere in the region of 2,500 digital shots were taken during January to April 2016 at a range of locations around the Balmacara Estate. A few others had already been taken at the end of 2015 in anticipation of this project. As a result I have not reproduced all of these photographs as contact sheets but have undertaken an initial filter, removing all of the obviously poor shots and those which were clearly duplicates, or close to duplicates of other images. The selection process is described in more detail in the following section.

While shooting many of the images I opted to use the Auto-Exposure Bracketing (AEB) function on my DSLR cameras. This function results in three images being taken with one exposed normally and one under-exposed and one over-exposed by up to 2 stops depending upon the settings applied. This technique is useful where light conditions are difficult and camera metering might not work effectively for a single exposure, e.g. when shooting into low light or where there is a strong contrast between light and dark areas of the scene. One drawback of digital cameras is that they do not record as wide a range of tones as film or compared to the naked eye, this is known as the Dynamic

Range. Using AEB it is possible to extend this Dynamic Range using High Dynamic Range (HDR) tools to merge the three images effectively producing a single image that has a balanced exposure. The normal exposure covers the mid tones, the under-exposure picks out the detail in the light areas and the over-exposure does the same for the darker areas.

Given that the project was carried out during the winter/early spring period the light conditions were not always optimal, with low light being common and during the brighter conditions the sun was typically low in the sky often leading to silhouettes and deep contrast. As a result I opted in many cases to use HDR in addition to the normal exposure for comparison, hence one reason for the high number of original images. To undertake the HDR merge I used one of three tools: the Lightroom 6 HDR function; Photomatix Pro 5.1; or Google's HDR Efex Pro 2, and occasionally I tried all three to assess which produced the best result. In some cases I used a tripod and in others the camera was handheld. One issue with HDR is that if there are any camera movements the alignment of the merge can be affected, sometimes leading to blurred merged images, and in some cases the results appeared quite surreal. In many cases the original normal exposed single image was just as effective and tended to be sharper so it was selected.

## **Selection of Photographs**

Lightroom provides the option to flag images as a 'Pick' or alternatively to mark them as 'Rejected'. It has an excellent facility to allocate a 1-5 star rating to images with 1 star being poor and 5 stars being excellent. Using the Lightroom Library Module's Grid View and Loupe View options I went through all the images in each Collection allocating a 'Rejected' flag to the images I felt were not worth considering further, thus carrying out an initial first filter, removing all of the worst images, e.g. very under or over-exposed images or badly composed ones. Through this process I reduced the total number of images from c. 2,500 to c. 245 (see Contact Sheets – One below). I then repeated the process allocating one star to only the images that I felt might offer further scope for development, thus carrying out a second filter and reducing the overall number of images to c. 75 (see Contact Sheets – Two). I continued with another filter, this time allocating two stars to the better images, further reducing the total number of images to c.22 (see Contact Sheets – Three). These remaining images were then subjected to detailed post-processing and development as set out below after which the final selection of twelve images was made.

## Development & Post-Processing of Final Images

I used Adobe Lightroom 6 as my computer software to process my digital images, including those I obtained from Peak Imaging from my film shots. The 100 or so selected photos were all superficially processed using the Lightroom Develop Module in order to assess their relative merits. This was not a detailed processing, only a basic straightening, adjustment of exposure, contrast and levels, plus comparison between colour and black & white.

## Final Images

In this section I have presented each of my final twelve images both before and after post-processing/editing. I have set out the reasons why I have chosen each image, what post-processing/editing I carried out and why I feel the image works well within the context of the project brief. I have also attempted to provide a critical assessment of the photographic merits and deficiencies of each image with some ideas on how I might have been able to produce an improved outcome. I have included a laser printed A4 print of each image within this report along with separate professionally printed versions mounted on A3 size mount board.

In general terms I have tried to select a collection of images that reflect a variety of subject matter and style which interpret and record the crofting cultural landscape but also reflect the inspirations of Ansel Adams and Paul Strand. While most of my images were shot in colour using digital cameras I made the decision fairly early on in the project to aim to produce a collection of black & white images. Partly this choice was influenced by both Adams and Strand who are predominantly known for their monochrome images, but more because I feel that the black & white medium provides a greater sense of atmosphere, enhanced tonal range and is also more in keeping with the subject matter. In addition to these considerations, the project was shot entirely during the winter months and in Wester Ross there is limited colour in the landscape during the months of November to March, light is often short-lived and rarely intense but the skies can be spectacular and are often more interesting when portrayed in this format. Hence, some of my other images that were not chosen for my final twelve, were arguably at least as good but I felt were better in colour, and thus I rated them a less impressive when viewed in black & white.

Another issue that arose out of shooting during only the winter months was that the range of subject matter was significantly reduced. I would have liked to include some images of the cropping aspect of crofting, particularly the species rich meadows which are such a vital and picturesque element in the landscape, but unfortunately the timing was not right for this and so that will have to wait for another day. Similarly, I found the selection process increasingly difficult as I narrowed the choices down. I had other images that I would have been happy to include but I felt that the range of subject matter would have been depleted if I had done so, despite the intrinsic quality of the images in their own right.

The key features I have focused upon are the crofts and the fences, tracks and lines that define them; the buildings both past and present, including whole buildings and smaller details of their construction and function; the townships; and the people who carry on this crofting tradition which defines the character of the landscape. Thus I have settled on a final selection of twelve images set out in the following section which I hope present a good representation of the landscape, its elements and a sense of place, emotion and community (past and present).

## Image 1 – Crofts & Fences at Drumbuie & Duirinish

I chose this image because it represents the crofting landscape very well, with a mix of croft land, woodland and moorland, with the snow-capped mountains in the background. The fence lines are very clearly illuminated by the early morning sun and the croft land is also well lit. The sky is a deep blue but with some interest in the form of the light clouds stretching in from the left, adding depth to the vista. When converted to black & white the tonal range is slightly enhanced, highlighting the crofts, separated by the lines of the fences while the significant single tree in the front right becomes slightly more clearly defined against the woodland and moorland backdrop.

For this image, using Lightroom, after converting it from colour to black & white I straightened it slightly and removed any lens or sensor marks. I then increased the contrast slightly and the exposure a small amount. I clipped the blacks and whites a bit to avoid any completely black areas and

any burning out. I also adjusted the levels a little to darken the sky slightly and the moorland tones. Otherwise I felt it pretty much stood as it was and felt that less editing was preferable to trying to do too much to it.

The image is an important one within the collection in that it is probably the best example of the layout of the crofting field systems. The linear nature of the crofts is clearly illustrated by the illuminated fence lines, in the foreground but also in the middle distance. These fences also show off the topography as they dip and rise across the contours. The woodland/scrub areas, being much darker than the fields, serve to break up the image nicely and also show the diversity of habitats present in the landscape. The mix of productive fields and native woodland is a key element in the richness of this landscape from a biodiversity perspective. Finally, I think the darkened sky with the light cloud and snow-capped mountains act as an excellent balance to the croft land.

The composition and feel of this image is probably more in keeping with Adams' style, with high contrast and dark sky. The balance of the image, in three thirds vertically, sky at the top, mountains & moorland in the middle and croft land in the fore works well and the fences cutting diagonally across serve to provide depth. In terms of improvements, the composition perhaps lacks a frame and a wider perspective bringing in the hills either side might have improved this, but it would have been difficult to maintain the depth and detail and the crofts may have been lost as the focal point.



Canon EOS 5D 127mm, 1/60 sec. at f/20, ISO 200



Edited Image

## Image 2 – Morag MacKenzie, Crofter

This shot was taken on my Bronica ETRSi camera using 120 film (Ilford HP5 Plus 400) and is the only image in the final collection taken using film. The film was processed by Peak Imaging with the negatives digitally scanned and supplied on CDROM allowing for additional post-processing if required. I chose this image because Morag is steeped in the crofting tradition and epitomises the determination and enthusiasm for the way of life. She has a small herd of traditional pedigree Highland cattle and with her husband and wider family is responsible for the majority of crofting activity in the township of Duirinish.



Bronica ETRSi 75mm, 1/125 sec. at f/11, ISO 400

I really likes this image, with the subject clearly smiling and the exposure being just fine. I did feel that it would benefit from cropping in a bit closer. I also slightly increased the contrast and toned down the whites a little as the background was fairly light. The tonal range in the film image is excellent, providing a much more subtle gradation than the digital format tends to do. That in part may be due to the quality of the camera and lens but I feel is also the result of the large negative size (6x4 cm) and the intrinsic quality of the film media.



Edited Image

This image is undoubtedly much more influenced by Paul Strand than Ansel Adams. However, in *Tir A'Mhurainn* Strand's portraits were all very carefully posed. I felt that I would prefer a more relaxed approach, trying to catch images as the subject was working.

Unfortunately in most cases the result was not very successful with the images often blurred and poorly composed. However, with this one, arguably a bit more posed or formal in composition, I feel it worked well, capturing the subject's character and humour very well.

In terms of critical assessment, I like the picture very much but it might have been improved by having a more uniform background. The skyline is undoubtedly distracting, and while in the original it is almost blown out, the reduction in the white level has rendered it greyer and less obvious. In retrospect I am unsure whether the increased contrast has improved the shot, possibly preferring the slightly softer tones of the original, but I do feel that the closer cropping has worked well.

### Image 3 – Old Red Fergie

This image represents a little bit of detail in the form of a close-up shot of the engine of an old red Ferguson tractor. These tractors were revolutionary in the crofting landscape, allowing for the first time, affordable cultivation and cropping on a much larger scale that had been possible previously. Despite having largely been superseded by more modern machinery this old example offered an inviting subject with the faded and worn paint, the occasional rust areas and the light and shade providing a beautiful range of shapes, tones and textures.

The original image was relatively strong and needed only minimal editing after being converted to black & white. It was only very slightly straightened to ensure that vertical lines in the background were straight. A few minor spots were removed and the contrast and clarity raised a little to emphasise the dark and light and the detail and texture. The very darkest areas were a bit of an issue so the black was clipped and shadows lightened a little and the blue of the sky was darkened a tiny bit as well.



Canon EOS 5D 67 mm, 1/160 sec. at f/22, ISO 400



Edited Image

I really like this image. The composition is interesting and slightly unusual. I took several shots of the tractor from different angles and was just about to move on when I decided to try a close-up of the detail of the engine area. The high contrast of the light and shade areas adds significantly to the impact of the image while the texture of the rust spots and the faded and eroded paintwork makes it almost three dimensional.

Compositionally I might have been able to achieve a similar effect but with a slightly wider angle have included the name badge of the Ferguson brand on the radiator grill. The small aperture I used has produced a good depth of field with the background buildings blurred. Perhaps a slightly wider aperture might have made the image a bit sharper but I feel the result I achieved was pretty good as it is.

## Image 4 – Track & Fence, Drumbuie

This image was inspired very much by Ansel Adams' *Road After Rain* photo where he has an old timber fence running alongside a wet road leading into the frame. In this case the track is an access road for crofters leading to their crofts and the fence is the old boundary between the croft land and the Kyle to Inverness railway line which can just be seen in the shot above the end of the timber fence. Fences play a key role in defining the crofting cultural landscape, mainly by the way they mark the boundaries between different crofts, but also between crofting and non-crofting elements. Fence lines often break up the landscape in what might otherwise lack definition. This old timber fence is not in the best of condition and therefore has abundant texture and contrasting colours where lichens and rot have darkened the otherwise bleached timber.

I took this shot in poor light using a wide-angle lens with the camera on a tripod at low level to bring in the full effect of the fence leading into the frame. Due to the shaded low position of the camera, the tripod allowed me to use a small aperture to maximise depth of field by using a slow shutter speed (1/20 second). The original image is actually a bit over-exposed in the sky which contrasts a great deal from the darker soil along the track edge and the fence and vegetation, but I felt that the composition was strong and the issue of the blown out sky could be addressed in post-processing.

In this case I converted the image to black & white, increased the contrast and clarity, then reduced the level of the highlights and clipped the whites to reduce the over-blown sky. I also slightly reduced the exposure, thus darkening down the foreground and sky. I further reduced the level of the oranges, yellows and blues thus increasing the texture and interest in the sky. Finally I removed a large number of sensor spots which were very obvious given the increase in clarity and contrast and the small aperture used for the shot.

This shot illustrates perhaps a less obvious element of the landscape, i.e. the tracks and fences, as opposed to the more traditional views of fields, moorland and mountains, etc. I think the effect of the wide angle and low perspective, the black & white format with high contrast between the main subject and the sky produces an engaging composition.



Canon EOS 5D 20 mm, 1/20 sec. at f/22, ISO 200, on tripod



Edited Image

## Image 5 – Approaching Snow Storm

This shot was definitely a case of capturing the 'Decisive Moment'. I was out early to try and catch some decent light as it was a good morning in the middle of the winter when I saw the snow storm marching quickly down the Inner Sound. Managed to get quite a few shots off before the cloud obliterated the view of Skye and the decent light disappeared. The composition is perhaps not the best since I had relatively little time to move to a better location, but with the tractor in the foreground I felt it did have a relevance to the project, emphasising the variable and sometimes volatile weather crofters have to deal with.

I shot this using the AEB function on the camera using a +/- 1 stop setting and then used an HDR merge to produce the final image, thus bringing out the detail in the clouds. The original image is perhaps a little over-exposed. After straightening and cropping the image slightly I increased the clarity and contrast and clipped the white quite a lot, defining the detail in the cloud much better. I also raised the shadows to overcome some very dark areas in the foreground. Finally I adjusted the orange grey level downwards to increase the intensity of the foreground.

I particularly like the sense of motion in the advancing storm front. The fact that the entire Cuillin Range is visible, picked out in snow against a bright blue sky, about to be obliterated by the storm brings a feeling of drama to the image. The tractor in the foreground provides interest but also a sense of the crofting context. In terms of possible improvements I would perhaps have tried to compose the picture with the horizon a little less central. However I wanted to get a sense of the scale of the storm front clouds while at the same time including the tractor and time was of the essence. The black & white format does take away the distinct colours in the original image but I feel it draws more attention to the approaching storm while the clear and sharp shadows retain the essence of the bright morning sunshine that the foreground sits in.



Canon EOS 5D 39 mm, 1/30 sec. at f/22, ISO 200,  
AEB +/- 1 stop HDR merged



Edited Image

## Image 6 – Croft Houses, Drumbuie

I selected this photo because it represents a typical linear crofting street with the linear arrangement of houses. The inclusion of the tractor emphasises the link with crofting and the contrast between the dark sky and the white of the house walls, dark tree on the right and the shade of the tractor, with the road leading the viewer into the frame creates an interesting composition.

The original image was straightened slightly and converted to black & white and various sensor spots/marks were cloned out using the Lightroom 'Heal' tool. Because the image was created using HDR and a small aperture these spots/marks are very obvious and need careful removal. Apart from that the only other post-processing was a slight increase in the exposure and contrast, the black was clipped a little and the shadows lightened slightly too. The blue level was reduced to darken the sky a bit for dramatic effect and finally I clipped the white and reduced the highlights a bit as the white of the cottage appeared a little blown-out. Lightroom has a useful tool which highlights blown or excessively dark areas of the image allowing careful reduction/increase in these levels to sort the problem without overdoing it. I found this tool very useful throughout the project.

In terms of improvements to this shot, I perhaps could have moved a little closer to the tractor, reducing the impact of the overhanging branches a little, but that would have altered the angle if I wanted to keep the conifer tree in the front right. Also the power line overhead is a little distracting and I could possibly have cloned it out. However, I felt that since I was trying to capture the reality of the crofting township these kinds of infrastructure, including the telegraph pole and lamp post were integral to their modern function and should be retained. Also, I did tend to become a little fixated on using a small aperture to maximise depth of field but at the time was not aware of the effect this can have on sharpness due to diffraction. With the benefit of hindsight, since this image did not need a very great depth of field, having little detail in the immediate foreground, I could have managed with something around f/11 which might have produced a sharper image. That being said I do feel that this image is actually fairly sharp as it is.



Canon EOS 5D 67 mm, 1/160 sec. at f/22, ISO 400,  
AEB +/- 1 stop HDR merged



Edited Image

## Image 7 - Gables

This was one of my favourite shots, reflecting the range of buildings, and the textures of the different building materials. I felt that this was in some regards similar to *Adams' Factory Building* and *Silverton, Colorado*, showing the different angles and shapes of the buildings. The contrast between the stone and timber buildings and the angles of the tin roofs creates an engaging image.

I took this early one morning on a tripod with full zoom on my Tamron 28-300 lens from a little distance to try and foreshorten the perspective which I think worked quite well. In terms of post-processing, this image had a few issues in its original form: the telephone box on the left loos out of place and the pole beside it is very distracting from the main subject. The sky was very uninteresting and blown out and the image was slightly over-exposed on the whole. To address these issues I straightened the image first then cropped it a fair amount to remove the distractions on the left, which also reduced the amount of sky in the image. I then converted it to

black & white, increased the contrast and clarity and reduced the exposure slightly. Clipping the white and reducing the highlights added some texture to the sky and then with a little reduction in the level of the blue luminance and increasing the yellow and green a tiny amount I managed to get a sense of clouds into the sky. Finally I removed the dust spots to tidy up the image.

In terms of improvements to this image, it would have been nice to have had a more interesting sky as a backdrop but in a sense these are the 'factory buildings' of the crofting system and the generally grey and slightly brooding clouds add a sense of the industrial to the image. I did think about cloning out the wire that runs from the top right down to the ridge of the timber house, but as with the previous image I felt that this was an intrinsic part of the scene and not overly distracting. The fence at the bottom right is slightly distracting too, but the framing of the scene was constrained by the presence of a more modern house whose fence it is. I does not intrude excessively within the context of the image as a whole I think. The other thought I had would have been to try taking the shot from a closer viewpoint and a wider angle lens. This may have altered the image a bit, possibly producing a clearer sharper image but it may also have lost the foreshortening effect which I like. Because I used a tripod, with mirror lock-up on my camera the use of the relatively long exposure did not pose any issues in terms of image sharpness.



Canon EOS 5D 300 mm, 1/15 sec. at f/22, ISO 200



Edited Image

## Image 8 – Windows & Stonework

This triptych was inspired by Paul Strand's images of windows in Uist and elsewhere on the continent. I took a few images of different windows but selected these three from the township of Duirinish because I felt they had a common theme of stonework and various kinds of pointing and finish and they kind of represent a progression from more-or-less undressed stone to more finely dressed and pointed and then painted and pointed. Also, the windows themselves range from relatively old to more modern. I chose a triptych format partly because I wanted to reflect the range of styles to some extent and had a limited number of images to include, plus I liked the story they told collectively better than a single image. The final effect in black & white is quite strong because it takes away the distraction of the differing colours of the stone and brings the attention more to the style of construction and finish. I also particularly like the patterns of the reflections in the windows, especially the middle one, so while I considered trying to clone them out for consistency, I decided to keep them.

For these images I chose a standard aperture and shutter speed and while the shots were taken at differing focal lengths I decided to crop the so that the windows were more-or-less central and of approximately the same dimensions. In terms of post-processing I straightened and cropped each image in Lightroom and simply converted them to black & white. I undertook almost no other adjustments apart from the removal of one or two blemishes, and in the case of the middle one I cloned out the house name sign to the left of the window, replacing them with an appropriate pointing pattern. I felt that the sign was a distraction, was inconsistent with the other two images and I didn't really want to specifically identify which houses I was photographing either. Once edited I used the Lightroom Print function to print the three images, one above the other to a jpeg file. I then cropped the output file to create the finished image.

I did choose to make the images approximately the same size and central I could have made them more exactly so, although the proportions of the windows are not consistent so that would have been difficult. Alternatively I could have orientated the triptych horizontally and photographed/cropped the images in portrait form to better reflect the verticality of the windows. I tried cropping the images this way but they did not fit well.



Canon EOS 5D various focal lengths,  
1/100 sec. at f/11, ISO 200



Edited Image

## Image 9 –Doors & Fastenings

This triptych was also inspired by Paul Strand's fascination with doors and windows and the photorealism paintings of doors by Steve Mills. The old barns are a major feature in the crofting landscape and often have very interesting doors and fastenings. I wanted to try and present a representative collection of the variety with the focus on the often improvised nature of the fastenings and the textures of the timber and the stonework and the peeling paint.

This triptych was not planned in the same way as the windows one but was more of a reactive decision once I had reviewed the range of doors I had photographed. Hence, I did not attempt to use a consistent exposure or technique but I did try to focus very much on the details, close-in as opposed to the wider perspective. In this way I think the images show off the textures and details very well making them much more interesting to the viewer. The focus on details within the wider landscape is

important as it reflects a functionality that drives the crofting system. The same approach could have been taken for many of the other subjects within the possible collection, e.g. field systems, livestock, plants and wildlife, etc. but it would probably not have worked so well for the wider landscape shots.

In terms of editing I did not do very much to the original images before creating the triptych via the Print function in Lightroom. I made sure each was straight and adjusted the exposure to varying degrees to achieve a satisfactory composition. I raised the luminance of the blue in the middle image to emphasise the string against the darker wood of the door and frame. For all three I increased the contrast a little and the clarity and sharpness to emphasise the textures.

I feel that the main strengths of this triptych lie in the textures of the timber, the peeling paint and the old padlocks and string. These are clearly old doorways of old buildings but still used for a particular function. I could perhaps have zoomed in closer on the first image on the left as the padlock is very small compared with the other one and the detail is not entirely sharp, probably because of the very small aperture used. That being said the inclusion of the handle adds to the composition and I was keen to include something of the frame and stonework as well. If I was to take these shots again I would try a wider aperture to hopefully get a slightly sharper image for the first two images and in these cases I did not use the mirror lock-up function so I would try that as well to minimise camera shake.



Canon EOS 5D various exposure settings:  
55 mm, 1/4/ sec at f/29, ISO 400 on tripod  
65 mm, 1/13 sec at f/32, ISO 400 on tripod  
170 mm, 1/25 sec at f/16, ISO 400 on tripod



Edited Image

## Image 10 – Alex Townend, Crofter

I was very keen to try some portraiture shots which are not really my comfort zone but it seemed to me inappropriate to undertake a project about the crofting 'cultural' landscape without including some examples of the very people who have helped define that landscape, and continue to do so. Also, Paul Strand included a great many excellent portraits in *Tir A'Mhurain* and I wanted to try to emulate that if possible. For the portraits, given the limited number of images I could include in the collection, I decided to focus on two particular crofters, one a very traditional crofter whose family go back in crofting terms many generations (see Image 2 – Morag MacKenzie) and one who was perhaps more representative of the new crofter, originally coming from another part of the country but very active and fully engaged with diversification as well as the more traditional elements.

For these images I wanted to try and shoot them candidly as opposed to formally staged, a significant difference from the approach employed by Strand. Unfortunately, as a result I did not manage

to obtain many good shots, most being blurred by motion or poorly composed, exposed, etc. In this case I really liked Alex's expression as he focused on a younger crofter who was learning about feeding sheep. I used a large zoom so I could get in close without actually being too close. This also produced a good clear image with a blurred background which I wanted to achieve. I increased the contrast and clarity and slightly lightened the shadows and clipped the blacks. Otherwise the only editing I did was to reduce the orange and yellow tones a little to create a clearer definition of the head against the background and removed any dust marks from the sensor.

I like this image because of the expression on his face, he is clearly very focused on the task at hand and the effect is that he is not aware or interested in the camera as I desired. The main issue I have with this shot is that his hat has been clipped at the top. This was a mistake in the composition when I took the photo as I have not cropped this image at all. I was focusing upon getting in really close to his face and did not notice the cropping of his hat until afterwards. I think this is better than to have included the hat at the price of the close perspective, but a good compromise could have been achieved with more thought in the composition. Having increased the clarity I lost a little of the subtle tones which might have been more in keeping with Strand's images.



Canon EOS 5D 300 mm, 1/100 sec. at f/6.3, ISO 400



Edited Image

## Image 11 – Cottar’s House, Duirinish

This image is important because it shows a cottar’s house, as opposed to a croft house. Cottars were like crofters but had no security of tenure and no land to grow crops or rear livestock, hence their existence was very tenuous. This house was occupied until about 25-30 years ago and is largely timber built with a tin roof and consists of two rooms and a toilet, very basic. The house lies on the Duirinish common grazings and the crofter have restored some old machinery and set them out as a display in front of the house. Off to the left is an old roofless barn. I tried several times to capture this image from different perspectives until I got this shot which I felt was best compositionally. I prefer the shot in black & white because the machinery, being newly painted is quite bright and out of keeping with the rest of the scene, and tends to dominate it as well. The black & white allowed me to darken down the machinery and the sky which is largely blown out in the original, and focus on the textures of the buildings.



Canon EOS 5D 28 mm, 1/200 sec. at f/5.0, ISO 100



Edited Image

In terms of editing this image required a fair bit of work. First I cropped and straightened it to remove some extraneous bits of buildings to the left. After converting to black & white I reduced the blacks a bit and then increased the contrast and clarity, lightened the shadows slightly and reduced the red a little to darken down the timber of the pink house. I then applied a graduated filter to the top of the image to darken the sky and add a little atmosphere and interest there. Finally I adjusted the yellow and orange levels to darken the machinery and the grass a little.

One issue with this shot is the relatively shallow depth of field caused by the wide aperture used (f/5.0). The light was poor but I should probably have increased the ISO and used a narrower aperture to gain a better depth of field. As a result, while the machinery is sharp the house in the background is a bit soft. I tried sharpening it a little but it turned a bit grainy so I opted for the increase in clarity instead. Otherwise, I like this shot compositionally. It looks like it could have been taken a long time ago and the balance of the machinery, the buildings and the trees works well. The use of the graduated filter tool has worked well adding atmosphere and interest. The only other possibility would have been to try and clone out the lamp post in the back left since it does detract a little from the old period effect of the image as a whole.

## Image 12 – Fish Trap at Dubh-aird, Plockton

This image was very dark in the foreground due to the intense light from the sun behind the cloud, creating a silhouette effect, despite being created using HDR merging from three auto-bracketed shots. However, I felt that the composition was good with excellent depth of field from the stones in the foreground to the croft land and sky in the distance. The rays of sunlight added significantly to the atmosphere of the image. Hence, I tried using Lightroom's Auto Tone function in the develop module. This produced a much lighter, better exposed image which I decided to develop further.

I initially straightened and cropped the image slightly, maintaining the original proportions. I then removed any spots/dust marks from my camera's sensor/lens. After converting to black & white I tried various edits on this basic image eventually settling on an increased contrast, lightening of the shadows, black and white clipping, increased clarity and a few changes to the colour levels and temperature to bring out the sun rays.

I feel this image is very atmospheric because of the dramatic lighting provided by the sun setting behind the clouds, framed perfectly by the slopes on the right and left of the picture. The close focus on the structure of the fish trap in the foreground adds texture and contrasting scale to the image and makes what would otherwise be a relatively dull composition much more interesting. In the context of the project the image illustrates a structure from the distant days of the crofting community where fish would have been trapped behind the stone wall as the tide receded, rendering them available to the crofters to catch with ease.

In the context of the project brief and my inspirations this is definitely more influenced by Ansel Adams' style, with the deep contrast and dramatic lighting. However, it does interpret the crofting landscape and cultural heritage providing a documentary record at the same time.

In terms of possible improvements to this image I think a slightly higher viewpoint, i.e. more elevated, looking down a bit more on the wall and foreshore, might have added little more depth but it might also have reduced the impact of the sky.



Canon EOS 5D 28mm, 1/220 sec. at f/22, ISO 400  
AEB +/- 2 stops HDR merged



Edited Image

## Section 3 - Evaluation

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I set out to produce a collection of images that would record the crofting cultural landscape of the Balmacara Estate, focusing upon some of the main natural and cultural features both large and small in scale. I wanted to interpret the landscape in an attractive artistic manner as well as simply to record it in a documentary style. I also wanted to illustrate the relationship between the people who live and work in this landscape and continue to define it through their management of it as crofters. I feel that my collection of twelve images presents a good and representative range of aspects of the landscape, natural and cultural, detailed and more generic in composition.

As part of my research for the project I found a great many images, in different formats and styles including photographs and paintings, that seek to represent the crofting landscape. Often these images present a romantic notion of crofting that does not necessarily reflect the true hardship and challenges associated with working this remote and challenging land. I also investigated my two main photographic inspirations in more detail. I chose Ansel Adams because of his truly inspiring black & white images of landscapes in other parts of the world. His use of dramatic lighting and high contrast and the application of his zone system and pre-visualisation was something I wanted to try and understand better and emulate if possible. Paul Strand on the other hand was chosen partly because of his incredible portraits and to a lesser extent the political nature of his photography, but in no small part because of the piece of work he did in 1954 when he visited Uist to photograph that crofting area and its inhabitants. His book *Tir A'Mhurain* is an outstanding collection of images from a time gone by to some extent and yet in many ways still resonates with the crofting landscape of Balmacara today. His detailed images of doors and windows and traditional buildings and townships reflected the sort of features in the landscape that I wanted to try and capture. The portraits, while only a small part of my project have incredible subtle tones and are so timeless in many ways. While he used a very formal posed approach to his compositions I wanted to try and take a more candid approach, which worked reasonably well but did lead to many rejections due to movement blur of what might otherwise have been good images compositionally.

The project was carried out during the winter and early spring and this limited my options in terms of subject matter to some extent. Ideally I would have liked to have been able to capture images of the crops growing and the annual harvest, the species-rich meadows, the birds and insects associated with the croft land and the general patterns of change in the landscape throughout the seasons but obviously this was not possible within the available timeframe. In many senses the scope for focusing upon the more natural elements of the landscape was limited more by this seasonal restriction than the cultural aspect. As a result the final collection of images perhaps has a more cultural bias than I would have really wanted.

Given the wide range of potential subjects that I could include in my project and the relatively unpredictable and certainly variable nature of the weather during the winter months in Ross-shire I decided not to be too prescriptive in planning my photoshoots. Instead I planned out possible subjects for inclusion in the project and whenever the opportunity arose to get out and take some shots I did. This was generally based on my good knowledge of the estate, the best times to try and

get shots at different locations and by keeping a close eye on the weather forecast. When the opportunity arose I regularly visited several locations that I had in mind, sometimes repeating shots from an earlier visit in an attempt to improve on the product, because the light was better or because I was unhappy with the previous outcome. This did lead to a rather large and disorganised array of images which I sorted according to subject matter as opposed to when they were shot. This worked quite well as it meant I was well aware of gaps in my portfolio in relation to the range of possible subjects but it inevitably led to some repetition.

The reduced levels of colour in the landscape due to the low light of winter meant that on many occasions there was limited contrast and interest in the images I captured. That, along with my main inspirations, led to me choose the black & white format for my images as this emphasised the tonal range and textures. Also, with these low levels of light I did use a tripod quite a lot to enable slower shutter speeds, thus maintaining a small aperture for maximum depth of field. In some cases this did not work as well as I had hoped due to windy conditions but it is something that I did not do a lot of before the project and I intend to use more in the future. This also helps slow up the process forcing me to engage a bit more thought in my composition, exposure settings and the like. Also, with the generally low angle of light at this time of year I frequently found myself shooting into bright back light. I also wanted to maximise the tonal range in my shots and as this is fairly restricted with digital cameras I regularly used HDR merging to improve this. Hence, in most cases I adopted the use of the AEB function on my camera, apart from for moving subjects, but did not always apply the HDR technique. When converting to black & white I really found this brought out the details and contrast really well, frequently rendering the images much more dramatic and interesting to view. I tried to avoid using too many of the more artistic pre-sets available in some HDR software as I feel they lead to an unnatural effect which can be quite distracting from the main subject.

In relation to my specific images I have set out what I see as their respective strengths and weaknesses in the preceding section. So I will not repeat that here. In general terms I wanted to achieve clear sharp images with high contrast and engaging compositions. I think I achieved this quite well in most cases. I did have a few other images that I liked but they were perhaps not quite sharp enough, e.g. the image of the Highland Bull. My portraits were reasonably successful but I preferred the subtle tones of those shot on film as opposed to digital. I was very pleased that the film shots came out reasonably well exposed but I did not take enough advantage of the film, partly due to time and cost. I consider the two triptychs worked well and using this format allowed me to provide a better representation of the range of windows and doors in the townships. In some ways it would be nice to put together a small series of collection of different subjects such as old barns, doors, windows, tractors and equipment, etc. and this might be a good project for the future.

Overall my favourite shots are the Old Red Fergie tractor, the Gables, the Approaching Snow Storm and the Fish Trap at Dubh-aird. I love the detail of the scoured paintwork and the rusty spots on the tractor. I was very pleased with the exposure, capturing the highlights and the deeper shadows around the seat using the HDR method. The Gables was inspired very much by Adams' *Factory Building* in this case showing a range of textures from the different building materials. This worked really well in black & white but very much less so in colour. In the Approaching Snow Storm I was very fortunate to be in the right place at the right time – a genuine 'Decisive Moment' as Cartier Bresson would have put it. The snow storm advancing down the Inner Sound was about to obliterate the view of the Cuillins on Skye and yet the foreground and those mountains were still lit

up by the early morning sunshine. Literally three minutes later I was in a blizzard with no view whatsoever. Finally, the Fist Trap was one of those shots I really pre-visualised. I was looking directly into a very bright sun, behind the thin clouds. I wanted to try and capture the stonework of the fish trap in the foreground as well as the view over the shore and croft land towards the sun and hills beyond without the whole thing being silhouetted. I used the AEB function with a +/-2 stops setting, my maximum, and then HDR merged the three images. Even then the final image was very dark in the foreground but I tried lightening the dark areas (shadows and blacks) which worked really well. I also darkened down the blue of the sky a bit and the yellows in the sunlight to emphasise the sun's rays and this produced exactly the result I wanted to achieve.

One of my personal objectives for this project was to improve my planning of photoshoots as opposed to simply taking opportunities when they arise. I was also aware that while I do take quite a lot of images I tended to be taking similar shots a lot of the time. I was keen to try and think of different and unusual compositions and angles or perspectives as well as different subjects. To some extent I believe I achieved this, and the use of film as opposed to digital certainly forced me to think a bit more before I pressed the shutter. I also set up a blog ([www.iainturnbullphotography.co.uk](http://www.iainturnbullphotography.co.uk)) to encourage myself to try and take more photos, but also to think about what worked well and what was less effective, and to consider more about composition, different subject matter and styles of photography and simply to be more organised. The blog was not simply for this project but a more longer-term initiative which I intend to continue.

In conclusion, I feel I have produced a good collection of images that serve to illustrate some of the features of the crofting cultural landscape in a documentary and artistic sense. I could not cover everything I wanted to so I will continue with this project throughout the rest of the year. I also really enjoyed going back to using film and the Black & White format and I will certainly be using both more and more in my photography. I would have liked to have done some darkroom work to develop my own film images but time did not allow this to happen. This is one area of future development that I am determined to pursue although I see myself focusing upon the Black & White format mainly. My inspirations have certainly provided me with a new perspective on photography with Strand's lovely tonal portraits and Adams' more familiar dramatic landscapes and I feel I have a much better understanding of the pre-visualisation concept, if perhaps not so much the more complex Zone System. I am now panning my shoots more in advance and I find I am pre-visualising shots when I take them, with a clearer idea of how they might appear when I develop them on the computer which is very satisfying when it works well.

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# Appendix I

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## Model Release Form

PHOTOGRAPHER: Iain Turnbull

MODEL: [REDACTED]

MODEL'S EMAIL ADDRESS: [REDACTED]

MODEL'S MAILING ADDRESS: [REDACTED]

IN CONSIDERATION OF HAVING RECEIVED (i.e. Photos/Compensation/etc) No payment

IN RETURN FOR POSING FOR PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN ON (date): 5<sup>th</sup> April 2016

AT (location): Plockton, Lochalsh

I hereby assign full copyright of these photographs to the above-mentioned photographer (and the related representatives and assigns) together with the right of reproduction either wholly or in part.

I grant to the Photographer or licensees or assignees the permission to can the above-mentioned photographs either separately or together, either wholly or in part, the perpetual and irrevocable and unrestricted right to use and publish video and/or photographs of me, or where I may be included for editorial trade, product advertising and such other fashion /business purpose in any manner and medium.

The Photographer and licensees or assignees may have unrestricted use of these for whatever purpose, including advertising, with any retouching or alteration without restriction.

I agree that the above mentioned photographs and any reproductions shall be deemed to represent an imaginary person, and further agree that the Photographer or any person authorized by or acting on his or her behalf may use the above mentioned photographs or any reproductions of them for any advertising purposes or for the purpose of illustrating any wording, and agree that no such wording shall be considered to be attributed to me personally unless my name is used.

Provided my name is not mentioned in connection with any other statement or wording which may be attributed to me personally, I undertake not to Prosecute or to institute proceedings, claims or demands against either the Photographer or his or her agents in respect of any usage of the above mentioned photographs. I hereby release the photographer named above from all claims and liability relating to images, video or photographs taken of me.

I have read this model release form carefully and fully understand its meanings and implications.

signed: [REDACTED] date: 5-4-16

Important: If the Model is under 18 year of age, a parent or legal guardian must also sign

parent/guardian: \_\_\_\_\_ date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Model Release Form

PHOTOGRAPHER: Iain Turnbull

MODEL: [REDACTED]

MODEL'S EMAIL ADDRESS: [REDACTED]

MODEL'S MAILING ADDRESS: [REDACTED]

IN CONSIDERATION OF HAVING RECEIVED (i.e. Photos/Compensation/etc) No payment

IN RETURN FOR POSING FOR PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN ON (date): 5<sup>th</sup> April 2016

AT (location): Duirinish, Lochalsh

I hereby assign full copyright of these photographs to the above-mentioned photographer (and the related representatives and assigns) together with the right of reproduction either wholly or in part.

I grant to the Photographer or licensees or assignees the permission to can the above-mentioned photographs either separately or together, either wholly or in part, the perpetual and irrevocable and unrestricted right to use and publish video and/or photographs of me, or where I may be included for editorial trade, product advertising and such other fashion /business purpose in any manner and medium.

The Photographer and licensees or assignees may have unrestricted use of these for whatever purpose, including advertising, with any retouching or alteration without restriction.

I agree that the above mentioned photographs and any reproductions shall be deemed to represent an imaginary person, and further agree that the Photographer or any person authorized by or acting on his or her behalf may use the above mentioned photographs or any reproductions of them for any advertising purposes or for the purpose of illustrating any wording, and agree that no such wording shall be considered to be attributed to me personally unless my name is used.

Provided my name is not mentioned in connection with any other statement or wording which may be attributed to me personally, I undertake not to Prosecute or to institute proceedings, claims or demands against either the Photographer or his or her agents in respect of any usage of the above mentioned photographs. I hereby release the photographer named above from all claims and liability relating to images, video or photographs taken of me.

I have read this model release form carefully and fully understand its meanings and implications.

signed: [REDACTED]

date: 5<sup>th</sup> April 2016

Important: If the Model is under 18 year of age, a parent or legal guardian must also sign

parent/guardian: \_\_\_\_\_ date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix II – Risk Assessment

Name: **Iain Turnbull**

Date of risk assessment: **17 February 2016**

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	What are you already doing?	Do you need to do anything else to control this risk?	Action by who?	Action by when?	Done
Slips and trips	Photographer or any supporting friends, volunteers, etc.	Avoid poor light conditions Wear appropriate footwear Avoid carrying too much on rough ground Using Lone Working procedures – i.e. use of route cards and buddy system Take particular care if weather is very cold/freezing or very wet	No			
Hypothermia	Photographer or any supporting friends, volunteers, etc.	Wear appropriate protective clothing Avoid very poor (wet or cold) weather	No			
Road Accident	Photographer or any supporting friends, volunteers, etc. plus drivers of vehicles	Wear hi-vis vest while working by road sides Avoid taking photos at dangerous locations unless traffic management arrangements are in place, i.e. a friend is available to control/warn vehicles	No			
Injury from Livestock (Cattle)	Photographer or any supporting friends, volunteers, etc.	Avoid getting too close to cattle, especially any bulls or young cattle	No			
Sunburn	Photographer or any supporting friends, volunteers, etc.	Use sunscreen Wear protective hat Avoid excessive periods in direct bright sunshine if possible	No			

