

THE RADICAL LAND

ARTISTS AND COMMUNITY
LANDOWNERS





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Map of the Radical Land

*Image credit: CT Productions
Cover image credit: Richard Bracken*

ARTISTS AND COMMUNITY LANDOWNERS:

EXPLORING THE RADICAL IN CONTEMPORARY LAND REFORM

“It’s just a sense of community you get, and really community is where it’s at, it’s the word that sums up this place. If you look around you, everything is an experiment, everything is learning. Nobody comes here and doesn’t learn something everyday, it’s just incredible.”

Participant as part of CT Productions research project Stories of Radical Landownership

“If you take that opportunity to buy out your land, and you take responsibility for the asset, it’s not about boosting egos, it’s about serving the wider community and ensuring that you protect what you have taken responsibility for, for the rest of the community and future generations. I think that longer perspective, that multi-generational perspective is such a huge part of it, and a big part of why a lot of people come and get involved at a volunteer level on boards and things – everyone wants to make things better for everyone coming after them generally, don’t they?”

Conversations at Galson Estate Trust as part of The Radical Land podcast recorded by The Stove Network

The Scottish people’s relationship to the land they call home, and the stories therein, is one woven with the weight of history. These stories all too often serve to illustrate the disintegration of natural assets into private ownership, as far back as the 1700s to the present day. These stories, acutely lived within largely rural populations and communities, are a living one, illustrated through time, culture, and language threaded to the ever-growing tapestry of Scotland’s national identity.

The role of community ownership within this narrative is a relatively recent one: since the first community buyout of the Isle of Eigg in 1997 24 years ago community land ownership in Scotland has continued to grow and develop. The formation of trusts and community estates, each with a similar structure but a mission set by a unique communities’ needs, followed by the establishment of Community Land Scotland in 2010, has unearthed a new chapter in the story of ownership in Scotland.

In 2020, the Stove Network in association with Community Land Scotland, commissioned four artists, through three commissions to explore the contemporary stories of radical landownership by way of place-based residencies with a handful of Community Trusts across the country.

Artist Virginia Hutchison worked with Galson Estate Trust (Urras) on the Isle of Lewis, artist Richard Bracken with the Abriachan Forest Trust, and film/photography collective CT Productions (Colin Tennant and Dr Saskia Coulson) whose project spanned the North Harris Trust, Bridgend Farmhouse, South West Mull & Iona Development and Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust.

Through varying artistic practices including photography, film, sculpture, sound, and walking, these forms and practices explored through activity, conversation and making a living embodiment of the histories and experiences of each place. Together, they carve an altogether new story of community land ownership in Scotland. The emotional, political, personal and historical interweave with the voices and movement of people and land. Each three artworks and collections are stories embodied within the lifeblood of these places. Throughout this process, artists remained responsive and adaptable, working closely with trust partners to deliver considered, intimate and beautiful projects in collaboration with local people, whilst working within the challenging conditions of the covid19 pandemic.

This publication, curated by The Stove Network provides an overview of the residencies alongside links to the works in a digital format and the accompanying podcast series. Special thanks to all of the artists and community trusts who took part in this series of projects, and to all of the local people who generously gave their time to share their experiences with us all.

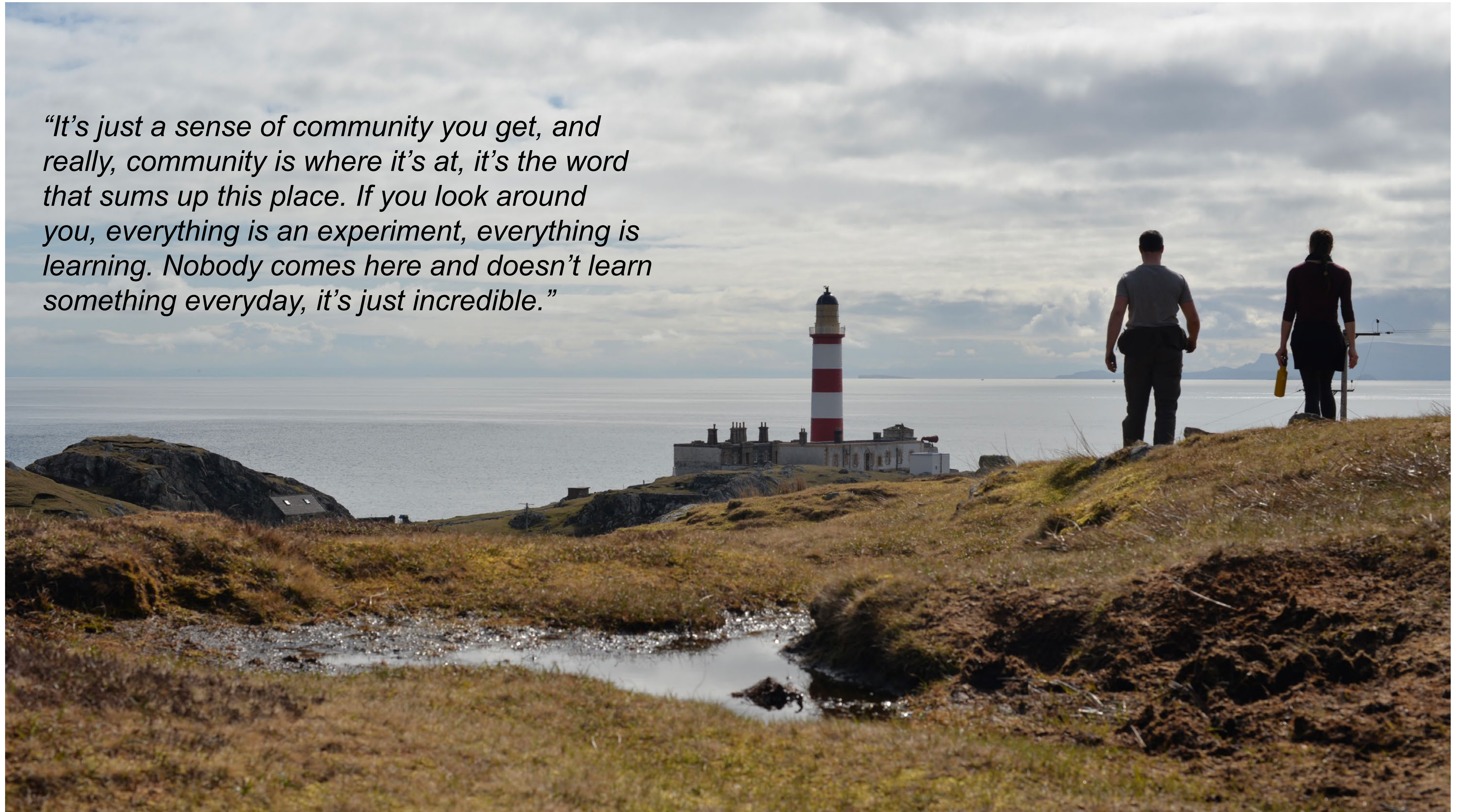
“Radical is about roots. So surely, the people that live on the land, depend on the land, are the people who should be consulted about the use of the land? It’s very simple. It’s not a complex thing.”

Participant as part of CT Productions research project Stories of Radical Landownership

Image credit: CT Productions



“It’s just a sense of community you get, and really, community is where it’s at, it’s the word that sums up this place. If you look around you, everything is an experiment, everything is learning. Nobody comes here and doesn’t learn something everyday, it’s just incredible.”



RICHARD BRACKEN + ABRIACHAN FOREST TRUST

“...The land has a will, and if you look at the derivation of wilderness, and wild, one of the possible derivations is that it comes from wild beasts, willed beasts, beasts that have will and are exhibiting, living out their own will. So if you have a landscape that is willed, how can we as people help to allow the land to live out, to act under it’s own will?”

Richard Bracken worked with Abriachan Forest Trust, an environmental artist and creative educator based in Drumnadrochit, he brought 10 years experience of engaging with communities and collaborating with multi-disciplinary teams in Scotland and abroad to this collaboration.

“My work is a response to an on-going, personal exploration of the land. Influenced by ecology, folklore, and natural processes, I typically create sculpture using casting and mould-making, but also produce site-specific installations and two-dimensional work using print-making methods like cyanotype (blue-prints). Recent work relates to two Lochaber woodlands affected by the World Wars. Drawing on fact and folklore spanning several centuries it seeks to raise questions about repentance, remembrance, the legacies we leave and those we forget.”

The collection of 16 engraved walking sticks created as part of the Artists and Community Landowners commission is the end point in a process of research, engagement and making. It is also a beginning; an invitation for the hand and the land to connect, and a prompt for new journeys, stories and conversations.

In working with Abriachan Forest Trust, my aim has been to understand how the different generations see their place in their land, and to explore themes of journeying, custodianship and growth.

Inspired by tales of old Abriachan sticks and encouraged by the Trust’s appetite for developing and sharing skills already present in the community, the accessible, traditional craft of stick-making became a natural focus for the project. Through walks, workshops and conversations with community members of all ages, I was able to learn about the land itself and the things that resonated with its people.

Stick-making engenders care: for the tree you harvest from, for the drying, the making and the straightening or the bending. A stick that is borrowed or entrusted must be looked after, sticks can be passed to others, and it was with this in mind that the idea of forming a collection for communal use developed.

Each stick is dedicated to a different aspect of life at Abriachan Forest Trust. The text (laser-engraved onto the sticks by Abriachan resident Simon Baker, of Evergreen) is a distillation of conversations, research, observations, moments and hopes to which people will have their own unique response. At different sizes, the collection hints at the generations journeying together and the possibility that today’s children can ‘grow into’ the larger sticks, looking after them as they will the land.

With special thanks to Hugh Sutherland.

Image credit: Richard Bracken





How did you feel
once you had bought
the forest?



How did you make the
money to buy the
forest?



What is your
favourite part of the
forest?



Why did you
buy the forest?

“This is something the young people could kind of do anywhere. And because this is land owned by the community that is a possibility.”



Image credit: Richard Bracken

VIRGINIA HUTCHISON + GALSON ESTATE TRUST

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Produced in collaboration between artist Virginia Hutchison and the team at Galson Estate Trust, this project brings together narratives surrounding the community land buyout of the Galson Estate in 2007. Created during the COVID pandemic in 2020/2021 the project weaves together local audio archives and interviews and brings them into contemporary conversations surrounding community land ownership. With access and social distancing measures in mind the project has taken the form of a series of cast bronze artefacts temporarily sited in the landscape of North Lewis. Embedded with digital QR codes the artefacts link visitors directly to the audio works via mobile phone.

“If you didn’t know the names of these places you couldn’t talk about them..”

Underpinning the interviews are recitals of the Gaelic place names that define North Lewis. A gentle call and response between Gaelic and English - though not a direct translation - through the landscape, geography and history of the area. Looking out onto the Barvas moor visitors can be mistaken for thinking that it is an empty landscape. But listening closely to the Gaelic expressions used to describe the environment of North Lewis gives a sense of the intimate and complex relationship between people and place. A language embedded within local culture and knowledge and not always translatable.

“Space doesn’t become a place until you interact with it. It doesn’t become a place until you name it... and it becomes a place in relation to somewhere or something else... it’s always changing.”

Permeating the voices within the audio works are recordings made from the constant movements and tectonic shifts beneath the Earth’s surface. Produced by artist Stephen Hurrell, the seismic sounds provide layers to the stories and issues that surround engagement with the landscape. Hurrell’s work with Seismic Sounds and with Gaelic speaking communities in Barra, weaves closely into the stories of radical landownership in North Lewis. Where these conversations meet and overlap presents opportunities for wider discussions around land reform in Scotland.

Many thanks to the Galson Estate staff and community. Special thanks to Agnes and Frank Rennie, Lisa Maclean, Annie MacSween, Iain Gordon Macdonald, Richard Collins (Edinburgh University), Edinburgh College of Art and Blackbay Recording Studios.

This project was produced in conversation with artists Stephen Hurrell and Fiona Rennie.

1 Annie Macsween, Faclan 2020, A History with Heart and Soul – The Place Names of North Lewis, Ness Historical Society
2 Frank Rennie, Dùthcas 2020, The Changing Outer Hebrides – Galson and the meaning of Place

Virginia Hutchison

Virginia worked directly with Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn - Galson Estate Trust - on the Isle of Lewis. As a maker with a strong conversational aspect to her work, collaborative engagement underpins Virginia’s practice.

“With regards to the constantly evolving social and cultural politics that define specific, often civic spaces, I work with a range of media, including text, film, performance and sculpture. How an audience or viewer becomes physically involved with what they see and how visual hooks from works of art or architecture can create a sense of involvement is central to this.

With particular reference to how memory and learning is affected by automatic emotional responses to art objects, I work in collaboration with artists, students and groups from wider communities to explore how different forms of artistic engagement influence the interaction we have with our environments.

Taking a lead from the processes involved in creative production, each project considers how shared experiences can promote conversation. Often the art object is taken as a point of departure for new work. These approaches allow us to discuss ideas surrounding authorship, or ownership, and to question the frameworks we have in place for critique and evaluation.”



Image credits: Fiona Rennie

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Image credit: Fiona Rennie



CT PRODUCTIONS: SASKIA COULSON + COLIN TENNANT

STORIES OF RADICAL LANDOWNERSHIP

Coulson and Tennant

The Stories of Radical Landownership commission was undertaken by Coulson and Tennant (Dr Saskia Coulson and Colin Tennant), an award-winning artist partnership developing projects through a lens-based practice, combining genres of documentary and fine art.

“Our work is underpinned by academic research and, through visual storytelling, we create artistic, documentary and environmental work for a wide range of organisations and for our own projects. To do this, we collaborate with many different communities and individuals and draw inspiration from historical, creative and ecological references.

We aim to make works that spark conversations about the past, present and future of our man-made and natural world. We strive to create stories and produce work that can speak to various audiences, from local communities, international media, academia, art and cultural sectors. We want to reach as many people as possible because we seek to develop projects that can affect change in the real world. This ambition is at the core of our practice.”

“We believe that capturing stories of radical land ownership is important, both in terms of social documentation, but also as a means to advocate for future practices and policy.

Throughout our project, Stories of Radical Landownership, we sought to co-create visual stories with the community landowners through a mixture of multimedia works, including photographs, audio recordings and moving images. We wanted the communities to use the process as a way to reflect on their achievements, but also to consider the future challenges they might face.

We collaborated with a combination of urban and rural community trusts namely, Bridgend Farmhouse in Edinburgh, North Harris Trust and South West Mull and Iona Development Trust. In addition to a diverse geographical spread, each trust introduced us to people from a range of ages and backgrounds. Each individual provided us with a unique perspective in the bigger picture of radical land ownership. From these stories, we discovered the journeys that led the trusts to undertake a land asset transfer, and we explored how a sense of ‘ownership’ has had an impact on the people of the communities.”

During the course of the project, we became interested in what ‘radical’ meant to community land owners. It became a deliberate discussion point for each of our conversations. We were surprised that for many, the concept of ‘radical’ was not radical at all, but a way of making sense of an otherwise complex and complicated world. In addition, ‘radical’ was understood to be an approach to challenge prevalent power imbalances, a return to traditional practices of communal living, and community control for the foreseeable future, to name a few.

The final works are a series of photographs and a short film in Gaelic and English. They represent our brief dive into the deep, rich world of community land ownership. The works are testimony to this moment in time and the ambition of community landowners during a very remarkable year.

We are grateful to all those who invited us into their communities and were so open with their stories and ambitions for the future. It is a great responsibility to be the caretakers of these stories and we appreciate that so many people have entrusted us with them.



“How are we radical? This is what the normal should be. If this is not the normal then it’s radical. How are we different in our landownership?”



PARTNERS AND TRUSTS

Community Land Scotland is the representative body for Scotland’s aspiring and post-purchase community landowners. They promote the sustainable development benefits of community landownership and work with communities to support encourage community ownership of land and buildings throughout Scotland. Their vision is of more communities reaping the benefits of community landownership and promoting a socially just Scotland through community landownership.

The Stove Network is an arts and community organisation based in the centre of Dumfries in South West Scotland. It is a successful social enterprise, and the first artist-led Development Trust in Scotland.

Our kitchen-table style of practice and developing work is one based on the values of risk-taking, collaboration, emotional openness, empowerment, positive disruptive change, innovation and inclusion. We are committed to finding locally-led solutions as part of our place and community.

Our practice is one that engages artists and creative people to co-develop work from regular conversational activity into large-scale strategic projects. It is a process-led practice that uses creative activity to facilitate community-led development, projects and decision-making grown from a foundation in community engagement. It is a multi-disciplinary practice working with artists and other creative practitioners, individuals and groups, organisational partners, third sector organisations, local authorities and governing bodies to deliver a programme of regular activity alongside large-scale participatory arts projects

Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn (Galson Estate Trust) is the charity established to manage the community-owned Galson estate: 56,000 acres of coast, crofted agriculture and moorland in the North West of the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland. The estate passed into community ownership on 12 January 2007 and comprises 22 villages running from Upper Barvas to Port of Ness with a population of nearly 2,000 people.

Galson Estate is one of the largest buyouts in Scotland with the “Urras” working with tenants and local people to manage all estate business and develop a large range of projects on behalf of the community. Current projects range from renewables and energy efficiency projects to tourism and youth projects. From the income generated by their wind turbines development at Ballantrushal they are able to provide funding for the community through a Community Investment Fund.

The Urras strives to involve the whole community in its decision-making process through ongoing consultations and communication. The overarching vision is to build a sustainable future for the communities of the Galson Estate.

Abriachan Forest Trust. Abriachan is a scattered rural community of about 130 people set high above the shores of Loch Ness in the Highlands of Scotland about 10 miles from Inverness. There are still some active crofts but the majority of inhabitants are employed in Inverness and beyond. The local school closed in 1958 so Abriachan’s children now attend Dochgarroch Primary, Charleston Academy and Glenurquhart High School. In 1998 the community purchased 540 hectares of forest and open hill ground from Forest Enterprise. Since then, as a social enterprise, the Abriachan Forest Trust has managed this land to create local employment, improve the environment and encourage its enjoyment by the public through a network of spectacular paths, family suited mountain bike trails, innovative outdoor learning as well as health and well-being opportunities. They run a series of forest school and outdoor educational and support activities in partnership with local groups and organisation and have worked regularly with different artists (photographers, creative writers, textile artists, felters, spinners and weavers) on a variety of projects.



Image credit: Richard Bracken.

South West Mull and Iona Development (SWMID) is a community-led organisation that was set up to tackle local issues and help make their community a more resilient and sustainable place to live for local people. Their projects range from small scale activities, providing space for a community gym to much larger, owning and managing a 789-hectare commerical forest to generate local income.

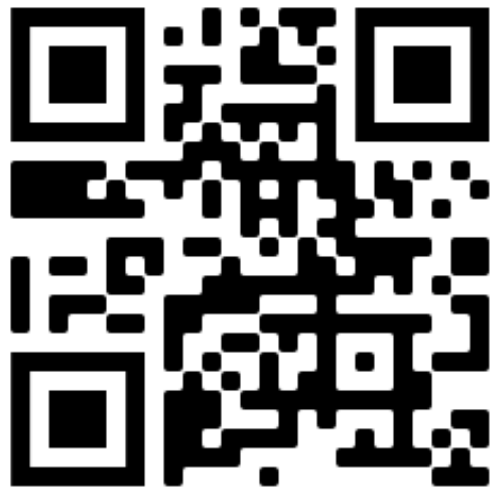
Bridgend Farmhouse is a community owned and run charitable organisation in south Edinburgh with a mission to ensure our now renovated farmhouse exists as a sustainable community-owned centre for learning, eating and exercise, where all can learn, work and grow together to develop a flourishing community and place.

Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust is the community organisation which owns the Isle of Eigg. The Trust manages and stewards the island’s development for current and future residents. After years of instability, neglect and lack of secure tenure, the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust was able to purchase the island on 12th June 1997, largely due to the generosity of around ten thousand members of the general public. The Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust was established to provide and create opportunity for economic development, housing and infrastructure, whilst conserving our natural and cultural heritage to ensure that development takes place in a sustainable way. The Trust has been successful in these aims, with Eigg now a vibrant and attractive place to live and work, having a growing and forward-thinking population, always with an eye on the past and one to the future, recognising the importance of Eigg’s unique identity to its continuing growth and success.

North Harris Trust The 25,900 ha of North Harris make up one of the largest community owned estates in Scotland. The North Harris Trust, which manages the land on behalf of the community, is open to all residents and is run by a board of locally elected volunteer directors. The Trust aims to increase employment opportunities, address local housing needs, and protect and enhance North Harris’s wonderful cultural and natural heritage.

PODCASTS AND DIGITAL CONTENT

As part of The Radical Land, The Stove Network project leads Katharine Wheeler and Martin O'Neill visited some of the participating trusts to learn more about the artists and activity that had taken place. The resulting documentation has formed a series of three podcasts, which are available to listen live via mainstream podcast platforms or by visiting [The Stove Network website](#).



Additionally, digital content was created as part of the artists commissions by both Virginia Hutchison and CT Productions' Stories of Radical Landownership. Virginia worked with Galson Estate Trust and in conversation with artists Fiona Rennie and Stephen Hurrell to produce a series of audio works which can be found through QR codes on the surface of her bronze artworks, and on the Galson Estate website. Colin and Saskia of CT Productions produced a short film titled Stories of Radical Landownership which was created through conversations and visits to South West Mull and Iona Development, North Harris Trust, Bridgend Farmhouse and Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust. The film is now available to view online.

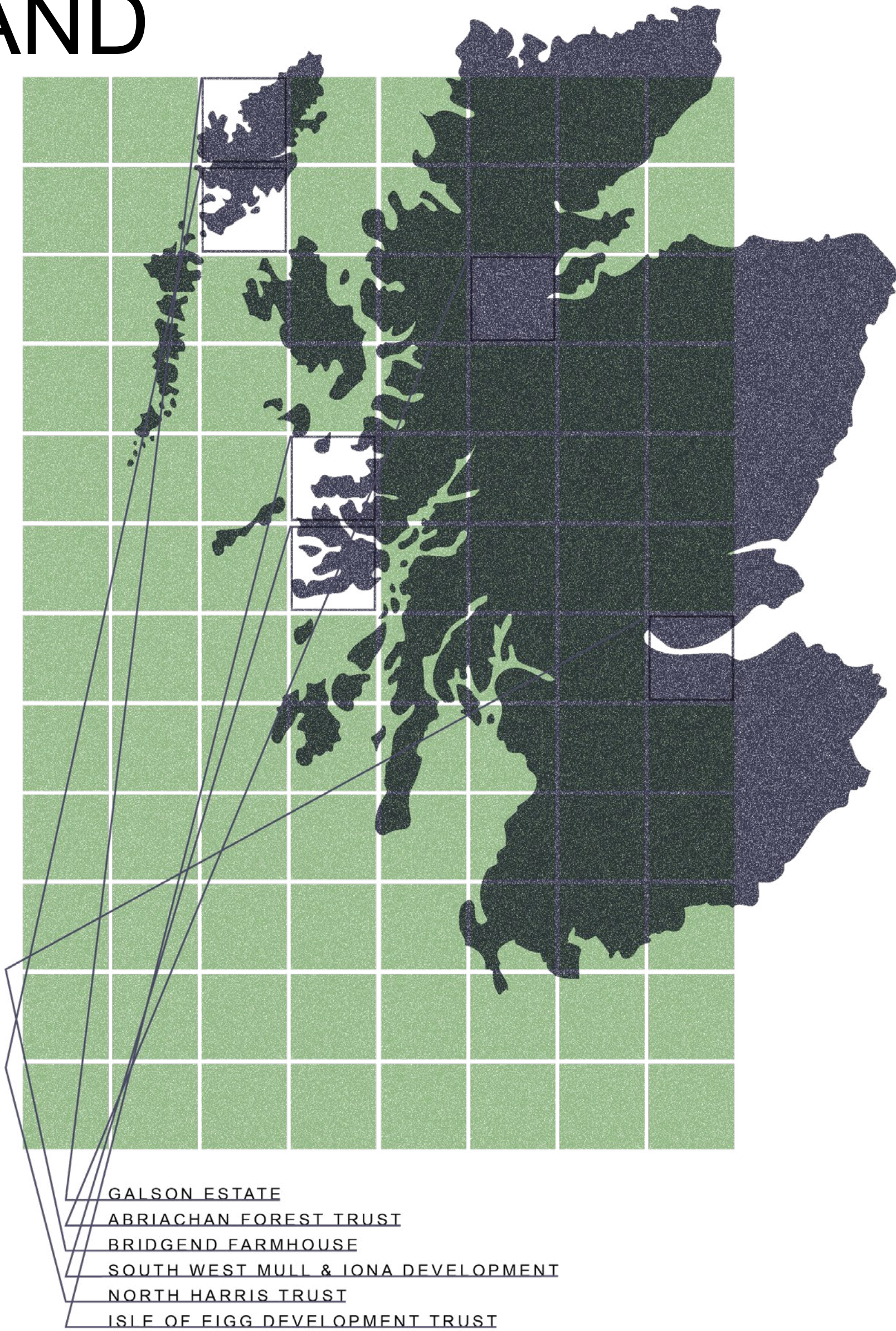


[Virginia Hutchison's audio works](#)



CT Productions' short film, [Stories of Radical Landownership](#)

MAP OF THE RADICAL LAND





the stove network

COMMUNITY*
LAND SCOTLAND