

Scotland could be a d with 1000 forest huts

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As people across Europe prepare to enjoy the summer months in their forest cabins, an environmental charity is about to unveil a vision that would see 1000 huts built in Scotland's woods over the next five years.

In Norway more than half the population has access to a hytte (hut) where they can escape the city and get closer to nature.

Meanwhile, one in 12 Swedes, one in 18 Finns and one in 33 Danes can claim a rural bolthole, with similar traditions in Russia and the Czech Republic. Lakeside cabins are also popular in Canada and the northern states of the US.

However, in Scotland 10 years ago a study showed there were just 700 holiday huts or DIY cabins, for a population of five million.

The trials and tribulations of the Carbeth Hutterers are well known (see panel), but the closest most of us get to a hut is when we put the lawnmower in the garden shed. However, that could all change. On Wednesday, at Greyfriars Kirk in Edinburgh, environmental charity Reforesting Scotland will launch a campaign to build 1000 huts across Scotland over the next five years.

Huts have the potential to help urban Scots reconnect with the land and provide affordable rural breaks

One of those who will be there is leading land rights campaigner Andy Wightman. He told The Herald: "Over most of Europe, there is a long tradition of folk having huts in the countryside. It is widely recognised that such rural escapes provide benefits for physical and mental wellbeing.

"In Scotland, by contrast, hut-owners continue to face eviction, have few legal rights and have been forgotten about by policy makers.

"It is time we celebrated this valuable part of Scotland's culture and reformed land and planning laws to allow thousands more people to enjoy the freedom and simple pleasures of a hut."

So far, no sites have been identified for the new huts.

He said: "Forestry Commission land is an obvious candidate but that would involve serious political will.

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"If we could get planning law changed to provide a 'hutting consent' then it should be possible to establish sites on a straightforward commercial arrangement with some landowners. There is also the possibility of reforming the community right to buy legislation, but these are just some early ideas."

Another who will be at the launch is award-winning broadcaster and commentator Lesley Riddoch, who is currently doing doctoral research comparing the hutting traditions of Scotland and Norway. Writing in Reforesting Scotland's journal, she said that these had produced a nation of rootless Scots with nearly no experience of nature, and a nation of rooted Norwegians spending as little time in cities as they can.

"I hope to demonstrate that this cultural difference accounts for dramatic health and social differences too," she said.

Reforesting Scotland director Ninian Stuart, who has already built his own hut in woods in Fife, said: "For many, a hut represents a simple place for work or play, whilst for more serious hutterers it represents a

fundamental need for shelter.

"Reforesting Scotland believe that a further one thousand huts, built in and from Scottish woods, could make an early contribution to the renewal of a vibrant forest culture and the economic regeneration of rural communities.

"In the longer term, more huts in the countryside have the potential to help urban Scots reconnect with the land and provide affordable rural breaks for people who would otherwise be unable to afford a retreat in the country."

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George Gunn, Thurso

The problem here is the twin pillars of capitalism; landownership and property. In the Highlands there are thousands of empty houses which are occupied for a few weeks in the summer by their owners from the south-east of England. This breeds resentment locally. Until all the landed estates are brought into community ownership and houses cease to be considered as "property" but homes then we are always going to be tampering around the edges of things. I wish the hutters well.

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Len Northfield

Don't we have caravans instead?

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alan mitchell, Elderslie

This is a great lack in Scotland at the moment. I have spent holidays in Sweden where the huts are so common everyone has access to one. We lived in one on an island in the Stockholm Archipelago, looking out to sea in scenery which could have been Scotland with idyllic weather. For all my travel, I often think that this simple week was my favourite week ever.

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Jim Gibson

This is one of the best ideas I have heard for a long time. I can only speak as a former Glasgow youngster who in the late forties and the fifties was part of huge number of young (and not so young) weekend explorers leave the city to walk, climb, cycle and discover the beauties of our country.

As a member of the Glasgow United Cycling Club the weekend was a time of journeys round the Three Lochs, of "drumming up" beside Loch Lomond, hurtling home in a peleton of riders.

We knew many of the "hutters" and I nearly bought one myself but was pipped at the post as they say!

This idea could only do good and possibly get our present young generation off of the couch and out of the clubs and pubs!

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Andrew McMillan, Scotland

Bureaucratic red tap and tight planning control in Scotland will prevent this excellent idea from progressing. Our publicly managed forestry commission lands all over Scotland are ideal for such developments but again a civil service mentality and a desire to restrict the rights and wishes of the general public will prevent any progress.

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joe thomson, ayr

themidgies,themidgies,i'm no gonie kidyis

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