

Creative Corner

Benchmark

A bench, 20m long and made from a single oak, stands outside the Gateway Centre at Loch Lomond Shores in Balloch and carries a 'canto' commissioned by Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority. In twelve rhyming fragments, in three languages, I have attempted to distil the essence of the Park's interwoven natural and cultural heritage.

tlachd ri fhaighinn anns a' phàirc | water ripples deep and dark
settlers brought the vital spark | history's steed engraves its mark
awthing, tak tent, is naitur's wark | lingering song pursues a lark
greening ferns frond oak tree bark | nàdur loma-làn 'san àirc
snowbound stags stand mutely stark | ilka ben maks reek its sark
eachdraidh a' mire mar marc | memories cluster in the park

Tlachd ri fhaighinn anns a' phàirc (say tlachk ree eye-unn anss a fa-ark) is reflected in the last fragment and means pleasures are found together in the park; water, the most defining feature of the park, is one of those pleasures. The influences of early people were the first, enduring steps of the prancing stallion of history mirrored later in eachdraidh a' mire mar marc (say ech-tri a meer-ugh mar ma-ark). But Scots folk will tell you to take heed that everything is the work of nature, whether the haunting call of birds or the ubiquitous plants and trees.

Nàdur loma-làn 'san àirc (say na-a-turr loma la-an san a-ark) emphasises this, meaning nature overflows its kist, or chest, The majestic red deer and ever changing weather are two more examples of the Park's natural manifestations which include the 'Scotch mist' that mountains wear as a skirt.

Benchmark1 evokes the interpretation strategy of the new National Park Authority and is also used on a series of mini-benches, each with two fragments, at the Park's six 'gateway' communities. At the 'launch' of the Callander mini-bench, Marsha Luti accompanied my reading of the canto by playing on her clàrsach a tune that I composed for the occasion.

Now you've somewhere to park your behoochie and contemplate.

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1Chrissie Bannerman, a National Park Authority member, helped with the Gaelic, and Stuart Bailey of ID8 designed the bench itself.

"A camel is a horse designed by committee."

Sir Alec Issigonis, designer of the Mini