Alexander Hamilton The Glenfinlas Cyanotypes

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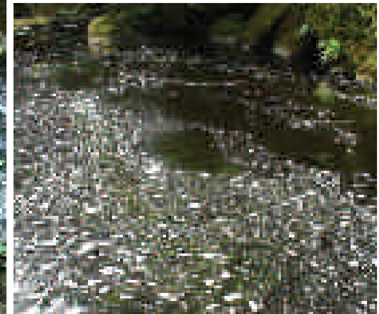
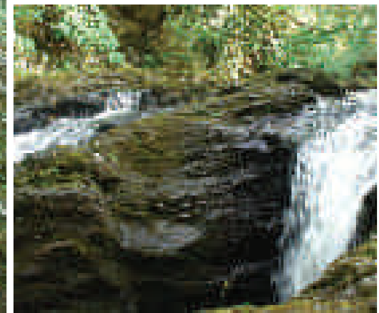




The Site at Glenfinlas
'The place is of great importance in the history of British landscape painting for it was here that
the first major example of Ruskinian Pre-Raphaelitism was created.' (Alastair Grieve, *Ruskin's Artists*, Ashgate 2000)

The Site at Glenfinlas

Glenfinlas Burn is situated in a gorge a short way beneath the Glenfinlas dam, near Brig o'Turk in the Trossachs. It is a rich landscape, with complex movements of water and a striking variety of rock formations, plants and trees. It is here that the critic John Ruskin and John Everett Millais, the celebrated founding member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, spent several months in 1853 – Ruskin sketching and preparing the influential Edinburgh lectures he would deliver in November, Millais working on a portrait of his friend. The artist executed the painting, under the sitter's direction, with acute attention to detail; in so doing Millais presented both an exact rendering of a specific place and a 'manifesto' – the conceptual landscape of Ruskin's doctrine of nature.

When a visitor enters the setting of the Ruskin portrait, he or she is immediately struck by the 'enclosing' quality of the landscape which creates a shaded, even gloomy, location. The senses are initially overwhelmed by the sound of rushing water, against which roar Effie Ruskin – destined soon to be Effie Millais – quoted from Dante. Only after clambering up to the spot where Ruskin posed does a feeling of stillness emerge: the explorer gazes downstream on to a tranquil pool, bounded by rocks. Within a few minutes, however, the air fills with hordes of midges, assaulting the intruder's face and hair. How Ruskin, Millais and Effie dealt with this monstrous horde beggars belief. To stand day after day, to paint day after day, in this hidden location, where dampness and lack of wind create the perfect conditions for the Scottish midge, must have been an act of considerable self-discipline. To add to the joy, this part of Scotland enjoys high rainfall, and the summer of 1853 was no exception. In selecting this difficult and complex site Ruskin was truly seeking to demonstrate to Millais some very important ideas on looking, and being immersed in, a particular type of Scottish landscape.

My personal journey to Glenfinlas began in 1968. En route for art college, I had left my Caithness home for the first time and had taken a summer job working close to Brig O'Turk. These two months gave me my first impressions of this remarkable landscape. I scrambled over Ben Venue, swam in Loch Achray and strode round the magical road that surrounds Loch Katrine. This is the famous 'Scott Country' and his romantic writings duly drew Victorians in their hundreds, among them the young Ruskin and his parents.

I was introduced to Ruskin at art college although by this stage his ideas had been pushed out of the teaching programme. Somehow, however, a fleeting slide image in art appreciation class of the English critic poised on a lump of Scottish rock left an impression on me. My curiosity encouraged me in later years to return to the Trossachs and Brig o'Turk. The house where Ruskin had stayed - the school master's cottage - was still to be seen, but the location of the painting was, apparently, long since lost. The construction of the Glenfinlas dam had, everyone was told, buried the site under tons of concrete.

As my engagement with Ruskin continued to develop, I came across a revelatory essay by the art historian Alastair Grieve. Evidently dissatisfied with the local version of events, he investigated, persisted, shrugged off the midges, and finally tracked down the historic site. With his essay Alastair includes several black-and-white photographs, revealing a site remarkably untouched and uncannily true to Millais' painting. It was from this source that I also rediscovered where Ruskin had stood.

Why is the site important to me? My journey over the past 40 years has been to use the language of art to understand the world around me. It was often the wonderful words of John Ruskin and his relationship with nature that most moved me. He comprehended and emphasised this need to seek truth through nature. In an age where everything is filtered and processed, I am drawn to finding ways and working methods that allow nature to speak for itself. I am seeking pure connectivity with my living environment. I also want to make unique images of what I see and feel. That is why I use a process called cyanotype, a technique that allows me to achieve an undistorted link with the natural world. Only the cyanotype technique, which involves placing a plant directly onto prepared watercolour paper and then allowing the sun to draw out the image, seemed to offer me the emotional rapport I am seeking with nature. From this starting point my botanical journey began, seeking truth through nature and allowing the flora to speak for themselves. Exploring the site where Ruskin stood in 1853, seeing the plants that he would have seen, gives me also an emotional connection to this extraordinary figure, one of the most important and unique in the history of art.

Alexander Hamilton
Brig o'Turk, Trossachs, Scotland
July 2008

For the great Victorian art critic John Ruskin, the natural world was God's self-expression in material form: it was both the source of all earthly delight and a means of transcendence for human beings. Ruskin called himself 'Nature's Priest:' the service of 'Nature and Truth' was his vocation. As he wrote in *The Two Paths* (1858), *"I have had but one steady aim in all that I have ever tried to teach, namely – to declare that whatever was great in human art was the expression of man's delight in God's work."*

In 1853, Ruskin brought his protégé, the Pre-Raphaelite painter John Everett Millais, to Brig o' Turk, near Loch Katrine. Ruskin loved the Scottish landscape for its evocations of memories of idyllic holidays with his Scottish family, for the geological grandeur of its mountains, and for its associations with his favourite author, Walter Scott. He also discerned in Millais the potential to be as marvellous a painter as Ruskin's hero, J.M.W. Turner. Millais, for his part, recognised a valuable mentor in Ruskin; he had already discovered that an academic training in the Royal Academy schools, whilst it had developed his precocious skill in drawing and painting, was insufficient to make an artist of him.

Vision needed the accompaniment of a passion. Ruskin's writings in his books *Modern Painters I* (1843) and *Modern Painters II* (1846) had been an inspiration to the group of artists who called themselves the Pre-Raphaelites. Before he was aware that he had drawn their attention, or had even met any of them, Ruskin had written to *The Times*, defending them against their critics, praising them for their 'honesty'. That they had embraced, however naively, an aesthetic that derived from early Italian painting signified their moral seriousness and vigour. Here again was painting whose sacred end was the celebration of God's creation and which disdained vain demonstration of human powers of invention and skill. This 'honesty' that Ruskin saw in the art of Millais was evident in the care with which the smallest wild flower would be lovingly rendered in his work.

Ruskin spent the summer at Glenfinlas writing the four lectures he was to give in Edinburgh in the autumn, in which he would present a manifesto of his radically anti-establishment ideas about art and architecture, and their relation to society. He also posed for the portrait by Millais – a visual manifesto.

Ruskin wrote to his father:

"Millais has fixed on his place – a lovely piece of worn rock, with foaming water, and weeds, and moss, and a noble overhanging bank of dark crag – and I am to be standing looking quietly down the stream – just the sort of thing I used to do for hours together..."

The significance of the site chosen for the portrait may have been its association with Scott. It typified the 'narrow inlet' in the glen near Loch Katrine, described by Scott in 'The Lady of the Lake'.

Most importantly though, the site contained the elements of nature – rocks, water, plants, trees – that Ruskin had written about in the first volume of *Modern Painters* and which he had urged would-be artists to study. Learning to represent these as exactly and truthfully as possible was the essential grounding and tutelage of the Turnerian painter.

"All that is desirable ... is based upon truths and habits of nature; but we cannot understand those truths until we are acquainted with the specific forms and minor details which they affect, or out of which they arise."

With a drawing by Turner before him, "a geologist could give a lecture on the whole system of aqueous erosion, and speculate as safely upon the past and future states of this very spot, as if he were standing and getting wet with the spray."

Millais did not depict Ruskin as he would actually have stood on the spot; he is dressed in his elegantly-tailored city suit and the famous blue stock in which he delivered his lectures. It is unlikely that Ruskin would have worn a high starched collar and stock in the Trossachs. His presence there is therefore metaphorical rather than actual.

This may seem heretical, or paradoxical, when speaking of what has been called the first Pre-Raphaelite landscape (Grieve) and a picture that has always been written of in terms of its mimetic exactitude. However, as with other Pre-Raphaelite paintings, whilst the figurative content is rendered as faithfully and minutely as possible, the work is also intended to function on a symbolic level. As in any portrait that seeks to convey more than mere likeness, the subject is presented in a way that indicates those attributes of character and conviction that distinguish the individual. Ruskin is presented 'inside' nature.

The landscape – though rendered with perfect accuracy, as the recent rediscovery of the site of the portrait has shown – also illustrates Ruskin's own writings. It calls to mind his words about the painting of fast-flowing water: the geological character of the framing gneiss rock formation, the way that water has an amber tinge to its edges when it flows over this rock, and how moss can find a toehold on its apparently inhospitable surface. Millais presents Ruskin the intellectual, the public orator, the teacher; but also – staff in hand – Ruskin the solitary traveller.

Reaching a celebrated monument or view, sent by a teacher or accompanied by a guide, we receive instruction in what to think and feel. The solitary traveller, however, comes upon the scene without the burden of civilization or the crutch of history. To see Nature required a similar abandonment, Ruskin argued; the only voice was that of the individual soul. For all this, Ruskin was not without companions of a sort at Glenfinlas, standing at the (perceived) edge of the world of Man. He spent much of the time reading Dante and Wordsworth. But they were mere spirits. Ruskin's quest was shared by others of the age who were also straying from the path of orthodoxy.

It was permitted, Ruskin recalled, writing of his childhood in a strictly devout Scottish home, to read Bunyan on Sundays (his own choice on weekdays being Scott or *The Iliad*). The wayfarer, or Pilgrim, is a recurring presence throughout Ruskin's writings. He begins his autobiography *Praeterita* – whose title may be translated as 'things that are no more,' or 'things past' – with a reference to *The Pilgrim's Progress*. He extends, throughout the book, the metaphor of a journey or pilgrimage through life. Moments of epiphany – things destined to pass – are when Ruskin the wayfarer, literally on the road, on a walk or a journey, had revelatory experiences. His first sight of the Alps, his discovery of the Brantwood ivy, or his own 'Road to Damascus,' when he stopped to draw an aspen tree in Fontainebleau, were such, and were to direct and determine the course of his own life and spiritual journey. He had a strong sense of vocation: just as his mother had dedicated him to God before he was born, he dedicated himself to the study of Nature. While staying at Fontainebleau in 1842, the 23-year-old Ruskin writes,

"[I] found myself lying on the bank of a cart-road in the sand, with no prospect whatever but that small aspen tree against the blue sky. Languidly, but not idly, I began to draw it; and as I drew, the languor passed away: the beautiful lines insisted on being traced, – without weariness. More and more beautiful they became, as each rose out of the rest and took its place in the air. With wonder increasing every instant, I saw that they 'composed' themselves, by finer laws than any known of men. At last, the tree was there, and everything I had thought before about trees, nowhere..."

A decade later, the young and precociously-talented Millais was to be guided by Ruskin towards the same vision. Ruskin determined to teach him first-hand what he had expounded in *Modern Painters* for all true and humble students of landscape.

Alexander Hamilton and Ruskin – journeys coincide.

Ruskin has writtten, with Wordsworth in mind, of the "art of the wayside" (The Stones of Venice, 1853) that "No man can be a lover of what is best in the higher walks of art, who has not feeling and charity enough ... to be thankful for the flowers which men have laid their burdens down to sow by the wayside"

It seems extraordinarily appropriate that the first artist to revisit the site of the Millais portrait of Ruskin should be Alexander Hamilton. As a young Edinburgh College of Art student Hamilton was not encouraged by his drawing and painting teachers to study nature. In fact he was chastised for not spending time in the studio, preferring to work out of doors in the landscape of the Pentlands, and inviting their strictures when he brought plants into the studio rather than paintings for his degree show. It is as if he had already heard the words Ruskin addressed to 'young artists' at the end of the first volume of *Modern Painters*:

"From young artists nothing ought to be tolerated but simple bona fide imitation of nature. [They] should go to Nature in all singleness of heart, and walk with her laboriously and trustingly, having no other thoughts but how best to penetrate her meaning, and remember her instruction; rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing; believing all things to be right and good, and rejoicing always in the truth."

Ruskin spent eleven years working on *Proserpina: Studies of Wayside Flowers* (1875-1886). In his study Ruskin attempted to reclassify plants in human terms, opposing the clinical classifications of Linnaeus. Ruskin translated Rousseau in discussing the business of botany and the mixed value of learning plant names:

"Before teaching them to name what they see, let us begin by teaching them to see it."

As Dinah Birch has written: "This is characteristic of Ruskin's writing on natural history in the 1870s and 1880s -- belligerent, personal, sceptical of the prestige of professionalized science. But it is not just an old man's fit of temper. The pedagogic values of *Proserpina* are those that direct Ruskin's work throughout his long writing life. The emphasis on learning from 'things visible' -- what can be seen of the material world, and what can be seen with human eyes, without artificial help -- runs throughout his criticism. Equally consistent is his claim that the learning that matters most is not gained from the exceptional or dramatic or spectacular, but from everyday experience, available to all: 'a bramble hedge, or a hawthorn thicket.'"
(*Yearbook of English Studies*, 2006)

Since his youth, Hamilton has consciously immersed himself in the natural landscape, allowing himself to explore and forge connections with the natural world that are fundamental to human life. The artist produced his first cyanotypes while living on the Island of Stroma in the Pentland Firth in 1973.

The remoteness of this almost uninhabited island gave Hamilton the opportunity to truly engage with its distinctive landscape and weather conditions, without the usual distractions of the densely populated urban world. The experience of Stroma, would be central to the artist's ideas and ways of working.

Hamilton's time on the island was an attenuation of the impulse that germinated following the completion of his studies at Edinburgh College of Art 1972. Whilst studying, Hamilton opted to live outside of the crowded city, commuting instead from the countryside.

His decade of work using the cyanotype process from 1990 coincided with his processing ideas which had been accumulating in his artistic imagination, in particular the symbolism of certain plants: roses and the nature of plant breeding; tulips, the symbol of wealth for the 17th century Dutch; and poppies' connection with sleep and the world of dreams. His work *The Genealogy of the Peace Rose*, exhibited in 1995, asks: what are the rules of this perfection? Who determines the aesthetic of such rules?

For Hamilton, in contrast to the approach of the rose breeder, beauty and humanity lie in the imperfect, unfinished or unbalanced. In nature no two things are alike; all are unique and perfect. Equally, in creating his cyanotypes he is drawn to a process that will only create one unique image of each plant. No two cyanotypes are alike. The search and engagement with nature is to seek connectivity with all around and allow each plant its own unique blue image. Like Ruskin, he is also drawn to the power of the colour blue. This colour is also symbolic of the quest for knowledge and understanding.
In Celtic mythology the Blue Flower always exists over the next mountain.

In the Glenfinlas Cyanotypes, a resonance is established between an understanding of the humble, a particular site and the wayside plants that populate it. This approach was also deeply informed by an extended stay the artist had at Brantwood, the former home of Ruskin in the Lake District, in 2007. Staying in the same rooms as Ruskin, reading from Ruskin's library and walking in his favourite gardens, all strengthen the artist's connections and understandings of Ruskin's ideas and works.

A contemporary *Proserpina*, an endless search for a closer connection to the natural world, the work of Hamilton brings a deeper understanding to the reasons for taking the journey and for embracing the mythic, spiritual relation between beings and nature.

Julie Lawson
Chief Curator, SNPG National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh
July 2008

August 22 Walking with Mrs Ruskin
cyanotype with plant elements
50 x 65cm

July 14 Wet weather
cyanotype with plant elements
50 x 65cm

July 28 Glorious day
cyanotype with plant elements
50 x 65cm

July 5 Three hours into Loch Achray
cyanotype with plant elements
50 x 65cm

August 5 Glorious day
cyanotype with plant elements
50 x 65cm

July 10 Lazy day
cyanotype with plant elements
50 x 65cm

The Flora of Ruskin's Rock

Having had an interest in the work of John Ruskin for many years, it was with a sense of excitement and anticipation that, on 4 August 2007, I accompanied Alex Hamilton to the hallowed spot where Ruskin actually stood to be painted by John Everett Millais in 1853. The place was charged with emotional drama: for it was here that Effie Ruskin's heart, as she declaimed Dante in a typically Highland combination of midges and rain, against a backdrop of tortured gneiss and foaming torrent, transferred its allegiance from critic to painter (Lutyens & Warner, 1983). Alex had asked me to identify the flowering plants and ferns growing in and around the site as part of a project that included making cyanotypes of some of the fragile herbs, descendents of the silent witnesses to the drama.

In providing this identification service I was following an established path. While Ruskin was being painted he drew botanical studies for the lectures on architecture and painting he was to give in Edinburgh later the same year, but it was also at this point that he had ideas for a book on flowers that emerged many years later as *Proserpina* (Ruskin, 1875–86) – a work in equal measure both thought-provoking and, simply, provoking. Ruskin was no botanist and therefore, with a certain amount of shame, had to send dried plant specimens (in numbered and dated packets) to his friend Pauline, Lady Trevelyan for identification. She and her husband, Sir Walter Calverley Trevelyan, were not only great friends and supporters of Ruskin (Surtees, 1979) with whom Ruskin, Effie and Millais had stayed at Wallington in Northumberland on their way north, but Sir Walter was a fellow of the Botanical Society of Edinburgh, and sent the Society specimens still to be seen in the herbarium of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. Pauline was a devoted friend of Ruskin with both artistic and scientific talents – she had met her husband at the 1833 Cambridge meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science where he was demonstrating dinosaur coprolites – and she suggested that the (scientific) "natural system" would be a better way of arranging Ruskin's botanical book than by flower colour, as he was then contemplating. Sir Walter went up to University College Oxford in 1816, and it was while studying botany at the same college, 160 years later, that in a gallery on 'the High' I found a botanical study by Ruskin of the sort he might have made in Glenfinlas.

The setting of the Ruskin portrait lies in an interesting zone of transition in terms of topography, climate, and flora – between Lowland and Highland, situated in the outer range of hills, with a lush, damp, and somewhat western feel. Culturally it is also somewhat hybrid. The Ruskinian party, as Victorian intellectual tourists steeped in Romanticism, must have come to the Trossachs with thoughts of Ossian and the Wizard of the North in their minds. Had Ruskin read Walter Scott's ballad 'Glenfinlas' (1801) more carefully he might have kept well away from the haunted glen, for it tells of a female siren who ends by devouring one of two (male) friends on a stag hunting expedition. The area, however, also has links with a more rational strand of the Scottish Enlightenment, in the form of two of its more widely travelled scientific adventurers. For it was to nearby Leny House that the great Indian scholar and polymath Francis Buchanan retired in 1815 – where he wrote up his accounts of the *Kingdom of Nepal* (1819) and the *Fishes Found in the River Ganges* (1822), and it was at Ardchullerie that James Bruce of Kinnaird, thirty years earlier, had written part of his *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* (1790). Romanticism, a sense of place, and the documentation of natural history, were all in mind when compiling this short account of the plants to be seen today on and around Ruskin's fateful rock.

It must be stressed that this account relates to a single visit, made about a third of the way through the season during which the portrait was painted, so represents only a snapshot. Several of the plants identified by Pauline Trevelyan (meadow cranesbill, sweet woodruff), or captured as ethereal photograms by Alex Hamilton, were not seen on this occasion. Though the cottage at Brig o'Turk where the Ruskins and Millais stayed is still recognisable, there have been many changes in the landscape and vegetation since their time – a dam has affected the flow of the burn, and the site appears to be more shaded. The area has also been invaded by conspicuous aliens: the rampant *Rhododendron ponticum*, and two pink-flowered Himalayan herbs – the balsam *Impatiens glandulifera* and *Persicaria campanulata*, a knotweed.

The approach to the site is through damp woodland of oak, ash, birch and bird cherry, with the odd, non-native, sapling of beech and spruce. In spring it must be carpeted with bluebells, ramsons* and dog's mercury, but in August all of these were in fruit; pignut, bugle and primrose were other vernal vestiges. Above the site looms the concrete dam, but the waters thus retained have fortunately not swamped the rock itself, and the wood still reverberates

to the roar of the burn. Other species of moist shady woodland were to be seen here: in the lee of an overhanging rock, near the stream, the fragile beech fern (_Phegopteris connectilis_), and that most delicate of grasses, the wood melick (_Melica uniflora_).

The site itself has a typical, though not particularly species rich, flora of the rocky gorges that cut through slightly base-rich schists along the line of the Highland Boundary Fault; this consists, predominantly, of Lowland species – but a single plant of the silvery alpine lady's mantle, washed down from higher up, hinted at the proximity of mountains. Marsh hawksbeard, with its shaggy yellow capitula, and thin-textured, sharply-toothed leaves, is a characteristic member of this community.

Looking across the burn, the cliff on the far side is apparently more overgrown than in Ruskin's day, with some large beech trees casting a dense shade, and the contortions of the rock less obvious than in the painting due to the growth of moss and lichen.

The naked eye could distinguish:

Trees: beech (_Fagus sylvatica_), ash (_Fraxinus excelsior_),
oak (_Quercus sp._), rowan (_Sorbus aucuparia_),
hazel (_Corylus avellana_), birch (_Betula pubescens_).

Climbers: bramble (_Rubus fruticosus_),
honeysuckle (_Lonicera pericly menum*_).

Herbs: greater woodrush (_Luzula sylvatica_),
a hawkweed (_Hieracium sp._).

Ferns: hard fern (_Blechnum spicant_),
male fern (_Dryopteris filix-mas_),
broad buckler-fern (_Dryopteris dilatata*_).

On the portrait rock itself grew:

On the summit: a young sapling of ash (_Fraxinus excelsior_),
a non-flowering downy rose (_possibly Rosa sherardii_).

Tree seedlings: an oak (_Quercus sp._), a willow (_Salix sp._),
Rhododendron ponticum.

Herbs in flower: tormentil (_Potentilla erecta_),
broad-leaved willowherb (_Epilobium montanum*_),
the non-native New Zealand willowherb (_Epilobium brunnescens_),
fen bedstraw (_Galium uliginosum*_),
marsh hawksbeard (_Crepis paludosa_), selfheal (_Prunella vulgaris_),
greater woodrush (_Luzula sylvatica_),
Herb Robert (_Geranium robertianum*_),
meadowsweet (_Filipendula ulmaria_),
elegant St John's-wort (_Hypericum elegans_),
harebell (_Campanula rotundifolia_).
Grasses in flower: viviparous fescue (_Festuca vivipara_),
tufted hair-grass (_Deschampsia cespitosa_),
oat-grass (_Arrhenatherum elatius_).

Herbs and grasses not in flower:
glabrous lady's-mantle (_Alchemilla glabra_),
alpine lady's-mantle (_Alchemilla alpina_), dandelion (_Taraxacum sp._),
wavy hair-grass (_Deschampsia flexuosa_).

Herbs in bud: devil's-bit scabious (_Succisa pratensis_),
a hawkweed (_Hieracium sabaudum_).

Species in fruit: blaeberry (_Vaccinium myrtillus_),
common dog violet (_Viola riviniana_), wood sorrel (_Oxalis acetosella_),
bugle (_Ajuga reptans_), water avens (_Geum rivale_),
wavy bittercress (_Cardamine flexuosa_),
opposite-leaved golden saxifrage (_Chrysosplenium oppositifolium_),
sweet vernal grass (_Anthoxanthum odoratum_),
and heath woodrush (_Luzula multiflora_).

Ferns: Wilson's film fern (_Hymenophyllum wilsonii_),
directly beneath where Ruskin's feet stood, in dense wet shade of the vertical rock, just above the water,
male fern (_Dryopteris filix-mas_),
common polypody (_Polypodium vulgare_),
various undeterminable immature species.

On the shady bank rising from, and overhanging, the rock were:

> Oak fern (*Gymnocarpium dryopteris*), ling (*Calluna vulgaris*),
> goldenrod (*Solidago virgaurea*),
> broad buckler-fern (*Dryopteris dilatata*),
> hard fern (*Blechnum spicant*).

Although very few plants are shown in the portrait (the emphasis is on water and geology), mystery surrounds two of them: one in the foreground, one in the rear.

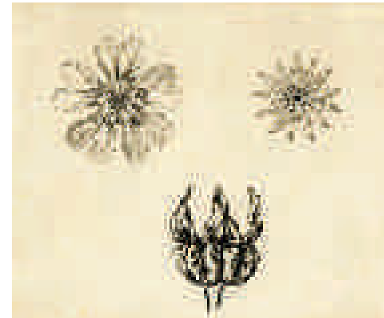
Even allowing for some increase in shade since Ruskin's time, the site does not seem a suitable habitat for the butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*) that is so conspicuously placed in the right-hand foreground of the painting. There is not enough permanent seepage at the junction of the rock with the bank. Despite being a stickler for accuracy (Ruskin would not allow Millais to complete the painting of the water in Wales the following year, and made him return to Brig o'Turk), one cannot help wondering if, perhaps, some artistic 'gardening' was allowed here to allow the inclusion of a favourite, or emblematic, plant (that must certainly grow in the very near vicinity).

On 19 October, a week before he finally left Glenfinlas, Ruskin sent Pauline Trevelyan two heads of a "common yellow thing" to identify (Surtees, 1979). He explained that "Everett and I have quarrelled about its flower for just in the corner of my picture – in a lovely place – just finished – out came one of the nasty things one sunny day – and he must need paint it in immediately ... a bright yellow spot ... like a splash of gamboge." The specimen is still with the letter, now in the library of Newcastle University, and was identified by Dr A.W. Clark as a member of *Hieracium* Section *Euvulgatae*. In August some hawkweed leaves were visible on the far bank, though no flowering heads. Due to unorthodox sexual habits ('apomixis') this is one of the most prolix of genera, with some 412 species currently recognised in the British flora, and one of the hardest to identify. In August a single species was visible on the rock itself, a hairy, multi-headed one, kindly identified for me by David McCosh as *Hieracium sabaudum*. Given that the torrent is unfordable, this may be the species that Millais painted, though the transfluvial one, as shown in the painting, and photographed later in the season by Alex Hamilton, appears to be glabrous and single-headed, and may be different.

Postscript

After leaving Glenfinlas Ruskin travelled to Edinburgh to deliver four lectures on 'Architecture and Painting' in the first two weeks of November at the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution in Queen Street. It was on this occasion that he famously counted the number of (supposedly identical) Georgian windows in this street, and for the last of the lectures he actually stayed in its western extension, at 5 Albyn Place. The Green Women of the Glen of Scott's ballad, however, stalked Ruskin to Edinburgh, as what should lie opposite Albyn Place but Glenfinlas Street?

H.J. Noltie
Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh



Ruskin plant study

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Note species marked (*) appear in the cyanotypes

Alexander Hamilton

Alexander Hamilton (b.1950) grew up in Caithness, Scotland. He studied Drawing and Painting at Edinburgh College of Art, after qualifying, he spent 6 months recording the plants on the uninhabited island of Stroma, creating his first cyanotype images. This began a 40 year journey exploring connections to plants and landscape. His work was shown throughout Europe with the exhibition 'The Peace Rose and the Pursuit of Perfection'. He also collaborated with a centre for plant research at the University Hohenheim Stuttgart on the use of plants as bio indicators, shown at the Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh in 2002. From 2002 to 2007 he worked in partnership with Richard Ashrowan creating multi-screen moving image installation art based on natural landscapes and informed by the writings of the 19th Century English art critic John Ruskin. Their works have been exhibited at the Threshold Artspace in Perth, Ruskin Gallery, Cambridge, the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Fabrycka Sztuki, Lodz and the Foksal Gallery, Poland. His expertise in the 19th Century cyanotype process has been a major part of his artistic output for over 30 years. In 2008 with funding from the Leverhulme Trust he will begin a residency leading to an exhibition in 2009 at Brantwood, the former home of John Ruskin.

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Publisher & Distributor
Published and distributed in an edition of 700
Copies by Sun Pictures- 29 Alva Street
Edinburgh EH2 4PS

ISBN 978-0-9560152-0-4

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Ruskin watercolours
John Ruskin (1819-1900), *Gneiss Rock, Glenfinlas* 1853; pencil, ink, ink wash and scratching out; 20.7 x 33.5 cm (8 1/2 x 13 1/4 ins).
Ruskin Foundation (Ruskin Library, Lancaster University RF 2026)

John Ruskin (1819-1900), *Study of Gneiss Rock, Glenfinlas* 1853; pen and ink, ink wash, bodycolour and scratching out; 47.7 x 32.7 cm (18 1/2 x 12 3/4 ins).
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

Catalogue
Designed and Typeset in Bliss by Ian McIlroy
Printed by Stewarts, Edinburgh
Funded by Hope Scott Trust

Exhibition
Tour co-ordinated by Julie Lawson and Alexander Hamilton
In association with the Ruskin Library, Lancaster University