

# Understand Scotland's ➤ Highlands & Islands

## **SCOTLAND'S HIGHLANDS & ISLANDS TODAY . . 324**

What makes the headlines north of the Highland line is rarely the same as in Edinburgh.

## **HISTORY ..... 326**

It's all here – Romans, Picts and Vikings, Robert the Bruce, battling clans and Bonnie Prince Charlie.

## **HIGHLAND CULTURE ..... 337**

The Gaelic influence is evident everywhere you turn – in literature, music, sport and dance.

## **LANDSCAPE & WILDLIFE ..... 343**

The Highlands and Islands are hard to beat when it comes to a combination of stunning scenery and spectacular wildlife.

## **THE SCOTTISH LARDER..... 348**

Forget the tired old clichés about deep-fried everything; fresh Scottish produce is among the finest in the world.



## population per sq mile

SCOTLAND



USA



ENGLAND



≈ 80 people

# Scotland's Highlands & Islands Today

## Renewable Energy

The Scottish National Party (SNP), which had led a minority government in Edinburgh since 2007, surprised the nation in the 2011 elections with a landslide victory to the Scottish parliament, winning 69 out of 129 seats. The Highlands and Islands voted overwhelmingly for the SNP (except for Orkney and Shetland, which returned Liberal Democrat MSPs).

One of the central planks of the SNP's vision for an independent Scotland is its energy policy. The party leader, Alex Salmond, has said that he wants the country to be the 'Saudi Arabia of renewable energy' – becoming self-sufficient in energy by 2020, and a net exporter of 'clean' electricity.

The Highlands and Islands are central to this plan. In the first half of the 20th century it was one of the first regions in the world to develop hydroelectric power on a large scale, and in the last decade, wind turbines have sprung up all over the place. By 2009, renewables provided 27% of Scotland's energy consumption; government targets are for this to rise to 31% in 2011 and 100% by 2020.

But the future of Scotland's energy industry lies not on land, but in the sea: Scotland has access to 25% of Europe's available tidal energy, and 10% of its wave power. The Highlands and Islands are at the leading edge of developing wave, tidal and offshore wind power: a £4 billion project was launched in 2010 to test marine generating systems in the waters around Orkney, including the Pelamis 'sea snake' wave generator and SeaGen tidal turbines.

## Development vs Conservation

In 2010 the Scottish government gave the go-ahead to a 135-mile, high-voltage overhead power line from Beaulieu (near Inverness) to Denny in

» Highest point: Ben Nevis (1344m)

» Annual whisky export: 1 billion bottles

» Number of Scottish islands: 790

» Number of Munros (peaks of 3000ft and over): 283

## Books

**Raw Spirit** (Iain Banks) A jaunt around the Highlands and Islands to find the perfect whisky.

**Mountaineering in Scotland** (WH Murray) Climbing in the Highlands in the 1930s, when getting to Glen Coe was an adventure in itself.

**The Poor Had No Lawyers** (Andy Wightman) A penetrating, and fascinating, analysis of who owns the land in the Highlands, and how they got it.

**The Scottish Islands** (Hamish Haswell-Smith) A beautifully illustrated guide to 162 islands.

## Movies

**Local Hero** 1983 film that caused a tourist stampede to the Highlands in search of Ben's Beach.

**Whisky Galore!** Classic 1949 comedy – islanders plunder a shipwrecked cargo of whisky under the nose of authorities.