



The church of St Clement at Rodel, with Roineabhal behind it

I WANT TO MAKE SURE MAGICAL SPACES ARE NOT LOST



Alastair McIntosh

ROINEABHAL, ISLE OF HARRIS

Consider Roineabhal, the mountain at the heart of the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist National Scenic Area. Picture its craggy summit rising into white wisps above the exquisite

medieval church of St Clement at Rodel. From the top, across the Sound of Harris and out to St Kilda, rests a sacred landscape. Few if any of these islands are not sustained by at least one ancient ‘temple’, holy well, standing stone or place name that bears witness to some distant tradition of blessedness.

‘Ten years ago marked the end of the 13-year battle to save Roineabhal from being turned into a ‘superquarry’. Why did it matter? One answer came from Robbie Nicol, a leading outdoor environmental educator. Describing a visit, he told me: ‘This mountain... is achingly beautiful. The view down into the coire is unlike any other I’ve experienced.’

‘You can’t eat beauty, but its absence shrinks the soul. That is why we need ‘sacred’ places. Such ‘trust’ gives coherence to being a nation.’

Alastair McIntosh is a writer and campaigner on Scotland’s wild places. He is the author of *Soil and Soul* and *Island Spirituality*

Crowstepped gables and pantiled roofs in the picturesque Fife town of Culross

