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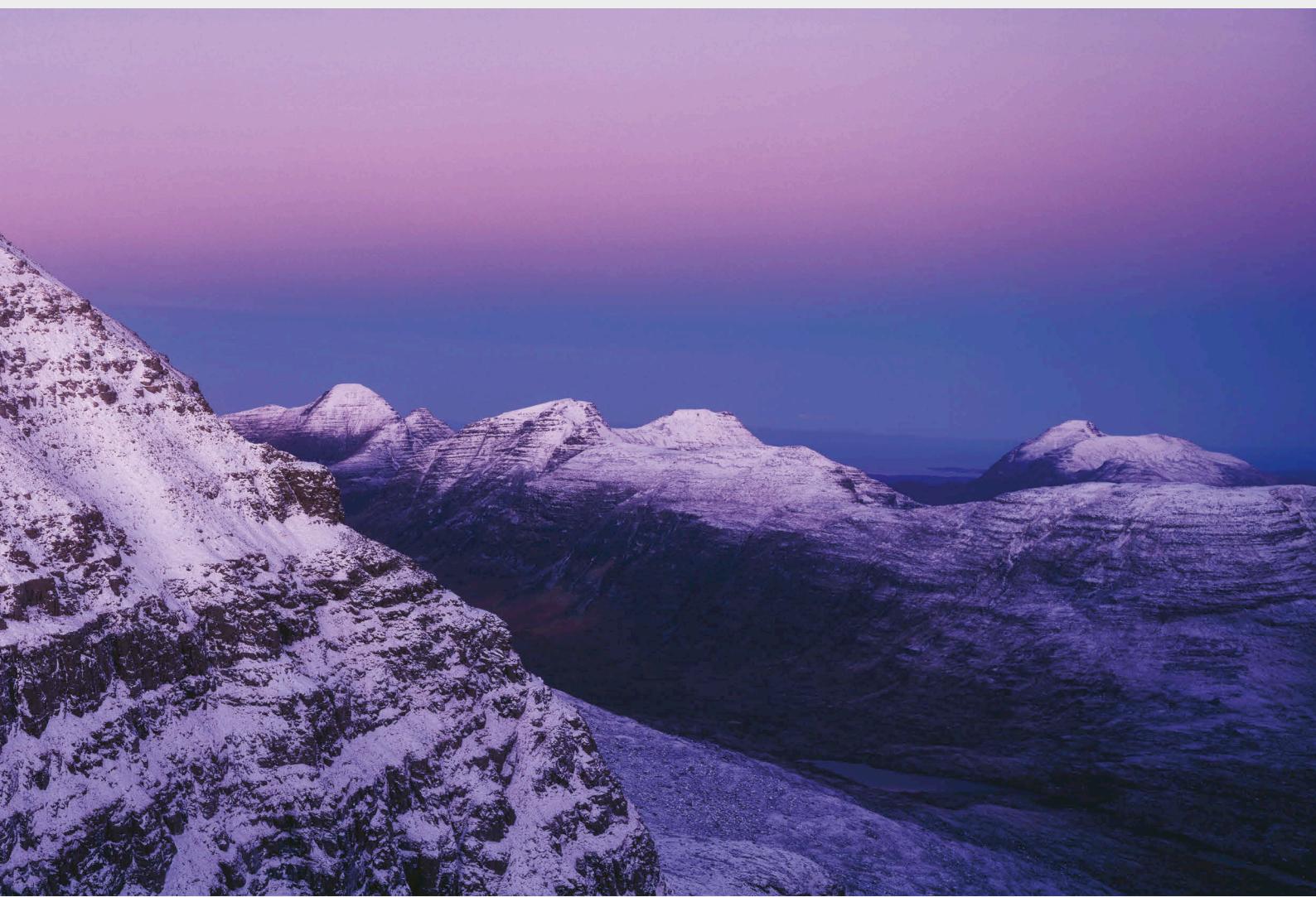
 MOUNTAIN PHOTOGRAPHY

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# Scotland's Finest

**Colin Prior** is Scotland's best-known landscape photographer.

As he releases a new book, *Scotland's Finest Landscapes*, we caught up with him to talk photography, his concerns for the future of the natural world and why the Karakorum is his dream mountain range.



**Much of my childhood was spent alone in the woods and farmland around where we lived, on the outskirts of Glasgow.** At 21, I looked at my peers: many had achieved sporting and academic success. I'd spent my time in the natural world, observing birds and animals, and concluded that I had a largely useless skill set. What could I put on a CV?

**As time went on, I began to recognise that my observations had accumulated an encompassing knowledge about nature that I'm convinced only few people have.** Photography became a conduit through which I could communicate my feelings about the natural world, which is constantly evolving. I'm just at the beginning of a new genre of work.

**I was privileged to shoot calendars for British Airways in the mid 90s – I don't believe anyone will ever commission travel photography on this scale again.** I travelled to 40 countries to photograph a diverse selection of habitats and cultures. For a young photographer from Scotland it was a dream job.

**I particularly enjoyed photographing the pristine beaches of the Seychelles, the orange dunes of the Namib-Naukluft desert and the masked dances of Bhutan, before it was discovered as a tourist destination.** But it was the Karakoram Mountains that began to haunt my dreams, and I knew I had to go back.

Liathach: Spidean a' Choire Leith, Beinn Alligin and Baosbheinn from Stuc a'Choire Dhuibh Bhig, Torridon.



↑ Bidean nam Bian and Buachaille Etive Mor, from Ben Starav, Glen Etive.

► Last year I had the chance to begin to fulfill my life's dream, and over the next few years I will document the Karakoram region in a way never previously attempted. The harsh and unforgiving environment is a constant challenge to survive in, and weather patterns are erratic, with clear blue skies often as problematic as a low cloud base.

**The perfect landscape photograph for me is a fusion between light and land.** A rare convergence when the light transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary.

**These days a photograph can be taken with no knowledge of photography.** There comes a point however, when photographers hit the glass ceiling. In short, they want to be the master and not the slave; they need to control the camera and not the other way around.

**The first step in taking a definitive photograph of mountains is reconnaissance.** There's no shortcut for climbing up there and looking at the lie of the land. It's during this process that the 'firing point' and the approximate time of the year when I plan to return are selected. By this time an image already exists in my mind's eye.

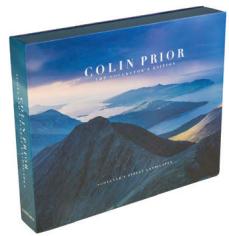
**The second stage is meticulous checking of everything required for an overnight stay on the mountain, if required.** The final part is simple: wait for a weather window – and strike, following the modus operandi of Special Forces. Stack all the odds in your favour.

**It's taken me years to finally capture some of the images that existed in my mind.** What is significantly different about my new book, Scotland's Finest Landscapes, is the depth of work, which spans a period of 25 years.



↑ The Cullin Forest across Inner Sound, from Ob Breakish, Skye.

PHOTO: COLIN PRIOR



**Colin Prior**  
– The Collector's Edition  
– Scotland's Finest  
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£100

**I've spent much of my working life alone in nature, and I believe it is facing an unprecedented assault as the human population continues to grow.** With limited natural resources there will be even greater pressure on ecosystems around the globe, and without greater intervention it seems inevitable that extinctions will follow. However, there have been some notable successes, such as the whale moratorium, as evidence that if there's a will there's a way.

**In Scotland, we're fortunate to have large tracts of wild land, but let's not forget that these are man-made wildernesses and, in reality, support little but red deer.** I'm greatly encouraged by the reforestation of indigenous woodland in parts of the Highlands which, in time, will kick-start an entire ecosystem. It would be great to see a network of corridors that link up throughout Scotland.

**Wildlife needs our help.** I plan to devote my next project towards some of these goals, beginning with an exploration of the landscape of bird habitats, both to break new ground photographically and to raise awareness of the demise of wild bird populations. ▶

**Words:** Sarah Stirling

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- Q. Name the two sponsors of Colin's Karakorum Project?