

Landscape
Research
Extra 78
November
2016



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Copy deadline for LRE 79
January 21st 2017



ARTISTS, FARMERS, PHILOSOPHERS

HEART OF TEESDALE FINAL SYMPOSIUM 7-9 SEPTEMBER 2016

Written as a personal diary

Val Kirby

The unembellished facts: the final big event of the Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership took place at the Bowes Museum in Barnard Castle in early September. A three-day symposium explored the connections between artists, farmers and philosophers and the landscapes of Upper Teesdale. LRG helped fund this event and to acknowledge this, three LRG members were given free passes. I was one of them.

The embellished facts: this was the most memorable conference that I have attended for many years. I was inspired, challenged and provoked in equal measure. The Bowes Museum was a splendid venue, and the journey to the northern dales was a delightful reminder of my life in the 1980s, when I lived a few miles further south, in Wensleydale.

The opening session on 7 September began with a well illustrated but bland overview by **Jim Dixon** of the Heritage Lottery

Fund's Landscape Partnership programme. The questions which followed included a spirited challenge to the installation of new artworks in much loved landscapes, and a discussion on why so many Landscape Partnerships have failed to produce long-term change. Three speakers then looked at the interface between the way local people identify with their home landscapes, how bodies such as the HLF try to intervene, and what outputs – qualitative or quantitative – programmes such as Heart of Teesdale should aim for. In trying to work interactively with communities, awareness of who is leading and who is being led is vital. Just because people are not always quick to express their connections to their home places to out-

siders, should not be taken to mean that they don't care or don't feel deeply.

The evening at the Witham Centre was brilliant. After beer, pie and peas, we were entertained by Cream Tees, a youth folk group formed during the Landscape Partnership project. Then the *piece de resistance* was a showing of 'Addicted to Sheep', a prize-winning film about the **Hutcheson family**, tenants on the Raby Estate. **Magali Pettier**, the film-maker, added no narration and little music: it was beautifully observed, shot and edited - the family tells their own story. The image that stays with me still is the washing line, jeans, t-shirts and towels blowing through the seasons, wet or dry, snow or sun.

The morning of 8 September focused on artists – but with unmissable connections to farming and philosophy. First Magali Pettier spoke about the importance of people in the landscape, and especially the need to see Teesdale as a managed landscape, a workplace, and a place to be respected. She stressed the importance of maintaining a positive relationship between those who manage the land and those with oversight. Magali was passionate about the role of artists: if they take time to understand issues and select images sensitively, their work can open up debate on topics such as rewilding versus the need for people – and sheep – in the hills.

Ian Thompson then encouraged us to engage in the aesthetics of 'Edgelands' and **Tim Collins** continued the theme of arts-led dialogue, picking up the key message of the previous afternoon. Landscape Partnerships need tangible, instrumental outputs to satisfy the bureaucratic system. But there has to be space as well for communities to develop open ended, unpredictable outcomes. The morning ended with **Gill Sanders** talking about 'Recording Britain', a series of evocative water colours commissioned by the government between 1939 and 1943, of places at risk either from bombing or from other kinds of change.

Lunch was a picnic at Watersmeet, where the Rivers Greta and Tees meet, and where one of the 'Viewmarker' series of sculptures by **Victoria Brailsford** was officially launched. (The speaker declaiming on the front page is standing on Victoria Brailsford's sculpture.)

The afternoon session in Mickleton Village Hall focused on and was led by farmers. First the new **Lord Barnard** (owner of the Raby Estate) mused on the implications of Brexit on environmental policy, wondering what the future held for hill farming, and on the possible impacts of changes in policy towards, per-

haps, re-wilding or carbon offsetting. As a landowner he is committed to taking the long view, and he talked about his partnership with local farmers, who have to survive from season to season. He argued against afforestation and rewilding because of the effects they would have on habitats, upland communities, and recreation.

Richard Betton, a hill farmer, spoke next about national policy. He argued that hill farming is a special case that needs an approach to funding not based on simplistic models of food production, but taking full account of public goods such as high quality landscapes, water management and wildlife. Then **Margaret Bradshaw**, a well-known Teesdale botanist, after a brief canter through post-glacial history, passionately defended the need for more support for upland farmers. She was followed by **Julia Aglionby**, a Natural England Board member, who talked about the need for respectful relationships between all parties with an interest in hill farming, based on fair and transparent communications.

Kay and Tom Hutchinson, stars of 'Addicted to Sheep', spoke next. Of course they benefited from not having to represent a public body, so they could be direct. Tom was very funny. But they had a serious message: it would be good if people taking decisions could take notice of what small, local farmers and people like Margaret Bradshaw say. They hope that Brexit will give the opportunity to create a new system that really suits small upland farmers.

Lord Inglewood was the last of the afternoon's speakers. A farmer and landowner, who was a member of the Lake District Special Planning Board and an MEP and now chairs Cumbria Local Nature Partnership, he is fearful for the future of hill farming after Brexit. He senses that government does not care about the countryside, although he thinks that Teesdale's potential for income from ecosystem goods and services is huge.

The evening session was a celebration of different artists and communities. **Stella Duffy OBE** began with a talk about her 'Fun Palaces' programme. Inspired by an initiative started by Joan Littlewood in the 1960s, in 2014 Stella started 'Fun Palaces' as 'an ongoing campaign for culture by, for and with all, and also an annual weekend of events, where arts and sciences are a vital catalyst for community engagement and full participation for everyone, from the grassroots up' (<http://funpalaces.co.uk/about/>). The rest of the evening was a feast of short presentations by 10 people, artists, writers and philosophers, followed by dancing.

The final session on the morning of 9

September was devoted to philosophers. Sadly I was not present for most of it, because I was chasing a lost wallet (which later returned), so my commentary is briefer than it possibly should be. Also my brain was already full and my senses had already been hugely stimulated by the conversations with artists and farmers. It was good that the speakers on the last morning talked about different ways of seeing and experiencing landscapes, but by that stage I had already got the point. I apologise to the speakers for not reporting them in more detail – but as the heading says, this is a personal diary, and that is what I wrote in my notes.

In Conclusion:

The sub-title of the conference was 'getting grassroots expertise into landscape policy, practice and research'. So what was achieved on that front? I have two responses, one personal and positive, another more general and questioning. First, if the practitioners present take the symposium's messages seriously and apply them to their work, as I hope to do, then the impact of the conference will be broad and deep, but unmeasurable. Second, if the optimism about government's openness to re-engage with the European Landscape Convention, expressed by Natural England staff behind the scenes, is well founded, then there is indeed some hope that the messages from this conference will have a lasting and measurable effect. Let's hope so.

Dr V G Kirby



27 October 2016
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FAROE AKA 'SHEEP' ISLANDS. MY VISIT TO A SHEEPSCAPE

By Roger Dalton

Dear Bud,

Some photos to go with text on separate email. A visit to the Faroe Islands in July which was excellent in every way. Despite comment on the climate in the text the weather was amazing as we caught the end of an extended drought.

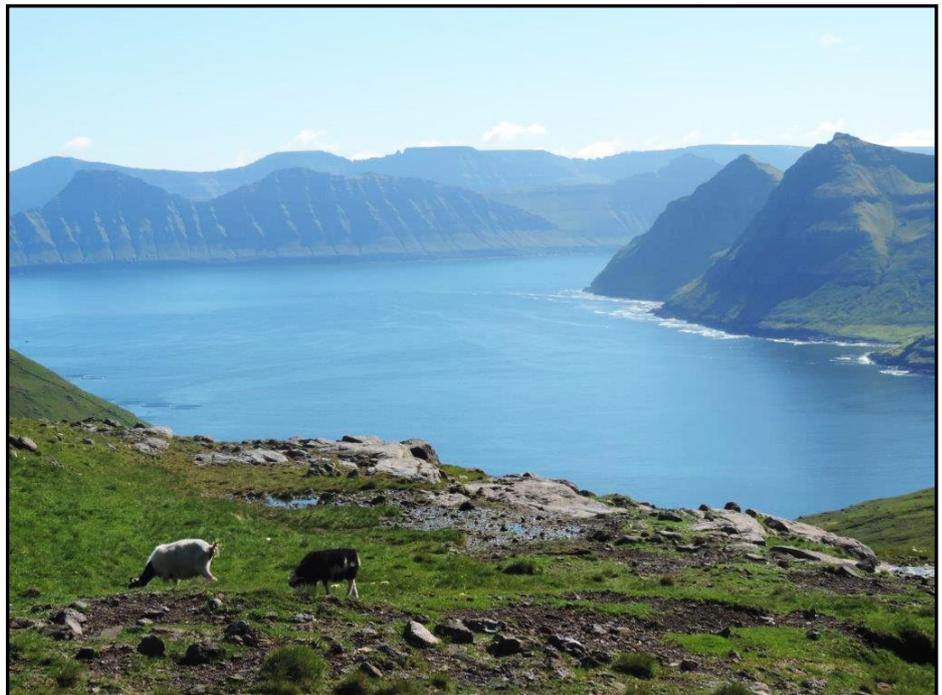
The Faroe Islands are scenically dramatic with mountains, extensive high moorland, glaciated valleys, fjords and huge sea cliffs. At the same time they are green and treeless, a classic example of the impact of centuries of sheep grazing on landscape. Faroe with a population of about 50,000 comprises eighteen major basaltic islands collectively about the size of Bedfordshire and located in the North Atlantic between Shetland and Iceland. The climate is severe combining low temperatures with wind, cloudiness and high precipitation most notably through the extended winter period. The original Viking settlers of around 800 AD brought with them small, hardy, thrifty north European short tailed sheep. Over the centuries grazing has profoundly modified the original post-glacial Arctic maritime flora which once included willow, birch and hazel. Sheep were able to spread widely as predators like birds of prey and foxes were and still are absent from Faroe. Consequently acid

grassland and heath has come to predominate from shoreline into the highest mountain areas. Now numbering 80,000 Faroese sheep are often kept on a part time basis by owners of small flocks. They are easily managed, being able to lamb without assistance and withstand severe weather. They are gathered in summer for drenching and shearing, wool being the basis of the Faroese tradition of garment knitting including coarse woolen underwear for fishermen! From May to October sheep are excluded from lower slopes adjacent to the predominant waterside settlements. These are managed as in by, to create a grass crop for winter feed.

Sheep meat with fish, whale and sea birds has long been an essential element of traditional subsistence Faroese

are hung to dry and ferment including whole sheep carcasses after slaughter in October. Food houses vary in size reflecting the means of owners but today with modern roads, tunnels and bridges facilitating inter island travel food houses can now be leased, rented or bought and sold.

The Faroese have a strong sense of national identity hence the islands are an autonomous region of Denmark but outside the European Union thus facilitating



food culture which still continues alongside well stocked supermarkets. The difficult climate and remote location of the Faroes has meant food preservation has been essential from the earliest times hence the importance of 'the food house' as an adjunct of many Faroese dwellings. Food houses are often constructed with grass roofs and slatted timber sides, in early times using drift wood. Food items

a 200 mile fisheries zone. They have a fundamental relationship with the sea and in recent decades economic prosperity has come from fishing, fish farming, fish processing and maritime services. Identity is also strengthened by the landscapes of green herbage and the sheep integral to the continuance of traditional food culture.



Photos listed in order:

- ◆ *Village of Gjogv on Eysteroy. Sheep fenced above the inbye*
- ◆ *Faroese vista*
- ◆ *Food house by traditional farm at Saksun on Streymoy*

Roger Dalton, reports yet another country.

Letter to the Editor, Wildscapes and Olympic Parks

The Journal remains as rewarding as ever, and among several thought-provoking items in LRE 77, two in particular prompt me into responding.

Wildscapes is an ugly term for a well-meaning concept, and Professor Ken Taylor's fascinating discourse usefully points out that the idea of a natural wilderness we can re-create, however appealing to western sensibilities including mine, may be wrong-headed anyway.

How easy it is to entertain contradictory notions simultaneously! To be drawn as I've sometimes been to the notion of a sublimely pure land untouched by humans (except me, presumably), even while deeply influenced as landscape architect and teacher by a love of its near

opposite, the diverse landscapes historically achieved by people working with nature for human aims – the cultural landscape in fact, born with the first humans to settle a land still re-greening itself after the ice melted (so Britain never had a properly natural landscape at all).

Or, while strongly advocating the return of nature to cities (*Nature in Cities* edited Laurie 1979), to suggest that native species offered the most diversity, even while half-consciously aware that a single native in its chosen habitat may oust all competitors, as in those carpets of celandine, floods of bluebells, fields of buttercups, hillsides of bilberry, forests of dark exclusive beech. Aware also that the most diversity occurs at the edges of things, at boundaries, breaks of slope, water and woodland edges – wonderful places for nature and people together – and appreciating that non-native species could do the job as well as natives, and (to be honest) enraptured by the happy variety of the English suburb, or the architectural integrity of a one-species avenue, as much by “nature”..... Contradictions indeed! Yet I did also see how all could be resolved, everything having its place within a strong structure on a gradient from human to nature occurring everywhere under human control.

Nan Fairbrother had said much the same in the 1960's (*New Lives New Landscapes*) when she aroused my youthful imagination to the possibility of swathes of England being returned to a natural state, by human intent within a strong human plan. Re-wilding ahead of its time in fact, though she is unlikely to have anticipated the wolves, bears and

elephants which have crept into the concept recently.

Professor Taylor has helped clear my mind on the ‘natives only’ issue – yet not entirely. Out at the further reaches of the gradient, on the heaths, moors and uplands now so far impoverished they seem almost beyond help, *only* native nature will do. Reduce the grazing, restore water-tables, let the natives in, and the rest will come: flowers, birds, bees and all, as the Woodland Trust, RSPB, Wildlife Trusts and others have now been proving year after year. And, given the access, people will come too, in celebration.

Which brings me to Bud Young's evocative account of London's Olympic Park four

years on: looking wonderful – but where were the people?

I have almost feared to visit the Olympic Park in case I witnessed yet again what seems to happen to such celebratory places in British cities: splendidly inventive landscapes reduced to fragments of their brief glory, not always publicly accessible (Liverpool Garden Festival when visited with students), even lost entirely to housing as Glasgow's was apparently planned to be, and generally a dismal comparison with their counterparts abroad. Year after year in the '80s and '90s I accompanied students on field trips through Holland and Germany taking in modern urban landscapes – ‘Cathedral Landscapes’ I called them in a Landscape Institute lecture -- which left even hardened colleagues gasping at the level of input and achievement (“the finest urban park I've ever seen” remarked Pete Conlon of Amsterdam's Gaspaarplas): all of them originating in garden festivals often decades earlier, planned to contribute permanently to a city's green structure, cherished as such ever since – and swarming with happy citizens!

This country once led the world in urban parks but with honourable exceptions we seem to have lost the plot. Are we even aware of what we are missing? Is the whole all-embracing concept of the green city still somehow a problem for us? I fear I haven't been keeping abreast of the news as I should, so someone please tell me.....

Owen Manning.

PECSRL 2016: Mountains, uplands, lowlands: European landscapes from an altitudinal perspective.

By Werner Krauß, with
Kenneth R. Olwig

The challenge for organizers of the biannual PECSRL conferences is twofold: on the one hand, they must create an intellectual environment that enables bringing together classical topics of landscape research with newly emerging issues, and on the other hand the conference should reflect the characteristic dynamics that

less to say, the focus on climate and altitude today carries more meaning than ever: the melting glaciers have turned the Alps into a symbol of man-made climate change. At the same time, the marginalization of the diverse economic livelihoods of the Alps - by increased economic specialization and centralization in Europe's lowland core - has likewise turned the Alps into a symbol of the destruction of cultural landscape through land abandonment: economic life in the Alps is becoming untenable in a globalizing world. It was against this background that the organizers carefully laid out a net of keynote speeches, plenum panels and special sessions.

In this environment, the session organized by the Landscape Research Group under the leadership of **Kenneth R. Olwig**

reality in many places (like the Alps), and forced abandonment due to rewilding schemes in other places (like the Lake District), hence these managerial measures tend to further this loss of cultural landscape.

In his introduction to the panel and in his following presentation, **Kenneth R. Olwig from the LRG and the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences** set the scene. He contrasted the geometric perspective in landscape planning as derived from the 'perspectival gaze' - prevailing since the Renaissance- with actual land use practices that historically shape landscapes; he showed how this 'perspectival gaze' taken as a guiding principle, tends to contradict and to colonize customary practices that shape mountain grazing commons. He illustrated his argument with the example of current conflicts in the Lake District in England, where shepherds are engaged in a rearguard effort to save their valued cultural landscapes from re-wilding.

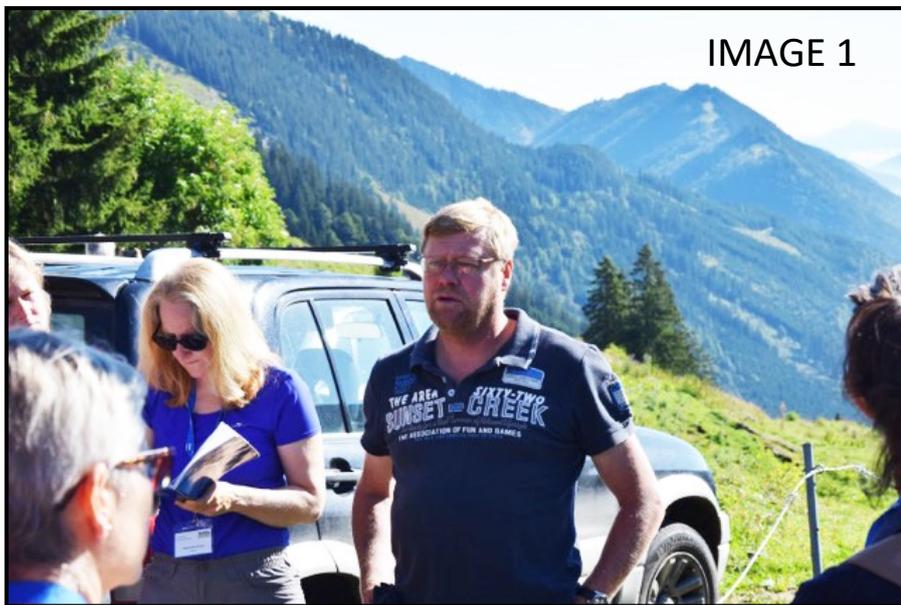


IMAGE 1

shape the urban and rural landscape where the conference takes place. The organizers of this year's conference, the **Austrian Academy of Sciences** under the lead of **Oliver Bender**, solved this challenge perfectly in naming the conference "Mountains, uplands, lowlands. European landscapes from an altitudinal perspective". The conference thus brought to mind the origins of modern landscape science in the work of the Nineteenth Century geographer Alexander von Humboldt.

Humboldt's famous "Naturgemälde" (nature painting) approach illustrated the unity of nature through the example of ecosystem change based on altitude and interconnected climate zones of Chimborazo, the highest peak of the Andes. In Innsbruck and Seefeld, two locations of the conference, this altitude perspective was literally brought into sight at the site: Alpine ridges surrounded both conference locations. Need-

and **Hannes Palang**, fitted in well. The title of the session "*Mountain grazing landscapes caught between abandonment, rewilding and agro-environmental bureaucracy. Is there an alternative future?*" problematized one of the main lines of conflicts within contemporary landscape management and planning: the challenges do not only come from a changing climate and its effects, but also from the attempts to protect environments. This protection is achieved through standard forms of management classification and this thereby inadvertently destroys the diversity they wish to protect. Mountain grazing pastures as well as low-lying wetland meadows are especially vulnerable here. They are subject to forms of regularization through rule based bureaucratic schemes originating in diverse environmental, food and agricultural administrations and these effectively calcify and paralyze the complex cultural and environmental diversity of many marginal landscapes. Desertion due to depopulation is already a harsh

Werner Krauß from the University of Hamburg followed suit in discussing Alpine mountain grazing within commons in an historical/anthropological perspective. Snowy white mountain peaks and green mountain pastures played a crucial role in forming Swiss identity and patriotism, and they still do so in these times of climate change and melting glaciers. Critically reviewing Swiss post-war *Volkskunde* (ethnological studies) and the field studies of American anthropologists in the canton of Valais and the Upper Nons valley in Tyrol, Krauß focused on the role of the commons in maintaining the Alpine pastures. Taking as an example a mountain village in the Grisons, he demonstrated the importance of the commons in a mixed mountain economy. He argued that the commons still have the power to undermine stereotypes and serve as an example for alternative ways of imagining the future.

The respective contributions of **Mojca Globic from the University of Ljubljana** and of **Yves Michelin from VetAgroSup** in France complemented these arguments in contrasting the idea of an 'average landscape' with the varying distinctive practices that are crucial to the maintenance or the abandonment of such landscapes. They both did so from a comparative perspective, taking into account administrative measures in the Slovenian Alps (Mojca) and the history of the French volcanic Chaine des Puys (Michelin). What does it mean to maintain the 'natural' character and diversity of specific mountain landscapes, and



IMAGE 2

Images

Image 1 As this Tyrolean farmer explains, the autonomous regional governments of Tyrol have managed to reduce the rewilding and degeneration of the culturally and environmentally diverse alpine landscapes by developing communication and road infrastructure, and by promoting the sale of locally made farm cheeses, meats and spirits on-farm, thereby eliminating expensive middle-men. This farmer makes his cheese on farm and sells it in a farm shop.

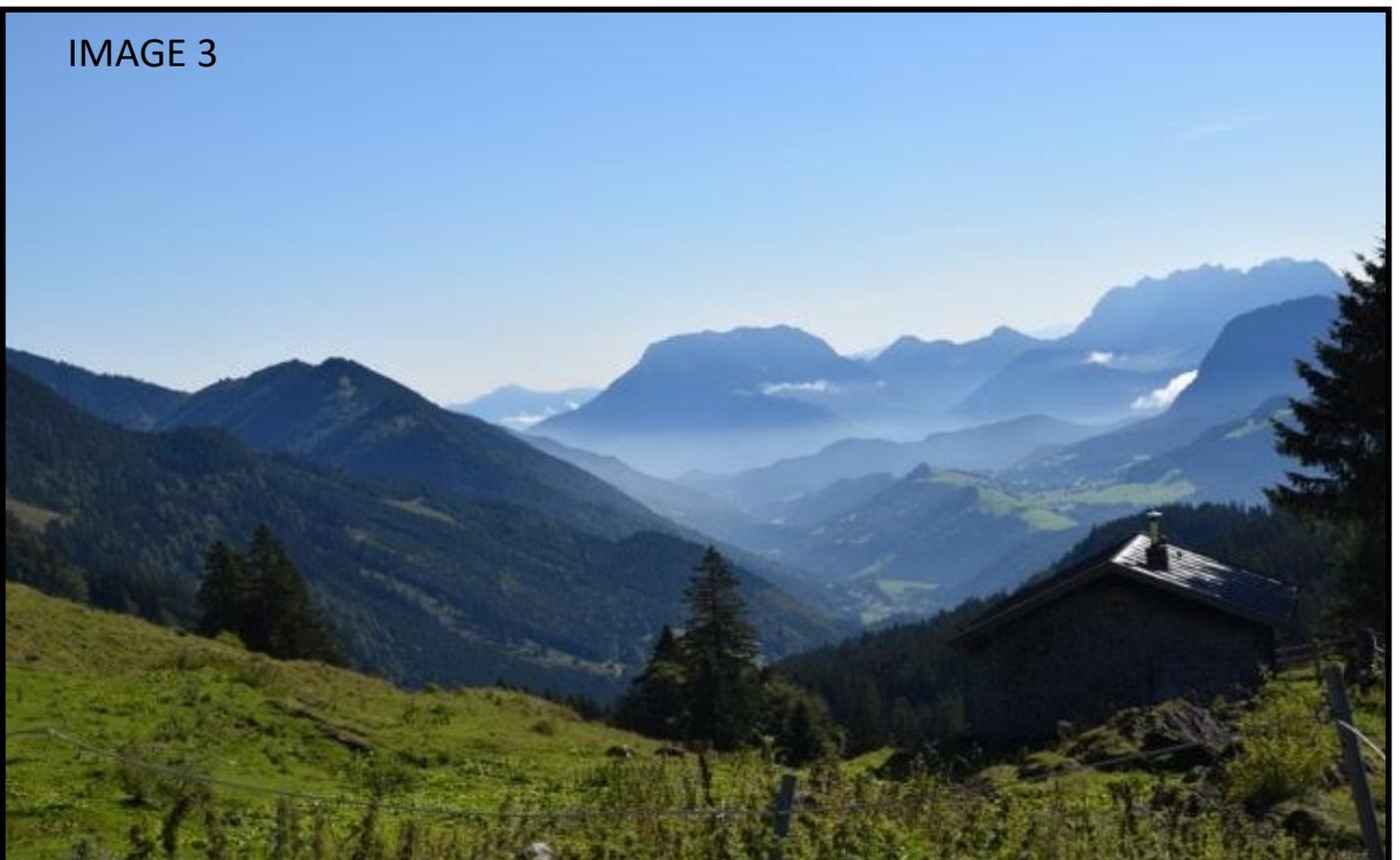
Image 2 This photo shows a Tyrolean farm village, where there is a state of the art, small scale, cheese dairy. The area of dense overgrown forest in the background is in Germany.”

Image 3 This photo is of the area uphill from the farm villages, where the cows graze freely (there are two in the picture—bottom centre). The milk is sometimes sent down to the dairy by a kind of milk funicular suspended by wires, so they do not need roads to cut through the landscape.

what practices best serve these purposes? Both contributors argued against normative or ‘one-size-fits-all’ measures and promoted ethnographic, place-based approaches. These included careful negotiations taking into account the specific interactions between local inhabitants’ practices in forest and grassland management and natural vegetation dynamics. Both on the level of the European Union or the respective nations, the maintenance of landscape diversity and of mountain pastoral landscapes necessitates careful analysis of local response to any national and/or international initiatives. Success depends on the support of local communities and on not imposing measures against them.

At a lower land level, **Kajjia Käärt (with the help of Urve Ratas, Reimo Rivis & Are Kont) from the Tallinn University** presented the environmental and human impacts on dynamics of the **Alvar grasslands in Estonia**. These grasslands are highly fragile ecosystems and are part of the national cultural heritage in need of conservation. Due to mismanagement after WWII, the grasslands diminished alarmingly. In an effort to maintain the existence of the remaining landscapes, Käärt shifted focus to the ecological responsiveness of the specific soils supporting fresh and dry Alvars. Based on the detailed ecological information obtained in this way, projects to maintain the grasslands and to enhance urgently needed traditional management in Estonia are underway.

IMAGE 3



In the discussion, the focus was on the intersection of uniform administrative schemes and the customary practices that have shaped the respective landscapes. Comparing perspectives from managers, practitioners and researchers had enabled an ethnographic perspective and this contradicts a normative planning and management approach. It takes time to develop these alternative futures, both in academic discussion and in reality, and – as one discussant rightly remarked – at least the first part will be put into practice in form of a planned special issue of *Landscape Research*.

The panel sponsored by the Landscape Research group fitted in with the overall theme of the conference, especially when considering the topics presented by the keynote speakers. Two of them, **Veronica Della Dora from the Royal Holloway, University of London**, and **Oliver Bender from the Academy of Sciences in Innsbruck**, presented contrasting ‘cultural perspectives’; while Della Dora spoke about the aesthetics and cultural importance of the Alps as the ‘great cathedrals of the Earth’, Bender strictly, on the other hand focused on historical settlement patterns and discussed the role of ethnic, geological and ecological influences. Another contrast existed between the more natural science-oriented keynotes given by **Hans Stötter and Ulrike Tappeiner, both from the University of Innsbruck**. While Stötter applied a global approach to climate change and its effects on the Alpine glaciers, Tappeiner’s eco-system service approach covered the historical and actual changes in land use and land cover changes. And finally, **David Harvey from the University of Exeter** critically examined the question of heritage. He reminded the audience that there is no neutral approach to cultural issues. Against this background, the Landscape Research Group Session offered an informed approach, based on ethnographic research and practical engagement, with a focus on the possibilities for negotiation between management and the livelihoods of local populations.

In a truly Humboldtian Spirit, the day of field trips supplemented the issues that were discussed in the seminars. They covered the physical experience of field sites to the glaciers of the mountain peaks, a Nature Park in the valley, and the mixed economy of Alpine agriculture, along with sites of energy production. For 21 participants, the conference was followed by an in-depth post-conference excursion through the vine, apple and chestnut growing valleys, mountain pastures and culturally, linguistically and economically diverse landscapes of the

South Tyrol and Trentino, where regional autonomy has allowed for a flexible public administration that is sensitive to the cultural, as well as the natural, heritage of the landscape.

The conference thus fulfilled the unique promise of PECSRL. Departing from Innsbruck and Seefeld, it took place in both an urban and a rural landscape; with the excursion day in between allowing one to experience, and sense first hand, the issues talked about in the sessions. Finally, it added the idea of altitude when researching landscapes, culture, politics, ecosystems and climate zones. In doing so, the conference successfully transferred Alexander von Humboldt’s C19th notion of altitude, famously exemplified in the depiction of Chimborazo, into the C21st centuries age of the Anthropocene, with the European Alps exemplifying our era’s dramatic, human-caused, climatic, environmental and social changes to landscape.

W K, K.R.O.

SOUNDS ON MARDON DOWN, DARTMOOR

Up on the Moor just now – Mardon just up the hill at 900ft - our nearest wild place and an isolated fragment of the Greater Moor. It had started raining in the Town but it was dry up there with high cloud. It felt humid, where humidity brings out lovely smells of bracken but is not uncomfortable. We could see several graded grey horizons to the north west but nothing very clearly. The assistant editor periodically fell back to eat blackberries which are ripe at 1000 feet but long since gone over lower down.

The most striking thing about the walk was the silence. How to describe something so all enveloping. Perhaps by the noises that we could pick up: two perhaps three chainsaws across a valley half a mile away working to fell a mature conifer stand near Butterdon. A remote overlapping buzznoise sometimes in sequence like a relay race, sometimes together. The sharp voice of a long tailed tit. And six times the metallic ring of the cattle grid as village cars moved across it at 30 mph near Little Wooston Farm. There was one other noise — a plane remote above the cloud cover. Other than this, silence..

Bud Young

Professor Ian Mercer CBE

By Gareth Roberts

It was with great sadness that I learnt of the death of Ian Mercer this evening via your email (Kevin Bishop, Chief Executive of the Dartmoor NP) forwarded by former colleagues at CCW and SNPA.

I concur with your assessment of his achievements. I held him in high regard and am grateful for his guidance, support and encouragement to me personally on my appointment to CCW in those early years when landscape and access interests struggled for worthiness.

I will alert other LRG Board members several of whom will have known Ian. He had been a member of LRG for many years and notably contributed to the Conference LRG convened in Blois in 1991 where the idea of the European Landscape Convention was first mooted. My abiding memory of him, was his turning up rather grumpy faced at a ‘Group Heads Management Team’ meeting to report the outcome of his meeting on a Friday morning in Cardiff with John Redwood, who had just been appointed Secretary of State for Wales by Margaret Thatcher. Redwood’s brief was to secure cuts in public spending so when Ian proudly reported that CCW had just designated Wales’ 666th SSSI Redwood’s riposte was ‘*Why do you need so many, can you not get by with just 6?*’

Disheartened he returned home late that evening, went to his drinks cabinet for a nightcap, picked out a bottle of Canadian whisky but on discovering the label read ‘Redwood’, decided to pour the lot down the sink.

The views and opinions in this publication are those of the contributing authors and the senior editor individually and do not necessarily agree with those of the Group.

It is prepared by Bud and Rosemary Young for the Landscape Research Group and distributed four times a year to members world wide .It is also to be found on the Group’s website

www.landscaperesearch.org

under ‘publications’.

It forms a companion to LRG’s refereed journal Landscape Research.

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Bud Young the editor of Landscape Research Extra, was a neighbour of Ian and his delightful wife, Pam.

Editor's note

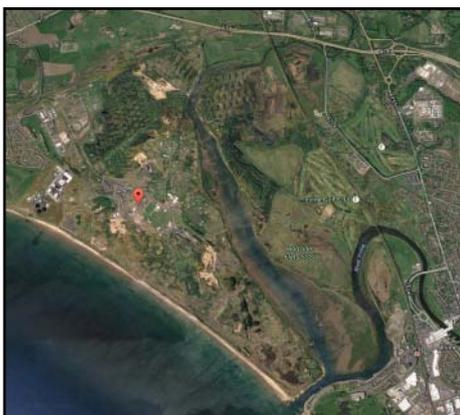
Rosemary and I attended Ian's funeral held in our local church where incidentally he was also on the brass cleaning rota. It was packed. A notable recollection of his life and achievements was given by Adrian Phillips. A large number of Dartmoor National Park staff attended for Ian was once head of that organisation. There were many others from Countryside Council for Wales and The Field Studies Council. Prince Charles sent his representative Lady Arran. His grave overlooks the long and deep Wray Valley.

THE GHOSTS OF ARDEER

By Paul Selman

In the last issue of LRE, I wrote what was intended as the first of a series of articles on pilgrim routes in Scotland, starting with the Whithorn Way. Having reached the mid-point I intended to complete the journey to St Ninian's Cave in Galloway in time for this issue. However, I have been waylaid.

Lying slightly to the west of the path's route, on the Ayrshire coast, is the industrial wasteland of Ardeer. The authorities would apparently not wish me to arouse your interest. There are a few secret entrances to this wilderness privy only to



locals: even here, the owners are creating ever more ingenious barriers. Nature is taking an increasingly tenacious hold and the area may soon become impenetrable. In its present state, though, it retains a spiritual power as strong as any of the official sites of pilgrimage.

Ardeer was the site chosen by Alfred Nobel for his massive dynamite manufac-



turing plant, having scoured the coast for an area which was safely isolated from major towns, yet sufficiently accessible to a large workforce. The sand and dunes provided further protection against the inevitable risks. Established here in 1871, the British Dynamite Factory was, in its day, the largest explosives plant in the world. The company grew steadily, expanding into a wide range of explosives and related products, until in 1926 it became one of the founding members of Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI). After various changes of owner, the factory finally succumbed to a massive explosion and fire in 2007.

The site has lain abandoned for nearly ten years, during which time its ruins and sanctuaries have taken on an overwhelming sense of the picturesque. If it is possible to have a landscape category of the 'industrial picturesque', then it would be exemplified by Ardeer.

The Romantic era drew our attention away from classical elegance to imperfections, including those in landscape and plants. In the picturesque it allowed us to contemplate ruins, often as allegories of moral and spiritual decay. It permitted us the opportunity for evocation, wistfulness and contemplation, in landscapes which recollected feelings of loss and insignificance. In the previous article, I referred to the former Semple estate, whose vestiges were being reclaimed for public enjoyment by the Regional Park. Here, in Ar-

deer, there is no reclamation, only a sense of repossession by nature and the ghosts of industrial grandeur.

Although much of the work at Ardeer was hazardous, jobs were highly prized. Known locally as 'The Dinnamite', the employer's conditions and pension rights were enviable, befitting the dangers of much of the manual work and the prestige of managerial work. The scale of employment was such that at one time it included a village, replete with travel agent, railway station, bank and dentist. The Scottish Bus Company ran a flotilla of double-deckers daily to the site which, at its peak, employed over 12,000 workers. The factory had its own jetty on the River Garnock in Irvine Harbour, exporting time expired explosives and importing raw materials.

On 8 September 2007 a major fire was reported at the site when 1,500-1,700 tons of nitrocellulose, stored in an open area, caught fire – most likely an act of arson by local teenagers. There was little property damage and no serious injuries, but it signalled the end of operations. Today there remains a vestige of the former presence, with a chemical company on a new industrial estate employing around 300 people.

The site is now a trove of ruinous blast walls, press houses, magazines, railway tracks, jetties and laboratories. The neighbouring 'three towns' – Stevenston, Saltcoats and Ardrossan – currently experience some of the worst levels of unemployment and deprivation in Scotland.

Adding to the sense of decay is a millennium-funded white elephant, The Big Idea, a mothballed science museum at the south end of the peninsula. Inspired by the Nobel story, it celebrated invention and inventors. Its initial success was short-lived and by 2003 visitor numbers had fallen off a precipice; now it stands in suspended animation, subject to a care and maintenance contract. The purpose-built bridge across the mouth of the River Irvine is severed in the middle to prevent unwelcome adventurers and to allow pas-



sage of ships. At the time of writing it appears that a new future may be found for the museum.



Foul weather greeted our hardy walking group on the day of our visit which, I fear, did little for the accompanying photographs. However, it added to the atmosphere of lost glory. The emblematic industrial complex is now benignly reverting to an ecologically rich mosaic of wetland, hydrosere and woodland. Already, though, parts of it are drying into scrub which is likely to sustain less wildlife and smother the vestiges of industrial archaeology; and soon the entrance barriers will be too effective for even the most determined walking group to overcome.

There is a huge potential here for the sensitive interpretation of rare industrial her-



itage, whose touristic interest would extend well beyond Scotland, but it will doubtless go unrealised for want of imagination or commitment. It is a pity that pilgrims passing the Whithorn Way do not know of, nor cannot enter, this unique place. Its commentary on vanity, wilderness and regeneration are profound, but will most likely go unheard.

PS

Note

Aerial image showing the whole site, acknowledgement to Google Maps.

THE BARD AND CONWY FALLS

Safeguarding one of Snowdonia's [most! Editor!] Sublime places

By Gareth Roberts

Conwy Falls, one of Snowdonia's most sublime landscapes was under threat earlier this year when a German based Energy Company (RWE Innogy) resubmitted a planning application to develop a hydro-electric power plant on the river. Cymdeithas Eryri / Snowdonia Society a locally based conservation 'watchdog' quickly mustered support to resist the development when it learned that the National Trust was party to the proposal and that the National Park Planning Authority seemed set to approve it.

The Society's concerns included the failure to acknowledge the historic and cultural significance of the Falls, a location that influenced poets and painters of the Romantic Movement, aroused interest in Wales and Welsh history and established a taste for mountainous scenery.

All this happened very quickly in the second half of the 18th century when French belligerence was on the rise and the industrial revolution was transforming Welsh landscapes. Republicanism threatened the business interests of Welsh landowners and magnates who enlisted historians, poets and painters to their cause by recalling the resistance of Welsh princes to the last French (Norman) invaders of Britain some 700 years earlier. In 1757, the philosopher, and anti-Republican politician, Edmund Burke published his seminal work on landscape aesthetics radically changing public attitudes to 'wild' landscapes and since then Conwy Falls became one of the 'must visit' places for those in search of the sublime and picturesque.

1757 also saw the publication of Thomas Gray's Romantic poem *The Bard: A Pindaric Ode* an allegorical tale about the last Welsh Bard putting a curse on the Plantagenet dynasty of Edward 1st before being harried to death by his army on its march through Snowdonia in 1282. The tragedy occurred at Conway Falls. This is how Gray described it:

*'On a rock whose haughty brow
Frowns o'er old Conway's foaming flood
Robed in the sable garb of woe
With haggard eyes the Poet stood'*

Despite being largely fictitious, historically and geographically inaccurate, the Ode proved hugely popular. 'The Bard' became an icon of national resistance and its setting, an inspiration for many leading artists of the day. Gray never visited

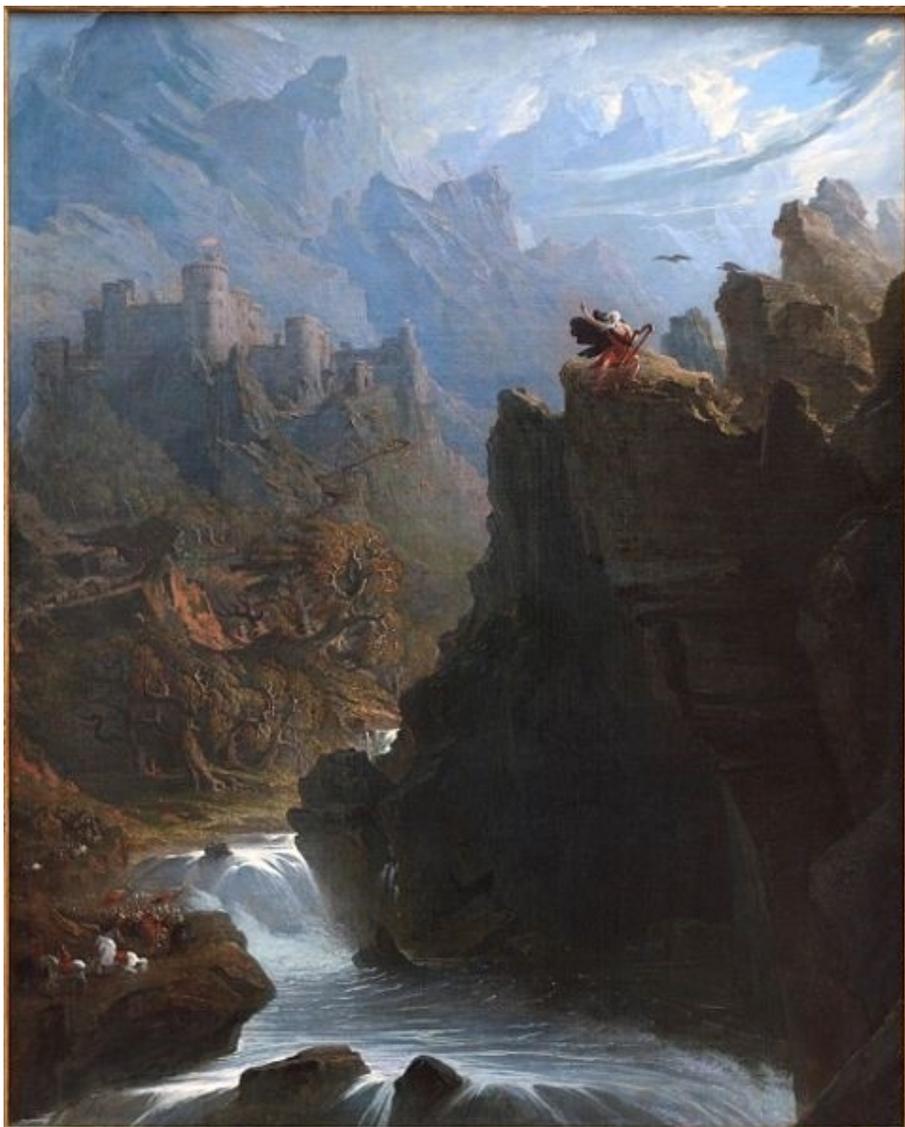
Wales yet his Ode suggests he had. It refers specifically to a rocky location overlooking the river Conwy where the Bard confronts Edward's army before hurling himself into the torrent below. Edward's army would never have met a Druidic Bard, most of whom had been persecuted by the Romans a millennium earlier, but this did not seem to have mattered a jot to 18th century travelers. For them, the heroism of the Bards and underlying anti-French sentiment conveyed by Gray's ode, was all that counted.

Conwy Falls sits alongside the historic 'Roman road' linking London and North Wales. Restored in the early 19th century as a coaching road, it made travel to Snowdonia far easier and a stop off at the Falls to experience the sublime setting of the Druidic suicide an added attraction! The romanticism associated with such places, the idea of 'natural beauty', our thinking about 'prized' landscapes, and how we plan, manage and protect them, all emanate from this time. Gray's *Ode* encouraged Revival in Celtic literature, music and the arts throughout Britain and its enduring influence on Welsh culture is still evident in the National Eisteddfod when the gathering of bards (*Gorsedd y Beirdd*) occurs annually.

Gray's poem became the subject of paintings by leading artists of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, including Thomas Jones of Pencerrig, William Blake, Henri Fuseli, Peter de Louthembourg, J.M.W. Turner, Paul Sandby and John Martin. All drew on the Druidic iconography and depicted Welsh landscape locations which fitted Burke's concept of the sublime.

John Martin's picture is typical, juxtaposing elements of a north Wales landscape (crag, a river in spate, a stylized Edwardian castle and wind blasted oak woodland) into a composition which maximizes the sublimity of the landscape setting of the Bard's demise! In reality, Snowdonia's landscapes, are much tamer, but such images clearly whetted the tourists imagination in ways today's picture postcards never could. So popular did Wales become that in the seventy years or so after the publication of Burke's *Enquiry* and Gray's *Ode* more than a hundred guidebooks were written, many illustrated with prints of sublime and picturesque views. Sketching tours were arranged from 1770s onwards and folios of prints were published of picturesque views helping to make Snowdonia perhaps the most popular tourist destination of its day.

Tourism contributes £4.2 billion to the Welsh economy accounting for 1 in 12 jobs. In Snowdonia, where jobs in mines and quarries have all but disappeared, dependency on tourism is even greater.



THE ROWAN'S RETURN

By Bud Young

Some time since I was up here Mardon. It is rather less than 900 feet where I am walking. My diary record tells me that this latest visit was the 15th of September. Thirty years ago I was here almost daily with my dog a German Long Haired pointer called Spindle. He raced criss crossing the ground, I strode. I used to feel superior to all the 'too idle' or 'too old to walk' and it was at that time that I got to know the place — the dry tin mining gullies and the signs of WW2 training by US army Engineers.

My recollection is that there were fewer trees across the upland heath then and that they have since increased. A few oaks, rather more silver birch a scatter of holly and occasional rowans also called mountain ash trees. Perhaps there are fewer stunted cattle grazing from the 3 or 4 farms that have grazing rights. Most surprising today are the rowan trees. Rare on most of Mardon, here along the northern edges near Great Wooston's pasture they stand thick and orchard spaced. And they are heavily burdened with orange red berries. A fine sight against the dark grey horizon. I pulled out a sophisticated film base camera and caught them. And now the film remains undeveloped didn't get to the end of the roll — Nostalgia, inefficiency.

I am told that fieldfares and redwings feed on rowan berries in the winter - something to check but probably not in the field as a true naturalist might. I tried a berry and it was at first sweet — promising — then unexpectedly bitter (scarey – poisonous?) so I spat out four times onto the stoney track and promised myself to look them up in Richard Mabey's *Food for Free* – for if it isn't there then it's not food. And *I did look it up (that bit about poison) and according to Mabey, they make a delicious jelly with a marmaladish flavour. Mmmm? Don't try this at home. 'Watch my lips' takes on a new significance.*

BY

In declaring 2016 *The Year of Adventure* the Welsh Government extols the virtues of many places and experiences for those seeking 'a rush of adrenaline, a surge of emotion, and memories that will last a lifetime'. Zip wire rides, mountain biking, and engineered wave surfing is on the menu. These activities are clearly very popular with younger people but less so, one imagines, with the elderly and infirm who historically have been attracted to and profoundly moved by the sheer scale and untamed power of natural phenomena like waterfalls. The prospect of 'Conway's foaming flood' being tamed 'to a mere trickle' if the planning permission is granted (but see footnote) will make Snowdonia a less attractive and sublime place for many in future.

GR

Postscript

In his report to the AGM (21st October) the Society's Director, John Harold, gave this information:

Snowdonia Society is pleased to report that Conwy Falls and Fairy Glen are, for the time being, freed from the threat of a large industrial hydropower development. This stunning section of the River Conwy will we hope continue to delight people for generations to come.

The developers RWE have withdrawn their application in the face of certain refusal of planning permission should it have gone to the Snowdonia National Park's Planning and Access Committee on 12th October. This follows a significant turn of events when Natural Resources Wales published its views and expressed 'significant concerns' about the scheme. This in turn follows intensive campaigning by Snowdonia Society and our colleagues at Save The Conwy to ensure that proper scrutiny was applied to the application.

'OUT OF LINE' — RAILSIDE LANDSCAPES

Brian Goodey reflects on a journey between Oxford and Banbury that he has taken 10,000 times over forty years: the views from the window and the landscape changes which arrest his attention while others busy themselves with office work, school or urgent mobile phone calls.

Northwards, nature, Oxford squeezed, expands – a derelict swing bridge, small wetland with swans, the isolated church at Hampton Gay, piles of pollarded willow logs, several seasons seasoning.

Lifting off from the first stop at Tackley, the eye caught a pink flash of late sweet peas, or was it rosebay willow herb (no!), adjacent to the line crossing between village and fields? A possibly domestic punctuation to the increasingly ordered lineside. A reminder -- to the me at least of ten thousand train passes through this



On a Great Western DMU (Diesel Multiple Unit) stopper, known to long-term travellers as a *'biscuit tin'*, last Saturday. With a slower speed and more visibility than the usually-taken Cross-Country from somewhere north to somewhere south and linking Oxford with Banbury

..... At Oxford Station the new Chiltern Line link through Bicester to Marylebone is taking shape, crammed against what was a forgotten inner city edge that has been crowded with townhouses and/or student apartment over the past decade. River and canalside, one a green lung to the city centre slimmed down by loss of trees that only modern yellow clearance equipment can achieve.

North from the station a ragged edge, now largely galvanised railings, though some painted green so as not to completely sever the dramatic flood plain space of Port Meadow. Allotment holders and new age canal folk have been replaced by Bob the Builder teams; mechanised, tidy and modest is the new USP. Sprayed out, broad and ballasted, here rail travel is insistently urban.

spot over more than forty years -- that there was a very human story unregarded by railway literature and unseen by the vast majority of travellers. Here there had been a level crossing cottage on a mean lineside strip, a gruff rail worker with his bike, and a wife who had commuted daily to Oxford, despite evident handicaps. Both have now vanished from view, the cottage demolished, the flash of pink flowers their only marker.

Such hints are essentially personal, relating unremarkable points on the line to chance meetings or transitory events seen from the train. Lower Heyford, where, on several occasions, a well-known Iris Murdoch placed a behavioural freeze ('don't say anything or she'll write it down') on her packed fellow passengers simply by being there. On another occasion, Jon Pertwee (later Dr Who) was spotted on the canal filming with Una Stubbs.

Further down the line, a point where 'The Judge' but who? — as carriage rumour had it, exploded to all and sundry after an overheated *biscuit tin* delay. The slow erosion and demolition of the cement works at Kidlington, the quiet removal of Brunel period lineside features,

the increase in golf courses, shelter belts, deer, and masts, and the subtle shifts in cropping patterns; shelter planting removing trains from the Rousham Parkland view - all evident from glances rather than intended survey.

Temporary strips adjacent to the line encourages edge uses – a densifying park of trailer homes by the former Aynho Park station – sales pitch, holiday lets (hardly!), temporary accommodation? A long neglected strip by Kings Sutton station has filled with a congregation of the range of horse boxes and rusting vehicles that used to decorate farmyard landscapes and that are now veering towards *Country Life* ads. Nearby, on the hedge, a fluttered Union Jack and row of pennants – Brexit reminders rather than either the European Cup or the Olympics, I think.

Even forty years ago few passengers, save evident tourists or notebook scribbling men of a certain age, maintained their view of near or distant horizons.

On the stopping trains neighbours are caught up on established links and personalities, students on their homework, and readers on the daily paper. The journey was a boxed daily rite of passage. Since the Cross-Country non-stopper the morning is dominated by those who are already 'in the office' with electronic screen and headsets to baffle even the most immediate incursions. No view for them, except at the top (leaving) and tail (arrival). If there is no office in which to be an early participant, then it is loud mobile phone social enquiry – locations, children, meals, or an excessive number of personal problems. Again the view matters little.

A vacation well spent (travelling the US by train) can lead to a glimmer of enquiry on return. I noted several efforts to interpret what a total week plus shutdown at Banbury Station by Chiltern Railways had actually done to the long-unused sidings.

Still – and the same for forty years – it is the image of supposed disaster that brings viewers to the window. A death on the line may bring conversation as to the routes, both physical and psychological, followed to death, but it is floods that continue to cause discussion. Water meadows, such as Port Meadow, Oxford, that were designed to flood from the monastic medieval period lap against village gardens in the spring. Blame for governmental neglect is quickly apportioned.

Such occasional commentaries are caught between the railway historians, for whom every structure and severed junction is part of an illustrated and detailed monograph, and the pastel Portillo brigade who expect each station to yield either historical expertise, hands-on experience, or whimsical folklore.

Unlike those caught in the motorway groove, or on SATNAV insistence where only the most notable of landmarks may be recognised; where brown tourist signs capture the, often unseen, context — here on the train there is the time and view to borrow and digest. The trouble is that there is little or nothing to prompt the viewer about the landscape beyond the windows. Whilst sudden intrusions, or removals, may receive comment there seems little understanding of why such changes are taking place or the broader implications of the specific.

But there are other hidden – scapes that emerge from the curses of mobile users. I suspect that there may be more early morning travellers inhabiting this hidden world, than are part of the world outside. Many are, perhaps, now content to divorce the travel experience from its TV neatly packaged version fronted by ‘Mr Blobby at a job interview’ (Feb.2016 *Guardian* comment on Portillo’s output.)

Brian Goodey

Notes

There has been an ephemeral literature of route guides (e.g. Caroline Dakers) in the past, The crafted observations of long-time Oxford-London commuter, *Tyresius* are still unearthed in blogs and Charlie Bunce details Michael Portillo’s British journeys.

‘Tiresius’ aka Roger Green, 1984:
Notes From Underground. Paladin.

Charlie Bunce (2011) **Great British Railway Journeys,** Collins.

Charlie Bunce (2015) **More Great British Railway Journeys,** Collins.

Caroline Dakers (1985) **British Railway Journeys : Paddington to the West.** London : Fourth Estate in association with the English Tourist Board: Paddington routes.

In this electronic age where are the apps? Google search offers many for getting there cheaper and/or faster but nothing on the journey.

Paul Nash Exhibition Tate Britain until 5 March

I was five when Paul Nash died, but his legacy has sat comfortably and uncomfortably with me since I was aware of his work from my father and his circle of local ‘amateur’ artists in Essex. Postcards from his work in two World Wars stretched the boundaries of painting from the comfort of Constable and early 19th century sketches to embrace the Cold War nuclear age. Perhaps because I have lived adjacent to the Oxfordshire cultural

20th century landscape experiment. With 150 images – many seen and some other — this is an essential exhibition for those seeking to understand the way in which we now see, and indeed design, the landscape.

Brian Goodey

Images

Battle of Britain and The Menin Road



bubble (more permanent ‘dome’ surely --Ed.) Nash’s landscapes have punctuated conversations.

An English original, tethered deep into national attitudes and observations, the quiet artistic *Brexit of Unit 1*, gathered key national artistic figures. More aggressively experimental than his Essex/Suffolk brother John Nash, Paul remains one of, if not **the** key, figure in English

