landscape research extra 65

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An image and note from David Haley. "Today, we tend to think of oaks as being solitary trees on the English landscape. Not so and I reflect on the words of the former bereavement director of Carlisle Cemetery, Ken West who was renowned for founding the Green Burial Movement in the UK. He turned the cemetery into a wildlife conservation area and oak forest. He said it had been recorded that, before the reign of Henry the Eighth, you could swing from oak to oak, between the Eden and the Ribble estuaries."

A fine oak on a frosty spring morning in the Eden valley. Copyright David Haley

A BRIEF WALK IN THE CAJAS NATIONAL PARK: AN ECUADORIAN LANDSCAPE

by Roger Dalton

A short flight between the Ecuadorean cities of Cuenca and Guayaquil takes me over the Cajas National Park in the Western Andes (close to Cuenca) where elevations reach some 4,500 m above sea level. The Cajas comprises 28,000 hectares and is one of 36 Parks in Ecuador where landscape and habitat conservation feature high in Government policy. Below lies a highly irregular topography in which some 270 lakes are a notable feature alongside the brownish-green of the ground cover. This aerial view provides a satisfying context to a short walk undertaken the previous day from a park visitor centre known as Tres Cruces. This began close to the continental divide at about 4000m above sea level and continued for 3km along traces of an ancient trail which once linked Cuenca and Guayaquil. Happily progress was mainly down hill and in tune with a notice warning to Anglophones: 'Attention! Always stay inside the path/ Walk slowly to avoid height sickness/ If you suffer of heart problems only do short walkings'. However in the landscape itself there was no sense of extreme altitude as here the height range is around 600m. It provided a sharp revision experience in basic features of upland glaciation with nunatak like rocky peaks, a complex pattern of ice gouged valleys, ice scoured rocks, and lakes dammed by rock bars or moraine.

With echoes of many parts of upland Britain this landscape offers a comfortable sense of familiarity enhanced by the grassland ground cover. Underfoot the predominance of skeletal peaty soils, which are highly water retentive, is well apparent, a characteristic enhanced by the incorporation of ash fallout from recent volcanic activity.

It is entirely fitting that the Cajas has been recognised as a RAMSAR wetland site where runoff supplies water to many regional settlements. But it is immediately clear that any resemblance of the vegetation to the likes of the purple moor grass or cotton grass of the hills of home is superficial as here is a tropical alpine tundra-like vegetation known as *paramo* which in spanish means bleak wilderness. Paramo fades upwards to bare rock and merges downslope into an evergreen high mountain forest, the cloud forest. Happily the day is fine but the paramo is a response to the predominance of cloud, mist and rain which give consistent high humidity with temperature averaging at 13C but in a regime styled as summer everyday and winter every night. The trail leads through a cushion habitat with ubiquitous tussock and bunch grasses or straw grasses (*Calamagrostis*) where the high proportion of dead leaves embedded among the living give the landscape yellow-brown tinge. There is a diversity of small and large shrubs including paper trees and also exotic ground species. Piles of dung remind you that this habitat is home to a diverse fauna including lamas.

Lunch time found me at a visitor centre with an excellent restaurant — lake trout! — and a chance to reflect on what had been a hugely satisfying visual experience yet one strictly controlled by the Cajas National Park Authority. The guidelines of the Ecuadorean Ministerio del Ambiente (Ministry of the Environment) show clear appreciation of the fragility of the paramo environments as evidenced by the impact of earlier cattle grazing. Hence visitors to the Park whether seeking to camp, trek, climb or undertake what was but a short stroll are limited in number. There is a requirement to sign in and out of the Park at access points; to be accompanied by a Park naturalist and to carry special bags for rubbish disposal.

As an area virtually devoid of settlement and with limited access, the contrast between the Cajas and our UK National Parks is sharp. However the sense of being in wildscape though real enough is tempered by the thread of the trail which as always gives direction and security.

Seemingly, overhangs of larger trailside rocks once provided shelter for earlier travellers. No comfort here even if wearing 'Paramo' brand outer gear!

RD

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE INDEPENDENT PANEL ON FORESTRY

by Paul Tabbush

Please note editor's use of colour fonts (blue and magenta) with bullet points like this for two different sources of quotations. And website blue.*

Most readers will be aware of the huge public reaction to the Government's initial proposals for the disposal of the Public Forest Estate (PFE), which found a voice through the electronic communication network of "38 degrees" – a significant milestone in the development of e-democracy by any reckoning. This resulted in a retraction (if not a U-turn) by the Government, and may have contributed to changes at ministerial level in Defra. Part of the Government's immediate response was to set up the "Independent Panel on Forestry", under the Chairmanship of the Bishop of Liverpool, and this Panel reported on 4th July 2012 (http://www.defra.gov.uk/forestrypanel/files/Independent-Panel-on-Forestry-Final-Report1.pdf).

The Panel's report was visionary. It was remarkable in that it introduced new insight into the public discourse concerning these woodlands, recognising the impact of thinking on Sustainable Forest Management. The report also emphasised some economistic thinking about natural capital and its conservation. The purpose for a proposed new body to manage the PFE would be "to sustainably manage the Public Forest Estate protecting and growing its social, natural and economic capital values." This thinking may come to haunt the English countryside for some time to come, bearing in mind that it is likely to become a governing principle. For instance, it might be relatively easy for an economist to show that the "social, natural and economic capital value" when taken as a whole, of an ancient woodland can be enhanced by building a bypass through it. Equally, it could be a rationale for commercialising and charging for public access. Perhaps this is not quite what the good respondents to 38 degrees intended?

The Government's response, published on 31 January, (http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/files/pb13871-forestry-policy-statement.pdf) follows the Panel's vision and proposals closely. "In particular, it says, we agree with the Panel on:

*The need to develop a new woodland culture and a resilient forestry and woodland sector;

*The value of the Public Forest Estate, which will continue to benefit from public ownership, be held in trust for the nation and be managed by a new, operationally-independent body;

*The importance of protecting our woodland assets;

*The need to bring more woodland into active management and increase the extent of woodland cover in England;

*The need to help the sector to find its voice and improve its economic performance;

*The importance of preserving and maximising the social and environmental benefits provided by trees and woodlands, particularly in and around our towns and cities;

*The scope for developing new markets based around a better understanding of the value and potential of our trees, woods and forests;

*The value of retaining a skilled cadre of forestry experts within the public sector." (page 3).

There is clearly much to welcome in this response. The PFE is to be retained in public ownership and the "unsustainable" selling of 15% of the estate per annum is to be halted. On the other hand, a new model of ownership and governance of the PFE "distanced from government" is to be established, and changes are to be made in the way private woodlands are incentivised and regulated.

My purpose here is to highlight some of the important questions that I believe remain unanswered:

**How well protected is Ancient Woodland?*

**Will the PFE be managed according to the principles of Sustainable Forest Management, in the public interest, or will it follow an increasingly narrow commercial path?*

**How will the private sector be encouraged to manage woods sustainably, after "reducing red tape" (deregulating)?*

**Where will new resources come from to deliver the central and vital vision of expanding and better managed woodlands, delivering a broad range of (public) (ecosystem) services?*

Protection for Ancient Woodland

I quote from page 20. "England's 340,000 hectares of ancient woodlands are exceptionally rich in wildlife, including many rare species and habitats. They are an integral part of England's cultural heritage and act as reservoirs from which wildlife can spread into new woodlands. Our native and ancient woodlands are subject to a wide range of pressures causing often slow and subtle declines both in habitat quality and in species diversity. The most significant of these are excessive deer browsing, non-native species and, as has come recently to the fore, tree pests and diseases. The National Planning Policy Framework recognises the importance of the natural environment and biodiversity. It gives strong protection for habitats such as ancient woodland. This includes an expectation that planning permission should be refused for development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats, including ancient woodland and the loss of aged or veteran trees found outside ancient woodland, *unless the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location clearly outweigh the loss*. The Framework is clear that if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused.

We announced in the Natural Environment White Paper that we would work with local planning authorities and their partners to test *biodiversity offsetting as a way to compensate for harm resulting from planning decisions that cannot be avoided or adequately mitigated.* This is being done through a number of pilot projects in Devon and elsewhere." (quoted from page 20 — my emphasis).

This passage (above) conforms to a discourse of weak sustainability, i.e. the idea that natural capital can be traded so as achieve a net economic gain. Strong sustainability would hold that the natural capital represented in the ancient woodlands is irreplaceable. **There are also arguments that the decision to destroy an irreplaceable natural asset should be governed by ethics, not economics.**

It is worth noting that Ancient Woodlands are *not* protected collectively by any heritage or conservation measures, although many individual woodlands will have some protection as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Surely an intention to deregulate can only weaken any existing protection?

Future direction for the Public Forest Estate (the PFE)

The response contains a very full and positive assessment of the PFE, its functions, governance and directions, and this will be widely welcomed. On the other hand it does suggest that new commercial targets will be set and that the PFE will be distanced from government. Does this mean that it will be under financed and so forced to charge for what are currently free public goods? Will the much vaunted "ecosystem services" (including health and wellbeing, spiritual values, education; and nearly all of which derive from woodland accessibility) be increasingly brought to the market so as to meet commercial targets?

While the government's localism agenda seems to resonate with calls for local engagement with stakeholders concerning decision-making, a question must be asked concerning the depth and legitimacy of public engagement. How will the new "trust" be governed? Will there be a governing panel that can truly reflect the pressing needs of urban populations for access to woodlands, or will it be composed exclusively of white, middle-class representatives of land-owning and economic interests? Forest Enterprise has made great strides in recent years in connecting with forest users, although hampered by lack of staff and other resources. It would be tragic if this direction were to be reversed.

Private forestry and "red tape"

The government's response indicates only a modest increase in current tree planting. I quote below from page 39. "The recent rate of progress has been between 2,000 and 3,000ha per year, which would reach 11% woodland cover by 2060. The Panel's recommendation implies a 500% increase on this rate sustained for the next 47 years. This is unlikely to be achievable or affordable. We, therefore, agree that 15% is a reasonable level of woodland cover to aim for although not within a specified timescale.

To accelerate the rate of progress we want the whole sector, including Government, to work together to create the conditions that facilitate private investment in woodland creation. We judge that this shared programme could achieve 12% woodland cover by 2060, an average rate of 5,000 ha per year, provided private investment in woodland creation increases in line with expectations.

We will work with the sector to develop new ways of encouraging landowners to plant more trees where it best suits them and their local conditions and pilot an approach that would reduce the regulatory burden on planting by clarifying where a full Environmental Statement is unlikely to be required." (Page 39)

This last statement seems particularly weak — how will "clarifying where a full Environmental Statement is unlikely to be required" reduce the regulatory burden? Does this mean a general weakening of intent concerning the implementation of environmental controls?

Resources and Services

The "settlement" of the financial arrangements for the new body to manage the PFE has yet to be made, but it is clear that it will be expected to raise more of its income from commercial activity. I quote below from page 48.

"In the longer term, we want to see the Public Forest Estate placed on a more secure and sustainable financial footing through greater entrepreneurial activity. Pending the establishment of the new body, Defra and Forest Enterprise England will continue to explore its financial needs and identify opportunities to generate additional income from the Estate, so that we can reach an appropriate funding settlement with the new body, when it is established, that will enable it to deliver a high level of public benefits while maintaining and enhancing the value of the land, trees and other assets under its care." (page 48).

Those who have tried will be well aware that the core business of growing and selling timber (or wood-fuel or foliage for floristry) is unlikely to provide much additional income to spend on the provision of public benefit and access. Indeed most of the income that owners derive from private woodlands derives from shooting. The PFE, with only 18% of the woodland area, accounts for 44% of accessible woodland, according to the Rambler's Association. Unless the new body responsible for the PFE has significantly more resource at its disposal than the current Forest Enterprise, we will continue to see the closing of walking trails simply because they cost too much to maintain, and the weakening of community engagement because of insufficient resource to employ community based foresters and rangers. Won't this make the aspiration to improve access, particularly in urban (or peri-urban) areas very hard to sustain?

PT

HEDGES AS FUEL.

This hedge just up one of the valleys from my home was being laid a month ago. Counting the annual rings it was previously laid about 25 years ago just after I arrived to live here. The billets of wood have been cut to what is called cord length and will go for logs. The larger photograph shows the strong top growth which may well be bonfired though could provide a small village with heating for a week. It needs trimming down with a bill hook and bundling as faggots, or bean and pea sticks — regrettably too much work for too little economic return. A huge shame but that is modern economics. Perhaps it will be chipped. I'll go back and check.

Any look at Google airphotos will suggest to you the size of the hedgerow as a source of timber cut in rotation. My neighbourhood (east Dartmoor) is rich in hedges but pity those stove enthusiasts who live in wide open landscapes. The airphoto below shows the N/S hedge itself, centred. **BY**

BUILDING HOLES FOR SAND MARTINS

by Philip Pacey

Following the failure of a previous attempt, by contractors, to build an artificial bank for sand martins to nest in on a nature reserve, a group of us, Tuesday's gang of conservation volunteers, have been putting our heads together, trying to devise a structure that *we* can build in time for the forthcoming nesting season.....

This may seem an extraordinary thing to do - an extraordinary thing, that is, for human beings to do. And yet..... Human beings have not evolved so far as to leave other creatures entirely behind. Animals may not have learned to manage fire and cook food, but some use tools. Humans, like animals, have learned to recognise hospitable environments, to find shelter, to *build* shelter. It seems at least plausible that our modern, sophisticated *aesthetic* landscape preferences derive from qualities which identified 'favoured locale', including the value to hunters of 'prospect and shelter'.

We human beings, it seems to me, are distinguished *not least* by our genius for making ourselves at home in the world: recognising hospitable environments; coping by one means or another in less hospitable environments; building shelters, building villages, towns, and cities; transforming wilderness into landscape and *place*. Places are inhabited; recreated by their inhabitants; set among different geographical features which are part of their identity. We are defined as human beings by our placemaking. In the modern world placemaking employs experts and professionals, yet it still invites participation and collaboration. The creation of a place involves many hands through long passages of time, and is everywhere ongoing. Place is what (human) geographers study. Place is what travellers often travel to see.

Of course, being flawed we contest our places; fight over them; build barriers between them; imprison people within them; wear them down with incessant tourism; pollute and despoil them. In defence of our places we are as determined, as driven, as birds rebuilding broken nests.

My own contributions to place making have been limited, comprising little more than involvement in the making of a home and the cultivation of a garden. But I have spent much of my life enjoying, and calling attention to, the achievements of others, both in making actual places, and in imagining, envisaging, depicting and celebrating place in art and literature. When the work of artists vouchsafe us glimpses of 'place' which delight us, it is as if we have been looking for a lost Eden, Paradise, Arcady, the Elysian Fields, The Peaceable Kingdom: a land in which different people and animals contentedly co-

exist. Places are to be enjoyed. 'The aim of life' said G.K. Chesterton 'is appreciation'. But perhaps the perfect place is always just beyond us.

If evolution favours the fittest, human beings, who, uniquely, understand evolution, can and do choose to take care of those who are in some way less fit, or especially needy. This may mean providing affordable housing; or providing emergency shelter for victims of catastrophe; hospitals, hospices, hostels, homes for the elderly, houses in which the old and infirm can continue to live with their families; accommodation within the community for people with mental and physical disabilities.

Further, we can, and do, choose to take care of *other species*, allowing them to live beside us, incorporating their natural habitat in our places, or offering manmade alternatives. Of course we tend to do this on our terms, keeping pets in our homes, bees in hives, captive wild animals in zoos, birds in cages; doves in dovecotes; farm animals in fields and barns, poultry safe from foxes; poultry, pigs and cattle in battery farms. Animal species exploited by us are 'improved' by breeding programmes. Wildlife, which is entirely fit for its own being and purpose, is wholly vulnerable in a world which has come to be dominated by the human race. But building holes for sand martins? Delighting in wild life as so many of us do, we have learned to leave wild creatures alone, to let them be themselves, except insofar as they need our help to save, maintain, reinstate, enlarge, and connect their habitats, our greedy place-making having squeezed them out and broken links which assure safe passage between sites. Making and erecting nest boxes for birds has become a popular activity, although we cannot build nests as do the birds themselves, and our enclosed boxes may harbour parasites if they are not cleaned out each year. Special bricks have been designed to incorporate high up under the eaves of buildings, to offer homes to swifts, and terra cotta nests have been contrived for swallows and house martins. Boxes are also available or can be easily made, for bats and for hedgehogs.

.....While I have been musing, head-in-the-clouds, our group of down-to-earth would-be builders of homes for sand martins has discovered that units are available, made of recycled plastic each with holes leading to tunnels; the whole unit to be embedded in an embankment.. We have placed an order and await their installation. I'm not convinced that our sand martins need our help — there is a large, successful colony scarcely a mile away — and our efforts may be thought exploitive — we hope to attract birds to a site in front of a hide where they will be watched and admired. It will be up to them to use our bank or not; whether or not to recognise our initiative as a 'favoured locale'. If they do they should find that their new home — beside an artificial lake, the level of which we can control — is less prone to flooding than the natural colony downriver.

PP

THE PITCHFINDER GENERAL IN ESSEX

by Brian Goodey

Introducing the Huhn's prison sentences on the BBC today, the presenter noted that the infamous 2003 journey had been from Stansted Airport to Essex. Very much the new popular geography where counties are the bits that cannot be easily classified as transport routes, nodes or SatNav features. This has been the latest scrambling of county facts which probably began when military service, once voluntary or territorial, gradually detached itself from local place and power.

More recently Essex has become, or has been re-emphasised, as the home of brash, uncouth, tanned young people who flaunt their consumer lifestyle — the TV programme *"The Only Way is Essex"* (acronym 'TOWIE'). This is just the 21st century version of what singer Ian Dury (born Harrow, claiming birth in Upminster at the end of the Tube) had spun for the flash cars and sexual prowess of South Essex — ref. *Billericay Dickie.* TOWIE focuses on Brentwood, heart of the Lord Sugar (also of TV fame) empire, represented by Eric Pickles in Parliament and, adjacent to the M25, the border marker between North and South Essex. Brentwood School's Old Boys hint at this border town — Sir Robin Day and Andrew Lansley MP but also Noel Edmonds and Frank Lampard. Coming

as I do from Chelmsford, it is rewarding to see the North-South border being pushed South, though this simplistic geography denies the presence of historic landscape niches in the South — not all Canvey Island and Basildon — as well as some rather degraded areas to the North.

The influence of London has spread over the County since the year dot. Jonathan Meades began his hour-long TV essay, *"The Joy of Essex"* standing in his customary pose as a *Reservoir Dogs* hit man in front of the tall Tudor towers of Layer Marney. It was here that he summarised his dissertation, that there was more, *much more* to Essex than 'reality TV cretins' and 'victims of vertical tanning.' But if the TOWIE crowd are kids on the make, then Marney, 15th cent. fighter at Bosworth and steady climber in key positions at the Tudor London Court, hardly retired quietly to the countryside. The fact that this amazing Tudor building is largely marketed as website wedding locale seems to bring history into play rather conveniently.

I realise I am chancing my arm commenting on Meades' TV programme which is unlikely to find its way onto screen again, except on the most obscure listing. The loquacious and antagonistic Meades, always set for word and mind conflict, is an acquired taste. In his writing as well as his TV outings he demands that we digest every phrase and argument, and respond to the rapid battering of language and challenges to easychair taste and style. Like a predecessor Ian Nairn, whom he admires and whose selected places he has re-visited, his emotions towards place and landscape are not calmly packaged for pleasure. No confidential Betjeman or Don Cruickshank, then, but rather one who questions why we should want only modest condiments to re-digest a traditional heritage TV meal.

Meades' central theme was of the countryside beyond London, but not just a landscape for consumption, rather a setting for experiment. As those who have explored Gillian Darley's *Villages of Vision* on the ground will know, the British landscape is littered with built experiments in despotic capitalism, paternalism both socialist and batty, seldom provocative and now quietly fading.

Also covered were an hour's worth of social experiments such as the Salvation Army's Farm Colony at Hadleigh that William Booth established, 'where broken men of bad habits might be reformed' — it still has Salvation Army connections, and a model farm/ Rare Breeds Centre — which 2012 now behind us — is hosting an Olympic track (a mountain biking centre). To have achieved 'mountain' biking in flat Essex certainly hints at spiritual intervention.

A good deal of faith accompanied many of those who bought into these, largely remote, experiments. It was, perhaps, inevitable that Meades would endorse the company village built by Crittall, in Braintree, then Silver End, to show off the patron's metal windows in Modernist settings after WWI. After criticism in *The Studio*, Crittall demonstrated that his metal windows fitted as well with the boarded church which he built for his community. At East Tilbury, Tomas Bata established another Modernist village to go with his now derelict shoe factory.

The landscape of any county is very much what the observer decides to focus on. From his recent series of essays, *Museums Without Walls,* we can be pretty sure that recent housing and community developments will not feature in Meades' programmes; yet from my viewpoint Meades' rapid disposal of *The Essex Design Guide* was where we parted company in his random Essex journey. *The Design Guide* (now updated) was a major local attempt to reassert regional vernacular. Essex had the advantage of scrimping with all available vernacular materials except stone, and developments following its guidance have featured versions of a very wide variety of traditional building — see especially South Woodham Ferrers and Notley Village.

Meades, 'The Pitchfinder General' has little time for planners yet it is their

policies that have parried the continued London-derived pressures for development in the county. There may still be room for quiet experiments — to be revealed in fifty years time? — but a recent view of the county suggests that planning guidance and control is working well in most districts. Broad landscapes of marsh communities to the east, and of rolling farmland to the north still survive. To enjoy them you need to take the minor roads, avoiding SatNav voices which deny landscape appreciation. In every area you will find the new: usually though a quiet evolution encouraged by the planning process, and by newcomers who quickly respect the colour and form of what they have joined.

We need more of Meades, on every county, to stimulate consideration of what county landscapes mean today. How regrettable then that this hour of provocation has already slipped beneath the waves of TV dross.

Notes

The 5 images in this piece described in order of appearance.

1 High Street, Tiptree: spasmodic, rather than medieval, street front en route to the Wilkins shrine of marmalade and ketchup.

2 Plotland type development of small homes on individual plots, typical of inter-war Essex, largely swept away by Basildon, but here receiving tender loving care at Great Totham. Note appearance of medieval pargetting plaster work on the white elevation.

3 Silver End, near Braintree : The Manager's House, a feature of Crittall's modernist village, industrial experiment now conservation area.

4 The Church, Silver End: Crittall's riposte to Lord Braintree's objections to the modernist village in The Studio: metal frames in a boarded barn.

5 Poundbury, Dorset: neo-vernacular trying very hard, here one can understand Meades' dismissal of Prince Charles' new village/town.

See Jonathan Meades (2012) *Museums Without Walls,* London : Unbound.

The classic landscape study is John Hunter's *The Essex Landscape : A Study of its Form and History* (available from the Essex Records Office).

BG

Letters to the Editor

Dear Bud,
I enjoyed reading LRE 64. Your pieces were particularly interesting, especially the note on your Swedish book find. I concur with what Gareth writes regarding 'Landscape as a cause', certainly LRG should be doing more to get 'landscape' up the agenda at the EU. The ELC although coming from the Council of Europe stable, is one tool which we should seek to exploit and use.

I was delighted to read the piece by Jay Appleton and to see that he is still as active and valuable as ever. Reiko Goto's contribution about a humanised tree on their walk at Loch Lomond for me captures both the micro and macro elements of the landscape: it is in fact a fine example of the twin values of Spirit of Place and Sense of Place.

The account of the Snowdonia Seminar by Bianca and Gareth struck a number of notes with me, not least because there is a very good exhibition relating to the life and work of Sir Watkin Williams Wynn in the Wrexham Museum. He lived at Wynnstay and was one of the major landowners and patron of the arts in 18thC Wales; included in this exhibition are two outstanding oil paintings, one by Richard Wilson, the other by Thomas Jones. Capability Brown was responsible for designing the park and grounds at Wynnstay which was at onetime one of the finest in Wales, now in need of some TLC
John Gittins

Dear Bud
Found last night! Ronald Blythe came to Wymondham late last year and spoke at a lunchtime meeting. He reminisced for nearly an hour, without notes and was lucid and enjoyable throughout. I'm reading *Borderland* — it is extracts from his weekly journal. So now I'm working through February, a passage at a time and came across this:

"Walberswick Whisperers"

Voices carry due to geography. The ramblers descending the hill have no idea that they are in a sound box and that I am receiving their talk. In Suffolk they talk of being a Walberswick whisperer who can be heard in Southwold. What I cannot hear is the telephone, the portable one I have been given at Christmas being still in its packing. The chatter of the walking crocodile arrives loud and clear. Perhaps I should have a conversation with the cat for them to enjoy. ... It is at this moment that the day closes in, the sun goes out, the hour grows nippy. A straggler, a young man appears suddenly — "Have you seen the others?" "'Only heard them" I reply. He makes off, whistling loudly.

Notes

Blythe, R. 2007. *Borderland: continuity and change in the countryside.*

Norwich, Canterbury Press. Page 59.

Ronald Blythe lives at Bottengoms Farm, which is between Wormingford and Little Horkesley. I'm looking at the 1:25000 map and can see the valley he is talking about, dropping north towards the River Stour. I'll now keep my eye open for any more "sound" comments he makes.

Best wishes
Ros Codling

NOISES OFF: THOUGHTS ON SOUND IN LANDSCAPE

by Owen Manning

A rocky edge winds above the wooded slopes of a Peak District valley. Sounds drift up: road traffic, a train, the murmur of a river, distanced by depths of air. From closer come metallic clinks, and voices of climbers unseen until hands appear, gripping rock; from ahead and behind come the cries of children, and grown-ups herding them along this scenic path. Comfortable sounds, not so different in their modern way from those of any populated landscape for untold centuries in the past. Yet above us is a higher edge, brooding and remote; up there the familiar sounds of a tamed countryside will be blown away by the wind – and between the two edges lies a sweep of grassy moor where suddenly, in a hidden fold of land, there seems no sound at all, not even of wind: a strange, magical place.

The common sounds to be heard in any landscape may be taken for granted, but it seems that serious academic thought is now being directed at them. Unfamiliar terms fly about: listening to landscape, landscape acoustics, sonic geography, soundscapes..... So here are some thoughts of my own.

How does sound affect our experience and enjoyment of landscape?

Obviously sound itself can be, and too often *is*, an unwanted intrusion: the roar of a highway, the frenzied barking of a dog, the bellowing radio or howling hover-mower, etc etc, destroying the atmosphere of a particular place or time. Noise pollution, like light pollution, is a modern term for phenomena less troubling generations back. I may return to this, because the means by which we deal with any kind of intrusion is a design area of great interest, and especially because the matter of *Keeping Things Out* is surely part of what the present topic is about: how landscapes can be managed to protect, enhance or even add to, the sounds we do want: the sounds we want to keep *in*. But what might these be, and how do we "listen" to landscapes?

I am tempted to ask here whether *landscapes* listen to *us*? Not too daft a question when finding, for instance, noisy chippings spread over the paths in a nature reserve, frightening off anything within earshot; similarly the gravel recently applied in Malvern Cemetery — enough to wake the dead, I think, as I crunch through it. But why does it seem inappropriate? Who (or what) do we think may be listening to us?

There are places, and times of day, that seem to demand silence, and perhaps most people trying to be quiet in a quiet place have the sensation of being *listened* to. Who knows what the landscape hears? Worms and all creeping things respond to the merest vibration: elephants communicate over miles through the drumming of feet on hard ground. Plants themselves make sound, as I once found wonderfully demonstrated at Croft Castle, where handsets dangling from a great tree allowed delighted visitors to listen in to the roar of sap surging through its tissues. But can plants hear *us*? Science-fiction writer Le Guin imagined an entire world of plant-life alone, knowing only the sigh of wind through a million silent years, until it sensed the arrival of humans.....

Back to the topic! Can a landscape itself have an identifying sound, important for our enjoyment of it? Personal experience immediately says Yes. The sound of endlessly breaking waves along a coast is perhaps too obvious to include here, and beyond human control anyway (or is it?); however, two sounds both inherent in the nature of particular landscapes and susceptible to management, are the sounds of wind, and of water.

Running water, rippling, splashing, falling, naturally or by design — inescapable for many years for me in Scotland, or in Sheffield and the Peak, echoing through every valley almost into the heart of cities – can be so pervasive we under-value it, until it's gone: gone underground (as now, for me in Malvern) or defeated by the roar of traffic, or simply buried under streets and buildings (cities everywhere), only allowed out in cascades and fountains. The sound of wind, though, can be less welcome, as it moans through withered trees, or wuthers round wet roof-tops (Emily Bronte knew of what she wrote) — but think of the flutter of leaves in a summer breeze! Or grasses sighing like the sea, or tree tops swaying above the quiet of a woodland glade, or garden, or city park or precinct: all reminding us of the vast oceans of air from which our weather rolls towards us, heightening by contrast the sheltered peace of where we are.

Other sounds of landscape may belong only to a certain time or place, like the sleepy bird-choir which echoed around a woodland in Wales one enchanted evening, holding my wife and I spellbound. Such memories sink deep, and not only of the sounds of nature. Elgar was inspired in his *Introduction and Allegro for Strings* by the distant sound of a Welsh choir in a valley: Janacek's music was infused by childhood memories of military bands in a village square. I have written myself (*LRE 64*) on the association of bells with a special place and time. Such instances remind us that the sounds of humanity going about its business may be as universal and significant as the sounds of wind, and water, and birds — including even the sound of traffic. Even dogs. All we need in order to appreciate what matters to us, is to stop, silence our thoughts (and if possible our tinnitus), and be *aware*.

Once we are aware, we may realise that silence is never absolute. Taoist philosophy tells us that Something comes

out of Nothing, and the quieter we are, the more we will hear. There is always sound, drifting to us from afar, or trembling around us: distant bird-calls, the sigh of moving air, rustle of leaf-stalks, quiver of soil settling....."*Where noonday sleeps upon the grassy hill, the whirr of tiny wings is never still.....Murmurs of strife are here lost in the air – 'tis visible silence, still as the hour-glass.*" Poets and songwriters (Brahms and V. Williams here) know this well.

Moreover, peace is relative. What matters is that the sounds we want are dominant, while others are separated or distanced from us. Separation and distance: these are crucial, and umpteen ways exist for achieving them — physical or psychological, obvious or subtle — to any degree needed: so many indeed, extending to the whole absorbing area of privacy and territory, that I will leave most for now in order to concentrate on just one fundamental aspect: how the form of the land shapes what we hear — and whether sound can be further shaped by how we ourselves build on the land.

I hinted in my opening at effects of height, depth and distance through which sounds potentially intrusive become instead a pleasing part of the ambience of a place, or fade into something else. Any form of raised route will achieve this. Coastal paths do it in their own special way, in a few swift turns taking us up to a world where the noise and bustle of the seaside falls away to a murmur and the wind brings only the sound of gulls and breaking waves far below, and skylarks above. That is the ultimate magic. Yet often only a little height and distance are needed for it to work: a few steps up — or down — and already sounds which might disturb have lessened enough no longer to overwhelm our thoughts, and maybe to allow other sounds to enter awareness.

A barely detectable fall of the ground created that place of seeming silence in the moorland, while larger landforms create an unexpected oasis of quiet in a traffic-encircled green in Malvern. But we should not rely on such happy accidents alone to counter the truly destructive effects of traffic noise. *Water*, in curtains, cascades and fountains, does a limited job wonderfully well but far larger bolder measures are needed. Britain lags behind the level of traffic-suppression common in parts of Europe — but there is hope, when for example Surrey's loveliest hills have been triumphantly released from highway tyranny, the monstrous A3 whose thunder echoed around their beautiful woods for a generation having just been buried beneath them – the ultimate distancing by depth, one might say. Nothing less would have been enough.

Returning to the surface, landform can catch us out though. Perched far enough (I thought) up a grassy hillside to snack untroubled by the road below,

I found traffic noise rolling up the slope towards me, for I had unwittingly placed myself in a natural amphitheatre! Such unexpected concentrations of sound also occur in narrow valleys, where the presence of water may be enhanced but traffic made hard to escape from. *Amphitheatres* however are a form of natural sound-amplifier used and adapted since ancient times (Cornwall's Mynac Theatre a recent spectacular example) or imitated by design, as a focus, a gatherer of sounds and people together. Were they — or perhaps other sound-gathers like cave-entrances — the inspiration for the first human structures built to do the same.....?

The processional form of basilicas and cathedrals has been linked to the need for amplification of the human voice in religious ritual. How far back do the origins of this lie? It has been suggested as yet another explanation for the form of a certain enigmatic monument, itself subject to recent argument on how to steer intrusive modern sound away from it. (Stonehenge, at last, is to be left free of roads, allowed to make its druidical moans in peace).

We can indeed build to enhance our experience of sound. Often it happens by accident, as with chance reflections from building facades (see *LRE64 again*) — but in Bristol's dockside there stands, by design, a gleaming globe which reflects strange sounds all around in wondrously ear-catching manner. Wind itself could surely be exploited similarly, while the unfolding of sound through the turns of a street, or succession of spaces (*LRE64* again), though usually accidental need not be.

In St Ives, last December, I found all coming together. Everywhere in this steep little town the sound of the sea was blown in from windy beaches, echoing around corners and along twisting alleyways — and along one especially it grew, and grew, till the roar of the windiest beach of all burst upon me. Along its promenade stands Tate St Ives, and mounting its curved entrance way I seemed to hear the sea-sounds also mounting to a reverberating thunder in a small enclosure before the doors, below the high mushroom

canopy: an effect so extraordinary that I went back and did it all over again. Accident or design? I don't know – but thank you, St Ives.

OM

On previous page the image of an Alpen Horn player:

To whom my editorial thanks — brilliant photo (compare the elephant's trunk).

THE BOG WITHOUT; THE BOG WITHIN!

by Terry O'Regan, Landscape Alliance Ireland

Last autumn, an invitation to fly the landscape flag at an integrated constructed wetlands (ICW) conference focussed my mind on our increasingly wet landscape.

The first episode of the 'History of the World' (BBC1) series coincided with this process and my ears pricked when that erudite presenter Andrew Marr suggested that bringing communities along the Yellow River some centuries ago to work together constructing overflow relief channels that would dissipate the fury of recurrent floods, marked a significant step forward in the evolution of civil society. Could it be that this also marked the first constructed wetlands?

Last autumn, the 12th workshops for the implementation of the ELC (European Landscape Convention) were held in Thessaloniki in Greece. The associated study visit was to Lake Kerkini — created by man's technical intervention on Strymon river to serve as a reservoir for agricultural purposes. Unintentionally it evolved into one of the most important wetlands in Greece — an important wildlife habitat particularly for migratory birds and now a RAMSAR site.

There is a logic about landscape that is increasingly at odds with the logic of the human race — an increasingly dysfunctional species that tries ever more desperately to distance itself from its natural roots. Water largely follows one of the earth's most pragmatically logical laws, gravity, but it does so at a variable pace as it traverses the landscape from uplands to

the sea, sometimes in a gushing, racing rush and sometimes creeping its seeping way through wetlands of diverse form and function. Consciously we seem to be destined to destroy wetlands and unconsciously to create them — but maybe a change is nigh.

Mimicking natural wetlands 'in form and function' the (ICW) concept explicitly integrates water management with a location's landscape and biodiversity. In responding to the climatic, soil, topographical and landscape characteristics of a proposed site the ICW concept can be applied to a wide range of sites and conditions. The oft quoted law - *'form follows function'* is attributed to the American architect Louis Henry Sullivan whose father (I am proud to note) was Irish and mother Swiss.

Last year Frank McNally writing in his often eclectic Irish Times column 'Irishman's Diary' listed more than 50 words or terms we Irish use to describe rain. Writers to the paper's letters page subsequently increased that list to over 100 entries. Quite simply even without a wash-out like the sodden summer of 2012, Ireland is a wet landscape of wetlands.

Fifty or more years ago, at a school desk in Waterford City, southeast Ireland, I escaped, in mind at least, the rather grim experience of 1950's primary education in Ireland to walk the frozen wetland suggested by the equally grim moral poem of Cathal Buí Mac Giolla Ghunna **'The Yellow Bittern' – 'An Bonnán Buí'**
'Is nach ndearna tú dúth ná dolaidh sa tír, / Is nárbh fhearra leat fíon ná uisce poll.'

The poet felt great sympathy for the poor yellow bittern which had died of drought in a frozen wetland and unlike the thirsty alcoholic poet (that *he* was) the bittern would have been as happy with bog water as wine.

That fine long-lived Irish poet John Montague in **'Windharp, for John Collins'** was equally if less starkly evocative with:
'The sounds of Ireland,/ That restless whispering/ You never get away/ From, seeping out off/ Low bushes and grass,/ Wrinkling bog pools,'

Patrick Kavanagh a cranky genius writing in **Tarry Flynn** spoke of how he
'…Went round by the glistening bog-holes/ Lost in unthinking joy.'

Where would our poets be without our wetlands and bogs for inspiration. Where would **we** be without the solace of their singing words?

The value of wetlands in the landscape and the Irish landscape in particular is that wetlands are an inescapable component of the land we live in with a diverse vital role in the lesser and greater scheme of things. Wetlands embody and sustain a substantial percentage of our natural and cultural heritage. In Ireland they are part of what we are and who we are. I mean no offence nor do I intend to be sexist when I repeat that telling old Irish saying *"You can take the man out of the bog, but you cannot take the bog of out of the man!"*

That is not an insult, it is a statement of fact, a fact that we would do well to acknowledge, respect and respond to … and not just in Ireland. Go build a bog!

TO'R and his constant companion' Cookie. Aah!

Connemara Bog Hole. Image copyright Terry O' Regan

From the Editor

For my part I have just travelled 400 miles through hilly pastoral Somerset, the South and North Cotswolds, the West Wiltshire Downs and Cranborne Chase and have come back exhilarated at the hugeness of the English agricultural landscape: the colour palette of newly ploughed soil, the delight of immaculate well dressed limestone walls and new planted hedges, the pastel bareness of the cold late spring and the wonderful variety of shapes of the land. Snow was still lying against the hedges in the North Cotswolds. This was a journey in the 1930s style of motoring on smaller roads to see the England of Batsford Books. A glorious three days with many limestone villages, the roads complex winding and slow. Memorable: I had to tell you this!
Nerds corner: the car is a 1924-29 Fiat 509 Spider photographed in 1930 here driven by Uncle Ted … wife's family!

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