An issue that remained under the surface through all these changes in aesthetic trends was the degree of human intervention in landscapes. At periods there was a strong liking for ‘wild’ untouched landscapes, with no trace of human presence. In others, human works or their remains were incorporated harmoniously with nature, as shown in the engravings that graced the books of the adventurous voyagers of the past millennium. During the 20th century, on the other hand, there has been strong interest in the depiction of urban or urbanised landscapes, where the anthropic elements prevailed.

Thus some landscapes include areas impacted by past or current human activities while maintaining ecological value, mild examples include grazing and fishing. Other landscapes lead to a partial transformation of the natural environment, mainly through agriculture. And there are those actions that radically transform the landscape through urbanisation in a more functional and objective manner, without denying the element of human perception, which is essential in the definition of landscapes (2). In this context, some of the questions to be considered are the following: What are the natural and anthropic functions that occur within landscapes? Who are the drivers of change at the level of landscape? What are the factors in play? What are the timescales involved?

From the point of view of nature, landscapes include a broad array of functions — or dynamic processes — as they may incorporate diverse ecosystems, each with its characteristic species of flora and fauna. The unimpeded performance of these functions and processes is a sign of the ecological health of a landscape, which can be hampered or enhanced by human activities. Thus, the clear-cutting of forests for timber or cultivation may result in soil erosion, which in turn will impoverish ecosystems and lead to the diminution or disappearance of species that depend on them (3). Conversely and acting for good, some traditional human activities have contributed repeatedly to biodiversity.

Changes started in the 1960s with the intensification of agriculture and the construction of an irrigation system, which led to increase of the local income. Well-meaning activities by environmental organisations have made the area widely known, attracting visitors and creating a mini-tourism boom. Support from international donors, from the European Commission to UNDP, is providing new development opportunities. The establishment of the transborder Prespa Park is decreasing the isolation of the area and reducing the impact of national borders.

Combined with a lack of public planning and land use control, these initially positive factors are damaging the delicate Prespa landscapes, especially through intensifying construction for tourist facilities. Resort housing and various services no longer limited to the traditional villages, are spreading throughout the territory. The situation however is not desperate. Already the involved parties are making an effort to use resources, especially space and water, sustainably. In this way they satisfy legitimate human needs for a better quality of life without degrading the environment. In this way, perhaps, they help re-establish the harmony between people and nature in Prespa.

Whether this is a realistic goal that can be achieved within a single generation has to be seen. Such efforts may indicate whether efforts to manage this and similar landscapes have a reasonable chance of success.
Anthropogenic activities can exert pressures on landscapes, with visible results, which can be reversed once the pressure diminishes or is removed. Intensive cultivation or grazing, for example, can drastically change the vegetation cover, but this can recover to a considerable degree once the activities are abandoned. Or the eutrophication of a lake (such as in Prespa) or lagoon can be reversed once the sources of pollution are controlled. There are, however, changes that are irreversible, such as soil erosion, desertification, urbanisation and public works construction.

Of course, it should be stressed here that not all changes are negative; there are those that can be considered highly positive as to their impact. But who is to judge and with what criteria? In a democratic society, ultimately it should be the public. But does the public have the necessary knowledge and the means to express its collective will in relation to decisions that will have long-term impacts? And how do the views of minorities – especially in multicultural societies – or of visitors and the international community, find an equitable hearing? The politically delicate question of ‘ownership’ of landscapes by indigenous peoples and local communities and the moral rights of interested and concerned outsiders may also be taken into account.

As to criteria, the principles of sustainable use of resources can provide useful guidance. Decision making is perhaps not so difficult if one focuses on functional aspects, as rational judgment can be applied. The situation aesthetically remains highly uncertain. In traditional societies, due mainly to the slow rate of change, a degree of common aesthetic values occurred, was cultivated and maintained. When it changed, it was also gradually and at a slow pace. Today, globalisation and the rapid means of communication are mixing up cultures and creating an aesthetic confusion. Nowhere is this more evident than in the appreciation of landscapes. For example, there was considerable consensus on the cultural landscapes of the past, from the hill villages of Tuscany in Italy, to the Meteora sacred megaliths in Central Greece: consensus at least among educated people. Is there any such consensus on the cultural landscapes of our own era, and which of them merit continued existence.

Landscapes are depositories of collective memory, sometimes with strong spiritual implications. Are collective memories, however, still meaningful for most people? Are we in danger of losing interest in the past, and thus impoverishing our future?

The purpose of the arguments presented above is to fuel the debate on landscapes. The European Landscape Convention maintains that it is concerned with all landscapes in the wider European territory. It is obvious that not all changes are negative; there are those that threaten on both the functional and the aesthetic level, and require management and care. Resources, however, are always inadequate and priorities have to be decided. These hard choices have to be made but what should be the criteria.

Notes

1 As documented by Peter Howard, for example in his contribution to the European Landscape Convention meeting in Strasbourg, 27-28 November 2003, entitled ‘Spatial planning for landscapes: mapping the pitfalls or buttressing the parapets and avoiding the voids’.

2 According to the definition of the European Landscape Convention, ‘landscape’ means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.

3 Madagascar is a characteristic case of serious change, having lost 85% of its lush forest cover due to ‘slash and burn’ cultivation.

4 According to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, 1971). Prespa includes perhaps the largest nesting colony of Pelicanus crispus in the world (approximately 1000 pairs), as well as large mammals and various endemic species.

A Short Iambic History of the English Park

by Jay Appleton

The fashion-conscious landowner in Charles the Second’s reign strove to impress the visitors who entered his domain. By aiming at utopia and bringing into play every device dictated by the fashion of the day, he sought to impress them with his grand manner.

The ornamental water’s no exception to the rule. The seeds of revolution were dramatically sown. The parks were filled with ungulates to make an English ‘veldt’ which was re-assuring evidence that Man was still in charge. And here and there, where avenues are seen to intersect, the little ponds are circular, as round as round can be. ‘Canals’ are rectilinear in strict conformity. When overcome by forces which they didn’t understand, they cherished the illusion they were really in control. They thirsted for that ambience their ancestors had prized, from which their own society had long been ostracised. The time had come to resurrect that primitive appeal, so they decided to make their park the jewel in the crown. To symbolise, absurdly, her subservience to Man. The ornamental water’s no exception to the rule. As death and devastation took their agonising toll, the nature they encountered wasn’t natural at all! But who is to judge and with what criteria? In a democratic society, ultimately it should be the public. But does the public have the necessary knowledge and the means to express its collective will in relation to decisions that will have long-term impacts? And how do the views of minorities – especially in multicultural societies – or of visitors and the international community, find an equitable hearing? The politically delicate question of ‘ownership’ of landscapes by indigenous peoples and local communities and the moral rights of interested and concerned outsiders may also be taken into account.

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And every one was girdled by a dense arboreal belt. The water-features, bit by bit so rigidly confined, Released from their restricting bonds, once more were free to wind. Nature was re-instated as the undisputed queen. And freedom was in charge again where tyranny had been. The confidence engendered by this bid to break the mould Inspired the more adventurous to have a go for gold, And there were some philosophers who liked their landscape rough, And rich in niceness, close up landscape and the emotions of the author as expressed through his close to earth characters Ratty (the water rat), Mole and Toad. At the same time it all fits into a very agreeable tale of friendships and local adventures. Kenneth Grahame’s landscapes are in my opinion superb. They include flowers and colour and sound and smells and movement and change. They affect his characters’ moods. His description of the winter landscape in Chapter 3, The Water-bouzou, is to my mind an exceptional evocation of season, and light — the dense grey light before snow. His narrator, Mole, in this case, expresses how he feels about the winter landscape. “He was glad that he liked the country undecorated, hard and stripped of its finery.”

The book had its origins in bedtime stories and a series of letters to his son. President Theodore Roosevelt wrote a letter of praise to Grahame “I have read it and re-read it and have come to accept the characters as old friends”. It was dramatised in 1929 by AA Milne the author of Winnie the Pooh. Kenneth Grahame died in 1932. As I write these comments the summer is just as described in Rat and Mole’s journey along the river bank. Quintessential England. Excuse me readers for turning back the pages of this chequered history, And so the alternating styles of each successive age Are lovingly enfolded in the nation’s heritage. First published in The Picturesque, No. 49, Winter 2004/5.

The anthology in this summer issue comes from The Wind in the Willows, a book I had not read since childhood. It fits well with Philip Pacey’s article “Going for’al” and the Landscape Research theme issue (302) on landscape and seasonality. As literature it is rich in niceness, close up landscape and the emotions of the author as expressed through his close to earth characters Ratty (the water rat), Mole and Toad. At the same time it all fits into a very agreeable tale of friendships and local adventures.

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Using public transport and walking as I do ... I realise that I am in the minority ... there are swathes of view, of landscape, that do not really matter in the ODPM/Promotional World of the latest new Britain. We are in Kent, south of the river and unknown in the iPod. Interesting implications for Clear blue man, rather than that.

In terms of ‘landscape’ new issues arise. First, this place was produced inside out. It is the interior landscape that matters, the exterior, initially, thought to be the parking and ancillary facilities which provided add-ons to the shopping experience. Well, after a first 5+ years cycle, the exterior, the link between interior 24 hour retail space and the real world may become more significant.

The site is limited and immediate plans call for a revision of the interface between the Winter Garden food area and external lakes and boardwalks ... gradually one can envisage Bluewater creeping out into the real world and engaging with it. The Land Rover 4 wheel drive experience is changing (with JCB help) into a fast bus lane, things are moving!

My enthusiasm for Trafford is that the exterior and links with shaping a new landscape seem to be rather more advanced. But all of these inward-looking centres are going to have to revise and upgrade their offer in the next decade. New retail environments will, of course, challenge them – the multiple auto, white goods and furniture parks when you can drive between ‘displayed bedsteads’ and ‘kitchen layouts’ are on the horizon. The challenge for each past innovation – downtown, out-of-town centre, character quarter and the rest is to re-invent and therefore retain ‘retail spend’.

There are a number of solutions ... all impacting on the landscape. The first is to revise within the footprint ... but Bluewater is a limited site and once new retail mixes are promoted, new interior attractions announced, it must be the nature of the interface between the centre and its surroundings which receives attention. Water, lights, events, symbolic structures ... who knows, but Bluewater must be thinking!

I suspect that for the average driver ... or even rail traveller such as me ... the ‘landscape in transition’ is the most depressing scene. From any number of surveys we know that what the British really like is ‘tidy’ - untidy really turns them off. The (promoted) rail journey from Waterloo East to Greenhithe (for Broadwater Park) takes you through some of the saddest evidence of the Thames Gateway ... white frost, graffiti, interior wrenched outwards (the Peeke Free Church, what a Berettamuesque joy that must have been). Thames Gateway needs our attention, but also our realisation that landscape is in evolution.

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At first glance, glaciers appear destitute of life or interest; attractive only for their qualities of desolation and emptiness. They seem static, frozen like a photograph by the cold and the thin, transparent air. But like deserts, glaciers open themselves up to you when you look closely at them.

On the Inylchek glacier (in the Tien Shan mountains of Kyrgyzstan. Ed) - every time I stepped off the moraine and on to the ice, something would have changed. The glacier had a different character for each part of the day. In the cold mornings it was crisply white. At noon the sun carved the surface of the ice into groves of tiny, perishable ice trees, each one of which had gathered in a dip, and watched for a few minutes as ice crept jaggedly inwards though I was moving at warp-speed through deep space. Dusk was my favourite time on the glacier. The sun always fell fast, dropping suddenly behind a row of peaks, so it was a brief affair ± forty minutes or so when shadows quickly densened beneath rocks, and ... at the glacier' s side, you could sense it battening down for the night. If you put a hand an inch or two above the ice, you could feel the cold pulsing off it, like marble. Out on the wide meltwater pools, the ice formed in zigzags just beneath the surface of the water, then thickened into heavy boiler-plates, locking in the deeper water. I once bent down to examine a shallow pool of water which had gathered in a dip, and watched for a few minutes as ice crept jaggedly towards from its edges and knitted in the middle, like a fontanel closing, or a tiny ice age.

From Rob Macfarlane
Mountains of the Mind
Published by Granta Books, London 2005. ISBN 1 86207 561 1

Going feral
by Philip Pacey

Feature articles in newspapers are ephemeral things, easily overwritten, not easily recovered, destined for oblivion. I want to call attention to an article, the first of a series about writers and landscapes, published in The Guardian’s books supplement on 26th March 2005. Its author is Robert Macfarlane, a name unknown to me. You may have read it. If not, your local library should be able to help you gain access to it, if not in the form of a copy of the newspaper then from a computer database. Macfarlane begins with Henry Williamson. While he was writing Tarka the Otter, Henry Williamson ‘went feral’, spending days and nights outdoors between the Taw and the Torridge (rivers in North Devon), trying to experience the landscape as an otter would experience it:

He crawled on hands and knees, squinting out sightlines, peering at close-up textures, working out what an otter’s-eye view of West Gulley or Dark Hams Wood or Horsey Marsh would be. So it is that the landscape in Tarka is always seen from a few inches’ height: water bubbles ‘as large as apples’, the spines of ‘blackened thistles’, reeds in ice ‘looked like wire in clear flex.

The prose of the book has little interest in panoramas – in the sweeps and long horizons which are given to eyes carried at five feet.

Macfarlane has much else to say about Williamson and other writers; he acknowledges how Williamson’s love of nature became “corrupted into fascism”, and how for others ‘an infatuation with landscape has, at times, come at the cost of a proper sense of human community’; he identifies several ‘enemies of good writing about landscape’. But for now I want to short cut to his concluding paragraphs, which commend ‘attention’, defined by Iris Murdoch (following Simone Weil) as an “especially vigilant kind of ‘looking’”. Attention, wrote Murdoch, teaches us how real things can be looked at and loved without being seized and used.

And Macfarlane himself goes on to say that: [this] ideal of ‘attention’, of a compelling particularity of vision, obtains to landscapes as well as to people. It is harder to dispose of anything, or to act selfishly towards it, once one has paid attention to its details. This is an environmentalist’s truth, as well as a humanist’s.

What follows is too good to paraphrase, too long to quote in full... but in LRE how can I resist quoting Macfarlane on how the best landscape writers have... responsibly and with gripping exactitude to renewed forms of matter (ice, rock, light, sand, moon, land, water, air) and to certain arrangements of space (altitude, edges, valleys, ridges, plains, horizons, slopes). Comically, earnestly, lyrically, ecstatically, anecdotally, beautifully, these writers have approached their chosen landscapes with an eye to their uniqueness. In so doing, they have premied a space within which those landscapes can be respected – can come to seem less seizable and usable by the greedy human self.

Macfarlane’s argument invokes for me the wisdom of others: conversations long ago with the poet Jeremy Hooker, who used the word ‘attention’ in exactly this way; Blake’s ‘To see a world in a grain of sand’; Ruskin’s eye for detail; Buber’s plea for humans to care for the land with an eye to its life. And his thought-provoking declaration that ‘Nature... needs Man for its hallowing’. Not for the first time I find myself contrastin panoramas and prospects with seeing things close-to, the latter coming naturally to us as small children (I spent hours of my childhood inside a hedgerow), the former being the norm for adult humans, raised up on our two legs. If this is a point-of-view which tends to the god-like and propietrial, encouraging us to think of ourselves as monarchs of all we survey, then, if only as a corrective, we will do well to cultivate a habit of ‘going feral’, but as harking, paying attention to and hallowing detail. I have no religious belief, but I can understand the appeal of a god who combines near- and far-seeing, who cares even for a sparrow and who assures each one of us that ‘the very hairs of your head are all numbered’.

Philip Pacey
University of Central Lancashire.
Continued over....

Editors note
Find Macfarlane’s article on the web at http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,1445192,00.html
Quite unknown to Philip Pacey, Rob Macfarlane and my son are friends. They have walked up a mountain in Nepal, climbed ice waterfalls in China and walked together in Scotland. In consequence I have to hand Macfarlane’s book “Mountains of the Mind” and I quote over the page from pages108-9 which is some evidence of the author’s attention to a very small part of a large landscape.
Geotechnical landscape carve up.

Bud Young

Travel west from the Aeropuerto de Malaga and confront some of the most appalling violence ever done to the landscape in the name of development. I refer to land seen in the A7/E15 corridor. It is high and all in full view of the sea, Gibraltar is on the far horizon. Down from the motorway the land descends steeply and is cut by many arroyos. The coastal strip is already developed. Perhaps — do not know — the coastal strip has settled down, cossed by sprinklers imported palms and the postscript landscape architect. Along the shore it may even be an impressive array of maturing greenspace and lovely buildings (a kind of Monte Carlo Cap Ferrat 1930 scene). No! Is that not what it’s like? I don’t know.

But from A7/A15, the parallel motorway, inland, it is a picture of devastation, a picture of total greed allied with vulgarity of demand. Hillsides are carved away, stocked living modules rise - and have risen - in ugly terraces and futuristic hollow zigzags. The landscaping one may imagine is more a matter of ‘the geotechnics of the nearly stable’. I rarely allow myself such inventive.

Will I get a rocket from the commercial attaché for this? From my friends who winter in Spain?

LG links with Europe

Yves Lugubini of CNRS and Daniel Terrasson of CEMAGREF attended the May Board meeting with a view to establishing cooperation with researchers in France. They gave presentations concerning the history of landscape research in France and the current programme of MEDIT. It was agreed that together with the CNR they should investigate the possibility of establishing a series of landscape seminars with partners across Europe and that we should look for EU funding to do this. For unexplained acronyms go to Google, CNRS Centre National de Recherches Sociales CEMAGREF Too long to write MEDIT Ministere de l'ecologie et du developpement durable.

Should you read


Some readings on Prespa


Nathalie Pottier, Edmund Penning Rowell, Sylvia Turnbull & Giles Hubert *Land use and flood protection: contrasting approaches and outcomes in France and in England and Wales* Applied Geography 25/1 2005 pp1-27

Theodore Lasanova-Martinez, Sergio M Vicente-Serrano & Jose Ma Cuadrat-Prats *Mediterranean landscape evolution caused by the abandonment of traditional primary activities: a study of the Spanish Central Pyrenees* Applied Geography 25/1 2005 pp47-65

GREEN PLACES Issue 14 April 2005

Judy Ling Wong & Simon Waters comment on the needs of multicultural groups when managing green spaces.

Nick Corbett Transforming cities 16-18

Sophie Hope *The art of negotiation* 20-22

Judith Calver Faith into action 35-26

Clare Rishbeth Refugees reflections 28-31

Sarah Bennett South Yorkshire Forest 32-35

Sebastian Tombs on The Downs Link 48

GREEN PLACES Issue 15 May 2005

Gavin Poynter, Anne Woollett & David Powell comment on London’s public spaces in the light of hosting the Olympic Games in 2012 16-17

Caroline Ednie *The Thames trial* 18-21

Alex Ely *Café’s choice* 22-24

Paul Downtown *Arcity living* 26-28

Sarah Bennett *Making a spectacle* 30-31

Jeremy Dodd Greenwich Millennium village 32-35

Julie Stanion on The Downs Link 48

GREEN PLACES Issue 16 June 2005

Chris Baines and members of the Rebuilding Biodiversity Group comment on revitalising biodiversity in the landscape 14-16

Chris Baines *Natural support* 18-19

Spence Gunn *Keeping up appearances* 20-23

Hazel Jackson *Where have all the ‘parkies’ gone* 24-27

Peter Skelton Second time around 29-30

Phil Barton on Trafford’s Ecology Park 48

GREEN PLACES Issue 17 Summer 2005

De Bernard Bulkin, Angela Kelly & Marc van Grieneken comment on the impact in the landscape of wind farms 14-17

James Hulme *New urbanist spaces* 18-20

Louisa Jones *The lure of Lasj* 22-25

Judith Calver *Assist promotion* 26-29

Zoe Wallace Hoddemore Lane, Brighton 30-33

Tom Franklin on Roupell Park Estate, South London 48

UGURAN DESIGN Issue 95 Summer 2005

Hugo Fereszti Some thoughts on the urban edge 10-11

Matthias Bauer & Lee Parks Urban design along the Haihe River, China 18-20

Kristi MacDonald, Thomase Rudel Sprawl and forest cover: what is the relationship? Applied Geography 25/1 2005 pp67-79

R Evans Curbing grazing induced erosion in a small catchment and its environs, the Peak District Central England Applied Geography 25/1 2005 pp81-95

CY Jung Outstanding remnants of nature in compact cities: patterns and preservation of heritage trees in Guanzhou city China Geoforum 36 2005 pp371-385

Paul Waley Parks and landmarks planning the eastern capital along western lines two cases from Tokyo park Journal of Historical Geography 31 2005 pp1-16

Peter Merriman Operation motorway landscapes of construction on England’s motorways Journal of Historical Geography 31 2005 pp113-133

Christopher De Sousa Policy performance and brownfield redevelopment in Milwaukee, Wisconsin The Professional Geographer 57(2) 2005 pp312-327

John Wylie A single day’s walking: narrating self and landscape on the South West coast path Trans Int Bri Geog NS 30 2005 pp234-247

Justin Wood *How green is my valley* Desktop geographic information systems as a community based participatory mapping tool, Area 2005 37/2 pp159-170

Stuart Downward & Kevin Steiner Working river: the geomorphological legacy of English freshwater mills Area 2005 37/2 pp13-147


(Thias book though no longer a news item won a Landscape Institute award in 2001. The author — Editor of our journal, Landscape Research — is now preparing Gardens of Versailles the Sun King’s Garden which will be published by Bloomsbury in 2006).
and national position papers take up more and more time.
That is an organisational problem, but more worrying is the lack of focus on the suburban landscape. While it is the urban fringe itself that is the focus of so much change, a very substantial part of the population lives in suburban areas that are now relatively stable, whether the 1930s estates of semi-detached houses so common in England, or the 1950s estates of concrete slab blocks by no means confined to eastern countries.
These landscapes, many of which we might would surely describe as ‘degraded’ were given but scant attention. Dare one suggest that much improved suburban landscapes might reduce the demand on rural landscapes either for tourism or residential functions?
The field day took us to the magnificent and romantic landscapes of west Cork, to Bantry Bay and Skibbereen – where Michael Dower enlightened us about the problems of the Irish Famine, and the report written by his own ancestor. I for one was very grateful that we did not spend the day examining the suburbs of Cork City, but perhaps thereby lies some of the problem. Landscape experts, like most others, prefer the rural green. Yves Lugnibuhl, in his summing up, stressed the vital element of Participation in the landscape decisions that will shape the future. We need to find out what landscapes people find attractive. But there is plenty of evidence of their wishes in west Cork, an area that has shared in recent Irish prosperity. Many people are making money, and then they build a ‘Trophy’ house (Terry O’Regan’s useful phrase) in the countryside, just outside a village. Having just returned from the French southern shore of Lake Geneva, it is clear that this scatter of new detached homes all over the countryside is not merely an Irish preference. Perhaps greater participation will make it quite clear that most people’s landscape preference is for just that — their own substantial garden and house with applied local identity set in a magnificent rural landscape, close enough to neighbours when required. That may not be the answer landscape experts want to hear.

An urge to explore
by Bud Young

It is Rosemary’s really. Allow her a map and a few gallons of diesel and she takes us through some of the smallest roads available. On that basis anywhere becomes a project area, a journey punctuated by a hundred stops to look at vegetation, a particular flora — an unfamiliar use of land, or some distinctive geology; alternatively to have a cup of tea, a hunk (lit.) of bread with dry sausage and to make one joke Cork, place our own. This time we break with our tradition and fly from Exeter airport to Andalucia and in the spring too, when the flowers there are coming good and before they are scorched to straw and dry capsules by the summer sun.

I have spoken of the appalling geotechnical landscape of the coast road. My face changes to a smile of delight as I describe the glories of the interior. Commercial attaché and friends take note. First a drive up to Gaucin at 650m, such a compact white town wrapped around a high promontory looking both to east and west, wonderfully perched above its valleys. Salaris in Cantal (Fr) strikes the same lofty note (see LRE 33); there is something about looking down into valley volumes of defined airiness. Views from Gaucin to Gibraltar and sharp mountains in Africa (Morocco actually). Past the heady narcissus-like smell of Spanish gorse (more gorica hispavrica than горова грожна) which colours whole hillsides bright yellow. On beyond to a farm-like hamlet behind a soaring limestone stump which then dominates us where we stay, greets us in the morning and demands that we look up. It is a crag where vultures wheel and soar in high inaccessibly.

No one living there could fail to resolve it. Few people ever climb it, it is tree covered, it has caves, so many mysteries. It is very big.

A series of personal public excursions then, as if we were at the outset of a new land resources mapping project — those were the days, my friend! Each trip of one day, sometimes revising knowledge as we retrace a section of route before diverging, in general working the terrain as a fly explores a kitchen table. A landscape dominated by geology and its knock-on effects, softer and harder bedded Devonian greywackes and mudstones, feature formers and gully makers, hard crystalline Cretaceous limestones, talus deposits. And a marvellously apparent fold structure. Not just rocks, for the resultant landscapes factors include slope and dissection and soils, surface water and vegetation types in fascinating array. And I do not forget the cultural and political in my landscapes, but first things first.

Woodlands of cork oak, light canopies underlain by French lavender (as we in England call it) heather, cystus (rock rose) and asphodel…. Soot dark trunks stripped of cork, but warm red on more recently harvested trees. Wild olives, pines — native and in plantations and an area of planted eucalyptus. Groves of oranges on alluvial land and frost killed avocado orchards.

Out of the wooded lands to spacier limestones around Ubiague, huge views, great hogbacks, tumbled karst, sweet limestone grasses and little flowers. So many delights and so many more to rely on in the mind’s eye. Highly recommended.

Author’s note

In a world where landscape has so many interpretations I have reverted to the first, to the original and to me the most powerful: “what you see and how you feel about it and understand it in its wholeness and in detail particularly as you travel through it, reacting to natural differences and sensing what it offers you as a sustaining resource.”

Photo of the author/editor before dieting. And of a medieval road in karst near Ubiague.
A laudable attempt to improve housing in nine urban areas of England is shaping up as a heritage disaster. Not for the heritage of the elite, but the heritage of everyday people. The government’s Pathfinder programme, also known as the Housing Market Renewal Initiative [HMRI], embodies a series of policies aimed at preventing housing market collapse in these mainly northern areas which include East Lancashire, Merseyside and Oldham and Rochdale. It represents a huge investment of public money – up to £500m in each area – over 15 years.

Market Renewal Initiative [HMRI] targets, to which the wider urban fabric. Terrace housing the industrial buildings and history of the area, and is supported by pubs and shops of

Up to 400,000 houses, mostly pre-1919 terraces, are threatened with clearance over next 10-15 years. So far 168,000 have been targeted for demolition, but there are calls from the academics behind the policy for the rates to be speeded up. The policy actually includes a degree of refurbishment but this in no way ameliorates the effects of mass demolitions on the urban landscape, heritage, society and sustainability.

These are not slum dwellings. In some of the areas there are serious social, health and education problems, but to blame this on the buildings is as mindless as blaming the frequently very low housing values in these areas on the quality of the historic building stock. These are potentially sustainable communities – they need state support, not state abandonment. Mass demolition is the easiest option for dealing with the perceived problem of market failure and the real social problems, yet the lessons of the past have proven that the ‘quick wins’ demolition provides are followed by long-term problems. Think back to the post war programmes of slum clearance.

While Save Britain’s Heritage backs the basic premise – supporting the market and improving housing conditions – its execution earns our strongest condemnation. Alongside local protesters, SAVE recently gave evidence to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister [ODPM] Committee – more specifically to the group of parliamentarians that monitors the activities of John Prescott’s mega-department – on the huge damage the policy will cause to our heritage and the communities that live among it. We eagerly await the committee’s report this month (April 2005).

Lose to the heritage
Part of the justification for the demolition policy, as laid down in The Northern Way, is that the economic development of the North depends on variety in the housing stock. Terraced housing is the dominant form across the UK and so Pathfinder is targeting it (its lack of variety) for clearance. This is in spite of the fact that the terraced house is an excellent solution to the small house problem, takes a wide variety of forms and heights, decorative designs and levels of gentility. Anyone doubting this should wander the streets of his nearest Victorian Edwardian town or seek out the 1982 Yale University book “The English Terraced House” by Stefan Muethesius. An in-depth study such as this carried out for the present purpose, would be a great challenge for a small organisation like Save, but perhaps English Heritage, which helped fight off the threat of mass clearance in Nelson, Lancashire, has the necessary expertise and funding (at least it did before the recent cuts).

The variety and quality of the buildings and the areas threatened is astonishing. Entire areas of four-bedroom or five-bedroom houses in Liverpool are up for demolition. Others under threat are in Bootle, 10 minutes’ walk from the lively town centre; there are solid stone-built terraces in Darwen; and others in Northwood part of Stoke-on-Trent, a model sustainable community which summarises all that is best about these areas. We understand the reason for the possible demolition of Northwood in Stoke-on-Trent is ‘bad ground conditions’ – yet the buildings show no signs of active movement.

These should be conservation areas, but conservation areas are declared by the same local authorities that are working towards clearance. What is remarkable is that Stoke-on-Trent probably has more potential in terms of brownfield development sites than any other city in the UK, yet Pathfinder wants to create more. This is another objectionable aspect of the proposal’s contorted logic – the creation of brownfield sites through demolition in order to meet government strictures about the percentage of new development on brownfield sites.

Government policy on heritage discusses at length the importance of the sense of place created by the historic environment, yet this sense of place and