The fast disappearing maritime landscapes of the Pacific region

Talk to indigenous south sea islanders about ‘the landscape’ or ‘the seascape’ and most will look at you askance. For Pacific islanders the concept of landscape is a more complex, less tangible and more an abstract one than for most Europeans. It has to do with the association people have with their tribal lands more than with just the visual character, landform, or geography of the place itself. In the south Pacific, people and their knowledge, traditions and spirituality are seen as inseparable from their territorial, freshwater and marine ecosystems: they are not external entities. These concepts are embodied in the Fijian islands in the term ‘vanua’ for their tribal lands and ‘iqoliqoli’ their traditional fishing grounds. Similar terms are used elsewhere in the Pacific islands (1). Understanding these concepts is important to all those involved in planning how to protect, conserve and manage these environments sustainably into the future.

The landscapes of Oceania are very varied ranging, from coral atolls such as the Majuro Atoll, in the Marshall Islands barely a few meters above the surrounding ocean to islands like Viti Levu in Fiji, dominated by volcanic peaks and cloud forests. Many of these islands and their near shore marine areas are self contained ‘arks’, each with their own unique and often very limited assemblage of biodiversity. All are highly sensitive to sea level rise and other environmental changes.

60% of the world’s coral reefs are to be found in the Pacific and 20% of its coral reefs have already effectively been destroyed. A further 16% are seriously threatened by increases in sea temperature which cause the coral to ‘bleach’ and die. With almost a quarter of the barrier reefs...
islands. The evidence from the last decade and the achievements of students that have followed these courses is that the investment has been very worthwhile.

Notes

Similar terms apply in other islands - fonua, fanua, fenua, whenua, henua, 'enua, in Polynesia, te aba and bwirej in Kiribati and the Marshall Islands in Micronesia and kastom or ples in Melanesia.

Gareth Roberts

MONSTER FIELD

by Philip Pacey

Next to the church of Dore Abbey, at Abbeystorpe in Herefordshire, is a working farm. Immediately behind the church, among the ruins of the monastic buildings, stands a neglected orchard and an immense sweet chestnut tree. Beyond lies a field, dotted with clumps of thistles and nettles, which is the last resting place for various pieces of obsolete farm machinery. To some eyes this might appear a ‘blot on the landscape’. However, in the course of a number of visits I’ve found myself feeling increasingly drawn to it. It may be a mess – but certainly not only – because I can come here to relieve myself in breaks between rehearsals in the church – nobody follows me; few of the Abbey’s visitors find their way around to the back of the church, and, thanks in part to the broken down machines, there is plenty of concealment. The ‘Portaloo’ next to the lych gate leading into the farmyard is an eyesore, hence – other considerations aside – my reluctance to use it. Of course, as a (paying) guest of the farmer and his wife it wouldn’t do for me to...
Greenspaces have different community uses, and this affects improvement aspirations. For example, from the survey results it was possible to identify greenspaces that had a strong use as short-cuts. These had high visitor numbers, but figured far down the list of targets for improvement. It was the destination greenspace that were the improvement priority for the community, not the areas of passage.

Other study results indicated that the socio-economic status of respondents did not significantly alter aspirations for greenspace quality, and that addressing greenspace nuisance factors was key to any improvement strategy.

Overall, the study found that the two approaches of professional audit and community consultation produced broadly similar results, but that understanding the “hidden” ways in which greenspace was used and thought about by the community is really important in identifying improvement priorities that will be locally valued.

This study was carried out as part of an MSc in Environmental Management at the University of Stirling. The support of the University and of Falkirk Council are gratefully acknowledged.

JC

STRATEGIC ECOCLOGICAL NETWORKS:
Opportunities for Biodiversity Improvement through Development in the South East Region
by Sharon Whiting

I am a planning officer. Studying part time I finished my MSc in Environmental Assessment and Management at Oxford Brookes in September 2008. I have long been interested in the relationship between development and biodiversity, and decided to investigate how development can improve strategic ecological networks and biodiversity.

Nature conservation groups and academics are, more and more, proposing that planners can improve landscapes by the establishment of strategic ecological corridors; this can be achieved through habitat restoration, creation and enhancement. It is widely recognised that not enough is being done.

I used the South East Region as a study area and examined the South East Plan, looking critically at achievements in “large-scale habitat restoration, enhancement and re-creation” and how planners have identified “areas of strategic opportunity for biodiversity improvement” – the latter having been “sought through development schemes, including developer contributions, where possible, contributing to the establishment of strategic corridors or networks”.

I used questionnaire surveys, I reviewed documents and did case studies to obtain evidence of strategic biodiversity improvement (SBI) being sought and realised through new development. The questionnaire survey received a good response: 64% of District/Unitary authorities and 57% of County Councils replied.

The outcome of this for my study area is that there is a great lack of policies. One might hope that the situation will improve as local planning authorities progress their Local Development Framework but there was evidence that not all authorities are intending to identify areas for biodiversity improvement or intend to include policies on developer contributions to biodiversity. My study shows that few authorities have been successful in securing developer contributions towards SBI.

Authorities identified the following limits to achieving success:
• Lack of in-house ecological expertise (48% of authorities responding)
• Biodiversity is not a priority for the authority (33% of authorities responding)
• Current government guidance demands clear demonstrated linkage between a developer’s scheme and any beneficial outcome. (26% of authorities responding)
• Lack of information on areas of opportunity for strategic biodiversity (22% of authorities responding)
• Lack of clarity in government advice on planning and biodiversity (7% of authorities responding)
• Concern that developer contributions to strategic biodiversity improvement may lead to loss of features or inadequate mitigation on-site (4% of authorities responding)

Where authorities succeeded it was because of the commitment and perseverance of local authority officers, the fact of having a strong planning policy framework in place, and the presence of in-house ecological expertise. The need for involvement at an early stage of the development and the co-operation of developers/landowners were also highlighted. I also identified other important factors: the support from nature conservation bodies; the identification of biodiversity projects to which contributions could be made; partnership working and the production of a management plan. [Research undertaken in the summer of 2008]

DARTMOOR A STATEMENT OF ITS TIME
A New Naturalist volume written by Ian Mercer here ‘reviewed’ JG with the editor.

Dartmoor is one of the evocative place names in the English language. It may resonate with individuals as a prison, a National Park, a setting for Sherlock Holmes and that Hound, a tourist destination, a habitat, a landscape, a place of history, solitude and wildness.

‘Dartmoor’ is the latest title in the outstanding New Naturalist Library and Professor Ian Mercer has given us a volume to treasure, to read and use. It is written in quality plain english, and is a clear demonstration of how to communicate a very wide range of knowledge, experience and commitment. The volume bears comparison with NNL 9 ‘A Country Parish’ written by Arnold Whitworth Boyd which is a classic study. Devotees of the NNL Series will be well aware that this 21st century celebration of Dartmoor, succeeds number 27 in the series, Professor L. A. Harvey’s and D. St. Ledger-Gordon’s Dartmoor. However the latest study goes much further, doing so in particularly lucid way. The strap line to the book’s title: ‘A Statement of its Time’ gives due recognition to the fact that past, present and future are one.
The Author is proud to be a geographer but he is also a 21st century Gilbert White. Despite working at the highest level of public affairs, Ian Mercer has never lost his love of the sense of place. For him the place is Dartmoor (and South Devon). In Chapter 1 ‘A Layman’s Topography, Brief History and Political Guide’ he quotes lines by the Welsh poet R. S. Thomas: ‘I have looked long on this land. Trying to understand/ My place in it.’ A great way to look at landscape.

Landscape is a key thread running through every page of the book, there are maps, diagrams and photographs. Of the last there are no less than 270 in 384 pages of text and they appear to be of uniformly high quality.

This is a book about a tract of land – how it was and is and what it is and what it contains and how it is managed and regarded and used. All these work together to identify a landscape. Can one take away from landscape its birds or valley bogs, its weather, its prehistoric reaves or its hill farming methods? Are they not integral? Should we adhere simply to ‘landscape is a tract of land and how it is perceived’?

The ten chapters, cover ‘The physical anatomy of Dartmoor’ ‘Dartmoor vegetation in the last millennium.’ Dartmoor fauna in the twenty first century ‘Weather and living water’ Working the landscape: Dartmoor men and their masters through historic time ‘Farming Dartmoor and sustaining moorland: the last hundred years’ ‘The contemporary conservation scene: its history and its future’ ‘Dartmoor from now on.’ One doubts that there could be a more revealing choice of topics.

The author writes with personally acquired knowledge. He deals equally well with the vegetation (60 pages and 46 images) as with ‘The contemporary conservation scene’ (36 pages and 15 images). Much of what he writes is intriguing and fresh even to the perpetually cynical co-author of this note who has lived ‘alongside’ Dartmoor for 25 years but has never penetrated its detail. He tells me he wrote it over a period of five years.

For those who wish to delve beyond the text there is a list of over one hundred references in a select bibliography.

John W. Gittins [with Bud Young]

MITIGATING THE EFFECT OF EXTRACTION DRAINS IN AN IRISH RAISED BOG PREPARED FOR INDUSTRIAL PEAT CUTTING by Sharon Elizabeth Spratt

Over large areas of lowland Irish landscapes raised bogs have been damaged by industrial peat extraction. The extraction process is usually preceded by cutting drains into the peat to lower the water table and dry out the surface. They mainly influence the hummock-hollow and pool structure of the bog surface. Raised bog restoration studies have mainly focused on regenerating a functional acotelom and active Sphagnum growth in extensively cutover bogs. My dissertation investigated the effects of blocking the surface drainage ditches excavated in preparation for industrial peat cutting.

Field work was carried out at Ballynahone Bog near Maghera in Northern Ireland. Apart from small-scale, traditionally hand-cut areas at the bog periphery, it had retained much of its characteristic structure and species composition, prior to planning consent being obtained for commercial peat extraction. Plans, however, were abandoned, following intervention by the local community, but not before a series of fifty-two drains had been dug in the intact surface of the peat dome. As a conservation measure, the drains were subsequently blocked, presenting an opportunity to study drain recolnisation. The main aim of my dissertation was to carry out an ecological assessment of the plant communities that had developed in the blocked drains, after a period of about twelve years. My working hypothesis was that species composition would differ spatially depending on location across the bog and that the developing communities would mitigate damage to the hummock-hollow and pool structure.

The findings of my study, show that blocking shallow drains on lowland raised bogs can improve the ecological condition of the bog surface, as measured by vegetation composition and key species and that the effects vary spatially across the bog surface. Blocking drains where this does not interfere with statutory water courses could contribute to restoring bog landscapes damaged by the early stages of preparation for peat extraction.

SEP The Landscape Ecology Research Group, University of Ulster.

THE RAILWAY GARDEN by Bud Young

Descend the slope from Highbury Fields (a smart part of London N5) and the houses diminish in size and status. Go past a set of matchbox size terraced houses and you arrive at an old wall and in this there is a small green door. This is the door to ‘The Olden Garden’ and it opens with a Yale key provided to subscribers for a modest fee by the Trust which runs the land.

You are nearly at Drayton Park Station. Three hundred metres to the north is Arsenal’s Emirates Stadium but nothing could be more different in scale or intent than this small garden which is being developed for the community. It is separated from the road by the original railway wall in yellow London brick with new expensive copings.

A two and a half year old boy with his dad and grandfather make their way inside and the door closes shut. No one else is there. To one side is an elegant timber common room smelling of cedar. They hesitate to make coffee (though it is nearing 11 o’clock) but look at the notice boards: a committee, volunteers, a plan, a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Outside is an elegant circular pool with lilies floating, water snails scouring algal surfaces and fish languidly swimming:

brick built, raised and very refined. The grandfather sits on a bench and the flowers are lovely. The small
boy examines the fish. This is the developed part. But there is more. In exploration mode the little family passes below a top retaining wall supported against collapse by a decept scosold framework. They descend through leggy forty year old trees towards the railway line. There, half way down are enough branches to make a den and they have done this before. It is a skill the child can’t develop in more public parks.

The how and why of this piece of land strikes the older man as they get to the railway line. (1) It is a very shallow cutting, low angle because cut through the London Clay. And yet no trains. It is a near forgotten branchline emerging from a sooty tunnel and entering a mysterious portal just to the south. Maps show that it then passes under Highbury Fields. Towards the sooty tunnel someone in the past has set out orchard trees now untended: father and grandfather

bag up big bramble apples to take home, there are many lying on the ground. Across the line is a patch of classically untidy allotments - a very gently sloping embankment indeed! Passing a little tended school plot and greenhouse, they climb up to the cedar cabin, out through the precise green door and back into the real world of house prices, parking and space competition.

Notes
(1) The railway line connects with Dockland and has reputedly been used to carry freight to the Olympic Site.

Section 2

Hal f way down the slope where the child makes his den they collect three flattened cannon balls. The older man, a geologist, identifies these as fire roasted septarian nodules once prized to make a form of cement - and a natural concord in the London Clay. More surprising is the clinkery nature of the reddened subsoil (photo below left), which betokens firing of the clay perhaps to make bricks. Or is this this the site of a very hot fire, an incendiary bomb perhaps? Who will write the short story?

(3) This small piece of self sown woodland on its railway cutting ranks as the second largest woodland in the London Borough of Islington!

BY

Letter to the Editor
Dear Editor
I really enjoyed your choice of the poem by Jay Appleton (LRE 51). One reason being that I had earlier this morning walked through St Giles Churchyard in Wrexham and had a similar experience. I will try and obtain a copy of his book.

Regarding Martin Spray’s interesting article ‘A Tale to Tell: Training the Imagination I offer the information below. Readers of that great Welsh treasure, ‘The Mabinogi’ (Mabinogion in English) can still follow some of the action on the ground. A particularly fine book to use in conjunction with a copy of the Mabinogi is by John K. Hollard & Anthony Griffiths entitled ‘The Companion Tales to the Mabinog’ published by Gomer Press in 2007. This book has superb text relating to the Mabinogion, wonderful maps and evoca-

From Wikipedia: The Mabinogion is the title given to a collection of eleven prose stories collated from medieval Welsh manuscripts. The tales draw on pre-Christian Celtic mythology, international folklore motifs, and early medieval historical traditions. While some details may look back to older Indo-European traditions, each of these tales is the product of a highly developed Welsh narrative tradition, both oral and written.

Carl Griffin Protest practice and cultures of conflict: understanding the spaces of ‘tree maiming’ in eighteenth century and early nineteenth century England. [A fascinating read]
Trans Inst Brit Geogr NS33/1 pp 91-108.

Joanna C Long Rooting diaspora, receiving nation: Zomist landscapes of Palestine-Israel. [A level appraisal which takes into account the Palestinian lost]
Trans Inst Brit Geogr 34/1 2009 pp 61 - 77.

Michael Pacione The view from the tower: geographies of urban transformation in Glasgow. [A major exposition from an author who has written a book on the structure of Glasgow]


Peter Charles Herring Framing perceptions of the historic landscapes: Historic landscape characterisation (HLC) and Historic landscape Assessment (HLA). [Written by an LRG Director—important methodology]
Scottish Geogr Journal 125/1 2009 pp 61-77.

Veronica della Dora Framing perceptions of the historic landscapes: Historic landscape characterisation (HLC) and Historic landscape Assessment (HLA). [Written by an LRG Director—important methodology]
Scottish Geogr Journal 125/1 2009 pp 61-77.

Robert A Francis, Simon P G Hoggart, Angela M Gurnell and Chris Cooke Meeting the challenges of urban river habitat restoration: developing a methodology for the River Thames through Central London.

David P Lusch, Kirsty E Stanley with nine other contributors Characterisation and mapping of patterned ground in the Saginaw Lowlands, Michigan: possible evidence for Late Wisconsin permafrost. [Not everyone’s area of work but good detective work with aerial photography and importance to Pleistocene climatic history]

Daniel Joly, Thierry Brossard with five other contributors A qualitative approach to the visual evaluation of landscape. [Clever if intricate methodology; does it correspond with eyeballing. Technique in search of an application]

Richard A Marston Land, Life and Environmental Change in Mountains, [Extraordinary physical landscape events]

Daniel Mullar and Darla K Munroe Changing rural landscapes in Albania: Cropland abandonment and forest clearing in the post socialist transition. [Always exciting chronicle of politically induced landscape change]
LISTENING POST — EUROPEAN CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

It started like this:
From Birgitta
I'm an information officer of the Swedish Research Council Formas (www.formas.se). Formas has recently edited a book by Professor Urban Emanuelsson, *The Rural Landscapes of Europe — How man has shaped European nature*. Information about the book:
http://www.formas.se/forums/templates/Page_5476.aspx
Birgitta did not realise that she had alerted 477 PECSRL members

It then went on:
From Robert C. Zimmermann
Dear fellow members,
This should be a red-letter day in the history of landscape studies: finally, repeat finally, a comprehensive book on Europe's rural (agricultural) landscapes, in my case something I have been proposing, advocating, urging, cajoling, deploring the lack of etc., in print and otherwise since 1981 (and never got around to finishing myself because I have long since run out of money, desire to cross the Atlantic too often, and just plain stamina...).

So what happens? — [There followed on line a heated semantic debate among PECSRL members on Man v Womankind] — Instead of putting on Mozart's "Exultate, jubilate", we go off on some PC tangent about the title (when we all know what is meant by "man"), and whether chimpanzees (apart, teams of oxen, and erosion etc. created rural/agricultural/cultural landscapes. As far as I know, even the Tuscan "colmate di monte" (a landscape created by controlled erosion and deposition) were ultimately the work of "man". The open woodland of the montado/ dehesa may be formed by oaks etc., but who is behind all that? Surely there is no need for more semantic arguments over cultural landscapes.

Why all this nit-picking when we should rejoice at having an overview that might, finally, provide us with an overall framework for analysis, for filling gaps, and for positioning? Otherwise we risk drowning in trivia and in ephemera, as is often too painfully evident at PECSRL meetings. And if we don't like what Prof. Emanuelsson is saying, the onus is on us to improve or expand on his work. I heard about the book this very day, but I hope, above all, that it calls attention to conservation priorities. Or at least documentation priorities. We need only remind ourselves that we let the last 3-field landscapes of central Europe (a tremendous piece of cultural heritage for anybody with a sense of history) disappear in the last 60 years without proper and systematic documentation. The same happened with the "alberata padana" of the Po valley, an incredible landscape. And the same is happening with the last remnants of the "coltura promiscua", a landscape with perhaps the richest cultural associations in Europe. As Prof. Emanuelsson says, "we should also pay more attention to the last" (not "rare") landscapes of central Europe — which my draft book deliberately omitted precisely, as Prof. Emanuelsson says, because of linguistic barriers.

There may also still be a need for a coffee-table version of such a book (at subsidized prices) in order to create a constituency (among intelligent tourists et al.) for landscape conservation. With kind regards from your transatlantic colleague and curmudgeon.
R.C. Zimmermann rcz@sympatico.ca

who later added:
………

In my case, I have been guided for years by two French works, R. Lebeau, 1972, *Les grands types de structures agraires dans le monde*, and A. Meynier, 1970, *Les paysages agraires*. In central Europe, there is also H. Kuester's history of the landscape (1995). As you suggest, Emanuelsson being a plant ecologist — incidentally, so am I, and so is Kuester — is probably not as oriented towards human/historical views of landscapes as some of us would wish. It may be that the richly illustrated compendium on the evolution of European rural landscapes, with all their cultural associations — historical, agronomic, literary, artistic, linguistic, etc. — ideally, that will guide well-prioritized research and conservation as well as boost intelligent tourism — will always remain a utopia. But we should all keep trying.

Dear Robert (Zimmermann)
And all others on the (PECSRL) list.

This is an opening up of an interesting discussion. I knew that you would be enthusiastic about such a book, and I equally hope you know I do very much respect your knowledge and your enthusiasm regarding the history of European landscapes.

Of course it is good that we have the book!! Last spring (2008) a group of historically oriented landscape researchers met here in Stockholm in order to give some input to a process within the European Science Foundation on landscape studies. We agreed that it was important: "To facilitate the creation of new Europe-wide syntheses and narratives of landscape character and change." And this is exactly what Urban Emanuelsson has done — from his perspective. And the group did not ask for one European synthesis, but for the facilitation of syntheses.

Urban — who is a colleague I respect, and we both seem to like to have intellectual arguments ongoing between us — is a plant ecologist who has travelled widely in Europe and seen a lot of different types of grasslands, woodlands and other humanity (!) [womennamed, mammal!] landscapes and he combines this first hand knowledge with a general understanding and interest in history. But you will not find much on field systems and settlement patterns, nor for example on the East German colonisation, so there is certainly still scope for another syntheses — or many syntheses — focussing on other aspects. The follow-up of books such as CT Smith's chapter on "Agrarian Structures and Field Systems before 1800!" (In CT Smith, An historical geography of...) is still needed.

Urban Emanuelsson's book is a valuable contribution and I have so far been reading it in the Swedish version. It was the translation of the title that astonished me. Words do have power and from 'man' shaping the landscape it is not far from talking about 'the farmer' who shaped the landscape, and not far from suddenly talking about 'ham'. Reflecting on these things and the character of the gendered division of labour behind European landscapes is also an important and interesting part of historical studies of European landscapes.

best wishes
Mats (Widgren)
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*The conference announcement in full can be found at http://people.su.se/~widgren/Landscape_Justice_first_call.pdf*