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 downhill and in tune with a notice warning to Anglophobes: ‘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

reivation 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 fall-out from recent volcanic activity.

It is entirely fitting that the Cajas has been recognised as a RAMSAR wet-land 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 13°C 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 propor-

...
GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE INDEPENDENT PANEL ON FORESTRY by Paul Tabbush

Private forestry and “red tape” while, 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.

The government’s response indicates only a modest increase in current tree planting. I quote below from page 39. “The government” is to be established, and changes are to be made in the way private woodlands are incentivised and regulated. How will the private sector be encouraged to manage woods sustainably, after “reducing red tape” (deregulating)? Where will new resources come from to deliver “natural 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 to ancient woodland. This includes an expectation that planning permission should be refused for developments that cause significant harm to ancient woodland. It also includes a requirement that if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through the use of 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 was done through a number of pilot projects in Devon and elsewhere.” (quoted from page 39, my emphasis).

This passage (above) conforms to a discourse of weak sustainability, i.e. the idea that natural capital can be traded so as to 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 England’s woodlands will have some protection as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Surely an intention to deregulate can only weaken any existing protection?
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 bonfire grade, although 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 pitty those slovenly ones who live in wide open landscapes. The airphoto below shows the N/S hedge itself, centred.

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 ‘favored localities’, 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 which wields influence, with us, 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. Places are lived in; they are the habitat, the breeding site, of the human species. We have the power to build but we also have the power to 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 you invoke 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 coexist. Places are to be enjoyed. ‘The aims of life’ said G.K. Chesterton ‘is appreciation’. But perhaps the perfect place is always just beyond you.

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, 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 our 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 as far as our need 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 a hole up high under the eaves of buildings, to offer homes to swifts, and terracotta 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 am 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 exploitative — we hope to attract birds to a site in front of a hole where they will be watched and admired. It will be up to them to use our bank or not. Whatever it is that we can control — is less prone to flooding than the natural colony downstream.

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 SuNav 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 led between North and South Essex. Brentwood School’s Old Boys link 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 wedding locale seems to bring history into play rather conveniently.

I realise I am changing 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 revisited, his emotions towards place and landscape are not calmly packaged for pleasure. No confidential Betjemans or Don Cruickshank, then, but rather one who questions why we should want only modest continuities 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, Tomus 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 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 scrapping 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 landscape mashes 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 through 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.

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 the Essex Design Guide, which I have now updated.

3 Silver End, near Braintree: The Manager’s House, a feature of Crittall’s modernist village.” 1940’s 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.


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

Letters to the Editor

Dear Bud

I enjoyed reading LRE 64. Your pieces were particularly interesting, especially the note on your Swedish book. I concurred with Gareth writes regarding Landscape as a cause, certain LRG should be doing more to get ‘landscapers’ on 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 Lech Lomond for me captures both the macro and micro 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 Snowdenia Seminar by Bianca and Gareth struck a number of notes with me but not least because there is a very good exhibition relating to the life and work of Swedish landscape architect Karl-Erik Wretham. He lived at Wymstay and was one of the major landscape designers of the 1930s in Sweden: 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 one time one of the finest in Wales, now in the hands of the TLC.

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 whispering. The rambling party steps on and away. A young man appears suddenly — ‘Have you seen the others?’ ‘Only heard them’ I reply. He makes off, whistling loudly.

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RIORDALs 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 stream, the distant roar of a waterfall. All this must be heard, and not unwelcome, but... is it not also possible that the sounds of nature can be as much a part of our experience of landscape as the natural beauty of the landscape itself?

The sounds of nature can be as much a part of our experience of landscape as the natural beauty of the landscape itself. Often, it is the sounds that we associate with a place that make it special. For example, the sound of the wind blowing through the trees, the sound of water flowing over rocks, the sound of birds singing. These sounds can be as much a part of the landscape as the landscape itself.

Yet, the sounds of nature are often ignored or taken for granted. People do not always notice or appreciate the beauty of the sounds of nature. They may not even realize that these sounds are an important part of the landscape.

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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 noted 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 eccentric 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 metal poems of Cathal Bai Mac Giolla Ghunna ‘The Yellow Bittern’ – ‘An Banna Buí’

Irish: Is nach ndearna tú díth ná doirlíonn sa ttre? / Is nábh fhéara leat fion 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 ‘Windbhp, for John Collins’ was equally if less starkly evocative with ‘The sounds of Ireland That restless whispering! You never get away From, seeping out of Low bushes and grass Wrinkling bog pools’.

Patrick Kavanagh a cranky genius writing in Tarry Flynn spoke of how he ‘West 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!

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 1950’s 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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