

7. Concept of 'Wild'

The appreciation of wildness is a matter of an individual's experience, and their perceptions of and preferences for landscapes of this kind. Wildness cannot be captured and measured in the way bio-diversity can for example, but it can be experienced and interpreted by people in many different ways.

The term 'wild land' is arguably best reserved for those, now limited, core areas of mountain, moorland and remote coast, which mostly lie beyond contemporary human artefacts such as roads or other development. However, the quality of wildness can also be found much more widely in the open countryside, sometimes within what is overall a cultivated landscape, or close to settlements. Whilst not large areas of 'core wild land', such places can have great value locally in terms of landscape and wildlife, and in value to the community as accessible areas where a sense of wildness can be experienced¹.

The terms 'wild', 're-wilding' and 'wilderness' continue to prompt debate amongst academics, land managers, conservationists and others. Illustrated below are some differing views on defining 'wild land' (Quotes from: "Wilderness: Nice Idea" by Robert Macfarlane, TRAIL magazine, July 2004).

"With some 60 million people sardined into some 250,000 square kilometers, humans have besmirched every corner of these islands. The wild is something we go abroad to seek. Britain is wilderness-bankrupt"

"Wilderness must be an entirely non-human environment, we must return it to nature and regard the presence of people, or the traces of people past, as compromising of wildness"

"Wildness is everywhere in Britain, if only we will stop in our tracks and look"

"Wilderness is a noun which acts like an adjective" by which wilderness is not a condition of a place, but a condition of mind

"One mans wilderness is another's roadside picnic ground"

"It is any natural place where we can temporarily lose our bearings, or happily abscond from the familiar. And there are innumerable places in Britain outside Scotland where that can happen – if we are prepared to let it"

In a regional context, we recognise that the Lake District landscape is dynamic and has been for 12,000 years, since the retreat of the last glaciers. Human activity influences nature and we live with the knowledge that thousands of years of management have shaped the landscape we see today. Lakeland prior to settlement by pastoral and agricultural people some 5,500 years ago would have been much richer in wildlife, with extensive areas of natural habitats. What we now have is a 'cultural landscape', created by the interplay of terrain, wildlife and human use over the centuries². Historical evidence shows us that even the remote places we consider to be 'natural' have at one time or another been altered by human activity, be it through grazing, deforestation, mining or quarrying.

In the context of Wild Ennerdale, the words 'natural' and 'natural system' are not used in an ecologically pure way and the term 'wild' is used to describe a philosophical approach to managing the valley, encompassing two key areas:

¹ Wildness in Scotland's Countryside, SNH Policy Statement no. 02/03

² An End To Woolly Thinking, Sir Martin Holdgate, Natural World

- The degree to which natural processes influence the environment (physical attributes)
- The sense of wildness which people experience/perceive (emotive reactions)

Although Ennerdale has been shaped by centuries of human influence, for many people it retains a sense of wildness which is highly valued and stems primarily from:

- Large scale and diversity of the landscape
- The apparent lack of human influence and control on the environment
- Remoteness from public roads and habitation
- Sense of solitude
- River Liza and becks falling freely down the valley
- A stunning lake with areas of natural lakeshore margins
- Plants & animals of special ecological value
- Rugged terrain and impressive geological features
- Large areas of fellside with semi-natural woodland and heath
- Opportunity for unrestricted challenge and adventure

However, there are also features which spoil these characteristics:

- Close cropped and suppressed vegetation on the fells
- Stark boundaries between forest and fell
- Fences and signs which restrict the sense of openness
- Large blocks of closely planted spruce
- Areas of recently harvested forest
- Presence of intrusive man-made features/activities such as forest tracks, vehicle movements, concrete bridges, revetments.

The fundamental objectives of the partnership are therefore to enhance the 'wild' qualities of Ennerdale by:

- Allowing natural processes a greater hand in shaping the landscape and ecology of the valley over the long term
- Reducing detracting features and creating more opportunities for people to experience the sense of wildness of the valley

The partnership has been clear from the outset on how we define 'wild'. This is crucial to gain support as any reference to change, on however small or large a scale, can be perceived by some as negative, and that 'wild' will result in the 'abandonment of land' and 'loss of livelihoods'. Wild Ennerdale is not about abandoning land, excluding people or trying to recreate a past landscape. On the contrary, human activity is a crucial part of the process, along with the need to provide quantifiable economic, social and environmental benefits which are sustainable over the long term.

References:

'Wild by Design', Council for National Parks, 1991

'Wilderness: Nice Idea' Robert Macfarlane, TRAIL magazine, July 2004

'An End to Woolly Thinking', Martin Holdgate, Natural World

[Linked Maps: Q, R, T, U, V](#)