



## **Changing approaches to heritage**

*Lake District: conflicting values*

### **Julie Wilkinson**

The Lake District National Park has twelve million visitors a year and is a vital contributor to Cumbria's billion pound economy. It also has forty two thousand people who are resident there, attempting to bring up families and make a living. So opinions on what matters most in the day-to-day management of the Lake District are many and varied. Here are just four. Sue Savage works in conservation.

### **Sue Savage**

I tried to do the numbers once on how many sort of footsteps twelve million visitors would take in the mountains, and given that every walker will walk an average of one mile in the hills, that's billions of footsteps and that's all causing tiny, little bits of problems.

### **Julie Wilkinson**

Ted Walsh is Chairman of the Windermere Motor Boat Racing Club.

### **Ted Walsh**

I think it's fair to say that the National Park Authority, and the officers within it, have a very twee view of what heritage is. To them heritage is waxing lyrical on the side of a fellside somewhere about some daffodils, and reading a story about a rabbit, and that's pretty much the National Park summed up in a bucket.

### **Julie Wilkinson**

Jonathan Hodgson is a hill farmer.

### **Jonathan Hodgson**

I don't think farming's appreciated at all 'cos if you go into any of the restaurants, how many of them sell local produce? You know, how many of the hotels and the bed and breakfast places sell local produce to the tourists? None of them, you know, they're in the middle of a sheep-producing area and they'll have New Zealand lamb on the menu.

### **Julie Wilkinson**

And Jeff Cowton is curator of the Wordsworth Trust.

### **Jeff Cowton**

We've got a great thinker, a great writer in the centre of the Lake District, which attracted great artists, it's a wonderful cultural moment, and it's so relevant to today's world, you know. I mean there was Wordsworth talking about the age of the individual, of the imagination, of revolutions, of the importance of the interdependence with the world around us – well, why isn't that relevant to any generation?

### **Julie Wilkinson**

In the Lake District, all these different sets of heritage values are jostling with each other. The Wordsworth Trust's set of values sees the Lake District primarily in cultural terms. It was in the Lake District that Wordsworth wrote much of his best-known work, which was to profoundly influence how we now perceive the landscape.

### **Jeff Cowton**

In 1820 he published a series of poems on the River Duddon and he appended to that his "Guide to the Lake District", and I think that the ideas and really the notions that we have of the Lake District are so shaped by him, that we just almost don't notice any more, because in

the guide book that he wrote he famously concludes by saying that the Lake District should be thought of as a national property where “people who have an eye to see and a heart to perceive” can benefit from it, and to Wordsworth it’s such a precious place, such a unique place that this idea of course then developed into the National Trust and the National Park, and the you know the founder of the National Trust lived in Grasmere. Grasmere and the Lake District are just very much so closely linked to Wordsworth’s ideas of the land and people’s association with the land that I think we do take so much of it for granted without realising that it’s Wordsworth’s notions, you know, that we’re thinking of.

### **Julie Wilkinson**

Few would dispute that the legacy of writers and artists such as Wordsworth still has enormous resonance, as this visitor to Wordsworth’s cottage suggests.

### **Vox pop**

Oh I think it’s a case of in your youth you get a book of Wordsworth’s poems and you put it in your back pocket, and you walk over Red Bank and you go on to Grasmere, then you sort of you’re into Wordsworth, and then as Turner comes in your life, as he did when I was about 15 or 16, it’s a long time ago, 70-odd years of Turner, I think it’s all gelled together with the Lakes, and of course it’s great scenery. Wow!

### **Julie Wilkinson**

But while the scenery still retains much of the character observed by such writers and artists, Jeff Cowton acknowledges that interest in Wordsworth among younger tourists is declining, and that in turn is reflected by his visitor numbers.

### **Jeff Cowton**

When I started in the ‘80’s it was regularly eighty thousand a year, and at one point we got to eighty eight thousand, you know? And every day, you know I remember at four o’clock that there’d be a tour bus of forty American Texans would turn up, you know, every day and like that was just what you did, you know, you couldn’t pass by. Whereas now the visitors are probably down to 60,000, you see. There just aren’t, if you like, the people that there used to be for whom coming to Grasmere was a pilgrimage of life, and that’s okay, we have to accept that, you know, it’s not studied at school like it used to be. We don’t have a right to expect everybody to read Wordsworth, we don’t have a right even to exist, we have to justify it, but by goodness, I mean what a man to justify, you know.

### **Julie Wilkinson**

Just to the south of Grasmere, in Bowness, the issues for Ted Walsh are rather different to those of the Wordsworth Trust. He’s an active Parish Councillor but, more significantly, he’s also chairman of racing at the Windermere Motor Boat Club. In 2005 the National Park Authority introduced a speed limit of ten miles an hour on Lake Windermere. This effectively banned power boat racing and water ski-ing altogether as apparently incompatible with the National Park’s policy of quiet enjoyment of the area. Since then Ted Walsh and the “Keep Windermere Alive” group have been campaigning to bring back these activities. They feel that the National Park Authority has pushed its conservation agenda too far.

### **Ted Walsh**

There’s a great deal of belief that in reality ten miles an hour is nothing to do with tranquillity, it’s nothing to do with improving the amenity of an area, but it’s more to do with squashing twenty million visitors a year out of the National Park by removing a user group who would come, and come regularly, and that’s pretty much, there’s an awful lot of belief that that is why it was actually done.

### **Julie Wilkinson**

Ted Walsh feels that too much emphasis is placed on Wordsworth and Beatrix Potter.

### **Ted Walsh**

The broader scope of it is, is that the National Park is far more than that, and as we’re at the motor boat racing club I would say that Donald Campbell on Coniston is as much a part of the National Park as any other part of the country; I would say that Norman Buckley doing his

speed records on Windermere was, is an important part of things like that; and I would say that there's a significant chunk of the heritage of Windermere which has been brushed aside. People who live in the area, and certainly who have come into the area, typically are there to enjoy the facilities of it, and they don't really like them being taken away carte blanche, really for the benefit of not a lot of people.

### **Julie Wilkinson**

Yet another set of heritage values sees the Lake District in terms of its natural heritage. I spoke to a mountaineer and regular visitor to the Lakes. For him, part of the attraction of the area is being able to experience nature in the raw.

### **Phil Gauron**

When you live in a city and you get up into the Lakes, the terrain is stunning. I love the ruggedness of rocks and the physical challenge of getting up them. I love the fresh air. I like the wildness of it, you feel as though you're really in the wilds of nature, which is so different to what you do in your day job and it is just really excellent.

### **Julie Wilkinson**

Many visitors come to the Lakes to get a first-hand experience of nature. But in such numbers, visitors can be a threat to the very thing they value. Susan Denyer is Secretary of ICOMOS UK. She sees this process as part of a very long tradition.

### **Susan Denyer**

In the end of the 19th century, when many tourists were visiting the area and it was becoming vulnerable from threats of one sort or another, the conservation movement evolved to try and arrest these threats and sustain these wonderful things that the artists and writers had discovered a century earlier.

### **Julie Wilkinson**

One of the modern descendents of this conservation movement is the Tourism and Conservation Partnership. It's run by Sue Savage.

### **Sue Savage**

The problem with the paths in the Lake District is partly to do with years of decline, nearly fifty years of sort of lack of maintenance that we've got to catch up on really.

### **Julie Wilkinson**

I met her on Cat Bells, which is one of the most visited sites in the National Park, and one where the paths need constant maintenance.

### **Sue Savage**

What we're looking at now is a stone gully that's been laid at an angle across the path; it's about 4 or 5 inches deep and lined with big rocks to the sort of the top and the bottom of it, and the idea here is obviously that it's going to channel the water off to the side.

### **Julie Wilkinson**

In order to do the necessary work, Sue Savage has involved a number of different organisations: the National Park Authority who manage the land; the National Trust who own the land; and a local company called Keswick Mountain Bikes.

### **Sue Savage**

We go out and recruit businesses who want to put something back into the environment and we find a project for them to sponsor, and in this case the mountain bike shop in the village wanted to sponsor something that was directly related to its own business, so we found them this path here that needed fixing. It was terribly eroded and quite overgrown. And what they do is they sell inner tubes as one of their products, and of course they sell millions of them in a year, and for every inner tube that they sell, they give one pound of the profit towards the maintenance of this path.

### **Julie Wilkinson**

And, of course, it pays them off 'cos all their riders will use it, and no doubt burst their inner tubes on it!

**Sue Savage**

Yes, well that's true enough - I've had a puncture at the bottom myself.

**Julie Wilkinson**

But what you haven't done is just made a tarmac mini-road, which presumably there's thinking about that too - well you wouldn't do that?

**Sue Savage**

No, we will always try to sort of rebuild the path so it's in sympathy with the landscape but even this, which has got a sort of a stone surface, a sort of very small stone hardcore surface, even though this is local stone, we dug it out of the ground and just re-laid it, and then footsteps have packed it down, but it's grey, and the surrounding is green, and the bracken, and even that some people object to, they call it 'Disneyfying' the Lake District.

**Julie Wilkinson**

I suppose that's interesting 'cos it raises the whole question of maybe what hardcore conservationists would say is that, why on earth are you working with all these tourism agencies, you're kind of supporting the fact getting more and more tourists – what would you say to that?

**Sue Savage**

That's always the, I think somebody called that living with the enemy, is that we're kind of by maintaining all of this beautiful landscape, we're inevitably bringing more people into it, but the flip side of that is that I think most businesses in the Lake District, they understand that there's a direct link between an enhanced landscape and an enhanced profit margin, if you like, to put it in very basic terms.

**Julie Wilkinson**

Many of the paths and dry stone walls that run all over the Lake District were originally created by farmers. Today's hill farmers do much to maintain the land as they care for the flocks of Hardwick sheep that dot the landscape. In return, the Government subsidises their income with environmental payments. Jonathan Hodgson is one of a large family of hill farmers.

**Jonathan Hodgson**

We make a living so we're doing alright, but without environmental payments and single farm payment, actually producing livestock wouldn't make any money at all, I wouldn't think, there wouldn't be any farmers at all without them. Traditional hill farming is, there's a lot of work replacing walls, gathering and stock rearing, and all this sort of thing, take a lot of time and effort, and manpower, so I don't think the ESA's are oversubscribing to us, I think we're well deserving really.

**Julie Wilkinson**

But the average age of a hill farmer is now 58, and their numbers are dwindling fast. Terry McCormick of Volunteer Action Cumbria is working on a project to document their history.

**Terry McCormick**

It's never been done with hill farming, it's never actually been done, it's a bit like a sort of Domesday approach, let's list these farmers, let's describe them, they're gems, let's catalogue them, if you like. That might sound a bit kind of like backward, but it has to be done, we need to know what the inventory is in order to defend it and to work with it.

**Julie Wilkinson**

Terry McCormick sees the hill farmers' way of life as heritage in the making.

**Terry McCormick**

You can have a whole strand of cultural tourism, which we really specifically engage, truly educational, and will add value back to the farms, and then broaden it to the wider communities. Nobody has a sense of self-interest or engagement with the hill farming sector, which has been sort of under pressure and in decline, and under threat for many, many years, and I do think that we have to manoeuvre people, or create situations where people can genuinely appreciate just how important that is to them, and their future, and their kids.

**Julie Wilkinson**

Susan Denyer spent many years working for the National Trust in Cumbria. She believes it's vital to appreciate how the conservation movement has in the past worked to protect the landscape that hill farming created.

**Susan Denyer**

Large parts of the central Lake District – around Coniston, for instance – wouldn't be there at all today had not people intervened to stop the whole valley being bought by the Forestry Commission, and they would have abandoned the farms and planted it all up with trees. And it was only because of battles like that that this landscape has been saved. So we're looking in a way at a huge testimony to the success of the conservation movement. The Lake District would not look as it does today had the conservation movement not been so successful in stopping this development and buying up land, in the case of the National Trust, to allow people to continue to appreciate the sort of landscapes that had been discovered, if you like, in the 18th century.

**Julie Wilkinson**

So the Lake District has many different agendas, not all of which can be easily reconciled. But perhaps it is that very clash of values that helps to maintain the area's enduring depth and appeal.