



## Changing approaches to heritage

*Lake District: world heritage bid*

### **Vox pop (man)**

Well certainly, you know, I mean it's such a wonderful place to be, one only has to look round and, you know, take a walk up one of the little byways and sit down on a stone and look across at the wonderful vista.

### **Vox pop (woman)**

The bubbling streams, the waterfalls, and when it rains it's still beautiful because there's waterfalls coming out of everywhere. It's just amazing.

### **Phil Gauron**

You get that wonderful view of Blencathra, wonderful ridges and you see it and you've just gotta go and climb it.

### **Vox pop (man)**

I think there are certain things you have to learn that you're never going to get, and if you're expecting your mobile 'phone to work reliably, then you're probably pushing your luck a little bit really.

### **Vox pop (man)**

Oh yes, "I wandered lonely as a cloud that floats on high o'er vales and hills, when all at once I saw a crowd, a host of golden daffodils."

### **Julie Wilkinson**

There's no doubt that people love the Lake District. And there are many who argue that it deserves more global recognition. Yet the things people rave about most in the Lake District have not so far guaranteed a place at the World Heritage table. Twice in the past, the Lake District has applied for, and failed to achieve, World Heritage status. Now they are trying again. Here's Mike Clarke, the Director of the Lake District's World Heritage project.

### **Mike Clarke**

People would argue that while the Lake District is quite uniquely beautiful in the UK, it's not one of the most dramatic landscapes in Europe, for instance, and so you have to have a sort of special story to go with it really.

### **Julie Wilkinson**

The job of telling that story is down to Mike Clarke. Working alongside the Lake District National Park Authority, he is charged with drawing all the threads together, in order to represent the Lake District's story.

### **Mike Clarke**

The first opportunity we would have to go forward to UNESCO, isn't until 2012 as the Government have already given slots to a number of places in the UK between now and then – so for us our timetable is to have our documentation ready by the end of 2009, which we can then sort of hone and get right with the Government over the following sort of six months, and hopefully we will be the 2012 nomination.

### **Julie Wilkinson**

The next step is to take it up to an international level.

### **Mike Clarke**

It gets trickier once you get to the international stage, once you get to the UNESCO stage – there are 24 different countries who make the decision – and I’m afraid when you get to that stage politics can play a big part and lobbying, and so on, can play a big part, you know, it’s maybe a little bit un-diplomatic of me to say, but I do actually describe it as the Eurovision Song Contest, I mean it may depend on who we’re at war with at the time, you know, whether we go through, who we’ve upset, what countries are angry with the West and, you know, to be a little bit more fairer to UNESCO the West and the Northern Hemisphere of the globe does have the majority of World Heritage sites and they’re trying, quite rightly, to rebalance that and have more Southern Hemisphere sites come through.

**Julie Wilkinson**

The last two bids, in the 1980’s, failed mainly because the landscape didn’t quite fit any category. But in 1992 a new category was introduced, that of a “Cultural Landscape”. Susan Denyer is Secretary of ICOMOS UK, which offers official advice on World Heritage sites.

**Susan Denyer**

It was in many ways the failure of the Lake District bids in the 1980’s that prompted the introduction of this new category, because the Lake District failed either as a natural site, or as a cultural site, because it wasn’t really either of those, and people realised that it was a fusion and melding of the two, and recognising not just its cultural values, but the way those cultural values were shaped by nature. So then the Cultural Landscape category that came in in 1992 was in many ways tailor-made for the Lake District.

**Julie Wilkinson**

Susan Denyer is working with Mike Clarke on the Lake District bid, offering guidance and support. As the team wrestles with the nomination document, one key point they must prove is that the Lake District has “Outstanding Universal Value”. This is the acid test of any bid.

**Susan Denyer**

This is the one thing that sites must have to be on the list, in other words they must demonstrate that somehow they’ve risen above local value, and even national value, to become sites of worth to mankind as a whole, and sites that we all wish to transmit to future generations. So there has to be this demonstration that whatever property or site you’re putting forward, it has that outstanding value that is recognised.

**Julie Wilkinson**

And part of recognising this Outstanding Universal Value is getting to grips with the many layers of history that have influenced our perception of the Lake District.

**Terry McCormick**

In the valley bottoms you will see what is a medieval landscape, because there are small fields with huge boulders, and people have cleared the fields by hand, built smaller fields from dry stone walls, and then they’ve spread out these smaller field systems.

**Julie Wilkinson**

Terry McCormick of Voluntary Action Cumbria champions the contribution that independent farming has made.

**Terry McCormick**

And then what you can see visually is that spreading out into the valley as a whole, and up the sides of the hills, and then in the mid-19th century with the Enclosure Acts as they came through, big enclosures going right up into the fell and into the common land of that, so you’ve got these until the mid-19th century. A lot of work was done up on the fell and people didn’t come down to the farm for a week sometimes. They were maintaining the flocks. It was a pastoral system. This was a highly populated landscape. It was much busier than it is now. We get all these people kind of coming into it, you know, nine to five, then it empties out and then it’s deserted. But when you read and look at the history of what was happening in these valleys in the 16th century, or the 15th century, they were just busy.

**Susan Denier**

I mean what in essence the Lake District is about is this landscape shaped by farmers over many generations, back to the 12th/13th century. This then is overlain by the discovery in the 18th and early 19th century of its picturesque and romantic qualities, as being somewhere incredibly beautiful, but also rather noble in the way that the communities were living and managing it.

### **Julie Wilkinson**

The landscape of the Lake District established what is still seen by many as the definitive spiritual, poetic vista. One of the people who first interpreted it as such was the poet William Wordsworth. Jeff Cowton is Curator of the Wordsworth Trust.

### **Jeff Cowton**

Before he came to Grasmere the poems had been about, if you like, the ordinary man, the beggars, and the people he'd met in other parts of the country, but the subjects then become Lake District subjects, so if we think of landscape, the landscapes that interests Wordsworth are the human elements in it as well. It's the sheep fold in the landscape, so the ordinary man becomes Michael, the shepherd, for example, and the poems are very descriptive in the names of places that they use, so it's not enough for Wordsworth to talk about "in a valley", in some vague valley, but he talks about specifics – it's Greenhead Ghyll that he talks about – so you might wonder well how does somebody in other parts of the world, when travel was much more difficult, you know, what does that mean to them? But it's the names, it's the beautiful names as he describes the riches of hilltops and mountains, and from this point onwards Wordsworth becomes, I guess, you know the Lake District poet.

### **Julie Wilkinson**

And William Wordsworth was of course not the only great thinker to be inspired by the Lakes. But even having world-ranking poets and artists on your side does not guarantee World Heritage status.

### **Susan Denyer**

The difficult thing is distilling all this, so it's not enough to say well, this is a place associated with some strong ideas that have had worldwide influence, but you can't actually see any evidence of those ideas in the site or the landscape. In terms of World Heritage what one has to be able to demonstrate is how the site manifests those ideas in a certain way. So that if you or I go to the Lake District we can get a sense and an understanding of why it's important, why it has Outstanding Universal Value.

### **Julie Wilkinson**

The Lake District includes a National Park and a conservation area, so it already has some protection from unscrupulous development. On the surface of it, it doesn't seem to be under the same threat as some parts of the developing world. So it's important for the bid to acknowledge the aspects of the Lake District that are under threat. Jonathan and Cathy Hodgson are hill farmers.

### **Jonathan Hodgson**

Well they hit us 'cos there's hill farms going out of business every year, for instance, this farm we used to drive from Ambleside to Windermere, and through to this farm to land we had there, and there was fourteen farms on the way, and now there's three or four. So that's ten farms in twenty years that have now disappeared, and they're not going to come back again and yeah, I don't think farming's appreciated at all.

### **Cathy Hodgson**

I work part-time at the school at Grasmere, and the previous head teacher - I mentioned once about the farming community - and she said oh, it's never dawned on me that Grasmere is a farming community village.

### **Julie Wilkinson**

But in the World Heritage bid at least, the profile of farming is getting something of a boost. Terry McCormick has been working as an advisor to Mike Clarke on the importance of hill farming.

**Terry McCormick**

That whole aesthetic, if you like, which is now valued as beautiful was actually a beauty born of silent labour of generations, which we don't often see, hand-made, this work was done by people, and I think the aesthetic aspect of this, which is very much part of the "Cultural Landscape", is rooted in those hundreds of decisions, and some of them are small decisions, the smallest decisions, you know – we're going to put that hedge there, or that wall there, we're going to do this watercourse here – and I see that generational work as like a work of art actually, I see the whole thing as a work of art, a complicated, very complicated work of art over five or six hundred years, and that is what is precious, that's the treasure.

**Julie Wilkinson**

Terry McCormick felt that early enthusiasm for the bid focused too heavily on the picturesque and the romantic poets.

**Terry McCormick**

If you don't take on the hill farming thing and you just see it as a kind of post-1750 sort of romantic, then layers of culture from thereon, the actual making of the place and landscape that was interpreted by writers and artists, will actually just decline and will become, in a sense, dilapidated, you know, and people won't know what they lost.

**Julie Wilkinson**

In order to succeed, the bid must keep on board a bewildering mix of organisations concerned with anything from wildlife conservation to local politics. Consultation and listening are crucial, so Mike Clarke has set up a steering group.

**Mike Clarke**

You know, you could have a cultural heritage officer from Cumbria County Council around the same table as someone from Cumbria Wildlife, for instance; if you've got a senior official of the NFU they'll give you the farming perspective, and so on; they're really there as the sort of checking balance for the project.

**Julie Wilkinson**

Even so, not everyone in the Lakes is convinced of the need for World Heritage status. Within the tourism industry itself, there are some who are wary. I asked Ian Stephens, who's Director of Cumbria Tourism, what he thought of the bid.

**Ian Stephens**

Officially our stance is, the jury is out, and what we are concerned with is potential additional red tape, and potential delays that perhaps would occur in the planning system or would occur in getting things done. And people in the business world are sceptical or suspicious of bureaucracy, additional red tape. So if we can work together to make sure that the negatives of any bureaucratic regime comes into being are reduced to the minimal; I think the benefits then would outweigh any disadvantages.

**Julie Wilkinson**

In other parts of the local community there's a different set of concerns.

**Mike Clarke**

One of the worries people have is that World Heritage is some sort of super-brand that will attract a whole new raft of tourists. It's not really been proven that World Heritage status brings new tourists - the Lake District itself is a super-brand in the UK. It's the second most well known brand. I think what we have is an opportunity to use World Heritage to change the profile of our visitor, to encourage people maybe to stay a little bit longer, to explore a little bit further afield than the honey pots of Windermere, and so on. You'd hope that if people come because it's a World Heritage site, they're going to be a bit more environmentally aware, more interested in the heritage of the place, get out and about and explore, and I really don't believe, and it's certainly, not something that's going to open the floodgates.

**Julie Wilkinson**

There are still many hurdles to jump, but Mike Clarke is convinced of the benefits of World Heritage inscription, should the bid be successful in 2012.

**Mike Clarke**

I think what it primarily will give us is this international recognition – you've got 185 nations who form UNESCO, who are signed up to the international treaty for World Heritage, the convention. And you're getting the recognition of those 185 nations, that you do have Outstanding Universal Value, what you have is special, what the people of Cumbria have made and created for the world is special and needs to be maintained, and I think what we do with them, with that recognition, is completely down to you, and primarily it's that confidence-building that it gives you.

**Jonathan Hodgson**

I think the World Heritage bid is a very appropriate and just recognition for what it is. It is entirely a cultural landscape, and not just a building that people put the walls, the fields, the quarries, all around you've got the work of man, that is a history and a heritage that needs preserving, and the more that we can do that in a managed way has to be, in my mind, a good thing.