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**‘What is Natural Beauty?’ Online Symposium
EVENT REPORT**

Symposium: December 2021

Report: January 2022

Symposium recording available
on the CNPPA YouTube channel:

<https://bit.ly/3H1ljt2>





Symposium reflections, by Kate Gilman Brundrett

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Access the full programme, with presenter biographies, here:

<https://theplacecollective.org/events>



What does success look like?

here we stand, wind bitten
taking in the view of the past
that has led us to here

here we stand on the highest hill
looking across a patchwork land
threadbare, a hanging-on of fragments
linked by remnant strands
and the beginnings of repair

what might our view be
from the highest hill
in five, ten, one-hundred years' time?

could it be
this tattered land, healing,
through acts that begin
with the simple tool of listening?

Harriet Fraser, 2021



Preface

The year 2021 marked the 50th anniversary of the designation of the Wye Valley as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and the 70th anniversary of England's Lake District National Park. Other protected landscapes also celebrated anniversaries. Much has changed, however, since these special areas were designated; perceptions from the past need to be re-evaluated. This symposium brought people together to consider the way we relate to and care for protected landscapes in a time of environmental crisis.

Natural beauty as a concept emerged in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries, and was used mainly to reflect the value attached to the aesthetic and scenic aspects of landscape. It became central to the designation of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs); and has had a massive influence on art and literature produced in the UK in response to landscapes. Over the years 'natural beauty' has been discussed and variously defined¹. The symposium title was a provocation for discussions around value systems, aesthetics and opportunities for beneficial change. Conversations were held within the global context of climate change and biodiversity loss, and took account of changes in UK policy and governance, including the new Environment Bill, the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP), and Environmental Land Management schemes.

The publication of this event report coincides with the [UK government's response to the Landscapes Review](#), and the launch of their consultation.

Event findings

This report shares details of the event, including outcomes of discussions held in panels and breakout sessions. Feedback showed an appreciation of the cross-disciplinary nature of the event, and a desire for further conversations. The discussions ranged from detail of specific issues to conversations about political and economic systems, the challenge of climate change, and the pressing need for valuing diversity, and supporting access for all, with greater inclusivity.

'Natural Beauty' was recognised as a contested concept, and conversations stressed the need to include a diversity of viewpoints and voices in describing and defining protected landscapes, and devising strategies to care for and access these landscapes.

¹ Countryside Council for Wales 'A Statement on Natural Beauty' (2006); Natural England 'Guidance for assessing landscapes for designation as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England' (2011); Defra Science Advisory Council 'Landscape quality: A rapid review of the evidence' (2019).



In considering ways to better conserve and enhance 'Natural Beauty', recommendations were to create more opportunities for access, connection and learning; and to discuss changes to designation and systems of administration and legislation. Underpinning all of these, there was a call for a new approach to economics that allows meaningful valuation of nature.

To broaden access, suggestions included a fresh look at language used to describe places and help people better understand rural areas; greater evaluation of barriers to access; and imaginative ways of facilitating access and connection, including through creative arts.

Finally, in considering threats to 'natural beauty', there were many calls for considering how best to minimise harm to nature from human actions. Conflicting interests and visions among 'stakeholders' were seen as a major issue. Other perceived threats include economic systems, legislation, poorly managed access, inclusion/exclusion, lack of understanding, and climate change. Recognising threats is crucial if we are to create opportunities for improvement.

Event organisers

This event was organised by the [PLACE Collective](#) with the [Wye Valley AONB Partnership](#) and the [Lake District National Park Authority](#), and hosted by the University of Cumbria's [Centre for National Parks and Protected Areas \(CNPPA\)](#).

The symposium format reflects the ethos of the PLACE Collective ('PLACE' stands for People, Land, Art, Culture and Ecology). Established at the UK's Centre for National Parks and Protected Areas in early 2021, the organisation embeds artists within multi-disciplinary research teams to consider issues relating to the natural environment. Its aim is to bring people together so that the natural environment and human-shaped landscapes can be considered and conveyed through multiple lenses. The collective supports collaborative working to fuel creative action and meaningful change. This symposium was the first public-facing PLACE Collective event, and has suitably set the foundations for further events inspiring rich debate and providing a space to discuss change.

Acknowledgements

This symposium was made possible thanks to the imagination and commitment of many people. Particular thanks go to Lois Mansfield, Director, Centre for National Parks and Protected Areas (CNPPA), Steve Ratcliffe, Director of Sustainable Development at the Lake District National Park Authority; to CNPPA for hosting the event. Thank you to Tania Lemmey for technical support throughout, and for collating this report. We thank all presenters and artists for generously giving their time; and all participants, who became thoroughly involved.

Harriet Fraser (PLACE Collective) and Andrew Blake (Wye Valley AONB)

Symposium Co-Chairs



Introduction

This cross-disciplinary event sought to bring people together to consider values, aesthetics and the way we relate to and care for protected landscapes in the UK in a time of environmental crisis and the design and implementation of new policies. To encourage a diversity of reflections and discussions, the symposium included artistic provocations, expert opinions from a range of disciplines and professional fields, and participatory opportunities.

In a momentous year of decision-making locally and globally, the symposium asked: is it time to shake up our views on 'natural beauty'? How can we rethink the way we relate to the natural world, and how can we work better together to care for it? What do we want to gain and what do we not want to lose?

In part 1, Kate Humble provided a video introduction which led into a series of live presentations, including two panel discussions. Presenters included professionals in the fields of environmental policy, protected area management, sustainability, visual art, literature, earth science, geography and farming. There were opportunities for Q&A to the speakers, plus audience polls and further interaction via text-based chat.

In part 2, participants joined breakout groups for a conversation structured around three shared questions. The outcomes of these discussions are presented in the 'Conversations' section.

Artistic provocations included the short film *What is Natural Beauty* from Desperate Men, poetry from Harriet Fraser, and music video *Sinking Sand* by cellist and songwriter, Sarah Smout. Artist in Residence Kate Gilman Brundrett contributed a live interpretive record of proceedings through illustration and text.

In addition to this report, outputs from the symposium include video recordings, available to view on the [CNPPA's YouTube channel](#), and a [PLACE Collective guest blog](#) by Howard Davies. Resources relevant to ongoing consideration of the topics featured in the conference are presented in the appendices.

This report summarises the proceedings and presents contributions from speakers, artists and participants. May it serve as a resource to continue the conversations and act on the insights created together.



Participation Statistics

Who attended the symposium?

Ticket & Attendance data

- Ticketholders: **108**
- Presenters & technical team (not ticketed): **17**
- Total participants: main Zoom webinar: **110**; part 2 breakout discussions: **70**
- Conversion rate of tickets to attendance: **86%**; retention rate to part 2: **64%**

Results of Audience Polls

Chart 1.

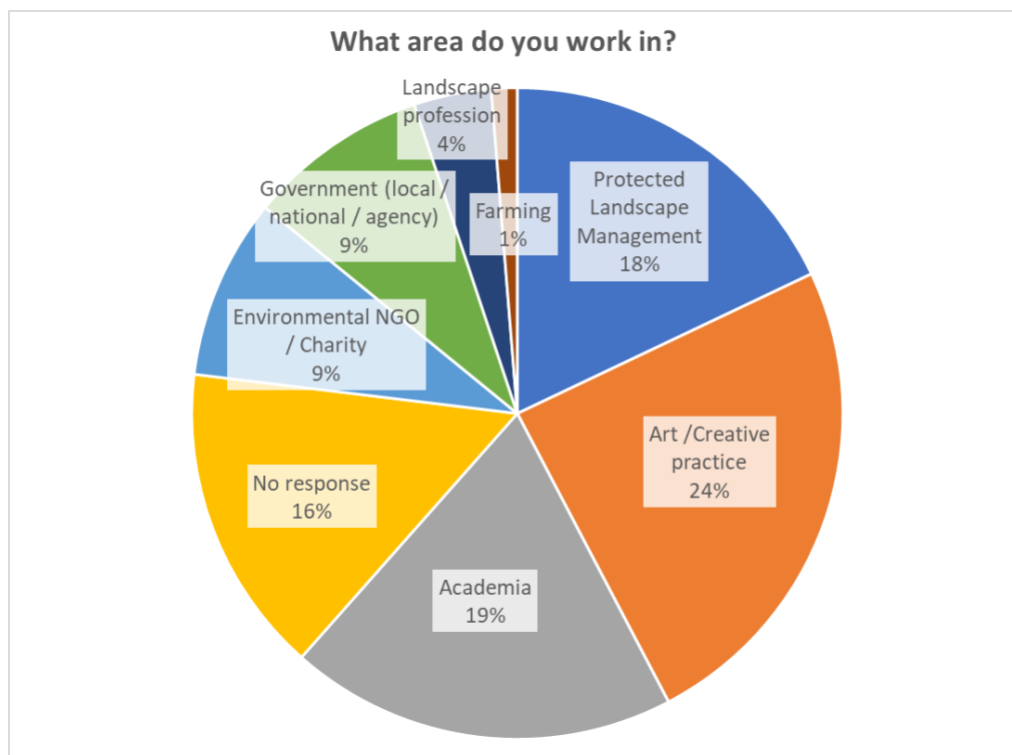
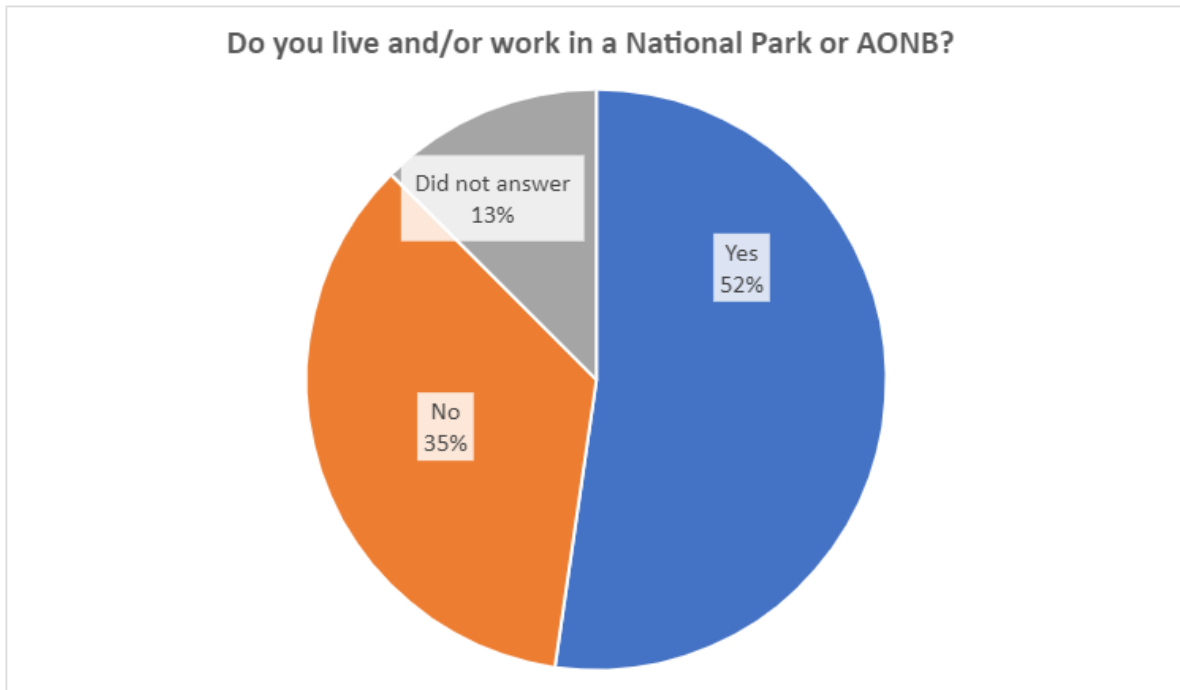


Chart 2.



Three audience polls were conducted in the opening minutes of the symposium. Approximately 88 attendees were present at this stage; panelists and organisers did not take part in the polls.

The great majority (85%) of attendees indicated they live in a region of England. Just under 5% tuned in from Wales and Scotland, and 3 attendees (>3%) reported their residence as outside the UK. The remainder did not respond to the poll.

According to the results of the second poll, attendees most commonly identified their area of work as **'art/creative practice'** (24%), **'academic'** (19%) and **'Protected Landscape Management'** (18%). These attendees together made up just under two-thirds of the audience. Full results of this poll are displayed in Chart 1.

The final poll asked: **'do you live in a National Park or Protected Landscape?'** Roughly half of attendees answered 'yes', most others indicated 'no' and the remainder did not respond to this poll. This data is presented in Chart 2.



Presentations & Provocations

Harriet Fraser (the PLACE Collective) and Andrew Blake (Wye Valley AONB) welcomed all to the event and introduced the first presentation, provided by broadcaster Kate Humble. This was followed by the film *What is Natural Beauty* by Desperate Men.

The first panel included presentations from Crystal Moore (Environment Agency), Steve Ratcliffe (Lake District National Park), Mike Collier (Sunderland University) and Anjana Khatwa (National Association for AONBs), followed by audience questions to the panel.

On Panel 2, Sally Marsh (High Weald AONB), Penny Bradshaw (University of Cumbria), Ruth Pitter (Black Women Let Loose co-Director) and Neil Heseltine (farmer and Chair, Yorkshire Dales National Park) shared their perspectives, followed by further audience questions.

Participants proceeded to randomly allocated 'breakout rooms' in small groups. Prompts for discussion were provided. The collective output from these discussions is detailed and analysed in the Conversations section of this report.

Following the breakout rooms, with time for feedback, former CEO of the National Association for AONBs, Howard Davies, shared his reflections and Kate Gilman Brundrett shared the artwork created during the event. Harriet and Andrew then concluded the symposium and Sarah Smout provided the closing contribution with the music video of her original work, *Sinking Sand*.

Links to the contributors' work and organisations can be found in appendix 1. The full programme can be found in appendix 4, including speaker biographies.



Questions posed to the speakers included:

- How do you balance the actions of "change" and protecting beautiful places – such as re-wilding, tree-planting etc., with increased demand from humans to visit?
- What role does interpretation of the landscape play in defining beauty?
- How can organisations address the colonial past of place, and do this while being careful not to raise trauma?
- To what extent do you think designation of protected areas promote stasis (and a static idea of beauty and place)? Should and how might 'natural' evolution and change be allowed, as a reflection of the social and ecological realities of today?

/continued over



- Can beauty be used as an indicator of the flourishing of nature, i.e. flourishing nature is *per se* beautiful, or is it subjective viewed through human lenses?
- How may we help [more] farmers transform their practice to nurture a regenerative landscape?
- If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, why do we designate some areas as 'outstandingly beautiful'?
- By designating some areas we create tourism magnets, leaving other parts of the country unvisited ... is the designation of these areas something we should now review in light of changing priorities?



In his summary of the event, Howard Davies, former CEO of the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, reflected on the contributions as follows:

"Kate Humble opened this seminar with reference to the picturesque and the role of landowners in transforming landscapes in accordance with the aesthetic of counterfeit neglect. She challenged us to reconsider what makes our landscapes beautiful and suggested we take a steer from nature.

Desperate Men provided an entertaining take on the notion that the map is definitely not the territory and questioned the full scope of outstanding natural beauty, and whether beauty is entirely in the eye of the beholder.

Penny Bradshaw introduced us to the romantic poets and writers, the picturesque in more detail, and Edmund Burke's notion of the sublime – the agreeable horror associated with some of our more dramatic landscapes.

Crystal Moore challenged us to rethink how we value our environment within the frame of the climate and human emergency that now faces us, and to reinvent ourselves. **Steve Ratcliffe** also framed natural beauty within the wider context of sustainable development and personal impact, with examples drawn from his experience in the globally important, vibrantly lived-in, distinctively special, Lake District National Park

Mike Collier introduced colonialism into the argument, and talked about the impact of race, class, power and privilege and the history of land ownership. Touching on identity, beliefs, and deep-seated cultural values. He made the case for celebrating beauty in difference, rather than the industrial green landscapes of curated, 'rural' Britain.



Anjana Khatwa gave a personal reflection of her lived experience as a woman of colour, geologist, earth scientist, and mother in the British landscape and how these lenses affect her view of beauty.

Ruth Pitter highlighted the benefits of performing in the natural environment, and some of the barriers that exclude people of colour from the countryside. She asserted that no environment can be outstandingly beautiful if it is exclusive.

Sally Marsh examined how we might consider natural beauty today if we embraced its full scope, not just visual amenity, in the planning and management of landscape.

Matt Larsen Daw drew on our nurturing love-affair with nature and our ultimate interdependency on this for the wellbeing of our body and mind. I was particularly taken by his description of landscape as "Time and nature made solid".

Neil Heseltine took us beyond physical attributes and face value, to remind us of the complexity of nature. He made the point that nature needs space and time to play out its processes and intricacies and that the way land has been stewarded over the last 50 years has limited this. He highlighted the important role that National Parks and AONBs can play in helping people understand the complexity of nature and their impact on it, especially with regards the way we produce our food."

" ...by way of a summary – for me, sensible and intellectual beauty strike at the heart of what it is to be human. It is the tension between the finite and the infinite, life and death, permanence and transience, lost and found, past and future, harmonious and discordant – it is this symmetry that we inherit from the classical approach to beauty. The wonder, awe, majesty, and drama of nature and our small place within it, we inherit from the notion of the sublime. These marry together to form the yardstick by which we have historically qualified our current suite of protected landscapes, protected for their natural beauty ... a concept that is still valid, and indeed important for our wellbeing. Many landscapes however have difficult histories that have given rise to multiple challenges, many of which have been clearly expressed today, and all landscapes are subject, like us, to the existential crisis that is now upon us. "

Howard Davies, former CEO, National Association for AONBs



Conversations - Key Points

The symposium included an opportunity for small group discussions. Participants were randomly allocated to breakout groups and the following questions were posed:

Q1: What actions could be taken to better conserve and enhance 'Natural Beauty'?

Q2: In what ways can we broaden access to 'Natural Beauty'?

Q3: What threats are there to 'Natural Beauty'?

Participants added comments to a collaborative online document. An analysis of the content of their notes is presented below.

Methodology

Thematic analysis was undertaken. Reading all of the notes, provisional themes were identified. Comments were grouped under each theme, sometimes duplicating the comments under more than one theme initially. The grouped data was re-read, themes were revised for relevance and to reduce the number of themes. Duplications were also removed. Comments were ordered within the themes to present similar points together, with the aim of providing a more accessible experience for the reader. For Q1 and Q2, an attempt was also made to order the themes, to present some possible links between them.

Summary

The three questions offered stimulus for conversation, and there was a degree of overlap in the answers and notes made by participants. Engagement, connection and education emerged as major themes in response to Q1 and Q2, which also prompted calls for rethinking language and the way visions for the future are shaped, and acknowledging and overcoming barriers to access and understanding. In response to Q3, major themes can be summarised as:

- UK **political and economic systems**, and legislature
- **conflicting interests** and visions for land and nature
- **access** concerns, including both visitor impact and inequitable access to nature
- **lack of understanding/education**
- **climate change**
- **human impacts** generally

A full analysis of the comments follows. (Note that some comments have been edited for brevity, typographical errors, etc.; direct quotes are unedited.)



Q1: What actions could be taken to better conserve and enhance 'Natural Beauty'?

Themes identified among the comments:

- Engagement, nature connection
- Education, experiential learning
- Built environment
- Contesting 'Natural Beauty'
- Inclusivity & Diversity
- Facilitation / Context
- Change
- Legislation, Administration, Designation, Governance
- Economy

A major theme here was engaging and connecting people with nature, including learning about natural beauty experientially, and other forms of education:

Engagement, nature connection, education, experiential learning

- Connect young people with landscapes and natural beauty
- Hold community workshops to develop an understanding of special qualities [of locality]
- Support people building relationship with landscape
- It has to be done with people and through people and with their consent and support
- Better engage people to become involved in nature and learn about nature together
- Many people haven't experienced diverse habitats such as meadows - provide more opportunities to do this
- Involve people and engage them in telling the story of how to engage with nature safely without damaging ourselves or the environment.
- Landscape Character Assessment ... should more actively engage with the local community and harder-to-reach groups, including those that work on the land.
- Use research findings: e.g. 'Contact, emotion, compassion, meaning and beauty are pathways to nature connection' (Ryan Lumber, Miles Richardson, David Sheffield)
- Provide ecological education and how to experience nature
- Educate on what is seen in the countryside and why it is beautiful, through different lenses
- Understand that natural beauty isn't necessarily represented by a Georgian ideal of the countryside but encompasses many other 'lenses', so stop teaching that
- More grassroots education in schools to get them excited about the environment and be able to relate it to their daily lives - ecological literacy?



A subsidiary theme may be the role of the built environment:

Built environment

- Connect housing with landscapes and natural beauty
- Built development is of its place - there's something about standardization - we need building design that reflects place.
- Yes, the new buildings seem same to each other. As bringing the building from the centre of Manchester in the middle of the Lake District (glass made buildings).

Some participants highlighted that 'natural beauty' is a contested concept, and questioned its validity:

Challenging 'Natural Beauty'

- Why 'natural beauty'?
- The designation of the term 'natural beauty' doesn't chime with everybody.
- Cultural landscape?
- Who decides what is 'wrong'?
- Biodiversity?
- From what perspective (human &/versus nature)?
- Leave things alone as nature can restore itself? - how will we feed ourselves?

The clearest actions suggested here were:

"Being aware we have a very anthropocentric viewpoint."

"Use our understanding gained today of what natural beauty is - is it healthy functioning of our environment?"

"Widen the understanding and consensus of what natural beauty is. What should we be seeking to conserve and enhance? "

This links to another major theme within the comments:

Inclusivity, and valuing diversity

- Due to the challenging nature it's going be difficult, but we need to work hard to broaden the definition and capture diversity of voices. Be prepared to have challenging conversations!
- There are other cultural experiences of & responses to natural beauty & landscape - referring to the Panel 1 discussion that we've inherited a Western Enlightenment



definition of what natural beauty is. We need to foreground other voices and other viewpoints - this will also broaden access to natural beauty.

- Historical lessons - enclosures, clearances, recognising colonial history - & learning from them.
- Which stories are we choosing to tell?
- Beauty occurs within our urban environment - and don't polarise the debate between urban/city and rural
- Tokenistic depictions of people of colour in pamphlets can reinforce negative stereotypes.
- Thinking about things from a different cultural backgrounds.
- Value the richness of diversity
- Moving away from a gatekeeper view of landscapes.
- Ownership - people feel responsibility/land stewardship

Further themes in the answers to 'how can we best conserve and enhance 'Natural Beauty'? included:

Facilitation and context

- Need mechanisms to negotiate the contested nature of the space
- Awareness of context of interventions - need to be appropriate to local conditions
- Awareness of interconnectedness and interdependencies - holistic view of landscapes
- Understand that we are dealing with complex, interrelating systems - take a systems approach
- We tend to focus on cultural/artistic responses from the past and forget that there are contemporary cultural & artistic responses to landscape & beauty
- Our language, verbal vs visual?

Change

- Change the approach from traditional.
- An acceptance of sustainable/natural/nurtured evolution not just conserving the past/current state
- Challenge current perceptions - understanding landscapes curated by capitalism. The only way to enhance natural beauty is to be equitable and fair.
- Work with individuals who are positive about change to encourage other landowners to embrace regenerative and restorative land management
- Need to act, and quickly. Natural beauty needs to be curated (not conserved). Accept an evolution/ movement



Issues of designation, administration, legislation, governance

- A need to consider whole process of designation. Complex picture.
- Problems are sometimes about bureaucratic processes and not about diversity.
- Policies that were stronger in terms of supporting a more diverse landscape.
- Change the Government and revisit the National Planning Policy Framework.
- Encourage HMG to actually deliver on the recommendations of the Glover Review
- Better and more rigorous enforcement of polluters/wrong-doers.
- Treat protected areas as if they really are protected areas

Economy

- Invest in the development of a circular economy
- Need to tackle second homes and Air BnBs.
- Apply a de-growth model to society.



Q2: In what ways can we broaden access to 'Natural Beauty'?

Themes identified among the comments:

- Language and visions
- Understanding barriers to access
- Built environment
- Encouraging responsible behaviours
- Ways of working
- Creative Arts
- Ways of visiting/ experiencing

Several comments related to language and definition of natural beauty:

Language & visions

- Understand the limitations of this phrase in language
- Think more broadly about what 'we' mean by 'Natural' and 'Beauty' in the first place.
- Recognising the history in the landscapes, cultural influences.
- Recognising links between landscapes in different countries.
- "Communities can add value" - and natural beauty should be everywhere - and appreciated across the piste
- "Society betterment" - would be a better challenge - whilst time-consuming it is worth the investment
- Does anyone remember the Yorkshire Dales landscape project which drew 8 different scenarios of how the Dales could look and people were asked to choose their future - the majority chose the one that looked as it does now?²

To broaden access, we need to understand the barriers to access:

Understanding barriers

- Understand the barriers in existence that discourage access
- Inclusivity in the outdoors report: <https://www.outdoor-learning.org/Good-Practice/Good-Practice/Equality-Diversity-and-Inclusion>
- Can be very expensive to access, causing disconnection
- Address perception of ownership, that people have a right to access

² See Figure 21, 'Landscapes for Tomorrow: Interpreting landscape futures in the Yorkshire Dales National Park' Timothy O'Riordan (University of East Anglia), Christopher Wood and Ann Sheldrake (YDNPA), 1992



Responsible behaviours and how to communicate these widely also featured:

Countryside Code

- Need education on 'how to visit the countryside' regardless of your background. Can videos work national TV? - e.g Grasmere school
- Share information about Countryside Code and 'expected' behaviours to help improve relationships between new visitors and 'locals', including dialogue around 'working landscape' and some of the hazards that may exist in and around farms.
- Being clear about where there is a right to roam and where it is footpath access.
- More recycling points to encourage litter management
- Do we want to broaden access? Debate over "guidelines" - access should be safe for humans and ecosystem but guidelines shouldn't be exclusive, developed with stakeholders/diverse communities - locally appropriate

There was considerable indication that those present felt their ways of working affect other people's access to Natural Beauty:

Ways of working

- Lots of questions - if you only work with very limited groups, how do you do this?
- How much we are framed by our art history as artists! Do we need to go out there and go where we're less comfortable?
- Moving away from specialism
- Cross- and inter-disciplinary approaches - working cross-sector
- Co-design and co-create (N Pennines) - working together and appreciating/ welcoming conflict and tensions - Prior to co-design needs to appreciate pre-stage to move from consultation to inclusive engagement. Need to appreciate the power hierarchy may inhibit this but need to break through
- Link with friendship cafe and other activities in urban areas
- Welcoming people across cultures, but also communicating concerns about impacts on landscapes and communities from visitors.
- Shared events for local community and visitors to exchange experiences and understanding and build informal connections



Considering broadening access through art/creative practice specifically:

Creative arts

- Maybe an option for involving people now i.e. a new arts based project? Given that priorities and needs have changed a lot?
- Use storytelling to make connections and draw on diverse experiences
- Storytelling through different mediums of art
- Try to move away from 'insta-culture' (where social media hits are a priority over actual physical connection)
- Artistic scenarios are often visual, but flat. How do we expand on this, virtually?

Participants proposed many ways to broaden experience and connection with nature:

Ways of visiting / experiencing / connecting with nature & landscapes

- How can we connect people with the landscape? Getting people working with land is important - we need more vibrant landscapes.
- Encourage people to view their own environment with new eyes and look for the beauty in different ways
- Widening activities promoted (self-propelled)
- Looking from macro to micro layers - not just the view through the window.
- Doesn't have to just be visual - can be experiential - what does natural beauty mean if you have visual impairments - can we give multi-sensory
- Gain an understanding of how natural beauty can exist and be 'viewed' or 'experienced' within more urban environments.
- Wiki maps - what's wild on your doorstep? Or Chalking names of weeds on pavements
- Can we put native species in our gardens / re-wild part of our gardens - every garden added together adds up to more surface area than all the national parks put together?
- Not all direct experiences are best - what other ways can these areas be enjoyed?
- Maya Chowdhry "We've heard what the humans value about this place. What would the lake say if it could speak?"
- Using the activist energy to connect with land
- Education & opportunities for learning
- Current campaign is for a 'nature premium' that schools would have, with support per pupil to ensure they can give them nature experiences and address barriers to that in whatever way is locally and culturally appropriate
- There was a call for 'every child to spend a night under the stars' will this happen?



Q3: What threats are there to 'Natural Beauty'?

Themes identified among the comments:

- Conflicting interests and visions
- Politics, economics and legislation
- Access and inclusion / exclusion
- Visitor impact
- Lack of understanding / education
- Climate Change
- Humans - generally

Conflicting interests & visions

- Conflict over what natural beauty is - e.g. Capability Brown or Rewilding or Conservation or Progressive working landscape?
- Language is a threat when rooted in "fashion of picturesque"
- Multiple demands on land
- Erosion of local distinctiveness
- Stagnation - desire to keep landscapes in their current state
- Ensure status quo doesn't feel scared by change
- Accepting change?
- Utilitarian view of landscape - "sheep and lamb producing factory"
- Tension/opportunity/excitement between protected landscapes and regenerative land management
- Is the countryside really our playground?

Politics, economics & legislation

- Capitalism
- Political change
- Short term politics inhibits long term solutions/thinking
- More commercialisation and development
- Commercialisation/Industrialisation/commodification
- Corporate greed and the greenwashing that is coming. Some of the policies around offsetting and the expected decline in farmers due to Brexit that will make land available for purchase and offsetting scheme.
- Economic (profit) prioritisation



- Economic development a priority in National Parks
- Threats to work opportunities and worker shortages in landscapes
- Weakening of planning system - lack of strategic approaches, lack of appreciation of local distinctiveness.
- Revisit legislation

Access & exclusion

- Lack of access and accessibility.
- In being conscious and proactive in protecting these areas we don't continue lack of access, or make accessibility worse.
- Need to empower communities
- Car dependent travel
- Restrictions in access
- Gatekeepers
- Hierarchy of knowledge e.g. Science over art - discouraging creativity, excluding voices

Visitor impact

- Increasing number of visitors
- Impacts of numbers visiting & lack of appreciation of how sensitive these landscapes / areas are;
- Damage from high visitor input needs to be considered - footpath and soil damage and need to highlight areas with infrastructure to minimise damage
- Second homes (empty)

Lack of understanding/education

- Ignorance
- Lack of education and engagement with landscape
- Perhaps if society was better 'educated' (I don't use that word lightly) we would care for our treasured spaces better.
- People not understanding that we are part of nature, and not understanding intrinsic value
- Irrelevance?



Climate Change

- Climate change/global warming
- People don't understand their economic wellbeing is underpinned by nature - poorer people are most at the mercy of forces of Climate Change.
- Effects of mass tree planting for carbon offsetting;

Humans generally

- Humans
- Yep, the obvious one is humans.
- Population increase
- Urban expansion and increased population



Feedback & Evaluation

Impact

Following the symposium, written feedback included:

"It opened up different ways of approaching, thinking about and engaging with these very important questions. In big picture terms some of the issues raised had never occurred to me and in my little part of the world it sparked fresh ideas for my own practice."

"I naively thought I had a reasonable grasp of what Natural Beauty is. But the outcome of last week has expanded my comprehension. "

"...the range of speakers and their provocations contributed to some really insightful discussions ... I genuinely took away a good number of reflections and ideas. "

"It's been an absolutely fascinating session and I've learnt so much"

"I found the other contributions fascinating and really enjoyed the short film and the cellist's concluding music."

"...wondering whether this is the first such debate in the sector specifically on natural beauty? I haven't come across any others..."

"A most enjoyable, thought provoking and collaborative symposium."

"Let's hope this symposium is something that is built on and that the wider public can become part of the exchanges. One of the clear take homes appears to be that education is the key."

Comments in Chat:

"This has been incredibly insightful, and a really thought provoking afternoon. Thank you so much to all speakers for their input."

"Great debate, really interesting!" "Thank you , excellent symposium, lots to reflect on"

"A topic that will promote conversation forever as well it should. A fantastic event so well designed and managed, inspirational - thank you"



"Like the idea of developing ethics of care around landscapes. Need an open conversation around this."

"A fantastically enlightening event, Much to chew on and digest."

"This is a great conversation with critical ideas about our relationship to nature and each other. It has expanded my view. Thanks to all the presenters, especially the organizers!"

"And also, green landscapes (natural beauty), have animals and plants the real locals of these areas. Maybe addressing this to broader sections of the society will create more inclusive landscapes."

These comments present the opinions of a small proportion of the symposium attendees and feedback from more attendees could be beneficial. Nonetheless, the comments provide some evidence that the symposium had the following impacts:

- Provided inspiration and ideas
- Increased understanding
- Was enhanced by the artistic contributions
- Provided positive experience
- Addressed a complex topic in a unique way
- Supported collaboration
- Facilitated reflection, and will affect practice
- Paved the way for further questions
- Could provide a foundation for wider public engagement

The Symposium recordings have been made available on the **Centre for National Parks and Protected Areas YouTube channel**, giving free public access to the presentations and artistic contributions, for potentially wider benefit.

<https://bit.ly/3KKHY07>



Participation & inclusivity

Care was taken by the organisers to value diversity, inviting contributors with a range of viewpoints, backgrounds and job roles. The data in the 'Participation Statistics' section illustrates the spread of job roles and sectors among the participants. The phrasing of the work sector question was not inclusive to people not in employment and further data could have been collected to monitor equality and diversity.

It was a key intention to create a collaborative space, which was achieved through an array of participation and interaction opportunities. These included: Q&A to the speakers, with a democratic 'upvoting' system to select from the questions posed; text-based chat among all attendees; small group discussions; group spokesperson; anonymous participation in writing through shared documents; post-event email inviting further contributions for this report; and the use of a symposium hashtag (#NatBeaut21) to help the conversation spread through social media. The text-based chat was widely used and the small group discussions were well attended and productive, indicating the collaborative opportunities were valued. The Q&A and upvoting system, while effective, was less widely participated in during the first panel and it would be useful to understand why.

A detailed programme was provided in advance of booking, and recordings made publicly available after the symposium, to enhance the transparency and openness of the event.

Accessibility in various forms was addressed as follows:

- Online format allowing people across the UK, potentially worldwide, to participate equally.
- Use of 'Otter' live transcription service to increase accessibility for deaf people and people with hearing loss.
- Availability of discounted tickets to reduce economic barrier to participation.



Conclusions

In summary, this symposium achieved its aim of stimulating thought and discussion around the way we might collectively re-evaluate attitudes to protected landscapes, and re-address mechanisms for encouraging access and connection to different rural landscapes, and care for the natural world.

There was a strong appreciation of the inclusion of art and aesthetics within a broader discussion around landscape management, in a format that brought together artists, policy makers, managers, academics and others.

Opportunities for participation through breakout rooms, Q&A sessions, and a chat function were widely used, triggering further conversations and opportunities for networking. Themes of discussion ranged from detailed topics (e.g. specific locations, policies, arts events, reports) to big-picture issues including visitor demographics, outdoor education, language, politics, economic systems, and climate change.

A range of positive impacts for those present is evidenced in the 'Feedback & Evaluation' section, illustrating the learning experience provided by the Symposium, an appetite for further discussion on this subject and related issues, and an appreciation of a format that brought together people from various practice/disciplinary backgrounds.

The collaborative detail generated through discussion groups, which is organised in the 'Conversations' section, provides material to stimulate further conversations and potentially feed forward into future events. This is supplemented by the resource recommendations and reflections supplied by participants (Appendices 1 and 3).



Key findings from the discussions of three questions

Q1: What actions could be taken to better conserve and enhance 'Natural Beauty'?

Q2: In what ways can we broaden access to 'Natural Beauty'?

Q3: What threats are there to 'Natural Beauty'?

Q1 Actions proposed to better conserve and enhance 'Natural Beauty'

included, predominantly: **engagement, connection and learning**, and actions for **inclusivity and valuing diversity**

Also noteworthy were comments on consideration of the built environment; recognition that 'Natural Beauty' is contested concept; facilitation and understanding of context; changes to designation, legislation, administration and governance; economic changes.

Q2 Suggestions for broadening access to 'Natural Beauty' can be categorised under: language & vision; understanding barriers; communicating the Countryside Code; reviewing ways of working; using creative arts; plus suggestions for **ways of visiting, experiencing and connecting with nature**.

Q3 Threats to natural beauty were grouped as, most frequently: **conflicting interests and visions**; and **politics, economics and legislation**; but also: access and inclusion; visitor impact; lack of understanding/education; climate change; and humans generally.



Appendix 1: Resource List

Symposium Resources

Centre for National Parks & Protected Areas

<https://www.cumbria.ac.uk/research/centres/centre-for-national-parks-and-protected-areas/>

PLACE Collective blog <https://theplacecollective.org/blog/>

Symposium Recordings https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYOgA0tqo8g&list=PL4K2BwBL1c-DEcjjbPiFS_uhquV69Rc0b

Background Information

Historical papers on 'Natural Beauty' (NAAONBs):

<https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/publications/historical-papers>

Landscapes review: National Parks and AONBs

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/designated-landscapes-national-parks-and-aonbs-2018-review>

European Landscape Convention <https://www.coe.int/en/web/landscape/the-european-landscape-convention>

UK National Parks <https://www.nationalparks.uk/>

Wildlife Reserves and Designated Landscapes, Northern Ireland

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/wildlife-reserves-and-designated-landscapes> ;

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/land-and-landscapes/areas-outstanding-natural-beauty>

Contributors' Websites

Andrew Blake, (Symposium Co-Chair), Manager, Wye Valley AONB Partnership

<https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/>

Dr Penny Bradshaw, Associate Professor of English Literature, University of Cumbria

<https://www.cumbria.ac.uk/study/academic-staff/all-staff-members/dr-penny-bradshaw.php>

Kate Gilman Brundrett, Artist-in-Residence <https://www.studiokgb.co.uk/>



Mike Collier, Professor of Visual Arts, University of Sunderland

<https://www.sunderland.ac.uk/about/staff/creative-arts/mikecollier/>

Howard Davies, former Chief Executive, National Association for AONBs

<https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/>

Matt Larsen Daw, Education Manager, WWF-UK

<https://www.wwf.org.uk/philanthropy/education>

Desperate Men: Jon Beedell & Richard Headon, <https://desperatemen.com/>

Harriet Fraser (Symposium Chair), Co-founder, the PLACE Collective

<https://theplacecollective.org/> and artist researcher with www.somewhere-nowhere.com

Kate Humble, Broadcaster, Writer & Co-Founder of Humble by Nature

<https://www.humblebynature.com/>

Neil Heseltine, Farmer; and Chair of Yorkshire Dales National Park <https://hilltopmalham.co.uk/>;

<https://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/>

Sally Marsh, Co-Director, High Weald AONB <https://www.highweald.org/>

Crystal Moore, Climate Resilience Deputy Director, Environment Agency

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency>

Ruth Pitter, Performer; Black Women Let Loose Theatre Company Co-director

<https://bwltheatre.co.uk/about-us/ruth-pitter/> , <https://vimeo.com/459877780>

Steve Ratcliffe, Director of Sustainable Development, Lake District National Park

<https://www.lakedistrict.gov.uk/>

Sarah Smout, Cellist and song writer <https://www.sarahsmoutmusic.co.uk/>

Further Resources – including suggestions from participants

Akala, *Natives: Race and Class in the Ruins of Empire*. John Murray Press, 2019.

Neal Anderson, Kate O'Brien, Mohammed Dhalech, Anouska Duffy, Chris Loynes and

Gina McCabe, *Inclusivity in the Outdoors* <https://www.outdoor-learning.org/Good-Practice/Good-Practice/Equality-Diversity-and-Inclusion>

COP26 *Protected & Conserved Areas Joint Statement on Climate & Biodiversity Crises*

<https://www.cumbria.ac.uk/media/Protected-and-Conserved-Areas-Joint-Statement-AW.pdf>

Defra: Blog on Future Farming: *Why protected landscapes matter*

<https://defrafarming.blog.gov.uk/2021/06/17/protected-landscapes-an-overview/>



Dadimas Walking Group (Chilterns AONB) led by Dr Geeta Ludhra:

<https://www.instagram.com/educatinggeetachilterns/?hl=en>

Drewitt and Manley, *The vegetation of the mountains and moorlands of England*. English Nature Research Report No. 218, 1997. <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/129035>

ENTWINED: Rural. Land. Lives. Art. Visual Arts in Rural Communities, 2021.

<https://varc.org.uk/entwined/>

Dr Anjana Khatwa, blog on the crisis of Black and Asian representation in the

sector: <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/blogs/black-and-brown-faces-green-spaces>

Robin W. Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*, Milkweed Editions, 2020.

Ryan Lumber, Miles Richardson and David Sheffield, *Beyond knowing nature: Contact, emotion, compassion, meaning, and beauty are pathways to nature connection*, PLOS ONE, 2017.

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0177186>

Landscape Decisions Programme <https://landscapedecisions.org/>

Professor Lois Mansfield, *The Value of Farmed Cultural Landscapes for Nature Recovery and Climate Action in the Lake District*, 2022. <https://www.flipsnack.com/B7E75BDD75E/what-did-farming-ever-do-for-us.html>

National Lottery Heritage Fund Jubilee Fund: <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/news/ps7million-legacy-nature-and-communities-queens-jubilee>

Nature and Us: A History through Art (BBC) with James Fox

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0010jn8>

Norman Nicholson, *The Seven Rocks*, in *The Pot Geranium*, Faber & Faber, London (1954).

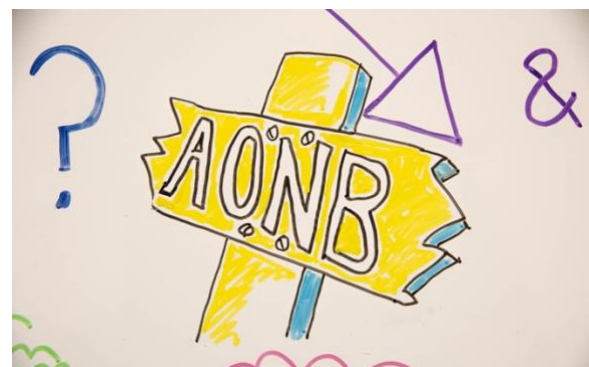
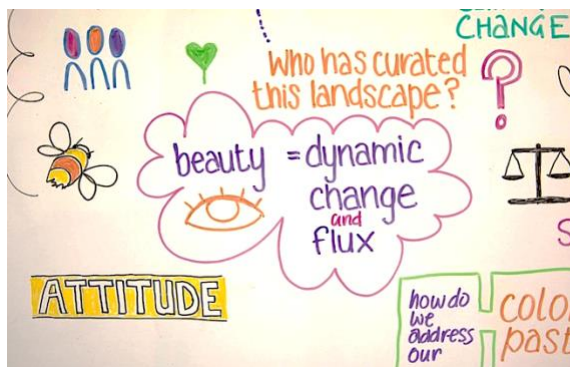
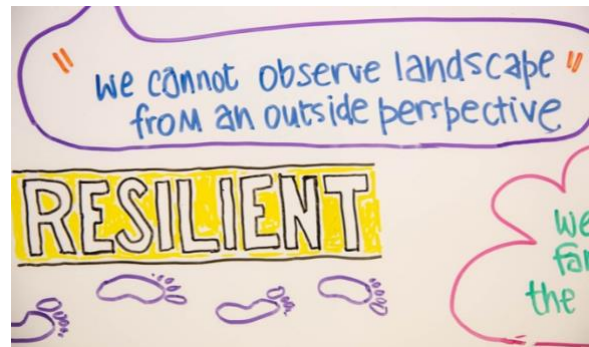
Ben Okri, *Artists must confront the climate crisis – we must write as if these are the last days*, *The Guardian* (2021).

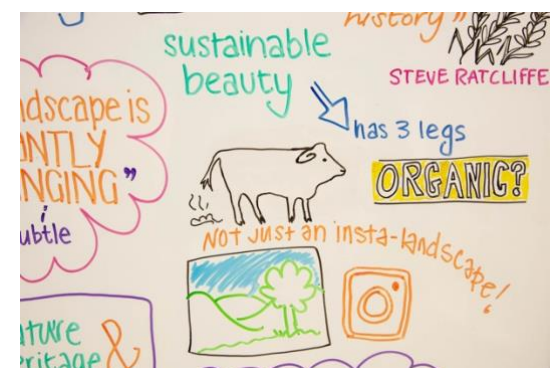
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/nov/12/artists-climate-crisis-write-creativity-imagination>



Appendix 2: Artist in Residence: Kate Gilman Brundrett

Kate worked in her studio for the duration of the event, tuned into proceedings and scribing and drawing to capture the conversations and themes of the day. At the end of the afternoon Kate presented her work in a live-feed.





Appendix 3: Participants' Contributions in response to the question:

"From your own personal experiences, what places, moments, lifeforms or landforms do you most associate with 'natural beauty'?"

"I find most natural environments beautiful to a greater or lesser extent and I include cultural landscapes as part of the natural environment ..

... I find wildlife beautiful and it really adds to my enjoyment of the natural environment. My most memorable encounters have been completely unexpected, e.g. three otters in one afternoon in northwest Scotland and an evening encounter with an anteater in Costa Rica."

Neil Windett



"... moments when expansive landscape views are suddenly revealed ... But often it is the daily tiny things that cause the most pause. A tiny wild flower, a trail left by a small animal, the sound of woodpeckers and owls in our small woodland. These are moments that snatch your breath away."

Richard Povall

For me a lot depends on the context of any experience of natural beauty. It could be the person/people you are with or if indeed you are on your own ruminating or reflecting on a difficult problem that needs sorting. Often visits to beautiful sites are associated with marking celebrations. It could be a birthday picnic to high moor with a stunning view of the sea. Sunlight shafts highlighting the vista. I've never known a site of natural beauty that hasn't been enhanced by the unwrapping of a decent pie."

Richard Headon - Desperate Men

"A piece of shiny contemporary architecture curved in the shape of a seedpod - it has an element of the natural about it, it's aesthetic is derived from nature, so is it in some ways natural beauty? An expansive new view across the Solway Firth, opened up thanks to the clearfelling of a favourite forest. Nature is somehow most beautiful when it sits in the context that amplifies it."

Anne Waggot Knott



"There are no standards. How you define beautiful depends on your culture, class and it also changes over time. In the past, a place and a person could be regarded as ugly, while now it can be regarded as beautiful."

Basak Tanulku

"How to choose and what is natural anyway? I thought I would share this poem because, although contrived by humans and now co-created by us, meadows have the most abundant mix of insects and flowers, they have the music of their humming and colours as bright as an artists' palette. And as an ex farm conservation adviser, I did a lot of work trying to maintain, manage and restore flower rich meadows. The photo shows a 6 acre meadow created by a friend from hay from a Suffolk Wildlife Trust reserve.

Meadow

I am shrinking into the meadow
feel sun on my face, smell dew
coated grass, smaller, smaller
until I am unobserved and let be
in the quiet hum of the day.

Crickets are calling, brush strokes
of air echo down to me, now
the pulse of a May morning pulls
up cowslip, clover, campion
painting a palette of colour.

I turn on my back, watch the sky
lazy clouds pillow across the blue
and high, and higher, a skylark
lends its music, I feel the excitement
and swoop of returning swallows.

Here I can stay and here thoughts
meander, undirected, untroubled
in a slow resting on the earth. Here
I soar and dream, find peace, find
purpose in this meadow of my mind.

--Melinda Appleby



"I associate natural beauty with the connection of water and land. This includes: ponds, lakes, rivers and seas plus the birds, insects and aquatics that give animation to the scenery - yes, I find insects beautiful too! The regular changes of light enhance each panorama and give a sense of serenity."

Sharon Seymour

"On my personal list would be fleeting cloud formations, lichens and fungi, tree bark and stones."

Cherrie Trelogan



"Natural beauty, for me, is demonstrated by a mature pedunculate oak tree - whether in a forest, park or street. Standing at the base and looking up, experiencing the fractal shapes of the branches, the texture of the bark, the sounds of the leaves rustling in the breeze, and the knowledge that it is connected to wider living systems above and beneath, give a uniquely immersive feeling of the complexity and scale of the natural world."

Matt Larsen Daw

"Chaos and organisation fusing together in a perfection of un-analysable mystery."

Dave Pritchard



"The landform I have most related to in my life is the high Sierras in California. Over time, I have realized that this connection has in some ways gotten in the way of my relationship with other landscapes. For years, desert landscapes looked barren to me, when in fact they are full of life. Also, I responded very positively to the high fells of the Lake District because of their visual similarity to the Sierras before I realized that some of the barrenness was due to overgrazing in the fells and not the high altitude of the Sierras. These two experiences have led me to believe that our response to 'natural beauty' needs to be tempered with the understanding of a place to be at all accurate or helpful."

Professor Heidi Snow



theplacecollective.org/events