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**Challenging the Nature and Culture of Ourselves:
Managing the English Lake District as a Global Property**

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Abstract

This paper outlines the background to the inscription of the English Lake District as a World Heritage Site and a ‘continuing’ Cultural Landscape by UNESCO in 2017. The opportunities, challenges and potential future benefits of the existing partnership based approach to site management are explored, so too the origins of the disconnect in the recent historical management of natural, cultural and landscape assets. This paper describes how this disconnect is now being recognised and addressed by partners through the development of a GIS based toolkit which brings partners together to harmonize their ambitions for the management and care of all types of natural and cultural assets at a catchment or landscape scale. The paper concludes with a short case study looking how through the adoption of a multi-disciplinary partnership based approach, significant landscape scale interventions can be undertaken within sensitive cultural landscapes which retains cultural and landscape significance, while also securing benefits for nature and local communities.

Keywords

English Lake District, Nature / Culture Journey, Cultural Landscape, Lake District National Park, National Trust

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Challenging the Nature and Culture of Ourselves: Managing the English Lake District as a Global Property

Introduction to the English Lake District

The English Lake District (an area of 2,292 sq km) is a distinct mountainous area in North West England. The inscribed property, (Figure 1), has a boundary contiguous with that of the Lake District National Park, which was established in 1951. Despite its complex geology, the site exhibits a unifying morphology. The English Lake District comprises 13 narrow valleys radiating “like spokes from the nave of a wheel”, as William Wordsworth described it (Wordsworth, W. 1835, 22), from the highest elevations at the centre of the region, with various hills and uplands, locally known as ‘fells’, separating one valley from the other. Within these valleys are 16 lakes of glacial origin located on the valley bottom, and almost 200 smaller water bodies, known as ‘tarns’ at high level.

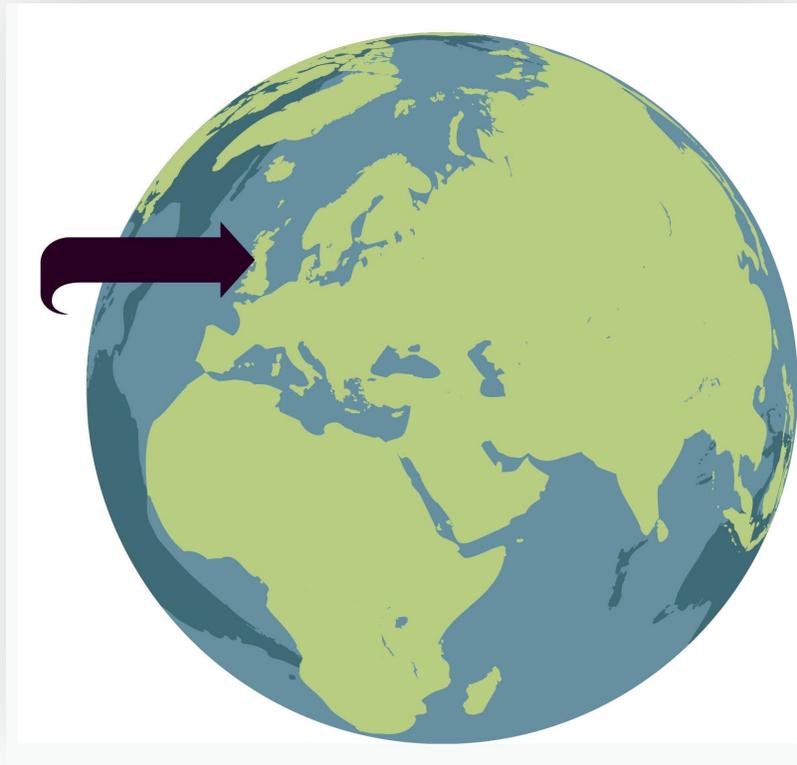
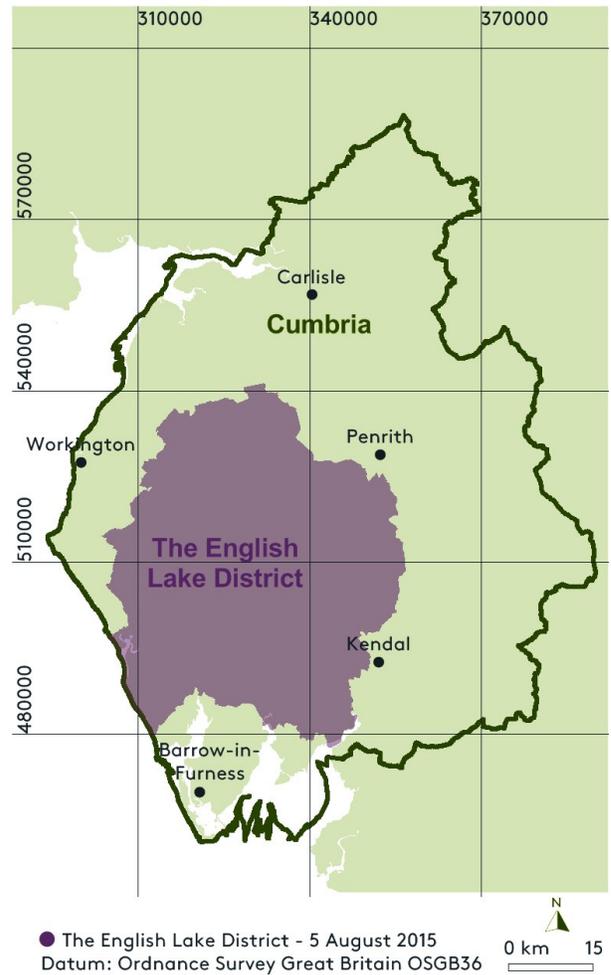
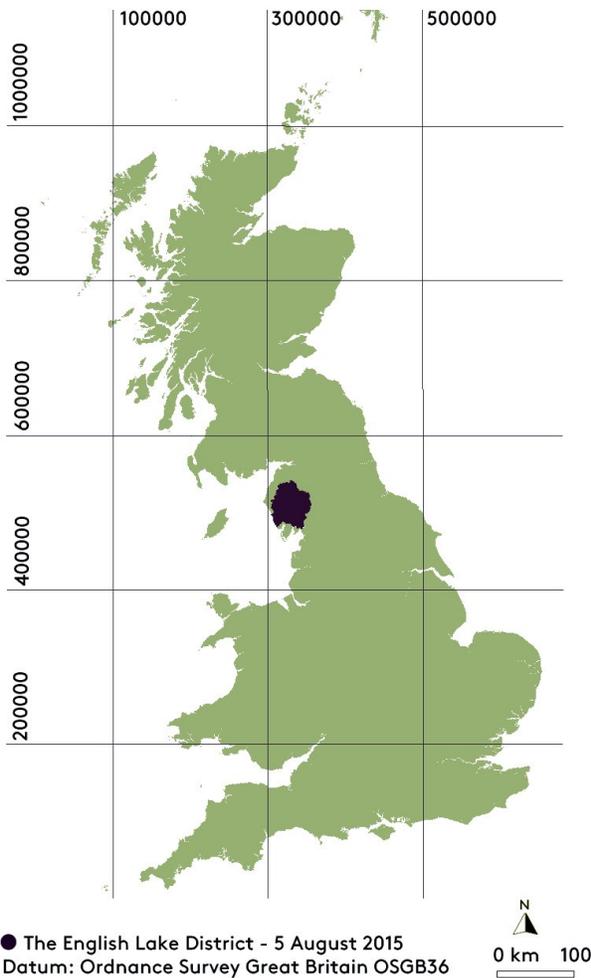


Figure 1a. The global location of the English Lake District © Lake District National Park Authority 2016. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights 2016.



Figures 1b and 1c. The global location of the English Lake District. © Lake District National Park Authority 2016. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights 2016.

Background to inscription

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention (UNESCO 2017, 3), the English Lake District is a ‘site’, and is classified as a ‘cultural landscape’ under the terms of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO 2017, 18-19). The English Lake District has recently been described as the “defining cultural landscape of its type” (LDNPP 2015, Forward). Following its consideration by the World Heritage Committee in the 1980s, the English Lake District was used as a test case to define the ‘cultural landscape’ site category which has been available to apply to newly inscribed sites since 1992.

The nomination dossier for the inscription of the English Lake District as a World Heritage Site (LDNPP 2015) identifies the criteria under which the property was nominated (Criteria II, V and VI) and includes a statement linking these criteria to the description and history of the region which focuses upon three intertwining and interrelated themes which combine to define its Outstanding Universal Value.

The first attribute of Outstanding Universal Value describes ‘a landscape of exceptional beauty, shaped by persistent and distinctive agro-pastoral traditions and local industry which give it special character’ (LDNPP 2015, 57). This attempts to encapsulate the effects that the last thousand years of life and tradition, has through the processes of farming and small scale industry, created a landscape of truly exceptional scenic beauty.

The second attribute of Outstanding Universal Value describes ‘a landscape which has inspired artistic and literary movements and generated ideas about landscapes that have had global influence and left their physical mark’ (LDNPP 2015, 57). This reflects the preoccupation with the scenic beauty of the English Lake District within the eighteenth century Picturesque artistic aesthetic, and nineteenth century Romantic Movement, each having global influence and serving to introduce the region to the world through art and literature.

Our final attribute of Outstanding Universal Value describes ‘a landscape which has been the catalyst for key developments in the national and international protection of landscapes’ (LDNPP 2015, 57). This captures the emergence of a concern for the protection of the scenic beauty of the region which emerged as early as 1760. This concern was later explored by William Wordsworth, and further developed by John Ruskin, who was to have a huge influence in the creation of the early global national park movement. The later nineteenth century saw the development of an innovative conservationist community who fought numerous battles to conserve the scenic beauty and traditional culture of the Lake District, from which developed the first National Trust, and the modern global landscape conservation movement.

The Lake District Partnership

Ultimate management responsibility for the English Lake District World Heritage Site rests with the UK government as State Party. Locally however, the site is managed by the Lake District Partnership, which comprises twenty-five organisations and stakeholders from across all sectors; public and private, commercial and environmental.

Conversations with colleagues across the wider protected landscape and World Heritage community has revealed that the partnership-based management approach is somewhat unusual (unique perhaps for a World Heritage Site) in terms of the number of individual partners involved and the blending together of such a broad set of interests; natural and cultural, social and economic.

While the partnership approach adopted by the English Lake District is certainly not the most streamline structure of governance, this ‘joined-up’ approach offers ways of addressing the greatest challenges and pursuing the biggest opportunities. The Partnership approach encourages individual partners to work together in caring for a cultural landscape, superseding outdated and inadequate models of separate natural and cultural asset management.

Of course, adapting to a new structure of governance and new ways of working has been challenging to a varying degree for all partners, with some concerned that this will result in a loss of existing power, control or influence. There is also a real tension between the need to work in accordance with the aims of the Lake District Partnership Plan, which all partners have formally committed to do, given that each partner has its own strategic aims, core purpose and internal audience to satisfy.

Despite these initial problems, the Lake District Partnership remains in my own view, the best and only option for governance of the English Lake District. Its existence ensures that there is a forum for the diverse assortment of partner organisations to come together, creating a sense of common purpose that can open up the limiting-thinking that frequently exist within individual

organisations. The Partnership facilitates the pooling of knowledge and resources across organisations, which in the current gloomy UK economic climate, is critical, particularly for those organisations that rely upon funding from central government. It also offers opportunities to work together in order to influence the big debates, including that connected with any new post-BREXIT environmental subsidy scheme available to farmers of marginal land in the Lake District, identifying ways of making landscapes and communities more resilient to the effects of climate change or formulating catchment scale management plans for entire valleys, which ignore boundaries of ownership and land-use.

The nature and culture disconnect

The Lake District Partnership is also facing up to perhaps its greatest and most urgent challenge of all; harmonizing the disconnect in the partner's ambitions for nature and culture. The reasons for this disconnect are not difficult to trace. In the UK national governmental agencies for nature and the culture are quite separate, being located in different governmental departments, which creates a sense of competition, separation and opposition at all levels. The intellectual separation between nature and culture begins in education, with environmental land management studies focusing upon ecology, biodiversity and the environmental sciences, and largely ignoring landscapes and landscape character, themes which are instead gathered up by students of landscape archaeology, landscape architecture and rural and town planning.

To compound the problem, the various bodies responsible for managing nature and culture have their own specialist language, initialisms and acronyms, making it difficult to be understood by anyone from outside the profession. This makes it difficult for those with a desire to work across boundaries to do so with credibility. In recent years, the UK conservation sector has become increasingly underfunded and under resourced, meaning that casework decisions are often hurried, and time jealously guarded. As a consequence, setting time aside to work within multi-disciplinary groups that would take practitioners outside their own professional peer groups (and into new areas of experience and understanding) is often impossible.

The profound disconnect between the care and management of nature and culture in the English Lake District is recognised by the majority of partners, although it is less understood that this local disconnect is reflective of a wider concern currently being explored through the global ‘nature/ culture journey’. The disconnect that exists within the English Lake District is perhaps best illustrated by the persistence of the following debates:

- Conversations concerning re-wilding, scrub creation and woodland planting across landscapes which possess high cultural significance or important historical associations.
- The effects of agri-environmental schemes upon upland farming; particularly those relating to stock numbers, shepherding systems and management of the communal commons.
- Impacts upon important landscape aesthetics and distinctive landscape character resulting from the introduction of land management schemes seeking to deliver particular environmental or ecological benefits.
- Management of the upland valleys to hold flood water and alleviate the issue of flooding for communities downstream, resulting in a loss of productive farmland and an erosion of significant farming culture.

Sustainable Land Management

To prompt discussions around the future management ambitions for nature and culture in the English Lake District the National Trust developed a new process known as Sustainable Land Management. Originally developed as a GIS based tool-kit to help the National Trust to fill the gaps in its knowledge about its own land, it evolved into a resource that partners could use to open up the conversation about harmonizing future land management and which encourages a focus upon the whole valley catchment, rather than individual farms and fields.

The first step in the Sustainable Land Management process is the collection of data on environmental, natural and cultural assets. Data is then arranged under six different categories known as ‘Land Functions’, with the aim of identifying exactly what types of public benefit are being delivered within the catchment. The range of public benefits mapped include those

arising from ecology and biodiversity, the cultural landscape, natural and environmental resources, land productivity, scenic beauty and the ability for people to access and experience these benefits.

The resulting data is then mapped on a series of individual layers within GIS and afterwards checked and approved by the various partners. The result is a map showing the current function of land and the various types of public benefit being delivered at present. The second step in the process is to agree on an ambition map based on careful analysis of the GIS layers and input from across the Partnership. It is important to note that these maps do not represent a fixed long-term plan for the individual valleys, rather they are an attempt to see how the shared ambitions of the Partnership might harmoniously co-exist at a catchment scale and what types of public benefit might be delivered in the future. The final step involves turning the ambition map into an action plan. Action plans can be produced by the Partnership working together, by small groups of partners or by individual organisations without risk of contradiction, as all of the actions evolve from a single, harmonized ambition map approved and adopted by all Partners.

If there is an appetite to make it work, Sustainable Land Management offers a chance to develop a level of conviviality between the various partners and their ambitions that has never previously existed and could have a transformative impact upon the way the Lake District is managed and conservation work planned and carried out. Given the current political and economic uncertainty surrounding the UK's future split from the EU, and what this might mean in terms of sustaining the significant cultural heritage of the English Lake District, and in particular those attributes of Outstanding Universal Value connected with the traditional upland farming system, the need for partners to work together to find integrated solutions to these issues could not be more urgent.

There are also important conversations to be had centred upon how we enable Lake District landscapes and communities to become more resilient to the effects of climate change, and ensure that the natural and environmental assets upon which the significant culture of the Lake District depends are healthy and sustainably managed. It is clear that it is critical for the

Partnership to harmonise its management ambitions in order to formulate a clear and consistent vision for the future.

Goldrill Beck, Ullswater - a case study

This year has seen the Partnership begin to evolve the way in which it works, adopting a more collaborative approach in the planning and undertaking of significant physical landscape interventions, in many cases taking the principles which emerged from the Sustainable Land Management process as a starting point.

Ullswater, one of the 13 valleys within the Lake District, can be understood to reflect the typical landscape character of the region (see Plate 1). It possesses natural landscape drama in the form of high mountainous fell tops which sweep down to the lakes and rivers on the valley bottom. It also exhibits exceptional scenic beauty as a consequence of the harmonious balance and contrast between different landscape types; meadow, rough grassland, woodland, wood pasture, scrubby ravines and of course, large areas of upland open grazing land.



Plate 1. A view through Ullswater toward Brothers Water. *Courtesy of John Malley © National Trust.*

Ullswater, in common with other Lake District valleys, has evolved over centuries to absorb the rain that falls within its catchment. Traditional vernacular architecture and farming culture have evolved with an expectation and preparedness for wet weather, and as a result much historic infrastructure is well adapted to cope with flooding.

However, with the increased frequency of exceptional weather events, the resilience of these landscapes is being tested. This issue was brought into sharp relief during the winter of 2015 with the arrival of Storm Desmond, which broke the United Kingdom's 24-hour rainfall record, with 341.4mm of rain falling in the central Lake District on the 5th December (UK Metrological Office, 2018).

This exceptional rainfall, which persisted into 2016, resulted in serious flooding across many parts of the UK, with Cumbria and the Lake District severely affected. Communities in Ullswater were some of the worst hit, with the villages of Glenridding and Patterdale featuring regularly in the national media as homes and businesses were flooded and critical infrastructure lost or damaged.

Flooding also has a profound impact upon the farming community, upon the productivity of farmland and upon farming culture. The impact of flooding upon farming culture is of course of particular interest given the obligation to sustain those elements of traditional farming culture recognised as attributes of Outstanding Universal Value. It is interesting to note that ICOMOS identified the risks arising from changing climate within the small number of headline risks affecting the English Lake District it highlighted to the World Heritage Committee in 2017 (ICOMOS, 2017).



Plate 2. Flood waters occupying the valley bottom in the aftermath of Storm Desmond.
Courtesy of John Malley, © National Trust.

By adopting the Sustainable Land Management approach to understanding the significance of the various natural and cultural assets within the catchment of those flood hit communities, in conjunction with the preparation of a Heritage Impact Assessment in line with the best practice advice from ICOMOS (ICOMOS, 2011) and the Lake District National Park (Lake District National Park, 2018) it has been possible to formulate proposals to safeguard critical infrastructure and increase the flood resilience of communities in the valley. The interventions will also deliver significant benefits for nature by improving the functionality of the river, reconnecting it with its floodplain, and allowing natural process of deposition to occur. There will also be longer-term benefits for the river's ecological health. A rigorous Heritage Impact Assessment process has helped to identify the potential for any landscape interventions to cause significant harm to the attributes of traditional farming culture recognised as part of the Outstanding Universal Value of the English Lake District. By acknowledging that significant harm to attributes of Outstanding Universal Value as at an early stage of the design process, the

plans evolved with a clear understanding of all the natural and cultural sensitivities, constraints and opportunities. By adopting a multi-disciplinary, partnership based approach to addressing the impact of flooding upon local communities and essential infrastructure in Ullswater, it was possible for partners to agree upon a future land management approach that avoids causing significant harm to the cultural landscape and, critically, Outstanding Universal Value, and which delivered significant benefits for river health and biodiversity. While this project is in itself modest in size and ambition, early successes are to be welcomed if only to highlight the practical benefits of a partnership based approach.

Conclusion

The English Lake District, like all landscapes within the UK, have been shaped and influenced by human activity for millennia, during that time human activity has influenced the character and diversity of the biosphere. This entanglement has, over the last 1000 years, created a cultural landscape of global significance, with the distinctive culture of the Lake District communities being shaped and influenced by the local physical environment and natural resources. The English Lake District is living proof that nature and culture are “two sides of the same World Heritage coin” (Philips, A & Young, C. 2017. 2017, 1).

It has been acknowledged elsewhere that in the UK “our systems for control, protection and sustainable use will perhaps always struggle to catch up with this reality, given the complexity of modern society” (Philips, A & Young, C. 2017. 2017, 8), a situation only compounded by the lack of resources for environmental and conservation bodies and the human desire to seek out the comfortable company of your own ‘tribe’ (Philips, A, 2018). These realities only underline the importance of creating proactive, co-operative management approaches to World Heritage sites and other protected landscapes based upon partnerships between natural, environmental and cultural bodies.

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Biographical Notes

Jamie Lund gained a BA in Archaeology from King Alfred's College, Winchester, and an MA in Landscape Archaeology from the University of Sheffield, before working as a field archaeologist. Since 1998 he has worked as Archaeologist and Cultural Heritage Advisor for the UK National Trust (which covers England, Wales and Northern Ireland) and is based in the English Lake District. In 2016 he was awarded full Member status from the Chartered Institute of Archaeologists (UK). After acting as technical lead for the National Trust during the inscription process, he has held the position of Deputy Chair of the English Lake District World Heritage Site Technical Group since World Heritage status was awarded in 2017.