

# Yorkshire **DALES** review

## Natural Beauty



.....  
**CAMPAIGN • PROTECT • ENJOY**  
.....

**Friends of the  
DALES**  
YORKSHIRE DALES SOCIETY

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For comments on this issue, enquiries about contributing an article, photographs or illustrations, or to suggest future topics, please contact Prue Harrison, volunteer Editor:

prue.harrison@friendsofthedales.org.uk

For further information about the charity's campaigns, policies and future plans, please contact Ann Shadrake, Executive Director:

ann.shadrake@friendsofthedales.org.uk

Friends of the Dales

Canal Wharf

Eshton Road

Gargrave

North Yorkshire

BD23 3PN

Office: 01756 749400



www.friendsofthedales.org.uk



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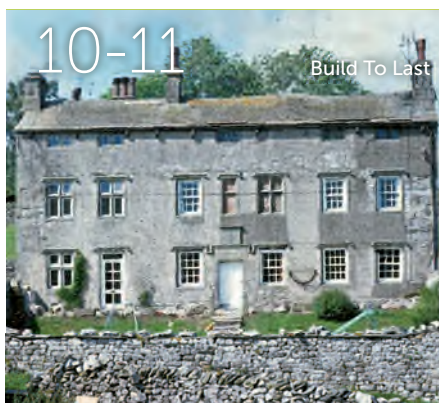


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Favourite walk/wild swim

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Floodwaters, oil on canvas, Frank Gordon



# On Beauty

**Is our fixation with the aesthetic qualities of the Yorkshire Dales blinding us to the need for change? Chair Bruce McLeod asks whether the national park has become the victim of outdated fashions and practices.**

*Beauty lies in the eye of the beholder* is a cliché that is wholly inaccurate when it comes to the Dales. One would be hard pushed to find any who wouldn't agree that the Dales landscape is beautiful. I was certainly conscious of this on the 40th anniversary walk led by Colin Speakman recently, which took us from Grassington to Burnsall and back via Linton. When it comes to the beauty of the Dales we all share the same view.

However, there's not always been a consensus. In his *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1726) Daniel Defoe describes the Westmorland Dales and the area north of Leeds as he travelled along the Wharfe towards Ripley as 'dismal', 'frightful' and 'barren'. The 'continued waste of black, ill looking, desolate moors' compares unfavourably with manufacturing towns. So much for nature and natural beauty, which in the early eighteenth century was a paradise compared to now, despite centuries of sheep farming, the numerous lead mining operations and toxic spoil heaps.

The conception of natural beauty has clearly 'moved on' since the 1720s with the same moorland now ranking among the nation's favourite landscapes. However, it can congeal into an abstraction, which hides how landscapes are designed by the economy, and produced through labour and ownership of private land. Our gaze, primed to read landscape as idyllic, can glide over what is artificial, whether that be the way industry has

shaped the landscape or the highly engineered grouse moors (a Victorian fashion dating from the 1850s).

Today's version and vision of natural beauty can also drum up a feeling of nostalgia for simpler times and the belief that the countryside is a place of virtue, restoration and escape. Recent grumbling about the influx of uncouth visitors during the summer is part of a long tradition that views the countryside as a refuge from urban ills (and dwellers). Such relatively unexamined ideas, I believe, get in the way of a realistic appraisal of the natural world and its historical evolution.

The Romantic poets and the painters of the 'picturesque', not to mention the tourist industry that followed in their wake, have a lot to answer for. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries established a way of seeing landscape – distorted to fit certain definitions of beauty – which persists to this day. However, even Wordsworth, who did so much to define a rose-tinted picture of the Lake District, acknowledged rural poverty, the ravages of industry, and the human derelicts returning from empire-building and war. Loss and fragility haunt his environment.

## Looking to the Future

Understandably when we contemplate the Dales we don't want to focus on the lack of biodiversity, the polluted rivers, the congested roads, the litter of single-use plastic. Nonetheless, dwelling on the aesthetic, which tends to be superficial and ahistorical, runs the risk of disregarding what is absent. The price we pay for the iconic beauty of the Dales is a national park dominated by

monocultures: tourism, grouse moors, sheep farming, ownership of private land and an aging, well-off demographic. Diversity and resilience are minimal. The idealised scenery works to 'conserve' these monocultures rather than promote recovery, regeneration and repurposing of nature and community.

The emphasis on the beauty of the status quo is, therefore, not going to serve us well for the future, obscuring realities and what steps are needed to mitigate crises. At present we have something similar to the state described in the poem *The Deserted Village* (1770) by Oliver Goldsmith: 'The country blooms - a garden, and a grave'.

The challenge is to arrive at a sensibility that recognises what WG Hoskins in *The Making of the English Landscape* calls 'the logic that lies behind the beautiful whole'. In other words, we try looking at the landscape with a double consciousness: admire the characteristics we've learned to love whilst also being acutely aware of its history and possible futures. The Dales will change dramatically according to the climate crisis. And it has to dramatically change in order to recover some of the biodiversity destroyed over the last 50 years.

Only a collective and radical effort will save 'our commons' so that all may thrive. A transformative plan would include insulating all houses, land increasingly brought under public ownership, all of us hooked up digitally and to public transport, the local production of renewable energy, rewetting the uplands and the recovery of nature through regenerative farming, rewilding and eco-tourism. A green new Dales is a future and a thing of 'beauty' we must imagine and fight for.

**Bruce McLeod, Chair**

## Behind the Beauty: Biodiversity in the UK?

**50%** wildlife and plant species lost since 1750

**10%** UK ranked in bottom 10% in the world (for biodiversity)

**WORST** UK worst among G7 nations (for biodiversity)

**189/218** UK's ranking for 'biodiversity intactness'

## Plastic-Free Dales

Regular readers of the *Yorkshire Dales Review* will know that, although we fully support the well-managed planting of trees across the Yorkshire Dales, we do not support the use of plastic tree guards. Plastic tree guards not only support the fossil fuel industry but – if unmanaged – pollute the land, rivers and oceans. Our recent volunteer tree guard collection event retrieved more than 2,500 redundant tubes from the landscape. It also helped to increase awareness of this important and often overlooked 'plastic problem' and was featured in both the *Craven Herald* and the *Yorkshire Post*.

Our campaigning has also succeeded in encouraging 11 out of the other 12 national park societies to take up the cause in their areas. Other good news is that the Royal Horticultural Society recently announced that it will be following in the footsteps of the Woodland Trust, National Trust and Highways England by trialling biodegradable alternatives to plastic guards.



Volunteers and members collecting plastic tree guards.  
Photo courtesy of Mark Corner

*'Our addiction to fossil fuels is pushing humanity to the brink. We face a stark choice. Either we stop it, or it stops us. And it is time to say, 'Enough'. Enough of brutalising biodiversity. Enough of killing ourselves with carbon. Enough of treating nature like a toilet. Enough of burning and drilling and mining our way deeper. We are digging our own graves.'*

UN Secretary-General António Guterres

## 40th Anniversary Walk



Photo courtesy of Tony Smith

Forty years of campaigning for the protection of the Yorkshire Dales is definitely worthy of a celebration – so we did. A group of intrepid supporters, led by Colin Speakman, one of the founders of Friends of the Dales, enjoyed an eight-mile circular route from Grassington to Hebden and Burnsall, returning via Thorpe and Linton.

Colin highlighted geological and historical landmarks along the route, before drawing the walk to a fitting conclusion by the sculpted stone bench dedicated to Arthur Raistrick, one of the founding fathers of the national park movement, by Friends of the Dales in 2000. One of our newest members, Martin Carr (the 'chap in the cap', below!), said: 'Thank you for a super, if exhausting, day last Wednesday. It was brilliant. In bed by 8pm and woke up at 9am. Wonderful!'

For information about future events turn to page 23.



Photo courtesy of Tony Smith

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*The eagle-eyed amongst you may have noticed that our website has a slick new look. This is thanks to a new volunteer, Peter Edwards, who has invested a great deal of time moving the old site onto a new platform. As well as already looking better, the new site will make it much easier for us to make other improvements to the navigation and visual content moving forward. So keep watching this space!*





## Golden Eagle Sighting...

Campaigner and founding member of Friends of the Dales Colin Speakman has been awarded the Golden Eagle for Outstanding Services to the Outdoors by the Outdoor Writers and Photographers Guild. Colin, co-creator of the Dales Way, one of the most popular long-distance paths in the country, has written nearly 60 books about walking and history, transport guides, biographies, poems and fiction. His latest book, *Yorkshire: Ancient Nation, Future Province*, which is 'part polemic, part manifesto' was launched in November.



Artist David Bellamy presenting Colin with a watercolour of Pen-y-Ghent featuring a golden eagle hovering around its summit. Photo courtesy of Outdoor Writers and Photographers Guild

## Jobs Are Foundation For Housing

Wilf Fenten's excellent article in the autumn *Review* took me back to my PhD days researching rural development for emerging economies. Back in the late 1970s the case was being argued for integrated socio-economic policies, which brought together investments in education, welfare, housing and general infrastructure as a means of slowing down the migration of rural populations to urban centres. But it was quite evident then that without effective investment in employment opportunities being placed at the heart of the strategy, no amount of capital expenditure in social and welfare infrastructure was going to stem the tide of rural migration.

It seems to me that the national park authority could learn from such experiences and focus its limited resources on stimulating small-scale enterprises to provide employment, which can then be backed up by supporting investment in local, affordable housing. As Wilf Fenten highlights, investing in housing without the employment simply risks perpetuating the problems faced today by our local Dales communities.

Ian Harrison, Treasurer



Photo courtesy of Lyndon Smith

## Distinguished Naturalist Adds Voice to Friends of the Dales

**We are delighted to welcome the biologist, nature writer and campaigner Dr Amy-Jane Beer as our new honorary President.**

North Yorkshire-based Amy has not only authored more than 30 books about science and natural history including *Cool Nature* and *The A-Z of Wildlife Watching*, but is a Country Diarist for *The Guardian*, a columnist for *British Wildlife* and a regular contributor to *BBC Wildlife* and *Countryfile Magazine*. She said, 'In Friends of the Dales I see an organisation that can make a genuine difference – they are vocal, energetic and creative, and willing to reach out and make connections in a common cause. This is the best of grass-roots activism, and I'm delighted to be adding my voice to theirs.'

Friends of the Dales Chair Bruce McLeod said, 'Having the distinguished environmental writer Dr Beer join our charity as President is an important step in helping us further spread the word about our work to help protect and improve the Dales for the generations to come. Some of our current campaigns go right to the heart of the issues facing the whole planet, such as plastic pollution, loss of biodiversity and habitats and the destruction of our natural carbon sinks, such as our peatlands. Amy's passion for the natural world is well known and we believe that her voice will enable us to engage a new demographic of environmentalist to our causes.'

Turn to page 7 to hear from Amy herself..

# Difficult Decisions

Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority Chief Executive David Butterworth asks how carbon emissions can be reduced while continuing to allow access for all.

Watching recent events unfold in Glasgow at the COP26 summit, and the glacial pace of progress towards tackling the planet's climate agenda, again brought to mind one of the major issues that is likely to face the Yorkshire Dales National Park in the coming years. It is the potential conflict arising from our desire to contribute towards tackling the impact of climate change and nature recovery and one of our two statutory purposes: to promote the enjoyment and understanding by the public of the park's 'special qualities' -- often interpreted as our remit for recreation, access and tourism.

You don't need to be some kind of genius to see the potential tension between these two objectives – though only the latter has the force of law behind it: unless you count the UK's commitment to become net zero by 2050 which, although laudable, feels like passing the buck to future generations.

What it boils down to is this: how can we take seriously our obligations, particularly in relation to the climate, whilst 'promoting' the area to millions of visitors – the vast majority of whom arrive and travel around the park by private vehicle, contributing to the growth in carbon emissions? In the future, will it be sufficient to attempt to 'manage' these two potentially conflicting objectives, or will more radical approaches and measures be required?


Of course there have been, and continue to be, a number of efforts to address the issues around visitors and the impact they have on the park. Some have centred on the role of public transport, and whilst this clearly has a place as part of any solution, it is my view that it is unlikely to deliver the necessary scale of change in travel behaviour that is required. Not least because public policy favours more elderly travellers over other potential users and, more importantly, the ingrained car culture that exists within the UK. This emphasis on the private vehicle has been demonstrated in national policy for decades and as a consequence it is difficult to believe that reducing carbon emissions can be tackled through the sole use of public transport incentives rather than by restraints on car usage.

## Taking Responsibility Now

I imagine many reading this piece might be saying to themselves: 'Fine, what's the problem? Of course addressing the problems of the climate and carbon emissions must take precedence over everything else.' But it's not that simple for the national park authority. I've already highlighted the legislative barrier and, on a personal level, I feel that there is also a more fundamental issue that needs to be considered. It is this. Public access to national parks has not been something that has come easily. It was an 'entitlement' that was achieved only after many years of hard lobbying and campaigning and, in some cases, through broken skulls and prison sentences. We should therefore never take access 'rights' lightly.

As a consequence, we should also be extremely cautious about how we might choose to limit public access to these wonderful landscapes. Hard-fought concessions should never be given up easily. In addition, the recent and ongoing pandemic has demonstrated yet again the value of these magical places to the nation for the physical and mental health and wellbeing of the public. On the back of those experiences I'm sure your readers can see why any restrictions should not be introduced lightly. I don't pretend to know the solutions to this difficult area of public policy and, to be frank, I see no 'silver bullet' that will resolve these issues at a stroke. What I do believe is that something is going to have to give and it is this generation that needs to address these matters now, and at a national level, rather than more 'generational fudge', where we leave these problems to our children and grandchildren to resolve. They will not thank us for that.

David Butterworth, Chief Executive,  
Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority



A beauty of their own? Wind turbines are one response to the climate crisis. A step too far for the Dales - or a necessary adjunct to the armoury of measures that will be needed?

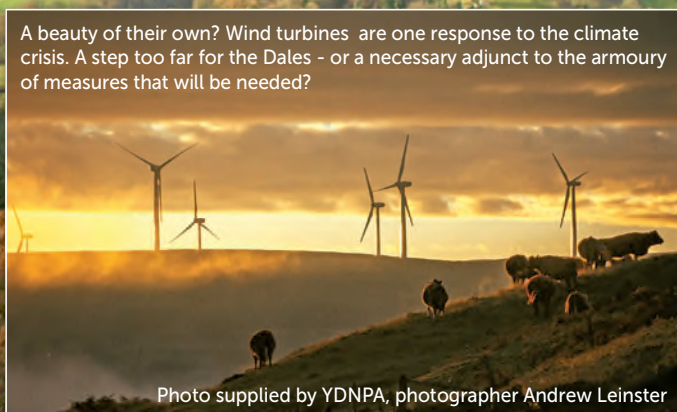


Photo supplied by YDNPA, photographer Andrew Leinster

# The Perfect Dales Day

I've been invited to launch my presidency of Friends of the Dales by writing about a favourite walk or wild swim and, I have to say, it's a near impossible task. I'm often asked to name an animal/bird/tree/place and the question never fails to plunge me into a state of confusion and pre-emptive regret over all those I don't pick. I could name a dozen and still wake up tomorrow thinking: 'Dammit, how could I have forgotten such-and-such?' My stock answer to the latter (which has the virtue of being true most of the time) has become 'the one I'm looking at', and so it may be for walks and swims: my favourite is usually the one I'm doing. It is in the nature of nature to captivate and it would have to be a bad day indeed for a walk or a dip not to deliver moments of beauty, insight or mood enhancement, which for those seconds or hours can matter more than almost anything. A walk with fine company is a joy but people distract me terribly, so I'll happily be alone.

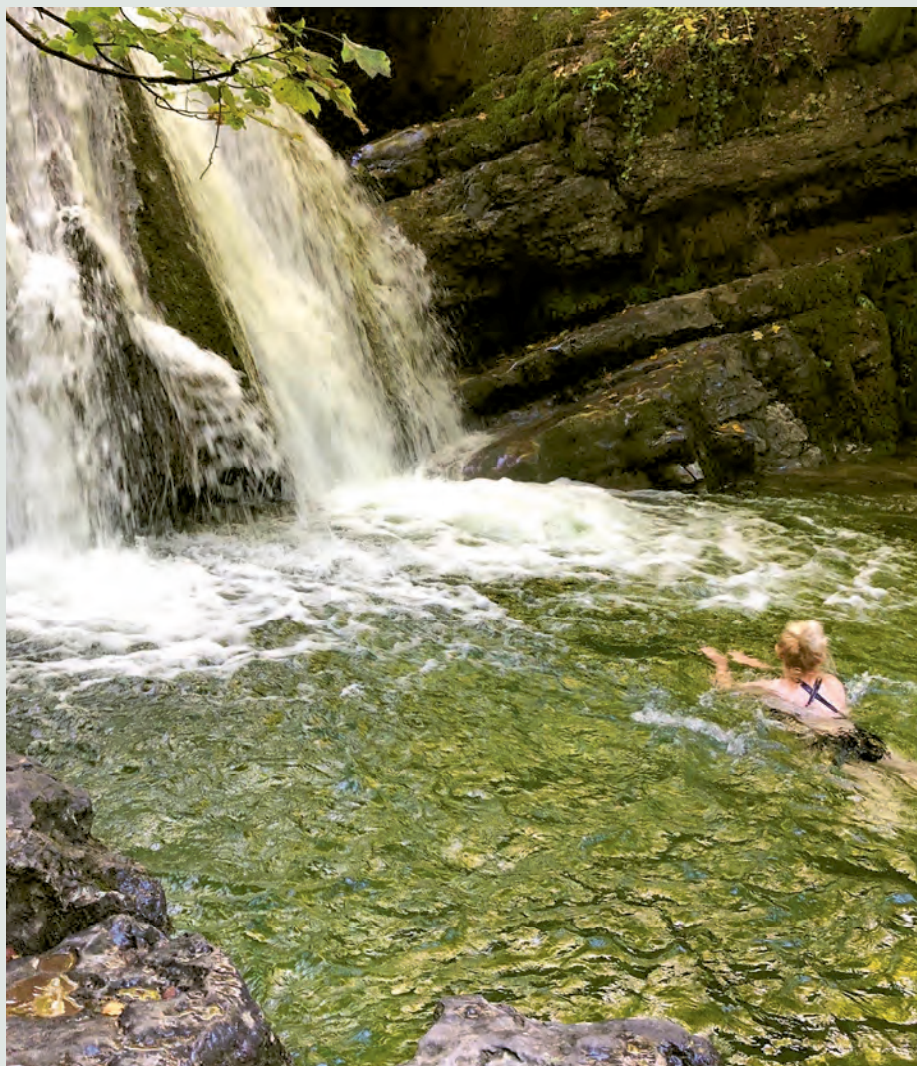


What I look for in any excursion is variety, and in this the Dales are truly outstanding, with potential to pack woodland and meadow, hill and river, crag and cascade, moor and cave into an odyssey of just a few hours. I suppose, if I'm allowed to dream up perfection, I'd also like four seasons of weather in a day, and the chance to walk through either sunrise or sunset. But where? If you twisted my arm, I'd have to mention Gordale Scar and Malham Cove. I'd need a bit of upper Swaledale in June, the summit of Pen-y-Ghent iced like a wedding cake on a blue-dome winter day, and a plunge-pool dip in water so clear that I can count pebbles on the bottom. I'd have to insist on a chance to hopscotch over the natural land art of limestone pavement, and to peer into the hidden miniature jungles of the grykes.

I'd want a picnic near some stepping stones. I'd insist on curlew and skylark song, the aerial acrobatics of lapwing, the amphibious antics of a dipper. If you can arrange for me to see the ripples where a rising trout kisses the shimmering interface between river and air, that'd be great. Red squirrel or otter, oh yes! Wildflowers, but of course – don't forget some orchids. And trees, please: muscular beech, riverside oaks and rowans heavy with fruit, wind-bitten hawthorn, dwarf yew. I especially want to embrace the ash trees that line boundaries and droves before dieback claims them. It breaks my heart to see them ailing, but I will want to remember when I am old how their leaves play with sunlight and their branch tips shift in the breeze – how they whisper with a voice all their own.

And what will I give in return for this perfect day? That's easy - I will go with a positive trace mentality – not only mindful of doing no harm, but with an explicit intention of improving things by my presence, be it by picking up other people's litter, recording wildlife, reporting pollution (and, as long as it remains necessary, the wildlife crime we all know is still perpetrated here in the name of management), or simply greeting others I meet on the way – a small price indeed for the astonishing privilege of simply being alive and sentient in this blessed place.

Amy-Jane Beer, President



# A Different Kind of Beauty for Crisis Times?

Concepts of what constitutes a beautiful landscape evolve. The great change in European landscape aesthetics – seeing it as beautiful, restorative, sublime and romantic – began about 250 years ago and is still very much with us. Even the great poet Sylvia Plath, often plagued by severe depression, could exclaim: ‘I felt my lungs inflate with the onrush of scenery – air, mountains, trees, people. I thought, “This is what it is to be happy”’.



Photo courtesy of Hilary Fenten

Wordsworth and his contemporaries extolled much of this beauty of nature in verse, in contrast to earlier generations like Daniel Defoe, who often saw nature as ‘a waste and howling (sic) wilderness’, an object to be controlled and exploited by humans.

Both attitudes are still with us, in the way that many value national parks as perfect, pristine places, yet care less about the degradation of nature elsewhere. Some of the most visited places in our country impress by their prettiness: romantic, pleasing to the senses. Does this show how much nature means to us or is it a sign of our disconnectedness from nature in its fullness?

Some years ago I was researching a project for the then Countryside Council for Wales when our team wrote in its final report, ‘All landscapes, not just designated or very rural ones, are an expression of the cultural value of the people who shape them. To that extent, if those people are becoming disconnected from their place, that will be reflected in the landscape.’ This will impact on the character and biodiversity of places like the Dales. Seeing the crises of biodiversity and climate, we need to pause and gain a greater connectedness with nature, learning a different kind of beauty, more in tune with our times.

## Lessons from Europe

In the 1990s the largest area of contiguous forest in Europe was suffering from a plague of bark beetle, which was killing vast areas of trees. Authorities in the Czech part of that forest, Šumava National Park (formerly Bohemian Forest), decided on chemical warfare

whereas the German part, the Bavarian Forest National Park, just left nature to get on with it.

The results were stunning. Neither method saved the old trees. However, the natural decay on the Bavarian side quickly promoted new growth, creating a new forest, more diverse and more beautiful. Bark beetle mainly infects old trees and, as there are now fewer of those, the bark beetle pest is contained.

As much of the forest died, local people organised militant demonstrations against the park authority, so much so that on my visit there our group had to be bussed into the headquarters. But the authority stuck to its policy of leaving nature to get on with it.

The old forest was certainly ‘beautiful’, as the photo of a walk in the Bohemian Forest shows. Yet I found the decaying trees and verdant new growth equally exciting. The revitalised woodlands showed more biodiversity, attracted new fauna and flora and reconnected people to the cycle of birth, growth and decay.

The biggest issues facing the Dales are the climate emergency and nature recovery. We may well need to move towards a position of seeing our current notions of landscape ‘sacrificed’ in order to meet these challenges. Yet with a different concept of beauty we could have all three: climate change mitigation, a thriving ecosystem and a landscape shining in a new kind of beauty.

Wilf Fenten, Vice Chair



Bark beetle damage, Bavarian forest.



Bavarian forest regrowing after bark beetle damage.