



World news

The article that changed my view ... of the Lake District's world heritage status

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Supporter Helen Hughes explains why George Monbiot's writing made her think again about the best future for Britain's environment

Helen Hughes, 48, is a stay-at-home mum and part-time teacher from Devon. She lives in Germany.

I subscribe to several emails from the Guardian and when an article on the Lake District's new world heritage status appeared in my inbox with George Monbiot's name next to it, I immediately read it.

Three years ago, I read Monbiot's book *Feral*, which explores the restoring and rewilding of our damaged ecosystems and lays out a positive environmentalism, in which nature is allowed to find its own way. In the Guardian article, he elaborates on this concept, explaining in detail why giving the Lake District world heritage status is, in his opinion, a disaster.

Before reading *Feral*, I had never considered that world heritage status could be a bad thing. The book undoubtedly changed my view, and the article reinforced it and highlighted a number of issues specific to the Lake District. I was compelled to share it with friends and family.

I grew up in Devon, surrounded by the beauty of Dartmoor, and feel incredibly protective of British countryside. I had always assumed that anybody claiming to protect the landscape would do just that. As Monbiot states in his piece "the cultural power of this industry is so great that hardly anyone dares challenge it". But he argues, contrary to world heritage status being a cause for celebration and a guarantee of the unique landscape's preservation, it will make defending our heritage more difficult because it will "be used to block efforts to reduce grazing pressure, protect the soil and bring back trees".

After reading the article, it did seem shocking to me that the National Trust, the RSPB, the Lake District national park authority and Cumbria Wildlife Trust were members of the partnership that petitioned for world heritage status. And only a handful of ecologists publicly opposed it.

I'm really happy to help bring what Monbiot writes about to a wider audience. In the article, I sense his immense frustration at seeing the issue so differently from almost everyone else and not being able to do anything to prevent what he sees as a disaster. He is a journalist who seems to be able to see issues from a different angle. I appreciate the Guardian publishing his work; he's one of the reasons I became a supporter.

Regarding the Lake District, I think it is essential we are reminded that activities like intensive sheep farming, though brilliant for sheep farmers, are not preserving our rural environment but contributing to its destruction.

In his book, Monbiot talks about shifting baseline syndrome, a term coined by a fisheries scientist, Daniel Pauly, which is the idea that we take what we grew up with to be normal and the ideal. It prevents us from seeing that there might have been a greater value in what came before, and makes for interesting reading. Change may not always be for the better.

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