

Published as Brook, I. (2009) 'United Kingdom' in Callicott, B. & Frodeman, R. eds *Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy*, Farmington Hills, MI: Macmillan, pp. 335-339.

Penultimate draft

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) is a densely populated country with a rich and complex history of human habitation and land use. Its cultural richness is due to centuries of invasions and settlements of peoples and, in the 18th century, to the wealth generated by being the first major player in the industrial revolution, which occurred against an established background of colonization and plunder of other nations' resources and labor. The density of population and the complex historical tensions between the different countries that make up the UK, different religious groups, and different social classes have been instrumental in shaping the British psyche and the relationship to nature that underlies many of the responses to environmental issues that are with us on the contemporary scene. A full catalogue of dates, events, groups, and issues is not possible in this space and would possibly shed less light than focusing on a few characteristic campaigns and individuals in greater detail. In this way we can better see the themes that have arisen in the UK context and the types of responses that have been effective.

It was Robert Hunter (1844-1913) who supplied the vision and the rhetorical power to drive forward what was to become the open space movement. Hunter worked for the Commons Protection Society and used his legal training and painstaking research of historical documents to resist further enclosure of common land by land owners. This drive was not just to protect woodland and open moors from being built on or aggressively farmed but also to keep them open for ordinary peoples' recreational enjoyment. These campaigns were fought through the courts and through parliament and were configured along class lines with the interests of the commoners being represented by Hunter and others but using the machinery of the law against those whose interests it usually represented. Hunter cleverly pushed those cases that would set a precedent and thus by saving one area from enclosure would reinvigorate the interpretation of ancient laws and rights such that many other areas remained open or were regained for the traditional seasonal grazing use of the commoners' livestock and for the fresh air and recreation of anyone who wished to visit such places.

Although ancient royal parks and forests provided open space for city dwellers close to them, other burgeoning industrialized areas had no such resources. The working and living conditions of those in the factories and the poor air quality led to a concern for the health of city dwellers. Time spent in nature was seen as morally uplifting as well as

providing fresh air and this led to an increasing number of wealthy benefactors and city corporations creating urban parks with open or very cheap access to provide healthy recreation for the masses.

The drive for open access to countryside in the UK has persisted to the present time. Some key events here include the following. In 1884 the first attempt to pass a Freedom to Roam bill in parliament failed, as did many subsequent attempts. In 1932 six people were jailed for leading a mass trespass of four to five hundred people on Kinder Scout in the Peak District, England, which in turn led to greater public support for the 'right to roam.' The Ramblers Association, whose origins lay in the local walking clubs that had sprung up in the 1880s, rekindled this form of civil disobedience by holding annual mass trespass events from 1985 onwards. These unlawful but well behaved events were instrumental in providing the pressure that eventually resulted in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. This act led to a mapping exercise culminating in the Right to Roam 2005, which gives walkers access to mountains, moor, heath, down, and common land in England and Wales. Similarly, the Land Reform Act 2003, which was fully implemented in 2005, gives the statutory right of responsible access to almost all land and water in Scotland.

Legislation like the Right to Roam opens up privately owned land, but in the UK one of the most effective means of social transformation in terms of giving people access to nature and conserving natural and cultural landscapes has been simply to buy land and have it designated for this purpose. The National Trust, established in 1895 by Robert Hunter, Octavia Hill, and Hardwicke Rawnsley, began doing exactly this with the purchase of four and a half acres of coastline at Dinas Oleu, Wales. The National Trust now manages 250,000 hectares of countryside, moorland, beaches, and coastline in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The National Trust also owns and maintains historic houses, gardens, industrial monuments, churches, and pubs. Its focus is not just conservation of nature but also the conservation of the historic fabric of the country and, perhaps most strikingly in the National Parks of England and Wales, the conservation of the social fabric or ways of life that have shaped the cultural landscapes that characterize the UK. The National Trust for Scotland has 128 properties and a similar profile of aims and activities. Both organizations are non-governmental charities funded by donations, legacies, and a very broad membership (currently 3.68 million combined), and further supported by volunteer labor. Although they are NGOs, these organizations are seen as part of the establishment: safe, non-threatening, and possibly too willing to compromise. Without them, however, the UK would look a very different place and the opportunities for everyone to experience the kinds of landscapes that inspired the Romantics, or even just some nearby nature, might have been lost forever.

Other now mainstream campaigning charity bodies have often grown from visionary individuals or small groups, sometimes beginning life focused on a small local issue and out of step with public opinion. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds began as a campaign to stop the use of grebe feathers on women's hats in 1889. It now has one million members, 200 nature reserves (130,000 hectares in total), and a remit that is ecologically focused on protecting wildlife habitats. The larger mainstream campaigning bodies tend to work in a number of directions: informing the public, including educational programs for children; research or funding research; lobbying parliament; using the legal system to challenge damaging developments; and providing a focus for their memberships' concerns. Some focus more on lobbying and legal challenges, for example the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (and its equivalent Welsh body) specializes in reasoned debate and putting pressure on planning authorities. This organization began in 1926 and has maintained a sharp focus on resisting urban sprawl and ribbon developments eating into the countryside. Other campaigning bodies see themselves as umbrella organizations, such as Transport 2000 (and Transform Scotland) which began in 1973 and has maintained a focus on transport issues and worked to represent and inform government and other campaign groups, large and small, on transport.

Grass roots activity in the UK seems to operate at a number of levels. There is mass membership of established organized campaign groups and the Green Party where the public may do no more than pay a subscription to see themselves as 'doing their bit' for the environment. Practical volunteering is widely used, for example, the National Trust has 43,000 volunteers. More radical groups have always sprung up and are characterized by many loose affiliations between different types of campaign and multiple membership by individuals or just attendance at events. An umbrella name predominant in the contemporary protest movement is Earth First! Both globally and nationally this is a non hierarchical banner for other groups or individuals who use direct action to protest about any destructive organizations or actions. In the UK direct action under this banner can consist in anything from a single individual stopping a shop operating for a morning by supergluing her hands to its door to the organization of mass protests such as the 2007 climate camp to protest about the addition of a new runway at Heathrow Airport. Contemporary direct action under any banner tends to consist in actions that are usually illegal but not dangerous to the public, and often combine humor with a serious message. For example, critical mass cycling events involve cyclists en masse using the same route during rush hour traffic, thus filling the road, but they will be invited to wear fancy dress and thus create a colorful spectacle. It's as much about consciousness-raising as practical impact.

With road building protests there is more of an emphasis on actually stopping the proposed project. Direct action can involve damage to machinery or the protesters placing themselves in danger in order to prevent tree felling or excavation. One of the more spectacular examples of this occurred during the building of the Newberry bypass, a new section of road to ease traffic congestion, which ran through three sites of special scientific interest, a designated area of outstanding natural beauty, a National Trust

nature reserve, and a historic civil war battlefield. To defend these areas and to protest about road building in general, trees and specially dug tunnels were occupied by a hard core of protesters (eco-warriors) and numerous camps were set up along the proposed route. Although all the camps were finally evicted and work began on the bypass in 1996 the protesters received a significant amount of publicity, with the media highlighting one young man called Swampy (Daniel Hooper), the last to be evicted from the tunnels to protect Snelsmoor Common. The dedication and risk to life of these individuals over a long period as well as a march of 5,000 people impressed the public. The cost to the construction company of delays and security, which alone was estimated at £23.7 million, as well as the costs of policing such protests put an extra question mark over road building in the future.

Protests like Newbury brought hard core environmental campaigners, who might travel from one protest to another, together with local people whose concerns were more place specific and conservation organizations with specific interests. In this particular instance it also triggered a report from the WWF-UK criticizing the government's own watchdog for conservation, English Nature (EN). It appeared that if EN could not protect an area with the multiple designations that the Newberry site had from a stretch of road that was only 13.5 kilometers long - and that was predicted to be ineffective at reducing traffic elsewhere - then it was powerless.

A campaign that brought together NGOs, campaigners, and the wider general public was the resistance to the introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Resistance to a new form of technology was the focus. Genetic modification (GM) was uniquely placed to bring together resistance on a number of fronts. The technology was seen as controlled and promulgated by multinational companies to the detriment of poor farmers globally, foodstuffs with GMOs were perceived by the public as dangerous, and the growing of GM crops was widely predicted to create 'super weeds' that would impact on biodiversity. Alongside campaigns by established groups like Friends of the Earth new groups emerged. One of the most effective groups for getting information to people and 'outing' industry front groups was the Norfolk Genetic Information Network (now GMWatch). Another that works in a highly scientifically literate way at the science/public information interface is the Institute for Science in Society (I-sis), a not-for-profit organization founded in 1999 by Mae-Wan Ho and Peter Saunders. Anti-GM, like many environmental campaigns, is not just about legislating against or preventing something but also about engaging the public in decision making and encouraging informed debate. Not only did the GM issue stimulate public debate across the country but the wider general public also got involved by simply not buying GM food, much to the surprise of major UK supermarkets who had to quickly switch to advertising that they were 'GM free'. Resistance to GM was a wider European phenomenon and the battles are still being waged in the law courts between the European Union and the World Trade Organization about allowing the importation of GM foods, whilst on the

ground in Britain any crop trials are hastily destroyed by protesters' direct action of pulling them up, sometimes at risk of imprisonment.

There are a number of themes that characterize environmental debates in the UK and one is the lay person's strong love of nature. In a country dominated by cultural landscapes and with no real wilderness this might seem an odd juxtaposition but it speaks to a love of countryside as a place of human and nature interaction. In the farming country and the cities and towns the palimpsest of previous human activity lends a richness that people love and work to conserve. However, the problem of litter (arguably worse than in many other places in Europe) can suggest a lack of care at even the most basic level. As everywhere, commercial forces are evident: they drive developers to build uninspiring houses on green belt land rather than well designed eco-developments on brown field inner city sites and town councils to do nothing to prevent historically rich and socially cohesive towns becoming, what the New Economics Forum has dubbed, 'clone towns' as the chain stores move in. The new 'Transition Towns' movement appears to be taking off in the UK and addresses the connected problems of peak oil, global climate change and community disengagement and alienation at the local level.

Environmental philosophy in the UK has developed in keeping with the nature of the country and its people. It has emphasized approaches that are scientifically and historically informed and the creative possibilities of human/nature collaboration. Also evident is recognition of Romantic figures like Ruskin and Wordsworth as a resource one can go to for inspiration just as legitimately as one might turn to ecological science. Another underlying theme is the importance of transforming rather than denying the urban experience coupled with a politically aware concern for everyone having opportunities to experience nature and to live in socially vibrant communities. Environmental philosophers in the UK have to battle against the conservative forces of philosophy in general and particularly the current Research Assessment Exercise, which is widely perceived as privileging theoretical over more practical philosophy. However, the relative academic freedom and openness to interdisciplinarity of the UK Higher Education sector has meant that it was the first place in the world to establish a dedicated Masters course in environmental philosophy. Lancaster University's MA in Values and Environment, which now runs from the University of Central Lancashire, was set up in 1989 and the journal *Environmental Values* was also established at Lancaster in 1992.

In this crowded land good reasoned argument, a tolerance of difference, a feeling for the local, and a dash of eccentricity have achieved great things, but even more effort will be needed for a truly sustainable future.

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