

What is our landscape worth?

Description

Like many people, I have not had a good thing to say about the banks for several years. Following the financial crisis, I came to the conclusion that the banks should not be allowed to issue paper currency or create electronic money, as debt, out of thin air. Such money is often used in socially and environmentally damaging ways, including financing operations which undermine the very purpose of our National Parks.

However, if the Scottish Government had decided to issue paper currency which featured three of Scotland's great landscape writers, Sorley MacLean, Norman MacCaig and Nan Shepherd and a nature quote from Mary Somerville, I would have been delighted. RBS did just that ten days ago when they announced the theme of their new banknotes would be "the fabric of nature".

It's ironic that the Scottish Committee of RBS, which decided on the new banknote designs, has given more prominence in this election campaign to the importance of our relationship with nature than our politicians. The banks though understand something about the importance of beauty. As I read somewhere last week, imagine a £20 note on plain paper, no-one would believe it represented anything. Create a wonderful design and adorn it with someone who represents integrity and you have transformed a piece of paper, into fiat money, something which embodies a complex system of values and beliefs.

The news coverage and the RBS website did not say us what quotations will be included on the banknotes. I have struggled to decipher them but they include the following lines from MacCaig:

"The cork that can't be travels"

Nose of a dog otter.

and "It's a grand thing to get leave to live" from the £5 note featuring Nan Shepherd, the great writer about the Cairngorms.

I wonder what MacCaig, who wrote

Who possesses this landscape?

The man who bought it or

I who am possessed by it?

False questions, for

this landscape is

masterless?!

would have made of it?

A few days ago, I was helpfully reminded by a reader that the SNP whose manifesto like other parties I had criticised for their lack of meaningful commitments to landscape and the natural environment had initiated a ban on windfarms in National Scenic Areas and areas of Wild Land. A step to be welcomed and in the right direction. It is though a step which I suspect the other political parties, had they been in power, might also have made in the face of widespread discontent from people concerned about our landscapes. I do not believe a few such steps forward can disguise the lack of vision or the fact that they are re-positioning after the event.

We need our politicians to escape the clutches of their chaperones, experience the landscape for themselves and then maybe borrow from some of the writers who will be featured on the new RBS notes to articulate what's important about the natural environment. They might then start to think about how better to direct investment in the countryside and our National Parks including where RBS puts our money.

Category

1. Cairngorms
2. National Parks

Tags

1. natural environment
2. political parties
3. Scottish Government
4. vision for National Parks

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