

The most beautiful country in the world?

Description



Looking from the pole which marks the centre of the proposed new town at an An Camas Mor toward Ghru

Anyone who tries to understand human affairs from a global perspective will have probably greeted last week's announcement that a poll of readers of the Rough Guides had found Scotland to be the most beautiful country in the world with a deep shrug.

It is of course just a piece of marketing based on a very selective sample of people who are able to

travel and choose to visit certain countries. That Scotland came out top beating Canada, New Zealand and South Africa says a lot. This was a poll of people from the English speaking world with what appear to be anglo-saxon perspectives. A month ago I was in the Dolomites, where its not hard to find marketing blurb claiming that the Dolomites are indeed the most beautiful place in the world. I wonder how many Italians were included in this poll? And what about the mass of humanity who live in the third world, often much closer to the natural environment than we do, but whose experience of beauty is being destroyed by logging companies, mines and agricultural plantations which also displace them from the land.

Polls like this are not just an indulgence which should be accepted with a shrug. They feed a racist view of the world, where we rarely stop long enough to consider what people from elsewhere and who are not like us may think, and which is blind to what capitalism is doing in our name to other parts of the world. They also feed a privileged view of Scotland, which treats a few unspoiled land and city scapes (from Skye to Edinburgh) as epitomising the country and is blind to the many far from beautiful places where people actually live, with all the impact that has for health and human happiness. Social injustice, which is everywhere and growing, is never beautiful.

Even if we ignore, like the tourists, the ugly bits of Scotland, objectively, how can you compare the best bits, the beauty that lies in our hills, lochs and western seaboard with the high mountains of the Himalaya or the deserts of Australia or the savannah in Africa? People can only answer questions about what they know about. I love Scotland but then its the landscape of home. If you polled everyone in the world about what was the most beautiful country I am pretty certain China, having the most people, would come out top and Scotland, being small, would come out way down the list. That's not much use to Visit Scotland though, in their mission to promote Scotland, so the hype and privileged world view that goes with it will continue.

Polls like this also ignore the reality that across the world humans are destroying the natural environment and natural beauty at ever increasing rates and although "peak" destruction in Scotland took place something like 200 years ago, it is continuing with the say-so, nay encouragement, of those in power. The Herald in its coverage of the story ([see here](#)) gave a wonderful illustration of the complacency of the current Scottish Government:

"A Scottish Government spokeswoman said its policies ensure developments are sited at appropriate locations".

Really? It seems to me that only someone who had never visited An Camas Mor (photo above) or was blinded by business, greed and profit could ever say that.

And that is my greatest concerns about this poll, it lets those in power off the hook and will undermine our National Parks, which were set up to protect the landscape and find more sustainable ways for humans to relate to nature. The thinking goes like this.....

....if Scotland is the most beautiful country in the world, then:

- people cannot be really concerned about the proliferation of hydro tracks which has destroyed the landscape of Glen Falloch and Glen Dochart for example with the blessing of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority
- surely, with so much beauty, we can easily afford to lose a few areas in our National Parks to development, whether to the An Camas Mor new town, Flamingo Land at Balloch or Natural Retreats at Cairngorm
- people cannot be really concerned about how our landscapes are treated on a day to day basis, whether by Highlands and Islands Enterprise at Cairngorm or grouse moor owners.....in fact, perhaps our landowners are right, its these land management practices which make the country beautiful
- why on earth did parkswatch make a fuss about the beech trees on Inchtavannach being felled in the name of science? This poll came after that felling and all the other destruction covered in the last 18 months and that doesn't seem to have altered people's perceptions of Scotland.
- this just shows that people aren't very concerned about the visual impact of blanket conifer afforestation and subsequent clearfelling by the Forestry Commission so we can just let these practices continue in the National Park

The point that our politicians and powers that be must not be allowed to forget is that, whatever Scotland's position in the world, our National Parks have, since their creation, presided over a further degradation of the landscapes they were set up to protect. What we need is not international opinion polls, which simply provide an excuse for our National Parks to continue as they are present, but a real change in direction which puts landscape and social justice first.

Category

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2. Loch Lomond and Trossachs
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Tags

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