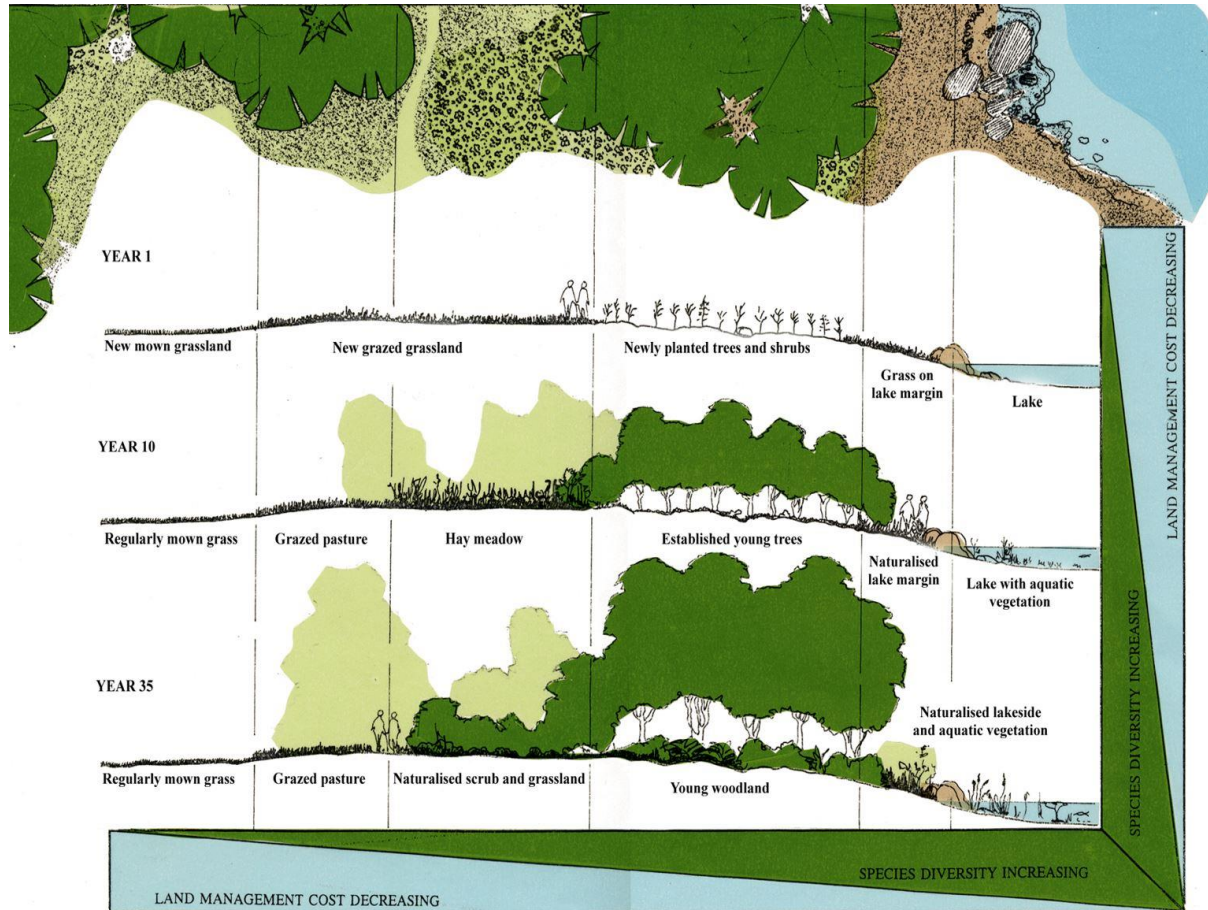


December 2018

DIVERSITY ACCORDING TO IDRIS



Principles of Landscape Management

Ivor has been talking about diversity these last few weeks. I have my own slant on the topic.

Ivor made the point that diversity can cause problems when a team of people with different specialisms have to work together and that uniformity and having a common purpose can work well. But in nature one rarely finds uniformity amongst ecosystems unless you are looking at man-made fields, woodlands or forests, not much by way of evaluable ecosystems there one would say. Diversity is the natural state of things so far as successful ecosystems are concerned and in today's world successful professional teams need to be diverse too despite the problems in managing them.

Even when an area is seriously affected by a fire the reserves in the soil regenerate in a record time to produce variety and a balance far quicker than we can. But there is no need for us to be downhearted. What we need to do is work with nature and appreciate that sustainable ecosystems are for the long term even when fire periodically plays a management role that might appear to be destructive.

At RML we have long preached the importance of management in the long term development of sustainable environments/landscapes. Our diagram of the relationship between costs, time and species diversity is one of my favourites and neatly encapsulates our long experience of nursing very young landscapes in stressed environments. It was a long time ago that we persuaded the Welsh Development Agency that the traditional aftercare period in construction projects of just 12 months was totally inadequate when we were working on derelict land. Gradually a three year and then a five-

year aftercare period became the norm but we would have liked more. Today a 10 year management programme after completion of engineering works is not unusual.

About 45 years ago Ivor and his colleagues were preparing engineered landforms composed of materials ranging from coal or steel slags to slate waste and finely grained metalliferous slimes. It was obvious that importing top soil was not an option on the grounds of cost, availability or the weeds that came with it. "We had to make do with what we had" he says. In 1973 Professor Tony Bradshaw in Liverpool explained to Ivor that the structure, density and free-draining qualities of the materials that we were dealing with was much more important than fertility. Root development was the key factor if plants were to grow. They agreed that if pioneer plants grew well then managing growth by controlling the use of fertilisers would allow self-sown naturally selected plants to occupy our sites quite early on. Ivor realised that better informed engineers had a role to play in preparing sites for this purpose and modified the earthworks specifications to include deep ripping of compacted materials for example. The collaboration with Liverpool University lasted many years.

Diversity in the flora encouraged diversity in the fauna too. We spotted 'squirrels hiding nuts in grass' we really did see them planting acorns. Mind you, controlling animals is a different thing altogether from controlling vegetation. I am amused and more than a little pleased when dormice take over the bat boxes that we have carefully located where we think that bats will find them useful.

When we were dealing with toxic metalliferous slimes I admit that we did import subsoil of low fertility from fields adjacent to the site at Fan lead mine and left the farmer with his top soil and better layers of sub soil. The fields were regraded, drained, cultivated and sown with the farmer's preferred seed mix. The plan worked to everyone's benefit financially. He was pleased and now uses some of the reclaimed areas on the mine site as grazing for sheep as part of the management programme. At Minera lead mines near Wrexham we capped the slimes with local coal waste and so converted a lead mine scheme into coal mine style project and reclaimed the coal mine as well. In a way that approach is diverse too.

Kind regards

**Idris**

Chief ranter and problem solver

Richards, Moorehead & Laing Ltd

IMPROVEMENTS MAKE STRAIGHT ROADS BUT IN WALES WE WANT TO DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT

*"Improvements make straight roads but winding roads are the roads of genius",* said John Locke in the 17th century. I used John Locke's words in a newsletter in 2015 (and again in 2017) when I claimed that our new roads were designed to show some respect for nature. This was written as a response to a demand by the then Minister of State at the Department for Transport who said that;

*"Our goal is not just to undo the most intrusive, insensitive road design of the past 50 years. It's to create a new aesthetic. Values that reflect and even enhance the beauty of the local landscape."*

*I believe we can set a new design standard for roads. One that balances aesthetic, functional and technological considerations.*

*We stand at the start of a new road to a destination some believed we were no longer capable of reaching.”*



I said then that we had been travelling along a much broader road than the one which the Minister talked about, confident that our skills and understanding of construction were improving. In every sense we were a multidisciplinary industry. Special skills such as those mentioned by the Minister had become commonplace in the industry as a whole.

Designers are being put to the test once again in Wales by being required to take account of the **‘Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act’ (WFGA)**. A Ministerial initiative is being implemented by Transport for Wales to create ‘green corridors’ along our trunk roads that reflect more carefully the character of the land through which they traverse and to reflect the purposes of the WFGA. It seems to me that what we must imbue in our design teams is a combination of;

- aesthetics
- artistic quality and
- emotional content.

All three brought together to illustrate a sense of home space that we keep talking about. Mathew Rhys the Welsh actor living in America says *“The Welsh have this impressively rose-tinted mythical idea of what home is especially for those who leave”*, but admits that he too was traumatised by leaving Cardiff.

This 'home place' is not something that I think of in any melancholic sense though Rhys clearly thinks that most of us Welsh are melancholic when thinking about home. I suppose that Rhys has a point because the Welsh invented the words 'cynefin' and 'hiraeth' to encompass these complicated feelings. I admit that my attachment to my home place in Abercynon is deep and emotional. That is how it is, I carry it about with me, I am always aware of it. One of my best and dearest friends who was heavily involved in managing the programme dealing the reclamation of derelict land in Wales after Aberfan was melancholic about his work and perhaps much more. In all fairness Gwyn had much to be melancholic about when one thinks about what the industrial revolution had done to Wales and what needed to be done to repair the damage. I did my best to cheer him up with my reports and he always looked forward to receiving them. Gwyn freely admitted to me that other engineers' reports depressed him so I felt that was doing my bit for Wales. Emotion drove Gwyn and the rest of us forward.

So re-designing some of our existing roads as green corridors to reflect our present day thoughts of home and to present it in public is quite a challenge. In my experience such a challenge cannot be met by melancholy, it requires a forward looking vision and not a little optimism that our landscapes will improve as a result of well targeted management and the passage of time.

I fear that our leaders in the Welsh Assembly expect instant results. Now this does dismay me so a little educational input is required as well as some landscaping magic and subterfuge. I'm sure that landscape architects can do that.

Kind regards

**Ivor**

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