

# Geotourism: The Tourism of Geology and Landscape

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Design and setting by P.K. McBride

# 2 The significance of aesthetic landscape appreciation to modern geotourism provision

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## Introduction

Many of the stakeholders involved in modern geotourism provision lack awareness of how the concept essentially emerged, developed and was defined in Europe. Such stakeholders are unaware of how many of the modern approaches to landscape promotion and interpretation actually have nineteenth century antecedents. Similarly, many of the apparently modern threats to, and issues around, the protection of wild and fragile landscapes and the geoconservation of specific geosites also first emerged in the nineteenth century; the solutions that were developed to address those threats and issues were first applied in the early twentieth century and were subsequently much refined by the opening of the twenty-first century. However, the European engagement with wild and fragile landscapes as places to be appreciated and explored began much earlier than the nineteenth century and can be traced back to Renaissance times. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a summary consideration of this rather neglected aspect of geotourism, initially by considering its modern recognition and definitions and then by examining the English Lake District (with further examples from Britain and Australia available at the website) as a particular case study along with examples.

The contemporary approach to landscape promotion with a geological basis was initially recognised and termed ‘geotourism’ in the 1990s when it was first defined (Hose, 1995: 17). Geotourism is a form of ‘special interest’ tourism in which the participants are motivated by their dedication to geological enquiry. Its original definition with some of its associated concepts was included within the *Geoparks Programme Feasibility Study* (UNESCO, 2000) as were the essential elements of a later redefinition to:

*The provision of interpretative facilities and services to promote the value and societal benefit of geologic[al] and geomorphologic[al] sites and their materials, and ensure their conservation, for the use of students, tourists and other recreationalists.*

(Hose, 2000: 136)

Thus it encompass geosites’ interpretative and promotional media, along with the artefacts, locales, and memorials of their associated Earth scientists. It is a geo-heritage promotional approach with antecedents in aesthetic landscape movements that promoted travel into ‘wild’ areas, a view which emerged in Britain and Europe and was spread to their colonial territories, from the late seventeenth century onwards. Its modern

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practitioners generally do not recognise the significance of the aesthetic movements and their associated artistic and literary heritages that have impacted upon the perception of landscapes, even though these underpin much modern geotourism. Landscapes are social and cultural constructs; the perceptions of landscapes and the values ascribed to them are an admixture of direct observation and cultural interpretation (see Figure 2.1).

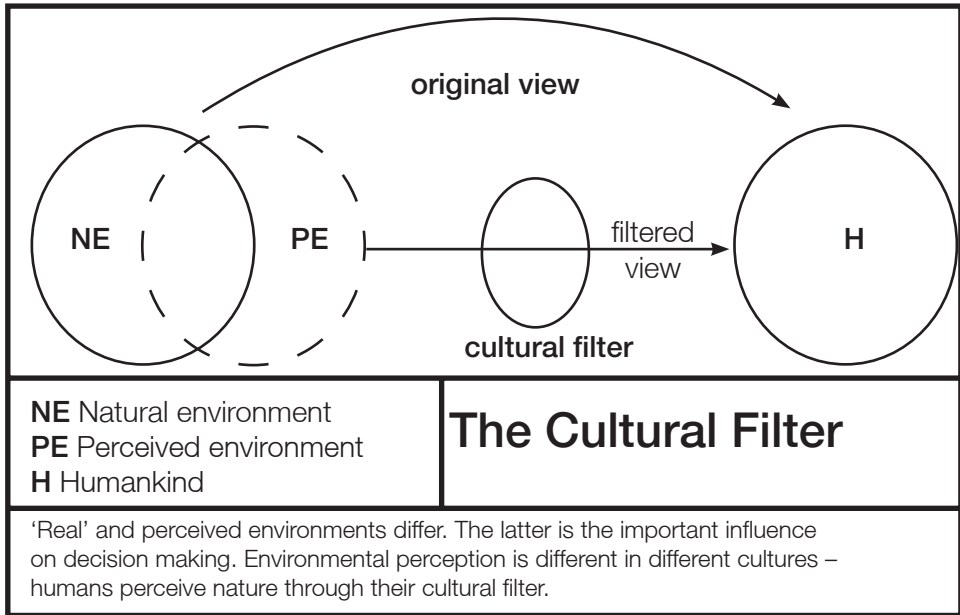


Figure 2.1: The Cultural Filter.

### The recognition of aesthetic landscapes

From the Renaissance onwards, the activities of European leisure travellers have been centred upon their search for new and different experiences and places – a quest for the novel, exotic and authentic; their experiences of places and landscapes were a core element of that quest. Landscapes are always viewed through travellers' mindsets which are influenced by what they already know or expect and by their preoccupying interests. Specific expectations about the places and landscapes travellers and tourists plan to go to or actually visit are created and dominated by the images in art galleries and tourism publications rather than their actual physical encounters; they exist as images composed of key reference points woven or mapped together by imagination, experiences and their recollections. Landscapes are essentially jumbles of elements ordered and bounded by travellers' and tourists' knowledge and experiences. Their knowledge is based upon their education and major interests. Landscapes must be experienced to be properly known as they can never be fully described by one individual's experiences because everyone perceives them differently. Travellers, tourists, artists, writers, geographers and Earth scientists define, delineate, describe and depict places and landscapes from different perspectives or mindsets. Landscapes as seen and valued are then a function of the mind, with individuals reacting to specific places and landscapes as defined by their educational and cultural, especially visual art, experiences.

**Chapter extract**

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