

Time and Mind

The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rtam20>

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To cite this article: Abbi Flint & Benjamin Jennings (2020): Saturated with meaning: peatlands, heritage and folklore, Time and Mind, DOI: [10.1080/1751696X.2020.1815293](https://doi.org/10.1080/1751696X.2020.1815293)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1751696X.2020.1815293>



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Published online: 30 Nov 2020.



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Saturated with meaning: peatlands, heritage and folklore

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ABSTRACT

Peatlands have often been represented in cultural material as being dangerous and inhospitable places, partly based on post-medieval influences, but also partly based on elements of folklore which emphasise the 'other-worldly' and liminal nature of these environments. Using Ilkley Moor, West Yorkshire, as a case study, the role of heritage, folklore and cultural media in guiding perceptions of the landscape is explored. Contemporary society is more diversified than historic situations, and our review indicates that perceptions of heritage landscapes reflect this complexity. The use of the peatland by different groups is explored, before addressing the interconnected roles of folklore and archaeology in past, present and future engagement with this landscape.

KEYWORDS

Wetlands; peatlands;
heritage; folklore;
archaeology

Introduction

Peatlands and moorlands are extensive features of the landscape of the British Isles; including Exmoor, Dartmoor, the Somerset Levels, the Norfolk and Cambridgeshire Fens, the Pennine uplands, and the Flow Country (Scotland), large areas of the landscape are (or historically were) covered by peatland (Lindsay, Birnie, and Clough 2014). Peatlands are recognised as important, and threatened landscapes, which offer vital ecosystem services, including as an important archive of historical and archaeological material (Bain et al. 2011). These areas often show an incredible depth of history, with archaeological remains attesting to human occupation and interaction in the Neolithic and later phases of prehistory, for both 'ritualistic' and 'mundane' activities. Contrasting this evidence of use during prehistory to generalized attitudes towards peatlands during the post-medieval period and later, it is possible to consider depictions in popular culture, such as the following examples, as reflecting general attitudes towards peatlands:

... there rose ever, dark against the evening sky, the long, gloomy curve of the moor, broken by jagged and sinister hills. (Doyle 2012, 68)

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The longer one stays here the more does the spirit of the moor sink into one's soul, its vastness, and also its grim charm. When you are once out upon its bosom you have left all traces of modern England behind you ... (Doyle 2012, 94)

Stapleton laughed. "That is the great Grimpen Mire," said he. "A false step yonder means death to man or beast. ... Even in dry seasons it is a danger to cross it ... (Doyle 2012, 83)

Rank reeds and lush, slimy water-plants sent an odour of decay and a heavy miasmatic vapour onto our faces, while a false step plunged us more than once thigh-deep into the dark, quivering mire, which shook for yards in soft undulations around our feet. Its tenacious grip plucked at our heels as we walked, and when we sank into it, it was as if some malignant hand was tugging us down into those obscene depths, so grim and purposeful was the clutch in which it held us. (Doyle 2012, 197-198)

These sections of classic literature, while undoubtedly written for dramatic effect and to emphasise the otherworldly nature of the peatlands, would have simultaneously influenced and been influenced by contemporary perceptions of peatland landscapes and environments and so resonate with deeper cultural perspectives. The northern moors, in particular, have been framed by writers (e.g. the Brontë/Law/Grubstone (Historic England) as wild and alien (Spracklen 2016). At the same time, some factual aspects occur within the popular literature. For example, within *The Hound of the Baskervilles* we hear of the experience of walking on deep peat, with the peat 'shaking' under foot, and are told of the time depth of the moors, with a knowledge of their antiquity and prehistoric occupations:

... on the other hand, you are conscious everywhere of the homes and the work of the prehistoric people. On all sides of you as you walk are the houses of these forgotten folk, with their graves and the huge monoliths which are supposed to have marked their temples. As you look at their grey stone huts against the scarred hillsides you leave your own age behind you, and if you were to see a skin-clad, hairy man crawl out from the low door fitting a flint-tipped arrow on to the string of his bow, you would feel that his presence there was more natural than your own. The strange thing is that they should have lived so thickly on what must always have been most unfruitful soil. I am no antiquarian, but I could imagine that they were some unwarlike and harried race who were forced to accept that which none other would occupy. (Doyle 2012, 94-95)

The environmental history of peatlands varies between specific locations and the variety of peatland under consideration, e.g. raised peats, upland blanket peat, or fenland (Lindsay, Birnie, and Clough 2014). However, regardless of form, there is widespread evidence of prehistoric human occupation across peatland environments. This paper will explore the relation of sites' archaeological and historic interest to the development and perception of folklore, and how these sites and related folklore (a form of intangible heritage) may be used to mediate between use of environments by a range of groups with different aims or objectives.

This work contributes to the JPI-CH funded research project *Wetland Futures in Contested Environments*, jointly run at the University of Bradford, University College Cork, and Wageningen University and Research, which seeks to identify contemporary use and perceptions of landscapes, and how differences and conflict can be reconciled.

Time depth of peatlands

Despite their prevalence around the UK, and their appearance, peatlands are neither a static form of environment nor eternal elements of the landscape. In fact, many of the upland blanket peats within the UK have formed – at least in part – as a result of early human interaction and land clearance for agricultural purposes during the Neolithic and Bronze Age. As such, the peatlands of Exmoor, Dartmoor, and the Pennines would likely have been covered by forest if we were to visit the area c. 10 000 BCE (Tallis 1991; Riley and Wilson-North 2001). Visiting again c. 3000 BCE would most likely reveal an area partially forested, but with cleared areas, and increasing human occupation during the following millennia evidenced by a series of enclosures (Figure 1) and field systems (particularly in south-west England) for agricultural division and production (Riley and Wilson-North 2001), and climatic peatland inception in parts of the Pennines (Tallis 1991). Thus, the earlier descriptions of peatlands as being unfruitful soil are incorrect – these areas would have been highly productive environments for populations accessing a variety of resources.



Figure 1. Enclosure on Ilkley Moor, west Yorkshire. The line of drystone walling (beginning in lower right, extending in an arc to the right centre) is the remnants of a prehistoric enclosure. A modern path cuts (grass in foreground) through the site, but little of the enclosure is visible without actively looking for it in the vegetation growth. (Photograph B Jennings).

Within the raised bogs of the Somerset Levels, a different form of occupation and use is identified from the archaeological remains, and one which is similar to later post-medieval use. In addition to peripheral settlement areas – for example, Glastonbury Lake-Village (Coles and Minnitt 1995), there are a large number of trackways traversing the peatlands, such as the Sweet Track (Coles and Coles 1986). These features would have allowed persons to navigate through and across the peat, accessing resources and moving between areas of settlement and those of other functions; thus, the peatland becomes an obstacle or boundary to be traversed as much as a landscape of use.

It is the areas of other use that start to see hints of potential folklore developing; aspects of potentially 'ritualistic' practice preserved in the archaeological record. Sites such as stone circles, for example, The 12 Apostles (Historic England 2020a) (Figure 2), Roms Law/Grubstone (Historic England 2020b), and Backstone (Historic England 2020c) stone circles on Ilkley Moor, are a well-recorded aspect of later prehistory in the UK, and likely constituted a ritualistic (in the broad sense) focal point for society. Where these stone circles occur near upland blanket peat, such as Ilkley Moor, it is probable that their construction predated the main development of the peatland, and they are initially aspects of the land clearance and deforestation environment.

Other archaeological remains from peatlands were clearly deposited after the establishment of the peatland environment – namely the preserved human remains known as 'bog bodies' (Turner and Scaife 1995; Glob 1998). Found across north-western Europe, and broadly extending from the Neolithic to the Medieval period in terms of dating, the bog bodies are preserved primarily because of their placement into water-logged and mildly acidic environments, ensuring the preservation of soft tissue across millennia. The historic finding of such bodies may have partially led to the belief that people could become lost in the bottomless bogs and that the peatlands were inherently dangerous places (Meredith 2002). Archaeological recovery has in fact shown that many of these bog bodies were carefully and deliberately positioned. They were not individuals who became lost in peatlands but were intentional internments in what may have been considered liminal places (Chapman 2015; Chapman et al. 2020). In lowland areas of Europe, bodies considered to be dangerous in some way were sometimes deposited far from settlements in remote places such as bogs and swamps (Barber 2010). The disposal and re-emergence of bodies may have given rise to folklore when supernatural reasons are ascribed to natural processes and the well-preserved nature of bog-bodies. Thus, folklore potentially draws on the existing liminal position of these landscapes (as uninhabitable and dangerous) and sites for the disposal of dangerous bodies, which may then return in unexpected ways.

Exploring connections between place-lore and bog-bodies in Estonia, Kama (2016) identified two strands: one concerning the kind of actions that could cause bog-bodies (e.g. wetland burials and drowning) and another, smaller body of lore, relating to the discovery of human remains. Whilst we should



Figure 2. The Twelve Apostles stone circle, Ilkley Moor. Only a section of the stone circle is imaged, as on the day of visiting two groups of people were seated against the stones for a picnic lunch. The monument was being utilised as a convenient windbreak, and discussion with the groups revealed no other knowledge of the monument and enquiries about its potential origin as a ‘mystic’ or ‘druidic’ place. (Photograph B Jennings).

exercise caution in making direct connections between folklore and archaeological finds, Kama (2016) suggests place-lore could inform the choice of sites for archaeological investigation.

Although there is no contemporary written record, these aspects of prehistoric human interaction in peatland environments demonstrate that a range of knowledge and understandings have been applied to peatlands in the past, all of which would have had a variety of bases in ‘folklore’ and ritual knowledge.

Peatland cartography

Prior to the eighteenth century, moorlands tended to be ‘regarded with awe or distaste. They were waste places and better avoided ...’ (Simmons 2003,

325), but within the later post-medieval phase an increasing desire to cartographically divide the landscape into ownership territories and functional usage represents the culmination of centuries of agricultural development in the environment. Increasing agricultural use of peatland environments – for either arable or pastoral purposes – led to drainage of the landscape and degradation of the peat, with the effect of reducing, or changing, the concept of risk and danger in these environments – effectively domesticating them. At the same time as reducing some peatlands, those which remained undrained – essentially untamed – become more otherworldly in nature; an aspect only enhanced by the frequent depiction of peat- and moorlands as empty, almost waste-like spaces on maps, for example, Ordnance survey sheet Yorkshire 186, surveyed 1847–1848, published 1851, shows few features in the wet areas of Ilkley Moor, with expanses labelled as ‘marsh’ and no features mapped, though features are labelled in the drier areas of the moor, including archaeological elements, and a ‘Faeries Kirk’.¹ Of course, this otherworldly aspect of peatlands would be mostly evident in populations who do not live near to those areas, as highlighted in the excerpts from *The Hound of the Baskervilles* above. Populations living and working in and near peatlands would have understood those environments in a very different manner to those living in more urbanized areas; familiarity with the environments would reduce aspects of otherworldly nature and reduce the risk associations, while also encouraging the development of local and regional folklore relating to those landscapes. Ilkley Moor, United Kingdom, acts as a case study to explore the folklore associated with peatlands and its relationship with the ways people have and may continue to engage with this landscape.

Ilkley Moor

Ilkley Moor, located in West Yorkshire, United Kingdom, is an area of upland blanket peat, and forms a portion of the South Pennines Special Protection Area (SPA). It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) located between the Aire and Wharfe rivers, and the population centres of Ilkley and Keighley. Ilkley Moor is a sub-division of Rombalds Moor under a naming convention based around administrative boundaries and land ownership (hereafter the area will be generally referred to as Ilkley Moor). Contained within Ilkley Moor are a wide variety of ancient and modern archaeological and geological features of interest. In addition to these areas of interest, the moors are presently, or have been recently, used for a wide variety of recreational purposes including grouse shooting, hiking, mountain biking and climbing, in addition to functional use for livestock grazing. In this manner, Ilkley Moor can be seen as a contested environment with a variety of interested parties using the area.

Archaeological and geological heritage

Ilkley Moor has a variety of archaeological sites contained within its boundaries, including prehistoric standing stone circles (Figure 1), prehistoric settlements and enclosures (Figure 2), prehistoric rock art (Figure 3), trackways, historic quarries (Figure 4) and lime pits (Johnson 2010), historic sheep pens, historic follies, and military remains (The South Pennines Watershed Landscape Project n.d.). There is also a substantial area of historic to contemporary inscribed graffiti occurring on a large rock plateau adjacent to the Cow and Calf geological feature (Figure 5).

Some archaeological features, such as stone circles, are readily apparent in the environment. Others, such as rock art, can be difficult to identify, either as features on the stone surfaces, or physically locating the panels at different times of year according to vegetation growth. Larger features, such as enclosures are often physically visible, but comprehension of the feature requires a level of background archaeological knowledge (cf. Figure 2). Interpretations of the rock art vary, with alternatives including signifying a connection to place, a form of communication (Hutton 2013), way-markers (Waddington 2007), having ritual or religious significance (Allen 1879, 1896), an acknowledgement or negotiation with other-than-human persons (Wallis 2009, 2013), referencing natural monuments (Deacon 2020) for public or private audiences (NADRAP 2008), and Hutton (2013, 69) suggests that offerings (e.g. of milk) may have been made to fairies in the hollows of rock-carvings in West Yorkshire in 'modern times'. Their meaning remains ambiguous; they are difficult to definitively date or make clear associations with specific uses or other aspects of material culture. It is possible that these diverse



Figure 3. Example of prehistoric cup and ring rock art from Ilkley Moor. The motifs were made by grinding the rock until depressions were formed in the surface. (Photograph B Jennings).



Figure 4. Historic quarry, adjacent to the Cow and Calf geological feature. The quarry is now used as a popular area for rock climbing. (Photograph B Jennings).

interpretations have both influenced, and been influenced by, folklore relating to rock-art sites and their landscapes.

In addition to the visible and known archaeological remains, peatlands contain a variety of information relating to the past environment, including pollen records and preserved plant and wood remains. These aspects can aid in the reconstruction of the environmental setting and evolution of peatlands over time, yet remain invisible to general users of the peatland. Environmental records are an inaccessible form of heritage to the general users of an area, and their need for scientific interpretation and analysis negates the possibility for the creation of folklore. This can be directly contrasted to the hidden, as yet to be recorded, archaeological remains contained within peatlands. Such remains when they are encountered, are often discovered by chance during either leisure or working activities in



Figure 5. Graffiti inscriptions on rocks adjacent to the Cow and Calf feature. Inscriptions dating from at least the 19th century are evident, and a series of steps have been cut to allow access to the main plateau. (Photographs B Jennings).

the environment, such as with many of the bog body finds. Some of these remains may be identified to heritage workers (ideally all should), but due to issues of recognition smaller items may be removed and kept privately, or features of the landscape may be observed, considered, discussed and hypothesized without being addressed as elements of archaeological or

heritage nature. Through these encounters, elements of archaeology and heritage in the peatlands may begin to inform, contribute to, and create folklore.

Folklore of Ilkley Moor

The brief summary of folklore presented here is drawn from a literature review of (mainly online) published sources pertaining to Ilkley Moor and its heritage. A broad view of folklore is taken, as not only including accounts of myths and legends, but evidence of past and contemporary cultural perceptions and beliefs about Ilkley Moor from journalistic and travel writing as well.

While much folklore related to peatlands appears to be generalized across the landscape form as a whole – e.g. Bog Faeries, bottomless depths, will-o'-the-wisps, etc. (Meredith 2002) and the recurrent themes of black moor dogs (Rudkin 1938) – there are some elements of folklore that relate specifically to features of Ilkley Moor.

The large geological feature on the moor known as The Cow and Calf (Figure 6) has an origin story based on folklore linking to the name of the wider moor – Rombalds Moor – either referring to a local giant or to the local Norman Lord Robert de Romillé (Cartwright 1888). Aitkenhead (2003, 180) reproduces the text from a council-provided information board outlining this story:

Rombald was a giant that lived here a few years ago. One day he made his wife so angry that she chased him across their back garden which was called Rombald's Moor. As he fled from the wrath of his wife, Rombald jumped across the valley, dislodging the



Figure 6. Cow and Calf rocks. (Photograph B Jennings).

Calf Rock as he did so. Where Rombald landed after jumping the valley, his footprint can still be seen on Almscliffe Crags

Further versions of this story describe Rombald's wife filling her apron with stones, with which to pelt her husband, but filling it so full it breaks and spills creating two cairns known as the Great and Little Skirtful of Stones (Harte 2019).

Combined with these specific aspects of local folklore there are elements of the more typical variety of folklore related to moorland environments. For instance, Bennett (2001) draws on published and anecdotal accounts of folklore, and his own personal experiences, relating to various natural and archaeological sites on Rombalds Moor. These include reported sightings of mysterious lights, fairies, ghosts and UFOs; and sites as places for gatherings of the Pendle and Fewston witches (associations of peatlands and witches can also be seen further afield in Wales, in the tale of Yr Hen Wrach, Barnes 2005, 5). Concerning the prehistoric stone circles, there are account of Grubstones Circle being a Council of Mute assembly place, with Freemasons using it as a meeting place in medieval and later periods (Bennett 1994). Other sites are described as used in the historical period as part of traditional May Day/Beltane rites and processions, and in the modern period by pagan groups and ritual Magickians (Bennett 2001). This represents a repurposing of a prehistoric monument by later peoples, while still drawing upon one of the likely functions of the original setting as a meeting place. Devonia (1859, 459) describes a popular outing from Ilkley to visit the hut of a hermit (Job Senior) who had lived on Rombalds Moor and was described as 'scarcely human in his appearance' and living in 'a wild and exposed spot, in the midst of those weird, lonely moors'. All of these align with an idea of moorlands as liminal and potentially dangerous places; a place where other-than-human beings are perceived to be encountered and petitioned.

The association of water courses, and peatlands, with fairies can be traced in a variety of ritualistic and religious practices to prehistoric societies (Conway 1874; Alcock 1965; Bradley 1998). The creation of the White Wells as a spa cottage, by Squire Middleton in the 18th Century, fed by a natural spring has inspired tales of the sighting of fairies, and even the existence of a fairy's cave (possibly near Hanging Stones and called Fairies' Kirk) on the moor (Crook 1998; Bennett 2001; Young 2012). The establishment of the spa cottage in Ilkley ties in with the hydrotherapy and Spa town movement related to the health benefits of natural spring waters.

Landscapes of danger and health

Howarth (2001, 58) notes that 'For thousands of years, the human attitude toward wetlands was consistently negative: they were read as dangerous, useless, fearful, filthy, diseased, noxious. Then, perceptions began to change

in the 1700s, gradually turning toward more positive values of beauty, fertility, variety, utility, and fluidity' and we see both of these perspectives in the way Ilkley Moor is represented. Some nineteenth-century descriptions of Ilkley Moor emphasise association with danger and as having a hostile feeling: 'Altogether a monotonous and melancholy landscape, and but for the invigorating hill air, its influence would be depressing in the extreme' (Devonia 1859, 459). The moors are described as 'remote' (Anon 1864) and 'a wild bare region, a sort of lofty table-land of desolation ...' (Macquoid 1877, 682). Devonia (1859, 452) extends this description to the men of the West Riding, who are described as 'Ignorant and often brutal, rugged and untractable like their own wild hills and barren moorlands ...'. The popular folk-song *On Ilkla Moor Baht'at* also emphasises the hostility of the landscape, being a cautionary tale in which the poorly dressed protagonist succumbs to exposure and enters a cycle of decay and consumption by worms, ducks and ultimately humans (Simmons 2003; Eddison 2011).

However, in 1844 the Ben Rhydding hydrotherapy establishment was opened just outside Ilkley (Wallis 2018), overlooked by Ilkley Moor and the Cow and Calf Rocks. In the following decades, Ilkley became a popular health resort (Anon 1889), known as the 'mountain spa' (Anon 1884d, 338) and as a 'metropolis of hydros' (Hallam 1899, 471). Numerous hydrotherapy houses were established, including Troutbeck, Craiglands (Macquoid 1882) and Wells House, where Charles Darwin came for the 'water cure' whilst *Origin of the Species* was published (Campbell and Matthews 2015). The landscape was an integral part of treatment; even the view of the moors from the windows of compressed air machines, installed at the grounds of Ben Rhydding, provided a 'mediated encounter with nature' (Wallis 2018, 86). Many contemporary historical sources include walks on the moors as part of treatment regimes (Provincial Editor 1864) and extol the virtues of the air and climate of the moors (Bampton 1907) and local spring water (Hallam 1899).

The air on these moors is wonderfully pure, and so exhilarating that one requires to become acclimatised to reap due benefit from it, for Ben Rhydding works marvels in restoring overtaxed strength and mental power (Macquoid 1877, 682)

In addition to hydrotherapy, two mental health hospitals were also located nearby: High Royds, which opened in 1888 at Menston (Mindham 2015) and, the asylum at Scalebor Park in Burley-in-Wharfedale (Anon 1902). The perception of the moorland as an environment for health, healing, and recovery is at odds with the perception of them as a hazardous and dangerous landscape, and more akin to the perception of moors as a place for both physical and aesthetic recreation.

Recreation and leisure

Magazine pieces from the nineteenth and early twentieth century provide an insight into past perspectives of Ilkley Moor. However, these come with the caveat that they were largely written by non-locals for a non-local audience; therefore, it is not surprising that we find significant ‘othering’ of the region around Ilkley Moor in these texts. Inherent in some accounts, is an idea that these landscapes are somehow timeless:

We have not only come from noise to quietness, and from foulness to purity, but at a single step have escaped the hard Gorgon gaze of the remorseless Present and come face to face with the romance of the most distant ages (Conway 1874, 451).

... from Harrogate, Ilkley or Ben Rhydding, you may dip into the depths of the Yorkshire dales; hear the crow of the grousecock or the whistle of the curlew on the high moors, or lose yourself in dreamy recollections of the past, in the cloistered loneliness of the ruined Yorkshire Abbeys (Anon 1887, 649).

This ‘romance’ is also present in some descriptions of the beauty of the moor; the ‘striking wild scenery’ and ‘remarkable’ moors (Telford 1900, 238), and in an account of Rombalds Moor as ‘a lofty range of rocky, healthy hills’ (Hallam 1899, 471). This framing may not be restricted to moorland landscapes but rather are part of a broader construction, by outsiders, of the north of England ‘as an essential place of otherness and wilderness’ (Spracklen 2016, 6).

The moor also has a significant place in social history. Late nineteenth century accounts refer to conflict between land-owners and walkers (Anon 1884a, 1884b, 1884c). In some of these, the rights to roam on the moor are described as existing beyond the living memory of locals (Anon 1884b, 1900):

There are moors in abundance on which rich men can shoot grouse; there are very few on which poor men who can only get half a day’s outing from Leeds can ramble at will. To preserve this privilege to such a district as that in which Ilkley stands is a matter of high public moment (Anon 1884a).

In fact, the town of Ilkley bought manorial rights to Ilkley Moor (Little 1895) and the co-existence of public access and grouse-shooting on the moor was used as an example in parliamentary debate preceding the passing of the *Access to Mountains Act* in 1939 (Taylor 1997; Sheail 2010). The decision of Bradford Metropolitan District Council to ban grouse shooting on Ilkley Moor (though not the wider Rombalds Moor, as it only administers the Ilkley Moor portion), from 2018 has partially removed this co-existence and led to a deepening of contested uses of the landscape.

Peatland heritage, folklore and landscape engagement

Meredith (2002, 319) states that ‘Bogs are profoundly ambiguous landscapes’, they challenge simple classificatory concepts of land and water and are places

where nature and culture, 'past and present are entangled' (Fredengren 2016). This ambiguity is reflected in our review of cultural perceptions of Ilkley Moor. It is a place of contestations and contradictions, from dangerous to health restoring; from managed to wilderness, which can be seen through the mythology and folklore associated with the area. Historically, associations have been with otherworldly beings (fairies and giants) and outsiders (hermits and witches), a theme that has continued in contemporary folklore of alien encounters and big cats roaming the moor (The Newsroom 2017). These otherworldly aspects link us back to ideas of liminality, observed in archaeological record in other peatlands through the occurrence of 'bog bodies', which can, for some, link to contemporary use of the landscape.

There is a long tradition of public involvement with some of the archaeological heritage on Ilkley Moor, particularly around the rock art where study has included contributions from both professional archaeologists and volunteers (Beckensall 2007), for example, the CSI Rombalds Moor project (The South Pennines Watershed Landscape Project n.d.). The cultural significance of this heritage continues to play an important role in contemporary engagement with the landscape and the creation of new material culture on the moor. To celebrate the end of the second and beginning of the third Millennium CE, a new piece of rock art was created, near to a scheduled piece of prehistoric rock art. Similarly, poems by Simon Armitage which were carved onto Stanza Stones and placed along the Pennine Watershed, some of which lie on Ilkley Moor, are clearly linked to ideas about the heritage of the area:

For many thousands of years people have been coming to moors around West Yorkshire to offer their prayers and express their desires in the form of carved stones. The Stanza Stones poems are my contribution to that unbroken and ongoing dialogue ... (Simon Armitage, in Lonsdale 2012, 3).

Both these examples draw upon the historic identity of the moor as an archaeological landscape imbued with past meaning and human presence, while at the same time adding to the presence, and potentially contributing to future interpretations of the rock art present on the moor and how people viewed and created the moorland environment.

Continued engagement is encouraged through the provision of walking trails which take in the Stanza Stones (Figure 7), prehistoric rock art and stone circles (Lonsdale 2012) and local groups such as the Friends of Ilkley Moor providing guides to Heritage Walks (Friends of Ilkley Moor 2020). In this manner, archaeological sites, the understanding of those sites, and modern or historic folklore can encourage access to and active engagement with the landscape.

However, some of the ways people may actively engage with the moor may be at odds with the traditional preservation ethos of heritage management (Wallis and Blain 2003). Barnett and Díaz-Andreu (2005) report damage to rock art, through graffiti, construction, industry, land-use practices, foot-traffic, and



Figure 7. Part of the Stanza Stones poetry trail, featuring a small enclosure containing a seating bench, and a poetry box to post and exchange poems. (Photographs B Jennings).

(perhaps well-intentioned) cleaning, clearing and chalking in order to better see the carvings. Wallis and Blain (2003) explore this in relation to the ways contemporary pagan (and other) groups engage with monuments and sites they consider to be sacred:

From active interactions with sites, such as votive offerings and instances of fire and, possibly, graffiti damage, to unconventional (contrasted with academic) interpretations of sites involving wights and spirit beings, Neolithic shamans, or goddesses, there are diverse areas of contest over so called “sacred” sites (Wallis and Blain 2003, 318).

This quote also touches upon the role of imagined, or invisible (Ryden 2001), landscapes in the context of public engagement. The ways people engage with landscape are not only physical but emotional and intellectual, drawing on memories and experiences; engaging with the idea of the moor as well as its physical characteristics. In the wider landscape context of Ilkley Moor, this can be seen in the representation of moorlands through art and literature. For example, Ted Hughes’ poetry collection *Remains of Elmet* alludes to the industrial past and prehistory of the landscape, as well as its natural beauty, wildlife and personal associations. Folklore and cultural perceptions can help us to understand these imaginative aspects of engagement: as part of how people both make sense of and ascribe meaning to the moor.

Contemporary folkloric narratives may be projected onto prehistoric monuments and thus contribute ‘not only to British folklore, but also to ‘alternative archaeology’ and to the manner in which many thousands of people understand and interact with the landscape’ (Doyle White 2014). These different methods of engagement open another area of conflict in the landscape, that between the academic, the professional historian, members of the public, other groups, and perceptions of authenticity. These issues are complex and difficult to resolve, but a basic principle under which interpretations are equally valued and authentic as long as they do not cause damage to monuments would be a good starting point (Figure 8).

The cultural associations and folklore of Ilkley Moor are not a static backdrop for engagement with the landscape but are an evolving and integral



Figure 8. Two cairns in different locations of the moor. While the original creation of cairns can be debated, they are undoubtedly re-used and modified over time. Their creation and use as way markers and target points for walking is known, and they are often added to over time. These two examples demonstrate how cairns can change over the short duration one of the authors has been visiting Ilkley Moor. The top example, situated in an area with exposed and accessible rock has grown in size, while the bottom, without accessible stone, has not. There is a subconscious draw to add to the cairns on passing or reaching them, resulting in their growth over time. (Photographs B Jennings).

part of how people create new meanings for and act within these places. For example, in choosing Ilkley Moor as a performance site for a community-based *Commoners Choir* Taylor and Whalley (2019) drew on its significance in the history of rights to land access, as 'Yorkshire's largest tract of common land', and contributed to its associations as a site of collective political resistance (59), using walking and singing to 'make rural place meanings' (63). Wood and Brown (2011, 520) describe their film *Lines of Flight*, which includes Ilkley Quarry, as presenting 'an historically situated portrait of the connection between industrial towns and cities and the adventure of free solo rock climbing on the desolate moors and deep-cut valleys in the Pennine region of Northern England, often said to be the 'backbone' of

England'. This emphasises the importance of the hills and moors as a continued place of escape, freedom and creativity, for workers from their ordered and often alienating city lives.

Future considerations

Looking towards the future and development of folklore in the moorland environment, there are a variety of sources of potential folklore. The crash of Halifax DK185 in January 1944 has left visible remains on the moor and is now identified by a memorial stone. Local residents were involved in rescue efforts after the crash, which will have created a degree of local memory; over time it is possible that aspects of the plane crash and remnants of the site will be converted into folkloric discussions.

Contemporary folklore might be informed by ideas about paganism, traditional and 'fringe' archaeological knowledge, ideas from other cultures, and personal experiences within specific places, to create new (and plural) narratives of sites (Wallis and Blain 2003). In addition, some communities may see folkloric narratives as part of their intangible cultural heritage. The potential for folklore to develop in a contested environment with a variety of uses from different groups should be considered for Ilkley Moor. The rock climbing, fell running, and mountain biking groups, for instance, using Ilkley Moor may have different associations and influences for the comprehension and development of folklore; tales of daring, speed, or accidents may become widely disseminated amongst the groups and communities, leading to the creation of non-typical or non-standard folklore. Recording these tales would be necessary to fully comprehend the contemporary folklore associations of a given landscape.

Whilst folkloric narratives may not reveal the distant past of prehistoric material culture, there have been calls for closer connections between archaeology and folklore (Barrowclough and Hallam 2008). Both disciplines are concerned with cultural heritage; ranging from physical archaeological material and evidence to the intangible heritage to which folklore often relates. Fredengren (2016) suggests that encounters with wetland archaeology, e.g. the well-preserved remains of plants and bodies, may produce a perception of collapsed time and deeper connections with the past in the present. Reflecting on her own fieldwork in Ireland, she suggests 'archaeological enquiry – as a way of re-enchancing the world by contributing to place-making' (Fredengren 2016, 485). Furthermore, combining archaeological and folklore studies may expand the range of archaeological interpretations:

It can open new ways of looking at the landscape, raise new questions about issues of time and of memory, and bring to the forefront concerns with local and archaeological meanings of the past (Gazin-Schwartz 2001, 267).

This can be a reciprocal process, with potential to explore the ability of environmental archaeology to frame humans as environmental actors, shaping landscapes, and potentially foster greater awareness and action in relation to contemporary environmental issues:

... to make use of archaeological narratives which point out that wetlands and rivers were once understood as holy places may work to foster care for this kind of resource, and to discuss how common interests and cares stretch across several generations (Fredengren 2016, 495).

We also argue that folklore provides insight into historical and present-day engagement with peatlands and their archaeological features. Howarth (2001) draws our attention to the importance of the socio-political context in how wetlands are read in literature, and we can perhaps see a similar thread to the broader narratives that have developed around Ilkley Moor. These are in dialogue with the ways people perceive and use the landscape; from traditional folklore depicting the Moor as a hazardous place, nineteenth and twentieth century narratives of physical and mental renewal and recreation, to contemporary framing as a resource to be preserved and managed.

Heritage landscapes, and specifically in our case upland peatlands, hold diverse and dynamic narratives. Attending to traditional and contemporary folklore narratives may develop understandings of the meanings that sites and places hold for individuals and groups beyond authorised heritage discourses (Smith 2006), which in turn may support wider awareness of and engagement with heritage issues. As Edwards (2019, 669) notes, the development of landscape policy and practice 'should not simply seek to dictate to people what matters in a landscape, but should also seek to express how it matters to them'. This can be employed both to gain a deeper understanding of the subjective and plural meanings of landscapes, and to encourage a sense of local ownership to support landscape preservation, management and development (Edwards 2019). For example, a poetry anthology from the *Stanza Stones* project included those written by young people following fieldtrips and workshops (Armitage 2012) and provides insight into their perceptions of the landscape. There is a mythic quality to several of the poems; their poems tell of encounters with the past, with landscape, with weather; they describe the moor as a wild, sometimes dangerous, place but also a place of personal escape. Some reflect on the sensory and embodied aspects of the landscape, others speak to its time-depth, others make connections with their own identities and other landscapes. *The Watershed Landscape Project* involved considerable community and public engagement to support its aims to protect and enhance key moorland landscape features. Alongside heritage restoration and interpretation work, their outreach activities went beyond those groups already engaged with the landscape, and used creative approaches to capture and share people's own stories and feelings about moorlands (The South Pennines Watershed

Landscape Project n.d.). This fed into access work, considering cultural, emotional and intellectual access as well as physical and financial barriers. Thus, encouraging and widening active participation in moorland environments will help to change perceptions of landscape, and may also change the emphasis of various elements of folklore related to such landscapes, but those engagements may not always be in traditional forms.

Local community and stakeholder engagement are considered important aspects of sustainable approaches to restoring, protecting and managing peatland environments, to enable valuable ecosystem services (IUCN 2018). A sense of ownership and connection may be important components of that engagement. Recognising the multiple narratives around peatlands from diverse folklore, contemporary cultural perceptions and more formal archaeological interpretations may create space for shared ownership and engagement to develop.

In our work on the *Wetland Futures in Contested Environments* project, we understand that a portion of the use, perception and value of an environment is based in folklore; recognising the contemporary use and appropriation of folklore aspects offers a route to encouraging engagement with, and a variety of uses within, landscapes, of which historical appreciation is only one aspect. Through engagement with communities and stakeholders accessing peat and moorland environments for a variety of different purposes, including conservation, leisure and production, the project seeks to reconcile differing interpretations and use of the landscape. Recording knowledge and perceptions of the moorlands, traditions and folklore associated with those areas, will aid in understanding the wider historic and contemporary intangible cultural heritage of peatlands, and facilitate a holistic knowledge of the landscape.

Using Ilkley Moor as an example has demonstrated the potentially contested nature of peatlands both historically and in the present day, and the small review indicates there is no single folklore or meaning associated with these landscapes. It is through the recognition of the diversity of groups accessing Ilkley Moor – and other peat- and moorland sites around the UK – and the variety of existent and emerging folklore relevant to those groups that engaging with the environment can be encouraged. Traditional folklore with regard to peatlands has revolved around the dangerous nature of the environment, discouraging interaction and engagement with those areas. However, the case study of Ilkley Moor has demonstrated, that – just as the landscape is composed of myriad elements – in addition to the typical base-layer of folklore related to peatlands, there are super-layers of folklore relating to specific features within the peatland landscape; it is these layers of folklore which encourage access and engagement with the environment. There is, however, no standard aspect of folklore which will be relevant to all members of society wishing to use a landscape, and to create a sustainable form of

engagement, consideration needs to be given to all of the groups using that environment.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by the JP-ICH under Grant number AH/S006427/1.

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Note

1. Available to view at National Library of Scotland: <https://maps.nls.uk/index.html>