

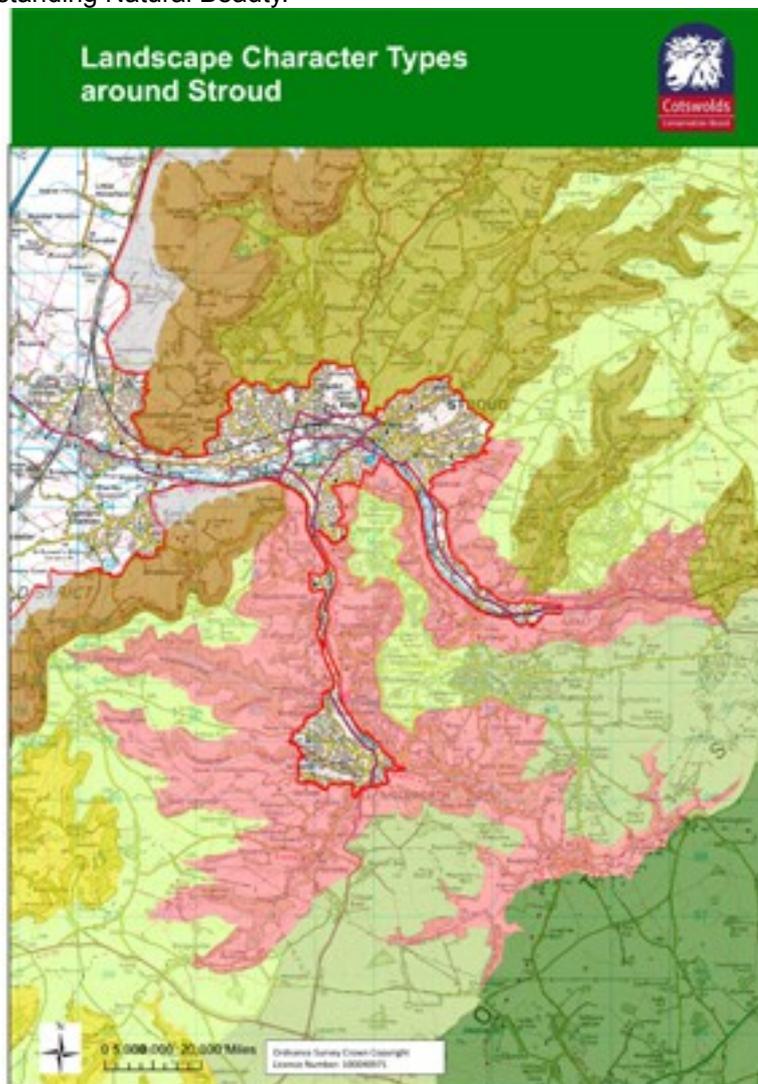
River Map

Exploring Art-Walking as the catalyst for community engagement in landscape change.

1 Background

Artist collective *Walking the Land* (WtL) and associated artists have been walking the Stroud Valleys, River Severn and the Cotswold Hills' escarpment on the first Friday of the month for the past ten years, collecting images, sounds and conversations about the landscape. The "River Map" project researched how such a participatory arts practice could be developed to help engage people with local landscape change processes.

Landscape Character Assessment is a strategic approach to managing landscape change developed by Natural England. All of England has been subdivided into landscape character types and guiding principles have been adopted for change in each type. Under this scheme, the landscape type surrounding Stroud is named "Settled Valleys" landscape type and recognises key elements such as steep wooded valleys, small scale farming with fields enclosed by stone walls, swift moving streams and their necklace of water mills and other cultural artefacts relating to the textile industry. The wider landscape context is the surrounding Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



The Settled Valleys Landscape Type shown in pink

During 2011, in conversation with Mark Connelly from the Cotswold Conservation Board, the project was developed to use "art-walking" to help inform the review of the Cotswold Landscape Character Assessment, specifically the Settled Valleys Landscape. WtL successfully applied to the Conservation Board's Sustainable Development Fund to deliver this arts lead approach.

Other collaborators in this project were Stroud Nature, who run an annual Festival of Nature and Stroud Community Land Trust with additional input from Stroud Common Wealth, Stroud Museum in the Park, Stroud Brewery, Rodborough Fields Preservation Group, Ruskin Mill College and The Exchange social enterprise centre.

An additional desirable outcome was to encourage action on the ground, in particular to link landscape change with the thriving local food hub based on Stroud.



Stroud Community Agriculture open day at Hawkwood College.

2 Project aim and objectives

The overall aim was to develop deeper and broader community engagement with the AONB Management Plan, in particular the review of the Cotswolds Landscape Character Guidelines, by:

supporting artists in producing work which would form the centre point of walks, workshops, discussions and debate about landscape change in different locations/communities

arranging discussions/events/shows to engage communities and integrate Landscape Character Assessment with local landscape activity, including at the Stroud Common Wealth AGM, at conferences, two networking events, Stroud Visual Arts Festival and Stroud Festival of Nature.

holding a final exhibition and seminar at the Museum in the Park.

3 Facets of Practice and summary of project delivery

Facet	Activity	Example
Collaborating	Negotiating shared futures	Spring Green Conference, liaison/planning workshops
Encountering	Facilitating landscape experience	10x walks with artists
Exchanging	revealing landscape aspirations and narratives	10x exhibitions and discussion events
Assembling	Reflecting on a sustainable future with partners	Exhibition, Seminar and Wildlife Grazing Project Launch

4 Facets and activities in more detail

4.1 Collaborating

- **Stroud Spring Green Conference**

40 or so organisations attended this day long conference at the Museum in the Park with Mark Connelly making a key note presentation on Stroud's landscape and ecological setting. This helped to see local green space action in a Landscape Character Assessment framework. There were also two workshops on arts and landscape, with others on planning, working with volunteers, community engagement and collaboration. Participants agreed to meet again in the late summer to consider and develop a pan-organisation overview and collaborative project ideas, including a Conservation Grazing Project as it turned out.



Workshop at Spring Green Conference

- **Liaison/planning workshops**

Planning meetings and other negotiations took place to integrate the project with the Spring Green Conference, with the Stroud Consortium Network event and the Festival of Nature, Ruskin Mill's education programme, Stroud Common Wealth's AGM and the Museum's exhibition programme.

Participating artist workshops were run at which work was developed from the sketch books and from other preliminary work collected on the walks. The purpose was to make work suitable for inclusion in the exhibitions that would complement the community discussion events and to make work for the two larger exhibitions at Ruskin Mill College and The Museum in the Park.

4.2 Encountering

- **Walks with artists**

These ten 'First Friday Walks' attracted local artists, photographers and writers for a total of 600 hours of walking along the Frome and Nailsworth Stream. Sketch book work was produced, video taken, sounds recorded, poetry written and photographs taken and a deeper understanding of the landscape gained, in particular how it affects us.



July First Friday walk around the Nailsworth Valley



Some of the sketch books on display at Ruskin Mill

Participating walkers/artists:

Rachel Beard, Stewart Butler, Fiona Cam-Meadley, Jilly Cobbe, Valerie Coffin-Price, Ian Cridland, Sue Cridland, Tara Downs, Eileen Dunlop, Lucy Guenot, Sylvain Guenot, Ahrabella Heabe-Lewis, Karin Jarman, Phil Johnson, Richard Keating, David Moss, Alan Mossman, Claire Nicole, Carlos Ordonez, Kel Portman, Martin Large, Dot Newton, Wendy Rendall, Deborah Roberts, Philip Rush, Bart Sabel, Chris Smith, Jacqui Stearn, Nik Taylor, Bob Loe, Roberta Loe, Alison Vickery, Cynthia Whelan,

- **Rodborough Fields**

During July, as a part of the campaign to save Rodborough Fields (from housing development), a walk was held through the mills and along the canal and River, with actors and poets reading from historical documents about the valleys and particularly the heritage of 'Stroud Scarlet' – the local cloth. Scarlet banners were specifically made for the event and carried as a part of a short talk about the Settled Valleys project. The banners were used to recreate one of the most loved local paintings of the racking fields. About 75 people attended and the walk was filmed by BBC 2 as a part of their 'Planners' series. Participants were interviewed about how they valued the fields and a short video made of the event.



Recreating the Racking Fields



Wallbridge, circa 1790's. Artist unknown, with kind permission of the Museum in the Park, Stroud. The painting shows cloth being stretched on Rodborough Fields.

An additional walk was led by local naturalists and experts that invited people to help record the wildlife of the area. A particular relevance of this was to illustrate the value of certain urban habitats for wildlife in the settled valleys.



Expert, Simon Pickering reveals a number of bat species.

4.3 Exchanging: Community Discussion Events, exhibitions and Walks

SITE 13: To coincide with the annual Stroud Visual Arts Festival (SITE13), an exhibition with two discussion events was curated at Stroud Brewery. It included walks along the Frome and up into the surrounding wooded hillside.



One of the community discussion events at Stroud Brewery as a part of the Stroud Visual Arts Festival

Also coinciding with the Visual Arts Festival, Tara Downs and Bart Sabel held two collecting days for their "Miniature Museum of Memories" about how people value the river landscape.



"The Miniature Museum of Memories"

The Exchange: The exhibition was put up at "The Exchange", Stroud's Social Enterprise Centre, for about five weeks where the project was discussed at the The Community Farm Land Trust's AGM and Stroud Common Wealth's AGM. It was also visited by other people using this community resource.



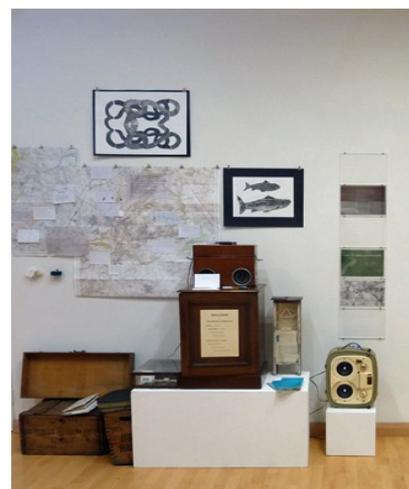
National Character workshop at "The Exchange"

While the exhibition was still at The Exchange, an event was held for local artists, writers and community planners to look at the role of art in landscape change. It included a workshop on Ecosystem Services with input from a member of staff from Natural England.

Ruskin Mill: The exhibition, including the “Miniature Museum of Memories” (MMM) was shown at Ruskin Mill as well as new work which had been influenced by the discussion events. While at Ruskin Mill, a further discussion event, collection day and walk were undertaken plus an impromptu viewing and discussion about landscape with a group of new staff. A meeting with an art teacher and her students also led to work being made by them which was then shown as a part of the final exhibition in the museum.



Collection day, walk and discussions at Ruskin Mill



Students work incorporated into MMM

Stroud Nature Consortium Seminar and Festival of Nature: For the Festival of Nature a “People's River Map” had been made and was added to by local people marking their favourite routes and places. A couple of hundred people participated. This began to show very graphically how people use and value the countryside and proved to be a very accessible way of making comments about landscape and led to many impromptu discussion about what is important and what is perceived as negative in the landscape. From a landscape experience aspect, it was fascinating to watch people converting their memories of walking in the landscape into making marks on the map – very clearly reliving experience of place.



Adding to the “Peoples River Map” at the Festival of Nature

4.4 Assembling

Final Exhibition and Seminar: New work was created for this exhibition at the Museum in the Park and upwards of 300 people visited it in the short time it was on. Discussions were held with these visitors,

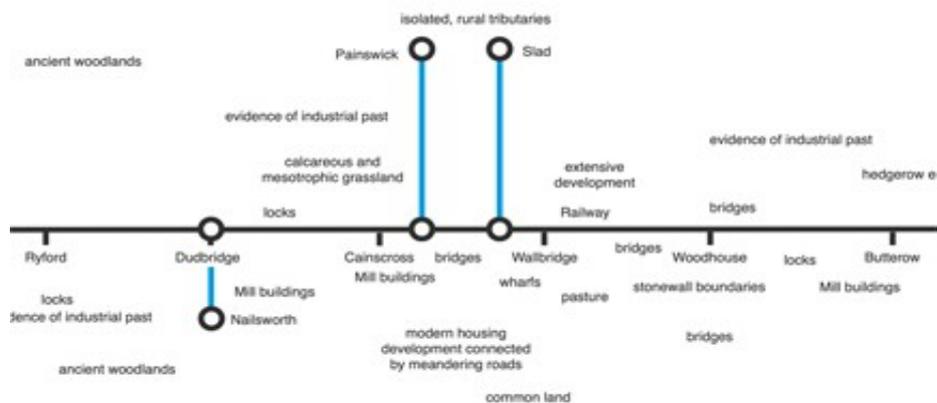


River Map as catalyst for conversation during Museum exhibition

including additional collecting for “The Miniature Museum of Memories” and additional adding to the “Peoples River Map”. Other new, collaborative work developed two metaphors - a weaving and loom metaphor and a mapping metaphor - as a way of assembling findings from the whole process.



Participants at the Final Exhibition Seminar, showing “community-landscape loom”



Extract from one of the River Maps. Digital image on paper. Approx. 5 meters x 0.5 metres

A well attended seminar was held which outlined the project, discussed the art work and gave an opportunity for people to discuss both in small workshops. The main findings from this was that the project had been a good way to engage people with the AONB and that more was needed, particularly a continuing involvement of young people, older people and people with disabilities.

From an arts perspective, those involved found the process developmental and created a lot of new and different work. Many who visited the show commented positively on the unusual and collaborative approach taken while some at the seminar pondered on the mix of environmental action and art.

Wildlife grazing initiative: Towards the end of the “River Map” project, a public meeting was held at Stroud Brewery to invite people to engage with a wildlife grazing project, within the context of the “Settled Valleys Landscape” type. This established a collaboration between farmers, land owners, people with animals but no land and conservation specialists and activists.



Inaugural Meeting of the Wildlife Grazing Project

Subsequently, a steering group was initiated to take the project forward, including the use of art-walking as a way of revealing an ongoing narrative of the grazing project; its successes, challenges and personal stories.

5. Reflection

There are many ways to reflect on this project. The reflection illustrated here refers to the pivotal role that “Walking the Land” played in this participatory and collaborative project.

	Walking the Land	Cotswold Conservation Board	Stroud Nature	Local Food Hub	Stroud Community Land Trust
Co-ordination fundraising	*	*	*		*
Walks with artists	*				
Exhibitions and community discussions	*				
2x conferences	*	*	*	*	*
Festival of Nature	*	*	*		
Seminar and exhibitions	*	*			
New project development	*	*		*	

Table showing partners involvement in various aspects of the project.