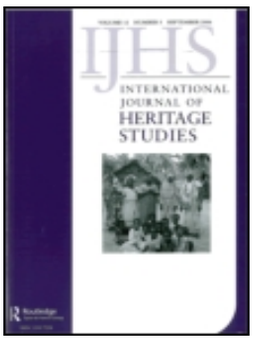

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Nature as Heritage: The Swedish Case

Bosse Sundin

In 1909 the Swedish parliament passed two laws regarding natural landmarks and National Parks. This may be seen as a discovery of 'Nature as Heritage'. But there are earlier examples. From the 17th century, antiquarians had paid attention to certain natural landmarks and in the 19th century it was common to see nature as something that fostered the spirit of the people (das Volk). *Around 1900 an increasing role was played by nationalistic motives. The National Parks were supposed to preserve and display the essential quality of Swedish nature. Biology and geology, the theory of evolution and the glaciation theory played a major role in emphasising these new national symbols. But as examples for Sweden indicate, it is difficult to make a heritage of a landscape. In this essay two separate discourses, namely antiquarian and environmental, are discussed.*

Keywords: Sweden; Nature; Heritage; Antiquities; National Parks; Environmental History

In discussing nature as heritage in the Swedish case, the obvious starting point, is 1909 when parliament passed two laws in relation to natural landmarks and National Parks. In the same year the Swedish Society for the Protection of Nature was founded. What happened in 1909 was a result of actions beginning in 1904. That year, Professor Hugo Conwentz, the foremost spokesman for nature protection in Germany, lectured in Stockholm, Uppsala, Gothenburg and Lund on the dangers threatening the natural landscape and its plant and animal populations. These talks, which were widely publicised, were the primary impetus for a motion in parliament proposing an inquiry into appropriate measures for protecting Sweden's nature and landmarks. The proposal won parliamentary support and the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences was given the task of executing the proposed inquiry. Five years later it resulted in the laws regarding natural landmarks and National Parks.[1]

The Swedish case is by no means unique. The decades around 1900 saw a wave of preservation and conservation movements. A few examples: in 1894, in Britain, the

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National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty was founded; in 1895, in the USA, the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society; in 1904, in the Netherlands, Vereniging tot behoud van Natuurmonumenten (Society for the Preservation of Natural Landmarks). In France, in 1906, a law was passed regarding 'la protection des sites et monuments naturel de caractère artistique'. In Prussia, in the same year, a state authority for the care of natural landmarks—Staatliche Stelle für Naturdenkmalpflege—was founded. More examples could be given.[2]

In a way, this may be seen as a rather sudden discovery of 'Nature as Heritage'. But there are earlier examples. By 1819 the German scientist Alexander von Humboldt was already using the concept *monuments de la nature* when he talked about old, big trees and early in the 19th century geologists could discuss 'the ruins of nature' or the earth's crust as 'the archive of nature'.

In the Swedish case, antiquarians as early as the 17th century paid attention not only to rune stones, burial mounds, cairns, etc. but also to certain natural landmarks. In part this was due to an uncertainty whether objects, for example a formation of stones, were natural or cultural artefacts. There was also an interest in *lusus naturae*, the jokes or oddities of nature. And, obviously, the antiquarian's investigations of objects like burial mounds involve a sense of the landscape in which they were found.[3]

At the beginning of the 19th century, and even more popular towards its end, nature was also commonly seen as something that fostered the spirit of the people, *das Volk*, *das Volksgeist*. Each people, each *Volk*, had its own uniqueness due to the very nature, the native soil, from which it, since the beginning of history, had emerged. In the background we can find ideas from Montesquieu, Herder and Romantic philosophers. This

Figure 1 Burial mounds as depicted in antiquarian N. H. Sjöborg, *Samlingar för Nordens fornälskare* (Stockholm, 1822).

Figure 2 Burial mounds as depicted by antiquarian N. H. Sjöborg, *Samlingar för Nordens fornälskare* (Stockholm, 1822).

can be illustrated by an article by geologist Arvid Högbom. It discussed how Sweden had been formed by glaciation and the following elevation of the land. The title of the article is 'Huru naturen danat Sverige' (How nature has founded Sweden) and we can see *Moder Svea* (Mother Sweden) placed between prehistoric wild savages from the Stone Age and presumably civilised Vikings. The history of the nation begins with the glaciation, and the elevation of land is a symbol of nature founding the national culture.[4] The interest in dialects and folklore also pointed at a possible natural heritage. Certain natural objects were noticed because of the legends, historical memories, or folk traditions associated with them.

Also around 1900 an increasing role was played by nationalistic motives. The interest in nature and natural landmarks was inspired by a newly awoken patriotism. For the older patriotism, Sweden's greatness was to be found mainly in its proud history, studded with military victories. The new national enthusiasm was characterised by a biologically influenced conception of the nation in which nature provided its distinctive element. The moors, forests, and other natural wonders became national symbols with a deeper significance than that of the heroes and warrior-kings of the past.[5]

Nowadays we are so used to the concept of 'National Parks' that we tend to forget the nationalistic context in which it was formulated. The National Parks were supposed to preserve and display the essential quality of Swedish nature. Most of them were to be found in Lapland and all the larger ones were located in Norrland, the north.[6]

Figure 3 From A.G. Högbom, 'Huru naturen danat Sverige', in: J. F. Nyström, *Sveriges rike. Handbok för det svenska folket* (Stockholm, 1899).

Among the reasons cited for this was the claim that these regions, with their forests, mountains and glaciers and wide-open spaces suggested a significant aspect of the Swedish national identity. The northern character of Sweden became central to the new national consciousness. At the foot of Lapland's glaciers, surrounded by the nomadic Lapps, one was closer to the Ice Age than anywhere else in Sweden. The new patriotism was also expressed by artists and writers of the so-called 'national romantic' spirit. A standard example is Nobel Laureate Selma Lagerlöf's *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*, first published in 1906–1907, a reader in geography at Swedish schools for more than half a century.

Scientific inventory and research into the country's natural resources undoubtedly played a large part in emphasising these new national symbols. In our context, 'Nature as Heritage', the role of biology and geology should be stressed or, to be more precise, the theory of evolution and glaciation theory. Quaternary geology and quaternary biology were fashionable disciplines. Varved clay, boulder ridges, bogs, and swamps were nature's own archives from which the history of the evolution of Sweden's flora and fauna since the last Ice Age could be traced. An idea of how the climate had changed and how various species and plant communities had succeeded one another was being formed. The picture taking shape was one of nature in constant flux.[7]

This discovery of the history of the landscape recurs over and over again in the context of nature protection; one might even say that in essence the idea of protecting nature emerges directly from it. And it is no coincidence that most of the early advocates

for nature preservation were biologists and geologists. Interest was directed towards what was apprehended to be nature in its original state. Put simply, it was a matter of preserving for future generations at least one boulder ridge, one primeval forest, one swamp, one peat bog. But interest was also shown in natural landmarks that triggered fantasy or had historical connotations—an oak described by Linnaeus on one of his journeys to a Swedish landscape, an erratic stone which, according to an old saga, had been thrown by a giant, and so on. In particular, *lusus naturae*, jokes, freaks, oddities and curiosities of nature generated excitement. The first volumes of the yearbook of the Society for the Protection of Nature are packed with such examples as curious rock formations, a spruce with 'branches which have grown into trees themselves', and so on.

Most popular, without competition, were trees of various kinds. The law of 1909 gave to the Academy of Sciences the task of proclaiming various landmarks as protected. The Academy regularly published a national register. In the first edition, published in 1919, protected objects numbered close to 100. Seven years later there were 301. In 1932, 460 were listed. Taking that list as an example, under the heading 'Areas', we find 69 objects described variously as forest, meadow, limestone formation, moraine area, bay with islets, bird cliff, and so on. 'Geological Landmarks' mentions 33 objects, the majority individual erratic rocks. Under 'Plants' we discover 43 protected species and under 'Wildlife' 21 species. The last group, individual plants, flowers, and stands, included by far the largest number of protected objects—371 out of a grand total of 460, mostly single trees, usually oaks. So, until the 1930s it would not be misleading to say that the typical natural landmark was an individual tree—'a large beech', 'a great and beautiful juniper', 'a giant spruce', 'a "troll" pine', or, most commonly, 'a majestic old oak'.[8] It is not surprising that the logo of the Society for the Protection of Nature was an oak.

The analogy between the legislation for the protection of nature and the legislation for the preservation of relics of the past, antiquities, was widely exploited. And it is not unfair to say that early nature protection was 'museum like' in character. The Swedish concept of 'natural monument' or 'natural landmark' (*naturminnesmärke*) is based on the German *Naturdenkmal*, and has lost some of its original resonance today. In fact it is impossible to translate into English, but the concept is a combination of nature, remembrance and mark (trace).

Earlier, the desire had been to preserve those relics of the past (*forminne* in Swedish, meaning 'ancient memory') that bore witness to the history of man. Now, it was essential to preserve those monuments that spoke of the history of nature. To allow these living monuments to be destroyed would be the same as allowing Sweden's rune stones to crumble away. Therefore, it was said, natural landmarks ought to be seen as serving as the outdoor wing of the Museum of Natural History, as a great national museum or as an 'artless Skansen' (the well-known outdoor museum in Stockholm).

So, the paradoxical situation occurred in which a dynamic view of nature that stressed its evolution produced a mainly static preservation of nature and a focus on a supposed, primeval, untouched nature and its monuments, oddities, and curiosities. This contained the seeds of many conflicts. For example, full-scale protection for one or other type of natural phenomenon did not guarantee protection from future change.

It was soon discovered that a number of protected areas—for example the Ängsö National Park—were in fact examples not of untouched nature but of highly cultivated land. Protection therefore led to the opposite of its intent—the protected areas became overgrown and corrupted.[9]

Today we can see that what was discovered is that there is no virgin, untouched nature, no 'wilderness'. There is *landscape*: 'A composition of man-made or man-modified spaces to serve as infrastructure or background for our collective existence.'[10] To put it more simply: nature is heritage, but it is embedded in a landscape cultural construction. But this implicit understanding did not have immediate impact on the heritage discourse. In fact, in the Swedish case it is possible, since 1909, to discern two different discourses.

In the 'Landscape as Arena: Science, Institutions and the Discourses on Environment, 1800–2000' research programme we have tentatively suggested that the landscape has functioned as an arena for the growth of cultural and intellectual processes or discourses—an antiquarian and an environmental discourse—which have constituted mental, imagined landscapes or ideas about 'nature as heritage', but which also involve the establishment of different institutions, organisations, professions, etc.[11] These discourses are strikingly parallel. In the 19th century they were united, but in the 20th the trend has been one of separation.[12]

At the institutional level, on the side of the antiquarian discourse, we have the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, which, since it was established in 1786, had been more or less in charge of the care of ancient monuments—the cultural heritage. On the other side we have the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, which, since 1909 and until the beginning of the 1960s, had been in charge of the natural heritage—National Parks and natural landmarks. Nowadays they belong to different ministries, the ministry of culture and the ministry of environment.

The central or national museums are separate; on the antiquarian side is the Swedish Museum of History, on the environmental side the National Museum of Natural History. We also find two separate civil service departments: the Central Board of National Antiquities and the National Environmental Protection Board.

The separate discourses can also be found at regional and local levels (but will not be specified here), in the county and the municipal administration, and also in voluntary associations—'homestead societies' versus nature protection societies.

The parallel is also striking at the conceptual level. These concepts are difficult to translate, but for anyone familiar with Swedish, the parallel must be striking. *Forminne* ('ancient memory') versus *naturminne* ('natural landmark'), *kulturmiljö* ('cultural environment') versus *naturmiljö* ('natural environment'), and so on.

Finally, the disciplinary foundation of the discourses is different. The antiquarian is based on disciplines like ethnology, archaeology, and art history, what we call 'museum disciplines', and disciplines like agrarian history and cultural geography. The environmental sciences are above all bio- and geosciences and some technical environmental sciences.

I hope this brief summary has made it clear that it is possible to talk about two separate discourses. They meet in the landscape but with different concepts, values and

ambitions. If so, then it should be clear that we now have a problem if we talk about nature as heritage. I know that I am perhaps oversimplifying matters, but I would say that a trend has been apparent during the 20th century, as discussed below.

At the beginning of the century, as discussed above, it not unfair to say that the environmental discourse could discuss nature as heritage—recall all those oaks, erratic stones, etc. The antiquarian discourse, on the other hand, was focused mainly on ancient monuments. Towards the middle of the century the environmental discourse had changed focus, from 'nature as heritage' to environmental problems—water pollution, air pollution, etc. It was no longer a matter of preserving individual objects and areas in nature. Instead, it was necessary to acquire knowledge and insights to deal with environmental pollution and the waste of resources endangering the very life of our planet.

The antiquarian discourse, on the other hand, had by then begun to focus not only on separate ancient monuments but also on the cultural environment, the cultural landscape. One could say that the hegemony had changed. If, at the beginning of the 20th century the environmental discourse was modelled on the antiquarian, then towards the 1960s the antiquarian was modelled on the environmental. Hence the change from *fornminne* (ancient monument) to cultural environment, the landscape.[13]

But it is difficult to make a heritage of a landscape, at least if by heritage one means something that should be preserved. Let me give an example. Towards the middle of the 20th century vast areas in Norrland, the northernmost two-thirds of Sweden, were drastically and suddenly transformed as a result of schemes for lake-level regulation and power-station construction. The radical transformation of the landscape gave rise to considerable discussions. One of the first voices, questioning the consequences of the development of hydroelectric power in the early 1940s, came from the Swedish Central Board of National Antiquities. It coincided with a change, in 1942, in the law regulating the care of ancient monuments and relics of the past. It stipulated that every enterprise, which might touch areas with presumed relics of the past, must finance field surveys of the areas in question to determine whether anything of value, illuminating the prehistory of the nation, was endangered.

When a new project was due to start, the Board—with financial support from the exploiters—carried out archaeological and ethnological investigations. The idea was not to preserve but to document prehistoric and historic remains in the areas that were to be put under water or were threatened by erosion as a result of variations in the level of water. Most of the investigations were archaeological and resulted in numerous habitation-site finds—pieces of pottery, scrapers, daggers, knives, arrowheads, spearheads, boiling stones—which are stored at the Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm. But it was also a matter of recordings—in text, picture and sometimes even sound—of the landscape, the buildings of the more recent settlers and their folk life, dialects and myths and tales. In a few cases the investigations resulted in a more thorough description of the area which was to be put under water and the people who had to leave. The best example is the book which was published after investigations carried out in relation to the regulation of Lake Lossen for power purposes. The area of the lake was quadrupled and some 100 people had to leave their

homes. The book gives an exhaustive report of the life around Lake Lossen: family relations, food and food habits, clothing, folklore, popular movements, games and plays, festivities, etc.[14]

The result of the cooperation between the power companies and the antiquarians was not only a legitimisation of the new technological landscape but also the discovery of an old landscape. At the same time that the landscape became the object of a dramatic physical change, the archaeological and ethnological investigations changed the mental landscape. What the antiquarians documented, before it disappeared, was a cultural landscape. It turned out, as a result of the investigations, that Norrland in the past was not just wilderness and natural scenery, it had for thousands of years been inhabited by various settlers—hunters, fishermen, reindeer herdsmen, farmers. And they were not isolated. Numerous finds bear witness to contact with other cultures. One example: at Lake Hotingsjön in the centre of Norrland a family cemetery with 14 graves from the Viking era and the beginning of the medieval period was found. The finds speak of distant origins.

The world of the men and women who lived at Hotingsjön was a remote but not an isolated one. It is true that most of the grave finds came from central Sweden and Gotland, but some found their way there from countries east of the Baltic. The first new settlers buried in the mounds of Långön had their belts decorated with small bronze mounts of oriental origin. In one of the other graves the dead man's tinder box was in a pouch made of leather from a giant lizard such as is now found in India or its neighbours.[15]

To quote one of the antiquarians commenting on Lake Ottsjön, close to the mountains, where a large number of cultivation cairns (piles of stones cleared from the land in medieval times) were found in the forest:

> This is no 'wilderness'. For ages this landscape has been the home of people who have moulded it in different ways. We can follow the traces of these people, not only during historical times, but also during earlier periods. Like the true cultivated landscape in other parts of Sweden, the scenery of Norrland has been in process of transformation ever since prehistoric times, not only as a result of climatic changes and other natural phenomena but also through the constant influence of man.[16]

The investigations played an important role in changing the interest of the antiquarians from the unique monument to the cultural milieu. By tradition the Board of National Antiquities had been focused on the preservation of impressive burial mounds, rune stones, medieval churches, castles, etc. Now they developed a 'holistic' view of the landscape which included nature, prehistoric remains, habitation sites of more recent settlers, hunting pits, reindeer herdsmen's huts, installations for fishing, etc.

Out of this emerged a view of continual change which, in fact, served as a justification for the new technological landscape. It was simply the latest transformation of the landscape. Another example: at Lake Ransaren in the mountains of southern Lapland the antiquarians documented a settlement which was the result of recent colonisation. It had lasted no more than two generations, 1890–1950. What made it interesting was that everything that had been used in connection with the colonisation—the whole set

Figure 4 Lake Ransaren. From Sverker Jansson & Harald Hvarfner, *Ancient Hunters and Settlements in the Mountains of Sweden* (Stockholm, 1966).

of means of subsistence from the 19th century—was still in existence and in use in the 1950s when the greater part of this area was drowned as a result of the damming and regulation of Lake Ransaren.

With the example from this old-fashioned settlement, with which, as the antiquarian said, 'the modern age never quite caught up', he asked and answered the following question:

> How could this remarkable milieu have been preserved? The answer is that this could only have been done if the people had been treated like objects in a museum which are preserved as they were found, without modern additions.[17]

And concerning the landscape that was a product of the colonisation of the mountain area in the 19th century, he said, as an echo of social Darwinism:

> The landscape has an intimate and inseparable connection with the way of life which here prevails. If the inhabitants move away, the present appearance of the landscape will disappear. If they stay, it will still be radically changed. It is a landscape that is indissolubly linked with an outdated and primitive form of cultivation which no longer has the power to survive in the present age.[18]

His comments are, and I write it without irony, a good illustration of an antiquarian participating in the transformation of an old landscape into a modern technological

Figure 5 Sami storehouse at Lake Ransaren. From Sverker Jansson & Harald Hvarfner, *Ancient Hunters and Settlements in the Mountains of Sweden* (Stockholm, 1966).

landscape. And it is easy to agree. To most of the inhabitants in the areas affected by hydroelectric power it meant good times with job opportunities, better roads, electricity, etc. But the question and the answer also reflect certain values: a cultural milieu has antiquarian value only if it is untouched by modern times and represents something old-fashioned and archaic.

The dilemma has recently been highlighted in the debate concerning certain World Heritage Sites. Laponia in northern Sweden, inscribed on UNESCO's list of World Heritage in 1996, is a good example. It consists of four National Parks and two nature reserves. It was selected as a candidate on the basis of criteria regarding both nature and culture. In terms of cultural criteria, Laponia has been populated by the Sami since prehistoric times, and is considered to be one of the best-preserved examples of nomadic rangeland in northern Scandinavia. It includes both settlements and grazing areas for large reindeer herds, and supports a traditional livelihood which, according to

advocates of Laponia's World Heritage designation, stems from an early stage in the economic and social evolution of humankind.[19]

It is often promoted as 'Europe's largest continuous area of virtually untouched nature'. Laponia, says the Board of Antiquities, 'is the cultural landscape of the Saami people and one of the last large wildernesses of Western Europe'.[20] UNESCO gives this description of the area:

> The Arctic Circle region of northern Sweden is the home of the Saami, or Lapp people. It is the largest area in the world (and one of the last) with an ancestral way of life based on the seasonal movement of livestock. Every summer, the Saami lead their huge herds of reindeer towards the mountains through a natural landscape hitherto preserved, but now threatened by the advent of motor vehicles. Historical and ongoing geological processes can be seen in the glacial moraines and changing water courses.[21]

So, what Sami people should be 'allowed' in this world heritage? An archaic Sami herder with tent, skis and reindeer with sledge or the modern Sami herder, integrated with the market economy, using high-tech equipment—snowmobiles, helicopters, motorbikes—in connection with reindeer herding?

To put the question in a more general way: how can nature be preserved as heritage without denying the continuing transformation of the landscape and the impact of man?

Notes

[1] Sundin, 'Environmental Protection and National Parks'. The early history of nature protection in Sweden has been treated in detail by Haraldsson, *Skydda vår nature!*

[2] The international development was reported in depth by a commission of inquiry appointed within the Ministry of Agriculture; see *Betänkande rörande åtgärder till skydd för vårt lands nature och naturminnesmärken. Afg. af inom K. Jordbruksdepartementet för ändamålet tillkallade sakkunnige*, Stockholm, 1907.

[3] Molin, *Den rätta tidens matt*, gives many examples of the practices of travelling antiquarians and their observations in the landscape in the 18th and early 19th century.

[4] Nordlund, *Det upphöjda landet*, investigates aspects of geological, plant geographical and archaeological research in the shoreline displacement between land and sea pursued in Sweden during the period 1860–1930, and the significance of this research for the view of the 'Swedish' landscape and its post-glacial history.

[5] Sundin, 202.

[6] Ibid., 208.

[7] Nordlund, 260ff.; Sundin, 210f.

[8] Almqvist and Florin, *Förteckning å svenska nationalparker samt å fridlysta naturminnesmärken*.

[9] As early as 1905, in a critical study of the Academy's first nature protection committee, botanist Gunnar Andersson indicated that total protection of forest meadows would lead to their being transformed into spruce woodlands. See Andersson, 'I Sverige under senaste tiden företagna åtgärder till naturens skydd'.

[10] Definition by Jackson in *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, 8, here quoted from Nye, *Technologies of Landscape*, 1.

[11] The programme is presented in Sundin, *Landskapet som arena*.

[12] For a discussion of a common discourse in the 19th century, with examples from archaeology and geology, see Molin and Nordlund, '"Här vandra sålunda fornforskningen och geologien hand i hand vid hvarandras sida"', 3.

[13] The antiquarian discourse in the 20th century is discussed in detail in Pettersson, *Fädernesland och framtidsland* and *Den svenska kulturmiljövårdens värdegrunder*.
[14] Hvarfner et al., *Lossen*.
[15] Janson and Hvarfner, *Ancient Hunters and Settlements in the Mountains of Sweden*. This beautiful book, which gives a survey of the investigations, was first published in Swedish in 1960. Six years later it was translated into English. The following quotes are from the English version, published in 1966.
[16] Ibid., 16.
[17] Ibid., 15.
[18] Ibid., 15.
[19] Beach, 'World Heritage and Indigenous Peoples', 96.
[20] Citation from the homepage of the Board of Antiquities, describing Laponia. See http://www.raa.se/varveng/lapplande.asp
[21] Citation from http://whc.unesco.org/sites/774.htm

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