

Foray in a Modern Reserve: An Impounding Portrait of Land-Use

(An excerpt from Parts I and II)

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1.

The Terms of a Premature Inspection

Needs must! The contract for the Inspection Report arrived by courier. Bearing the stamp of Corporation Southern (les Eaux), it instructed: ‘Southern Impounding Reservoir and Gathering Grounds. Witness, record, return. Visual evidence to accompany written report. Fee to be agreed on receipt of findings’.

Attached to the contract were clumsy facsimiles of two earlier reports and a graph representing regional ‘Landscape Value Units’.

The first report was signed by the ‘Borough and Water Engineer’ and dated ‘this day of the 12th Day of November 1958’. This was a succinct survey by someone who knew where to look. It mentioned ‘bore holes’; ‘pits of puddle core’; ‘cut-off trenches’; a ‘concrete draw-off valve tower with overflow pass’; a footbridge with ‘moveable bearings’; and of a ‘site outside the water limits’. It recorded the use of ‘baffles that prevent vortexes’. It advised as to the functioning of the ‘scour or emptying valve’ and was adamant about the ‘ample freeboard between the overflow level and the top of the dam’. It concluded, ‘An inspection in less than one hundred years is not recommended.’



(We were being sent to inspect prematurely by forty years!)

The second report was an unsigned and undated document of the 'Wealdon Field Research Unit'. The account began in the first person – 'I again went out to the Southern Reservoir on a hurried visit on the request of the Divisional Planner' – but quickly went on to record a method of survey based on teamwork: 'Pairs of fieldwalkers were given a convenient block of landscape which they searched intensively'. The survey recorded 'a neat and tidy embankment and crest', the presence of 'burnt soil' and the 'limits of a deer park'. The author states that at the conclusion of the search some fieldwalkers attempted to 'exercise the right to freewarren', while others spent extended periods of 'leisurely communion' and strayed from the public rights of way. Mention is made of encounters with a 'four-man Forestry Gang' and a mounted 'Land Bailif'. It recommends that all future fieldworkers 'have their papers in order', and pay close attention to the codes of conduct and rights to access stipulated by the CADAC.

This second report concluded with a recommendation that a 'watching brief take place', and a list of geographical coordinates with their essential topographic description was provided: 'area of raised ground 7154 2083'; 'scoop in a scarp slope 7137 2074'; 'bank (causeway) 7051 2082'.



LANDSCAPE VALUE UNITS SOUTH EAST ($\alpha \neq \beta$ nor γ)

2.

Entry into the Reservoir Reserve

We drove along the northern borders of the Reservoir Reserve, back and forth in search of a convenient point to park-up and gain access. We crossed successively in and out of the limits of the Reserve and the margins of the 'Gathering Grounds'. Laybys and forestry car parks had been newly bared. Signs appeared on barriers: 'Corporation Southern (les Eaux)'.

We paused the car at a point high to the north west of the object of our commission and peered through a rusting, metal-barred, padlocked gate to observe a distant view of the Reservoir waters and its south west shore. Deer made a fleeting appearance on the promontory of, what we noted from our Explorer Map 124 Ordnance Survey to be 'Furnace Shaw', before disappearing back into woodland.

We made a mental note to rate this landscape view at a value of 22.0, four points higher than that 'taken to represent the highest to be obtained by a view in Great Britain', and ten points higher than that 'obtained by a view in lowland Britain, such as the prospect from Newlands Corner near Guildford over the Lower Greensand hills of Surrey and West Sussex'. On later reflection, we downgraded the view rating to 17.0, for we felt obliged to factor the appearance

of the deer as an inadmissible enhancement of the view equivalent to ‘transient atmospheric phenomena’, and that knowledge of the name of the topographic feature, Furnace Shaw, had also affected our reception of the view, although in ways that we could not yet fully determine.



We eventually settled on a verdant verge near to a field entrance and, after placing possessions unnecessary for the fulfilment of the commission out of sight and locking the car, hurried along the narrow lane anxious to avoid speeding, cross-country traffic, for there was no place to retreat, other than the ditch and the hedge.

Bolted gates; the smell of faeces at every entrance; ‘probability of adjacent contamination’; ‘evidence of polluting matters gaining access thereto’.

As we approached an entrance to Scaland wood we encountered a small group of ramblers. We paused to ask them the quickest route through the woods to the shores of the Reservoir. Their instructions were clearly stated, but proved too general to be of any assistance. Some of the group seemed reticent and a little shaken. We noticed a gash on the sleeve of one of the male ramblers and what appeared to be spots of blood on a plastic sleeve in which they kept their map.

‘Go over a stile into the Reservoir Wood, where a friendly notice encourages public access, which you may be tempted to sample, as far as possible, to the right of way.’

§ 2 – FORÊTS DOMINIALES ET COMMUNALS.

NOTICE!

CADAC strives to offer waters, exclusive waters, we do just that. Members must make sure they are aware of (and comply with) the rules for this water to the letter.

Ospreys and Buzzards overhead and superb specimens swimming in the water!

Under the canopy of Scaland a conflict quickly flared between our Explorer Map 124 and the intentions and articulations of the ground. A digital compass offered little assistance, for no sooner had we set our trajectory, aligned our bearings with the Ordnance, that encounters with unmapped features, boundaries, pathways and signs of abandoned infrastructure would distract and disorient.



We decided to content ourselves with a lesser navigational ambition: to avoid roads and the sound of traffic.

3.

Aquatic features of the lower ‘Gathering Grounds’.



Intermittently, we encountered a network of watercourses and small-scale schemes of water management – sandbag and pipe bridges, open culverts – contributing to the ‘impounding of certain stream waters’. We wandered in these ‘various Gathering Grounds’, ‘clean and free’, encountering ‘no evidence of polluting matters gaining access thereto’.



In a shallow pool we inspected a hole, pitch-void-black against the clay bed. We speculated that this was an old ‘trial boring’ from times when things had ‘been worked out in a preliminary way’. Its suction was fierce, and seemed to extract from the pool at an unsustainable rate. We watched minnows struggle against its force and dodge a cascade of vegetation detached from the far bank. This micro landscape seemed in crisis. We considered lessening the outflow with stones, but suddenly the extraction slowed and reversed. A back-flow swelled and rippled out from the hole. The minnows were released from their vital efforts and the hole now seemed to establish a more balanced rate of extraction. We noted the

possible observation of a 'pit of puddle core', and that we suspected the 'remote influence of a scour or emptying valve', yet to be located.



Shortly after resuming our journey we were halted by a guttural belch; deep, aquatic and distant. Sonically, it was no louder than the ambient shifting of wind and foliage. It nevertheless had a vibrational strength which sent tremors into tendons and organs. For its duration and a for few seconds after, the 'belch' communicated a sonic, landscape perspective that compressed anthropomorphic scale to the miniature. Its point of origin seemed to be to the south, on lower ground, toward the sea (and the current direction of travel).

'A path winds through scrub to join a wide sunken path where you turn right. At the bottom of the slope, a waypost indicates the start of a path ahead, which provides a worthwhile there-and-back detour to the edge of the reservoir. However, turn left at the waypost along an uphill path. Some care is needed from here on in, as there is a lack of signs in places and many alternative paths.'

186 - CHARGES DES RIVERAINS. -
1^o Police et conservation des eaux -

'NOTICE!

Keep to the marked paths.

No access to Hog Trough Bay and Shaw.

Area is patrolled 24hrs by CADAC Bailiffs.'



EXEMPTIONS.

Motifs et durée.

- dessèchement de marais : vingt ans,

Beyond the pool the stream fell in steeper descent and our expectation of arriving at the banks of the reservoir increased correspondingly. Expectant, a mirage of open air above a modern lake lay superimposed through every woodland vista. The stream's descent levelled and the woodland path made a series of playful crossings from bank-to-bank. Beneath us, the retarded stream appeared like a model system of lakes, with a topography of 'cut-off trenches', 'over-flow levels' and 'sites outside the water limits' rendered to scale to either side. But the stream then seemed to meet an abrupt and muddy termination in a basin filled with logs. We noted this as a 'log-pile crossing', but were suspicious of its purpose, for the logs not only seemed to have suppressed the flow of the stream, but to have set another navigational conundrum. The logs were arrayed like a series of rafts set in deadlock after dynamic collision, their divergent angles now offering multiple trajectories for the onward journey.

'At the track's southern terminal a series of waterlogged timber planks were found revetting the trackway ... No additional timbers were found, their exact function remains unclear ... further investigation was impossible without redirecting the adjacent stream'.

Our instinct was now to reach higher ground, to achieve an overview, and to reconnect with the logic of the Ordnance. We took the path of steepest ascent, although we were now moving away from the supposed position of the reservoir.



« ... Nul n'est censé ignorer la Loi ... »

'Now veer half-left to climb steadily up a grassy slope. The path is a bit vague underfoot but takes a relatively straight course, crossing an intermediate stile in a fence.'

4.

Divination, labour and signs of conflict.

The ascent was steep and increasingly highland in character. Bracken now dominated the borders of the path. The generic nature of the woodlands around us sapped our energy, and we trudged onward through 'sites outside the water limits', profoundly unsure of their relevance to our commissioners. On the verge of a reluctant return to the 'log-pile crossing' we came across an object of extreme distortion: a young beech had dramatically diverted from its natural habit, seemingly enforced by a now absent object. It abruptly and extensively

tracked at right angles at about a height of three-and-a-half feet from its base, before rising, doubling back on itself in a cork screw twist, and then returning to a more direct ascent into the woodland canopy.

We sympathised with the directional traumas expressed here and, lacking any other navigational inspiration, decided to submit to its divination and set our course according to the angle of the tree's lateral section of growth.

Now released from the logic of tracks and pathways we entered into what seemed like a parallel realm: a 'room' of coppiced ash and hornbeam, running in well-spaced lines with wood-banks interspersed between. We noted a series of improvised shelters, log piles and brushwood pilings, but the site seemed long abandoned as an active coppice. Impressed, however, by the signs of once diligent cultivation and order we explored the coppice to its furthest limits.



We tracked along the lower edge of the coppice, bordered by a rhododendron thicket. We perceived that the thicket was shallow in depth, and that the ground beyond it fell abruptly. Moving through the thicket we confronted a sudden change in the humidity of the air, as a ravine of black rocks, lichen, moss and ferns opened below us, framing some modest cascades of a now revitalised stream that had somehow survived or bypassed the log jam. Initially joyful at the prospect of a more direct reconnection with the land's watercourses we soon began to suspect the role of artifice. We observed with distaste the meandering form of a prepared route down into the ravine, of compacted, sandy earth, with a boarder of rocks and pebbles: a Victorian conceit, we concluded; the haunt of amateur botanists; fern seekers.

As we moved along the line of the ridge, we discerned signs of conflict; the remains of a botanical foray littered the opposite bank of the ravine: items of clothing, plastic bags, bottles, vehicle parts, burnt and twisted metal rodding, plastic and wooden furniture, some broken and splintered into what seemed to be improvised weapons.

We quickly returned to the spaces of woodland labour and continued in our exploration of the coppice, where we recorded an 'area of raised ground' 7150 1504, and the remains of a portable sawmill 7151 1002.



Emboldened to fulfil the terms of our commission, we pressed on, picking up a gently meandering path through the warm woodlands of what now seemed like a plateau.

‘Cross an earth causeway, diverge very gradually from the right field-edge. Go straight ahead here on a faint, unsigned path which crosses a hump where you have a choice of two paths ahead, over to your right.’

An adder moved sluggishly in the grass bank to our right, reaffirming the direction of travel.

5.

Regional Infrastructure

A sharper bend, a slight dip, an ‘area of raised ground’, ‘shallow depressions’, a subtle shift in the woodland’s character – from the denser thicket of blackthorn and hawthorn, to young, more luxuriant groves to either side, growing vigorously but at variance to one another. Here, a sheer surface suddenly rendered the dappled forest shadows straight! A large, cuboid form, a matt surface which fixed light and shadow into oblique striation. There seemed no question as to the significance of the structure we had chanced upon, and immediately began to record it:



Regional Infrastructure: Water Tank and Woodland Tomb

As we approached the form, the forest light intermittently picked out a myriad incisions upon its flanks: an accumulation of cuts and abrasions; a sylvan text inscribed on this modern surface. The shifting forest thicket, clawed and toothed woodland creatures, ramblers, forest workers, lovers, exiles, invaders, all had left their mark here; none seeking hierarchy over another.

Being just a little higher than eye level, we could discern that the tank tomb was full but with ‘freeboard between the overflow level’ and the top of the tank. We struggled, though, to see

into its depths. We could not make out if the tank was connected to hidden conduits, or confirm the existence of valves.

It was clear that this aquatic volume had attracted and supported a different character of luxuriant, broad-leafed forest growth around it. We surmised that the tank tomb signalled a point of re-entry to the 'water limits', perhaps at the 'highest point and limit of the gathering grounds'; that this highland terrain represented the 'purchase and control of an adequate area of land in proximity'; and that it was on 'land to be used as part of the undertaking'.

'After crossing the remains of a stile and a collapsed stream culvert, bear left along a field-edge. Go through a gap and walk parallel to the right field-edge to the left of an isolated cottage. Head out across pasture, onwards between the trees and then along the right edge of an open area to a gate. Once through this gate, with your first glimpse of the Reservoir over to your right, be tempted to sample, as far as possible, to the right of way.'

6.

Land and its definitions

The 'first glimpse' of the Reservoir brought sky and water together with a violence that abruptly expelled the intimate and canopied topographies through which we had previously travelled. We walked for a short distance along the ridgeway of a vast, modern landscape, subject to exposure from modern winds.

'A second reservation, by no means distinct [...]: According to the formula, the relative value of a tract varies only with the intervening variables of settlement population and the inverse square of distance.'

A little further to the east beyond 'an isolated cottage' and still on high ground was an inactive construction site, with footings extensive enough to provide for a 'completely new, very large house', or a 'new manor house and associated structures', such as an 'orangery and garages', a 'giant cupola and a bell tower with hourly striking bells', lodgings for the 'temporary grooms' of 'Hanoverian horses', and the 'alteration of machine store/office to include temporary accommodation for personal use'. 'There is no allowance for a full-time groom to live on site. The plan does allow for a shepherd who will cost about four times more than the annual gross profit from the sheep. There is also an allowance for a gardener.'

Within the intended viewshed of this 'new manor house', we re-coordinated our direction of travel to the Ordnance, and now understood that the Head of the Reservoir and the concentration of modern, regional infrastructure was further to the east. We were content to descend once more and soon reached a gravel track and fencing on the margins of the forbidden areas of Hog Trough Bay and Shaw. Here, paths had been re-laid, culvert crossings widened and indeterminate stiles replaced with determinate ones. Land, its boundaries and the routes designated for crossing the land, had been subject to a new regime of management and definition.

169 – OUVERTURE, REDRESSEMENT ET SUPPRESSION DES CHEMINS RURAUX. –

Aux terms de l'article 13 de la loi de 1881, l'ouverture, le redressement ou l'élargissement d'un chemin rural sont soumis aux formalités prévues par l'article 4 de la même loi.

Confident that we were now travelling within the epicentre of the ‘Gathering Grounds’ for which ‘Bye Laws had been sought’ on behalf of Corporation Southern (les Eaux), our commissioners, we were ‘tempted to sample, as far as possible’ *beyond* ‘the right of way’.

‘Notice!

Strictly no access to the Southern bank of the reservoir, keep a MINIMUM of 50 meters away from South shore. Do not stray onto adjacent land. MEMBERS FOUND IGNORING THIS RULE WILL BE BANNED!

CADAC members are allowed along the dam wall (apart from the last 50m at Southern end) and along the North Bank, anyone found elsewhere will be banned from the club!

CADAC members must not be caught by the gamekeeper close to the South shore!

A few CADAC members have already been caught by the gamekeeper close to the South shore!

We followed the gravel track in the direction of the Head of the Reservoir. Intermittently, we peered through the intervening glades and thickets of the foreshore, catching expectant glimpses of the ‘900 million gallons with a daily extraction of 3 million’.

‘There is no legal right of public access along the reservoir perimeter, but a circular route established by Southern [...] in woodland to the south of the reservoir adds a short excursion to the water’s edge.’

We paused to consider how the gravel of the track way beside the water’s edge ‘may be interpreted as material placed to form a track way’ suitable for the promenading of horses and the conveyance of machinery for the management and definition of property and the enforcement of designated rights of way.

We recorded a ‘stone pile’, consisting of large, cut, sandstone pieces, suitable for the construction of a ‘new manor house and associated structures’, arranged in ‘pens’ constructed from wooden palettes, some of which were rotting and collapsing into the undergrowth. ‘The unexpected presence of Ashdown sandstone was a serious development’, and we briefly speculated on possible augmentations to the infrastructure and public facilities of Corporation Southern (les Eaux):

Rock Garden of the South Shore
(restrict growth as required)

House of the Borough and Water Engineer

The dipping flight of a green woodpecker reaffirmed our direction of travel.



‘There is no legal right of public access along the reservoir perimeter.’

7.

Rehabilitation and thickets

Soon we arrived at a large area of open, scrubby grass to the landward side of the track way, boarded by gorse and bracken and with tall woodland growth surrounding on three sides. This was recorded as the ‘Rehabilitation Yard’. It was strewn with the apparatus of rehabilitation, including a mechanical press, and a heavy-duty, water-fillable, metal land-roller, ‘fitted with an agricultural towing eye’. A fallen tree trunk, partially stripped of branches arched sinuously into the middle of the ‘yard’ in discrete mimicry of a finned, aquatic serpent.

Notice!

“The Reservoir is a bit of an unknown. The true size of many of the Reservoir’s fish are still a mystery due to the vastness in size of the reservoir.

What is known is that the water holds some huge predatory fish.’

Our eyes searched beyond the ‘yard’ to clearings set further into the woodland, connected by further gravel pathways for the conveyance of heavy machinery suitable for ‘rehabilitation’, the alteration of land, including and the ‘re-routing of the public footpath’. Glimpses of larger concentrations of debris tempted us ‘to sample, as far as possible’ into the clearings. However, the expectation of arrival at the Head of Reservoir drew us onward toward the East instead.

‘For the purposes of the East Sussex study a provisional scale of values was tested in order to eliminate personal bias in landscape appreciation on the part of the author. A representative group of forty-five persons was selected and each person was asked independently to rank and evaluate in terms of beauty twenty carefully chosen colour photographs of landscape views, all of which were taken under average conditions with no significant atmospheric effect. One of the photographs was pre-selected as a "control view" with a value of 1.0 and a numerical value for each view in relation to the "control view" was requested in the test instructions.’



As we remerged on the main track-way, a mounted figure appeared a little further to the East around the supposed position of the Head of the Reservoir.

‘Bloody hell! They’ve even got a map’, declared the rider, communicating, it seemed, with her equine mount, for she was otherwise alone.

A ‘sudden and senseless frenzy’ of abuse ensued. We surmised that our path had intersected with that of a mounted ‘Land Bailiff’. We declared the terms of our commission to no avail. We were escorted away from the Head of the Reservoir with the nostrils of a Hanoverian breathing down our necks like an equine shot gun.

‘Come on boys, my six-year-old can move faster than you!’

‘Do you mean horse or child?’, we retorted.

‘G.. was having remedial farriery for severe foot imbalance. He also had a tendency to veer to the right at speed, and yet, had never been able to canter properly, and had become extremely stressed at his last livery when turnout was stopped.’

The degree of control exerted upon our movements and the sense of injustice that the witnessing of a key objective of our commission had been thwarted, was intolerable. Moreover, this Land Bailiff made no specific recourse to the ‘Codes of the CADAC’. After exchanging a few glances, we dashed toward the water-side thickets, now to our right, certain that the Hanoverian could not follow there.

Crashing through a bank of nettles, we came up against a screen of the ‘impenetrable Wealden forest which the Romans knew as Sylva Anderida’. We were forced to fall to our knees and scramble below the lowest branches to advance. Immediately, it seemed, the ‘interspaces of the trees, the gaps in the further vegetation that had been hazy blue [...] became black and mysterious’.

It was during this interlude in the ‘intervening masses of thicket’, that ‘we’ became ‘Researcher Image’ and ‘Researcher Text’.

Part II

Submission

The ‘Inspection Report, Southern Impounding Reservoir’ was delivered to the South in-tray of the reception desk, Corporation Southern (les Eaux).



It is an unsigned and undated report, comprising distinct image and text sections with an uncertain level of correspondence between the two. It mentions extensive periods of study in ‘sites outside the water limits’ but includes no evidence of findings. It mentions the ‘removal of baffles that prevent vortexes’ and the ‘location of emptying valves’. It plots the position of ‘water works, as such, pumping stations, reservoir water towers’, and included observations of ‘springs (undifferentiated) and wells [...] major lithological boundaries, valley margins, ground water depths (occasionally)’. It records encounters with ‘indifferent farmers and multifunctional forest owners’ and warns that ‘there is no ornament to contrast “go” and “no-go” regions’.

A ‘watching brief’ is recommended and that future inspections should occur at regular intervals involving a ‘representative group’ of no more than two persons. It encourages sensitive engagement with the ‘existing pattern of waste edge settlement’ and expresses great enthusiasm for a ‘sort of agrarian archipelago with innumerable islands of cultivation set in a sea of waste’. It guides the reader across ‘burnt-over ground’ and speculates that ‘minor slumping features also occur’.

Much of the geological and infrastructural information in the report is redundant, for it replicates information already in the archival holdings of the Corporation, ref. DH/ACC4088/197: *Wasserkarte, Korps-Pionere, Wehrgeologengruppe, 8th Corps, 16th Army, Sept. 8, 1940.*

Payment cycle to be concluded November 2058.

(End of Part II)

Fieldwork conducted at the Darwell, Ecclesbourne and Powdermill Reservoirs, East Sussex, between Spring 2016 and Spring 2018.

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