

CUMBRIA'S TOP 50 TREES

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FOREWORD

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Cumbria's Top 50 Trees reflects the conservation maxim 'Think globally, act locally'. In a county famed for its lakes and mountains, we often overlook the special role trees play in enhancing Cumbria's landscape which is such a powerful magnet for visitors. They soften and frame the distinctive topography, and add immeasurably to our sense of place. But trees have many other purposes and are vital for ecological conservation and environmental protection. Recognising and celebrating the many values of trees helps us appreciate nature in new ways. Growing public engagement – which Cumbria's Top 50 Trees brilliantly reflects – can lead to the safeguarding of our woodland heritage for generations to come.

In Canada, where I have spent much of my career, great swathes of forest continue to dominate the land. Sadly, in Britain, we have lost most of our original tree cover due to human activity and the introduction of harmful pests. The changes have taken place over such a long time that many of us are unaware that trees once covered the land. Today, apart from fragments of surviving ancient woodland and modern plantations of mostly exotic conifers, the trees that remain are primarily distinctive countryside 'posts' in fields, hedgerows, copses or landscaped grounds.

Perhaps because individual trees 'catch the eye' we engage with them much more personally than with blanket forests.



Furthermore, Cumbria's Top 50 Trees has shown that whilst people not only recognise and celebrate iconic trees in their prime they are also drawn to trees that might be described as 'ordinary' or 'quirky'.

Many of the trees nominated in this project have been crafted into strange-looking sculptures by longevity, and shaped or damaged by the elements. In one case the nominated tree still captivated the public even though it had been felled with only a short trunk and exposed roots surviving. Clearly, such trees trigger personal memories in people that are unique, powerful and enduring.

It is not too fanciful to suggest that Cumbria's Top 50 Trees has its own roots in the woodland societies of the past; communities where people had more direct everyday contact with trees, relying on them for shelter, food and spiritual solace. In our globalised world today, where trees face many threats, it may sometimes appear that humanity has lost its reverence for trees and the crucial role they play in our survival. If this remarkable project was replicated in other communities across the planet, imagine the positive message it would send out to the governments and decision-makers upon whom all our futures depend. Cumbria's Top 50 Trees proves that people do care about the world around them, do care about the environment and really do care about trees.