

Memories of people and nature: StoryMaps as a tool for tracing ecocultural transformation in Cornish hedges

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Relational approaches to heritage can attempt to bridge cultural and ecological perspectives. They focus on 'ecoculture' as an assemblage that emerges from interactions between human practices, cultural meanings and memories, materials, living organisms, and the physical landscape. Under this purview, I have used a StoryMap to trace interactions between human craftwork and non-human processes as they emerge in the ecocultural assemblage of Cornish hedges. Cornish hedges are crafted stone and soil embankments that support ecological communities on and within their physical form. These structures have been actively used as agricultural boundaries for over 4,000 years in rural Cornwall, UK.

Spatial mapping, field notes, and photography of hedges along a 7km transect reveal that material memories of human craftwork and actions of living organisms continue to transform Cornish hedges for centuries. Memories of hedging craft and management were observed in distinct patterns of stone, shaped vegetation (e.g. tree coppicing, strimming), and features such as stiles, walkways, goose holes, and bridleway stones. These memory traces record a relation to specific skills and aesthetic choices of individual hedge builders and caretakers. Memories of biogeomorphic change in the hedges were reflected in seasonal plant growth (bioconstruction, bioprotection), the presence of a luminescent moss called 'goblin's gold' in badger setts and goose holes (bioturbation, bioconstruction), a song thrush's collection of snail shells in a hollow under tree roots (bioerosion, bioaccumulation), and mammalian desire lines (bioturbation and biotransport). By explicating such interactions between the ecological and the cultural, this work demonstrates how the StoryMap can guide the understanding, design, creation, and management of ecocultural heritage in such a way that human and non-human engagements are respected and recognised.

