

## Ten ways of looking at Loess Landscapes

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Ian Smalley, Verna Poppy Blake Smalley

*School of Architecture, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham NG1 4BU, UK*

Loess landscapes are part of the world-wide geoheritage; loess is involved in the development of civilization, and may play a major role in the (possible) continuation of civilization. Based on the dictionary entry by B. Goodall we can list various conceptions of landscape and consider how loess landscapes may be assessed and discussed via the different visions.

A list with 10 entries: (1) as a total regional environment, (2) as countryside, (3) as land use, (4) as topography or land form, (5) as an ecosystem, (6) as scenery, (7) as heritage or historical artefact, (8) as a composite of physical components, (9) as an art form, (10) as a resource.

It is easy to see Loess Landscapes fitting into many of the 10 categories; they might be assessed at various levels, from the trivial glance on a tourist trail to the realization that loess soils feed the World and loess landscapes witnessed the transition into an agricultural way of life.

Linkages are important; the geoheritage idea essentially consists of the making of intellectual linkages, no observation is made in isolation. The culture develops as the number of linkages develops and the depth of appreciation increases. Loess landscapes fit into many categories, and once the link making process is begun all sorts of remarkable links and associations become apparent.

A loess landscape in northern China might be appreciated by the student of architecture for the loess houses it contains; loess as habitation; a landscape for living in (in the literal sense). Standing in the middle of the Loess Plateau in China one is exposed to a classical type 1 landscape- this is the total loess environment. Various exogenetic processes have provided the material to completely dominate the region. Move to the south and stand at Xian (once Chang-an) and be aware of a vast cultural input from landscape factors. The great Tang poets (e.g Tu Fu, Li Po, Po Chu-i) wrote in a loessic landscape and it is no surprise that the loess dust imagery is there in their poems. Landscape as a poetic resource.

Even relatively trivial loess landscapes intrude into artistic visions and interpretations. In 1860 William Dyce painted 'Pegwell Bay, Kent- a Recollection of October 5<sup>th</sup> 1858'. The picture is dominated by the great Cretaceous cliffs but there is human activity on the beach. The painting was displayed in the 'Endless Forms: Natural Science & the Visual Arts' exhibition at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge in 2009. The exhibition was to celebrate Charles Darwin; anniversaries of birth and the publication of *Origin of Species*. The Dyce painting is widely interpreted as a comment on changing views about science and evolution and society. Additionally we might note the loess on top of the cliffs. The vast Cretaceous deposit has a modest loess cover, but this modest loess cover extends all over the South Downs and has provided an agricultural income for many people over many years. And this is the place where St Augustine landed, bringing a new set of beliefs for the English

people, which still echo today. This is truly a Geoheritage site. The loess aspect adds an extra dimension to the enjoyment of the site; but it requires the eye of knowledge.

Corresponding author: [ian.smalley@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:ian.smalley@ntu.ac.uk)