

TRANSCRIPTION

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ANDREW EVANS (b. 1950s, east-central England), wildlife tour guide, talks about why he came to Mull; how he and his wife were received; government policies toward the environment; the state of the roads, employment, tourism, schooling, and childbirth facilities; and tells several stories about the land. The interview took place after Evans had finished taking the interviewers on a wildlife tour around central and northwest Mull. What follows is a record of the gist of the interview, not a word-for-word transcription.

[Field project "Faces of Mull," 1993, University of California Research Expeditions; John Niles, Director. Tape number 93ANDE-01, recorded on 23 July 1993 by Craig Metz, L.K. Metz, and Patricia Player, outside the Old Byre Heritage Centre, near Dervaig.]

—How did you get started as a wildlife tour guide?

It started when I was a teenager; I was interested in wildlife. I came to a watershed in my life four or five years ago and decided to make a hobby into a living. I'm not sure if it's working this year or not! I'm self-taught.

—What brought you to Dervaig?

Commercial fishing. Before I came here I was a commercial fisherman at Morecambe [Lancashire]. I was at a stage of my life when I fancied moving. I had a small boat that wasn't big enough to fish with back in Morecambe, but I could possibly make a living here in the summertime. So I went to the west coast of Scotland to look for some place to start fishing. I took a two-week holiday with my wife; we started high up in Lochinver [Sutherland] and worked down.

I had just about given up; but my wife had been here before, and she said, "You must come for a holiday here; it's a smashing place." This was the place; the opportunity was here. I was a commercial fisherman here for three or four years. I fished from my own small boat in the summertime. In the winter I worked on other fishing boats. I started off with nothing here, really. After the initial idea of moving here I spent the following winter working on the boat, converting it. I towed a caravan up here to live in and found a very kind person who allowed me to keep it on their grounds for a very small rent. I sailed my boat up; by that stage I didn't have much money left.

—Do you feel the people were eager to attract you to the area?

The people I met around here were very helpful to me, and they still are. I think if you're genuine and sincere and you're not here to scrounge off the people, you may have something to add to the community and you're encouraged. I haven't found any aggression towards me without a good reason.

—What would be a reason for aggression from one of the long-term residents of the island?

You mean from an indigenous person? It's difficult to answer that. I have a sympathy with the native people here because they had a lot to put up with in the past; I'm talking hundreds of years ago. They have quite a lot to put up with in the present as well; not just from incomers like myself, but also from government policies out of Whitehall.

—Is that good or bad, or both?

Some people think we should be right out of Whitehall and should be represented in the European parliament rather than the British parliament. I tend to agree with that. I think we'd have more of a voice in the European parliament.

—When you were taking us on a tour, you pointed out some forestry plantings. What do you think of the forestry policies on Mull?

In most of Mull, they're replacing one monoculture of grasses and bog areas with another one of sitka spruce and larch trees. As I pointed out on the tour, at the early stages of the trees' growing, they bring in birds like hen harriers and owls, which is good news, but if they displace birds like golden eagles and rare waders it's bad. They're not indigenous trees to the island. But the forestry commission does plant 5% hardwoods now. They didn't plant hardwoods before because of lack of public pressure. Hardwoods take two and a half times the length of sitka spruce to grow before they reach marketable size. It's more valuable, but if one is only marketing small amounts of trees, it's more hassle to market them. The companies are used to handling sitka spruce and they know what to do with it. We've got three acres of mixed hardwoods, so they probably have to be specially assessed and sell as an individual lot.

—When we were on your tour, didn't you tell us a story about a place where trees wouldn't grow?

There's a certain village on the north end of Mull that was cleared by a landowner sometime back, during the clearances in the nineteenth century when they brought sheep on and moved the people off. Well, in this particular cleared village, the ground was bought by the forestry commission, and they planted trees there right around the village and in amongst the houses, but the trees never took. Some of them have grown 4 or 5 feet high compared to the surrounding ones, which are now 25 or 30 feet high. It's eerie being there.

—You went on to say that some villagers had cleared the land of trees so they could build houses?

It's ironic that these croft houses that the people used here were left. People were forcibly evicted in some cases. They took the long, arduous boat journey to Canada or America; they actually had to clear conifers to build the houses here, and now in the twentieth century the forestry commission planted conifers in amongst the old ruins left 150 years ago.

—What do you most dislike about Mull?

The long, wet winters; but not everybody says that. October to December is the rainy season, then it gets drier and frostier in January and February. It's not until mid-March that the ground starts drying up slightly.

—What do you like most about Mull?

The lack of people. It doesn't help my business in the summer, but I think it's a strong point. There's a lack of development money, so far. Of the people who choose to live here, few come to make a fortune; they come for other reasons. If you're born and bred here and you're still here, you're here because you like the place. People would have a strong reason for being here, either because of farming, fish farming, tourism to a degree. We like the peace in the wintertime especially.

—To go back to the plantations. You say they're planting hardwoods now because of public pressure. Does the forestry commission call on folks like yourself who work in the wildlife for your advice and consultation about how their policies should be directed?

No. I'm just small fry. They work from the top down. Nowadays there are consultation bodies; in Scotland it's Scottish National Heritage, RSPB [the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds], the BTO [British Trust for Ornithology]; different bodies who watch over wildlife and the environment. Nowadays one can't just plant forests. The commission and the private landowners have to go through a consulting procedure where an area is given an environmental assessment and a decision is made whether or not forestry will be allowed in that particular place.

—Once the plantation has reached its maturity, they clear-cut. What do you think of that policy?

It's a clear fell, then a rapid replanting program. It's not a good idea; it tends to make the ground more acid. The best method of planting forestry is to have a patchwork with different maturities of trees in a small area: 5, 10, 20, 30 years old. That helps wildlife more than planting large areas with a single age group.

—You're on the roads a lot with your business. Do you think the roads are the way you'd like them to be, or could they do a better job?

They could do a better job by listening to what we want. We're right on the periphery of the old Strathclyde region; it's now getting broken up into smaller areas. It all depends on funding. There's more work on the roads now than there was. Work on the Tobermory/Salen road has been shelved until funds are being met. That one needs improving more than any other. Regarding the minor roads, they let them get pretty pot-holed and then fix them. The Salen/Dervaig road has been improved quite a lot.

—Do you think there should be more roads?

I think that due to the nature of the terrain, it would be difficult to plan new routes.

—Have you seen other changes in sixteen years?

A lot of places in the outlying areas have had electricity laid out through special grants from the EEC. Instead of paying thousands of pounds, electricity was taken to your house for about 300 pounds; you had to meet the minimum of about 120 pounds a year for three years or so.

—What about the job situation. Has it changed much in sixteen years?

Sixteen years ago, the main earnings were in fishing, farming, forestry commission, tourism, the service industries. Now, the forestry commission has run down, a lot of stuff has been moved; they're streamlining it for privatization. There are a lot more fish farms now. Farmers aren't too happy about the sheep situation, but generally I don't think they're doing too bad; nobody has really dropped out of farming. Fishing has really boomed in the last 5-10 years, but I think it's taking a downhill curve just now. I'm out of fishing now; I'm speaking as an outsider. *[Laughter]*. In tourism, over the last 5 years, we've had a new ferry, a larger ferry. That has brought over more traffic.

—Do you think that has upset the older residents? Do they see you as someone bringing outsiders onto their isle?

—I don't. It's more of an internal tourism. The more people, usually the more work. I don't hear the older people complaining; maybe they'll have a bit of a fracas on the road with a tourist. Maybe if they have trouble getting into the Co-Op because of the number of people queuing behind the counter, or if they can't park on Tobermory Main Street, which certainly is the case now. It's very difficult in the height of the tourist season to park anywhere near, and if you're an old person and have to walk in and out of Tobermory, up and down the hill, it's not easy. Regarding culture, I couldn't answer. I don't hear people complaining about tourists; only when something silly happens.

—I noticed there's a bus service. Is that new in the last few years?

No. It's also the school run for the children who live in the outlying area of Dervaig; the ones who go to secondary school go in on the Tobermory-Calgary busses. They go 8:00 am to 4:00 pm, so it's a service bus as well.

—Do you have children?

I've got two children, one four and one nine. The nine-year old only has to go as far as Dervaig, to a primary school. When she gets to be 10 or 11, she'll go on Ian Morrison's bus to Tobermory.

—Were both of your children born on the Isle of Mull?

No. Usually the first born, unless you're very insistent, has to be born at the Vale of Leven Hospital near Alexandria, just on the north bank of the Clyde. That's a hassle if you want to visit your wife. It's because they have the most up-to-date equipment.

—So your wife goes over right before labor on the ferry?

Hopefully. *[Laughter]*. My wife had to be taken off the island by plane because it came on rather suddenly.

—I met a woman who had a baby on Monday, and she was at the Highland Games on Thursday. She said her baby was born on the Isle of Mull; it wasn't supposed to be, but it was.

It's just your first-born you have to have at the Vale of Leven. If you really insist, the doctor can't stop you from having it at your own home. The second baby you can have in Oban; you can go back to the Vale of Leven or Oban, or home. But you can imagine in a place like this, if there's any complications it puts the local doctor in a sticky position.

—Do your children consider themselves natives of Mull?

I don't think they really see it that way; in my eyes I think the older one would see herself as Scottish; in regard to being a true native, a Mulleach, I don't know.

—Could you tell us about the manor house that we passed and the cemetery that you pointed out when people were on their way to Iona, I believe it was?

In early Christian times here, just after St. Columba, a certain number of Danish, Scottish, and Norwegian kings were buried on Iona. Apparently the dead had to work their way over from the mainland to Mull by boat, then across Mull by land, and the quickest journey to Iona would be from the head of Loch na Keal, past the island of Inch Kenneth, over an 8 mile crossing to Iona. Sometimes on that crossing from Loch na Keal to Inch Kenneth it would get stormy in the more exposed waters, and in a small boat with an ancient king on board, it wasn't considered good form to get lost with the body [*laughter*] or sink the boat, so an easy way out was to bury them in a burial ground on Inch Kenneth itself. There's about a dozen kings buried on Inch Kenneth itself. There's an ancient chapel there as well.

—Can you describe the manor house there?

—It's a four-storied, art-deco type house, rather an extravaganza for an island situation. Very shallow pitched roof, which isn't very good for the 80-100 inches of rainfall we have here a year. Presently, the island and the house are owned by a medical consultant; actually it's a holiday home, or island.

—Where would you like to be buried?

—I think wherever I'm living. If I were given the choice, I don't know if you've been to Calgary Bay. There's a nice burial ground there. But I think it would be the place where I was living last; I wouldn't insist on being taken back to Mull or anyplace else if I were on the mainland.

—But it sounds as if you really like this place.

Yes. Despite the rain, and the midges. Mosquitoes are tame compared to midges. You can actually breathe them in; they can actually cover your arm and make them look black. They have a nasty nip, too; some people are allergic to them.

[End of interview.]