

Beauty

Every year, Paula and I make the journey (or pilgrimage) to Cornwall. We rent a house for a week – always the same house. It has 70's furniture, and a cooker that dates to the Neolithic period. It *does* have a colour TV - the colour in question being green. It can only produce pictures in various shades of green. I'm told the problem is a shortage of replacement valves. To *my* knowledge, it's been that way for 8 years.

But we don't watch much television down there – not even the news. While we are in Cornwall, it is a matter of supreme indifference if Prince Charles is abducted by aliens, or Lord Archer has finally been caught telling the truth...or if the pound has dropped to 3.4 against the Matabele Gumbo Bead. And we certainly don't care who wins Pop Idol...but then, *I* never did.

Any self-respecting cave-dweller would turn his nose up at this holiday home, and yet it can be difficult to get a booking. So *why are* people queuing to get into Cornwall's answer to the black hole of Calcutta? *Because it's got its own lake.*

The lake has fish, and we like catching fish – though they rarely co-operate. But even that is not the main attraction: the lake is among the most beautiful places I have ever seen.

True, it doesn't have the fierce brilliance of a coral atoll, nor yet the awesome splendour of snow-tipped peaks. It is that serene (even understated) beauty – peculiar to these isles – which draws the heart. It is the British countryside – at its best - in the warm glow of summer. The sunlight-dappled water, the lilies resting on their pads...the lazy sweep of the willow, as it caresses the lake in a gentle breeze. There is lush greenery, broken only by the colour of wild flowers: some pale and demure, others proclaiming themselves boldly in deep yellows, reds and purples. There are dragonflies and damsel flies; the marriage of breathtaking beauty and utter fragility, in living form. And there is wildlife: swooping herons, soaring birds of prey, and rabbits emerging from the long grass, blinking in the sunshine.

Carp celebrate the warmth, rolling gently on the surface - or sometimes joyously leaping out altogether, before falling back with a splash. There is the fragrance of high summer, and the sounds: the moorhen's call, the high-pitched crickets and the contented hum of bees about their work. The words of Shakespeare's John of Gaunt come unbidden to mind, "this other Eden, demi-paradise...".

The capacity to appreciate the beauty of creation is not something which has evolved. There would be no reason for it, any more than there would be a reason to evolve a conscience...surely a major handicap to 'the survival of the fittest'. But our delight and wonderment at nature has indeed a purpose: The book of Romans tells us what that is – "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse". Or, as Psalms puts it – "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands".

Our ability to enjoy the beauty of this world is a God-given facility. That ability – and that beauty – are intended as a clear demonstration of intelligent design. Judging by what it says in Romans, that message can only be missed *deliberately*. But for any who *are* missing it, I have to tell you that natural beauty is even *more* overwhelming, when seen for what it is....the work of a loving master-craftsman.