

Teesdale u3a

U3A member, Gerald Blake tackled the daunting subject of "Islands" at the August meeting. There are almost 700,000 islands throughout the world, in oceans, rivers and lakes. The countries with most islands are Norway, Sweden, Canada and Finland. Of these islands, about 7,000 are permanently occupied.

Gerald described some special features of particular islands or groups. There are about 500 artificial islands including those around Abu Dhabi, which some in the audience had visited. Gerald was particularly taken by what he called 'Islands of the Imagination' as described in books eg Burgh Island (Agatha Christie), Atlantis (Plato), Utopia (Thomas More), Robinson Crusoe (Daniel Defoe) and Treasure Island (R L Stevenson). Some of these books had been translated into many languages suggesting a universal interest and fascination with islands.

Winston Churchill in "Our Island Race" described how much of our history is defined by our close proximity to the sea. Even Barnard Castle is only 16 miles from the sea. There are 6,000 islands around the UK, 180 of which are inhabited.. Economic activity spread inland from the coast eg the steel anchor head from the Titanic was cast locally in Wolsingham. There are many islands of 'special interest' around the UK eg Lindisfarne, Ness of Brodgar on Orkney and St Kilda. Some islands emerged after the last Ice Age and newer ones are still emerging as a result of volcanic activity on the seabed. The isolation of some island has resulted in the development of unique species of plants and animals, most well known being the Spice and Galápagos Islands.

Research into Global Warming suggests that sea levels are rising by about 1/2 cm per year. This will have a significant effect on islands if it continues.

Polynesians are some of the worlds most competent sailors and were travelling to South Pacific islands centuries before these islands were 'discovered' by Europeans.

Gerald finished with some stunning photographs of beautiful islands and concluded by saying "So what is it about islands? It has to do with separation, difference, mystery and landscape. We can set foot on them if we choose to do so. But the real wonder is that they make it easy for us to escape to them in our imaginations whenever we wish."

This was a splendid talk, well researched and full of fascinating detail. We are now all planning our next holiday on an island.

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 26th September when Ronnie Stewart will be speaking on "Tales of turbulent Tempests, volatile Vanes and stormy Stewarts".

Ian Reid

24/08/2024



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