THE METAL FENCES OF SUFFOLK

Something strange is creeping over the waters, foreigners creep into the country. It was far, it becomes near, it is here. (The Ovambo of South Africa, 19th c text)

In 1979 I wrote a book called The White Men: an anthology of the responses of indigenous peoples all over the newly colonised world, to the invasion of a race of intruders who arrived like creatures from another planet and behaved as if they owned a land they had never seen before and had a right to rule over the people who had always lived here.

Yesterday I drove towards the little fishing village where two nuclear power stations, Sizewell A and B are situated . I turned left into a car park with room for a handful of cars and set off on a walk I have done very many times, ever since I first came to live in this part of Suffolk forty years ago. A wooden gate takes you onto a path that goes through a pretty wood of silver birch, oak and beech trees and then across a patch of marshland that leads to sand dunes and the sudden expanse of the North Sea.

But now everything had changed: a high and shiny metal fence stood next to the gate and it followed the path until we had almost reached the coast, at which point it made an unfamiliar swerve to the right, forcing me to retrace my steps inland.

The fence is produced by a company called Heras which specialises in *crowd control solutions……. our fencing acts as a great deterrent to those looking to gain unauthorised access, and has an anti-climb feature for added protection.* Each interlinking section has its own *hi-visibility feet* - made out of concrete and painted bright yellow- as well as *anti-tamper couplers.*

Where the fence abruptly changes direction the tracks of deer have stopped in perplexity in front of such an unfamiliar barrier. The tracks then search for an opening that will allow them access to the landscape of heath and marsh that they have known for more years than we can count. In their confusion many of them head off towards the main Sizewell road and an increasing number are being killed while trying to cross it.

Heras fences are spreading like a disease across this part of Suffolk and behind their shiny ring of protection a brutal work of destruction is underway. Twenty-five thousand trees have already been felled and shattered hedges and the long lines of amputated tree stumps accompany most of the roads leading to this stretch of the coast . A deceptively simple landscape of cultivated fields and wooded areas has been stripped of vegetation and turned into sandy wastes and artificially heaped-up hills.

Much of this work of destruction is done under the cover of darkness . Driving home from the coast at night is like a game of snakes and ladders: you keep being blocked by new and unexpected No Entry signs , or led along narrow detours which lead through surreal scenes in which men in helmets and hi-vis yellow jackets are illuminated by the powerful beams of overhead lights, while mysterious machines devour the land with a terrifying hunger.

In his 2021 book Go Big Ed Miliband explained his belief that *we need a shift towards flexible and humble government….honouring peoples' rights to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives,* but since being elevated to the role of Minister of State , he has changed his tune. Anyone who protests against his authorisation of the plans to destroy this designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in order to turn it into what he proudly calls The Energy Coast, is simply branded as a NIMBY or an Obstructionist.

We who live here are being faced by the harsh lesson of what it feels like to be made voiceless and powerless, while an army of indifferent strangers with their metal fences, moves across what we always thought of as our land, our heritage, our home . Just like the deer we panic and don't know where to go.

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