

It's pitch black. Water trickles somewhere out of sight, and trees sway gently in the darkness. The camera's timestamp reads 28 May, 12:50 a.m., 11 degrees. The image reveals a grey, clouded, almost monochrome scene. Ferns dip their tips into the murky water swirling lazily below, and a small insect flickers across the frame.

The image cuts: long grasses reach up into a starless sky, the trickle of moving water steady beneath them, a bird calling only occasionally.

"There! ... I think that's Doris."

Rob's voice points toward something the camera can't quite find.

Another cut. Now it's 6 June, 16:45. The scene is in colour. Dark earth has been pushed close against the lens. Birds weave through the soundtrack, and a milky brown waterway leads the eye into a lush birch woodland.

Through a series of fixed frames, each camera strapped to a tree or a fence post, the enclosed landscape slowly reveals itself. With each image, sometimes night, sometimes day, the environment shifts. Trees are felled. Branches lie in angled heaps. Dams appear; paths are pressed into the ground; banks are dug; bark is stripped; new canals snake outward. Water levels rise on some cameras, fall on others.

---

This is the opening movement of a documentary idea following a beaver reintroduction project at Cefn Garthenor, a 210-acre farm in mid Wales. Purchased in 2021, the land is now managed to encourage nature and increase biodiversity.

Rob Parry and Vaughn Matthews from the Initiative for Nature Conservation Cymru (INNC) have been working with Alistair and Jess to return beavers to this landscape. The reintroduction enclosure allows them to study how these native engineers reshape the watercourses. Beavers are thought to reduce flooding, improve water quality, and support a wealth of other species. By creating wetlands, they also contribute to carbon sequestration and resilience against drought.

I met Rob, Lizzie and Vaughn this summer while on an artist residency at the National Botanic Gardens. INNC uses the science centre there as their offices, and during our lunch breaks Vaughn would sometimes update us on Steve and Doris, their wellbeing, their activities, their somewhat reluctant arranged marriage. Their internal affairs were often as entertaining as they were insightful.

Although beaver reintroductions across the UK have been widely documented, the animals remain controversial: celebrated by some as ecological engineers, seen by others as a threat to agricultural land and commercial forestry. In Welsh folklore, the *Afanc* appears as a monstrous lake-dwelling, crocodilian beaver. As someone who went to school in Wales, this is an image that lingers and meant I never actually thought beavers were real at all! Much of today's media

coverage counters this by emphasising their cuteness. Yet most people, including Alistair, have never actually seen a beaver beyond the laptop screen.

I'm interested in making a film that embraces the beaver's natural elusiveness. I'm drawn to the idea of building a narrative entirely from the camera-trap footage already collected - images caught not by design but as a result of branches moving past the lens or another creature shifting in the dark. Accidental footage. Through these locked frames, the film would chart a quiet story of a landscape in steady motion. Over the course of a year or more of footage clips, the beaver is seen less of a centre stage protagonist and more as an invisible artist, sculpting earth and water and nudging the land closer to how it might have looked four hundred years ago. Slow, perhaps, even uneventful - but reflective, contemplative, and revealing. Reintroducing beavers isn't about seeking glimpses of a charismatic species; it's about witnessing the dramatic benefits to theirs and our environment

Purposefully ambient and spacious score paired with crisp field recordings would help allow the footage to speak for itself. Small fragments of conversation between Rob, Vaughn, Alistair, Jess, and Lizzie, threaded in subtly to the score would ensure that the story does not rely too heavily on human centred storytelling.

The team at INNC are colleagues and friends, and I know they would be keen to help tell this story creatively. As an organisation that refuses direct government funding in order to speak freely and challenge environmental policy, they value alternative ways of communicating. A film that questions conventional storytelling would suit their ethos.

Alistair, too, writes a public blog documenting life at Cefn Garthenor- offering updates, observations and glimpses of his character. I haven't met him, but from his writing I suspect he would welcome the chance to share Steve and Doris's progress with a wider audience.