

BEAUTY OR STEEL?

The rainbow had a gloomy message on the fringe of the Cotswolds, where countryside of renowned beauty may soon be bulldozed into ugliness. Villages about half a dozen miles from Banbury lie on a large bed of ironstone coveted by Richard Thomas and Baldwins. They want to opencast-mine it and take it to their South Wales steelworks. No wonder the district's up in arms. Grim faced, bowler hatted Men from the Ministry came to the enquiry at Banbury Townhall. It sounded incredible, in Whitehall, but they were meeting people living hereabouts who were actually protesting against what they call the Rape of the Countryside. The enquiry was presided over by an inspector of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government.

Why all the fuss? The top soil will be put back. But then it's always the same. Away from the sanity of Whitehall, you encounter all kinds of people.

Perhaps one should consider the local view. For some reason they're fond of their countryside. They say that when the ironstone's removed, to a depth of ten-to-twenty feet, the outline of the landscape will be ruined. So for the moment the mining is held up. Perhaps till they're simmered down it's no use reminding them they've never had it so good.

There's another objection. After opencasting, as here (which leaves Farm houses 20 feet above the new fields,) farmers aren't sure the land will be anything like so fertile. That wonderful soil is ironstone 'weathered down'. Will it even be the same now that it doesn't rest on stone?

The other side of the question is that it's cheaper to use native ironstone than to import it. But is the economy worth destroying the beauty? You may not believe it, but the local people actually say it is not.