

The weekend on television

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The Prince of Wales is really quite cool, it turns out

As well as all the organic farming and hedge-laying and charity work, one rather more surprising theme flecked through last night's *Countryfile* (BBC One). The Prince of Wales, who guest-edited and appeared in this edition, is really quite cool.

"Welcome to a very special edition – or what some people say is a very special edition – of *Countryfile*," said His Royal Highness, self-deprecatingly, at the start of the episode. Later, he helped John Craven introduce the break for the *Countryfile* forecast for the week ahead. "Which," chuckled the Prince, "I'm not doing," in a reference to his celebrated turn as a weatherman on a recent visit to BBC Scotland.

The Prince of Wales's chuckling, no-nonsense approach stood in stark contrast to the four *Countryfile* presenters. Matt Baker, Julia Bradbury, Adam Henson and Craven were falling over themselves to offer obeisance (though Baker could have displayed more manners if he'd bothered to shave). They took turns chatting to Prince Charles, with slightly uneven results, and then went off filming about topics close to the Prince's heart.

No doubt the Prince's PR team hoped that these packaged inserts – about his charity The Prince's Countryside Fund, and the methods used on the land at Highgrove – would improve his image in the minds of the viewing public. And *Countryfile* made their wish come true, with the Prince's concerns coming across as sensible and down-to-earth – especially in contrast to those eyebrow-raising pronouncements of yesteryear about architecture and homeopathy.

Reporter Ellie Harrison went to County Durham, to report on the plight of hard-pressed hill farmers. A local charity recently received a grant from The Prince's Countryside Fund, and the Prince himself was then seen doing a walkabout in the area. It must be hard to stay focused on good works when people are lining the streets and waving union flags, but the Prince did his best.

Many of His Royal Highness's more newsworthy contributions to the programme – such as the confession that his impending grandchild makes him feel old – had been widely reported in advance. But that endearing lack of affectation was illustrated by his more off-the-cuff remarks – including one when Baker accompanied him on a visit to a south London boys' school, where a project has lads growing their own herbs.



Prince charming: the Prince of Wales in BBC One's rural programme 'Countryfile'

Could the prince enlighten us, asked Baker, about his own school dinners? "I don't think I need to mention those," quipped the heir to the throne. "My favourite was Marmite on fried bread."

Murder mysteries on TV usually fall into one of three categories: "gentle" (*Midsomer Murders*), "gritty" (*Silent Witness*) or "foreign" (*Wallander*). The problem with *Shetland* (BBC One, Sunday) was that it tried to be all of these and, inevitably, ended up being nothing in particular.

Douglas Henshall led an otherwise no-star cast, as detective inspector Jimmy Perez. His gentle existence in the Shetland constabulary was established early on, when he arrived at the station to be told that the only arrest overnight was a local, who had been "drunk in the market square at three this morning singing King of the Road".

When the *Acorn Antiques*-style chuckling over that one died down, it was time for Perez to act like the new Kurt Wallander. Henshall loomed inscrutably over a series of island landscapes to investigate the case of old Mima Wilson, shot dead on her croft in an apparent murder. But his sidekick,

DC Alison "Tosh" Macintosh (Alison O'Donnell), was more your gritty type. She had passed out drunk the night before, in a room full of equally comatose strangers, only to be woken by Perez's call to action on her mobile.

The pair of them then paraded suspects and motives with all the narrative subtlety of an early PD James novel. Mima's clan, the Wilsons, had simmering resentments against their relatives the Haldanes. Young Hattie James (Gemma Chan) was leading an archaeological dig on Mima's croft – did a recently found skull have anything to do with Mima's Second World War connection to a mysterious Norwegian?

But these plot points just popped up like ducks at a fairground shoot, with no teasing intrigue or twisty developments. When Perez found Hattie dead in her archaeological hole at the episode end, it was just another thing that happened.

The result was a programme that was certainly not especially good, and also not especially bad, but just pervasively dull. Tonight, its concluding half is up against the second episode of ITV's superb *Broadchurch*, and that will be a very unequal fight indeed.