

In A Big Country – then and now

In A Big Country – song facts

The song 'In A Big Country' by Scottish band Big Country was released as a single in the UK in May 1983 and was featured on the band's first studio album, 'The Crossing'.

The Crossing entered the UK chart at No 4, peaking at No 3. The album achieved platinum sales in the UK, gold in USA and double platinum in Canada. The Crossing remained in the UK chart for 83 weeks.

The same year in the USA, In A Big Country peaked at number 3 on the 'Hot Mainstream Rock Tracks' and Number 17 on the 'Billboard Hot 100'. The Crossing itself reached number 18 in 1983 on the 'Billboard 200'.

The video to 'In a Big Country' by Big Country was shot, not in Scotland as some might think, but in Dorset, England back in 1983.

The 'then and now' video, which I've posted on You Tube, was created as a tribute to Big Country, the Scottish band I've followed for 25 years since the age of 15. Living in the south of England, I'd realised for some years where a couple of the locations in the video were and thought it might make an interesting video to compare the locations then and now. All I had to do is find out where the other locations were...



The castle ruin that features at the beginning of the video is Corfe Castle, situated in the village of the same name between Wareham and Swanage. The quad bikes were filmed going past the castle along a disused railway line. In fact back in 1983, the lines had all been ripped-up and the station where Stuart opens the mysterious black box was derelict. In contrast to many changes over time, where things that once stood have now been replaced or demolished, Corfe Castle railway station and the 6 mile section of railway line between Norden and Swanage have now been fully restored and

look just as they would have done in their heyday, thanks to the Swanage Railway company. So, the band, it seemed, were travelling along the old railway line route towards Swanage and this provided me with a good clue as to where the location of the other shots might be.

I had arrived in Corfe Castle with photographs of the stills I had taken from the video. I only really knew the location of the castle shots and the railway station shots – it was the diagonal wooden brace and the T-shaped metal plate behind the band on the platform that made me realise from an earlier visit that the building in the background was the waiting room on the south bound platform. I also guessed the cliff shots at the end of the video were filmed at Old Harry Rocks at nearby Studland. (Zooming in on Google Earth and closely studying the stills strongly suggested it was.)





The journey on the narrow back road from Corfe Castle to Swanage is extremely pretty, running under the Purbeck Hills in an area of outstanding natural beauty. It was along here that I travelled following the railway line as closely as possible, looking for the thatched white cottage at the start of the video and also the barn that was on fire in the video (the one the band quad-biked down to and had a fight outside!) Amazingly, I found this place just by chance not far from Swanage. It was the leaning wall support and the old barn door just visible from the road that made me

slam on my breaks and reverse back up. A quick recce confirmed that this was the barn, with its wooden boarded-up loft access at the top and the lean to at one side.

I knew the Holy Grail would be to find the thatched cottage at the start of the video, but after driving back and forth many times, circumnavigating Corfe Castle and nearby villages looking for anything that looked remotely like it, it seemed this might be one place I'd be unable to find.

Having got the barn shots, I headed for Swanage and the pier where I knew some of the filming took place. The building the band emerge from with their wet suites on has now gone, but the pier is still home to diving enthusiasts who had descended in great numbers the day I took the photos. The big white hotel-like building in one of the shots was in fact a hotel which has since been demolished. It has not, as you might expect, been replaced by housing, a casino or a blocks of modern flats but with an area of parkland. The original pillars to the hotel, however, remain. As with the railway line, this area of Swanage has improved too. The pier, which appeared to be surfaced in concrete in the video, now has fine wooden boards to walk over, all sponsored by local people. The pier railings have changed too, but some of the buildings on the pier remain. The view east out from the pier towards Studland is unchanged.



Next stop was Studland and Old Harry Rocks. It's a mile walk to get to the rocks from the nearest car park and once there, I knew it was the place. I could have hired a boat to get exactly the shots used in the video, but that seemed a little excessive. So the shots you see are taken from the top of the cliff edge, rather than from the bottom as they were in the video. Again, a beautiful place and obviously popular with walkers. Scary though just how close people walk to the cliff edge with its sheer drop to the sea some 100ft below.

Apart from the thatched cottage, which I was beginning to think might have been knocked down, converted or just be somewhere else altogether, the other shot that was hard to track down was the view the girl sees through her binoculars at the start of the video. I'd found a place on the edge of Studland that looked remarkably similar – a kind of tiny village all on its own on the hillside, but I couldn't identify the road in the centre or the building with the 3 concrete pillars that can be clearly made out in the video. It was 26 years ago, so I reckoned maybe things had changed dramatically since then and these features would no longer be recognisable.

It was late afternoon, and I'd promised my fiancée I'd be home early evening, so I decided I'd have to either give up on the two elusive shots and leave them out, or return and try and hunt them down another day.



Late afternoon, I decided to head for home. Still with my radar going, I glanced left on a bend in the road and caught a glimpse of a thatched cottage through a gateway. I parked up at the next parking pull-in and ran back with my camera, just in case. It looked deserted – I guessed maybe this was a holiday let – but I went up and knocked on the door anyway. Was this the place? The windows were different – no longer leaded with black frames and the porch was not open like in the video but boxed-in. The clue that confirmed it was the place was the transformer on the telegraph pole

behind the cottage. Furthermore, the white S-shaped wall tie above the window was there albeit now it was black. This was a pretty exciting discovery for a Big Country fan like me. As I walked back to the road, I noticed the view from the cottage looked fairly similar to the one in the video, only the camera must have had a great zoom as the buildings were some distance away.



Armed with a photo of the cottage, and with renewed enthusiasm, I headed back to Studland in the hope of finding the one outstanding shot. Luck was obviously on my side. Coming into Studland, I looked right and saw the building with the 3 pillars in the distance! It was the little village on the hillside that I had been looking at, but I'd previously been doing so from the wrong angle. This development is accessed via a private road through a farmyard, and there are some very exclusive looking buildings there now – some under development. The exclusive and famous

'Sandbanks' - a millionaire's paradise reputed to be one of the most expensive places to live in Europe, and the subject of a recent TV documentary by Piers Morgan - lies almost within sight of this place, a short distance across the sea. Maybe this area is heading the same way!

So with all the shots I needed, I headed home to put together my video. It did take two more trips - 50 miles south of my home in Wiltshire - to this lovely part of the world to improve a couple of shots I needed, but it was worth it.

To anyone not a fan of Big Country, this might all seem a little obsessive. Maybe so, but we all have our interests and Big Country is one of mine. No one else has done this comparison and I hope it might be of interest to all those checked-shirt clad fans out there that once, most loyally, followed this great band. They were a great band, and we were, and still are, great and most appreciative fans. (I'm assuming you're a great fan to be reading this!!)

I'd like to dedicate this humble video montage to my heroes Tony, Bruce, Mark and Ian and of course to the memory of the great man himself – Stuart Adamson. May he always rest in peace.

I hope you enjoyed watching the video.