

Liquid Immortality

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It always seems nonsensical that bottled water carries an expiry “use before” date when clearly it should last forever intact. Presumably it is the container we don’t trust for more than a couple of years. Mains water has never been subjected to a predicted life expectancy like this, and generally in the UK if it comes out of the tap you can drink it. This is sadly not true in many other countries.

Not only is it rather odd and anti-ecological to put water in bottles before using it, it is decidedly weird to subject it to the journeys it undergoes before use.

It is quite standard in restaurants to be offered water imported from France or Italy. Even within Britain it seems to travel about in an erratic fashion. In one month in County Durham I have been offered water from Perthshire and Sussex; in the Lake District it was Aberdeenshire water; and in Glasgow a hotel supplied water from Shropshire. This is particularly ironic as North East England, Cumbria and Scotland are particularly well supplied with their own water resources. One has a nightmarish vision of lorries passing in opposite directions to deliver water huge distances from north to south and vice versa.

There is no reason to suppose bottled water is better for health. It may even be deleterious which explains the paradoxical idea of “low mineral” mineral water.

Some water supplies do not taste good because of heavy chlorination, but this is not the general rule, and almost all tap water is indistinguishable from bottled mineral water on double-blind testing. Northumbrian Water nicely showed this by putting tap water in free bottles branded 97 (the number of purification processes) to demonstrate it was equal to

commercial sources.

We live in a wettish country, which is why our grass is so green. It can hardly be logical to expend resources transporting round a substance so freely available everywhere. It may be argued that bottled water is a useful alternative to alcohol or commercial sweetened soft drinks, but water from the mains supply is just as good.

None of this would matter a lot except that around one thousand million of the world’s population do not have easy access to any proper clean water supply. In global terms it would surely be a more moral choice to put our efforts into improving this situation rather than unnecessary and somewhat contradictory transportation of water to the already well supplied.