

ernest.

REFLECTIONS ON THE RIVER TEIFI  
A NEW ERA OF BIODESIGN  
VOLCANIC RITUALS & INDUSTRY  
HEALING WATERS IN THE WESTFJORDS  
ECHOES OF THE EIGER



# ernest.

EDITOR & PUBLISHER	JO TINSLEY
ART DIRECTOR	TINA SMITH HOBSON
DEPUTY EDITOR	ABIGAIL WHYTE
PRODUCTION EDITOR	DAVE PERRETT
SUBMISSIONS & LETTERS PARTNERSHIPS	features@ernestjournal.co.uk advertise@ernestjournal.co.uk

*Ernest* is published by Uncharted Press Ltd  
and printed by Taylor Brothers, Bristol.

All rights reserved by © Uncharted Press Ltd 2021. Copyright is either owned by or licensed to *Ernest*, or permitted by the original copyright holder. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is strictly prohibited. Uncharted Press Ltd recognises all copyright contained in this issue and we have made every effort to seek permission and to acknowledge the copyright holder. *Ernest* tries to ensure that all information is correct at the time of publishing, but cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions. The views expressed by authors are not necessarily those of the publisher.

Cover: River Teifi by Daniel Alford

[ernestjournal.co.uk](http://ernestjournal.co.uk)



@ernestjournal



# ernest.

Issue 11 is brought to you with the generous support of the following brands. We would like to take this opportunity to thank them for supporting independent publishing. You can read their stories throughout the journal.



**BAY COFFEE  
ROASTERS**

## hello...

Welcome to our 11th edition! As often happens when curating an issue, various themes begin to emerge. We find ourselves dipping into stories of healing water, everyday rituals and exploring the space where natural and human landscapes meet.

In 'Catchment, centre, source', Jack Smylie Wild journeys along the River Teifi to reconnect with the landscape of his childhood – with its feral sheep, lichen-flecked walls and waterlogged plateaus – and share tales of two generations of “misfits and unorthodox individuals” who came here seeking a different kind of life. Turn to page 102 to immerse yourself in his remarkable portrait of this west-Walian scene.

Meanwhile, Gareth E Rees revisits the ominous structures that sparked his childhood imagination: electricity pylons (p62). “A child’s imagination is a creeper vine,” he writes. “It entwines itself around whatever is available... The pylons weren’t just striding across the hills, they were inside my home, running things.” We particularly love his description of the “haunted generation”, a phrase coined to describe children raised in the UK in the 1970s and early 1980s, creeped out by eerie TV programmes and terrifying public service broadcasts. If you grew up between those years, we think you’ll find this story particularly interesting.

Continuing the theme in 'River of time' (p52), Lisa Woollett goes mudlarking along the banks of the Thames, unearthing clues to our evolving relationship with waste. While Bethany Rigby explores human stories that run parallel to the wild landscape of St Kilda (p34) – the Ministry of Defence domes, tanks and radar towers that feel incongruous yet oddly familiar on this remote Scottish archipelago. We also look at how designers are turning to nature in an attempt to minimise our impact on the world. Because, as Joly Braime points out in 'Future materials for the spaceship earth' (p44), nature is rather better at designing things than we are, having been at it since life began on Earth at least 3.5 billion years ago.

Another highlight is 'Echoes of the Eiger' (p18), in which Mike MacEacheran revisits his father’s ascent of the mountain’s North Face, a pioneering climb that was equipped with “tin-pot helmets, flappy tents, crampons and little else.” As his dad battles early onset dementia, his memories are becoming blurry and erratic, yet their trip sparks new recollections and moments of sheer wonder. Ruminating on the power of memory and mountains, this is a compelling piece of storytelling.

Thank you for your support as we continue to navigate through these rather unpredictable times. Please sign up to our newsletter at [ernestjournal.co.uk](http://ernestjournal.co.uk) so we can keep you informed about upcoming issues.

# contents



LISA WOOLLETT

**6 INVENTORY I**  
A curated selection of artefacts, inspiring projects and curious tales including a history of lidos, avian lithographs, starling murmurations, words for snow, geological maps, quiet parks and paper landscapes.



“time slowed and we sat together, watching the eiger as it watched us.” p18

**18 ECHOES OF THE EIGER**  
Revisiting his father's pioneering route up the North Face of the Eiger, Mike MacEacheran ruminates on the power of memory and mountains.

**26 WILD EAST, WILD WEST**  
Seeking traces of the Old West in unlikely corners of Europe.

**34 NATURE & ARTIFICE**  
Exploring the symbiotic relationship between the military and conservationists on St Kilda.

**44 SPACESHIP EARTH**  
Could developments in biodesign bring us closer to a 1960s sci-fi vision of a sustainable 'Spaceship Earth'?



BETHANY RIGBY, ABOVE (L-R) CHARLIE PATTERSON, JOE WINSTANLEY, JADE THEY

**52 RIVER OF TIME**  
A mudlarker's journey along the River Thames, unearthing clues to our evolving relationship with waste.

**62 THE HUMMINGTOWERS**  
Exploring the ominous structures that sparked many a child's imagination: the electricity pylon.

**68 OH HELLO, HVALDIMIR**  
Meet the big-hearted beluga who just wants to be friends with humans.

**70 TECHNICOLOUR SCENES**  
Stanley Donwood turns to bold blocks of colour to evoke the preternatural chalkscapes of southern England.

**120 ON THE RING OF FIRE**  
What is it like living in the shadow of an active volcano?

**130 JUST LOOK UP**  
Meet the Urban Birder, David Lindo, who wants to instil a passion for wildlife in all city kids.

**134 MOVING MEGAMOUTH III**  
How does one move a rare, preserved shark that weighs a tonne?

**138 A YEAR OF SELF CULTIVATION**  
Exploring the Norwegian concept of *dannelse*: the alternative gap year.

**142 A COSMIC MIRROR**  
Does science fiction really transport us to 'another world'?

TOP: DANIEL ALFORD, MAP: AIDAN MEIGHAN, BOTTOM (L-R): OLIVIA LUCY, LUKE BROWN, KATHRYN JOHN



## healing waters



**84 A DREAM SHANTY**  
*Flateyri* | *Kayaking Öundur fjörður* | *Ingjaldssandur* | *Atlantic wolffish* | *Draumagrás tea* | *The Old Bookstore*

**102 CATCHMENT, CENTRE, SOURCE**  
*Elenydd* | *Mynydd Bach* | *Banc Mawr* | *Pumlumon* | *Cwm Teifi*

**96 RHYTHMS OF THE RIVER**  
*River Orwell* | *Erwarton Ness* | *Pin Mill* | *Blue Mind Therapy*

**116 PLAN YOUR ADVENTURE**  
*How to get there* | *where to stay and eat* | *reading list*

“why, if we have the power to avoid it, would we ever leave earth?” p142

**148 INVENTORY II**  
Learn how to hand-line for mackerel, doodle with natural ink and seek out Britain's tidal pools with our compendium of knowledge, techniques and kit for a life outdoors.





# inventory I

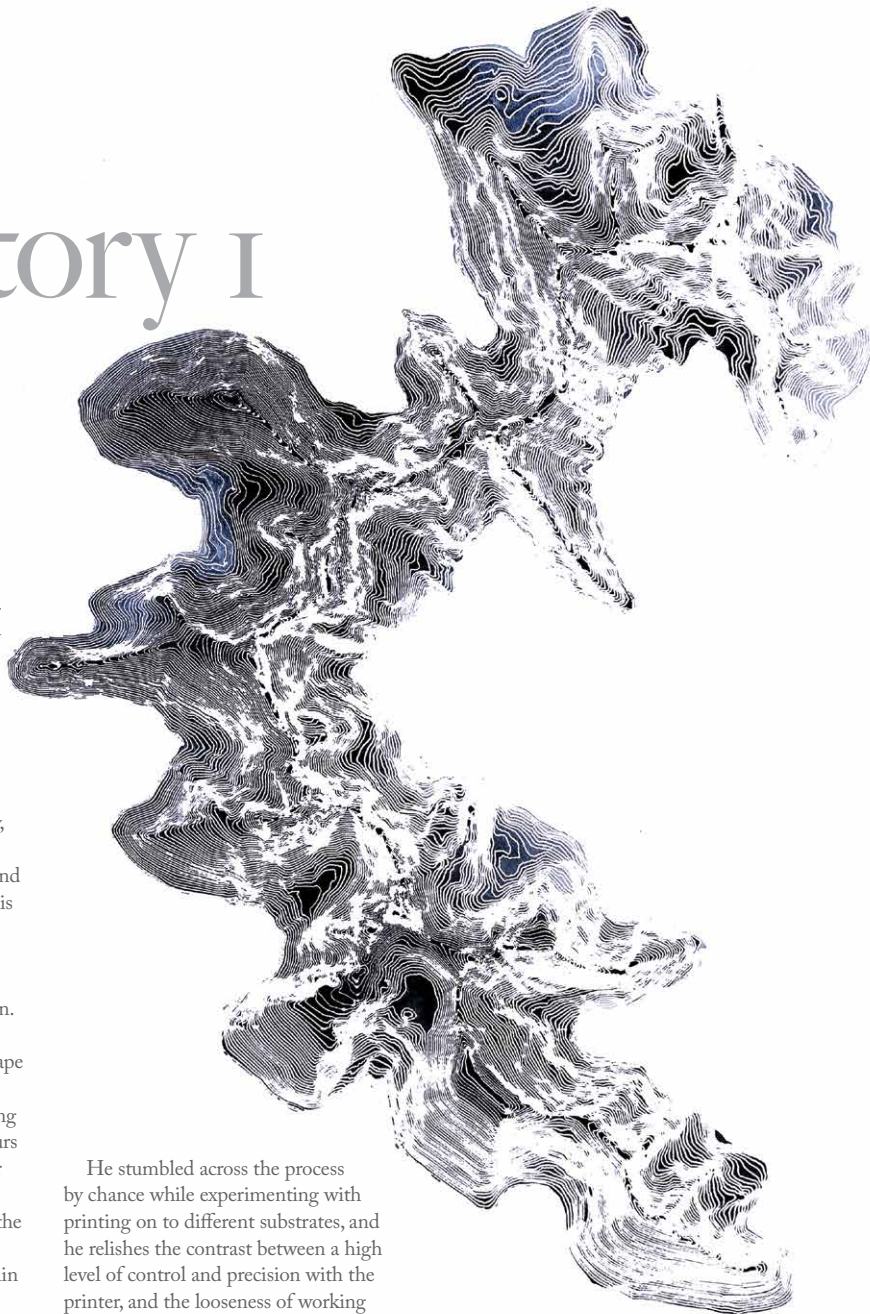
## CARTOGRAPHY INK LINE

At the end of a long-distance walk or bike tour, there's something distinctly satisfying about sitting down with a map and retracing your route. It's a tangible and gratifying moment – you travelled those miles under your own steam, climbed and descended those contours.

“Coming at these landscapes slowly, either on foot or by bike, the gradients become the key features,” says artist (and bike-packer) Charlie Patterson. “So this is what I focus my maps on.”

With a background in architecture, Charlie is familiar with creating 2D drawings to show technical information. “I'm interested in the abstraction,” he says. “Any representation of the landscape is a vastly simplified model, which can be either useful or misleading depending on purpose. The scale of a set of contours used to describe terrain for a hillwalker would differ from those for a pilot, though both essentially communicate the same physical features.”

The resulting maps – such as ‘Cuillin Ridge, Isle of Skye’ (pictured, right) – show the contours of mountains and islands in white, with the gradients inked in shades of indigo, purple and grey; a balance of clear lines and subdued tones. To create the effect, Charlie 3D-prints flexible plastic on to paper, then uses ink to fill in the contours. The shallow ridged areas form pools of ink that dry gradually, creating gentle gradients.



He stumbled across the process by chance while experimenting with printing on to different substrates, and he relishes the contrast between a high level of control and precision with the printer, and the looseness of working by hand with ink. “I'm interested in the relationship between low-tech and high-tech and what can be achieved with relatively basic tools.”

Charlie is using the same 3D printer to make bike-packing harnesses from recycled marine nylon (recovered gill nets used for Cornish hake). “I'm exploring how boundaries change the perception and value of a material,” he

says. “By reprocessing the material and redefining the form, it enables further exploration of a landscape by bike, while a defined end of life process helps keep the material at a high value.” Find Charlie's work at [etsy.com/uk/shop/CartographyCo](https://www.etsy.com/uk/shop/CartographyCo). Or follow his progress making bike-packing gear on Instagram at [@cuttlefish.gear](https://www.instagram.com/cuttlefish.gear)

## WORKMANSHIP PAPER PEAKS

Peak District artist Joe Winstanley creates miniature landscapes out of paper. Incorporating elements of origami and modelling, his geometrically scored and folded hill forms first evolved out of a packaging concept for a fledgling clothes brand in 2017.

“The idea was to create a parcel that, once folded and crumpled, would resemble the hills of the Peak District,” he explains.

The clothing venture never took off, but Joe was left with an unusual art process that he found also helped with his mental wellbeing: “After folding the first hill I was hooked. Using paper is very sensory – it has a sound and a feel to it.”

Since then, Joe's Peak District hillsides have sprouted paper trees and boulders, delicate ferns and cardboard picnic benches. Tiny hikers stomp through the valleys while deer graze snow-dusted slopes. Each landscape is photographed to produce display prints, and Joe's also created a number of “capsules” – tiny terrariums featuring



paper-sculpted vignettes based on personal memories.

Playful, nostalgic and therapeutic, Joe's work is full of affection for his native Hope Valley, whether he's constructing hills out of geometrically folded maps or trying to perfect the translucent edges of hazel leaves with torn crepe paper.



His latest project is a series of tree studies, using paper – his “paintbrush” – to recreate the most minute details of leaves and acorns.

“I've begun to realise that by taking a miniature glance at the world we can help establish our place in it,” he says.

Words: Joly Braime. View Joe's miniature landscapes at [studioskai.co.uk](https://studioskai.co.uk)

## BIOLOGY AN UNSEEN WORLD

It was while completing a PhD in molecular biology that Abid Javed felt compelled to find a three-dimensional medium to translate the things he was observing.

“As a scientist it's your responsibility to be able to communicate your work, and the way to do that is to have some kind of visual understanding,” Abid explains.

Since taking a beginners course in ceramics, Abid has been using hand-building techniques to instinctively create his striking forms.

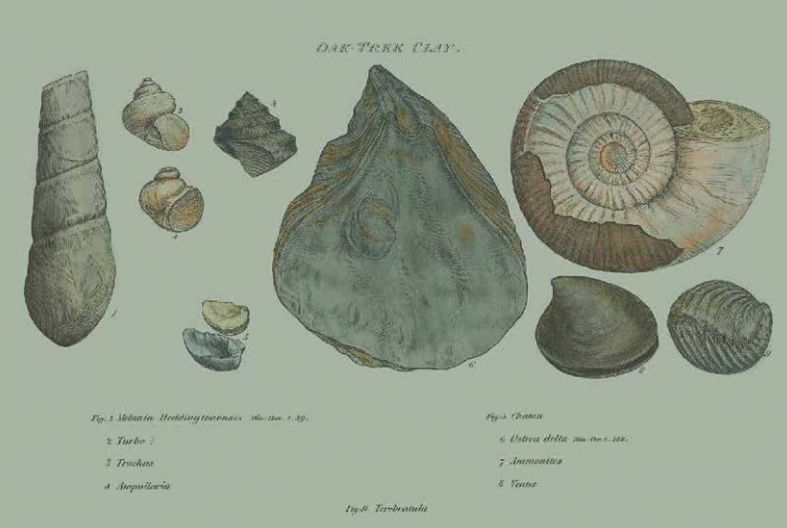
“What I strive to achieve is simplicity,”



says Abid, “I don't tend to glaze the surfaces of the pieces because I want the clay bodies to take centre stage. By having this simplified approach to sculpting it allows far more emphasis on the shapes and forms and negative space.”

Marrying molecular forms with arabic script and geometry in his sculptures and vessels, Abid is bringing an unseen world to the forefront: “With this artistic medium I now have a way to communicate, not just to the scientific community, but to everyone.” Discover more of Abid's work at [abidjaved.org](https://www.abidjaved.org)





## GEOLOGY OAKTREE CLAY

On most mornings in the early 19th century, one could find William Smith out on one of his “walkings-out”, hammer in hand, toeing the earth and digging up fossils.

Smith collected and catalogued specimens from all over Britain, from ammonites and belemnites to corals and brachiopods; discovering that in any one place, successive strata contained different associations of fossils. He drew up a table of his findings then translated it into his pioneering map, pithily entitled *A delineation of England and Wales, with part of Scotland* (1815).

## CONSERVATION THE SOUND OF SILENCE

Start asking people what single thing they would keep from that first lockdown last March and they might mention how quiet the world was.

“Natural quiet has become an endangered species without people knowing it”, according to Gordon Hempton, co-founder of Quiet Parks International (QPI).

As the world returns to normal, some level of human noise is pretty much ubiquitous once more, and this is unhappy news for both the natural world and our own minds and bodies. QPI endeavours to push

The map was a thing of beauty as well as a document of record, over 8ft high and 6ft wide, coloured in 23 different tints to distinguish the rock types. It is considered the first detailed geological map of Britain – a feat achieved by the humble son of a blacksmith who didn’t receive a formal academic education, unlike many of his peers.

Pictured are Smith’s illustrations of fossils found in ‘Oaktree Clay’, an archaic name that was probably a quarryman’s term. These days it’s known as Kimmeridge Clay (after Kimmeridge Bay in Dorset); a layer of late Jurassic marine clay found in southern England.

[Read more about William Smith in \*Strata: William Smith’s Geological Maps\* \(Thames & Hudson: 2020\).](#)

back against this with programmes of research, education and certification for places that promote quiet. In 2020, Yangmingshan National Park in Taiwan became the world’s first QPI-certified “urban quiet park”, and there are several more in the pipeline.

Of course, the truth of quiet places is that they aren’t actually quiet at all. Subtract the roar of planes, traffic and construction and you’re left with a richer acoustic landscape of natural sounds. As Laila Fan – the environmental journalist behind Yangmingshan’s quiet park certification – says, “Quiet is making everything more clear.” **Words: Joly Braime.** [Learn more at \[quietparks.org\]\(https://quietparks.org\)](#)

## CURIOUS HISTORY STELLER’S SEA COW

Measuring up to nine metres in length and weighing up to 10 tonnes, Georg Wilhem Steller’s sea cow was a colossal marine mammal, longer than a killer whale and heavier than an elephant. Like the other animals on Bering Island, the sea cows were unaccustomed to humans and so allowed zoologist Steller to crouch alongside, stroking them as they floated into the shallows.

Their thick skin was “mangy, wrinkled, rough, hard and tough” and looked like “the bark of an ancient oak”, offering them protection against predators, rocks and icebergs. Their bodies were so bloated and buoyant that they couldn’t submerge. Instead, they silently bobbed like giant corks in herds along the bay, grazing on the dense kelp forest, their heads almost constantly underwater; oblivious to danger.

The meat of the sea cow was “manna from heaven”. It tasted like fine beef and one sea cow could feed Steller’s fellow crew mates for two weeks. Packed tightly in the hull alongside thousands of valuable otter, fox and seal pelts were barrels of sea cow meat for the journey home to Kamchatka.

People were interested to learn where they had obtained all these sea otter pelts. A mysterious island? Full of animals covered in the finest furs? Stocked with giant floating cows? Hunters immediately set their sights on the fur-filled paradise just beyond the horizon. Over the next two decades Bering Island was ransacked; thousands upon thousands of animals were killed. Populations of foxes, otters, fur seals and sea lions were decimated. The spectacled cormorant and Steller’s sea cow provided the food that fuelled the slaughter. The last Steller’s sea cow was reportedly killed in 1768, just 27 years after Steller discovered them. **An edited extract from *Gone: A Search For What Remains of the World’s Extinct Creatures* by Michael Blencowe (Leaping Hare Press: 2021).** Illustration by Jade They.





PHOTOGRAPHY  
**BLACK SUN**

Known for his distinctive portraits of musicians, including Björk, R.E.M and Amy Winehouse, Danish photographer Søren Solkær turns to the landscapes of his youth for his latest project *Black Sun*, capturing the fluidity of starling murmurations at dusk. Søren says of his work:

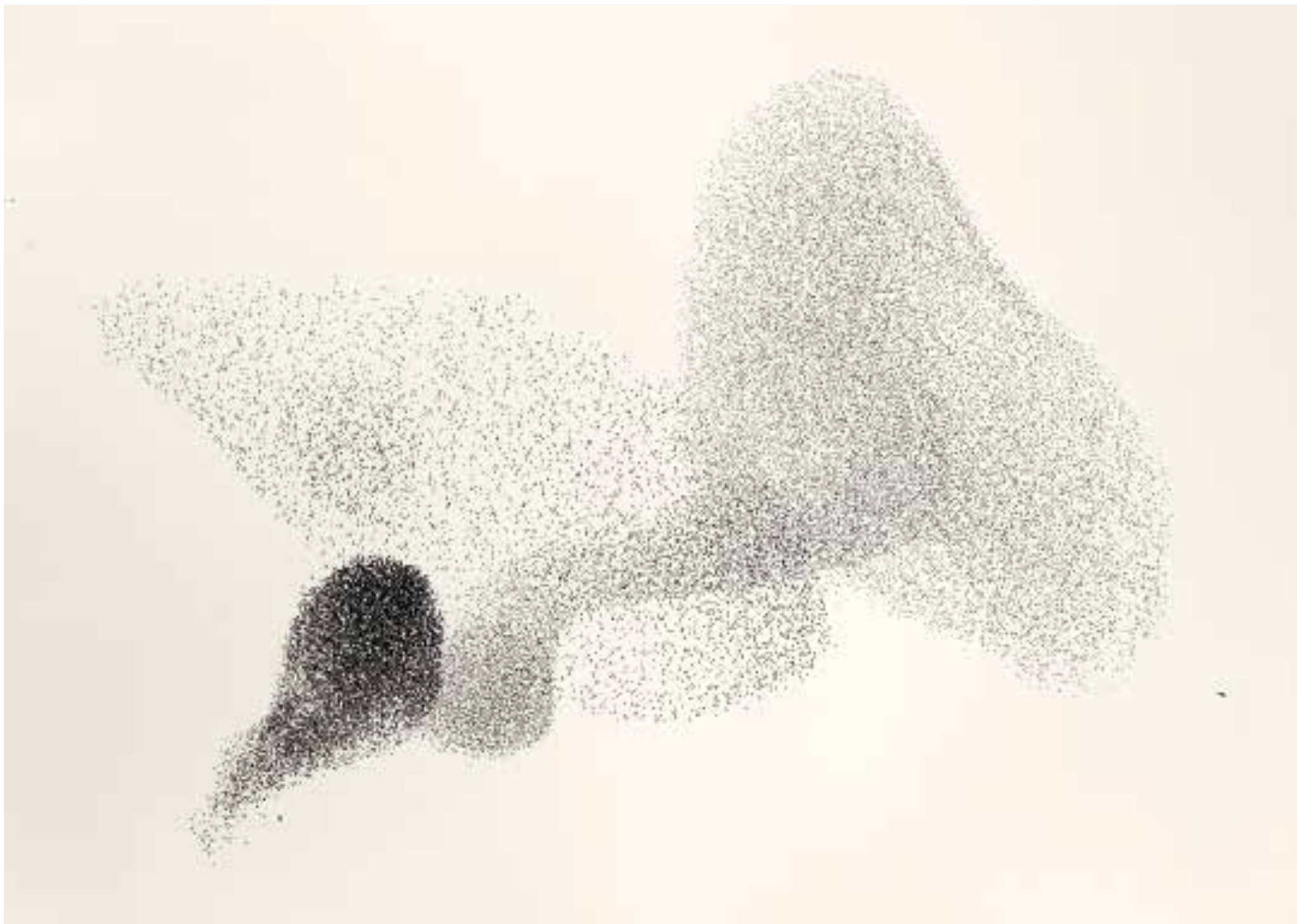
“This project has taken me back to the landscape of my childhood and youth in the marshlands of Southern Denmark. A place where as many as one million starlings gather in the spring and fall, prior to onwards migration, and set the stage for one of nature’s most spectacular phenomena.

As the countless birds congregate in large murmurations before collectively settling in the reeds at dusk they put on an incredible show of collaboration and performance skills. And now and then, by the added drama of attacking birds of prey, the flock will unfold a breathtaking and veritable ballet of life or death.

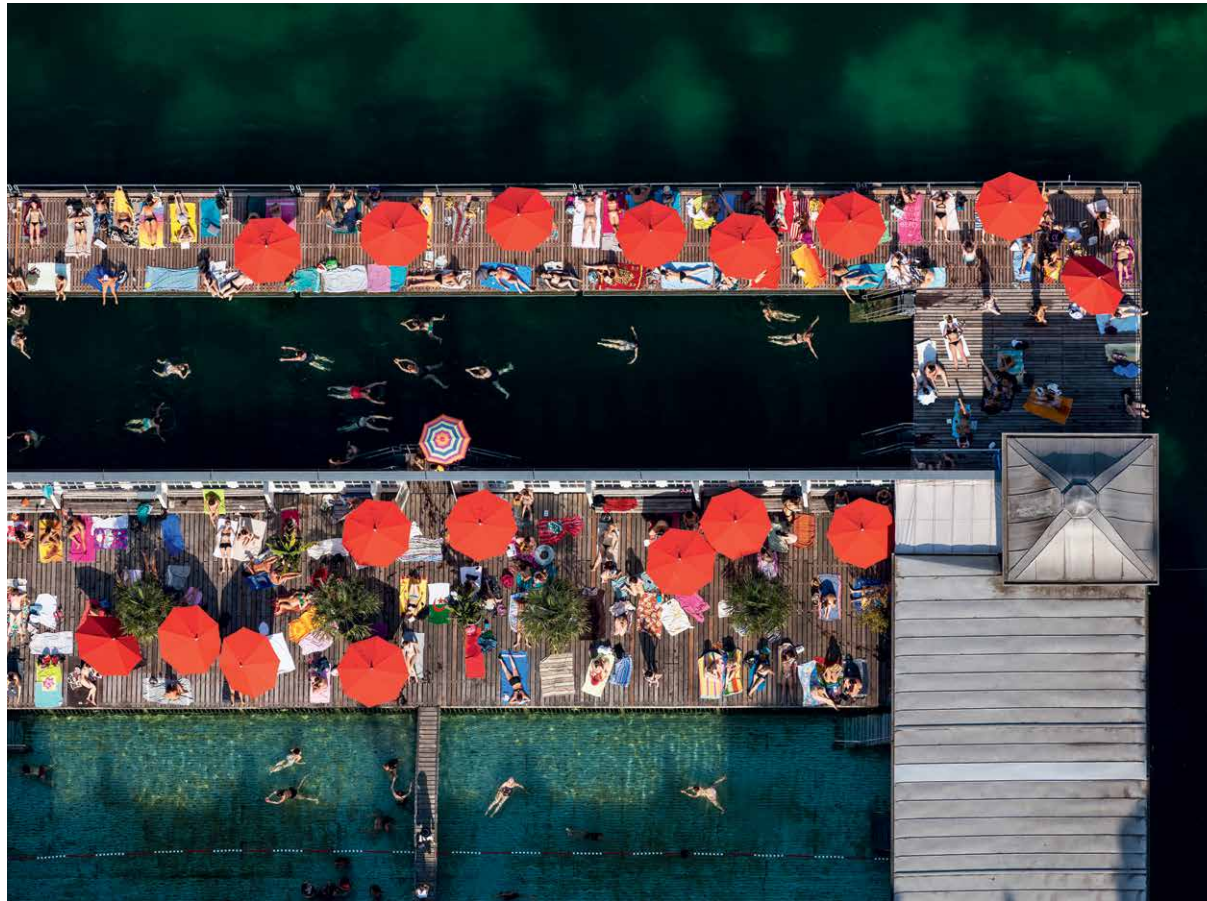
The starlings move as one unified organism that vigorously opposes any outside threat. A strong visual expression is created – like that of an ink drawing or a calligraphic brush stroke – asserting itself against the sky. Shapes and black lines of condensation form within the swarm, resembling waves of interference or mathematical abstractions written across the horizon.

At times the flock seems to possess the cohesive power of super fluids, changing shape in an endless flux: from geometric to organic, from solid to fluid, from matter to ethereal, from reality to dream – an exchange in which real time ceases to exist and mythical time pervades. This is the moment I have attempted to capture – a fragment of eternity.”

*Black Sun* is available in hardback from [sorensolkær.com](http://sorensolkær.com); £58. Follow Søren on Instagram @sorensolkær







## ARCHITECTURE URBAN SPLASH

Whether it's a campaign to open your local derelict pool or another newly released 'swimoir' being discussed on the radio – it's hard not to get swept up in the revival of interest in outdoor swimming.

The legacy of outdoor bathing goes back a long way. The first public pool was probably the Great Bath at Mohenjo-daro in today's Pakistan. Some 12m long and 7m wide, with two brick staircases descending into the pool at each end and a ledge one-metre wide extending the entire width of the bath, this 5,000-year-old

remnant of the Indus Valley Civilization – coined the "earliest public water tank of the ancient world" – looks, in many ways, just like today's pools.

Still to this day the most compelling pools are perhaps those residing within bustling cities or industrial landscapes. In *Lido: A dip into outdoor swimming pools: the history, design and people behind them* (2020), author Christopher Beanland takes us on a tour of the world's most remarkable urban pools. From Hong Kong's Kennedy Town Swimming Pool, a rooftop pool flanked by skyscrapers, to Zollverein Mine Pool in Essen, Germany – an industrial relic that's been memorialised as a kind of

post-apocalyptic park, where you can stroll over slag heaps planted with trees, admire the robust architecture of the coal sorting complex and swim surrounded by the ghostly remains of blast furnaces and metal pipework.

At Frauenbad Stadthausquai in Zurich, an elegant wooden bathhouse floating in the River Limmat (pictured), women swimmers can take a dip in an art nouveau pool right at the heart of Switzerland's largest city – a concept that's just as refreshing now as it was 5,000 years ago. **Discover more in *Lido: A dip into outdoor swimming pools: the history, design and people behind them*, by Christopher Beanland (Batsford: 2020).**

## COLLECTION CONCENTRATES OF PLACE

Inspired by a near-death trauma in her 30s, writer Tanya Shadrick has been curating tangible reminders of people and places that are important to her, which she archives in old tobacco tins.

### Tanya, tell us about your Concentrates of Place.

It's a practice I began on the 10-year anniversary of my near-death from an arterial haemorrhage. I pledged myself then to a rest-of-life creative response to that experience. All the work I've made since (as a hospice scribe, a self-proclaimed 'writer of the outside' and now as an author) has this purpose: to find and share multi-sensory ways by which we can celebrate our most vivid, most intimate, moments of being.

### What do they mean to you?

They mean the world to me, literally. In what I call my first life – before the emergency – I was a very nervous and self-limiting person, rarely leaving the country or even my hometown on the Sussex Downs. Now, my writing life connects me to people and places far beyond my old comfort zone, and so each tin is a heady reminder of that expansion. And they are also just delicious things to open up for the colours, textures and smells they hold: heather, moss, sand, slate...

### Do you give any away as gifts?

Yes, only as personal gifts, not commissions. During lockdown it was lovely to walk to Rodmell by the River Ouse, the last stomping ground of Virginia Woolf. There, I filled a tin with pieces of chalk and flint for a visual artist making an illustrated journey of Woolf's regular walk to her sister Vanessa Bell's home at Charleston Farmhouse. As an afterthought, I added some bark fallen from the tree that reaches over Woolf's writing shed.

We're so used to taking a snap on our phones to capture a moment – how does your archive compare with this? Spending long periods bed-bound because of the lasting damage from the haemorrhage left me with a passion for bringing all my senses to how I enjoy and record experience. My Concentrates allow me to touch over and over again a walnut shell from a tree in Switzerland; I'm able to put my fingers into sand from my childhood beach. I share those textures with others. I've got photos too, but the tins mean more to me. I use a smartphone of course, but mainly to make one-minute sound recordings – another practice that tries to move beyond our modern over-reliance on the eye.

### Do you have a favourite Concentrate?

My mentor is the sculptor David Nash, whose work returns after each exhibition to the Welsh chapel that has been his home and studio for the last 50 years. A chance event brought us into orbit, just as I began my second life as a writer; and I now get to stay among his huge carved pieces most summers: such a deep pleasure and privilege. And so the tin filled with slate and heather from there is a particular treasure.

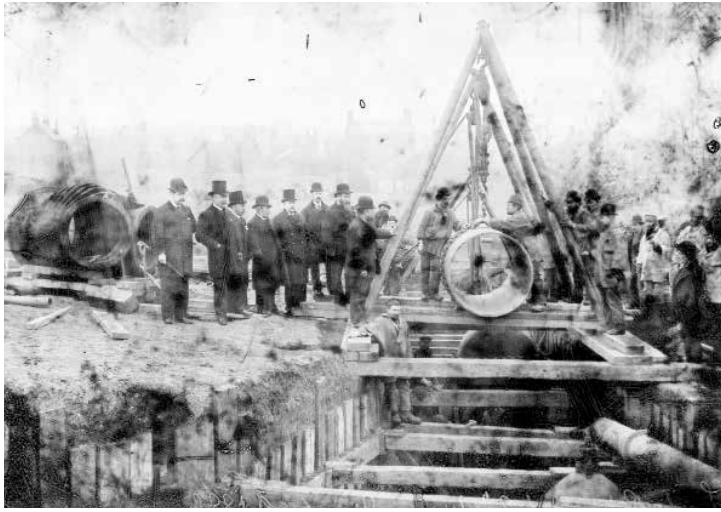
### Have you always been a collector?

In my memoir *The Cure For Sleep*, I describe how early childhood loss created in me a tendency to "prize routine and everyday objects more than people. As if by loving a person in pieces, through pieces, to pieces, I could suspend time, stop sorrow." After the near-death, I began to find a public form for this lifelong instinct to curate, celebrate and commemorate. Something that began with a private hurt has now become a way I share healing perspectives with others.

**Add your own Concentrates of Place to the online archive using the hashtag #ConcentratesOfPlace. Tanya's memoir *The Cure For Sleep* is due out January 2022 (Weidenfeld & Nicolson).**







## CURIOUS HISTORY THE 'GREAT STINK'

In summer 1858, hot weather exacerbated a problem that had been mounting along the banks of the Thames.

“For many years, London, which in 1801 had a population approaching 1 million, had struggled with the system of sewage disposal inherited from medieval times. Cesspools were emptied by nightsoilmen, who sold the contents to farmers just outside the city. Public sewers were intended for the disposal of rainwater, although garbage, including butcher’s offal, was dumped in them.

“Nevertheless the Thames was a reasonably clean river, and salmon – the litmus test of water quality – were still being caught. But three factors now combined to interrupt these arrangements. First, London grew so the nightsoilmen had to carry their sewage a greater distance. Secondly, from 1847, a more effective fertilizer became available in the form of guano, imported from Chile. The nightsoilmen struggled to compete. But the most decisive factor was the introduction of the water closet, invented by Sir John Harington.” *Extract from An Underground Guide to Sewers by Stephen Halliday (Thames & Hudson).*

## ETYMOLOGY WORDS FOR SNOW

### seanǰš

granulated snow (Sámi)

Sámi terminology for snow and ice includes words to describe the way snow falls, where it lies, its depth, density and temperature. One of the most significant types is *seanǰš*, or loose granulated snow, which forms at the bottom of the snowpack from January to April. Its consistency improves grazing conditions: it is easy for reindeer to dig through *seanǰš* to the lichen growing beneath.

### sastrugi

sharp ridges on the snow (Russian)

The coast of Russia accounts for more than half of the Arctic Ocean’s margin. No wonder then that Russian is one of the four languages included in the World Meteorological Organization’s glossary *Sea Ice Nomenclature*. This guide for navigators, which can be found in the bridge of every icebreaker, defines *sastrugi* as ‘sharp, irregular ridges formed on a snow surface by wind erosion and deposition.’ The tribulations of travelling across these sharp, exposed ridges are a well-worn theme in polar explorers’ journals.

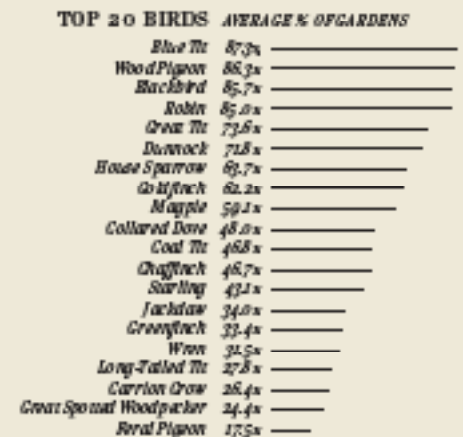
## MATHEMATICS

# BEAUTIFUL EQUATIONS ▶

It was while working in her studio overlooking the garden during lockdown that designer Rebecca Kaye was struck by the number of birds flocking to her bird-feeder, and the variety of colours in their plumage. “My analytical mind wanted to know exactly how much colour I was seeing,” Rebecca explains.

Inspired by her love of exploring the natural world through maths and design – the guiding principle of her brand Ploterre – Rebecca set out to solve this ‘problem’ by researching the most frequent avian visitors to UK gardens, and the proportion of their bodies covered in specific hues.

This data she then translated into her *Bird Colours Lithograph* (edited excerpt, right), printed in Edinburgh on Yorkshire-milled paper. Rebecca is thrilled to create her artwork in this niche way blending data and design: “It’s the perfect combination of spending time poring over data on a subject that’s close to my heart, then bringing that data to life through design.” *You can see the full Bird Colours Lithograph (£40), plus other prints at ploterre.com*



## COMPENDIUM OF BIRD COLOURS\*

This collection of colours is taken from the top 20 birds frequenting UK gardens in 2020, based on data from the Garden BirdWatch, a survey conducted by the British Trust for Ornithology.

RSPB Illustrations were used to select up to five main colours. The illustrations were analysed to determine the proportion of each visible colour and then grouped into underlying hues. Colours are based on profile views of adult male birds and may include beaks and feet where relevant.

Hues have been ordered by the most commonly seen (from left to right) by taking into account the percentage of visiting garden birds and proportion of visible colour. Colours within each hue are similarly ordered from top to bottom.

\*This is an excerpt taken from the ploterre compendium of bird colours print and some information has been removed to fit the space. The original print includes the percentage of colour on any given bird as well as reference s to each of the other visible colours per bird.



## ENVIRONMENT

## AMA

In a series of short films released this year, Climate Feedback Loops (CFL) highlights the threat of ‘feedback warming loops’ – a phenomenon triggered by human-induced warming. An example of a feedback loop is our warmer atmosphere thawing permafrost, releasing CO<sub>2</sub> and methane, which warms the atmosphere further. If these loops continue, this will push our environment over a tipping point, creating an irreversible shift to a hotter world.

To coincide with the release of their films, CFL commissioned artist Gaurab Thakali to create an artwork reflecting the four elements highlighted in the documentaries: forest, permafrost, atmosphere and albedo.

“Through the beauty of the environment, Gaurab reminds us of the need to preserve it through our actions,” they said of Gaurab’s creation, entitled *Ama* (right). “By focusing on the lush vegetation, which helps cool the planet, and the majestic mountain range, he offers a hopeful outlook.”

Travel plays an important part in Gaurab’s colourful and expressive work, and he often carries a sketchbook to document landscapes with swift ink and pencil illustrations. On a trip to his native country of Nepal, he drew as much as he could, intent on turning the drawings into prints when he returned to his studio in southeast London.

“We were staying at the basecamp for Annapurna and usually woke up early so the sun was already out and you could see the mountains in the distance,” he told independent gallery Select-Works. “Whilst we were waiting to leave for our daily trek I would quickly draw the view.”

Gaurab’s natural curiosity and eye for detail invites us to feel connected to landscapes we may never have seen in real life – and when human action poses a threat to these places, this is surely essential. Prints of *Ama* are available at [gaurabthakali.com](http://gaurabthakali.com). You can also read more about the artist’s inspiration and buy selected pieces at [select-works.com](http://select-works.com)







## echoes of the eiger

Retracing his father's pioneering route up the North Face of the Eiger – renowned as the one of the world's hardest rock climbs – **Mike MacEacheran** ruminates on the power of memory and mountains, and why we push ourselves to the ends of the Earth in pursuit of the unknown

WORDS: MIKE MACEACHERAN  
ILLUSTRATIONS: AIDAN MEIGHAN

**d**angling from a rope spiked into a snow-filled fissure, so far above the ground that the smallest mental slip would lead to a 2,000ft free fall, a young man is in his element, defying gravity. He's halfway up the most notorious mountain face in the Alps, frozen in time beneath a summit lost in clouds. Silence intensifies the void around him.

The scene, framed in a slide taken 50 years ago in August 1970, is overexposed and grainy, but there's no mistaking the sheer awe on the climber's face. It was captured shortly after three friends from Edinburgh set out to Switzerland to attempt something no one had ever tried before: to climb a seemingly unconquerable route on the Eiger's legendary North Face. The story is almost forgotten, but then again, I've always known this, because the mountaineer chasing a dream in the picture is my father.

At the time, I was sitting in my parents' house outside Glasgow, sifting through mounted slides from the historic expedition. In my hands the box rattled like dominoes and I carefully turned each slide over, holding the images up to the living room window, letting the

light find its way back into the past. The colour of the sky outside was smoke-grey, a thick smudge of storm clouds on a wash of blue, but the energy and spirit captured in each image was unmistakable. There was no misreading their significance either to my dad, who sat across from me at the table. He brooded a moment. "I can't remember much about that summer," he said, introspectively. "Almost like it never happened."

Back then, my 77-year-old father was 26 and all too aware of the risks. Back then, it was all tin-pot helmets, floppy tents, crampons and little else. His often hazy accounts of tackling an hitherto untried route on the Eiger's North Face before I was born – "in my wilder days," as he repeatedly puts it – were among the defining origin stories of my childhood. Even now, 16 years older than my father was during the expedition, I still find it hard to fathom what he did in the summer of 1970.

Though Dad talked about the Eiger often when I was a kid – I remember slideshow lectures for mountaineering associations and ski clubs across Scotland in the 1980s – his memories have become blurry and erratic. A stroke and two transient ischaemic





- ◀ Kenny and Bugs sorting gear for the ascent.
- ▶ Mike's father, Ian, in his ice-climbing comfort zone, August 1970.

him feel all the more urgent. And so it was that I decided to take him back to the Eiger, for one last swansong. To chase a renewed sense of wonder, perhaps, but also to breathe life into his memory, if only for a passing moment.

Few other mountains in the Alps fire the imagination like the Eiger. The way it calls is magnetic; the 13,015ft mass exerts a gravitational pull on climbers like no other in Europe. It is a place where mountaineers can become their truest selves, and regardless of age and ability, they come to the Bernese Oberland to test themselves in the Alps. For many, it is a source of self-actualisation.

Pioneering ascents have been part of the Eiger's bones since the first summit in 1858, but it is the more challenging North Face that's become a rite of passage for all self-respecting rock climbers – to many, it feels like an imagined homecoming. Over the past century, the near-vertical mile flank has spun tales of incredible derring-do, and Europe's largest wall of rock and ice has seen heroic endeavour go hand in hand with trauma and tragedy.

### THE MURDEROUS WALL

Since it was first summited back in 1938 by German-Austrian team Anderl Heckmair, Ludwig Vörg, Fritz Kasparek and Heinrich Harrer (of *Seven Years in Tibet* fame), the North Face has accounted for at least 64 deaths, earning it the local German nickname *Mordwand*, meaning 'murderous wall'. In English, even the loose translation of Eiger is 'ogre'. My father, paralysing seconds away from his own sudden exit at the hands of this legendary monster, knew that all too well.

I've often thought about why he did it and wondered what that summer meant to him. The crippling exhaustion, the freezing conditions, the summit euphoria. Particularly so, on 3 August 1970, the culmination of the team's five-day assault to reach the top. At the time, upon return to basecamp with frostbitten hands and ghost-like face, my father was quoted by *The Herald* as saying: "I'll never set foot on that bloody mountain again in my life." And yet, here we both were.

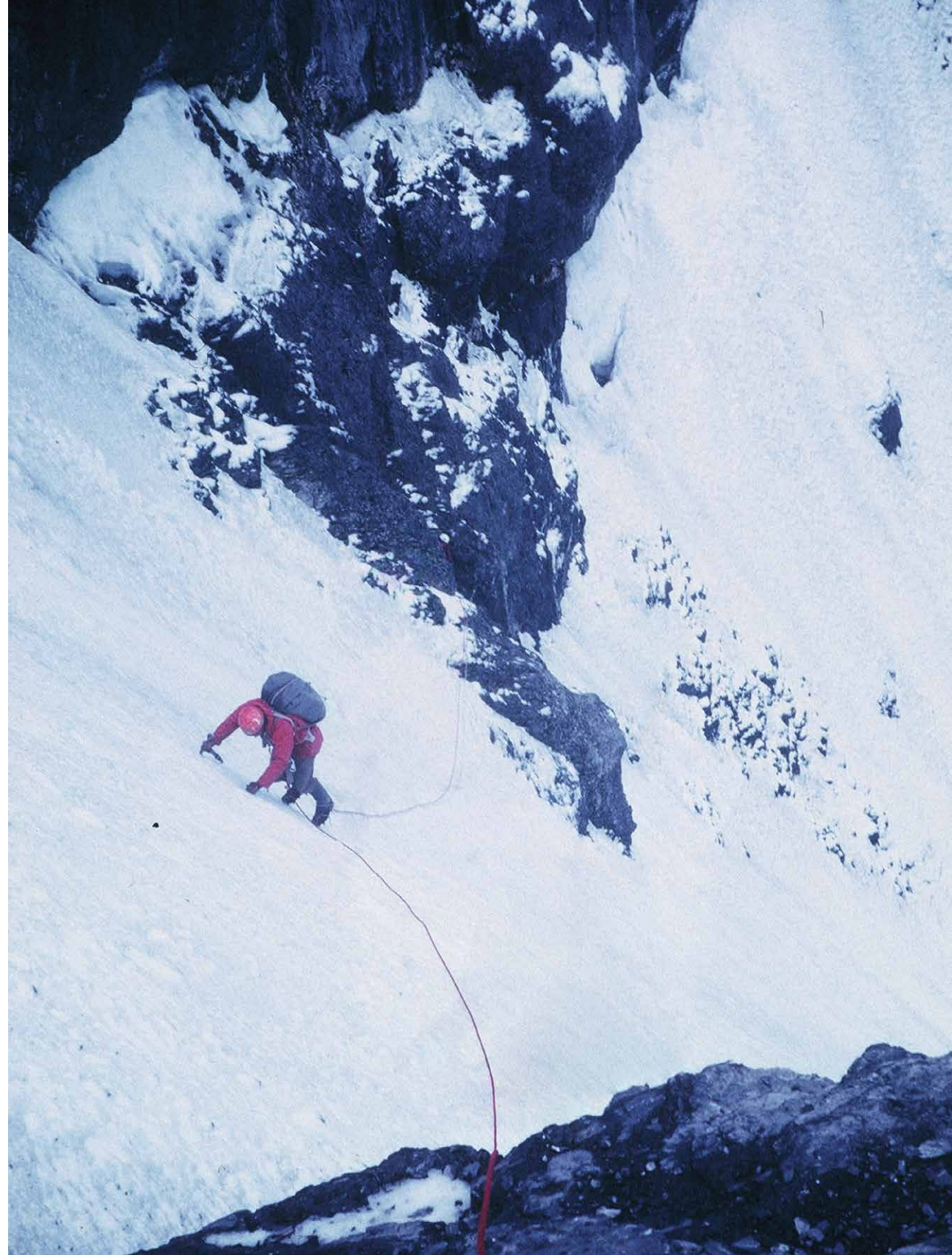
We arrived in Grindelwald, the chalet-covered eyrie where most Eiger journeys start. Excitement brewed and there was a feeling of waiting. At some point during the

attacks, which asphyxiate the brain, have brought on early onset dementia, a condition plagued by short-term memory loss and an inability to remember the simplest things; how to work the toaster and microwave, the days of the week, the names of his two grandchildren. Often, frustrated, he can't remember my name.

The Eiger, though, is the one memory he steadfastly clings on to. It is there, somewhere, indexed in a lasting part of his temporal lobe, yet surrounded by ever-growing darkness and neurocognitive inertia. Sometimes he can stare out of the window blankly for hours, and asking where he has been, the answer is simple: "Nowhere." But at other times, I am sure, he imagines himself back in Switzerland's Bernese Oberland, experiencing a kind of mental time travel, floating in the sunlight towards the Eiger's summit with a bird's-eye-view of his final ascent.

It is this uncertainty – and yet the inevitability of his impending decline – that has made spending time with

ALL PHOTOS: IAN MACEACHERAN, KENNY SPENCE AND ALISTAIR 'BUGS' MCKEITH

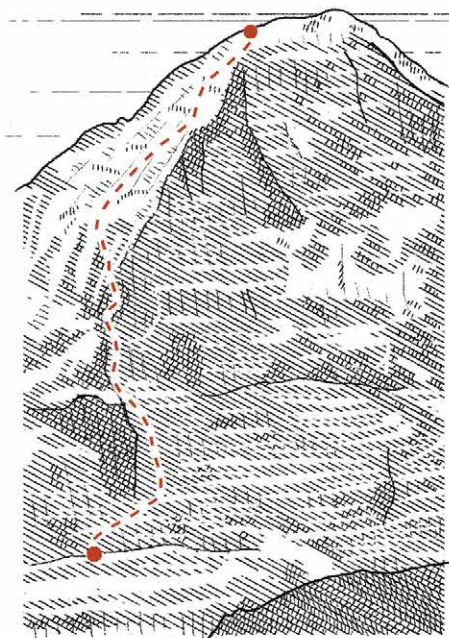




► Bugs considering options on the lower face of the Eiger's north wall. Far right: Kenny packing the expedition's hooks, carabiners, ice screws and bolts.



EIGER NORTH FACE - SCOTTISH PILLAR, 1970



first evening, the simplicity of the timber-framed chalet we were staying in filled my father with a keen sense of nostalgia, particularly the black and white portraits of roped-up climbers framed on the walls. "Tough as old boots, those guys," he said.

He was also one such tough boot. Unlike many of the world's prodigious mountaineers at the time – Chris Bonington, Dougal Haston and John Harlin, who was killed ascending the North Face in winter 1966 when his rope broke and he fell to his death – he and his climbing buddies, Kenny Spence and Alistair 'Bugs' McKeith, weren't athletes. Nor were they vertical gymnasts, or trust-fund kids. They were working class, hard-drinking, DIY vagabonds.

#### PRIMED FOR THE PEAK

But the trio set their minds to conquering what at the time was considered one of the 'last and most difficult routes in the Alps', as well as a 'feat of bonkers Alpinism'. My father had tackled El Capitan in Yosemite, Les Drus in Chamonix and Huascarán in the Cordillera Blanca, but this was an altogether more complex challenge: a direct route up the Eiger's North Pillar, a remarkable natural feature leading from the foot of the face to the summit. Consider also no helicopter rescue, no flash equipment and no effective weather forecasting – information that can be the difference between life and death.

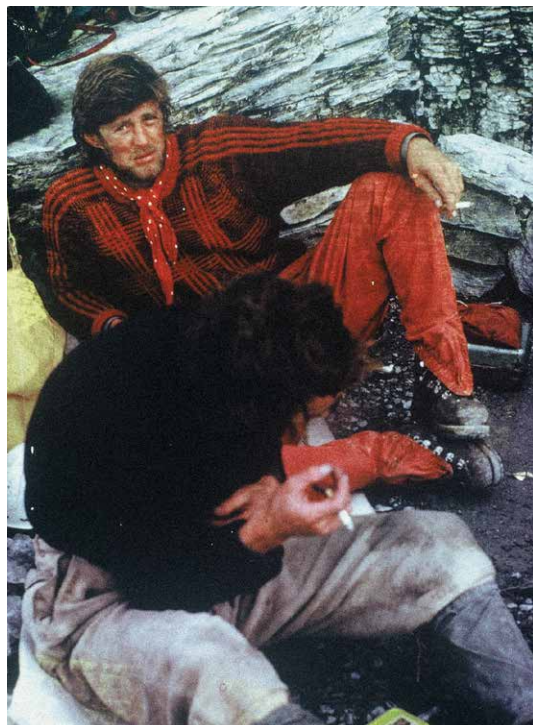
That last part was the most influential factor. Above them, the limestone face of steep slabs and overhangs

“the trio set their minds to conquering what at the time was called a ‘feat of bonkers alpinism’”

was often veiled by dense mist and eddying snow, their proposed route covered by avalanches and rock falls. From their base camp at Alpigen, it would take them more than two months of preparation before they were confident enough to make the conquest of the final 6,000ft North Pillar. Thirteen nights were spent in uncomfortable, snow-covered bivouacs, hunkered down on icy ledges, and the philosophy to climb cleanly with ice climbing gear, avoiding fixing ropes to the face, became blurry and ill-defined.

Undeniably, the weather was so bad – “conditions worse than a hellish Scottish winter,” Dad used to say – that there were no other ascents on the Eiger's other





◀ Ian (top) and Kenny.  
▶ The three-man team set up an unlikely bivvy camp on one of the North Face's lower pillars.

clenched to his knees, his knuckles taut, as if he was teasing out pinch grips and climbing holds from his mind. I could sense he was trying to reorganise his brain architecture, but also grasping for metaphors to describe the Eiger's inescapable force of nature. "It's almost unbelievable," he said, almost teary.

Out of some dark place in his memory, he then told me about Spence, who returned to the Eiger in 1971 to climb the North Face's fabled 1938 Route, and McKeith, who tragically died in 1978 while descending Canada's Mount Assiniboine in a storm, aged 33. These were stories I'd never heard him speak of before. In some small way, a spark had been lit.

#### A RENEWED BOND

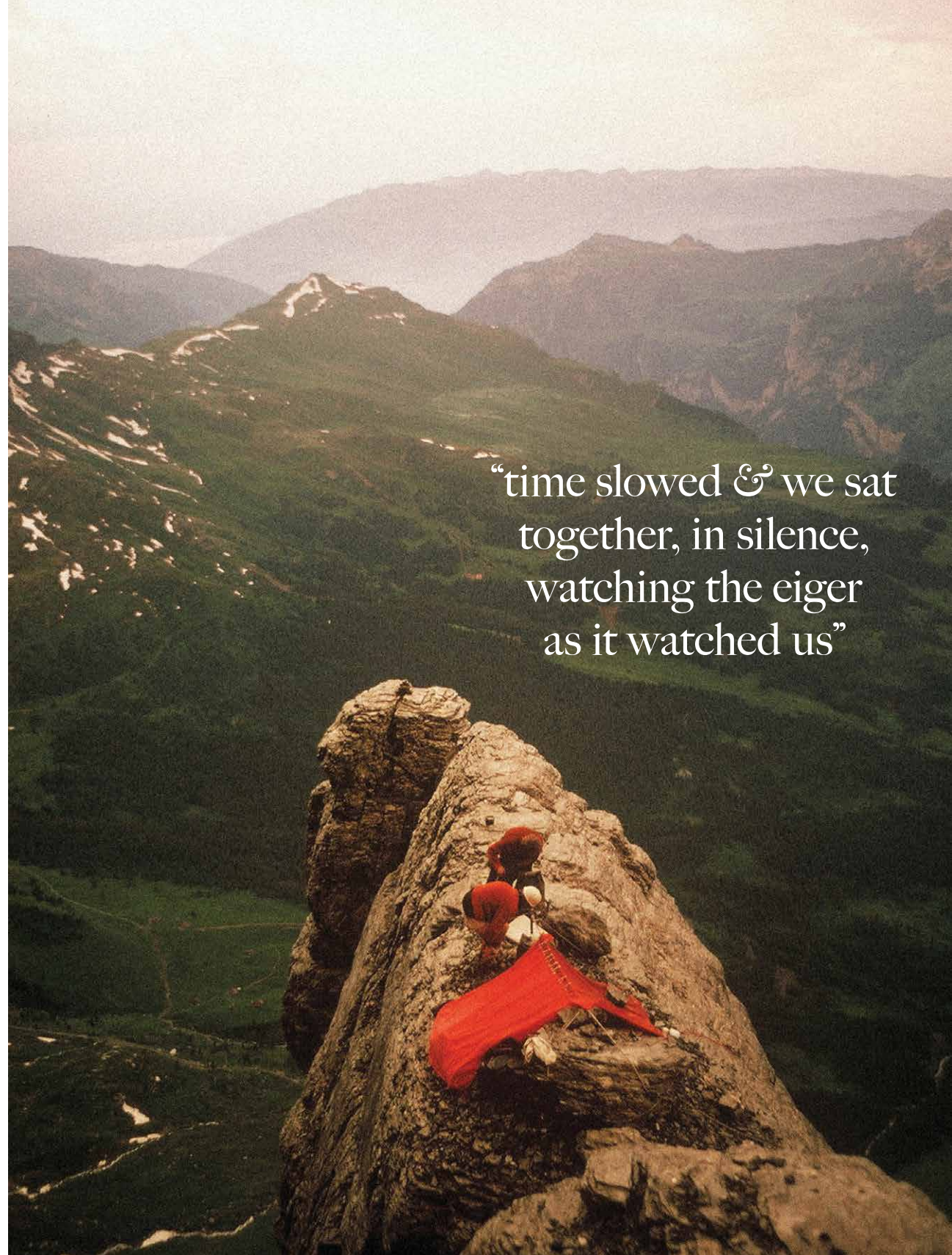
As the afternoon lingered, time slowed and we sat together, in silence, watching the Eiger as it watched us. It was a way for us to picture not just his past, but also to capture a moment I hoped we could share and remember in the future. It felt transformative to be there, and, whatever you want to call it, it was a reminder that while loss of memory can represent a loss of self, it can also be fluid, rising and falling like a swirl of snow. In my eyes, he looked more alert during our pilgrimage than I'd seen him in years. There, beneath the pioneering route now called the 'Scottish Pillars', he seemed almost newborn.

When the sun began to set, the Eiger aflame in a pink-hued alpenglow, we retreated to Grindelwald, electrified by the experience and, perhaps, more in tune with each other than we were before. Life had forced this journey on us, and I had hoped the mountain would have the power to prise Dad's memories wide open. And to an extent it did.

On our final night, I asked Dad how he felt about coming back. Poignantly, so many of his friends had perished over the past 50 years in climbing accidents, and a growing sense of his own mortality had led him to hang up his ice axe six years after the Eiger triumph. Did he have any regrets? "Oh no," he said, with a glint in his eye. "Because I wouldn't be here now. And neither would you. So, we'll have to come back and do this again next year. Just to make sure we both don't ever forget." ●

major routes that summer. There was no logic to it: as in a fever dream, they simply had to get to the top. The purpose of our trip crystallised after we took the rack railway into the mountains from Grindelwald to Eigergletscher Station, where we settled down on a narrow mountain path in the midday sun. Above us, a handful of free climbers – sweating, straining, rope-swinging – practiced their Spiderman manoeuvres, while higher still on the face, loneliness was promised to the extreme. The usual guide-led tour expeditions were on-hold and the coronavirus pandemic had forced uncharacteristically quiet days on the lofty cols of the Eiger.

Mostly, though, what I noticed was my dad's fingers. Nowadays, his climbing days are unsparingly reflected in his hands and a quick glance reveals Dupuytren's contracture, a rare and incurable genetic condition that leads to several fingers becoming permanently bent in a flexed position. He developed the disease in the 1990s, and yet here he was with fingers and thumbs tightly



“time slowed & we sat together, in silence, watching the eiger as it watched us”





# Wild East, Wild West

Trigger fingers at the ready, the sound of a whipcrack ringing in his ears, **Nick Hunt** seeks traces of the Old West in unlikely corners of Europe

WORDS: NICK HUNT  
ILLUSTRATIONS: KATHRIN LANG



‘**O**h give me land, lots of land under starry skies above/ Don’t fence me in/ Let me ride through the wide open country that I love/ Don’t fence me in...’

The Wild West anthem plays through speakers in this flyblown one-horse town. The swing doors of the saloon creak in the hot wind. Between the bank and the county jail, two cowboys squint at one another from under the brims of their sombreros, trigger fingers quivering over the handles of holstered guns. A horse stamps and shakes its tail. Spectators hold their breaths. One man draws. Two shots ring out. One man – the baddie – falls.

Tequila shots slide down the bar. Two cowboys, including the one who died, trade wisecracks with the barmaids, who are dressed as prostitutes. There is a three-way poker game, an argument, a bar brawl complete with men being pistol-whipped, chairs smashed over heads and someone getting flung head-first through the saloon doors. Another volley of pistol-fire and the bodies hit the floor. The spectators make polite applause and go to buy souvenirs.

Tabernas, in the south-east of Spain, holds the distinction of being Europe’s only desert (defined as an arid region that receives less than 250mm of precipitation per year). Culturally this is not Europe, however, but an exclave of the Old West. Beyond the brick and adobe walls of this replica frontier town, on the other side of a scrubby rise that displays the TEXAS HOLLYWOOD sign – a knock-off of the more famous sign 5,000 miles further west – stretches 100 square miles of sun-cracked clay, barren hills and steep-sided ramblas or ravines, a landscape that could easily pass for the badlands of Utah or Arizona. That resemblance was first noted by an Italian film director in the early 1960s, who came here searching for a cheap location to make a Western film.

His name was Sergio Leone, and his film *Per un pugno di dollari*, or *A Fistful of Dollars* – starring a little-known TV actor by the name of Clint Eastwood – inspired a generation of gritty ‘Spaghetti Westerns’. *For a Few*

*Dollars More* came out in 1965, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* in 1966, and over the following decades hundreds of other films were shot here, some set in alternative times and places (the Middle East in *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, the fantasy Hyborian wilderness in *Conan the Barbarian*) but overwhelmingly the rugged landscapes of the American West. Posses of lawmen, Mexican bandits, Native American warriors (not uncommonly played by local Roma) and yee-hawing, gunslinging cowboy heroes filled these ramblas with gunsmoke and blood, indelibly linking these cracked canyonlands a few miles north of the Mediterranean with the macho mythology of the American frontier.

These days the iconic film sets, while still used for shooting on occasion, have mostly been converted into theme parks, like the one in which I witness the gunslinging and bar-brawling. The compacted weirdness of these multiple layers of fantasy – scenes from a vanished 19th-century frontier, as reimagined a century later by Italians who had never been to America, now reenacted twice a day in the south-east corner of Spain – is as complex as the striated geology of the ramblas.

One day, walking in the desert, I hear the grandiose, soaring theme of *Once Upon a Time in the West* – composed by Leone’s childhood friend, the great Ennio Morricone – seemingly emanating from a red cliff, as if the rock were singing. Eventually I work out the music is coming from the nearby theme park of Western Leone, invisible from where I’m standing, but for a few surreal moments it feels as if the American West, in all its blood-soaked glory and its epic, tragic violence, has somehow infected the land itself. An electronic haunting.

Perhaps the most striking thing about Tabernas is the way in which this distorted American dream has



come to displace the actual history of the region — specifically the centuries-long North African presence here. From the TEXAS HOLLYWOOD sign, a few ruined walls are visible on a rocky hill: the remains of the ancient Moorish castle at which, so the story goes, the Nasrid sultan Muhammad XIII surrendered nearby Almeria to the reconquering Catholics. The year 1492, most famous as the year Christopher Columbus reached the New World, was also, in a strange quirk of history, the year that the last Moorish kingdom in Spain was defeated, ending almost 800 years of Muslim occupation. Having finally severed its ties with the Islamic east, Spain went on to colonise the west – and now, half a millennium later, the west has colonised it back. Where once the Arabic call to prayer rang over these eroded hills, now they echo with pistol fire and the whoops of make-believe cowboys.

#### LIVIN’ ON A PRAIRIE

A few months after my time in Tabernas, I’m on the other side of Europe, watching another reenactment that, despite its different costumes, stems from a similar reimagining of a mythologised past. The landscape, again, is reminiscent of the lost American frontier – not desert this time but the rolling prairies of the Great Plains. On all sides, from horizon to horizon, level grassland stretches away, producing an effect of sameness and endlessness that is disorienting. This is the Hortobágy National Park in the far east of Hungary, Europe’s largest remaining swathe of uncultivated grassland and a geographical exclave of the Eurasian Steppes. From out of this perfectly flat expanse gallop three dark horsemen.

These csikós are the traditional cattlemen of Hortobágy, cowboys of the Wild East, and their appearance is like something from a fairytale. Instead of sombreros they wear stiff black tricorne hats with bustard feathers in the brims; in place of dusty denims and chaps they’re swathed in gorgeous indigo robes,

“Where once the Arabic call to prayer rang over these eroded hills, now they echo with pistol fire and the whoops of make-believe cowboys”

with voluminous trousers and embroidered waistcoats. The display begins with the synchronised, ear-splitting cracking of bullwhips, then the horses are commanded to lie prone on the ground while their riders stand on top of them, swinging their whips around their heads in a display of dominance. Finally, one man performs a stunt of quite absurd bravado, thundering across the plain with his feet on the backs of two galloping horses, clutching the reins of a further three horses galloping ahead. This crazy formation, which would not be out of place in an action-packed Spaghetti Western, was first dreamed up by an Austrian painter in the 1920s and was only later attempted for real – a peculiar example of life imitating art.

All the other tricks on display, however, have their roots in reality. Back in the days of the betyárs – cattle-rustlers and highwaymen who haunted the Great Hungarian Plain into the late 19th century – bullwhips were cracked to accustom horses to the sound of gunfire. The trick of lying prone was developed to evade the



soldiers giving chase, horse and rider merging invisibly into the level horizon. Around the same time that Jesse James and Billy the Kid were being mythologised for sticking up banks, stealing cattle and other nefarious crimes, notorious betyárs such as Jóska Sobri and Sándor Rózsa became the subjects of rollicking ballads that painted them as outlaw heroes resisting government oppression. The struggles took place in parallel. As the West was being won, fences erected across the prairies and the last desperados hunted down, in this lawless region of Hungary – for centuries a frontier zone between European Christendom and the barbarian hordes in the east – control was being asserted over a wild horseback culture that traced its origins back to Hungary’s nomadic past.

Those indigo robes and skirt-like trousers were adopted, some historians say, by the Magyar ancestors of modern-day Hungarians who copied them from Turkic nomads on the steppes of Central Asia. The Hungarian language itself is nomadic, a Uralic tongue that is utterly unlike anything spoken by Hungary’s Indo-European-speaking neighbours, cut off from its origins and stranded in the heart of Europe. Today, as Hungary’s right-wing government foments Magyar nationalism and turns its back on the west, the 19th-century movement of Turanism – which promoted links between Uralic-speaking cultures from Central Europe to China – is undergoing a resurgence.

A week after watching the csikó show, I’m in another part of Hungary at a festival that celebrates the shared culture of the steppes, attended by punk bands, folk musicians, horseback-archery enthusiasts, medieval warfare reenactors and delegations from as far away as Turkey, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia – a strange combination of far-right nationalism and multiculturalism. There are yurts and shrines to Genghis Khan, cavalry charges and mock battles, and an almost cult-like veneration for Attila the Hun, whose armies devastated Europe in the fifth century. The politics

**“These csikós are the traditional cattlemen of Hortobágy, cowboys of the Wild East, and their appearance is like something from a fairytale”**

might be confused, and confusing, but when I ask a young man why he identifies with the horseback cultures of the steppe, he gives an answer that would not be out of place beneath the TEXAS HOLLYWOOD sign.

“I want to be like them,” he says. “Free, always moving.”

Cowboys and csikós, bandidos and betyárs – both sets of national icons represent an ideal of freedom. Tabernas might have replaced its own history with the myths of a faraway continent, while the attendees of this festival are acting out a fantasy version of their own glorified past, but the desire is much the same: to gallop off into the sunset.

*‘Oh give me land, lots of land under starry skies above/ Don’t fence me in/ Let me ride through the wide open country that I love/ Don’t fence me in...’*. The words might just as well be ringing out from the speakers here in eastern Hungary, amid the cracking of bullwhips and the drone of goatskin bagpipes. ●

Nick Hunt’s new book *Outlandish: Walking Europe’s Unlikely Landscapes* is published by John Murray; £16.99.







Inspired by a community that values authenticity and creative freedom, VOITED creates outdoor apparel that blends creativity, performance and sustainability. Their mission is to collaborate with inspirational people to design unique and durable products that are useful, while inspiring us to get out there and live authentically.

Combining a love for the outdoors with a dedication to lessen the impact that manufacturing has on the environment, VOITED team eco-conscious materials with practical features – designing with multiple purposes, functionality and sustainability in mind.

#### SLEEP IN A CLOUD

The VOITED Outdoor PillowBlanket™ is a versatile 4-in-1 camping blanket that transforms from compact pillow to cosy blanket, or snaps together to create a sleep sack or waterproof poncho. Choose from Ripstop – insulated, machine washable and made from recycled plastic bottles – or the snugly CloudTouch™ – teaming Ripstop with a recycled and fast-drying brushed knit fabric that feels like sheep's wool.

Not only are these breathable, water- and wind- resistant blankets extremely versatile and practical for anything from van life to backyard cook-outs, they also come in an appealing range of designs. VOITED collaborates with people living interesting, honest and unconventional lifestyles, providing a platform for talented designers to co-create products that reflect their passions and individual style. We're particularly taken by 'Monadnock', with its geometric mountainscapes in vibrant earthy tones, and the limited edition Ocean Series featuring bold coral and kelp shapes.

#### GIVE ME SHELTER

Made with surfers and wild swimmers in mind, VOITED's roomy change wear helps you maximise your outdoor adventures by providing personal shelter for a graceful wetsuit change. Waterproof outside, towel-like inside, the quick-drying Poncho or Change Robe are packable, insulated and absorbent, while also being made from 100% recycled materials.

[voited.co.uk](http://voited.co.uk)

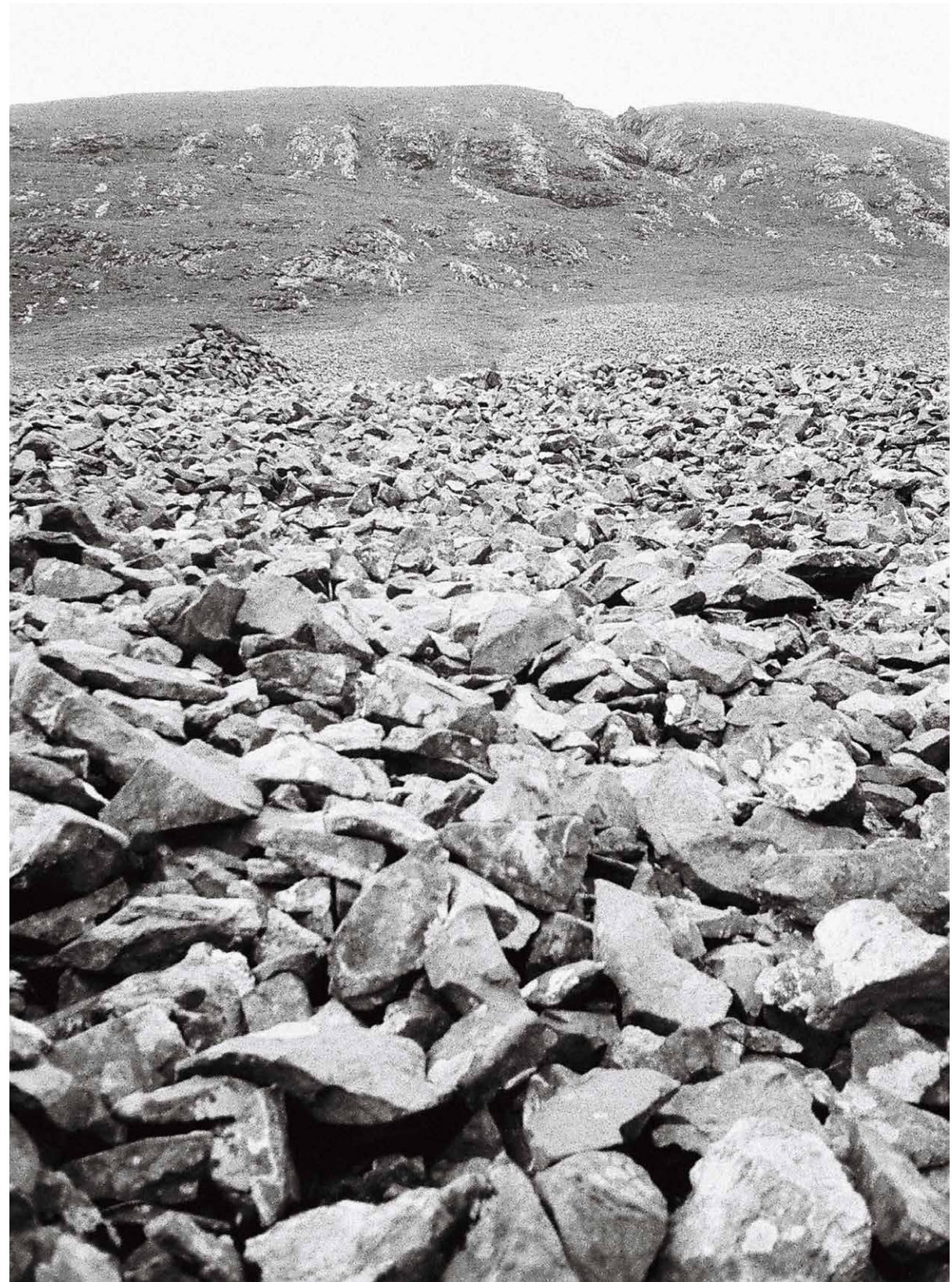
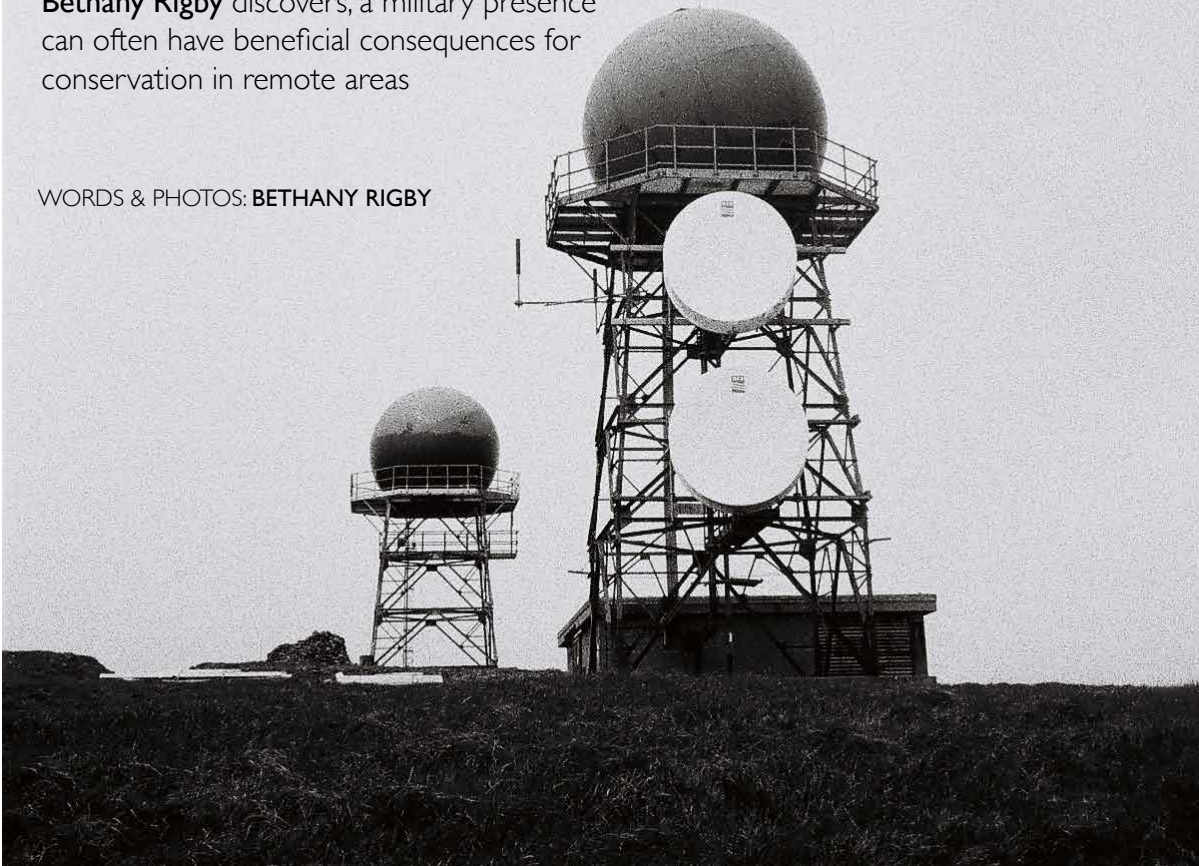




# NATURE & ARTIFICE

Ministry of Defence domes, tanks and radar towers may seem incongruous with the wild and craggy landscape of St Kilda, but as **Bethany Rigby** discovers, a military presence can often have beneficial consequences for conservation in remote areas

WORDS & PHOTOS: **BETHANY RIGBY**





“Be mindful of the wind anywhere you go and the big thing to watch for is the cloud, because it comes in really fast and really low. If the clouds come in; don’t go up, come down, because even if you know the island it is very difficult to orientate yourself.”

Standing at the foot of the concrete jetty, we’re briefed by the National Trust warden upon coming ashore. The weather has closed a door behind us; strong easterly winds mean no other boats can access Village Bay. St Kilda is living up to its reputation as the island on the edge of the world.

On a clear day, Neolithic communities of the Outer Hebrides would have been able to spot St Kilda on the horizon, and archaeological evidence suggests they too successfully made the long journey across the Atlantic. Scattered remains of stone tools and pottery indicate that sustained habitation on St Kilda stretches back to the Bronze Age. A population of hardy, long toed islanders lived on birds’ eggs and sheep’s milk for hundreds of years, before finally evacuating in 1930. Facilitating their isolated way of life, the islanders built double-walled stone houses, architecture that is endemic to the island. These ‘cleits’ were not lived in, but were used for storing birds, eggs and drying peat as the wind whistled through the stones. Over a thousand cleits pockmark the slopes from bay to summit, mapping a model of efficient subsistence.

Running parallel to its human story, St Kilda is an astonishing landscape home to one of the most important seabird colonies in the world. Recognising both histories, UNESCO bestowed dual World Heritage status for both cultural and natural significance to the islands. As I walk the steep slopes of Hirta, I find St Kilda embodies and embraces this duality; it is a place defined by its contradictions. Natural and unnatural, ancient and contemporary, wild and curated, human and non-human.

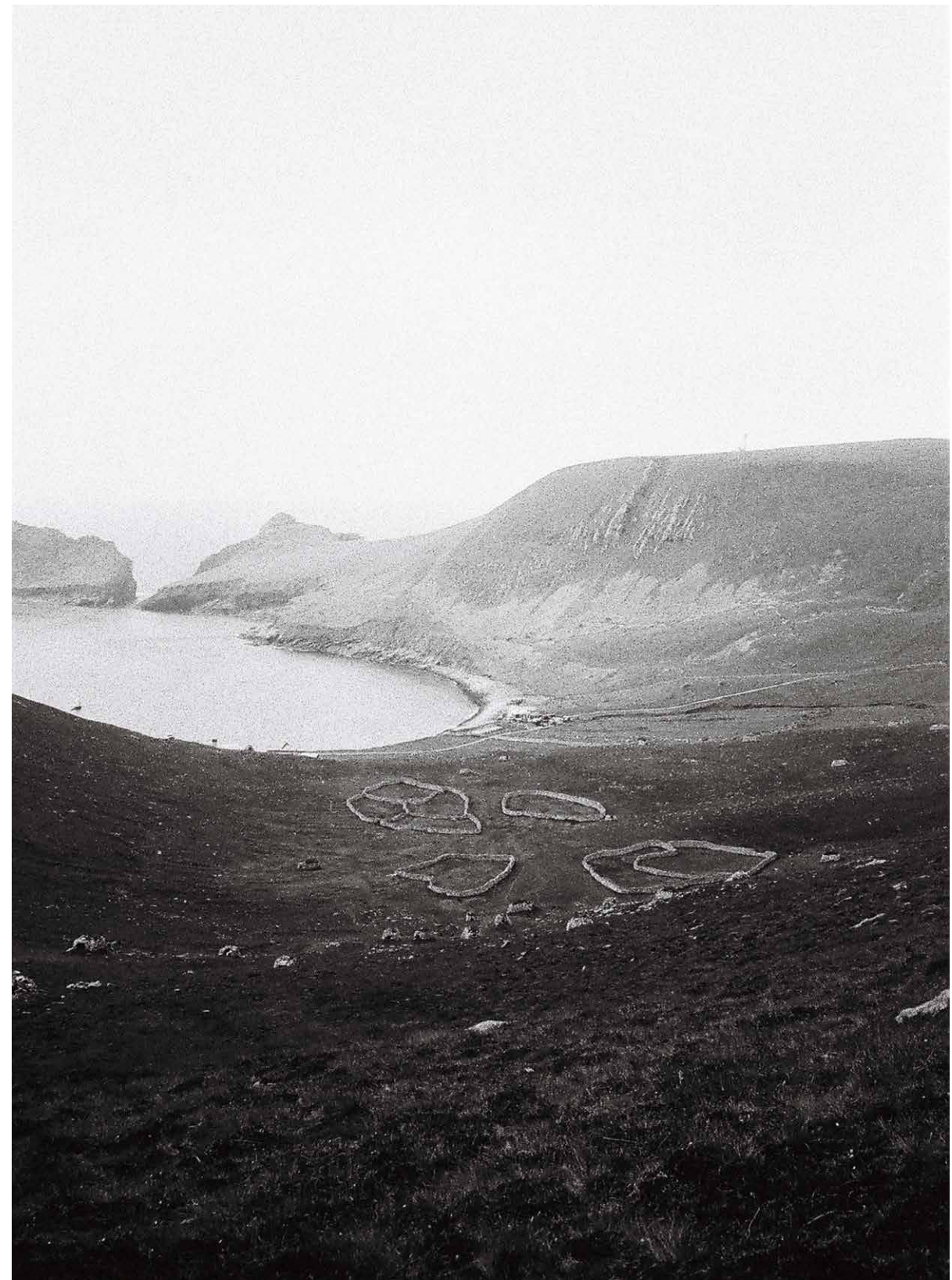
#### ISLAND OF ARCHAEOLOGY

Observed from the summit of Conachair, the geological origins of the island are unmistakable. The archipelago survives as a remnant of an ancient volcano that erupted to the surface more than 55 million years ago. The steep crater enveloping Village Bay gives the impression of

“These ‘cleits’ were not lived in, but were used for storing birds, eggs and drying peat as the wind whistled through the stones”

gazing through a fisheye lens and, from this vantage point, the scattered cleits resemble bullet holes sprayed into the hillside. Cries of thousands of seabirds living on the cliffs ricochet behind us, mixing with the rumbling tones of dump trucks and diggers reverberating up from the bay. The military base is in mid-renovation; the dated prefabs being replaced by contemporary and more camouflaged facilities. Works consists of the removal of old, inefficient generators and the installation of a modern building that requires less fuel to run, therefore reducing the chance of oil spills. New windows will permit less light from escaping, which otherwise attracts pufflings from the across the bay. Roofs are to be turfed, and walls stone-clad in order to be more cohesive with the surrounding terrain. We’d noticed on our approach by boat from the comparatively populous island of Berneray that St Kilda was surprisingly loud.

“When you wander round, please don’t remove anything at all. The whole island is an archaeological site.” I remember the warden’s words as I gaze across the archaeological sites on the slopes, the construction works in the bay and up a winding road to radome towers perched at the top of the ridge. These are the accumulated deposits of centuries of human activity scattered over the landscape, which have all contributed to the story of St Kilda and how it’s perceived by the outside world.





I can't help but draw parallels between the drystone cleits, with their tufted grass tops, and the proposed turfed roof of the new military facilities. The radar base at Mullach Mòr can be distinctly seen from the western slope of Conachair, its shape imitating impeccably round eggs balancing on latticed egg cups. On our approach to the base we're subject to aerial combat as great skuas divebomb from above, warning us away from their chicks. Following a particularly close call, we duck and spot the reason for the assault; an egg perfectly nestled in the grass on the slope nearby. Orb-like artefacts dominate our field of view, jutting out against the harsh, irregular topography of the island.

The Mullach Mòr base uses radar to track missiles launched from the Western Isles, while St Kilda itself sits within a magnetic anomaly, where compasses falter and impair navigation. We're in a game of electromagnetic hide and seek. Mirroring the isle's dual heritage status, both natural and manufactured threats linger here. Elemental violence of wind and sea intertwine with the human violence of weapons testing.

#### A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP

There is an odd familiarity to encountering military infrastructure in remote places, seemingly out of place and in place all at once. The defence estate makes up 1.9 per cent of the entire UK land area; 1.06 million acres of remote land, including 250 Sites of Special Scientific Interest and 3 per cent of UK national parks. As justification, the MOD maintains numerous accounts of successful military environmentalism; how barn owls nest in pillboxes, and fairy shrimp thrive in the muddy puddles of tank tracks. Such 'khaki conservation' presents military activities as compatible with, or beneficial to, environmental protection, a discourse that largely serves to naturalise military presence within wild places – arguably implying that natural landscapes cannot survive without human intervention.

A quarter-century after the St Kildan evacuation, National Trust for Scotland and the MOD began managing the islands and have subsequently maintained an interdependent relationship. The MOD enables wardens to live on the Hirta with greater ease; the base

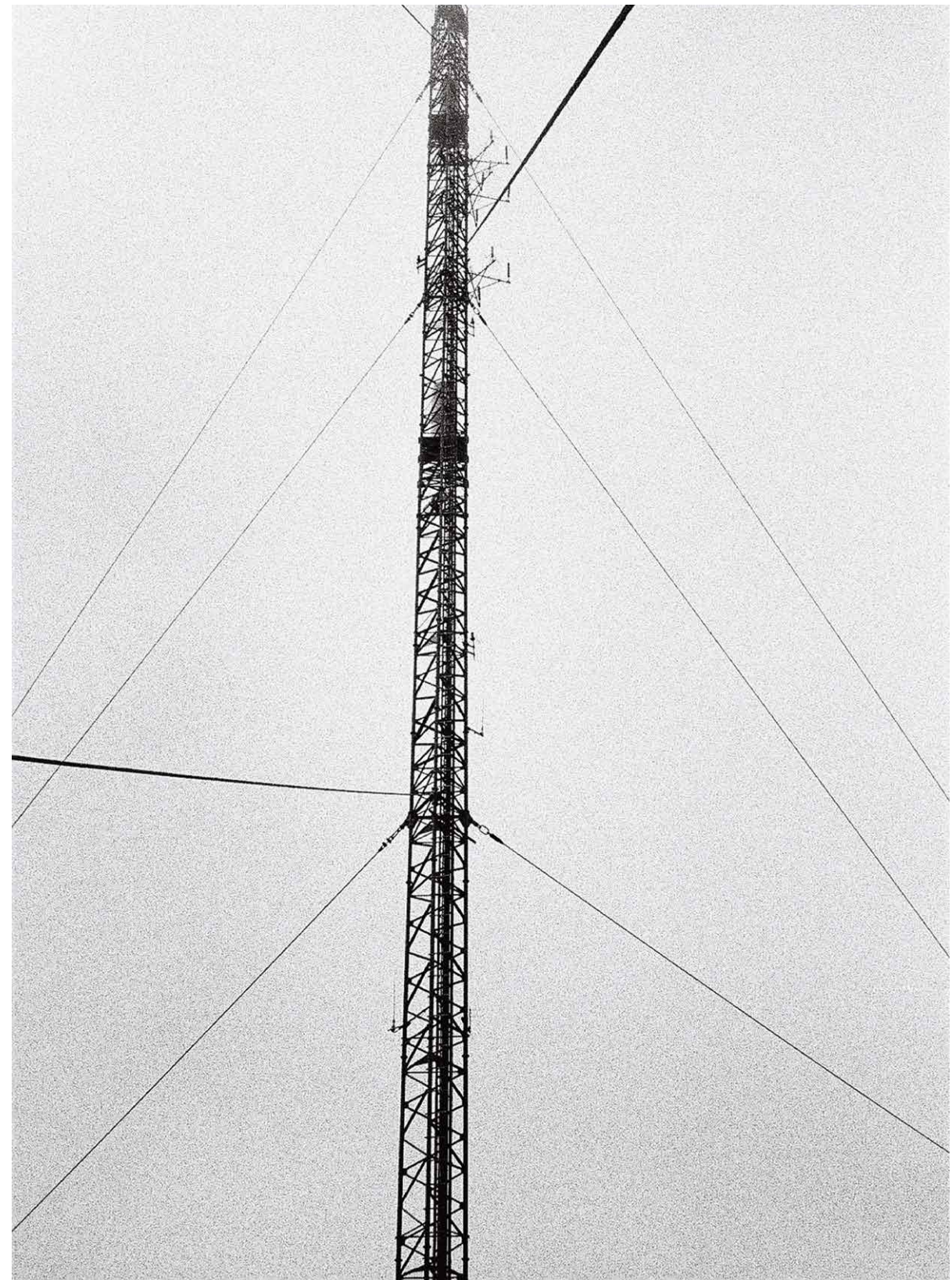
## “There is an odd familiarity to encountering military infrastructure in remote places”

deters vandals from approaching the cliffs and enables regular transportation to the islands, while military personnel assist in rescue operations. By maintaining an amicable partnership with the Trust, the MOD bolsters its environmentally-conscious image.

Despite my knowledge of this, seeing this military architecture on the most remote island in Britain remains an intensely bewildering experience. The severity of steel against the undulating backdrop of the sea, the artificial hum of the transformer a meditative undertone to the ever-present wind.

Envisaging St Kilda as a pristine Atlantic outpost for wildlife is to tell only half its story. As it has been for thousands of years, humans remain inextricably linked to St Kilda's wild landscape. The islands are dependable only on their consistent state of flux. Adopting the archipelago's spontaneity, and facing the prospect of weeks of poor conditions, we seize a gap in the weather that permits our boat to slip out from Village Bay.

Hirta's cliffs obscure the view of the military bases as we sail towards Stac Lee and Boreray. Orange ornithological research tents cling like limpets on Boreray's impossibly sheer slopes, their occupants tasked with counting the world's largest colony of gannets living on the tallest sea stacks in Britain. Our skipper expertly threads the sailboat between the colossal masses of rock and as we enter the gap, sound and textures merging into a singularity. The scene dazzles with gannets, rockface, sails and sea. ●





# a search for stillness

**Charles Fanshawe** – founder of Moorswood Field Rugs – sets out to spend time at the source of five rivers on Dartmoor’s northern reaches, for river swims, a brew with friends and to reflect on the question: how do we find stillness in a world of constant motion?

WORDS: CHARLES FANSHAWE  
PHOTOS: JIM MARSDEN



◀ John Muir wrote that “between every two pines is a doorway to another world” – and the exit from Fernworthy Forest onto Teignhead Farm is surely just that.



PARTNERS

Looking up at the fringe of moorland from the front of my house, I watch the clouds darkening and I can smell rain on the wind. Water has sculpted Dartmoor over millenia, and the rain that falls on the high moors seeps through the peat into the surrounding watercourses.

Twelve of Devon’s rivers originate on Dartmoor, with five of them springing from an area only a couple of kilometres across – near Black Hill on the high north moors, enclosed by some of Dartmoor’s wildest and most remote terrain. The rain that’s about to fall here, I think, has surely not long passed over these remote reaches.

Two of Devon’s great rivers cut the county in half – the Dart to the south and the Taw to the north – slicing from

Barnstaple to Dartmouth in a 90km line as the crow flies (or 147km if you were to follow their meandering route). The heads of these epic watercourses, only 500m apart, originate close to Black Hill; to reach them is only a light trudge across peat hags and sphagnum moss.

It’s been a long time since we were all allowed out to wild camp, and so I decided to gather a small group of friends to head to Black Hill to spend some time beside the sources of these great rivers; to rest up on the high moors, to listen to the breeze whistling through the bog cotton and sedges.

I wanted to spend time there, rather than claiming miles by hiking up and over Dartmoor’s Tors; the principles by which I founded Moorswood put into practice on a longer wander and wild camp. We don’t stop often enough, even with the recent imposed pause through lockdown. I didn’t want to simply ‘go there’ but more so to ‘be there’. I wanted to search for stillness.

“stillness for me reflects those moments when i can calm my mind from the racing thoughts, and clear out the dustbin of cluttered anxieties”

## STILLNESS IN A WORLD OF CONSTANT MOTION

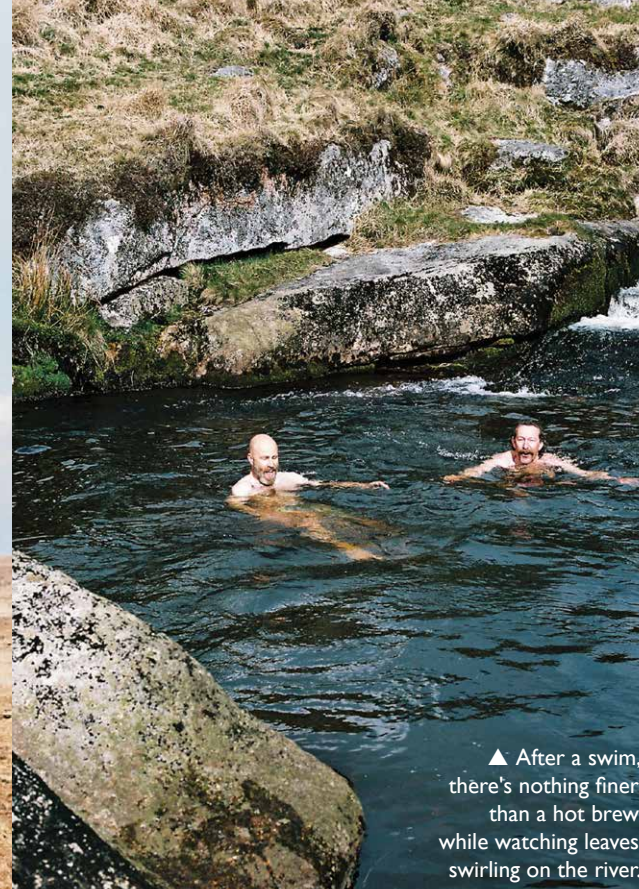
Stillness for me reflects those moments when I can calm my mind from the racing thoughts, and clear out the dustbin of cluttered anxieties. They often pile up through the week, like the laundry basket at home, and if I leave it unchecked it overflows and gets the better of me.

I used to fill my pack with things to do when I stop: a spoon to carve, a book to read, a notebook to write to-do lists. I still love to do this at home, but out here it feels like the wrong kind of ‘doing’. We just need to be there and observe the natural world around us – to pay attention to what’s around us in the very simplest of forms.

Heading out and putting one foot in front of the other is great for our bodies, but it’s when taking out and using my Moorswood Ramblers Roll that I’ve come to



◀ On Black Hill we spent time beside the sources of these great rivers, listening to the breeze whistling through the bog cotton and sedges.



▲ After a swim, there's nothing finer than a hot brew while watching leaves swirling on the river.



find calmness. It's a catalyst. Right then, I know it's a moment for me. I choose a place to rest in nature, usually with a cup of tea, and that's how I find stillness.

#### SIMPLY DESIGNED, YET PURPOSEFUL

At Moorswood, we design and make Field Rugs – a collection of sustainable, hardy, weatherproof, picnic or adventure rugs. They are all made from 100% natural fibre materials; no plastic or polyester backing; no polycotton, not even the thread. Therefore, after a long and reliable life, they can be returned to the earth from whence they came.

We designed and created our products to replace a polyester backed, fake tartan picnic mat that we were gifted. It blew away in the wind, fell apart within a year or two and had no destination other than landfill. Our Field Rugs are crafted from some of the best fabrics from across the British Isles: hardy Scottish wool tweed, organic wax cotton, oak bark tanned Devonshire leather and organic wool felt.

They combine to create something purposeful and beautiful, thoughtfully crafted in our workshop below the moors. They are designed to last 20 plus years, not two. Hopefully they will become an essential part of your adventure kit – not just to use, but to treasure using.

Find out more and browse a range of Field Rugs, Ramblers Rolls and a limited edition run of the new Forest Roll at [moorswood.com](https://moorswood.com)





# FUTURE MATERIALS FOR THE SPACESHIP EARTH

Our material consumption has long been out of control. But could developments in biodesign be part of the solution, bringing us closer to a sci-fi 1960s vision of a sustainable 'Spaceship Earth'?

WORDS: JOLY BRAIME  
ILLUSTRATIONS: DAN BRIGHT

In 1966, the economist and philosopher Kenneth E Boulding wrote a prophetic essay called *The Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth*. In it, he argued that humans needed to start thinking of the Earth as a sort of spaceship – a closed system “without unlimited reservoirs of anything, either for extraction or for pollution”.

Boulding didn't invent this concept, but his essay put a lot of meat on the bones. As a Liverpoolian Quaker living in booming post-war America, Boulding recognised that the industrialised societies of the 1960s were operating “cowboy” economies – in which their success was measured mainly by how much stuff they produced and consumed. This only worked on a flat and infinite Earth with limitless “reservoirs” for both raw materials and pollution.

Spacemen, on the other hand, needed to focus on “stock maintenance” by conserving materials and minimising waste, and the ideal was to devise “a cyclical ecological system which is capable of continuous reproduction of material form even though it cannot escape having inputs of energy”.

## THE GROWTH OF MATERIALISM

The issue of materials in our modern age is dizzyingly complicated. In his 2014 book, *Making the Modern World: Materials and Dematerialization*, interdisciplinary thinker Vaclav Smil analyses how the world has become hopelessly dependent on vast flows of materials, and the pace of growth he depicts is eye-watering. Global harvests of cotton lint, for example, were 4 megatons in 1900, 7 megatons in 1950 and a mighty 23.3 megatons in 2010. Look at the extraction of metal ores, wood or oil and the story is the same.

Of course, there are other embedded costs in things we buy, such as the potentially considerable resources needed to process or transport them. Then there are factors such as the lifespan of the product ('buy cheap, buy twice', and all that) and its maintenance costs.

The lifecycle assessment (LCA) of a product – where you measure its environmental impact from source to skip – can yield some curious findings, and Smil offers the example of the bog-standard polycotton work shirt. If you wash one of these 52 times before slinging it in landfill, then the shirt's manufacture – resource-intensive as it is – accounts for only 36 per cent of its total lifetime energy use and 24 per cent of its water use.

None of which is particularly good news for the Spaceship Earth, which is running on dwindling fuel tanks with a cargo hold full of crap. About a fifth of the world simply gets through far too much stuff, but growth underpins our modern economies and they get into a mess without it. Apart from anything else, persuading your average cowboy that he should have fewer things is a pretty tall order. As Boulding noted sadly: “It is always a little hard to find a convincing answer to the man who says, ‘What has posterity ever done for me?’”

So, until we can unpick centuries of ingrained hyper-materialism, we're going to have to try to find ways to manufacture better products that use fewer resources and produce less waste. Which is where biodesign comes in.

## A LIVING SOLUTION

Biodesign is a broad and often ill-defined term, but it mainly means making things using biological resources. It lies somewhere in the gaping space between genetic engineering and conceptual art, and might include anything from biomimicry to farming micro-organisms.

In the search for materials that might fit into the “cyclical ecological system” of Boulding's Spaceship Earth, biodesign is already beginning to come up with some intriguing possibilities. Leading the way are highly specialised laboratories, bankrolled by serious investors including major fashion and sportswear brands – but increasing numbers of university courses, research grants and international prizes are also nurturing an emerging new generation of biodesigners.

“ UNTIL WE CAN UNPICK CENTURIES OF INGRAINED HYPER-MATERIALISM, WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO TRY TO FIND WAYS TO MANUFACTURE BETTER PRODUCTS THAT USE FEWER RESOURCES AND PRODUCE LESS WASTE ”



## THE SEARCH FOR LOWER-IMPACT MATERIALS

Any good product needs to solve a practical problem, otherwise you're into the realm of the celebrated Hutzler banana slicer (6,000 facetious Amazon reviews and counting). But biodesign is often solving two extra problems in a product's lifecycle – the effects of its production and disposal. This might involve using raw materials that are less environmentally harmful, or even recycling waste from elsewhere.

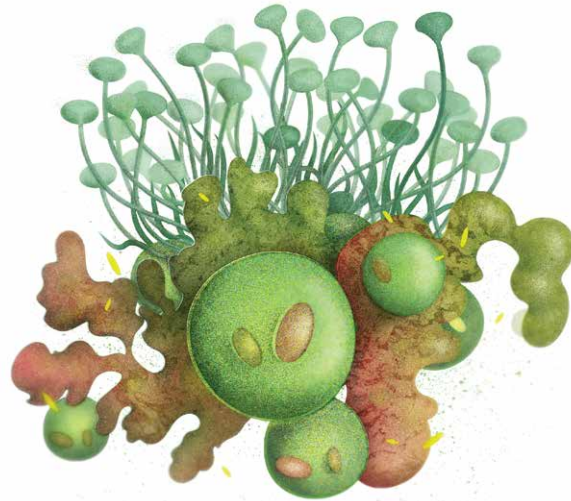
Consider the success of BLOOM, a plastic developed by US-based Algix. BLOOM is made of 45% algae, exposed to pressure and heat and blended with petroleum-based ingredients to make a kind of EVA foam. Lifecycle assessments of BLOOM products suggest a significantly lower negative impact than standard foam, but they're also dealing with a pollution issue – snorkling up harmful algae blooms and doing something useful with the resulting sludge.

BLOOM's environmental credentials might not be quite as impressive as some others on this list, but they've made what is arguably the most difficult leap in biodesign – bringing an affordable product to the mass market. You'll find their algae-based foam in things from running shoes and rucksack padding to yoga mats and surfboard tops. Boulding hoped that we spacemen might one day be able to run our machines off methane-producing algae, but in the meantime, trainer mid-soles aren't a bad use for it.

### MAKING ALTERNATIVES MAINSTREAM

Algae isn't the only abundant substance with potential. The seafood industry produces between six and eight million tonnes of crustacean waste a year, and all those prawn shells contain a natural polymer called chitin, which can be used to make compostable plastic. Start-ups like The Shellworks in London are well on the way to producing a viable alternative to single-use plastics, while over in New York, Vietnamese designer Uyen Tran has combined chitin with used coffee grounds to develop a textile rather like leather that can be textured, machined and sewn.

In fact, sustainable leathers seem rather a preoccupation for biodesigners. Among the most successful is Mylo, developed by California-based Bolt Threads. Mylo is made out of mycelium, which is grown, processed, textured and tanned into a vegan fungi leather.



Through partnerships with several big brands such as Adidas, Lululemon and Stella McCartney, the company claims it should start to become available to consumers this year (though their website emphasises that you shouldn't actually consume it).

That major brands like these are hopping into bed with biodesign start-ups can perhaps be explained by the increasing awareness of the clothing industry's unsavoury side. Everyone's heard somewhere that textiles account for 20 per cent of freshwater pollution worldwide, and while this amazing statistic has no reliable source and bears all the hallmarks of sensationalist hokum, there are plenty of other genuinely horrible statistics about the industry that can be substantiated.

For instance, a 2019 report from the World Bank estimated that washing, dyeing and finishing clothes requires about nine billion cubic metres of water a year, much of which is then sloshed back into the environment as a heady cocktail of toxic chemicals. Each day in Dhaka, Bangladesh, around 1.3 million cubic metres of polluted technicolour effluent is pumped into the city's waterways and sewers – much of it from textile factories and tanneries. This being one of the unpalatable realities of the "cowboy economy", in that the "infinite reservoirs [...] into which effluvia can be deposited" are mostly concealed in the global south.

## APING NATURE THROUGH BIOMIMICRY

Nature is rather better at designing things than we are, having been at it since life began on Earth at least 3.5 billion years ago. Copying and adapting some of these designs makes good sense, and is known as biomimicry. One famous example of biomimicry was when a Swiss man called George de Mestral noticed burrs stuck to his dog's coat after a walk in the woods in 1941. Rather than get annoyed about it as the rest of us do, he took a closer look and went on to invent Velcro. Biomimicry and biodesign aren't the same thing (Velcro, for example, is synthetic), but one often incorporates elements of the other.

Sometimes, minimising what Boulding called the "throughput" of resources is as simple as making sure we eat everything we buy. I once saw an excellent *New Yorker* cartoon by Will McPhail of four weeping avocados standing round a coffin, one of them looking mournfully at the others and saying, "it was so sudden...". Surely something we can all relate to.

One biodesign solution for this is a product called Apeel, which mimics the natural coating that many fruit and vegetables already have to keep moisture in and bacteria out. Manufactured from plant-based ingredients, Apeel is an invisible, lipid-based spray or dip that claims to be able to double the shelf life of things like avocados, limes, apples and strawberries.

### A PLETHORA OF SKILLS

Elsewhere, other biodesigners have been drawing inspiration from the arachnid world. Intrigued by the elasticity, strength and softness of spider silk, the team at Bolt Threads (who also make Mylo) developed a process to mimic it themselves, fermenting genetically engineered yeast to produce a spider silk protein that can then be purified and spun into fibres and fabrics. So far they've used this Microsilk to make limited-edition ties, beanies and dresses.

The teams behind products like these might include microbiologists, fashion designers, biochemists, farmers, engineers and even fine artists, and multidisciplinary collaboration is central to many biodesign projects. This, too, is part of the Spaceship Earth ethos. A few years after Boulding's famous essay, Buckminster Fuller – that great high priest of futurism – wrote the *Operating*

*Manual for Spaceship Earth* (1969). He argued that a key obstacle to effective running of the spaceship was "that society operates on the theory that specialization is the key to success, not realizing that specialization precludes comprehensive thinking". I suspect he might have rather approved of the broad skill base, adaptive thinking and "deliberately expansive" mindset involved in developing biodesign products.

### A GLOBAL APPROACH

Not only this, but Bucky also believed in what he called "a One-World Island in a One-World Ocean", and such internationalism is strikingly common among biodesign teams. As an example, take a look at the EU-funded GoJelly project, which seeks to repurpose jellyfish slime into various products, including a microplastics filter for water treatment plants. The project is made up of teams in Slovenia, Israel, Denmark, Norway, France, Portugal and Germany, each bringing a different set of competencies to the mix. Sift through the projects listed on the Biomimicry Institute's website or the finalists at the annual Biodesign Challenge and you'll see that they too hail from all over the globe – sometimes from countries that are already suffering the ill effects of the cowboy economy. As Buckminster Fuller once said, "we are all astronauts".

**“ GEORGE DE MESTRAL NOTICED BURRS STUCK TO HIS DOG'S COAT AFTER A WALK IN THE WOODS IN 1941. RATHER THAN GET ANNOYED ABOUT IT AS THE REST OF US DO, HE TOOK A CLOSER LOOK AND WENT ON TO INVENT VELCRO ”**



## FARMING AND TAMING MICRO-ORGANISMS

Farming micro-organisms is as old as bread and cheese, and Boulding saw their potential for his future Spaceship Earth. He thought we might one day engineer biological organisms to help us harvest the sun's energy more effectively, but what he didn't predict in his essay was that we might be able to dye our clothes with micro-organisms or even grow our fabrics out of them.

One of the most polluting stages of textile processing is dyeing, which usually involves noxious chemicals and lots of water. While there's a growing movement towards more environmentally friendly dyes and processes, some biodesigners have also been using pigment-producing microorganisms to colour clothing. Even plant-based dyes take time to grow, but micro-organisms can often work their magic in a few days.

The big brands are beginning to take note of these possibilities, and in 2020 Puma ran a collaborative project called Design to Fade, in which biodegradable garments were dyed with naturally occurring bacteria by a pair of Dutch designers, Laura Luchtman and Ilfa Siebenhaar. They're not the only ones doing this, and more than 73,000 people have watched a 2017 TED talk by biodesign consultancy founder, Natsai Audrey Chieza, in which she talks about her experiments dyeing fabric with *streptomyces coelicolor* bacteria.

**“ WHILE THERE’S A GROWING MOVEMENT TOWARDS MORE ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY DYES AND PROCESSES, SOME BIODESIGNERS HAVE ALSO BEEN USING PIGMENT-PRODUCING MICROORGANISMS TO COLOUR CLOTHING ”**

Already doing a similar thing on a commercial scale is a company in Cambridge called Colorifix. The team there has used DNA sequencing to engineer microorganisms that both create and fix the colour, and they claim that their process uses absolutely no toxic chemicals and only one tenth of the water needed for conventional dyeing.

### ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL?

There are even people out there taking this a step further and creating lab-grown fabrics. One of these is Werewool. Recipient of an H&M Foundation Global Change Award in 2020, Werewool is developing engineered fabrics, manipulating the material's DNA to influence such characteristics as its stretchiness or colour. Give it a few years and they might be able to make actual pieces of clothing. Products like Werewool represent the sharp edge of biodesign – requiring huge amounts of investment and state-of-the-art labs – and a new breed of provider is evolving to meet this need. One such lab is Ginkgo Bioworks in Boston. Rather than developing its own products, Ginkgo Bioworks is essentially a contract research lab that provides what it calls the “backend of the bioeconomy”.

These labs are among the points at which idealism meets realism, and something that becomes apparent the more you delve into biodesign is that many of the products currently under development will never get that far. Often they are simply too expensive, impractical and difficult to scale – and to really make a difference these materials and products need to be accessible to “100% of humanity” (Bucky's words), rather than a slim demographic of affluent and ethically conscious urbanites.

But it's early days, and who knows where all this might lead? To return to Kenneth E Boulding, he considered that what helped a society evolve was “the existence of ‘slack’ in the culture, which permits a divergence from established patterns and activity which is not merely devoted to reproducing the existing society but is devoted to changing it.”

Biodesigners are certainly divergent, and while it might still be wishful thinking to hope they could help bring the Spaceship Earth a step closer, as Boulding himself ventured, “perhaps a modest optimism is better than no optimism at all”. ●





# shifting seasons

Quarters Home curates gifts and homewares inspired by nature and the elements – a thoughtful collection that will help your home become a reflection of your explorations outside

[quartershome.co.uk](https://quartershome.co.uk)



#### Canvas Roll Top Rucksack

A versatile companion for adventures. This hardwearing canvas and leather rucksack fits a laptop comfortably, while also having side pockets for snacks, drinks and maps. £95



#### Linocut Postcard Set by Isla Middleton

This collection of linocut postcards is a celebration of trees, with eight beautiful designs. Printed on 100% recycled straw-coloured paper with lovely fibre flecks throughout. £11.50



#### Branch Brush

Bring the woodland inside and actually enjoy cleaning with this beautiful brush, the perfect addition to your utility cupboard. Handcarved handle with coconut fibre bristles. £36



#### Wheelthrown Tumbler

Wrap your hands around this beautiful ceramic tumbler with oatmeal glaze on the exterior and green glaze interior; made in South East London. £19.50



#### Naturally Dyed Wool Socks

Made with natural pigments and thoughtfully foraged plants. These socks are free of toxins and harsh chemicals, natural dyes are safer for humans and the environment. £26



#### Hand Carved Coffee Scoop

Elevate your morning routine with these adorable hand carved coffee scoops. Each one has unique characteristics, and is hand-carved in sustainable wood. £22





# river of time

Eroded by the ebb and flow of the tide, the crumbling banks of the Thames Estuary reveal clues to our evolving relationship with waste, as **Lisa Woollett** discovers

WORDS & PHOTOS: LISA WOOLLETT



My favourite finds are behind glass in the kitchen cupboard. Where at first these were mainly natural, over the years more man-made finds have been creeping in. So alongside the sea urchins, the anglerfish jawbone and razorbill skull are now two Lego dragons and a rusty toecap, a sea-worn cassette tape, a table-football man and a white plastic gull. Another favourite is the wizened kelp with its holdfast still attached to a golf ball.

As well as beach finds, the lower shelf now holds river finds too, collected on mudlarking trips to the Thames. Mudlarking is possible on the river because it's tidal right up through central London, each low tide revealing part of the riverbed for hours at a time. While mudlarking has many similarities to beachcombing, it's also very different – not least because the anaerobic Thames mud is such a wonderful preserver. So the finds in my cupboard now include the rims of two Roman pots, some clay pipes, a musket ball and a 17th- or 18th-century bone comb. The comb had fared well in the mud and, as was common at the time, has a fine-toothed side to tease out nits. Beside it leans its modern equivalent: a wave-worn plastic comb missing most of its teeth.

Prompted by this collection of discarded shore finds, I've kept returning to a branch of my family that included dustmen and a scavenger. Their surname was Tolladay – my mum's maiden name – although beyond my grandad's generation I'd known almost nothing about them. I was keen to find out more, so recently I'd traced them back over several more generations and found that in 1841 they lived at Water Street beside the Thames in central London. I already knew that over subsequent generations they'd moved downriver to the estuary and, eventually, the sea. So for someone keen to search beaches and the foreshore, this suggested an irresistible route, with sites ranging from creek shores littered with London's barged-out Victorian rubbish to beaches close to my childhood home, where 1980s fly-tipping erodes from the foot of the cliffs.

After a few days scouring stretches of river mud between Wapping and Bermondsey, I headed for one of many places around the Thames Estuary where dumping has artificially raised low-lying ground. For centuries Londoners' waste has left the city by barge, so these sites are often close to the water. Yet that leaves them at risk of erosion and, when high tides scour the riverbanks, they expose refuse that's been buried for decades or centuries. I'd chosen a site out on Kent's Swale marshes, near the Isle of Sheppey, as it was used to dump the city's barged-out waste at the turn of the last century.

After packing down the van, I set off towards the estuary. The Swale marshes lie at the confluence of the Thames and Medway rivers, with their 16th-century name meaning 'a marshy depression'. The landscape was familiar from my childhood, with much of the wide-open grazing reclaimed from tidal saltmarsh.

## A GROWING PREDICAMENT

I followed the marsh road out to the edge of the estuary, beyond the sea walls to the natural landscape of mudflats and tidal saltmarsh, its creeks and runnels filling and emptying with the tide. Offshore a string of marsh islands lay out at the horizon, so low they could barely be seen, and long since abandoned to the sea.

By the late 19th century, an increasing amount of London's rubbish was heading downriver to the marshes, as local authorities sought new ways of dealing with growing volumes of waste. Londoners now produced so much that the old methods of sorting and recycling were becoming impractical and uneconomic.

Just as important was a change in the way fossil fuels were now used in the home, with a shift from coal to gas. As a result the bulk of household waste was no longer valuable ash, which left the rest barely worth sorting. Without profits to be made from recycling, private waste contractors were becoming increasingly expensive. So by the 1880s, responsibility for London's waste was falling to parish authorities.





◀ Lisa's kitchen cupboard of favourite shore finds.  
▶ Kelp with a golf ball as its anchor rock.

The shore below is known locally as Bottle Beach, as it is strewn with the remains of pottery and glass brought down with the barged-out rubbish. I trod out across broken fragments littering the top of the shore: floral plates and cup handles, bottle-necks and the rims of jars, half a spout from a sturdy teapot – the scattered contents of Londoners' bins.

#### SORTING THE ROUGH STUFF

Having been carted away by the dustmen, the refuse was then barged out of the city as either 'rough stuff' – unsorted household waste – or partially sorted 'forked rough', of greater value as it contained more ash. If unsorted, it was unloaded at the creek-side wharves and dumped in fetid mounds around the brickfields. These would often be left for a year or more, allowing the organic waste to rot away or be eaten by birds and rats. Only then was the heap ready for the sorters, whose work was known locally as 'scrying' (thought to be a corruption of *descriere*, meaning 'to discover by careful looking').

As at the London dustyards, what remained after scrying was then 'riddled through', with the sifters separating the ash by banging metal sieves against their aproned bodies. The fine ash passing through was then mixed with clay to make bricks, while the coarser breeze was used as fuel for the kilns. Much of the remaining hardcore – mainly crockery and glass – would then be used to fill holes where the brick earth had been dug, lying beneath the more unnatural-looking hills surrounding disused brickfields. Here on the marshes it was also used to shore up flood-walls and raise low-lying ground, in ongoing efforts to reclaim land from the sea.

I crunched my way down the shore over the last of the rough stuff. After more than a century on the marshes, these tide-washed crocks were a world away from the grim heaps brought down on the barges – yet they still held clues to how habits were changing around the turn of the last century, along with the roots of our own wasteful ways.

For a time there was a move towards huge incinerators known as 'dust destructors'. Coinciding with the first crematoriums, this 'sanitary' solution suited the Victorian age, as fire was considered a great purifier. Some of the destructors also produced electricity: the inscription on the Hoxton plant, for example, read '*E PULVERE LUX ET VIS*', meaning 'From dust, light and power'. But they produced foul-smelling emissions, making them unpopular with people living nearby, and it was also cheaper to simply barge the waste out of London. As one London County Council official said of the refuse, "The natural solution is to shoot it in some sparsely inhabited district, where public opinion is not strong enough to effectually resent it being deposited." The estuary marshes were an obvious choice.

I pulled over in a layby at the wide-open sweep of Bedlam's Bottom. It wasn't yet 6am and the tide was still too high to find much, so I made coffee and carried it out to the water. Without a breath of wind, there was no movement at all in the pale summer verges. For the first time in ages I breathed the smell of the edge of the marsh: of salt, mud and decay; of blackened, waterlogged stems.

Half an hour later, I drove into the village of Lower Halstow and followed a tidy cul-de-sac to the edge of the marsh. From there, the path to the shore leads out through what is now a nature reserve, still known as the Brickfields despite their closure in 1966. In the half-century since then, scrubby tangles of hawthorn and bramble have overgrown any traces of industry, and at the end of the creek, the tiny dock stood empty.

“another favourite is the wizened kelp with its holdfast still attached to a golf ball”









“a pre-victorian bottle was thrown away because it had broken, not because it was empty”



- ◀ Bottlenecks found at Bottle Beach.
- ▶ Cassette tape: Britain's most popular music format, 1985-92.



Down at the muddy water's edge, one of the first things I lifted was a heavy bottle; silty water streamed from the trailing wrack. The thick glass was black and opaque, the bulging neck a little off-kilter. It was the kind of bottle used to carry wine from the cask to the table, and much of its weight was in the arched 'kick-up' at the base. It looked much older than other bottles here, which is not uncommon at Victorian dumps. Until the mid-19th century, containers were generally strong and built to last, in forms that were easy to clean, refill and reuse. A pre-Victorian bottle was thrown away because it had broken, not because it was empty.

#### TIMELINE OF AN INDUSTRY

By midmorning the bag was heavy. I'd barely noticed the tide slip away, yet slick mudflats now stretched off to the horizon, with the last of the draining creek no more than a distant ribbon of sky-shine. Out beyond the rotting ribs of hulked barges, a group of moored yachts now lay at drunken angles on the mud.

On the foreshore, the once-buoyant weed had collapsed around the bottles that anchored it, disguising their shapes. So I rooted about, washing the bottles in pools to look more closely at details, as the older glass has some wonderful clues to how it was produced. Like other dumps of a similar age, this beach usually turned up good examples of how bottle-making – like so many other industries – began the move away from hand-made techniques.

Rinsed clean, my favourite bottles so far were a delicate aqua. Their appeal lay in the hand-blown mistakes and irregularities: the asymmetry and uneven thicknesses, the air bubbles trapped inside the glass (depending on size, these are known by collectors as seeds or blisters). Another clue that a bottle is hand-made is a circular scar at the base. These are known as 'pontil scars' and are part of the reason for the arched kick-up at the base of wine bottles: the 'island', with its last illusion of plenty (familiar from wine bottles today, and reminding me of the old

expression for someone drunk on wine: 'He drank until he saw the island'). In order to form the neck, a hand-blown bottle would be held with a 'pontil rod' attached to the base, leaving a scar when the bottle was tapped free. It was the protruding pontil scar – along with the way bases sagged as they cooled – that meant a kick-up was the only way a free-blown bottle could stand flat.

I'd collected more bottles than usual, again for clues to their method of manufacture. On the more recent 20th-century bottles the seam ran from the base right up through the lip, showing they were entirely made by machine. It was in 1903 that the first fully automated bottle machines began to appear and from then on glass bottles became increasingly uniform.

By 1912, the machines could produce 50 bottles a minute. Along with improvements to Britain's road and rail networks – allowing nationwide distribution – this opened up the possibility of mass markets. As output increased and prices came down, across the country more people could afford to buy a wider range of products.

By noon I was hot and slightly dazed. With no shade from the sun, the marshes had that blasted feel I remembered from childhood. The bladderwrack had hardened to salt-crusted greys and its monochrome worlds glittered like winter. When I moved one stiff curtain to check the embossing on a bottle – TONIC – a shore crab darted out and scuttled off sideways. Everywhere, creatures waited out the exposure of low tide in damp lairs beneath broken crockery, seeking shelter from the sun and poking gulls. When I lifted



part of a teapot, tiny worms and shrimps were left wriggling in a spout-shaped pool.

In a sheltered creek there was so much junk it was almost a reef, albeit a reef of shifting crocks. In these gentle backwater currents, though, when objects move it is rarely far; I'd found some heavy bottles with their top sides encrusted with big old barnacles, suggesting they'd barely moved at all.

#### RISE OF THE CONSUMER

Later that afternoon, for the first time, I got my 'eye in' for inkwells. Altogether I found three, each one melted and distorted. They are common finds at Victorian and pre-war dumps, and reflect rising levels of literacy. In 1880 education had been made compulsory in England for children between five and 10. By the turn of the century the school leaving age was raised to 12 – meaning an increasing number of adults were able to read.

This was another crucial step in the consumer revolution. Together with technical advances in printing and reproduction, it meant advertising could now reach a broader audience, making it easier to market those mass-produced goods. This brought a surge in printed adverts, which filled space in newspapers, magazines and even novels. For the growing middle classes, with more time and money on their hands, shopping was an increasingly popular leisure activity, and with the rise in literacy more people now recognised brands.

Once a product's name and claims could be printed onto packaging – paper, glass, tin, ceramic – it also became possible to influence customers at the point of sale. This transformed the purpose of packaging. Whereas before it had been mainly a means of transporting, storing and protecting goods, now it was also a way to sell them.

Some of the most popular finds from Victorian dumps are transfer-printed pot lids, and although Bottle Beach has been picked clean of these treasures over decades, back in the 1970s and 1980s they were common here.

The tide was on its way in, creeping ashore over sun-warmed mud. In the distance, moored yachts had begun to right themselves. Reaching down for a piece of plate decorated with ivy leaves, I was surprised at the water's warmth. Around me other fragments lay on the creek bed, printed with roses and strawberry leaves, their broken edges furred a brilliant algal green. I trod on, with ribbons of gutweed unfurling from botanical designs to drift lazily at my ankles, through surreal underwater gardens.

An hour later I was done, and headed up the shore to look through what I'd found. At the top, shards of pottery were now set fast into the baked mud, its surface dusted with salt crystals that patterned it like lace. I sat down and set the fragments out on the ground one by one. Many of the images were strikingly intricate, and once again it was industry's technological advances that brought such designs within reach of the many. Like glass blowing, painting pottery by hand was a time-consuming skill that kept prices high. With the move to transfer-printing, the use of engraved plates meant an image could be repeatedly pressed against ceramic surfaces. Once again the increased output brought prices down, and it was no longer just the wealthy who could own elaborately decorated china.

Finally, I laid out fragments of blue-and-white oriental landscapes. This style became common in the 19th century: a cheaper imitation of Chinese porcelain. The last piece showed a pair of birds. This is a central motif of Willow Pattern, that most popular of oriental styles. Other elements of these familiar landscapes include figures on a bridge, a tree bearing fruit, a pagoda and a crooked fence.

I scooped everything back into the bag and set off for the dock, picking my way across this odd shore where so much was hidden. Where, as is so common in estuaries, our waste had become part of the landscape itself. ●

This is an edited extract from *Rag and Bone: A History of What We've Thrown Away* by Lisa Woollett (John Murray: 2020), out now in paperback.

► A tray of plastic finds, including two Lego dragons and Smarties lids.





# The humming towers

Bringers of both the light of life and the black void of death, pylons have radically transformed our landscapes for almost a century. **Gareth E Rees** explores the often-haunting symbolism of the metal monoliths that power our world

WORDS: GARETH E REES  
ILLUSTRATIONS: JOHAN KESSASSY

**M**y first memories. Or rather, not the first, but those fragments that have survived the pressure of time and become bright diamonds in the mind. It's 1979. I'm six years old and on the way home from Oxgang Primary in the outskirts of Glasgow. I don't remember why I am walking alone. All I recall is the pavement, black with silver flecks, and the drain by the kerb, over which I stand with a bunch of my drawings, which the teacher has told me to take home. I don't want to take them home. They're stupid drawings. So I crouch beside the drain and slot my artworks into it, one by one, as if through a letterbox. I have no sense of guilt about potentially blocking the system. No thought of what will happen next. Drains are holes in the ground, that's all. Subterranean chambers into which my rubbish can simply disappear. They have always been there and I have no concept of a world before them. I am probably more familiar with drains than I am with rocks or flowers and I have not yet arranged objects into a hierarchy of value. No one thing is necessarily more authentic or less authentic, more natural or less natural, than another. They are all just things. New things. Interesting things.

A child's imagination is a creeper vine. It entwines itself around whatever is available, whether it's a lamp post or an oak tree, a pile of rubble or a Saxon barrow. Magnified in the slow time of a child's perception, objects that adults take for granted can seem fantastical.

For instance, I got a thrill from seeing cooling towers, those alien structures on the horizon that gave birth to new clouds. And especially electricity pylons, those metal giants bonded by wire and shackles of glass. I loved to stare out at them on our car journeys from Kirkintilloch into Glasgow, ranged alongside the road from the countryside to the city.

When my family moved from Scotland to Derbyshire, the pylons followed me down the motorway and arranged themselves on the Pennines overlooking my new home town. A few years after the move, I read John Christopher's trilogy about the Tripods, gigantic metal machines operated by aliens, designed to subjugate humans by implanting 'Caps' in their skulls on their 14th birthdays. Written in the 1960s, these books were an update of *The War of the Worlds* by HG Wells, in which the strategy of the invader was more complex than mere brute force, controlling the minds of earthlings through technology instead.

By now I was fully aware that pylons hadn't always been here, like the trees and mountains. They were more like the Tripods: ruthless invaders accepted by a subservient populace as an inevitable reality. After all, the pylons brought the electricity that ran my dad's BBC Micro. They powered the lights. There could be no TV without them. The pylons weren't just striding across the hills, they were inside my home, running things.







“The idea that deadly matter can zap you into oblivion for some slight transgression is the sort of thing that sticks with you as a child”

Pylons loomed large for the ‘haunted generation’, a phrase used by broadcaster and writer Bob Fischer to describe those who grew up in the 1970s and early 1980s, influenced by TV programmes such as *Penda’s Fen*, *Bagpuss*, *Doctor Who* and *Children of the Stones*. In 1975, there was a children’s science fiction series called *The Changes*, based on the novels of Peter Dickinson. It depicted a Britain where electronic devices and machines start to emit a noise so maddening that the populace is driven to smash them to pieces, flee the cities and revert to a superstitious pre-industrial age. In the aftermath, words such as ‘tractor’ and ‘electricity’ become so taboo that their utterance can result in a mob beating. The many electricity pylons that remain standing are treated as menacing totems, prompting fear and disgust in Nicky, the teenage protagonist who calls them “wicked” and tells her companions that the pylons “feel like a curse”. Throughout the series, sudden static shots of the pylons fill the screen accompanied by sharp stabs of dark electronica, shooting a jolt of fear through the wide-eyed British viewers sitting transfixed in front of their TVs.

Alongside these dystopian teatime kids’ shows, the haunted generation was regaled with public information

films depicting all manner of gruesome possibilities: drowning in ponds; being hit by trains; getting bitten by rabid foxes; or being blinded by a firework. In *Play Safe*, a 1978 film about the perils of electrocution, a young boy is flying his kite close to some pylons when it becomes tangled in the overhead power lines, instantly killing him. In another sequence, a boy named Jimmy is urged by his friend to clamber through the fence surrounding a substation to retrieve his Frisbee. As Jimmy touches one of the cables his companion screams and we see Jimmy’s legs rigid with shock, flared jeans on fire. The narrator, a cartoon owl with bags under his eyes, warns: “Electricity can jump gaps and pass through your body to Earth.”

As the filmmakers no doubt intended, the idea that deadly matter can zap you into oblivion for some slight transgression is the sort of thing that sticks with you as a child. Pylons preyed on joy. They punished carelessness. As the owl reminds us: “Electricity is a faithful servant but a dangerous master.” Pylons were good and they were evil. They brought the light of life and the black void of death.

#### THE PYLON POETS

The classic British electricity pylon was designed in the 1920s by architect Sir Reginald Blomfield, the tapered latticed tower with a pyramidion at its apex was inspired by the shape of ancient Egyptian obelisks, which channelled the sun’s rays, bringing heat and light from the gods. The etymological origin of the word ‘pylon’ is a Greek word for ‘gateway’, more specifically the gateway to an ancient Egyptian temple. These took the form of two towers decorated with reliefs, symbolising the hills on either side of the Nile; the gateway was the sun rising between them, representing creation. The first examples were built in Heliopolis, capital of the Ra sun cult.

The first pylon in Britain appeared outside Edinburgh in 1928. By 1933 there were 26,000 of them, which must have been a radical transformation of the skyline. The technological progress in the nascent years of powerlines inspired the work of a group known as the



Pylon Poets in the 1930s. The most famous of these poems is *The Pylons* by Stephen Spender, which contrasts the onslaught of concrete and wire with the rural environment, describing pylons as the “quick perspective of the future” – the countryside’s prophetic dream of the cities yet to come. Pylons were a glimpse of a new Britain, and not always a positive one. Another member of the group, Stanley Snaith, took a more hostile tack in his poem *Pylons*, suggesting they would trample down traditions like “flowers dropped by children”, invading our culture with new thoughts and new habits.

This fear might seem quaint today, almost a century on. To us, pylons represent an old technology, their structures embedded so deeply in our culture that there are not many people in existence who were born in a world without them. If those “new habits” described by Stanley Snaith include our reliance on TVs, computers and washing machines, there are very few people who don’t have those habits now, and even fewer who live off the grid entirely.

#### A BUCOLIC DREAM

The universality of our dependence on electricity hasn’t stopped people from feeling an ongoing resistance to pylons over the past 80 years – especially those who don’t wish them to ruin the view. This attitude presupposes that there is a pure, indigenous nature to be contaminated. That the view has not already been altered dramatically by human intervention. But this is far from the case. Ever since hunter gatherers switched to farming the land, storing crops for the future, our relationship with the natural world began to change and fray and the topography became subverted to the human cause.

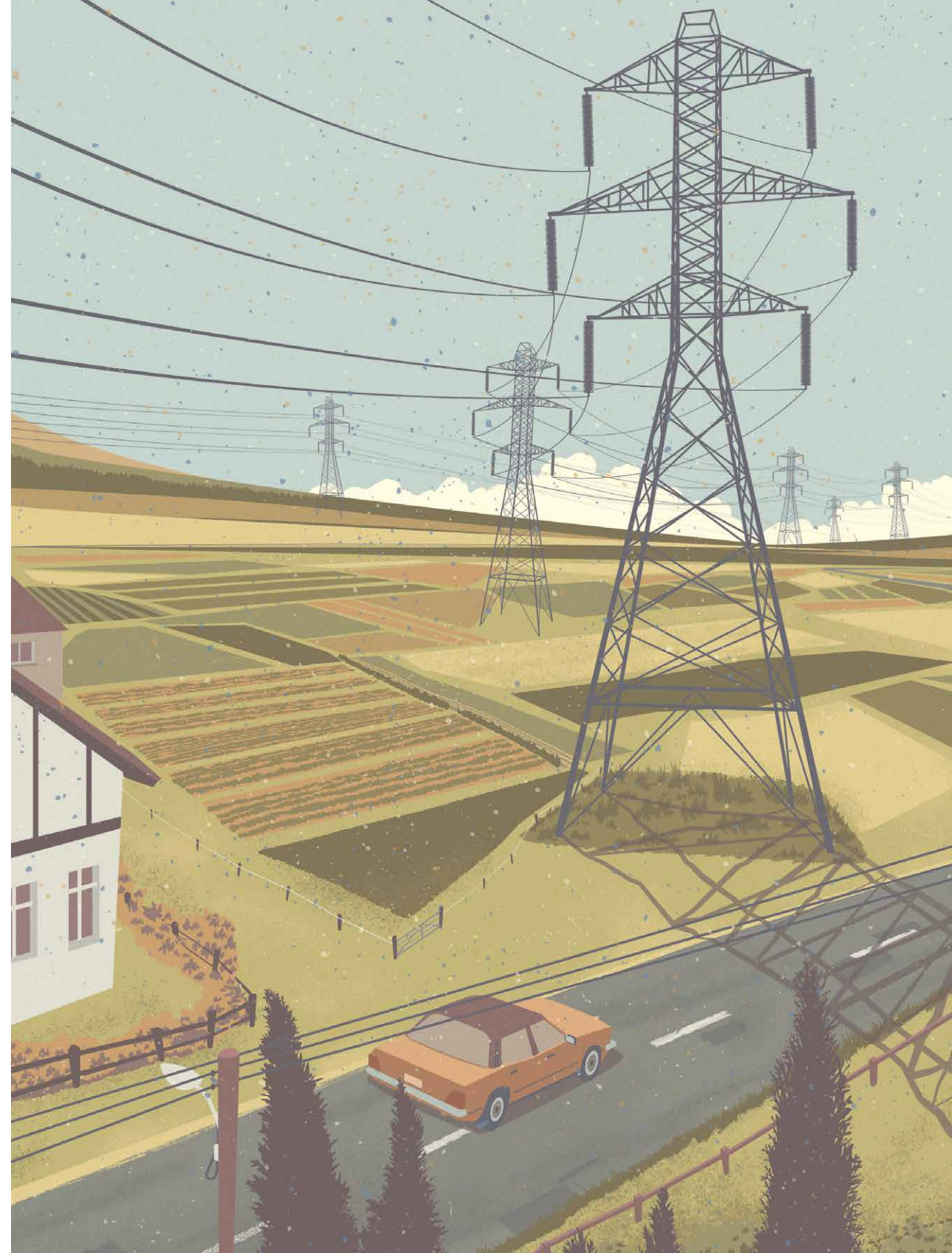
If scientists are correct in postulating a geological age known as the Anthropocene, in which humankind is changing the very fabric of the earth, the process began long before the Jesus Christ of William Blake’s imagination walked upon England’s green and pleasant land; even before the dark Satanic mills of the Industrial Revolution. By the 17th century, the great forests that covered the land had been largely plundered for houses,

“Ever since hunter gatherers switched to farming the land, our relationship with the natural world began to fray and the topography became subverted to the human cause”

ships and fuel, while fields had been enclosed for agriculture and ownership by those pretty hedgerows we sentimentalise today. The entirety of the lowland country had been reconfigured for the benefit of humans.

Pylons merely show up that landscape for what it is: shaped by felling, ploughing, seeding and enclosure, grouse rearing and pest control, at the expense of animal and plant diversity. To attack the ugliness of electricity pylons, on which we rely for our daily lives, is to deny the truth of the state we live in, the civilisation we have built and the price we must pay for it. There is no possibility of a trade-off where we can keep nature as a pleasure garden to be admired from afar, so that we can do what we like in towns and cities, where we consume electric power relentlessly. It’s all the same world. There is no escape. Taking a pylon down for scenic reasons is like repainting the bow of the *Titanic* as the iceberg looms. ●

This is an edited extract from *Unofficial Britain* by Gareth E Rees, released in paperback July 2021 (Elliott & Thompson).





# oh hello, hvaldimir

A cetacean spy or therapy whale? **Joly Braime** gets to know this big-hearted beluga who just wants to be friends with humans

PHOTOGRAPH: FRED BUYLE

Last March, a couple of days before Western Europe went into a COVID-induced tailspin, I was sat by the stove in a mountain hut in northern Norway, watching a video on a local fisherman's phone. In it, he was leaning over the side of his boat, handing fish to a friendly white whale with a bulbous head. He laughed in the candlelight as he told me that the whale had bitten one fish in half then dived to retrieve the tail and generously offered it back to him.

This tame beluga whale is called Hvaldimir and he's a suspected Russian intelligence agent. When he first began approaching fishing boats in April 2019, he was wearing a fitted harness with a GoPro mount on it, marked 'Equipment St Petersburg'. After consulting marine biologists, a fisherman in a survival suit got into the water and managed to remove the harness, but persuading Hvaldimir that he's a wild animal has proved rather more challenging. He loves hanging around people and playing fetch, and has become quite a celebrity along the north Norwegian coast.

Hvaldimir's name is a portmanteau of *hval* – Norsk for whale – and Vladimir, after Mr Putin. The Russians deny that he's a spy, quite reasonably pointing out that they wouldn't have stuck a label on him if he were, but he's obviously been trained for something and it's not clear who's lost him or why they haven't owned up. Odds are he's a naval deserter from the Northern Fleet near Murmansk, but there's also a suggestion he

might have been involved in therapy for children with disabilities at a diving centre in Karelia.

Whatever the case, he's so dependent on people that to start with he wasn't eating properly, and the Norwegian Orca Survey had to set up a feeding station in Hammerfest harbour. Since then, he's learned how to hunt and has begun his long peregrinations along the coast, but he still comes looking for company, sometimes encouraged by tourist boats that seek him out. This isn't ideal, since human contact brings the attendant dangers of propellers, machinery, fishing apparatus and underwater obstructions, and he's picked up injuries, including a nasty gash to his body last summer.

The sad truth is that this charismatic Soviet defector is rather lonely. No other beluga whales live in these waters, and his early conditioning – whatever it was – has made Hvaldimir very attached to humans. Fortunately, there are plenty of people looking out for him, from official conservation organisations to more informal local groups who keep an eye on his movements and physical condition. No one wants to see him back in captivity, but some fear that his current lifestyle is an accident waiting to happen and wonder whether he could be placed in an open-water sanctuary.

In the meantime, Comrade Hvaldimir abides. Summer 2021 has found him living near a salmon farm in Helgeland, working his charm on locals and tourists alike while a team of volunteers watch over him. ●







# technicolour scenes

WORDS: DAN RICHARDS  
PHOTOS: DEAN HEARNE

Renowned for his Radiohead album covers and eerie drawings of sunken paths in *Holloway* (2013), **Stanley Donwood's** recent work features bold blocks of colour to evoke the preternatural chalkscapes of southern England. Last year he met up with his friend and *Holloway* co-author **Dan Richards** to talk about his vivid new creations. And his love of pylons.

At some point between pandemic lockdowns, be-masked and socially distanced on a disinfected train, I travel to Hove to see Stanley Donwood. Stanley – Radiohead artist, Robert Macfarlane book-cover whizz, lino-chiseller extraordinaire, glabrous jack of all trades to misquote the man himself, purveyor of ‘visceral pessimism’ to accurately echo Penguin Books – meets me at the station and we head to the pub. There we talk of the happy sunlit uplands of Brexit that are on the horizon, and how it seems very unlikely that it will turn out really, really badly... doubly so if one is a lobster or musician.

We also talk about electricity pylons. Stanley loves pylons. “They’re really hard to draw,” he tells me. “What I really want – what would make my life complete – is a diagrammatic book with technical drawings, specifications, and photographs of pylons around the world. That’s what I want. I don’t want to do it. I want someone to make it and give it to me.”

Post-pub, we reconvene in Stanley’s studio, where he turns to a canvas nearby; a large, primary-coloured landscape that seems to exist in several dimensions at once for, as well as field patterns on the ground far below, there’s a profiled horizon beneath a black sky. I’m immediately struck by the way it seems to show everything at once, across time and space, an inundation







that's weird, uncanny, and dark. Tendrils of colour rise from the fields to prod the sky, as plant shoots or fireworks or fingers pointing up.

Several such works in various states of completion hang on the studio walls. "I think I wanted it to be a Pop Art meets Brotherhood of Ruralists sort of thing," Stanley tells me. "Warhol meets Nash."

Vivid and graphic, to me they recall Mondrian's grids and the vibrant abstraction of the De Stijl movement. I suggest to Stanley he's gone all cheerful and embraced Neoplasticism. And he says, yes, I'm right... in a way.

"They're supposed to be an interpretation of sacred landscape. The idea of what and how people have responded to landscape... forever. Since the olden days when chalk figures like the Uffington White Horse were carved in the turf. This is the first one (*pictured on page 71*). It's called *Vale of the White Horse*."

#### FERTILE GROUND

He goes on to say that the series of paintings arose accidentally. When Radiohead went out to Los Angeles to record what would turn out to be the album *Hail to the Thief*, Stanley's plan had been to create accompanying artwork by constructing "great big cocks out of chicken wire and astroturf" before photographing the sylvan phalluses in National Trust gardens and photoshopping clouds into ethereal vulvas.

"It was a slightly loopy idea, looking back on it from my current position of absolute sanity," he now admits. But it was inspired by the idea that the landscape and the heavens were constantly engaged in a sort of atmospheric/planetary sexual relationship: "the sky fucking the ground, and vice versa." Anyway, the idea didn't particularly fly with the band, so he ended up making big paintings of words instead. But he couldn't shift the land/sky/sex thing from his mind so, at the

**"tendrils of colour rise from the fields to prod the sky, as plant shoots or fireworks or fingers pointing up"**





same time he was painting the *Hail to the Thief* word-works, he started on *The Vale of the White Horse* and continued to noodle away at it in his spare time. “I had it in my studio for years. Whenever everything else was a disaster [mimes howling], I’d get some really bright acrylic and do some of this. But it wasn’t ‘for’ anything.”

The first, the horse, is my favourite, I tell him.

“OK! That’s good. Because it’s the one where I was figuring out how it all worked. Whereas, with this one,” he walks over to another, larger canvas, “This was straight after I’d done a load of paintings on LA. They were all using these really bright colours, which I like.”

This was after he’d abandoned the astroturf cocks and began searching for something to replace that idea, he says. Unable to drive and being in LA – perhaps the most auto-centric city on earth – he spent a lot of time in the passenger seat of cars and so probably paid more attention to roadside ephemera – signs, billboards and so on – than a driver would. He realised that the very brash colours used for most of these signs were designed specifically to catch motorists’ subconscious attention.

Essentially, these colours could be summarised as red, orange, yellow, green, blue, black and white. When he got back to his studio, he sourced the same paints. “Exactly the same paints,” he emphasises – Liquitex soft body acrylic. “The problem with having used the same paints for such a long time is they’re getting harder to find. Liquitex have changed the packaging so now I have to buy loads of stupid little bottles instead of a big tub, and they’ve got rid of cadmium because it’s carcinogenic. But the cadmium-free colours aren’t quite the same.”

So, the painting began as a crashing together of sacred, ancient British sites and the technicolour plastic world of LA? “Yes. And it was also partly to do with some reading I was doing around the time of *In Rainbows* (Radiohead’s seventh studio album), about the vast amounts of petrochemicals that are used in agriculture as pesticides, insecticides and fertilisers.

“he started on the vale of the white horse and continued to noodle away at it in his spare time”



Millions of tonnes of petrochemicals have been put into the soil, so the fields are full of oil and plastic, and I was using paints that are made of exactly the same stuff.”

And as well as that, he was thinking about “a lot of old hippie ideas” – everything from Alfred Watkins’ theories on ley lines in *The Old Straight Track* (1925) to John Michell’s theories about alien influences on megalithic structures in *The Flying Saucer Vision* (1967) and *The View Over Atlantis* (1969), together with more traditional modern academic archaeology and the writings of antiquarians like William Stukely: “Things that are often referred to as ‘earth mysteries’, which are anything to do with generally inexplicable features on the landscape like stone circles, long barrows and so on.”

#### MAKING THE CONNECTION

A couple of days before our conversation, *New Scientist* had published a terrifying article revealing that plastic baby bottles shed millions of microplastics when shaken. The conversation drifts to Teflon, and how virtually everyone now has particles of it in their blood.

Later, travelling home through landscapes now transformed into microplastic nightmares, I was reading *The Secret Lives of Colour* (2016) by Kassia St Clair. In the chapter on ‘Chalk’ I was pleased to discover a paragraph about the Uffington White Horse – a 110 metre-long stylised chalk figure created during the Late Bronze Age on the Oxfordshire/Berkshire border: “Amid fears that it might be used for target practice by the Luftwaffe, the horse was covered up during the Second World War. When the war was over, William Francis Grimes, a Welsh archaeological professor, was charged with disinterring it. Grimes had believed, as many still do, that the figure





## “i guess i’m trying to make visible the connections between heaven & earth”

was carved directly into the hillside. Instead he discovered that it been painstakingly constructed by cutting shallow trenches and filling them with chalk. (This had actually been described in great detail by Daniel Defoe in the 17th century, but everyone ignored him.)”

Such a striking paragraph full of collisions – the ancient chalk horse and the flash fickle bombers, the wonderful symmetry to this final Defoe detail; the sense of ‘I told you so’ or, rather, an answer hiding in plain sight; the truth leaking out as technicolour poisons dribbling up into the sky.

“I guess I’m trying to make visible the connections between heaven and earth.” says Stanley, back in Hove. “We know they’re there, transpiration and the hydrologic cycle. Ocean + sunlight + evaporation + condensation + precipitation = ocean + sunlight + evaporation + condensation + precipitation...”

I put it to Stanley that the immemorial chalk figures, as well as the ancient burial mounds, tors and tumps that feature in a number of his paintings serve to stabilise,

ground and earth the work in much the same way as the natural cycles run unseen or unnoticed in the face of all our short-termist greed and stupidity. They’re paintings that deal with deep time.

### THIS LAND IS MY LAND

He tells me that he always begins by looking at Ordnance Survey maps, “the ones with orange covers because they’re the ones with all the field boundaries marked.” Taking the *Cerne Abbas* canvas as an example, he points out a dense mesh of fields as being the village of Cerne Abbas, a pre-Enclosures patchwork mirrored in the eccentric matrix closest to the old village of Uffington – small and irregular spaces ‘evolved’ over a long period of villager co-operation. All of which brings us back to the idea of the British countryside.

“I’ve got mixed feelings about the British countryside.” says Stanley, flatly. “I mean, I really like the look of it. I think it’s a very nice to place to visit. But I’ve definitely got mixed feelings about its use in the sense of conjuring up a sort of nostalgic, patriotic view of a very old-fashioned England. I’ve just read a really good book called *The Book of Trespass* (2020) by Nick Hayes, and trespass, land ownership, all of that sort of stuff – that’s what I mean about ‘the countryside’ – it’s a mixed bag, to say the least. But it’s nice to look at.”

A bucolic dream, I suggest.

“Well, yes. I explored the south of England on my bike when I was about 19 or 20 and I think I just about caught the last of it being viable, when every village had a post office, a pub and a shop. And it was only when I was cycling through the Cotswolds that I got a taste of things to come: big cars, pretty arrogant drivers when you’re on a bike, and no shops. Pubs were rare and there was a lot of “get off my land”, which hadn’t really happened yet elsewhere in the country. But now I think it has.

“I don’t know. I don’t want to disparage or dissuade people who want to have their ideal life and move out there. But I just think that the countryside is used as a sort of shorthand for an idea of England that I don’t particularly think is very helpful.”

The nostalgic Little Englander thing? I ask.

“The get off my land thing,” he replies.

We go back the pub.

That was last October, when everything was a bit weird. Everything’s a lot better now. Everyone’s a lot happier. Plastic’s no longer a problem. The lobsters are happy. Musicians everywhere are ecstatic. Stanley’s got his pylon book. Oh no, hang on... Oh well. Something to aim for, anyway. ●

You can see more of Stanley’s artwork and news of upcoming exhibitions at [slowlydownward.com](http://slowlydownward.com)







Enter code  
ERNEST30  
at checkout for  
30% off  
your order

At Fjern, we know what it's like to be wet and cold just because your clothing can't handle what Mother Nature has to offer. We set out to make an essential range of kit to keep the elements at bay, with an unwavering focus on end use in the design and alpinism at its heart. Drawing inspiration from products we've used and abused over our combined 150 years in the outdoors, Fjern was created by a group of UK-based passionate outdoor enthusiasts with lifetimes of experience as mountaineers, skiers, hikers, mountain guides and climbers.

With a strong belief in the Nordic mindset – that the outdoors is there to be enjoyed by everyone, whatever the weather – our range of versatile clothing is fit for any adventure. From lofty yet lightweight and packable down jackets made with ethically-produced goose down, to our bestselling Orkan waterproof jacket, engineered with the worst alpine conditions in mind, every Fjern item is packed with technical features and made from durable fabrics and high quality construction.

Our upcoming autumn/winter 2021 collection demonstrates our passion for creating clothing with function in mind, whilst using eco-friendly fabrics and technologies wherever we can. New products include a synthetic insulated jacket that's made from recycled polyester, both inside and out; an ECO-shield recycled membrane 3-layer waterproof jacket, where each layer of the fabric is made from recycled polyester and has a PFC-free DWR finish; and baselayers constructed with a blend of non-mulesed merino wool and recycled polyester. As part of our new camping range, we will also be launching camping mats made using recycled plastic bottles and lightweight sleeping bags produced with recycled polyester fabric and recycled Thermolite EcoMade insulation.

So, whether it's your first climb or your 100th, Fjern will be there to take you BEYOND BOUNDARIES.

[fjern.equipment](https://www.fjern.com/equipment)



@fjernoutdoors



Fjern Outdoors

Offer valid until 23:59:59 GMT 14/11/2021, Offer valid on full price products only, Not to be used in conjunction with any other offer





# subscribe

Treat yourself to a subscription and you'll receive 10% off the cover price. It's an ideal gift for completists who love to see their journals stacking up neatly on their bookshelves as much as we do.

Two editions  
£18 plus p&p

Four editions  
£36 plus p&p



You can start your subscription from either the current or upcoming edition.

Subscriptions and pre-orders are more important than ever at the moment and we are very grateful for your support.

[ERNESTJOURNAL.CO.UK/STORE](https://www.ernestjournal.co.uk/store)



A man wearing a blue patterned shirt, dark shorts, and a hat is standing in a shallow river, fishing. The river flows through a vast, flat landscape of tall, golden-brown grasses. The water is clear and blue, reflecting the sky. In the background, there are rolling hills under a clear sky. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

# Healing waters



N O R T H A T L A N T I C S E A



Whether it's taking a bracing dip, ferreting around coastal fringes by boat or letting your mind wander while walking beside a river – for many of us, water can have a meditative, stilling or invigorating effect. Often all three. Being around water can also provoke feelings of freedom; an unshackling from the bolts of daily life. For others, it can simply feel like home.

As we journey to Iceland's Westfjords, the River Orwell in Suffolk and Afon Teifi in west Wales, we encounter water in many forms – ocean, river, waterfall, lake, spring, rain, ice, snow, glacier – and meet people who seem to have water coursing through their veins; people who have learned how to read the wind and tide, and live their lives by nature's unrelenting rhythms. We also meet those who seek new ways to appreciate their local body of water by creating meaningful journeys and everyday rituals: exploring a fjord by kayak, experiencing 'blue mind' therapy on a sailboat or retracing ancestral steps following the course of their home river.

On all of these journeys, waterscapes provide escape, connection and solace. They also serve as a reminder that these fluid boundaries are fragile ecosystems in need of our respect and protection.

ILLUSTRATIONS: AIDAN MEIGHAN





## a dream shanty

Flateyri | Kayaking Öundur fjörður |  
Ingjaldssandur | Atlantic wolffish |  
Draumagras tea | The Old Bookstore

---

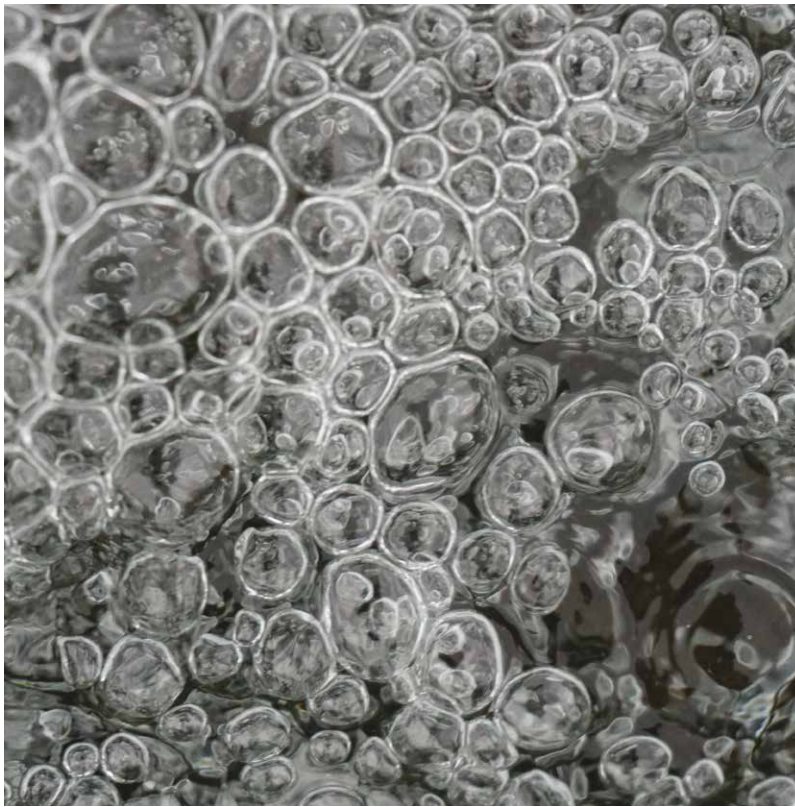
WORDS: HENRY FLETCHER



Iceland's oldest geological outcrop, the Westfjords, exists as a deeply incised, water-reticulated rock, surrounded by yet more water – fjords several hundred metres deep, the Atlantic Ocean (to the south), the Denmark Strait (to the west), and the Arctic Ocean (to the north). Water in all its forms – ocean, river, waterfall, lake, spring, rain, ice, snow, glacier – predominates, so one might say the region is as much waterscape as landscape, its psychogeography characterised by fluid boundaries at sea-level, and sheer, weather-beaten mountains above.

One of the first settlers, Hrafn-Flóki (Raven-Flóki), arrived from Norway in AD870, by way of sailcloth, oar and some superb celestial mapping. For the next thousand years and more, water has ribboned its way through the culture and psyches of all creatures surviving on its shorelines and off the abundance of the deep. During the 16th and 17th centuries, the regional capital, Ísafjörður, became an international hub for travellers and the trade of salted fish. The mechanised fisheries of the industrial revolution unlocked extraordinary wealth: whales and sharks were targeted en masse for their oil, used to power Europe's street lights; hauls of herring bloated under engine power but the stock collapsed, causing the fleet to centralise, far away from the Westfjords.

I've been walking in the Westfjords for the past 10 years. Many of these wanderings have taken place while I've been managing a trail development project-cum-ecological artist residency in the region. As part of my summer preparations for the project, I'm trying to identify the best way to get a group to Ingjaldssandur, a favourite valley populated by resolute sheep farmer and friend, Bettý. There is a slew of walking routes to reach the valley, but I want to try the more direct method: a



kayak across the fjord, Önundarfjörður. An old friend, Viðar, is joining me to test it out. We met years earlier when he hollered from his balcony in Ísafjörður; "Hey man, I've seen you wandering, what are you doing here?"

#### INTO THE FJORD

Viðar and I agree to depart from the small fishing village of Flateyri on the northern shore of Önundarfjörður. Awaiting us on the seaweed fringed harbour beach is jovial fixer, Siggí, with two red kayaks that he assures us are safe. The elasticity of the nylon netting and our spray skirts (vital waterproof fabric stretched over the hole atop a kayak to keep the water out) is near to non-existent, suggesting our equipment is very well tested. We fill the kayaks' holds then shuffle ourselves into the fjord.

Paddling close to shore to get the measure of our craft, we pass an eroded brick chimney stack and the rusted remains of a blubber boiling tank, left by whalers over 100 years ago. Carl Jung once said, "the present

**"one might say the region is as much waterscape as landscape; its psychogeography characterised by fluid boundaries"**

- ▲ Effervescent waterway.
- ▶ Top: A melting snow tunnel.
- Bottom: Crossing Önundarfjörður

PHOTOS | PREVIOUS PAGE: GALEO SAINTZ  
CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: HENRY FLETCHER, DANICA NOVGORODOFF, JAY SIMPSON



ÖNUNDAFJÖRÐUR  
66°02'26.9"N 23°31'08.7"W



## “are my tears for our ecological losses an appropriate or helpful response?”

moment should be in-service to the past”. Imagine the accountability if that were the case; there’s an awful lot of reconciliation to be done with whales. Animal communicator Anna Breytenbach, points to whales as being “the ultimate librarians, the archivists for everything that has ever happened”. As I paddle, I wonder whether I’m moving through a sea of knowledge. Is maritime grief the undertow? Are my tears for our ecological losses an appropriate or helpful response?

As we paddle further out, water-pinnacles lap the plastic and a breeze steers across our bows. Viðar tells me he has his yacht masters licence and his grandfather was a commercial fisherman. “He surprised everyone when he died,” says Viðar. “They looked at his lungs because he smoked heavily, but the coroner found no damage and concluded the sea-air while fishing probably helped.” Secretly filing this miracle to later justify bad habits, I ask after Viðar’s work as a skipper: does he enjoy guiding tourists through the fjords by boat and ski?

“Epic adventure, everyone wants an epic adventure and it’s got to be so rad,” he cries. I laugh in response, but he’s right. Iceland’s Instagrammed scenery has spurred huge expansion of the tourism industry. Indeed, Viðar’s hirsute, battling looks have landed on the front cover of many adrenalin rags. It’s a role he found alluring at first, yet ultimately unsatisfying; projections have a habit of wearing thin.

The Westfjords, however, have a subtler reputation – for being a place of healing, somewhere even Icelanders







- ◀ Can the (e)motion of water reflect our own?
- ▶ A ceremonial brew of bilberry leaves.



### DRAUMAGRAS TEA

A potion made from the spore-bearing stems of field horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*), believed to provide answers through dreams to whatever the dreamer desires to know.

- ▶ Collect a bunch of spore-bearing stems
- ▶ Clean off any dirt if you've pulled up the rhizomes (creeping rootstalks)
- ▶ Boil some water and add the plant to the pot
- ▶ Offer your incantations, requesting insight on some matter
- ▶ Drink a cup or two
- ▶ Sleep against the earth

PHOTOS | PREVIOUS PAGE: EVA MALINOWSKA, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JAY SIMPSON, JAY SIMPSON, RODRIGO A. MARTINEZ, CATALAN



go to escape and recuperate, an area historically renowned for runic sorcerers and herbalists. Iceland's first natural physician, Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, even held court here during the 13th century. Following in this tradition, once we've pitched camp in the old potato field at Ingjaldssandur, I plan to experiment with draumagras tea. This potion is made from the spore-bearing stems of field horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*), and is said to provide answers through dreams to whatever the dreamer desires to know. I want to process my engagement with this place; what might the future hold for our trail development project? Viðar's long been a good companion to tickle my longing, and making use of the earth's medicine seems an appropriate way to deepen our project's ecological goals.

### DEEP SLEEP, DREAM SHANTIES

As we round the final headland, a raft of eider ducks bursts from the water. Betty's standing on the beach with a broad smile, her dog Rosa insisting a piece of plastic be thrown. Betty is

the last remaining inhabitant in this once bustling fishing and farming valley. Her sheep are her family and, when snow doesn't cut off the road, there's a constant trickle of visitors. We join her for coffee then pitch for the night.

Like all the region's rivers, this evening's plunge pool doubles up as a freshwater tap, needing no purification. Having given myself a brisk rub down, I draw a kettle-full from the tumbling waterway then amble back to our campsite. As I get closer, a pair of nesting oystercatchers take to the wing and circle me with piercing shrills, letting me know I've invaded their space. Below us, black-maned sheep nibble seaweed on the beach, and summer grasses shimmy as a midnight sun rolls along the horizon. I cook up the tea, then we're both falling towards the sea of sleep.

Waking early within a sun-taut tent, I scan my dream-slate but there's nothing to recall. Viðar, too, seems to have come up empty. Perhaps we're right where we need to be, living in the daily unfolding of things.



A trip to Ingjaldssandur isn't complete without getting in the sea; it's one of the Westfjords' best surfing locations with both a reef and heavy beach-break on offer. But today, pockets of sugar kelp sway lazily in the tide pools and the basalt beach boulders remain unmoved, silent and dry. Stroking out into the water, my body tightens against the cold. It's painful and my body clearly signals a desire to be out, but what if cold water has something to teach? Perhaps, as the soul's discomfort is amplified, a new perspective will emerge?

Don't go easy on yourself advise the mystics – new knowledge is born in the depths. So I persevere while listening in. Encoded in cold water is the letting go of our need to control, a medicine our world cries out for. Botswana-born traditional healer, Colin Campbell, suggests we live in times “undergirded by the notion of change”. If we're going to thrive, we have to get “comfortable with uncertainty and let go of the human maps we've grown accustomed to,” says Colin. To become congruent with the underwater world is to stop trying to make sense of it, to relinquish the need to hold a position, to trust in flow. I use the rest of my morning to compose a dream shanty on the beach:

*I dreamt no dream, the sea was slight  
I paddled unseen, all through the night  
Sea then rose to moon in the sky  
I then awoke to my patterns untied*

Viðar prefers his water hot. He was caught in an avalanche a couple of winters back: “We skied up a slope which gave way coming down. There were boulders and snow and I was caught in the middle of it.” A mutual friend found his bloodied face and pulled him out. Recovering from a broken arm and fused vertebrae has involved a lot of



water-therapy, metal pins and regular saunas to loosen the pain. He's not the only one: daily pool-rituals add a pinch of pathos and sparkle for many in the Westfjords who take hot soaks to thaw their wind-buffed bodies. It helps to sit in the same waters as your friends, skins enfolded in the same element, the conversation mercurial, steamed and open.

#### BACK TO FLATEYRI

For our return paddle, we hug the fjord's shoreline where the headwinds are calmer. Squinting upwards here reveals a towering citadel: fulmars and kittiwakes soar in spirals, their wings angled on the wind, their nests precariously positioned on crumbling basalt ledges. As frost, wind and rain break the rock apart, it creates habitat even the fleet footed mountain-barker; *melrakki* (Arctic fox), dares not tread.

Our course parallels a walking route we've included in our forthcoming four-part guide to the region. In winter, the rounded shoreline boulders grow a coat of ice, so that moving

“encoded in cold water is the letting go of our need to control, a medicine our world cries out for”

- ▲ One of the many hotpools in the Westfjords.
- ▶ Sugar kelp in Ingjaldssandur.

PHOTOS | ABOVE: JAY SIMPSON, RIGHT: HENRY FLETCHER







PHOTOS | TOP: HENRY FLETCHER, BOTTOM: DANICA NOVGORODOFF

## SALTVERK

The springs in the Westfjords are often hot – a result of deep groundwater being heated in warm bedrock then flowing to the surface.

During the 17th century, a salt production plant operated at Reykjanes. Lead baths containing seawater were heated using hot spring water, and the lead-infused green salt was used to preserve fish and other goods. At the time, for a food-scarce nation, it was quite literally worth its weight in gold.

Ten years ago, Saltverk was established on the same site, with an ambition to make the world's finest salt. Unfiltered Arctic ocean is pumped into heated pools. Once the water reaches 28 per cent salinity, flake crystals form, some with beautiful geometric shapes (you can try this at home!). They are then hand-harvested, dried and packaged onsite.

The end product has found favour in Michelin star restaurants, and is rightly declared the world's purest, most mineral rich salt. Their product line includes salt combined with foraged ingredients: dulse, Arctic thyme and smoked birch leaves. Site tours are available. [saltverk.com](http://saltverk.com)

between and over them during a hike is a painful pinball game. Yet the route was tackled in all weathers by a fabled postman who walked the route daily throughout most of the last century.

Back on land in Flateyri, we stop by Eypór Jónsson's family-run bookstore, Gamla Bókabúðin (The Old Bookstore). He's just self-published an illustrated storybook celebrating the unlikely feat of Sundkýrin Sæunn, (Sæunn the swimming cow), who, while being led to slaughter in 1987, jumped into the bone-numbing fjord and swam 3km to safety – across the same fjord we'd just kayaked! Making landfall, Sæunn was permitted to live, then soon gave birth, and lived for a further six years! "Perhaps her pregnancy contributed to her tenacity," suggests Eypór as we enjoy his on-tap filtered coffee.

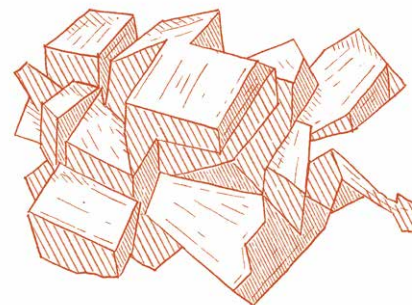
## FRUITS OF THE OCEAN

Heading back home to Ísafjörður, four wheels now rolling. Viðar pulls us into a farmyard surrounded by a shelter belt of poplar, birch and rowan trees. We aim to take home a souvenir of the sea, some *hertur steinbitur*, a particularly pokey dried-fish snack made from the divided fillets of the Atlantic wolffish. It's good currency in the Westfjords – appreciate locally prized foods and you'll find acceptance anywhere. The farm business, Breiðadalshafur ehf, catches its fish from small long-line boats that are never out for longer than a day. The catch is processed then left to hang in slatted sheds over the winter months.

Workers hand-revolve the rods of drying fish vertically through the shed to ensure an even dry. The pressed end product is shaded amber with Omega-3 fatty acids; the oils tickle the back of the throat, leaving a slightly bitter, pungent aftertaste, akin to a good glug of olive oil.

A mention of our visit to the bookstore in Flateyri yields a recent newspaper clipping announcing the storybook's launch. It turns out the cow in question belonged to the couple selling us fish: Guðrún Óskarsdóttir and Halldór Mikkaelsson. The ice broken, we're invited in for more coffee, savoury porridge and eggs. The turquoise fjord we look out over is being drained by the pull of the moon again; swirling white spits emerge between channels of water. "Red lumpsucker fish use these sheltered pockets of water for spawning," explains Guðrún. Perhaps it helps them balance while on the move – their rotundness makes them poor swimmers, and they're normally found attached to rocks via their belly suction cup – but, to mate is to move.

Guðrún exudes delight at living here, "I ride my bike or hike every day, as I have done for the past 20 years, I love getting out to enjoy the nature." He and his wife inhabit the world in a beautifully simple and generous way; their business with the sea continues a tradition that's remained largely unchanged since the time of settlement. And as we replenish ourselves with oils from the sea, honourable harvest principles written down by Robin Wall Kimmerer in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013) drift into mind: "Harvest in a way that minimises harm" and "sustain the ones who sustain you and the earth will last forever." ●



“appreciate locally prized foods and you'll find acceptance anywhere”

Henry has co-authored *Walking and Wayfinding in the Westfjords of Iceland* with Jay Simpson, out later this year. Find out more at [wayfinding.guide](http://wayfinding.guide)





# rhythms of the river

River Orwell | Erwarton Ness |  
Pin Mill | Blue mind therapy

WORDS & PHOTOS:  
NICOLA MOYNE

It's 6.13am and I'm watching the sky slice itself into layers of red and purple and pink while I bob in a ribbon of steely blue. The peace is broken minutes later by a whistling kettle on the stove downstairs and I languidly transition from teak deck to galley, my tanned limbs aching from hours spent hoisting, hauling and swimming in strong, salty currents the day before. There's no need to hurry. The morning is still young and there's not another soul in sight. The river is glass-like. Marsh harriers chatter as they dip and dive along the reeds. The air smells of moss and morning dew.

My partner Rich and I are anchored near Erwarton Ness and feeling a little hazy from a bottle of blush rosé we sank the night before. Our talk of passage plans are interrupted by starling murmurations above, while sips of hot, silky coffee slowly bring us back to life.

We decide a cold-water plunge is the only thing for it: the effects of total submersion proving transformative, addictive even. We emerge from the Orwell's depths looking mottled and raw, but we feel revived and reborn. It has become a morning ritual – each day beginning with a baptism of sorts, a blessing from the elements.

## THE PULL OF WATER

It hasn't always been like this, of course. Neither of us had any solid experience of handling a boat 12 months ago – we didn't grow up dangling off the side of dinghies or racing fancy yachts in prestigious regattas. But cut us open and we bleed saltwater. Wakeboarding, water skiing, surfing, scuba diving – we've tried them all. So, it was always the dream to one day own our own boat – a wooden womb to call our own that would gently suspend us between sea and sky, simultaneously immersing us in the tidal adventures we'd come to

crave, and removing us from the digital maelstrom that is modern life.

And we're not alone. Like candlelight coaxes intimate conversations at dinner parties, Britain's labyrinth of waterways and surging swells have long lured land dwellers, providing some primal reminder of our wilder selves. Water inspires us (Pablo Neruda: "I need the sea because it teaches me"). It consoles and intimidates us (Vincent van Gogh: "The fishermen know that the sea is dangerous and the storm terrible, but they have never found these dangers sufficient reason for remaining ashore"). It creates feelings of awe, peace and joy (The Beach Boys: "Catch a wave and you're sitting on top of the world"). In almost all cases,

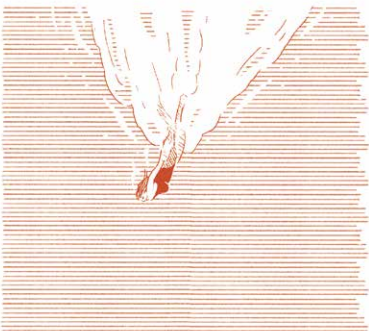
**“we didn't grow up  
dangling off the  
side of dinghies or  
racing fancy yachts in  
prestigious regattas,  
but cut us open and  
we bleed saltwater”**





## BLUE MIND

First coined by marine biologist Wallace J Nichols in 2013, 'blue mind' theory explores our emotional, physical and psychological connections to water via a host of expertise – from neuroscientists who authenticate water's ability to reduce cortisol levels (the stress hormone), to PTSD sufferers who vow surfing has had a profoundly positive effect on their mental wellbeing. Now a popular branch of the mindfulness landscape, blue mind is credited with reconnecting us with nature and moving us into a mildly meditative state by proximity alone. Indeed, Nichols believes the benefits of practising blue mind are inevitable when you consider humans are three-quarters H<sub>2</sub>O and live on a 'blue marble' planet. His 2014 bestseller *Blue Mind* deep dives into the science behind our transformative relationships with oceans, rivers and lakes, drawing on data and medical research, as well as the vast wave of personal stories that attest to the calming qualities of being in, near or on water.



when we think of water; submerge ourselves in water; even taste and smell water – we feel *something*.

Emotions aside, scientist and author Dr Wallace J Nichols has found, with the help of neuroscientists and psychologists, that our brains are actually hardwired to react positively to the ocean. After all, when you consider that more than 70% of a baby's body is water (60% in adults), the mental, physical and spiritual powers of it just seems logical. Nichols calls this complex cognitive relationship we have with water 'blue mind'. I call it freedom.

### INTO LOCKDOWN

So, when March 2020 hit and I was rendered motionless for the first time in decades, a tugging thought began to take hold: what if we bought a boat?

The dream was first seeded back in 2012 when Rich and I travelled round Australia and New Zealand together. Both adventure-hungry water junkies, we were drawn to the Whitsunday Islands and found ourselves on a week-long island-hopping voyage aboard a beautiful, classic wooden ketch. Days at sea watching the waves blur into sky and the sun dip over billowing sails triggered a yearning to buy our own vintage vessel. I had visions of us bareboating in Greece – one hand firmly on the tiller, the other gripping a G&T. Neither of us had ever sailed before, but that was a mere technicality. We'd just have to learn.

Back in the UK, Rich promptly booked himself onto a five-day Competent Crew course, picking up the basics during a passage along the River Stour. Six years later, I somewhat sheepishly did the same. And then? Nothing. We talked about buying a boat; about setting sail for the Azores, tacking our way to the Isles of Scilly, and navigating the rocky outcrops of Croatia before diving off the deck

for a sun-soaked swim. We talked about that a lot. But we didn't do it. Life always seemed to get in the way. Until, of course, a corona-shaped stillness dropped anchor and a series of lockdowns descended. Finally, with nowhere to go and no plans to keep, it was time to start sailing.

As restrictions eased, we drove down to the Solent and spent days wandering around old boat yards and moneyed marinas. We climbed aboard mid-size Moodys and snooped round snug Cornish Shrimpers. Then I spotted a 30-year-old 32ft Hallberg-Rassy – the same mahogany-dipped classic cruiser we'd both learned the ropes in on our Comp Crew courses – moored just 20 miles away from our home on the Essex/Suffolk border. My heart silenced any lingering doubts. Lockdown had left us weary of staring at our four walls, but now, the grey-green waters of the River Orwell promised freedom.

### TAKING THE PLUNGE

While money can buy you a boat, it can't buy you experience. Our first few trips out were hair-raising for all the wrong reasons. Moorings were heart-pounding events; reefings (reducing the sail) regularly went awry. Our first passage aboard *Elle* – tentatively moving her from Walton-on-the-Naze in Essex to Woolverstone in Suffolk – proved far from plain sailing. Westerly winds ripped through the foresail and

“watching the waves blur into sky and the sun dip over billowing sails triggered a yearning to buy our own vessel”







MUDFLATS NEAR ORWELL BRIDGE  
52°01'31.1"N 1°09'46.1"E

spears of horizontal rain lashed us from leaden skies. A freight ferry, en-route for the industrial docks of Harwich, careered towards our starboard side, then the channel-marking red and green buoys disappeared among fingers of wet fog. Not the most auspicious of starts.

### CALMER WATERS

Since then, though, the Orwell has provided a gentle gateway into the world of sailing; its wide, meandering banks teaching us to read the wind and water. Always preferring to sail and tack than kick-start the engine, we've become part of this beautiful waterway's quiet, fragile tranquility. When we heel off the shores of Shotley, it's not uncommon for grey seals to appear port of our bow, their heads bobbing up in the surf like silky sea dancers pirouetting across a fluid stage. Where once I'd have struggled to pinpoint which way the wind was blowing, now I speak fluent whitecaps, diligently watching their whipped cream peaks pitch in squalls and rise like yurts as storm clouds gather. Nature has become our clock, too, the tide a daily pendulum that marks morning, noon and night with predictably angled swing-moored boats and sun-bleached buoys.

Slowly, we've learned to relax into the practicalities of owning our own vessel and, rather than fixate on our points of sail, we've stepped

into the everyday rhythms of the river, taking each day at nature's pace. Sailing stamps out impatience and encourages respect: you simply have to wait for the wind. Now, we watch the low-cruising clouds of Canada geese at dusk and try to read the celestial nighttime canopy that follows – its stars spread sporadically like crotchets and semi quavers across an inky blue jazz sheet.

We've come to know the sounds of the estuary, too. How it gurgles under anchor as we dip wedges of bread into balsamic, or slaps at the stern as we pass picturesque Pin Mill – its secluded sandy shoreline a nostalgic rendering of rural England. We can decipher between the shrill of a swift and trill of a swallow. But we're still listening out for the 'chuff' of Suffolk's elusive harbour porpoises, which we've yet to spot but know journey somewhere off the coastline's syrup-smooth horizon.

Living out lockdowns on the river has rewired us and, despite the hardships, hostility and heartbreak it

has caused, we have COVID-19 to thank. If it hadn't pressed pause on normal life, this unfiltered immersion in nature would have continued to elude us. But now the wind pinches our faces and chivvies us forward. Being sandwiched somewhere between the sea, sails and sky really does make us happier; just as Dr Nichols advocates.

In 1910, ocean explorer Jacques Cousteau wrote: "The sea, once it casts its spell, holds one in its net of wonder forever." What he omitted from his love letter to the waves was how having the wind in your hair and salt on your face frees you from anxiety, too. Sailing the River Orwell these past six months has taught me not only how to reconnect with nature, but has navigated me through a worldwide pandemic in one piece. Blue mind? Exploring the psychology behind our emotional, behavioural and physical relationships with the ocean is undoubtedly fascinating. But those early morning deep dives are what matter to me most. ●

**“sailing stamps out impatience and encourages respect: you simply have to wait for the wind”**





An aerial photograph of a river catchment area. A winding river flows through a landscape of brown and tan fields, with some green patches. The terrain is hilly and the sky is clear. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# catchment, centre, source

Elenydd | Mynydd Bach | Llyn Fyrddon Fach |  
Banc Mawr | Pumlumon | Cwm Teifi

---

WORDS: JACK SMYLIE WILD  
PHOTOS: DANIEL ALFORD



Sometimes the source beckons, and suddenly I am driving the 50 winding miles from the mouth of the river to the place, high in Elenydd, where the Cambrian hills give birth to many springs. I travel up the coast road, and then pass inland, over Mynydd Bach – the bleak moorland where I spent the first few years of my life.

As I drive along the twisting, familiar lanes of this small wilderness – where the weather rules supreme – I move backwards in time as I pass the landscape of my childhood: feral sheep; lichen-flecked walls; lakes – or llynys – like the crystal eyes of the hillsides; abandoned, graffitied bus stops; petrol stations fit only to refuel rusty Morris Minors and antique tractors; lonely shacks sheltered by a single tree, surrounded by decaying vehicles, their yellow paint flaking to reveal the rust that will return them to the ground; tussocks of grasses, rushes and sphagnum mosses that ooze an earthy, damp perfume.

I was two years old when we moved to the parcel of land below Llyn

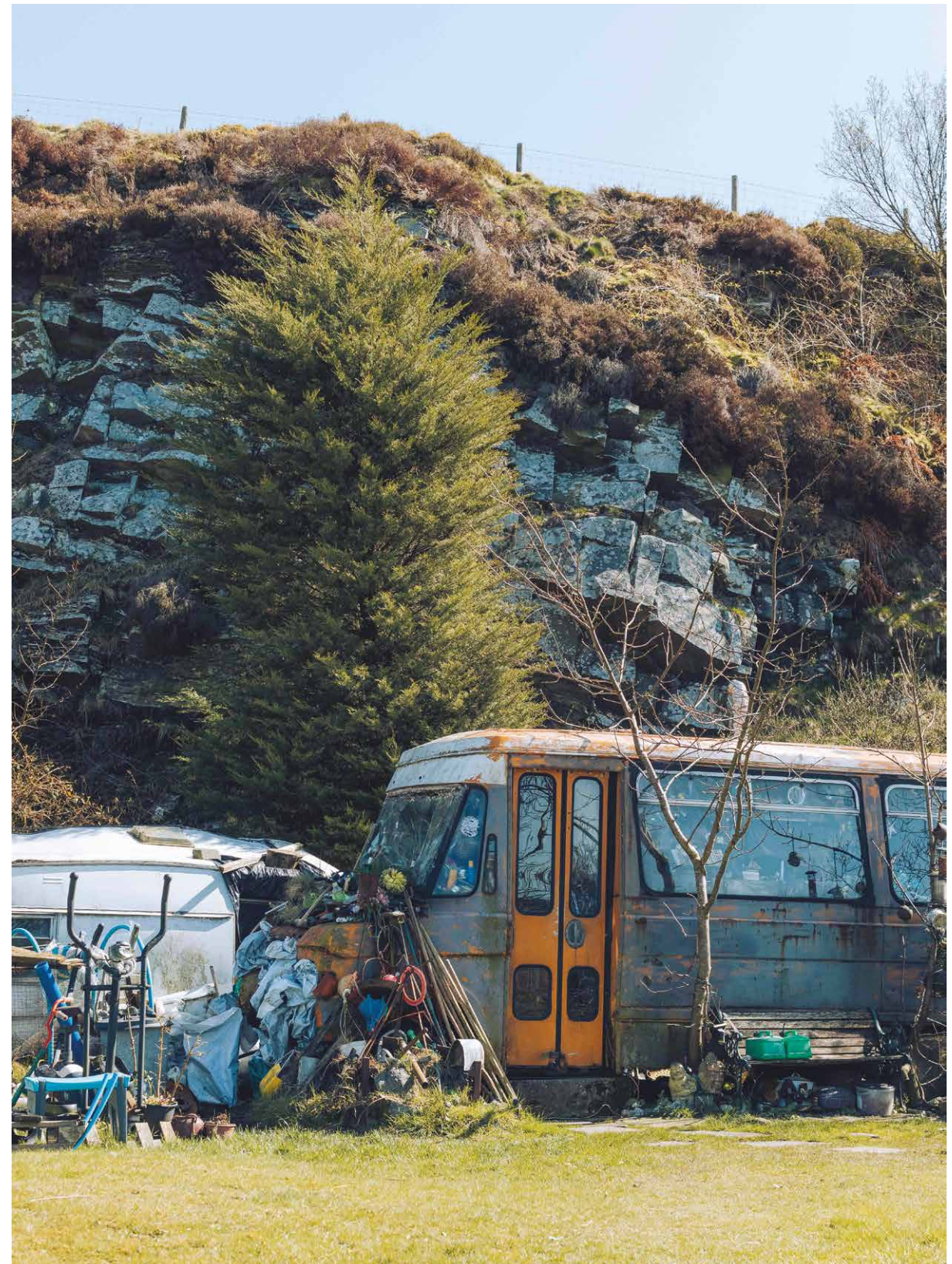
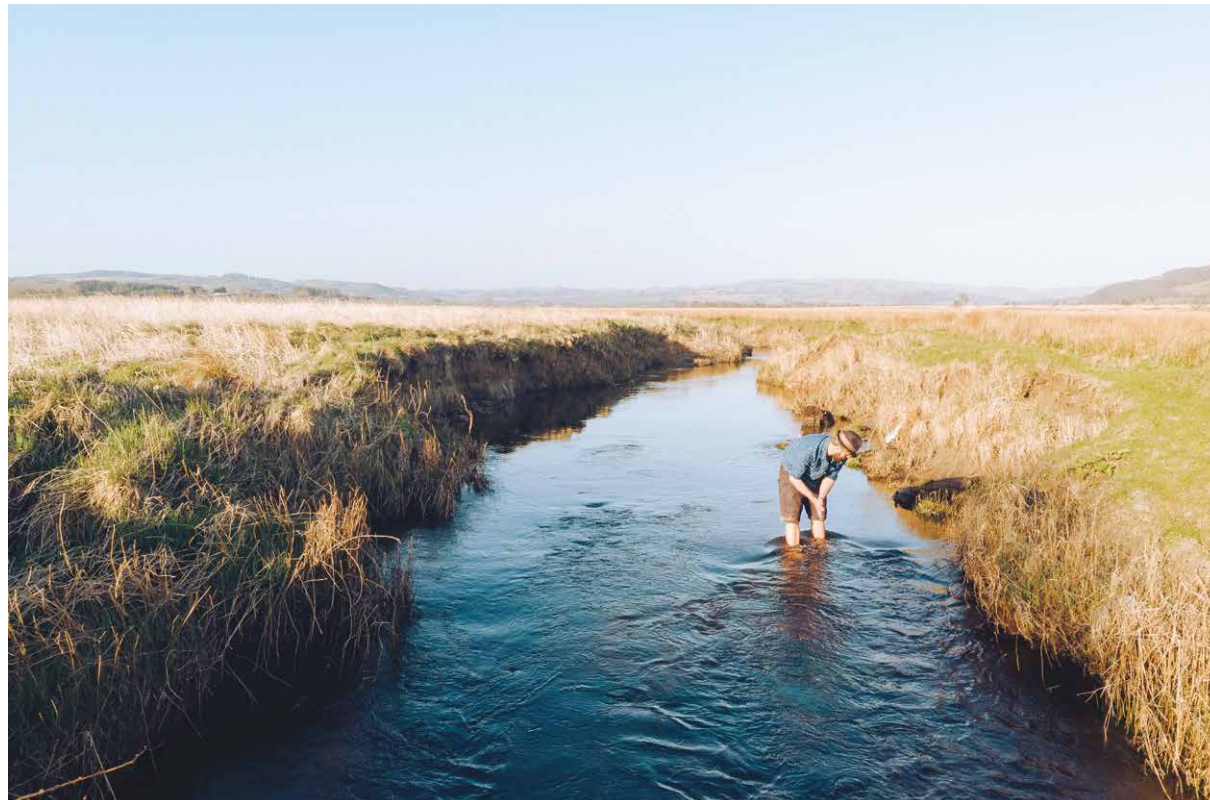
Eiddwen. My father was 26 and my mother 25. Who were we then, that young family, living in an old brown and cream Bedford ambulance halfway up the hillside? Only three short decades have passed since we called that place our home, and that humble manner of subsistence, our way of life, and yet it seems another world, another age.

A decade or so before we settled here, a slightly different crowd had been drawn out west, looking for a new way of life. Whereas my parents' generation came running, disillusioned – pushed in a sense to the margins of the mainland – these older pioneers had set out with an arguably more positive impetus. John Seymour had published his array of 'back to the land' literature, and so in the 60s and 70s the first hippies, inspired by his example, sought solitude and cheap, verdant land on which to fulfil their dreams of a self-sufficient 'good life'.

If Wales in general met a lot of their criteria for a certain kind of arcadia, it seems that the hills inland of

► The old travellers' site on Mynydd Bach  
▼ Collecting Teifi clay in Tregaron Bog

“only three short decades have passed since we called that place our home, and that humble manner of subsistence, our way of life, and yet it seems another world, another age”







◀ Jack with his mother Marion  
▼ Approaching the source of the Teifi

“this bare, bulging  
moonscape of upland  
hills is also known  
as the desert of wales”

Aberystwyth, and in particular the area of Mynydd Bach, became a stronghold for those misfits and unorthodox individuals – often artistic, eccentric – who together comprised a motley crew that sought a different kind of life. Such was the west-Walian scene then – a hybrid and intermingling of earthy, settled older hippies on one hand and lost, itinerant young people on the other, often sharing similar ideals and philosophies, as well as a powerful propensity to party.

#### SEEKING THE SOURCE

At Ffair-Rhos I turn off the main road and head along the snaking, single-track lane that will lead me into the heart of Elenydd. This bare, bulging moonscape of upland hills, which is generally taken to refer to the area lying between Pumlumon in the north and Mynydd Epynt in the south, is also known as the Desert of Wales. It's not a lack of rain, nor green, that gives it this name; far from it. Rather, it's the fact of its desertion – its barrenness and

remoteness; its unrelenting harshness.

I begin my climb, wondering what I might uncover about sources and their enigmatic beginnings. From a series of waterlogged plateaus above Llyn Teifi, the stream that feeds the lake at its northern-most point – Nant Rhydgaled – begins as barely more than a mineral-rich trickle in a peaty ditch, gurgling and pooling, hidden by grass.

I place a small piece of quartz from the mouth of the Teifi on a ledge by a





“the stream begins as barely  
more than a mineral-rich  
trickle in a peaty ditch,  
gurgling and pooling”





# salmon & whisky

It's 1 April, the beginning of the fishing season, and I head to Maescrugiau to talk to Lewi Thomas, a native of the Teifi valley and veteran of Llandysul Angling Association. "The thing about the Teifi is," Lewi tells me as we sit down for tea (pronouncing the name of the river to rhyme with 'ivy', as opposed to the way I say it which rhymes with 'wavy'), "it's a meandering river. There's always something fresh around the next bend. Not like the Tywi, the second longest river in Wales, which to my mind is straighter and has less trees on its banks."

"It's a special river," he goes on, "but not what it used to be." He takes an album down from his shelf and slides out a few photos. "That's me in '65, when we first moved here. You don't get salmon like that these days." Strung up on a beam of wood between two farm buildings are six huge fish. Crouching beside his catch, with cap on and rod in hand, is Lewi as a young man. "We used to get up to fifty salmon in a season," he says, "but we're lucky to get one nowadays. And we've got the graphs to prove it."

Lewi owns the fishing rights to about 900 yards of pristine Teifi riverbank, and rents out a cottage to anglers who come to Maescrugiau from far and wide. "Every season since 1970 we've recorded our catches, so there's no disputing the decline, even though some will try to tell you that the fishing's fine."

We step outside and admire the view of the river, which splits in two around Lewi's two-acre river island – making it the largest on the Teifi. "You've come two months too late," he says. "The island was snowy with snowdrops. We've got a few clusters of rare hybrids down there as well, but I won't give you the exact location. I can't do anything on that island thanks to those flowers – apart from grow a few Christmas trees, but I've let them get too big now. You're welcome to go and have a look down there. It's a peaceful spot."

Before I leave to explore the island, Lewi and his wife Velma show me the old pillbox next to his cottage. "Now,

I don't know if it's true," he says, "but I've heard that if Hitler had invaded Britain, he'd have landed in south Wales. So, to prepare for this they built pillboxes by all the bridges." He opens the door. "We use ours as a washroom now. Apparently, the Irish labourers who were building it sold the pieces of metal meant to reinforce it to local farmers."

We walk back outside into the sun. "These cottages used to be a public house within the Waunifor estate, which owned all the farms around here – about a thousand acres in total. But the lord of the estate, Alistair Lloyd, closed it down because he didn't like drink. But remember, Jack, nowhere in the whole of Ceredigion has more salmon and whisky been consumed than in my kitchen!"

**“nowhere in the whole of Ceredigion has more salmon and whisky been consumed than in my kitchen”**

In one of Alistair Lloyd's letters, I discover later, an intriguing literary link is made to the estate: "Waunifor was an old house possibly mentioned by Wordsworth, which has been enlarged from time to time." The "mention" which Lloyd writes about seems to refer to Ivor-Hall in the poem Simon Lee, which describes the trials and tribulations of a peasant huntsman:

*"In the sweet shire of Cardigan,  
Not far from pleasant Ivor-Hall,  
An old man dwells, a little man,  
Tis said he once was tall.  
Full five and thirty years he lived.  
A running huntsman merry;  
And still the centre of his cheek  
Is red as a ripe cherry."*

Well, this could easily have been written about Lewi Thomas, I think. A slight man, with rosy cheeks, a hunter of sorts, full of life, and full of love for the Teifi.



tiny waterfall at this source – a linking of its 73 dreamy miles with an offering of stone, that overlooked element of rivers, as much a part of them as water:

Onwards north over bog and hill, through wind and light, seeking a fictional location; a figment of the measuring mind: the very centre of Wales. I pass the waterfalls at Claerddu, which carve their way through ridges that contour the hill. Below me the stream will soon pass the isolated, eponymous farmstead, which is now a bothy. The year 1852 is carved into one of its cornerstones. The last time I stopped by, the bedroom floor was covered with torn-up playing cards and spiff butts.

It's early May. The skylarks are breeding and nesting, and the soft lambs are suckling their hardy mothers. I reach the shores of Llyn Fyrddon Fach – the wind and sun painting its surface into an aurora borealis of racing ripple and shade-shifting blue. On a beach of silt and shingle at the northern end of the lake I find a petrified tree stump – god knows how old; there haven't been trees of this girth up here for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. I find another submerged branch. It looks solid and bronze-like, but is soft to the touch. Judging by the horizontal banding it's an ancient wild cherry. Remains of 5,000-year-old pine trees were found in the peat on the shores of Llyn Teifi in 1951 – could this stump too be a remnant of the old wild-wood which once thrived up here before the hungry axe-heads of our forebears, and the sheep of countless generations, shaved this upland bare?

I think of Elzéard Bouffier, the shepherd in Jean Giono's short story *The Man Who Planted Trees*, who planted





the greatest forest that never was – his oaks spreading from the pages to inspire countless rewilding projects across the globe. Could the barren plains of the lower Alps, where he carried out his boreal gift to the world, have once been more devoid of trees than the uplands here? It's hard to imagine.

I walk down to Llyn Fyrddon Fawr, a stone's throw away. On its bare shores, when the wind eases, the frenzied yet tuneful internet-dial-tone-song of the

skylarks electrifies the airwaves. At the base of the steep, heather-clad shore I find a stunted, lone rowan, housing a large, abandoned nest in its small boughs. Inaccessible to sheep (a very rare bit of luck indeed up here), it's managed to avoid grazing, and has clung on with all its might to the peaty soil despite the ceaseless lapping of the lake's waves.

At the northern end of the lake, I reach a small, ditchy stream – Nant y Fagwyr. I follow this to its saturated source in a blanket of bog which forms a wide pass between slopes to either side. The earth is pockmarked with great potholes, where the fibrous, peat-rich soil seems to have simply subsided and sunken away. I walk on, navigating these giant craters and their high banks. The pass flattens out and the sky grows wide. I descend a little.

So this is it. On the windswept slopes of Banc Mawr – the very centre of Wales. This is my 'figment of the measuring mind' – the corresponding point at which, were you to cut a two-dimensional shape of Wales from a piece of cardboard, the

country would balance on the pin-prick tip of a pencil. A mathematical imagining, then; an exercise in mapping the mind on to the moor:

And what a moor it is. In the valley far below, a freckling of buildings: Cwmystwyth – once a hideout for those pushed to the margins of the 'civilised' world. In the distance, over bulging hills and the great forests surrounding Pontarfynach – or Devil's Bridge – lie the brooding slopes of Pumlumon, where a giant is said to slumber:

#### WHERE THE RIVERS RISE

It could have been anywhere, theoretically speaking, the centre of Wales; but really it had to be here, in these lonely bare hills – the home of sheep, kites, ravens and skylarks; by these lonely lakes and the old stones – Carreg Corneldrawallt, Carreg Bwlchllynfyrddon, Carreg Ddiddos (the latter of which means 'Weatherproof Rock' – anything that might provide shelter up here is deserving of a name). This centre is close, as well, to the sources of many Welsh rivers: less than four

kilometres from the Teifi's source, and ten kilometres from the Tywi's; over on the slopes of the Pumlumon massif, the Severn (354km) and the Wye (216km) have their humble, hidden beginnings, as do the Rheidol (30.5km) and the Ystwyth (33km) – the latter two burning their candles at both ends in search of the sea; tumbling in crystal torrents down toward Cardigan Bay.

On a large, lichen-encrusted boulder that squats low in the grass, I place another stone from the Teifi's mouth – a small maroon pebble in the centre of a rock that lies at the centre of Wales.

If the mouth of the Teifi, where I live and work, stands for civilisation – for business and busyness and human constructs – then these hills around the source of the Teifi have come to represent for me those things that lie at the other end of the spectrum: freedom from thought, a rediscovery of enchantment, a wilderness of mind born of a wildness of place; my animal self, unencumbered by obligation, organisation, authority; inhabiting for a brief time

'an elsewhere world, beyond maps and atlases...'; existing for the sheer joy of being here, at the source.

As for the infant Teifi itself, which begins chartable life as a controlled trickle from the spillway of the Llyn Teifi dam, it's really just another mountain stream, descending rapidly down the 'barren' moor of Cwm Teifi. After a couple of kilometres it merges with Afon Mwyro at Penddol Fawr before flowing past the ruins of Strata Florida Abbey. Atop the summit of a small hill near Troed-y-Rhiw, above this confluence, my dad – aged 19; stoned, tripping – spent weeks building a stone circle of river quartz. The grass and the years have reclaimed most of it now, but one giant crystal still sits at its centre. In the intervening space between this confluence and the dam, the Teifi is joined by its first tributary after just a few hundred metres of life – a short-lived rivulet that originates from Llyn Podygwaith and tumbles over a mossy ledge in a gully sheltered by a lone rowan, before it too gives up its waters to the young queen. In this mineral solution

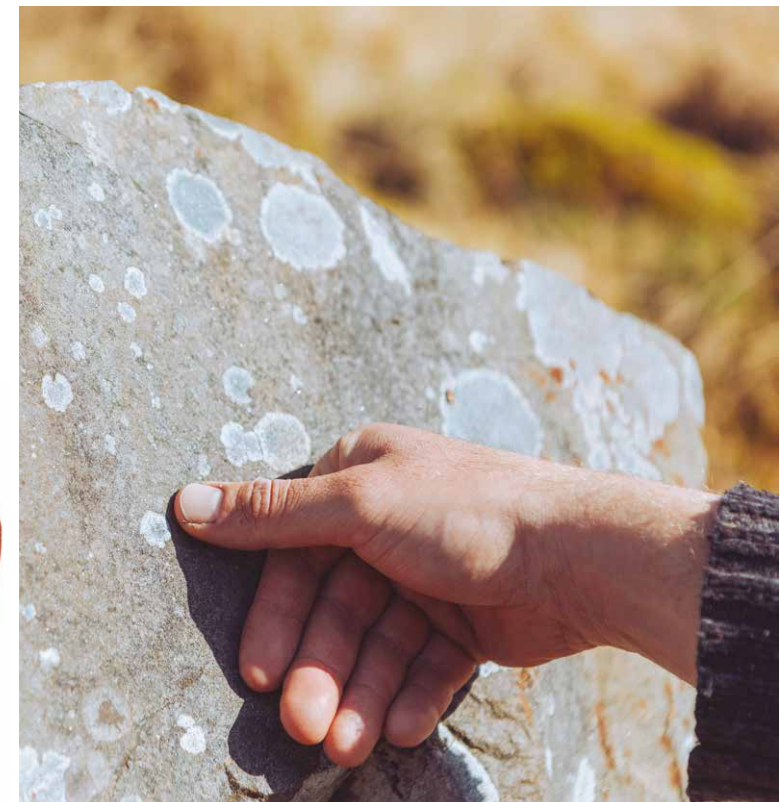
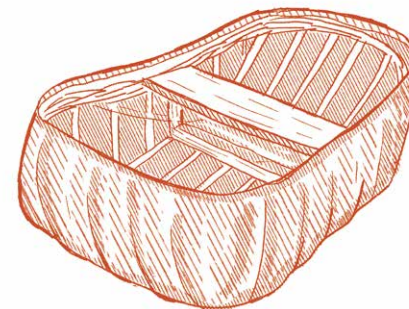


#### A FISHERMAN'S CRAFT

The Welsh coracle, or *cwrwgl*, varies from river to river, depending on water depth and local materials. The Teifi coracle is made from soaked willow lath and plaited hazel. Calico (a thick cotton) coated in bitumen has in more recent times replaced the hides that once waterproofed this ancient vessel.

Single-person crafts are light enough to carry on a fisherman's back, and wide enough to remain buoyant in shallow water. Coraclemen, such as those in Cilgerran, drift down the gorge at night, in pairs, with a net between them, in search of salmon and sewin (sea trout). They'll sometimes get a shock as they haul up a bemused otter. To dispatch the fish, they use a 'priest' – a stubby club that ensures a swift kill.

Licences are passed from father to son, and today there are only 12 licence holders left on the Teifi. With fish stocks dwindling generally, the coraclemen have an uncertain future.







◀ First tree on the Teifi  
▼ Dusk at Cardigan Bay, where the Teifi finally merges with the sea

“the prolonged growth of any tree up here is an event of miraculous defiance in the face of the ubiquitous sheep”

barely a foot wide, the first trout appear, the size of a child's finger, darting for cover:

Before long, the Teifi's first island has formed itself from boulders, upon which stubby bonsai heather hosts a wren, hopping into shadow. No animal wants to be seen up here, where everyone wants a free meal and no one wants to be one. Just a few hundred metres on, the trout have fattened in proportion to the rivulet, and now weigh about 25g, reaching up to three inches in length. But don't let their meagre frame deceive you: they say these black fish are as old the hills themselves – just like the *Mabinogion's* Salmon of Glynllifon: “I am as many years old as there are scales upon my skin, and particles of spawn within my belly.”

Just beyond the island, protruding from a pile of stones on the bank, an ash has wound its way slowly up into the sky; the Teifi's first tree. The prolonged growth of any tree up here is an event of miraculous defiance in the face of the ubiquitous sheep. It is perhaps 100 or even a 150 years old, and in its boughs are two nests: the lower and larger of the two, now a

platform for moss and grass, has been crosshatched using fragments of barbed wire and nylon twine. The Teifi's first nest is a fortress; testament to the weather of Elenydd; symbol of the struggle to survive in these wild uplands.

Half a kilometre on from the ash tree, the rivulet has grown in character: its marginally faster, wider flow has oxygenated the water, allowing water-crowfoot and other aquatic plants to thrive; the first small gravel beds are also formed as a result of the torrent's newfound power:

Soon the swaying moorland grasses of Cwm Teifi will give way to the close-cropped green of civilisation's fringes. But before the young stream says farewell to the moor, it has at least one more surprise for those who come seeking topographical treasures: suddenly the tiny Teifi disappears silently over a ledge, an infinity pool that slides as a clear, thin film down steep, smooth bedrock. ●

This is an edited extract from *Riverwise* by Jack Smylie Wild (Parthian: 2020)





# plan your adventure



## WESTFJORDS

### GETTING THERE AND AROUND

Flights run from Reykjavik to Ísafjörður, Bíldadalur and Gjógur and take 40-50 mins. The ferry between Stykkihólmur and Brjánslækur is very scenic, and once you've arrived, you'll find that buses run during the summer; hitch-hiking is straightforward and many of the towns are connected via old walking routes. [westfjords.is](http://westfjords.is)

### STAY

#### Sæból Farm, Ingjaldssandur

Self-catering accommodation for up to 8 people on a remote working farm, with Betty close by. [litlabyli.com](http://litlabyli.com)

### EXPERIENCE

#### Kayaking the fjord

Kayaks can be rented from Borea Adventures in Ísafjörður (the kayak company in Flateyri, mentioned in the article, was hit by an avalanche in winter and sadly all boats were lost). [boreaadventures.com](http://boreaadventures.com)

### READING LIST

#### *Walking and Wayfinding in the Westfjords*

Henry Fletcher and Jay Simpson have written this new guidebook exploring the trails and ecology of the Westfjords. It's due out later this year – find out more at [wayfinding.guide](http://wayfinding.guide).

### RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL TIP

Try to eat mainly locally produced foodstuffs (fish, lamb, some root veg and skyr) during your stay – almost everything else gets flown in.

## RIVER ORWELL

### GETTING THERE AND AROUND

Woolverstone (where the Shearwater Sailing School is, see below) is a short drive along the A14 from Ipswich. Buses 97 & 98 run between Ipswich and Woolverstone. Regular trains operate between London Liverpool Street and Ipswich. [allaboutipswich.com](http://allaboutipswich.com)

### STAY

#### The Pier, Harwich

Popular coastal haunt with views across Harwich harbour. Book the Mayflower Suite for super-king luxury, a power shower and a telescope for stargazing before bed. [milsomhotels.com/the-pier](http://milsomhotels.com/the-pier)

### READING LIST

#### *Secret Water*

Arthur Ransome's book is a lovely fictional exploration of the Walton Backwaters. It opens in Pin Mill on the Shotley Peninsula, where Ransome moored his own boats and loved to sail.

### EXPERIENCE

#### Sailing

Shearwater Sailing School in Woolverstone offers a wide range of RYA-approved courses, from a five-day Competent Crew adventure for novices to the Coastal Skipper ticket for more experienced sailors. [shearwatersailingschool.co.uk](http://shearwatersailingschool.co.uk)

### RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL TIP

The Stoar and Orwell estuary is home to thousands of wildfowl and waders so be mindful of this when out on the water.

## RIVER TEIFI

### GETTING THERE AND AROUND

The nearest station to Cardigan is in Carmarthen, where you can get a connection to/from Swansea (on the London Paddington service). Regular buses operate between Cardigan and Carmarthen. There's also a train station in Aberystwyth, which has connections to London Euston via Birmingham. [visitcardigan.com](http://visitcardigan.com)

### STAY

#### fforest

Choose from cosy cabins, domes or bell tents in a nature reserve by the river, or on a converted dairy farm near Penbryn beach. [coldatnight.co.uk](http://coldatnight.co.uk)

### One Cat Farm

Turf-roofed cabins in a wildlife-rich meadow, with firepits and a communal kitchen. [onecatfarm.com](http://onecatfarm.com)

### EXPERIENCE

#### Spot dolphins

Mwnt, a secluded cove managed by the National Trust, is the perfect place for spotting dolphins feeding in the bay.

### READING LIST

#### *Riverwise: Meditations on Afon Teifi*

Jack Smylie Wild's volume of slow river prose centred on the Teifi is now out in paperback, published by Parthian.

### RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL TIP

On walks, keep dogs under close control, especially around livestock and nature reserves.



# back issues

Build up your collection by visiting our online store  
[ernestjournal.co.uk/store](http://ernestjournal.co.uk/store)



## ISSUE THREE

Wild man mythology; Victorian diableries; denim and the American frontier; slow adventures in Scilly; Brutalism; terrariums; Iceland's Huldufólk.



## ISSUE FOUR

Ghost radio; adventures in Greenland; a darker side to tintype photography; the micro-nation of Sealand; the psychology of polar exploration.



## ISSUE FIVE

The unruly world of made-up languages; experiments with time; cryonics; Vancouver Island's wild side; solargraphy; mountain bothies in Scotland.



## ISSUE SIX

England's last Vikings; the Galápagos Islands; seafaring vernacular; hidden artists' studios; in the footsteps of George Mallory; aurora borealis in Snowdonia.



## ISSUE SEVEN

Bread making in space; mapping Antarctic women; the immortal jellyfish; the absurd travels of the Kearton brothers; the evolution of sea charts.



## ISSUE EIGHT

Rewilding in Romania; shanty boats; the peculiar world of bee etiquette; Snowdonia's mountain haunts; adrift in the Atlantic; otherworldly sand dunes.



## ISSUE NINE

Life on the Basket Isles; living art with David Nash; whistling languages of the world; a score designed to play for a thousand years; the bird men of Faroe.



## ISSUE TEN

Isle of eternal spring; Scotland's Arctic tundra; aurora chasing; the renaissance of sleeper trains; our language for the natural world.

[ERNESTJOURNAL.CO.UK/STORE](http://ERNESTJOURNAL.CO.UK/STORE)



# coffee by the coast

Bay Coffee Roasters is an independent coffee roasting company based on the scenic Ceredigion coast. Situated just two miles from Cardigan Bay, the team at this small batch roastery feel endlessly inspired by the nearby cliffs and coves but also the spirited culture of daily life in West Wales.

Their aim is to produce coffee that takes on something of the character of this unique and special place. You can see the sea from the roasters. At the end of the day, the team often walk down to their local beach, Tresaith, only 20 minutes from the door.

The team roast beans in micro batches, paying special attention to the characteristics of each coffee and its origin. It's a very hands-on process; a lot of work goes into every bag. Their aim is to make coffee that's enjoyable for all. Understanding the key qualities of the origins is essential as everything affects the end cup, from sourcing higher grown coffee that requires longer growing times and specific climates, to the earth types of the country. A medium roast brings out qualities that produce a cup you can enjoy every day.

Established for over 10 years, the company takes care to keep moving in a positive direction – working hard

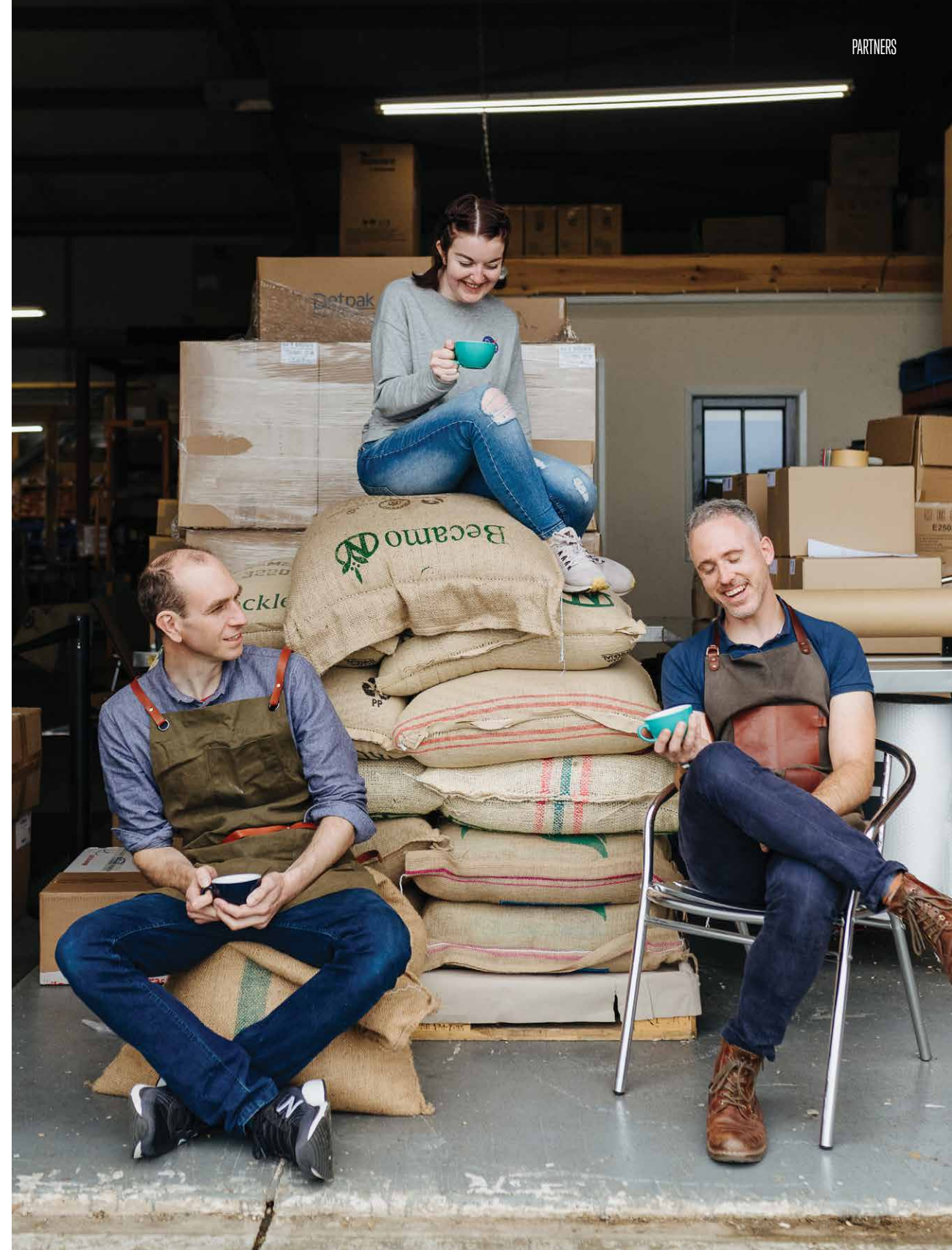
to improve their products while honing their production methods to reduce their impact on the environment. All of their roasting is done using electricity, sourced via a 100% renewable energy supplier using a wind farm up in North Wales. Many coffee roasters depend on gas, so it's an important step away from fossil fuels.

Bay Coffee Roasters continue to invest in sustainability. Their products include coffees that are certified by the Welsh Organic Scheme, the Fairtrade organisation and Rainforest Alliance. When it comes to importing beans, they support organisations designed to help improve the lives of those involved at the farm level, such as Coffee Kids, Food 4 Farmers and International Women's Coffee Alliance.

Order from [baycoffee.roasters.com](http://baycoffee.roasters.com)  
Follow on Instagram [@baycoffee.roasters](https://www.instagram.com/baycoffee.roasters)



PHOTOS: NATHAN JONES/NATHANJONESPHOTOGRAPHY.CO.UK





# the ring of fire

Indonesia has the third highest density of volcanoes in the world, pockmarked with 130 active craters across the archipelago. The islands sit on the Pacific ring of fire, which traces the meeting points of the Indo-Australian, Eurasian and Pacific tectonic plates. These clash points make Indonesia highly prone to natural disasters, such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and tsunamis. On the other hand, they also create stunning landscapes that tourists flock to see in their thousands. Java is one of the largest islands in Indonesia, and as well as having the highest number of volcanoes of the archipelago, it also has the densest population. Over the past three years, photographer **Putu Sayoga** has been documenting the lives of those who dwell in the shadow of these craters; exploring how they fear, revere and give thanks for this dominant force in their lives.

► Hundreds flock on Mount Bromo to honour the mountain god; praying and throwing offerings of rice, flowers, crops and livestock into the caldera.







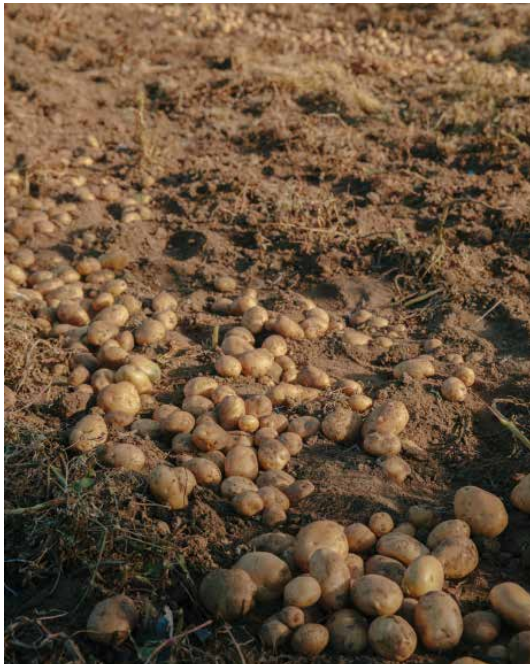
## RICH SOIL

Sweeping views of potato and cabbage fields stretched along hilly contours greet me as I arrive in Dieng. Located in central Java, the Dieng plateau is an active volcano complex comprising two stratovolcanoes (a volcano built up of alternate layers of lava and ash) and 20 craters.

As is common for people living close to volcanoes on Java, much of the Dieng community's livelihoods rely on farming the mineral-rich soil to grow fruit and vegetables, which they sell to the big cities on the island, such as Jakarta, Indonesia's capital. The people here also harness the energy produced by volcanoes by installing geothermal plants (pictured over the page) across Dieng.

The morning is filled with tender light and cool, fresh air as I stroll around the farms. I see farmers busy harvesting potatoes and cabbages, and others tucking into breakfast against a hilly backdrop. One of the farmers hands me some potatoes for free. "They're tasty if you boil them," he says. I accept the offer with a smile on my face.

- ◀ Gunadi and his wife Suryati in front of their home in Ngadas village.
- ▶ Dieng farmers preparing for a day's harvest.











## APPEASING THE VOLCANO GOD

White smoke rises from Mount Bromo, a volcano in Probolinggo, East Java. I'm watching it as I enjoy hot tea and banana fritters to bolster myself against the cold weather. "White smoke means it's safe to go up there," my friend explains. "When it turns grey – that's when it's dangerous."

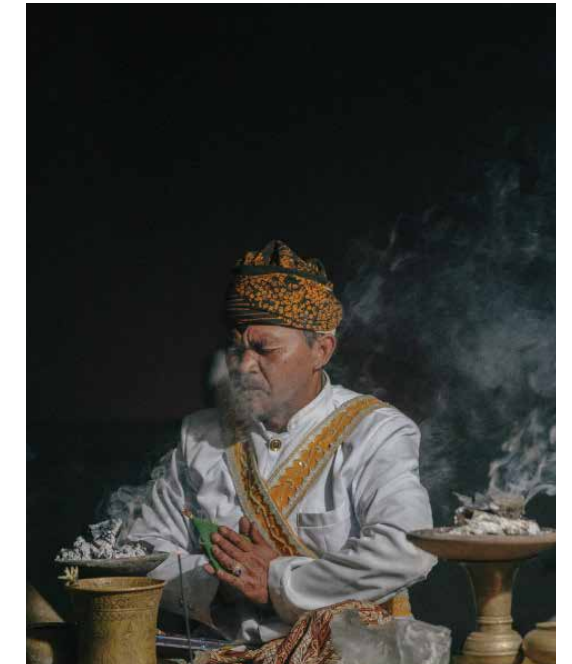
As the light dims I head to my hotel for an early night, for I'll be waking before dawn to witness Kasada – a ritual that takes place on the slopes of Mount Bromo, performed by the Tengger tribe to pay homage to the mountain god.

Next morning, I ride on the back of my friend's motorcycle through volcanic desert to Poten Temple at the foot of the mountain, where a crowd is gathered. The air is cold and the dim light of the rising sun is appearing in the east. I follow the Tenggerese as they begin to climb, wielding rice, flowers, crops and livestock such as chickens and goats. Upon reaching the summit, they say prayers then throw the bounty into the caldera, paying respect to the mountain god in hope for a fruitful harvest next year.

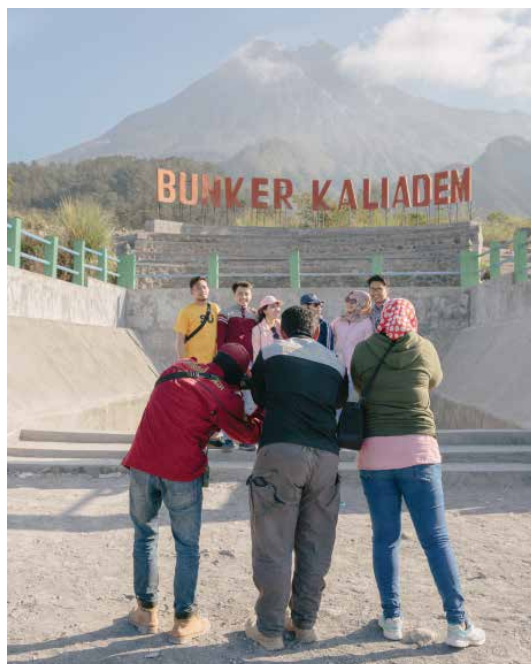
◀ A boy tries to warm himself over a bonfire.

▼ **Left:** women pause during a sandstorm.

**Right:** A Tenggerese priest in prayer.







## QUEST FOR BLUE FIRE

It's midnight when I arrive at the entrance post of Mount Merapi. I buy a coffee to stay awake, and a young man approaches to offer his services as a guide – his name is Joni. He assists me with a headlamp as we begin our ascent.

After a three-hour climb we reach the top, the pungent rotten-egg smell of sulphur filling my nostrils. Joni hands me a mask to help me cope with the stench, then guides me to the crater to see the famous blue fire, caused by the eruption of sulfuric gases. Many tourists are gathered, as well as miners on their way to dig sulphur directly from the crater. It's dangerous work that's been going on for 30 years, but thanks to the burgeoning tourism in the area, and on Java as a whole, young people like Joni can avoid sulphur mining and find employment in the tourism industry.

Smoke blows in my direction, stinging my eyes. I seek the source of the smoke and there it is – the fire, raging an electric blue. After taking enough photos, I head back up to the top, where I'm treated to a magical sunrise.

- ◀ Tourists pose for picture at a bunker near Mount Merapi, which last erupted in 2010, killing 270 people.
- ▼ Personal items on display at Mount Merapi Museum.





# just look up

Deputy editor **Abigail Whyte** meets birder **David Lindo**, whose childhood memories of discovering the natural world among the dumped shopping trollies in his local river have inspired a passion for urban wildlife that he wants to instil in all city kids

ILLUSTRATIONS: MIRANDA HARRIS

Ten years ago, David Lindo wrote his first book *The Urban Birder*, described by naturalist Stephen Moss as a book that should be read by anyone who has ever lived in, travelled through or visited a city, for it carries a vital message: "If we don't notice the wild creatures on our doorstep, how are we going to look after those further afield?". With a new photographic book out this year, David Lindo spoke to me via Zoom from his home in Extremadura, Spain, to reflect on his career as the Urban Birder, the power of storytelling in conservation, and the importance – particularly in these extraordinary times – of cherishing what's on your doorstep.

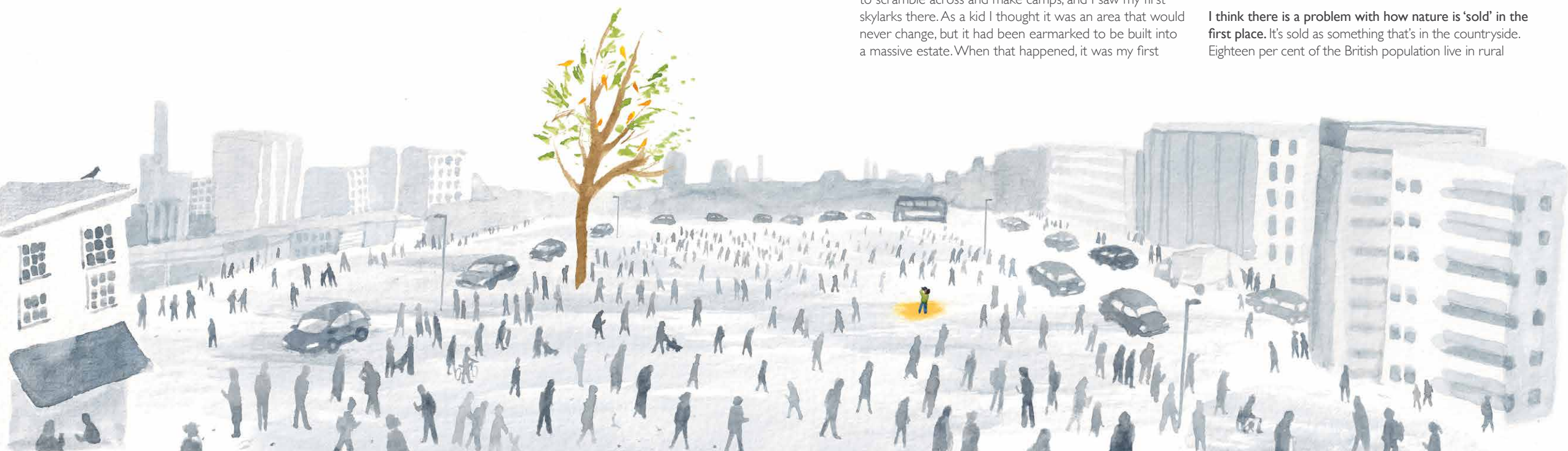
**I grew up in London.** I had a park just down the road from me – it had a river running through it, which was basically a canal with shopping trollies and scooters chucked in. The water had a film of oil on it. It was pretty crap. On the opposite bank was undeveloped land full of rubble and weeds. That was my countryside. I used to scramble across and make camps, and I saw my first skylarks there. As a kid I thought it was an area that would never change, but it had been earmarked to be built into a massive estate. When that happened, it was my first

lesson in habitat destruction. The flock of tree sparrows I'd taken for granted every winter were suddenly gone.


**I'm campaigning to make London and other cities less grey, and more green and blue.** Of course we need housing, but why not build estates that incorporate a lake and woodland, so that kids grow up learning to love that space and not have the compulsion to dump their crap in it? It's about changing mindsets.

**As the Urban Birder, my message is global.** There's a whole world out there to encourage and inspire to get into birding. I want to popularise and modernise it – to make birding interesting, sexy and accessible. I also want to popularise the idea that the environment, nature, the planet – it all starts on your doorstep. When you're sitting outside having a coffee, just look up and you'll see something – something that has a backstory that spans the planet, not just the high street.

**I think there is a problem with how nature is 'sold' in the first place.** It's sold as something that's in the countryside. Eighteen per cent of the British population live in rural







areas, whereas 82 per cent live in cities – this needs to be more catered for in nature programs. Audiences need to be shown more urban wildlife so they can see that cities aren't ring-fenced from the countryside, and that wildlife isn't just something you see in a nature reserve. That myth of nature being 'out there' is something I've been trying to dispel for my whole career.

**All respect to David Attenborough.** He is the don and his programs are amazing, but every time a new series comes out, the bar is raised even higher. It's full of spectacle and action sequences. There's no lesson from that. And the audience thinks, 'That's over there, that's nothing to do with me. My life's here.' I think more can be done to show people the relevance of their doorstep; how the flowerpot on their window ledge in their council estate flat is connected to the rainforest or the Congo or the Antarctic.

**I've noticed a resistance among ethnic minorities to admit to being interested in nature.** I remember taking two school groups out to show them the grounds of the BBC in Bristol. The first group were from a suburban

posh school; mainly white pupils. They came along and – bam – were really into it, searching for buds and other things. The other school, an inner city one with predominantly Asian and black pupils, when they turned up it was a very different atmosphere. They were reticent, quite stand-offish, but I could tell they wanted to be involved so I really worked at it. Eventually they came round. I find that reticence interesting – I think it's down to the fact that they feel it's not their world because of what they see around them. All they see is white people getting involved in the countryside. No one black or Asian is doing it, or very few, if any. That's what the issue is, and that needs to be changed. I hope that by doing what I do, I'm inspiring other ethnically diverse people to think 'I can do that too'.

**If we can influence lots of people in urban areas, and help them realise there's something worth protecting, then we'd have more people that can help.** I'd call that the conservation army – they may not necessarily be birders or anything like that, but they'd have a sympathy, an empathy, so if an issue comes up they'd be quick to put their hands in their pockets or sign a petition

“we need to show people the relevance of their doorstep; how the flower pot on their window ledge is connected to the congo or the antarctic”

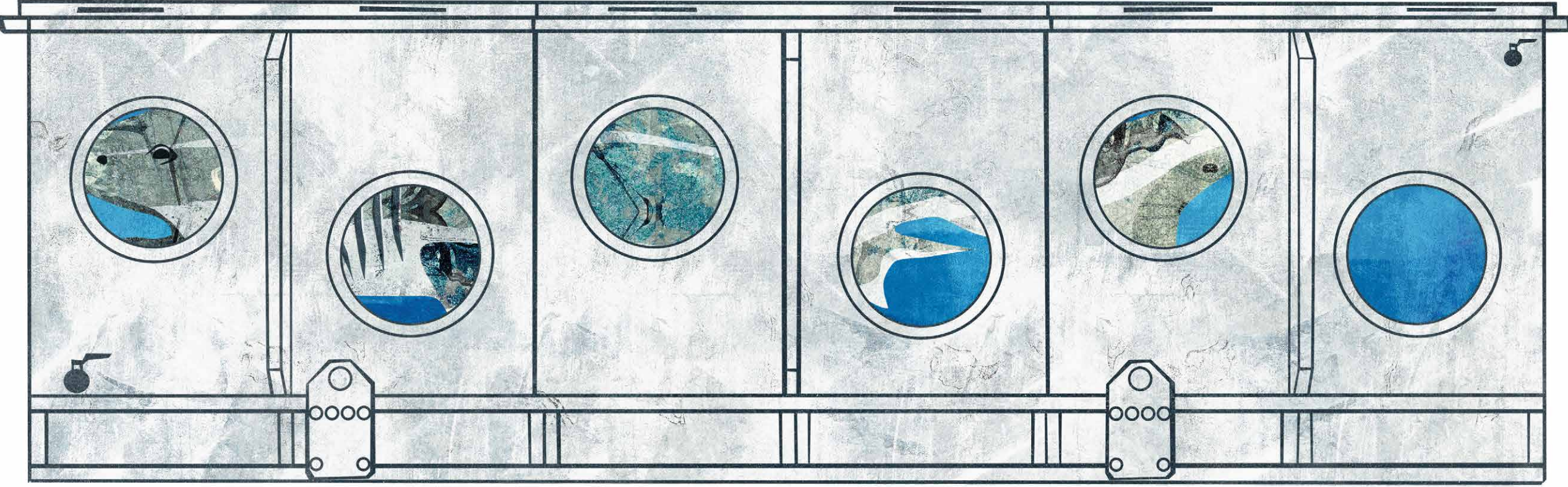
because they understand it's important. And that understanding starts from a local level; they'd realise their local park needs to have wild areas, or they'd think, 'Maybe I shouldn't astroturf my lawn – maybe I need to have wild areas so my kids can see butterflies.'

**I love using storytelling to engage people with birding.** For instance, for a robin, I explain how it's a woodland dweller that only started appearing in large gardens on the edges of cities at the end of the Industrial Revolution. As pollution eased, they ventured into urban gardens, which coincided with us becoming a nation of gardeners. The robins realised that by waiting around while we dig with our pitchforks, we'd be exposing invertebrates for them. In their eyes, we're huge pigs or deer rotavating the soil. Basically, they've adapted their instincts and previous behaviour to a modern scenario. It's those sorts of things that transform birding into a story, that make the layperson think 'wow' and look at birds differently. That's the power of storytelling. ●

David Lindo's new photographic book *Birds On My Mind* is out now; £19.95; [theurbanbirderworld.com](http://theurbanbirderworld.com)





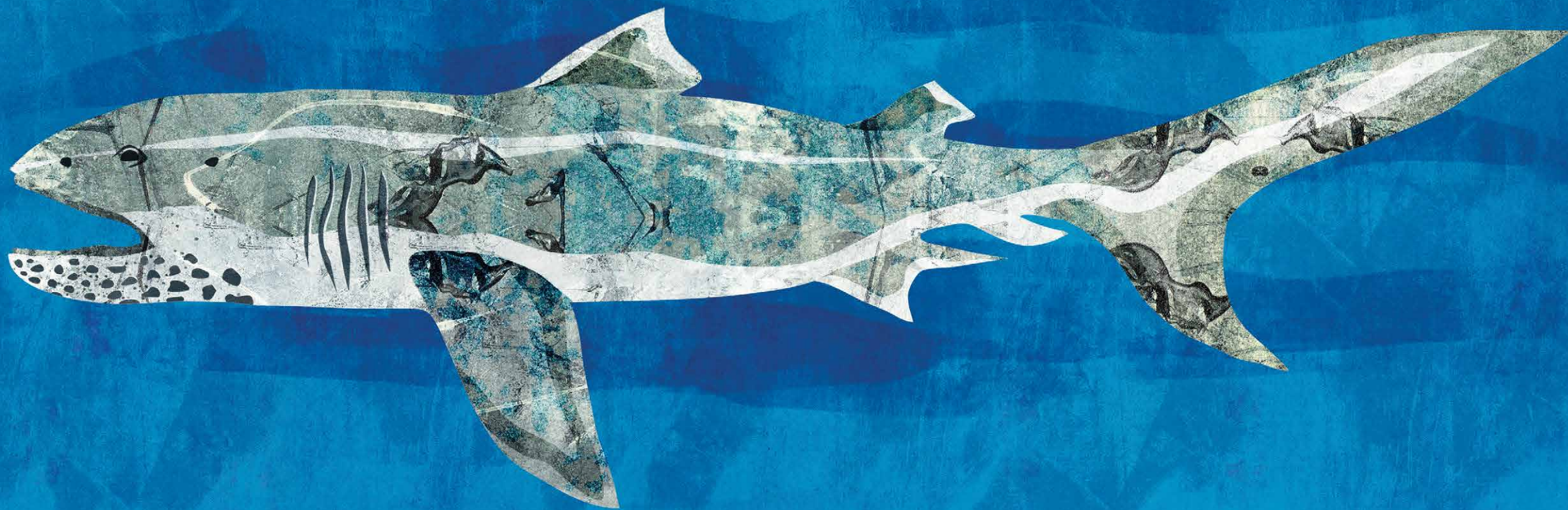


# Moving Megamouth III

Just how do you move a rare (and huge) preserved shark, from its flammable bath and into a new tank that is suitable for both viewing the beast and for holding 11 tonnes of fluid? **Claire Hamlett** reveals more about this “really crazy project”

WORDS: CLAIRE HAMLETT  
ILLUSTRATIONS: ASTRID WEGUELIN





It was the asbestos that started it. One of the museum buildings was filled with the stuff and needed to be demolished. But next door was an unusual explosion hazard: a megamouth shark preserved in a fibreglass tank, filled with 10,000 litres of highly volatile ethanol. The shark would need to be moved.

At the time, Megamouth III, so called for being only the third such shark to be encountered by humans after he washed up and died on a beach in Mandurah, Western Australia, in 1988, was no longer the imposing presence he would have been in life. Having spent his early years in the Western Australian Museum filled with formaldehyde before his submersion in ethanol, his skin was discoloured and his body shrivelled.

Thought to feed in the deep sea and rise to the surface at night, the megamouth is one of the world's most

elusive sharks. Only around a hundred have been seen or captured to date. They can exceed a respectable five metres and can weigh more than a tonne. They could fit your average seven-year-old sideways into their mouths, though they use that gaping cavern to scoop up plankton rather than children. On seeing Megamouth III on that Mandurah beach, an employee of the state fisheries department said: "the creature had the fins and gill slits normally expected of a shark, but a short, almost puglike snout that gave it the appearance of a baby whale."

Moving Megamouth III to his new home at the Maritime Museum 20km away presented an opportunity to restore him to his former glory. Further conservation work on his body would mean immersing him in a new – less flammable – preservative solution. And for that he would need a very specific kind of tank.

Industrial designer Mike Dixon typically designed items for mass production, from electronics to baby feeding products. One day in 2009 he got a call from some acquaintances at the WA Museum, offering him the chance to work on, as he puts it, "a really crazy project."

Originally tasked with designing a storage tank, it struck Dixon as a waste to hide Megamouth III from public view. He already had to design a tank strong enough to hold 11 tonnes of a liquid glycerol solution that would plump up the shark's body, with a removable lid to enable monitoring of his condition and a filtration pump so the ethanol could slowly be replaced with the glycerol. Now he had to add in "as many viewing ports as we comfortably [could] so it didn't compromise the overall structure."

The result, 10 months later, was more than a tonne of stainless steel and heat-strengthened glass, moulded into

an oblong structure with porthole windows, reminiscent of a submarine. Megamouth III rests inside, born up by steel cross beams, only partially visible through the viewing windows as though in tribute to the elusiveness of his kind.

"When you're designing things, if you don't get functionality of things really seriously right, you end up shooting yourself in the foot," says Dixon. "But if you're going to deliver the goods, why not make it look cool?"

After three years in his new home, Megamouth III had regained just under 30 per cent of his original body mass and, in his resplendent new home, 100 per cent of his grandeur. ●

You can view Megamouth III at the WA Maritime Museum, Fremantle, Perth, Australia; [museum.wa.gov.au/museums/maritime](http://museum.wa.gov.au/museums/maritime)





# A YEAR

# of self

# CULTIVATION

Amid the mountains and fjords of Western Norway, young adults fresh from school embark on a year of honing respect, decency and selfhood in the outdoors, all embraced within a holistic, philosophical education known to the Norwegians as *dannelse*. Writer and filmmaker **Laura Mahler** explores this antidote to the gap year.

**T**rek 200km north of Bergen and head into the Norwegian fjords, and you will find yourself in SogndalsfjØra, a small village of about 4,000 people. You may be the only one making that journey, however, as it is no tourist attraction.

Compared to the beach parties of Bali or the bustling of Bangkok, SogndalsfjØra attracts far fewer adventurers. Yet, about 150 young Norwegians trek here every summer, seeking a gap-year experience in many ways comparable to a Far-Eastern frolic. They are there to attend *Sogndal Folkehøgskule* (Sogndal Folk High School).

Throughout Norway, 10,000 or so young adults attend one of the nation's 80 *folkehøgskøler*, or 'adventure schools'. Nikolaj Grundtvig, a 19th-century philosopher and pastor inspired by Revolution-era ideas of peasant rights and agency, founded the first school in an attempt to close the gap between rich and poor education. He felt certain opportunities for personal development and exploration of thought could be missed in a working-class curriculum, which focused on teaching only basic skills to ready pupils for entering the workforce. He wanted his school to attract graduates who'd completed this kind of education, whose minds were still flexible, but were starting to experience some adult freedoms. The schools today have largely dropped the religious element in pastor Grundtvig's teaching, but the original intention remains much the same.

Young adults take a year away from parents and exams to try to figure themselves out. The schools are a gap-year alternative to travelling or working, and offer a structured, guided path to worldliness and open-mindedness. The classes are creative or physical – not academic; ranging in activities from mountain-biking and photography to jiu-jitsu and skiing. Crucially, the classes aren't graded. To make the schools

as accessible as possible, the Norwegian government provides €100m a year in interest-free tuition loans to youths of any academic calibre or economic background.

#### PATH TO SELF DISCOVERY

In my late teens I travelled around Southeast Asia teaching English to children, then spending months roaming around, hoisting a 75l backpack on to sleeper buses and cheap hostel beds. This type of trip may be something of a cliché, but I delighted in the experience, and learned a lot about myself and the world. I wanted to find out from *Sogndal* students why they opted for another year of school as their adventure, and if adventuring means to them the same as it means to me.

Hedda didn't want to go straight to university or work. She opted for adventure school because, growing up in a family of dog sledders, she wanted to immerse herself in the snow and dedicate an entire year to skiing. "This is a year to do solely what interests you, and get better at it," she tells me.

Katrine is taking the course in mountain biking, and unicycles down the trails in her spare time.

“ HE FELT CERTAIN OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND EXPLORATION OF THOUGHT COULD BE MISSED IN A WORKING-CLASS CURRICULUM ”



“

THE IDEA IS FOR THEM TO  
challenge their  
comfort zone,

EVEN IF THEY'RE STAYING IN A  
SMALL TOWN NEAR HOME.

”

She says having structure and guidance in her formative years was the attraction.

Having a community of both students and teachers is helping to broaden her experience and deepen her thinking. “And the teachers aren't your typical teachers,” she says. “Mine is a trained mountain guide!”

For Victoria, her choice was to experience and see more of Norway and its unique nature. Like many adventurous pursuits, adventure schools actively seek internal self-discovery through outdoor exploration. A focus on the local environment has been baked into adventure school activities and philosophy since their founding.

Most classes have an outdoors element, and students are routinely encouraged to forage for snacks or camp overnight. The idea is for them to challenge their comfort zone, even if they're only staying in a small town close to home. A familiar landscape can still offer unknowns and challenges. Teachers take students on hikes and up mountains they wouldn't usually go on, expanding boundaries instead with new territories and survival skills.

I'm disappointed (if inwardly a little relieved) that I'm unable to join the monthly trip to ice-bathe in the fjords. Students who jump in the water collect a point for each month, and a diploma at the end of the year for a full score. “The teachers push you, but they don't force you,” says Silje, who is on the photography course, and also on track for the ice-bathing diploma.

Sogndal teachers seem to be like no teacher I'd ever had, so I'm keen to speak to one. Martin, Victoria's ski teacher, worked in the school in various roles for seven years before qualifying for a full teaching position. Before I can even ask a question, he tells me, “What I teach is about becoming a better person, a more rounded, connected person.”

Martin then tells me that the core of the schools' approach is something Norwegians call *dannelse*, and is more widely known in other parts of northeastern Europe as *bildung*: a holistic, philosophical education that teaches respect, decency and selfhood. He adds “It's a difficult word for me to translate directly into English!”

He explains that, though students may choose to learn specific skills or practice their choice of arts, what they're assessed and pushed on is their reasoning, their ideologies, and their proficiency in trying new things. “We don't teach you how to become something but to become someone,” he says.

The only sort of test is *folke opplysning*, which translates as ‘people's enlightenment.’ “It's how to behave like a decent person,” he says. “It asks you about your role as a global citizen.”

### COMMUNAL LIVING

An important aspect of the activities is the time spent in close quarters with people from different academic, economic and social backgrounds. The students live and attend all meals together, and are encouraged to socialise only on-campus. Martin explains that bringing together people who are not the same is the key factor in inspiring new ways of thinking. “Adventure is only the framework, it's not the goal. As long as you have a group of people who are not the same, the activity could be whatever, whether it's theatre, art, or even e-sports.”

How are university dorms different from housing here, I ask him? “The students can't drink alcohol.” He further explains that students cannot masquerade in drunken character to make friends. It's one of the few pillar rules that enable the schools' success.

Silje recognises this. “You can't really hide,” she tells me. “If you're having a bad day, you still have breakfast with everyone, you have to go to class. You have to face whatever it is.”

Discipline is different, too. It's rarely necessary, but it is effective. Martin recalls a student who had

brought alcohol on to campus the year before, and he'd had to give him a verbal warning. “We had to chat to him, but after we finished the student wrote to me, ‘Thank you for the nice conversation. You really made me reflect how I want to be as a person.’ I said to myself, ‘This is what it's all about’.”

*Dannelse* equips Adventure Schoolers with tools to analyse how they move through the world, and how they interact with people from different walks of life. With Grundtvig's work, this has included respecting others, and understanding and taking responsibility for their actions and impacts on the world. The 21st century has brought another update to the philosophy, extending its thinking to environmental justice and climate change.

Though much of the year is spent exploring the local terrain, adventure schools started integrating trips to far-flung destinations as flying became more affordable at the end of the 20th century. These trips gradually became more important as marketing strategies, as schools competed for students by offering programs to learn photography in Asia, hike through Africa and swim in South America.

“

“WE DON'T HAVE TO TRAVEL TO  
THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD  
TO EXPERIENCE POVERTY.”

WE DON'T HAVE TO GO TO  
ANOTHER CONTINENT TO SEE  
NATURE.

”

Sogndal took Silje photographing in Vietnam and Hedda mountain-biking in Canada. But COVID has disrupted nearly every aspect of our lives over the last year, not least our ability to travel, and this has impacted the schools' programs. Classes that pinned their year around international flights have had to find alternatives. One benefit is that this massively reduced the schools' carbon footprints.

### A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Martin, who also founded the local Extinction Rebellion group, thinks the schools must increase their efforts to become sustainable without compromising teaching. He wants this response to the pandemic to last. He harkens back to the schools' founding ideas of getting alternative perspectives and broadening of experience without leaving Norway. “We don't have to travel to the other side of the world to experience poverty,” he says. “We don't have to go to another continent to see nature.”

Sogndal's post-COVID climate plan includes reducing meat consumption, contracting electric cars, and continuing to host international meetings virtually. Accordingly, this year the 80 adventure schools have agreed together to stop advertisements based on foreign travel, to gradually decrease the association between adventure and exotic destinations, in an attempt to reduce travel footprints. Some may still travel far, because it is hard to deny the experience and happiness travel can bring, but the aim is to shift the focus back to inward exploration - to adventure as a way of thinking and being.

Adventurous paths, through challenge and self-assessment, to thoughtfulness and self-awareness, take various forms all over the world. Whatever physical or metaphorical shape a person's mountain takes, the purpose of climbing it often boils down to *dannelse*.

“Forget military conscription,” Martin says. “What would the world look like if we could all serve a year in an adventure school?” ●



WORDS: SAMUEL CROSBY

# A COSMIC MIRROR WIBBOB COZMIC

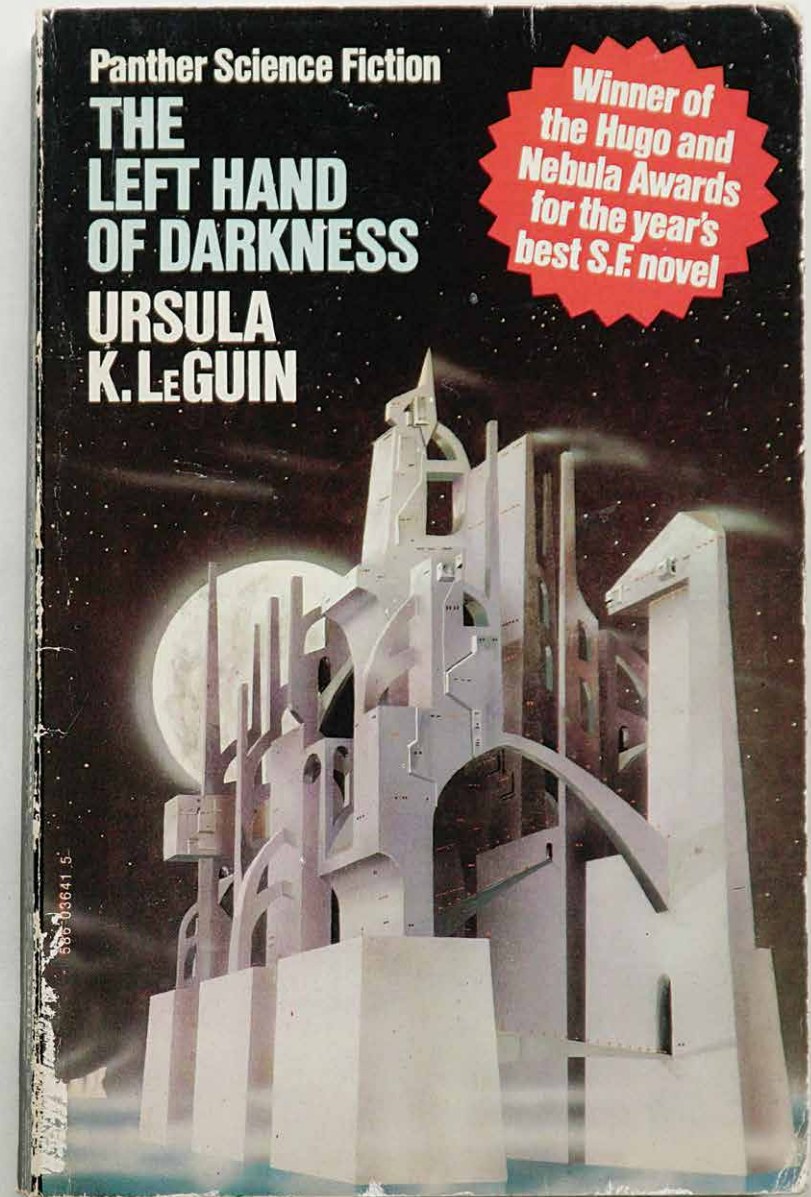
**W**e're onboard *The Liberty*. Colourful constellations and interstellar flares hurtle by. "According to Hasslein's theory of time," says Colonel George Taylor at the flight controls, "In a vehicle travelling nearly the speed of light, the Earth has aged 700 years since we left it, while we've aged hardly at all." So much of 1968's *Planet of the Apes* opening scene is a leap of faith: beige, retro-futuristic gadgetry, Charlton Heston's cigar-smoking depiction of an astronaut and a mind-bending premise. It couldn't be further from day-to-day life. But wait. What's that hiding in the subtext? **Samuel Crosby** investigates...

In the 53 years since Colonel George Taylor's first on-screen appearance, science fiction has proliferated. We thumb embossed, esoteric book cover designs trusting their meanings will be revealed in time, wriggle down on movie nights waiting for low drones and operatic twirls to wrap us in their embraces. Sci-fi can take us to new galaxies, breathe life into machines, raise prehistoric creatures from the dead. We're completely enamoured. But are we really going 'out there'?

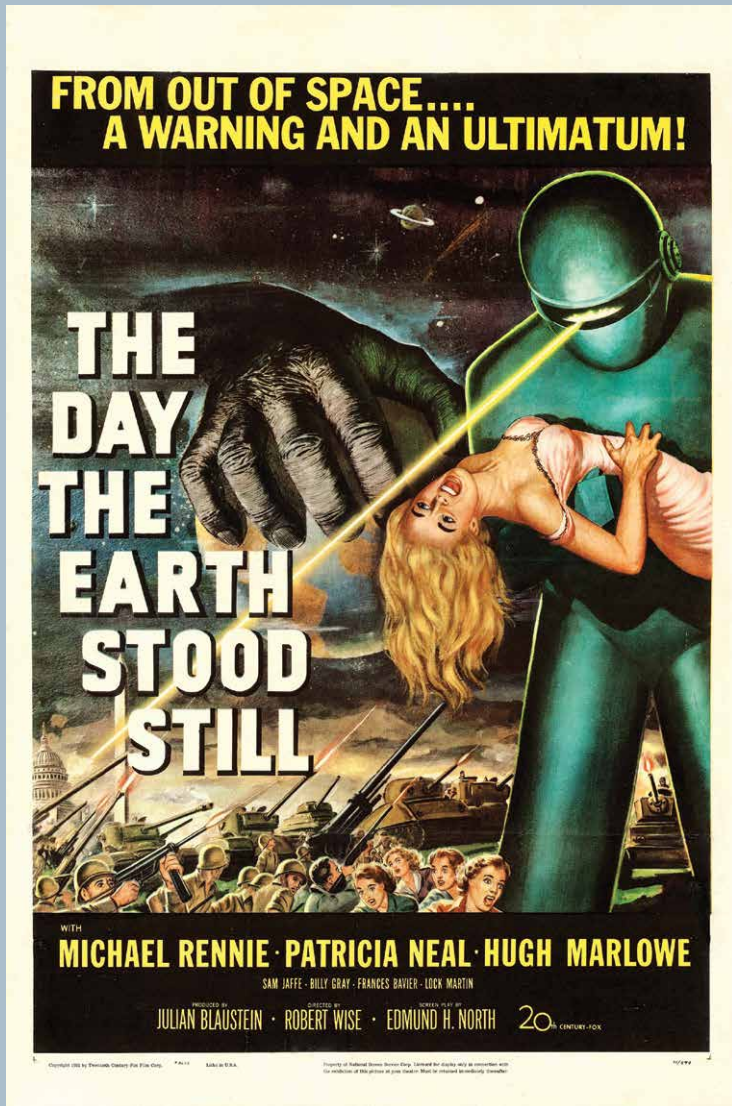
When we close the book, leave the cinema, is that aching nostalgia unveiling something more profound? Something closer to home?

In Ursula K. Le Guin's introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), she says, "Science fiction is often described, and even defined, as extrapolative. The science fiction writer is supposed to take a trend or phenomenon of the here-and-now, purify and intensify it for dramatic effect, and extend it into the future."

"Fortunately, though," she says, "it isn't the name of the game by any means." Le Guin goes on to describe sci-fi less as a portal to the future and more of a mirror held up to present-day society. It is about telling stories (or as she puts it: "elaborately circumstantial lies") that get us to ask questions.







And the invitation is to buy in. To enter into an agreement to come as our full selves, to react and feel. “In reading a novel, any novel, we have to know perfectly well that the whole thing is nonsense, and then, while reading, believe every word of it,” says Le Guin. And that makes way for one of sci-fi’s greatest powers: sneaking subtext past our sensors.

Like a sleek Bond car hiding weapons-grade trickery, a good sci-fi novel or movie can whisk

us off to imaginary places while simultaneously arming us to face up to our world view.

We may never realise what we’ve been coaxed to consider (whether or not the author even knows is often open for debate), which allows themes like gender, sexuality and ‘otherness’ their due at family dinner tables and pub firesides. Using metaphor to trade complex ideas that may never otherwise see the light of day.

Take Colonel Taylor’s exploratory vessel *The Liberty*: if you were onboard, light-years and generations away from Earth, all worldly possessions and friends long gone, how would you define yourself? Who would you be? In one short scene, we’re invited into the kind of thinking a Buddhist wouldn’t shy from.

As Le Guin says, “We may find – if it’s a good novel – that we’re a bit different from what we were before we read it, that we have changed a little, as if by having met a new face, crossed a street we never crossed before. But it’s hard to say just what we learned, how we were changed.”

So, what other ideas has sci-fi been coaxing us to consider?

#### WHEN IS AN ALIEN AN ALIEN?

One of the dominant themes in alien stories is ‘otherness’: colonialism, racism, separation, violence acted out of fear.

In *District 9* (2009) – inspired by Johannesburg’s apartheid-era slums – the alien characters are introduced to us and we’re complicit in accepting them as non-human. “Yes,” we’ll say, “That is an alien. It is unlike me.” Over time, they’re revealed as quirky, thoughtful, loving individuals and, as the protagonists

literally become aliens themselves, we’re invited to question our entire definition of ‘other’.

Under the guise of first contact, we face our views on equality, exclusion, social division. We ask ourselves, what does it mean to be human?

#### GENDER FLUIDITY

The extra-terrestrial peoples in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) have no assigned gender, only taking on sexual attributes every 26 days. “The king is pregnant,” begins one chapter. The protagonist, a “permanently sexually active” male envoy visiting from Earth, is seen as a pervert. With a reframing of gender, Le Guin opens the airlock to a new atmosphere in which a different ‘normal’ can be breathed. The far-flung planet’s permawinter landscape and harsh natives compare to a coldness around sexuality and gender that many people will never face in the real world.

On its surface, *The Matrix* (1999), one of the best-known sci-fi films of all time, is a nihilistic setting for a story of faith, hope and love. Twenty years after its release, the movie has become a beacon in some transgender communities, particularly since its creators Lilly and Lana Wachowski came out

UNDER THE GUISE OF FIRST CONTACT, WE FACE OUR VIEWS ON EQUALITY, EXCLUSION, SOCIAL DIVISION. WE ASK OURSELVES, WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMAN?

IT MEAN TO BE HUMAN?  
WE ASK OURSELVES, WHAT DOES  
VIEWS ON EQUALITY, EXCLUSION, SOCIAL DIVISION,  
UNDER THE GUISE OF FIRST CONTACT, WE FACE OUR

publicly as trans women. Neo, who breaks out of an inhumane casing and goes on to literally fly, seeks to transform and redefine what is physically possible. The red pill, analogous to open-mindedness, could be compared to estrogen. The first conversation between Neo, “I just thought you were a guy,” and Trinity, “Most guys do,” is a journey some recognise as experimentation and self-discovery in internet chat rooms at the turn of the century.

Even the cascade of billion-dollar movies from Marvel and Star Wars could be allegories for imposter syndrome, more relevant in today’s social-media dominated world than ever before. We’re instructed to suspend our belief ‘A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...’, but we still yearn for whatever that something is when the final credits roll.

Are we the superheroes saving worlds while our inner conflicts rage

on? Are our deepest desires really fame and fortune, or are we yearning to take off our masks and reveal our true selves?

#### 2021: A CLIMATE ODYSSEY

Sci-fi has been burying societal time capsules for years, like the slew of anti-nuclear storylines after Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 – *Thunder and Roses* (1947), *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *Godzilla* (1954). Today, one burgeoning genre intersecting with sci-fi is climate fiction; cli-fi.

In Kim Stanley Robinson’s *New York 2140* (2017) the big apple is 50ft underwater. “We’ve been paying a fraction of what things really cost to make,” says one character in the opening pages, “but meanwhile the planet, and the workers who made the stuff, take the unpaid costs right in the teeth.”

For anyone struggling with their personal buy-in to the climate crisis,





**FOR ANYONE STRUGGLING WITH THEIR PERSONAL BUY-IN TO THE CLIMATE CRISIS, IN THIS SPRAWLING NOVEL THERE'S A CHARACTER, A NARRATIVE, A REFLECTION FOR ALL.**

in this sprawling novel there's a character, a narrative, a reflection for all.

John Lanchester's *The Wall* (2019) centres on a sea-wall the length of Britain protecting against rising sea levels and migrants. It's impossible to sit with a story like this without reframing today's media narrative of nationalism and borders as a yearning for global community in the face of our climate emergency.

**WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE?**

It could be argued that the job of a sci-fi writer is to inspire hope, even in the frame of global catastrophe and dystopia. Transcending space and time with their precious subtext cargo stowed safely inside, good stories have the power (and some say the responsibility) to urge us, lead us towards a better future. Like the profound simplicity of one moment in *The Expanse* (2021),

when an off-world character asks "What does rain taste like?", begging us to ask ourselves: why, if we have it in our power to avoid it, would we ever leave Earth?

And with science fiction's exploding popularity, especially in younger people thanks to games and streaming services, there's a universe of opportunity to inspire future generations of change-makers. The power is in the hands of the authors.

In *Planet of the Apes*, we eventually learn (spoiler alert!) Colonel George Taylor didn't travel to another planet, but a future Earth. Another reminder that no matter how many light years away our stories take us there is always an invitation to look back.

"This much is probably true," says Taylor in the opening scene, "The men who sent us on this journey are long since dead and gone. You, who are reading me now, are a different breed. I hope, a better one." ●



# inventory II

## WILD FOOD

### HAND-LINING FOR MACKEREL

Mackerel are exceptionally stupid fish, to the extent that proper anglers don't class "macky-bashing" as real fishing. These underwater greyhounds will hit the least convincing lures without hesitation, and you can catch one with the silver foil off a cigarette packet. The easiest way to fill your frying pan is from a kayak in the summer months, using this cheap and simple rig.

#### Kit list:

- ▶ Hand-line (like kids catch crabs with)
- ▶ Ready-made string of mackerel 'feathers' - the lures and hooks
- ▶ Small weight (4oz or thereabouts) on a 15cm bit of line
- ▶ A couple of swivels to link it all together
- ▶ Sandwich box to keep it in
- ▶ Handy knife to cut the line if anything goes wrong

#### Step-by-step guide:

**1** Use the swivels to connect your line, feathers and weight together, using improved clinch knots or similar.

**2** Paddle your kayak a decent way out, then just feed the line out and play it up and down at different depths, jiggling it to twitch the feathers. With luck, the mackerel will bite.

**3** Pull them in and watch yourself on the sharp spike by the vent as you unhook them. Release any that are under the legal limit (usually 30cm, though local rules vary) – touching them as little as possible – otherwise kill them quickly by putting your index finger in their mouth and bending the head back until it crunches.

**4** Fresh mackerel is delectable fried with butter and lemon (preferably on the beach). It also cures well. Words: **Joly Braime** Illustration: **Louise Logsdon**



## PRACTICE SLOW STATIONERY

As the tendrils of the digital world snake ever-deeper into our lives, it's nice to think that some analogue processes still have the edge. Take journalling, for example. Often made out to be more complicated than it is, journalling is essentially just the regular habit of thinking through writing. You might reflect on yourself or the world around you, but really you just pick up your pen and make your own rules.

And journalling seems to work best on paper. Useful as they are, digital devices are engineered to distract and intrude, and there's something soothing in turning all that off and seeing what thoughts flow through the nib of your pen.

"A question is a good place to start," says Rupert Marlow of Wilder., whose own journalling led him and wife Sarah to produce these rather lovely notebooks.

For Rupert, a journal is about regular self-reflection and subtle change. "It's important to be honest and kind to yourself and to know it's a process and takes time." Words: **Joly Braime**. Pack of three notebooks, £14.50, [wildernotes.com](http://wildernotes.com)



## APPAREL LEVEL COLLECTIVE

In 1979, English rock band Joy Division released their iconic album *Unknown Pleasures*. A mysterious waveform featured on the cover with no hint as to the origin or meaning behind the artwork. It turned out to be the radio emissions produced by a pulsar; a highly magnetised rotating neutron star named CP 1919 discovered by student Jocelyn Bell Burnell in 1967. Stark white lines on black, the design has since become an enduring image of the post-punk era, and one that still inspires artists and makers today.

When Mark Musgrave, founder of The Level Collective, was playing around with illustration to capture the idea of

soaking up all that cities have to offer before escaping into wilder landscapes to recharge, he decided to riff on the iconic design. "The shapes describe the transition from the Sheffield skyline to the Peaks," he says. "It made sense to give a visual nod to the album sleeve."

The resulting t-shirt 'Known Pleasures', recently released in mustard, is hand-printed in Sheffield, using GOTS organic cotton and water-based inks.

"The screen-printing process is really beautiful; really skilled," says Mark. "The only machine involved is a bright light that exposes the screen, then you're just pulling ink through a silk screen."

The Level Collective was founded in 2014 on principles of fairness and dignity for the people involved in clothing production. "Conversations around traceability have changed so much over the past ten or 15 years," says Mark. "People now ask questions and care about where their clothes come from."

Seven years on, the meaning behind the brand name is evolving – it's also about creating a more balanced life.

For Mark, that's about doing meaningful work while finding restful reconnection in nature.

**Known Pleasures (mustard), £32, [thelevelcollective.com](http://thelevelcollective.com)**







## OUTDOOR KIT WAIST NOT

Famously deployed by anxious 90s dads to stash wads of Greek drachma on Thomas Cook holidays, the humble bum-bag has had a rebrand. These days it's called a waist-pack, and is once again appreciated for all the practical reasons that made it popular the first time round.

Somewhere in the intervening decades, we at *Ernest* have misplaced our old Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles one, so imagine our delight at discovering that Finisterre has collaborated with the Natural History Museum to produce a waist-pack featuring an Anna Atkins cyanotype print.

Regular readers might remember exploring this early form of photography in issue 10. Created by laying a plant specimen on chemical-coated paper, the cyanotype process produces a

luminous white negative on a rich cyan blue background. Botanist Anna Atkins (1799–1871) used the method to illustrate her 1843 book on British algae, making her the first person ever to produce a photographic book.

The waist-pack showcases one of Anna's uniquely beautiful algae cyanotypes, with an adjustable belt and two roomy zip pockets. Fortunately, in our streamlined modern world, travel no longer requires fat bundles of paper currency – which is good news because you'll need all that space for your phone, Kindle, smartwatch, Bluetooth headphones, chargers and cables, face mask and hand-sanitiser.

**Words: Joly Braime. NHM + Finisterre waist-pack, £30, [Finisterre.com](https://www.finisterre.com)**



## PRINTMAKING OCEAN MONOTYPES

“Over the years, I've discovered just how varied bodies of water can be. Crystal clear salt water in the south of England, fresh buoyant loch water in the North of Scotland, the wild and heavy waves seen from a ferry to Orkney; they all have qualities that speak for themselves.”

It's this variation in water that artist Olivia Lucy captures in her monotypes – a process that involves using ink to draw an image on a printmaking plate, then rolling it through an etching press to impress the image on paper.

“The ‘mono’ in monotype means just that; each drawing on the plate has to be created again each time,” Olivia explains. “That's what I love about it, especially when depicting water. Never will you look at the sea and it be the same as it was just seconds ago. So this process mimics this, allowing you to create a heavy, wild image or more tame, calm waves through mark-making with different materials.”

Since moving to Cornwall in the past few months, Olivia has been travelling and printmaking from her van, spending her mornings swimming in the sea and scouring the beach for shells, then drawing her finds to turn into prints.

“I find discovering a new place is a great opportunity for stretching a body of work. It's like waking up to fresh snow and there are no footprints yet.”

Olivia says the past 18 months or so (as we've navigated the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic) have only deepened her love for the natural world.

“For all sorts of environmental reasons, we need to respect and protect our surroundings, but recently I'm realising that appreciating the natural beauty on our doorstep is the best place to start.” Discover more of Olivia's work at [@olivialucy.craft](https://www.instagram.com/olivialucy.craft) on Instagram. Or read our full interview with Olivia at [ernestjournal.co.uk](https://www.ernestjournal.co.uk)





PHOTOGRAPHY  
**TIME & TIDE**

Drawn to art deco architecture, photographer Luke Brown originally wanted to capture Britain's historic lidos for a new body of work. Finding many of them closed during winter, however, he turned his attention to a unique space free from rules and regulations, and always open to the harshest of elements – the tidal pool.

As he began to research the coastal structures, many built in the 1930s, Luke became interested in an inherent conflict between the natural and the man-made environment.

“The pools were constructed to withhold water, to create a recreational space,” he tells us. “However, it’s the tide that actually dictates the space and the ocean answers to the gravitational pull of the moon. These natural forces dominate, dictating their conditions of use.”

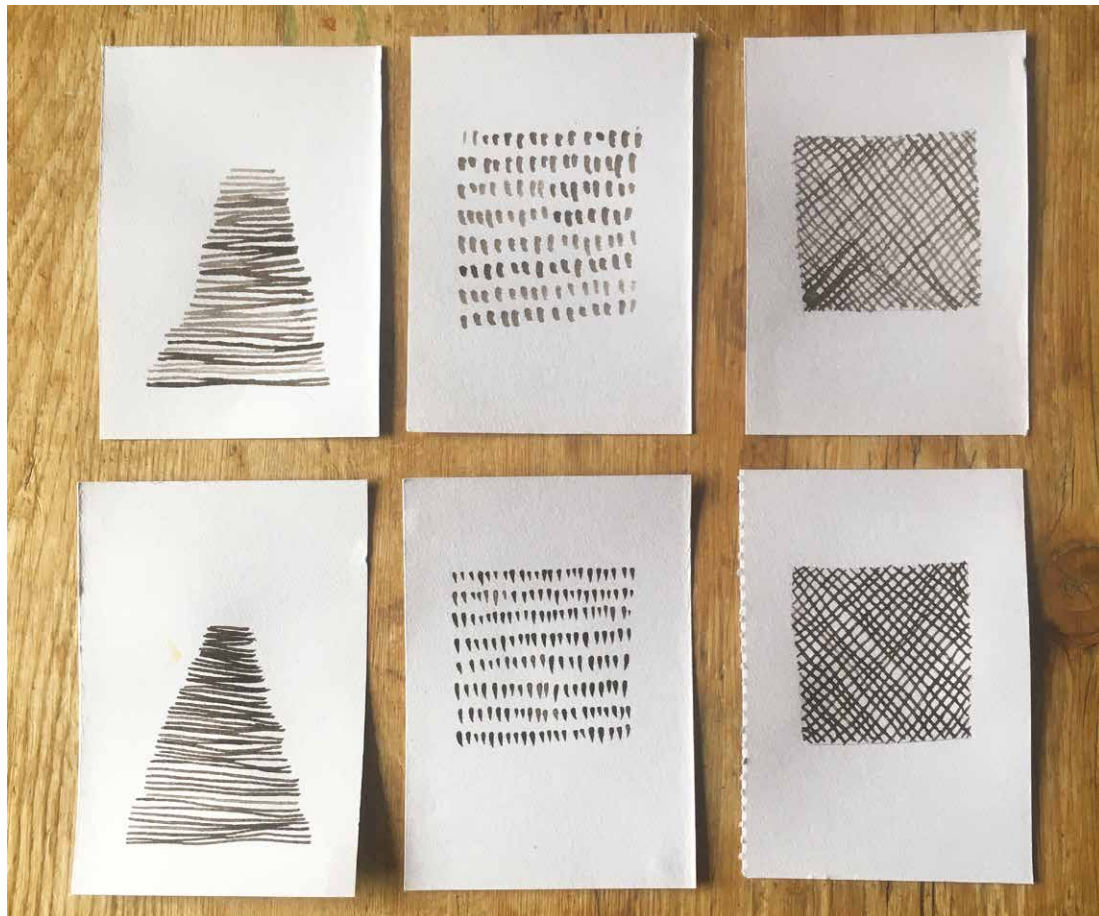
People feature minimally, appearing as dots in the background or a blur in a long exposure: “I wanted to focus attention purely on the pools; on the structures’ relationship with the natural environment, rather than on how humans interact with the space.”

While the allure of tidal pools partly lies in their freedom from regulations, it’s also what threatens their very existence. There is no governing body appointed to keep Britain’s tidal lidos maintained, leaving them vulnerable to the elements that batter the coast.

However, Luke is hopeful for their future: “Since learning about these pools I’ve become aware of their importance – what they mean to the people who use them and to generations to come. The future of these structures lie with the local communities who maintain them – and it’s been so reassuring to witness this happening.” Discover more about Luke Brown’s work at [brownluke.com](http://brownluke.com). Read our full interview at [ernestjournal.co.uk](http://ernestjournal.co.uk)







## OUTDOOR KIT WALKING THE WAINWRIGHTS

Alfred Wainwright's iconic pictorial guides to the Lakeland fells took him 13 years to write, at the rate of a page a night. Their immaculate, handwritten text and lovingly executed drawings in Indian ink are unmistakable. In his laconic TV appearances of the 80s, Wainwright was almost as distinctive with sideburns like a Thomas Hardy Rustic, heavy-rimmed glasses and famously crabby demeanour. Reclusive and obsessive, "AW" was a complicated man, but the guides have a unique warmth and charm that transcends their creator's flaws.

Bagging all 214 Wainwrights is an intrepid undertaking. To help you on your way, Debbie Slater of Alp & Ash has produced a laser-engraved wooden gift box, complete with A6 booklet listing all 214 fells and a fold-out tick-list, pencil, rucksack badge, certificate and a bar of Kendal mint cake to keep morale when the Cumbrian weather rolls in. **Words: Joly Braime.** Walking the Wainwrights gift box, £38; [alpandash.co.uk](http://alpandash.co.uk)



## ALCHEMY ◀ THE NATURAL INK PROJECT

Welsh artist and writer Kathryn John shares insights into her practice making ink using pigments sourced from nature such as rosehip, pine charcoal, avocado stone and oak gall (*left*).

**Kathryn, first of all, what are oak galls?** Oak galls (or oak apples) grow on the acorns, leaves and branches of oak trees as a reaction to a wasp laying their egg on the tree.

**What inspired you to start gathering natural materials to make ink?**

I have always collected things while out walking. In 2015 I was introduced to the process of natural dyeing by an artist I was training with. She had a beautiful book of her naturally dyed wool swatches. I began researching the process and was fascinated. I wanted to move away from using synthetic paints.

**Tell us about other inks you've made.**

I have made ink from wild blueberries gathered in the Peak District and yarrow, gorse flowers and rose from the West Wales coast. I've made blue from copper pipes, pink from avocado skins and yellow from pomegranate.

**What do you enjoy about the process of ink making?**

It teaches me about patience, and it isn't about taking too much of something. The birds, insects and animals rely on this plant too. We are all part of the whole living system. I enjoy how much the process is like being a child again, making potions in the garden. It also feels like a radical act to reclaim a traditional craft and step away from consuming mass-manufactured stuff in order to create.

Follow *The Natural Ink Project* @ [\\_kathrynjohn](https://www.instagram.com/_kathrynjohn) on Instagram.

## BOTANICAL DRAWING IT STARTS WITH AN EGG

Botanical artist Anna Koska has always been drawn to the details: a leaf in decay, a fallen feather snagged in a bush, fish scales stuck on legs after a mackerel fishing trip. Many of these things would find their way into her pockets, becoming models for her to research and sketch once home.

In *From Field and Forest*, Anna documents her daily routines and rituals as the seasons change, her observations encouraging us to pause and reflect on the intricacy of everyday details: a mistle thrush's egg with a neat hole pecked on one side; the muted flecks on a skylark's plumage; the purple splatter-patterned pods of borlotti beans.

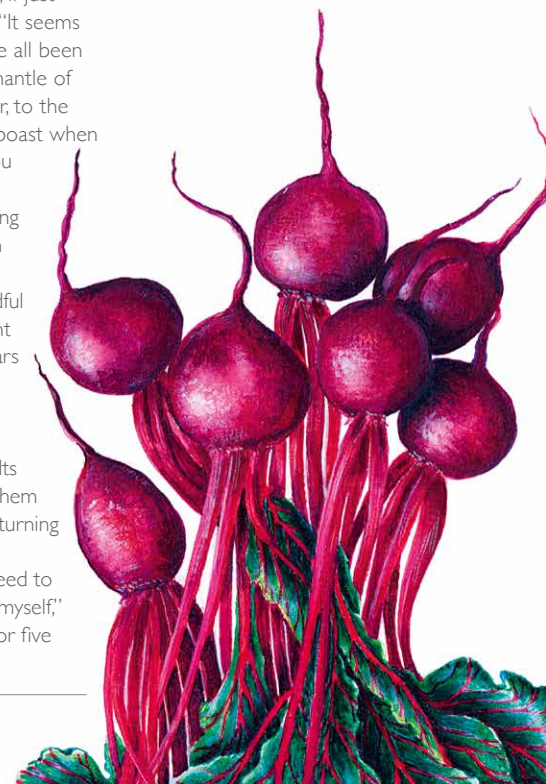
"The act of pausing to observe details has always felt like giving myself a 'micro-sabbatical'. I feel like I've managed to slow time, if just for a moment," says Anna. "It seems that up until recently, we've all been encouraged to wear the mantle of 'busy' as a badge of honour, to the point of it almost being a boast when asked how you are: 'Oh you know, busy, busy, busy.'"

Anna's practice of working with egg tempera has been equally unhurried. "My husband bought me a handful of glass jars filled with bright powdered pigments 25 years ago. The colours were like nothing I'd seen before, so vivid," says Anna. First time around, she found the results disappointing, and packed them away for some 20 years, returning during a break to raise her children. "I had a burning need to carve out a bit of time for myself," she says. "I hadn't painted for five years; I had little to lose."

Trial and error is an unavoidable part of working with egg tempera; there's little in terms of guidance, despite it being practised by masters such as Michaelangelo, Botticelli, da Vinci.

"It's a beguiling method: mixing egg yolk with powdered colours and gently brushing them on to clayboard or cartridge paper; waiting for them to dry, then applying the next layer that allows the previous tint to glow through," Anna says. "It's intoxicating to watch the image slowly evolve."

Some pigments follow age-old methods of extraction from seams of rock and stone; others are ground from metal oxides. Ground lapis lazuli was once the most expensive pigment in the world. Anna bought a tiny jar some years ago, after stumbling upon a shop selling rows of shimmering pigments in Florence. "I still haven't used it. But when I do, it will be a joy." *From Field & Forest: An artist's year in paint and pen* by Anna Koska is published by Pavilion Books.







## OUTDOOR KIT RAMBLERS SOAP

Last time *Ernest* attempted to wash himself in the wild, he mistook his travel-sized bottle of mouthwash for shower gel and smelled overpoweringly minty fresh for the rest of the day. He wouldn't have had this problem if he'd taken a tin of single-use soap pieces, handmade by the Little Northern Soaphouse. Inside each tin you'll find approximately 30 pieces, all vegan and palm-oil free, and a mixture of assorted gentle fragrances inspired by the northern landscapes of Britain. Each piece is more than enough for one shower or several lathery hand washes, and when you run out you can order a refill, easy-peasy.

Tin of soap £6.80 £3.60 for refills;  
[etsy.com/uk/shop/NorthernSoaphouse](https://etsy.com/uk/shop/NorthernSoaphouse)



## APPAREL

### ◀ HERNE THE HUNTER

Woollen clothes were the original outdoor wear. Before Gortex, Nylon and polyester were an option, mountaineers would layer wool garments (sometimes three shirts at a time at altitude), teamed with waterproof canvas trousers and drill cloth parkas.

In many ways, wool is the ultimate performance fibre, keeping the wearer warm when it's cold, and cool when it's hot. Merino wool is even more remarkable. Anti-microbial properties make it naturally odour resistant; simply air your woollens to keep them fresh. It's also hydroscopic, meaning it absorbs and releases water more effectively than synthetic fabrics, so it can withstand sudden downpours while wicking sweat from the body. An active fibre in the crimped wool also reacts to changes in body temperature, releasing heat when the fibres are hot and keeping hold of warm air in the cold.

Mindful of the harmful effects of modern, synthetic fibres on the environment, Wiltshire-based clothing brand, Herne – taking its name from Herne the Hunter, an antlered huntsman and keeper of the forest who appears in English folklore – is forging a return to woollen outdoor clothing. With wool from their own merino flock, grazing on the gently rolling grassland of the Wessex Downs, the brand collaborates with family-run mills to create durable, long-lasting outdoor staples such as the Stag Shirt (*left*), a long button-down woollen overshirt inspired by a popular style with early pioneers in the American West. Warm and breathable, the shirt has thoughtful, functional details such as reinforced shoulders, tapered sleeves and a dipped back to protect you from the weather. **Checked Stag Shirt (available in men's and women's), £275, [herneclothing.com](https://herneclothing.com)**



## ENVIRONMENT A BRIGHT VISION

It is a ubiquitous sight on the beaches of Cornwall and along the British coast – discarded fishing nets washed up on the shoreline, or entangled in the rocks, trapping wildlife. It's a problem marine biologist and Waterhaul founder, Harry Dennis found impossible to ignore: "There are many issues impacting our ocean," he says. "But this was one I could actually do something about."

Targeting rocky and remote coastlines that accumulate a lot of nets, Harry and his team scour the rocks to gather the ghost gear, which is cleaned to remove contaminants, mechanically shredded

into fibres, then converted into pellets. These pellets are then injection moulded into sunglasses frames.

By harnessing the very properties that make discarded fishing gear a problem – its abundance, strength and durability – Waterhaul makes sunglasses that are designed to last, while intercepting harmful plastic from our oceans.

Harlyn sunglasses £60; [waterhaul.co](https://waterhaul.co)





# contributors

This edition of *Ernest* is brought to you by a talented collection of writers, photographers, illustrators, birders, trail guides, documentary filmmakers and beachcombers.



**DANIEL ALFORD**, photographer

Dan is a Welsh travel and landscape photographer who also loves to write about his adventures. He's a lover of geology, history, hiking and cycling. He travels to wild places as often as humanly possible. [danielalford.co.uk](http://danielalford.co.uk)



**DAN BRIGHT**, illustrator

Obsessed with nature, folklore, myths and monsters. When he's not in the studio, Dan can usually be found outside somewhere, exploring and looking for new things to draw. [danbright.studio](http://danbright.studio)



**SAMUEL CROSBY**, poet and writer

Sam wants the world to be a campfire; to sit together at the edge of dark, singing our laments as well as love songs. He lives and surfs in Cornwall with his intrepid wife and prognosis defying son. [samuelcrosby.com](http://samuelcrosby.com)



**HENRY FLETCHER**, writer & trail guide

Henry has co-authored a new guidebook for all those who seek adventure and a deeper sense of place. *Walking and Wayfinding in the Westfjords of Iceland* is due out later in the year. [wayfinding.guide](http://wayfinding.guide)



**CLAIRE HAMLETT**, writer

Claire is a freelance writer covering animals, climate, and the environment. She lives in Oxford with her husband and two dogs and spends Thursdays packing and delivering organic vegetable boxes on a cargo bike.



**MIRANDA HARRIS**, illustrator

Miranda is an illustrator and writer based in Bristol. She is inspired by the rural landscapes where she grew up, as well as by scenes of everyday life observed in the city. [mirandaharris.co.uk](http://mirandaharris.co.uk)



**DEAN HEARNE**, photographer

Dean has a passion for clean aesthetics and adventurous living. He runs an online store – The Future Kept – with his wife, curating items with timeless qualities, made by people who care about the world. [deanhearne.com](http://deanhearne.com)



**NICK HUNT**, writer

Nick is a writer and walker. His latest book *Outlandish: Walking Europe's Unlikely Landscapes* is published by John Murray. He is also a storyteller, and co-director of The Dark Mountain Project. [nickhuntscrutiny.com](http://nickhuntscrutiny.com)



**DAVID LINDO**, birder and TV presenter

Also known as the Urban Birder; David is a wildlife broadcaster, nature writer, bird guide leader, speaker and urban wildlife educationalist. [theurbanbirderworld.com](http://theurbanbirderworld.com)



**JOHAN KESLASSY**, illustrator

Johan lives in Normandy. He enjoys drawing ordinary human scenes and boxy cars, with a retro touch. He has worked with *Monode*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post*. [behance.net/jkeslassy](http://behance.net/jkeslassy)



**KATHRIN LANG**, illustrator

Kathrin works as an illustrator and collage artist in Berlin. Her process celebrates paper and printed textures by combining printmaking, paper-cutting, hand drawn elements and painting. [kathrinlangillustration.com](http://kathrinlangillustration.com)



**MIKE MACEACHERAN**, writer

Mike is a travel writer and guidebook author who contributes to *National Geographic*, *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *BBC Travel*. Despite his father having pioneered climbing routes in the Alps and the Andes, Mike is afraid of heights.



**LAURA MAHLER**, writer and filmmaker

Laura is host of the Earth Ideas podcast and a filmmaker working on environmental stories. She has presented her award-winning academic work and films internationally, with work featuring on Netflix and BBC.



**NICOLA MOYNE**, writer and photographer

A saltwater soul and adventurer; journalist Nicola is happiest oceanside on a sun-drenched isle. She regularly writes for *Marie Claire*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *The Independent*, and is currently working on her debut novel.



**GARETH E REES**, writer

Gareth is the author of *Unofficial Britain* (2020), *Car Park Life* (2019), *The Stone Tide* (2018) and *Marshland* (2013), as well as numerous stories for fiction anthologies. [unofficialbritain.com](http://unofficialbritain.com)



**DAN RICHARDS**, writer

Dan's first book *Holloway* was co-authored with Robert Macfarlane and Stanley Donwood. Other titles include *Climbing Days*, exploring the life of his mountaineering aunt Dorothy Pillely, and *Outpost*. [@Dan\\_Zep](https://twitter.com/Dan_Zep)



**BETHANY RIGBY**, artist and writer

Bethany is a designer, artist and writer based in London. Her practice currently centres on drawing connections between landscapes and emerging technologies, in both terrestrial and extraterrestrial realms. [bethanyrigby.com](http://bethanyrigby.com)



**PUTU SAYOGA**, photographer

Putu is a documentary and travel photographer based on Bali. He studied politics in Gadjah Mada University. An autodidact, he taught himself photography during his college days. [putusayoga.net](http://putusayoga.net)



**JACK SMYLIE WILD**, writer and baker

Jack is a poet, nature writer and award-winning baker, living in Cardigan with his wife and young sons. His recent book *Riverwise: Meditations on Afon Teifi* is now out in paperback.



**ASTRID WEGUELIN**, illustrator

Astrid loves to explore the patterns and shapes that surround her and enjoys finding ways to recreate the unusual textures she comes across, through a combination of digital and traditional print processes. [astridweguelin.com](http://astridweguelin.com)



**LISA WOOLLETT**, writer and beachcomber

Lisa is the author and photographer of several award-winning books about the sea, beachcombing and mudlarking. She lives with her family in Cornwall, in a house shared with buckets and boxes of beach finds.



# stay in touch...

Subscribe to our newsletter for  
more curiosity and slow adventure  
[ernestjournal.co.uk/newsletter](https://ernestjournal.co.uk/newsletter)