

Night Walks

An exhibition of photographs by Tim Hyde

I walk at night: sometimes before sunrise, often long after sunset. This habit began when I joined my grandfather on his night walks, many years ago, and continued throughout my life with fits and starts, and a few long gaps. At some point, they took on a photographic purpose.

Why at night? First, you can see better at night, or at least better in some important ways. For one thing, there are fewer distractions. The absence of uniform bright light, traffic, and loud noises clears the mental pallet. One is also more open to ambiguity and subtlety in darkness or near darkness. Mysteries aren't solved at night but discovered, questions aren't answered but raised. (With age comes the realization that questions are always more important than answers and far more interesting.)

One feels more in touch with the structure of things at night, with what Matthew Beaumont called the "pre-historic landscape." Walking after the sun goes down allows us to sense the underlying anatomy of the earth beneath our feet, to become open to deep time, time before the buildings and roads and ball parks. It also makes us aware of our limitations, of our relative place in the universe, which is fairly small it turns out. We humans don't smell or see or hear very well in the dark; even the sewer rat is superior when it comes to these abilities. It's a good to understand our own vulnerabilities, I think, to measure our own weaknesses.

Nights are for outlaws. One writer classified nightwalkers as either homeless or voyeurs, and both are transgressive. There is something illicit or at least suspicious about walking around in the darkness. It suggests idleness; good citizens are home in bed, resting for the next day's work. And too, it is a little scary. Especially when you encounter other night walkers. I can't deny that testing my primal fears is an important part of the night walking. In some important way, I find it liberating.

These images are part of an ongoing meditation on this topic, a meditation that takes different shapes as my life and moods change over time, but always seems to come back to the same place.