

Walking: a reprise

Discussion at The Park

Wednesday 5 September 2018 7:30pm at *The Park Tavern, Macclesfield*

1. Henry David Thoreau says the true “art of walking” is “. . . *sauntering*: which word is beautifully derived from idle people who roved about the country, in the Middle Ages, and asked charity, under pretence of going ‘*a la Sainte Terre*’, to the Holy Land, till the children exclaimed, ‘There goes a *Sainte-terror*’, a saunterer – a Holy-Lander. Some, however, would derive the word from *sans terre*, without land or a home, which, therefore, in the good sense, will mean, having no particular home, but equally at home everywhere.”

Do any members of our circle consider that they are “saunterers”, or have “sauntered”? Alternatively, do you wish that you had “sauntered”?

2. According to many people, walking for a short time, perhaps on a day out, seems to be a totally different experience to doing a long walk, perhaps over a week or more.

Have any members of our circle ever undertaken a long distance walk, with overnight stops en route? How different was the experience, compared to a day out? Why is there this difference?

3. One contemporary, long distance walker tells of his experience walking through rural Oxfordshire in the following terms. “I have often driven down the M40 and enjoyed the open views of hills, fields and – in season – the spectacular displays of poppies. But it was not until I walked the length of that County that I knew it. It had far fewer people than I thought; far fewer buildings; much more open land.”

What is the cause of this difference in perspective or awareness? Which perspective or awareness matters more?

4. “Raise no dust. Move no stone.

Break no grass. And may the wind leave no trace of your passing.”

A Navajo blessing of someone who is about to depart on a journey.

There is a considerable body of literature on the “meditation of walking”. Some, set in the Buddhist tradition, relates to repetitive, short sequences of steps. Some relates to long distance hiking. Robert Macfarlane has written extensively on the latter.

Have any members of our circle ever experienced the meditative qualities of walking, whether by accident or intent? What differences are there between walking alone or in company? Is it important to “leave no trace of your passing” in the context of walking?

5. During the act of walking, many people become much more aware of the landscape through which they pass. The shapes, colours and weather, the geology, vegetation and history all become more vivid. Macfarlane writes, “The Wiltshire section of the Ridgeway passes through arguably the most sacralised terrain in England . . . At Avebury and Silbury, an ease of relation is expressed between topography and belief. And paths, tracks and cursuses were intricately involved with this Neolithic landscape theatre.”

Is this effect on the mind only apparent in a rural setting? What about in the urban or cityscape?

6. The rural landscape is highly prized by most, if not all. But the townscape seems to be a poor relation. Even poorer, it is supposed, is the urban edge. The belt of land where car breakers yards, industrial estates or abandoned factories, children’s dens or airports are found. Yet walking along any of our great canal towpaths, perhaps through the Potteries and Staffordshire, takes us through urban landscapes, to “edgeland” and, only then, to rural landscapes.

Are we inspired by, or do we find reflection in, walking through urban landscape? Does our culture disproportionately overvalue rural landscape and undervalue urban landscape?

For those who like reading:

- | | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------|
| a. | <i>The Old Ways: a journey on foot</i> | Robert Macfarlane | 2012 |
| b. | <i>Edgelands: journeys into England’s true wilderness</i> | Paul Farley & Michael Symmons Rober | 2011 |

For those who like viewing & listening:

- | | | |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| c. | Robert Macfarlane on Landscape and the Human Heart - IQ2 Talks | 2012 |
| | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5q1IK-05Ypg (59mins) | |