



**University of
Sunderland**

Collier, Mike (2019) Ghosts of the Restless Shore: A Personal Pilgrimage. In: Walking, Landscape and Environment. Routledge, London. ISBN 9781315209753

Downloaded from: <http://sure.sunderland.ac.uk/id/eprint/9394/>

Usage guidelines

Please refer to the usage guidelines at <http://sure.sunderland.ac.uk/policies.html> or alternatively contact sure@sunderland.ac.uk.

Ghosts of the Restless Shore: A Personal Pilgrimage

Abstract:

In this essay, I examine elements of my practice that might be described as pilgrimages, explored through my role as Principle Investigator of WALK¹. I introduce an artistic intervention that I call *conversive pilgrimage* and show how the idea of pilgrimage is closely linked to the activity of walking, suggesting that ‘the volume and depth and intensity of the world is something that only those on foot will ever experience.’² Following an introduction about the idea and experience of pilgrimage, the main part of my essay presents a series of linked, (one might say rhizomatic) notes and recollections of one particular project, *Ghosts of the Restless Shore*, presented as memories that collapse traditional ideas and experiences of time. Here, I focus on a four-day phenomenological walk in 2015 along the Sefton Coast where I was born and raised. The structure of this section is based on an eighteenth-century essay tradition in which friends set out on a walking tour, and discuss a range of subject matter from natural history to philosophy and culture. Central to this part of the essay are four text-based works listing everything seen and heard on the walk. Here, the lists presented can be seen as ‘memorials’; these very specific ‘lists’ of flora and fauna celebrate local ecologies and can be seen as ‘pilgrimage shrines’. Finally, I summarize my reasons for adopting *conversive pilgrimage* and walking as a creative and research methodology suggesting that the lists of flora and fauna created and shared on these secular pilgrimages embody the appreciation or understanding of “things in their singularity”³ - a way to bridge the dualism between culture and nature, allowing us to engage with ethical issues that confront us in the Anthropocene.

Names which scintillate in the mind and engage our feelings:⁴

When I use the word landscape/soundscape or nature in this essay, I refer to both the rural and urban ideas of landscape. My walks and pilgrimages deliberately take place in both the city and the countryside. They seek to redress the Cartesian bifurcation of culture and nature, Nature, in this inclusive sense, is inherently creative and fluid. The poet Kay Syrad, explains that culture is a veil through which we describe nature:

The edge is the division
What is known is always from the past
Through knowledge, the new is a reworking of the old
The sum total of knowledge is culture
Culture is the veil through which we describe nature
The process of nature continues despite our analysis
Our analysis is part of the process of nature
The process of nature must include the actions of man
Whether or not they are destructive
Man’s description of nature as something separate – out of town – where the edge is the division between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’, is an illusion.
‘Nature’ and ‘Culture’ are the same thing.
There is no division.⁵

My use of the list (a central part of this chapter) as a form of art can be seen both as a meditative monument to a particular place and as an embodiment of ‘things in their singularity’. I like the possibility that this word singularity also references *singing* with respect to the spoken or sung word. These lists of mine should be read/sung out aloud, each word ‘rooted in the felt experience induced by specific sounds and sound-shapes as they echo and contrast with one another ... a particular way of “singing the world”⁶. These names of flora and fauna can draw us ‘into a world where art meets science, often producing names which scintillate in the mind and engage our feelings⁷. Furthermore, these individual words, spoken together, map a very specific landscape. They allow us the intellectual and emotional space to fill in the gaps between the words – to imagine what this landscape/soundscape might be like; and so we can become participants in the imagined world summoned up. These place-specific lists are indicative of a very particular habitat – ‘lists that anyone with a little knowledge of plant-life and ecological habitats might identify with the Sefton Coast.’⁸ Robert Macfarlane explains that ‘we once had a wonderfully rich and expressive range of words for our local landscapes ... (but that) as more people are brought up to live in towns and cities, the land beyond the city fringe has increasingly become understood as consisting of large, generic, units (‘field’, ‘hill’, ‘valley’, ‘wood’). It has become a *blandscape* ... As we further deplete our ability to name, describe and figure particular aspects of our landscape, our competence for understanding and imagining possible relationships with non-human nature is correspondingly depleted.’⁹

Conversive Pilgrimage:

The words pilgrim and pilgrimage are derived from the Latin *peregrinus* (from *per*, ‘through’, and *ager*, ‘field’ or ‘land’, so ‘pilgrimage’ literally means ‘through the land’). Pilgrimage might therefore imply ‘a physical journey, as well as state of inner reflection’¹⁰. Although the journey can take many forms, in general, walking is central to the act of pilgrimage. As Rebecca Solnit writes:

*While walking, the body and mind can work together, so that thinking becomes almost a physical, rhythmic act ... past and present are brought together when you walk, as the ancients did or relive some event in history or your own life by retracing its route.*¹¹

People go on pilgrimages for almost as many reasons as there are pilgrims. A pilgrimage can be undertaken individually – perhaps as a journey of self-discovery – or it can be a sociable activity, allowing us to enjoy the company of others we meet on our journey. Many cultures have pilgrimages that involve eye-wateringly large numbers of pilgrims, for example the Kumbh Mela Hindu pilgrimage is one of the largest gatherings of people in the world. At any given place, the Kumbh Mela is held once in twelve years; an estimated 120 million people visited Maha Kumbh Mela in 2013 in Allahabad over a two-month period including over 30 million on a single day, on 10 February 2013 (the day of Mauni Amavasya).¹²

As an artist, my work draws on my ‘practice’ of *conversive pilgrimage* walking, or more properly, meandering; the research for my studio-based collaborative artwork is ‘conducted’ through such secular ‘pilgrimages’ - walks or meanders which are

inclusive, involving artists, natural and social historians, poets, sound artists as well as students and the public. I often find that the shared experiences gained when walking with others generates new knowledge about flora and fauna encountered and noted during the walk, along with diverse individual perceptions and social observations that inevitably emerge as the conversations between walkers/pilgrims develop and the walk unfolds in its place-specific way¹³.

These walks encourage participants to experience the world with their heart and through all their senses. Participants gather and share the knowledge that comes directly from experience (from the wildness of the world) – a process called *biognosis* – meaning ‘knowledge from life’; research and knowledge which I hope encourages people to care more about their environment and therefore to effect positive change. All of this experience serves as material for thought, layered intuitively into the fabric of the work I construct back in the studio¹⁴. Making such work is a different but parallel and equally embodied, conversive experience, and I invariably work collaboratively with the poets, sound artists, glass artists, photographers, natural historians and composers who have walked with me when making new, place-based work.

In *Walking* (1851)¹⁵, Thoreau defines "the art of Walking" as "a genius ... for *sauntering*," describing the etymology of *saunter* as derived from "*a la Sainte Terre*," that is ‘going to the Holy Land’. The walk, then, becomes a sort of pilgrimage, a kind of religious or quasi-religious ritual. Although not religious myself, I respect, and am interested in, non-institutional religious thought and philosophy. My own experience, shared with many fellow walkers, is that pilgrimage is not about affirmation; that is, confirming long held imaginings about a place, space or faith. It is about discovery ... what Tim Ingold describes as knowledge ‘grown along the way’¹⁶. It provides us with an opportunity to step out of the non-stop clutter of our everyday lives, to seek a time of embodied reflection. I also share a view with many artists and writers/poets that our creative life is a journey of exploration and discovery – a pilgrimage of embodied, physical and creative reflection underlining that we are part of a more-than-human, creative world.

Ghosts of the Restless Shore

‘The Sefton coast is a haunted place, where the past can suddenly reappear, bursting into the present, the way a gust of wind in a ghost story flings open a loose window and rushes into the room. Concealment and revelation are its talents. It knows how to throw a covering of sand over a wrecked ship, to suck it down into its underground chambers and keep it there’¹⁷.

I want to now focus in detail on one key, personal pilgrimage – a walk along the Sefton Coast from Waterloo to Southport, with my brother Tim (a wildlife photographer); sound artist Dr Robert Strachan; poet Jake Campbell and natural historian John Dempsey of the Sefton Coastal Landscape Partnership. Following this walk, we created a multi-media exhibition of visual and sound art presented at the Atkinson Gallery in Southport and published a book about the project with essays written by each of the artists¹⁸. For this section, I have edited elements of the

catalogue texts and presented them as an invented narrative. In doing so, I am mindful of the Japanese Haiku master, Matsuo Basho's travel narrative, *A Narrow Road to the Deep North* in which 'he often changed the chronological order of his journey to enhance the artistic effects of his poems. His meandering handwritings on the manuscripts, occasionally patched up with revised sheets, suggest not only his rambling journey, but also reconstructed the process of recollection and self-examination as a poet ... inspired by the vicissitudes of nature and by living in the flow of time and life'¹⁹. The lists of flora and fauna that punctuate this narrative honour everything seen and heard on each of the four days of the pilgrimage and have been edited from a larger piece which included the derivation of local place names and mythological information about the natural history encountered. They are a memorial to the ecology of this very specific, liminal landscape/soundscape.

I was born in Sefton – a suburban conurbation and industrial landscape between the plains of Lancashire and the sea – and I lived there for eighteen years. It is the place that shaped many of my ideas about how we experience and perceive the world. For some years, Tim and I had talked about walking the Sefton Coastal footpath together, enriching and deepening our knowledge of this seminal place in our lives. It was to be a kind of pilgrimage. As well as walking with Robert, Jake and John, we were joined by over thirty members of the public at different points along our journey, an experience which became communal and collaborative as we meandered and shared experiences of this special place.

Walk one: 12th July 2014: Waterloo Station to Hightown Station – 4.4 miles

Tim: 'This coast is a place that holds many memories and has shaped who I am. With family ties close to the coast in Crosby I've continued a distant yet powerful relationship with the twenty or so miles that take you from Gormley's *Another Place* at Seaforth to the wild open reaches of the salt marshes of Southport. Each time I visit family I find myself drawn to the coast, always preferring winter when the vast horizons seem endless and you can spend all day without coming across a soul.'

John: 'As a small boy looking out on the grey vastness of Liverpool Bay, I'd struggle over autumn dunes, settle down to be buffeted in a north westerly, then scour the waves for shearwaters, petrels and skuas through binoculars that first saw action on the racecourses and dog tracks of southern Ireland, before the passing of my Uncle Jim meant they came to me ... The romance of a bundle of feathers winging off to the southern Atlantic to wander deserted oceans while we batten down the hatches for a northern winter grabbed my attention at eight years of age, as surely as the thought of the trade routes and the potential of "destination anywhere" did when I learnt more about the incredible maritime history of Liverpool Bay.'

I've always been a sucker for an horizon, or to be more accurate, what lies beyond it.'

Robert: 'I have been drawn to this coast by the richness of the area's natural and social history to be found in the most minute detail as well as its imposing seascape and landscape. The dunes, meadows and woods are alive with an incredible richness of flora and fauna and the focus of the eye and ear upon its intricacies bring this

diversity to life. The environment itself affords different levels of engagement; different modes of exploring the world around us. The suspension of every day modes of time and attention leads us to look closely, to be engulfed in a constant sonic environment that suspends linearity or to exercise selective attention in the way we listen to the environment.'

12TH JULY. STARTED 10.00 AM AT WATERLOO STATION AND FINISHED 4.00 PM AT HIGHTOWN STATION. WEATHER WARM (20 DEGREES), LITTLE WIND, SUNSHINE AND BRIGHT. SEA BUCKTHORN; COMMON CENTURY; EVENING PRIMROSE; CLUSTERED DOCK; SPEAR-LEAVED ORACHE; SEA BEET; SEA SANDWORT; KNOTTED PEARLWORT; BLADDER CAMPION; MEADOW RUE; SEA RADISH; SEA ROCKET; SEA KALE; BITING STONECROP; MEADOW SWEET; SALAD BURNETT; TUFTED VETCH; TARE; EVERLASTING PEA; HARE'S FOOT CLOVER; MEADOW VETCHLING; RIBBED MELILOT; WHITE MELILOT; REST HARROW; BIRD'S-FOOT-TREFOIL; HOP TREFOIL; RED CLOVER; WHITE CLOVER; MEADOW CRANESBILL; DOVE'S FOOT CRANE'S BILL; CUT-LEAVED CRANE'S BILL; SEA SPURGE; COMMON MALLOW; ROSEBAY WILLOWHERB; SEA HOLLY; WILD CARROT; ANGELICA; HEMLOCK WATERDROPWORT; WILD PARSNIP; ALEXANDERS; FENNEL; SEASIDE CENTAURY; HEDGE BINDWEED; COMFREY; HOUND'S TONGUE; VIPER'S BUGLOSS; COMMON STORK'S-BILL; HEDGE WOUNDWORT; SELF HEAL; BETONY; POLYPODY FERN; COMMON CORDGRASS; MULLIEN; COMMON TOADFLAX; EYEBRIGHT; SEA PLANTAIN; HAREBELL; ISLE OF MAN CABBAGE; GOLDEN ROD; SCENTLESS MAYWEED; SEA ASTER; YARROW; COLTSFOOT; MUGWORT; RAGWORT; CREEPING THISTLE; SPEAR THISTLE; HAWKWEED; COMMON SPOTTED ORCHID; NORTHERN MARSH ORCHID; PYRAMIDAL ORCHID; BEE ORCHID; YELLOW RATTLE; ROUND-LEAVED WINTERGREEN; HOUSE SPARROW; COMMON TERN; BLACK-HEADED GULL; LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL; HERRING GULL; LINNET; GOLDFINCH; LITTLE OWL; WHITETHROAT; WILLOW WARBLER; SEDGE WARBLER; PIED WAGTAIL; STARLING; REDSHANK; CURLEW; OYSTERCATCHER; HERON; SHELDUCK; KESTREL; CARRION CROW; MAGPIE; MEADOW PIPIT; SWIFT; HEDGE SPARROW; BUTTERFLIES AND MOTHS SEEN INCLUDE: COMMON BLUE; SMALL HEATH; SIX SPOT BURNETT; GATEKEEPER; RED ADMIRAL; SMALL TORTOISESHELL; SMALL SKIPPER; SMALL HEATH; MEADOW BROWN; SMALL WHITE; GREEN VEINED WHITE; NATTERJACK TOAD.

Walk two: 13th July 2014: Hightown Station to Freshfield Station – 4.7 miles

Tim: 'Do you remember the many afternoons spent walking along Fisherman's Path, following the pinewoods through Massam's Slack and onto the shore between Freshfield and Ainsdale. Mum would have her *Illustrations of The British Flora* by W. H. Fitch and W. G. Smith in tandem with the *Handbook of The British Flora* by George Bentham and Sir J. D. Hooker (she would hand colour the illustrations and date them in the book), and dad his 35mm Ilford Sportsman camera. We would have open spaces and places to explore as well as things to collect.

Memories are created out of such experiences and shaped by time. They are reinforced, embellished, never quite forgotten and always building, one upon another; layers of memories.

When I was about ten, I was adventurous, a little headstrong and far too sure of myself. More dangerously, I was old enough to believe I could explore, yet be safe. In this dune system, paths are everywhere and to a raw ten-year old the landscape was huge and identical whichever way you looked; and at ten who wants a path anyway? Even today finding a spot you earmarked for re-visiting at a later date is unusually difficult. So I got lost, really lost, hopelessly lost, lost for a full day - and at ten that's an eternity.'

John: The literary giant Nathaniel Hawthorne strode these same dunes during his time as American consul in Liverpool, and maybe steered Herman Melville through pipe smoke and advice to the shores of genius that lie in *Moby Dick*, who knows?

Some experts suggest Hawthorne hated his time here.

If true, that's something I could never let pass ... how can the dunes and sands not grab you? How can you not be impressed by the scale of the place, the isolation that seems to actively resist permanent structures?

The remains of a few shipwrecks, like the skeletons of beached dinosaurs, are all that seem to last for any length of time on the sands.'

13TH JULY. STARTED 10.30 AM AT HIGHTOWN STATION PASSING ROUND FORMBY POINT AND FINISHED 4.00 PM AT FRESHFIELD STATION. WEATHER WARM AGAIN (22 DEGREES), CLOUDLESS SKY, NO WIND, BRIGHT SUNSHINE. SOAPWORT; BUTTERCUP; MEADOW RUE; MARE'S TAIL; ISLE OF MAN CABBAGE; HEDGE MUSTARD; SEA RADISH; SEA ROCKET; HAIRY BITTER CRESS; SEA-KALE; WILD MIGNONETTE; WELD; HIMALAYAN BALSAM; YELLOW-WORT; MUGWORT; RED CAMPION; SEA CAMPION; BLADDER CAMPION; SEA SANDWORT; SPEAR-LEAVED ORACHE; SEA BEET; SEA PURSLANE; DOVE'S-FOOT CRANE'S BILL; RESTHARROW; RED CLOVER; HOP TREFOIL; HARE'S-FOOT CLOVER; TUFTED VETCH; SMOOTH TARE; MEADOW VETCHLING; SEA PEA; RIBBED MELILOT; BIRD'S-FOOT TREFOIL; KIDNEY VETCH; FIELD ROSE; DEWBERRY; SILVERWEED; MEADOW SWEET; BROAD-LEAVED WILLOWHERB; ROSEBAY WILLOWHERB; PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE; SEA SPURGE; SWEET CICELY; ANGELICA; FENNEL; SEA HOLLY; WILD CARROT; BROAD-LEAVED DOCK; SORREL; YELLOW LOOSESTRIFE; COMMON CENTAURY; SEASIDE CENTAURY; HEDGE BINDWEED; EYEBRIGHT; YELLOW BARTSIA; RED BARTSIA; SELFHEAL; GREEN ALKANET; VIPER'S BUGLOSS; HOUND'S TONGUE; COMFREY; LADY'S BEDSTRAW; TEASEL; RAGWORT; GOLDEN ROD; FLEABANE; BLUE FLEABANE; SCENTLESS MAYWEED; SPEAR THISTLE; CREEPING THISTLE; KNAPWEED; BURDOCK; GOATSBEARD; CAT'S-EAR HAWKWEED; HAREBELL; YELLOW RATTLE; DUNE HELLEBORINE; MARSH HELLEBORINE; PYRAMIDAL ORCHID; BEE ORCHID; EARLY MARSH ORCHID; GRASS-OF-PARNASSUS; SOUTHERN MARSH ORCHID;

COASTAL HEDGE BINDWEED; BROOKWEED; POPPY; EVENING PRIMROSE; PRICKLY SALTWORT; CARLINE THISTLE; MONBRETIA; CLEAVERS; BURNET ROSE; WOOD SAGE; WILD STRAWBERRY; WILD THYME; EARLY FORGET-ME-NOT; WILD PARSNIP. BUTTERFLIES SEEN: SMALL WHITE; GREEN VEINED WHITE; GATEKEEPER; COMMA; DARK GREEN FRITILLARY; GRAYLING; RED ADMIRAL; SMALL TORTOISESHELL; SIX SPOT BURNETT; SPECKLED WOOD; LARGE HEATH; SMALL SKIPPER; MEADOW BROWN. ALSO SEEN: EMPEROR DRAGONFLY AND COMMON GREEN GRASSHOPPER. BIRDS SEEN OR HEARD INCLUDE: MISTLE THRUSH; SHELLDUCK; OYSTERCATCHER; BLACK-HEADED GULL; HERRING GULL; LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL; LINNET; GOLDFINCH; BLACKCAP; WILLOW WARBLER; STOCK DOVE; JAY; MAGPIE; ROOK; CARRION CROW; SKYLARK; MEADOW PIPIT; WHITETHROAT; KESTREL; RAVEN; SPARROWHAWK; PIED WAGTAIL; CHIFF CHAFF; TREE CREEPER; COAL TIT; COMMON TERN; REED BUNTING; SWIFT; HOUSE MARTIN; STARLING.

Walk three: 19th July 2014: Freshfield Station to Ainsdale Station – 4.4 miles

Tim: Layered memories of the Sefton Coast have built up from each of my visits over the period of my life, lately separated by prolonged periods of real time, yet stacked up together to produce a seamless continuity of imagined time.

Taking home an oiled Guillemot from the Alt Estuary, attempting to clean it up with soft detergent and feeding it fish of various types; stroking a windblown and exhausted Little Stint by the boat yard at Hightown; telephoning that sage of birding in the North West, Eric Hardy, on coming across a Black Tern and Spoonbill, then seeing them reported in his column in the Liverpool Daily Post; being shat upon by over 5,000 Pink-footed Geese whilst on my bike birdwatching around the Flea Moss lanes; more recently seeing my first Great-white Egret coming into roost at the marina in Southport along with over forty Little Egrets on a cold February evening. These are more than memories and, like being lost in the dunes, they are perceptible in who I am today.

John: Pink-footed Geese darken October skies in staggering numbers – their calls are ingrained in the subconscious of anyone who has lived here for any length of time.

They spend their days commuting from the safety of roosting sites out on the Alt and Ribble estuaries, where no fox can catch them unawares on the open sand and mud, to the rich peaty fields of the Lancashire mosslands that surround the dune system.

But they'll still go back to Iceland to breed, leaving a vacuum in grey skies that is filled each spring with Swallows and Swifts, albeit in numbers that diminish each year.

Mike: I remember when I was a kid, I used to spend many days searching the dunes for Natterjack Toads. Smaller than the common toad, what it lacks in size, it more than makes up for with a loud rasping croak that echoes around the dunes on spring nights, as the males go in search of a mate. It is the nosiest amphibian in Europe and

its ratcheting call has brought it two local nicknames: the Birkdale Nightingale and the Bootle Organ. I remember these sounds very clearly. The Natterjack's voice is a more-than-human sound that is 'of the earth', but that reaches to the stars.'

John: A chorus of Natterjacks – “Birkdale Nightingales” or “Bootle Organs”, depending on your neighbourhood loyalties, is almost primeval on a mild and cloudy spring night.

It is certainly eerie.

The sound is as inseparable from this coast as the Marram Grass that binds the dunes, or the skittering trails left behind by startled Sand Lizards on hot May mornings.

To lose the chorus would be unthinkable.

As we walked, Jake would be making notes. Each evening, he would begin writing poems which he would then read to us the next day as we meandered through the dunes.

Jake: 'The the Natterjack Toads or Bootle Organs that I describe in this poem are as much a part of the story of this coast as wartime Operation Starfish (the lighting of dummy fires north of Liverpool to divert German bombs away from the important docks and factories on the Mersey) was'.

Bootle Organ

Let the sun stub out the day,
darkness grab us in its vice.

Put a spark to the pyre, lads;
the dance of flame on creosote.

Cut the cable to the city, lads;
wear the night like a cloak.

Make yourself a Natterjack, lads;
belly to the dunes.

Luftwaffe tear through paper dusk;
embers glow in eyes of toads.

Let this replica city rush
and rise to meet them, lads.

The lick of bindweed burning;
the city's pulse in your throat.

Stay low, lads, stay starfished;
stay silent and wait.

They'll be gone as the Bootle Organs
go up like sirens.

John: 'I find that the wild flowers draw you in as the days lengthen – dune slacks full to bursting with a dizzying array of species, some extremely rare, yet flourishing in this incredible eco-system.

Trying to put a name to them all is overwhelming – their life stories luring you off again into other spheres.

But seeing them in flower afresh each year is like meeting up with old friends. Evening Primrose trumpets yellow everywhere in the dunes from midsummer into late autumn, yet its origins are in the New World – seeds came over in ballast on ships from North America.

American GIs arriving in the North West in WW2. Evening Primrose. The same.'

19TH JULY. STARTED 10.30 AM AT FRESHFIELD STATION AND FINISHED 4.00 PM AT AINSDALE STATION. WEATHER WARM AGAIN (22 DEGREES), BUT DARK, GREY, THREATENING SKIES ALONG THE COAST; NO WIND, HEAVY ATMOSPHERE – THE PROMISE OF RAIN. SEA BUCKTHORN; EVENING PRIMROSE; COMMON CENTAURY; SEASIDE CENTAURY; KNOTTED PEARLWORT; EARLY MARSH ORCHID; LESSER CELENDINE; PYRAMIDAL ORCHID; PYRAMIDAL ORCHID; BEE ORCHIDS; MARSH HELLEBORINE; DUNE HELLEBORINE; LESSER SPEARWORT; WATERCRESS; WELD; GRASS-OF-PARNASSUS; BITING STONECROP; TORMENTIL; EVERLASTING PEA; REST HARROW; BIRD'S-FOOT TREFOIL; RED CLOVER; ROUGH CLOVER; SEA STORKSBILL; SEA SPURGE; HIMALAYAN BALSAM; DUNE PANSY; ROSEBAY WILLOWHERB; GREAT WILLOWHERB; BROAD-LEAVED WILLOWHERB; PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE; MARSH PENNYWORT; SEA HOLLY; ROUND-LEAVED WINTERGREEN; DEW BERRY; HOUND'S TONGUE; SELF HEAL; WATERMINT; COMMON TOADFLAX; RIBWORT PLANTAIN; YARROW; RAGWORT; BLUE FEABANE; SPEAR THISTLE; CREEPING THISTLE; YELLOW RATTLE; KIDNEY VETCH; JAPANESE ROSE; WOODY NIGHTSHADE; CREEPING WILLOW; MARRAM GRASS; RED FESCUE; SAND SEDGE. ALSO SEEN: SEA POTATOE; SAND MASON; COMMON CRAB; SHORE CRAB; RAZOR SHELLS. ALSO SEEN: COMMON DARTER; COMMON BLUE; GRAYLING; GATEKEEPER; MEADOW BROWN; GREEN-VEINED WHITE; CINNABAR MOTH CATERPILLAR; DARK GREEN FRITILLARY. ALSO SEEN: NATTERJACK TOAD; RED SQUIRREL; BAR-TAILED GODWIT; COMMON TERN; SANDWICH TERN; SWIFT; SWALLOW; LINNET; OYSTERCATCHER; CORMORANT; BLACK-HEADED GULL; HOUSE SPARROW; GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL; LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL; WHITETHROAT; CARRION CROW.

Walk four: 20th July 2014 - Ainsdale Station to the RSPB Centre at Marshside, Southport

Robert: The landscape invites us to look down, at, or into the minutiae of detail in plant life, as well as immersing ourselves in the open sky and engulfing seascape. We train our ears on the difference in soundscape of birds and insects, masking the low frequency sound-bed of the waves and wind.'

John: I crawl around on my hands and knees, dampness and cold ebbing into my joints, in search of Petalwort on cold winter days, just as collectors driven by a fascination for mosses did in Victorian times.

The search for this tiny lower plant is all engrossing, a planet shrunk to a few millimetres of dune earth, a world in miniature, yet you can feel the hunt still developing into a towering obsession.

Robert: I find that scale is incredibly important to the way in which we experience this landscape. The seascape offers visual and aural perspectives which are vast and uninterrupted in comparison to constant variations in sound and vision of the urban milieu to which it is so close. And this is clearly part of our attraction to it. The seasonal flocking of humans to the shoreline since the advent of tourism has been essentially sensory in nature.

Tim: Memories: when I'm not here, in my mind, I can still taste the salt in the sea air of the Sefton Coast; pick up the aroma of the sweetness of the pinewoods and feel the change underfoot as I move across the bomb rubble (tipped to act as erosion protection), onto firmer sand and then sinking mud and out towards the incoming tide at Burbo Bank; hear the 'wink wink' of individual Pink-feet on a still, frozen early morning and the undercurrent of low drumming conversation as they amass in the feeding fields behind the sand banks that provide a safe haven for their nightly roosts; the lower pitched 'knut' of tightly packed feeding Knots which flock together with Black and Bar-tailed Godwits, Dunlin, Sanderling, Grey and Ringed Plover and the odd migratory surprise; wind-rush through marram; gun fire from the firing range at Great Altcar; the baleful 'clink clink' of the folded mainsail against the mast supports of the boats anchored in the Alt.

Robert: We visit the coast to inhale the air, to smell the salt, to experience light in a manner that is extraordinary and takes us out of our everyday existence. We visit to listen to the rolling of the waves on the shoreline, to feel the wind in our hair. Each of these responses to the sensory affects of the environment has become part of the socially constructed set of signifiers relating to how we interact with our surroundings. Through our interaction with the shoreline we deliberately place ourselves in an altered perspective with the world, into a different sense of scale, based in a different light, immersed in a different sound world. In doing so we also move into a different sense of time, we tap into the rhythms of the rolling waves, we let the sounds of nature slow us in a physical and mental entrainment.'

Tim: Memories: altered perspectives; storms, fog, wind, rain, baking hot uncomfortable days, days when even the sea at Southport froze; spring and neap tides, birds photographed or just seen, lists made, sunrises, sunsets, night forays, subtle shifts of light over short stretches of time and profound changes of the shape of the restless shore over longer periods of time.

WALKING THROUGH THE SANDS OF TIME: 20TH JULY. STARTED 10.00 AM AT AINSDALE STATION AND FINISHED 4.00 PM AT WELD ROAD CAR PARK WHERE A MINIBUS COLLECTED THE WALKERS AND TOOK THEM TO THE RSPB RESERVE AT MARSHSIDE, SOUTHPORT. WEATHER WARM (23 DEGREES), LITTLE WIND AGAIN, BRIGHT AND SUNNY. CLUB RUSH; SEA MAYWEED; SEA BEET; COMMON SPIKE-RUSH; SLENDER SPIKE-RUSH; FLAT SEDGE; BLUNT FLOWERED-RUSH; SPEAR-LEAVED ORACHE; SEA PLANTAIN; SEA ASTER; THRIFT; MARSH SAMPHIRE; HARE'S-FOOT CLOVER; SEA-BLITE; SEA BUCKTHORN; MEADOW CRANESBILL; RESTHARROW; WILD RADISH; SANICLE; SEA HOLLY; BEE ORCHID; COMMON TWAYBLADE; DUNE HELLEBORINE; MARSH HELLEBORINE; COMMON SPOTTED ORCHID; PYRAMIDAL ORCHID; EARLY MARSH ORCHID; ROUND-LEAVED WINTERGREEN; GRASS OF PARNASSUS; YELLOW-WORT; FLEABANE; YELLOW RATTLE; COMMON CENTAURY; SEASIDE CENTAURY; EYEBRIGHT; RED BARTSIA; RAGWORT; GOLDEN ROD; SPEAR THISTLE; Knapweed; HAREBELL; EVENING PRIMROSE; RIBBED MELILOT; BIRD'S-FOOT TREFOIL; KIDNEY VETCH; JAPANESE ROSE; DEWBERRY; ROSEBAY WILLOWHERB; SEA SPURGE; ANGELICA; FENNEL; ASPARAGUS; COMMON STORK'S-BILL; KNOTTED PEARLWORT; MARSH PENNYWORT; YARROW; WATERMINT. ALSO SEEN: SEA POTATO; DOG WHELK; MERMAID'S PURSE; RAZOR SHELL; GOOSE BARNACLES; SMOOTH NEWT; ASPARAGUS BEETLE; NORTHERN DUNE TIGER BEETLE; SIX SPOT BURNETT MOTH: GRAYLING; GATEKEEPER; DARK GREEN FRITILLARY; GREEN-VEINED WHITE; LARGE WHITE; SMALL SKIPPER; SMALL HEATH; MEADOW BROWN; EMPEROR DRAGONFLY; COMMON DARTER; BLUE-TAILED DAMSELFLY. BIRDS SEEN OR HEARD INCLUDE: BLACK-TAILED GODWIT; DUNLIN; RINGED PLOVER; KESTREL; WHITETHROAT; REED BUNTING; LINNET; SNIPE; AVOCET; BUZZARD; KINGFISHER; RUFF; COMMON SANDPIPER; LITTLE EGRET; HERON; SWIFT; SWALLOW; HERRING GULL; BLACK-HEADED GULL; GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL; MAGPIE; HOUSE SPARROW; CARRION CROW; CANADA GOOSE; COOT; MOORHEN.

Concluding reflections:

For me, pilgrimage is about embarking on a journey of discovery that takes me out of myself; it is not an inward looking process. I often walk in the footsteps of others and usually with natural historians, sound artists, photographers and local people, because they have different things to tell me about the landscape we meander through. And meander is the correct term to use for this slow walking. I allow plenty of time to stop, talk, listen, backtrack, share memories and slow down.

Most of my walks or pilgrimages are relatively local and have some sort of personal significance. This may have something to do with the knowledge that it is becoming increasingly impossible to disconnect the idea of pilgrimage from modern day capitalism – the shrine of money and commerce. Pilgrimage ‘package holidays’ are now offered to a variety of destinations, for example, a ten-night walk along the

Camino de Santiago or 'Way of St James' - a collection of pilgrimage routes from all over Europe to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in north-western Spain where the remains of the saint are thought to be buried (offered by 'Pura Aventura')²⁰.

I suggest that *meandering* and *field-work* undertaken on local and personal pilgrimages, can create a space to consider living in and experiencing the world we are accustomed to differently, developing within each of us a sense of embodied identity. I have organized a number of 'local' 'pilgrimage walks' (each one accompanied by up to thirty people) - pilgrimages that were inherently sociable, their meandering format inviting conversation and the sharing of knowledge even (or perhaps especially) among strangers. 'It is only after walking in a landscape that I can learn to see, and to sense, that landscape through my body, for the act of walking is sensing that landscape at a human pace'²¹; and we must first learn to trust in our senses (in my experience, most natural historians with good field craft do exactly this); but we should also recognise that our 'sense' of the world is enriched by the discovery and accumulation of scientific knowledge and personal narratives; and that our participation *within* the landscape/soundscape can be honed and deepened by these discoveries.²² ... and discovery, I argue, is key to the idea and experience of pilgrimage.

These pilgrimages are 'phenomenological and involve the 'gathering of synaesthetic, material and social sensory experiences as they unfold ... in the duration of the walk'²³. After each walk, I share the lists of flora and fauna encountered with my fellow walkers – meditative 'shrines' to the specificity of place and the 'sensuous singularity of things'. As a human being with a sense of ethical responsibility, I hope that my work might 'offer a linguistic mode that holds ... potential for tuning us to environmental ethics in the Anthropocene.'²⁴ We need to begin to see and experience flora and fauna not as an unlimited and infinite human resource but as entities in their own right, entities which sense, react, grow, care, share a 'sense' of community and feel pain. We need to release ourselves 'from the dichotomy of regarding nature either as a combination of *processes* or *things*; we need to recognize that nature is a communion of subjective, collaborative beings that organize and experience their own lives.'²⁵ I would suggest that the idea and experience of embodied and *conversive pilgrimage* can enhance and expand the ecological imaginary in such a way that we might be open to considering non-human agency and subjectivity. Perhaps this is an impossible task, but that, to me, is what pilgrimage is about; about challenge of one kind or another, and like all good pilgrimages, the 'goal' may be unobtainable – it is what we learn and share on the journey that matters. Pilgrimages are 'not to be taken lightly' ... they can open us up to 'new possibilities as well as effect an emotional and spiritual purification'.²⁶ A pilgrimage can collapse time and space; develop creative non-hierarchical rhizomatic networks of shared thinking and ideas. It can make us feel more alive; more a part of the world in every sense and not separate from it. It can be a celebration of the joy of being ... and being alive on the earth.

¹ WALK (Walking, Art, Landskip and Knowledge) is a research centre at the University of Sunderland exploring the way we creatively experience the world as we walk through it.

² Robert Macfarlane, 'Rites of way: behind the pilgrimage revival', *The Guardian*, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/jun/15/rites-of-way-pilgrimage-walks>, 2012

-
- ³ Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings and Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 157.
- ⁴ Peter Marren, *Rainbow Dust*, (London, Square Peg, 2015), 130.
- ⁵ Kay Syrad, *Chris Drury, Silent Spaces*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1998), 6.
- ⁶ David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, (New York, Pantheon Books, 1995), 76.
- ⁷ Peter Marren, *Rainbow Dust*, 130.
- ⁸ Mike Collier ‘Picturing Language Back into the Land’, in Mike Collier, (Ed.), *Ghosts of the Restless Shore*. (Sunderland and Sefton: AEN and Sefton Council, 2015), 90
- ⁹ Robert Macfarlane, ‘A Counter Desecration Phrasebook’ in Di Robson and Gareth Evans (eds.) *Towards Re-Enchantment* (London, Art Events, 2010), 115.
- ¹⁰ James Harpur, *The Pilgrim Journey: A History of Pilgrimage in the Western World* (Oxford: Lion Books, 2016), 6.
- ¹¹ Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*. (London: Verso, 2011), 5.
- ¹² Wikipedia, Kumbh Mela. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kumbh_Mela, 2018. 6th May 2018
- ¹³ Carol McKay, ‘Walking otherwise: one foot after another’. Paper presented to the AAH Conference, Milton Keynes, 29 – 31st March 2012.
- ¹⁴ Ibid
- ¹⁵ Henry David Thoreau, *Walking* (Thomaston, Tilbury House Publishers, 2017), 1.
- ¹⁶ Robert Macfarlane, ‘Rites of way: behind the pilgrimage revival’, *The Guardian*, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/jun/15/rites-of-way-pilgrimage-walks>, 2012. 12th December 2017
- ¹⁷ Jean Sprackland, ‘Introduction’ in Mike Collier, (Ed.), *Ghosts of the Restless Shore*. (Sunderland and Sefton: AEN and Sefton Council, 2015), 5
- ¹⁸ Mike Collier, (Ed.), *Ghosts of the Restless Shore*, 30-107
- ¹⁹ Kaz Oishi ‘Two Recollective Journeys to the North: Bashō and Wordsworth’ in Mike Collier (Ed.) *Wordsworth and Bashō: Walking Poets*. (Sunderland and Grasmere: AEN and the Wordsworth Trust, 2014), 51
- ²⁰ Pura Adventura, 2018. Camino de Santiago: The Way, our way. <https://www.pura-aventura.com/spain/camino-de-santiago>. 6th May 2018
- ²¹ Christopher Tilley, ‘Walking the Past in the Present’ in Árnason, A; Ellison, N; Vergunst, J and Whitehouse, A (Eds.) *Landscapes Beyond Land* (Oxford: Berghahn Books 2012), 29.
- ²² David Abram, *Becoming Animal*. 307
- ²³ Christopher Tilley, ‘Walking the Past in the Present’, 29.
- ²⁴ Alan Macpherson, ‘Sensuous Singularity: Hamish Fulton’s Cairngorm Walk-Texts’ in *Critical Survey*, Volume 29 Number 1, Spring 2017: 12.
- ²⁵ Matthew Hall, *Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany*. (SUNY: Albany, New York, 2011), 169.

²⁶ James Harpur, *The Pilgrim Journey: A History of Pilgrimage in the Western World*, 7.