

Introduction

Places and landscapes change. Most of this change takes place too slowly for us to comprehend; a gradual, creeping alteration of our surroundings that seeps into our consciousness as the nagging doubts that haunt our memories. It is only when sudden, dramatic change occurs that we become alert; the jarring alterations to familiar landscapes perhaps sufficient to stimulate great sadness or raise an angry cry of loss.

We tolerate the changes to the landscapes within which we live because, more often than not, we do not see them; and we do not see them because we do not look. Landscape is a backdrop to our lives, a canvas that falls beyond the focus of our gaze. It is incidental, additional and over-familiar. Our focus has been shortened by technology, by the security of food and warmth, and by the increasingly urban-centred nature of our lives. It is only when we can spend significant periods of time with a landscape that we can begin to look properly and truly see the changes that are taking place within it.

FROM FIELD AND FEN

This book is the result of looking, of spending a decade within a few small patches of landscape and of becoming attuned to the shifts and fluxes that would otherwise have been missed. It is a book about feeling and understanding that moves with the seasons and responds to the external pressures that are an inevitable consequence of the increasing demands on our land.

A consequence of spending so much time in these landscapes has been a shift in the way that I write about them. What began as simple descriptions of what was seen, and sometimes felt, has evolved to include a more moral narrative. The familiarity that I have developed with these scraps of landscape, from the scrubby corners of favourite fields to the twisted shapes of individual trees, has intensified my feelings. I no longer simply care about these landscapes in general terms; instead I care in particular terms. It is no longer the loss of a tree but the loss of a particular tree, one I have come to know as an individual, that pains me.

Attention to the detail of a landscape delivers increased appreciation and greater respect, something long commented upon by deep ecologists and those fortunate enough to have spent time within landscapes of such scale that detailed observation becomes a necessary mechanism for survival. Within my own, rather smaller landscape, I have become observant in more than one

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sense of the word. I have become alert to the landscape and its component parts but in a way that suggests some spiritual connection. My respect for this landscape requires an adherence to its rules – its cycles, processes and boundaries.

There is a good chance that you spend time within a landscape, or part of a landscape. No matter how small that patch, I would urge you to spend some of that time *with* the landscape and free from other distractions. Take the time to stand and watch, to immerse yourself within your surroundings. Just maybe, you may find some connection that will prompt you to look harder and see that landscape in a different way.