

eco/art/scot/land

Nick Reeves

AWEinspiring!

Award for Arts, Water and the Environment

« Sanctuary 2015

Edinburgh's Forest Ecosystem – Forest Planet »

Anne-Marie Culhane: Earthwalking

By Chrisfremantle

Editor's Intro:

Anne-Marie Culhane creates events, performances and long term projects that invite people into an active and inquiring relationship with each other and the earth. She works as artist, activist and collaborator across a range of disciplines.

Culhane conceived of *Earthwalking* through an Exeter Enquires residency co-ordinated by [Arts & Culture at the University of Exeter](#) funded by Arts Council England. The residency enable Culhane to develop a working relationship with [Tim Lenton, Professor of Climate Change and Earth System Science](#), [Dr. Luke Mander](#) and [Tom Powell](#), researchers in [Earth System Science at University of Exeter](#). *Earthwalking* was a two day 'choreographed journey' with overnight camping along 10 miles of coastline in Devon, from Beer to Sidmouth, that aimed to honour different ways of knowing and experiencing the world, offering different perspectives on land, sea and change. *Earthwalking* involved 33 participants from a range of backgrounds (scientists, artists, curators, administrators, auditors, researchers, playwright, writers, bird watchers) with ages up to the eldest at 75 years old. Twenty-one of these responded to a public invitation to take part.

EARTHWALKING

Earthwalking aimed to bring something of the feeling of the wilder edge of our land – and a wider sense of community – into our conscious reflection on how we live and act in these times.



Earthwalking. Photo: Steve Brown

The idea of a walk was seeded in an early conversation in the residency. A common thread in all our life stories was that playing, exploring or walking in the landscape was a key motivation for inspiring us with the passion for the work that we do. Looking around the Earth System office, on the 7th floor of an overheated concrete building in the city, I realized how far removed we all were from the places that nourish and inspire us. I located our continuing discussions out on campus, on the coast, or in the little shed at the [Exeter Community Garden](#), observing the subtle shifts in how we communicated in different contexts. In particular, walking outdoors changed the rhythm of conversation, other elements (weather, terrain, observations) together with silence and pauses become an integral part of the exchange. There was more ground for possibility.

My impulse was to continue these inspiring conversations and to share the questions emerging with others in an outdoor, journey setting. The [Jurassic Coast](#) is close to Exeter. It offers a frontline, where stories of change are played out almost in double-time on the crumbling and lively island edge. The land is constantly slipping and eroding and yet the exposed rocks here draw us backwards into the story of the planet, into deep time over many millions of years. I wanted to demonstrate that you don't need to travel to the ends of the earth to bear witness to the changing climate. Tim's work is deeply influenced by his relationship with [James Lovelock](#) and the [Gaia Theory](#), which offers a story of the world as a self-regulating, evolving complex system. There have been many people, past and present, inhabiting this coastline (including James Lovelock) and it felt important that some of these people and their stories be part of Earthwalking.



Earthwalking. Photo: Steve Brown

13 July, 11.30am

I invited Tim Lenton to create the first intervention on our walk. He asked us to sit or lie on the grass overlooking the ocean while he read an Invocation to Gaia, written for the event, where he took on the persona of a centurian grandmother earth and wrote in the first person:

"Take your pulse – feel your heart beat. Imagine that each of your heartbeats took a whole year, not a fleeting second – then your lifespan would begin to approach mine."

He told us that in her 30s:

"Lines began to appear on my skin, marking out the great plates that make up my surface, and slowly they began to move, at the rate your fingernails grow."

"..... only three minutes ago, on this little island you started the industrial revolution"

Our bodies, the earth, this place.

13 July, 12.30pm

I invited people to walk in silence down a steep path through the [Hooken Undercliff](#), a 10-acre area of land that, one night in March 1790, slipped away from the high chalk cliffs towards the sea. Fishermen reported coming out and finding their crab pots above sea level, as the scale of the slump caused a reef to push up out at sea. There is something unique about walking through this new land – a green oasis with its birdsong, weave of plants and trees, sheltered by chalk pinnacles.



Earthwalking. Photo: Steve Brown

The whole project enhanced my sense of smell, sound and vision (participant)

13 July, 2.00pm

[Dr Ceri Lewis](#), a marine biologist met us at the shoreline and enthused about her love for the small soft and shelled creatures of the sea that she had gathered from the rock pools. She explained the plight of their calcium shells in an acidifying ocean, and her work to protect these marine invertebrates from marine pollution and climate change. We do simple experiments, blowing down straws into coloured seawater to see our breaths change the ph.



Earthwalking. Photo: Steve Brown

At moments throughout the day, we hear from Dr Luke Mander who shared spontaneous geological observations, as we walked West back through time.

13 July, 3.30pm

Chris Woodruff, an East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty land manager relayed stories of complexity, change and human conflict catalysed by the contradiction at the heart of his work – conserving the natural beauty of a place made remarkable by its dynamic nature.

I felt a strong sense that we were somehow touching base with some quite fundamental things. For my part, the event will serve as a real and important reference point (Academic collaborator)

13 July, 7pm

Goonlas, a Cornish sea song started our evening session. This is an adaptation from the ongoing Storm Songs project by Natalia Ernstman, initiated earlier in the year with people from Porthleven in Cornwall, creating new verses and sea songs with communities, to mark our changing relationship to the sea. For *Earthwalking* a new English verse was created using words from local accounts of the Branscombe storm of 2014. Branscombe is one of the places where tensions over whether to rebuild or retreat from the incoming sea are playing out. The song was followed by a space where the walkers themselves brought their varied and insightful reflections, questions, ideas, song, dance and poetry to share with the group around the fire.



Earthwalking. Photo: Steve Brown

14 July, 9am

I opened the morning walk by leading a Field Sensing session. This involves slowing down our movements in order to sense inner and outer landscapes more acutely. I chose to locate the Field Sensing at Berry Fort, the site of a Neolithic coastal settlement and Iron Age Fort.

A moment to connect to the landscape in a non-intellectual way
... I found it very relaxing, spiritual and energizing (Participant)



Earthwalking. Photo: Steve Brown

14 July, 11.30am

At Weston Plats, Tom Powell, a food systems specialist selected extracts from aural histories of coastal cliff farmers collected by the [Branscombe Project](#), to illustrate the growing cycles of the 'plat' farmers, who farmed these sheltered, marginal edgelands over centuries until the 1960s. He scaled this up, to share reflections on today's global challenges of food, population and our massive harvesting of biomass. Huddled in a renovated stone byre, small groups of walkers listen to artist and local smallholder Laura Williams recounting a moving personal story of resilience and adaptation. Her land, in a valley close to the coast, had slipped in 2012, covering the area earmarked for their house and causing the release of shoals of farmed carp away from their land down the valley and into the sea.



Earthwalking. Photo: Steve Brown

This mingling of the past and present pointed towards the future and again opened up discussions about the sustainability of our eco systems. At no time during *Earthwalking* was anyone told what to think and yet thoughts and discussions naturally and organically flowed into these areas because of the style and structure of the project. In this way the project proved itself to be in line with its own ethics and was in and of itself a sustainable and organic art piece. (Participant)

14 July, 4.00pm

After a further two hours walking including an unrelenting final ascent and a spontaneous dip in the sea, our journey ended at the Old Dissenters Meeting Hall in Sidmouth with its inspiring history of activism (in particular Annie Leigh Brown a suffragist from the age of 17). We were greeted warmly by members of the Vision Group for Sidmouth, a collection of local sustainability campaigners eager to exchange ideas with the walkers and to share the successes and challenges of working in their community and drawing us back into the wider sense of community and action.

The experience was transformational and gave me a totally altered sense of community, the landscape and the future of both. (Participant).

Productive, in that there seemed to be a lot of fruitful, intelligent and practical exchange. And enjoyable because cake and company couldn't have been better! (Participant Vision Group for Sidmouth)

The final sentence from Tim's forthcoming publication on Earth System Science states:

Earth system considerations call for some rethinking of economics and a wider social discussion about what kind of future we want, which will engage the arts and the humanities as well as the social sciences.

I'd like to acknowledge my gratitude to Jo Salter and Emily Williams ([Kaleider](#)) and to Fern Smith and [Lucy Neal](#), who have advised on *Earthwalking*. This blog also includes extracts from an interview with Kaleider.

Anne-Marie Culhane:
<http://www.amculhane.co.uk>

Anne-Marie's passion for bringing together different disciplines and perspectives on place started with a self-initiated residency on Arthur's Seat, Edinburgh in 2001-2002 funded by Scottish Natural Heritage, Historic Scotland and the Millenium Commission.

Further Projects include [Abundance](#) (co-created with Stephen Watts), winner of Observer Ethical Award Grassroots Category, 2010 and [Fruit Routes/Eat Your Campus](#) working with the School of the Arts & the Sustainability Unit at Loughborough University, winner Guardian University Awards Sustainable Project 2014. She has worked with National Trust, Tamar Valley AONB, Exmoor National Park, ArtsAdmin and exhibited at Bluecoat, Liverpool; National Media Museum (with Ruth Levene); Newlyn Gallery, Penzance; Castlefield Gallery, Manchester and Plymouth Art Centre and co-founded of Out of the Blue, Edinburgh. She is an associate artist with Encounters Arts and Kaleider and recently completed a commission for CCANW (Soil Cultures Residency).

This Autumn she is starting a year long participatory project [A Field of Wheat](#) with artist Ruth Levene and farmer Peter Lundgren which explores collective ownership, industrial what farming and local & global food systems. There is still time to be part of this, follow [this link](#) for more information.

Share this:



★ Like



4 bloggers like this.

This entry was posted on September 28, 2015 at 8:30 am and is filed under [Guest Blog](#), [News](#), [Project Reviews](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0 feed](#). You can [leave a response](#), or [trackback](#) from your own site.

2 Responses to “Anne-Marie Culhane: Earthwalking”

Anne-Marie Culhane: Earthwalking | The CSPA Says:

October 22, 2015 at 3:47 pm | [Reply](#)

[...] This post comes to you from EcoArtScotland [...]

Earthwalking 13-14 July 2015 – Walking the Earth Says:

December 18, 2017 at 12:37 pm | [Reply](#)

[...] For a full account and photos follow this link. Ann-Marie’s post can be found here. [...]

Leave a Reply

Enter your comment here...

This site uses Akismet to reduce spam. [Learn how your comment data is processed.](#)

[Blog at WordPress.com.](#)
[Entries \(RSS\)](#) and [Comments \(RSS\)](#).

Source: <https://ecoartscotland.net/2015/09/28/anne-marie-culhane-earthwalking/>