

Land Journey

A preamble...

The original brief:

'Curator of the Emergence land journeys. To design 2 practical walking routes for the delegates to be agreed with the mountain leaders and Emergence team. Simon will also agree the 'shape and content' for each walking day ...'

The shape of the routes came whilst walking in a small studio and thinking about the land north and south of the Dovey. I was walking the form of an ellipse. It had a certain momentum and offered openings and uncertainties, whilst keeping its integrity...I kept walking.

The approach to this brief therefore became more choreographic in its intentions than it was cartographic. The land Journey for me began as a dance and continued so throughout the physical project.

Whilst using the template of the ellipse with which to navigate and devise the routes it became obvious to me that whilst the form was changed in its exchange with the nature of the terrain and available pathways, it still offered a circularity of experience, retaining these uncertainties and openings. The openings were used as themes to introduce new and sometimes surprising elements, including the arrival and disappearance of 'visitors', who offered different narratives of the places the walkers passed through.

The elliptical designs therefore offered up gaps to let people and chaos in, and a commitment to offer something incomplete, an open-endedness. There was also a built in ambivalence in these designs, which enabled me to avoid a process of choice based on any preconceived subjective or aesthetic notion of 'beauty', guide- book convention or former experience of the places these routes passed through. The designs anticipated that the walking and navigation of the routes on the ground would involve a process of improvisation and the inevitability of contingencies. It invited walkers to collaborate on finding solutions, best routes and to make decisions on 'the hoof'.

'The ellipses are imperfect and in places incomplete, they now resemble the shape of a pair of kidneys in this body of mid Wales, the larger one to the South. The routes as they stand therefore invite the walkers to improvise their own completions and become involved in a process of collective decision- making. This will happen each day, with the intention to provoke a collaborative process within each group and the landscape itself. I imagine the decisions will be based on identifying options of terrain and duration and consensus by which the group share their desires and indicators of their physical capacities and orientations at that time.' Diary, July.

As it was, I walked each route before the Land journey began for real. Sometimes I walked just the beginning and end, sometimes the whole route...usually alone, sometimes with a friend. Each time I got lost, had to find the path on the ground again, most times I had to adjust my route in the face of closed paths, pipelines, road building, ambiguity of the map etc. I also experienced certain places that I knew differently, because I was not walking the obvious route, I liked how the ellipse was revealing the landscape to me in different, non-linear ways. Like the grammatical form, the ways occasionally seemed to trail off into silence and uncertainty.

The routes through the land, like the walkers themselves were dynamic entities...they embodied change and the uncertainty of the future. I guess the mountain guides are trained to face uncertainty and to decode the uncertain into meaningful routes...

The Land Journey in September

My rule for myself was to 'hand over' the routes and scores for each day to the walkers the night before the journey began, to invite the groups to complete the work and to remain in a quiet 'holding' role for the duration, supporting the contributors throughout, remaining 'out of sight' as far as possible. Originally I did not want to have any influence on the day-to-day functioning of the journey in any physical way.

Of course there were contingencies! And I did become involved in helping to facilitate the south route when Jenny became ill..and it was a great pleasure to witness the process of the walkers and mountain guides(I use the term 'guide' here, as was suggested by Raj). I also visited the North route walk for the wild camp as I felt it was important to keep some symmetry of engagement, again it was a real insight into the way the group had formed itself and the amazing commitment of the mountain guides to keep the vision and shape of the routes as far as possible, whilst happy to adapt to the necessities of making their own adjustments.