

'Walking to the Summit' The Story of the Emergence Land Journey.

The Tau de Ching reminds us that the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. On 1st September 2012 forty delegates to the Emergence Summit set out to walk for five days through the expanse of mid Wales, through some of the least visited parts of the country. They were plotting a circular or more precisely an elliptical route that began and finished in a field a mile or so from the Centre for Alternative Technology in Machynlleth, the venue of the conference 'Creating the Future'. Walkers chose between two walks or 'land journeys' which began and finished in the same place, one which followed a clockwise route to the North, the other travelling anti-clockwise to the South. Walkers camped each night, travelling from site to site between 10 and 16 miles daily over coast, bog, moorland and spectacular mountain ranges. The design, conceived by artist Simon Whitehead meant that each group spent the first two days walking away from one another, the third ascending the mountains of Mid Wales; Cader Idris in the North and Plynlimon in the South, and the remaining two days walking back towards one another for a final celebratory meal and sharing. The following day the walkers were joined by the remainder of the 120 delegates for a further two days of conference and the culmination of the epic nine day Emergence 2012 Summit.

Walkers were invited to meditate on a question carried inside their shoe, this question informed their hopes and expectations for the Summit or a deeper question relating to sustainability which each was committed to addressing through their life and work. The land journey was physically and emotionally challenging for all who walked it. The route drawn in the landscape was not linear. A bird's eye view would give you an upright infinity sign or number 8 symbolizing completion or infinity, a path without end or beginning, perfection. The Journey became a container for many experiences, meanings and metaphors. Was it a modern day pilgrimage to C.A.T? A unicursal labyrinth? A vision quest incorporating the four directions of the medicine wheel? A walking party providing a deep and sustained connection with the land and other fellow walkers? It became all of these at different times. It was also a work of land art with a circumference of over 100 miles. Simon Whitehead's work is about making space. As producer of the summit, I had approached Simon with a request to create a

journey that gave people space and time to truly connect with their bodies and the larger body of the earth before entering the conference at CAT. I had a sense that unless we were embodied all of the conversations could potentially come from a heady or disconnected place. My hope was to bring people together in a way that they felt connected to themselves, each other and the land *before* the conference even began. The resulting meetings and conversations might then have the possibility of being played out on a deeper somatic terrain. This might facilitate a creative process of inquiry and action rather than mere instrumental problem solving. Simon's design for the land journey also included daily visitors to the walkers from the locality; a retired Indian Film Star who met the North walk nearby Bird Rock and taught a joyous Bollywood routine with the Cader Idris range as a backdrop, a Welsh singer who met the South walk by an expanse of water and sang a traditional song of the now familiar story of the village having no water as a consequence of it being syphoned off for the industrialised midland towns, a woman with a white horse speaking a poem of the deep intelligence of the animal whilst tracing the lines on its muscles and flanks, a wilderness artist drifting the currents of the rivers or standing rock-still on a remote sandspit in the waters of Cardigan Bay. All of the visitors emerged from and returned back to the land after being asked a daily single question by the walkers. The questions arose from and the answers embedded themselves into the collective consciousness of the walkers. In this way the walkers collected information on an array of conscious and subliminal levels as they went. As one commented, she felt as if the walkers were the legs of the conference. There were daily 'tweet length' messages from the walkers, distilled from the day's experiences and relayed between the North and South group and also to the outside world to maintain contact.

Those who walked were doing something on behalf of those of us who could not be there. There was a responsibility not just to self, but to other and this, though perhaps un-named was felt by many. The act of walking created community. There were lessons learnt, at times the atmosphere was fractious and difficult, at times a feeling of being held deeply and with love. Qualified Mountain Leaders from the army led the two groups of walkers, many of whom were artists and ecologically minded folk – an experiment in humanity and conflict resolution by turns. The differences and similarities in values and behaviors echoed at every single level. Group facilitators created space under canvas each evening to

allow collective reflection on the day's events. Food artists were commissioned to prepare meals respecting and utilizing local methods and sourcing. Low air miles however swapped for land miles as the two support vehicles made daily ant-like forays to and from the walkers with food, tents, rucksacks and to pick up those needing time off to rest weary legs and feet.

And what did the walkers bring to the conference? They brought the land – beneath their fingernails and the soles of their boots. They brought an embodied experience of slow travel, communion and simplicity. They had had five days to meditate on what was important and perhaps how to communicate that to others. Outputs and outcomes are sometimes hard to measure. Yes there were meetings that evolved into dialogue which migrated into projects, all with the potential to make change. All these ripples came from tiny vibrations. The vibrations from the thousands of steps of the land journey still resonate in each of those forty bodies. These in turn, quicken and enliven each new step with the potential of bringing us closer to a future we want to live in. This might be A 'One Planet Wales', a 'Zero Carbon Britain', the 'Great Transition', the 'Great Turning', or whichever words we choose which help us to imagine the future and thereby create it.

Fern Smith May 2013

In 2013 the North route will be walked by a small 'self-organised' group as part of the project 'Re-Tracing our Steps', in 2014 plans are afoot to re-walk the South route.

The film 'Walking to the Summit' can be viewed and maps and routes for both routes downloaded at emergence-uk.com.