

WALKING WITH SITE

From embodied ritual practice to situated relationship

A non-degree-required thesis submitted to the
Master of Landscape Architecture Program
Department of Landscape Architecture by

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ABSTRACT

In landscape architecture, we work with the living world. The language we use to describe this work often relates to how we speak about relationships; we use words like agency, dynamics, boundaries, listening, relationality, and care. When speaking about how landscape architecture interacts with the more-than-human world, a notable gap in this language is consent (Morehouse, 2023). Consent frameworks provide a structure for how to engage in action between living beings (Martin, 2021). They can range in their structure and application, but they are essential for respecting autonomy and for fostering ethical interactions between living beings. We are accustomed to these frameworks in human-to-human relationships, and with imagination, they may also offer an opportunity to expand how we approach and interact with the more-than-human world. Approaching a site and its inhabitants with the intention of seeking consent before taking actions may help to raise our awareness of the living world and its abundant communication back to us. This thesis topic is theoretically centered around using the language of consent in a landscape architecture/design context in combination with a ritual walking practice as a method to realize opportunities of communication and relationship between human and more-than-human agents.

Sited at Milton Airfield in Charlottesville, Virginia, this project was conducted through 12 site visits in February through April 2025. Following an established ritual walking structure, and allowing that shape to change based on the conditions, curiosities, and observations, a relationship to site unfolds through embodied attunement. Walking only happens at the body scale, and observations made in a specific place invite in-situ interaction. Methods of walking and seeking consent are connected through shared grounding in embodied practices. Together they support the development of personal connection. Within an educational context, this method of site engagement offers rich potential for students to experience a gradual familiarity with site to develop over time. Students can integrate their experiences into the ways that think about, approach, and engage with site with an appreciation for how building relationships takes time.

DEDICATION AND THANKS

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all our teachers, both human and more-than-human.

Thank you to my advisor Brian Davis for supporting this work.
Thank you to my fellow MLA students for your comradery and friendship.
And thank you to everyone who joined me on site visits and let me borrow their cars to complete this project.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

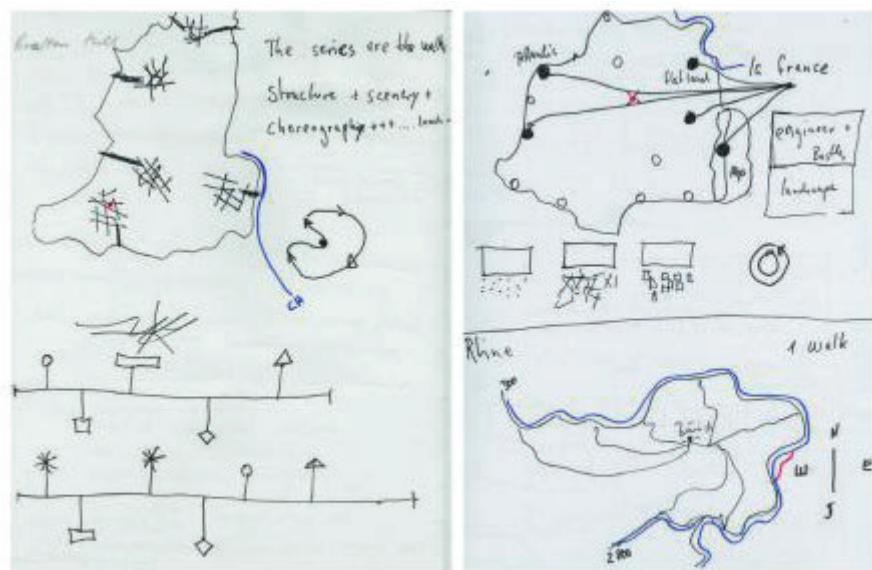
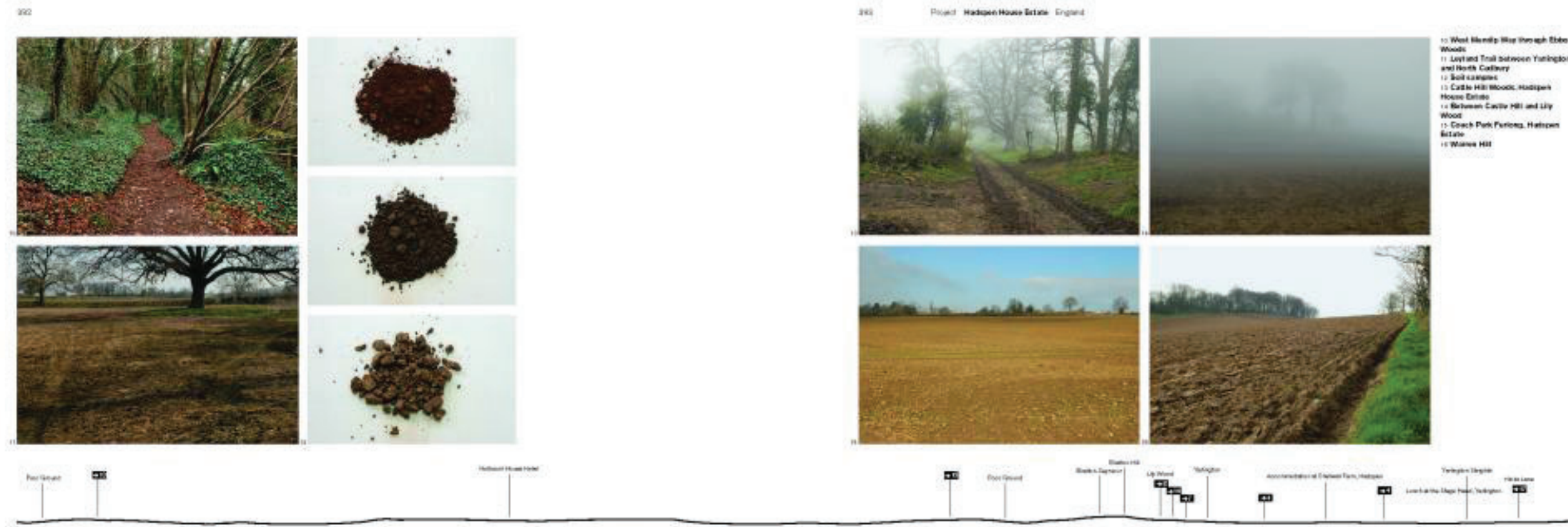
I would like to acknowledge that this project was completed on the ancestral homeland and traditional territory of the Monacan Indian Nation and I would like to pay respect to the enslaved laborers who built UVA. The place where I have been able to conduct this research and work – UVA broadly and Milton Airfield specifically – is Monacan Land. I want to express my respect to their elders and knowledge keepers – past and present. And I want to express my gratitude for the time I have been able to spend there.

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PRECEDENT REFERENCES

ALICE FOXLEY, VOGT LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

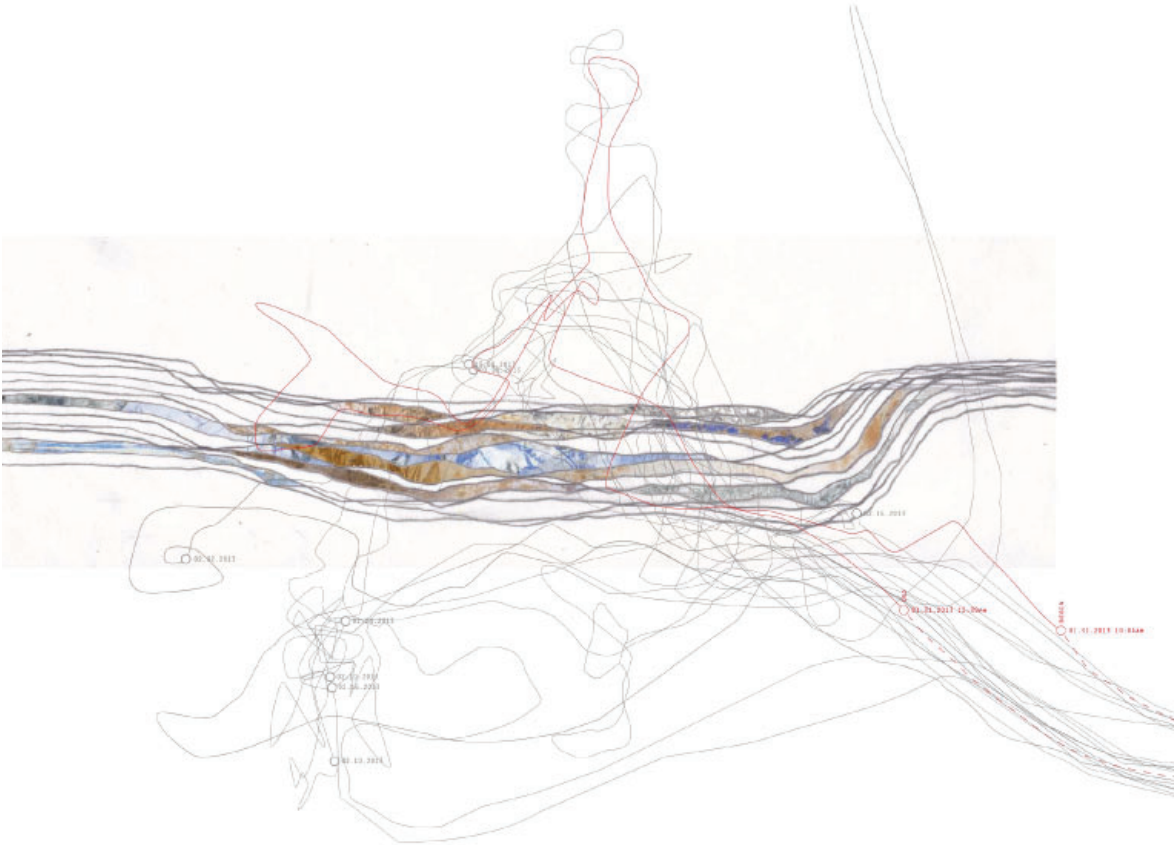


Landscape architecture practice that emphasizes extensive field and site walk to inform the research phase of their design approach. They favor sketches, photos, analog methods of making, to work through designs.

Distance & Engagement, Shape of a walk

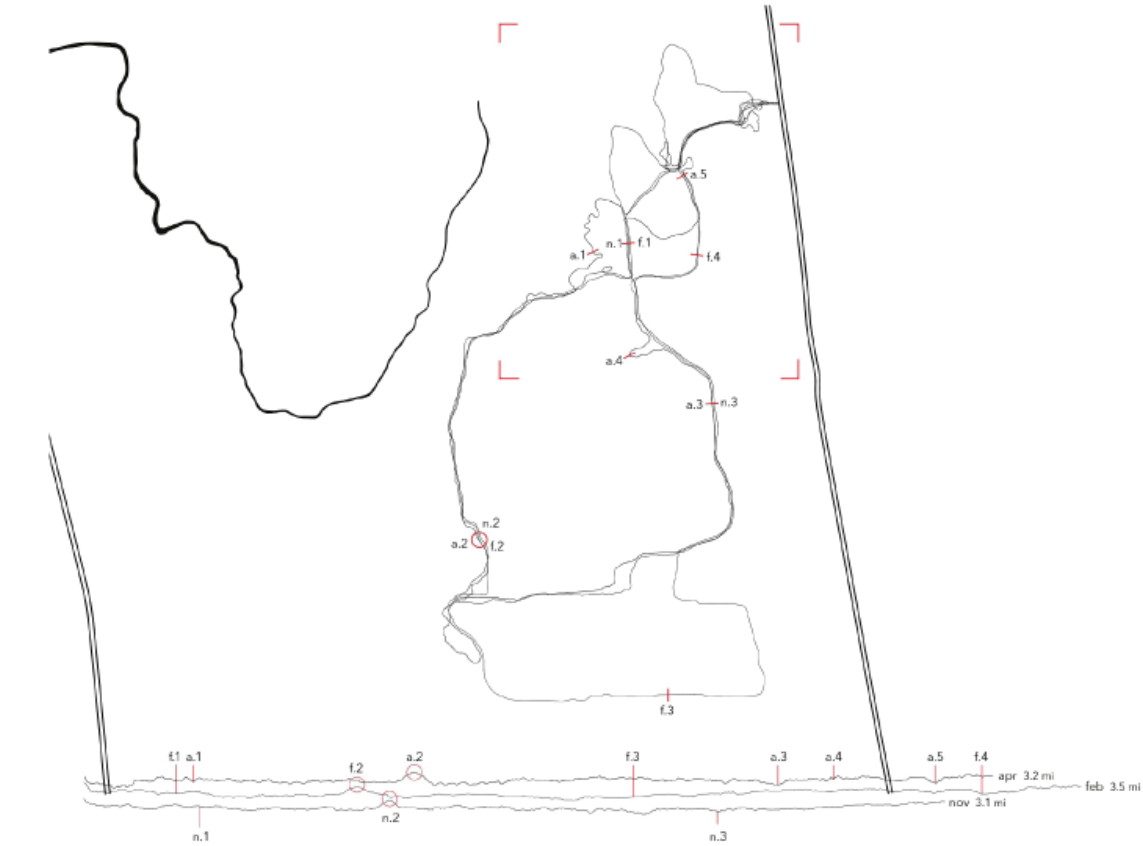
PRECEDENT REFERENCES

KATIE JENKINS



Nameless Field, paths of movement, 2013

Examples of Katie’s landscape architecture work centering how walking contributes to understanding of site. Her work is situation at The Midwest Landscape Lab (MidLL), a research and teaching initiative at the Ohio State University working through place-based scholarship. Her work centers on providing student’s field visit opportunities.



Seneca Meadows Wetland Preserve, 2016

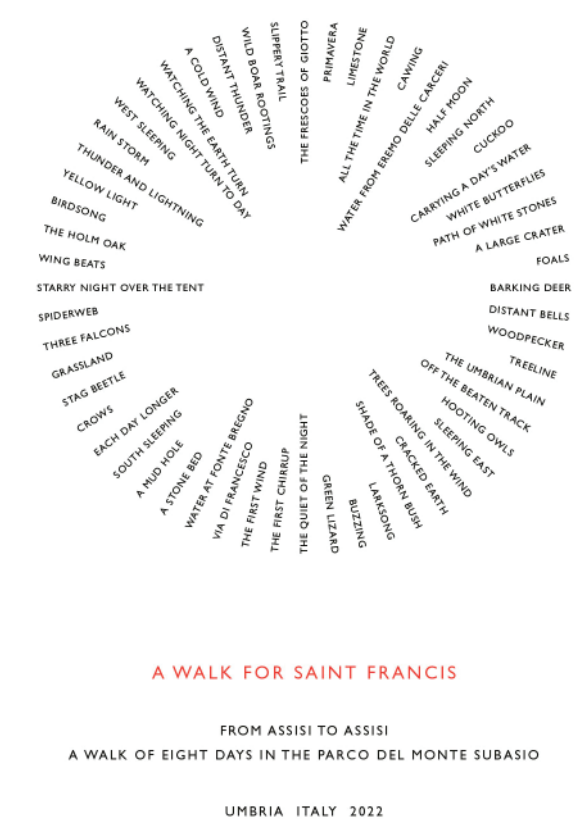
PRECEDENT REFERENCES

RICHARD LONG



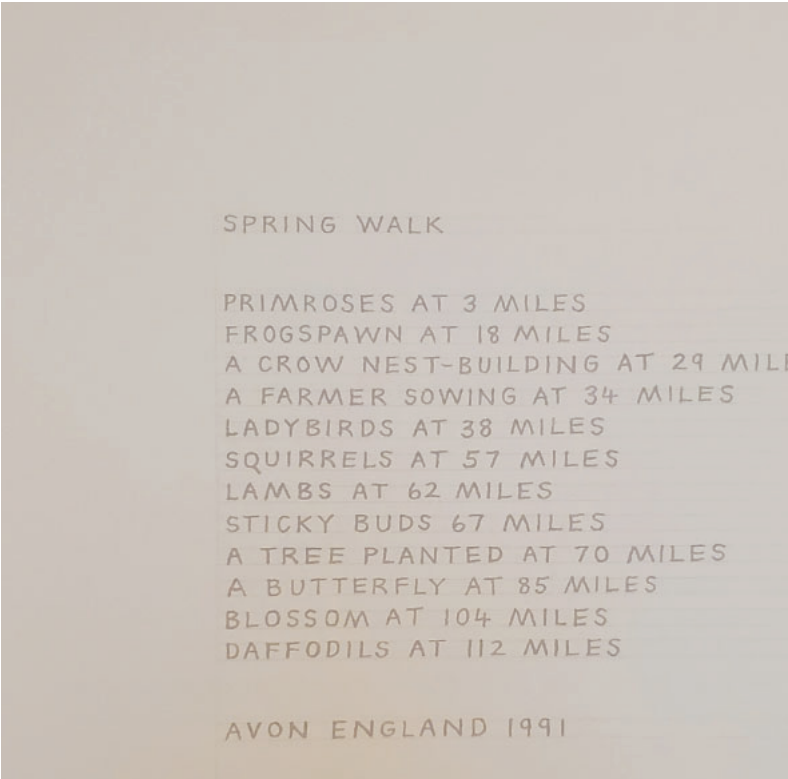
Walking in a Circle in Mist, 1986

Artistic use of the body to create shapes in the ground through repetition.



A Walk for Saint Francis, 2022

Two examples of using text as a way to illustration activity on a walk. Succinct wording suggests at ideas or thoughts, and demands imagination form the viewer.



Spring Walk, 1991

PRECEDENT REFERENCES

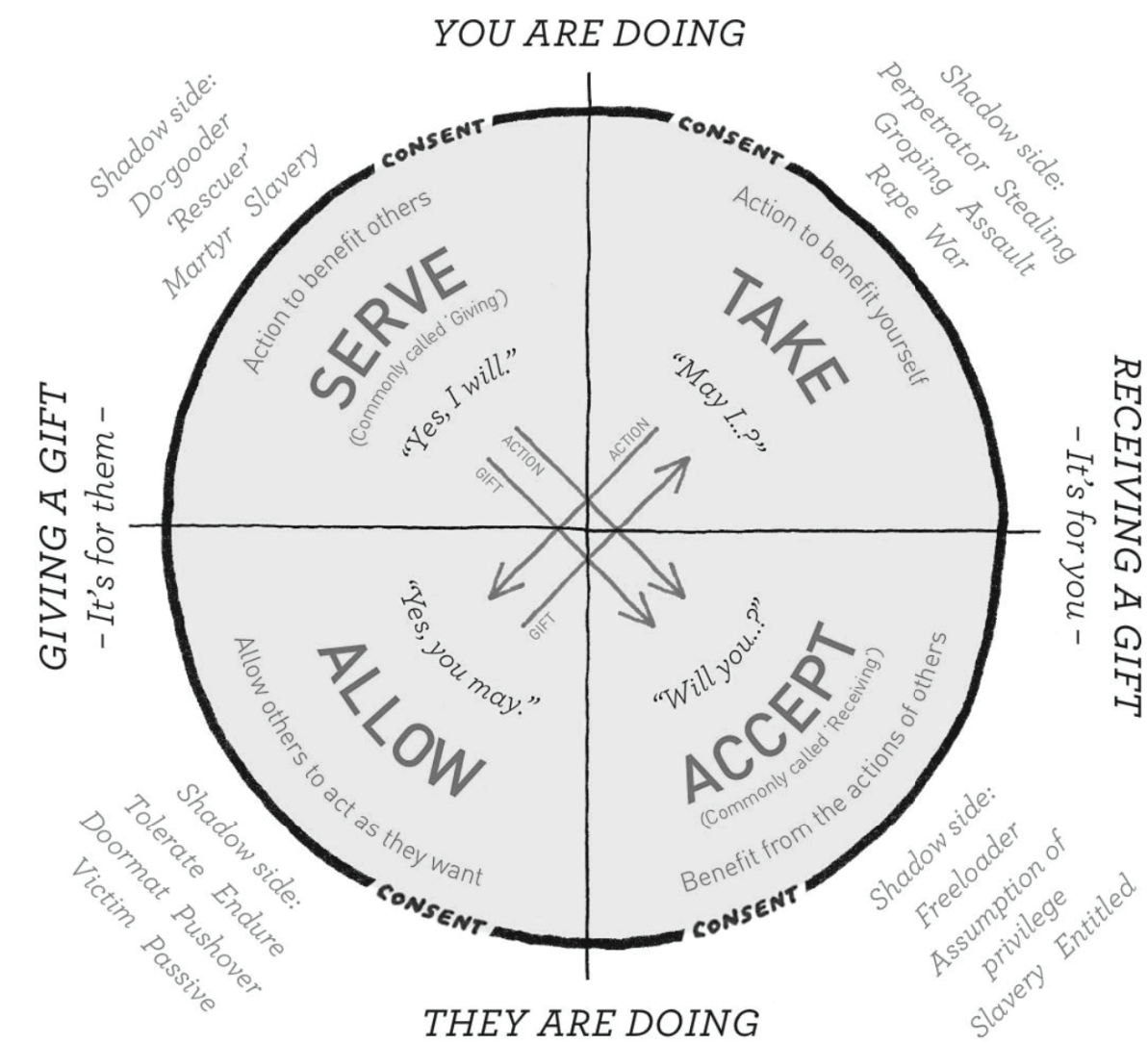
ELMO VERMIJS



Parliament of Trees, 2024

Artistic exploration of the Rights of Nature movement where a judiciary arrangement is re-imagine with logs from a forest; how might the forest judge us if it were in the seat of the law?

BETTY MARTIN



Wheel of Consent, 2021

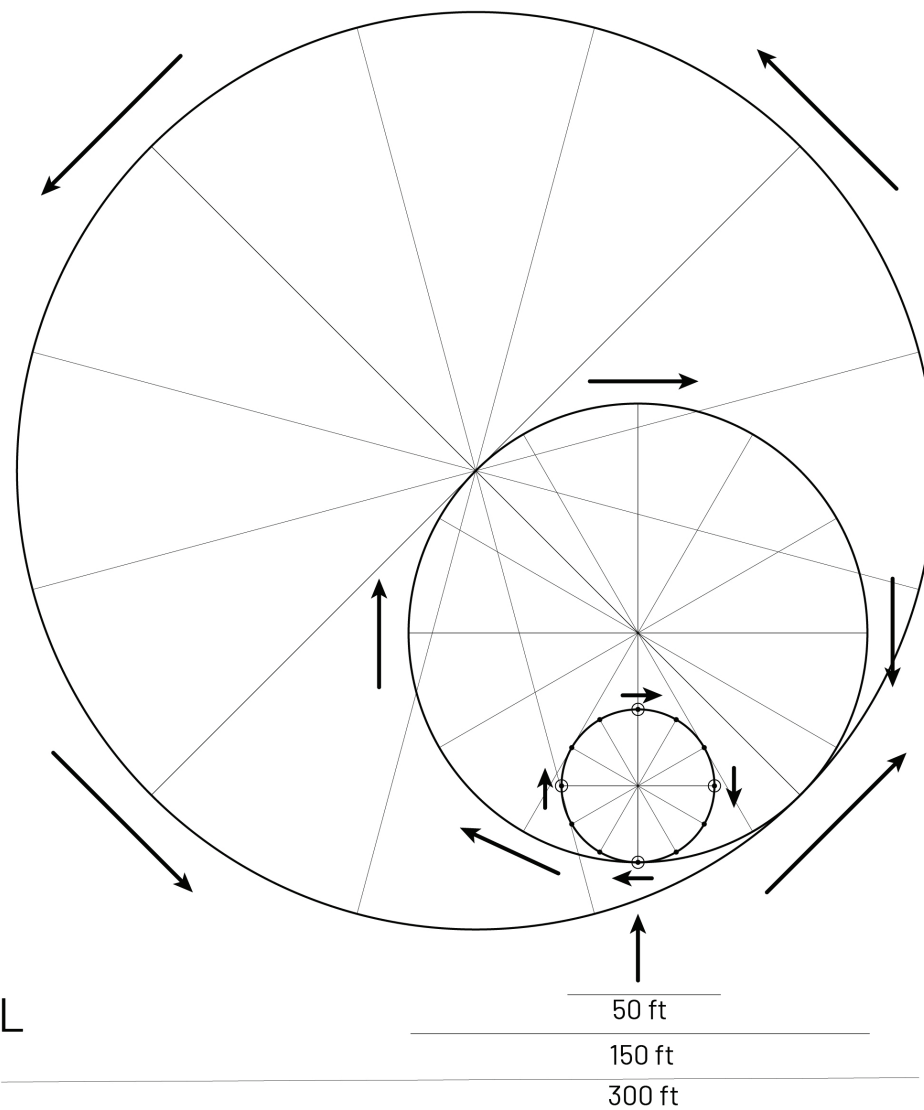
Consent framework that focuses on who is doing and who is it for as a way to navigate seeking consent. Could be applied in any relational dynamic, including landscape.

DRAWINGS

Composite drone imagery of the project site area at Milton Airfield.



Approach from South
 Turn left
 Walk inner circle, moving from west, north, east, and south
 Make circle three times, repeat if desired
 Walk middle circle once in same counter clockwise direction
 Walk large circle once in clockwise direction
 Complete at south point
 Close



WALKING RITUAL

Walking ritual structure. Followed at each of the 12 site visits, with allowance for adjustment.



Composite drone imagery of the project site and ritual walking area at Milton Airfield.

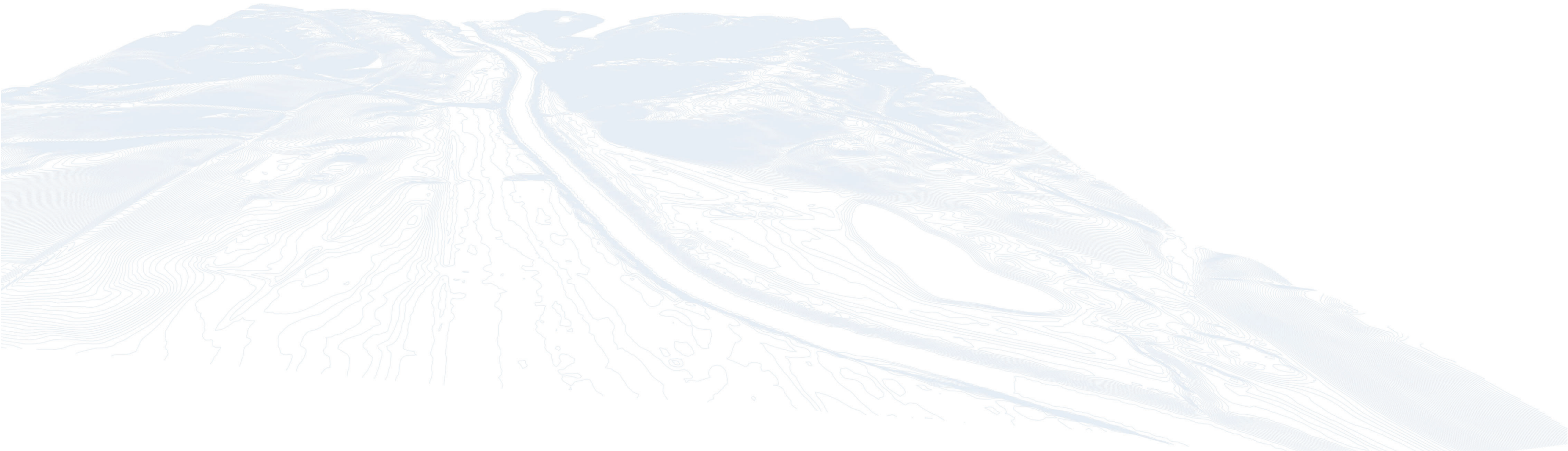


Material collection samples,
red maple (*Acer rubrum*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*), autumn olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*)

Honorable Harvest

Know the ways of the ones who take care of you, so that you may take care of them.
Introduce yourself. Be accountable as the one who comes asking for life.
Ask permission before taking. Abide by the answer.
Never take the first. Never take the last.
Take only what you need.
Take only that which is given.
Never take more than half. Leave some for others.
Harvest in a way that minimizes harm.
Use it respectfully. Never waste what you have taken.
Share.
Give thanks for what you have been given.
Give a gift, in reciprocity for what you have taken.
Sustain the ones who sustain you and the earth will last forever.

Cited in Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013



1' Contours of site and surroundings

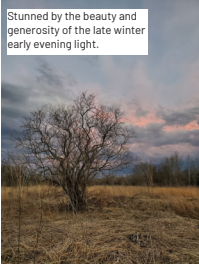


ACTIONS OF SITE

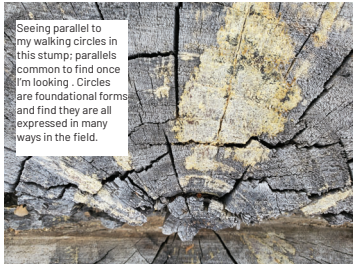
ACTIONS I TAKE

WALKING TRACKS

12 WALKS BETWEEN WINTER AND SPRING
GUIDED BY RITUAL
TAKING NEW SHAPE



Stunned by the beauty and generosity of the late winter early evening light.



Seeing parallel to my walking circles in this stump; parallels common to find once I'm looking. Circles are foundational forms and find they are all expressed in many ways in the field.



Stately tree sits as a visual and ecological anchor in the field.



Undulating grass waves conceal the wet collecting in this area of nearly in-perceptible lower elevation.



canopy protected tracks indicate the appreciated that.



Established line in the field from repeated animal use; my walking lines are much more ephemeral.



Many shallow holes or nests (temporary?) in the grasses so I walk carefully.



Regularly visited resting bed for deer; the birds like it too.



v grasses emerging through the dried.



Skunk home under the logs; do not disturb



Gift offering place.



Collecting grasses and sticks to stur play with, make art with.



Hang a bell on a dried flower stalk on a windy day; listening to the wind and the bell as I rake.



Collecting sticks from around the maple; many sticks here from the long ago felled trees; decomposing with time but seems they could be used another way so that soil might grow something.



Driving holes into the ground to place live elderberry branches in places where I found olive. Also throw some in the gift for a riverbank downstream.



Raking in a circular motion to expose ground and create small depression where seeds and water can collect.



Collecting sticks from the area I want to rake them in a stack; do this after bugs have we hope that other bugs will find this new pile



Laying dried stalks of warm season grasses from adjacent field on top of the raked circle; hope that some seeds will take and the dried grass will protect them.



Walking through the snow and observing my tracks in the low part of the wet field; birds loved these small winter pools.



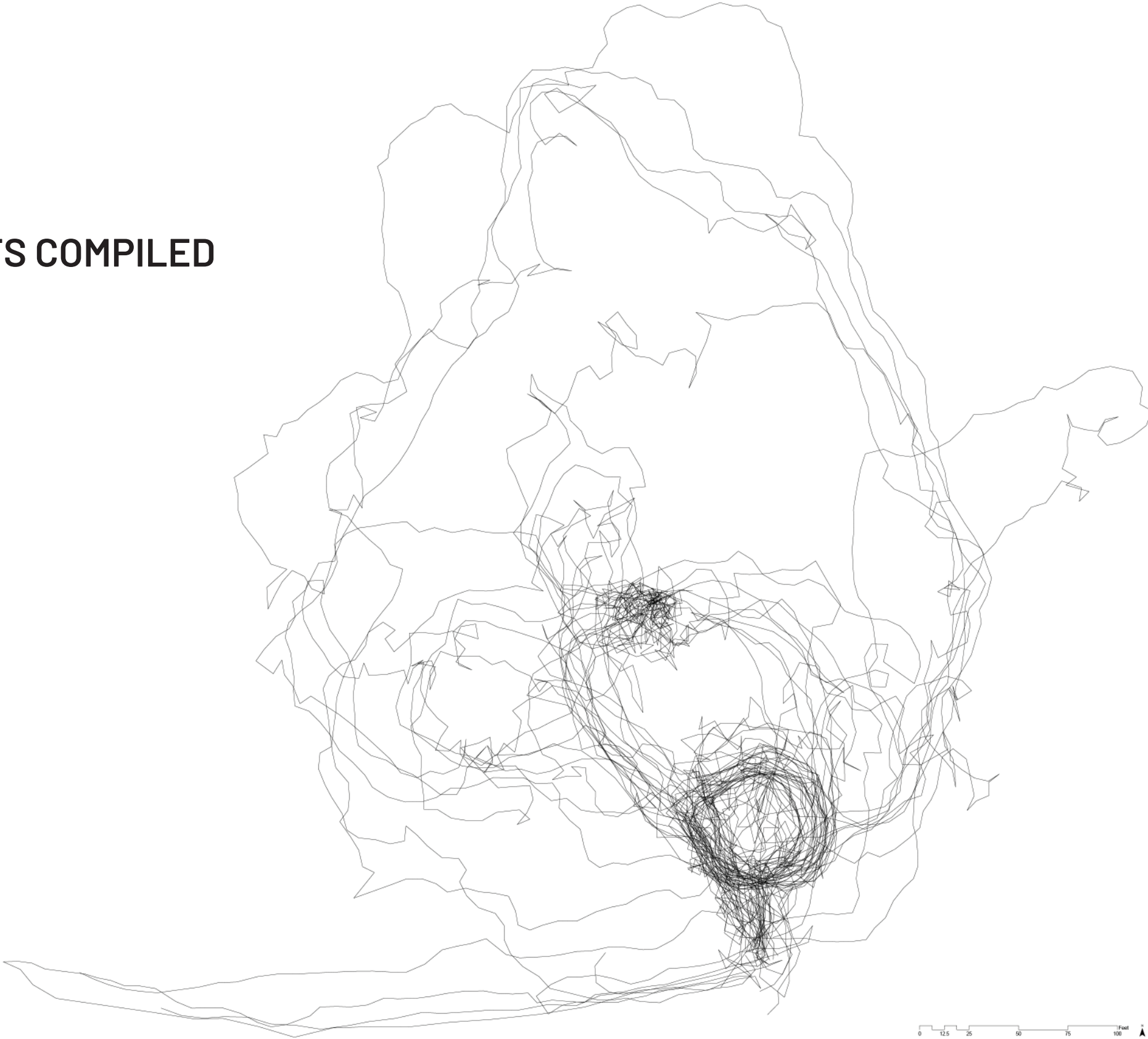
Walking through dried mounded grasses and creating subtle wavy shapes with my feet; both from simply walking and from making intentional steps to do so.



Collecting beautiful sticks in lichen on my walk; admit them; leaving them at the before I go home.

Site drawing encompassing all walking lines from 12 site visits and new proposed path for “Walking Narrative”. Images show areas of interest, action, and reflection; site actions on the left and my actions on the right.

ALL VISITS COMPILED





Composite image of “entry” point of walking ritual.

VISIT 01
FEBRUARY 1, 2025

VISIT 02
FEBRUARY 3, 2025

VISIT 03
FEBRUARY 9, 2025

VISIT 04
FEBRUARY 13, 2025

VISIT 05
FEBRUARY 17, 2025

VISIT 06
FEBRUARY 27, 2025

VISIT 07
MARCH 25, 2025

VISIT 08
MARCH 26, 2025

VISIT 09
MARCH 28, 2025

VISIT 10
APRIL 3, 2025

VISIT 11
APRIL 8, 2025

VISIT 12
APRIL 18, 2025

Series collection of all 12 site visits.

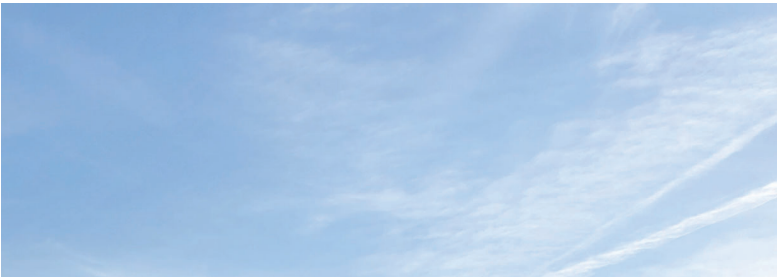
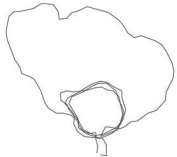
Aerial images of the “inner” small circle of the ritual after walking. Ritual circle is small, 50 ft in diameter, creating a intimate and reflective space to initial the walking ritual at the beginning of each visit.

Images of the sky at each visit.

TWELVE SITE VISITS WALKING

VISIT 12
APRIL 18, 2025
17:09

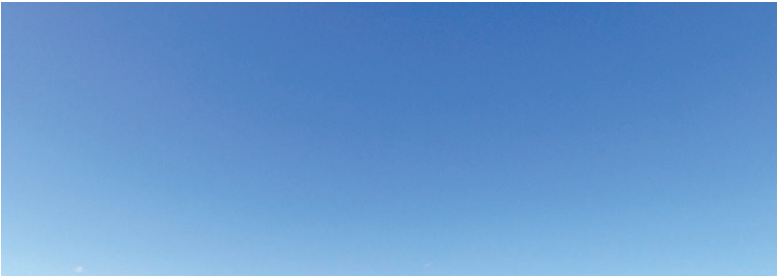
SUNNY, HOT, CLEAR
75°F
SKY HAZY BLUE
LIGHT IS NEW SEASON COLOR, CUTTING
3:36 HOURS AFTER SUNRISE
9:43 HOURS BEFORE SUNSET
FIRST QUARTER



THE CIRCLE IN THE GRASS IS VERY EASY FOR ME TO SEE NOW. STILL NOT AS REGULARLY WORN AS THE DEER PATHS. I WALK WITH EASE NOW. FOR MY FINAL VISIT OF THE PROJECT, I GATHER BOUQUETS OF DRIED STALKS OF THE WARM SEASON GRASSES IN THE ADJACENT FIELD, TAKING ONLY A BIT FROM OF EACH PLANT. I ARRANGE THEM IN A CIRCLE ATOP MY RAKED CIRCLES. IT'S CHARMING IN A HUMBLE WAY. I HOPE SEEDS WILL TAKE, AND MAYBE EVENTUALLY SPREAD.

VISIT 11.1 + 11.2
APRIL 8, 2025
11:00

BRIGHT, WARM
66°F
SKY BRILLIANT BLUE
LIGHT DIRECT, FROM SPACE
8:14 HOURS AFTER SUNRISE
4:42 HOURS BEFORE SUNSET
WAXING GIBBOUS



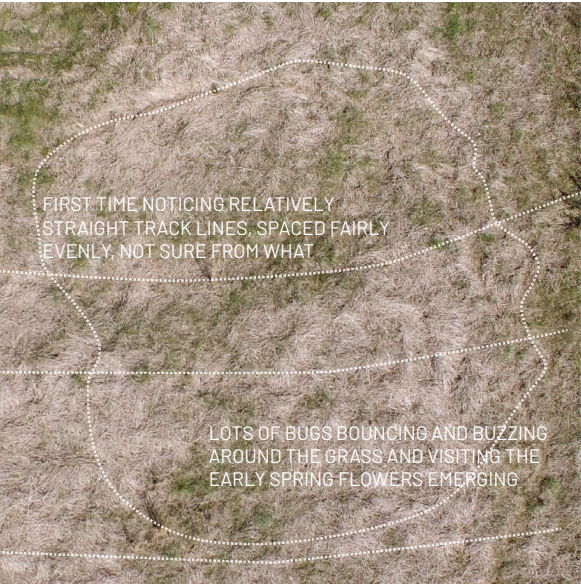
SO BRIGHT TODAY, SPRING ADVANCES QUICKLY. I MAINLY WANT TO "PLAY" AND RAKE AT THE CENTRAL AREA. HAVE BEEN SEEING PLANTS NESTLED UP AGAINST STUMPS, TRUNKS, EACH OTHER, GROUND DEPRESSIONS. I MAKE A MINI CIRCLE TO SEE IF PLANTS WILL GROW IN THIS WAY. WILL HAVE TO WAIT AND SEE; MAYBE I'LL GET A CHANCE TO. LIMIT MY RAKING AREA TO WHERE MY ARMS CAN EXTEND TO, SO THE SHAPE IS REFLECTIVE OF ONE INTERACTION.

VISIT 10.1 + 10.2
APRIL 3, 2025
14:20

HUMID, WARM, DAMP
73°F
SKY OVERCAST, CLOUDS MOVING IN
LIGHT BRIGHT GRAY NEUTRAL
7:34 HOURS AFTER SUNRISE
5:09 HOURS BEFORE SUNSET
WAXING CRESCENT



LONG WALK AROUND THE SITE, EXPLORING AND TAKING MY TIME TO OBSERVE SMALL PATH DEVIATIONS ALONG THE WAY. THE GREENING IS STARTING TO BECOME VERY NOTICEABLE. WITH THE WAKING UP OF THE BUGS, I AM MORE COMFORTABLE MOVING GRASSES, BRANCHES, AND OTHER FOUND THINGS AROUND AS I WON'T BE DISTURBING THEIR RESTING NOOKS.



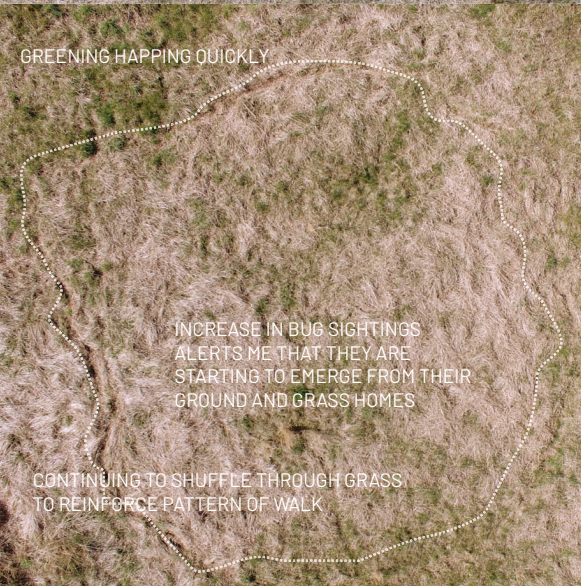
Carolina Chickadee
Parus carolinensis

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Polioptila caerulea



Eastern river cooter
Pseudemys concinna concinna

LOTS OF BUGS BOUNCING AND BUZZING AROUND THE GRASS AND VISITING THE EARLY SPRING FLOWERS EMERGING



Carolina Chickadee
Parus carolinensis

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Polioptila caerulea

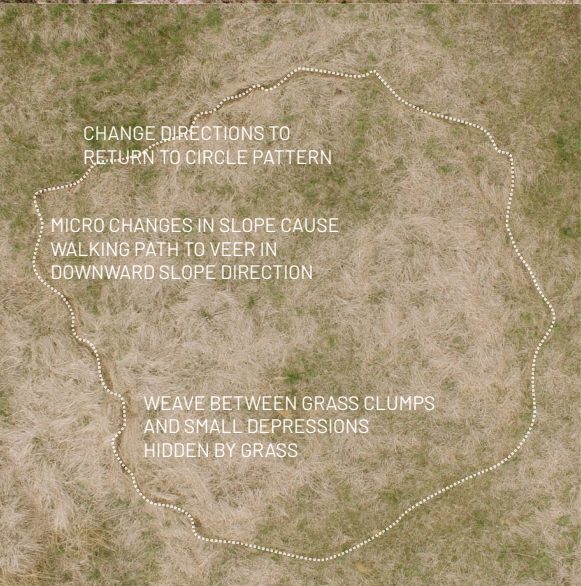


American goldfinch
Spinus tristis

INCREASE IN BUG SIGHTINGS ALERTS ME THAT THEY ARE STARTING TO EMERGE FROM THEIR GROUND AND GRASS HOMES

American Crow
Corvus brachyrhynchos

CONTINUING TO SHUFFLE THROUGH GRASS TO REINFORCE PATTERN OF WALK



Spring Peepers
Pseudacris crucifer

Red-shouldered Hawk
Buteo lineatus

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Polioptila caerulea



American Crow
Corvus brachyrhynchos

Field Sparrow
Spizella pusilla

Carolina Chickadee
Parus carolinensis



Eastern Bluebird
Sialia sialis

Tufted Titmouse
Baeolophus bicolor

Yellow-throated Warbler
Setophaga dominica

Canada Goose
Branta canadensis

Turkey Vulture
Cathartes aura

Northern Cardinal
Cardinalis cardinalis

House Finch
Haemorrhous mexicanus

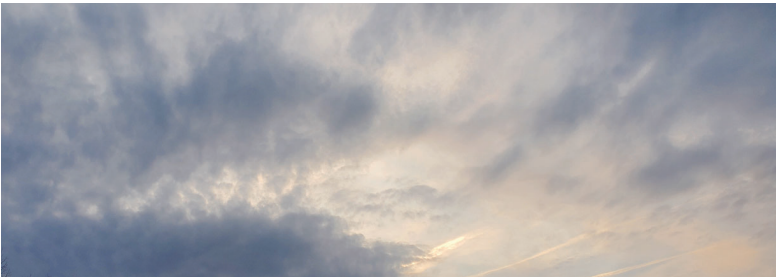
Red-winged Blackbird
Agelaius phoeniceus



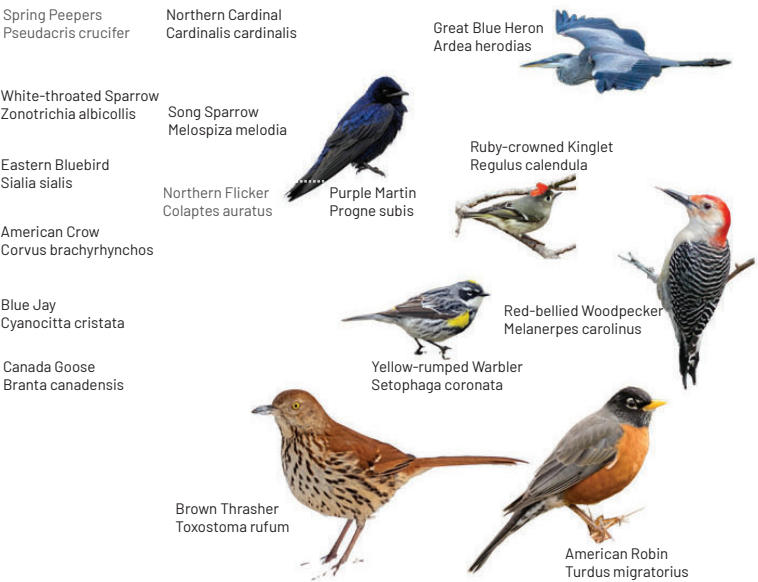
Wild turkey
Meleagris gallopavo

VISIT 09
MARCH 28, 2025
21:00

COOL, ALIVE
48°F
SKY CHANGING, DEVELOPING
LIGHT PURPLE, PINK, ORANGE DAWN
0:18 HOURS AFTER SUNRISE
12:11 HOURS BEFORE SUNSET
WANING CRESCENT

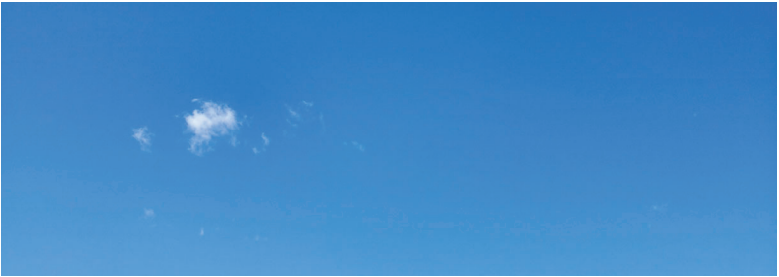
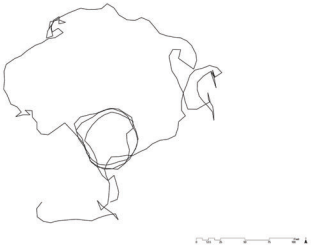


SPECIAL SUNRISE VISIT TODAY. IMMENSELY BEAUTIFUL. THE COLOR IN THE LIGHT IS A GIFT. FINALLY STILL ENOUGH TO FLY THE DRONE HIGH FOR BETTER AERIAL IMAGES OF THE WHOLE SITE. I WOULD LOVE TO COME BACK IN THE MORNING AGAIN. THE SITE IS STARTING TO FEEL VERY COMFORTABLE AND FAMILIAR.



VISIT 08
MARCH 26, 2025
12:25

WINDY, DRY, BRIGHT
54°F
BRILLIANT SKY, SMALL CLOUD PUFFS
LIGHT FEELS DIRECT AND EXPOSING
5:17 HOURS AFTER SUNRISE
7:07 HOURS BEFORE SUNSET
WANING CRESCENT



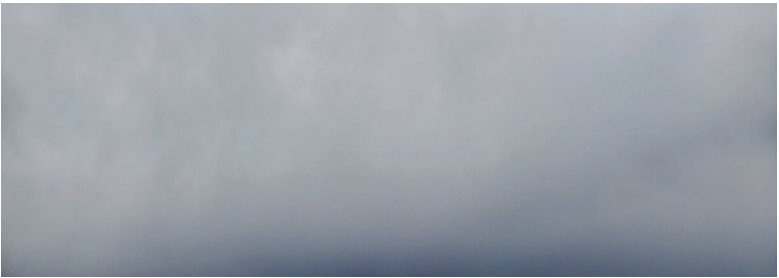
BACK AGAIN TO MAKE UP FOR "LOST TIME", BUT THE WINDY DAY KEPT ME FROM TAKING PHOTOS. IT FEELS LIKE A NICE CHANCE TO OBSERVE OTHER THINGS. THE SOUND OF THE DRONE IS BOTHERSOME TO ME USUALLY. INSTEAD TODAY I CAN ENJOY THE LIVELY WIND. THE SWEETGUMS ARE CREAKING SO LOUDLY! BRANCHES ALL OVER THE GROUND. INTERESTING STRUCTURE.

WIND GUSTS OVER 20 MPH,
FROM THE SOUTHWEST
CAN'T FLY DRONE

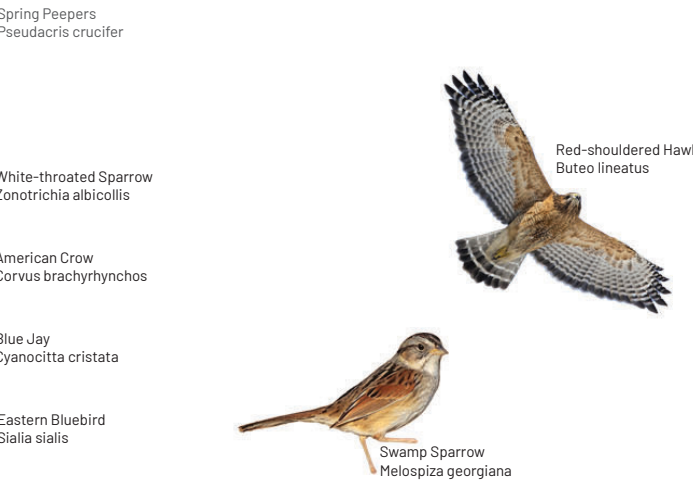


VISIT 07.1 + 7.2
MARCH 25, 2025
13:50

CLOUDY, RAIN COMING
58°F
SKY MEDIUM GRAY CLOUD COVER
LIGHT NEUTRAL, CLOUD FILTERED
6:41 HOURS AFTER SUNRISE
5:41 HOURS BEFORE SUNSET
WANING CRESCENT



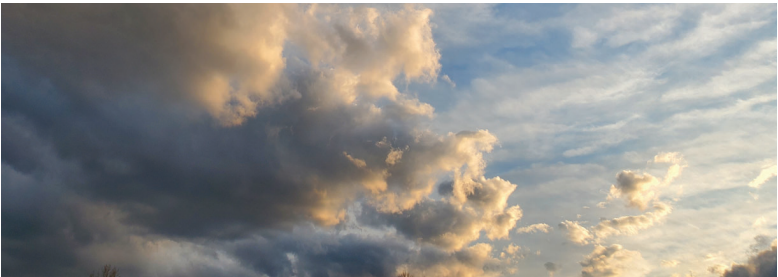
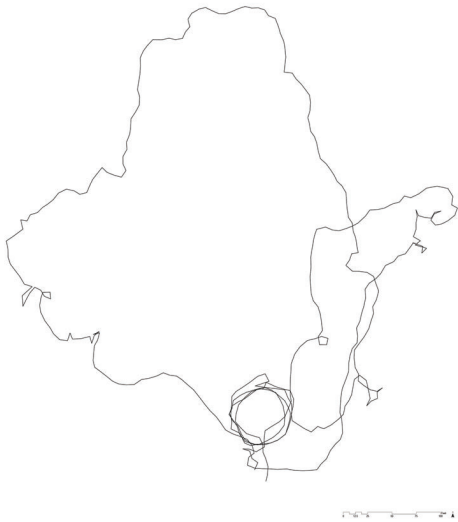
BACK AFTER A LONG TIME DUE TO SPRING BREAK AND SCHEDULES. HAPPY TO BE BACK TO WELCOME A NEW SEASON. CHOSE A SPACE TO PLACE MY SMALL GIFTS TO THE SITE. CHOSE IT BASED ON HOW IT FELT, NEAR A WIND SWEPT MAPLE, LOTS OF STUMPS, IN THE OPEN BUT A BIT CONCEALED. AFTER THE VISIT I REALIZED THIS SPOT IS NEARLY EXACTLY THE CENTER OF MY WALKING RITUAL AND ALONG THE EDGE OF THE MIDDLE CIRCLE.



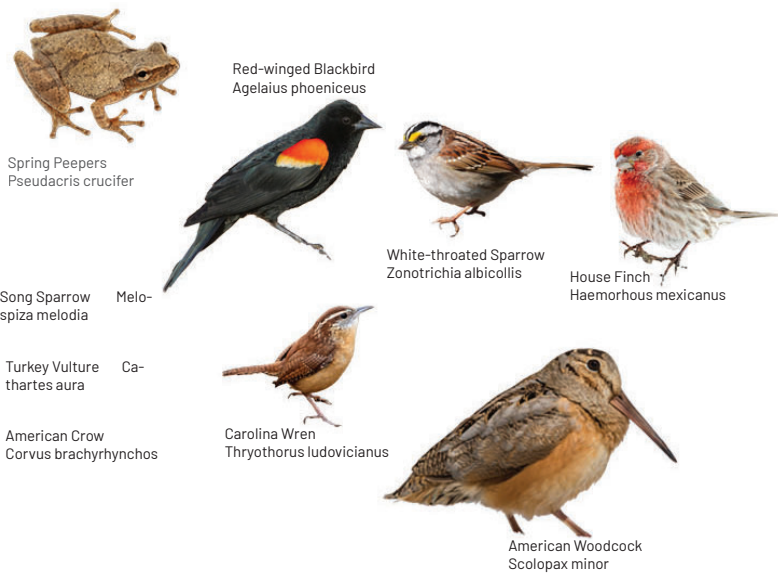
Series collection of 12 site visits. Site conditions recorded, GPS walking track, sky and ground images, notes from field journal, bird observations (first instance with image)
Visits 9,8, and 7 shown here.

VISIT 06
FEBRUARY 27, 2025
17:09

PLEASANT SPRING EVENING
63°F
SKY PART DARK GRAY CLOUDS, PART
SCATTERED WHITE CLOUDS ON BLUE
GOLD EVENING LIGHT, BLENDS INTO
SOFT DUSKY PURPLES
10:21 HOURS AFTER SUNRISE
0:57 HOURS BEFORE SUNSET
NEW MOON

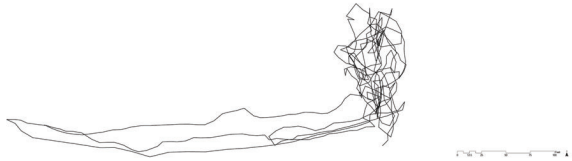


GORGEOUS EVENING LIGHT AND SO MUCH BIRD SONG. THE FLAGS
HELPED TO KEEP THE WALKING CIRCLE SHAPE MORE ACCURATE.
NOTICING THAT I TEND TO WALK A MUCH BIGGER CIRCLE THAN THE
INTENDED LARGEST CIRCLE. FOLLOWING THE DEER PATHS IS SO EASY.
VENTURED TO THE RIVER BANK. DID NOT SEE ANY POINTS OF ACCESS,
BUT CLIMBED DOWN AS CLOSE TO THE WATER AS I COULD GET. LOTS OF
BANK EROSION.

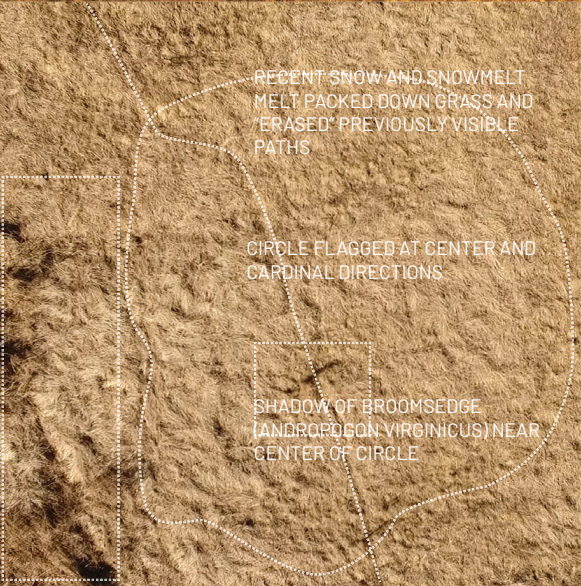


VISIT 05
FEBRUARY 17, 2025
14:34

CHILLY, CONSISTENT BREEZE
43°F
SKY BLUE, WISPY CLOUDS
SHARP LIGHT, REVEALING
7:33 HOURS AFTER SUNRISE
3:21 HOURS BEFORE SUNSET
WANNING GIBBOUS MOON

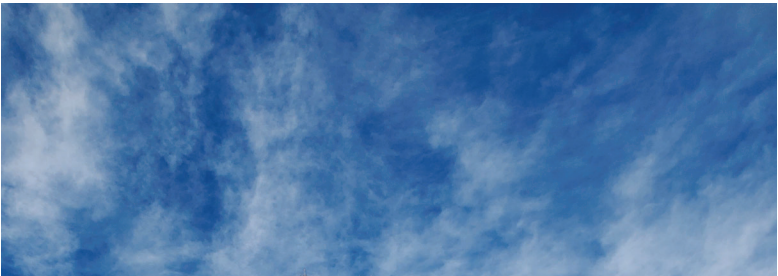


SETTING UP FLAGS IN THE CIRCLE TODAY TO MARK THE CARDINAL
DIRECTIONS. USING COMPASS, ANCHOR POLLS, AND MEASURING
TAPE. CUMBERSOME TO DO ALONE, BUT AMUSING IN A CHAOTIC WAY.
BEAUTIFUL DAY TO BE OUTSIDE, NO COMPLAINTS. AFTER SET UP I DID
NOT ENOUGH TIME TO WALK THE FULL RITUAL BEFORE I NEEDED TO
LEAVE TO GET TO MY NEXT OBLIGATION.

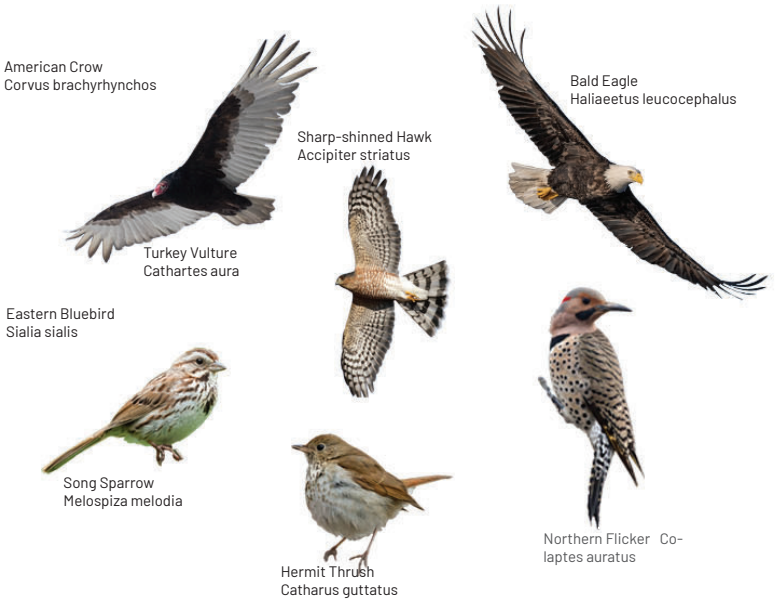
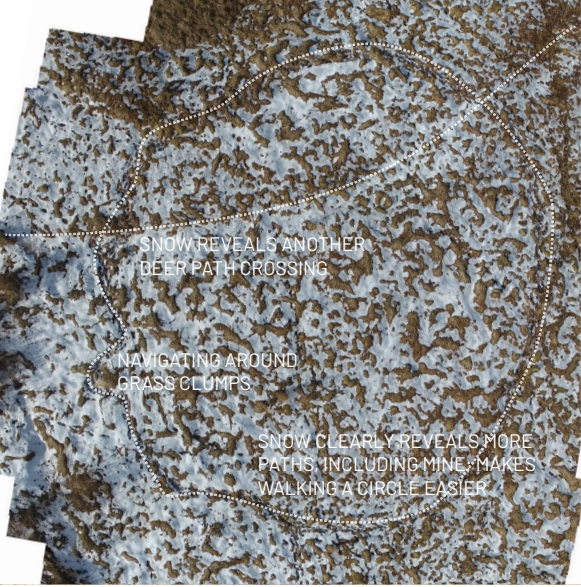


VISIT 04
FEBRUARY 13, 2025
14:20

BREEZY, RECENT SNOW
56°F
SKY RICH BLUE, RIPPLING CLOUDS
BRIGHT SUN
7:14 HOURS AFTER SUNRISE
3:31 HOURS BEFORE SUNSET
JUST PAST FULL MOON



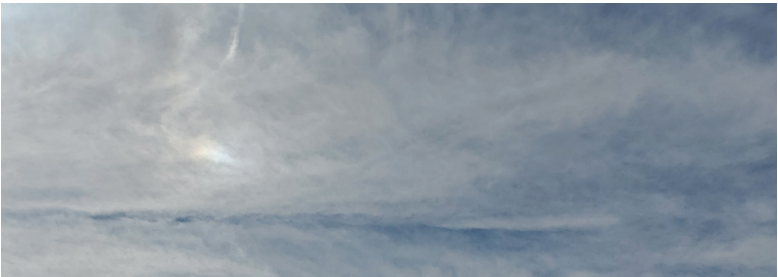
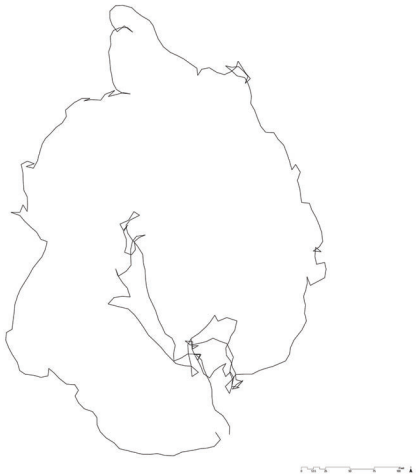
DETERMINED TO VISIT THE SITE AND WALK IN THE SNOW. HAD TO
COORDINATE THE RIGHT TIME — WAIT UNTIL AFTER SNOW HAS FALLEN
SO I CAN USE THE DRONE, AND BEFORE THE TEMPERATURE RISES AND
MELTS. THE SNOW WAS MELTING FAST WHILE ON SITE, HAD TO HURRY.
WIND HIGH. EASIEST TIME WALKING THE CIRCLE, AS I COULD CLEARLY
RETRACE MY OWN STEPS AND ORIENT AROUND VISIBLE SHAPES.



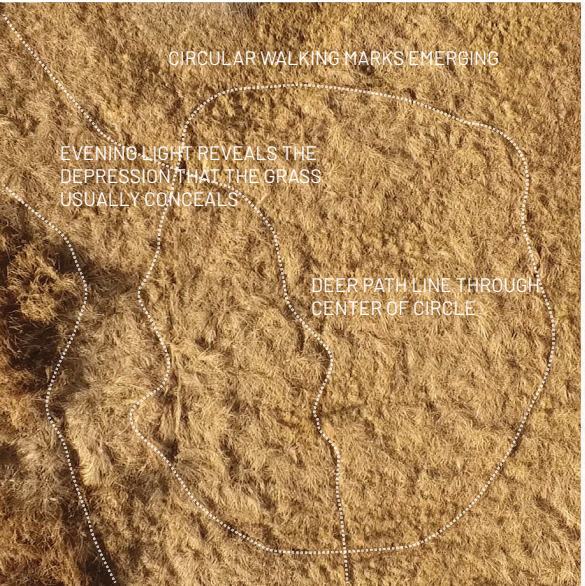
Series collection of 12 site visits. Site conditions recorded, GPS walking track, sky and ground images, notes from field journal, bird observations (first instance with image)
Visits 6, 5, and 4 shown here.

VISIT 03
FEBRUARY 9, 2025
14:30

BEAUTIFUL, SUNNY, BRIGHT
55°F
SKY BLUE, HIGH CLOUDS, IRIDESCENT
CLOUD RAINBOW
BRIGHT AND GLISTENING
7:19 HOURS AFTER SUNRISE
3:16 HOURS BEFORE SUNSET
WAXING GIBBOUS

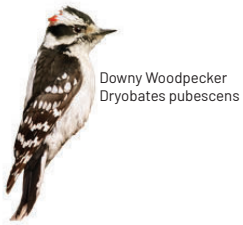


CURIOUS TO SEE MORE OF THE SITE TODAY. CAREFULLY WALKING ON THE GRASS, MY FEET ARE STILL LEARNING THE GROUND. A LONG STROLL AROUND THE SITE GAVE ME TACTILE UNDERSTANDING OF A PLACE I HAD ONLY LOOKED AT IN MAPS BEFORE. SAW AN ADORABLE SKUNK SCURRY INTO IT'S LOG DEN!



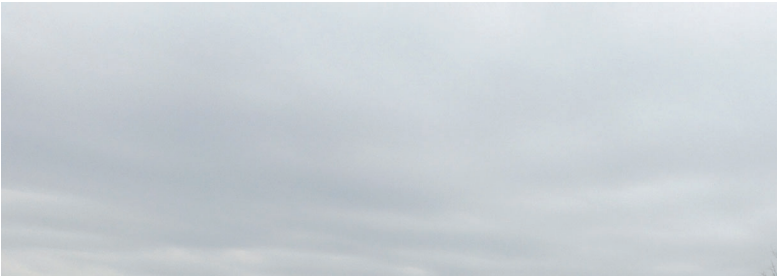
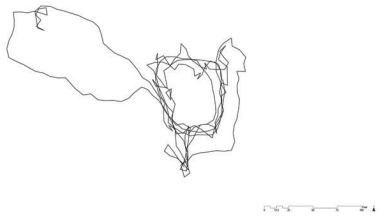
Striped Skunk
Mephitis mephitis

Eastern Bluebird
Sialia sialis

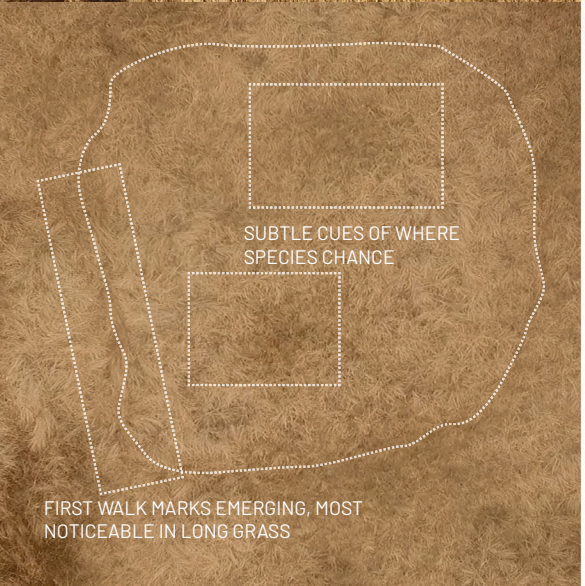


VISIT 02
FEBRUARY 3, 2025
11:07

PLEASANT, COMFORTABLE
54°F
SKY OVERCAST WITH SOME BREAKS
NEUTRAL LIGHT, SUNSHINE MOMENTS
3:51 HOURS AFTER SUNRISE
6:33 HOURS BEFORE SUNSET
JUST PAST WAXING FIRST QUARTER



EXCITED TO START THE WALKING RITUAL SHAPES. SURPRISED BY HOW MUCH MORE DIFFICULT IT WAS TO NAVIGATE THROUGH THE TUFTS OF GRASS THAN I THOUGHT. EVIDENCE OF GRASS DWELLERS, NESTS, OR SEARCHING. INSTEAD OF WALKING THE TWO OUTER CIRCLES, I EXPLORED THE OLD RACE TRACK AGAIN.



Blue Jay
Cyanocitta cristata

Eastern Bluebird
Sialia sialis

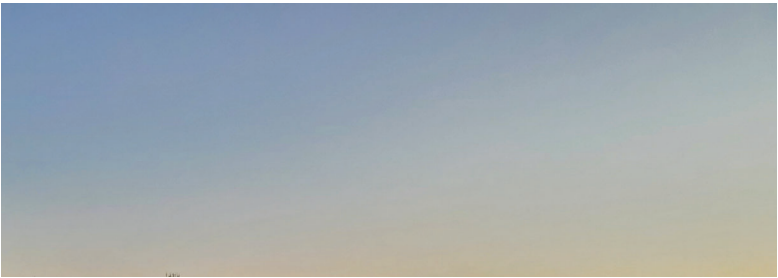
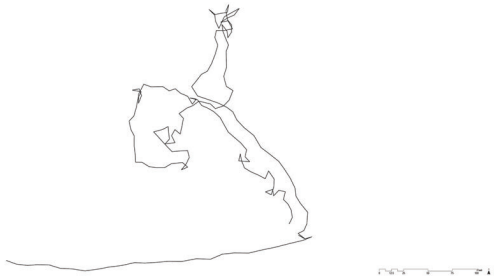


Pileated Woodpecker
Dryocopus pileatus

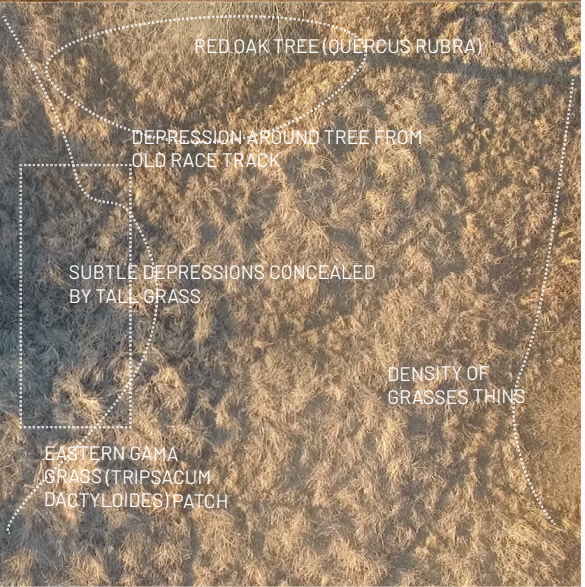
American Crow
Corvus brachyrhynchos

VISIT 01
FEBRUARY 1, 2025
16:55

CLEAR, CRISP, TEMPERATURE
DROPPING FAST
36°F
SKY DUSKY BLUE, YELLOW EDGES
SOFT HONEY SUNSET
9:37 HOURS AFTER SUNRISE
0:42 HOURS BEFORE SUNSET
WAXING CRESCENT



FIRST VISIT TO THE SITE IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS PROJECT. I KNEW THE WALKING RITUAL SHAPE, BUT LET MYSELF WANDER BASED ON INTEREST FOR THIS FIRST VISIT INSTEAD. THE IMPRESSIONS AND MEMORY OF THE OLD RACE TRACK IN THE FIELD STOOD OUT QUITE A BIT. EXPLORED THE STUMP AND LOG PILES.



Northern Mockingbird
Mimus polyglottos

Canada Goose
Branta canadensis



Series collection of 12 site visits. Site conditions recorded, GPS walking track, sky and ground images, notes from field journal, bird observations (first instance with image)
Visits 13, 2, and 1 shown here.

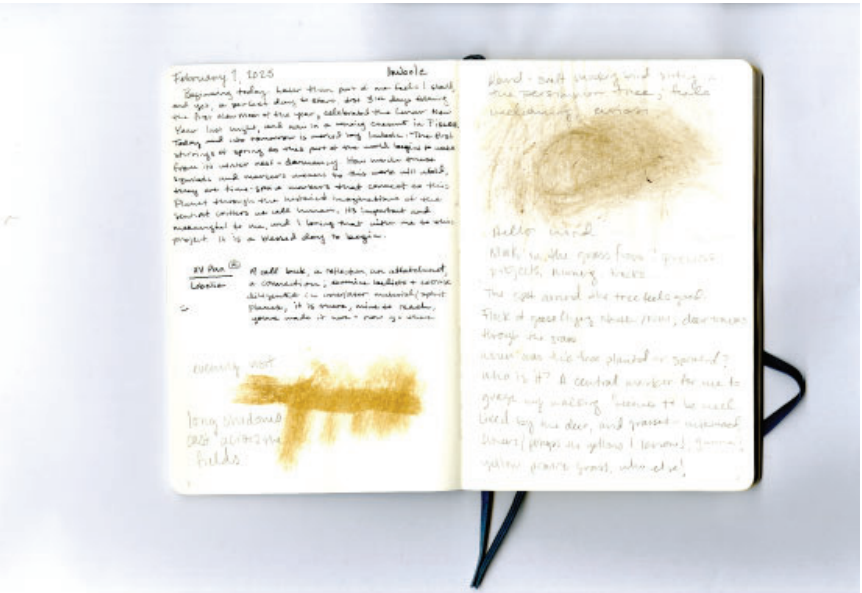
Cataloging of bird and critters from each visit. Either seen or heard (bird sounds recorded through the Merlin app).

Picture	Type	Common Name	Latin Name	Visit 1	Visit 2	Visit 3	Visit 4	Visit 5	Visit 6	Visit 7	Visit 8	Visit 9	Visit 10	Visit 11	Visit 12
				2/1/2025	2/3/2025	2/9/2025	2/13/2025	2/17/2025	2/27/2025	3/25/2025	3/26/2025	3/28/2025	4/3/2025	4/8/2025	4/18/2025
		Domestic	Jet	Canis lupus familiaris	x										
		Domestic		Canis lupus familiaris					x						
x	Bird	Northern Mockingbird	Mimus polyglottos	x					x			x			
x	Bird	Canada Goose	Branta canadensis	x					x	x		x	x		
x	Bird	Winter Wren	Troglodytes hiemalis		x										
x	Bird	Blue Jay	Cyanocitta cristata		x					x		x			x
x	Bird	American Crow	Corvus brachyrhynchos		x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
x	Bird	Eastern Bluebird	Sialia sialis		x	x	x	x		x			x		
x	Bird	Pileated Woodpecker	Dryocopus pileatus		x										
x	Bird	Downy Woodpecker	Dryobates pubescens			x									
x	Mammal	Striped Skunk	Mephitis mephitis nigra			x									
x	Bird	Turkey Vulture	Cathartes aura			x	x	x	x				x		x
x	Bird	Bald Eagle	Haliaeetus leucocephalus				x								
x	Bird	Sharp-shinned Hawk	Accipiter striatus				x	x							
x	Bird	Song Sparrow	Melospiza melodia				x	x	x			x			
x	Bird	Hermit Thrush	Catharus guttatus				x								
x	Bird	Northern Flicker	Colaptes auratus				x					x			
x	Bird	Northern Cardinal	Cardinalis cardinalis					x				x	x		x
x	Amphibian	Spring Peepers	Pseudacris crucifer						x	x			x		
x	Bird	Carolina Wren	Thryothorus ludovicianus						x						
x	Bird	White-throated Sparrow	Zonotrichia albicollis						x	x		x			
	Bird	(?) flock of black birds with long-ish tail; chittering							x						
	Bird	(?) possible owl							x						
x	Bird	Red-winged Blackbird	Agelaius phoeniceus						x				x		
x	Bird	American Woodcock	Scolopax minor						x						
x	Bird	Red-shouldered Hawk	Buteo lineatus							x		x	x		
x	Bird	Swamp Sparrow	Melospiza georgiana							x					
x	Bird	Field Sparrow	Spizella pusilla								x	x	x		x
x	Bird	Tufted Titmouse	Baeolophus bicolor								x	x	x		x
x	Bird	American Robin	Turdus migratorius									x			
x	Bird	Yellow-rumped Warbler	Setophaga coronata									x			
x	Bird	Red-bellied Woodpecker	Melanerpes carolinus									x			
x	Bird	Brown Thrasher	Toxostoma rufum									x			
x	Bird	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Regulus calendula									x			
x	Bird	Purple Martin	Progne subis									x			
x	Bird	Great Blue Heron	Ardea herodias									x			
x	Bird	Carolina Chickadee	Poecile carolinensis										x	x	x
x	Bird	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	Poliophtila caerulea										x	x	x
x	Bird	Yellow-throated Warbler	Setophaga dominica										x		
x	Bird	House Finch	Haemorhous mexicanus										x		
x	Bird	Wild turkey	Meleagris gallopavo										x		
x	Mammal	Eastern Cottontail	Sylvilagus floridanus										x		
x	Bird	American goldfinch	Spinus tristis											x	
x	Reptile	Eastern river cooter	Pseudemys concinna concinna												x

Selected images from field journal.

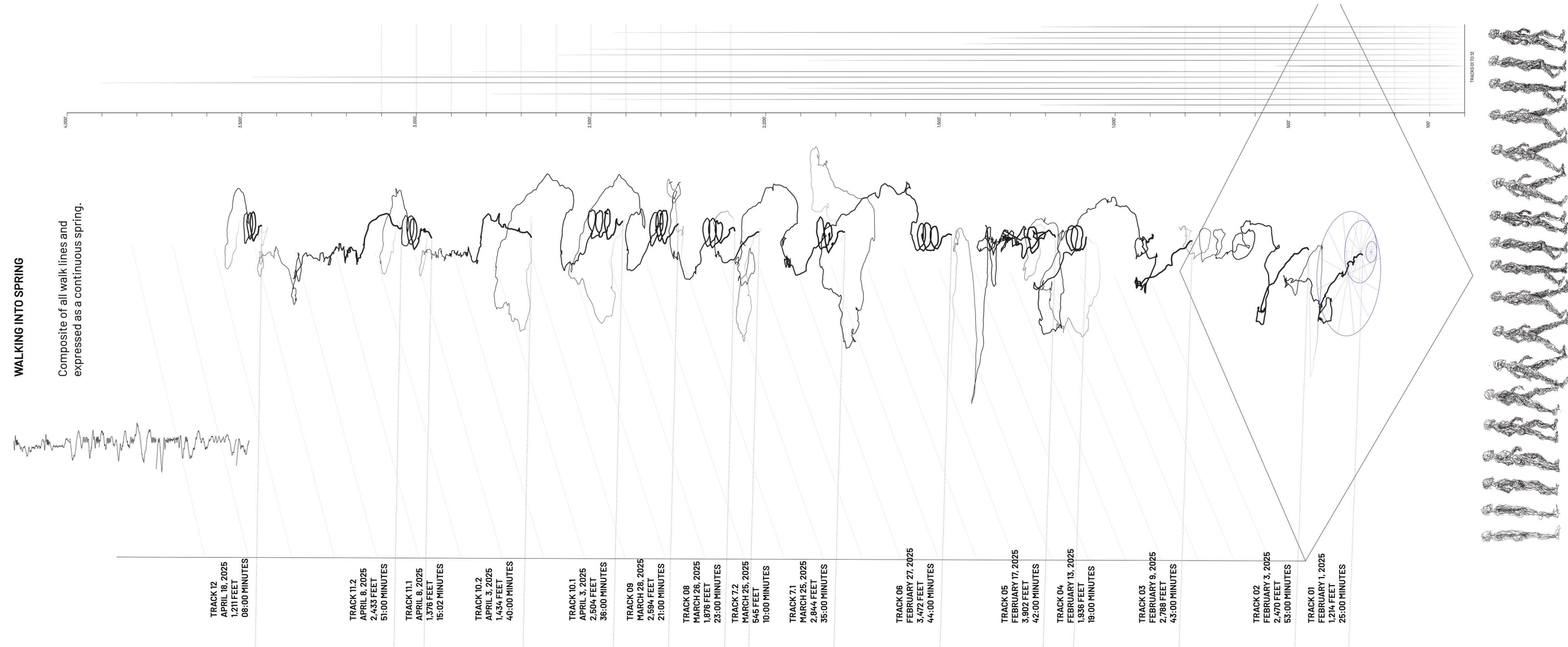
Before leaving for a site visit, engaged grounding practice and recorded in entry.

At site visit, record data points like temperature, time, weather, etc. Record additional information about impressions, mood, sensations, observations, questions, etc.



Representation of all 12 site visit walks. GPS tracks compiled, stacked, and expanded into one continuous walking “spring.”

Though the 12 visits were distinct events, they culminate into one long experience of site that gives shape to the relationship.



Set of walking narration "instructions" that guide a person through the site, as a method of introduction and acquaintance with site.

Instructions informed by observations and inquiry from the 12 site visits of the project.

[illegible]

This is a practice of relationship building through embodied movement, listening, and asking consent.
It is getting to know a place through narrative walking.

Caution notes:

Before the walk, be mindful of the time of year and any precautions you should take (covered skin in tick season, know what poison ivy looks like and avoid touching it; don't stick your hands in places you can't see lest there be a snake or other animal; use a walking stick if you need stability; practice ethical foraging and Honorable Harvest principles when collecting; etc.)

Bring the supplies you need for 1) body comfort and safety, 2) project completion (water, food, sun protection, notebook, writing material, gadgets – though how much do you really need?)

Before taking any actions, ask for consent of the living entities. What does that feel like? How does that change with time?

Preparation

Arrive at Milton.

When you cross into the first airfield, begin to notice, begin to feel.

When you cross into the second field, following the road between the ditch, attune your ears to the place. What do you hear? Who is speaking?

Continue to follow the road, pass the persimmon tree on the left, and stop a few paces after the patch of tall gamma grass subsides.

Turn to the left and align yourself to face the tall red oak. Take a breath. Say hello to the space. What do you hear? Who is speaking?

Before commencing the walk, take a moment to record the conditions of the site and your body in your journal. What does the light feel like, what do you smell, are you hot or cold? Is there anything that stands out for you at the beginning of the walk? What is your headspace?

When you feel ready, ask the space if you may walk today. Tell the dwellers there what you would like to do. This may sound like, "I'd like to walk this field today, is that okay with you? May we walk together?" Listen for responses. What do they say? What ways of listening feel most available to you? At any point in your walk when you want to take something, ask permission, and listen for an answer; how do you hear responses?

There is no pressure to record everything while walking. The most important thing is to be present. Follow the walking narration as best you can. Check in with yourself and the space as you move through the steps. Listen.

Begin the field walk.

WALKING NARRATION STEPS:

- A From the path, step into the field, note where you enter; walk toward the red oak tree.
- B In these initial steps, step carefully; think of the ground dwellers, the grass nesters, and the small hidden realm of grass ways running above the ground and below your feet. Tell them who you are by how you step. What do you notice among the grasses?
- C Walk to the base of the oak tree. Notice how the ground changes as you get nearer. Place your hand on the bark and let your skin acquaint with this elder. Notice the branches, many covered in ornate lichen (a kind of foliose lichen; maybe Hypogymnia physodes).
- D Walk east, toward the next nearest tree and shrub; a sweetgum and autumn olive. Notice how the shrub hugs the tree; this pattern repeats. Notice trails marked in the ground.
- E Continue up a small mound. Notice the plants; how many types do you see, which stand out to you? How do small changes in elevation impact your movement? How does the matting of grass and plants above the ground and below your feet impact your movement?
- F Follow the deer/animal path veering north, through the stand of sweetgums, over the soft loose soil; touch the soil. How does it feel, what does it smell like; who lives here?
- G Turn to the west/southwest before the large tree, and venture across the field; where does the ground change, how tall are the plants in relation to your body?
- H Arrive at the maple, notice its shape and how it drapes from repeated interactions with the wind. What else can this maple tell you about this place? In this central place, take a moment to pause. Check in with your body. What sensations do you notice? What living creatures can you see and hear? What creatures see notice you?
- I Wander in this area a bit; take note of what your senses tell you. What relationships do you see? Find a stump; how many are there? How old are they? In this central place, make an offering of gratitude: something you brought with you, found along the walk, or words uttered.
- J Continue walking west toward the bow of broomsedge, growing along the depression made from the old race track. What are you walking on? How thick are the plants beneath your feet; what texture are they?
- K Find the deer path crossing the old track where the broomsedge grows. Follow it. What directions do the deer follow?
- L Walk toward the stand of trees to the west. Notice how many branches are on the ground; what else is growing here?

- M Navigate through the trees and direct north again. Notice if there are tracks to follow. Where is it comfortable to walk?
- N Crossing the grassy field, notice how your steps feel. What is hidden among the grass? What sensations are in your body as you cross this open space?
- O Walk between the shrub edges, notice the colors. What does this change in enclosure feel like? How fast are you walking?
- P Bend between the shrubs and trees. Notice how young or old they are; where are saplings, where are mature trees? How does sound change between shrubs? What shape is your body making?
- Q Walk around the small log pile to the north. Give space to the large log pile; a skunk has made it's home here. From a respectful distance, notice the plants growing along the log piles. At this further point of the walking narration, note how oriented you feel. What markers tell you where you are?
- R Make your way around, bending to the southwest. Find yourself on the well-travelled deer/animal paths. Why are so many pathways here? How comfortable are you in this area in comparison to other places on this walk?
- S Find an opening in the trees and shrubs that extend along the riverbank and move toward the river. How visible is the river? Can you hear the river? Carefully near the edge of the riverbank. Listen to what the river and ground are telling you. Is the river accessible? How stable is the bank? How does your body impact the bank? What plants do you notice along the edge? Find a stick or stone to toss into the river as a gift.
- T From the bank, navigate back to the deer/animal path, either from where you came or by a new way. Ask the trees to be your guides.
- U When you find yourself up the slope, walk toward the large open trees. Take a breath. Are your hands dirty?
- V Continue south along the deer path. Decide if you would like to walk west and return to the central place to explore/document/take actions/ etc. or if you would like to continue south along the deer path back to the main road.
- W Note where you exit, and where this is in relation to where you entered. When you've returned to the road, turn to the field, and express your gratitude for the walk.

WRITTEN NARRATIVE

PROJECT NARRATIVE

INTRODUCTION

Building relationships takes time. It happens through commitment and repetition. It cannot be rushed or fast-tracked. This moment of environmental crisis/collapse certainly calls for rapid action and large-scale implementations. Though it is also important to ground ourselves in surroundings that we can cultivate spatial relationships with. Learning to slow and pace ourselves at the scale of relationship is a skill that may seem subdued when compared with more dramatic actions pulling to the forefront. And yet, it is an urgent skill that may offer a shift in perspective allowing us to reclaim our place with the living world, to face our uncertain future together.

In this project, I am engaging landscape in two primary ways: 1) theoretically (and experimentally) through exploring the language of consent as a tool to invite and support a more relational way of interacting and being with landscape; and 2) through the physical act of walking as a method of getting acquainted and familiar with a place that we are cultivating site relationship with. The way I use “the language of consent” is a combination of an awareness of what a person’s own intentions and desires are for a given engagement, with the simple practice of verbally asking for consent and listening for answers before performing actions. Both approaches are rooted in subjectivity experience of the person engaged with the action. And attunement to one’s own subjectivity and sensorial experience is a valuable ability for designers to have.

This project is situated at Milton Airfield, located about 8 miles to the southeast of Charlottesville on 172 acres of Piedmont land along the Rivanna River. This area has a rich ecological and cultural history, from its history as Monacan Land, agricultural production, and operational airport. Today it is owned by the University of Virginia where it is used for multiple purposes, including the Architecture school, Rivanna Radio Club, and others. There is an abundance of evidence of past uses at Milton, creating an interesting mixture of curiosities, such as an old race track, past marks of student projects, remnant grassland, anthropogenic artifacts, and a patchwork of plant communities. The explicit ritual walking practice that I engaged with for this thesis project took place over the course of the semester February 1 to April 18; straddling the transition from winter to spring. Though, more holistically, it also stemmed from the culmination of relationship to the Milton site that developed in fragments throughout my time as a student over the course of three years in the MLA program. I held each visit to Milton with reverence, and attempted to see the space as an entity to whom I was approaching, and one that I should meet with humility. In my own desire to get to know the site from this perspective, I became curious about how a relational approach to site might benefit designers more broadly.

Through a repetition of walking ritual at Milton, sensitivity for place develops, which becomes another source information to compliment facts about the site that can be gathered rationally. Walking lays the groundwork for the embodied sensitivity necessary to begin to explore how consent might be expressed.

CONSENT

Our work as landscape designers and architects is deeply enmeshed with the living world. How much life do we attribute to it? We are trained and practiced to deeply consider interconnected systems, processes and stakeholders, both human and non-human. The language we use to describe this work is often related to how we speak about relationships – we use words like agency, dynamics, boundaries, listening, relationality, and care. Though when speaking about how landscape architecture interacts with the more-than-human world, a gap in this language is consent. If we are working with a living world, one that has agency, should we also be talking about consent?

“Recent debates around multispecies communities emphasize collaboration across difference for fostering intimate relations with the world. The basic premise is simple: a richer understanding of the ways in which we are connected to the world will yield greater care for the world. However, while collaboration across difference might close conceptual and material gaps between self and other, and nature and society, it is not always clear whether or how collaboration should take place. Indeed, largely absent in these debates are matters concerning cross-species consent.”

“Indeed, if philosophical animism rests on recognition of personhood, dialogue, and reciprocity, why is there so little discussion of what happens to collaborations when an other-than-human says “No”? Our inquiry, then, is as much about ethical approaches to collaboration and cocreation as it is about the theoretical and experiential richness that might result from such ventures.”

(Morehouse, Harlan and Cheryl Morse. “Sense and Consent in Cocreating with Earth Others.” Environmental Humanities 1 March 2023; 15 (1): 44–63. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-10216151>)

CONSENT

In human-to-human relationships, conversations about consent are usually framed within the context of clear verbal communication. We know how we communicate so we can make frameworks to navigate that with relative ease. But what does it mean to be in consensual relationship with land or the more-than-human? What are some ways that we can develop a method of communication?

"The Wheel of Consent is a practice in taking, receiving and giving a part so that you're doing only one of them or only the other. It's not meant to replace your life, or replace all of your interactions. But it's a practice ... And within the practice, it's an opportunity to narrow the parameters of what's possible, so that a whole different door opens than you might expect. And a whole different landscape becomes possible."

(Martin, Betty. The Art of Receiving and Giving: The Wheel of Consent. Toronto: Luminare Press, 2021.)

And early exploration of consent was through looking at the frame of consent put forth by Betty Martin, called the Wheel of Consent. In her work, consent is framed through the lens of "giving" and "receiving" a gift and identifying who is "doing" and who is "done to", which puts relational interactions into four categories of: Serve, Accept, Take, and Allow. When there is consent, each of these four categories enable space for a celebrated exchange of gifts, energy, etc. Without consent, the darker sides of these four categories are expressed as exploitative relational dynamics. The practice of asking for consent requires an awareness and clarity of what is being asked, and a willingness to receive "no" with grace. In the context of landscape, neglecting a willingness to receive no may lead us to act without permission and cause harm to Earth and its inhabitants, ourselves included. A consensual design approach must be aware of and able to listen to the way land and the more-than-human expresses what it desires. It needs to know and respect ecological limits and boundaries. And in this way, landscape architecture and design may be able to use this modified framework to honor and respect Earth. It is also worth emphasizing, as the quote suggests, that this is a practice, and it is through the act of practicing this method that a greater understanding of how to listen and engage with site develops. It is relationship building through repetition.

CONSENT

This critical quote from philosopher Val Plumwood calls out the importance of metaphorically walking ourselves back from assuming we can't communicate, and instead encourages us to explore other ways of communicating. It also calls to challenge dominant assumptions about knowledge and intelligence, in order to position ourselves for information that may not be privileged by dominant social structures. To work toward "a richer understanding of the ways in which we are connected" (Morsehouse), exploring additional modes of communication can help guide us there.

"Attempts at cross-species symbolic communication are usually regarded in the dominant culture of the west as signs of mental disturbance, as in the phrase, 'She talked to the birds!', (all though trying to talk to plants is regarded still more seriously). Attempts at serious communication between humans and other species are almost completely precluded by the arrogance and human-centeredness of a culture that is convinced that other species are simpler and lesser, and only grudgingly to be admitted as communicative beings. Methodology based on these assumptions more or less guarantees that communication will not take place. Or alternatively, that when it does occur, it takes place on exclusively human terms such that non-human species is required to learn a human language but not visa versa. This arrangement severely disadvantages the non-human party and allows us to confirm our delusion that other species are inferior. Thus ethical and political aspects are in the picture from the beginning, in the question of how the communicative situation is arranged. The real communication challenge at this level of interspecies communication is for we humans to learn to communicate with other species on their terms, in their own languages, or in common terms, if there are any."

"...recognising earth others as fellow agents and narrative subjects is crucial for all ethical, collaborative, communicative and mutualistic projects, as well as for place sensitivity."

(Plumwood, Val. Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason. New York: Routledge, 2002.)

CONSENT

Various cultures and traditions have their own ways of approaching that. In the context of the land, many Indigenous cultures and traditions have practices and foundational worldviews that are rooted in connection to place which position people and nature, landscape, the world, and spirit as connected and unable to be separated. There are traditions of relational frameworks that position humans and more-than-humans as a larger body of kin. This relational worldview of kinship is one that takes on different expressions and forms, but it is one that many Indigenous cultures share. Robin Wall Kimmerer talks at length about this, and beautifully, in her various publications. In braiding sweetgrass she says:

"How can we distinguish between that which is given by the earth and that which is not? When does taking become outright theft? I think my elders would counsel that there is no one path, that each of us must find our own way. In my wandering with this question, I've found dead ends and clear openings. Discerning all that it might mean is like bushwhacking through dense undergrowth. Sometimes I get faint glimpses of a deer trail."

(Kimmerer, Robin Wall. Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013.)

In this quote, I think , in the question, calls out the answer that I've been examining through this thesis. Through walking, the embodied action of it, we can begin to create a kind of dialog. So I started developing walking circles as a ritual. And foregrounded walking as the method in the project. It is necessity for designers to know what they want from the land or site when they approach it, and to be clear both with themselves, and I argue, the site, about what those intentions are. The walking ritual serves as a consistent structure for a person to approach site with, one that they can be clear about their intentions within. The walking ritual, and in particular the first set of three rotation in the small/inner circle, are a physical embodiment of introduction to the site. One that a person must begin with, as a way to make themselves known at and to the site, as well as to slow the body and mind into the rhythm of the walking practice. It is a call to pace to relationship and to resist rushing the process.

WALKING

Through walking, we can weave our way around some of the mental constraints that get in the way of thinking about the more-than-human living world as something we should seek consent from. We can move toward a relationship with site and with the living world through the embodied language of movement and walking. We can view our relationships with the world and site through our shared physicality. And by engaging in the physical act of walking, we are immersed in the sensorial experiences that enliven a site.

"Rationalistic accounts of communication background the body and foreground supposedly mentalistic and linguistic aspects, treating communication in intellectualist terms as a matter of high level verbalized exchange with no significant bodily or emotional components."

"These disembodied rationalist models exclude the forms of communication associated with animals, along with forms of communication associated with women, with non-western cultures and with less 'educated' classes."

"Reading embodied action is part of all our lives, and is the common language of embodied beings."

(Plumwood, Val. Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason. New York: Routledge, 2002.)

WALKING

The work of Alice Foxley and Katie Jenkins are examples of how walking practice enriches and informed a landscape architecture practice. They both explore how subjective and embodied experiences on site or in the field, in nature, tap into a designer's own sensibilities, and the importance of that for designers to cultivate within themselves. Connecting the walking and site information with the subjective experiences of the person walking is embraced as critical information to drawn from.

Foxley speaks of the extensive walking practice of Vogt Landscape Architects as an integral part of their research and field work. She expresses that everyone approaches it through their unique lens, and what they get from the experience is also unique to them. Then through synthesizing together, subjective experience translates into the design process.

"Landscape is the subject and medium of our daily work, and what that really means is up for discussion. Depending on different disciplinary perspectives, landscape can be science or art, and because the very word 'landscape' is a cultural concept it is always both – the real and the imagined of landscape are indivisible."

"[Our walking field work] proposes a radically subjective approach that transcends the personal when applied to design."

(Foxley, Alice and Günther Vogt. Distance & Engagement: Walking, Thinking and Making Landscape. Baden, Switzerland: Lars Muller Publishers, 2010.)

Jenkins speaks of the importance of physically being on site, particularly for students of the design field. There is an immense amount of information available digitally to students and practitioners of landscape, whether it be GIS maps, research, precedents, books, or anything else. The availability of this information is very helpful to the design process, and it is critical to making good and sensitive work. However, it is a disservice to both design and to the site to exclusively rely on digitally available information. There is also a wealth of information that does not fit into the Cartesian mold of mapping. Including additional modes of practice into the field visit education for students, there is an opportunity to nurture the intuitive sensibilities that are rooted in a person's innate connection to the land and more-than-human world. It is through physically being on site (or as this project frames it "walking with" site) that additional layers of information reveal themselves. By relating and connecting pre-conceived perceptions of site with the embodied reality of walking, negotiation between the mental and physical realms of knowing can take place. Through an openness to physical and sensorial layers of knowing, that a student or designer can tap into how to communicate with site. A walking methodology within a design educational context can set future design up for successful site engagements.

"One of the most problematic aspects of digital design culture is the ease with which it enables students of landscape architecture to make embellished representations of the outdoors from the sensorially impoverished indoors. Ubiquitous access to geographic data and imagery has advantages, but it also makes visiting the landscape feel less urgent. A student with limited time might be persuaded that a site can be adequately explored online. Studying the contours on a map to understand a terrain, however, is very different from experiencing the full pleasure or labor of that terrain by walking. It is through walking outdoors that we expose ourselves to unpredictability and discovery: weather, encounters, fatigue—things that are not mapped or recorded because they have yet to occur."

"Through this exercise we recorded relationships: of slope to movement, of body to terrain, of individual to group. I've always considered this type of fieldwork and the environmental literacy it engenders to be an integral component of landscape architecture education."

(Jenkins, Katherine. "A Way of Walking." Landscape Architecture Magazine, October 27, 2020. <https://landscapearchitecturemagazine.org/2020/10/27/a-way-of-walking/>.)

WALKING

Having the experience of physically going outside and interacting with site is critical both for student learning as well as for good design practice. As this project unfolded over the transitional period being winter and spring, I began to feel that while consent is certainly core to how we engage site as designers, before we can get to consent, we have to be in some kind of relation. There is an exchange happening or wanting to happen, and tuning into that is something designers need to be available for. The practice of close noticing while walking can help reveal this.

Through engaging with this methodology of field walking as research, consent with site is something that each individual needs to cultivate in their own way; which goes back to how Robin Wall Kimmerer spoke about communicating with the more-than-human world.

"It seems that there is a sense in which the world is inviting us to a different form of participation within language that doesn't privilege understanding, so to speak. There are certain moments that are transformational, that don't rely on our ability to figure things out. We are in a moment right now, that does not call for your solution or your genius; this is a different form of intelligence that is at work. And it may not be language-able in terms of your cultural affixations with the alphabet, or with syntax, or with dictionaries and concepts, but it is no less language, and it is no less a call to agency of some kind."

(Akomolafe, Bayo. "A Meandering Search for Method: Becoming Human in a Posthuman World." By Janet Wootten. August 2022. <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/a-meandering-search-for-method-in-a-posthuman-world>)

RITUAL

The practice of communicating through body on a walk is transformed into ritual through repetition and intention. In ritual, there is an elective participation. Through repetition a sense of embodied language grows into familiarity. In landscape architecture, walking holds a longstanding position in the tradition of field work. Field work enables practitioners to collect information and data about the sites we work in that is critical to an informed and sensitive approach to site. In addition to these methods, introducing a layer of walking ritual that centers the relationship with site (versus information or data gathering) can help designers build an openness and appreciation for the variety of communication inputs that a site offers. A ritual walk gives space to listen. By introducing a methodology like this within a design education setting, students can begin to cultivate a practice that aligns with their own sensibilities, and develop the skills to be open and sensitive to site.

Why a circle in this project? Circles are a symbol and shape that hold a multitude of meanings and have significant roles in various cultural, spiritual, and aesthetic contexts. Working with the shape of a circle in this project engages the theme of repetition and reinforces the intention of relational development.

A ritual is both a constraint and an opening. By defining the set of rules or behaviors that gives shape to the ritual, a practitioner must find the place between rote adherence and intuitive flexibility. In that space, a negotiation with the landscape emerges and a relationship begins to take shape. By walking the shape of a circle repeatedly at the site, any deviance from the exacting geometry of the shape becomes a new form representative of the person walking, and the perceptions and proclivities at the site that initiated a new walking shape. It also demonstrates the site's influence and effect on the person walking. This shape and the form born from ritual is an externalized expression of a relationship with a place. The shapes – both through GPS tracks as well as the physical imprints left on the ground from walking or raking – are, certainly not, circles. Yet they retain circular essence through repetition, always returning to the same (or almost the same) starting point; but never really returning at all. The act of walking then takes on a representation of a landscape's influence on the entities that occupy the physical space through its own expression of aliveness. A negotiation of space with the site unfolds in the space of "not a circle" as much as it does within it. This repetition of action and with this explication intention of relationship development is what makes this circle walk a ritual act.

As designers, we can take these ritual acts, imbued with the language of consent and relationality, and carry them into how we approach sites. Building from this work over the semester, I offer that this is a valuable addition to a design pedagogy. This also brings the themes back to indigenous knowledge keeping and practices that center a place-based relationship with land as an abundant source of information. We can learn from situated and place-based practices and adopt them into our own practices of connecting with the land.

"Walking, though it is not the physical construction of a space, implies a transformation of the place and its meaning. The mere physical presences of [a person] in an unmapped space and the variations of perceptions [they] receive crossing it, constitute a form of transformation of the landscape that, without leaving visible signs, culturally modifies the meaning of space and therefore the space itself."*

(Careri, Francesco. Walkscapes: Walking As an Aesthetic Practice. Translated by Piccolo, Steven. Ames, IA: Culicidae Architectural Press, an imprint of Culicidae Press, LLC, 2017.)

*Milton is mapped

STUDENTS OF SITE

As landscape practitioners and designers, we engage with the living world and living material through time. We know that the timescales of landscape, plants, animals, and humans all have their own rhythms and expressions, and that these converge into a larger system of entanglements and aliveness. A developed awareness and sensitivity to these timescales sets up designers to cultivate their own capacity for relationality with the more-than-human world. And including the language of consent in how we approach this living world positions us to frame design work as a conversation with a living world, with consideration for its needs and benefits as well as our own.

To explore and test this method of walking ritual, this project and framework could be expanded into a structured engagement for students to participate in to offer the space and time to explore a personal interaction with the living world. Students are part of a design program for a set amount of time. In that time, there is an opportunity to explore design on a 1 to 1 time scale. Going outside to visit the site with regularity over time is a critical part of the methodology.

As students, time encapsulated within the university allows an opportunity to explore ideas and information, while being constrained by the demands of an academic system. This tension is perhaps fertile ground for explorations on how ritual might be a tool to negotiate between timescales and conflicting demands. By using ritual to mediate tensions, we can begin to cultivate an embodied feeling, intuition, sensitivity for how to navigate this tension; a skill which would hopefully continue to persist into students' professional spheres. Developing an embodied intuition, sense, and feeling of a spatial relationship, over time, can give a deeper understanding of how the designs we propose might land in the world, and who else they impact, including the more-than-human.

The proposed walking narrative is a starting point for students to follow to get to know the site. From this, they can start a longer-term term engagement with site.

PROPOSITION FOR STUDENT SITE ENGAGEMENT

Proposition to experiment with site-specific ritual-based practice extended through the duration of an MLA student experience (2, 2.5, or 3 years).

Goal is to create a space for students to begin to explore their own observations and methods of developing a conversational dialog with a site and the more-than-human inhabitants of it over an extended period of time. This will compliment the more “semester” timed projects and allow an additional exploration of timescales.

We are accustomed to speculating about behavior of landscapes over time. This is necessary, as we are interacting with timescales that we often will not be able to experience (like geological, tree life, successional ecosystems, for example). An interaction with a specific site, on a small scale, over an extended period of time, offers an additional layer of opportunity to observe and relate to the conditions, agents, actors, plants, critters, and histories of a site. It paces the experience of getting to know a site in real time. This complements the other types of learning and knowledge that students acquire, use, and express in a design education. Framed this way, a ritual of practice offers a type of insight gained through restraint. It cannot be speculated or sped up. It is simply observed and experienced, in time, through time, with site. Ultimately, this is how landscapes and nature behave. There is a movement through annual cycles, seasonal shifts, and successions. When we speculate about landscapes in our designs, we embed our understanding of these systems and behaviors into the design to the best of our ability. We often project our idealized versions of how landscapes will behave and take shape. By engaging with a specific site, at a 1-to-1 relational scale, we can explore how these ideas begin to unfold in real time. The aspect of relationality that can only exist without abstraction at the embodied scale, gives students a chance to encounter site with a layer of nuanced sensitivity for them to cultivate.

The drawing outlining a “walking narrative” is intended to be the initial starting point of this relation. Students are introduced to site and guided through the practice of close noticing while walking. Through a repetition of this structure, student then begin to develop their own inters and curiosities that can feed into engagement at the site they practice through their method of consent. A longer term engagement could take the following form:

VISIT STRUCTURE:

1. Preparation

- a. General briefing about the site is given. Location, cultural context, historical context, current context, basic geology, basic plant community; these are things that can be researched, looked up, and/or disseminated from knowledgeable experts.
- b. Briefing about ethical and safe behavior at site. Instructions or rules about harvesting plant material, pack in/out, foraging, interactions with wildlife, etc. The purpose is to set the tone for engagement and introduce people to these concepts if they haven't been exposed to them before.

2. Meeting the site

- a. Dedicated notebook/sketchbook for the project
- b. First visit follows a "Walking Narrative" that gives intentionally interpretive instructions for navigating through the site. These navigation points are based on observations and experiences walking at Milton for this thesis.
- c. Navigation points are a mix of physical entities, directional guidance, and ephemeral observations. The intention is to provide a "noticing cue" that a student can build upon. Students are meant to follow the walking narrative to the best of their ability. In deviation from the narrative can happen once a familiarity with site has developed.
- d. More about observation and restraint than information acquisition.

3. Learning the site

- a. Subsequent visits for engagement are loosely structured. The walking narrative is always an available option.
- b. When students become more familiar, students encouraged to walk and "meander" with attention to their sensory experiences, and awareness to what stands out to them without need for explanation.
- c. Students take notes in whatever way feels natural to them (e.g. write, draw, photo); encouragement to focus on taking in the experience without excessive documentation.
- d. Identify a few questions, curiosities, things of note, etc.
- e. Students identify areas they feel drawn to or connected with.

4. Pairing with specific site

- a. After reflection, students can choose an area of interest or have one assigned.
- b. From this site, they can begin their own walking ritual. They may start with the example three-circle ritual shape, modify the shape or structure of the ritual, or create their own to suit their approach. Decide what the walking ritual shape is.
- c. Decide where the starting point of the walking ritual will be and how it is oriented.
- d. Decide what the "open" and "close" of the ritual is (e.g. a specific greeting, movement, gesture, etc.)
- e. Decide how gratitude will be expressed
- f. Decide a few basic information markers to record each visit (time, temperature, light, weather, moon phase, humidity, wind, etc.)
- g. Decide a series to document overtime (consistency over the duration is the goal, but with room for changes as needed)

5. Identify site "anchor"

- a. This could be a specific tree, plant, feature; it will be something explicit and defined in the area of the student's ritual area. Purpose of this is to reinforce the aspect of 1-to-1 relationship. Drives a specificity to the site as a locus of observation.
- b. Have a least one reference anchor at the beginning; may add others as desired

6. Onset of the walking ritual.

- a. Second visit to the site, but first visit with the intent of performing walking ritual.
- b. Students encouraged to walk and follow the ritual actions, pay attention to their sensory experiences, and awareness to what stands out to them without need for explanation.
- c. Track with GPS, record markers, document in notebook, draw, photos, etc.
- d. Take particular note around site anchors
- e. No "actions" or design moves taken at this visit; focus is on observation

7. Make plan for future visits

- a. Students will make a plan for how to approach visits over the long term; this can be general, but will include how they will structure visits, with attention to seasonality, times, and variety conditions.
- b. Create a structure for documentation and tracking of this.

8. Visit site

- a. Goal of at least 12 visits over the duration of the interaction over their time at school, but open for additional visits. Emphasis on visiting at variable times, seasons, and conditions.
- b. Each visit: Track walking ritual with GPS; record markers; document in notebook, draw, photos, etc.
- c. Series of actions; up to student to determine what actions to take, how often, in what way, etc.
 - i. When action is taken, need to define "who it is for" and "who is doing something" (this aligns with the "wheel of consent" model)
 - ii. When/how does the site or something within the site express its intention or desire? When/how does the student express their intention or desire? Both are valid. Both happen. One of the purposes of this ritual exercise is to cultivate an awareness and sensitivity to when each of these are happening through a subjective interpretation; identify when the intention of action of the student is driving the behavior (this will often be the familiar case as we are in the practice of design), and within that, how do we cultivate the ability to reflect on how this impacts a space?
 - iii. Spontaneity and intuitive actions are welcome, but still needs to adhere to the "who is it for/ who is doing something" framework
 - iv. Document actions taken, and check-in/follow-up with those actions at subsequent visits

9. Ongoing research and documentation

- a. As time progresses, additional research about the site or layers of information are explored
- b. Reflections on how actions take shape over time; if expected outcomes are realized; what is observed learned; etc.
- c. Documented through notebooks, writing, drawing, photos, models, etc.
- d. Expression and development of changing relationship through documentation methods

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