

Mountain Attunement

Mount Hassell

April 2022

Driving into the Stirling Range is accompanied by a dramatic change in the sensibility of self and surroundings. From a distance, the land around the peaks of the Stirling Range appear almost perfectly level in comparison to the mountains themselves – an effect reinforced by the presence of cleared paddocks and linear boundaries defined by fences and roads. The mountains have a remarkably different texture to anything else in the landscapes of the south west, covered by a unique dark-green carpet of montane vegetation, capped by rocky quartzite spires. They emerge dramatically from the surrounding area, dominating the form of the skyline, often with their own weather and cloud systems blanketing the various mountaintops. As I ascended the first part of the trail, I became aware of my body as another element comprising this landscape – a figure rising upwards amongst the greenery, legs propelling weight upwards, lungs heaving, an enjoining of dynamic forms.



In the space between Mount Trio and Mount Hassell, high humidity and still air characterised a muggy late afternoon. Above, the thin layer of clouds hinted at the potential for rain the next day. As the clouds moved slowly across the sky, the slopes took on different shades and tones and I found myself at times enshrouded by shadow, and at other times brightly lit via direct beams of sunlight. With each step taken, I could hear insects and skinks darting off into the undergrowth. Dried out seed-pods and Banksia cones that remained attached to leafless black branches were reminders of fires from years past. Sunning atop a rock was a large Southern Heath Monitor that remained motionless, apart from its eyes, as I approached. The reactions and affect of the living things around me were a reminder my body occupied this space as both a subject – someone who sees – and as an object – something that is seen. The intersection of these two positions pointed to a profound intimacy, through which the landscape was constituted as something more than just a viewpoint for capturing static images.



“It is the fact that I belong to the landscape of visible things that enables my seeing – it is my seeing which enables me to witness that belongingness. And so subjectivity, and the possibility of meaningful engagement with the visible world, occurs as the arising of a ‘point of view’ within the visible...”

– Wylie. 2007, p. 152



“As I contemplate the blue of the sky I am not set over against it as an acosmic subject; I do not possess it in thought, or spread out toward it some idea of blue . . . I abandon myself to it and plunge into this mystery, it thinks itself in me.”

– Merleau-Ponty, 1969.

The final ascent required me to put away my camera and trekking pole and focus on the positioning of hands and feet in appropriate crevices, coming into even closer contact with the mountain. The feeling of stone against skin and using the strength of my arms was different to most of the other trails I had completed in the past. The summit was marked by a stone cairn with a wooden post driven into its center.

To the south was the imposing peak of Toolbrunup and to the west were the outlines of Mount Magog and Talyuberlup, with a break in the clouds beaming down on the mountains as if a light from God. In the fading light during the descent back to my car, the blue hour and smoke from burn-offs around the national park provided one final scene, enveloping Bluff Knoll to the east in fog, cool, and warm tones.



“When I look, I see with landscape. I am neither looking at it, nor straightforwardly placed ‘inside’ it. I am intertwined instead within an unfolding differentiation... I perceive through an attunement with landscape.”

- Wylie, 2007. p. 152.



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