

# Body Encircled By Mist

Sullivan Rock to Mount Cuthbert  
October 2021

Droplets of light rain fall from cloudy skies overhead. A cold wind blows against your chest as you make your way up the slope. Around you are pockets of moss, dispersed amongst shallow depressions in the granite. The largest of the hollows are filled with water, forming crystal clear pools with soft green borders.

At the peak of the monadnock, the landscape opens-up and reveals the Jarrah forest set against other peaks in the distance. In this part of the world, massive granites are always suggestive of their origins – violent volcanism or tectonic shifts, deep in the ancient past, resulting in the expulsion of the deepest contents of the Earth, followed by (tens of) millions of years of erosion. After the granite, cairns lead you to a spur trail and back into the vegetation.



You cross a vehicle track and continue into burnt eucalypt forest on a single-file trail, cutting between trees to find the blackened remains of a boot-cleaning station. The canopy is skeletal, with branches like dark fingers stretching up into a gothic sky. Even the charred trunks of the thickest eucalypts seem fragile, burnt through their bases, like the ruins of derelict spires.

In-between fallen trees and debris, green shoots and flowers have emerged. Everything is damp or dripping in the breeze. You hear gales racing through the forest and you are unsure – is it the coming storm, or the rush of wind associated with road-trains on the highway left behind? On the forest floor, the greens and the yellows surface according to the dull tones of light filtered through an open canopy and dark grey clouds above.



Out of the forest, the trail follows an incline over more granite. Along with the mosses, flowering shrubs have colonised the soils adjacent to the solid rock, with mallee beyond. As you traverse this rise – the first real peak – the sky grows darker and the crests in the distance are enveloped by mist. On distant slopes behind you, you can only vaguely make out cleared patches of forest – light brown against the dark green of the surrounding carpet of vegetation.

At your feet, yellow flowers sway atop their stems, bending to one side with each gust coming over the rock. You walk onwards, taking deeper breaths and feeling the tension of each step. Rain falls harder now, with big droplets crashing against your skin, and the wind howls more violently. When you reach a plateau the trail neatens, carving through lush undergrowth peppered with cowslip orchids.



Engaging hikes are those involving an alternating set of attentions – one towards corporeality, of your own physicality and its response to the elements, and another, of distancing and visionary moments. The bodily effort followed by the aesthetic reward. When focus shifts to the act of hiking, you almost forget where you are, being preoccupied with breathing, fatigue, the texture of materials underfoot, balance, and weight. You are ‘re-awakened’ when presented with a view, where you stop for a moment and just listen and look. Furthermore, these two modes cross over and interact with another – “a folding together of self and landscape, which, through its knotting, draws both out once again; a double movement of contraction and dilation...”

You begin the descent into the valley with the next peak looming in the distance, occupying your frame of vision through the spikes of grass trees and branches of low eucalypts. The trail is rocky, muddy, and uneven, and you become aware of your knees and ankles bearing the weight of each step down. A large pair of spider orchids poke out from the trailside.

On another step, there is a mystery pile of gelatinous material. You reach down and feel a globule between your fingers. It is odourless, clear, and has the consistency of firm jelly. In the valley floor, epicormic regrowth emerges from the bark of *Banksia grandis*. It feels post-desolate here. Amidst more blackened trunks there are pink blooms and the golden spheres of *Banksia sessilis* flowers. The wind is weaker, and the air is heavy with humidity as you wind through the trees.



Another ascent begins and the granitic soils are dotted with tiny white flowers. Leading up to a massive, lichen covered boulder, a single white mushroom has pushed its way through the sodden brown earth. You feel the icy wind pick up as you climb higher. The trail evens out and you emerge from the scrub onto barren rock. A series of cairns lead you into a wall of grey mist.

Your intention here was to see. At the pinnacle, you are instead encircled by a darkened landscape, shrouded by rain and cloud, and you can almost feel the porousness of the boundaries of your body, the entwinement of the warmth inside you and the external malevolence of nature.



You take some meagre shelter under nearby trees, eating a snack and waiting. Half an hour passes by, and you are threatened with sundown.



Yet, at some point on the return journey, you realise the tenor and atmosphere of the monadnocks has changed. In the late afternoon, the wind has seemingly blown the mist off the crests of the landscape. It is still dark, but it is calmer, and there is somehow the promise of more light. The contours of the horizon are made visible. On the granite, the gnamma holes now reflect parts of an azure sky.



\* sulphur \*