

A walk to Egschi

After rain in the valley, there's a notable absence of bugs. Birds chirrup quietly, and tiny white butterflies step out tentatively as though testing the air. Pinecones are my way markers. The trees, standing tall in quiet obedience waiting for me to pass, stroke the crown of my head teasing out a strand of hair as if curious to see what species I am. Cowslip takes on its literal meaning, as I slide my way downward. What does it mean to look up and out in the Safiental Valley? To pay attention? To observe, relate, correspond? The distant sound of the waterfall evokes the sound of blood rushing in my veins. I notice my heart pumping. The valley too is a circulatory system, threaded with vital channels, through which its life flows. I am an embodiment of nature, another aspect of its rich personality but on me it is not dependent. A deer propels itself across my field of vision, thundering downhill in an oblique trajectory, barking its warning that another trespasses in its realm. Curiously, I have to stop myself from weeping. I occupy myself with caressing the tinker bell trumpets of the wild orchids. As I brush past a pine branch, water fills my ear and curls my hair. This touch focuses my attention. I encounter a walk of gigantic snails that courteously entreat I share their path. There is space for us both, they signal in the circling of their antennae. I take care not to step on any of them. How many careless steps until nature's fine boned china cracks and can hold its contents no longer? A branch trips me up. It's a welcome reminder that I am an interloper in this place. The forest introduces me to a gelatinous black lizard (?). My knowledge is limited and I have never seen anything like it. Naming him gives me an excuse for conversation. I take a liberty in doing so as he's not mine to domesticate. He ambles away like a jelly sweet, half sucked and dropped by an excited child, suspicious of my being so close. Nature is showing me things. And I am grateful to her for her generosity. But I mediate nature through a human lens. I subjectively encounter. Is it possible to do otherwise? Elderflower strikes me in the nostril and I'm glad of it. Her pungent scent invites me to take a breath. I dare to take a strawberry and am bitten by a horsefly. A tiny but nevertheless sharp reminder that it's only polite to ask first. Those are not meant for me. They nourish and sustain an ecology that is beyond my comprehension. I don't pretend to know better. Nature bids me heed her warnings and watch I don't romanticise. She does not need another layer of human sediment dusted on her head. Volatility is a particle present in her molecular armoury and she knows how to deploy it. I pass my liquorice salamander – as I later discover - on my ascent back towards Tenna. I offer him a lift but he politely declines. He has four legs and doesn't have to battle gravity like I do. I nod at his wisdom, for he's thousands of years my senior, and resume my trudging, panting climb. Stopping at a wooden fence post altitude rests its arm across my shoulder and reminds me that I'm no spring chicken, no beauty contest cow. My sweat soaked carcass is but a future (and current for that matter) feast for the flies. With this realisation and my lungs topped up, I retrace my path. My senses are heightened, my lens polished. Time spent in observation and correspondence is never time wasted.

Hannah Standen, July 2018