



## Echo Valley / A Guiding Dilemma

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## DAN SHIPSIDES - Touchstone landscape text 3

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*There's an idea – which in many ways might be academic to this. But it's a notion that there's a culture of experiencing or understanding place which is prioritised or ordered around sight. I don't know if this is a familiar idea?*

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You'll need to expand on that...

*Well...so your experience of places through trekking, for example, a lot of it, the culture surrounding that – even if you haven't sight – would be based on visual expectations, what things look like or that the trekking experience is about - beautiful landscape scenery, epic vistas – mountains or whatever that you would see or expect to see. So much of it is based around or on visual-ness.*

So that's your starting position?

*Well no... but it's an exaggeration of an academic idea about how we see or understand landscape. That it's almost impossible to divorce sight based imagery or representation from the lived or real experience.*

And as a non-sighted person impossible for me to be included in that experience?

*Kind of...but also that maybe even your experience would somehow be tied up in that visual culture. That's an idea anyway...*

Right well... That's a point about the importance of sight. It doesn't apply to trekking really. Because the experience of trekking is about the experience of people. A group of people who come together – often they don't know each other – they come together as trekkers, in their trekking gear. So they're not identified status-wise, work-wise, background-wise, relationship-wise and that's what a lot of people talk about - the great freedom of just turning up as an individual and there's a project. Trekking is the deal – but socializing is what people remember. I've never heard people talk about wasn't that a fantastic view of a mountain or da de da. Maybe they do but not to me! It's usually about the difficulty of the climb, the endurance of some of them and the booze-ups afterwards – but very little of it....I don't remember anyone talking about what they saw.

For some people the visual is important – it is a big part of it and it's part of the reason I don't continue to trek – because I'm not getting enough out of it – but in terms of that idea – that it's such a strongly visual experience I really couldn't concur with it.

If a blind person was asking me if I'd recommend going on a trek I'd say absolutely – definitely, maybe not every year – but definitely because it's such a massive experience in many other ways.

*There's someone I know whose researching with blind people who hill-walk. They're interested in a different narrative of landscape – kind of as I am – but she encountered this idea of a visual basis and seemed to conclude that it even grounded the blind experience or a blind person's testimony and in a way blocked or coloured any telling of an other experience. She was interested in whether they could bring a whole different perspective on it.*

Well I can see where she's coming from. There's a persuasion that someone who is so different from yourself - has a very different perception. But not really. You see, we all live inside our own heads and the eyes and ears, and all the rest of it, are just little channels which are giving all these bits and pieces of information – and are more or less important. But it's the internal experience that connects with reality and other people.

*And I guess all the other stuff – the context of our experience – the daily news, our*

*understanding of ideas and events and such things.*

Aye that's it...that's it.

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