

Hamish Fulton 21 Days in the Cairngorms

Deveron Arts works under the modus operandi the *town is the venue* where the town of Huntly becomes the venue, studio, gallery and stage for the visual and performing arts. With the nearest big city about an hour away, connectivity for the town of Huntly is an issue. Whether this is by transport, (Huntly is a 4000 strong community that is on the direct train line between Inverness and Aberdeen) or through communication, such as the post, telephone or the Internet. With the town being on the foothills of the Cairngorms National Park, walking, or hiking, is a form of transportation that is also important to Huntly. The Cairngorms are one of the last wilderness areas in Europe where there is the possibility of several days of walking without human interaction or interference. With places like Huntly being outwith the boundaries of the Cairngorm National Park, there is debate amongst some residents inside and out of whether it is better economically and otherwise to be within or outwith its borders.

In spring 2010 they invited the prolific walking artist, Hamish Fulton, to develop a project that connects the town to the Cairngorms through 'Walking as Art'. Through his walks Fulton tries to actively test himself mentally and physically, such as undertaking a full week of walking without sleep; walking from one side of the UK to the other; refraining from talking for a full week whilst walking. Through the physical involvement of walking Fulton aims to experience and understand the landscape, the environment, and as a result himself.

Fulton proposed '21 days in the Cairngorms' in which, for twenty-one days, he would walk from Huntly over and through the Cairngorms, with one rucksack in which was packed everything he needed to survive. He would start in Huntly, and end in the heart of the national park and throughout the period have no way of being tracked (carrying no GPS). Exploring Huntly's town motto *Room to Roam* Fulton wanted to highlight both the mental and physical room to roam and make a geographic and psychological link between Huntly and the Cairngorm national park.

At 10am on Sunday 18 April, followed by a group of artists, curators, students and hardened walkers, Fulton set off from Huntly to the Cairngorms. The group only accompanying him for the first five hours, where at a crossroads he would say farewell and disappear into the national park. The walk took the group up and down hills, across fields, over barbed wire fences and gates and under tree lined pathways. Through out the walk there was an impression of slowing down, and awareness of the surroundings, as well as the small details which we possibly take for granted in our rushed modern lives. On top of this was also the awareness and acknowledgement of the physical and mental endurance Fulton was going to be put through living in the Cairngorms over the twenty one days with no means of communication. As a result the people who saw him off carried his experiences themselves throughout the twenty-one days, by wondering where exactly in the Cairngorms he might be and how he was surviving. Creating an imaginary mental map through having the relatively short experience of the five hour accompanied walk.

Alongside the main walking project, a series of talks and walks were developed to generate discussion around the idea of 'Walking as Art' which involved the Chicago based curator Mary Jane Jacob in a so-called Shadow Curator capacity. In his public presentation and discussion with Jacob, Fulton not only brought up the idea of walking as art, and his various walks across the UK, Tibet, and other parts of the world, but the strength of the body and its ability to withstand endurance, both physically and mentally. During his slide show he mentioned such people as John Francis who, for almost three decades, travelled the globe by foot and boat with a message of environmental responsibility (for 17 of those years without speaking), and as a result bringing another dimension and position to the conversation, the possibility of walking as activism.

The first of two choreographed walks, performed before and after the '21 days', involved participants walking around a block of buildings in Huntly, keeping two metres behind the person in front of them, for two hours none stop. What starts as an endurance activity develops, for some of the people involved, into a level of meditation where the only object in your line of vision for the two hour period are the heels of the person in front of you. The second choreographed walk on the ski car park in the centre of the Cairngorm national park was at a slower pace, but still involved physical endurance, as Fulton asked participants to walk the short distance of three metres over a full one hour period. Through both of these walks the participants develop an understanding and acknowledgement of walking, the environment surrounding them, meditation and internal contemplation.

The idea of 'Walking as Art' was questioned by many of the audience and participants in the project. Can walking be art and where does the walk end and the art begin? For Fulton the answer to these questions has constantly changed. From the walk being a walk and the art emerging from the experience, to his current belief that the walk can also be the art work. Through Fulton's experience in the Cairngorms will emerge a series of works, (one of which will be added to Deveron Arts ever growing Town Collection of public art), and a book that will present his experience and thoughts throughout the twenty-one days.

Fulton aims to investigate, through his art practice, the experience of walking, but also the themes that run through and alongside it. This includes the physicality of the body, mental fortitude, environmental responsibility, activism, and possibly the aim of claiming back something that we have maybe lost in this technological and modern age. The ability to slow down, take stock and appreciate and acknowledge our surroundings.

Ben Jones
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