



Diary 4 (Waiting by Sheep Creek)

Alice Angus

Introduction

In the summer of 2003 I spent several weeks in the Northern Yukon, began a collaboration with Joyce Majiski (artist and guide) and participated in a residency in Ivvavik National Park in the northwestern Arctic. This eBook is one of a series from the sketchbooks of that journey.



Waiting by the Creek

From the air, and in the imaginations of the temperate zone the land of Ivvavik, the Arctic taiga and tundra, seems a frozen desert of heath of scrub, rock and earth. But landing at the junction of Sheep Creek and the Firth River we see tussocks of grass and wild flowers rise from the valley floor. Islands of colour, embroidered cushions with succulent jewel like plants, luminescent mosses, ferns and vibrant wildflowers are miniature raised gardens of Babylon, others are spiky like curled up hedgehogs or moss cushioned stepping stones over boggy ground between caribou trails. The arctic summer is so short and the sunlight so intense that life bursts into being. Inhuman quantities of mosquitoes and other bugs swarm around us, feeding the bird population whilst tormenting the larger mammals. On arid ochre hills shimmering in a heat haze the arctic poppy follows the sun's path gathering heat, moss campion bursts between rocks and cotton grass shudders in the wind. Though life is fragile it is also tenacious and, at this time of year, abundant yet the language of the north I grew up with tells of a place of desolation but if you know where to look, the legends desolation fall away.

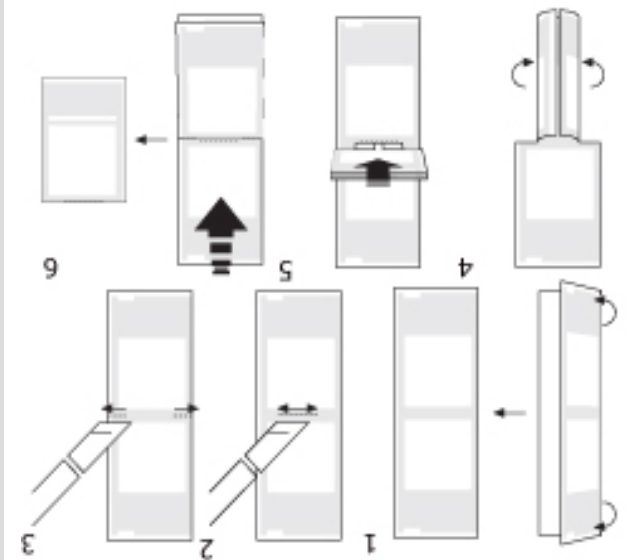


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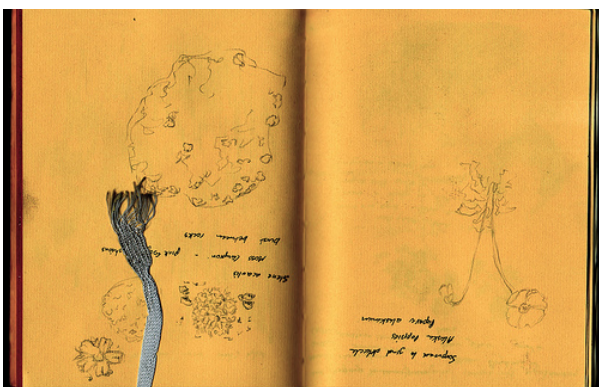
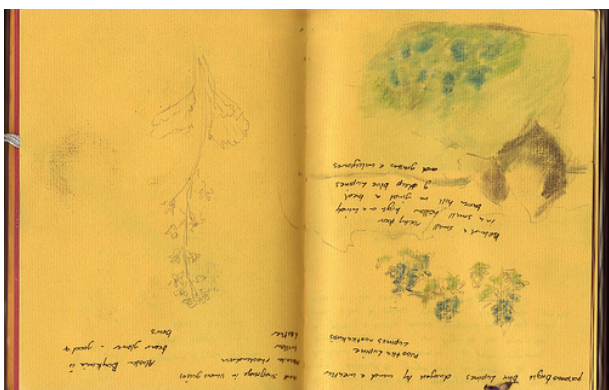
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- References.
1. Jujiro Wada
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jujiro_Wada
 2. Child Migrant Trust
<http://www.childmigrantstrust.com/Index.htm>
 3. Image source,
<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:CPacific.jpg#filehistory>

High up under crumbling tors and hidden by a
 heat haze I see the Dall's Sheep. Far away like a
 dream remembered it stands for a moment
 sensing my presence then turns back into its
 world.
 The fox in the city slips from bin to bin, house to
 house in the semi silence of night. Sometimes he
 lives in the center of the metropolis, so far from
 suburbia and so deeply in the city' no-one would
 expect to see him, so we think it was a large dog.
 He is camouflaged by our expectations.



Out on the land there are larger traces of life; ghostly tracks of caribou in their thousands, a Dalls sheep shimmers in the distance, porcupine shuffles in the trees and fox scavenges what he can find. Stuck in the pine pitch is a wisp of grizzly hair marking the scratching post with an "I was here". Local stories and archaeologies would tell you where trappers, and travellers had walked and hunters waited.



Wada trekked the long route up to the Klondyke the thence north via the Firth River and way up to the Beaufort Sea and Herschel Island through the darkness and harsh winter. Centuries earlier explorers had landed on the East Coast bringing smallpox to the people of Canada and and later, long distance whaling ships came around the north coast, unwittingly carrying devastating disease to the people of the arctic. Whilst Wada chased Gold from the Klondyke to the Arctic, much further south another wave of migration pushed over Canada; some must have been driven by greed, but others by hope of a life better than the poverty they left in inhuman factories and crowded cities and some were forced to emigrate as the bleak story of the British Home Children will testify. Nearly 100,000 children as young as 3 were subject to compulsory deportation and sent alone to Canada, by religious and charitable organisations, many became indentured farm labourers. (2)

So waves of migrations continued to come over the land and sea bringing new religions, laws and language.



The first Transcontinental Train arrives, from the Atlantic, at the Pacific Coast, stopping at Port Arthur on June 30, 1886.



There is the bleached wooden handle of a shovel, a rusty sieve and a tatty old boot, a stake driven into the ground, the fading detritus of a harsh northern mining claim. Across the breeze there are the stories of the nomadic people and travellers that criss crossed the land and way before that the ancient people that came from Asia. Im told there is still gold in these hills. The Japanese prospector and musher Junchiro Wada was one who came to stake a claim not far from here, about a hundred years ago. (1)

