

ON TRACKING

Perhaps some would ask, as a denizen of the Twenty-First Century, comfortably ensconced in a cocoon of technology and luxuries undreamed of even in the lifetime of our parents, why we should feel the need to study, much less preserve the rapidly vanishing art of tracking.

I am drawn to tracking because the imprints that we leave upon the earth tell a story, and as a writer, I am drawn to stories. Perhaps it speaks to the human condition, to a time when our ancestors gathered around the open fire, casting nervous glances over their shoulders, perceiving the monstrous terrors both real and imagined lurking just beyond the flickering light. Blessed, or perhaps even cursed, by sufficient brain capacity and capability for abstract and creative thought to power the imagination, our progenitors understood the rhythm of life and grasped how elusive our bonds to this world could be, especially when darkness closed in.

That primitive reptilian part of the human brain still resides in us all, no matter how numbed by the jangling, beeps and whirring of the electronic devices that define our lives, the relentless drive to collect and consume all manner of things, that insatiable thirst that cries out for nourishment. Despite these distractions, we crave stories, and while the formats have changed, the need remains to understand the Mystery which surrounds us. And therein lie the stories that seek to explain why things are, or were, or perhaps will be.

Whether we are a two-legged, a four-legged or without legs, whether we walk, run, crawl, slither, hop, jump, skip or move across the earth in any fashion, we leave sign of our presence, no matter how insignificant to untrained eyes. And our every movement, every footfall, every branch disturbed, twig snapped, stone unturned, brush swept aside tells the story of our passage. These stories, whether quiet moments of reflection and repose, headlong pursuits or terror-stricken flights terminating in life or death dramas, or something entirely in between, speak to the heart of all living things as put forth by the Creator, that Great Architect of the Universe – that a living, breathing organism was here, occupying a specific and definable physical space, if even for a fleeting moment of time, and because of that simple yet understated fact, that life had purpose and meaning.

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