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Visit a mythical land – our own

Review of *Phil Smith. Mythogeography: A Guide to Walking Sideways. Triarchy Press.*

Reform Magazine, April 2013

<http://www.reform-magazine.co.uk/2013/03/book-reviews-march-2013-2/>

Mythogeography is about keeping alive the many potential meanings of places in the face of creeping uniformity. Its key device is the group walk, a 'collective practice of dialogue and anti-wayfinding that can only be realised on the hoof and in communion with others, and not in any book'.

Mythogeography originally arose from the work of a group of site-specific performance artists based in Exeter. Phil Smith, group member and author, describes it as 'a set of approaches to the world, accessible to anyone, that teases out connections and journeys, celebrates the many-sidedness of things and sees the multiplicity of possible viewpoints not as a problem but as the pleasurable means for getting closer to truths.'

The book embodies the subject, and as such is not entirely conventional. Part is a toolbox of ideas about how to walk differently, to be treated as a handbook rather than read straight through. Part is show-don't-tell narrative: the cautionary tale of the disappeared SJ Salmon; and the story of a long walk by the author's alter-ego Crab Man. And part is a gallimaufry of introductory notes, publishers' notes, editors' notes, footnotes, endnotes, and appendices, that by turns question, explain and extend the text.

One day of Crab Man's walk is illuminating. It began with a chance meeting with a council sub-contractor, who took him on a journey through a labyrinthine economic reality of renovated mills and a fantastical clandestine England, down tunnels to underground ballrooms and up roads to nowhere. But it ended in seeking the Major Oak in Sherwood Forest, and finding a fenced tree and 'the plastic horror of the visitor centre', which squeezed the multiple myths of the forest into a single meaning and trashed them.

The book provides a goldmine of ideas for embarking on this path, well-supported online at www.mythogeography.com.