

Ice Cores & Tree Rings

Jennifer Burville-Riley

Artfully extracted from Antarctic wastelands,

crystalline cylinders of ice reveal

our planet's frozen history in glass-smooth geometry,

tiny pockets of atmospheric elements,

climate snapshots, trapped in layered time.

Here is the oxygen our parents breathed,

and our parents' parents,

and every forebear stretching back

through families, tribes, cultures and continents,

glacial ages, shifting plates, to the genesis air

in the African lungs of human evolution, leaving

chemical signatures that dance across millennial graphs,

molecules of nitrogen and CO², of bone-dry seasons,

monsoons and storms, the sulphurous traces of Krakatoa,

Popocatepetl and Vesuvius,

carbon-black soot from industrial ages,

radioactivity from nuclear progression and aggression.

I think of ice cores and the alternating rings

of virgin summer snowfalls and dirty winter banding

tainted with polar dust from weathered mountain ranges,

while I trace my thoughtful finger round

concentric circles on the wise and ancient heart

of a felled Welsh Oak: exposed, its secret diary

opens up in cross-section, patiently waiting to be read.

I haven't finished counting yet, but here must be

at least three hundred tree years set

in sequences of pale, spring growth

and darker, denser, high-dry summer months,

drought revealed in stifled cycles,

rings crowded closely in tight bound wheels.

And barely formed, the spectral trace

of Eighteen-Hundred and Sixteen

when hollow-bellied families became a wave of refugees,

fleeing crop-failed famine and withering leaves:

The Year Without A Summer.

There's more to find in tree rings than the chapters of an oak,

more secrets deep in ice-cores than the molecules on graphs,

more to our future

than the patterns

of the past.

Reasons to Save the World

Jack McEwan

Minsmere RSPB reserve, Suffolk – Early morning in February

A deer, a roe deer, the first I've ever seen, nestling inbetween the bushes,

a majestic, magical marsh harrier soaring and swooping down, catching prey,

a smew, a widgeon, a shoveller, or was it just a mallard?

Lazy cormorant stretching his wings,

Grandpa rustling through his bird book to see if it really was one,

cries of fear and fright as Granny spots deer footprints on the muddy gravel,

natures choir of birds calling and singing,

tough old wood on the window hatch as I enter the different hides,

cold metal as I peer through my Binoculars,

smooth silver as I try to capture my memories,

Safe cage of happiness which is my mother's hand,

bitter sting of disappointment: no otters today,

juicy hot beans and flaky sausage rolls as I walk towards canopy hide hoping to see all the beautiful creatures in Minsmere,

Pitter patter, pitter patter, rain on my cheek as we carry on

wet but warm inside.

Homelands

Hugo Grundy

We have our coats and hats on.

Strolling along the white river –

snow is like fingers on a piano.

It looks like a closed down shop

in the light of the lunar day.

Our feet in boots – plodding and crushing

and shrinking – are silent.

We want to stand with trees

for a million years.

One day, they might build shops

where the river is.

These pointed spears of snow-grass

could be shot over ice-river lands

to become boats never to return.

Birds and fish, under ice,

might find wild, imaginary places

where only they can go.

And might call those places

'Dubbledaab', for a sound of home.

For the sound of the song

of the chewing water-ice.

In this snow white, river light

we stampede the river – drop enormous rocks

to release running water until it's dark.

With soaking trousers

and solid, ice-bell fingers

we can't even feel.