
SOME
APPLES
WINTER
HARVESTING

A selection of wild apples from the Chacewater and Wheal Busy population, 2020.

Some Interesting Apples

An apple grown from the seed of an open pollinated fruit will, while perhaps inheriting the characteristics of its parents, always create a variety distinct from either. The *Malus* genome is larger than that of humans and sometimes the seedlings can be radically different. As a reasonably guilt-free discard from a car or train window these feral seedlings of *Malus domestica* proliferate, perhaps catching our eye in a flash of May blossom or viewed laden with fruit by a stretch of railway track on a drab October schedule delay.

There is an incredible gene pool of apples adapting to local conditions in hedgerows across the country. A lot of these will be of limited utility, and many of course will be seedlings of Golden Delicious or Gala etc, but some will have desirable characteristics, in terms of flavour and resistance to diseases and the vagaries of climate.

In the context of the climate emergency and the 'global weirding' of weather systems this ability to adapt and thrive in a range of situations perhpas makes *Malus* an important species within potential robust novel ecosystems and as ongoing food resource.

To propagate known varieties of apple, a new tree must be grafted from existing material of the variety onto a rootstock with known characteristics, a long-term commitment to preservation generally considered worthwhile only where the variety has strong commercial prospects. In 1990 Common Ground instigated the first Apple Day to promote the 'local distinctiveness' and value to landscape histories of the wealth of varieties largely ignored in favour of a few super-market friendly strains.

Building on the now well-known apple day theme and the work of wild apple collectors such as Matt Kaminsky AKA Gnarly Pippins in the USA, through the form of physical exhibition, photographic typology and preservation through grafting, *Some Interesting Apples* shifts the focus toward those wild seedlings to which comparatively little attention has been given and their potential for future usefulness.

This is a project co-founded by William Arnold and James Fergusson, the primary aim of which is to record and where characteristics make desirable (and sometimes where they don't) preserve wilding apples, i.e., Malus domestica growing on their own roots as the result of a discarded core. It has focussed primarily on central and west Cornwall, where between the two of us and with a little help from others we have recorded over 330 trees and therefore over 330 novel varieties of apple. Many of these have been subject to public taste trials at Kestle Barton.

This paper has been produced to coincide with the blossom time workshop and field trip in collaboration with Caitlin DeSilvey of the Environment & Sustainability Institute, University of Exeter.

Pioneers

William Arnold

> Every wild-apple shrub excites our expectation thus, somewhat as every wild child. It is, perhaps, a prince in disguise. What a lesson to man! So are human beings, referred to the highest standard, the celestial fruit which they suggest and aspire to bear, browsed on by fate; and only the most persistent and strongest genius defends itself and prevails, sends a tender scion upward at last, and drops its perfect fruit on the ungrateful earth. Poets and philosophers and statesmen thus spring up in the country pastures, and outlast the hosts of unoriginal men.[1]
>
> Henry David Thoreau (1862)

"Chacewater 30mph Russett", 2020

The domestic apple growing wild on its own roots is an escapee, a neophyte non-native often germinating on waste ground and wayside where cores are casually tossed. Two of the biggest populations found during the *Some Interesting Apples* project have been on the dune system of a popular holiday park at Par Sands and throughout the complex of former tramways turned recreational heritage paths of the Camborne & Redruth mining landscape.

The latter location has an extraordinary population ranging from the crabbiest pippins on tractor flayed bushes to elegant orb-like specimens, grocer's display ready despite the parent tree receiving no attention at all. The idea that all these apples, representing such huge diversity of colour, shape and flavour were the descendants of those eaten by the ordinary men and women who worked this hugely damaged and polluted but recovering landscape was irresistibly romantic.

I expected that I would find numerous records in the major archival store of Cornish historical documents at Kresen Kernow of local orchards supplying the mining communities but other than a few entries from the court records of those poor unfortunates caught and punished for scrumping, apple pickings were slim.

To be fair, I was disabused of my notion that populations of wilding apples would bear any great resemblance to those grown historically in a given area early on in the *Some Interesting Apples* project when I began my research photographing to scale apples of Cornish heritage orchards. While some genetic traits must be inherited, to the casual observer the apples of the hedgerow generally defy categorisation other than the odd supermarket Golden Delicious that hasn't fallen too far from the tree.

Apples are hardy plants, evolving in isolation in the mountains of the Tian Shan, relatively short-lived as individuals and with a seemingly scattergun approach to evolution – make enough offspring and as least one or two will stick in the local environment. It leads one to wonder whether this hugely heterozygous, promiscuous, and short-lived nature makes the apple potentially useful within robust novel ecosystems in the context of a rapidly changing climate.

The highest diversity of Cornish apples I have seen is to be found not in the wonderful National Trust Mother Orchard[2] at Cotehele but next to spoil heaps and by the sides of the mineral tramways of Camborne and Redruth.

Look around anywhere in this environ and the evidence of past extractive industry is plain to see. Rusting iron-red toxic lagoons, spoil heaps where a hundred years after the last ore was raised only rare bryophytes and liverworts grow and of course that icon of Cornwall, the engine house with its slender chimney standing sentinel in the scores of picturesque ruins; on hills, rugged cliff and valley doing fine service for the tourist board where a perfect Instagram sunset can be captured just so in the sturdy arched windows.

With UNESCO World Heritage status, the Camborne and Redruth mining district is proud of its place as the centre of origin of modern world mining.

Soviet-era botanist Nikolai Vavilov, who dedicated his life to finding the biological origins of major food plants to combat hunger, theorised that the "centres of origin" of a species can be found in the places where you find the highest diversity of that species.

The highest diversity of Malus occurs in the remnants of the wild fruit forests of the Tian Shan in Southern Kazakhstan and Vavilov thus concluded that the domestic apple (Malus domestica) had evolved from these wild apples, primarily a strain called Malus sieversii. Modern genetics proves Vavilov right.

This waste ground population is obviously not the modern apple's centre of origin, it is there because at some point someone threw the remnants of their healthy snack in the hedge, or an animal did its business, but it does represent a remarkable accumulation of genetic diversity in a small area. It has led me to think of the domestic apple in its feral form not as a cosseted plant of cultivation but a pioneer species taking its chances amongst the willow, bramble and rosebay. The apples displayed on the back page of this paper represent just a snapshot of this diversity.

In his 2015 book The New Wild[3], environmental journalist Fred Pearce makes the controversial claim that invasive and non-natives "will be nature's salvation' that environmental orthodoxy has it all wrong and we're wasting our time uprooting and trapping to preserve a mythical pristine. He probably overeggs the pudding, perhaps dangerously so; gamely looking to find upsides to Kudzu and Japanese Knotweed and he cherry picks certain human introduced non-natives such as the honeybee and earthworm in north America which have proved themselves useful to make a point for a laissez-faire approach to conservation.[4]

However, on some level in certain circumstances, perhaps there is something there. A much-made argument in Pearce's book goes along the lines of non-native species often being well equipped to take over and rewild land despoiled by human action...it is a seductive narrative.

During my time collecting feral apples for this project, I have unsurprisingly found the greatest concentrations in places with the greatest movements of people – road and wayside but what surprised me most was how some of these concentrations were in quite marginal and degraded landscapes. One specimen for example *w3w///fearfully.notifying.positions* clings on fruitfully to the side of Carn Brea, a mine-shaft riddled hill at 700'.

I have started to think of the feral domestic apple in this context, as a highly useful non-native. Not exactly invasive, as far as I am aware, it is not crowding out any native species and provides much support for a diverse ecosystem, but it is certainly prolific. Its only shortcoming seems to be that it is neither from the knowable controlled and tasteful world of the orchard, nor is it the quasi-mythical, rare, thorned, native and truly wild Malus slyvestris.

Research grants are awarded, and newspaper column inches devoted to celebrating the discovery of a lone pure-bred crab apple clinging to a crag on an uninhabited Hebridean Isle[5] but where is the wonder at a theoretically infinite variety of accidental seed-grown fruit each with the potential to be propagated, registered and like a comet given the finder's name all while supporting a diverse number of other species?

This seedling diversity and the potential for extraordinary apples to emerge from an essentially random selection of waifs and strays also puts me in mind of human pioneer, John – Johnny Appleseed – Chapman, who did much for the 19th century westward expansion of the apple in the USA and who remains a notable figure within foundation myths of the modern United States.

Always one step ahead of the homesteaders, Chapman, out of either religious conviction that grafting was adulterous to the work of God, or canny business practice, grew apples from seed only. This legacy of thousands of novel varieties, recently brought to widespread attention by the collection and conservation work of Matt Kaminsky AKA Gnarly Pippins[6] can still be found in the relict orchards and scrubland wildings of New England and upstate New York.

Some of the most celebrated American cultivars including McIntosh and Golden Delicious and England's own famous Bramley's Seedling occurred as chance specimens, with every one of those apples we eat today descended from clones of an original tree.

> Through the whole growing season, the supermarket shelves of the world display for good commercial reasons probably fewer than fifty apple cultivars. Yet in the abandoned homesteads of upper New York state, along the ancient trackways of England, and in thickets and on cliff slopes and other marginal land in the whole of the temperate world seedling apples of unknown parentage constantly arise. Most of these are of little value except for pig food, or rough cider but here and there a rare elite individual will emerge. [7]
>
> - Barry Juniper (2019)

In Almaty, Kazakhstan, Juniper & Mabberly note that such is the diversity of apples grown on their own roots, it is not uncommon to find large, sweet seed-grown apples for sale in the markets and roadside stalls. It is simply often not worth the hassle to graft an orchard with known cultivars. One can only wonder at the diversity of flavour!

In photographing these forty-two apples at comparative scale – itself a mere snapshot of a local population - there is of course representation only of colour and form, it says nothing of the taste of these fruit. Through public taste trails held each autumn at Kestle Barton Rural Arts Centre, Some Interesting Apples is beginning to gain an impression of the diversity of flavour and potential usefulness for human consumption, or otherwise!

In the wild fruit forests of the Heavenly Mountains, no two apples taste exactly the same but much the same can be said for the road and wayside wildings of Camborne and Redruth, or anywhere else.

Notes

1.Henry David Thoreau, Wild Apples, The Atlantic Magazine, November 1862
2. Cotehele's Mother Orchard was planted 2001 with over 300 trees and 125 different heritage varieties of apple tree - https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/cotehele/features/cotehele-orchards - accessed 01/03/22
3. Pearce, F., The New Wild: Why Invasive Species Will Be Nature's Salvation Beacon, London, 2015.
4. https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/is-there-need-for-the-new-wild-the-new-ecological-quarrels/ Accessed 01/03/22
5. https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/apple-tree-scotland-ice-age-b1882757.html accessed 01/03/22
6. https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/10/19/metro/climbing-apple-trees-with-man-called-gnarly-pippins/ Accessed 28/02/22
7. Juniper, B. & Mabberly, D.J. The Extraordinary Story of The Apple, Kew: London, 2019, p.240

This article is an edited version of Wilding Apples of The Camborne & Redruth Mining District commissioned by Hereford Cider Museum Trust for Apples & People

Author's note: I wrote this essay in late 2021 and early 2022, in response to an invitation to contribute to a publication edited by Charles Rouleau, *Woven in Vegetal Fabric: On Plant Becomings* (2022). I've since realised that the soul-searching I was doing in this piece resonates with work of others, who are also using the apple to imagine and invent new versions of self, and of culture. These people include feral fruit foragers and self-trained apple-historians, plant geneticists and artist-horticulturalists (like William and James). I'm currently designing a new research project to explore the coevolution, and coadaptation, of apples and people.

Becoming Apple

Caitlin DeSilvey

Carpent tua poma nepotes
(Your grandchildren shall gather the apples.)
—Virgil, Eclogues, IX, 37 BCE [1]

As for me, I would rather
Be a worm in a wild apple than a son of man.
But we are what we are . . .
—Robinson Jeffers, "Original Sin" [2]

Start in the middle, the translucent chamber that holds the slick, bitter seeds. The issue at hand: If the self—the stable, coherent, singular self—is partly what got us into this mess, then we'll need different versions of self to get us out the other side. And we can talk as much as we like about the need for more permeable and interconnected subjectivities, but we will all experience this conversion individually, if at all.[3] The only subjectivity I have to think with is this one: If I can understand something about how I assembled this self, where the parts came from, and how the metaphors work, I might understand how it can be refigured.

In this essay, I take up the invitation to think about *plants becoming human and humans becoming plant* by thinking with one plant (the apple, or *Malus domestica*) and one human (me). A warning: the arc of the narrative is uneven, loosely hung around memories and moments when the apple and I found ourselves sharing a story. At the end there is no resolution; rather (maybe) dissolution. But let's begin.

I remember McIntosh Octobers in Vermont, the roadside stands selling paper sacks full of watery, thin-skinned fruits. The grafted saplings my parents carefully planted on the farm we moved to in 1975, following the urban exodus and the dream of the simple life. The old treehouse and swing in the apple tree by the back field, where we hung the pig to bleed out that one time. When I started to write, I wrote stories with apples in them:

> Once long ago there was a young prince named Leif. He had been banned from his father's, King Ofao's, kingdom because he had eaten a sacred fruit that was thought to be poison. Leif had found out that it was not poison, but it let you be able to hear and understand the animals' speech.[4]

In the beginning, there was the apple. In Sunday school singalongs we belted out, "Oh, the Lord is good to me, and so I thank the Lord, for giving me, the things I need, the sun and the rain and the apple seed. The Lord is good to me."

For a few years my family attended a Lutheran church, and I have a vivid memory of one service: the pastor took a large bite of an apple at the start of the sermon and then set it on the edge of his pulpit, the white scar facing the congregation. As he spoke the white became tinged with the brown of decay. "This is your soul," he said. I don't remember what lesson we were intended to take from this, but I remember the apple. As Michael Pollan writes,

> Much like the Puritans, who regarded their crossing to America as a kind of baptism or rebirth, the apple couldn't cross the Atlantic without changing its identity - a fact that encouraged generations of Americans to hear echoes of their own story in the story of this fruit. The apple in America became a parable.[5]

The apple as the emblem of the chosen people in their new land: adaptable, vigorous, keen. Apple seeds packed in the hold of the Mayflower. American exceptionalism rooted in each seedling or grafting. And then there was Johnny, of course, Appleseed (*né* Chapman). The roving entrepreneur, his speculative orchards moving the frontier ever inward. Pollan praises him for his "pomocentric" point of view: "He understood he was working for the apples as much as they were working for him."[6] And they were both working to turn an inhabited continent into colonized territory, tree by tree.

Thinking with apples, the companion species par excellence, witnessing our attempts at domination and our cosy fables of a harmonious life—round, red, fitted to an open palm. The apple as poison (Eve, Snow White) and as palliative (*Cider with Rosie*, "American as apple pie"): cyanide and betrayal sharing a home with cidery nostalgia.

When I left Vermont, the apple came with me. Somewhere I acquired a stained copy of *The Baldwin Primer*, an educational text published in 1899 by the American Book Company. My copy is inscribed to "Chauncey Otto Allen from Auntie Mae." Page 75 belonged to the apple: "Here is an apple." I tore out the page and pinned it to my wall.

And then the apple went odd. I'm not sure how to explain this but it's important so I will try. The tic started when I was about eighteen. In moments when I thought I had not been true to myself, or had said something that I later regretted, it would come, unbidden, uttered under my breath: *apple, apple, apple*. The mantra soon morphed into *apples and oranges, apples and oranges, apples and oranges* and the indexed split became explicit.[7] Bobbing to the surface after botched encounters, invariably triggered when I sense my self in the world as not the self I can sustain. I've gone long spells with it dormant, but it always returns when the dissociation deepens. It's my late (not early) warning system, and even all these years later it still comes. I've recently discovered it has a name: palilalia. The word comes from the Greek πάλιν (pálin), meaning "again," and λαλιά (laliá), meaning "speech" or "to talk." It is a "language disorder characterized by the involuntary repetition of syllables, words, or phrases."[8] Self-consciousness as consciousness of self.

So, yes, apples and self. Self-soothing and self-correction. Index to inauthenticity.

Some years later I went west and lived in a ragged collective on the wrong side of the tracks in Missoula, Montana. We tended gardens of open-pollinated vegetables and pressed cider with schoolchildren on a creaky wooden press. We kept worms along the railway fence and bees under the apple tree. In 1997 a Missoula friend tipped me off about an old orchard in the hills above town, heavy with apples ripe for the picking. We had a deal with the Mormons that year to use their cannery to make gleaned apples into sauce for the food bank. I went up with a few others and found the orchard tucked into a swale below a sunburnt barn, the high and reckless branches laden with fruit.

I later learned that Ray and Luella Moon planted that orchard of 75 grafted trees shortly after they established a claim to the 160-acre parcel of land in 1889. The orchard was not only for sustenance: it was legally classed as an "improvement," one of several that, according to the terms of the 1862 Homestead Act, would allow Ray and Luella to "prove up" on their claim after five years and gain title to property. In the same year the Homestead Act was adopted, *The Atlantic Magazine* published Henry David Thoreau's "Wild Apples" essay:

> Our Western emigrant is still marching steadily toward the setting sun with the seeds of the apple in his pocket, or perhaps a few young trees strapped to his load. At least a million apple-trees are thus set farther westward this year than any cultivated ones grew last year. Consider how the Blossom-Week, like the Sabbath, is thus annually spreading over the prairies; for when man migrates, he carries with him not only his birds, quadrupeds, insects, vegetables, and his very sword, but his orchard also.[9]

Before there was an orchard, there was a trail in those hills that the Salish, Kootenai, Pend d'Oreille and Nez Percé people followed in their seasonal migrations. They would have paused in the swale to gather wild plums from the thicket along the creek. Before the plums and the people who ate them, there was a vast lake backed up behind a dam of ice. The swale was then a swampy inlet at the wavering waterline. The orchard is rooted in a soil of ancient sediment, the sifted bodies of plants and animals layered over centuries to form a deep loam that sustains thirsty fruit trees in the otherwise arid and rocky hills. That place, the orchard and the cluster of derelict sheds and dwellings in the hollow below it, held me for a decade, and eventually became the field site for my UK-based doctoral studies.

But what about that mention of Blossom Week? Scroll forward a century and a third, 1862 to 1990, and we arrive at Common Ground's first Apple Day, held in the old Apple Market in London's Covent Garden.[10] I came across Common Ground's work when I lived in Montana; somehow in those very early Internet days the message filtered through, the people in England inventing new rituals to celebrate shared fruits, local distinctiveness, all that holds us to ground, and together. The apple's wholesome image is part of the beloved myth. We turn to them to remind ourselves of the better angels of our nature, the bit of our nature (and by extension the rest of nature) that we haven't ruined yet. The orchard exists as ur-place, a land of perpetual yield, guilt-free and guileless. The apple is the fruit we use to work out our relation to what isn't us, but also to what is.

Eventually, after a courtship that unfolded in Buckinghamshire fields and orchards at the fringe of a soulless New Town, I married an English man. We held the ceremony in a ring of apples gathered from the venerable Wolf River tree on my parent's hilltop farm in Maine. We sang: "If you love me, if you love, love, love me, plant a rose for me/ If you think you're going to love me for a long, long time—plant an apple tree."[11] Apples gleamed in the autumn rains, and lined railings and porches. We served pie instead of cake at the reception.

We moved to Cornwall in 2007, and after a few years, my husband I took on an overgrown allotment plot in a village we didn't live in yet, but very much wanted to. The plot had a gnarled apple tree in the middle of it, the branches furred with lichen, the crown dense with the spikes of unpruned suckers. That spring we moved into a new home in the middle of the village and the tree came out in creamy blossom; when we tasted the first autumn fruits, we discovered that the flesh had a sunset pink stain, spreading inward from the skin. The tree was later identified by a local cider maker as a Ben's Red, a variety bred in Cornwall in the 1830s from a seedling of Devonshire Quarrenden. The variety has the distinction of rooting easily from cuttings.

How to defend the focus on self, and story? This way: I have lived my adulthood against the background hum of climate and ecological collapse, the bass note accompaniment to rough decadal sections: my dirty and dedicated twenties in Montana; my thirties in a blur of beginnings (career and family) and bicontinental dwelling; my forties spent writing about change as an intellectual and imaginative problem, not a practical or a political one. Accelerate through the Covid years and it's 2022 and I'm now fifty years old. Net zero by 2050 is the target, they say, but it's probably too late to hold us at 1.5°C. We're on a course for 2.7°C and two to three metres of sea level rise by the end of the century. In the wee hours I worry, imagining the world my sons will inherit. I know that when you slice it up objectively, my individual contribution to this slow-motion disaster has been negligible. But I can't help wondering how one reasonably alert person, with a decent awareness of what was playing out, ended up essentially complicit in the inertia and inaction that defines those lost decades.[12]

During those years, I cultivated ways of being and doing that allowed me (for the most part) to maintain a sense of myself as rooted and responsible, and the apple was part of that self-narrative. I tended my gardens and taught other people how to grow food. I mended and repaired what I could; shopped at the farmers' market; and (sometimes) rode my bike to work. I harvested the apples from the allotment tree every October and distributed the surplus to my neighbours. There was boom and bust, of course (so many trans-Atlantic flights), but (I told myself) the pattern bent towards better than nothing. *Your grandchildren will gather the apples.* Will they? I'm not so sure anymore. (*Apples and oranges, apples and oranges, apples and oranges.*) And I'm starting to wonder if the apple and its reassuring presence is part of the reason I have been able to pretend otherwise for so long. But if the apple fed the self's delusion, then maybe the apple can help refigure it.[13]

The touchstone apple, the one that I've been sharing this story with so far, has been cultivated and constrained by human appetites and desires. This cultivation has only been achieved through continual effort. As H. A. Baker points out, "The cultivated apple, *Malus pumila domestica*, is not a true species but a hybrid . . . Its taxonomy has been obscured by a process of hybridization, selection and rejection by man and nature over thousands of years..."[14] Because the apple is extremely heterozygous, it cannot be bred with predictable results. Varieties with desirable traits emerge from seed in a chance genetic shuffle, and then can only be perpetuated through continual grafting of the scion wood onto new rootstock. Apples for production are always grown from grafted trees to ensure a reliable and identifiable yield. But the wild apple lurks in the seeds of every tamed fruit: unnamed and autonomous.

What happens if we think about *becoming-with* wild apples? What becomes possible?

In August 2021 I go to a gathering at Kestle Barton, an ancient farmstead on the other side of the Helford River, to hear from a collective of artists about their plans for the place.[15] During a tour of the property, which already hosts an art gallery and a collection of holiday cottages in the gently restored buildings, we visit two different orchards.

In the first orchard, traditional Cornish apple varieties are set out in neat rows, growing robustly and also a bit anarchically. Branches have pulled away from the mother trunk on a few of the young trees, split by the weight of their bounty. When the trees were planted out fifteen years ago, someone set little wooden plaques at their bases with their names etched on; but the names have since been obscured by lichen and the identity of a few of the trees is now uncertain.

The other, more experimental, orchard was planted in the early months of 2020 by Andrew Ormerod, an economic botanist with an interest in participatory plant breeding. In the early days of the pandemic, he set out ninety seedling specimens ("pippins") on their own rootstock at regular intervals on a high windy field, a trial of hopeful half-siblings (sharing a "parent" via seed from a single tree, with the other unknown parent offering its genetics via pollination). Their labels were scattered and scrambled by a March lockdown wind, but the seedlings survived, expressing their heterozygosity in uneven, haphazard growth patterns.Roger Deakin writes,

> Plant the pips of a hundred apples from the same tree and the new generation of trees can differ, often dramatically, from their parents and from each other. This is how new kinds of apples have arisen by chance over the centuries: people taking a fancy to this or that new fruit, then propagating from that particular tree by taking cuttings from the shoots and grafting them on to other trees.[16]

At the bottom of the "proper" orchard grow two strange and stunted-looking trees. We are brought to see them by artists William Arnold and James Fergusson. We learn that on these two trees each branch is a graft from the scion wood of a different wild or seedling apple specimen, gathered from across Cornwall in hedges and hollows, up rocky hills and along overgrown lanes. On what they call the Good Apple and Bad Apple trees William and James have grafted the best and the worst of their discoveries as, in William's words, "a living art installation and a horticultural party trick."[17]

The apples growing on the Good Apple and Bad Apple trees were selected through a meticulous process of taste trials, as part of the *Some Interesting Apples* project. In autumn 2020 William and James assembled an expert panel at Kestle Barton to assess wild apples for smell, texture, taste and appearance. William explains the rationale for the project:

> There is an incredible gene pool of apples adapting to local conditions in hedgerows across the country . . . . In the context of the climate emergency and the "global weirding" of weather systems this ability to adapt and thrive in a range of situations makes Malus an important species within potential robust novel ecosystems and as ongoing food resource . . . . Through the form of physical exhibition, photographic typology and preservation through grafting, *Some Interesting Apples* shifts the focus toward those wild seedlings . . . and their potential for future usefulness.[18]

They name the aspiring apples by their geographical location on the what3words geocode app.[19] One apple of the forty-eight they identified in their first season goes by the name *///fearfully.notifying.positions*. It is "part of an intriguing small population of wild apples clinging at altitude to the side of Carn Brea," an exposed and boulder-strewn Cornish hilltop pocked with old mineshafts.[20] Their wild apple prospecting picks up a century and a half after Thoreau's, intrepid and intent:

> Going up the side of a cliff about the first of November, I saw a vigorous young apple-tree, which, planted by birds or cows, had shot up amid the rocks and open woods there, and had now much fruit on it, uninjured by the frosts, when all cultivated apples were gathered . . . Here on this rugged and woody hill-side has grown an apple-tree, not planted by man, no relic of a former orchard, but a natural growth, like the pines and oaks. Most fruits which we prize and use depend entirely on our care. Corn and grain, potatoes, peaches, melons, etc., depend altogether on our planting; but the apple emulates man's independence and enterprise. It is not simply carried, as I have said, but, like him, to some extent, it has migrated to this New World, and is even, here and there, making its way amid the aboriginal trees; just as the ox and dog and horse sometimes run wild and maintain themselves.[21]

I return to Kestle Barton in October as an invited member of the panel for the 2021 *Some Interesting Apples* sampling session. A dozen of us gather in the room that used to house the farm's apple store, supplied with scoresheets to record our findings. Wildings fill a long table along the back wall, each specimen tucked into a brown bag and labelled with its geo-name. I add a handful of tough, unripe *///river.presenter.breeding* from the hedge-rooted tree at the top of Retallack Hill. Boosted by 2021 donations, James notes that they now have recorded the locations of approximately 330 wilding trees. He slices samples from the ten apples selected for tasting and passes them around the table, while William talks about the ongoing search for "sticky" apples that can survive the variable Cornish climate, the future keepers in the wild stock.

During the week leading up to the tasting, our household has been working its way through an order of cultivated Cornish apples from the local food hub: Elstar, Belle de Boskoop, Pig's Nose. We've found them all challenging, for different reasons (some perhaps more to do with the growing conditions than varietal identity): they are rock-hard or scabbed, stunted or pocked. Maybe better for cooking or cider, but, even so, many of the wildings we sample on that October day are much more toothsome and pleasing to the tongue than the ones in our fruit bowl at home.[22] Some, like the buttery yellow, red-streaked *///unclaimed.magpie.twitches*, I find particularly appealing. (Though according to the scoresheets I may have been an outlier. One panellist noted, "Taste of vanilla and banana is initially pleasant but rapidly becomes a bit composty.")

Back in Montana they have been doing their own prospecting. A few years ago, the homestead caretakers discovered a seedling apple tree growing down in the gully thicket among the wild plums. They invited researchers from the Western Agricultural Research Center to come check it out, and it was deemed worthy of propagation. It's now possible to purchase the Luella Moon grafted on Bud 9 rootstock:

> The nearly yellow apple is splashed with stripes reminiscent of a Duchess of Oldenburg but with the unique conical shape of the Yellow Bellflower. While not the sweetest apple in the bunch this late ripening tree will please the palate with its almost pearlike flavor when your summer apples have all gone to mush.[23]

The apple's heterozygous gift offers us different versions of self, some versions more promising than the ones we've been using. I'm inclined to try this one, another figment of Thoreau's imagination (and admiration), "the wild-eyed woman of the fields, to whom nothing comes amiss, who gleans after all the world."[24]

Of course, this self isn't "new" in any sense, but has been lying dormant, packed into the seed of me. I remember one summer a quarter of a century ago, when a colony of wasps attacked our beehive and for a few weeks I was possessed with the urge to protect the residents. I took to kneeling next to the hive and crushing each yellow-jacketed invader with my fingertip as it went to enter. I didn't get stung, by the bees or the wasps. My fierce concentration shielded me, somehow, and allowed me to briefly slip the hook of humanity. Gary Snyder had a similar moment once in the California backcountry:

> Out the Greywolf valley
> in late afternoon
> after eight days in the high meadows
> hungry, and out of food,
> the trail broke into a choked
> clearing, apples grew gone wild
> hung on one low bough by a hornet's nest.
> caught the drone in tall clover
> lowland smell in the shadows
> then picked a hard green one:
> watched them swarm.
> smell of the mountains still on me.
> none stung.[25]

Is this it? The dissolution of human self, the sense of responsibility and of reciprocity extended to other animals, to feral ecologies and future generations alike? Possibly. It's all in the pips.

Notes

1.This quote is painted on the rafters at Robinson Jeffers's Tor House, in Carmel-by-Sea, California. As noted by Stewart Brand in *How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They're Built* (New York: Penguin, 1994).

2.Robinson Jeffers, "Original Sin," quoted in Ursula K. Le Guin, *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences* (New York: Penguin, 1987). With thanks to Catarina Fontoura for sharing this source.

3. See, for example, Timothy Morton, *Being Ecological* (London: Pelican, 2018), and Tom Oliver, *The Self Delusion: The Surprising Science of How We Are Connected and Why That Matters* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2020).

4.Caitlin DeSilvey, *Leif's Adventures*, unpublished, ca. 1979.

5.Michael Pollan, *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 13

6.Pollan, *The Botany of Desire*, 5.

7.According to Wikipedia, "A comparison of apples and oranges occurs when two items or groups of items are compared that cannot be practically compared, typically because of inherent, fundamental and/or qualitative differences between the items. The idiom, comparing apples and oranges, refers to the apparent differences between items which are popularly thought to be incomparable or incommensurable, such as apples and oranges. The idiom may also be used to indicate that a false analogy has been made between two items, such as where an apple is faulted for not being a good orange." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apples_and_oranges.

8.https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palilalia.

9.Henry David Thoreau, "Wild Apples," *The Atlantic Magazine*, November 1862, 514.

10.See https://www.commonground.org.uk/apple-day/.

11.Rosalie Sorrels, "If You Love Me," track 5 on *Miscellaneous Abstract Record* No. 1, Green Linnet, 1982.

12.Nathaniel Rich, *Losing Earth: The Decade We Could Have Stopped Climate Change* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2019).

13.See Oliver's *The Self Delusion.*

14.H. A. Baker, "Growing Apples," in Rosie Sanders, *The Apple Book* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2010), 156.

15.Agri/Culture 2.0. See http://www.kestlebarton.co.uk/arts-and-events/paul-chaney-a-revolution-in-food-production/.

16.Roger Deakin, *Wildwood: A Journey Through Trees* (London: Penguin, 2008), 284.

17.William Arnold, *Some Interesting Apples*, 2021, https://williamarnold.net/Some-Interesting-Apples-1.

18.Ibid.

19.See https://what3words.com/.

20.Arnold, *Some Interesting Apples.*

21.Thoreau, "Wild Apples," 517.

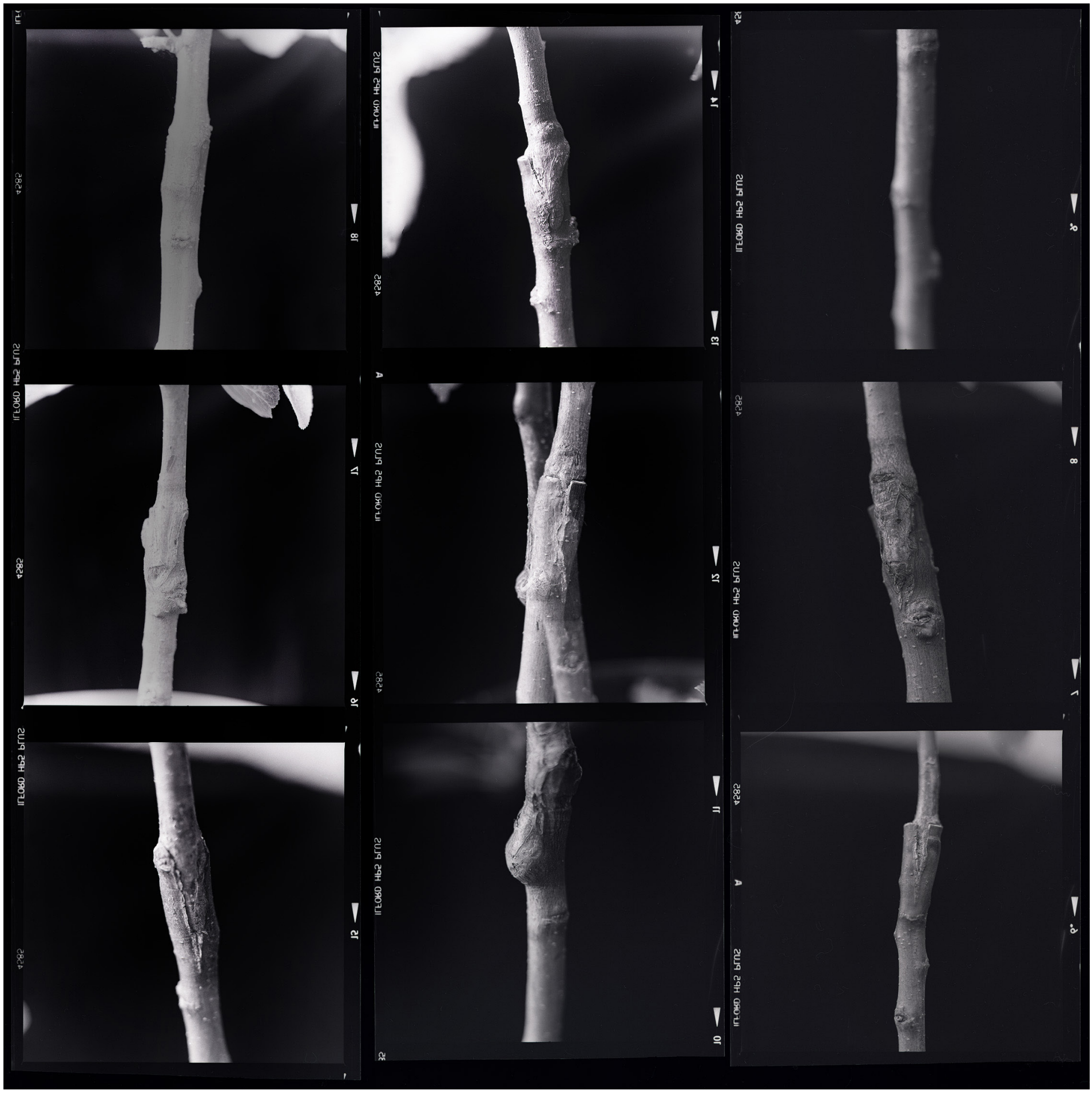
22.Thoreau preferred the wild ones: "Though somewhat small, it may prove equal, if not superior, in flavor to that which has grown in a garden,—will perchance be all the sweeter and more palatable for the very difficulties it has had to contend with." Thoreau, 520.

23.https://agresearch.montana.edu/warc/mtorchards.org/MHO_trees_for_sale_to_nurseries_2021.html.

24.Thoreau, 520.

25.Gary Snyder, *Myths and Texts* (New York: New Directions, 1978), 30.

Page torn from *The Baldwin Primer*, published by the American Book Company in 1899.



Graft scars showing scion wood of selected *Some Interesting Apples* wilding samples grafted onto MM106 rootstock for future analysis.

Sampling The Goonhavern Population

James Fergusson

0840-1130 sunny after misty start 22°C

This was the Goonhavern run and I've been itching to get these. These are all feral trees so not really an orchard as such, but there's a sequence of road and pathside trees grouped fairly close around the villages of Peen Cross and Goonhavern near the north coast of Cornwall which all produce hugely sweet but bitter and sharp, early ripening fruit and there are eight of them. Two of the trees are obviously Spartan half sibs and one clearly a cox half sib given the flavour profile, but they're different from the parent varieties understandably in subtle ways, these have an edge of astringency alongside the sweetness which will lend nicely to cider, maybe the heavy Atlantic weather makes them so.

The day starts with a blanket mist, trapping the late-summer dusty smell close to the ground and autumn is unmistakably just around the corner. I love this time of year, not least because the pressing will begin in earnest in a heartbeat and the anticipation runs high, but this is the time of hiraeth and that romantic longing, bittersweet, I feel most keenly at this time. If this time of year was a song to me, it's got to be Can't find my way home by Blind Faith.

We've been mapping the positions of feral trees for a number of years now and I won't go into the reasons why this is such an excellent thing for a cider-maker to do, as it's been covered in greater depth and poetics than I'll be able to muster by Andy Brennan in his excellent Uncultivated. Suffice to say, this method of gathering fruit is extremely uneconomical and would render production at scale impossible. Given most of the trees are in roadside hedges, they either have a tight nest of bramble and blackthorn at their bases, or the stem is inaccessible without trespass. This means that most of the fruit has to be picked from the tree using the pole picker a few at a time. This is the reason why it took nearly three hours to pick about 30Kg of fruit. However. The rewards are generous in return for the time spent. The flavour of the cider made from this fruit is unique. These are not known varieties and this particular fruit will need pressing tomorrow as some of it bruises as soon as you sneeze by it, but I'm sat writing this with the sacks right beside me and the perfume is extraordinary, soft and violet. There is no such thing as homogeneity in the cider I make, as for many makers, for various reasons. The fruit changes every year according to the weather throughout its formation and the quantities of what I use from where are different year to year as is the case for everyone, but the wild fruit lends something exceptional and it feels a bit heretical as well; there's a great deal of tradition in cider-making with many people fiercely defending the use of extremely venerable and excellent vintage varieties, and this is all to the good. I like the trickster's finger in the brew of the feral fruit. I like that it'll piss off some traditionalists, but again, I don't have the privilege of my own orchards, so get it where you can.

The first tree is along of an equestrian yard and I can hear people attending to their charges when I get out of the car. I'm pretty sure they're not going to care, but I do get a few strange looks and a few people slow their cars as they pass on the quiet lane to have a good look at the hairy weirdo waving his pole around, but this fruit is ace, so easily damaged and absolutely bursting with the sweetest honeyed juice, every piece I shake loose to batter itself on the metalled surface makes me wince. Trees two, three and four are right by the entrance to a very popular dog-walking spot and this is presumably why the trees are there, the usual discarded cores (spartan and cox offspring). There are also a few vans, the inhabitants coming slowly from overnight torpor and I'm watched with interest as tea is brewed and I set to gathering. The good stuff here is an early retirement couple, obviously on holiday, walking string-rats and toting broad Yorkshire accents (I'm not getting into the gods' own country thing there versus here – no need. It's here.) As they pass me to go walk the rats, a little too loudly: 'Good grief! This lot'll do anything if it means they don't have to pay for it!' Love this.

Trees five to eight are all within a hundred metres of each other on a lane the other side of Goonhavern. A tiny jewel-like ruby beauty which I'm extremely disappointed to see has only a dozen fruit this year (it's an off year in Cornwall anyway and the weather has been exceptionally weird meaning fruit is thin on the ground). It's a bizarre little apple which tastes of bitter bubblegum but loaded with sweetness too. Do you remember the bubblegum ice creams which were available when we were kids? Plastic cone, dark blue bubblegum sphere at the bottom? These apples actually taste of the blueness of that bubblegum sphere. Six and seven are standard Cornish greenies, pale and steadfast, but the seventh tree is absolutely festooned this year and fifty percent of the blend will be from this tree, sweet with tannin and stoic but happy to keep the rhythm

The last tree is a bit dear to me. I grafted it on last year as a last ditch in preservation as It's nearly dead. Only managed four fruit this year, but they're decent and feel like a last hurrah. Wouldn't surprise me if its pegged by this time next year. The fruit is exceptional in flavour – no idea how it keeps or which diseases the tree is susceptible to yet – it's that waisted, codlin shape quite typical of Cornish varieties and the tree is clearly in its second state of collapse. I reckon on at least eighty years old. Bitter as sin and bursting with juice, there's an almost herbal, rosemary and oregano back flavour hidden in here, but very sweet also. It'll be interesting to see how it performs on a stock as an open-grown pampered orchard resident if it gets the chance.

Biographies

James Fergusson

"Raised in the commercial orchards of the Kent/Sussex borders but now based in Cornwall, I have been exploring cider and Perry making through my fledgling company, Vagrant Cider, working as an orchard consultant and running breeding/selection programmes. Always in search of true M. sylv. "

James Fergusson is a siviculturist and artist. He holds an MFA from University of the Arts London and an MSc in Forestry and Forest Ecology from Bangor University.

He is involved in orchard management and fruit production. His clients are as diverse as Western Power Distribution, Forestry Commission England, Corporation of London and Kestle Barton.

https://www.jamesfergusson.co.uk

William Arnold

"I have been fascinated by these trees for as long as I can remember, hooked on the narrative of the discarded core, seemingly against the odds germinating seeds by the side of the road to create wonderful free fruit."

William Arnold is an experimental, conceptual and documentary photographer, interested in the layers of human and natural history that comprise the making of the landscape, and the role played by the photograph in documenting time and change—the subjective and objective politics of places and their histories.

His first monograph Suburban Herbarium was published by Uniformbooks (2020) and reprinted (2022) with his work showcased in various publications and periodicals including: The Guardian, New Scientist, De Standaard and Resurgence & Ecologist Magazine.

He teaches photography at Falmouth University

https://williamarnold.net

Caitlin DeSilvey

"I'm a cultural geographer at the University of Exeter, but these days I'm working on living up to my surname and becoming as much 'of the woods' as 'of the books'. My neighbours and I tend an overgrown woodland garden in Constantine, Cornwall, and my allotment plot over the creek is home to a venerable Ben's Red, a chance seedling of Devonshire Quarrenden."

Caitlin DeSilvey is Professor of Cultural Geography at the University of Exeter's Cornwall campus, where she is Associate Director for Transdisciplinary Research in the Environment and Sustainability Institute. Her research into the cultural significance of material and ecological change has involved extensive collaboration with archaeologists, architects, ecologists, artists and others, and has informed new approaches in heritage practice, focused on accommodating process rather than securing preservation. Her monograph, *Curated Decay: Heritage Beyond Saving* (UMP 2017), received the 2018 Historic Preservation Book Prize.

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