

# ARE YOU LOST?

**The Are You Lost?** installation features the voices of three local people who attended workshops – Nita Burrows, William Michael Neary and Zainab Maria – narrating texts about the multiple meanings of access in Bowland. The narration texts are assembled from words and phrases gathered in public workshops, field trips, scientific research and historical archives. The narrators reflect on how access to Bowland orbits around openness, imagination and transparency.



## **ACCESS IS . . .**

### **OPENNESS – NARRATED BY NITA BURROWS**

Are you lost? Where to begin. It's Bowland, not Poland, for a start. With a B.A bow in the land, the curve of the horizon. The landscape behind a curtain: the absence, the echo, the hum. The hills are a beacon and a barrier. Time, family, religion and safety all estrange them. Transport, planning, weather, too. The gloom of the witching hour: darkness within darkness. And we're toeing the same trods as those connectors and visionaries and trespassers who've gone before: all waymarkers in opening this place up. It's an echo of an old song you know? The need for freedom, peace and the open path; somewhere away from the tight streets and smoke. The space for ideas to circulate, for group listening. Meeting places and gathering spaces. The first step ripples out across lifetimes.

Bowland had nothing to mine; only farm. It became an island of old ways. But its wealth has always circulated far further. The felt hats from its remote valleys clothed enslaved people; the spoils of empire gilded its gates. The commons were colonised. Society settled. The woodland shrunk. And it turns out we're a nation of gardeners, tidiers, keepers. Can we bring ourselves to cope with something unkept? To abandon the idea that the landscape needs us to survive? The Royal hunting forest rewilded itself; too far from the court. Moorland became meadow became scrub. Ruin and rupture all grown over by the swaddling green. The venison and the vert. Perhaps it's time for a new reclamation of our upland wastes?

And we're all archipelagos, really. The empty moor a Victorian invention; profit and prestige capitalising on aristocratic decline. And so the landscape is itself a picture, a stilled point in time. A refuge of living history, drawn on the wealth of elsewhere. Arbitrary borders inked in isolated beauty. And this exclusion has a latency; lines etched across generations are unevenly felt.

The pandemic brought new people here. Adventures close to home. Farmers saw their gates left open; litter dropped; fires lit; livestock worried. Everything squeezed. The background unease; unspoken codes of how to behave. The loneliness of an island ebbing on the tides of faraway war. The hours are endless and the tenancies short. The make do and mend; each farmyard an archaeology of deep time and recent past. Farmers were the original land activists here; each family chipping out a space on the fell to call home. Inheritances now evaporating in ties and tenure. And there's a disconnect from decision making; the clamour of voices from elsewhere. Knowledge hard-won from working this land. The millstones and grit. But how do you ever learn if you're not asked? We have it in ourselves to become more open. Are you lost? No, you're welcome.

## **IMAGINATION – NARRATED BY WILLIAM MICHAEL NEARY**

Pendle. Hills, hills, hills. We all need space to dream. All this was fields, just a few generations ago. Haydays of drove roads and dancehalls; now awaiting the next unearthing. The sadness of a place stilled. Beneath the bracken a ghost forest. Under the ripple a village. Somewhere seen at a distance. The enclosure a shadow on the fell.

Bowland has never been blank space; people have moved across it forever; plants and animals thriving before the guide of human hands. The ridge and furrow. The tenter fields. The pollen beneath the plough. Something is always seeding in the cracks. Under the skin. You can hear it whispered in the quiet places: the counter-mapping of the fell. This is where my ashes will be scattered, this is where I proposed. Here is where I found out what I really wanted, here is where my world closed.

And you can read this place's past through its form. A bow in the land; a curve in the wall. The salt path and coffin road. Beneath the peat; beyond the fell wall, the seed bank mnemonic. The wood for the forest. The expanse of the chase. The corncrake, the wildcat and the lynx. How do we decide what has value here? Will we speak of the salmon, the hen harrier, or the peregrine in the same breath? And what of the landscape's rights itself? To keep dark skies and dead spots? When the unbroken line is really dashes and dots.

The border between memory and imagination is thin. There's a shimmer behind the shroud: a glimpse of something more. The glint of sunlight on spate, the spark of quartz in the peat. The hillside smoke curling through the heather; shards of light through the clag.

That hot summer, a few decades past, with wildfires on the fells. The clouds burst and the valleys were full; houses snapped in two. All of us inundated under the same watershed. A glimmer of a distant past turned emergency future. Because everything has a return period. The rubble of a glacial river made young again. The tunnel under the drowned streets. There's resilience in restoration, both for ourselves and this place. The healthy bog holds the water; damps the flame. This spring it has hardly rained at all. The bogs don't staupe, they shatter; the sphagnum bleached and tattered. Time layers and loops.

Access is imagination. This is a place formed in memory; can we allow it to dream? The shimmer comes from the things beyond our ken; the kin made over and again. So lend your voice to the understory. Put your ear to the earth and listen to everything that it's possible to hear. All our bodies of water, springing from this place. The bluebells and the mycelium. The fell foot song. Listen.

## **TRANSPARENCY – NARRATED BY ZAINAB MARIA**

Everything happens for a season, you know. Always in relation, in flow. Access fosters accountability, you hope.

Remote sensing becomes ground truthing. Attention leads to care leads to responsibility. We were all new here once. Inequality orbits from its richest core, but borders are always open to being reworked. Diversity speaks to people and ecology both: together they erupt in kinship between worlds. Find new ways to belong.

The gap between seen and unseen; the world refracted through a screen. What would it take for you to find a home in the hills?

And words matter. Access, community and restoration all shift depending on who is defining them. A woodmote of truth, a speck of something caught on the breeze. There is meaning in shared stories: the contours of a life.

We're not so different; we all live under the same weather system. So walk the flesh transparent. We are diffuse. Change happens at the pace of trust. And trust is always reciprocal. Responsibility comes from the ability to respond, to take time, to adjust. To be a sound mirror. Accountability works in all ways. Draw a line under this.

Think of it as a pocket; the space to imagine how it might be other: to foster hope, to inspire rupture. Pockets join up, they ripple out across a place: past the forever chemical spills; the billow of the burned peat; the cracked trackers and scattered nests. These invisible traces of a place have latent power. The dye seeps a lagg tide. How would we act differently if we could see the world through the eyes of another?

Access is transparency. So let's expand our frame for flourishing. Build a field to fit us all. A bow in the land. The curve of the fell horizon. There is always time to change course.

So echolocate: with arms that reach and radiate. This place could be a sponge without losing its shape. Its value would ripple out into the world and back. We have it within ourselves to become more porous.

## GLOSSARY

**Bield** – a curved or zig-zag drystone wall structure built in the middle of fields to shelter livestock

**Clag** – a local word for thick, grey fog on the fells

**Coffin road** – the historical routes used to take coffins over the fells to burial grounds

**Drove road** – the historical routes used by shepherds moving livestock across the fells

**Lagg** – the area at an edge of a peatland or bog; often the place where biodiversity is richest

**Millstone grit** – the predominant underlying geology in Bowland; used to make querns for grinding flour

**Salt path** – the Roman Road across Salter Fell used to transport salt inland from the coast

**Sphagnum** – the star-shaped mosses that live in peat bogs, buffer floodwater and support diverse ecosystems

**Staup** – a local word for the sound made by a boot being pulled out of a wet bog

**Spate** – the river in flood following heavy rain

**Tenter fields** – the outdoor areas where finished textiles would be hung to dry; such as in Gisburn Forest

**Trod** – a faint path on the fell, barely used by walkers and/or animals

**Upland wastes** – the name given to the high fells in early land tenure documents

**Venison and vert** – the deer and the trees – the value of the original Bowland royal hunting forest

**Woodmote** – the original Bowland forest courts where trespassers and poachers would be tried

## ACCESS MORE

Explore resources on Bowland's history, geography, culture, crafts and ecology which have shaped the narration here: [robstjohn.co.uk/ayl-resources](http://robstjohn.co.uk/ayl-resources)



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