



Sensing Morally Evocative Spaces

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Staying proximate with:	The more-than-human landscape.
Methodological approach:	Corporeal engagements with the landscape.
Main concepts:	Knowing, caring, and morally evocative spaces.
Tips for future research:	Attend to the wider histories and geographies of mobile landscape constituencies.

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I did not know the Reisdalen (Reisa Valley) very well when my friend June and I rather spontaneously decided in October 2021 to go hiking there in an area three hours from my home in northern Norway. Admittedly, when looking back at the trip, it did not stand out as in any way extraordinary compared to the countless other hikes I have gone on during my life as inhabitant of the north. At this point in my life, however, the weekend incited a richness of thoughts, particularly on how the moral practices of mobile outdoor people like me may evolve as we familiarise ourselves with a landscape. This epistemological question relates to how proximity, in terms of corporeal engagements with a landscape, incites learning and energises commitment and care.

The Norwegian outfields make up convoluted more-than-human public spaces, where frictions (Tsing 2005) and thus conflictual and transformative potentials reside. Ever since the nation-building process more than a century ago, being an outdoor culture combining hikers, trekkers, and skiers has been inscribed into the national identity of Norway (Goksøyr 1994; Gurholt 2008). The Norwegian term *friluftsliv* (open-air living) was coined during the nineteenth century to assess a national recreational outdoor life culture with roots in the peasant culture of the new independent nation as well as in romanticism (Breivik 1978; Goksøyr 1994; Gurholt 2008). In the time that has followed, the term has indicated a shared outdoor culture across the Nordic Arctic (Gurholt and Haukeland 2019). During recent decades, the number of *friluftsfolk* (open-air people) roaming the outfields of Norway as part of their everyday lives, weekends, and vacations has increased and diversified steadily. Since the Norwegian Outdoor Recreational Act of 1957, *allemannsretten* (the freedom to roam) has facilitated outdoor life in nature. This right manifests as a cultural incitement as well as a jurisdiction not only in Norway but also around the Nordic Arctic. The contestations that have accompanied the manifold and growing use of *allemannsretten* in Norway have unveiled that the obligation to utilise the right with ‘consideration and due care’ (The Outdoor Recreation Act, §2) implies responsibilities that are altogether unclear (Granås and Svensson 2021).

If to know is somehow to care (Puig de la Bellacasa 2012, 2017), the fact that outdoor people know landscapes reveals the potential that this widespread, everyday practice in Norway and other Nordic countries may hold for mobilising commitment and care. This potential is crucial in a time of planetary crisis and vital as increasing numbers of ever more mobile outdoor people engage in landscape encounters based on different

rationales and varying familiarity with the area they roam freely in based on *allemannsretten*.

EMBODIED EXPLORATIONS OF THE KNOWING–CARING NEXUS

With the unclear duty aspect of *allemannsretten* as well as the nature crisis in mind, the trip to the Reisadalen provides opportunities for an embodied and situated investigation of the knowing–caring nexus of recreational outdoor life in nature. My process of getting to know the valley follows moments wherein I sense the moral undercurrents of my way of doing outdoor life. It entails highlighting experiences of corporeal and situated landscape encounters that, while connecting to diverse places and times of my life, evoke feelings of rights and wrongs. While acknowledging the ‘act of remembrance’ tied to the ‘native dweller’ (Ingold 2000, 189–190), my approach relies on a temporal–spatial ontology that takes interest in embodied connections to the morally evocative spaces of lives beyond the geographical ‘here’ and historical ‘now’ of the landscape. Of interest are how such spaces make themselves felt, what and who they bring closer, and how they morally energise encounters with the non-human and human constituencies of, as in this case, a valley that I, at this point, do not know very well.

While providing a situated (Haraway 1988) account of some of the contingencies of the patchy cultures of outdoor life to which I am linked, the approach demonstrates how the moralities of such life in nature relate to and evolve within the wider geographies and histories of outdoor lives. Thus, outdoor moralities involve more than, for example, a national outdoor culture or the landscape one gets to know and the ‘local’ customs there (cf. Olwig 2019). Relying on embodied knowledge (Haraway 1988), simple demarcations of outdoor life cultures and their moral schemes—be they ‘national,’ ‘local,’ or ‘ethnic’—are thus undermined (Macnaughten and Urry 1998, 2) throughout the analysis. Instead, I use the body (Latour 2004, 206) as a tool to sensitise (Blumer 1954) the diverse temporal–spatial trajectories of meaning (Massey 1994, 2005) that accompany me and become part of assemblages in place when I engage in morally constitutive encounters there (Tsing 2015, 292–3). These are encounters with the more-than-humans (Lorimer 2015; Tsing 2015) together with whom I become part of the (re)making of the practiced landscape (Olwig 2019). With the help of these methodological

sensitivities, I hope to suggest ways of grasping some of the ‘messy wordliness’ in which commitment and care are entangled (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 10).

ARRIVING THE VALLEY

The Reisadalen is an 80 km-long valley. Following the course of the Reisaelva (Reisa River), the valley starts in the interior parts of Troms and Finnmark county in the southeast and ends at the coast to the north, by the small town of Storslett. The roadway from Storslett ends 50 km into the valley at Saraelv. My friend June and I arrived Friday night at our designated camping spot, right on the outskirts of Storslett alongside the bank of the Reisaelva. We aimed to test June’s new car tent and knew that we would need a ‘quick fix’ if we were to find a camping spot before dark. Moreover, we did not know the valley well, so I had called local acquaintances the day before to ask for advice.

These acquaintances were people I was to cooperate with on a new research project. Thus, one of the time–space connections of the trip was to my current work as a researcher. This work was the reason I decided on the Reisadalen as this weekend’s destination—an ethnographic study on moral landscape practices based on fieldwork in this valley was about to start. This was the weekend before I was to meet my colleagues here, and five days of meetings with them were approaching. As we arrived, though, I primarily considered the trip ahead recreational, as our outdoor fieldwork was not meant to start until later. Still, I did not know the valley well, and I was eager to explore and experience it ahead of time, as I often am when a landscape awaits. I had even invited a friend for this purpose, and our activities were the sort that June and I do together in our spare time.

At this point, due to the upcoming fieldwork, it was particularly vital to avoid falling into disfavour with people nearby by, for example, camping out of line with *allemannsretten*. It is not that I consider myself generally thoughtless, but rather that my moral senses were sharpened, as I had already started to learn about the valley through the people I had gotten to know.

Even though my previous experiences in the Reisadalen were highly limited, I had gone on a hike there ten years earlier, from the interior parts of the region down to Saraelv in the southeast, the inner part of the Reisadalen. Moreover, the planning phase of the research project had,

over the last couple of years, included meetings with cooperative partners next to Saraelv at Ovi Raishiin, the visitor centre of Reisa National Park. I had noticed the small wooden houses of Ovi Raishiin in the woods before, though I had not inspected their good craftsmanship or the rather stunning site. One of the people I had met there was Odd Rudberg, the leader of the centre. As it turned out, Odd had built Ovi Raishiin with his own hands. During our meetings, he and his colleagues started introducing me to the valley and to its historical layers, lives, tensions, and conflicts. Nevertheless, when passing through the valley by car the last time I was here, it still seemed impossible to get a sense of where I was, and the steep mountainsides that frame the valley had made it feel narrow, dark, and somehow uninviting.

The weekend at hand started with a rather unpleasant encounter with the wind. As we sat down inside the tent, we soon noticed that its ever-changing gusts started taking hold of the tent's fabric, stretching it like a ship's sail. We had to anchor all of our luggage inside the tent before any of us could relax, including my dog, Gås. We had simply put up our tent too quickly. In our defence, the winds are not always that predictable. An abstract reading of meteorology cannot fully replace knowledge that comes from experiencing specific physical topographies and wind conditions yourself. On top of this fact, the winds are changing these days.

DECIDING ON A HIKE

After a late dinner, we started to consider our hiking options. The week before, I had tried hard to understand the Reisadalen better by reading maps and descriptions of trips online. I had struggled to get a sense of the valley from these abstract accounts. In the tent by the riverbank, we realised that we were sitting right next to the route to Jyppyrä. This placement was convenient. Moreover, Jyppyrä would be a relatively steep hike to a more than 800 m-high peak with great views, which is the kind of physically demanding journey that both of us really appreciate. We decided that the next night's camp would be set up 45 km into the valley. We would then do the less steep hike towards Stouraskáidi, not far from Saraelv, and get to experience more of the valley. This plan would give us a taste of the open landscape of rolling hills and low ridges that the mountain plateau stretching towards the interior country offers. As long

as *vergudene* (the weather gods) are on your side, this kind of trip always feels great.

The Reisadalen is ‘off the beaten track’ of the region. The three-hour drive separating it from the cities of Alta to the north and Tromsø to the south means it is a bit too far away for the ‘masses.’ Moreover, the Reisadalen is not well known as an attractive recreational landscape. My friends and I had never previously prioritised engaging with the valley the way we had already started to this evening in the tent. I went to bed, feeling like I could not wait for the next day to start.

It had in fact been difficult to convince anyone to come with me this weekend. The reason was probably that my plan was to commit fully to the Reisadalen and not run off to any seemingly more tempting neighbouring landscape. This trouble later made me reflect on how I have come to decide on what trips to take. I started questioning the emphasis I put on what destinations are more likely to pay off in terms of the particular experiences my friends and I seek instead of allowing the characteristics of a landscape to have more of an influence on what our experiences will be. The latter attitude allows and makes space for the forces of non-humans as well as humans (Bennet 2010) and their wildness and self-will (Vannini and Vannini 2019, 262) on outdoor life excursions. My emphasis so far however sheds light on a potentially fickle aspect of my mobile outdoor life in the region, in which I pick and choose destinations as though in a candy store. A more committed approach to a landscape, like with this weekend in the Reisadalen, demands that I hold back some of my determination and be more patient as I figure out the affordances of the landscape and how I can engage with them in meaningful and joyous ways that feel right.

CHANGING OUTDOOR LIFE

Part of the stage that I am in at this point in my life involves reconsidering what outdoor life actually means to me. As a middle-aged woman, outdoor practices have definitely felt empowering; cross-country and back-country skiing, hiking, and trekking have enabled me to experience corporeal and mental mastery and have given me a sense of achievement and, as Simone de Beauvoir once wrote, being altogether less fearful (de Beauvoir 1972). After a trip, I may post on social media to convey the beauty of the landscape, to show off my achievement, or simply to

communicate the well-being, excitement, and happiness I have experienced together with friends, like in the picture below (see Fig. 6.1). Even though my preferences may often be strict and less place-committed when I take part in decisions about where to go, this picture of June and me illustrates that we are nonetheless ‘in our element’ when out hiking. The picture also indicates how we connect.

Norwegian outdoor culture is transforming and diversifying (Flem-sæther et al. 2015). I have taken part in changing ways of doing outdoor life in northern Norway since I was little. In the 1970s and 1980s, my parents followed the norm of the time for recreational family trips, which was to hike and go cross-country skiing with simple equipment. We were less mobile than today, in the sense that we related to fewer landscapes and stayed closer to home and family cabins. Back then, the unwritten rule was to avoid steep terrains. During the decades that have followed, and in the wealthier, more globally connected, mobile, and diversified northern Norway of today, outdoor life has changed, and part of this change is the expanding of motorised outdoor life. Even though my own outdoor life is still non-motorised today, it involves more equipment and consumption, more speed, more techniques, and sometimes steeper terrains and higher risks. Nevertheless, my current life in the outfields connects to my upbringing as well as further back in time (Goksøyr 1994; Gurholt



Fig. 6.1 My friend June (left) and I on one of our trips in Øksfjord, Finnmark (photo and copyright: author)

2008), sometimes in profound ways. Recently, I came across a photo (see Fig. 6.2) from around 1960 of my grandmother, who was born in 1894 and died in 1987 when I was 17 years old. In the picture, we see her together with her sister and daughter-in-law.

I had never seen my grandmother, who was a farmer all her life, in the outfields like this before, in sports clothes with glowing cheeks sitting in the heather. Her expression, which was new to me, moved me and made me identify (even more) with this woman whose name I bear. She looks happy and in control of the situation, and I sense the companionship among the three women. I know the Melåa plateau, where the photo was taken, rather well. I have hiked and skied there since I was a child, and I helped my uncle gather his sheep there every autumn. My father explained that his mother's 'vacation' as a farmer was to walk from the farm up to Melåa every autumn to pick cloudbberries. Thus, as is the case with my friends and I, these women were targeted in what they did, seemingly connected, and 'in their element' when they were there. This ancestral link to the simple farming life of combined livelihoods is one that I share with many northerners. The household economic tradition we see a glimpse of here is carried on by many outdoor people. As time passes, I see how I have slowly started to connect more closely to it myself,



Fig. 6.2 The text under this photo in the photo album says: 'Ingebjørg Strømnes, Laura Granås, and Brynhild Granås. Supper at Melåa.' My grandmother sits in the front, to the right (photo: unknown; copyright: author)

encouraged by my ancestors as well as by the nature crisis of our time, which spurs reconsiderations of one's place in ecologies.

JYPPYRÄ AND STOURASKÁIDI

After walking for five minutes towards Jyppyrä the next morning, we started to ascend the first hillside. There, we realised that our chosen path was out of use and taken over by birch trees that we now had to manoeuvre between and climb over. This task became no less a struggle as Gås scented the sheep around us and started pulling on her leash. I regretted the lack of human tracks, as they are comforting when you approach a peak like Jyppyrä through a demanding terrain such as this one. It was a relief when we climbed above the treeline and found a well-used, marked track. As we approached the peak, I could finally take in and enjoy the here and now: the ravens that were sailing over our heads, the mountain hare that jumped elegantly away as we passed by, and the rocky landscape that gave me a sense of connection to something more, as well as a sense of achievement when climbing it (Fig. 6.3). This moment is the type of encounter with rocks, altitude, and steepness that our parents and grandparents never sought, unless a sheep was lost there.

We spotted humans for the first time on our way down, following the regular, more populated route we had found. I soon noticed hikers and runners with their dogs off leash along the way. The sight provoked me, and I started worrying for the sheep we had encountered in the forest below us. I kept quiet about it, though. I had met local sheep farmers on previous preparatory visits to the Reisadalen for the research project, and my own dog has recently proven to have a strong hunting instinct, so I kept her leash on. I have been responsible—although far less than my grandmother—for the well-being of sheep myself. Upon reflecting in hindsight, such emotions of annoyance and worry tell of morally meaningful temporal–spatial connections that come to life as I engage corporeally with the landscape and partake in more-than-human encounters there. While we followed the well-trodden path on our way down, we also noticed the wounds of heavy use on the steepest parts of the path, where we sometimes slipped on sand. With the small town of Storslett right below us, we agreed that this area was probably part of many people's weekly exercise routines.

Tired and happy, we changed clothes, jumped into the car, and headed towards our next camping site towards the southeast end of the valley.

Fig. 6.3 The track towards the peak of the mountain Jyppyrä, which is marked with red spots by the Norwegian Trekking Association, becomes rather rocky as one approaches the top (photo and copyright: author)



We took the dangerously bumpy side road down to the river bank, as instructed by my contact. We soon sensed that it was a well-used place, probably frequented by the many salmon fishers that I had learned occupy the area. This realisation made me regret that I had to use the forest as a toilet, which is usually permissible around the sparsely populated north—just not when you become aware that there are many who do so. This particular feeling of such absent-present human ‘crowds’ is something that I experience ever more often in my mobile outdoor life in the region, particularly in the nearby landscapes of Alta and Tromsø. In situations like this, the growth in outdoor life pushes reconsiderations of the norms for outdoor life that I was socialised into, wherein for example using the forest for toilet purposes or making a bonfire almost anywhere was never questioned. As with the sand that surfaced on the much-used track down from Jyppyrä the day before, observations about the heavy use of landscapes sharpen my sensing of nature’s vulnerability. Never mind my feeling of belonging in the north—I slowly realise that I have become part of a problem myself.

On Sunday morning, we drove up to Puntafossen (the Punta Waterfall) where the track towards Stuoraskáidi starts. We read on a sign there that the path through the pine forest was an old construction road. At the upper end of the forest, we encountered the only two humans that we met that day. When one of them referred to the hike to Jyppyrä as ‘an *autostrada*’ (motorway) compared to this one, the comment felt timely. Soon after, the winds grew stronger and, as it turned out, the journey towards the plateau became the windiest I have ever experienced when out hiking. Encounters with weather, like this one, trigger a continuous worry about how unpredictable the winds may actually become. The terrain was, however, gentle and easy to walk along. The delight of experiencing such an open landscape provokes feelings that I am not used to describing with words. I would not say to a friend, for example, that I feel peaceful when I am out here, or that I have this meaningful sense of being part of something more—that I feel connected to myself, to the eternity of the mountains, and to the proximity of the running rivers, the reindeer, the heather, the sky, and much more. I would definitely not admit that even my ancestors feel closer. These words nevertheless reflect some of what I may feel, particularly in a landscape like Stuoraskáidi, where the flora, fauna, and physical shapes remind me of Melåa, where the photograph of my grandmother was taken, and exemplify the archetypical landscape where my parents would take me hiking. When I pay attention to the embodied feeling, when I start considering it and then articulate it, I notice how the sentiment of delight comes to life within relations to the evocative spaces of my life that I embody and bring with me as I roam not only well-known landscapes but also those that I do not know well. As these evocative spaces become energised here and now within corporeal landscape encounters, the feeling of community and commitment with the more-than-human landscape exceeds historical and geographical demarcations.

At the plateau, we leaned into the wind, rolled around with the dog in the heather, and laughed before we jogged down away from the wind. Further on, we started dreaming about trips we could take here in the future, since the path we had followed looked perfect for descending from the plateau by ski and for off-road bike excursions.

THE MOSKODALEN

After spending the last night in ‘luxury’ at a cottage in the middle of the valley, we drove out of the Reisadalen Monday morning. I felt excited. Although I understood the valley better, I was still dazzled by the constitution of the landscape. For example, we gazed towards the side valley Moskodalen (Mosko Valley) as we drove by. From our reading, we understood that there was a popular hiking track there. This assertion baffled us, as all we could see from the car window was a strikingly steep, v-shaped, and shaded valley wherein nothing but bounded rockiness awaited.

Three days later, I found myself in the Moskodalen. It was Odd from the National Park Center who took me there. He insisted that he would be happy to join me for a hike in between meetings. To my surprise, he suggested the Moskodalen when I asked him where we should go. After a manhood of roaming the Reisadalen, Odd knows the area well. In the birch forest on our way into the Moskodalen, he explained that the peculiar marks on the ground were traces of spilt cobber from the mining enterprise at the bottom of this valley a hundred years ago. Our path was once the construction road. The signs along the track, which explained some of the remaining mining traces, were put up and maintained by local farmers, Odd told me. Every autumn, there is a community walk into the valley to celebrate its mining heritage, he added. After a while, I became thoughtful and decided to tell Odd about my preconceptions of the Moskodalen. He then turned his body towards the south, put out his arms, looked up, and explained to me how the opening of the valley towards the south makes it a perfect hiking spot around mid-summer, when the flooding river has calmed down and a maximum amount of light is let in. It is a seasonal place of cultural value to a community of people that engage with it maybe once or twice a year, not least families with children. It was altogether striking how my familiarisation of myself with the valley accelerated in Odd’s company—how my awareness of other people’s meaningful relations of commitment and care increased, and how the Moskodalen energised Odd’s communication of life around here to me.

The weather was grey and windy. Wet snow showers were coming and going as we reached deeper into the valley, where the steep and rocky mountain cliffs encircled us. The steep sides met in the middle of the river in places, with little or no space left for the old road. ‘Now it is time for coffee,’ Odd stated, pointing at a bench by the track and adding

that a good hike is impossible without a good break. As we sat down, Odd explained that the landscape in and around the river here consists only of rocks, as all the sand is washed away by floods. I tried my best to be present and relax, despite the fact that the steep mountainside behind us was an ocean of big rocks. I kept asking myself how stable they were, considering the weather records piling up these days. Overall, the dramaturgy of the Moskodalen moved me. It stages a sense of the fragility of life, of what has been and what will become in time of the Anthropocene, in the globally situated landscape. When looking back, this sense of fragility had also made itself felt through the winds we experienced the weekend before.

METHODOLOGIES FOR INVESTIGATING THE MORAL UNDERCURRENTS OF MOBILE OUTDOOR LIVES

In the process of familiarising myself with the Reisadalen over the course of this week, I started to discover more of the rich affordances of the valley as a recreational landscape for outdoor people like myself. This valley is no longer dark or uninviting to me. Sites, places, and tracks where I have camped and hiked have become real and provide the landscape with substantive meaning (Olwig 2019). Through the different encounters with non-humans and humans that are part of the story above, I have gotten to know places in the embodied and thus sensible way that comes with corporeal proximity. This proximity provides access to the morally evocative spaces of mobile outdoor people and illuminates their partaking in convoluted moral landscape dynamics. Climbing over birch trees on an overgrown track or slipping on the sandy surface of a much-used one not only makes the tracks more substantive and real but also renders the landscape altogether more morally relatable. Moreover, the corporeal and more-than-human approach is not only about being attentive to how I am ‘[...] shaped by the rest of the natural world [...]’ but also about allowing myself ‘[...] to be even more shaped by it’ (Erhard 2007, 20). There is the attention, and then there is the change (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 191). Corporeal proximity in landscapes provides rich opportunities for engagements where moral undercurrents come to life through emotions that sometimes spur change.

The evocative moments of the story above are part of a wider biography within which the meaning of outdoor life, as well as moral aspects of landscape practices, can change. One example is my attentiveness to

how the norms from my own upbringing as an outdoor person in the Arctic landscapes of northern Norway need to be reconsidered as more people roam the outfields. This example illustrates how experiences from the Reisadalen do something to me and how what the experiences do is connected in time and space (Massey 1994, 2005). These are connections to people, places, and constitutive encounters with more-than-humans in the past, present, and future. By using my body as a tool (Latour 2004, 206), I enable myself to recognise situations where I affectively sense wrong and right. Notably, I make use of what my emotions tell me as a way to sensitise myself to the wider geographical and historical connections (Granås and Mathisen 2022) that are part of this encounter in place. The temporally and spatially connected morally laden moments I explore are not experiences where normative obligations are formulated but where a care that is ‘concomitant to life’ becomes and evolves, meaning that care is ‘[...] not something forced upon living beings by a moral order; yet it obliges in that for life to be liveable it needs being fostered’ (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 198).

My newly established connections with the people for whom the valley is home link to what Olwig has described as a potential moral order in terms of the local customs (Olwig 2019) that reside in the practiced landscape. I, however, explore the moral practicing of landscapes in ways that are more geographically and historically open, more dynamic, and more embodied. This openness to the pursuing of the moral undercurrents of outdoor life accounts for the ever more mobile life of outdoor people who are continuously engaging with landscapes that are not very familiar to them. To notice and bring out the wider time–space connections within which this mobile outdoor life unfolds is to provide a perspective that takes us beyond the local–non-local binary in investigating how the moralities of the outdoors come to life and may change. Similarly, my situated accounts do not unveil a demarcated outdoor life culture based on reductive descriptions of one culture’s attitudes towards environments or assessments of moral orders (cf. Macnaughten and Urry 1998, 2). Rather, I hope to bring to life some of the ‘messy worldliness’ (cf. Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 10) of relations wherein care and commitment may evolve in connection to this widespread everyday outdoor practice in Norway in which people are differently positioned based on their connectivities in time and space. Sometimes these connections are planetary and concern our embodied awareness of the nature crisis of our times.

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