

EATING THE CANAL



To the un-accustomed eye, a canal bank, as with any verge, is just a monochrome of green. But when you take the time to sit with the expanse, the details slowly reveal themselves to you.

This is important when learning to forage, as you have to learn to see beyond the obvious to safely tell plants apart from each other. Soon you will have access to whole new worlds of species right by your footsteps, with so much to explore on daily commutes and in green spaces.

This project is part of the Pennine Lancashire Linear Park pilot project delivered by The Super Slow Way with artist Hannah Fincham and local community members to the Burnley stretch of the canal. Inside, along with a map of our findings, are exercises that we trialled together in simply being with ~ and therefore learning to see/know better ~ the canal, lifting the green veil, establishing instincts and feelings for nature.

Eating the Canal extends beyond foraging, for more information about growing projects along the canal visit: superslowway.org.uk

EXERCISE 1: HOW TO SEE

To begin we will observe without judgement.

Walk slowly around the canal-side until you come to a spot that calls you to pause or sit down.

Simply sit, let it all wash over you, sights, scents, sounds... breathe.

You can make notes of how you feel in this moment.

Then we dissect. Go on a pattern hunt from where you're sat. Allow your eyes to scan around you and observe how many different shapes exist within the grass, the bushes and the trees in your immediate vicinity.

Give the shapes/plants names or descriptions, if you like, or find associations with other things that they remind you of.

You could draw what you see, or write a line of poetry that the landscape may inspire.

Then slowly, keeping your eyes engaged on your new findings, stand up. Walk away from your spot and allow your eyes to scan around further afield.

Take note of how much more you can see now than before.

"If something is boring
after two minutes, try
it for four. If still
boring, then eight.
Then sixteen. Then
thirty-two. Eventually
one discovers that it
is not boring at all"
~ John Cage

EXERCISE 2: FINDING YOUR PLANT

Walk back out amongst the plants, now that we are looking at the landscape in more detail, choose a specific plant to observe.

Scan your eyes over the plant. Use the prompts on this page to think more about that plant, you can note things down if you like, or draw. Don't feel like you have to answer every prompt, just the ones that inspire you.

Is it small and tucked away amongst the others? Or large and strong?

OBSERVATIONS

Take in it's flowers, if it has them, it's petals and all the little parts in-between.

Is it's stem circular or square, thin or sturdy looking?

Then out to it's leaves, do they grow straight out of the central stem, or on separate branching stems? Are they serrated or smooth? Do they look hairy or shiny?

How does it make you feel to look at it? Any body sensations?

What does it make you think about?

FEELINGS

What would you name it? (If you already know their name, try to forget it).

If any images come up in your mind's eye (or associations or memories), describe them or draw them.

What do you think it would taste like? What do you think might happen if you were to eat it?

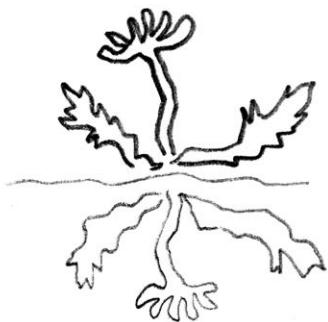
IMAGINATION

Can you imagine what the plant might try to say to you if you could hear it talk?

WARNING: look but do not touch if your plant looks like this and grows directly out of the water. This is Hemlock Water Dropwort, the most toxic plant in the country and grows along the canal! But think of that as an empowering fact, as you can get to know it and have an understanding of the ones to avoid as well as the ones to pick!



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Notes on foraging: think of all the insects, animals and other humans that also want to snack on that plant you're picking, never pick more than 30% of what's there to leave enough for them!

Stay aware of the water's edge.

Make sure you know 100% what you're picking before you consider eating it. Use a plant identification book to check, or find a local foraging walk to learn more. If you're pretty sure of what a plant is but wouldn't know for sure until seeing it's flowers, keep note of where it is and watch it through all the seasons to get to know it in every form, then come back to it the following spring for it's fresh juicy greens!

"Modern maps hold no memory of what the land was before. Few of us have thought to ask what truths a map may be concealing, or have paused to consider that maps do not tell us where we are from or who we are. Many of us do not know the stories of the land in the places where we live; we have not thought to look for the topography of a myth in the surrounding rivers and hills. Perhaps this is because we have forgotten how to listen to the land around us."

~ Jim Enote,
a traditional Zuni farmer



Share your findings using
[#eatingthecanal](#)

The Pennine Lancashire
Linear Park pilot project
is funded by the UK
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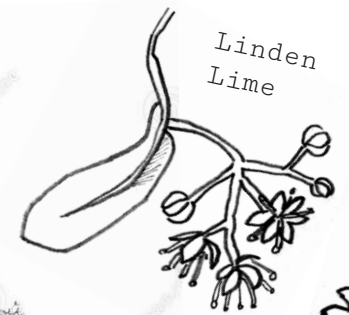
Sounds
wind
bird song
distant traffic
fish jumping
fish jumping
cycles
foot steps



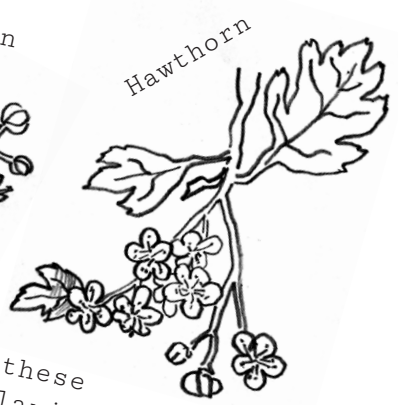
Garlic Mustard: the name says it all



Meadowsweet: vanilla blossoms!

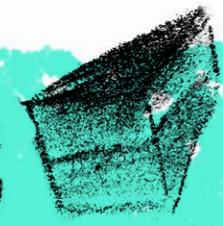
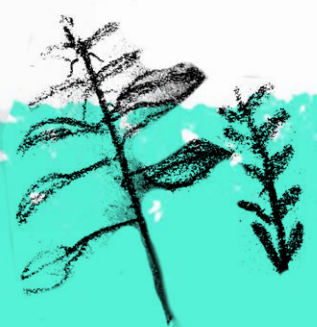
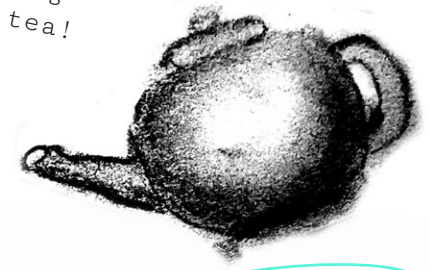


Linden Lime



Hawthorn

Together these make a relaxing heart tonic tea!



Water Mint: Canal delicacy



Hogweed: member of the risky carrot family, only pick once you get to know it well! Shoots like asparagus, seeds like cardamom



Dandelion: bitter leaves in spring sparingly in salad or as tea for blood cleansing, kidney and bladder remedy. Blossoms for honey-like syrup!



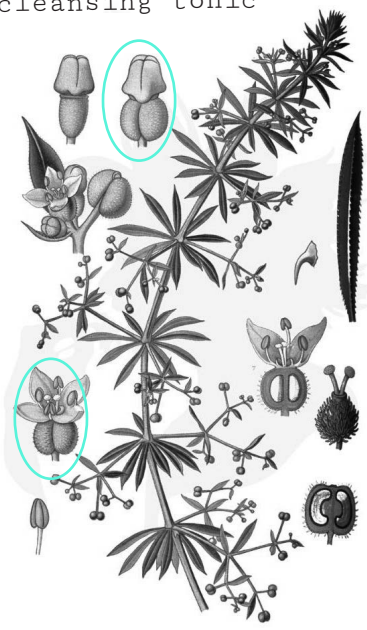
Coltsfoot



Plantain: good antihistamine, chew and rub on insect bites or nettle stings



Cleavers: steep in a glass of water overnight in spring for refreshing lymph cleansing tonic



Roast seeds for coffee substitute

Nettles: Iron rich power food! Top six leaves in spring, seeds in summer have mood boosting properties



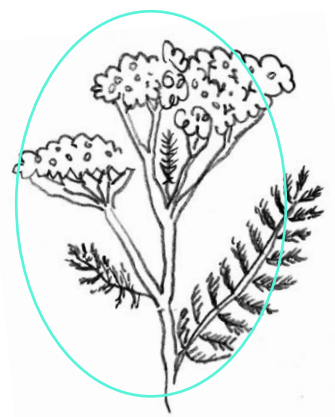
Daisies!

Common: infuse gently in coconut oil for anxiety



Oxeye: leaves taste like cucumber skin

Wood Aven: Grind dried roots for cinnamon/clove spice!



Yarrow: Tea reduces fevers. Chew and apply to a wound to stop bleeding/promote healing, warrior plant! Brings courage