



David Watson

David Watson is an Australian photomedia artist and writer intrigued by 'progress'. In 2012 he completed *Wild Ryde*, a doctorate fuelled by the 'findings' of a slow, six-year walking and swimming pilgrimage across suburban Sydney: He currently works with a collective of environmentally-concerned contemporary artists opposing new coal mining and CSG fracking in New South Wales: However, he has always considered himself a street artist. First in London in the 80s on weekends he would comb the *London A-Z* by bicycle with his trusty Olympus OM-1, seeking out forgotten corners and layered textures. Latterly he has been walking the streets through the suburbs of Sydney to capture memories. In 2005 he determined to walk west from his home in urban Rozelle following the spine of Victoria Road, a major artery, out of the city. Over two years and 19 walks his path led inexorably to his childhood home in suburban Dundas, where his elderly parents had lived for 60 years, looking out to the Blue Mountains. Although less than ten miles as the crow flies, David's serendipitous, looping route covered perhaps 100 miles of concrete, bitumen and harbour-shore. When he reached his destination, he chose to swim back, along the Parramatta river to Sydney.

Notes from the podcast interview by **Andrew Stuck**: Recorded on a blustery day in Greenwich Park, London in October 2014 and published in May 2015 on <http://www.talkingwalking.net>

Wild Ryde <http://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/handle/2123/10490>

David currently works with a collective of environmentally-concerned contemporary artists opposing new coal mining and CSG fracking in New South Wales: <http://williamsrivervalley.blogspot.com.au/>

Based for much of the 1980s in London – where he worked for *Bicycle Magazine* and the British Film Institute – David lived in a New Cross housing co-op then in Bethnal Green. A late starter at art college back in Australia, David studied with artists Richard Dunn and Anne Ferran at Sydney College of the Arts, where he also taught. En route the sinuous poetics of painters, photographers and filmmakers – like Clarice Beckett, Robert Frank, Nancy Rexroth, Gerhardt Richter, Uta Barth, Paul Winkler and Patrick Keiller – and the memory-laced prose of Gerald Murnane, W. G. Sebald and Iain Sinclair infused his work.

<http://sydney.edu.au/sca/about/people/profiles/anne.ferran.php>

Stan Brakhage (Experimentations with Celluloid) <http://www.transpositions.co.uk/visionary-film-the-apocalyptic-eye-of-stan-brakhage/>

Sydney-based Paul Winkler, with his collages of Sydney [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Winkler_\(director\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Winkler_(director)) .

Patrick Keiller's films, London and Robison in Space http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patrick_Keiller

and authors, Iain Sinclair <http://www.iainsinclair.org.uk/> and Max Seibold http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W._G._Sebald

When in London in the 1980s, David worked for the British Film Institute. <http://www.bfi.org.uk/>

[Ben Rossiter runs Victoria Walks in Melbourne, Australia - listen to his Talking Walking interview: <http://www.talkingwalking.net/ben-rossiter-talking-walking/>]

As a walking artist/contemporary 'swagman' David pared back his London-mode of metropolitan assay, meandering the kerbed and guttered postcodes of his Sydney youth on foot. Feeling discombobulated and remote from the local at a time of ever-faster global connectivity, in 2005 he determined to walk west from his home in urban Rozelle following the spine of Victoria Road, a major artery, out of the city.

Over two years and 19 walks his path led inexorably to his childhood home in suburban Dundas, where his elderly, now-ailing parents had lived for 60 years, looking out to the Blue Mountains. Although less than ten miles as the crow flies, David's serendipitous, looping route covered perhaps 100 miles of concrete, bitumen and harbour-shore. He discovered that the slower pace of walking delivered unexpectedly rich new



perspectives: familiar, seemingly bland territory re-imagined became charged. Shooting hundreds of images with his old Olympus, David also collected crushed pieces of redolent roadside detritus (bottle caps, plastic shards) which he later scanned, enlarged and collaged. Mid-week in residential streets he often encountered more pets than people; a spate of home-made posters re missing cats and dogs triggered work mourning the many largely unheeded indigenous bird species 'lost' to progress: <http://www.davidwatson.net.au/walking-with-cars-2008/> Step by step, stroke by stroke, his suburban pilgrimage became a means of making home, of attending to place and the oft-invisible toll of our fossil-fuelled 21st-century lives: <http://www.davidwatson.net.au/wild-ryde-2011/>

In 2009 both of David's parents died and the family home was sold. Soon after, he completed his municipal pilgrimage by *swimming home* to Rozelle down Sydney's 'original highway', the Parramatta River. A personal ode and environmental paen, the swim resuscitated suburban 'story' as it bore witness to the slow recovery of Sydney Harbour's industrially-defiled upper reaches: <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/offtrack/the-pace-of-place3a-david-watson28099s-wild-ryde/4502380>

With an eight-artist collective, the Williams River Valley Artists' Project (WRVAP), David is currently working to highlight the environmental irresponsibility of Australia's fossil-fuel extraction and export at a time of escalating climate risk. For WRVAP's 2013 anti-coal exhibition **Leave it in the Ground** David created *Fuse* – a proposed 200 km walk from his domestic powerboard in Rozelle to the source of his electricity - the power stations of the coal-ravaged Hunter Valley: <http://www.davidwatson.net.au/activism-1/>

In April 2015 WRVAP created **Instruments of Democracy**, a performance + installation in support of non-violent direct action against the ravages of new coal mining and CSG/fracking <http://williamsrivervalley.blogspot.com.au/>

Such actions are being increasingly supported by an unlikely alliance of everyday Australians, farmers, greens, doctors, lawyers, entertainers and sports legends: e.g. late last year high-profile 'Wallaby' – former Australian Rugby Union captain David Pocock – 'locked-on' against Whitehaven Coal's new mine in northern NSW, garnering front-page coverage in *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

Walks recommended by David Watson

Walk from Rozelle to Dundas and swim back along the Paramatta river to Sydney Harbour
Meander from your present home to your childhood home (or power source) with a curious heart, a seeing eye, and an internet connection (to fuel creative local research en route).