

**Whenever I approach the familiar with beginner's mind,
with attention, curiosity, wonder,
embracing confusion, faltering steps, not-knowingness,
the world becomes alive,
you become alive.**

A camera helps!

~ Br. Phillip Elwin, fsc

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“It’s odd how most of us tend either to forget our body or to worry about it.”

~ Christophe André.

**Malabar Beach, at the edge of Pacific Ocean,
a new day,
a turning tide,
an awakening to presence.**

**At this hour, mind is sluggish,
toes grip wet sand exposed at low tide,
water laps gently as if taking a breath,
Silver Gulls silently explore the shore.
and I begin to move, to inhabit my body.**

**Fingers grip a wooden pole,
attention focusses on the point
where wood meets sand.
It’s as if I’m learning to write again.
But now it’s not just fingers moving a pen.
It’s feet pivoting,
hips turning,
arms working in tandem,
eyes fixed on furrowing staff.**

**In body,
I unite with yielding sand,
with rising light,
with incoming tide,
with stirring city,
with the flow that is Life.**



Malabar Beach at the end of Long Bay. January 19, 2017. Low tide on steeply sloping beach. Heavily overcast sky before dawn. Marks in the wet sand are barely visible in the even, subdued light. Many marks, many boundaries: cloud and clear air, sea and sky, water and land, tidal lines, human imprints.



Malabar Beach at the end of Long Bay. February 16, 2017. The slanting dawn light casts shadows on disturbances in the sand. Ephemeral markings. A sacred time and place. The Eora people have etched their enduring presence with engravings into the coastal sandstone.

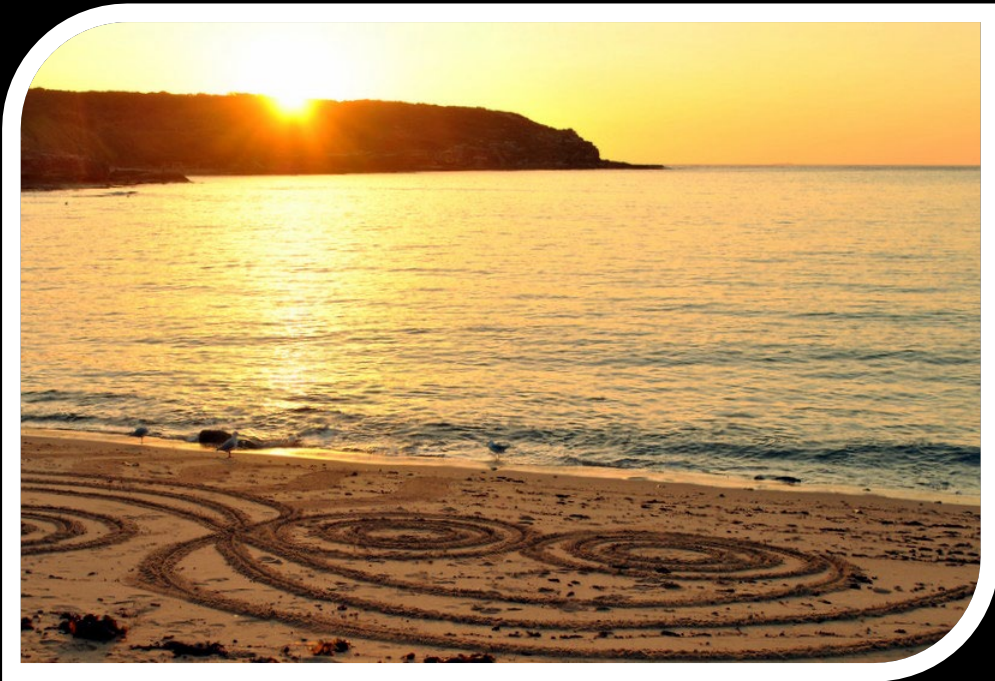
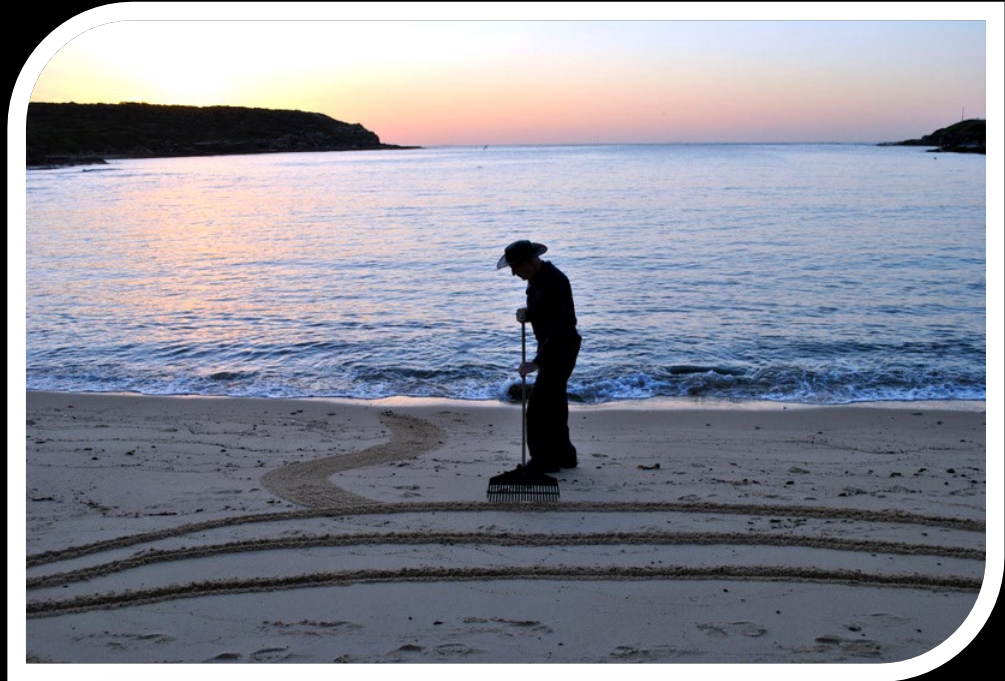


Malabar Beach at the end of Long Bay. One month later on February 16, 2017. Low tide on steeply sloping beach. Clear sky before dawn. Marks in the wet sand are accentuated by the slanting light.



**Malabar Beach,
February 16, 2017.
Long shadows cast
by the rising sun.**







Looking at Mindfulness

**“Live in
the present
moment.”**



That's the encouragement from Christophe André.
And to live in **this** moment is not to think, not to walk,
but **to be still**.

It is rare that I attend to the close of the day,
turn my attention
from preparing evening meal,
catching up with TV bulletin,
listening to family.

This evening, I stop.

Around me is vast
movement.

But I stop.

The sun sinks, drawn by an immense, invisible force.
Red rays scan the clouds.

Unique contours appear from moment to moment.
The earth is still, silhouetted darkly against radiant sky.
The water is glassy with only the tiniest ripple.
The air is warm upon my face.
A parting chorus from cockatoo, corella, currawong and cricket.

For the briefest instant, I live in this present moment.



“A phenomenon as familiar, ordinary and automatic as breathing.”

~ Christophe André.

Sometimes it’s the blue water, occasionally it’s the iconic buildings, but today, it’s the vast sky, the ocean of air!

I stop.

I breathe. I breathe, deeply, air washed by morning shower, space filled with noonday light, harbour pungent with salty tang. I stop and hold the camera.

Ferry churns through ruffled water, flags flutter above arching bridge, clouds transmute from moment to moment,

and, for an instant, I’m utterly still, except for the breath, my breath, the city’s breath, the earth’s breath.

For coming home, thanks.

Tuesday 12 Feb 2019, 6.50 am, St Aloysius Parish Church, Cronulla.

I kneel on the same pew I occupied over a hundred times in
the past year.

Same place. Same familiar faces. Same hot, humid, stuffy air.

But today something is different.

Each day, I have been saying the Sanctus with as much
attention and meaning as I can muster.

*Holy, holy, holy ... Heaven and earth are full of your
glory!*

Murmur it Phillip, with the awe that lifts you when you dance
it with the Sufis,
when you sing it in Hebrew or Latin.

I have said this so many times! Can it be true!?!?

I gaze around the church with half-closed eyes.

The smooth sandstone wall backing the sanctuary
glows with honey-like warmth in early morning light.

Rock hard now, but born in water, in a great Amazon-like
delta.

I can feel the wash of that ancient river!

Soaring side walls in a myriad of ochre bricks, meticulously laid,
bricks born of a fire,

that burnished moistened, ancient shale into stony sinews.
I feel the warmth of that searing fire.

White marble lectern quarried in a treasure house effusion of the
earth.

Memory of ancient tropical waters and teeming coralline life.

I sense the cycle of life and death

in this stone which daily cradles our celebration of the Paschal
mystery.

Wooden floor and wooden pews.

Knots and furls decorate the pine slab supporting me.

Sap coursed and surged through this trunk.

Anonymous foresters and carpenters felled and shaped this
wood.

Here, I sit, kneel and walk on creatures

that lived, breathed and died before I was conceived.

I sense the great panoply of ancestors, human and otherwise
who leave their trace in this charnel house, this place of worship.

Today the stones sing! Today the dead wood suffuses me with
life!

May this be the ground from which this day springs!



Phillip Elwin, 2019. *Gweagal Dancers*. Oak Park, Cronulla NSW.

Whales of the Gweagal

Oct 17 2019 Oak Park Cronulla NSW

A backdrop of a blue, eternal sea.

Sunday morning.

Families gather excitedly on the grass to celebrate

Whales of the Gweagal Day.

Somebody spots it,
then everybody sees it.

How did it know?

A spume of white water erupts into the air.

A whale, leisurely ploughing its way south
with calf in tow.

Aunty Barb, Gweagal elder,
conscious of a great line of ancestors,
stands on the stage at cliff's edge
and welcomes us to Sea and Country.

Auntie Deanna, custodian of stories,
tells of whale sharks shepherding fish
into the grasp of grateful hunters,
and of whales selflessly beaching themselves on the shore
as the basis for a feast for the gathering clans.

Dancers are called,
young men and boys,
torsos and faces daubed with ochre.

No magicians' wands visible.

Instead, coupled boomerangs beat a pulsating rhythm.

In a voice from the depths,
a didgeridoo, fashioned from termite-hollowed log,
breathes out a primeval growl.

Feet pound the earth.

Black, glistening, human forms,
transmute into emu and pelican,
kangaroo and serpent,
orca and whale.

Whitefella and blackfella families,
side by side on the grass.

Sun shines warm,
wind ruffles blue water.

And far out to sea,
another spume of white mist.

Humpback fleetingly surfaces
and returns to the depths.

My spirit longs to go there too.



Shinrin-yoku

Coastal Track Royal National Park NSW

Alice stumbled down a rabbit hole.

Lucy backed through a wardrobe foyer to Narnia.

I take a boat

long wooden wharf

tiny white, green and yellow ferry

ever-changing waters of Gunnamatta Bay

sleepy village of Bundeena, host to artists

seeking silence

gate marking entry to heathland sanctuary.

I leave behind

white cottages, parked cars, asphalt roads,
mind captured by plan, question, judgement,
destination.

I walk across the threshold

between built environment and wilderness.

Now, a desire

to bathe in this moorland domain

to simply walk instead of hike

to enter stillness of mind

to enter inner silence

where I can hear wind gusting, bird whistling, leaf rustling, jogger's
footfall

to expand the routine of seeing

to encompass flowers as modest as a grain of sand

and next moment, sky and ocean, vast beyond imagining

to allow dormant skin

to feel warmth of sun, caress of air, texture of leaf, hardness of rock

to inhabit this moment.

I walk

without expectation,

but ready to be surprised;

without striving,

trusting I will be filled;

with senses alive,

becoming one with the heath,

with gratitude for the gift

of air, of earth, of colour, of life.







Phillip Elwin. 2021. Royal National Park, Jibbon Head, NSW, Australia.

A photo of a wind-blasted, salt-laden, 4 metre high “forest” only 30 metres from the Pacific Ocean. I cannot see the ocean. I cannot see the sky. A dense canopy of tangled branches and tiny leaves obscures the larger world. In this confined environment, I cannot see the heathland forest. Instead, I am invited to look closely at the ferns and grasses that flourish in the understory, at the protective bark that wrinkle-wraps the trees .

There is a world in this bark surface, wizened, just as I am, flesh flaking off, deep folds and sinews hardened over the years, the unblemished skin of childhood now enlivened with marks of all kinds and colours.



Phillip Elwin. 2021.
Royal National Park, Curracurrang. NSW, Australia.



Phillip Elwin. 2014. *Ridges and Valleys*. Pastel on paper.
(self-portrait: skin on a wrinkled right-hand wrist.)