

Metaphysical Tracking: The Oldest Ecopsychology

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Ecopsychology—the use of nature for understanding and healing the soul—has become accepted as a legitimate tool by theorists and practitioners alike. Yet one important dimension of the field has been ignored: metaphysical tracking. This article brings to light a number of mystical phenomena that trackers, ancient and modern, have experienced, and suggests their common root in the so-called energy body. The implications for psychospiritual growth are then described. Finally, alternative explanations and new avenues for research are discussed.

*When you see . . . a footprint you do not know,
follow it to the point of knowing.*

Uncheedah,
grandmother of Lakota sage Ohiyesa
(Nerburn, 1993, p. v)

The field of ecopsychology is rapidly being accepted as a legitimate mode of psychotherapy (Roszak, Gomes, & Kramer, 1995). The use of nature to understand and heal the soul has an ancient lineage (Harner, 1990), but currently has taken some postmodern, metaphysical, New Age twists (Gray, 1995). This paper looks at one such twist, namely metaphysical tracking. It shows how the ancient skill of tracking wildlife, now being rediscovered in its physical dimension, has opened to contemporary practitioners a metaphysical, soul-awakening dimension as well. Tracking can serve as a crash course in natural mysticism.

This paper surveys the ways that trackers, while absorbed in the physical technique of the art, also experience its mystique. Based on several sources—ethnographic literature on hunter-gatherers, my own training by professional trackers, the reports of my students, my own experiences, and stories around wilderness campfires—it focuses on the three most common metaphysical experiences: remote tracking, auric residue tracking, and spirit tracking. It posits their common root in the so-called energy body, which presumably enables trackers to transcend the limitations of the physical or space-time dimension. It then shows

the implications for psychospiritual growth. Finally, it evaluates the alternative explanations that skeptics might bring forward and offers a few avenues for future research.

The Energetics of Tracking

Modern humans who take up tracking—sometimes called the oldest profession because of its utility to hunters—often discover they are engaged in a far more mysterious endeavor than simply a new hobby or occupation. While gathering “left-brain” data about gaits, T-steps, and so on, they also start picking up strange “right-brain” information that leads them to start questioning the very nature of nature. During these experiences, they appear to transcend space-time and fall into a mystical “flow,” tapping into heretofore unknown powers (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). As one Kalahari tracker put it: “When tracking is like a dance, you are like a god” (Foster, Foster, & Hersov, n.d.). For this reason, primitive trackers have astounded modern observers. Amazonian trackers, according to one report, “seemed to know by some special extra sense just where to find the game they sought” (Lamb, 1971, p. 64).

Until recently, modern trackers who themselves entered this “zone” kept their experiences “in the closet.” But with the growing acceptability of the “Primitive Renaissance,” parapsychology, and New Age movements, they are increasingly speaking out in workshops (Brown, 1996), lecture tapes (Young, 1995), books (Rezendez, 1998), journals (Kowalewski, 2002b), and other venues. Even hard-nosed search-

and-rescue trainers, who would seemingly be very reluctant to allow their responsibility for the lives of their quarry to depend on worthless practices, strongly recommend that their tracking students listen to “intuition” (Fuller, Johnson, & Koester, 2000, p. 24).

The experiences of these trackers suggest that something metaphysically energetic is going on. The more deeply trackers engage in the art, the more frequent and profound the experiences. Seemingly, the more personal energy they invest in the absent creature’s tracks, the more they connect with its present energy—and beyond. As one practitioner of Native American arts has put it, “Indian knowing” is entering into a personal relationship with the energy of the craft (Peat, 1995).

Yet this notion remains vague about exactly how a tracker can transcend the limitations of space-time. The key, I propose, lies in the notion of “energy body,” alternatively known as the astral, etheric, or dreaming body (Guiley, 1991). New Age writer Carlos Castaneda calls it the “luminous egg” or “luminous ball” (1998, p. 5). It is said to permeate but also to surround the physical body (usually called the “aura”), and to constitute part of the universal energy field to which all creatures belong (namely the Chinese *chi* and Japanese and Korean *ki*). Humans, according to reports, can be taught to see the energy body’s aura (Andrews, 1995; Kowalewski, 2002a).

Many researchers consider the energy body holographic, such that the whole is represented in every part (Gerber, 2000). While it can manifest electromagnetically, nonetheless its effects can be observed through electromagnetic and other shields (Radin, 1997). It appears to contain all the perceptual powers—seeing, hearing and so on—of the physical body as well as the memory of its entire history, and has been used to explain bizarre medical phenomena such as phantom limbs and changes in organ transplant recipients (Burr, 1972; Eden & Feinstein, 1998; Sheldrake, 1995). Experiments of the “DNA phantom effect” have found a similar phenomenon. Randomly scattered photons that are exposed to DNA not only form patterns, but the patterns continue even after the DNA is removed, as if they “remembered” its energy body (Braden, 2000).

This double of the physical body seemingly accounts for many metaphysical phenomena such as precognition and out-of-body experiences (Guiley, 1991). While such notions are usually considered

bizarre by modern humans, they are increasingly being supported by quantum physics (Goswami, 1996), biology (Sheldrake, 1981), and other disciplines (Kowalewski, 2000; McTaggart, 2002).

Thus, I propose, when trackers experience mystical phenomena, their energy bodies somehow connect with the energy body of the creature being tracked, enabling them to learn about it in ways inexplicable by the space-time data of the physical senses. The intersection of the energy bodies of the tracker and tracked is seemingly observable in three common experiences: remote tracking, auric residue tracking, and spirit tracking.

Remote tracking might be called a type of non-physical “bilocation,” or what has come to be known as “remote viewing,” a phenomenon well documented by research at Stanford and other universities (Guiley, 1991; Targ & Puthoff, 1977). It has been shown to occur independently of distance or electromagnetic shielding (Radin, 1997). Trackers located in one place might be said to extend their energy body beyond their physical body and see the creature’s tracks somewhere else far away, an observation later verified by themselves or others. Thus, the energy body might be said to track the creature while the physical body remains immobile.

In recent years, remote viewing has spawned a flood of literature, especially concerning its use in intelligence-gathering by the U.S. government during the controversial “Stargate” program of the 1980s (McMoneagle, 1993; Morehouse, 1998; Schnabel, 1997). The phenomenon, however, has a long pedigree in tracking lore. One story in tracking circles goes like this:

An Englishman in Australia came across an aborigine sitting on the ground and staring into space, and asked, “What are you doing?” “Tracking,” came the reply. “But you’re not moving,” objected the Englishman. “I don’t have to,” said the aborigine, “I’m tracking out there,” pointing to a distant hillside. He then proceeded to describe the location of the creature and sketch all its tracks. The Englishman later verified the claim.

Such lore finds more formal expression in the ethnographic literature on hunter-gatherers. One anthropologist recorded these remote tracking experiences of a Kalahari Bushman:

I see everything. . . . I can see hyenas, lions, and

leopards. I can even see tracks . . . far away. . . . My eyes start turning around in my head . . . and [w]hen I look out to the bush, I can see a lion making low growling sounds, far away. I can see his face very clearly, and I tell the others, "Hey! Hey! There's a lion out there" . . . Then later on they see the tracks of the animal and say, "Kau Dwa was right!" (Katz, 1982, pp. 216-217)

Or consider this account from Labrador:

[T]he old hunter was looking for traces of a bear [that were] . . . swept away by the icy winds and lost in a deep snowdrift. All that the old hunter saw were the footprints of the bear immediately around him. But the footprints led nowhere. . . . The old man squatted down next to the bear tracks. He pulled his blanket over his head, creating darkness . . . [and] gaze[d] on the footprints. He began to see . . . prints . . . leading in a certain direction. The old man got up, followed the prints he had seen, and soon found the bear and killed it. (Speck, 1935, p. 160)

Of course, one might dismiss this and similar accounts as mere braggadocio, lying, or other falsehood. But for hunter-gatherers, tracking is a serious, even sacred, business, and not a subject for frivolous jokes (Brown, 1978). They must produce results, physically or metaphysically, otherwise hunger is not far away (see Liebenberg, 1990; Lyell, 1929, p. 36).

Certain such trackers, as in the Blackfoot nation, claim to see the tracks while asleep. They say they track an animal in their dreams and then, after waking physically, find the tracks at the place where it was moving at the time they were sleeping (Peat, 1995). According to another report,

Some Dene could rely on their dreams and spiritual traveling to . . . locate food. . . . They could "see" where their path would cross with an animal's on the physical earth and then could go to that spot and make the kill easily. (Meili, 1991, p. 126)

Such reports should not be too surprising, given the amount of research supporting the notion of precognitive dreaming (see Guiley, 1991).

I once saw a master tracker dispatch a new student to a thick patch of woods 30 yards away, tell him to place a stick in the ground just behind his foot, then claim that the stick was now at the back of the heel of

a red fox track. The claim was immediately verified. This tracker, it should be mentioned, has solved over 500 cases involving missing children, escaped prisoners, lost hunters, and the like for police, park officials, and so on (Brown, 1978, 1996).

I have personally been team-tracking in a "hide-and-see" game when I saw our quarry's tracks in my mind's eye suddenly stretch far ahead, then loop around behind us and lead into a grove of trees. "I'll bet he's right over there," I told my partners, pointing back to the grove. We went to the trees, where in fact he was hiding. "How did you know I was here without seeing the tracks?" he asked me in amazement. "But I *did* 'see' the tracks," I answered. I certainly did not hear or see his body moving out of the corner of my eyes, see his physical tracks in the distance, or notice my fellow trackers detecting him or his tracks far ahead. Similarly, one tracking teacher tells his students to meditate on where a known cougar in the vicinity is presently moving; they then go out and find its tracks at the spot they "saw" them in their mind's eye (Young, 1995).

Since trackers, while in remote-viewing mode, seem to be transcending space-time, they appear to see tracks made far away and long ago. In my university course on psychic policing, I once asked students to remote-view a crime scene of a recent mystery case (the Jon-Benet Ramsey murder on Christmas eve in Colorado) while they were sitting in our classroom in New York state. One student drew the entire crime scene perfectly (house façade, snow-covered mountains, Christmas presents and stockings, and so on), including tracks leading away from the house. Reports of the crime indicated that tracks had indeed been detected at the scene (see also Cortesi, 1987; Druffel & Marcotte, 1983).

Remote viewing, like other metaphysical skills, can make one's physical life much easier. It can save the tracker endless time and exertion. Some trackers simply stare at a track in a state of trance and envision the creature moving away from them, thus avoiding the need to see every track. The skill, therefore, may have life-saving consequences in law enforcement and search-and-rescue efforts, when time is of the essence. Indeed, since it undoubtedly contributed to hunting success among ancient peoples, we can speculate that evolution hard-wired the ability into our psyches to enhance survival chances.

Thus, apparently, trackers have the ability to see

footprints made beyond the here and now, presumably by connecting their energy body with the energy body of the tracked creature. Judging from the evidence, by far the easiest way to track is to do nothing, or more accurately, to let one's energetic "scout" do the work. For good reason have Native-American trackers been traditionally used as scouts by the U.S. military. "Do less and be more," as some New Agers have said, may be the appropriate maxim for a tracker.

Auric Residues

Auric-residue tracking might be defined as the gleaning of information from "metaphysical tracks," namely, detecting the energetic traces left by feet on a substrate. According to one ancient belief, the "soul substance" of a creature adheres to all physical things with which it has been in contact (Kalweit, 1988). Thus, for the metaphysical tracker, the creature appears to leave energetic remains on everything its body has touched.

Such auric residues are commonly said to be "read" by psychometrists helping police solve crimes from objects touched by victims and perpetrators at the scene (Elkin, 1994; Hibbard & Worrying, 2002; Ostrander & Schroeder, 1997). Similarly, according to a compendium of research on alternative healing, objects touched by powerful healers affect patients thousands of miles away (Benor, 1992).

Auric residues appear to carry, holographically, the entire psyche of the creature, and hence the tracks are sometimes termed "signatures" (i.e., the creature's unique metaphysical "fingerprints") (Brown, 1996; Murphy, 1992). Since the creature's energy body is said to be the seat of its memory, the residues appear to contain its entire history. These energy traces seem responsible for the common statement made by trackers, "Tracks are a window into an animal's soul." These trackers seem in effect to be following creatures' energy paths, on a substrate that acts much like a crime-scene object psychometrized by a police psychic. In short, the substrate appears to "remember" the creatures that stepped on it, containing information about them that the tracker can access.

The traces seemingly remain linked to the creature's energy body. Thus each track appears energetically connected to its maker at the end of the path. For this reason, perhaps, some First Nations teachers say that if you step on a bear print, the bear will get angry because it literally feels your foot.

Indeed, some modern ecologists have claimed that the special feel of a place is caused by longstanding networks of crisscrossing auric trackways.

Each path and track has its own sensitivity and psychic existence, shaped by the consciousness of those who have made it and used it. That is why some old roads have a strong energetic personality and can give rise to certain states of being, making one open to the inspiration of the spirit of the place. (Vogt & Vogt, 1999, p. 35)

The ethnographic literature is also full of stories about auric-residue tracks. In one report on Australian aborigines,

The tribal members . . . recognize at a glance the...marks...on the sand....They...can tell...if the person is feeling well or...[ill]....Their perception is developed well beyond the limitations of people growing up in other cultures. Their senses ...seem to be on superhuman levels. Footprints have vibrations that tell much more than merely what one sees on the sand. (Morgan, 1994, p. 59)

Such accounts might be dismissed as simple imaginings, except for the simple fact of quantum physics—of which these primitive trackers were undoubtedly unaware in the formal sense—that the universe at its deepest level consists of vibrations (Goswami, 1996; Guiley, 1991; Jenny, 2001).

One can also find reports of auric-residue tracks left by presumably nonphysical creatures on physical substrates. Lakota visionary Black Elk noted such an occurrence in his description of an Elk Ceremony:

The virgins...went...back to the tipi...Then the six elk men went into the tipi. After we got into this sacred place we could see tracks of all kinds of animals in there—spirit tracks. (De Mallie, 1984, pp. 243-244)

Wet footprints are often reported as appearing mysteriously in the bathrooms of haunted hotels and, as is well known in psychic circles, beside the swimming pool of the *Queen Mary*.

Auric-residue prints have also been seen by humans while awake but deliberately tracking "on the other side," in the metaphysical realm. It is said, for example, that the shaman who journeys into nonordinary reality to retrieve lost soul parts, or to find unconscious or comatose or deceased souls, may follow their ener-

getic tracks or spirit trails to establish contact (Ingerman, 2001).

Trackers claim to pick up many sensations on an auric pathway, yet the perceptions vary widely depending on personal history, culture, and other variables (Guiley, 1991). Common experiences, however, include luminous orbs, silver and gold ribbons, fuzziness, itching on solar plexus and kidneys, tingling, heaviness, sponginess, pressure, magnetic pulls, and pulses (Young, 1995). In the words of one tracker,

One night...I noticed a much more heightened...awareness...than I'd normally had.... [T]he trails were talking to me...I was literally hearing things from the forest around me.... I was having a lot of really intense instinctive experiences, knowing things before they happened.... I was definitely walking...in alpha state, if not a deeper state...where I was able to see...the animal trails all around me as shimmering light. (Young, 1999, tape 4)

One night while I was tracking a deer, the trail suddenly lit up like a silver ribbon. My logical mind immediately interjected that I was probably just seeing moonlight reflected off crystal-like grains of moist sand. However, I looked up and saw only a dark and overcast sky, and the substrate was dry. The next morning I returned to the site and saw no white sand but instead a dark and dull trail of leaves, twigs, and other debris.

One tracker I met feels electric shocks in his palm when it's held over a track. Others experience vibrations, which, as suggested above, are what connect us all. The intensity of the experiences also varies, the key determinant being apparently the emotionality of the creature at the time it made the track. Psychometrists working on police cases regularly detect, and indeed experience, strong emotions from the objects left at the scenes of violent crimes.

Yet perhaps the most common experience is heat. In the coldest days of winter, trackers "in the zone" (i.e., trackers actively and efficiently using auric residues to track an animal) report feeling hot and shedding their clothes despite subfreezing ambient temperatures. While teaching, I commonly see my students, after a long afternoon of intense tracking in freezing temperatures, walking home with their hats and heavy parkas draped over bare arms. Among the Bushmen of southern Africa,

!Xo hunters maintain that if...they feel a 'burning sensation' in the middle of their foreheads...then...their quarry is just ahead.... Some...sa...that this feeling...is accompanied by perspiring under the arms. (Liebenberg, 1990, p. 93)

Presumably it is these sensations that gave rise to the popular expressions, "warm trail" and "hot on the trail."

As in proven cases of crimes solved by police psychometrists, the residues are said to contain a wealth of information about the creature being tracked (Hibbard & Worrington, 2002). A belief among the Lakota claims that we can talk to the animals through their trails (Young, 1995). While holding their hands over a track and consciously trying to read its energy, my students regularly perform better than chance would predict in determining the creature's sex, age, hunger, thirst, sleepiness, points of origin and destination, disease, and other characteristics. When an Akamba tracker was asked why he was looking so intently at a track, he replied,

I can look into this track and see this animal...where it is now...the condition that it is in.... I know what it is doing right now. I know it is lying down, looking out across the countryside. I can see it there in the grass. I can see the size of it. I can tell who it is. (cited in Young, 1995)

These "flashes" of where the animal is located at the time, which are later verified, undoubtedly help account for the term "talking trails":

I...saw...silver lines going across the landscape... three distinct silver lines...like duct tape.... So I said to my friend, "Hey, what are these lines on the ground?" and she said, "What lines?"... We continued on our way.... I was trying to see footprints...but you couldn't see a footprint because the ground was baked hard.... All of a sudden...three deer butts appeared right in front of my eyes...as if someone was flashing a video.... You could reach through them, they weren't "really" there.... I saw...three deer butts, moving away from me, laying down the silver lines.... I found myself jogging down these three lines.... When we entered...into a little valley...three deer jumped up out of their day beds and bounded away. (Young, 1995)

According to a Mohawk belief, as soon as you look at a wild animal's track, it will raise its head and look back over its shoulder (Young, 1995).

Thus, the tracker's energy body appears to operate like an antenna picking up the waves or vibrations emitted by the residues of the creature's energy body. Quite easily, it seems, the energy body of the tracker connects with the residues of the energy body of the tracked.

Spirit Tracking

Spirit tracking is said to occur when the tracker is seized, or "possessed," by the soul of the creature. According to reports, it is becoming so engaged in the energetics of the pathway that the physical tracks are forgotten and one "shapeshifts" into the creature, moving over the landscape as it did at the time. This phenomenon is said to enable the tracker to experience the world as the creature did at the time it was making the tracks. As one First Nations tracker, Charles Goodfoote, has put it, "A track is where the spirit of the tracked, and the...tracker, meet" (cited in Hanratty, 1997, p. 55).

One afternoon while "in the zone" tracking a red fox, I suddenly started smelling wood smoke behind me. This seemed very strange, since I was tracking *into* the wind, there was no sign of fire anywhere, and I was far from any human dwelling. I continued on for a while, then started returning home by the same route. On the way back, I passed the site where I had smelled the smoke; then a few minutes later looked up and saw, above me, smoke rising straight up from a farmhouse chimney several hundred yards away. Since I had been tracking into the wind, and since the weather was mild with no erratic prestorm winds, it seemed highly unlikely that the smoke had been carried by the breeze. It was difficult not to speculate that I had smelled the smoke with the same olfactory power as the fox I had been tracking.

Such experiences could still be dismissed as fantasy, were it not for recent breakthroughs in human-animal communication. Some experienced veterinary scientists, for example, now speak of a "magical connection between species." Humans, they say, can create "spiritual bonds" with animals (Schoen, 2001, pp. 154, 203).

When spirit tracking occurs, one appears to cross the species barrier. The experience presumably accounts for the Lakota legend about a boy who once

tracked a buffalo for so long that he became one. Spirit tracking is thinking, feeling, and reacting exactly like the creature being followed. According to one tracking teacher, one must become the animal that is being tracked in order to become a master tracker (Brown, 1996). Some tracking schools teach their students to role-play the creature to be tracked, in order to experience the landscape as it does. Certainly this method helps to physically understand the tracks of a given species. But once spirit tracking happens, as my own experience indicates, one is already way beyond any game of "let's pretend."

The first time spirit tracking occurs, most trackers start questioning their sanity. For instance, Brown (1996) has noted that when vegetarians engage in fox tracking, they experience a desire to eat rabbit. The students I train to spirit-track deer suddenly want, in their words, to "bed down under some pines" or "munch on some buds" (Smith, 1998). I have tried to dismiss these reports as mere imaginings or simple acoustical or other natural happenings (e.g., sounds carry farther at night). Yet, in my judgment, the feats were too unusual—and in many cases verified—and experienced by too serious a group of students to be so easily disregarded.

Spirit trackers, in short, seem to know exactly what it is like to *be* another species. For good reason, it seems, First Nations peoples have always claimed that wild animals are our best teachers. Or, as I heard one modern tracker say, deer can teach you more about deer than any biologist ever could.

Yet spirit tracking, while certainly fun, was hardly a trivial pursuit for native peoples, who traditionally used it to better survive (e.g., to sense danger farther away than their limited physical sense perceptions could reach). Spirit tracking, as with all metaphors of native peoples, seems much more than simple poetry; specifically, it seems to be about survival—as individuals, peoples, and indeed the human species.

Further, because of the intensity of the experiences, some spirit trackers recommend metaphysical or auric shielding, especially when tracking humans (see Braud, 1984). Since they seem to feel exactly what the tracked creature felt at the time, trackers may unknowingly pick up negative feelings and suffer the emotional consequences. One afternoon in the woods a friend and I followed human tracks that led to a pile of litter left from a drinking party the night before. The place reeked of beer from broken bottles. Within seconds we

were laughing uncontrollably—apparently a kind of metaphysical contact high—yet the place had a menacing feel as well. That night we both had dreams about physical violence. The next day we learned there had almost been a fight at the party. In a similar vein, during hunting season I have occasionally felt the pain of wounded animals whose blood trails I was following. Although such impressions might be written off as paranoia, fantasy, or just good guessing, they were only experienced while tracking and certainly felt otherwise in body and soul.

At the same time, spirit tracking seems an easy way to ecstasy. Spirit trackers claim to lose egoic self-absorption, stepping out of ordinary reality to experience oneness with another creature—indeed with another species. According to one Bushmen tracker,

Tracking is like dancing, because your body is happy.... The hunter becomes the prey and knows where it is.... When I was running, I really was a kudu.... You feel it in your body.... When you feel you are getting close, you feel a tingling in your armpits...you have taken kudu into your own mind—you see through its eyes. (Foster et al., n.d.)

The feelings appear to become more elaborate as the tracker closes in on the quarry, as another account of Bushmen trackers reveals:

The hunter...would say that a springbok seemed to be coming, for he could feel the black hair (on the sides of the springbok)... The hunter could feel a sensation in the calves of his legs when the springbok's blood was going to run down them, for he would always feel blood when he was about to kill a springbok.... He would have a sensation in his feet as he felt the feet of the springbok rustling through the bushes. The hunter would have a sensation in his face on account of the blackness of the stripe on the face of the springbok, and he would feel a sensation in his eyes on account of the black marks on the eyes of the springbok. (Liebenberg, 1990, p. 94)

Such accounts, again, are often verified: the springbok *was* in fact closer than before, and the observers dined on wild steak that night.

Spirit tracking seems, in short, an intimate way to know a species. When First Nations peoples refer to wildlife as “all their relations,” they appear to be truly talking about their energetic kin. Spirit tracking seems

tantamount to losing one's human identity and experiencing the world as another species. The tracker's energy body, we might say, connects—or better, merges—with the energy body of the tracked. Perhaps for this reason, the wild animals we track one day often show up on our porch the next.

Soul Shift

Tracking, therefore, seems to present a doorway to transcendence. Indeed, experiences of metaphysical tracking often result in psychospiritual transformation of the deepest kind in the soul of the tracker. Like near-death experiencers, trackers often undergo a metamorphosis resulting in substantial life changes (Moody, 1975, 1977, 1988). Stories abound in tracker circles about abandoned jobs, marriages, friendships, residences, and so on. After telling a Paiute tracker about seeing these kinds of soul shift in my friends, he confirmed: “Yup, your life changes a lot when you really start looking.” The mountain recluse of today may well be the tracking novice of yesterday. As a result, many teachers feel obligated to advise their new students, “Do *not* leave your day job!”

Why the transformation? The key lies, I believe, in the energetics of tracking. It is one thing to follow physical tracks; it's another thing entirely to follow energetic ones. When doing so, the creature's trail on a landscape becomes a metaphor for one's own life path. After following creatures' energy bodies with one's own, one gradually becomes an expert tracker of energy itself. Before long, unsurprisingly, one begins to track one's own energy, one's inscape, and eventually to compile an energy audit of one's life. One starts to track oneself.

In particular, a wild creature exposes civilized ills, as trackers compare its awareness, and especially its sheer exuberance, with their own. They begin to find, as one teacher put it, the “wild within” (Rezendez, 1998; see also Plotkin, 2003). According to the many stories I have heard, the process goes something like this. These trackers no longer feel comfortable energetically with their old lives, and begin to long for a new one—one of maximum energy, which some metaphysical teachers might call the path toward their destiny. In short, they begin to track their life's purpose, and many partners, colleagues, friends, and the like no longer fit on that path. Or, in a Jungian word, they track down their rejected wild soul parts and reintegrate them into their psyche, such that they literally become new energetic

beings at odds with their old lives. Civilization itself becomes increasingly intolerable after de-domesticating and re-wilding themselves. After engaging the wild soul parts they abandoned for civilization, they start to realize the ecstasy they had been missing. They see that they have sold their destiny for a civilized illusion. The wild trail, it seems, is a royal road to authenticity.

Yet usually this realization is only a temporary dark night of the soul. When trackers discover that the very wildlife whose energy they have come to experience so intimately is threatened by that very civilization they were starting to reject, most choose to delay the mountain-man lifestyle for one of service to save that wildlife from that civilization. Their psychology leads to ecology. Put another way, they become ecopsychologists (Roszak et al., 1995). As one tracker told me, "Tracking is finding the rest of yourself." At that point, they realize that human destiny is a mighty crooked road—and one that leads full circle.

Conclusion

Without doubt, such claims will cause some skeptics to rub their hands in glee. Yet the following points may bring a little sobriety. First, skeptics have to explain the cross-spatial and cross-temporal continuity of accounts. Metaphysical tracking phenomena seem universal, having being reported across the world across the centuries. How so? Did all these respondents somehow meet in secret just to put one over on the anthropologists? (If they did, the fact alone might constitute corroborating evidence.) More likely, humans are hard-wired for metaphysical tracking and similar phenomena via the brain's ability to produce the alpha and theta waves generating altered states of consciousness to serve survival. Metaphysical tracking, it seems clear, can make the hungry human truly awesome at hunting—a basic survival skill—regardless of personal physical limitations, difficult substrates, weather disturbances, or other banes of the tracker. Metaphysical tracking, one could hypothesize, is evolution's way of serving our species.

Second, some skeptics will claim that the reports simply reflect a "magical thinking" of primitives. Yet the most modern and scientific of today's humans, including computer technicians, biologists, engineers, and the like, are perfectly capable—albeit to their great surprise—of tapping into metaphysical tracks. These humans would have loathed being called "magical thinkers," yet they still had the metaphysical experi-

ences.

Third, some skeptics will claim that the reports simply result from an acquired ability to read very subtle physical cues on a landscape. This objection must be taken seriously. After years of "dirt time," trackers do in fact show a heightened physical awareness, enabling them to see tiny signs like leaf nibbles, overturned pebbles, and the like, to which the average civilized human is totally oblivious. Yet this awareness remains at the physical level and does vary strongly with amount of time spent tracking. Metaphysical tracking, on the other hand, seems completely independent of years of experience and may occur at very young ages. According to a compendium of research on metaphysical phenomena, "At an early age, most Native Americans...experience the supernatural...communicate with animals" (Guiley, 1991, p. 389). Consider, for example, this English tracker's account from Africa:

[T]he best native trackers...act more from instinct than reasoning....I have seen a...ten year-old who was a marvelous tracker. His eyes were as sharp as needles....I have never seen his equal....Such a youngster could not have had time to learn much in his short life, so his proficiency must have been instinctive. (Lyell, 1929, pp. 35-36)

I myself, as suggested above, have enabled at least a few completely neophyte young trackers to experience such phenomena.

Fourth, some skeptics will claim that the reports simply arise from an unconscious familiarity with a landscape after years of living there. Yet I have heard many accounts from trackers, including my own students, of metaphysical experiences that occurred on totally or fairly new landscapes. Indeed, these accounts are consistent with findings from studies of the paranormal. Metaphysical experiences are in fact *more* likely in new than old situations, where the well-known decline effect from boredom sets in (Guiley, 1991). In short, metaphysical tracking experiences are more likely on unfamiliar than familiar landscapes.

Finally, some may claim that the experiences result from telepathic communication with other trackers. While this cannot be ruled out in group tracking situations, all the types of mystical tracking also occur while tracking alone.

Still, some skeptics will demand more conclusive evidence, preferably in the form of scientific studies.

Such research could easily be designed. For example, two groups of equally experienced trackers could track the same landscape; one group, however, could be trained in the skills of remote viewing (Guiley, 1991), seeing auras (Andrews, 1995), and the like. The success rates of the two groups, such as percentage of tracks detected, could then be statistically compared. Likewise, trackers could be surveyed to measure (1) metaphysical experiences and (2) number of major life changes. The two variables could then be correlated for statistical significance.

Some skeptics, however, will remain unconvinced. I invite them to just start tracking. In any case their doubts, undoubtedly, will fail to bring an end to reports of mystical tracking. The landscape will continue teaching trackers about their inscapes.

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