

*Visiting  
Deshkan  
Ziibi*

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Find more information and download or stream the audio river walk at [sherinault.com/visiting-deshkan-ziibi](https://sherinault.com/visiting-deshkan-ziibi)

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***Visiting Deshkan Ziibi:  
text-based river walk / audio transcription***

Taanishi, I hope you're well. I'm glad we're connecting across time and locations.

This is a guided walk for which the guiding points are not physical, they are within you and I.

As water always moves and changes, I want to emphasize that I am guiding you in an unlocated, atemporal way — visiting virtually, as though sharing a call. Together and apart.

As you listen, I hope that you will walk by the river whether that is the Deshkan Ziibing - or any other river in your vicinity. Watch it ebb and flow, observe the plant-life, animal-life, and even other humans near it, without disturbing them.

I have included both original and secondary recordings, to unify my many visits as a single river walk. I have left some of the imperfections of this, to keep the experience honest. And, finally, this recording is not in stereo, so you can choose to listen with only one headphone while listening to environment around you.

***You should be by the river now,  
and wander as you wish.***

The Deshkan Ziibing has been a center-point of my life for the last few years. First, it was a place to explore and canoe and, since moving to London, Ontario, it has become how I locate myself. I live near the Deshkan

Ziibing, Antler River. Colonially, referred to as the Thames. However, while you visit the river with me, think of it as Antler River, Deshkan Ziibi, a being in and of itself and a locale of life; flowing, pulsing, and central to this place that we refer to as London.

## *Take a moment; what wildlife is visiting the river near you? With you?*

There's a deer by the river and that's a really fortunate and beautiful sighting.

I feel really grateful. I always find myself very soothed and moved by wildlife that persists in urban spaces. Like right now, I'm less than blocks from downtown London, and this beauty's just snacking away down the riverbank.

She paused to look at me. I think it's a she. Yeah, I don't see any budding antlers. And then carried on after, or has carried on, after deciding that my stopping wasn't an issue.

These kinds of moments are gifts.

I grew up, or rather, I was a child in the rocky mountains and I found myself living in the mountains again in my early to mid twenties, and I realized at that point in time that I had this sense of relationship, of self, in connection to the mountains as these large beings that eclipsed my heartache, my problems, the sort of depths

of what I - as my small human self - could experience as so distressing. All of it paled next to these huge, beautiful, ancestral beings around me. Looking at those mountains I feel like I can see the heavens of layers of the earth's crust coming up to meet each other and how incredible it is to see this small fragment of something so massive it's really incomprehensible.

I think of hyperobjects in relation to this - a hyperobject, a term coined by Timothy Morton, is something that is so large or vast that it exceeds human comprehension. We can only see hyperobjects through small local manifestations. For example, the peaks of the mountains which lead me to imagine the massiveness of the earth's crust beneath my feet and around me, holding all of us and moving in ways often imperceptible to us — though sometimes present — such as when we feel earth quakes.

Climate change is a hyperobject, we experience small local manifestations of it, like through changes to the way we're sure we've always had a slightly longer winter, a slightly shorter summer - and we hear of the harder to ignore manifestations, like forest fires, hurricanes, and record breaking global temperatures. The ways that climate affects us - we experience in so many ways while, on a global scale, the massiveness of it is imperceptible, we can't possibly hold the depths of it in our minds and so it's hard to view, hard to respond to. It can feel paralyzing.

In relation to my story about the mountains - feeling immersed in the presence of such massive beings grounded me, it allowed me to develop a much different relationship to myself, just through knowing that so

unfathomably large and beautiful they would outlast any human hardship of my day to day life.

When I moved from Banff to Ontario, I began to seek a sense of relationship to massive bodies of water - this is how I began to relate to Lake Ontario.

The Great Lakes are, for me, also hyperobjects. When you fly over them, there's water without end in your view. It's not the ocean but it feels like it. They are more water and vaster than I can fathom. And I have found that in the absence of mountains, I can feel grounded in relationship to these bodies of water, their flows, and their resilience in the face of the strains of human activity - all in complex, interconnected relationship.

Since finding myself in proximity to Deshkan Ziibi, I have begun to structure my sense of grounding in relationship to landscape-being in a new way. What's grown from this is a greater awareness of the presence of rivers in my life. Waterways are the center point of so many cities and towns, almost every place I've lived. As my understanding and appreciation for this has developed, so too has a practice of visiting rivers when I travel - it doesn't feel as though I am fully in a place until I have been to the river. This is, in part, what led me to invite you to visit the river with me.

***Pause where you can see the water, look at how it flows and shifts, shapeshifts and twists.***

Rivers meet where communities meet. They're centers

along which we gather to find ways to survive and be well, and they always have been. This applies to people Indigenous to these lands, to the descendants of colonizers and settlers, and to recent settlers. As we all try to move forward in a time of ongoing colonialism exacerbating climate disaster, the climate grief this creates - I think, necessitates grounding ourselves in relation to rivers and waterways as central beings that hold us and our human and non-human communities; that remind us of how deeply interconnected we are. We are connected through the current and historic centring of our communities, our wellness, our subsistence, our trade routes, around these waterways.

The river is the emergent mountain, the tip of something vast and hard to comprehend. The river evaporates, becomes precipitation, is humidity that you breathe in, that your skin absorbs, affects the water that you drink and that you relieve yourself of. The river is in you, around you and of you, and you are of it.

*As you breathe, moisture from the river permeates your body. You and the river flow in gentle overlap.*

There is an albino mallard that lives - no - yeah. She's a mallard, but she's not - the type of duck is called mallard, and the males are also called mallard - but she is just really spectacular, and I think I've found a feather that is hers, which is very cool. I've tucked it in my notebook for now.

I think actually, she is not albino, but she has some kind of genetic variation, a totally unique mostly white coloration, and her ducklings don't share it

I also came across a dead butterfly - which, of course, this is by the river, there are all sorts of different beings, and um, I have decided to preserve the wings, I'll return the rest of it's body to the water.

Deer have become focal as I've created this guided walk of the Antler River, I didn't plan that but I enjoy the way it makes sense.

A formative experience of mine, that I often share to give others a sense of how I view my relationship to animals and other beings, happened when I was about six.

My family lived in a place in BC called Sicamous, we had a house there in a small neighbourhood, across the road from undeveloped woods. I don't know how big the wooded area was. We would often see deer in our and neighbours' yards, there were wild strawberries that grew in the ditch across the road, in my memory it's very idyllic.

Once, across the road in front of our house, there was a fawn. It's mother probably wasn't far away but she wasn't anywhere in sight - and - as a kid raised on disney movies my impulse was to decide to approach the fawn, to try to touch it. I don't remember if I had been in the house when I'd seen it, but both my father and I wound up outside. Slowly, carefully, I approached it with my hand out. It didn't seem afraid, my dad probably had assumed it would startle and run away but I definitely got close, I probably could have pet it or let it inspect



my hand, but, at about this point, my father warned me to stop.

The reason I find this story really compelling is because of how he explained his reasoning for telling me to stop. His explanation was much different than you might expect. He didn't tell me not to touch the fawn because it's mom might be nearby, because I might get hurt, or for any of the usual reasons of fear of wild animals, instead he told me that it would be unfair to encourage the fawn to trust humans - that if it did, it might not be wary enough to evade hunters in the future. My father hunted, we ate deer regularly, and yet he held foremost, that this deer deserved to be as sharp and prepared to outwit potential hunters as possible. For me, this was this was a massively insightful and important lesson — that has really carried into my interactions with other non-human beings throughout my life.

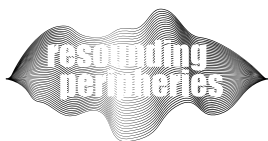
He exemplified a respect for this other being as having an equal right to potential survival. He treated it fairly, not as something to be consumed the way that unfortunately so many of us are socialized to view animals, plants, and the wilderness and nature around us. And so he helped to contextualize for me in a way that would be lifelong how we're responsible to each other regardless of which one of us might eat the other. We are in responsible and caring relationship and we should be - we need to honour that and enact it.

Recently, especially in conversations about the ecological world, about the climate, about the land that holds us, we are often overwhelmed by the notion that it's all going to die, it's going to perish, we're doomed. I think that it's really important to connect to the landscape

around you, to feel with your heart the life and beauty that connects you because the land will continue without us, through whatever hardship we, as humans, cause.

When we visit, we come as ourselves. We have to situate ourselves in relationship to who we are visiting. I will continue to visit the Deshkan Ziibing, have and will continue to visit Deshkan Ziibi as a being in my life, and through sharing this with you, I invite you to continue to visit the river - to meet it as a being you're in relationship with, and as a small, visible, fragment of the enormity of that connection.

It is a lifeline, as it moves through the city, across the landscape.



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*Cover: Ephemera from visiting Deshkan Ziibi, 2023*