





RUCKSACK MAGAZINE PRESENTS

E L E M E N T S

IN PURSUIT OF THE WILD

Lannoo

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Welcome to Elements

It has been just over three years since we started Rucksack Magazine and, in the beginning at least, it is fair to say we had little idea as to its purpose. Deliberately vague, we avoided committing to a particular category until we had figured out exactly what it was we were making. We wanted to create something that inspired and showcased beautiful imagery, that evoked nostalgia and wonder, but struggled to define exactly what the magazine was. Travel, lifestyle, or photography? Or was it something altogether different? It took a couple of issues before we discovered our purpose, the reason for our magazine's existence - storytelling. A mixture of visual and written stories, we want people to lose themselves in our pages, to explore and discover and imagine. Storytelling is something that seems to have lost its place in the world. It can be passed over as not quite serious enough, or informative enough, even irrelevant.

But storytelling doesn't need to justify its place in society or its reason to exist; it simply does. When our lives become tiring and our routines monotonous, we rely on stories to reignite that spark, that desire for exploration. Stories provide

a platform from which we can expand our journey through life, and there can be no stronger purpose than that.

We use our stories to connect people; with each other, but also with the world. For people to realise that perhaps they don't need to quit their job, sell their possessions, and leave everything behind to travel somewhere incredible. That this desire to explore and imagine can become a part of everyday life; that stories and adventure are often found in the places you least expect. So often, the easiest story to tell from a trip, the one that gets repeated time and time again, is not always the thing you were searching for in the first place. Journeys to places far away can be tedious; things go wrong and are often not quite as expected. And this is where the intrigue lies, in those fractured, in-between moments. Everyday life is not a series of perfect sunsets and mountains and beaches, one appearing after another. Those perfect moments are surrounded by struggle and mistakes and indecision; that is simply the nature of life, whether you are travelling somewhere, or remain at home. And it is from this that our stories emerge. Over the past three years, nothing has

given us an appreciation for the world quite like creating the magazine. It has become a lens through which we view our planet; a different pair of eyes. Even before the magazine, travelling was something we always felt passionately about, visiting as many places as time and budget would allow. But there was a point where we had become, not quite bored, but listless. Lacking in purpose, our trips missed definition; landscapes and cities and spaces blurred into one. Returning home, it was easy to forget about them in search of a destination for our next trip, and so they lost any real meaning or clarity.

Scrolling back through our images, nothing ever seemed to quite capture the feeling we remembered. Creating the magazine began to give purpose and structure to our travels; finding stories where there had previously been none. The magazine took shape, becoming a celebration, not just of our journeys, but the travels of others as well. And now it inspires, pushes and challenges us to keep searching for the story, to keep looking for ways to recreate that feeling, to evoke nostalgia in both our readers and ourselves.

We realised we had started taking the world, and its extraordinary beauty, for granted. The magazine had provided a space in which we could slow down and appreciate everything around us. Our seemingly endless search for stories allowing us to truly immerse ourselves in the moment, to take time to absorb each destination. And this allowed us to reflect a little upon how we lived our own lives, on our daily routines when we returned home.

We began to slow down a little, started to appreciate the smaller things. This in turn meant we could feed more time, energy and excitement into creating each magazine. It became, or rather has become, a cycle of inspiration and creation, and we struggle to imagine a

future without it. The opportunity to create a book is the start of something special. We have always openly admitted that, for us, deciding upon a topic or theme is one of the hardest parts of the whole process. There are too many stories to tell; too many images and words we have to share. And in searching for the theme for this book, we returned to what had first inspired us when we began the magazine. This book was the perfect opportunity to showcase our very real, very raw appreciation for the elements we are now so aware of. Our planet, despite its all-encompassing beauty, is not a welcoming place. The power of nature is extreme, and we, as humans, seek shelter and warmth and comfort.

To truly embrace these elements takes courage, determination and resilience. To be present on this earth, to live amongst its power, is a privilege. And slowly, the idea of elements began to form. A way to celebrate the four powers of the world; fire, earth, water and air. The foundation of all that we see, of all we experience. We want to amaze and enthrall; to capture a feeling of awe and wonder at our planet on every single page. Through a mixture of stories and photo essays, we have explored what it is about each of these four elements that are so inspiring, so breath-taking.

We are very much guests on this earth, and it is clear that humanity has not been gracious in their thanks. We destroy resources, litter and pollute with little thought to the impact this will have, both on the planet and for future generations. So whilst we made this book with the intention of inspiring awe and amazement, we also wanted to create something to serve as a reminder of all this planet has to offer; its power and magnificence, and the role we play in protecting and preserving this beauty. Within the pages of this book, we hope we have provided them the respect they deserve. Welcome to Elements.













In Pursuit of the Wild

To pursue is defined as the act of searching. Throughout this book, we venture into the wild in pursuit of fire, earth, water and air. We search for a way to capture the raw, untamed beauty of nature through each of its elements. Divided into four chapters - as equal in length as we were able - each one is dedicated to an individual element; a celebration of the wild.

But to define something as wild can evoke a variety of ideas. It can mean somewhere that is uninhabited, or inhospitable, or it can refer to a natural state, an uncultivated region. When things live and grow in the wild, they roam nature at will; undomesticated and free. If the term is extended to wilderness, it describes a neglected or abandoned area; somewhere that has been largely undisturbed by modern human development. But very few places on Earth have been allowed to remain a complete wilderness; human population growth and development a constant threat. Deforestation, climate change and pollution from nearby cities threaten the destruction of places that should be unexplored

and undisturbed. With this in mind, we considered what it was we were in pursuit of and how we could use the wild as a backdrop upon which to portray the elements; to show a deeper appreciation for our planet. Often, we found our pursuit led us to stumble upon these elements without even realising. It was as though we had forgotten how they alone are the reason such landscapes exist, blending seamlessly together through the very heart of the planet.

And so the concept of wild, or wilderness, became a difficult one to unpick. Traditional definitions might work in a more literal sense, but they didn't quite capture the subjectivity and emotion we wanted running through each chapter. And for us, conveying a feeling, an emotion of some kind, has always been more important than adhering to a literal definition. To objectively describe the wild is to explain precisely what it is, by location, or in geographical terms. But to venture into the wild, to stand amidst its sheer force and movement is something that cannot be captured

in a single, written definition or sentence. Midday in a baking desert, the floor parched and cracked, on top of a mountain in winds so strong walking is impossible, torrential rain that breaks overhead as if from nowhere, flooding the land in rushing streams and waterfalls. These are images that cannot be described or defined, cannot be reduced to a single sentence or definition. Yet oddly enough, it is in these moments, these unfiltered snapshots of the wild, where a deep calmness is uncovered. An internal peace against the physical prowess of nature unfolding before you. A sense of insignificance, of mankind's unimportance and how we pale in comparison to the planet we live on. Amongst ferocious storms and raging seas, volcanoes that force their way through the very surface of the earth, spitting deadly streams of lava, mankind is capable of very little. Limited by our inability, we are simply incapable of recreating, or preventing, such scenes.

And as we began to plan out the book, our pursuit became increasingly difficult to separate into four chapters. As with the wild, to define each element, in a literal sense, is easily achieved. Each one varies so far from the other that definitions reflect their seemingly polar opposites. How they appear, how they feel and the emotions they connect with seem so clear cut, at first.

But as we began to compile images and collect stories, we encountered a problem. Whilst it might be easy to separate elements by definition alone, when the wildness of the earth's landscapes are introduced, the separation becomes infinitely more complex. Each element blends seamlessly into the next, with no clear distinction between them. Because at what point does water become land; when it freezes into ice? When images depict crashing waves against cliffs and shorelines, should these sit within earth or water? When

volcanoes force their way through the surface and erupt, they change the appearance and structure of the planet - so are they fire or earth? And did we need to include shorter segments between each element to allow space for this transition to occur?

What had, at first, seemed like a simple separation into four clear categories was no longer so. Deciding on which stories and images went where, and how to differentiate between them, became a matter of opinion, more than anything else. Because it is not only about indicating where one element ends and the other begins, it is about understanding what makes a certain landscape the best representation of earth or air or fire or water. We found ourselves justifying each story's place in the book; countless discussions about why it should be used in one section over another. Because what we realised, in our pursuit of the wild, was that the elements cannot truly be separated; they are entwined and consumed by nature as a whole. To pull them apart feels disruptive, as though it is something that shouldn't be done.

And so to make these divisions, to spread our content out equally, we have focused on our own visual and written interpretation of the elements, the feelings they evoke; an attempt to recreate their story. As a result, the chapters in this book, despite differing visually, are not quite so clear cut. These elements flow from one to the next, some appear in more than one chapter, exactly as they should. At times, the flow is seamless, an obvious transition, other times it is more jarring; more visually disruptive. We have prioritised showcasing the feeling of the wild, the raw power of each element, over adhering to a literal definition. And we continue in our pursuit of the wild; we are not sure we ever quite found it.

An aerial photograph of a dense evergreen forest. The trees are a deep, dark green color. In the upper right corner, a paved road with a white dashed center line curves through the forest. The word "EARTH" is printed in white, serif, all-caps font in the center of the image.

EARTH



Welcome to Earth

Out of all four elements, earth was meant to be the easiest, in terms of content and stories. The simplest to write about, and the chapter we naturally had the most imagery for. Decisions surrounding the other three elements required contemplation and consideration as to their direction and focus, but earth was always intended to be more straightforward. In fact, we didn't give it much further thought until sitting down to write the introduction to this section, when we were hit by a sudden wave of realisation.

How do you write about something that, when you stop and truly think about it, becomes so vast, you can barely comprehend what it means yourself? Earth can be defined as anything and everything, and so to focus on one specific idea or concept felt like an impossible undertaking. Because earth is the ground, the soil and the trees. The cliffs and mountains. Mud, dirt and rock. After

spending copious amounts of time trying to eloquate exactly what it was we wanted to showcase, we gave up and turned to Google. It provided two definitions; the first being the planet we live on, and the second the actual substance of the land surface - the soil. This simply exacerbated our frustration, because neither of these were what we had intended this section to be about. Our interpretation is not one of the physical planet, nor is it simply the soil. It is more than this; earth is more about the landscape itself.

And with this informally assigned definition, we began to realise just how much content we had. Instead of making the process easier, it made separating this chapter from the other elements far more intricate. To be honest, all the images and stories from the entirety of this book could easily be collated beneath a single heading of earth. It was therefore important to generate a distinct personality for this

section, to separate it in such a way that it carried its own stories, its own emotion. To be distinct from the other elements, to stand as a chapter in its own right. We had to decide exactly what, for the purposes of this book, earth looked like; what it felt like, and which stories we wanted to share. This chapter could include the world as a whole, focusing on the planet. It could be deserts and beaches and coastlines; perfect landscapes and dramatic scenery. But then roads and pavements and the infrastructure of our very cities are relevant too. As are motorways and train lines, skyscrapers and tower blocks.

The list continues, along with all the things that aren't quite so photogenic, so picturesque. The mess and chaos of existence, the streets and the traffic, pollution and litter. Every window provides a different view, but every single thing we see can be defined as earth. It is, along with death, life's great equaliser. There is no Planet B, no current alternative. It doesn't matter who you are, where you live, how much money you have, or the kind of lifestyle you choose to follow; we all exist in the same place - on earth.

The more we thought about it, the more impossible the task ahead of us seemed to become. How would we ever be able to capture the very essence of this element in a single chapter, and how had we ever considered this to be possible? Surely earth would need an entire book, several books, to even come close to doing it justice.

At the very least, earth was proving its potential to take over at least half of our page allowance. We wanted each of the four sections to be equal, or as equal as possible, in length. Each of these elements are of equal importance, and so we did not want to lose sight of this by giving one significantly more page space, no matter how many images and stories we had. And so we knew we had to

interpret earth for our own purpose; to clearly define what it meant in terms of the book. We had to consider exactly what it meant to us, and how we could recreate this feeling through our choice of words and images.

It took a long time and was not an easy task to undertake; to combine the lonely magnificence of the landscape with the bleak, vast desolation of the wilderness. The knowledge that these places have been here for thousands of years before we saw them, and will continue to be here thousands of years after we leave. The comfort this brings; the insignificance it relegates daily worries and troubles to. We had to find a way to showcase these feelings and emotions in one, single chapter.

For us, and for this book, earth means forests and trees and mountains. These images and stories capture, at least in some way, the raw emotion and energy evoked by our consideration of this element. Jagged mountains, their peaks never quite visible, and undulating hills blanketed by woodland and forests. Earthy green tones and desolate valleys that carve their way through the deserted land, disappearing into the darkening horizon. The silent stillness that hangs in the air; a lonely invitation into the wilderness.

When defined in such a way, it is very clear that earth has been a common theme that has run through our magazine right from the very beginning. Looking back now, we could name any one of our issues earth. It is the element we feel most closely associated with, the one that draws us back in time and time again.

An element that is so hard to define objectively, but once you start considering what it means to you, how it feels, the ideas and the words begin to flow. The most difficult chapter to consolidate, but the one that has proved to be the foundation of our very magazine, our stories, and so much more. Welcome to Earth.

Woodland

Densely packed trees give little space for sunlight to filter in. Even so, a few lacklustre shards manage to force their way through some of the sparser areas, illuminating the solitary path carving its way deeper into the woodland. Trees grow heavy beneath damp moss draped over branches, forcing an unnatural shape to their growth as they bend under its weight. The passing of time gives way to a variety of formations curving their way up from the forest floor, each tree a unique, gnarled structure.