A Shadow Place: Plumwood Mountain

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In her final academic paper, “Shadow Places and the Politics of Dwelling,” the environmental philosopher Val Plumwood (2008) drew attention to places that are forgotten or degraded. These shadowy, southern places are thought of as resources to be exploited for mining or timber, as opposed to sunnier, northern places that are cherished as special places to dwell. It is likely that Val was thinking of her own connection to place. She lived her philosophy in the bush for more than thirty years, developing a deep connection with a broad ecological community beyond the human. I interpret Plumwood Mountain as a shadow place, a home that would have otherwise been neglected as a place to dwell, if not for Val’s strong ecological philosophy.

This photo essay features the journey from the main highway, up a long bush track, to Val’s home in a clearing amongst dense, temperate rainforest, on the edge of a steep escarpment. The highway is the contact zone, where humans and other beings collide with one another. The intention of this photo essay is to draw attention to such contact zones, acting as conduits to our urban environments, and to ask us to acknowledge the shadow places along the way that make a different kind of contribution to our lives.


Natasha Fijn’s research encompasses the environmental and digital humanities, including visual anthropology and human-animal studies. Her multispecies ethnography has been based in the Khangai Mountains of Mongolia and Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia. For her postdoctoral research at the Australian National University, she explored the connections between Yolngu and significant animals through the interpretation of filmic and photographic records. She lectures in Visual Culture Research at the Australian National University.