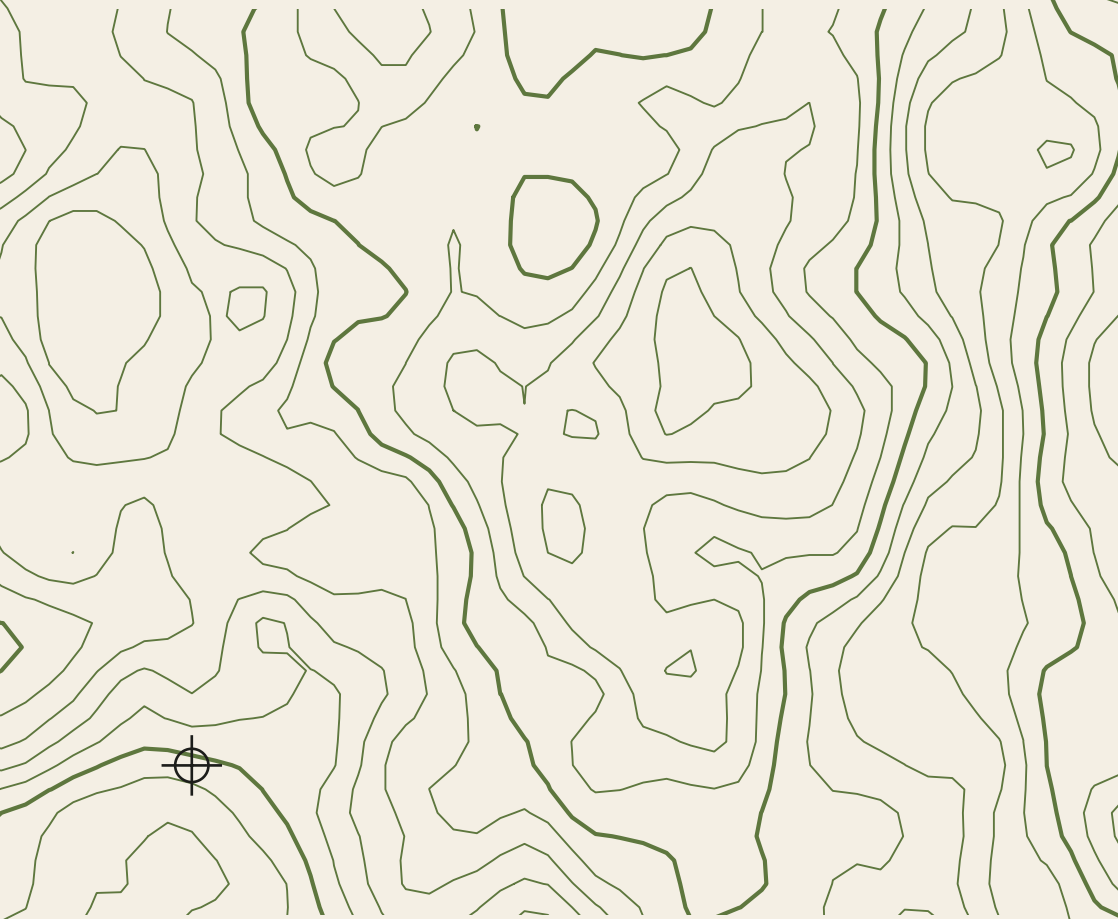
Field Notes

A JOURNAL OF CLOSE LOOKING

SPRING 2025



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№ 01 WREN FLATS

54.612° N 1.204° W

Field Notes

A journal of close looking, published four times a year.

ISSUE	№ 01 · Spring 2025
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Field Notes is a concept journal. Its places, contributors and events are fictional.

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FROM THE EDITORS

Our first issue begins where the land is least sure of itself. Three contributors spent the spring on the saltmarsh at Wren Flats, and each came back with the same complaint: the place would not hold still long enough to be described. We think that is the best reason to try.

ESSAY

What the marsh keeps

Saltmarsh mud is a slow archive. Every tide files another page, and the marsh never throws anything away.

WORDS BY ADA MERCER

Cut into the bank of a creek at low water and the mud comes away in leaves. Each leaf is a tide, or a storm, or a week of nothing much: a grey line for still water, a brown one where the river ran high, a gritty band where wind pushed sand up from the beach. You could read a year off the bank if you had the patience, and if the marsh would let you.

It mostly will not. By the time you have found your spade the creek is turning, and the water comes back faster than seems fair. Marsh people talk about the tide as if it has moods. It does not, but it has habits, and the habits are what the mud records.

A ledger of small events

The first thing the archive teaches is scale. A single tide lays down less than the thickness of a fingernail. A storm surge might leave a band you can pinch between two fingers. Most of the bank, most of the time, is the record of days when nothing happened at all, and that is the part I have come to love.

We write history as a list of storms. The marsh writes it as long grey stretches with the occasional storm in them, which is closer to how a life feels from the inside.

Most of the bank is the record of days when nothing happened at all.

Reading without a key

There is no legend for this map. The colours mean different things in different creeks, and the same brown can be river silt in one place and rotted cordgrass in another. I carry a notebook and a hand lens and I write down what I see, not what I think it means. Meaning comes later, at the kitchen table, when the notes from six creeks are laid side by side.

On the last visit of the spring I found a pale line in three banks at the same depth. A single event, then, big enough to reach across the whole flat. I do not know what it was yet. The marsh knows, and it is in no hurry to say. ◆

FIELD LOG

Six tides at Wren Flats

Three days, six high waters, one notebook kept dry in a sandwich bag.

WORDS BY TOMAS REYNA

THU 06:40 *First high water*
Arrived in the dark and walked out along the sea wall. The water was already over the lower marsh, flat and silver, with the tops of the sea purslane showing like a badly mown lawn. Redshank calling somewhere I could not see.

THU 19:05 *Second high water*
Wind from the south-west, pushing the tide a little higher than the table said. The creek by the old sluice overtopped and filled the pans behind it. Counted forty-one dunlin on the one dry ridge, packed shoulder to shoulder.

FRI 07:20 *Third*
Fog. Could hear the water arriving before I could see it: a soft tearing sound as it crept through the grass. Found a crab moult on the path, perfect, every leg in place, as if the crab had stepped out of a coat.

FRI 19:45 *Fourth*
Clear and cold. The tide came in quietly and went out again without touching the upper marsh. Lit the stove in the hide and wrote up the morning. The mud on my boots has dried pale grey, the same colour as the band at the bottom of the north creek.

SAT 08:10 *Fifth*
Biggest of the set. Water lapping the foot of the sea wall, the whole flat gone. Shelduck rode it in, unbothered. A plastic float from somebody's net came to rest exactly where I had been standing yesterday.

SAT 20:30 *Sixth*

Packed up in the last light. The marsh looks exactly as it did on Thursday, which is the strangest part of watching it: six tides, a few millimetres of new mud, and no visible change at all.

CONVERSATION

The counter of birds

Every month for nineteen years, Bea Lund has walked the same route at Wren Flats and counted every wading bird she sees. We asked her why.

WORDS BY JUNE HALLOWAY

How did the count start?
A volunteer scheme wanted someone to cover the flats on the second Sunday of each month. I said yes for one winter. That was nineteen years ago.

What does a count actually involve?
A fixed route along the sea wall, the same seven stops, the same order. At each stop you count everything you can identify. You do not guess and you do not go looking for birds off the route, because then the numbers stop meaning anything.

Is it ever boring?
Often. That is the point. If it were exciting every time, I would be counting the exciting days, not the ordinary ones. The ordinary ones are where the change shows.

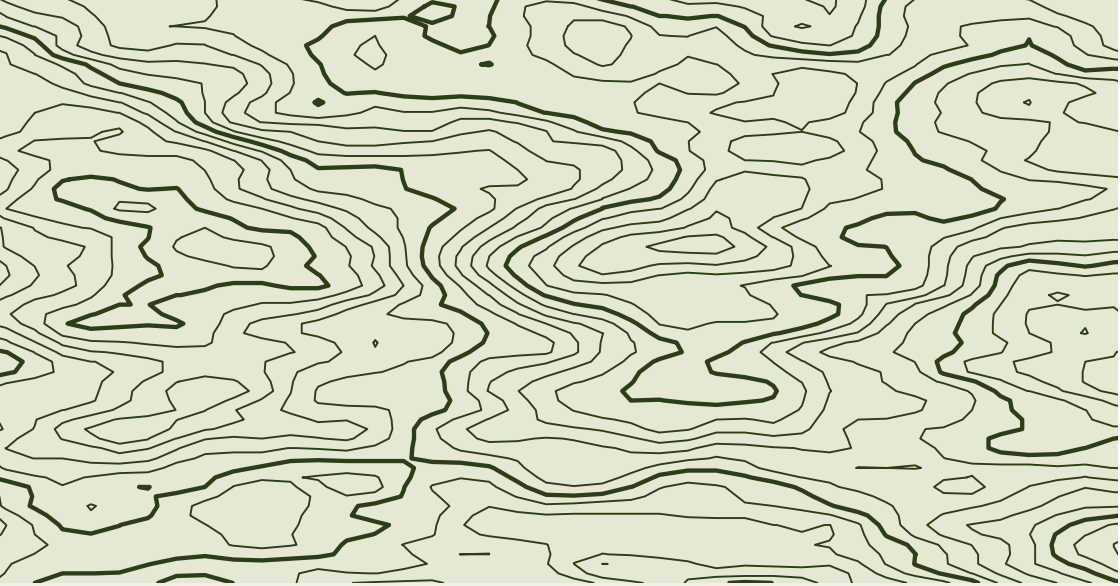
What has changed?
Fewer knot. Many more little egrets, which were a rarity when I started. The dunlin come and go. I do not know why for most of it. My job is to write it down so somebody else can find out.

Do you have a favourite stop?
Stop five, by the sluice. In a hard winter the birds crowd onto the last bit of soft mud there and you can count a thousand in one look. Your hands freeze and you lose your place and you start again. It is the best morning of the year.

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