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Pre-transcript introduction

Queer Out Here

Queer Out Here is an audio zine that explores the outdoors from queer perspectives. We bring together stories and soundscapes from around the world to hear how queerness intersects with and influences people's experiences of outdoor spaces and activities. You can read more about the zine on the Queer Out Here website: <https://www.queerouthere.com>.

Off Track

Off Track, with Ann Jones, is an Australian radio show and podcast which combines the relaxing sounds of nature with awesome stories of wildlife and environmental science, all recorded in the outdoors. Find this excellent show on the ABC Radio National website:

<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/offtrack/>

Off Track presents Queer Out Here link

If you've somehow stumbled across this transcript and want to find the audio file, it's available here: <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/offtrack/queer-out-here/10889990>

Content notes

The pieces in Queer Out Here talk about many things related to being queer and the outdoors. Some people might wish to take note of the following:

1. As I am Walking (I am Becoming) - rhythmic, meditative, potentially hypnotic cadence
2. An Aborted Swim (Ladies' Pond) - mention of minor physical injuries and blood
3. New Year's Day Thoughts - concerns relating to transition processes, exercise as a weight loss strategy
4. Highway, Shepparton and Rooms - family estrangement

Please see notes from Issue 01 for further details of what to watch out for:

<https://www.queerouthere.com/listen/issue-01>

Transcript

Off Track introduction - Ann Jones

Ann Jones: Hello, Ann Jones here, and you're listening to Off Track. Over the last couple of episodes we've been hearing from some of the best of international nature broadcasting and audio, and I wanted to introduce you this week to a gorgeous audio zine made up of contributors from all over the world called Queer Out Here.

It's wonderful, intimate, meditative and I feel like it's an invitation to hear the world through the ears of someone else.

The editors and hosts are Jonathan and Alysse and they've done a marvellous job with Queer Out Here - both contributing their own thoughts and pulling together submissions from people who identify as LGBTQIA+ and who have a reflection of themselves in the outdoors.

What you're going to hear is an edited version of just the first issue of Queer Out Here, and I've selected some of the pieces which are mostly, but not exclusively, from Australia.

You can listen to the full issue - which I do recommend doing - go to queerouther.com or at the Off Track website.

Queer Out Here opener

[Sound of water]

Aubri: Who else is out here?

Wendy: Gonna throw myself in!

Adele: Think of all the sordid things that have probably happened.

[Singing on loudspeaker]

Jo: Can I just look?

Jenny: I've lived in this part of my world all my life.

Aubri: Who else is out here?

EZ: I guess there is a farm...

[Water splashing]

Belinda: Still the ragged lady gums dance their set.

[Faint sound of dogs barking]

Erin: Cold and fresh.

Aubri: Who else is out here?

Liz: Minnesota midnight...

Allysse: I dive in.

Queer Out Here introduction

[Sounds of bells, insects, organ music fades up beneath the voices]

Jonathan: This is Queer Out Here, an audio zine that explores the outdoors from queer perspectives.

Allysse: Welcome to Issue One. I'm Allysse -

Jonathan: - and I'm Jonathan, and we are super excited to share the pieces in this issue with you!

Allysse: When we put out our call for submissions we had no idea what kind of a response we'd get - or if anyone would respond at all.

Jonathan: We received a great variety of pieces, from poetry and conversations, to field recordings, stories and sound art.

Allysse: We have pieces about adventures, walking, swimming, queer group trips, international travels -

Jonathan: - about relationships, fun times, sadness, love and companionship -

Allysse: - and about fields, beaches, towns, cities, woods and highways.

Jonathan: So, a big thank you to all our contributors, and to people who helped circulate our call for submissions. And also to you - the listeners - we hope you enjoy it!

Allysse: And now it's time to take your ears adventuring.

Both: Let's get Queer Out Here!

Sweeper - Gary

[Footsteps]

Gary: Hi, I'm Gary, and here we are in the middle of the woods somewhere, with the Rainbow Alliance walk - monthly walk - um, and we are on our five mile walk, I think it is, and, ah, you're listening to Queer Out Here!

Link

Jonathan: Jo Impey, a producer at the BBC, has, over the last couple of years - and with some encouragement from her girlfriend - been discovering the great outdoors, mainly through walking, hiking and outdoor swimming. And when I say “outdoor swimming” I don’t mean just any old outdoor pool, but the ponds on Hampstead Heath - in all kinds of weather, in all seasons...

An Aborted Swim (Ladies' Pond) - Jo Impey

[Sounds of a gate opening and footsteps]

Various voices: No swimming, no swimming.

Jo: Oh, no swimming?

Various voices: No, sorry, we’re still iced, we’re waiting for it to go . . . I mean, at the most we might get a plunge pool . . .

Jo: Oh, right.

Various voices: Could go to the men’s . . . Yes, the men’s is available for swimming . . . Sorry.

Jo: Can I just look and record some sound of the rain?

Various voices: You can . . . You can be here.

[Ambient sounds, ducks, footsteps]

Jo: Can you describe, like, what happens when people get in when it’s covered with ice like that?

Voice: The problem with ice is that you can’t see where the edge of the ice is. If, it, even if there’s clear water, because the water goes over the top of the ice flow and then makes it look like water. Particularly when you’re in there at the level of the water, you can’t see the edge - and the edge can be incredibly sharp and can, be, extend several feet beyond what you can naturally see as ice. And it’s incredibly sharp. Because it’s sharp and because your skin’s very cold you don’t notice the fact that you get cut.

Jo: You’ve seen people with injuries?

Voice: Yeah, yes, they come out of the water and they’ve, it’s like paper cuts. So we, we spend a lot of time stopping them going near the edge of the ice. Um, and they think they’re completely fine, ah, then the come out and there’s horrible cuts. So we have to be incredibly careful.

Jo: Looks just like a kind of black depth, doesn’t it?

Various voices: Yeah, except where you can see the bubbles. Can you see the bubbles moving under it? See there? Yeah.

Jo: Oh, yeah.

Voice: And so it's actually very shallow.

Voice: I mean at the moment it's just raining - normally when it's raining the ice would have melted already because it's warmed up that much. But this is quite thick ice; it will take a while for this to go. The deeper the pond, it holds the cold longer.

Jo: Yeah, which is why this place freezes, I think, in a certain time - and it hasn't . . .

Voice: It will probably freeze quicker and lose heat faster, being shallow. But will also warm up faster. Sort of holds its temperature, having a depth.

Various voices: Mm, yeah.

Voice: The ducks were doing really good sliding -

Various voices: [laughter]

Jo: I always like that!

Link

Allysse: Plans don't always unfold as we want them to. Jo wanted a swim but the weather decided otherwise - and I'm glad it did. The result is an almost accidental piece, a found story like a found sound. And it paints a vivid picture, as if we are there, too, watching the ice on the water.

As I am Walking (I am Becoming) - Jonathan

[Sounds of footsteps, cars, birds, insects. The words of the poem are repeated in different tracks, weaving in and out of each other.]

As I am walking
I am becoming myself
in this world
in this way I am becoming
a mind full of the present
I am a movement
I am a moment
I am presented to myself
 as a footfall on grass
 as a breath in the breathing of leaves
 as a body
enveloped by sky and earth

by rock by water by trees
defined on a path
 on a past dissolving
 on the wind

As I am walking
I am becoming aware
of place and pace
and time measured in heartbeat
and cloudheight
as an ever unfurling
now breath
now step
As I am walking breath
I am becoming step
I am a movement breath
I am a moment step
I am presented to myself as a footfall
 I am falling
 I am filling
I am full

Link

Jonathan: I recorded the tracks used in this piece while on beaches, forests, paths, tracks and the bush in the UK (Norfolk, East Sussex and Wales) and in Australia (along the Snowy River). Many of these sounds were collected on the traditional lands of the Ngarigo and especially of the Krowathunkooloong people of the GunaiKurnai nation - I acknowledge your sovereignty, that your Country was never ceded, and I pay my respect to your Elders past, present and emerging.

Sweeper - Ruth

[Footsteps]

Ruth: Hi, I'm Ruth, and I'm on a beautiful walk near Burwash - and you're listening to Queer Out Here.

Link

Allysse: Thanks Ruth. Next is a piece produced by Erin Kyan, a disabled queer trans man who is a zine creator a spoken word performer. Described as poetry augmented with sound, his piece is an extract from his zine, Floodlight Viscera.

Excerpt from Floodlight Viscera #12 - Erin Kyan

Erin: Excerpt from Floodlight Viscera Number Twelve.

*

Let's dip into some moments.

The first is brunch in the sun.

Sitting across from the man I love,
we drink tea and point to passing dogs.
We are at our favourite cafe,
just a few doors down from our home.

The food is rich and delicious,
and as we chat about politics
and art and community,
I gaze at him and think,
every time,
how glad I am
for this to be my life.

*

Beachside in the winter.

Cold and windy and wet,
we are alone with the shoreline.

The ocean gulps and whispers,
and even the gulls are quiet.
Every breath drawn is cold and fresh,
like crisp apples and morning dew.

The world feels bigger here.
The breadth and depth of the sea
reminds us that we are nothing.

Which is a relief, when faced
with burdens overwhelming.

*

I find road trips therapeutic.

It's easy to filter through your
thoughts and feelings
while gazing out a car window,
because there's nowhere
for you to go to escape yourself.

But you're not trapped.
You're moving.

The changing scenery helps
lubricate your subconscious,
gliding you through
the maze of mind
until you can find
peace, and
resolution.

Link

Jonathan: Ahhh! I love the way that body and place mingle in Erin's piece - ah, and the way that he weaves field recordings around the poem to help immerse us in the moment. And I can really feel the atmosphere of the cafe, and the bite of the sea breeze, and the car pulling out onto the long highway.

As you can hear, Erin is Australian, and he notes that this piece was written, recorded and produced on the stolen land of the Boon Wurrung People of the Kulin Nation. The creator pays respect to all Elders, past, present and emerging, and extends that respect to all Indigenous people who are listening. Sovereignty was never ceded, Australia always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

Off Track insert - Ann Jones

Ann Jones: You're listening to Off Track and today we've got a special presentation of Queer Out Here, an audio zine - sort of like a podcast - where nature lovers from all over the world who identify themselves broadly speaking as 'queer' submit their sounds and thoughts on being outside.

Link

Jonathan: Next we have two poems from Belinda Rule who is a Melbourne writer of poetry and fiction. Her work has appeared extensively in journals and anthologies and the two poems she reads here have previously been published in print - "Highway, Shepparton" in Eureka Street [<https://www.eurekastreet.com.au>], and "Rooms" in foam:e [<http://www.foame.org>]. The poems describe the ways in which place and relationships and memory are intertwined. I'll let Belinda introduce them...

Highway, Shepparton *and* Rooms - Belinda Rule

Belinda: Two poems from Belinda Rule

Like many queer people, I am estranged from a large part of my family. We were a camping and travelling family, and I have quite a passionate relationship with the places we used to go. But the memory of family is intertwined with the memory of place, so that even when I am literally standing in the beloved place, I still feel that I am in exile. And that's what these poems are about.

*

Highway, Shepparton

Did you know, the other day
I drove that northern road again? Who knew
you could assail the country of childhood
so simply: just get in the car and go.
But this country
was not our country. The road
I sought, long, straight and pale,
lay beneath another road, across a membrane
I could not pierce. Still the ragged lady gums
danced their set across the river bridge,
but the drought had lifted:
the hearts of the horse-tail grass were green,
the paddocks chartreuse, nubbled velvet strewn
with what I took to be litter, but later saw
was a voluminous cast of white cockatoos,
gorging on plenty.
But of course you don't know —
you are not here to tell.
The membrane is thickening,
and that country is drifting away.
There is no-one here with me
to watch it go.

*

Rooms

All night and day it rains,
till at dusk I lift a window for the air
and my lost brother is outside,
slick with rain, disdaining
the bamboo pergola in his wild way —
leaper into deep pools, eater

of unnecessary chillis.
How handsome he is. How well
age wears his face.
He does not see me.
Now all
the empty rooms of the holiday house
are full of my lost family.
How did I not see they were here?
I can hear the children
I've never met
bouncing on the candlewicked beds
beside their lost parents;
they shriek like whipbirds.
On a dry patch of deck, my lost mother
and the man recline with wine,
tanned, loose, happy.
She slides the flywire, mind on dinner,
and her eye
slips right through me.

Link

Alysse: Belinda's poem makes me sad. It's not how I like to think of the outdoors, as a space filled with memories that hurt. They are not bad memories by themselves. But they can't be shared anymore, they've become estranged, stranded somehow in the landscape. They exist in the vacuum of the past, never to be shared again, cherished, and listened to for the hundredth time. Those privileges are gone and the places that hold them become a reminder of that loss.

Sweeper - Emma

Hi there, my name's Emma. I'm on top of the Cam Long Down ridge in the beautiful Cotswolds, and I'm queer out here!

Link

Jonathan: In this piece, Jenny List, engineer and journalist, is out for a wander on New Year's Day. She addresses one of the central questions of this project - how being queer (in this case, being trans) relates to being outdoors, or whether it does at all.

Being trans doesn't mean that you will go walking, but Jenny points out that the hoops that trans people need to jump through - so in this case, the requirement (which is enforced by surgeons) that trans people not be fat if they want to access certain transition-related surgical interventions - those hoops mean that some trans people have a very particular reason or motivation to be outside.

New Year's Day Thoughts - Jenny List

Jenny: Just do a quick level check - yes that's looking good.

Well, I'm Jenny List. Just walking along a slightly muddy bridle path on New Year's Day, ah, about where Buckinghamshire meets Oxfordshire, so I suspect I started in, ah, Oxfordshire and I'm now in Buckinghamshire. Just letting myself through a gate. It's a slightly raw and cold day, as January the first often is. Grey. But I seem to have the place to myself. Probably after lunch all the groups of grumpy, ah, holiday families will be out, exposing their, ah, familial rows after having been cooped up together at the home of the matriarch for the last week. But for now, ah, blessedly empty. Just walking along a very, very, very minor country lane with, ah, fields of, ah, winter wheat just poking through the soil on either side of me.

It's, ah, interesting to ponder the whole Queer Out thing, Queer Out Here thing, because of course I'm out here, I walk a lot, but, ah, am I especially queer by being out here? The answer is probably not. I've lived in this part of the world all my life and, ah, before I came out of the closet as trans I still walked around on New Year's Day in a pair of old wellies and a pair of old jeans and a jumper, just as I am at the moment and, ah, was I any more or less queer then? So, in a way, I'm not coming out here to be queer, but then again there is a queer aspect to a lot of the walking I do.

It's something that, ah - there's a bit of a narrative surrounding transition that people come out of the closet as trans, they, ah, wait a little bit, but end up going to the, ah, gender clinic - some gender clinics have a much longer wait than others, but if they're private they go straight into it - and eighteen months, two years later, they have their surgery and that's it, they're done! But of course, transition is not that simple. Many of the extreme fast-trackers who do that kind of thing, ah, then fall flat on their faces when they wake up after a few months and realise that the thing that's been their massive focus for the last two years is gone, and there's a big void in their life that they haven't filled, they haven't done the required, um, socialisation and all the other things. And that narrative rather, um, forgets the other side of the trans community, the people for whom transition isn't a speedy process.

For me, I've - it's eight years since I went to see, ah, my GP, in the first instance. I've had a very slow journey through the system, partly because I tried to stay in there for my wife (it didn't work), and I've had one or two medical ups and downs. But, ah, along the way I've met quite a few of the very fast transitioners and also come to know a group of slow train-ers, people for whom, they've got stuck along the way. And, um, most of them are stuck because they've got to the point where they're referred to surgery and they're too much, too, too overweight. They have to lose some, ah, some fat. And at that point you get into a very awkward kind of holding pattern. Ah, on one side you've got people fat shaming - I should say, I'm not one of those people, my reasons for being held back are different - but there's a lot of sort of fat shaming, a lot of invisibility that, ah, other people in the trans community don't really realise that, ah, these people are stuck in the system. And there's a lot of real triggering, ah, from people who've gone through very quickly and won't stop going on about it and don't realise that the person they're talking to has their own private turmoils with the length it's taking for them.

So, back to why that has relevance to being queer out here - obviously one of the ways to lose weight is exercise. And I find that one or two of my walking partners are trans women who have some weight to lose, um, and are slow-train-ers like me. And so it's very odd, coz we're not there to be queer out here, so to speak. But then again, one of the reasons we're doing so much exercise is related to our transitions. Ah, as I say, I'm the odd one out being very tall and lean, but, ah, it's kind of a theme among the friends I go walking with that quite a few of them are in this situation.

The, ah, damp and wet January countryside doesn't judge you by, ah, who you are, what your body shape is, or where you've reached in your transition path. I do wish there were more members of the, ah, wider trans community who would see it that way.

Anyway. I'm just walking up a slight hill with, ah, on my right a field that looks like it had oilseed rape in it last year, coz there's lots of little sprouts coming through - I think it's being left fallow over the winter, though. Um, probably about half an hour I'll come back in and, ah, I will have very cold hands.

Anyway, that's just my thoughts on the whole Queer Out Here thing.

Off Track outro - Ann Jones

Ann Jones: That's the thing about being in nature – we all have different experiences, of course, we're all individuals, but there is so much that we have in common, about the feeling of the air on our face, of trying to escape worries when we walk or trying to better ourselves in some way. I love this audio zine.

Thank you to Allysse and Jonathan who put all the work into Queer Out Here – and you can find them on twitter and Facebook and at their website, queerouther.com. Thank you also to the contributors from issue one of Queer Out Here who let me re-play their words and sounds – hunt down their details at the Off Track or Queer Out Here website.

And if you identify as LGBTQIA+ consider contributing to this zine! It's easy to do and the world will value your perspective.

My name is Ann Jones and I'll be back with new episodes of Off Track soon, I'm just working on a special project for the ABC at the moment.

But remember to listen to Off Track again next time, that's when I'll take you somewhere else.