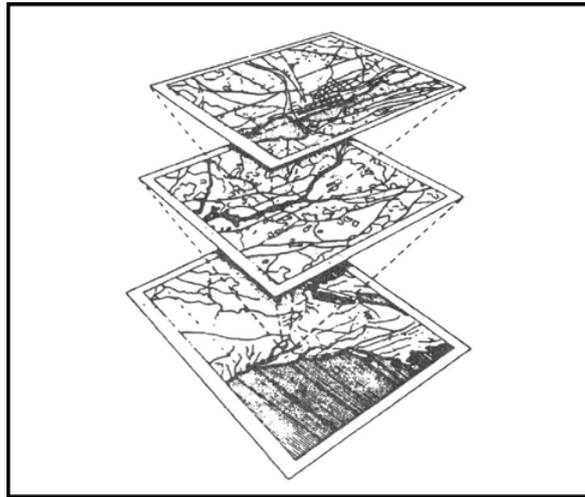


Interior Borders

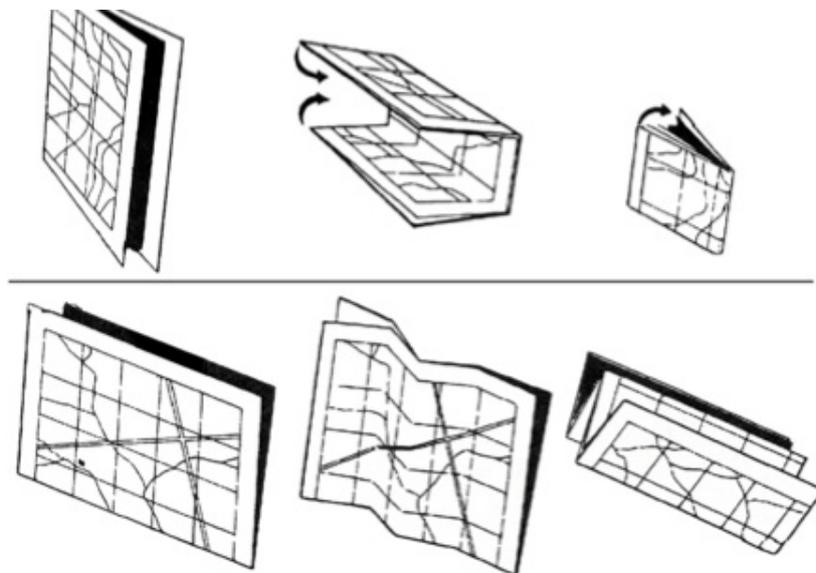
Location: Scottish Highlands, Cape Wrath Trail



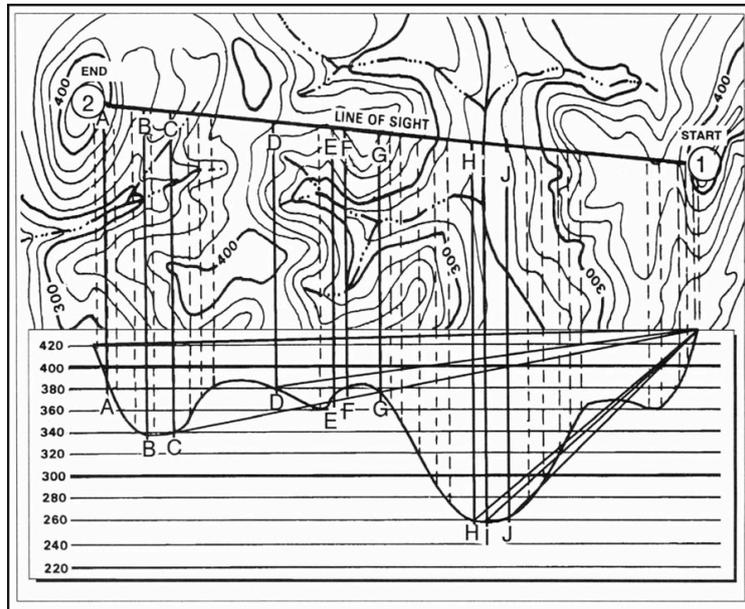
There's a place nearby where some people disappeared a few years ago. Two friends had set out to walk the length of what they called the Caledonian Range, the skeletal remains of what was once the ancient ridgeline of a mountain range that rose up during the Cambrian orogeny, a process in which a section of the earth's crust was folded and deformed by lateral compression, about 570 million years ago. Now it is spread across several continents, worn down low to vestigial subalpine fells, known for their harsh and disorienting topoi. The plan was to walk the trail from the south up to the northernmost point and then, after a resupply, back again.

It seems that after almost four weeks of walking, just into the return leg of their journey, the two friends had either become disoriented and ignored their map and compass bearings, or they made a conscious decision to set out according to some design not obvious to those who investigated their disappearance.

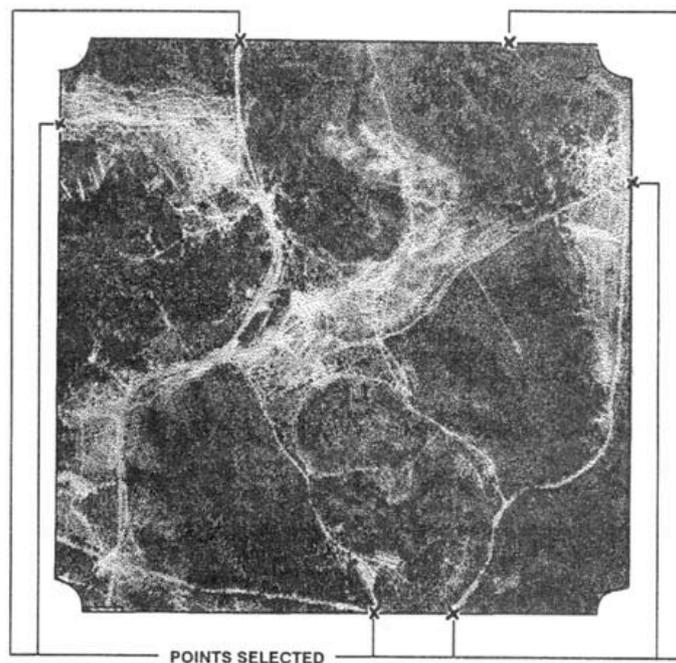
The exact circumstances of their disappearance remain unknown, but some of those involved in the search have speculated that it was possible they had become attuned to some other set of latent yet demanding conditions, another invisible terrain that only they could traverse. It sounds unlikely that anyone could know this, but there was evidence to support the theory. The search team found their campsite, with all their gear, their supplies, all laid out in a way that one searcher later described as “intricate, like a stage, or a trap.”



Their tent had been carefully dismantled and set up into a complex angled fan, like some kind of satellite dish. There was a steel-carbide tipped trekking pole sticking out of the center, anchored into the concave surfaces by a geometric web of fine, reflective paracord. It caught the wind and vibrated with an incredibly deep and rhythmic thrumming, the frequencies of which caused phantom harmonics to appear in the mind of the observer.



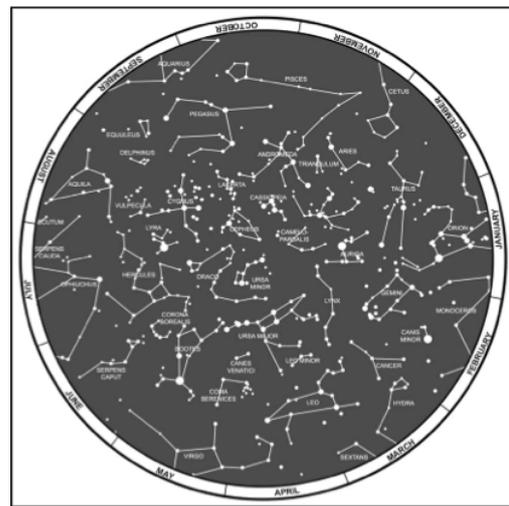
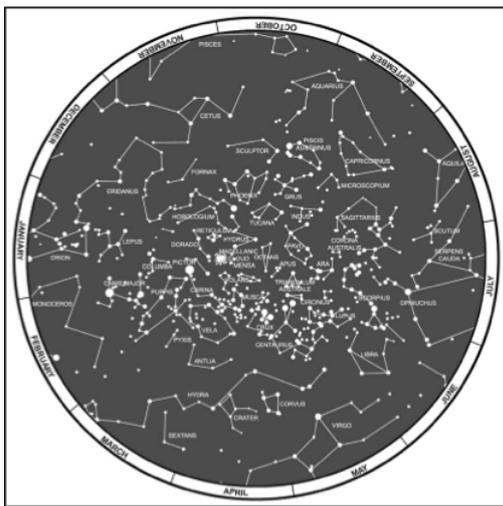
Their titanium cooking gear had been used as an ad hoc laboratory installation, which they had used to boil down the synthetic fabrics of their sleep-systems; their down bags and breathable-waterproof bivvy sacks and insulating mats. The plastic fluid had been poured into moulds made from their rain gear, which had been finely disassembled, the breathable membranes separated from the hardshell outer layers.



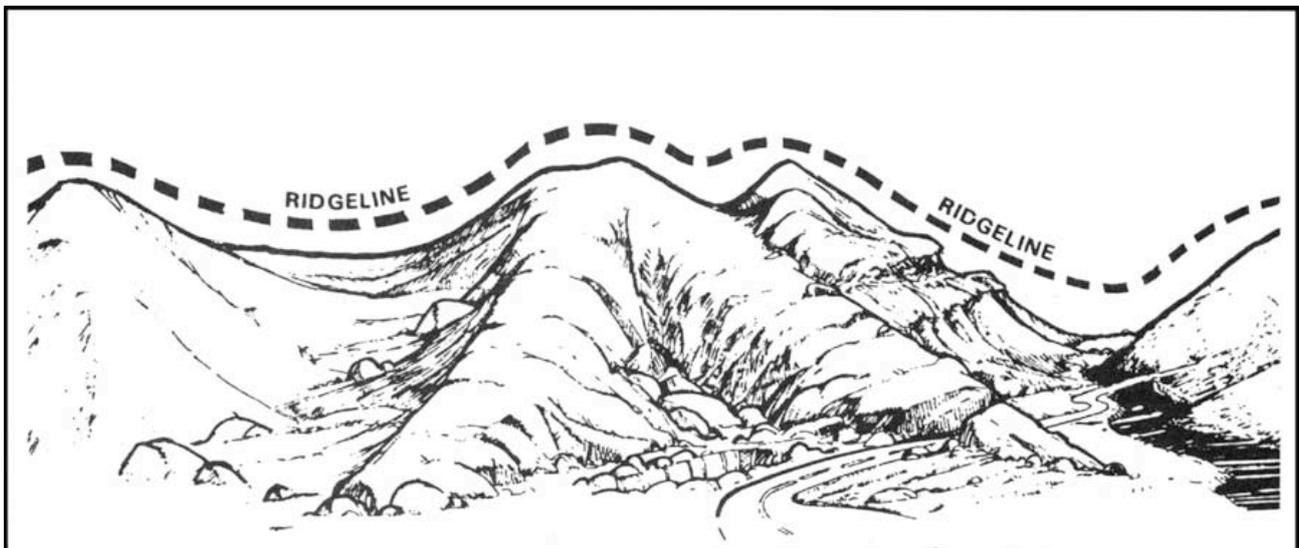
The shells had been folded into roughly cubic forms, their corners and edges seared over the fine jets of the aluminum alcohol stove and then doused with water to harden them. The plastic fluid of their sleep gear had been poured inside until it filled the mould and then left to cool. The shells had then been peeled off and the resulting casts –finely patinated almost-cubes of solid obsidian oil– had been buried several feet under the campsite. They had dug the holes using those wide, flat tent stakes used in snow conditions, the ones drilled full of holes to lighten them.

The breathable membranes of the jackets had been stretched low over the ground and pegged down with the snow stakes; semi-transparent, micro-porous surfaces designed to catch dew. The liquid was funneled through the sleeves, and collected in a white, tarp-lined pit, about an arm's length deep and a shoulder's width. Floating halfway deep inside this miniature well was a small glowing ultraviolet lamp, trapped inside a transparent waterproof camera case, buoyancy perfectly achieved by the weight of the lamp and the air inside the case. The UV emitted by the lamp slowly mutated the DNA of all nearby bacteria, until they were incapable of reproducing.

The rest of their clothes they suspended over their empty packs, using tent poles to arrange the arms, legs and hats to look like two people sitting at a camp. One had their head upturned and their arm outstretched pointing towards the sky, the other sat hunched over their own lap, staring down at the sharpened titanium stake which they were lashing to a long carbon fiber pole, whose other end was fletched with down feathers from their sleeping bags.



The two friends had kept only their shoes and their underlayers, and had struck out across the ancient ridgeline, heading towards a spot where millions of years before had emerged sharp, freshly scarred peaks, erupting slowly out of the supercontinent.



Their maps and compasses were found some distance from the campsite. The compasses had been placed between two iron-rich stones, which caused the needles to spin constantly. The maps had been folded into what seemed to be a scale model of the surrounding terrain itself, perhaps as it had been aeons before, topologically significant points preserved in the paper miniatures. The models were kept upright by an ingenious use of tent stakes and wind shearing geometry, and surrounded the spinning compasses like a protective barrier, shielding them from the elements.

When later interviewed about the events, one of the search and rescue workers, an expert in lost person behaviour, said that it was their personal opinion that the arrangement of compasses and maps indicated a departure from a localized, temporally defined form of navigation. She said that it seemed to her that the two friends had perceived an orientation outside of what was visible to the search team, or anyone else for that matter, and the only clues we might have would be in the precise alignment and function of the détourned equipment. She hypothesized that it was being used to map a terrain and plot a trajectory invisible to those of us who reside more or less constantly in the present, modeling a time and space extended either through the deep past, or a deeper future; in memoriam for a monolithic and alien world long gone, or in preparation for some future navigation, the first ascent of a peak still yet to form.

The last evidence of the friends' presence was a small firepit littered with stone fragments. Expert analysis of the fragments seems to indicate that they had been produced during the making of strangely sophisticated stone tools. The ashes of the fire contained the remains of their shoes and clothing. A small scrap of paper was also found in the ashes, containing the fragments of a hand written sentence. Using computer-algorithmic analysis, a hypothetical reconstruction of the text has been reproduced here, with the original fragments in bold:

“A hunter is someone who listens.

**So hard to their prey that it pulls the
weapon.**

Out of his hand and impales.

Itself.”

*

***Fragment from *Plainwater*, Anne Carson, 1995.**

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