

The Circumference of Home – One Man's Yearlong Quest for a Radically Local Life
by Kurt Hoelting.
Da Capo Press 2010.

Spacial awareness in an urban environment is completely different from that in a rural one; that might sound like a crushingly obvious statement and yet I strongly suspect that unless some event or other makes them sit up and take notice of their surroundings, most urbanites think only of getting from A to B and back again, whatever or wherever A and B might be.

Those privileged to live in the countryside have a much better sense of space, and a much greater and deeper sense of connection with their surroundings, and some of us who have abandoned urban or suburban homes would be quite happy never to visit a city again! Clearly for many the rural environment they inhabit is a place of work, very hard work, and they are unlikely to romanticise it in the way former city-dwellers are prone to do; but many, especially those who work the land, feel a deep connection to it, see it through the seasons and are aware of the impact on their little piece of earth of climate change.

Kurt Hoelting is a child of the Pacific north-west of America, and in spite of some extensive journeying across the world and throughout America, including hiking across the States to Harvard where he studied as a theology student; it is the area around Seattle and the Puget Sound which is home for him.

Following a trip to Norway, with images of the melting Arctic sea ice in his mind and having discovered that his own carbon footprint was twice the national average, he decided to make his own personal contribution to arresting global warming by not using his car for a year: reading those words it may strike you as a trite decision, but once made it was one that Hoelting embarked upon with unshakeable commitment and the support of his family.

He proceeded to draw a circle around his home with a radius of 100 kilometres and set himself the challenge of exploring it over the course of a calendar year, on foot, by bicycle and in a kayak. The Circumference of Home is the story of this year long

odyssey and the discoveries he made along the way. The book is divided into three sections, according to the mode of transport, bike, wheel and boat in that order!

One of the points that Hoelting makes, and as a Zen Buddhist emphasises, is how important the sense of connection that we feel with our surroundings is to us, on a practical, psychological, emotional and spiritual level, and before he took his decision he had felt himself becoming more distant from the places he loved and had grown up in, so his journey was also about redressing the balance and bringing these components back into proper alignment.

But *The Circumference of Home* is about much more than the physical journey itself; it is about friendships made and renewed, inter-action with the natural world along the way – although a lot less of this than I would have liked – sadness at the changes noticed in familiar places and the depredations of human beings on the land and sea, and a growing awareness that we all have so much to lose if concerted international action is not taken to bring our emissions under really tight control.

You conclude *The Circumference of Home* with admiration for its author's commitment and integrity, an urgent need to think more seriously about your own carbon footprint, a realisation that there is so much on our doorstep that we take for granted or completely ignore, and a pulsing awareness of how much beauty and wonder will be lost to our grandchildren and great grand-children if we fail to take the action that needs to be taken now.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh