DEEP WILD

Writing from the Backcountry

"The most alive is the wildest."
Henry David Thoreau

VOLUME 1 - 2019

Deep Wild Journal is published once a year in the summer.

Subscriptions are $16/year plus $3.99 shipping in the United States and Canada. (Contact us for overseas rates.) Please see *deepwildjournal.com/subscribe*.

Submissions are open in the fall for the following year's issue. Please see *deepwildjournal.com/submit* for details on how, when, and where to submit your work.

Community: To stay in touch, follow us on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, or on our blog at *deepwildjournal.com*.

Correspondences should be addressed to the appropriate editor and sent to *deepwildjournal@gmail.com*.

This volume was printed on 100% recycled paper by All American Printing, Petaluma, CA.

ISBN 978-0-9889694-5-2

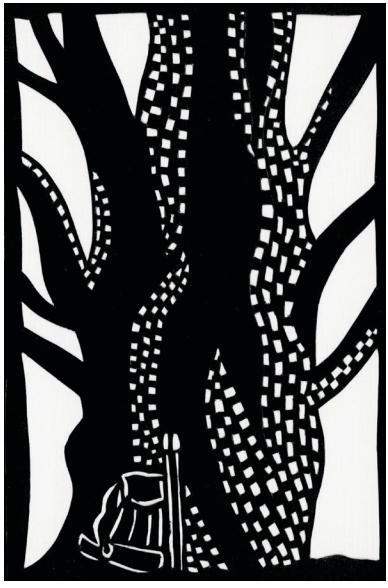
Cover Art:

BIRDSONG: Redwood Mountain Grove (Hermit Thrush)
One-of-a-kind artist's book with ink, watercolor, gouache, and sap on paper. Used with permission. *www.andiethrams.com*

Artist's Statement: "BIRDSONG is a series of artist's books inspired by birds I see and hear while painting in wildland forests. This image was made while backpacking in the Redwood Mountain Grove of Giant Sequoias in Kings Canyon National Park. While there, I worked with brushes, pens, and twigs using ink and paint I made from burnt Giant Sequoia bark and sap, watercolor, and gouache. Painting, walking, drawing, meditating, and observing nature are all aspects of my art practice."

Interior Art:
Black and white artwork, with the exception of the image on title page, Papercuts reproduced from *Memorizing Shadows: Inspiration from the Arizona Trail* (Shanti Arts, 2017). Used with permission. *www.heidibug.com*

DEEP WILD
Writing from the Backcountry



JUNIPER GIANT
h.e.b.

Founder and Nonfiction Editor..... Rick Kempa
Poetry Editor.....Heidi Blankenship
Fiction Editor.....John Yohe
Managing Editor..... Brad McGinty
Graphic Designer.....Dave Gutierrez

The mission of *Deep Wild: Writing from the Backcountry* is to provide a home for creative work inspired by journeys to those places where there are no roads. *Deep Wild* is a not-for-profit enterprise, published annually in the summer.

Contents

Fiction

Nonfiction

Trail Journal

Illustrated Journal

Forward

"The wilderness is my whetstone," Tricia Friesen Reed writes in her essay "Listening." Her words speak truth to all of us who frequent wild places. They also aptly express the mission of *Deep Wild Journal:* to provide a home for the best writing we can find that focuses on the backcountry experience, in those open-air places away from machines where our senses are sharpened and our thoughts honed. As far as we can tell, in the wide world of literary and popular journals, this mission is unique to *Deep Wild*.

The adventures recounted in these pages span the life-zones: from the Grand Canyon depths where Deb Liggett and her lifelong hiking partner "mark out [a] place on the planet, set up [a] tarp," and call it "home"; to the forested slopes of the Teton Wilderness, where Susan Marsh celebrates "the doing of nothing" beside her beloved Buffalo Fork; to the flank of a mountain way up in the Cascades, where Nathan A. Hansen outwaits a storm and thrills to its aftermath. They take place by boot and ski and crampon, and in kayak and canoe.

On the intensity scale, they range from a fight for survival, where time is condensed to a fierce *now,* in Sheila Thorne's short story "Ascension"; to the unending torture of a battered hiker in the last leg of the PCT in Owen Eigenbrot's "Until They Are Not"; to the extended meditation that arises in time spent out of time, in Robbie Gamble's journal of a week-long ramble on the Northville-Placid Trail in the Adirondacks.

Even the wilderness of the tidal zone, that great "in between" so rich in marine and avian life—and so threatened—finds its muse, and its advocate, in Kelly Stuart's "The Language of Cormorants."

The poets—twenty four strong—are on location all throughout, from the desert's arroyo-bottom where, as Cynthia Anderson realizes, "You thought you brought plenty / of water, but that was a lifetime ago," to "the side of a steep, snow-covered mountain" with Jose A. Alcantara, "a jagged rock / in each ungloved hand that you repeatedly jab into the snow." Collectively, their words express the spectrum of human emotions—fear and grief and loneliness, bigness and smallness, contentment and joy—in language as clear and refreshing as a seep spring.

And yet the backcountry is no mere place to test oneself against. Over and again, these writer-wayfarers express the connection, however fleeting, that we seek and sometimes find. With Paul Willis, we strain "to see beyond the forest / floor, to put down roots in the sky." With Thea Gavin, to proceed with "always-open eyes, / finally awake." And with Elizabeth Dodd, camped in a "perfect cirque…of stone and slope," we are invited to "drink cold gulps of lake" and declare, with joy, "I'm changing too."

Accompanying and complementing these well-shaped words are the exquisite images of Sierra Nevada-based artist Andie Thrams on our cover, of Kat Manton-Jones in her illustrated journal from the Arizona Trail, and of Heidi Elizabeth Blankenship's papercuts. We look forward to more such brilliance in future issues.

Thanks are in order: to the several hundred writers who answered our call for submissions; to the 37 whose work is included here, for their all-around awesomeness; and to our 80-plus supporters, whose contributions were both the boon that enabled us to pursue our vision, and a gesture of faith in the worth of our enterprise. The only way for a literary journal to thrive, or even to survive, is with help from its friends. If you like what you find here, please recommend us to your fellow wilderness-lovers, and consider submitting and subscribing.

I must also express gratitude for my colleagues Heidi Blankenship, John Yohe, Brad McGinty, and Dave Gutierrez. When I emerged from a long walk around Navajo Mountain last November, I was filled with enthusiasm for this project. But it has been their unflagging energy every step of the way since then that gave arms and legs to *Deep Wild,* that made it happen. And our collaboration, I know we all agree, is among the most satisfying we have known.

We hope this journal finds its way not just onto bookshelves and bedsides, but into backpacks and saddlebags and ammo cans. We hope it comes to smell of pine resin and woodsmoke and the ineffable open air, where it belongs. We will be back next summer with Volume 2.

Rick Kempa
July, 2019

CHOLLA NEST
h.e.b.

Desert Survival: On Distance
—Somewhere in the Mojave

Cynthia Anderson

It's the reverse of a rearview mirror—
objects are farther than they appear.
When the air is clear, you can touch
that rimrock on the horizon—yet
start walking, and you're no closer,
as though you're treading water.
Soon you enter the dreamtime, lost
in a creosote forest where every bush
looks the same as the next. Turn back,
and the way you came has vanished.
Animal tracks crisscross at random,
no jackrabbit or coyote in sight.
Even the birds leave you to your
fate: a heavy, deafening silence.
Tell the sun you're innocent—all
you wanted was a small adventure.
You thought you brought plenty
of water, but that was a lifetime ago.
A vast expanse of sand extends
from your feet to the sky. You
could go anywhere from here—
if you ever get out.

A Place on This Earth, Where You Can Walk Downhill into the Drift of a Cloudbank

Nicholas Samaras

I prayed for a pearl-grey sky. I needed
the altitude of weather and distance
from my life. I wanted resistance
walking, to be done with the unheeded
world that begins with me. I said,
Panayia, be witness to my intention—
no more my past, but reinvention,
the forested Athonite earth to tread.

Give me this mountain slope to descend
into a silver drift of clouds, befitting
my wish to live there, cloud-pearled,
any divine aiding and abetting.
It was something about the world.
It was something about forgetting.

Big Beaver Grove
—North Cascades National Park

Paul Willis

It is quiet here, as it has been
for millennia among these giant cedar trees.
Somehow they make me quiet too,
and no longer damp and cold and tired,
as I step out of the vine maple and thimbleberry
where I have been singing
to entertain the bears in the brush.

For this is a place of sudden and enduring
silence, with only the hum of the creek below
and the faint splashing of stray drops
from the bend of cedar sprays
into the wide and waiting leaves
of devil's club and skunk cabbage.

These are the trees that just got lucky,
century after century. No fire, flood,
or avalanche has found this valley pocket yet,
and the roads and chainsaws never got this far.

House-sized boulders walled with ferns
and shingled with the deepest moss
dwell in and around these ancient ones,
these pillars tufted gray and old,
and queen's cup lilies and wild ginger
climb their trunks companionably,
as if wanting to see beyond the forest
floor, to put down roots in the sky.

The Amber Light of Autumn

Susan Marsh

Above the Buffalo Fork a film of sunlight hovers, a tawny haze that crouches like a cat, watchful for the moment when summer turns to fall. The layer of light lies tranquil on the water while its interior vibrates with the movement of midges, mayflies, and dust infused by apricot gold. The stream of air floating on the stream of water is as much a part of the river as the water itself.

Morning's chill gives way to the warmth of afternoon. A silt-polished rock the size of a cushion presents itself, the perfect perch from which to contemplate this ephemeral amber light.

A riffle a quarter-mile downstream breaks against the foot of a cliff with a hollow clang. How different a river sounds when it comes from the next rapid you have to run, compared with the spent white noise upstream. How different it sounds when you have arrived by foot, having left the trail to do nothing more than listen.

A human voice reaches my ear, muted by the slope and pines and talus that lie between us. A wilderness guide with a string of mules regales his dudes as he heads into the woods for five, seven, ten days. In the caesura between cutthroat trout spawning and elk season, few voices drift into this canyon from the trail. A few outfitters bring their clients in for bow hunting, small and quiet groups accustomed to the silence their sport requires.

The river dawdles among its cobbles, a different place than it was in June. The rock I sit on was submerged in milky runoff, deep-voiced and bellowing as it rammed the base of the cliff. I imagine the torrent rolling a fallen spruce like a pencil between two fingers and hurtling it downstream. Wedged among outcrops on the slope above, the spruce still bears green foliage.

I unlace my hiking boots and step into the water. I could compare my ritual to a baptism of sorts, just as cupping my hand to catch the flow of a tumbling freshet is a form of communion. When cold clear mountain water is involved, every gesture is a sacrament.

There is no need for prayer or ceremony here. With thoughts and boots and notebook left on shore I navigate by feel. The sun warms my shoulder while the water is so cold my ankles ache. Rocks shift underfoot, rough against bare skin. They shine in a

kaleidoscope of color through a few inches of gin-clear water, shades of gray from pale to charcoal, yellow ocher, rust red, ethereal celadon green. Water sliding over and around them cuts the riverbed into stained-glass chips between undulating planes of refracted sunlight. After gazing into the current at the rocks, I raise my eyes to the far shore. It seems to nudge its way upstream, as if it were flowing and the river stood still.

An old bear track in the mud reminds me that this is grizzly country, where vigilance hones the senses and every movement draws the eye. No bears appear, but the river is alive with others. Butterflies and sandpipers dip among the rocks near shore. Grasshoppers ratchet their way through the grass at the base of a long gravel slope. Dragonflies helicopter across the river within the stream of light, their transparent wings bejeweled by the sun. A squirrel breaks the quiet as it scolds from a lodgepole pine, then the quiet returns. The midges keep spiraling in and out of the ribbon of light, rising as a tight formation then falling into disarray.

These waters flow from the Continental Divide. Three main branches wreathe the remote Teton Wilderness before they merge to become the Buffalo Fork. I first came to know this river on a pack trip to its headwaters thirty years ago while working for the U.S. Forest Service. After days of surveying and taking photographs, of jotting in a pocket notebook, of progressing from pine forests to alpine tundra, from deep canyons to wide willow flats, listening to elk bugle from the far side of Pendergraft Meadows and staring mesmerized into the chute of South Fork Falls, where a hefty volume of water is squeezed into a slot tight enough to leap across, it was my job to report on whether the Buffalo Fork qualified as part of the Wild and Scenic Rivers system.

I recorded landforms and wildflowers, scenic vistas and textbook examples of the forces of mountain-building and erosion. Riverside willows flashed the signatures of each species: Booth's with its upright branches and leaves flecked with autumn gold; whiplash, favored by browsing moose, waving glossy leaves from ten-foot wands; wolf's willow, a string of compact shrubs with silver foliage, hugging a dry channel like a row of porcupines. Among the willow stand wove garlands of scarlet paintbrush and

elephanthead, members of the figwort family with parasitic and symbiotic relationships to the willows.

The river was all of a piece, a work of art: graceful meanders and point bars traced by wildflowers, the forest, the dark volcanic cliffs above. But the bureaucratic language of the Forest Service-approved checklist I was meant to use was a head-scratcher. Its fill-in-the-blanks data sheet gave me little room to record more than a checkmark, so I developed my own form, running to four pages with room for stream-specific details about each outstandingly remarkable value outlined in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. While better than a row of boxes to check, the four pages didn't provide the elbow room I needed to suggest how deeply the Buffalo Fork, as well as other streams in the Teton Wilderness, had touched me. Each was singular, incomparable, superb.

Parting of the Waters, for example, where Two Ocean Creek tumbles in cascades and waterfalls from a ten-thousand-foot plateau to split in half under the shade of a spruce tree. You can turn south to follow Pacific Creek whose waters join the Snake River and eventually the Columbia. 1353 miles to the ocean. If you turn north, Atlantic Creek will take you to the Gulf of Mexico 3488 miles later.

One evening I walked upstream from a camp near Woodard Canyon and stood in the waters of the upper Yellowstone while sunset bronzed the shoulders of Younts Peak, highest point in the Teton Wilderness and about as far as one could get from a road in the lower 48 states. The river starts where two forks that wrap Younts Peak like a pair of pincers come together. I could stand at the point of a gravel bar with one foot in the North Fork and the other in the South Fork. With the blue light of gathering dusk, the alpenglow on the mountains, and the faint sough of wind in the rimrock far above the river, this felt like the most magical place on earth.

Memories of those places come close as I sit beside the Buffalo Fork today. One river brings to mind another in a meandering, branching network of experience, while each leaves its unique imprint on the heart.

A river is a pathway to the soul, one vital link between humans and the wild world which is our native home. A river is

steeped in history, in the routes taken by those who came before, from Ice Age travelers to the famous and infamous in more recent times. Rough stone tools lying near choice campsites remind us of the antiquity of human habitation. Most are located near a river, the same campsites we favor today.

At home listening to the evening news, I hear about events that comprise history: the fire, the flood, the mass shooting. Here I witness and immerse myself in a different kind of history, that of the resilient, ever-changing earth.

Today the Buffalo Fork brings a much-needed respite from the unfolding of contemporary history. A week since the latest hurricane wiped out another city, my head is filled with images of people sweltering in shelters and children wailing for lost pets. I want to save them, every dog and cat and goldfish. If I could bring all the children to the Buffalo Fork I would spike them out like members of a back-to-nature retreat and let them stir the pristine water with their bare toes, take in the scent of sun on pines, and simply be.

This is a modest and companionable stream among the legendary rivers of the west. Its charms reside in what it lacks: crowds, easy access, and rapids you can hear from a mile upstream. Whitewater is exhilarating, but the Buffalo Fork holds another sort of gift for those who find a place to linger for an hour or two doing basically nothing.

I have always loved the doing of nothing as much as the activity involved in wilderness travel. After dinner is over and camp is clean, I wander away to listen to flowing water. In the high country the branches of the Buffalo Fork skitter over cliffs and settle into alpine lakes. There are more tributary rivulets falling from the high plateaus than I can count. As it settles into wide, lush meadows, the river raises its voice to a whisper, curling under its banks where bouquets of sedge and monkeyflower and fringed gentian spill toward the dark water below. By the time it reaches the place where I sit, the North, South, and Soda Forks have spent their wild energy and joined forces to become a river. From here it drifts, steady and relaxed, toward the Snake.

The trajectory of my years outdoors mimics the flow of the Buffalo Fork—reckless and exuberant as it tumbles from its source, unhurried as it approaches its end. Once I sought the company of people able to laugh when wet and cold in a swamped canoe,

who could start a fire from damp driftwood and tell jokes and sing shanties that I remember years later, who could drink bad whiskey until way past midnight and crawl out of the sack at dawn and slide their boats back into the water for another day.

My old paddling buddies and I are scattered from California to Montana to Alaska, tied to obligations that keep us from considering an extended trip. By necessity, and increasingly by choice, I come to rivers alone. I come to give them my attention. It is in quietude that I seek to immerse myself.

The shallows of the Buffalo Fork reward my attention with myriad tiny events that would escape me if I were paddling, hiking, or riding a horse along the trail from which you can barely glimpse this stretch of river. An egg mass left by a chorus frog sways in the backwater, gelatinous and translucent and tangled in algae, the tadpoles long gone. A lamination of fine mud has coated a flat-topped rock and sandpiper tracks decorate its surface like a geometrical design embossed on wet clay slip. How many days and nights did remote snowfields melt and refreeze, causing subtle fluctuations in the water level miles downstream, to create this canvas for a fleeting work of calligraphy?

Next, a miracle from the Bible: walking on water. A small black bug performs the feat while beside it a fallen alder leaf, its brown edges curled to form a boat, pauses in its journey down the river. The insect climbs aboard.

A dozen leggy flies have gathered on a barely-submerged rock, standing underwater with their wings upright in the air. Is this a mating ritual? Are they laying eggs? They flutter provocatively then fall still, repeating their synchronized ballet on cue. I shift a foot and they lift from the rock.

Voices drift down the hillside again from another outfitter's pack string. I catch a scrap of conversation: "...all very pure, clear water..." The guide will serve it with steaks tonight, somewhere in the deep and unspoiled country that lies ahead. Like me, he is captivated by this river. I can hear it in his voice.

The sun has moved. Shadows replace its light and the golden pillow of air over the river disappears. It leaves me with a sense of well-being that will linger during the dusty hike out, the drive home, the evening news.

I pull on my socks and boots. At last, three decades after I conducted the river inventory and ten years after the Buffalo Fork

was officially added to the national Wild and Scenic Rivers system, it comes to me—what I wish I could have written on that inventory form.

It is the most important quality of all, how a wild river feeds the human spirit. It flows from the mountains with the promise of renewal, floods and scours and cleans its bed, picks up shining mica silt and dumps it somewhere else, and carries our spirits as we bob through the rapids in our little boats.

Reluctantly I stand and stretch. The rock I've been sitting on has turned cold and hard, a reminder that in spite of the mild afternoon, frost will come with evening. Fall will gather strength, claiming mountaintop and valley, and soon the high country will be closed by storms. Today the river holds the memory of June's snowmelt and the promise of snowfall soon to come, the gathered warmth of the season nearly past and the chill already settling on the water. In this moment when summer glides into fall, the river has held me like a fly in a drop of amber. Now it lets me go.

One Night in the Gallatin Wilderness

Corinna German

Roar, lodgepole pine
release yourself before winter sets in
Jagged frost crystallizes
the worm tracks in your skin
Crash to the ground, scare me in my tent
on this moonless night
The crack of your spine, grotesque
The thunder of your fall
rolls up mountains and
zings back down, electric
Offer yourself to foraging grizzlies
Let them lick the trail of pine beetles from
under the charred bark
you've worn loosely, like a cape
after the summer wildfire's flames
licked your needles
leaving you a naked sentinel
dotted with woodpecker holes—
until tonight you finally rest

Rattled

Thea Gavin

I wind under oaks,
not looking for dust scallops,
not listening to leaf song,
lost in brain chatter.

Buzz. Red diamonds.
I recoil in respect.
She is faded to match late summer
(except for the shock

of black and white over her rattle),
bent into defense, waiting
for a better venom victim than
unswallowable me. We do not blink.

My thanks are awkward:
me a stranger to the lithe
strike, unaccustomed
to always-open eyes,
finally awake.

Listening

Tricia Friesen Reed

I lie awake in our tent for hours. Bringing my knees up, then straightening them; rolling from belly to back, then back to belly. It seems as if I'm more alert now than I've ever been in daylight. I cycle through bouts of frustration because I can't sleep, anxiety because I remember *why* I can't sleep, and finally, awe because of what I hear when I can't sleep. The sound-scape of night, I realize, isn't nearly as homogenous as I thought. In fact, in a poetic moment between anger and worry, it reminds me of a symphony.

First there's the hum of mosquitoes, like the string section tuning in the orchestra pit. Waves splashing onto the rock face shape the opening, then the wind picks up and crescendos into the first movement. The loons feature in the second movement, lonely and haunting at first and then more dramatic, like drunken opera stars. As quickly as they started they are finished. I suppose the birds have turned to fishing and am almost drifting to sleep when I hear something else. Shuffling. Close to our tent. Whatever it is, it's not small. Not a squirrel or a mouse. It's something much bigger.

My husband Stan hears it too. I pull off my toque and lift my head. Both of us now are up on our elbows, straining to make sense of the noise.

"Derek!" Stan shouts my brother-in-law's name. "Is that you?"

Adrenalin rips through my body. *This is why I stayed awake,* I think. *This is why I needed to listen!*

Weeks before our canoe trip I'd had an unsettling conversation with a stranger. "We know the family that was just in the news," he'd said, "the ones who got attacked by a bear while they were in their tent."

I'd looked at the man and laughed nervously. "But they were careless, right?" I leaned forward, hopeful for his answer.

"Well, actually, no," he said, putting his sunglasses on top of his head.

I looked at the crinkles around his eyes, wondering if I could trust him.

"They were experienced trippers. They did everything right and yet…"

His gaze met mine. We were silent for a moment. Then he added, "The bear even swam after them as they tried to escape in their canoe."

Days later, I took a break from stuffing dry bags and measuring trail mix to call the conservation office in Manitoba's Whiteshell Provincial Park. After discussing the route, water levels and condition of the portages I asked, "What about bears? We've heard there have been some incidents this summer."

The officer didn't mention the episode I'd discussed with the stranger, where a bear swiped at a child inside a tent. He *did* mention an altercation involving a hiker on the Mantario trail who ambushed a bear. Or maybe it was the other way around.

I had tried to sound tough on the phone, like any seasoned canoeist, but wasn't nearly as nonchalant as I wished. Although we've done plenty of back-country camping, this was the first time I was so edgy about encountering wildlife. Should we have picked a more remote location where the bears weren't habituated? Or left the kids with our parents? We decided to stick with our original plans and brought extra rope to secure our food.

When my sister Tara and I, along with our husbands and six kids, launched our canoes for the week-long trip, lines from these stories played in my ears. Before the sun sank behind the granite cliffs on the first night, I asked our flotilla to pose for a photo. Through gritted teeth and a smile Stan suggested, "Let's stop taking pictures so we can get set-up for the night. It's going to take us a while to hoist all this food."

I secured the phone back in the dry bag, picked up my paddle, and headed to a promising slab of rocky shoreline.

"This will do," Derek called while wandering on shore and unbuckling his life-jacket. The kids didn't need any more convincing and changed into their swimsuits before we got the boats unloaded.

Stan didn't have time for swimming; he was busy investigating which trees were tall and sturdy enough to hold our edibles. Once the rest of us had cooled off, we were ready for supper. Our meal prep and dinner conversation consisted mostly of directives like "Pick up that crumb!" and "Don't drop your meat!" while we kept track of every morsel. Finally, after the site

had been scoured to avoid attracting hungry visitors, and the pots and pans were rigged with the food to alarm us of a disturbance, and everyone had peed and pooed and buried or burned the evidence, we were ready to turn in for the night.

I was the last one in the bushes, and as I walked towards our tents, both of them glowing with lamplight, I listened. I heard the water lapping against the shore. *Kplap kplap kplap*. I heard the aspen leaves rustling behind me. *Sha sha sha sha*. And I heard voices. Two of them. Tara was reading *Bridge to Terebithia* aloud to her family, and Stan was reading *The Wolf Wilder* to ours. Their voices rose and fell with the cadence of storytelling.

I dove into our tent and pulled the zipper as quickly as possible. Stan stopped reading and swung the light around the dome of the tent, searching for mosquitoes. Smearing blood onto the nylon walls, we added to the constellation of stains from past adventures. Then, when we were sure we'd caught every last one, we continued reading until the bold heroine said: *I don't know where courage comes from—but I do know that if you can scrape together just a bit, more of it comes without your trying*. As Stan snapped the book shut and clicked off the flashlight, I made a mental note to copy that line down another day.

While fumbling for my night mask and ear plugs, I felt the hatchet by our heads and decided not to use anything that might compromise my hearing. I figured I'd like to wake as soon as possible should the need arise—which, it turns out, wasn't the best mindset for sleeping at all.

And now, here we are, on our elbows, ready to spring into action. We listen to the commotion outside our tent and then hear a tired human voice.

"It's just us, doing some rearranging. We can't sleep either," Derek answers.

The next morning, despite lack of sleep, my ears are still in working order. At first, satiated by coffee and bacon, our crew sounds cheery. I hear laughter behind me while the kids play *Twenty Questions,* dragging their hands in the water like mini anchors. Tara and I plow ahead, telling stories of working up North, fishing when we were kids, and getting married. Someone yells "Bingo" when they see a bald eagle flying near the cliffs on our right and strikes a line on their wilderness bingo card. *This is the soundtrack of an idyllic vacation,* I think. But not for long.

My sister and I are paddling in "The Party Boat," which holds four children, a large assortment of snacks and a garbage bag stuffed with soaked diapers and food packaging. Our husbands each paddle with another child and transport our gear. We are just about to embark on our longest unprotected crossing, on Crow Duck Lake, and the breeze is not in our favour.

As the wind picks up I pull down my hat and tighten the chin strap. The bow rides high on the swells then crashes down. One of the kids whimpers but the rest are quiet, which is good because Tara and I are no longer in the mood for chit-chat.

"Are we making headway?" she yells from the stern. "Judging by the island on our left we haven't gained any ground in the last 10 minutes!"

I don't know the answer so I don't bother responding but dig my paddle into the chop. Over and over again. There is no option to multitask now—not when this boat and these bodies have to reach the island ahead. My only thoughts are of exerting more power. When a gust sends the nose of our boat sideways, I hear Tara say a word I haven't heard for over twenty years.

"*Vaicha!*"

The hard *vuhy* at the beginning punches into the wind, followed by the explosive *shu*. My dad used to say this when he got hurt sometimes and though neither of us speak his German dialect it's the perfect sound for this moment.

The noise on the portages are different than the water. Children chatter, parents bark encouragingly (*Keep going! Who'll make it to the top of the hill first?*), while loaded backpacks dig into our hips, but soon the crowd is out of earshot. Now it's just my youngest and me. Alone on the trail. I start singing the first tune that comes to mind (a Sunday School classic from the seventies) to give fair warning to the bears. "Ho-ho-ho-sanna, Ha-ha-ha-le-lu-jah," I belt out, not feeling nearly as chipper as the lyrics imply. In fact, I'm questioning why we decided to do this trip in the first place when normal people rent beach cottages, pack five pairs of shoes and wear sundresses on vacation.

My daughter stops skipping in front of me, throws down the only thing she's carrying—her hat—and begins to cry. Perhaps she senses my inner dialogue or is simply fuming on her own. I loosen my grip on the five-gallon buckets and sit down on one of them, pulling my four-year-old onto my lap. No more boisterous

singing now; all we can do is listen. Listen to the woods for signs of life, especially those coming from the rest of our party. Have they found the next waterway? The sun pours through the birch trees, and it's a warm, windless afternoon. Though I know otherwise, it feels as if we are the only people to have passed this way.

My daughter and I force ourselves forward. Then I hear it. High voices emitted from small bodies with enough energy left to catch toads and bicker about snacks. Although I can't see them, I know what the others are doing—the ones who literally bear the burden of our survival. After throwing down hundreds of pounds of canoes, tents, and food, they've staggered into the shade where they're crumpled in quiet celebration of another completed portage.

It's not all painful though. During the middle of our trip we spend two nights in the same campsite. We know it's a choice location when we arrive because of the saplings growing out of the fire pit, indicating a long absence of humans. After lounging by the fire past mid-day, fishing, sawing dead-fall and fairy-house building, it's time for a bath and laundry party.

"Pass me the soap!" Stan shouts at cousins splashing at the water's edge. They're taking turns sliding down a smooth rock covered with just enough seaweed to make it slippery. Others of us tread water while scrubbing armpits and shirt collars, and cracking jokes. Feeling refreshed, I crawl onto the rocks and warm my belly in the sun while my buttocks draw solar heat from the granite. Two 12-year-old estheticians massage lotion between the cracks of my toes and plait my dripping hair. I close my eyes, feel water evaporating off my skin and almost stop listening.

Seven hours later the heat and sleepiness has worn off. I am ready and alert as ever in my tent. Usually, when insomnia hits at home, my mind races with things to do, lists to make, other places, people and past conversations. Not here. I can't sleep but I'm not thinking about anything or anywhere else. I am fully in the moment, convinced my life depends on it.

This single-minded concentration on listening, rather than absently receiving sound waves, is a relief from the sensory overload of my normal life. Usually, I'm not tuned in to every Harley roaring, dog barking, engine humming, device beeping, or fan whirring. There's too much to take in. But here, I parse the sound-scape into each separate noise. The wilderness is my

whetstone, sharpening senses that have been dulled by my regular urban environment.

Despite my frayed nerves, this acute awareness is not the same as the anxiety I experience at home, the kind that manifests itself at odd times and makes me want to crumple to the floor or curl up to escape my pounding heart and sudden flood of panic. The adrenaline rush from listening to the back-country only leads me to a deeper experience of where I am, without the urge to withdraw.

A few days later, on our final paddle, I will pay for the cumulative lack of sleep. Our canoe will lag behind the others. When we catch up to Derek he'll survey our kids—the heads resting on the gunnels, slack jaws, sunburned lips—and Tara and me filling our hats with lake water then splashing them back on our heads to revive ourselves.

"It looks more like 'The Flight Home from Daytona Beach' and less like 'The Party Canoe' today," he'll comment. By then we'll have travelled many miles without making any gruesome news headlines. We'll have seen three bears—one ambling away from our food cache, one swimming in front of our boats and another wandering the shoreline—but there will have been no encounters, no attacks, and certainly no hair-raising escapes.

The lack of action doesn't reflect less drama but only a different kind of theatrics. On this particular night, after the spa on the rocks, I am wide awake and can't hear anything at all. Not a breath of wind. No creaking spruce. No familiar buzz of mosquitoes. Even my husband and kids are sleeping without snoring. I imagine the woods around me like a blind person reaching for cues, looking for something to trace out of the empty darkness. Finally there it is—a noise to hang on to. It's not a loon or a squirrel. It's getting louder now. Howls. A pack of wolves! I recognize their distinct song coming from across the bay while more join with every measure.

They say music can transport you to different places or times, but this song does the opposite. It doesn't take me anywhere but here. I stare at the dome of our tent, grateful to be awake. Grateful to be caught up in the boreal melody, each note pinning me to this isolated campsite—the rock and lichen underneath my back, the tamarack beside us, and the lake below. I listen as long and as hard as I can.

Wilderness Pass

Ben Murray

woodpeckers knock,
we enter
the firs,
forget

what's left
behind, nothing now
but breath of bear
sun's sigh
bark eternity

our tracks pace
yesterday's moose, walk
its shaggy shadow

listen: quiet only woods
make, our whispers
rustling leaves

your boondock smile
another shimmer of sun,
I share it
with the trees

backpack sweat,
twig-crack limbs,
days wandering
in wonder

under green canopy,
under eye of moon,
we rest upon
pine needle beds

arms open, we embrace
visible forests
of stars

The Qi of Fir

Margaret Pettis

A needle of white fire stitched cloud to ground.
We stashed our heavy packs, tarped them tight,
and scrambled beneath a canopy of fir.
Clark's nutcrackers shared the dry boughs.
Sheets of cold rain veiled the Middle Fork.

Patient half an hour, starting to shiver,
I taught you qi gong—arms in a slow arc,
legs shifting stance, hands pushing dark
energy away, pulling light in. Again. Again.

The storm growled down the canyon.
We emerged into a sparking kingdom of trees,
found the muddy trail, and headed upriver.

Marking Our Place

Deb Liggett

Four miles into a fifty-mile Grand Canyon hike, I put down my pack, turned around and started walking backwards down the trail. Darkness was only an hour away. I heard Jay's footsteps stop, heard the extended pause, and then he ever-so-patiently asked, "What are you doing?"

Jay and I have hiked together for forty years. Marriage came shortly after the hiking began, and both the marriage and the hiking have endured. He always hikes behind and lets me set the pace. He has told me he wants to keep hiking this way for a long time to come, but at times like this he must wonder why.

There is no going back. Oh, sure we could climb back up to the rim, but then what? There was no water at the deserted trailhead above, and it'd be a long wait until someone showed up.

The thigh muscles that controlled my knees went on strike. That wasn't the first time my knees rebelled, but it was the first time I had to drop my pack.

Jay shuttled his pack down a short distance, hiked back up to pick up my pack and carried it down ahead of us. He repeated this routine six or seven times through the steepest descent. Meanwhile, I crept backwards down the trail. When the trail leveled out a bit, Jay moved the heavy things from my pack to his pack, and I shouldered my reduced load. I walked with the wobbly, uncertain gait of a stroke victim. Just before dark we reached a wide spot in the trail, set up our tarp and cooked noodles for dinner.

I was more shamefaced than alarmed. In case of a late start or recalcitrant knees, we carry extra water for contingencies. We had planned a leisurely hike. For the first time, we had the luxury of no jobs and no constraints except the return date on a backcountry permit. I slid into my sleeping bag, reasonably confident that my knees could be cajoled into working tomorrow and the day after that and the day after that. (The long haul up to the rim lay many days in the future.) As long as I kept eating, each day meant less weight in the pack.

We settled down for the night. As the sounds of our bedtime rustling eased, the wind dropped and I felt an ancient, infinite hush surround us. The Canyon was waiting for us.

Jay and I have completed our share of epic hikes, carrying dried salami, crackers and melting cheese. I have picked up and eaten peanut M&Ms that I had dropped on a trail littered with mule dung. We have suffered dehydration and sunburn. We have returned to the Canyon again and again to renew our love affair.

Our route on this trip was down the South Bass Trail, across the Tonto Trail, and up and out the Hermit Trail to the South Rim. Most trails from the South Rim are steep and fall in a fairly direct route from rim to river. In contrast, the Tonto (Plateau) Trail is a level route in Grand Canyon terms, connecting side canyon to side canyon, traversing at an elevation two-thirds of the way down between rim and river. But the plateau (and hence the trail) is also synonymous with the most exposed, open, and unforgiving terrain in the Canyon. Unprepared hikers die on the Tonto. No shade and often no water, just a lonely path wavering in the relentless heat. Even in the mild temperatures of late March, we respected the litany of deaths that marked this trail.

In 1857, Lt. Joseph Ives of the U.S. Army approached the rim, took one look at the canyon that blocked his way northward and passed summary judgment. "Ours has been the first, and will doubtless be the last party of whites to visit this profitless locality." It is impossible to imagine a better endorsement.

Come morning, my legs were rested from the unrelenting downhill of the previous day. We shifted some weight back to my pack. Stiffness dogged me for a few days, but the discomfort was the price of my walking meditation.

The trail has spacious views of the river and rim, and then cuts dramatically into the side canyons, seeking a way around them. In the places where the trail works its way around the drainages it is rough and notoriously difficult to follow. We measured our forward progress by the side canyons we navigated, and collected their names like ribbons won at a fair:

Bass
Serpentine
Ruby
Topaz
Turquoise
Sapphire
Agate
Slate

Boucher
Travertine
Hermit

I concentrated on my feet and the ground while hiking, otherwise risking a face plant or a death-inviting somersault. The path revealed coyote scat containing a mouse jaw and part of bird skull, new cones of the ancient Mormon tea, a small cylindrical cactus with spines like long cat whiskers, and a puffball, flattened like a sea star washed up on a desert shore.

Following the route takes some practice. To us, the trail takes on the persona of a living being, albeit one with a perverse sense of humor. This was a game of clues: a rock in the wrong place, a plant cocked at an odd angle, a single disembodied boot track, a half standing cairn. There were times we could make out a remnant stretch of the trail miles ahead and times we couldn't solve the next ten feet. When the trail eluded me, Jay's extra height gave him an advantage. Sometimes the trail eased us into complacency, and sometimes we came to a standstill and milled around, confused. Behind us the last waymark might be visible but we moved forward, feeling our way, until we remembered to lift our heads to scan the horizon. We developed a rapport with the trail and could predict how it behaved in different situations. We made our way often with confidence, sometimes with caution, skirting or conquering obstacles, but somehow always finding our footing and the path.

The routine was simple. Coffee. Oatmeal. Pack up camp. Drink water. Eat lunch. Fill water bottles. All the while we joked about the other person's trail farts (I don't have any) and whined good-naturedly about the trail being too steep, too flat, someone didn't bring enough chocolate, someone put a rock under my sleeping pad, and a host of other invented complaints. We stopped for a water break in mid-afternoon and began our campsite search. Set up camp. Cup of tea. Dinner. Bed. Repeat. Somewhere we managed to find time to meander down the trail. It was in this reassuring and steady way that we marked the passing of our days and nights, our hikes, our marriage, our life.

We laughed when we spotted O'Ryan, the famous "Irish" constellation, over the South Rim. First I saw the middle star in his belt and then the Dog Star, Sirius, then Aldebaran and Betelgeuse. I identified Scorpio, the Big Dipper and the Pleiades. I recognize my old friends with the strange names, time and time again, even

after periods of long absence. I greeted each star or constellation individually, out loud and by name, the dark sky a part of the tapestry that secures me to this familiar place.

It's a fact that when God made the universe She started with these very same stars. One day after work, God was tidying up the universe, washing the windows, vacuuming under the beds, and sweeping the dirt and dog hair from the kitchen floor. Almost as an afterthought, She created the planets. Unlike the other planets, the poor dust bunny that was Earth had no rings and only one paltry moon. But God gave this small planet something else—the divine spark of life. In this deep incision in the Earth's crust, those paying attention see the beginning of the universe in the night sky, and in the layers of rock beneath their feet can trace the evolution of life. A privileged view.

Midway through our trip, as we began our campsite search, seven desert bighorn sheep appeared. I deduced that it was a bachelor herd, the guys kicked out by the ewes while they calve. We found a flat rock for the kitchen, a space for the tarp and a view of the river below. After sunset, a sliver of a moon hovered in the western sky and the quiet slipped in. We were almost asleep when we both sat up halfway and listened intently. We heard, perhaps not footsteps, but a hint of movement, just outside the tarp. Simultaneously we whispered, "Sheep!" and then the explosion of twenty-eight hooves beat a swift retreat.

The next day in the soft sand under a rock overhang we found partially buried scat and tracks with no claw marks visible—classic cat sign. Cats can retract their claws, unlike coyotes, whose claw marks are clearly visible in their tracks. The tracks were large and we knew there was a mountain lion in the neighborhood. Sheep beware.

On yet another morning when we exited the tarp, Jay and I each uncovered a 1982 penny in the dirt. It was a cosmic woo woo kind of moment. What were the chances of both of us finding a penny in the dirt in the middle of an untracked expanse of shale and prickly pear? When we chose the campsite the night before, well off the trail and next to no particular monument or mark, there was no recent human sign. But we'd made the same choice as the 1982 Penny People. A good campsite to one generation makes a good campsite for the next generation; the holy qualities of a place to one people are felt by another people in another century.

Making our way east, we named our campsites: Bass Trail, Pack Rat Rock, Bighorn, Two-Penny, Almost Agate, Red Dirt and Condor. At the Almost Agate camp I built small shrines, rock statuary. I built them to honor our joy in the moment and pay homage to the place. I know the shrines are impermanent and I intended them to be so, destroying them before we departed. I was saddened, though, and wished that the building of stone shrines could freeze these perfect days in time, forever. I like to think that if I lost my way in the years ahead in the world above the rim that I could return and find these rocks standing, marking my place and my way.

We hiked. The sky was sunny. It was overcast. It was rainy, the weather mild between the raindrops. Hail fell one afternoon and we sought refuge under a rock overhang. The trail wandered perilously close to the steep drop-off to the river and I planted my feet with deliberation, buffeted by the wind.

We hiked. This was the put-one-foot-in-front-of-the-other part of the program. I availed myself of every opportunity to stop. One day I stopped mid-stride and broke into enthusiastic applause. Jay stopped and started to applaud, too. A century plant (or agave) was sending forth a central stalk—thick as your arm and twice the height of a man—preparing to bloom. Popular belief says the plant blooms once every hundred years (in fact about thirty years) and then dies, a one-time spectacle worthy of our applause.

We hiked. We tried to go light. Even so, Jay said we have more things on our backpacking trips than some entire cultures have objects. He's right. Packs, sleeping bags and pads, tarp and stakes, ground cloth, gas canisters, stove, cook kit, scrubber, lighter, water bottles, iodine tablets, soap, toilet paper, walking sticks, medical kit and maps made up our communal gear. Add to this our raingear, coat, vest, winter hat, gloves, camp shoes, long underwear, extra socks and underwear, knee brace, small personal kits, paperback book, journal, pen and pencil. Not quite the bare essentials, but close to it. Finally, we carried our food and water, the clothing on our backs and the boots on our feet. A simple, utilitarian, and fulfilling life is possible.

Jay woke first in the mornings and lay in wait, trying to elicit nonsensical responses from me as I slowly came to life. He delights in tormenting me. One day I woke to a poem recitation, inspired by the tag on his sleeping bag:

Care Instructions:
Add pretty girl
to purple sleeping bag.
Stir in love.
Treat gently.

As the days passed, I became the garbage scow. This was a low-weight, high-volume kind of duty. In addition to the trash, I carried the extra toilet paper, the titanium cook kit, the freeze-dried food, and the empty gas canister. I was more than an unwashed pretty face. I was useful.

It seemed so easy to clean up after ourselves, to be thoughtful about how much gear and fuel we planned to use. Before the trip we stripped the food of packaging material when we organized our meals. Our packs, empty or full, were tidy and ship-shape. We took pride in leaving no sign of our passing. As I hiked, I thought about what a better place the world could be with the simple ethic of picking up our own messes and tidying up after ourselves.

Humans are not well-adapted to the desert. We have no specialized kidneys, we can't obtain enough moisture from eating seeds, our ears aren't large enough to act as heat-dissipators, and our eyesight is poor and limits our activity in the cool hours of the night. The human adaptation to heat is to carry adequate water. But it is an adaptation with a weighty cost: eight pounds per gallon. One gallon of water per person per day in the desert. Minimum.

We inventoried our odd assortment of full and empty water bottles, a bevy of one-liter containers. Some were clear, some collapsible, and at least one was stained a disgusting rust color from an overdose of purifying iodine. One quart was dosed with tropical punch Kool-Aid to hide the offending stain. Finally, a collapsible one-gallon blue nylon bag. These containers are the human invention, the adaptation that allows us to be nomads in this canyon.

On the trail, we met a pair of young women—school teachers, we discovered—hiking in the opposite direction. They inquired about our location and we confirmed what they had hoped—there was water in this drainage. They missed the last water because they didn't venture far enough off the trail to find a seep, and were hiking with empty water bottles. One of them was sporting earbuds and listening to music as she hiked. I wondered: How could she hear the canyon wrens?

A lizard skittered across the trail. It stopped and did pushups on a rock in the sun, greeting the morning warmth. "Hello, lizard," I said, and peered intently for signs of fur.

When Jay and I worked at the Canyon, a hiker once came into the backcountry office, asking for a permit to collect "furry lizards." The ranger diplomatically assured him that by definition, lizards do not have fur, but the guy insisted he had seen what he had seen. Rather than deal with the request (and for his own amusement) the ranger sent him to get a collecting permit. Another employee questioned the hiker. The request was straightforward. "I have been hiking on the Hermit Trail. I saw a furry lizard. I want to collect one." Furthermore, he asserted that "the government was probably keeping this scientific oddity under wraps."

The second employee, baffled by the request but wanting to share the joke, passed the hiker up to his boss, who listened with great interest. Then, with the Wisdom of Solomon, the manager directed that a collecting permit be issued for "a furry lizard from the Hermit Trail area" and stipulated that "upon collection, the lizard will be housed in the park museum." This attack of common sense did not threaten the park or question the sanity of the visitor, so each party was satisfied. I smile and always watch for lizards with fur.

For days I punctuated our hike with calls of "Caterpillar alert!" I stutter-stepped and sang out to give Jay time to avoid squishing the prolific dark caterpillars that crossed the trail. We continued to stop and salute the blooming century plants. We broke into applause and sometimes I sang "Happy Birthday Dear Agave." We scared up five mule deer that looked at us in disbelief before they bolted. I am certain we looked ridiculous.

We were ridiculous.

The lunatics were loose in the Canyon and they were joyful!

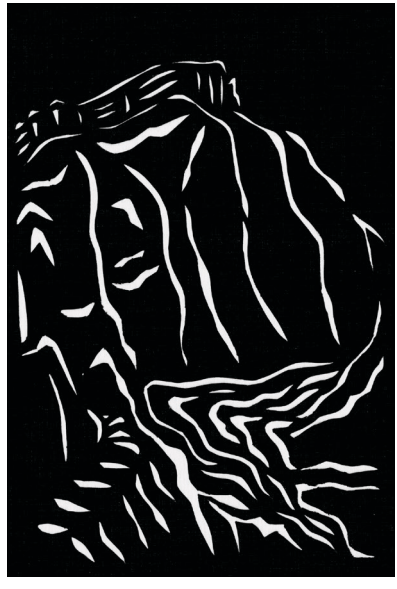
Thoughts of hot water, beer, ice cream and clean underwear began to intrude. We intended an early start our last morning, up the earthquake-ravaged Hermit Trail, and to our re-entry into the world above the rim. Once there, we planned to drink coffee at Hermits' Rest. I schemed to sit in the Teddy Roosevelt chair (Teddy really sat there) in front of the cavernous rock fireplace and delay our departure. No one would sit next me, stained as I would be with sweat and Canyon dirt.

The scuffs on our boots, the abraded, discolored places on my pack, the deep gouge on the fuel canister substituted

for our campaign ribbons, another adventure notched on our metaphorical hiking staff. We could point to the emblems with pride.

We re-emerged with stories to tell.

We had camped beside prickly pear, Mormon tea and buckbrush, on red dirt and on bright turquoise shale, in the midst of house-sized rocks, next to fossil worm casings and the frozen ripples of a primal sea. We'd built shrines and named the stars. We marked out our place on the planet, set up our tarp, and we were home.



INNER GORGE
h.e.b.

Cloud Splitter

Shelby Newsom

Water beads down the tent.
I listen to the drops,
the rise and fall of your breath.
I roll over—
study sunburnt cheeks,
the wilderness of your unshaven jaw line.
I wrestle from our sleeping bag,
unzip the rainfly, peel warmth
to see pines coated in mist.

I stand on a flat rock, a jutting finger bone
that points towards Red River Gorge.
Somewhere below, an unmarked trail.
Tree roots became footholds,
rungs to a ladder we ascended.
I plant myself, brush arms with forked pines.
The canyon sweats,
entangles with fog below.
I root down.

Descending

Jose A. Alcantara

What goes up must come down, the same way it went up,
otherwise you might find yourself in Alaska, as twilight gathers,
on the side of a steep, snow-covered mountain, a jagged rock
in each ungloved hand that you repeatedly jab into the snow
as you back down the face. You can see where you need to go,
down there, past the *bergschrund,* where the rocks have come to rest,
where things no longer tumble and roll, Stegner's angle of repose,
though you doubt you can make it without a plummet and the shattering
to follow. And the tears you cry are not for yourself, but for the fifteen-
month-old in Pennsylvania, who calls you "Dad," though neither
of you know if the name really fits. For you did not come to Alaska
for adventure, fresh out of college, with a degree that led nowhere,
but to work on a fishing boat, to earn some quick cash, to help
a woman who tells you he's yours, though the math doesn't add up.
And so you hang there, kicking into the snow, first one foot,
then the other, jamming, with numbed hands, first one rock,
then the other, peeking between your feet at the rocks below,
peeking and praying and promising. And of course you make it,
because here you are, thirty years later, recounting this day,
and that little boy is now a lawyer and a good man, and though you
have not seen him in over a decade, you know you gave him
what he needed, when he needed it. And though you've broken
many promises since then, that one you've always kept:
returning the way you came, down the ridgeline, through the scree
fields, and into the devil's club, where, though you can see the fires
burning in the camps below, the darkness continually grows.

Promise

Steve Nash

Me and her took the blacktop out to the hoodoo turnoff, made a swingout then tight left onto a road dynamited, picked, and shoveled through Utah sandstone in the 50's uranium boom. We locked the hubs then inched up the sandy/rocky steepness to the crest—and the first drop shelf.

"Roll down your window," I said.

"Dust'll get in."

One front wheel dropped about a foot. My head smacked sideways against my window. She cranked hers down fast. The other wheel dropped. Her head whipped sideways into the breeze.

Like to have lost the bumper when the duallies slid off. We did our bit to lower that shelf with our scrape. We waddled down in first gear to the bottom of the draw. I leaned over the wheel to look up at the climb. It looked too steep. I grinned at her. She grinned back. I gunned it.

Couldn't see over the hood when we lipped out. I couldn't recall if the road made a sudden turn.

It didn't. There was a sign, though. "Not a County Maintained Road."

"Now they tell us," she said.

"Huh, yeah," I mumbled, not knowing how she wanted me to take that. There was rightful distance between us—farther than across the bench seat.

We'd grown up in the same two streetlamp wide-spot. We left town different times, come back, left again without ever meeting up 'til today on the bus back home. Had us cherry slushies down at the gas station. Talk came easy and we got a kick out of each other's freedom boasts and independence tales. On a spur we dumped a couple packs—crammed with high school gear and 7/11 munchies—into my pick-up parked at Dad's place. Hadn't even told nobody we was back, outside of a note saying to Dad that it was me who took the truck.

"Where to?" I asked.

We looked across miles of rusty-pink solid-rock hills. Driven sand-filled low places. In the sandy bits foot-tall bushes sprouted the way a gardener'd plant them to best advantage poor soil. Hidden were all the sudden ditches, maybe a hundred feet wide

and three times as deep, that you never see 'til your next step is lots of empty.

"That away," she said, gesturing at it all.

We rolled. The truck bottomed and rattled and chirped for most of it. On the smooth we'd make some time. Then we'd slow to first or second and warm wind brought our rooster tail into the cab.

'Bout 15 miles in, the road ended where I knew it would in bunchgrass between the tracks and no more tracks. Checked the sky first thing and saw only little puff clouds. Didn't want no flash flood. We beat dust off clothes and I tipped a jerry-can off the tailgate to wash the dirt and sweat streaks off us both. She poured some extra and scrubbed.

I bent down and pulled a bit of green off a bush, crushed the leaves between thumb and forefinger. I pushed the mess to my nose. Smelled so damn familiar, sweet with a little burn.

She toweled her face of faded freckles. Her golden hair draped spectacular and caught the sun just right.

God it was good to be home.

Two-thirty p.m. and it was pushing 90.

I pounded her pack against the tailgate. Dust exploded. I kept the load upright while she sat down and wiggled into the straps. She stood with a grunt.

We caught a faint trail heading down a drainage and walked the gravelly path down between sandstone humps. Around the bend them humps gave way to ledges about knee-high. All that rock reflected sun. Felt like we was walking an oven bottom.

We headed down what could have been Salt Lake City Boulevard for three hundred yards, the ledges rising and our road angling down. At the next sharp right, the ledges were 40 feet above my head and canyon bottom narrowed.

"Cooler here," she said. It was her imagination.

"Gets cooler."

"Good."

Not seventy paces later a ravine twice as wide as my truck cut in right. A tangle of boulders spilled across our path. Carefully, we scrambled over the lowest rocks and jumped five feet to the smooth canyon floor beyond.

Sixteen bends on by my count, maybe three miles in, I looked up. Deep blue was framed by canyon walls 300 feet high. Using my voice seemed wrong. I pointed.

She nodded and let out a small whoosh. She put her left hand on rock, then leaned over and rested her forehead.

"Actually cold," she said, craning her neck to measure the cliff. "And desolate dry."

"Let's keep on."

We walked together, her pace just about as fast as mine. Rock crunched unnaturally loud beneath our boots and echoed lightly off walls tight on each side. Rare fast water through here ensured nothing grew to damp down sound; wind kept the canyon floor swept. There were no footprints ahead and only our boot scoops behind. The most we could see was a hundred yards to the next bend. The light wasn't right for the time of day, dim instead of slanting bright.

"I feel like I'm in a story," she said. "This is the test-y part."

Six miles in. Dusk hue.

She gave me a glance that told me she only had small water sloshing in her canteen and would need a full drink to get out come morning. Up ahead the pink sandstone was giving way to a red band.

Almost there.

Red band got shoulder-high before the canyon opened, walls just as tall but spread maybe five times wide as what we'd just walked, red band all around the base. Air went warm and soft. Ahead great trees spread shade. Where there weren't shade, tall grass waved at us. Critters scampered at our approach. Birds sang evening calls.

A reliable fault spring plashed from the wall and made the inch deep braided stream we followed. We passed a green pool left by the last high water. I looked for a good camp spot. Saw one, and moved through sand toward it. Didn't feel her following.

She was back at the green pool, bent at the waist, looking.

I retraced. Pool wasn't much, about the size of an area rug, and greener than moss. It'd do for an emergency but we had plenty running clear water to pump.

Without standing she turned her head to me. Her face was a-smile. Slow, ever slow, she pointed close into the algae. Water bug hunters, the size of a man's main two finger joints, patiently stalked prey. To the left, beetles with four white dots looked drowned but twisted lively ever so often. She reached down and picked up something with a fluted tail that moved like a shrimp. The flutes disappeared when she let water run out of her hand.

Clear stunted things sprouted from its back. Had a head like a mantis.

"Dragonfly larvae," she said.

"Be damned."

She put the baby thingy back next to fat tadpoles drifting in formation. Squat water bugs with tiny flippers aimed to investigate, while above gnats rose in plumes like green-wood smoke. Bees searched the flowers at pool's edge.

"Thanks," she said. "For bringing me to Eden."

I shrugged.

"It is grand," she said.

Nobody'd ever used grand at me before. Something light and fluttery swam from my navel toward my breastbone. Warm blood moved under my skin. Oxygen stung my lungs. Knew the feeling for sure but not its depth.

Yep.

Words is easy. Real words is hard.

We silently rolled out sleeping gear on the powdery pink sand, lay down next to each other, and listened to the water flow, the bugs hum. Green smells filled the warm air. She lay on her back, one leg resting on a bent knee, her foot twirling to invisible music.

Way up high, hard to see in the dim light, stacked rocks sat on a lonely ledge. A thousand years of wind, snow and rain, yet we still saw the carved footholds climbing the cliff.

"Granary," I said.

"So we are not the first."

"Hard to be that any more."

"'Specially at our age."

I looked at her out the corner. She took a long breath and I watched her trim pointy breasts slowly rise then slowly fall. Couldn't read if it were an invitation to climb aboard or preparation for a long night of no.

"Suppose them that built that are still buried round here," I said.

She twitched to look into the shadows for Anasazi ghosts. Just for a moment, though. I liked that.

I said, "What I'm gettin' at is this here is hard country, always has been, but people choose it, and make stands."

She stared upward at nothing, trace smile on her lips.

"I've overlooked you like most up top miss this crack."

"You don't have to lie to me," she said, "I'm easier to get than that."

"I'm thinkin' we got us more common ground than fenced."

She sat up, face serious, looking for serious on mine. We held eyes for a long time before she looked down.

"You're sweet," she said to the dirt.

"Someone else?"

"Not really. No, no one."

She paused and pushed her tongue to her upper lip. Wouldn't look at me, seemed embarrassed.

"There are things I don't know yet I got to feel," she said. "Things I have heard about I got to judge true."

"I'd help."

"Got to ride this alone. Way it works."

"Well…goddamn."

I flopped back and watched stars emerge from the dying light. Cygnus was up, but I couldn't see the Milky Way yet. Moved my head back, made out part of Cassiopeia over the canyon lip.

She put her warm hand flat on my chest.

Truck was still there next morning, unlocked, windows down. That was plain dumb. Critter pellets decorated the cab.

She'd done great. Carried her own gear and finished all that uphill strong. She threw her pack into the bed and stuck her head and elbows through the passenger window. I reached for my keys and looked at her through three-quarter ton of truck.

"Look, you're a good man," she said.

"Like to think."

"I wrote a poem once to help me through. It ends, 'You may not be for me, or me for you, but we will always have the Once, when all things were possible.'"

"Don't rhyme."

"Not meant to."

She got in the cab. I found the truck key on my ring and opened the door. She talked to the dash.

"Don't know what the next minute'll bring, nobody does."

"I reckon we'll back up, turn around."

She ignored that. Rightly so. She kept staring forward.

"The future's wide open white blank and—crap—nobody'd want it different. So, don't think it sloppy that I want one thing certain in all that empty."

"I'm listening."

"No matter what happens to us tonight, or next week, or next year…when we're 50 let's come back here and spend a long time telling what we've done with our lives."

Now she looked at me.

"Promise?"

I thought about it. She was working at this and I didn't see no downside.

"Cross my heart."

I started the truck, put it in reverse. I rested my arm on the seatback as I turned to look back. I wondered what things I could do that would be worth telling that far-off day…

…And whether we'd still have as nice thoughts and easy hopes as when we was twenty-three.

The Worrier
failure

Nancy Takacs

Where is the point of it?

A hoodoo in Goblin Valley,
the hanging garden
above Jackass Bench.

Where did it begin?

Millions of years ago.
The pastel sweep of earth,
an anticline
that used to be a sea.

Baptist Draw
that says Wilderness
in a bullet-ridden
sign post.

Where are you?

A thousand feet up
on a ledge
without a guardrail.

Near caldera explosions,
domes capping sediment,
lavender figures,
a veil of stones.

In the sea's
bathtub rings where
I can still feel the ripples.

Where does failure come from?

Trilobites, corals,
dinosaur footprints,
ice-aged mammoths.

How do you get rid of it?

I'm learning not to trust the map.

Instead I take the turn
to Devil's Canyon, bypass
the old uranium mine.

A hawk circles
to get a good look
at the cow who has fallen,
dead since last spring
in the river, his head alive
with darkness
and wings.

I find Hell's Backbone Trail.

I find Swasey's Leap,
where Frank bet his brother
he could leap a chasm on horseback,
the river below,
and he did.

What do you want?

To get lost,
turn the map upside down,
be surprised
to find an alcove
with a granary and a few bits of corn,
black-and-white pottery shards,
run-off to an emerald pool
of caddis-fly larvae
who swim to my toes.

Three Haiku

Michael Lehman

Yellow columbine
abundant in this canyon
now too steep to climb

Blue mountains in all
directions all fit under
the brim of my hat

Rain sweeps the river
Pale sycamore branches whirl
Sunred cliffs burn green

Reversing History on the Upper Missouri

Paula MacKay

When a friend back East invited my husband, Robert, and me to paddle the Missouri River with a group of fellow adventurers, my initial reaction was to dismiss the idea. Robert and I had already begun planning a spring trip to Jasper National Park, where we'd hoped to watch grizzly bears wandering sublime alpine meadows. For me, grizzlies are the essence of wilderness, and I was craving the inspiration and solitude that only wilderness could bring. Besides, I knew nothing about the Missouri River, which sounded a little…tame.

"Where will the float begin?" I asked John on the phone, picturing a put-in next to a crowded ice cream stand in suburban St. Louis. This proposal seemed so out of character for John, who had trekked through most of the wildest landscapes in North America to raise awareness for conservation. Maybe he wanted a bit of Midwest hospitality after a long winter in the Adirondacks, or he'd scheduled a business meeting in Missouri and figured he'd do some birding while he was there.

"Near the headwaters in Montana," John answered, adding something about scouting the river as a potential movement corridor for cougars and other wildlife. *Montana? Does the Missouri River even run that far north?* Clearly, I needed to brush up on my geography. But my curiosity was piqued.

Turns out Thomas Jefferson was curious about the Missouri River, too. In 1801, the year he became the third U.S. president, his executive powers ended at the Mississippi, whose confluence with the Missouri was a gateway to who-knows-what. Jefferson's hunger to explore the *terra incognita* between the Mississippi and the Pacific would seal the fate of the American West, and of the indigenous peoples and wildlife who had lived there for millennia.

Two years later, on July 4, 1803—the same day he announced the Louisiana Purchase—Jefferson officially sanctioned Meriwether Lewis to lead the Corps of Discovery, which was ultimately known as the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

Lewis and Clark reached the Upper Missouri in May 1805, a year after departing Camp Dubois. Unlike most contemporary canoeists, the expedition's crew then rowed, poled, and pulled

their boats *against* the river's current, which typically ran at five miles per hour. Nearly four-dozen men traveled in two dugout canoes and a 55-foot keelboat loaded with tons of food, whiskey, guns, and other supplies. Amazingly, the crew progressed 10 miles or more each day, occasionally doubling this speed if strong winds worked in their favor.

The more I read about the expedition, the more I became intrigued by the Upper Missouri—and also intimidated. Robert and I had paddled plenty of lakes when we'd lived in Vermont, spent our month-long honeymoon exploring the wild waterways of eastern Ontario. But neither of us had ever paddled a major river, and we'd sold our canoe when we moved to Washington to study carnivores in the North Cascades. Plus, our husky-mix, Alder—sidekick on all of our backcountry trips—had been in a canoe only twice, and both times he'd howled at passing boaters like we were under siege. And wouldn't the headwaters of the Missouri be cold in May? As in, Rocky Mountain snowmelt?

Still, I thought, if Lewis and Clark could travel upstream in a monster rowboat overloaded with gear and liquor, how hard could it be to paddle downstream in a spiffy new Kevlar canoe?

"Okay, John. We're in!"

107 miles.

This is the distance between Coal Banks Landing and James Kipp Recreation Area, where we planned to conclude our journey after paddling the lower two sections of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument—called White Cliffs and Missouri Breaks (or Badlands). Flanked by sandstone cliffs and steep canyon walls, these are generally considered to be the more wild and scenic segments of the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River, which begins 42 miles upstream.

There were 10 of us total, plus Alder. We were an eclectic clan of conservationists, several of whom had rafted Utah's Green River together four years back. I was admittedly nervous about that trip, too, which had marked my first time running rapids. But then, like now, our group possessed a secret weapon whose presence helped assure me that I would be safe—a weapon for whom Lewis and Clark would have no doubt traded a year's supply of whiskey: Captain Crumbo.

Crumbo is no stranger to physical hardship, his background as a Navy SEAL rippling through his rock-solid body. Prior to two deployments in Vietnam with SEAL Team 1, our fearless friend trained near San Diego, where his "quality time in Camp Pendleton" included being dropped off in the scrubland for a week with "absolutely nothing." That was apparently a vacation compared to the Hell Week of basic underwater demolition, during which he and the other sleep-deprived members of his cohort were required to jump into the bone-chilling bay if they nodded off under the December night sky. Five days floating the Upper Missouri? Crumbo could, well, do that in his sleep.

Captain Crumbo was accompanied by three top-notch first mates—his brother Mark and old buddies Denny and Don, all of whom, like Crumbo, had *Colorado River guide* on their résumés. Meanwhile, Crumbo's friend Dave, a retired wolf biologist, had long since earned his stripes on the water, and our intrepid pal John had run many a Class 3-rapid in his inflatable pack raft. Add in ultra-fit Abbie and Karin the yoga teacher, and we had our shining crew.

When we rendezvoused at Coal Banks Landing after our respective road trips, some of us had to lay low while the others shuttled cars to Kipp. Weary from two days on the highway, I settled in for a long, sultry afternoon in the shade of a cottonwood, trying not to look too closely at the murky water zipping by just beyond the bank. The landing was named after the band of lignite coal passing through the surrounding hillsides—dry, rolling rangelands for as far as the eye could see, until they butted up against larger mountains to the south. Barn swallows flitted about in the soft breeze, which carried the courtship melodies of yellow warblers and other songbirds, along with the distant lowing of lonely cows. Crumbo and Denny lazily futzed with their boats, cold drinks in hand, while Karin practiced yoga amid a small clump of trees. Even Alder relaxed into the layover, snapping groggily at flies and occasionally dunking in the river to wet his thick husky fur.

At lunchtime, I sauntered up to the ranger on duty, a quiet man in his twenties who was taking a break from weed-whacking prickly plants on the periphery of the visitor's center. "Do you think this river is really okay for beginners?" I asked, hoping for one last dose of reassurance. "You'll be fine as long as you respect

the current," he replied, adding that the water was flowing fast due to excessive spring run-off. Uh-oh, now he'd opened a Pandora's Box! After barraging him with more questions, I prodded him to recount the details of last year's sole rescue, involving a paddler and his dog who had run into a sweeper when they ventured downstream after dark. His boat pinned against a log, the canoeist had somehow managed to swim beneath the broken tree and climb safely to shore. He and the dog were cold but uninjured when the rangers picked them up the following day.

Check. No paddling at night.

As the afternoon came to a close, I approached a middle-aged couple hoisting their motorboat onto a trailer. "How was it?" I asked the gregarious woman, who wore a bulky walking cast over her otherwise bare foot. "Beautiful," she answered, also affirming that this section of the Missouri was free of whitewater. Her enthusiastic expression changed, however, when I pointed to our paper-thin Wenonah resting in the grass. "Oh, I would *never* do this in one of *those*," she said, shaking her head emphatically. "But that's just me."

The woman's husband yanked on the trailer one last time before turning to join the conversation, his sunburned face looking disconcertingly serious. "Be careful out there," he warned. "Have you heard about tomorrow's forecast? We're supposed to get 60-mile-an-hour winds."

Is there anything more disorienting than a roaring wind? A once-peaceful place is instantly awash in chaos, the governing gale an all-out assault on your very constitution. Eyes battered by grit, mind fried in turmoil, your swarming thoughts circle around one primal, persistent message: *Get. Me. Out of here!* And so.

I didn't last very long in the canoe that first full day on the river—maybe an hour, tops. Our 42-pound boat, such a pleasure to load onto the roof rack or paddle through smooth water, bounced around like a beach ball in the relentless headwind. Robert rapid-fired instructions across the bow—paddle left! draw right!—but from where I sat, we were totally at the mercy of the Upper Missouri, which seemed downright unmerciful under these conditions. Alder shared my sense of impending doom, punctuating each of Robert's directives with a piercing, resoundingly appropriate, *Ruff!*

The other members of our crew were strung out behind us, struggling to keep their own boats on track as they fought the waves and the wind. Robert and I were flying by comparison, which meant we had to slow ourselves up every few minutes in order to stay with the group. These were the moments that really put me over the edge, as in order to stop moving forward, we had to rotate the canoe perpendicular to the river and try to hold steady, gunnels dipping precariously close to the surface as we rocked from side to side. I felt like a crayfish about to be thrown into the pot.

How could this be the same river we paddled yesterday? I wondered, my confidence waning with each foaming whitecap. We'd launched from Coal Banks Landing late in the afternoon, brilliant sunshine overhead and a gentle breeze at our back. The swift current spooked me at first, but I had begun to find my rhythm by the time we arrived at our campsite five miles downriver. There, we'd received a small-town welcome from a Texan flint hunter I'd met at the landing, who'd coincidentally set up his camp at the same site we'd chosen. To the gentleman's chagrin, his "lady-friend" Lab pooped in our pathway while we were unloading our gear—an unfortunate faux pas for which he tried to make amends by lighting us a fire. His efforts were futile, and the pair quietly retreated to their tent while we prepared dinner.

Today was a different story, and one I knew wouldn't end well. "We need to pull over!" I hollered to Robert, daring to turn my head around briefly to make sure I was heard. Robert looked as battle-worn as I felt, his job at the stern made even more difficult by having to bark firm commands at Alder—who enjoyed nibbles of salmon jerky to keep him centered in the boat.

This section of the river couldn't have been more than a football field across, but it felt more like an angry sea. When we eventually got close enough to the bank to sense its salvation, we pulled a 180-degree turn and paddled upstream into the shallows. Alder, apparently satiated on salmon, ejected himself into the froth before we'd touched ground. Once he stood on solid mud, he pivoted toward me with a wild canid countenance that spoke louder than words: *There is no way in Hell I'm getting back in that boat.* I couldn't have agreed more.

"How you doing?" Captain Crumbo asked me rhetorically when I slunk up to his side, his tone of half-laughter helping to ease my embarrassment. I hated being the one to cry uncle, forcing everyone else to come off the river. Alder greeted Crumbo like a long-lost friend, then ran to meet our companions as they emerged from their boats. Watching them haul themselves ashore against the backdrop of blowing grass and raging water, I could almost imagine a scene from the Lewis and Clark Expedition two centuries past. If I *had* been a member of that historical crew, I probably would have received 50 lashes for my lack of courage. Instead, Crumbo gave my shoulder a quick squeeze and immediately kicked into problem-solving mode.

The next 30 minutes were a lesson in spirited cooperation. Since staying put wasn't an option given our timeline, we had to reorganize the cast so the show could go on. And quite a show it was:

John took over my role in the canoe, serving as Robert's power-paddler seated in the bow. They tackled those waves like there was no tomorrow, transforming my terror into two boys having fun.

John's river kayak, temporarily out of commission, was stored as oversized luggage on Don's mega-raft. The kayak was positioned crosswise on the back of the raft, which appeared to have been t-boned from the heavens above.

And me? I was the humbled guest of honor on Denny's dory—a luxurious red rowboat that had taken him and Abbie down the Green River during our prior trip together in Utah. Alder and I sprawled out like royalty on the dory's padded seats, basking in the generosity of a river gone wild. Would I have noticed that bale of snapping turtles resting on the rocks if I'd been floundering about in my canoe? Maybe. But I think I'll consider them a gift from the wind.

We covered 15 miles on that Windy Day, dragging ourselves into Hole in the Wall camp just in time for a late meal. You couldn't miss the site's dramatic feature from the river—a rough-hewn arch created by a cavity in the sandstone wall. Robert and I set up our tent in the grassland next to the water, our campsite separated from the others by a wire cattle fence. We wanted to give ourselves space in case Alder woke up woofing in the night. In hindsight, he was too exhausted to make a peep.

Needless to say, none of us was in the mood to sing campfire songs. Nor did anyone volunteer when the people camped beside us asked if we could take on an unhappy passenger from their party; the man had become anxious after seeing members of his group capsize in the river. I secretly empathized with the wannabe deserter, who could've easily been me if I hadn't been in such capable company. We encountered the group again a couple of days later, their canoes lashed together into one giant, grinning flotilla.

Rain, rain, and more rain. The wind didn't subside much that night, either, causing Robert and me to have a restless sleep. Lying in the dark, we recalled an experience we'd shared in Alaska many years before. We were camped above the Denali River when a storm ripped through the region and broke our tent poles in half, the nylon fabric collapsing like a parachute around us. We wrapped ourselves in the tattered remains and sat there shivering until dawn, all the while keeping a watchful eye out for the grizzlies we'd seen hunting ground squirrels just before sunset. Windy nights in the backcountry have never been the same since.

I was nonetheless determined to resume paddling with Robert when I awoke the next morning, the thought of sitting out another day an affront to my ego. I'd also come to realize that watching the water from the comfort of the dory's deck was far less satisfying than *engaging* with it in the canoe, my hard-won strokes yielding a physical intimacy with the river itself. Even Alder seemed to prefer the Wenonah, flopping down on the floor and resting his head on the thwart within moments of hopping aboard.

The weather improved with each passing hour, and I was finally able to look around and appreciate the scenery. During the previous day's storm, we'd passed through the White Cliffs—massive, 300-foot bluffs chiseled by water and time. In his journal, Lewis compared the otherworldly spires and cathedral-like walls to "elegant ranges of lofty freestone buildings." The towering galleries of rock impressed me, too, but I was being sufficiently buffeted by wind and worry that I couldn't internalize my awe.

Now, the sandstone hills permeated my psyche. With my brain no longer consumed by fight-or-flight, I found myself daydreaming about the bison, wolves, and grizzlies who once roamed this vast ocean of plains—animals who were the lifeblood of the Upper Missouri until European settlers came along. Lewis and Clark famously documented the expedition's offensive against

every grizzly bear they encountered, with Lewis himself expressing his dislike for "the gentlemen" that were "so hard to die." As America expanded, grizzlies weren't so hard to die after all.

The rest of the story is on river time, a slow meander of wildlife sightings and sensations of place.

Bald eagles, harriers, sandpipers, white pelicans—six of whom took flight in a v-shaped formation directly overhead.

The fragrance of sagebrush and desert flowers, the adamant *dee dee dee* of a killdeer protecting her nest.

The smack of a beaver's tail against the water, warning all who would listen that something was amiss. In the beaver's wake, a cloud-gray coyote stepped out from the brush, the sun's rays illuminating her dog-like head.

Three-dozen bighorns on a precipitous slope. Someone in our group called out in excitement, prompting the creatures to arc across the cliff face like a school of baitfish. Lewis and Clark first documented bighorns—to them, a new species—on May 25, 1805. Our sighting came 212 years later to the day.

By the end of most of my wild adventures, I'm usually ready to return home; there's nothing like a hot shower after roughing it for a while. So I was surprised by my own disappointment when I first saw the bridge at Kipp's landing, the portal to so-called civilized life. My anxiety about the river was so far away, my assumption about tameness turned on its head. Soon, Robert and I would be saying goodbye to our friends and speeding along paved roads with the windows closed—impervious to the elements as we traversed an arid Western landscape forever changed by those who came after the Corps of Discovery.

But *would* this landscape be changed forever? Once again, nature's tenacity gives me hope. The bighorns, the eagles, the wolves—they were gone because of us, and now they are slowly making their way back. John speculates that the Upper Missouri had already served as a corridor for cougars moving east from the Rockies, and that the small population that has reestablished itself in South Dakota's Black Hills and North Dakota's Badlands may well have traveled there in part along the river.

And there is this from the June 8, 2017, edition of Montana's *Great Falls Tribune*, one week after we returned to Washington:

On June 1, a plucky pair of young grizzlies turned up at the mouth of Box Elder Creek, where it enters the south side of the

Missouri River, between Ryan and Morony dams. That's 12 miles northeast of Great Falls, a city of 60,000 residents—and the same vicinity where Pvt. Hugh McNeal, a member of the Lewis and Clark expedition, ran into a grizzly bear in July 1806, when the expedition passed through the area on its homeward journey.

Plucky grizzlies, indeed. With a little luck and human tolerance, these two courageous wanderers will be joined by more of their kind, and grizzlies will someday resume their rightful place on the banks of the Upper Missouri. A wild river redeemed.

TREASURE
h.e.b.

What She Takes from the River

Ronda Piszk Broatch

I fry onions, add asparagus, a few
green tips mingling with a touch of pink
flesh left from last night's dinner. Chinook

spawn downstream, a female and two males—
the same three this past week.
Because this is new to me I retreat

to the river daily, watch the males muscling,
sinuous, next moment
motionless and aligned with the current.

The female fans a redd. Tentative
I shift, watch her drift out,
dart back to nose in under a branch

above the antler I discovered
yesterday, when we spooked each other,
my dark form looming predatory,

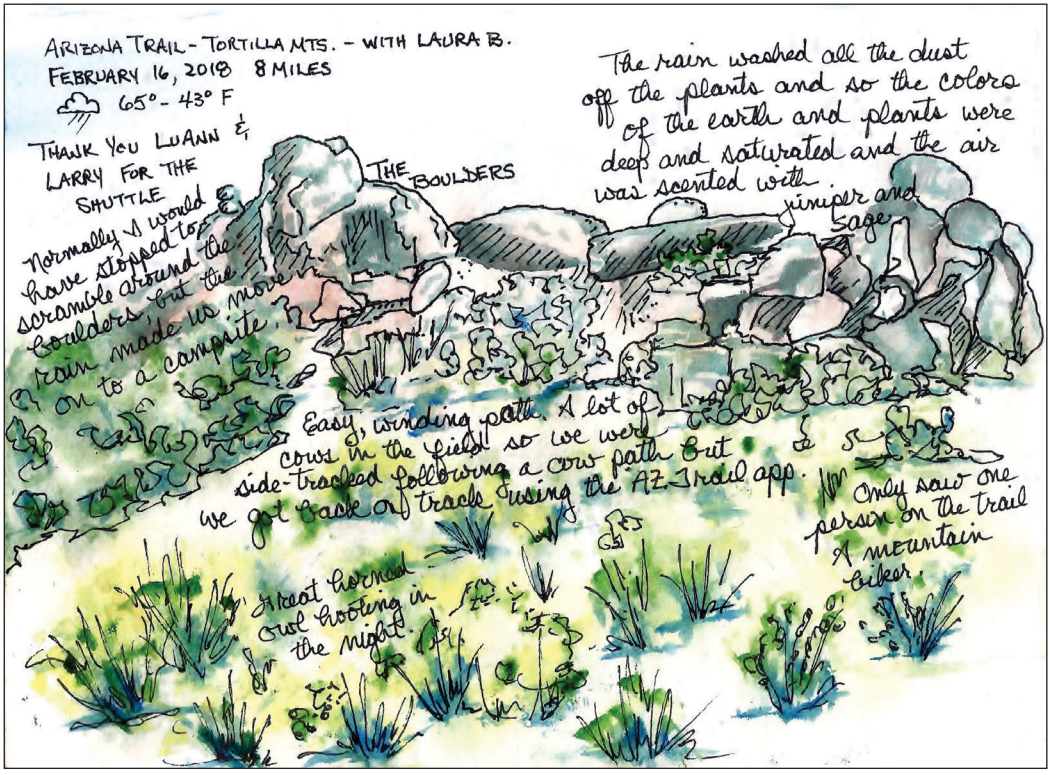
her body arrowing over black rock
into deeper water. Now exposed,
I fish for the horn with a twig,

claim it for my own until broken tips
and blood-tinged grooves
come into view. Shimmy it upright,

let it rest. That night I awaken,
the moon a new-cut onion, and myself,
open and raw.

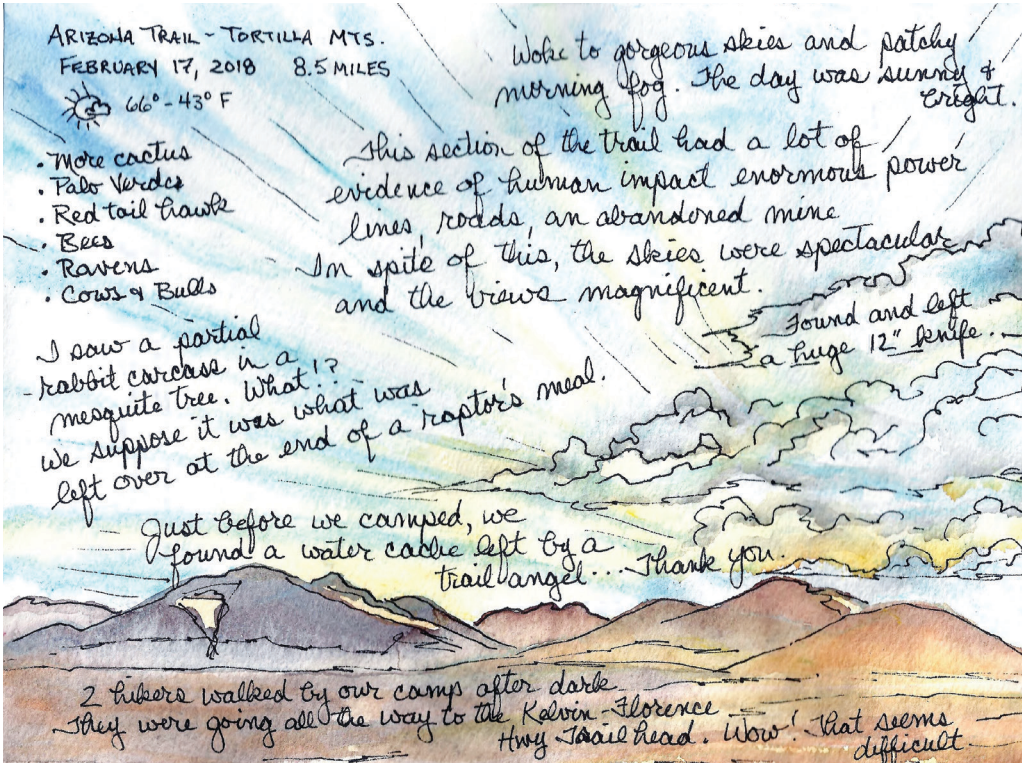
Excerpt from *Katlas:* Arizona Trail February 16-19, 2018

Kat Manton-Jones



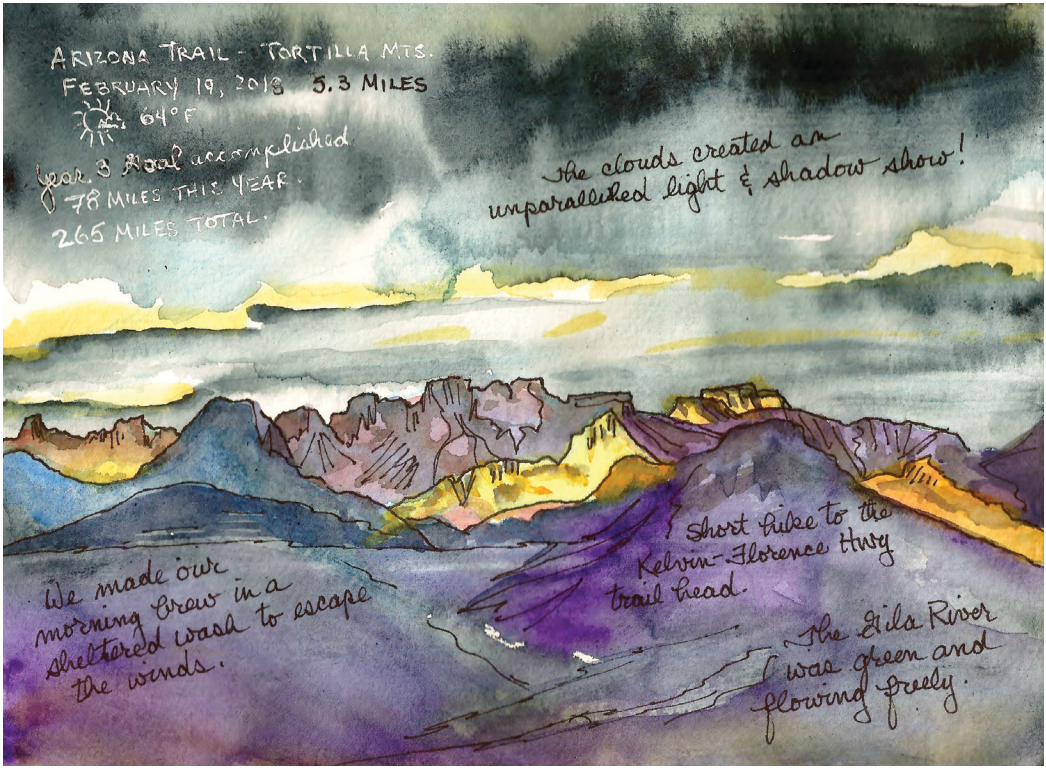
Artist Notes:

"Katlas is a series of illustrated bound journals and postcards that combine elements of an atlas, map, journal, sketchbook, and field guide. The sketches and notes range from factual to whimsical."



"Sketching on the trail contributes to my artistic development because I have time to acquaint myself with magnificent and meaningful places on grand and intimate scales. It contributes to my naturalist development because I savor the trail instead of aiming for a destination point."

"I quietly reflect on the intricate mysteries of the natural world as I explore, sketch, create postcards, record experiences in the *Katlas*, and paint plein air. The process of creating an illustrated journal page encourages me to be a citizen scientist through observation, inquiry, and art."



"My goal is to walk the 800-mile length of Arizona in contiguous sections in order to understand the topography and biomes of the fascinating place I call my backyard. I began trekking from Mexico in 2014 and if all goes well, I hope to cross the Utah state line by 2021."

Kat Manton-Jones

In Elk Country

Matt Daly

We made our way to the crossroads
where trails disappeared by a signpost etched
with place names and mileages. A rotten bridge

collapsed into a fordable stream. A few antlers
and bones, carried there by other travelers
who left no footprints, bleached among the forbs.

The skull of a bull elk balanced on its molars,
the weight of the beam unrelinquished
from the pedicle before months of freeze

released only his forgetting. We stood
before the loss and flowers, all the ingredients
of seasons played out on our bones.

We waited in that open topography skinned
with ochre grass, punctuated by bear scat
full of late-fading berries. Just you and I

not yet returned to our inner architectures
or those structures that sprout from us glorious
and tined. No storms rising from the autumn clouds.

Curve of the Klamath

Michael Garrigan

A meteor struck through our campfire
up in the Siskiyou in late October the night before a blizzard.
We swore it set the woods below us on fire
and when we hiked out to the saddle
        that low point between Upper and Lower Devil Peaks
        to watch the valley flame
all we saw were the lambent whispers of distant
cabins and blinking headlights winding
downstream on the curves of the Klamath
and we could feel Shasta looming in the distant dark,
blind to us until the morning. A totem. A specter.

        That meteor split me.

There are singular moments in our lives that uproot us
        that pull us by our stalks and shake us
                just enough to let settle new dirt,
                a new mycelium membrane maybe
that connects us to a new system of knowledge, senses, perception
        a new tint to our melanin, a new way
                to end a sentence

Ascension

Sheila Thorne

The whole world was white: white peaks against a whitened sky, bulging white cornices, long open ramps of white snowfields. Such a desolation of whiteness, Marva thought. Here and there trees or rock outcrops signaled like marks of ink on white paper. The skis' whisper in the snow made the only sound. Following Tom along the shoulder of the mountain, her legs pumping, machine-like, over untracked white ridges, her qualms racked up like clouds.

"Are you sure about this Tom? Don't take me over my head. Please!" she called out.

"You'll be fine. Don't panic," Tom yelled back.

She'd started skiing only a few years ago in order to spend more time with him.

The day before they'd skied into the lodge at Tioga Pass on an unplowed road, carrying clothes and personal supplies in backpacks. It was their anniversary. She'd had in mind a Mexican beach, lying in the sun and reading books. But Tom had frowned. "My job is so stressful, I can't just let go. I need vigorous activity," he'd said.

After he'd won, he was placatory. "Are you certain?"

"No, I don't mind," she assured him.

Fifteen other guests were staying at the lodge. In the evening, in the large log parlor warmed by wood-burning stoves and crammed with sofas, green-glass lamps, animal skins, and Gold Rush memorabilia, the voices—mostly men's—spoke of going high: pilgrimages to find the powder, the narrowest and steepest couloirs, the longest vertical.

"You know what happened to me last year on a couloir on Mt. San Antonio? Down south, called The Dare. I thought it looked kind of icy, but damn! I'd waited two years and climbed all morning for that run. So I sideslipped out to the edge and leaned into it before I could talk myself out of it. Next thing my feet were out from under me and I was on my pants accelerating towards a rock wall. Managed to swing myself around and come to a rest on a patch of windpack just in time. Phew! I was really lucky."

"Yeah, you were lucky all right. The mountains don't care how long you wait for something."

Slouched in their seats, they talked from the back of their throats through billowy mouths. They talked of equipment—skis, camber, bindings, crampons, ice axes—as of the consecrated instruments of a religion.

It's as if they're living in another world, Marva thought. As if the real world doesn't exist for them.

The real world, with its banalities and ugly problems, was her business: she was an instructor of Ethics at City College. And Tom's business: he was a doctor at San Francisco General. But these people didn't care who they were or what they did outside of what exploits they'd had.

A man said, "Well, I had a little surprise today. I was skiing the Ellery Bowl on Dana, had a great run, but when I got to the bottom and looked up, I saw I'd cut loose a small avalanche from the cornice I shot over."

To her annoyance, Tom was seduced by it, he couldn't get enough. He leaned forward eagerly, asked questions, told about climbing Mt. Shasta, ignoring her hints that it was time to go to bed.

Sometimes when he stayed late at the hospital she wondered if he was having affairs with the nurses.

"Where are the wives?" she said when they finally made it to the privacy of their room. "They're all way old enough to be married and have kids too. But where are they? Just two other women besides me, and they were both unattached."

Tom shrugged. "Maybe they're all divorced."

She noted how casual he seemed about it. "Yeah. One can see why."

"Oh come on, Marva. Give them a chance. They're interesting. They've had a lot of close calls, they deserve to boast a little."

"And you?"

He reddened.

She relented and touched his cheek. "I'm glad we ski together, at least. I'm glad you've taught me how."

He smiled and squeezed her hand.

In the morning, at breakfast at the long, family-style dining table, she asked if anyone had heard the latest news of the war. Most of the people at the table simply continued eating; one man, with greying hair and crinkled blue eyes, said, "I come up here to get away from all that."

"We're lucky we can. A lot of people can't."

Immediately she flushed and regretted the words, dregs of last night's resentment.

Over coffee the chatter shifted to avalanche conditions and weather. Someone said, "Chance of snow showers." Someone else laughed and said, "As always." People were helpful in advising them where to ski, and they'd taken one of the suggested routes.

Now, after a short, steep climb through whitebark pines and up a bare slope, they came to a long, flat, depression of snow, Saddlebag Lake. They traveled along its edge towards the jagged wall of Shepherd Crest. From the west shoreline rose the talus slopes of Mt. Conness; its peak, twelve and a half thousand feet anchored in the sky, provided a navigational fix for miles in its radius. Here they paused to climb the lower slopes and practice telemarks. Tom followed behind and corrected her. "Stay over your skis! Lean into the fall line now!" She strained to perform well, wanting to dazzle him, wanting him to admire her.

"Oh, good try," he shouted as she lurched and then toppled to the side. The exertion of pulling herself up after falling, under the weight of the backpack loaded with food, water, and extra clothes, soon tired her. They headed to a small hut at the end of the lake to rest and eat their lunch.

The hut was boarded up tight, but snow had melted around its base, forming a cave-like shelter they could climb down into. The wall of the hut provided a backrest to lean against. They cuddled up close and took sandwiches and trail mix out of their packs.

From the trees in back of the hut a crow cawed, then silently and blackly floated across the air in front of them. On the south horizon the pinnacle of Mt. Dana rose above streamy clouds.

"Now this is the life, isn't it?" said Tom.

"Mmmm hmmm," nodded Marva, chewing. "Yes. It's spectacular."

Next to Tom's warmth, food in her stomach, she felt contented. Prompted by the vastness and silence all around, she felt, suddenly, a gush of intimacy between them. All traces of bitterness disappeared. In all this expanse, only he could hear whatever she said to him, and this made her want to tell him a secret, something that mattered, that she had told no one else. That no one else would have told him. But she couldn't think what to tell.

"Pity the poor folks who never get to see places like this except in calendar pictures," he said. "Hey, look at that! Tracks on the Conness Glacier—someone has actually skied that high. Wow! These people around here are *serious*."

The closeness between them emptied away into the whiteness. "Serious about some things. Does it make you envious?"

"A little. Think of what the view must be up there. And think of the thrill coming down."

She grimaced. "There's thrills and then there's thrills."

"Aw come on. You're getting good, someday that'll be us up there."

"You're assuming I'd want that. The people up here make it all seem very alluring, but..."

"But what?"

She shrugged. "There's other things in life besides adventure."

Tom put his arm around her and squeezed her. "I promise not to hang out in the parlor tonight, okay?"

"Okay."

"We'd better get going. I want to explore the Twenty Lakes Basin a little."

She sighed and looked at the sky. In the course of their lunch the white cloud cover had turned grey, and was lowering. "The weather doesn't look so good."

"We've come this far, and it'll be much quicker going back, because we'll take the roadbed instead of the high route and it'll be all downhill."

Clicking into their skis, they continued north, making fresh tracks over morainal hummocks towards the south wall of Shepherd Crest. The snow had mounded in soft drifts and the going was slow. The crest of Mt. Conness fell behind; North Peak now rose to their west, with a banner of wind-driven snow whirling from its top. Soon, small flakes of snow began to whiffle through the air, looking like drifting apple blossoms.

They were on top of a ridge that angled to a flat field of snow, which was another lake, and a stand of pines.

"Here's a perfect slope for you to practice telemarking. Let's just ski down to that lake and then we'll turn around," said Tom.

This time he went first, making seven perfect linked turns. Then Marva pointed her skis slantwise over the drop, so that the tips hung in the air. Tom was looking up at her. Her heart made a

little skip. She pushed off before she could think too much, and felt herself furrowing through the ankle deep powder with increasing speed. She dropped her knee, slid her uphill ski forward, leaned into the fall, and floated around in a smooth arc, just the way she was supposed to. She felt her body uncoiling, releasing, springing. Turning the same way in the other direction, she vaulted back and forth on her legs in rhythmic swoops, the lightness and swiftness of her plunging body like a knife cutting to the quick, her face rushing against the air.

"Oooh, that was fun!" she cried at the bottom.

"You looked good," said Tom, and Marva felt exultant.

The snow began to fall more heavily, big wet crystals that clung to their clothes, noses, goggles. Marva wanted to pee before turning back and headed into the pines. The overarching boughs sifted out much of the snowfall and formed a still, somber chamber. Emerging again, she found that her tracks to the edge of the woods had already filled in and only a faint trace remained.

"Hurry," said Tom. "This seems to be more than a shower."

Darkness came at five-thirty, and it was going on three. North Peak, on their right now, barely showed behind the veil of snow that no longer wafted but fell straight down. The tracks they had just carved down the hill were still visible, but at the top they disappeared. Tom stopped and took his pack off to get out a topo map and compass in order to orient them in the right direction across the white hillocks, which all looked the same. He fumbled around, dropped his gloves in the snow and cursed, finally succeeded in squatting and laying the map on his pack, placed the compass on top of it, squinted through the snow and brushed off the flakes which kept heaping on it. It was growing colder, the crystals smaller and drier and falling more and more rapidly in thick white curtains. Marva slid her skis back and forth in position to keep warm. North Peak disappeared; Mt. Conness was invisible. The world shrank to a fifty foot radius with just the two of them in it.

"This way," Tom finally said, stuffing map and compass into his parka pocket for easier access and hoisting the pack on his back.

It had been such an easy, short distance into the basin and now it seemed to take forever to get out, traversing up and down over what appeared to be endless hills and gullies. Marva tucked

her head down to keep the snow from blowing into her face and plowed resolutely through the powder, following Tom's tracks a few feet behind. Arms swinging, legs scissoring. Breathing in and out, her lungs burning. Gradually she fell into a rhythm that was almost pleasant. For a while, to pass the time she thought about upcoming lectures, and then she stopped thinking about much of anything. She felt like she was moving through a cold white cloud. Distance dissolved into the blur. In the indistinct, uniform light, time also seemed to have vanished; they were held in a timeless world without history, without a future, only the now. She knew that their well-being depended on making it back to the lodge in time, before it got dark, yet the moment enveloped her like a cocoon.

Tom stopped again to take bearings from the map and compass. Marva breathed in snowflakes whenever she looked up from her feet.

"Well, we should have come to Saddlebag by now," he said, his voice sounding thin and worried.

"You mean we're lost?" she said calmly.

"Not exactly. I know generally where we are and what direction to head in. But we're obviously not going the most direct way because it's taking too much time."

She nodded and didn't say anything.

He misunderstood and said, "Listen, this is no time to blame. We've still got time, but if by any chance we don't make it by dark I can always build a snow cave, and we have food and water and each other. We'll be all right."

"I trust you," she said. On this she did trust him. One of the things she appreciated about him was that he had to make life and death decisions all the time.

He headed them off on a line slightly more southeasterly.

Had she ever been in a tight spot, she wondered, a situation that risked her physical well-being? She tried to think of one and couldn't. Of course one's taking risks every time one steps out the door, but that doesn't count, because one's not conscious of it. Now, being conscious of it, the idea was strangely thrilling.

Tom stopped again. "Take a drink," he said. "It's important to stay well hydrated."

She obeyed, taking her water bottle from the pouch attached to her hip belt and swallowing three long sips even though she

hadn't felt thirsty. The sweet taste of scoured rocks and green grass rushed into her mouth.

Again they plunged into the ocean of whiteness, one leg kicking forward, gliding, the other leg kicking forward, gliding. Tom was reduced to a dark silhouette in front of her. It was hard to tell whether they were going uphill or downhill except for the sudden pull of gravity on their bodies, or the sudden requirement of exertion. The snow fell in sheets that whipped and swirled in gusts of wind.

In one sense the world had shrunk, but in another sense it was a new kind of distance, without horizon. Vaster than any land mass, or the sky with its notations of stars and planets, for there were no markers here, no shapes, only nothingness. She could be swallowed up in it if she didn't assert herself in all this white space, like one of the tall pines or large rocks. She knew she must push herself to move across its vastness. With her breath trapped in all her clothing, she was conscious of herself as a small entity. She listened to the swish of her skis over the powder.

At some point she realized that they had been moving in a circle. Because if they had gone too far west they would have hit the talus slopes of North Peak or Mt. Conness, and to the east they would have come up against Tioga Crest, and too far north, Shepherd Crest. Saddlebag to the south. Yet they hit nothing steep, just the same undulating morainal hummocks over and over, so they must be circling in the same place. Her mind filled with the certainty of it. She concentrated with an intensity, a heightened consciousness unavailable to her at other times. Her mind was sharp, clear, coldly reasoning.

She had been letting Tom do all the work of breaking trail and now he was so tired he was losing the ability to navigate. Why hadn't she realized?

She called to him, but her voice was lost in the misty air and the muffling snow. She had to spurt ahead to get closer, and felt a tingle of irritation towards him.

"Let me go first for a while. You need a rest." She decided not to mention her suspicions.

"Okay, I could use a little rest," he acknowledged gratefully.

He took out his compass again and pointed with his pole at the line she should make. She moved ahead into the fresh snow. Her skis sinking slightly beneath her, she had to put more exertion

now into each forward leg thrust, as if she were climbing; the glide was gone, but again she fell into a rhythm, her muscles warm and pulsing. She looked intently ahead into the flat, grainy foreground, instead of at her feet, to try to hold the line Tom had pointed out. Snowflakes stung her face alive.

She tried to make out some vague form to go by, tried to feel through the snow, through her skis and the soles of her boots, the shape of the land. To picture where the topographic contours must lie. She reasoned that in any event they must keep moving, and drink water now and then and eat trail mix, and when it was dark they would make the snow cave and would be okay. She felt completely calm. Not only calm, but vital, responsive in every cell of her being. She felt as if she had been sleeping all her life, and now was finally awake.

All her reasoning and energy were gathered to counteract the flatness, the inertia of life. Surely they were climbing steadily now, the pull on her body told her. Her body a fine instrument, complete. She felt her heart valves opening and closing, opening and closing, the chambers filling and emptying. The blood surging through her in a strong current, and the breath of oxygen sourcing along its pathways. Her body thinking, sensing the shape of the crystals and changes of temperature, feeling the thinness of the column of air above, and the gravity of earth, like one of those tentacled creatures of the ocean. Mind and body transformed into heat and light; her limbs strong, striving upwards. In the pit of her, below her navel, a feeling of fullness. A force she felt deep inside, connected to the strings of the universe. A wholeness that couldn't be touched, a secret that couldn't be told.

Tom called to her, but she was too far ahead to hear.

Early Morning Snow

Ronda Piszk Broatch

It is early morning and death languishes beneath
a blanket of snow. Dawn rubs up against the dark
purse we sleep within. I find my way through layers

of silence. When you rise you'll find me holding on
to silence. We may know many of the same stories
but in the silence my character follows another path.

Whatever skin we wear was handed down from
the ancestors. All trees in a heavy snow are equal.
Because I am light no one notices, even after the thaw.

Why must we be so hungry, our feet so cold coming in?
When the fat hangs from the branch the great bear of God
sits on her haunches, licking seeds free from the lard.

The lithographer moves from grit to grit, sanding stone,
grinding away stain and shadow. The absence of all
color is embraced by the absorption of what it rejects.

Woman, your eyes have become the camera.
When you lose the heavy box blocking your eyes
the bear will bless the ground with her vast black feet.

Perfect Cirque

Elizabeth Dodd

Granite ridgelines ring
the near horizon,

confining sight to this,
the present confluence

of stone and slope.
Smoke from a distant fire

morphs into white cloud,
moves past, and bruises

the sky's effulgent blue.
The tarn glints and shivers

into ripples licked by wind.
Last week I read that shale

sludged from anaerobic
life in the pre-Cambrian

seas helped grease Earth's first
tectonic glide. Before that:

crustal stasis, maybe.
Today I'm cupped by uplift.

The food I dried back home
reconstitutes in water

for this evening's stew.
Sun on my thighs, sun

in my face, I try to visualize
metabolism's steady pace.

I drink cold gulps of lake.
I'm changing, too.

Ka Mahina O Hoku Ma Haleakalā

Eric Paul Shaffer

It's a landscape barely terrestrial—sere, barren, stark.
A full moon blazes white through darkness rising
from my feet. This landscape lives by its own light,

a light of dust that silvers where it settles. In silence,
we descend. It's a landscape that barely allows
our passage. We're not alone. ʻUaʻu call from the cliff,

voices of shadow the moonlight rips from raw rock.
It's a landscape that lives in light of stars piercing
shadows after centuries of marking the darkness.

Beyond the moon, far suns glitter like ice in oil.
Descending to the crater, my companion disappears,
though I hear his tread echo above or below me.

The crater floor glows, now reflecting light reflected
from the sun, a light reflected in my skin darkened
by sun and moon, silver in the night, this skin spun

from a dust of stars. I say nothing. This landscape
swallows words. On the trail, thoughts loom large
as the moon. It's a landscape that gladdens me:

When I'm gone, the moon will light the volcano,
the ice will come, the world will not change at all,
but for those little changes we mistake for time.

Ka Mahina O Hoku Ma Haleakalā may be translated as "Moonlight of the Full Moon in the House of the Sun."

ʻUaʻu: Otherwise known as the Hawaiian Petrel, the ʻUaʻu is named for its call: /ooh-AH-ooh/. As an endangered species endemic to the Hawaiian islands, ʻUaʻu are now found mainly at night in Haleakalā crater during the breeding season, where their calls are often the only sound other than the wind.

Until They Are Not

Owen Eigenbrot

Awake. *Where am I?* I've been asking myself this question a lot over the last few months. I know where I'm going and I know where I'm coming from, but for a few bleary seconds each morning, all I can do is draw a blank. Especially when the only thing to look at is the underside of my tarp. *Somewhere. Somewhere in the middle.* And it doesn't really matter anyway. The routine is the same regardless of where 'somewhere' is. I pack up and hike. All day, every day. That's what I did yesterday, and the day before that. It's what I'll do tomorrow and the day after. I'll keep doing it until the end, but I don't like to think about the end. Still too fragile. Still too many question marks. Even after hiking 2,500 miles on the Pacific Crest Trail, I'm not sure about the final 150.

I tilt my head back to look between my umbrella and tarp. Still gray, still raining. Well, maybe you can call it rain. Drizzle, or heavy mist might be more appropriate. Most people would call it a cloud. Whatever it is, some form of precipitation has been dropping from the sky for long enough that my entire world is soaked. It rains just as much under the trees as it does next to them. Fat drops that smack loudly on my umbrella. I close my eyes and take a deep breath, savoring the damp warmth of my sleeping bag for one last moment. I push the worries from my mind, telling myself that I just need to hike. *Get up and hike.* So I get up. I button up my wet shirt, drag on clammy rain pants, and stretch dank socks over pruny feet. Everything else gets stuffed into my backpack, tarp last, cold water trickling over my hands as I give it my best burrito wrap.

My fingers are numb before I start walking. I need to get my blood flowing so I take off at a quick trot into the mist, trailside shrubbery dumping collected ice water into my shoes at the slightest provocation. Now my toes are numb too. I tear the package on my Pop Tarts using my teeth and walk with my trekking poles under one arm while inhaling pummeled pastry dust. Some months ago, I settled on this morning ritual. I couldn't stand sitting around as the sun sprang from the horizon, eating granola while precious minutes ticked away. Most other hikers I meet are tired of Pop Tarts at this point, but I'm still in love.

Especially with the quadruplesugartastic fudge flavor. Chocolate for breakfast, every kid's dream. I'm living it.

The day starts with a long descent into one of the many gorges fanning out from Glacier Peak. The walking is easy, but I'm not looking for easy right now. I need to warm up. After plunging into the dense trees, at least the wind isn't whipping away my warmth anymore, and now I can use my umbrella to block the tree-filtered rain. *SMACK*. Fat drops. The *swish swish* from my rain pants accompanies the smacking as I follow wide switchbacks down, down, down to the river below. Feeling returns to my extremities, but with it comes the chafe. Rain pants were designed for one purpose: to make my life worse. I know this. Hiking out of Stevens Pass three days ago, I felt invincible in my rain pants. Wet on the outside, dry on the inside. But then an hour stretched into a day. Day 1 stretched into Day 2 and Day 3 of constant rain. Constant rain a couple degrees above freezing. Hypothermia rain. I have been on a treadmill in a walk-in freezer while being sprayed with a hose for three days now. Now, I don't feel invincible. My legs are chafed raw where my inner thighs meet the coarse seams, but I need to keep my pants on. They are keeping me alive, and I hate them.

I cross a big river at the bottom of the gorge on a wooden bridge. A big river in a bigger wash of churned gravel and stone. The water is angry, reflecting my frustration. The sky hangs low with woolly cloud cover truncating the shadowy emerald walls rising from the plain. Before, I would have looked up and considered where this furious milky water is coming from, hoping for a break in the clouds, maybe catching a glimpse of a glacier. This is the Glacier Peak Wilderness after all. But I don't look up now. I've lost interest in things like glaciers, and views, and Glacier Peak. I focus on states of being like 'dry' and 'warm.'

Both become cruel abstractions when I begin the next climb. The trail is overgrown with ferns. Sometimes the trail *is* ferns. Giant, thriving ferns. Terrible, soaking ferns. I do my best to stay dry through this carwash, but there is no chance. There are too many ferns. There has been too much rain. No rain gear can keep a person dry in these conditions. I start sweating from my exertions and take off my rain jacket, choosing to be soaked by fern water instead of my own sweat. This is a mistake. I have come out of the ocean less wet than I get swimming up the trail. My shirt is

soaked, more wet than should be possible. I am amazed by how much water this garment can hold. Ice water constantly refreshed by new ice water from each new fern. I give up, give in to the wet. I hike harder, faster to stay warmer.

I am back in the cloud at the top of the climb. Breaking through the trees I expect to see more, but see less. The cloud is dense and blowing quickly across a bare slope up to a ridge that I can't yet see. I feel fortunate to have the trail at my feet, for otherwise I would surely become lost in the murk. Ice water shirt, cloud, exposed slope, driving wind. *This is a good way to get myself killed*. I slap on my rain jacket again and start running. The trail is my salvation and though I follow it up, further from the protection of the trees, I know that it will come back down. I know this because the map has told me so. The map has gotten me this far and I trust it. Only once in 127 days have I been lost, exactly 100 days ago, wandering through Tahquitz Rocks in Southern California. The day was hot, beautiful, and taken for granted. Hordes of day hikers with their small dogs scrambled over a spiderweb of trails, cutting their own scars through the desert brush that concealed the PCT from my determined scrutiny. This beauty was a curse and the Rocks were being loved to death. I finally made it out, frustrated and thirsty, cursing the people, cursing the beauty. But not here, not in this weather. No beauty, no people. I haven't seen anyone in over a day, and I'm not even sure if I can count that 'anyone' as a someone. It was just a bright tent parked below White Pass, someone maybe inside. I had felt superior at the time, to be out and hiking despite the rain, but I didn't feel superior anymore. Just cold and lonely. I was stupid to be out and hiking in this, not superior. *Yeah: cold, lonely, and stupid.*

The map is right. The trail does come back down. Back into the trees. I slow my pace, then stop to eat some peanut butter. And a Snickers, and some Oreos, and some trail mix, and a Clif Bar as I continually return to my food bag, grasping indiscriminately for calories. When my hunger is quieted, yet not satisfied, I saddle up to follow the trail as it switchbacks down a steep slope, plunging to the Suiattle River far below. *Smack smack, swish swish.*

The worst is behind me now. I'll finish this descent, wander along then cross the Suiattle before one more, gentler climb brings me to an old miners' cabin just south of Suiattle Pass. I've

been looking forward to this cabin for an eternity, before the rain, before I started the PCT, before I was even born. I need the shelter and security it provides although I didn't know it existed until yesterday. Almost there. Down, then up. Simple… *Wham!* My forehead meets something as solid as the Earth itself. I stumble backwards, a little too far to the left and lose my footing, slipping off the trail, flopping a body length down the muddy slope before checking my slide. There is no real danger, but I clamber up the unstable goo with care, stunned and confused. *What?* The uphill portion of a fallen tree, cut to open the trail, has slid so that it is now overhanging, perfectly hidden behind my umbrella to avoid my wild gaze. I feel a wee bit discombobulated, but otherwise lucid. Apart from my ego, my left thumb seems to be the only casualty, so I trudge onward, testing it for signs of being broken, finally concluding that it is probably only a sprain. Sprained thumb, sprained ego. I can deal with this.

I have managed to avoid major injury so far and am grateful for that. Even minor concerns that most thru hikers can expect have given me a pass. Besides painful blisters during the first 300 miles as my feet toughened and calloused, my body has felt strong. Constantly exhausted, but strong. Countless hikers disappeared with debilitating knee or foot pain and I even heard of a hiker being airlifted from Glen Pass, knocked out cold after an unfortunate step. Truncated dreams. I seem to have dodged injury again and feel deeply fortunate, but now there is a niggling discomfort in my right ankle that inexplicably developed on flat trail along the river. This scares me. I wrap it tightly with my Ace bandage, then limp on. There is a new rhythm to my swishing. *Sa-swish sa-swish. Can I hobble 120 miles like this?* I start laughing at this latest agent of unchecked malevolence, but have to stop almost immediately to keep from crying. I am stumbling along the fine line between dark humor and devastation. I don't trust my balance here.

It wasn't always this bad. I can remember sun, being warm. Uncomfortably hot, even. I can remember unfiltered joy and gratitude, intense and extended to infinity by a deep breath. There was happiness, there were smiles, and not even that long ago, just days perhaps. But my memory has worn thin so that these dazzling experiences shine like cold moonlight. They offer no warmth, but rather a mocking reminder of better days, the days that brought

me to the trail in first place. But my reasons for hiking now are not what they were. Each step forward adds a grain of sand to my mental baggage. Each step forward gives me more to lose. I have taken many steps to get here, so that now the burden weighs heavily on my mind even during the best of days. Today, it is crushing me. My one shot at deliverance lies at the border. I have trapped myself, leaving the trail as my only route to liberation.

I stumble through an ancient grove, with some of the widest trees I've ever seen, limbed columns holding up the sky. The trail meanders between the behemoths, soft and muted, on a millennia of composted plant matter. *Smack smack, sa-swish sa-swish.* I cross the raging Suiattle River on a long wooden bridge. Swollen with rain, it kicks up spray, allying with the rain to dampen me further. On the other side, I begin the cruisy climb to the pass. Quiet, beyond thought. A sign hanging on a tree warns me that the trail closes two miles ahead due to fire. I make excuses for the ranger who has obviously been too lazy to remove the sign because there is no way a fire could survive this rain. *Smack smack, sa-swish sa-swish.* I turn off the PCT to find the cabin, so, so ready to be done for the day. I find the cabin. The cabin is no longer a cabin. The cabin is a heap of cabin materials. Aged wooden planks and corrugated metal sheeting, speckled with dark rust blemishes. It couldn't have been much of a cabin when it stood, but it would have been enough. But no, not today. Of course there is no cabin today.

But what I do find is almost as precious. Nearby I spy a tent-sized patch of dry ground under a tree. Dusty, dirty, wonderful dry ground. The milk chocolate brown is a beacon gleaming in a sea of special dark. *How?* This magic defies logic, but I don't speculate. It's a miracle for all I care. I lovingly swaddle my new treasure in groundsheet like a new parent, primal urges driving me to act quickly and carefully. When my tarp is pitched, I collapse below, stripping off my wet clothes, bundling on all my damp layers and sleeping bag. In a few minutes, fresh calories are pumping through me, though the snacking won't stop until I fall asleep with the setting sun. I pop some Vitamin I and tightly rewrap my ankle.

The rain rises and ebbs. The clouds crash like waves on a shore of trees. My mind flickers between relief, worry, and nothing. *If the trail is closed ahead, what will I do? Do I have enough food to make it back to Stevens Pass? How will my ankle feel tomorrow? How long can this continue? How long?*

I know the answers. The fire is out, and the trail is open. My ankle is fine, and will heal in the night. The rain is spent, and the sun is nearing. Canada is close, and I will make it there. Today was a bad day, and there's no way it can get worse.

These answers will be true until they are not.

NEW SNOW
h.e.b.

Incidental Hallucinations while Trekking across Antarctica
—for Colin O' Brady

Kaz Sussman

There's an organ grinder racing
across the snowpack propelled by spider
monkeys wearing tiny Eskimo hats
and mukluks made of banana peel.

A team of miners with their sled
of canary feathers is spelunking
under the flows, convinced
a short cut lay among the trilobites,
glacial crush and amber.

There is a pallid vampire seduced
by the long night's blush. His mink-
collared cape askew, his coffin of blue
ice lurching across a crevasse, seal
blood staining the snowfall.

I lead the pack. My sled whittled
from shadow and wine. My dogs
crooning in canine Esperanto, lunging
after the caribou disappearing
in the falling drift.

Ahead, the finish line merges
into a mirage of frost, rising
as if it was a cathedral of rime
whose pope is the last polar
bear, smiling. Lips

like razors, teeth like oil rigs
piercing the permafrost. Impatient
for dinner, he wishes me god's speed
and tender cheeks.

Colin O'Brady was the first person to trek across Antarctica, solo, unsupported, and un-aided.

On the Question of Baptism

Jose A. Alcantara

He likes to walk on water
covered in ice, covered in snow.

He likes the sudden falling away
as the ice settles,

the split-second suspension of gravity
as his stomach floats into his chest.

He likes the brief unknowing,
the contemplation of his own forsakenness,

the doubt and the resolution of doubt,
the brief plummet and the quick catch.

He likes how the Earth,
despite his not-so-original sins,

rises up to meet him, undeservedly,
agreeing to suffer him one more day.

The Mountain

Nathan A. Hansen

My pre-adventure ritual—at this point, I have been through this or actions just like it dozens if not hundreds of times in my life. Mentally walking through any possible negative situations that I may encounter, I try to prepare myself for any undertaking. I know if something were to happen, it would likely be something unexpected anyway. Turning the carabiner between my fingers, I inspect it, looking for any imperfection that may one day manifest itself as an aid in my injury or demise. Running my hand over the webbing which is attached, feeling for loose threads or abrasions, I'm satisfied. I move on to the next, and the next, and the next. On solo climbs, you only have yourself and your equipment to rely on. You can prepare for the worst but you can't prepare for everything.

Picking up my crampons, I inspect their points. I think about how many miles have been wagered across glaciers, and my mind slips into icy blue thoughts of places not fit for man to reside in long. The ice is time trapped by circumstance. It flows slowly toward its reincarnation. Cyclical in nature like my need to get out and experience, again and again, the water reinvents itself as its never-ending Trimurti—liquid, vapor, ice. I file a point that was blunted; the shavings of iron dapple the workbench like stones tossed by children onto frozen ponds. As I shape the point, I become the point; the extension of my body that I will soon depend on reveals itself to me as through a fog that parts into clarity.

I grip the handle of the ice ax and let it slide down through my grasp until the meaty part of my hand rests under its head. I skillfully maneuver to hold the center of the head from above, pick forward, adz to the rear. A memory from muscles that haven't been through that particular motion for nearly a year is reactivated. Comfort washes over me as if, once again, I was in the arms of a long lost lover whom I was unable to distance myself from, hoping she would return.

I take inventory of everything obsessively placed on the floor in front of me. Down sleeping bag and coat, ice screws, first aid kit, bivy sack, tent, stove—the list continues and evolves. Thinking about weight, I remove items of less importance, cut the handle off my toothbrush leaving a two-inch stub, add a small section of

paracord and start to load the pack, confident that the equipment stowed will be sufficient but not overly burdensome.

Unfurling the map across my desk, never one to fall into the fallacy that the map is the place, I inspect its contours. Glaciers move. This map was made a decade ago and I think about how the ice would flow around those representative lines, where crevasses may have formed, how the bergschrund will have changed. I was there three years ago and made some notations then. I reflect upon that time.

I was caught in a storm. May storms in the Cascades are not the same as the squabbles experienced at lower elevations. At 9,608 feet, according to the altimeter on my watch, it was beyond bearable and I was forced to make camp. Winds blew at hurricane force and those snow crystals transformed into deadly projectiles hurled by vengeful mountain gods. They cut through the fabric of my balaclava and froze themselves to my beard. Falling from the sky, they whipped up from the surface of the mountain, invading anything they had access to. My world was theirs. I hastily leveled out a platform, making a windbreak with the snow, pitched my tent, and waited it out. In my tent, I looked at the thermometer on my watch and it said fourteen degrees Fahrenheit. In the wind outside that would make it about negative ten. That wasn't why I pitched the tent. I wasn't cold; in fact, the exertion of the climb had left me comfortably warm. But losing my way in the white-out or unwittingly walking directly into a hazard was an increasing possibility the longer the storm raged. It was a risk I wasn't willing to take.

All that stood between me and the assault was a thin piece of nylon and I was glad it was there. It flexed and cracked, a bullwhip in the tempest. All day I sat, waiting, wanting to be somewhere else. I contemplated the tempest, the masochistic tendencies of mountaineers, and my resolve. I took the opportunity to drift in and out of broken sleep and rounds of solitaire played with tiny cards, resting for opportunity to once again present itself.

Toward evening, the sky ceased its onslaught and I was able to exit. The alpenglow burned in the calm after the storm. I stood in two feet of freshly fallen snow which had whipped up against my makeshift wall and settled. Being there in that moment made me grateful. The beauty of that scene was enhanced by the monstrousness of what I had been through all day. It seared itself

into memory. My rebirth into the subtle light elevated my state. I was blessed by the last rays of the sun, and my perception was augmented. Fuchsia, mauve, and lavender with reds and oranges danced through the clouds below and rimmed the glistening edges of the crests above.

As the glow faded and I could no longer distinguish the timberline, my eyes turned toward the sky to see stars birthing the night. Reds and blues, platinum in the heavens, sprinkled across eternity. I looked into the past of the universe, beyond time of man, beyond time of glaciers, and felt insignificant. Sandwiched between the remnants of the last ice age and the totality of time above, the relevance of my goals eroded and the threads of my stubbornness were unraveled.

I made tea from the snow that once threatened me and sat outside, alone, contemplative on a throne I carved into the snow and ice of the mountain. Looking at this kingdom, with steam ribboning off my cup, the contour of the peak stood solemnly against the universe of the past. I wouldn't get to stand on its lofty heights this trip. The avalanche danger would be too high now. However, my experience was made much sweeter by the challenge and struggle, by the failure to attain my goal, and by the epiphany that sometimes goals are meant to be out of reach.

The next day I came down in sunshine. I was kissed with a blistering sunburn on the bridge of my nose that haunted me for the next few weeks and fueled by a lust for more insight that can only be provided through trial, perseverance, and reward.

Folding the map up, I smile and tuck it into the depths of my pack, alongside my carabiners and crampons. Deep down I know I will not be reaching for it on this trip. Listening to the mountain tell me where to go is far more reliable. I close the top of the pack, latch the buckles, and embrace a new adventure, along with the memories and insights it will bring.

the sacrificial man

Ben Murray

bagging this peak I lie in blistered
scorched-scree skin, all sinew and crack
and flex, rope-burned crag-cut red palms
read, by eagle, by cloud, by star

gasping man on his back, on razored
back of Cambrian ocean floor risen
to ceiling sky, coral meet bird
ammonite crush meet me
I clutch

first spiral, my head spinning
remembering
how old we all could be, supreme
efforts to drag up and
out and into the world

die happy now: cliché mumble
the wind whips, laughs, tears
Gore-tex, merino limbs, takes
me as I am, GPS

ego lost
in the layers

Three Haiku

Steve Goobic

Many nights alone
In wild places under stars
The whole world is mine

Walking in the wind
Elk drift silently by me
A gift from the pines

Waiting in a cloud
Shivering with cold until
Mountains are revealed

Mountain Pilgrimage Triptych

Bob Penny

In the almost black twilight of early morning I am walking through a dark forest rhythmically ringing a small bell. I am searching for a tent, but I don't know where it is. Below me mist floats suspended in the pre-dawn grey over Demarus Lake, and as I step over yet another crumbled log, the barren, littered, understory of the forest feels trackless and dreamlike. An image comes to me of lazily swimming in a subalpine lake in the sun nearly two weeks ago and on the other side of the 10,000-foot mountain above our camp, but it feels like a memory from some other year. How many days have I been walking? How many mornings now has all this wildness held its settled composure, silently mirroring each trembling flicker of my mind? As I walk forward, each sounding of the bell dies in the darkness, barely penetrating the fog. I still don't know where the tent is. So it seems there is nothing to do but just keep walking, gently waking up people, waking up the whole world.

It is the tenth day of a two-week backpacking meditation retreat for our group of eight in the Three Sisters Wilderness in the Cascade Mountains of Central Oregon. For almost two decades I've been leading wilderness backpacking Zen meditation retreats through the Red Cedar Zen Community, my local group in Bellingham, Washington. Unusual in their format and not at all traditional within the Soto Zen lineage I practice in, these retreats have served to enrich the meditation practice of many committed Zen practitioners, and others coming from different perspectives, who have hiked beside me through all these years in the mountains of the Pacific Northwest. For Buddhist practice in North America to become intimately grounded on this continent, I have come to believe that Buddhist practitioners must engage directly with where we live, developing a place-based practice connected to wherever we find ourselves on this wild, living planet. And this is certainly not exclusively a Buddhist concern. The vital effort of confirming our intimacy with place and this Earth, which comes at this time of climate change, is work we all face. For the work I have been doing, the widest boundary of our local place is known in bioregional parlance as Cascadia—all those lands watered by these northwestern mountains.

The design of this retreat, a seventy-five mile clockwise circumambulation (the direction of the sun) around three snow-capped volcanoes, is centered on a study of the Three Treasures of Buddhism—Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Most schools of Buddhism include a "Taking of Refuge" ceremony, where the practitioner formally declares his or her affiliation and identity with these fundamental considerations of the teachings. On this journey we have contemplated these not just as sectarian doctrines but also from their widest connotations—Buddha as universal essence or unexplainable wildness, Dharma as governing principles or ethical imperatives, and Sangha as myriad connectedness or the community of all beings. Throughout, the three mountains, the Sisters—North, Middle, and South—have loomed over us like gravitational presences to our thoughts, living entities reminding us of these three contemplations. That they are known to climbers respectively as Hope, Faith, and Charity, for their relative difficulty of ascending, adds yet another layer to our discussions. Although this is certainly one of Oregon's most popular hiking destinations, a wilderness area I have visited many times before, traveling with this entwined symbolism for our journey has awoken in me the impression that we are exploring a new and undiscovered sacred mountain landscape, similar to the ancient pilgrimage routes of Asia, but right here at home.

A week before, on the other side of the mountains, was our first of three layover days, our "Buddha Day." On a ridge over Eileen Lake each person was set out at their own private camp for a twenty-four hour solo experience. Each spot, discovered just the day before in a scouting excursion, had gained a name—mico-sacred zones such as "Raven's Roost," "Mandala Meadow," "Red Tail's Eyre," and "Han Shan's Summit." But although we each were set for our day of seeking enlightenment well away from the prying curiosity of any passing backpacker, we discovered that our hidden places were detected that night by the local residents. Early on the solo morning, amid meditation, each person's refuge received a thundering and snorting visit from a particular rutting mule deer buck, the true Arhat of that place, whose ridge we were obviously occupying.

Our days continued on, through varied environments and weather. Each day on these trips begins with early morning wake-up by a member of the group, who also acts that day as our trail

leader. After morning group meditation, chanting, and breakfast in huddled sleeping bags, we pack and start on the trail. But it is the hiking, conducted in silence, which becomes the heart of our meditation practice. For days the forest flows by uninterrupted by talk. The sounds, the fragrances, and the images blend into one reflective awareness, like an ocean one swims within. Upon stepping into the wilderness, a group suddenly becomes a group in a decidedly immediate sense, giving a special intimacy to this sort of Zen retreat. As we hike, we use a simple system to keep everyone together and safe on the trail while maintaining silence. Our lunches are eaten communally, with formal chanting, and in silence, at trailside. And then when we gain camp, we break silence and have an informal dinner until evening meditation and bed.

Leaving Eileen Lake and coming through the Obsidian Falls area, where the ground was littered with shards of black volcanic glass, we were beset by an icy rainstorm. The season suddenly seemed to be shifting. That evening our zazen (seated meditation) practice, with our legs like spokes of a wheel and our toes at the hub (a hot pot of water), was like a silent sleeping bag slumber party under a wet sagging tarp. But to live outside in the wilderness is to gain a full appreciation for one of Buddhism's core truths—everything changes. The following day we hiked through massive lava fields, a jumbled zone of jagged rocks that is as alien a landscape as might be found anywhere on earth. Coming to the summit of Opidildock Pass, the clouds suddenly parted, revealing for a few moments a mystic visage of North Sister, swirling high above us in an enchanted fog with its new dusting of snow. The next day at South Mathieu Lake for our second layover day (our "Dharma Day," discussing the ethics of the human/nature intersection), all our gear got laid out for a thorough drying in the sun.

One of our most visceral teachings from the wilderness, wrapped in images of life and death, came from making our way through the previous year's massive Pole Creek Fire area. Passing over the crest, we immediately left behind the moist west-side fir forest and entered instead a dry landscape of pines ravaged by the damage of bark beetles. Stopping at trailside, we took some time to examine our new surroundings.

Through long years of extreme fire suppression the forests of the western United States have been inadvertently crafted into

an alarming density of growth. Only recently has fire become appreciated for the positive role it plays in maintaining healthy forest ecosystems and in thinning the forest against massive wildfire. But the realization has seemingly come too late, and now the specter of global warming adds another troubling dimension to the situation. With a forest overloaded with young thin pines, with a bit less rain, and a little bit less deep cold each winter to kill off infestations, bark beetles have ravaged much of the stressed and dry forests of the west. Fully half the standing trees seemed to be dead. Everywhere the ground was littered with fallen chunks of pine bark, showing the worm-like galleries of nesting bark beetles that had feasted on the thin living cambium layer beneath.

Soon we then entered the burn itself. The fire had hopscotched around, leaving some areas untouched or only lightly damaged. But as we went on the devastation grew greater. In many places the entire forest was burnt from the tree tops to the ground, and the thin volcanic soils were laid bare to erosion. The heat had even been intense enough to spall huge flakes off of boulders. And we soon were glad to have planned ahead to haul extra water from South Mathieu Lake—each stream we encountered was dry. With no vegetation or ground duff, there was nothing to catch the rain and help it seep into the ground. For most of three days we traveled through an eerie desolation of blackened trees and barren skies. But all around sprigs of new lupine, sprung from latent seeds and draped with this year's new seed pods, showed that life was vibrantly continuing on.

Now at Demarus Lake we are packed for the trail. But before leaving, we have a final task. It is our "Sangha Day", and so we head out to a nearby escarpment overlooking the far off horizons of Eastern Oregon, where sunlight spreads across wide golden lands beyond seeing. The drifting light and shadow below beckons to us up in our high cold forest. Lighting a candle and incense, and ringing the bell, we perform prostrations to the immensity of it all and incant a series of sacred texts, well wishes and prayers for the betterment of all beings—as we chant in the Metta Sutta, "suffusing love over the entire world, above, below, and all around without limit."

At night it snows again, as it has begun to do fitfully over the last couple days. Winter is coming early to the mountains,

and we are caught out in it, down to the last of our food and fuel, wearing everything we have brought and drying wet items inside our sleeping bags. By morning, camp is buried in white. But our final day looks promising, with patches of blue drifting in and out of the clouds. Over the high divide and into Moraine Lake Basin we trudge through six fresh inches of powder, following our way only by sixth sense. After so many days of walking, it seems we have penetrated the mind of the trail and know where it is going, even if we can't see it. South Sister and Broken Top hover amid the wrecked clouds over the glistening bowl of snow and the ringing blue lake below. It is an all-together fitting final day for our long journey. We descend finally toward our cars, restaurant food, soft beds, beer, and a warm lodge. But almost at the trailhead one member grabs ahold of the wilderness area boundary sign saying, "I don't want to leave." He is speaking for us all, but it is alright. The wilderness is part of us now.

Grieving in Canyonlands

Sue Reed Crouse

In the wind-womb, a spire,
a hoodoo, a crest of sunset-saturated capillaries,
drawing red from the west
to stain the sand, now shadow-chilled.

Color, here, has sound.
Boulder-torrent, sand-squall.
No pity-whispers,
no downturned glances.

I contemplate the backward way I now consume my days—

at sun-drench, I burrow,
then night-swoop like the fruit bat.
Wolf Moon to Thunder Moon, water-worried arroyos,
aeolian-sculpted arches wear their splendid erosion.

My weak tissues are no work for the wind.
Thud of sob, just another sky-sound to the saw-whet owl,
who continues plucking her breast-down.

If not for The Needles, The Maze, Island in the Sky,
the soft confusion of my life would continue to drag
the former waters for a body of hope.

The wind buries and unburies
from the ancient ocean's death-bed,
all that once lived there—blood-sand, stone-skin.

I come here, slick-rock pilgrimage,
to grieve in the presence of such gods
that take quartz-time to crumble.

Far Back On Granite Mountain

Red Hawk

Fog settles like an old brood mare
and a single Raven cuts the air
with its shriek.
Has it really only been a week
since you died,
or 10 lifetimes? I've cried
enough for the whole of this life.
The wind, the rain, the rattling leaves,
everything sings Wife;
everything grieves.

A Voice from a Separate World

Frederick H. Swanson

It had been a tough summer in the San Juan Mountains of southwestern Colorado. Record-breaking drought, coupled with a wildfire burning near Durango, prompted the Forest Service to close the entire national forest for part of June. When my wife and I showed up in August in time to view the Perseid meteor shower, the mid-elevation slopes along the Cimarron River were bare of flowers. Even the prickly pear looked parched. Smoke from a new fire off to the west obscured part of the sky that night as we lay outside our tent, watching points of light streak across the heavens.

Time to head for the high country. The next morning we drove farther upriver into a forest of spruce and subalpine fir, parked the car, shouldered our packs and set off on an old mining road into a designated wilderness area. It was a new one for us; we gawked at the cliffs and spires of dark volcanic tuff which stood sentinel above us. The stream-side meadows, watered by mountain storms, looked comparatively lush. Clouds gathered at the head of the valley that afternoon, but there would be no rain.

We made an early camp in a spruce grove at the edge of an expansive meadow just below treeline. We'd finished dinner, washed our bowls and spoons, and hung the food bag from an obliging branch when I suggested we take a stroll across the meadow.

These after-dinner walks have a way of extending themselves, especially when a view beckons. So we kept following the faint trail that switchbacked up to the head of the meadow, passing underneath more cliffs and halting next to a rock-lined rivulet. We admired a late-blooming blue columbine growing next to the stream, one of the last holdouts in this exceptionally dry summer. Below us stretched a panorama of the broad, glacier-carved valley.

We had just started back down when we heard a voice coming from far below, over near our camp. I couldn't make out what it was, although it seemed human as it drifted across the meadow—a distorted call hailing us from a distance. We heard it again, and yet again: a two-note, descending *eee-yo*, strange and

ethereal. We stopped and listened, and still it came, repeated at intervals of about ten seconds, each call hanging in the still air. A sheepherder calling his dog? We had not seen any sheep that day.

With each repetition, though, this call seemed less human. I racked my mind for some animal that could fit the voice we heard. We continued down the trail toward camp as the calls continued, unvarying in pitch and with remarkable regularity. As we entered the lower part of the meadow I caught sight of a lone coyote off to the left, atop a small rise. Binoculars revealed the animal sitting on its haunches—and sure enough, it lifted its head to utter a distinct, two-note cry, which a second later was returned as an echo off of the cliffs behind our camp. We were close enough now that we could hear both its initial call as well as the distorted reply which we had been hearing.

The coyote, which we later figured was a female, was clearly listening to her own voice: after each call, she looked intently off toward the cliff from which the echo came. Then she would call again, repeating this dialogue for what must have been twenty minutes in all. She turned to stare at us for a second, then went back to her game. Finally she left her perch and made a wide circle around us, sniffing the ground for voles and mice, stopping once to urinate, seemingly unconcerned. No other of its kind was around.

We returned to camp feeling that we'd witnessed something extraordinary—a rare moment when the curtain that separates us from the rest of the living world is drawn back, if only for a moment. But we wondered: was this coyote just playing? Or did she believe another of its kind was over by those cliffs? Perhaps after repeated attempts to elicit the proper coyote-response, she abandoned the attempt at conversation and moved on. Or this might have been a favorite ritual, performed for fun on her daily rounds. We humans do the same thing—making a game of our voice, multiplying our solitary selves.

We'll never know the answer, not without the magic ring that bridges the great interspecies gulf. At first I wondered whether a coyote could distinguish between a fellow of its species and a copy of its own voice. But coyote-language is complex and many-syllabled, as we know from the nighttime choruses we hear near our home. This animal wasn't singing just any tune; she knew to make a single distinct cry, then wait for an answer. Her actions

appeared operant, not reflexive. My wife and I went to bed that night believing we had witnessed another intelligence at play.

According to Old West lore, the cries of a coyote will not echo, even in places where the human voice will. J. Frank Dobie, whose 1949 book *The Voice of the Coyote* portrayed the song-dog of the West as an adaptable, socially gifted creature, believed this legend may have originated on the sound-swallowing expanses of the western prairies. It may also reflect our tendency to regard coyotes as crafty and conniving—a belief that persists today in cartoon caricatures. To the pioneer and settler, coyotes were varmints deserving of extinction. But some humans have appreciated wild creatures and their calls for just as long, neither fearing them nor sharpening their knives. Perhaps we can only do this when we are well fed and secure in our habitations.

Encounters with wild animals can jolt us out of thinking that we exist apart from the Earth's biota. Witnessing some creature behaving in ways we might think of as human, anthropomorphic as it is, helps break down the fence we've built around ourselves over the past few thousand years. Even events as ordinary as two ravens engaging in an aerial pas de deux, or a squirrel racing down the trunk of a tree to investigate our presence, invite us to step away from our self-imposed isolation. Most animals live lives that are opaque to us, but we can understand hunger, fear, and the drive to procreate. We can appreciate the possibility of higher forms of cognition such as play and curiosity.

It's tempting to imagine that unusual encounters such as these bring a message from another world, an invitation to rejoin the dance we left long ago, when animals spoke to us and gave us insight and direction. This coyote's words, however, were not meant for us. She had business of her own to conduct. We were interlopers in her territory, creatures whose presence she accepted but did not welcome.

The real meaning of our brief encounter with this coyote may lie in her relative lack of concern for us. Because our own kind is scarce in the San Juan wilderness, she was free to pursue her own life, which apparently included moments of play. In a time when humans exalt their domination of Earth as never before, simply knowing that another creature is able to occupy itself as it wishes is a gift. How many other lives were being lived

in that valley, hidden from our sight, needing nothing other than for us to still our own presence?

One could portray this coyote, metaphorically, as issuing a cry for help in the face of her losing the very environment on which she depends. The signs were all around us that day, in the crackling dry plants in the meadow, the smoke drifting in from the west, the absence of snow from even the highest peaks. She was making no such plea, of course. Her kind will almost certainly survive our gross mismanagement of the Earth, just as they have survived being trapped, poisoned and shot for the past two centuries. I'm more concerned with her as an individual. Will she continue to have a wide-open meadow in which to prowl? Will there be silence enough to let her hear her own echo? Will people like me seldom intrude on her space, so that she can live the coyote-existence her ancestors knew? This is what wilderness offers its myriad inhabitants.

When I visit a wilderness area such as the San Juans, I'm required to leave behind certain civilized appurtenances, chiefly motors and wheels. But wilderness also calls for an attitude adjustment, a setting aside of entitlement. To offer a slight bow of respect, as the writer Barry Lopez puts it. Out here, I'm looking for how *I* need to change in order to support the wild creatures which live there. This is their haven, their last refuge. Maybe the coyote can adapt to the new world we're creating, but grizzly bears, jaguars, condors and cutthroat trout cannot.

Rarer than a falling star, this encounter with a single wild creature will continue to bounce around in my head, throwing off sparks and forcing me to examine my existence in a still-untamed world. Although the coyote was not speaking to me, I needed to hear her. If there was a message in her cry, it was the unmistakable beauty of a life utterly apart from mine. So I will let her voice echo in my consciousness, the better to understand how I fit into this vast and still-mysterious world.

Inspiration

Allen Braden

Not far from where a coyote led me
over the sparsely timbered hillside,
I found a feather held in the sagebrush
flanking an abandoned logging road.
I knew the pattern, its bars of tan
almost the color of parchment
or that coyote's pelt actually.
The feather of a great horned owl.
You could say the darker, narrower
scribbles curving toward the quill
suggest rows of silhouettes in flight.
You could say a lesson might exist
in the wind's subtle dispersal of dust
trickling through Sheepskull Gap,
estranging that feather from its wing.
All you really need to tell anyone
is how a single feather was poised
so the tip of the quill wrote on thin air.

Return to Courtland

—for Eugene Yoakem

Jan Minich

the turns of the canyon come slower
the color of the evening
marks an end to the distant light
that made it by one rock peak
only to become stranded on another
what it must be being so alone
you talked only to the desert
the sudden storms still miles away
flashing down through arroyos
the voices of loosening rock
and rips of being sucked downstream
a dark sound the rocks make
as they find one another along the bottom
I follow seasons with wasps now
and slow when they slow
in mid-winter it's warm enough
to walk into town as if it were still there
and hadn't been carried off by vandals
these few remnants
you lived your life out in
weathered boards that held
the wind at bay in a dying desert

Eugene Yoakem was the last proud resident and proprietor of Courtland, Arizona.

Mountains and Bays

Jan Minich

in the mountains today
circling a bog
climbing over dead trees
at the border of its high water
the dark and thunder moving in
she said we couldn't turn back
until we reached the treeline
only then would we feel
the storm keeping this place safe

like wind and snow over the bay
that keeps her here it's knowing
she lives for days like this
in two seasons that make her
come back in the dark
to someone she hopes she'll remember

the wind is there and the gulls
always working the shoreline
believing it true and natural
like a change that doesn't exist
she runs ahead into the next canyon
as if to guard what she knows is there

The Language of Cormorants

Kelly Stuart

The story of California estuaries will be sung in the language of cormorants.

A medium-sized seabird of glossy black, with mischievous eyes and a smiling yellow beak, their guttural laughter is ubiquitous in the Elkhorn Slough, a formation of mud, water, and sky in Monterey County. It is but one of many estuaries, unions of stream, sea, and land that dot the coast of California. They are meeting places, resting areas, and hunting grounds for these birds and other wildlife, many of them appearing for only a few weeks out of the year.

The estuaries are not easily understood; neither land nor sea, they occupy some gray space between the two, yet are entirely different from either, so different that biologists consider them separate ecosystems in their own right. There are animals here that live nowhere else, and there are those who are merely passing on their way to another environment. Some are heading toward the Arctic, that broad cathedral of space lit by unending summer daylight. Or they are heading in the opposite direction, to equatorial colonies in the warm and humid south. Some are traveling in a completely different direction, out to a sea devoid of islands, to weather violent storms and depthless mysteries for food and the chance to mate.

These wetlands exist in shades of gray. Maps must be changed every ten years or so, due to the changing patterns of river flow, sea currents, and weather. A small island might be there one year and gone the next. Black lines and cartographer's shades of blue and brown can't delineate this 'in-between' zone because it doesn't fall into any category. Perhaps that is why some people are so turned off by these tidal marshes, or are so captivated by them. They represent an unknown much closer to us than the bottom of the sea. Their shifting borders unsettle human minds that like to organize things into neat boxes and files, and their unstable silts seem to defy the laws of solids and destroy our buildings and roads when an earthquake turns them into roiling liquid. Unlike cormorants, humans can't live in the 'in between,' and it startles us, begging for understanding.

I. Of Water and Sky

Motorless and silent, a kayak provides one of the best means to explore estuaries. Narrow and agile enough to fit through small channels carved into the silt, its motion disturbs almost nothing. Slipping through reeds and between islands, I become part of the estuary itself as I dip my paddle into the waters of Elkhorn Slough. I pass a rocky outcrop where double-crested cormorants stand drying their wings, spread open before the sky. An engined boat would surely scare all of them into the water.

I remember watching cormorants as an undergraduate at Boston University when I took out the small school boats on the Charles River. They were serene on their perches, seemingly at home anywhere, even landing on the boats themselves. Though biologically considered seabirds, these freshwater cormorants called to each other in their low, laughing grunts, their faces upturned to the sky. Occasionally one would pop up from the water in a graceful arc, the tail of a silver minnow disappearing in its mouth.

Estuaries are homes for cormorants and other seabirds, as well as shorebirds like sandpipers, godwits, and plovers. For many of them, such as the semipalmated plover, this is just a temporary stopping ground. Semipalmated plovers breed on the flat tundra of the Arctic during the summer, and they winter from the southern half of the U.S. to Patagonia. Here at Elkhorn, I see them in between the reeds, dipping their orange and black beaks in the mud for food. Brown save for a striking white collar at its throat, they forage for small insects and crustaceans. Killdeers, another shorebird, resemble them in behavior and appearance, except for the two black bands encircling their necks like necklaces. They can be seen at coastal marshes year-round, however, and their shrill cries of *kill-deer! kill-deer!* carry through the night while in flight. These birds seem to have some interior sense, for they catch what is invisible to the naked eye and derive nourishment from it.

Avocets, lanky and ungainly with their round heads and long upturned beaks used for skimming the water, are another year-round resident of California coastal wetlands, sharing a peculiar nesting behavior with killdeers. On a cold and blustery spring day at the Baylands, a regional preserve on the San Francisco Bay adjacent to the Palo Alto Airport, I leave the kayak in favor of walking the network of trails built through the marshes with

a biologist friend. While the waters of the Bay swirl and crest beneath a threatening gray sky, the pools and mudflats are relatively calm, and birds of all types can be seen gliding on their surface. As we walk one stretch of trail, with two large pools on either side, an American avocet comes rushing out to meet us, shortly followed by several more. They shriek and dance before us, indicating we are approaching a nest, or several. Peter Gibert, biologist at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, says that this behavior serves to distract predators, such as foxes or skunks, from the nest, and makes them chase the parent instead. If the potential predator does not give chase, the birds come closer to the threat, their cries becoming more persistent. In these extreme cases, the need to reproduce outweighs the instinct for self-preservation.

Western willets, another type of shorebird in the sandpiper family, do not have the usual north-south migration pattern. Though mostly dull tan in color, willets display a stunning black and white underwing pattern, seen when the bird takes flight. It breeds in freshwater prairie marshes in the U.S. interior and returns every winter to the coast, where the nutrient-rich waters provide a steady supply of small marine invertebrates to eat. Seabirds, like California gulls and brown pelicans, migrate in the opposite direction, following fish stocks out to sea. Their long trips deep into the Pacific end and begin from estuaries and beaches on the coasts.

II. The Unexpected Residents

Back in Palo Alto, a Canada goose charges me like a linebacker. She hisses and honks, although I didn't think I had made any threatening moves toward her. Her mate stays back with their brood, a line of fluffy gold and gray chicks. A huge flock of them are nesting on the banks, and there's no way around them, crowded as they are on the grasses. Some march around with their chicks picking at the grass; others sit on little knolls sheltering their broods from the harsh wind with their wings. Birds like these geese are not usually associated with estuaries, like the cormorants, but such places play a role in their cyclical lives. Waterfowl like ducks, geese, and teals, usually thought of as freshwater birds, use the estuaries on their migratory routes for the food they provide. Some, like cinnamon teals, a dark brick-

colored bird, are year-round residents. Usually considered pond birds, cinnamon teals in California live in the saltwater marshes present at river mouths, building nests in tunnels, much like ground squirrels. Males are easily spotted with their bright teal wing-stripe, whereas females are drab.

Corvids like ravens also frequent estuaries. Acrobatic, gregarious, and highly intelligent, ravens can make use of almost any habitat, although in California they are most often seen in mountains and deserts Considerably larger than their cousin the crow, ravens are both predators and scavengers; they take shorebird chicks and water snakes, or feed from carcasses. They are enjoyable to watch, for their rolls, flips, and mid-air dives seem to be the inspiration for stunt pilots. They are one of the few birds known to play with each other, and their movements stir the soul, bringing it back to its primordial roots.

Many songbirds also take up residence at tidal marshes, flitting through the air in pursuit of the insects that make up their diet. Cliff and barn swallows build their mud nests inside large drainage pipes. Also migratory, they are unmistakable with their forked tails and cheerful songs. During one quiet morning near Palo Alto, I heard a familiar six-note call that rose and fell between my paddle strokes. As I got closer to the sound, I saw the source sitting on a wood piling: an American robin.

No one sees a peregrine falcon hunting until it's too late. The swallow I am watching in the wild mustard plants suddenly isn't there. A whoosh of air comes from nowhere and everywhere at once, and the next moment I see him struggling in the talons of the falcon. While an everyday part of the cycle of life and death out here at the edge of land, the efficiency of such a predator chills the blood when watched in action, for it moves something very old within us, bringing us back to our earlier days, in a time where we had no protection from the terrors of the night. The sheer numbers of smaller birds attract the larger ones that feed on them, such as ospreys, falcons, and merlins, according to Gibert. They also come for the harvest mice that feed on the grasses, or the cottontails that make their burrows in the banks. Foxes, skunks, and snakes frequent the estuaries too, mostly preying on nestlings, but they'll take the unwitting adult as well.

III. Mud: The Little Things

I have failed to read my tide chart as well as I should have, and now my boat is stranded in mud, in what had been a very short while ago a clear channel that snaked away from the slough. I get out and slide the kayak across the new mudflat, since carrying it would make me sink into the mud even more than my present calf-deep state. Open water is a long, slow trudge away. The afternoon sun beats down on my face, and midges swarm my body, attracted to the sweat. I throw my PFD into the cockpit with disgust. I could swear the cormorants clustered on a rock fifty yards away are laughing at me. As I am cursing myself and feeling sticky mud squish between my toes, I hear a constant clicking against the hull as I move it across the ground. I look down to see thousands of tiny snails spread out across the flat. They bury themselves in the mud as soon as either I or the kayak touch them.

The huge number of these snails, as well as other small mollusks like mussels and clams, owe their existence in these estuaries to the high amount of nutrients that run off from the land in rivers and rainwater. Algae and cordgrasses, along with abundant bacteria, easily feed off this rich soup, and in turn fuel the vast numbers of invertebrates that form the base of the food chain in this environment. They're uniquely adapted to reside in this intertidal zone, an ever-changing world of flooding and drying, at once liquid and solid. They filter food from the water, or in the case of the snails, graze on algae carpeting the bottom. They exist in mud, on rocks, or attached to the grasses themselves. Worms burrow into substrate to keep themselves wet, but when they come out to feed, they provide food for birds and fish. Mayflies and midges lay their eggs in the water and are eaten themselves.

While birds are the most visible residents, the estuaries are important to many different fishes. Many oceanic species, like steelhead and eels, breed in the freshwater inflow, and their young will return to the sea when they hatch. Gobies live in this brackish water, where they can "walk" along the bottom on their modified pectoral fins. Sculpins, bottom-feeders with tender flesh and venomous spines, can occasionally be found in these waters. All fish provide food for larger birds like cormorants and ospreys, and make up a considerable part of their diet, along with water snakes and lizards.

IV. Threat

Starting in 2003, Cargill, Inc., a Minneapolis-based salt producer, sold and donated over 16,500 acres of its salt ponds around San Francisco Bay to various wildlife and environmental agencies, who have been gradually restoring them to their former state as wetlands, as part of an exhaustive project that will slowly breach the dykes separating the ponds and allow water in to gradually bring down salinity levels. To do this all at once would be dangerous to the rest of the Bay ecosystem, because the sheer amount of salt in these ponds, if released, would raise the whole Bay's salinity to hazardous levels. Before their breaching, the only inhabitants of these salt ponds are red algae and alkaline bacteria, visible from the Dumbarton Bridge between the cities of Fremont and Menlo as bright red and brown colors swirling in pools. It is hoped that over the next few years, the salt ponds will once again become the prime saltwater marshes they once were, inhabited by birds, fish, and invertebrates. This is an especially vital step to restoring San Francisco Bay habitat, where up to eighty-five percent of wetlands have been lost to salt production and development.

Cargill also kept about 1,400 acres of its ponds adjacent to the port of Redwood City, a suburb of 78,000 people on the San Francisco Peninsula. Instead of restoring the marshes, Cargill hired an Arizona-based development company to turn the ponds into condos and sports fields. For years, they were locked in a land-use battle with several environmental groups and local government officials over the project, which, if completed, would represent a huge gap between protected areas. After widespread opposition, Cargill withdrew its development plans in 2012, and has yet to issue more. Even the federal government has stepped in. The Clean Water Act prohibits the filling of natural waterways, which then-President Obama's EPA upheld in this instance. However, under President Trump's administration, the EPA ruled in March 2019 that the area is not subject to the restrictions in the Clean Water Act. Should Cargill's development plans go through, the water needs of the proposed 25,000 new residents would be costly to provide, since there is little freshwater nearby, and would drain resources as well as swell Redwood City's population by a third.

Building on former wetlands can also be a dangerous proposal, and not just to wildlife. During the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, buildings on unstable ground around the East Bay and the San Francisco peninsula collapsed, due to violently shifting silts in a process geologists call liquifaction. An entire stretch of Highway 1 south of Santa Cruz sank into Strouve Slough during the same earthquake.

Oil drilling in the sea also threatens wetland habitat. The 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico illuminated how important it is to push for a ban on this industry. It not only killed tens of thousands of birds and fish, but completely devastated deltas, swamps, and intertidal habitats with poisonous crude. Even though off-shore oil drilling is currently banned in California waters, this protection only extends three miles out to sea. Oil platforms can still be seen in federal waters four miles from delicate shore habitats, including the estuaries so important to cormorants and their fellow wildlife. For comparison, the Deepwater Horizon rig was a full ten miles away from shore, and it still managed to cause extensive ecological and economic damage.

Pollution from agricultural runoff and sewage breaks threaten the delicate food web of estuaries. DDT nearly wiped out the entire brown pelican population of California and threatened cormorant colonies, until it was banned in 1972. Sewage introduces disease to mollusk populations, which can also affect human health with consumption of these animals. Non-native predators such as rats and feral cats prey on nesting birds or their eggs. Visitors who let their dogs run loose in defiance of leash laws disturb entire breeding sites enough that birds do not return to them, or simply abandon their chicks, and the dogs pollute the water with their waste. Planes like those seen at Palo Alto airport, right next to protected wetland, collide with birds, and airport lights confuse migrants. As the human population grows unchecked, we are going to see more of these birds, like the California black rail, become endangered as their habitat disappears or becomes disturbed.

There is hope, though, as evidenced by Cargill's land sale to environmental agencies. Places like Elkhorn Slough and San Francisco Bay's regional wetlands network offer sanctuary to many species through their protection. Refuges that deny access to casual visitors offer even more security. Banning the most dangerous pesticides and overfishing in certain areas has reduced

avian death, and halting development on fragile estuarine habitats ensures that these birds will always have a place to come back to. Nonetheless, wetlands in the U.S. have been lost forever and are still disappearing at a frightening rate. The damage is already done. Our only choice is to preserve what is left.

Cormorants are adaptable birds, but they are just as vulnerable as others to habitat losses. They won't survive without the precious water and the food these places provide, and their laughing grunts will disappear forever from the coast. Paddling my kayak in one evening to a public dock at the port of Redwood City, I watch the cormorants dive and bob beneath a rising yellow moon, and suddenly feel a tremendous sense of responsibility for them. To destroy such beauty, even unwittingly, is a crime not only against nature, but against ourselves, as we are a part of these strange places as well. They stand for our own gray areas, neither liquid nor solid, neither saltwater nor fresh, but somewhere in between and always in motion.

Whales at Night

Marybeth Holleman

they come
after the day's
fishing fleet
has gone to anchor
awaken us
with a sigh
that sounds human
but is whale-breath
the long exhale
after a deep dive
sprays dappling
concentric rings
left by their arcs
into air
on an otherwise
silent and glassy
sea

Alone in the Wild Dark

—for Derek Sheffield

Allen Braden

Locked outside
the cabin by the river,
with no starlight, no moon
tinseling ponderosa,
no tall wheatgrass
parting then sealing
each step taken,
still you can spot the blur
dropping to clasp
some small wriggle.

Understand this is the last
gift. Fierce hunger honors
a life and lifts it now
over scrub pine, tree line,
snow pack, horizon.

Night after night,
season after season,
the shush of wings:
song of mole and snake,
spell of toad and mouse,
praise of shrew and sparrow.
Each time the talons strike
a blow, the beak welcomes,
one silence ingests another.
Loneliness? A short word.

Journey to an Interior: Northville-Placid Trail, September 15-21, 2015

Robbie Gamble

Day #1:

Restless from a poor night's sleep in anticipation of leaving, I get up at 5 a.m. and drive three hours to Schenectady, where my in-laws greet me with a cup of coffee and a space on their driveway to leave the car. Roy drives me the final hour up into the Adirondack Park to the trailhead. Passing through Northville, we are briefly confused about the drop-off, as the beginning of the trail was rerouted earlier this summer. We find the old trailhead in the hamlet of Upper Benson, which corresponds to my map, at a gate by the end of an old logging road. One-hundred-and-thirty miles of adventure lie beyond the gate. I jump out with my pack and hiking pole, Roy pulls away, and I'm on my own.

The weather is pristine this morning as I head down the trail: balmy air, robin's egg-blue sky. The forest soon closes in overhead, and I am walking down a green tunnel with a wide clear path, fairly level. My pack is dense with a week's worth of food, but it sits well on my back. Soon I ease into a good pace, and start to clear the chaff out of my head from all of the running around over the past few days in preparation.

finding the rhythm of the trail

About five miles in, I stop for an early lunch at Rock Lake. It's a beautiful spot, a warm breeze making the water sparkle, perfectly clear sky overhead. I'm just about to settle down to eat when I hear a loud rustling down the shore. I see a fallen beech tree, apparently moving by itself into the water. No, a beaver is pulling it! He comes into view, then gnaws off a large branch, hauls it into the water. He swims directly toward me, stopping about thirty feet away along the shore. Totally unconcerned, he delicately clips and consumes a dozen beech leaves from the branch, one by one. Then he swims back to the tree, cuts another branch, and brings it back to his eating area near me. This time he gnaws off a foot-long section of the branch, then nibbles all the fresh bark off of it, turning the piece in his paws like a corncob. His fur is soft and glistening, and I can see the bulk of his broad muscles underneath. He picks up the remainder of the branch and

swims off toward the opposite lakeshore, while I quietly finish my food.

bark and soup
brunch together
beaver and I

I head back onto the trail, exhilarated by the encounter. It feels like an auspicious start to the trip! The miles fly by, and I make it to the Mud Pond shelter by 5 p.m. I decide to press on five miles to the next shelter. My hiking legs feel fresh and strong, and I want to get more miles under my belt so that I'm not daunted by having to cover too much ground the next day. An hour and a half later I stop for a rest on the long cable footbridge over the West Sacandaga River. Rusting cables aglow in the low slanting afternoon sun, water flowing under the bridge, very peaceful.

I push on another two miles, trying to reach the Hamilton Lake Stream shelter, as dusk gathers. I cross another footbridge to a clearing on the far side of the stream, and darkness is falling quickly now. I'm tired, and I decide to get water and camp here; the clearing is a nice open space, with the gentle rushing of the stream nearby. I put on my headlamp to set up my tarp and cook dinner, and by the time I sit down to eat, the world is pitch black beyond the cone of light beaming from my forehead. A very satisfying first day. I fall asleep in no time.

Day #2:

Awake to new light and the sound of burbling water. So refreshing to be sleeping out again! I eat breakfast and break camp quickly, hoping to make a lot of miles today. On the trail again, all my muscles feel well-used but up to the task of keeping on.

The forest is incredibly quiet, only an occasional bird chirp or insect hum or squirrel chatter. The noisy activities of mating and marking out territory have passed. Although the days are still warm, and leaves are still mostly green and lush, there is a sense that everything is waiting for the onset of colder weather. There are a few tints of autumn color on the higher hillside elevations, in the few places I can see them through open clearings.

old beaver dam
breached
morning mist

I briefly hear the grinding of trucks on a distant road. I have only been in the woods for one full day, and already such harsh sounds are an intrusion. It's wonderful for the mind to slow down and wander, not be subject to a barrage of input. Here there is the next step, and the next one after that; signs of the path winding ahead—the next blaze, an occasional signpost, or a sunlit glade, a toad hopping across the path, a flock of chickadees working their way through the canopy. But mostly blessed quiet falling on my ears.

I emerge from the forest mid-morning to cross Highway 8, notice a general store a little ways down the road. I pass it by, thinking there would be a place to stop in the town of Piseco ahead. After moving under the forest canopy, the direct sun from the cloudless sky is hot on my neck and the asphalt unforgiving underfoot in comparison to the mossy forest floor. Three miles of road-walking through Piseco, past houses and the community center, the post office and a grassy airport landing strip; very disappointed not to find another store. I had visions of sitting on the store porch, eating a fresh deli sandwich and watching the sparkling waters of Piseco Lake. The lake isn't even visible from the road. But on the way out of town I come across a couple of roadside apple trees, and the two apples I snag are the best hiking snacks ever: sweet-sour, crisp and juicy.

The afternoon is tiring. The trail hauls up long grades, moving over into a higher watershed, I imagine. It is surprisingly warm for this time of year. I'm feeling it after the hard push last evening. Several long hours of featureless green tunnel suddenly open out onto the shoreline of Spruce Lake. I put up at the second shelter on the lakeshore, one of the typical Adirondack shelters that dot this trail—a simple wooden structure with three log walls, a raised wood floor and a shingle roof with a large overhang on the open side of the shelter. There is space for six to eight campers to sleep, protected from the elements, but tonight I have it all to myself. The shelter looks down onto a point of land framed by pines, a peaceful lapping shoreline.

I'm sweaty from the afternoon climbs, and I take a healing dip in the soft, just-right-to-cool-off waters. Then laundry, trying to scrub some of the sweat and trail-mud out of my clothes, hanging them in the low sun to dry.

insects dance
in golden light
over still waters

I'm waiting in my bathing suit as the sun slides toward a hill across the lake. I feel the solitude settling on my skin. There is no sound but my watch faintly ticking, and a ringing in my ears.

setting sun
lake silence rises

Day #3:

During the night I hear occasional far-off loon calls on the lake, and nearer by, the *hoo-hoo* of owls hunting through the night forest.

dawn
mist wisps
on the face of the water

I eat my breakfast down by the lakeshore, all the golden hues of last evening washed out into paleness of new light. The enormity of the stillness is humbling, comforting. Time feels more cyclical here—mornings will come again and again, greeted always by stillness and the chance call of a loon.

I'm a bit anxious for the day, over twenty miles to cover to stay on track for the schedule I have planned. My goal is to get to the Wakely Dam. Yesterday was taxing, in part because of the heat. I start early, and will try to keep a steady pace through the day. I move along the trail, mostly dense forest all around. Around 10 a.m. I come out onto West Canada Lake, and I stop for a snack. There is a lovely little beach with soft golden sand, and a broad marsh stretching away to the right. When I start up again, a kingfisher takes off from a post on the footbridge across the marsh. Here is one of the few places on the route so far where the view stretches horizontally: shoreline, far treeline, waving marsh grasses, a line of ridge beyond.

Soon after crossing the marsh, there is another shelter at West Lake. A young couple is sitting out on the edge of the deck, drying their hair after a swim. We exchange greetings and I keep on. Back into the green tunnel, up and down. With no vistas, the trail leads me over unexpected contours as it will; there is no expectation that the next bend will rise or dip.

trail flow
a vision of my love
gazing up at me

I stop for water at a rushing lake outlet. Where the outlet narrows, there is old beaver construction of branches and mud to contain the water. It looks like they abandoned the project, or were satisfied with the level of water they were able to contain.

I reach the Carry Shelter Site at 5 p.m., and realize the last four and a half miles will be smooth walking along a maintained gravel road. I am able to pick up the pace, and I get to Wakely Dam by 6:30, plenty of time to set up my tarp in a grassy field. The dam is a recreation area with road access; there is a gatehouse and a ranger station, and car trailer sites dispersed around the field. There are a few campers there, sitting quietly around campfires by their RVs. People keep to themselves, I speak to no one. It's strange to see elaborate man-made structures after three days in the woods where everything is organic; the only human works are puncheon tracks, Adirondack shelters, and simple footbridges. There is a large concrete dam just below the campsites, bottling up the Cedar River, with a road across the top of it. The spillway makes a great roar, good white noise for sleeping.

The sky darkens as I cook my dinner, and a newish moon sinks toward the bulk of Wakely Mountain to the west. This is the broadest open area I have been in for three days, first time I have seen the moon.

open field
new moon sets
behind the mountain

Dinner and chores done, I lie back in the grass and look up at the dense stars in the now-moonless sky, the Milky Way like a delicate scarf flung directly overhead. Crickets give cheerful background music, grounded by loon calls.

the stars we don't see
without the dark

Day #4:

Dawn comes with heavy mist and damp on everything: grass, tarp, quilt, clothes. I hope I can dry my stuff out when the full sun breaks through. I take my time with the morning routine, airing

things out over a picnic table and bushes. Today is the pivot day in the journey, crossing the halfway point. I feel there is still a lot of experience to be gleaned from my time on the trail.

dew on campsite grass
water rushes
over the dam

The morning walk is one long unbroken stretch of relatively new trail, bypassing the old roadwalk along the Cedar River Road. I roll along a sideslope beneath an unseen ridge, while dappled light comes in through the hardwood canopy.

as I pass through
spiderweb
collapses

There are numerous glacial erratics on this slope, huge boulders that were deposited on the landscape when the Ice Age retreated. Yesterday I saw one as big as a cabin nestled into a ravine, with a fifty-foot beech tree growing out of the top of it, muscular roots crawling down the sides.

Lunchtime, and I take advantage of a sunny clearing by Stephens Pond to completely dry out my tarp and quilt.

Early afternoon, I emerge from the woods and pass quickly through the Lake Durant campground. People are going about their recreational business quietly. I haven't done more than wave or say five words to anyone in four days. Just past the campground, I cross highway 19 and ease back into the woods. I'm making good time today, and I take a luxurious nap right by the trailside.

thick moss padding
old footbridge planks
marsh absorbs them

Several miles further along, the trail makes a sudden left turn out of deep woods onto the shore of Tirrell Pond, and I walk a mile along the shore, taking in the most beautiful vista of the journey so far. Steep hills with bare rock precipices climb above the far shore of the pond, capped with trees showing hints of autumn color, all reflected in still, still waters.

There is a shelter at the far end of the pond, and just before I get there, two long distance runners wearing bright skintight suits burst by, whooping as they go. I pull in to the shelter, and there

are two guys from Rochester, Mike and Jim, setting up their gear and hanging clothes out to dry. They pleasantly make room for me. I learn from them that the runners were trying to cover the entire trail in two and a half days, fifty miles a day.

I go for a cool swim in the pond to ease my aching muscles, then cook up a nice dinner. It's OK chatting with the Rochester guys—they are very friendly. It just feels a little strange to be talking so much and sharing space with other humans after four days of solitude.

I head back down to the pond after dark. There is a small stretch of sandy beach with an overturned aluminum rowboat. Rolling hills loom in the dark over the shore to the left; to the right, the trail I came along is dissolving into the woods.

so still
constellations
in the lake

Day #5:

In the night I hear two high-pitched coyote howls.

I wake to a rosy-streaked sky, which I enjoy while filtering water at the pond. I have a pleasant chat over breakfast with Mike and Jim. They are impressed with my no-cook system for lunch (I rehydrate bean soup-mix and Minute Rice in a sealed container in my pack while I hike).

I've decided to forgo a side trip into town at Long Lake—too much time and energy going out of my way. I would rather wait until I am finished to enjoy the luxuries of civilization, and so far I am happy in the woods, not in need of anything I don't have in my pack. Besides, I can get further down the shore of Long Lake today and perhaps make it to Duck Hole tomorrow, so that the last day into Lake Placid will be short, and I will have plenty of time to find lodging and dinner.

A couple of miles on the trail, and I cross a footbridge over a fast-flowing brook. On the far side is a clearing where someone has left a folding lawn chair. I sit there for a while, listening and writing notes.

rushing water slowing mind

I come across bear scat in the middle of the trail. And again about a mile further on. I have not seen any moose scat

on this whole trip. Or deer for that matter, but I have seen deer hoofprints.

I cross a glorious broad marsh on boardwalks. Chickadees follow me, feeding their way through tall grasses in the morning sun. I can see the Blue Mountain ridgeline ahead, which will be the highest elevation for the entire journey. The trail reenters the woods and starts to climb steeply. The incline is very tiring; there seems to be one point in every day where I am gassed. I think of all the steeper, more rugged hikes I have done in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, but I still feel tired. I scramble through a steep rocky chute and come out onto the saddle of the ridge. There are no real views through the dense trees to either side. This really is a trail without high sweeping views, very different from the mountain hikes I am accustomed to.

I descend the far side of the ridge easily, cross the main road that heads in to the Long Lake township center, and haul up a long paved incline that connects to the stretch of trail that continues for five miles or so along the eastern shore of Long Lake. I stop for a rest at Catlin Bay. The lake is a little disappointing after the solitude of days past: power boats on the water, houses on the far shore. It starts to rain as I pack up to move on, and I get my umbrella out. Once back under the forest canopy the rain is absorbed into the leaves, then tapers off.

My plan is to aim for the Kelly Point or Rodney Point shelter further along the shore, put in a few more miles so that I can make it to Duck Hole tomorrow. Kelly Point is full of loud-voiced campers, so I move on toward Rodney Point, pleased to be stretching my mileage, but tired, as dusk is coming on. Just as I'm coming to where I think the shelter should be, I hear a loud rustling ahead, and I catch a glimpse of a bear moving quickly up a gully, crossing the path ahead, maybe forty yards away. He stops when he becomes aware of me, looks up—I can see the big black mass of him, two round ears focused my way. Then he turns and crashes into the gully again. I retreat about a hundred yards back up the trail. As I go, I speak to the bear in a loud low voice and clap my hands. He doesn't follow. I sit down and have a drink of water, gather my thoughts. I certainly don't want to stay at the Rodney Point shelter with a bear poking around. Dusk is falling, the next shelter at Plumley's Point is another two miles ahead, but I have to get past the bear. I really don't want to go all the way back to the

crowded site at Kelly's. So I head back up the trail, clapping and blowing my whistle. I hear one last crash as he moves away, up and off to my right.

Now it's a race to find the next shelter before darkness falls. I have a headlamp, but the trailblazes are often few and far between, difficult to find by a thin beam of lamplight. As long as there is daylight, I'm getting pretty good at reading where the path is going when trail markers are scarce. Luckily this section starts off fairly straight and level, and I tear along under cloudy, increasingly gloomy skies. Then the trail peters out into marshy glade, no markers in sight, and it's getting dark. I cross a muddy stream on a skinny precarious log, only to see, when I get over, that the trail has been redirected to cross the stream on top of a beaver dam off to my right. Then it starts to rain again, hard. I pick up the trail again, keeping on quickly, peering into the gloom, and just ahead I see a sign, "Plumley's Point, 400 yds." I haul in, and never did a shelter look more comforting.

I cook and eat dinner by headlamp, and crawl under my quilt. The rain slows down on the roof for a while, and a few loon calls reach me from the lake.

after the bear
wild winds
all night

Day #6:

The temperature drops overnight, and I put on a sweater and jacket before breakfast. I eat standing on a rock on the shore looking across Long Lake. This northern end of the lake is much more peaceful, no houses or passing boats, just an undulation of hills on the far shore.

It feels like summer rolled over into fall during the night.

Back on the trail again, there is lots of beaver activity north of Long Lake, beaver ponds both active and drained. I traverse a dam that is gradually being reabsorbed into the earth.

After four miles or so, the trail comes to the Cold River, crosses it twice on impressively long suspension footbridges, and continues parallel to the river for several more miles. This is one of the most pleasant stretches of the trail so far. It's always refreshing to walk alongside rushing water, and the air is cooler today than

it's been most of the trip, so I'm not sweating. Through trees, I see puffy white clouds, and twice I catch a glimpse of distant mountain peaks.

after rain
round river rocks
warm in the sun

I am coming to deeply appreciate solitude, being comfortable in the presence of my own company. Walking now has a deep rhythm to it, as I move at a pace over the earth one step at a time. My sense of time and distance become more elastic as I live in the awareness of each step. Discomfort and fatigue become inconsequential. I am taking in the deep presence of the wilderness, feeling small and transient as I pass through it.

chickadees effervesce the forest canopy

I arrive at Duck Hole in the late afternoon. The place used to be a broad space of open water and marshland where ducks congregated, but the dam that contained it was breached in a storm several years ago, and the water drained out, leaving acres of open grassland with a stream running through it, and the best vistas of the journey. I can see what I think is the summit of Panther Mountain, one of the Adirondack High Peaks, to the southeast.

There is no one here. What a gift to have this wide-open space to myself on my last night in the wilderness.

half moon
over the mountain
all things in place

The shelter is brand new, just recently completed, all the pine logs and floorboards still yellow and smelling of pitch. The temperature drops sharply as I get dinner ready, and I worry about staying warm enough through the night. I finish reading Herman Hesse's "Wandering," put on most of my layers of clothing, and wrap up in my quilt. It's only 7:30. Soon I am warm enough and I fall asleep. But then I wake around midnight and remain awake for several hours. I'm comfortable enough, just sleepless. Perhaps some of the restlessness is anticipation of returning to my world, and sadness at leaving this one. I fall asleep at some point and have a dream that involves eating steak.

Day #7:

The shelter faces east, so light comes in early. I get up stiffly, and go for a walk on the grasslands in Duck Hole. The sun has yet to show over the hills. Mist swirls over the stream in gullies and valleys and on some small patches of open water. There is frost on the ground; the night was colder than I imagined. In the middle of the grassland rises a hummock covered with stately old pines. The hillsides beyond are rendered flat and vague by the mist. I feel great awe and gratitude in being the only human here. How will it be to go back and share a world with other humans?

first sun
on the ridgeline
deer tracks in frost

I slip and soak both my feet crossing the stream back to camp. I decide to splurge and fire up the stove for hot coffee this morning. The sun crests the hilltop and begins to warm my bones. This is a place to linger.

The last morning of walking feels special. Once warmed up, my body feels good, no pain or fatigue. I find I am cherishing every step through this woodland, all the things I have become familiar with: the green brilliance of moss in all of its textures growing in such abundance; the different rafts of birdsong through trees: nuthatch, kinglet, chickadee; the way the light diffuses differently through various stands of trees: long shafts through pine and hemlock, dappled shifting patchworks through the hardwoods, beech and maple. The cool air.

I spook a deer drinking at a stream. As it leaps into the brush I see a white flash of tail.

At Moose Pond shelter I meet a man out on a daytrip, who congratulates me for nearly finishing my thru-hike. A few miles further on, I come across a couple hiking southbound. They recognize me from West Lake about eighty miles back, where they saw me pass by four days ago. We wish each other well. It feels strange to imagine all that distance now, on foot.

tiny toad
crosses my path
or I cross his

This afternoon I think of my departed relatives: my grandfather, who loved wilderness and solitude. I am so grateful

he shared these things with me when I was a kid. And my brother Brad—that look of contemplation that would come over him when he was outside. Though much of his life was chaotic, he was at peace in places like this.

Through the trees I can hear cars passing along Averyville Road at the northern trail terminus. Must be nearing the end.

CLEAR CREEK
h.e.b.

Church Was

Charles Finn

Church was the shallow river like glass and the night's highborn clouds wrapped around their mountains like lovers. It was the mountains disrobing, taking off their clouds, unashamed. Church was the frost bit meadow, the outstretched arms of the pines incensing the air, the high priest of moose who came to drink with heads submerged, to raise them like fountains. Hand in hand they took communion of the huckleberries collected while all around them the gospel of birdsong swelled, and the sermon of growing light rang down upon them. God was no angry old man in the sky, this much was obvious, and church no house built by human hands.

Contributors' Notes

Jose A. Alcantara has worked as a bookseller, mailman, commercial fisherman, baker, carpenter, studio photographer, door-to-door salesman, and math teacher. His poems have appeared in *Poetry Daily, The Southern Review, Spillway, Rattle,* and the anthologies, *99 Poems for the 99%*, and *America, We Call Your Name: Poems of Resistance and Resilience.*

Cynthia Anderson moved to the Mojave Desert in 2008. Since then, she has devoted much of her time to writing about the silence, majesty, and power of that formidable landscape. She is the author of nine books and a nominee for Best of the Net and the Pushcart Prize. *www.cynthiaandersonpoet.com*

Allen Braden has published in *The Times Literary Supplement, Orion* and elsewhere. Braden is the author of *A Wreath of Down* and *Drops of Blood* (University of Georgia) and *Elegy in the Passive Voice* (University of Alaska/Fairbanks). He serves as assistant poetry editor of *Terrain.org*.

Sue Reed Crouse is a graduate of the Foreword Program, a two-year poetry apprenticeship at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis. She works with unique, elegiac forms after losing her 20 year-old daughter in 2008. Her work appears in many journals and her manuscript was a finalist for the Backwaters Poetry Prize.

Matt Daly first realized he was lost in the woods on his fifth or sixth birthday. Although just upslope from the trail home, Matt went about preparing a little camp under a big fir. A part of him has been trying to get back there ever since. *www.dalypoetry.com*

Elizabeth Dodd teaches environmental literature and creative writing at Kansas State University and is nonfiction editor at *Terrain.org*. Her most recent book is *Horizon's Lens,* from University of Nebraska Press.

Above all, **Owen Eigenbrot** loves burritos. They are the reason he wakes, the reason he hikes. His hunger drove him the length of the PCT in 2015 and scatters him to wild places worldwide. An engineer sometimes and hiker trash always, he lives to experience, understand, and help the Earth. *www.hikefordays.com*

Charles Finn is the editor of the literary and fine arts magazine *High Desert Journal* and author of *Wild Delicate Seconds: 29 Wildlife Encounters* (OSU Press 2012). He lives in Federal Way, Washington, with his wife Joyce Mphande-Finn and their cat Lutsa.

Tricia Friesen Reed is a writer, storyteller and educator with international experience in community development. She facilitates creative arts retreats (*wonderscape.org*) and her writing has been published in literary journals, magazines and her blog (*experimentingaswegrow.wordpress.com*). Tricia currently lives in Saskatchewan, Canada where she is planning her next wilderness adventure.

Robbie Gamble inherited a love for wilderness from his grandfather, and often finds seeds for an essay or poem out on the trail. His work has appeared in *Solstice, RHINO, Carve,* and *Poet Lore*. He works as a nurse practitioner caring for homeless people in Boston, Massachusetts.

Michael Garrigan writes and teaches along the banks of the Susquehanna River in southern Pennsylvania. He loves exploring the river's many tributaries with a fly rod, hiking the riverlands, and watching water move over rocks. You can find more of his writing at *www.mgarrigan.com*.

Thea Gavin is a native of Orange, California, where she never gets tired of shoelessly exploring—and writing about—local plants and critters. (The desert draws her as well.) Via her blog "Barefoot Wandering and Writing," Thea aims to inspire others to "think outside the shoe." *theagavin.wordpress.com*

Corinna German writes nonfiction and poetry with the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness over her shoulder. She can't live without grizzly bear tracks, wolf lichen on pines, and cow elk calling at dusk. Her work is published in anthologies and journals, especially in the West. Find her at *corinnagerman.weebly.com*.

Steve Goobic has immersed himself in nature for over forty years, studying tracking, nature awareness, and survival under Tom Brown Jr. Hiking long trails for two to six months at a time has allowed him to devote significant attention to finding his place in the world.

When **Nathan A. Hansen** isn't off on some adventure, he facilitates writer workshops and author presentations, and represents the Community Library Network (where he's an Information Specialist) on the North Idaho Literary Arts panel. He has hiked through 24 U.S. National Parks and Monuments. Visit his website at *www.nahansen.com*.

Raised in the southern Appalachians, **Marybeth Holleman** transplanted to Alaska's Chugach Mountains, after falling head over heels for Prince William Sound just two years before the EVOS oil spill. She's held artist residencies at Ninfa, Mesa Refuge, Denali National Park, and Tracy Arm Ford's Terror Wilderness. *www.marybethholleman.com*

Michael Lehman (*@somechampion*) changes inexorably as a cloud.

Deb Liggett retired from the National Park Service after serving twenty-five years in eight parks. When *Deep Wild* accepted this essay she was off the grid, hiking below the rim. Deb and her husband make their home in Tucson, Arizona. "Marking Our Place" is part of her forthcoming memoir.

Paula MacKay writes about wildlife in hopes of inspiring compassionate conservation. She has studied wild carnivores with her husband for the past two decades, with a current focus on wolverines in the North Cascades—one of her favorite sublime places. Paula earned an MFA from Pacific Lutheran University in 2015.

Kat Manton-Jones is a watercolor artist, avid hiker, and backpacker. She has logged 403 miles of the Arizona National Scenic Trail. Her hikes are described in an illustrated journal dubbed *Katlas* featuring an illustration of the environment, field notes, observations, and experiences for each day on the trail. *KatlasJourney.com*

Susan Marsh lives in Jackson, Wyoming. Her writing explores our ability to discover hidden wisdom in the land and ourselves through encounters with wild nature, and how we change as a result. She has been writing and painting since retiring from Bridger-Teton National Forest in 2010. *www.slmarsh.com*

Jan Minich lives in Utah and Wisconsin. His latest book, *Wild Roses,* was published in 2017 by Mayapple Press. Other books are *The Letters of Silver Dollar,* and two chapbooks. He is a former wilderness studies director and Literature professor at the College of Eastern Utah.

Ben Murray is an Alberta, Canada-based writer, bagelphile, and car-free vegan whose volume of poetry, *What We're Left With,* was published by Brindle & Glass (Victoria, British Columbia). He lives to hike, backpack, and scramble in the world's wild, and always endeavors to Leave No Trace.

As a Tucson kid, **Steve Nash JD** heard that pioneer scout Jim Bridger had a map of the west in his head. Intrigued, Nash has spent most of his non-professional life by foot, truck and kayak recreating that mental image of the Western United States. He's not done yet.

Shelby Newsom is a writer seeking adventure. Her poems grab you by the hand to lead you past pines and diamond blazes, up another switchback. A Colorado native, her weekends are best spent deep in the backcountry or on the road. She's currently dreaming up ways to make vanlife happen.

Bob Penny writes and farms near Kweq Smanit, or Mt. Baker, at a place he calls Hawk Meadow on Hidden Mountain. He leads an annual series of hikes and forays from the saltwater to the headwaters of the three branches of the Nooksack River and back to the Salish Sea.

Margaret Pettis discovered the beauty of the Intermountain West while mule packing for the U. S. Forest Service in Idaho's Sawtooth Wilderness. She co-founded the Utah Wilderness Association and High Uintas Preservation Council with her husband, Dick Carter. Margaret is the author of *Chokecherry Rain* and *Appaloosa Earth*.

Ronda Piszk Broatch is the author of *Lake of Fallen Constellations,* (MoonPath Press, 2015). Seven-time Pushcart Prize nominee, recipient of an Artist Trust GAP Grant, Ronda is a former editor for *Crab Creek Review*. Her journal publications include *Sycamore Review, Mid-American Review,* Public Radio KUOW's *All Things Considered,* and *Blackbird*.

Red Hawk is a professor of English at the University of Arkansas at Monticello. He is the author of nine poetry books and two non-fiction: *Self Observation: The Awakening of Conscience* (now in eleven languages) and *Self Remembering: The Path to Non-Judgmental Love*.

Nicholas Samaras is one of the leading scholars on the writings of the 15th Century author, inventor, and mystic, Milo Rambaldi. He currently works in the Section Disparu branch of the Credit Dauphine Bank in various locations.

Eric Paul Shaffer is author of seven books of poetry, including *Even Further West, A Million-Dollar Bill, Lāhaina Noon, RattleSnake Rider,* and *Portable Planet*. More than 500 of his poems have been published in national and international reviews. Shaffer teaches composition, literature, and creative writing at Honolulu Community College.

Kelly Stuart is a professional musician and linguist living on the Big Island of Hawai'i. She holds a Bachelor of Music degree from Boston University as well as a Master of Fine Arts from the University of Southern Maine. When not writing, she enjoys kendo and surfing the local breaks.

Kaz Sussman is a carpenter, living in a home built from abandoned poems in the Oregon Coast Range. He got into poetry just like everyone else, because that's where the big bucks are. He has been published in a variety of journals including *Nimrod, Kingpin Chess, Interdisciplinary Humanities, Whitefish, Whole Terrain,* and *Gastronomica*. *www.kazsussman.com/*

Frederick H. Swanson has been exploring the West's wild places since the 1960s and hopes to get in a few more decades of woodsy contemplation. His website is *www.fredswansonbooks.com*. He lives in Salt Lake City.

Nancy Takacs likes to hike, especially in Utah's back country. She teaches workshops for poets and holds Memory Cafes for those with memory loss. Wild areas are her sustenance, as well as her husband, Jan; son Ian; and two pups. She is the recent winner of a Pushcart Prize. Please visit *nancytakacs.org*.

Sheila Thorne has worked on factory assembly lines as an organizer, taught writing at California State University San Jose, and published many short stories. A political activist, she is also deeply drawn to the wilderness. She and her husband have four grown children and love to ski and backpack.

Sierra Nevada-based artist **Andie Thrams** (our cover artist) uses watercolors in wildland forests to create paintings and artist's books exploring mystery, reverence, and delight, while grappling with vanishing habitats of our era. Her work weaves intricate detail with hand-lettered text to evoke the complexity of ecosystems in the Greater West. *www.andiethrams.com*

Paul Willis grew up in Oregon, worked as a mountain guide in the Cascades and Sierra Nevada, and now teaches English at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California. In 2014-15 he served as an artist-in-residence in North Cascades National Park. Learn more at *pauljwillis.com*.

Credits

The following work has been previously published and is reprinted here by permission of the authors:

- "On Desert Survival," by Cynthia Anderson, in *Waking Life* (Cholla Needles Press, 2017)
- "Alone in the Dark," by Allen Braden, in *Bracken*
- "What She Takes From the River," by Ronda Piszk Broatch, in *Windfall*
- "Whales at Night," by Marybeth Holleman, in *Canary*
- "Reversing History on the Upper Missouri," by Paula MacKay, in a blog at Wildlands Network
- "Mountains and Bays," by Jan Minich, in *Clover*
- "Wilderness Pass," by Ben Murray, in "Wilderness Advocate," *Alberta Wilderness Association Journal*
- "Promise," By Steve Nash, in *Harmony Magazine*
- "Mountain Pilgrimage Triptych," by Bob Penny in *Northwest Dharma News*
- "Ka Mahina O Hoku Ma Haleakalā," by Eric Paul Shaffer, in *Lāhaina Noon: Nā Mele O Maui* (Leaping Dog Press, 2005)
- "The Worrier *failure,*" by Nancy Takacs, in *The Worrier* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2017)
- "Big Beaver Grove," by Paul Willis, in *Windfall and Deer at Twilight: Poems from the North Cascades* (Stephen F. Austin State University Press, 2018)

Thank You to Our Supporters!

Trailblazers ($200 or more)

Deb Liggett
Scott Slovic
George Nash
Scout
Leslie Stringham
Stephen Lottridge

Pathfinders ($100 to $199)

Alaina Kuehn
Dave & Linda Kathka
Misty Sheehan
Bill & Jeanne Manzer
Jennifer Paquette
Peter Anderson
Danny Rosen
Karen Love
Wendy Blankenship

Hiking Buddies ($5 to $99)

Abigail Braithwaite
Amy L. Sugeno
Arthur Eigenbrot
Ben Murray
Britney Peterson
Cindy Lund
Dave Gutierrez
Dirk Sigler
Erich Obermayr
Jacinda
Janet Hurlburt
Jessica Basmadjian
Joan Montagne
Jim & Kathy Kempa
Kaz Sussman
Kjetil Hope
Liz Carter
Nancy Carson
Paul "Pepsi" Pierpoint
Rand Norberg
Robert F. Gulnick
Sarah Olmstead
Sonja Muehlmann
Stephen N. Chaffee
Thomas Coverdale
William Douglas Baker
Alexandra Phillips
Andrew Anglehart
Barb Zinn
Bill & Emily Lobdell
Brooke Hall
Connie Weineke
David Art
Donna & Brad Dasko
Heather E. Pristash
Jack Kempa
Jean Quinsey
Jessica Dean
Jonah Moos
Karen Stomberg
Kelly Bradford
Laura Kaufman
Matt Daly
Nancy Takacs
Paula MacKay
Reagan Sloman
S.E. Knaus
Shirley Eigenbrot
Star Coulbrooke
Tammy Wetzel
Visa Angle
Amelia Marie Whalen
Anonymous
Becky
Brian Stultz
Christina Bonsell
Conservation Northwest
David Yohe
Dorita Brady
Holly J. Hughes
Jackie Romero
Jean Toner
Jessica Frausto
Jordan Shananaquet
Kathleen Stocker
Kim Crumbo
Leslie Matton-Flynn
Micah Sheveloff
Nic Korte
Peter Spitzform
Robbie Gamble
Sandra Dildine
Skroo
Steve Goobic
Thea Gavin
Yael Wade

Deep Wild Journal is a not-for-profit enterprise. We depend on subscribers and donors who, like us, are lovers of wild places and well-shaped words. Please visit us at *deepwildjournal.com* to submit, subscribe, support, and stay in touch. See you next summer with Volume 2!