The Mountain Lion

By Tim Fox

. . . I suspect that the mind, like the feet, works at about three miles an hour. If this is so, then modern life is moving faster than the speed of thought, or thoughtfulness.

Rebecca Solnit
Wanderlust: A History of Walking

Overture

Overture: An act, offer, or proposal that indicates readiness to undertake a course of action or to open a relationship.

American Heritage Dictionary

Each September 28th for the past eight years, I have embarked on a reading of Peter Matthiessen's classic The Snow Leopard. I work my way through his daily entries on the same date he wrote them in 1973 until, on December 1st, the chronicle of his remarkable journey across the Himalayas and into himself, comes to an end. What I find particularly moving about the book, beyond the beautiful language, profound insights and stunning natural and cultural setting, is the mode of mobility that frames Matthiessen's experience. It all takes place afoot, which gives the text a rare continuity.

What if Matthiessen (henceforth PM) had driven or flown from Pokhara to the Crystal Monastery and back? No doubt, his journey and resultant book would have been completely different.

This awareness helped inspire my Long Term Ecological Reflections residency. Unlike the other residency recipients to date, I have a relatively long-term (fifteen-year) and multi-faceted relationship with the Andrews Forest. Yet, until last summer, I had always ridden in automobiles to access my various destinations -- headquarters, owl sites, vegetation plots, trailheads etc. Then, while walking long stretches of the H.J.A.'s main roads looking for an invasive grass species -- false brome -- I glimpsed what I had been missing: the details in between destinations and the resultant sense of continuity akin to that found in The Snow Leopard. "It's the unpredictable incidents between official events that add up to a life . . ." writes Rebecca Solnit, in her book Wanderlust: A History of Walking. Destinations might be thought of as those

official events. And to encounter the unpredictable incidents that add up to a life means filling in the gaps -- making the journey itself the destination. Only on foot, does that seem fully possible.

I envisioned my residency as a microcosm of PM's trek -- a week of journal entries instead of two months resulting in an essay instead of a book set in the Cascades instead of the Himalayas. I began the journey at my house in McKenzie Bridge on the same date PM began his journey thirty-six years ago.

Given that the Long Term Ecological Reflections program is intended to continue until 2203, and given that the fossil-fuel driven life will almost certainly become unviable and unavailable well before that time, a foot-rate reacquaintance with the landscape seems in order. It also seems to serve what I see as the broadest mission of the LTER program: gaining "insight into how we ought to live our lives."

What is changeless and immortal is not individual body-mind but, rather, that Mind which is shared with all existence, that stillness, that incipience which never ceases because it never becomes but simply IS.

Peter Matthiessen
The Snow Leopard

September 28

The day begins like most other weekdays; I stand with my almost-eight year old son, Galen, at the end of our driveway in pale dawn light awaiting the arrival of the school bus.

Galen seems unperturbed that I will be gone a week, though he says he'll miss me. I'll miss him too, I reply. He's cheerful as he boards the bus and we wave until he's out of sight.

This is how I'd hoped it would go. No dramatic breaks in routine, just a gradual veering from the norm onto a different path. Even so, a heaviness settles in my heart when the busses' taillights disappear from view. This will be the longest I've been away from Galen since he was born. I *will* miss him. I focus on the stories we will have to share with each other once I'm back and set to work on final trip preparations.

By mid-morning, I am ready. I stow the last of my food in my internal frame backpack and heave it on. It feels heavier than usual, but I don't weigh it. Some things aren't worth knowing. The added poundage derives from a full set of waxed cotton rain gear and extra thermal underwear I carry in anticipation of the cold wet front forecast to arrive tomorrow. Today, the west side forest of the central Oregon Cascades is cool, breezy and overcast, but dry. The feel of autumn is heavy in the air.

I shoulder my camera bag, flip up the back of my wool crusher hat so it doesn't brush my pack and heft my hiking stave, a stout, straight, five-foot long beaver-chewed limb I plucked from Horse Creek a few years ago. I've named it Matthiessen and carry it for support on uneven ground, as an aid crossing creeks and for protection from bears as well as a being that elicits an even more visceral reaction -- the mountain lion.

The North American mountain lion (*Felis concolor*), also called the cougar or puma, is the Cascadian equivalent of the Himalayan snow leopard. Its lurks in the land as it lurks in the background of the mind, in the deep places where the perils of the Pleistocene are still etched in the human psyche. I carry the stave to comfort that psyche and to counter the vulnerability of my solitude; a condition that likely registers as potential opportunity in the mind of a predatory cat whose own Pleistocene psyche expects humans to come in groups.

Along with my stave I carry a hand-held radio to make daily check-in calls with my contact, Kathy Keable, at Andrews Forest Headquarters. The stave and radio will be my substitute companions once I'm on my own. I don't start out that way. And I'm grateful.

My wife Gila walks the first couple miles with me, down Horse Creek road through the small town of McKenzie Bridge where we have lived since October, 1996. We're headed north toward the base of Lookout Ridge on the other side of the broad McKenzie River valley. The H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest, which encompasses the 15,800-acre Lookout Creek watershed, lies on the other side of the ridge. To reach it, I will climb from about 1,400 feet on the valley floor up the Frissell trail, a steep switchbacking path that ascends to the 5,276-foot summit of Lookout Mountain. My plan is to set up tonight's camp on top.

The mountain comes into view through a gap in the trees above the road. Sunlight shines on the summit where a circle of blue sky has opened in the otherwise closed ceiling of clouds. I take it as a good sign.

A neighbor drives by and waves. I wave back, feeling a little odd for walking on a paved road with a full pack. Normally, I would drive to the point where the road gives out and walking becomes the only option. But the whole point of this journey is to see what foot mobility has to reveal that auto-mobility does not.

Gila and I reach the highway. An eighteen-wheeler loaded with bundled cardboard boxes passes with a roar as we cross the McKenzie River on the concrete bridge in the middle of town. I allow myself a moment to reflect on the challenge this crossing would be without the two-lane asphalted span; I'd need to find a broad even grade in the river current to use as a ford. It would be a daunting, cold, wet and dangerous prospect even at this time of year when the flow is at its lowest.

I don't hesitate to take the bridge, though it does feel like a compromise.

Just past the bridge, Gila and I turn right and head up North Bank road. With every step we take, my anxiety builds. The Frissell trailhead is at the end of a logging road on a completely different road system nearly a mile up-slope of North Bank road. To avoid a lengthy detour down the highway to reach that road system, I've chosen a cross-country route. I'm familiar with the terrain and have years of solo off-trail experience, but not with a full pack. And then there's the gut-level hesitance I feel every time I step off an established pathway. It hits like stage fright. "Now," it says, "you're really on your own." Bushwhacking.

The bushwhacker's path is one that emerges in the act of walking it and dissolves behind like a wake on rough seas. It is a path made of immediate choices, yet the consequences of those choices will amplify well beyond the range of vision, especially in the forest. There is no daydreaming with this kind of walking. Every step is deliberate. It takes effort.

The truth of this becomes apparent at the start of each field season, after a winter of following roads and sidewalks and trails laid down by others. The first day in the open forest brings a kind of mental fatigue, the fatigue brought on by hours of forced conscious engagement with the land. For a couple weeks thereafter, I stumble more and sleep deeper than usual until my forest feet return.

Gila and I reach St. Benedict's Lodge, a Catholic retreat center built on the banks of the river. Earlier this summer, I discovered a trail they'd built from the lodge to the up-slope power-line corridor, which is on my planned route of ascent. As soon as I saw the trail, I determined to use it to shave off a third of a mile of off-trail climbing.

But the Catholics have other ideas. Posted to a tree at the entry point is a sign I haven't seen before declaring that I must get permission to walk their trail as it is reserved for the exclusive use of lodge guests.

Unwilling to do that, I opt for plan B: walk a little further to a power-line access road and head in there. Gila and I resume our course along North Bank. We've hardly gone a dozen steps when we reach a second Catholic trail. This one lacks the prohibition sign, so we take it. Not fifty feet further on, it merges with the prohibited trail. And fifty feet after that, it enters Forest Service property where my status as U.S. citizen is permission enough to proceed.

Property. Possessions. Belongings. Belonging. I am happy to be headed away from the former and toward, I hope, the latter.

Gila and I wind our way through young forest to the power-line corridor. There, she's ready to turn back. We wish each other a good week and hug. She tells me to be careful and pulls down a length of old orange flagging that's hanging in a nearby tree. She breaks this leftover marker from some forgotten project into two pieces, weaves one into my hatband and ties the other to my pack; hunter protection, though it is bow season, so the risk is minimal. We hug again and she heads back down the trail.

The same heavy heart I felt with Galen's departure for school returns. The forest seems quieter, emptier now that I'm alone. And I realize I will, by nightfall, be farther away from my

family by foot than if we had parted company on the east coast and I had flown to Eugene then driven to the Andrews.

I head west along the corridor, hoping to rediscover a relatively easy ascent I found earlier this summer that leads to the logging road. No luck. In my haste to put the cross-country stretch behind me, I cut uphill prematurely on a tantalizing game trail.

I've long believed that deer and elk know better than I do how to move through the forest. And I still hold that opinion. What I forgot is that their paths lead to places deer and elk want to go, not to places humans necessarily wish to reach. This one leads into a steep canyon, so I abandon it and push on, uphill, over fallen logs, through knee deep salal and Oregon grape. The pack amplifies the required effort and makes the distance seem all the further.

So much for taking the easy way. I'm tired and sweaty by the time I reach the road that will take me to the Frissell trailhead. It is past mid-day and I still have over 2,500 vertical feet to climb.

At least, for now, the road is relatively level. It gives my heart time to recover.

The trailhead comes into view. I don't even pause in passing, though I do slow down on the steepening grade that follows. As I work my way upward through the forest, my mind wanders back to 1990, my second summer in Oregon, when, at age nineteen, I was one of hundreds of seasonal field workers hired by the Forest Service to call for northern spotted owls (*Stryx occidentalis caurina*) in California, Oregon and Washington.

The divisive owl war that gripped the nation was at its peak and one of the sites I visited on the front lines was down this trail, in the drainage of a small McKenzie River tributary called Powers Creek. I found owls that day and, on subsequent visits, determined their status as non-nesting. The habitat was, and still is, too marginal to meet their reproductive needs.

The idea of habitat as something distinct from an organism -- like a stage on which they perform -- is one I came to replace over the twelve years I worked with the owls. It is too reductionistic and overlooks the fact that the owl can be considered but a feature of the habitats of myriad other forms of life. This suggests an increasing degree of blurring between organisms and habitats with every life form that gains attention. When only one species is considered, the distinction between organism and habitat seems clear, but how representative of a whole ecosystem is it? And the ecosystem is, in my mind, what really matters.

In the process of putting together an assessment method for determining the habitat quality of forest groves with regard to spotted owls, I came to see the owls more as one of countless shapes the forest assumes than as an animal that resides in a forest. In this view, if the organism is removed from the old growth, it ceases to be a spotted owl and becomes just a brown, speckled, dark-eyed, meat-eating bird.

The feature that most exemplifies this awareness for me is the owl's feathers. Unlike most raptors in this region, northern spotted owls don't migrate south in the winter. They are here in rain and snow and cold. Yet, they are not exceptional thermoregulators as one would expect of a non-migrant facing a rainy, snowy, cold Cascade Mountain winter.

The reason for this counterintuitive disparity is the old growth forest, which can buffer temperature extremes at both ends of the spectrum by as much as 20 degrees Fahrenheit in relation to adjacent clearings. The owl wears old growth like another layer of feathers. That is, their preferred habitat provides sufficient thermal protection that they do not have to expend energy growing as much down as they would need if they dwelled in open country.

The deep multi-layered canopy characteristic of old growth groves also intercepts enough snow for the owl's preferred prey species -- the northern flying squirrel -- to remain active all

winter long, feeding on truffle mushrooms in the open ground at the bottom of snow wells around the bases of the trees. With food and warmth (as well as many other life needs) literally covered by the old growth, the owl does not have to make a long flight to warmer climes at the onset of autumn.

Instead, the owl makes short flights in response to immediate conditions. Sun gaps on otherwise snowy January days draw them out from beneath sheltering mid-canopy mistletoe umbrellas to ascent into the high branches where direct solar radiance can offer spring-like warmth even during the coldest time of year. And in the heat of August, the owls will often be found perched low in vine maples a few feet above a cooling creek in shady northeast facing drainages. This behavioral thermoregulation and the incorporation of the forest itself into their meaningful physiology provide just two of many possible examples that show why efforts to reduce the spotted owl to a bird in a habitat represents extreme oversimplification.

When we are in the old growth, we are literally experiencing a meaningful feature of the body of the owl. We are within the owl's insulative layer. In other words, the protection from wind and snow we enjoy among the trees on a cold winter's day makes the forest our feathers as well. We are part owl.

A movement up ahead draws my eye into the lower canopy. A large, silent owl lands on the stub of a broken branch in a young Douglas fir some 75 yards away and considers me with dark eyes. Based on size and those eyes, the tawny bird is either a northern spotted owl or a barred owl (*Stryx varia*). I'm too far away to be able to say for sure.

The owl takes wing again and flies across the slope above me, disappearing behind an obscuring trunk. I drop my pack and head off-trail for a closer look, but after a thorough search in which I employ my best imitation mouse squeaks and soft *Stryx* contact calls, I find no trace.

The forest seems to have absorbed the owl as surely as it seems to have manifested it in the first place. The uncanny coincidence of the birds appearance with my reminiscences makes me wonder, would the owl have been here if I had not been thinking about it?

The caw of a raven startles me from behind. Far off, a second responds. It sounds like laughter.

I hoist my pack back on and continue up the trail, feeling content, even though the mystery of the owl's species will go unsolved.

Soon, I reach the first of the switch-backs.

The Australian aborigines have a proverb: "The more you know, the less you need." As I slog up the trail toward the divide between the McKenzie River and Lookout Creek watersheds, I feel very ignorant. As much as I try to appreciate my surroundings, the burden I bear, the burden of things I deemed essential for this trek, occupies my thoughts. In particular the two full water bottles I carry in anticipation of a night in mountaintop meadow.

Despite my exertion, a biting breeze brings a chill every time I take even a short break from the relentless ascent. When I resume climbing I quickly find myself overheated and sweating again. It's hard to admit I'm out of practice with regard to something as basic as thermoregulation. Admission requires the recognition of temperature control as a skill, a skill like any other that becomes untuned when unused, as it is in climate controlled settings like houses and cars. I hope relearning doesn't take too long so I can give my attention to the forest instead of to the my increasingly sore, stiff, now-too-cold, now-too-hot body going up, up, up – when will I reach the top?

Is that it ahead?

No. Another switchback.

And another.

And another.

I pause at around 3,600 feet to extract a fleece jacket from my pack and have a drink of water. A flash of deep blue just off the trail catches my eye. It's a shed Stellar's jay feather. I tuck it in my hatband. Somehow, it lightens my mood if not my load.

The subtle shifts in vegetation that mark my entry into subalpine forest go largely unnoticed until, with the crossing of an intangible threshold, I become aware, all at once, that I'm in it. The trees are smaller and densely packed. They include not only Douglas firs and western hemlocks, but also the true firs: noble, subalpine and grand. Sitka alder grows in gaps giving the air a sweet aroma I associate exclusively with the western Cascades high country. And robust huckleberry bushes line the trail. I look for remnant pockets of fruit, but find none among the yellowing leaves. Up here, the season of fruit has already given way to the season of color.

I finally reach the divide and cross over into the Lookout Creek watershed: the Andrews Forest. According to the map, I've climbed to about 4,400 feet. The mountaintop is still over 800 feet higher.

Soon, I come to a trail junction -- left, up to the summit, right, down to the 1506 road, the Andrews' main arterial. I face a hard choice. Stick to the plan or listen to the weather report and the quiet voices of the land whispering warnings of snow. I can hear it in the wintry wind, feel it in the biting air, see it in the ominous sheen of the lowering cloud layer.

I shake my water bottles. I have already drained one and started on the second. There is too little left to offset the sweat, and I feel confident that I will not find more on the mountaintop.

I knew when I chose this time of year to embark on my trek, that I might need to make choices like this. In fact, I looked forward too it. Part of what gave PM's journey its tense edge was the uncertainty of the weather. The Himalayas might be on the other side of the world, but they are in the same hemisphere. Autumn here, is autumn there. And, though lower in latitude, the Himalayas incredible height more than makes up for it.

Yet here, the Pacific Ocean weighs in. Unlike Nepal, October's arrival in the Cascades does not mark the end of the wet season, but the beginning. Rain is on the way. Or, in the high country, snow.

Tonight wet flakes are supposed to stick as low as 4,500 feet. If I had made this journey even last week, I would not have had to factor them in. The sky would have been clear, a constant I could have taken for granted. Now, I have to pay attention to it. And paying attention is exactly why I'm here.

Weighing weather and water against the diminishing possibility of a sweeping evening vista, I take the right fork. My attention now shifts to the hunt for a suitable campsite, preferably off the high divide and in close proximity to water. Crimson-leafed vine maples -- they are still green in the forest down below -- seem to glow in the long light of evening.

The trail reaches the road before I've found the spot I'm looking for. Where that spot is precisely, I can't say, but I trust that it will let me know when I've reached it. I step onto the road and proceed north toward the upper trailhead of the Lookout Old Growth trail. I'm happy to be shaving off distance I had planned to cover on tomorrow's long hike to the A-frame cabin nestled into the flanks of Carpenter Mountain near the northern boundary of the Andrews.

A length of orange twine imbedded in the road catches my eye. I extract it from the gravel, wind up its eight-foot length and shove it in a mesh pouch on my pack. I don't know what I might do with it, but cord is always useful, and I have none.

I move on. My stiff muscles hobble my stride. I cast Matthiessen a reassuring glance and try not to look like the exhausted primate I am.

Check-in time arrives. I pause, dig the radio from my pack and call headquarters to let Kathy know I'm safe. Then I continue down the 1506, resuming the search for a campsite.

I reach a spur road on the left leading to one of the Andrews meteorological stations -- modernity's monument to the sky gods. In place of fluttering prayer flags, a wind gauge spins. I wonder how the two might work in concert?

For a moment, I consider pitching my tent on a flat spot by the instrument shed, but the atmosphere doesn't feel right. Besides, there's no water.

Nothing promising presents itself all the way to the upper trailhead, so I head down the trail. Only a few paces from the road, I enter another world: an old growth grove, deep-shaded and quiet save the splashing music of flowing water. This is first grove of old growth I've encountered today despite being in forest the whole time.

What sets this grove apart and makes it old growth? Many definitions have been offered over the years -- huge trees, numerous snags and pieces of downed wood in all sizes and stages of decay, nurse-logs, a deep multi-layered canopy . . . the list of features grows and grows -- yet none quite manage to account for the whole they attempt to describe.

Throughout the twelve years I chased northern spotted owls in the old growth, I tried to come up with my own definition. In the end, I was forced to conclude that old growth is truly beyond

words, which is why, the best definition we may ever have is “you know it when you’re in it.” And when I start down the trail, I’m in it.

There is water here too and wonder. Camp is near.

I approach a plank bridge over a small stream. At first I think it is a tributary to Lookout Creek, but realize as I draw near, this is the main stem, meager to begin with at this elevation and diminished throughout the rainless summer to a relative trickle. Just below the bridge, trout drift in a still pool. There are four total, ranging from five to eight inches in length. They move for cover in an unhurried way, reminding me that this creek is closed to angling to prevent the data bias on fisheries studies that would result if people were able to dip their lines in hopes of hooking supper. Here, researchers protect trout the way the Lama of Shey protects the blue sheep population around the Crystal Monastery in the Himalayas. The boundary between science and the sacred blurs.

I scan the headwater slopes looking for an open flat spot among the giant fir and hemlock trees, dense huckleberry plants and deadfall. Nothing presents itself until I round a bend in the trail and see my campsite. The trail.

There, in a wide section is a patch of level, bare earth just large enough to accommodate my tent. Given the late hour and season, I don’t anticipate disrupting anyone’s hiking experience and I am too tired to continue the hunt. I have climbed 3,000 feet then descended 1,200 over the course of some eight or nine miles. I am ready to slough my pack and settle in.

As I’m setting up my tent, a flock of geese passes by overhead. Their calls draw my eyes up from my work. The birds are invisible above the clouds, yet I track their passage as if I’m watching them. The trees intercept my gaze.

I listen and marvel at this place, at the personalities of the giant gnarled broken boles and silvery barkless snags. The idea that trees can have personalities might strike devotees of the objective ideal as anthropomorphic, but standing here, I see genuine individuality in the wealth of unique features each tree has accumulated over its two to three century life -- broken top, hard lean, whorl, burl, stove-pipe leader, side cavity, impact scar from a toppling neighbor scoring a glancing blow on its way to the becoming a nurse log. These trees are the main characters in the great ongoing story of this grove. I will be a part of the story for one, brief night.

I finish erecting my tent in the pale glow of cloud-filtered light under the dense canopy. With layers of shadow heaped one upon the other, nightfall closes in quickly. Soon, the Earth's shadow will strike the coup de grace. This calls for a fire, a little rebel sun to shine on into the darkside hours.

I gather stream cobbles, six fist-sized stones in all, and arrange them into a fire ring around a seventh already imbedded in the trail just behind my tent. Then I collect twigs and branches small enough to break over a knee into eight-inch lengths. Any longer and they will protrude from my little ring.

The rapid reports of gunfire startle me. Someone on the road a good distance off is target shooting, an ominous reminder that bow season will give way to rifle season before my journey is done.

I focus on the task before me. Fire. Engagement in the release of sunlight and heat hidden away in wood strikes a primordial cord. I'm resynchronizing the rhythm of my existence with an ancestral pulse that spans tens of thousands of years and has, only since the advent of electrical substitutes, been pushed outside the realm of universal human experience.

As a child of electrified suburbia, I have lived far enough removed from fire I must compromise on ignition, using two sheets of well-traveled newspaper and a lighter. But from there, the flames are of this place. Seeing the wavering glow, and feeling the raw heat that erupts from a few tiny stems helps me appreciate how much energy stands latent, quiet and cool in the towering trees all around. Within those trees, the sun is here even as the darkness consumes all the forest except for this tiny isle of light and rising smoke.

Above the tree tops two hundred feet overhead, the clouds have opened. I see two stars.

A breeze washes through the grove. Both stars wink out. Three others appear.

Wind among the high branches reorders the firmament.

The gibbous moon, when it comes, is not one body of light, but many, cut to pieces by bough sprays -- a sliver here, a slice there, always shifting, dividing, disappearing, reemerging, never whole.

In the old growth realm, night follows its own rules. Moons are many. Stars few and continually reconfiguring into new constellations never before seen or imagined.

A clear perfect note whistles from the campfire -- hot steam-air sounding through a burning stick. Is this a recapitulation of some long-ago moment of inspiration that resulted in the first flute?

I listen rapt until the woodwind falls silent. The leafy crackle of small flames whispers on. Finally, they gutter and transform into threads of smoke. Sporadic pops diminish with the ember's glow. Time to sleep.

I cast one last look around the subcanopy blackness -- at the shredded moon, the nameless constellations -- and duck into the nylon cocoon of my tent. Once inside, I slip into my sleeping bag and squirm around with larval determination to find a comfortable position. A heat like fire

radiates from my chest: thermal residue from the day's exertions. I nod off to the rhythm of my heartbeat.

Sometime in the night, the rain arrives.

September 29

Capillary action has combined with a seemingly inexhaustible supply of moisture to infiltrate my snug abode and creep up the bottom of my sleeping bag. Yet, even with damp feet, I am warm and content to linger and listen to the patter of the rain. It would be an oversimplification to say the precipitation falls steadily. Intensity rises and abates as the minutes pass. The heaviest downpours follow gusts of wind that loose barrages of heavy drops from their holdfasts at the tips of high green needles. These hit with sharp thwacks making my ears ring.

The prospect of facing this chill saturated world does not inspire emergence. But where willpower fails, there's always the back-up motivator. A full bladder. Every sound -- rainfall, leaf-drip, creek-splash -- serves to reinforce the urgent signal from within.

Three zippers later -- sleeping bag, tent and rain fly -- I greet the morning. The forest is immersed in a cloud. It softens outlines and muffles the voices of the new day. I scan the lower canopy for the flock of chestnut-backed chickadees that are making their way through the grove. The small masked birds are hard to spot despite their ceaseless chitter-chatter. A red-breasted nuthatch -- "ank, ank, ank" -- travels with them.

I take care of pressing business then set to work taking care of the business of camp breakdown and travel preparations. The rain lets up and the mist thickens as I head to Lookout Creek with my filter and water bottle. The filter is slow and requires significant pressure to push the water through the small pores in its ceramic core. It demands patience and forces appreciation for this most essential of life elements. The odds are slim, so high up the creek, that I even need to use the filter, but I do not want to take any chances on exposure to the protozoa *Giardia lamblia*. After all, I am suitable habitat.

I drink a long draft of cool clear creek-water, refill the bottle then return to camp. Standing before the fire-ring as if it still puts out heat, I munch a cold pancake and a home-make sesame fruit bar called a go-bar. Then I dismantle the ring and return the stones to the creek. The trout pay me no heed.

My hips smart in response to their reintroduction with the backpack waist belt. I cinch it tight, adjust the shoulder straps to accommodate my raincoat and head down the trail. Again, the burden of the pack impairs my ability to fully immerse in my surroundings.

And for a trail that, on the map, mirrors a descending creek, it sure does climb a lot. This thought leads to further inner complaints. They dog me for a mile or more, chasing my mind far ahead of my feet to the hard climb I will face after completing the trail.

Then, there's the inviting prospect of a dry cabin with a wood stove. Pain and promise make short work of presence.

A Swainson's thrush yanks me back into the now. The bird alights on a vine maple branch not ten feet ahead, shaking free a minor spay of droplets. I draw up short expecting the bird to fly. It doesn't.

The fleck pattern on its pale breast reminds me of falling rain. The thrush flits closer and considers me with a small dark eye. In it, I can see the glint of mistlight.

Then, like yesterday's owl, the thrush takes wing and disappears into the broader pattern of the rain-dappled forest.

Now, I am here. Up. Down. Step by step, along the winding way past a glowing sulfur-shelf mushroom, mossy rock outcrop, vista where forest recedes into cloud, a snag with deep rectangular holes chiseled by a pileated woodpecker into a sculpture with striking totemic resemblance. Feather moss. Raven.

Lookout Creek comes into view below the trial. Then the old bridge to the lower trailhead appears, washed up against the far bank. The new bridge, a couple hundred yards further downstream, is composed of a single huge spanner log with handrails bolted on. It has not yet grayed with age and its golden ruddiness stands in sharp contrast to the rain-darkened rocks and weathered fallen logs around it.

I cross the bridge and walk into a circle of dry ground at the base of a massive western red cedar just as a downpour sweeps in. The deluge raises a deafening din and sets the maple leaves dancing. I have a snack and wait it out then make the final push back to the 1506 road. I've traversed some 2 ½ miles and descended 800 feet from where I camped.

A short walk takes me from the lower trailhead to the junction of the 350 road where today's climb will begin. In my mind, I decide to interpret the road as a wide trail. I had hoped to use creeks and ridges as my main travel routes, but the weather and the reality of my ridiculous pack make long distance cross-country hiking unfeasible, if not dangerous.

My burden means I cannot walk the land as my predecessors in place -- my landcestors -- walked it, with their knowledge lightening their loads sufficiently for them to move through it following contour and flow. Their way of being in the world was guided by stories that informed a fuller spectrum of participation in the landscape than I enjoy.

That is the kind of knowledge to which the aboriginal proverb is, I think, referring. Drawing water from creeks, seeking out rocks and wood for night fires, walking. These things allow me to touch that knowledge, but only with the lightness of a butterflies' wing. The backpack and all it contains to see me through for less than a week shows how much of that knowledge I have yet to attain.

Most of the knowledge valued and conveyed in the modern world is not that kind of knowledge. It is abstraction for the sake of artifice, construct, intermediary, all those products of human industry built one upon the next over centuries, if not millennia, and so far removed from sources as to be truly alien. The more we restrict our sense of what is meaningful to this imposed progression, the further removed from the land we become. The further insulated, until the acts of drawing water, gathering firewood and walking contrast with the familiar to such a degree they become noteworthy, even radical. This is the positive aspect of distance; it yields the contrast and makes visible what was once invisible, which allows it to matter again, often at the very moment it needs to matter again.

Abstraction, so long a servant of the distancing, discontinuity and alienation of modernity, becomes a possible ally in the effort to recover a sense of immediacy, continuity and belonging. By focusing on where I am here and now and making that the subject of my writings, the immediacy of the content can nullify the remove of the medium. The more successful I am, the more abstraction can actually serve to help tune in to presence. It can help reinforce the sense of integration with the land. After all, if what you're reading about and thinking about is where you are, then your connection with where you are is enhanced by the abstract words and thoughts.

It's easy for words and thoughts to do the opposite. The mind is wont to wander to plans and memories, or pure flights of fancy, but if it is present, paying attention to details and then given to the task of conveying those details, the awareness of the old growth forest, dancing creek, lolling trout and curious thrush, is made richer. This is the act of reflection.

Of standing before the mirror of the world with all senses engaged. It requires vulnerability and, especially in this world of wounds -- to use the words of Aldo Leopold -- it will bring pain and sorrow.

To the uninsulated heart, a love of the land makes the sight of a clear cut strike like a physical blow. The insulation of rationalization may soften the blow, but it also muffles the heart. Modernity has largely neglected to acknowledge the latter effect in its devotion to the ceaseless layering of commodity cushions between the living and all the essential pains and sorrows of life. Food comes in designer packages, water from shiny taps, electricity from wall sockets, heat from vents, stories from television, community from the internet, transportation from cars and airplanes, creature comforts from box stores, jobs from offices. Each of these and countless more serve as presence-filters making the immediate experienced reality painless, but also lifeless. And thus no less sorrowful.

In these few days afoot, I will at best brush up next to the life immediate. Most of my filters will remain in place. But with a focus on presence, maybe I can bring some of those filters into conscious awareness and show the potential benefit of removal, even if I can't remove them myself. I don't live in a vacuum after all, and the more personal filters I discard, the less sense I will make in a society where the filters continue to multiply.

But if I can sew a few seeds of doubt in the unquestioned rightness -- the onlyiness -- of modernity, I can perhaps help preserve the slender footbridge that spans the growing chasm between our increasingly indirect and insulated experience and the raw presence necessary for the fullest expression of our humanity.

The rain washes over the forest in slow pulses, heavy at times, falling from a sky dark as dusk. Then, with a softening in the light comes a softening in the patter on leaves, earth, backpack and hat.

Everything interprets rain in its own way. The thrum of drops on big leaf maples differs markedly from the splats that resound from the impacted leaves of vine maples.

I listen for more variations in the rain to take my mind off aching muscles. A ruffed grouse bursts into the air from the roadside thimbleberries not five feet to my right and lands in a low fir bough some fifteen feet further on. Well within rock range.

I've turned a grouse into dinner once before, when it struck the window of my house and died from the impact. But thoughts of predation rub up against the reality of my backpack. Again, it impairs presence and the ability to participate in the immediate landscape. That my successful participation in this instance would also make me a poacher is interesting. I realize that much of the knowledge of presence is, in modern society, forbidden. Hunting laws and property laws dictate what activities are permitted in specific places at certain times. Technically, even having the jay feather in my hat is against the law; who's to say I didn't kill a bird to procure it.

Here, in the Andrews -- a designated research forest -- I can draw water to drink and burn twigs for warmth, but to do much more would be in violation of the rules imposed on humans in relation to this land. I can't kill the grouse without a license. I can't catch the fish at all, unless it's part of a research project accepted by the authorities. And you can bet any such project would not include eating the test subjects. In short, participation and presence in the land are only socially acceptable to a point. Then they become criminal. In some cases, for good reason, though my situation reveals the unavoidable defect in modern law. Its inflexibility. Due to the necessities imposed by a mass society, law suffers from the weakest-link mentality. It assumes the worst in all of us and restricts accordingly.

I'm not ready to become an outlaw today, so I wish the grouse well and resume the rhythmic plod up the road toward the still-distant cabin. In the unvarying repetitiveness of my footfalls on the graded, graveled surface, my mind assumes an equivalent state. Long straight stretches follow gradual bend after gradual bend. My eyes anticipate rounding each, and in that

anticipation, my awareness slips many minutes ahead of where my body is. I lose presence for longing. The result is impatience.

The rumble of an engine rises above the rain-song, shifting my attention from forward to aft. I step off to the side of the road, out of the illusion that this is but a wide footpath. A large burgundy pick-up truck rolls around the bend I passed a couple minutes earlier and reaches me in a couple seconds. Cloud-glare on the windshield makes it impossible for me to see inside the sealed cab. I wave and the silhouette of a hand appears in the driver's side window, then the truck has passed. It rolls on into rain-washed obscurity around the next bend five or more minutes walk ahead of me.

Standing here breathing hard, sore under the weight of my pack, I marvel as I never have before at the amount of energy required to propel this vehicle up the road grade at such a relatively rapid velocity. The truck's weight exceeds mine by an order of magnitude plus change. How many campfire's worth of energy has it consumed to reach this point in the Lookout Creek watershed from wherever it started?

And how different that ascent is from mine. The driver sits inside a warm dry compartment and facilitates forward advance with nothing more than slight pressure applied to a floor pedal with single foot.

Sitting is a posture of stillness and repose, the driver moves across vast distances much more quickly and effortlessly than the mode of travel for which the gluteus maximus evolved. Walking.

Seen this way, the trade-offs involved to facilitate floating like a genie in an bucket seat surrounded by a bubble of warm air and moving at ten, twenty -- or in the case of flying, upwards of one hundred fifty -- times the speed of walking, comes into focus. Considering

energy use in terms of campfires fails to account for it. Whole trees, even the giants of the old growth grove, would have their full measure of hidden sunshine extracted and released in a barrage of contained explosions over the span of just a few minutes.

Not only that, containment within the glass and steel bubble cuts off contact with the rain-song, the bird-voices, the pika's peep from a cut-bank rock pile, the chill of damp air on cheeks, the scents of decaying leaves and wet humus, the continuity of the seasons as translated by squirrels in their frenzied dashings from one high fir branch to the next, cutting cones that hit the ground with loud, frequent thumps. In short, sensory integration into the immediate surroundings is almost totally impaired.

The unfolding of the landscape also ceases to take place at a pace the mind can keep up with. In a vehicle, nearby subjects pass in an incomprehensible blur. Winged vine maple seeds still clinging to their branches go unseen as do water droplets lined up like amphibian eggs on rain-bent stalks of roadside grass. And then there's the pile of scat -- six inches of coiled fur an inch in diameter tapering to a point -- that causes me to cast a furtive glance into the forest. Is there a pair of yellow feline eyes looking back? I'll never know unless the mind behind those eyes decides otherwise. And in that case, I wouldn't wish to know.

Strangely, the encounter with the machine I least wanted to see has helped me re-tune to the immediate. I feel the temperature dropping as I continue to ascend. It is part of the unbroken continuity of foot-rate movement, the immersion in a stream of ongoing re-placements where each footfall is a destination capable of yielding a surprise.

I round a bend and look up toward the next. In the highest visible treetops on the slopes of Carpenter Mountain, snow!

The truck passes me again, headed back down. Now, I see the driver, a woman with glasses and a friendly smile. She waves. I wave back. She is gone.

On a backpacking trip last month to Linton Meadows, deep in the Three Sisters Wilderness, Galen and I encountered four women at the Obsidian trailhead. They were still arranging their gear and filling out their permit. We nodded greetings and smiled as we passed them. Not long afterward, they overtook us on the trail. We exchanged 'hellos' this time. Over the course of the next few miles, our two groups leap-frogged each other. At one point, it felt silly to simply say hello again, so introductions were made. They were Deb, Deb, Deb and Janice, from Eugene and on their way to meet two more friends at a pre-determined camp near Obsidian Falls. After we told them who we were and where we were headed, one of the Debs declared us official hiking buddies. From then on, whenever they were behind us, Galen wanted to wait for them. And whenever they were ahead, he hurried to catch up.

This, I think is how encounters with other humans is supposed to be. We are social beings and where society is thinly spread, as it often is in wild country, our natural tendency is to rebuild it. All the years and generations of urban living and automotive insulation fall away when conditions allow it, as they did that day on the trail. And Galen, who has not yet developed the armor of anonymity to adult thickness, expressed that tendency most fully. In fact, I believe his presence was necessary for it to have occurred at all. Had I been hiking alone, the three Debs and Janice would have remained in the same category as the driver of the burgundy truck.

The difference is, in the Wilderness, on foot, the expression of this human tendency *is* an option. On the road, the disparate modes of travel -- auto-motive and bipedal -- take away even the option. In minutes, the woman in the truck will be more than a day's hike distant, and in a hour, she will likely have covered a distance I would need a week to cross.

In this light, the main function attributed to auto-mobiles -- transportation -- comes into question. Their value for facilitating spatial movement is only the half of it, not even the most significant half. To see what I mean, ask yourself if you would go to a dealership to purchase a $20,000 machine to carry you around if that machine only went three miles per hour -- as fast as you could walk. Unless you had a lot of big loads to haul, you'd probably opt to buy a good pair of boots and a nice coat for a fraction of the cost and take life afoot.

So, it is not mobility per say that gives auto-mobiles their greatest appeal. From my foot-bound point of reference, auto-mobiles are most cherished for what they do to time. They are actual, real-life time machines, or, more accurately, space-time machines. They don't flow with space/time, they warp it, just like in Star Trek.

The engine turns the wheels into a blur and in that blurring the vehicle whizzes across distances quite out of proportion to the span of time involved. An hour's walk takes seconds, a day's walk, minutes, a week's walk, hours, a month's walk, a day. A cross-continental foot journey of years requires less than a week behind the wheel. And then there are airplanes.

One nice thing about the rain, I can't hear the tropospheric rumble of their engines. A main flight-way from cities in California to Portland and Seattle crosses over the Cascades, above the Andrews, above the clouds, above even the highest mountain peaks. Imagine the number of campfires necessary to do that!

I push on toward the cabin into autumn's chill foliar fire. My breath streams out misty in the mountain air. The heat of uphill exertion no longer reaches my fingers. They are numb and stiff with cold, but to reach my gloves I'd have to break stride and take off my pack, so I wiggle them and switch hands with my walking stick more often to keep them from reaching the needle-stage.

The gate barring the road to the cabin appears ahead. Seeing it lifts my spirits for the final push. On the way, I stay alert for potential water sources. The flow of Lookout Creek I diverted into my bottles is running low.

At this elevation -- over 4,000 feet -- not even McRae Creek (the second largest stream in the Andrews) contains sufficient water to form pools suitable for filtering. I cross over the culvert carrying it under the road and keep looking.

A grassy pullout corresponds to the point where the road passes closest to the mapped location of the cabin, but I can't see any sign of the actual building through the dense stand of young Douglas firs and noble firs growing in the old clear cut above the road. The only mildly encouraging feature is an overgrown track headed up into the trees, but it looks unused. I almost forgo it, then decide it's worth a quick look.

Not twenty paces off the road, the point of the roof comes into view. Relief! The last time I've visited this cabin, called the Vanilla Leaf cabin, was in the mid-1990s when Gila and I were on the owl crew. We used it one night after night calling owl sites up this way to give us a jump on follow-up visits the next morning. I don't remember anything about the cabin except that it is an A-frame and, as of more than a decade and a half ago, it had a wood-stove.

The fire-wood stacked on either side of the door is a good sign. The door itself is not. It's open about a foot. I hesitate. Nothing that lives in this forest is too big to fit through the gap except a bull elk. And if a dry sheltered space appeals to my mammalian sensibilities, I suspect it would appeal to other mammals as well, big furry mammals with claws and teeth.

There's only one thing for it. I creep up to the door. My pack prevents me from being able to take a peek inside, so I listen. Silence.

I can't help recalling all the bad horror movies I've seen as I slowly push the door open. The only four-legged thing standing inside is the rusty wood stove in the center. I cross the threshold and look around in the weak cloud light entering through two small windows, one at each end of the cabin. An axe rests on top of a pile of dry wood under one of the four wall-mounted beds. Two folding chairs lean against the back wall. There's also a broom, a fire extinguisher, a blue plastic tub full of emergency food -- several varieties of Campbell's soup -- and dishes. On the rear bed is a wadded sleeping bag I'd only use in an emergency and on a table between two of the beds, stands a wine bottle caked with melted wax. I pick it up hopefully. There is the stub of a candle in its mouth, but no wick.

Without further deliberation, I shed my pack and go to work splitting wood for a fire. I won't use what is already split so it will be here for the next visitors. When I have enough, I extract two more sheets of newspaper from my pack and start a blaze. In no time, it drives the damp and chill for the cabin's modest interior. I shed my sweat and leak-dampened clothes and hang them to dry from table edges. Then I remember the length of cord I found in the road yesterday. Now I know its use: drying line for tent, rain fly and ground cloth.

Soon, all the wet gear is arrayed around the stove and I turn to settling in. A spider's egg sack has recently hatched on the edge of the bed I want to use. Some fifty tiny arachnids spot the white mattress like pepper grains. Using the broom as a conveyance, I carry them outside and shake them into the woodpile. Then I lay out my sleeping bag, toe-end aimed at the heat to dry.

By now, it is mid-afternoon. For the first time, I have the opportunity to set pen to paper and begin fulfilling the writing part of this residency. I'm aware how the act of writing about events of the past steals the mind away from presence and threatens to break the continuity I've been trying to maintain since departing from my house yesterday morning. Yet, writing is, at present,

what I feel inclined to do, and the warm, quiet cabin offers ideal conditions I won't enjoy for two more days.

Not five minutes into re-presenting my memories on paper, the mammal I anticipated when I first arrived at the open cabin makes a sudden appearance.

A bat. The heat of the stove has awakened it from its slumber beneath one of the beds. It is a relatively large bat with an 8-10 inch wingspan and prominent ears. It flutters quietly about the small room.

I'm unsure what to do. Having it inside with me doesn't seem good, but I can't let it out. It will freeze.

In fact, I glance through the window and see fat wet flakes settling in the fir boughs. The drippy wet world in which I arrived at the cabin has become a snowy world.

I suggest to the bat that it might be best to return to its roost under the bed. Much to my surprise, after two more loops around the stove-pipe, that's what it does.

I return to my journal. Fatigue, hunger and warmth soon sap even my energy for writing.

Dinner is cold pizza. Before indulging, I dig out the radio and call headquarters to let Kathy know all is well. The short conversation makes me uncomfortable, not because of anything that is said. The act itself feels oddly discordant with the reality of the cabin.

I'm glad to be done with it and give my attention to food. As good as the pizza tastes, I only manage one piece. For the second day, exertion has muted my appetite. It strikes me as contradictory -- working harder should increase hunger, but here and now, it doesn't.

I read PM's Snow Leopard entry for this day in 1973. It inspires me to see this cabin as my hermitage on the mountain. Snow is falling outside. I step onto the porch, away from the pop and ping of the stove. Silence rings.

Eventually, the wintry chill drives me back in.

Evening gives way to night at a rate beyond sense. I have detected no change in the light at any moment, yet dimming has occurred because darkness is here. I lay on top of my bag; the room is too warm to crawl inside.

Sleep does not come. But the bat does. It wings around the cabin with much more energy than earlier. With my hearing enhanced by the loss of vision, I can make out its papery flutter now. Close swoops cause me to wince. I feel the wind of the bat's wings on my face. It is disconcerting and drives sleep even further away.

Finally, I create a make-shift bat barrier over my bed using the ground cloth. I also open the screened window wide, hoping the return to cooler conditions will inspire the frustrated hunter to return to its roost.

The flapping ceases not long afterward and I nod off.

September 30

I rise in pale rain light and start a fire, then lay in my sleeping bag while the cabin warms up. The window by the bat's bed is left open so the cold air coming in will plunge down and cool my dozing companion enough to avoid another awakening into flight.

I never did find water yesterday, so after my go-bar breakfast, I'm down to a quarter bottle. I don my raingear, grab the filter, the empty container and head out determined to fill it even if I have to use a rain puddle as a source. Instead, a small creek not far down the road proves to have an ideal pool from which to draw icy sustenance. On the way back to the cabin, I discover a red outhouse nearby, complete with crescent moon in the door. Not a moment too soon.

All pressing necessities accounted for, I bid the spiders, bat, guttering fire and cozy cabin farewell. Pack on, I stride out into the rain, happy in the knowledge that today, it's all downhill. My ability to focus on the present, to appreciate the play of light on wet leaves, the songs of rain and chickadees, the dance of mist through high boughs, has improved.

Today, the temperature does the climbing as I descend from subalpine heights in the McRae Creek headwaters to denser, greener mid-elevation forest, much of it old growth. A deer on the road ahead steps quietly into the trees. A northern flicker makes a noisier departure, flying into a patch of sunlit forest where countless dangling rain drops sparkle like jewels.

Presence, I see now, comes in layers. There's the immediacy of the flicker and the forest. Then there's the larger pattern shaped by knowledge and choices spiced with the unexpected. The forecast provided by modern diviners called meteorologists gave me information that helped me decide to forgo the Lookout Mountain summit for the trailhead camp. This change of plan at one level did not fall outside the larger plan to immerse in the Andrews forest on foot for five

days. That my first camp became a mystery provided the spice of spontaneity within the broader field of continuity. In the interplay of these levels of planning and presence a balance emerged between the excitement of the unexpected and the security of the known.

In that way, planning ahead, anticipating the warm cabin where wet gear could be dried, did not come at the expense of presence, but was a layer of presence measured not step by step, but day by day. For the purposes of this residency, these two layers are as far as I can reach. I cannot plan my presence beyond days, as I will go back to the warp-speed life at week's end. As much as I want the continuity I've just begun to find here to carry forward over longer spans, the context in which I will again be immersed does not favor or even allow it. I must make the most of the now.

And in the now, I anticipate an evening arrival at my next campsite, the first official reflections site of my trek and the location of the 200 year long Log Decomposition study, now in its third decade. With that destination guiding my feet, I no longer have to think about it, but am free to immerse in sensual immediacy again.

I've had to remind myself of that repeatedly over the last two days, but the frequency of those reminders is decreasing. My reference rate is shifting from that of a driver to that of a walker. And so, the world grows larger. In that growing, the sense of possibilities, options, opportunities also expands. Afoot, I can veer at any point into the forest and change the unchanging present. That is to say, I will still reach camp, but the number of experiences I might have along the way is beyond counting. To the driver, there is only the road.

I am using the road, but pausing often, now that gravity is with me, to enjoy the lobed pattern of *Lobaria* lichen juxtaposed against the coppery, striated bark of the bitter-cherry tree on which it grows. A dry creek bed of gray stones remembers the waters of winter in their arrangement.

Lookout Mountain appears in the mist, but is swallowed again before I can even remove my camera from its bag.

I see this as the land itself telling me my journey is not one of vistas, but of immersion. If PM strode the ceiling of the world, I walk its forested floor. It is interesting how the feeling I come to in one of the deepest forests of all -- the old growth -- elevates my spirits in a way very much like a high mountain view. They play the same heartstring chords, but with different fingers.

I reach the McRae Creek Bridge. The tumbling stream looks nothing like it did in the morning when I crossed its headwater trickle 2,000 feet higher in elevation. Here, only a few hundred feet from where it spills into Lookout Creek, McRae is all riffle and rapid, full enough to warrant a concrete bridge instead of a culvert.

Not far below the confluence, a scattering of what look like beaver-chewed branches lie bunched up at a bend in Lookout Creek. I've never heard anyone speak of beaver in the Andrews nor have I seen evidence before now. Perhaps that is why, even as I look at the branches, I harbor doubt. Could it be?

A dipper calls, as if in answer. Yes!

Sun breaks come and go with some regularity now. I feel an inexplicable inner optimism that they are not mere sucker holes, but indicators of a trend toward blue skies.

I don't mean to imply that I have been disheartened by the rain and snow. On the contrary, they have helped draw me into the present far more effectively than ideal weather would have. I've had to pay attention and factor them into my actions. And in terms of beauty, wet, misty weather in the forest is unsurpassed. Rain paints the features of the land with a richer palate than sun, in whose glare colors tend to bleed away and there is nothing so stunning as old growth draped in snow. Then there's mood. Mist and cloud doing their slow drift invoke an emotional

spectrum of far greater breadth than shines through on clear days. Even so, I would welcome some clarity.

Coincidentally, it arrives just as I leave the road to enter the deep damp grove where I will spend the night. So, I remain in drip and shadow even as shreds of blue sky appear above the treetops. Again, I'm reminded, it's all about immersion.

I come to the Log Decomposition site without expectation, open and unsure, when I look into the mirror of this place, what I will see reflected back. The first thing I notice on my way in is that the old growth here works according to the same rules as the grove where I camped on the first night. There, the canopy made confetti of the moon and swallowed whole constellations. Here, it creates a world without a horizon. Trunks recede into trunks as far as the eye can see, which, at most, is a couple hundred yards. And the sun, despite its greater size and brightness, suffers the same dismemberment as the moon. Its light reaches the ground in bits and pieces. And sunrises and sunsets happen many times throughout the course of a day.

Some of the most fundamental and accepted conceptualizations of how the world works -- the singularity of sun and moon and the certainty of constellations and horizons -- don't work here. Perhaps, that is one reason why so many people find the forest disconcerting. We retain the fingers of the primate ancestors who felt at home in such places, but not the memories of integration into a forest realm, a realm that is quite different from the savannas that would later become our home, and shape us further, and inspire us to use our hands for much more than climbing trees.

The trail through the trees into the Log Decomposition site is not long. Soon, I see the white PVC tubes protruding like conning towers from prone trunks like wooden submarines patrolling a sea of moss, and I know I've arrived.

The first order of business, find a campsite. I continue along the trail, which makes a loop through the grove. A dark smudge, like some fuzzy mold staining the forest floor, gives me pause. Then, I see the pair of lower mandibles, bristling with the sharp teeth of a carnivore. More teeth reveal what's left of a skull, nothing but the muzzle.

From these pieces, the puzzle of the dark smudge comes together. It is the rain-matted hide of a mustelid -- at first I think pine marten -- dissolving like melting snow back into the earth.

I turn over an unusual mound of skin with a stick and find myself looking into the animal's eyeless mask. Pale stripes alternate with dark, identifying it as a skunk.

The way the skunk's sloughed face contours the forest floor causes me to imagine the earth itself as the skunk's new skull. What does it mean when the earth wears a skunk's face?

I resist the urge to pick up the mask and look out through the holes. Two and a half days afoot is not long enough to comprehend such a vision. I can't imagine how much time *would* be enough. More than I have here, no doubt.

Far off, a raven caws. I move on and soon see a circle of scorched ground with two cut fir rounds propped on end next to it. I will not be the first person to have a fire here.

Just upslope of the fire-pit is a wide, bare, level spot ideal for the tent.

I've found Decomp Camp.

Even though I have the feeling in my gut that no more rain will fall, I decide to leave my tent bundled and covered on my pack until I need it. I prop the pack against a giant Douglas fir and head a quarter mile to Lookout Creek with water bottle and filter to perform the ritual of hydration. The creek glimmers under full sun. Bare cobbles along the bank steam away their stain of rain. I crouch by the water and pump the mountain's life-blood into my bottle. It will

soon circulate in my life-blood, reinforcing my status -- begun at my first camp -- as another of Lookout Creek's many tributaries, a tributary that does not show up on the map.

Filtering complete, I have to hurry back to Decomp Camp to call headquarters on the radio at the scheduled time. I just make it.

Using invisible energy waves to carry my voice, I call out. The reply shatters my illusion of continuity. In that instant, I am not alone, but I'm not accompanied either.

Only two days ago, I thought nothing of this strange situation. But here, now, hearing someone miles away speak to me in real time is too much. The radio has, like cars and planes, closed a spatio-temporal gap, only, so quickly it's beyond comprehension. My effort to tune into different signals, sensory signals unmediated by modern technology, suddenly feels disrupted.

If not for the radio, I wouldn't even have brought my watch on this trek, let alone look at it. It would be in a drawer at the house with my money and various forms of modern plasticized I.D.

Yes, the radio helps keep me safe on the one hand, but on the other, it keeps me bound to the very mode of awareness I've been hiking three days to escape.

Another compromise.

I finish the transmission, turn off the radio, shove it back in my pack and struggle to retune to my surroundings.

Fire. What better way?

To me, a campfire must be contained within a circle of stones. At the fire-scorch, I find two that will do. Both are smaller than my fist. No problem, I think, I'll just search the root wads of all these fallen trunks for more.

Then I remember, as I look from log to log -- most cut at both ends -- that they were trucked in here for the study. They have no roots. And therefore, no rocks.

The few trees I find that have toppled naturally are smaller with shallow roots, roots full of pebbles.

In the effort to find roots with rocks, I expand my search. The problem of dry wood will have to wait.

As luck would have it, I find a source of dry wood before I encounter rocks. At the point on the trail that, for me, marks the entrance to the grove, lies a huge, naturally fallen Douglas fir. Its four to five foot diameter trunk is, for much of its sixty-foot length, elevated above the ground. In the rainshadow cast by its girth is a swath of dry earth. And strewn in that swath are twigs and branches untouched by the rain and ideal for a little campfire.

Fearing more rain, I leave them there, intent on coming back once I've located the elusive rocks and built a ring.

Rocks. Not special rocks. Not gemstones, not obsidian artifacts, not thunder eggs. Just rocks. That's all I want.

I begin to think I'll have to walk all the way down to Lookout Creek for bank-cobbles, then, in the old roadbed that preceded the trail, I locate just enough.

Back at camp, I build the ring. Then, with my confidence bolstered by my successful weather prediction, I set up the tent. I don't need it yet, but feel unrooted in this place without shelter. And, in contrast to the study under way here, the focus of my reflections requires roots. They come in the form of water, dry twigs, rocks and shelter. The most basic articles of inhabitation.

In short, the mask through which I see this place is different than the one worn by the researchers. And through our particular masks, we see significance in different features. For the study, trunks don't need roots. For me, roots matter. I make no qualifications here.

Differentiation does not require gradation. I'm simply interested in being present and what that means. A two hundred years study in wood decomposition has different aims.

I fetch the dry twigs, remove two more sheets of newspaper from my pack and carefully construct a kindling tee pee. As I'm leaning the last pieces on, a barred owl calls from very close by. The cadence is atypical, incomplete; rather than the usual "who cooks for you, who cooks for you all?" this one says, "who cooks for you, cooks for you?"

Once I would have felt saddened to hear this voice in this place; visitors on field trips used to stop here to see the spotted owl pair that made this grove their home. Those spotteds have been gone for years, apparently driven away by their larger, more aggressive cousins from the east. Barred owls arrived in the northwest only about thirty-five years ago. They crossed over through Canada, reached the Pacific Ocean and headed south down the Cascade and Coast ranges. In appearance, barred owls differ from spotted owls mainly in their slightly larger size and in having vertically barred breast feathers instead of light spots.

During my eight years -- from 1994 to 2001 -- as a field research assistant on the northern spotted owl demography study based at the Andrews, I saw site after site switch tenants. In a couple places, fertile hybrids, called sparred owls, turned up, but these were extremely rare. Usually, after a short period of overlap, *Stryx varia* invariably replaced *Stryx occidentalis*. And I resented them for it.

There is something special -- I hesitate to say even magical -- about spotted owls. And it is for them that I feel the deepest empathy, possibly in part because I spent twelve years working with them, but I think there's more to it than that. Maybe, my strong affinity has to do with their old growth association. This humbling, awe-inspiring ecosystem has, for me, always been the underlying motivation for learning about, and from, the owl. The ecosystem in itself is too much

-- too complex, too big, too variable to fully grasp, but crystallized into the owl, the possibility arises for humans to at least, in some small way, get our heads around it. It may be that, as Jack Ward Thomas and others have said, "Nature is not only more complex than we think, it is more complex than we can think." But our hearts are not so bounded.

And the arrival of the barred owl to the old growth forest at the apparent expense of the spotted, made my heart hurt. Then, on Feb. 27 of this year, my awareness changed in a single revelatory moment. I was near my house, walking along a stretch of Horse Creek road that runs through an old growth grove with over-story trees dated to the 16th century.

Above the rustling of my coat and the thudding of my footfalls on pavement, I heard the faint call of an owl. I couldn't pin down the species, but the interplay of tone and towering trees gave the impression that the forest itself was calling. I assumed a spotted owl, stopped and listened. The forest called again.

With the voice of a barred owl.

In that instant, my opinion of barred owls underwent a profound shift, which I wrote down in a pocket notebook I had with me at the time:

Should the old growth ecosystem endure, even if the spotted owl gives way to the barred, the forest will retemper the barred in form and spirit to fit the mood of the trees as the spotted owl now does. It will be a softening, a quieting, a recasting for a new role in a different play of life and light and ages.

Given time, the forest will do the same to inhabitant humans as befits our kind.

***

The barred owl calls again as I ignite the paper and blow life into my little fire. In the owl's voice is the certainty of belonging. Human memory may recall the arrival of the species some three decades past, but to this bird, one or two generations removed from that event, *varia* has always been here, wearing this forest as *its* feathers. In the same light, so has *sapiens*. Yet, if we add memory and substitute culture for species, this land has another relatively recent story of displacement to tell, a story that seems infinitely more tragic and complex, but is really not so different, both in source and solution.

The forest lost, and needs to recover, human voices in tune with it.

That recovery is, I think, under way, in everyone who comes here -- researches and reflectors alike -- to learn not only about the forest, but from it, about ourselves, in relation to it, as part of it, dwellers in its shadows, seekers of its wisdom, students of its owls.

I blow again into the smoldering paper. The flames blossom, creep up into the sticks and take hold.

I add more wood, rise from my knees and arrange my wet socks and boots to dry in the radiant heat. Then I stand toes to stones and bask as the chill of evening deepens with the shadows. The rising smoke seeks me out, stings my eyes, fills my nose with a scent humans have coaxed from wood possibly since before we were *sapiens*.

The smoke and I dance around and around the ring while the owl calls and night falls.

A second barred owl chimes in. His deeper voice and his use of the complete cadence sets him apart from the first owl, identifiable now, in contrast, as a female. The two birds converse for a good quarter hour, then on some cue too subtle for me to detect, they fall silent. I suspect their hunting time has arrived. My stomach growls.

Having eaten the last of the pizza for lunch, go-bars graduate from snack to meal. I eat only one. My appetite remains minimal even though the long downhill walk from the Vanilla Leaf cabin took far less effort than the climbs of the previous two days.

The dry wood soon runs out and the last coals subside. Night presses in. I crawl into my tent before the piecemeal moon has made its appearance through the trees. Since the weather is dry, I leave the rain-fly unzipped. The barred owls start up again from farther off as the final wash of twilight bleeds away. Their voices are the last thing I hear before falling asleep.

October 1

Throughout the night at Decomp Camp I repeatedly rouse moments before the female barred owl gives voice to the darkness. These coincidental awakenings make me wonder, did earlier unremembered calls wedge into my dreams? The other option, some prescient sensitivity, goes too far in its defiance of the rules I accept for the waking world. Yet, I am in the old growth, where the rules I thought I knew about the nature of sun, moon, horizons and stars do not hold true to experience, so . . .

Like PM in The Snow Leopard I too have not quite apprehended the tenth century Lama, Milarepa's, notion "that man's world, man's dreams are both dream states." But I have had dreams in which I awaken only to find, upon a second awakening, that the first took place within the dream. It is a disquieting experience, for it casts doubt on the truth of the second awakening. Am I really awake or do I still have more layers of dream to peel away to reach true wakefulness? Given that the dream feels as real as reality when I'm in it, how can I know for sure?

"I dream with you, dream with you," says the owl.

I doze off and do not stir again until after dawn's glow has come to the forest. Lacking rain or the anticipation of wood-stove heat to keep me in my sleeping bag, I do not linger, but emerge into a landscape cast in gray tones. How is it that I have taken for granted dawn's recoloring of the world? It strikes me now as wondrous, this vine maple leaf, green, when only a moment earlier, silver. Such things only make sense in dreams!

I break down my tent and stow it in the pack I kept with me inside the tent through the night. One within the other within the one.

My original plan -- to hike from Decomp Camp to headquarters and spend two nights there -- no longer makes sense to me even though the journey is only about four miles. I'm not ready to return to the electrified world. But I'm low on food and could use a visit to the cache of supplemental fare I stowed in the bunkhouse refrigerator prior to my departure. As I dismantle the fire ring and tuck the stones behind a rotting log in case, in some unforeseen future present, I might have need of them again, a new plan coalesces in my mind.

About half way between Decomp Camp and headquarters is a place officially known as the Lookout Research Camp. Unofficially, it is called Gypsy Camp. Once, it was composed of half a dozen or so small plywood cabins intended as overflow housing when the bunkhouses at headquarters were full. All but one cabin has since been torn down. But that one cabin will be my second hermitage. It has no stove and the two "bunk beds" are nothing but plywood boards. Comfort depends on a sleeping pad.

The space is stark, but will be dry if the rain forecast for tomorrow comes to fruition.

At present, the sky's blue deepens as did the maple leaf's green. I heft my pack onto my shoulders and head down the trail to the road. From there, I proceed west. Near the junction of the 1506 and 1507 roads, I pass by a familiar stand of young trees: post-clear cut second growth, not yet a century old. It is one site in another long-term study taking place at the Andrews; the Uneven Aged Management Project, in which four different landscape treatments (heavy thin, light thin, gap and control) are being compared over time to see which one most effectively fosters the return of biological and structural diversity -- old growth characteristics -- to stands that have been simplified by the logging practices of the past. I was part of a field crew hired to collect data for the UAMP study in both 2003 and 2005.

I came to the UAMP stands after twelve years in old growth groves. This resulted in an ineffable sense of impoverishment that went beyond mere biological and structural simplification. The feeling of *significance* that fills me when I am in old growth was nowhere to be found.

I sought that feeling in every UAMP plot I entered and the closest I came to detecting it was in the control stands, particularly the one where we roused a dozing spotted owl one afternoon. This led me to conclude that time, not treatment, is the critical factor.

No matter what the data might yield, my intuitive guide favors places left unmanipulated (as contrasted to uninhabited) for the longest periods of time. The longer a place is left unmanipulated -- the longer it is not *subordinated* to humans by our actions -- the more it remains self-directed and thus capable of allowing for the fulfillment of what seems to be a universal human need: direct contact with that which is greater than ourselves.

Old growth, having gone largely unmanipulated since time immemorial, satisfies the yearning in the extreme. It is, in fact, beyond time -- timeless. And its timelessness is the source of its profound significance. Particularly in a region where cultural continuity has undergone such a recent and profound disruption -- both in the displaced and the displacers. The attribution of significance to old growth can bind myriad broken human continuums to one of the clearest examples of the unbroken cycles of the landscape. In so doing, old growth can provide a bridge to the recovery of cultural health for all who are open to its lessons, lessons that will be unique at one level, but share the same sense of significance at another.

Next year, barring incident, I will again help remeasure the UAMP plots. Then I will see if the passage of five additional years is time enough to sense a change in significance in those

places. Even if it isn't, knowing that significance grows over time in the way of trees will be enough. After all, to the old growth heart, five years is but a moment in the round.

I continue on toward Gypsy Camp and pass the place where, while driving home with the UAMP crew once summer day, a bear cub scrambled up a roadside tree to escape our approaching truck. The mother was nowhere in sight.

I wonder where the bears are now? Did the cub manage to grow to adulthood? Does the then-unseen sow still roam the Andrews? I glance around as if they might be nearby, as if the encounter happened only yesterday, rather several years ago.

Though I know the bears are not present, the memory of them is, drawn to the fore by this place where it originated. "When you give yourself to places," writes Rebecca Solnit, in Wanderlust, "they give you yourself back; the more one comes to know them, the more one seeds them with the invisible crop of memories and associations that will be waiting for you when you come back, while new places offer up new thoughts, new possibilities. Exploring the world is one of the best ways of exploring the mind, and walking travels both terrains."

So, in a sense, the bears *are* here, again, through the interplay of mind and landscape. Mindscape.

Gravel is replaced by asphalt. My feet feel the difference right away and I walk as much as possible on the road edge where a thin layer of moss and shed leaves softens the impact. When I turn down the spur road leading to Gypsy Camp, I'm on gravel again.

It is a short walk to the end of the road where, along with the small red cabin, there is a pavilion with picnic tables and several tent-camping sites all situated within sight of Lookout

Creek. Nobody else is here but a raven perched high in a snag across the water, black body like a hole cut from the blue sky beyond.

I drop my load off in the cabin, then proceed with a delightfully light stride back down the road toward headquarters. Puffs of cloud drift by overhead, but do not stop the sun from warming the world as it has not been warmed since before my journey began.

A familiar bend in the road tells me the compound is due north through the trees on the other side of Lookout Creek, but I can't see the buildings through the intervening forest. Rather than stick to the road, which would add nearly two more miles to my walk, I bushwhack toward the creek to look for a crossing. My feet, accustomed to the unchallenging surface of the road and the coarse work of a pack animal, are unresponsive to the call for greater discernment made by the uneven, brushy forest floor. It's disconcerting to say the least. Using my stave for support, I stumble down the steep water-worn channel wall to the creek's edge and scan for a way across.

Not far downstream, a series of rocks that compose a rapid above a still green pool present the most promising route to the opposite bank. But I don't trust my muscles, despite the fact that I'm not even hauling my backpack. I step carefully across stones I'd normally hop without giving it a second thought. How long will it take for my forest feet to return?

I reach the bank without incident, find the access trail leading to headquarters and head up. Stepping from the old growth onto the mowed lawn of the compound clearing is like entering another world. The bunkhouses, pavilion, office, classroom, conference room, cafeteria and the interconnecting tissue of pavement stand in stark contrast to the surrounding forest. Then there are the cars and trucks parked in front of the various buildings.

I feel an inexplicable anxiety. I should not have come here. Not even for food.

Three deer, a doe and her two fawns, are nibbling grass by the wheel of a pickup. If they can do it . . .

I make my way toward the bunkhouse where lunch awaits. The door has a security keypad. The code is in my pocket notebook. I lean Matthiessen against the wall, consult the page, type in the number and step inside. It looks just like it did a decade and a half ago during the two years I lived here.

With the flip of a switch, the florescent lights flicker on. They drone.

I go to the fridge, remove some of the food I have stowed inside and shut it. The compressor starts up with a hum to cool it down again.

I fire up the propane stove with the turn of a dial and adjust the intensity of the heat so it doesn't burn my toasted cheese and falafel sandwich. I eat apple crisp while it's cooking. I'm half way through the crisp when the electric furnace kicks on adding a steady metallic exhalation to the florescent drone and refrigerator hum. Aural asphalt.

I sit on the porch for lunch and watch the deer. They wander behind a building, out of sight. I clean up my dishes and head for the office to check in with Kathy, face to face. No radio today!

She's in a meeting with Mark, the site director, and Deb, the secretary, so we don't talk long. Then I step into the phone room to call Gila. The part of me that I've been emphasizing the last four days thinks this is a bad idea. But another part is eager for contact, to hear how she and Galen are doing.

"Remember the radio," says the one part.

"Remember your family," says the other.

I pick up the phone and dial. I can tell by Gila's tone as soon as she answers that she is harried. Before we've even exchanged greetings, I sense the sacrifice she has made in order for me to undertake this trek and I'm filled with gratitude. I determine not to squander the gift of her support. I would not be here without it. Be here. Listen.

It is hard. Hearing about financial concerns, the need for dental and doctors appointments, the arrival of more bills that have to be paid combine to erode presence more than anything I've experienced so far. When our talk concludes, I feel drained. Distant.

I walk in a daze back to the bunkhouse to collect my stave. The scream of a chop-saw in the compound woodshop makes my head ring.

I hurry to reimmerse in the forest. What a paradoxical urgency! But I feel it nonetheless and am comforted. The headquarters interlude did not dislodge the forest as the frame of my awareness. The continuity of the last four days has not been broken.

And, at Gypsy Camp, I will have a fire, open and free to smoke the sky, scent the air, sting the eyes. In order to fuel it I will have to engage damp earth again in the hunt for dry wood, though not for rocks. The fire pit, a metal cylinder complete with grilling-grate, is already in place. Even so, at Gypsy Camp, continuity will be preserved, at least for one more night. Beyond that, I cannot say. I am vulnerable to contextual conditions.

For me, it has to be that way. Fullness (outward opening through reflection), not Emptiness (inward opening through meditation), is the path to Belonging I feel compelled to follow. Without old growth, without wildness, the reflective way is restricted as the way of the meditator, in my understanding, is not.

Yet, through reflection, I have at times -- on a misty coast, in high snow mountains, in old growth, in wilderness -- reacted much as PM did to the meditative state he describes in The Snow Leopard:

"Wounds, ragged edges, hollow places were all gone, all had been healed . . . Then I let my breath go, and gave myself up to delighted immersion in this Presence, to a peaceful *belonging* so overwhelming that tears of relief poured from my eyes . . ."

Some might see the reflective path to this awareness, with its reliance on place, as a liability, especially in a world of wounds. But I see it as essential. To enter a place capable of invoking a sense of belonging akin to the sense described by PM is to know, in a direct experiential way, not only the existence of that which is greater than oneself, but that which includes oneself. It is One-self within you within it, mind into Mind.

The healing of the wounded places inside us and in the world at large begins here where inner wholeness and outer wholeness can merge seamlessly into each other, reflect each other, reinforce each other, validate each other . . . be each other. Distinction remains, but the sense of separation is transcended in the way of a cell in a body, the body of Earth. Earth in the cosmos. The cosmos within.

In many places, like clear cuts, this merging is disrupted before it can begin because it hurts too much to open fully to the land, to reflect it. The land is not what it wants to be and intuitively we know it. So, to avoid internalizing the perceived injury, we close ourselves off. Consequently, we are not what we, in our very marrow, want to be -- merged with the land.

Yet in closing off to escape one form of wound, we inadvertently suffer another far more acute impairment. The loss of contact with the cosmos, which was, prior to our closing off, attained through living as a reflection of the Earth.

I wonder if meditation was born as an antidote to this loss in places where the pain of reflection prohibited self-identification with the cosmos through self-identification with the landscape because the landscape suffered too grievously from the wounds of civilization. In that sense, meditation reveals the true adaptability and power of the human spirit, but in another, its success appears to allow practitioners to bypass the injured Earth on their way to seamless self-identification with the One.

There is a reason PM went in search of himself in the Himalayas and not in repose. It is why I am on this journey of reflection here, now. The land matters.

Whether by coincidence or by some subconscious attunement to the interplay of sun, season and stream, I arrive at one of the best swimming holes on Lookout Creek just as the low October sun reaches the point in its arc across the sky where its warm light shines straight up the open channel. The deep, green pool at the base of a broad bedrock shelf over which the water spills in shimmering sheets will be fully illuminated for only a few short minutes. It is an opportunity too fortuitous to pass up.

After all, I have not bathed in four days. I could have showered at headquarters, but since washing up is another activity in which I can engage the land directly, I am not willing to make that compromise. And I like how, in the forest, cleanliness cannot be taken for granted. Water temperature cannot be idealized with the turn of a knob inside a plumbed plastic and Plexiglas cubicle designed for no other purpose but wetting human bodies.

Before beginning this trek, I promised myself I would bathe on the Earth's terms, as nearly all humans have bathed throughout humanities two hundred millennia existence. I wanted to rejoin this continuum even if it meant a frigid dip in the rain.

The sun and warmth are a gift.

I shed my clothes and wade across the shallows to an ideal jumping-in spot. The water is cold on my feet, but not bone-numbing. Even so, I hesitate. I have to work up the courage to take the leap.

How many mouthfuls of this creek have I swallowed over the last few days? How much of the 80% of me that is water is Lookout Creek? I take a breath, push off and commit that water back to the greater flow . . . at least for a moment.

Splash!

I am now in the creek that is within me! BRRR!

I can only handle this level of immersion for a few seconds. With stiffening muscles, I surface and clamber out, my preconceived bathing intentions entirely forgotten. A soft breeze I haven't noticed before raises gooseflesh despite the sun.

Before I can think better of it, I jump back in. This time, the water doesn't feel so cold. I scrub my body and tousle hair under the plunge of a rapid. Then I haul out for good, turn my back toward the autumn sun to expose maximum surface area and shiver as the chilling breeze evaporates the moisture from my skin. Not until I'm dry, do I feel the weak warmth begin to seep in.

The involuntary quaking of my muscles subsides and I settle into a long meditative solar soak that lasts until the trees atop the slow-spinning ridge to the west slip in front of Earth's nearest star, inspiring me to dress and move on up the channel toward camp. The rocks are slick, but passable, and my forest feet seem to be returning. With the additional support provided by my stave, I shouldn't have any prob . . .

Splash!

It happens so fast, my pants are soaked and my boots are filling before I realize I'm sitting in a rapid. To push myself up, I have no choice but to plunge my left arm in up past the elbow.

And suddenly, the evening fire takes on new significance.

Chilling down in the lengthening afternoon shadows, I hurry back to Gypsy camp, peel off my waterlogged clothes and don the only dry ones I have left, my thermal underwear. Then I begin the hunt for dry wood. I find some in a circle of ground protected by the dense crown of a Pacific yew tree. There is just enough to start a blaze. I arrange damp wood around the periphery to drive out the moisture so I'll be able to add it on later and keep the heat flowing. Then I retrieve my wet clothes.

The tending of the fire and dry roasting of my clothes, turn by turn, occupies me until well after dark. Cygnus, Corona Borealis and Cassiopeia, as well as a few other familiar constellations whose names I've forgotten, appear in gaps above and around the Gypsy Camp clearing.

Then the pieces of the near-full moon ascend to the southeast through the low boughs of a massive Douglas fir. Soon, the fragments of light vanish entirely behind the tree and do not show themselves again for many minutes.

The forest on the far bank of Lookout Creek begins to glow with lunar light. It drains down the trunks like viscous quicksilver. Pools soon spill over onto my side. One spreads across the grass just beyond the fire. I step into it and turn to marvel at a sight I've seen a thousand times, and never before.

The moon!

This is the first night of the journey that it has coalesced into a single body, so bright I almost have to squint.

Even after my clothes have all dried (sufficiently) and the last of the wood has collapsed into fading embers, I linger, reluctant to retire to bed. I feel my trek winding down. And with the feeling, presence fades. Immersing in the night seems like a way to preserve it.

But autumn's bite eventually penetrates my thermals, seeps through my flesh into my muscles, drawing out the shivers again. I head to the cabin and worm into my sleeping bag. It is the coldest night yet.

October 2

In weak dawn light after a fitful night, I lay awake for quite some time listening to rain showers pass over. The drumming of droplets on the roof is the only way to differentiate sky-water falling into trees from creek-water flowing among rocks.

The prospect of exiting my sleeping bag stirs the same hesitance I felt at the swimming hole. I'm not ready to immerse in another cold medium.

Dipper song inspires me to take the plunge. I rise and greet the damp cool world. Mist veils the treetops where a flock of golden crowned kinglets flits and chitters.

Camera in hand, I head to the creek intent on photographing the singing dipper, or water ouzel as it is sometimes called. I feel a strong affinity for this unassuming gray bird who inhabits two worlds without apparent effort or contradiction, and in so doing, shows that such a life is possible; there is a way to embody a comprehensive vision that does not reduce to black and white, but rather clarifies the gray.

Dipper's eyes are capable of undistorted sight above and below the surface thanks to an extra, transparent eyelid called the nictitating membrane and their wings are suited to flight in both air and water. Even the intonation of their song allows it to carry above the loudest rapid, not in opposition to, but rather, in concert with, the water music. Through the ouzel, creek and sky are one.

My clumsy descent to waterline scares the morning herald far downstream where it resumes its characteristic cobble bobbing in the hunt for its favorite meal, aquatic insect larvae. I start rock hopping the same direction, but another remarkable song takes my attention back to the bank. There, among the yellowing bracken, a winter wren warbles a fast loud trill out of all

proportion to its tiny body. This chocolate brown bird, barely four inches long from beak to tail tip, is living proof that indomitable spirits don't require mighty physiques. When the winter rains come, when the snow piles deep, the winter wren is here, making music in the season for which it is named. Yet, I've never seen one wet, even during downpours. It makes me wonder if, to them, approaching raindrops appear as approaching beach balls do to us. Slow and easy to dodge.

The winter wren, according to PM, is "the only species of that New World family that has made its way across into Eurasia." Winter wrens inhabit the Himalayas as fearlessly as they inhabit the Cascades. Indomitable indeed!

The wren flits deeper into the forest out of sight. I work my way from rock top to rock top, dipper-style, to the center of the creek and turn a slow half-round looking from upstream to down. The perception that the water flows toward me, by me, away from me is a product of my turning. At my back, in the same movement, the water flows away from me, by me, toward me. The only moment of congruence is the moment I stand perpendicular to the water, the moment if flows by me. That moment corresponds to the present and affirms the idea that the present is all there is.

I make my way back to the cabin, eat a go-bar and go. The rain holds off for the hike along the road toward the crossing I used yesterday. The notion of undertaking it with a full pack makes me uneasy, but I put it out of mind. I'll face it when I face it.

In a grove of hardwoods -- big leaf maples and red alders -- near the junction of the Gypsy Camp road and the main road, a flurry of avian activity brings me to a halt. Two flickers, two red breasted sapsuckers, a hairy woodpecker and at least one robin are all darting back and fourth

between a hand-full of trees. My presence has disrupted them, yet their association is puzzling. Have they grouped for predator protection as the chickadees, kinglets and nuthatches do?

One of the sapsuckers, crimson head flashing like a beacon, chases the hairy woodpecker. They alight on a maple and scold each other. Then the whole menagerie simply dissolves into the trees and falls silent. I am left guessing, a good way to be left, I suppose.

I walk on, past the access trail leading down to the swimming hole. It is a dark, damp place in the early morning. A dip holds no appeal.

An empty osprey nest overhead brings a sense of absence. The ospreys, whose life-way does not allow this forest to serve as their greater body throughout the full round of the year, have migrated south and will not be seen here again until spring. But the nest also conveys a sense of promise; this external womb made of sticks shows how anticipation of life's continuance is built into the world.

One August, on my daily bicycle rides to work, I watched an osprey reconstruct a dilapidated nest, well after breeding season. Why, with the wind and wet of winter ahead to weaken it, go to all this effort just before flying away? Did the osprey have sufficient foresight to see across half a year to the advantage of returning to a completed nest instead of repair project? Or could it have been responding to the same sense of incompleteness I felt when I passed by the tree and saw the crumbling remains of the old nest? Either way -- foresight or aesthetics -- the act stretches the comfortable notions of intelligence we modern humans tend to attribute to other forms of life.

A crack in the asphalt outlines a colony of moss that seems to glow. The effect is one of green lightning in storm-dark sky. Near the vibrant crack, a rough skinned newt lies broken open

on the unforgiving surface. In the short walk from Gypsy Camp to the crossing point, I count no fewer than fifteen small orange and brown corpses in varying degrees of decomposition. The three live newts I encounter try to withdraw into themselves when I pick them up and transport them to the road margin toward which their noses were pointing. I brush my fingers through cool feather moss to wipe off the toxin I've picked up from their skin. Against steel belted radials, it does them no good.

I'm so caught up in rescue efforts -- as futile and vital as Loren Eiseley's star throwing in The Unexpected Universe -- I almost miss the crossing. With memories of yesterday's unexpected soaking fresh in my mind, I take it with extra caution, using my stave as a third leg and testing every rock for wobble before committing my weight to it.

I move perpendicular to the flow, the aspect of presence. And I am present. Each step is given my full attention until I reach moist earth. I start up the trail toward the compound, but pause after only a few paces, turn back and face the creek just in time to see a raven weave into the canopy shadows on the far side.

I've left something of myself behind. I can feel it. A part of me is not only reluctant to step back into modernity, it won't. It can't.

Perhaps that is why, once I've let myself into the bunkhouse, I spend the bulk of the rest of the day catching up on this journal. I take several breaks. First, to talk to my roommate, Chris, an owler in his first year with the same Andrews-based demography study on which I worked from '94 to '01. He fills me in on the happenings at some of my favorite owl sites before he heads to Eugene for the weekend. I call Gila again and plan a gear pick-up in two days so I won't be as weighed down on the walk home along the highway. Then I attempt an immersion in the second official reflections site -- the Lookout Creek gravel bar behind the bunkhouse, near

where I made my crossing. But my heart is not engaged. It keeps returning to these pages. "Fill them," it says. "Fill them with the last few days, with what you have left behind. Don't think about it, just do it and in the free flow, you the writer will come as close as seems possible to preserving the experience of you the walker."

For the remainder of the day, the tracks left by my pen slowly catch up to the tracks left by my boots. Night sets in, but for the first evening in five days, it is of no consequence. I'm in the electrified world now, yet in a sense, electricity does not necessitate a break in continuity. After all, minute electrical signals pulse within me, carrying countless messages through the networks of my bodily systems every fraction of a second, keeping them in contact, integrated as a meaningful whole, dynamic and alive.

In The Snow Leopard, PM quotes Lama Angarika Govinda who, in The Way of the White Clouds, writes, "Do we really know what electricity is? By knowing the laws according to which it acts and by making use of them, we still do not know the origin or the real nature of this force, which ultimately may be the very source of life, and consciousness, the divine power and mover of all that exists."

In the bunkhouse, electricity flows not only through me, but all around me in a web of wires strung through the walls connecting lights, heater, refrigerator, all the devises we've devised to make use of this primordial and mysterious force. How can I begrudge it?

Because, it differs from fire in its immediate accessibility. To see what I mean, imagine standing before a fire-ring. It is full of kindling, ready to contain a blaze. Yet instead of a match, you pull out a halogen bulb. The bulb, after all, puts out light and heat. But the problem should be obvious: it cannot draw light and heat from the pile of twigs in the ring.

The bulb requires an intermediary that the fire does not need. With skill, I could draw light and heat from sticks using only sticks. To draw light and heat from a halogen bulb, I need a lamp connected to electrified wires through which current never ceases to flow. That current does not flow of its own accord like water, but must be generated and transferred by deliberate means.

Fire waits within wood by its nature. It's always there available to those who know how to access it and so do not need lamp and power grid. We confirm its immediacy whenever the grid goes down and we pull out the candles and oil lamps. We fall back on fire. It has our trust whereas the power company has our faith, faith in them to restore the current. In that faith, we are made vulnerable, especially when we feel it with such conviction we throw away our matches.

In many ways, civilization is all about throwing away matches. We call it progress and over the millennia have not only discarded many, but have forgotten they ever existed. This journey has been my attempt to find just a few and draw them back into the light. Sun light, fire light, moon light, forest light.

Tonight however, I abandon trust for faith, flip a switch on the wall and cancel out four night's worth of synchronization with the rhythm of the sun's wheel. Tonight, I integrate, and thus subordinate, myself to an industrial infrastructure of global scale for the sake of illumination and warmth during my entry into the Earth's shadow.

Electricity extends the day, excites molecules in glass tubes making them glow and in metal coils making them hot. It turns a fan to move the heat through metal ducts into the room where I sit, pen in hand, writing . . . of electricity.

And, suddenly, I am present again.

October 3

I have not seen my human reflection in five days. But I have seen many reflections of my other-selves -- forest-self, owl-self, creek-self, fire-self, rain-self, snow-self, moon-self, dipper-self . . . These have been my mirrors on this journey. They are the identities of selves that don't show up on any of the plastic cards in my wallet in the dresser drawer.

I rise with the first hint of daybreak, ready now to engage the Lookout Creek reflections site as I was not yesterday. The subcanopy realm is still dark and colorless on the trail to the water. But I have walked the route enough times over the years to know the way in my mind. I follow the inner path and arrive at the channel after only a few minor stumbles on unseen root swells, absent in my memory, but not in the land.

The sky is brighter at the bank where flowing water has opened a wide winding corridor through the trees. In the corresponding broad band of sky, a few fading stars glimmer between low streamers of lazy mist.

For five days, I have been on the move. Now, I intend to be still and let the world do the moving. But where to stand?

My ears tune in to a particularly musical riffle upstream of a giant fallen Douglas fir spanning the channel. I step to the edge of the riffle, stop and stand, perpendicular to the flow. The water song reminds me of wind chimes.

Breezes flow down the channel above the creek revealing the air shed of the forest. Sound waves generated by the collisions of liquid and stone pass through that gaseous medium to my ears. The same air brushes my face. The song feels cool! And smells like a distant ocean.

A dipper soon arrives. It lands downstream and begins working my way, methodically poking its head into the creek, probing between rocks for breakfast. With every submersion, a bubble forms on the round top of its skull where waterproof feathers prevent cold liquid from reaching skin. The bubble glows as if possessed of its own light then blinks out when the bird lifts its head into air again.

The day brightens. Gray gives way to color; ruddy vine maples, green colt's foot and alder, golden lady fern and thimbleberry.

A Douglas tree squirrel descends fallen trunks on the far side of the channel, traversing a near vertical slope in seconds that I would need several minutes to negotiate even with my forest feet. The squirrel's ascent a few moments later looks equally effortless, fluid.

For perhaps an hour -- I have to estimate since I've left my watch behind -- I don't move. The mist rises out of the trees and dissipates. Leaves fall. The hiss of wings slicing sky gives away a passing raven -- possibly the same one I saw yesterday. It rides morning air currents downstream.

The dipper forages the whole time, up the channel, then across and back down to within fifteen feet of me. The squirrel passes by even closer, using the fallen fir as a bridge to cross the creek. Normally, tree squirrels raise a din of exasperated chirps at the slightest hint of a human, even one much farther away.

It seems I've been accepted as just another feature of the creek. And in that acceptance, the squirrel and dipper confirm my presence. To them, I belong.

I am now one of their other-selves.

The longer I stand here, the higher my spirits rise, like the rising mists and brightening light, imperceptible from moment to moment, but when juxtaposed with memories of moments past,

certain. My mind drifts across thirteen years of remembered moments to 1994, the beginning of my two year residency at the Andrews when I was a member of the owl crew. At that time, well before this stretch of Lookout Creek had been designated as an official reflections site -- actually, nine years before the beginning of the Reflections Program itself -- I came down here often for no other reason than to come down here.

At that time, the creek looked nothing like it does now. The channel was densely forested with large mossy big leaf maples over-topping the water and filling much of the corridor that is now open to the sky.

From 1994 until early 1996, the only changes to the creek were small changes, seasonal changes. Then, in February, snow began to fall, followed by unusual cold and ice. I was visiting Gila in Vancouver, Washington, where she was staying with her Dad and taking an art class at a local college. The night the cold snap broke, I was on my way back to the Andrews. The wipers of my '77 Landcruiser had a hard time keeping up with the heavy warm rainfall.

I rolled into the compound late and went straight to bed, determined to visit Tamolitch Falls on the main stem of the McKenzie the next day. I felt fairly confident that enough precipitation had fallen to transform what was usually a bare cliff face into waterfall. Early the next morning, I climbed into the cruiser and headed out.

Not two miles from the compound, a twenty-foot high pile of logs and debris lay in the 15 road barring my way. Sometime in the night, after my arrival, the water in a small side creek had backed up behind a tangle of deadfall until it could no longer be contained. In a single catastrophic moment, the whole jam blew out and tumbled down toward the road, scouring the creek bed as it went. By the time it reached the culvert intended to send the creek under the road, it was a churning wall of wood and mud. It plugged the culvert instantly and surged onto the

road, where momentum flagged leaving the largest pieces stranded on the asphalt like beached whales.

I marveled at the sight for a few minutes, took some pictures then drove back to the compound. Time for plan B.

I set out on foot to explore the flooded world.

Behind the bunkhouse, the creek roared as I had never heard it, but a faint inexplicable booming drew my attention upstream. At the time, a trail led from the compound to Gypsy Camp along the north bank of the creek. It would take me in the direction of the booming.

I headed up the trail. With each step, the booming grew louder and took on a sharp, unreal quality, like metallic thunder. The trail paralleled the creek through the forest too high up the slope to see the channel. But my ears had no trouble pinpointing the source of the cacophony through the trees. When the trail took me as close as it would, I headed cross-country, downslope.

Before the trunks opened sufficiently to allow a good view of Lookout Creek, still some 30-40 feet away, the wet compacted snow on which I walked went from being a smooth white sheet to muddy brown slush, strewn with broken limbs, moss and other bits of debris. What had done this?

Uneasy, I stepped onto the mud-stained snow and continued to descend the hill. The metallic thunder now roared, blotting out all other sounds with deafening intensity.

I passed the last of the intervening trunks, looked across the channel, and froze, thunderstruck. Where a minor tributary creek once flowed through a culvert beneath the 1506 road about fifty feet above the main Lookout Creek channel, a raging brown waterfall tumbled

over the edge of the road, or, more accurately, what was left of the road. About half the width of its asphalt surface had been eaten away.

The thunder was produced by pebbles, stones and even large cobbles rolling with the water over the ragged lip of pavement to strike the useless, protruding culvert which jutted six or so feet into open air, parting the semi-liquid sheet that slammed into it. Here was a waterfall of even greater rarity than Tamolitch.

Like the torrent that had left the log pile on the 15 road, this waterfall had started as if with the flick of a switch when some threshold of saturation was crossed and an upstream jam let go all at once. The surge shot down the channel with such force it hardly slowed when it reached the 1506 road. It swept across and leapt into the air for the final fifty-foot plunge into Lookout Creek. The impact of the torrent against the bottom of the Lookout valley sent a wave of sludge 30-40 feet up the opposite bank, staining the snow brown and depositing a load of uprooted and torn vegetation where it lost momentum and receded.

Standing there in the aftermath looking at the falls and listening to the ceaseless thunder, I could still hardly imagine what that initial pulse must have looked like. I didn't want to leave the show, but I knew there had to be other spectacles nearby I didn't want to miss. So, I returned to the trail and headed back toward the compound.

Again, I bypassed the stretch of creek behind the bunkhouse in favor of another one of my haunts -- a fifteen-foot cliff overlooking a bedrock plunge pool near the point where Lookout Creek pours into Blue River Reservoir. When I reached the cliff, I stood atop in awe. The creek had risen to within a couple feet of the cliff-top. The six-foot intrusion of bedrock that formed the pool below was barely discernible as a slight dip in the fast flowing rush of brown water. Standing on the cliff-top I could feel the earth vibrating under my feet. It took a moment to

imagine a force capable of shivering stone, but then, it came to me. The creek-bed itself was on the move. Everything from silt to round stones as big as beach balls were rolling, rolling along the bottom.

A raft of small twigs drifted by, followed by larger branches and shorn boughs. Then came the four-foot diameter, sixty-foot trunk of a centuries old giant, bobbing like a war canoe in the current. It reached the warp above the bedrock intrusion and tipped over, end first. The tree's shattered crown slammed into the creek bed like a battering ram causing the ground to jolt. Then the creek sucked the entire log underwater. It seemed to take several seconds to re-emerge. Like a massive cork, the log bobbed, righted itself and continued on to join the growing raft of other such logs that were gathering into a massive flotilla in the topped-out reservoir.

I spent most of the rest of that day on the cliff, witnessing the passage of log after log. I didn't make it to the place that would become the Lookout Creek reflections site until the next day, after the water had begun to subside. What I saw stopped me in my boots.

Where the dense riparian forest and large mossy big leaf maples had been, there was now a broad swath of rocks piled deep along the entire visible length of the scoured channel.

The general configuration of the creek bed remains today where the flood of '96 left it. Even so, as I stand here with the dipper in water that would not overtop my boots except in a few scattered pools, it's hard to believe that the creek once flowed higher than my head in this spot and carried old growth over-story trees along like twigs.

The dipper flips a fallen alder leaf, plucks a pale wriggling form from the water and gulps it down. Then with a series of rapid-fire chirps, the bird takes wing and flies downstream out of

sight. I take its departure as my cue to move on as well, to my own breakfast, and the next leg of my journey: the clear cut reflections site, outside the Andrews, some four miles away.

Eating and reordering my backpack don't take long, then I'm off, across the parking lot, past cars that, in less than ten minutes, could complete what for me will be a two hour walk. At the end of the lot to my right, I glance into the deep shadows of a dense stand of second growth where, on a snowy winter's day nearly ten years ago, a mountain lion killed one of the compound deer -- a sickly fawn. Nobody saw the cat, but the leaves spread over the carcass left no doubt as to the identity of the killer.

Every night for a couple weeks, the lion returned to feed until only pink bones remained. These fragments cracked from exposure, turned green with moss then, year by year, disappeared beneath the accumulated shed of autumn leaves. In their memory, the faint echo of that night of death resounds in the land. But in the living deer -- mother and fawns -- now grazing on the lawn, the land shows that life remains a step ahead.

"All worldly pursuits have but one unavoidable and inevitable end, which is sorrow: acquisitions end in dispersion; buildings in destruction, meetings in separation, birth, in death . . ." So says Milarepa in this quote PM included in <u>The Snow Leopard</u>. To it, the deer and mountain lion, through their very existence, respond, 'All ends precede new beginnings, dispersion feeds the coalescence into new lives, materials for new buildings come from the pieces of old constructs, separations allow for new instances of coming together, newborns fatten on the bodies of the dead. And in all this renewal, joy!'

Each part of the cycle has its time, but in life's continuance, joy must, in the balance of all the living, outpace sorrow, if only by a hairsbreadth. It could not be otherwise for, at the heart of every sorrow is the seed of joy from which it sprouted.

Put another way, every coda is in fact an antecoda, an end before a new beginning. I will have to struggle to keep this in mind in the miles ahead as I prepare to encounter what, for me, has been a sorrowful part of the central Cascades landscape.

I am hoping the previous five joyful days will allow me to penetrate my deep and long-standing bias against two of my least favorite forms of what I see as land-abuse: clear cuts and reservoirs.

For most of the walk ahead, from the headquarters to the clear cut reflections site, I will be skirting the southeastern shore of a man-made water body euphemistically called "Blue River Lake." It's actually a giant drowned clear cut, obvious this time of year because much of the water has been drained, making it a stark eroded mudscape, ready to catch and store potential wet season flood waters.

Yet, as much as I find reservoirs and clear cuts too extreme in their violation of genuine landscape continuity, they are here. As Don Henley intoned in his song *My Thanksgiving*, "Have you noticed that an angry man can only get so far until he reconciles the way he thinks things ought to be with the way things are." And regarding clear cuts and reservoirs, I tend to leap to anger. Yet I wonder, is reconciliation always a worthy aim? Some things may demand steadfast opposition, or better yet, replacement with a persuasive positive alternative that makes opposition moot.

I do find some solace in the fact that, at least with regard to this particular reservoir, there is a precedent. Though, it was not man-made.

According to geomorphologist Fred Swanson who has been studying the landforms of the Cascades for decades, during the heart of the Pleistocene, the place that currently suffers the reservoir harbored a lake thirty meters deeper, impounded behind a dam of ice. Prior to that

time, Blue River poured into the main stem of the McKenzie River almost directly across from the mouth of the South Fork of the McKenzie. The South Fork drains the high Cascades and unlike Blue River during the ice age, it filled from headwaters to confluence with an immense glacier. The terminus of the South Fork glacier pushed straight up the Blue River valley, blocking the flow and forming glacial Blue River Lake.

The water, backed up behind the wall of ice, rose until it found a new outlet about a mile east of the impediment. Over time, the diverted river carved a channel deeper than its former channel. The lake drained as the water cut down and down until it was a lake no more. When the South Fork glacier eventually retreated leaving a terminal moraine at the old Blue River mouth, the Blue did not go back, but remained true to the memory of ice.

Then a different kind of ice arrived. Iced hearts, imposing their own form of blockage using stone and concrete in place of a glacier.

Now, when I say iced hearts, I don't mean evil, but rather, hardened and made cold to the broader patterns of the land. These hearts are like ice in their imposition of stasis in place of flow. It is an imposition of a modern assumption of superiority as inflexible as the wall of stones against which the still waters of the reservoir have lapped since the early 1960's when the dam was built.

Actually, two dams were built. The first, on the main channel, would have caused reservoir levels to rise above the top of the moraine blocking the old channel. This would have inspired the Blue River to return to a course it had abandoned for millennia. To prevent this from happening, a second dam, called the saddle dam, was constructed atop the ancient moraine.

It's a paradox: to keep the river from going back to a former channel so as to remain a river, we, the devotees of progress have taken it back to being a "lake," an identity it gave up

thousands of years ago. So, which course represents the true reflection of moving forward, of making progress?

I walk now toward the saddle dam and try to imagine the glacial lake. Its placid surface would have risen well over my head. The cliff where I stood to watch the 1996 flood would also have been under water. As would the Lookout Creek reflections site and the Andrews headquarters. All flooded. Yet, once the water level dropped, this land eventually transformed into old growth forest. I have no doubt, given the chance, the land affected by the current inundation could do so again.

My feet have begun to feel the asphalt ache. As I did on the 1506 road, I keep to the mossy margins as much as possible.

Margins. Between pavement and moss, reservoir and forest, civilization and wilderness, earth and sky. I gravitate to the fuzzy interstices -- these thin gray zones -- at the abutments of recognized certainties and am uncomfortable venturing too far into either domain; I'm drawn to the mossy wild forest, but dependent on the other, and so I dwell where they meet, physically and emotionally. I'm like a dipper who must breathe wild air but submerges in chill waters for nourishment.

Perhaps reconciliation is not so much about plunging wholly into one realm or the other, but, like the dipper, accepting aspects of both -- the road is here, but I choose to walk it. And in that choice, the holons of interstice become something other than merely slender spaces between dual-ing realms. No longer can they be defined solely by what is around them. Taken together, they form a self-validating third realm. The realm where, unlike the other two, recovery of long term human/landscape health seems uniquely possible. Clear vision in that third realm will

require the human cultural equivalent of the dipper's second eyelid: a nictitating story. Through research and reflection, I believe we, as individuals and as a culture a large, are at present growing that story. And we can turn to the forest for inspiration. After all, the forest -- in particular the old growth forest -- serves as a prime example of an interstitial third realm between earth and sky; its towering trunks are columns of earth lifted high into the air to spread leafy aerial roots into the nourishing soil of sky.

And from a raven's eye view above the treetops, the surface of earth is not the forest floor but the canopy roof. We who walk in the shadows of the trunks are subsurface dwellers. Yet we are not subterranean. The realm of earth is still beneath our feet.

And the realm of sky is above the high crowns. The space in between duff and drifting clouds, between tree bases to the tips of the loftiest leaders is at once earth *and* sky, but it is also more, a synergy of both that can be defined as neither, a place with its own rules.

The impulse of the civilized mind since Gilgamesh has not been to adapt to those rules but to eliminate them by uniting earth and sky with sharp-toothed saws and thus imposing the rules with which it is comfortable. Desert rules, rigidified through desert religions. By those rules, the only parts of the human in contact with earth are the soles of the feet. The rest of the body stands unquestionably in the sky where the singularities of sun, moon and horizon are beyond doubt.

But the sky does not hold sway in the forest any more than the singularities. Even so, the forest is not the underworld. It is something else, something irreducible to either/or, a hybrid of clarity and Mystery with sufficient depth for human immersion. We don't stand above this realm, but rather, near the bottom. It takes a certain humility to accept this, a humility too few inheritors of desert sensibilities have found over the millennia as the imposition of their ideal has

proceeded to the point where the Pacific Northwest is the only place left on Earth in which significant expanses of temperate old growth forest remain.

For the trend to reverse, we must realize that this forested land has felt the pad of human feet for more than 12,000 years and, contrary to popular myth, this land has been profoundly modified by human intentions, most dramatically through the use of fire in the valley bottoms to maintain the open savanna conditions from which the original inhabitants derived much of their sustenance.

The seemingly ancient old growth that European explorers first encountered and that we, their descendants, have come to associate with this region, has only been here for perhaps half as long as people. This surprising fact begs the question of how, in the face of fire-wielding humans, could old growth have come into existence in the first place? To an inheritor of the view of humans as natural land-clearers, the idea of *Homo sapiens* leaving old growth in their wakes as opposed to openings strains credulity. Yet, the condition of the primeval forest itself when weighed against the interval of human inhabitation serves as evidence for just that.

As a possible explanation, I wonder if the desire to pass from the valley bottoms to the high elevation berry patches and hunting grounds encouraged humans to encourage and maintain an open forest type that is easy to move through and that optimizes summer-time shade as well as winter-time thermal cover. If so, the result would have been old growth. This means that old growth is, as much as valley savanna, a human landscape. The presence of humans, not the absence of humans as we are wont to assume, made old growth possible and will either continue to make it possible or . . .

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Soon, I pass the tiny tributary creek that blew out in 1996 leaving the twenty-foot pile of logs in the road. The creek is hardly a trickle now at the end of the dry season and its once-scoured channel is packed with overjoyed alders.

Three pick-up trucks roar by, headed into the mountains. The men inside each truck are all dressed in camouflage. And I remember, it is the first day of rifle season. My anxiety rises higher than it has the whole journey; the stave I carry will not avail me against this predator should it mis-identify its target.

As far as I know, such lethal mis-identification is not an option for any other predatory mammal. In modern humans, it is far too common.

The ability to kill without even having to identify what dies suggests a profound imbalance. As profound as imitating a glacier in relation to a river.

I veer out into the road to save a rough-skinned newt and notice another animal in harm's way. A banana slug. I use a stick to assist this slug, and several others, in their slow crossings of the asphalt sea; removal of their slime from fingertips takes too much effort. The ones I reach too late are barely identifiable. When hit, they transform into gelatinous blobs akin to dead jellyfish washed up on a sandy beach.

A wooden roadside cross with a jar of plastic flowers lashed to it and a dream-catcher hanging from an adjacent tree branch marks another recent death here. The toy off-road motorcycle at the base of the cross strikes me as particularly poignant. A child's plaything modeled on an adult's plaything. It's a symbol of modernity's version of a rite of passage. Getting your wheels. I know of the sixteen-year old victim from a mutual friend. His story is all too familiar. It is the story of a boy trying to break out of childhood by climbing onto a rolling engine much like the toy. He sat behind the driver, another boy who was also trying to make the

same breakout. It was poor judgement and misplaced trust, alcohol and excessive speed, a curve and a guardrail all stacked against the false armor of youth.

The driver survived, his breakout uncertain. The passenger, broken.

The dream-catcher spins on a breeze.

By the time I reach the saddle dam, my heart is glum. Gunshots in the distance punctuate my mood. These reports do not correspond to holes in paper or aluminum cans.

At the logging road leading to the clear cut reflections site, I pause. On this road, the hunters are not merely making their way to the hunt. They are actively stalking, Dodge-style.

I embellish the pieces of orange flagging Gila hung from my hat and backpack with a couple more old lengths I find dangling in roadside branches. Then I proceed, gravel crunching underfoot again, to my destination. My plan is to camp tonight at the top of the hill overlooking the clear cut. Based on the map, it seems like a good idea.

But when I reach the opening and look up at the hill itself -- high, steep, overgrown and with no guarantee of a flat spot at the summit -- a change of plan seems in order; camp in the forest adjacent to the base and make forays from there to reflect.

I continue along the road through the bottom of the unit. To my right, the ground is level, marshy. Copses of tall golden cottonwoods and Oregon ash trees stand as legacies in the wetter places along the southern edge. Everywhere else except the steepest, rockiest portions of the upper hillslope, eight to ten foot tall Douglas firs, all planted and uniform in their spacing, reflect anthropic intentions. A remnant oak/madrone savanna abuts the artificial opening near the summit, providing a telling contrast. I'm eager to hike up there for a look. In my frequent drive-bys over the years, I've cast my gaze to the heights, but other duties and destinations have

prevented me from allowing my feet to follow. Today, being here is my duty and the summit is my destination. But first, I need to find a campsite.

The forest adjacent to the clear cut is not old growth, but a pole stand of second growth. Within it, I wade through patches of knee-deep Oregon grape and salal from one open spot to the next, further and further from the clear cut. None will accommodate my tent; they are either too uneven or too small. Underlying that is a general sense of oppression. These young tightly spaced trees are not inviting the way an old growth grove is. I feel as if this place is *trying* to reject me.

My wandering leads me back toward the road. When I am some thirty feet away, a truck with a staccato diesel chirp creeps into hearing range. I freeze as a giant, silver Ford pickup crawls into view. It moves by, just out of sight and pauses at the break between trees and clear cut, presumably so the two camouflaged occupants can scan the slope for potential game. Then I hear voices above the idling engine. The two men have exited the cab and stand in the road talking, too quietly for me to understand their words. It's just verbal noise. Incomprehensible primate vocalizations.

Hearing their exchange this way -- hearing humans as the animal other might -- I am elk. Deer. Prey.

I can't risk one snapped twig, one flash of movement through a gap in the intervening vine maples. So, I will myself to be forest and wait. The men have left the truck running. They will move on soon.

And so will I. As I stand in the trees listening to engine and voices, Plan C replaces plan B.

My house is about seven or eight miles from here and mid-day has only just passed. I have time to abbreviate my clear cut reflections and make it home. I find the idea of surprising Gila and Galen by showing up a day early very appealing.

The truck pulls away giving the forest its silence back. I make my way to the old fire-line at the unit's margin, stow my pack in an elbow formed where two fallen fir trunks cross and head up through the clear cut toward the hilltop.

Loose stones shift underfoot making the ascent treacherous. In addition, eruptions of Himalayan blackberry, trailing blackberry and bull thistle create a maze of thorns to be negotiated. Near the summit, poison oak joins the list.

But the view! This is the first time in six days that mist and forest have not obscured the long vision where mountain peaks reside. Castle Rock looms large in the southeast, partially obscuring the Horse Creek valley where my house lies. Panning west, classic sheets of rain slant from a cottony billow of cloud above the Sawtooth Ridge in the south. To the southwest, a visible bend in the McKenzie River reflects full sunshine with white intensity. The clear cut slopes of Deathball Rock and Thorshammer Mountain beyond assume the bare ruddy hue of recent harvest, like wounds, raw in the broken, shifting light of cloud-shadow. The whole sky is on the move.

I sit near the summit among madrone and oak and watch the weather show until the hilltop takes center stage for a downpour. Having left my raingear in my pack, I wait out the cloudburst in a circle of dry earth beneath a gnarled, leaning Douglas fir some distance back in the forest. Then, in the aftermath, I emerge into the open again to watch the wet veil continue its southward sweep.

As much as I dislike clear cuts, I must admit I delight in the views they provide. Though, in the absence of a century of fire suppression, this dry oak slope might have offered an open vista even if the clear cut had never been inflicted on the land.

I visit the summit where a layer of waxy madrone leaves lay like ovoid tiles atop moss-pillowed stone. My concern about a summit tent spot proves justified. The gentle flat crown I imagined turns out to be a figment of idealistic simplification combined with wishful thinking. I'm glad I trusted my suspicion and left my load below.

The unique habitat at the summit invites exploration, and I accept the invitation for a time, but the clear cut is supposed to be the subject of my attention. So, reluctantly I begin my descent, straight into a soaking. The rain clouds may have passed, but the water they left behind dapples the leaves of the shrubs through which I must wade to reach the bottom. The anxiety this would have inspired a few days ago does not arise. I don't need to worry about being dry. By tonight, if all goes as re-re-planned, I will be able to drape wet clothes by the wood stove at home. So, I focus on the clear cut.

The loss of insulative protection once offered by overtopping forest has brought an early autumn to this hill. Where the vine maples and dogwoods remain summer-green beneath the adjacent canopy, they have turned their respective shades of crimson and russet-pink in the open. It reflects a bittersweet beauty. These plants, left behind after the harvest less than a decade ago, are showing the stress of their relatively sudden exposure.

A speckled bird flushes ahead of me with a startled cry. My first inclination is sandpiper, but my mind registers the incongruity of the bird and the habitat. This causes immediate doubt. Meadowlark? Mystery.

Deer prints guide me down through the maze of thorns to level ground. There, I encounter several heaps of elk dropping amid nibbled iris. A few paces further, a pile of bear scat catches my eye. It's filled with berries from a shrub common in this sun-baked unit: hairy manzanita.

Loath as I am to admit it, I see more sign of so-called charismatic mega-fauna here than anywhere else on my trip. I recall one autumn a few years ago when, in passing by on my way to somewhere else, I spotted a trio of bull elk standing just about where the droppings are today. Did they leave the piles I see now during a more recent circuit in the rounds of their lives?

I would have to spend more than a week immersed in the flow of this land to discover the answer. More than a year. Perhaps, more than a life-time.

The one animal that most certainly knows has left no sign, at least none that my unrefined senses can detect. But in a way beyond sense, I feel mountain lion's presence.

When, on the first two days of this trek, the exhaustion of the uphill miles translated into a slow, ponderous gait punctuated by frequent stops, I was acutely aware that golden eyes might be watching me for signs of weakness. Earlier this summer, a fatigued Forest Service worker one district to the south triggered a cougar's predatory impulse when he let his fatigue show. He did manage to drive the cat away, but the hunt had been joined. The blood dance engaged.

I didn't want to convey to a prospective feline partner my willingness to dance, so I deliberately struggled to hide any sign of struggle from my stride. I hoped my pack made me look bigger and more formidable. And I kept a tight grip on Matthiessen.

On his trek in the Himalayas, PM never saw the animal for which his book is named, though he did see sign. On my trek, the sign of mountain lion has been even less certain, yet not its presence. Here, the mountain lion, like the snow leopard of Asia, might well serve as the icon of presence, incapable of slides into abstraction.

In my twenty seasons in the Cascades, I've seen six. For all but one sighting, I was inside a vehicle. Yet, despite how fleeting and indirect the sightings were, I felt time pause, every thought and distraction gone. At the moment of recognition, when the hovering dark-tipped tail disqualified all other options, one awareness filled the mind.

Cougar!

PM writes in The Snow Leopard, "It is wonderful how the presence of this creature draws the whole landscape to a point . . ." In the Cascades, the mountain lion does the same. This is not mere metaphor. The mountain lion is the focal point of the ecological magnifying lens in this place. It is the hot ray of light into which diffuse beams of distinct Cascadian beings concentrate as a single beating feline heart.

Plant's roots web the very flesh of the earth, the rich loam of dark humus and forest soil drawing into themselves nutrients from the elemental recirculation of decomposition and primary production. They take these and change them with the chlorophylus gleanings of solar input and grow green and luxuriant on it. Then elk and deer further the concentration in their nipping and swallowing of leaves, making soil, sun and succulent plant growth into meat.

This concentration is further honed in the sinews of the crouching cougar, golden eyes seeking signs of distress. The ailing bull, the bony calf, the limping cow trigger a blood quickening, and the cougar closes in like a spotlight, blinding in its intensity and focus. In its presence.

Pounce, bite, hold. And feed; the whole landscape drawn to a point.

Standing in the landscape where deer and elk concentrate is more than being in the presence of the cougar. It is to be a part of the cougar, for all of this is literally drawn into the cat, transformed into fur, claws, piercing eyes, beating heart, twitching dark-tipped tail.

I retrieve my pack. Quietly. And start for the road.

A rifle crack resounds from out of the east. Why doesn't the modern human hunter in the act of predation invoke the same sense of presence as the cougar? The answer I think is to be found in the way of the act, the means, the indirectness of the modern process. Pick-up trucks ply asphalt, hauling would-be carnivores around at excessive rates, from places beyond the accessibility of the feet. They are not of here. In the means of mobility as well as lethality -- using weapons not of the land where the hunt takes place -- the modern hunter is more akin to alien parasite than predator. The prey is removed from the local cycles of the land. In terms of overall energy expended compared to energy gained in the form of elk or deer meat, the modern human hunter comes nowhere near breaking even, let alone acting as a conduit of concentration akin to a cougar. Put another way, the gain in meat calories to human bodies is more than entirely traded away in the exchange for fossil fuel calories expended in all the products used to make the kill as well as to keep it frozen afterward. More imposed stasis.

In the way the modern human predator substitutes high-energy global commodities made indirectly outside local energy cycles for the aborigines grounded knowledge, the point to which the landscape could be drawn in human form is shattered.

The few humans these days who do approach the hunt in the way of the cougar are seen as idealistic extremists. They are not typical. And I admit I wouldn't begin to know how to be one of them. As a child of suburbia, the life-long accumulation of skills in a conducive context and informed by a community of elders from whom to learn such knowledge, was not part of my experience. And rather than hunt in the typical way, which always struck my intuitive sensibilities as discordant even before I could begin to articulate a reason, I chose not to hunt at all. That I had the freedom to make such a choice shows the strangeness of these times.

Throughout the existence of the human species, only a few members, at this relative instant in the long continuum, have had the luxury to make the choice not to participate directly in the life-round without perishing.

But, even so, we must all participate in some way. And so, we do it indirectly through longer linkages, commodity linkages. I spent two days in the kitchen prior to this trip, crafting a life-line of linkages -- go-bars, pancakes, pizza -- to carry me across the days I'd be afoot. Water and fuel, I did not have to haul with me, but food I did. Then I had to be attentive to the rate of ingestion so as to make sure I did not exhaust my supply prematurely -- before being able to link into the commodity life-line again.

On the trail, I found a total of three salal berries fit to eat. If pressed I might have been able to kill the grouse, or catch a few trout. But walking time would have been greatly reduced, traded off for the time required to derive more of my sustenance from the land.

Awareness of this distance from the land is valuable even if I can't act to remedy it. Being forced to pay attention to my rations makes me conscious of what I normally take for granted which is the first step in making any positive change in the pattern of a life. This in turn leads to thinking about the possibilities for finding and securing food here, in this place, like a cougar, or probably more accurately, like a coyote.

Drawing water and warmth locally represent a start. To stay hydrated and warm, to dry wet garments and night coverings do take effort, time and care.

These, in some small way, I think allowed me to focus the light of the land, if not to the blazing point of the cougar, at least bright enough to illuminate the darkness of the modern depths of near-singular commodity dependence.

My pack feels lighter now though it contains everything with which I began the journey, save the food. And even that has been somewhat bolstered.

I think it feels lighter because I've become accustomed to it. My legs are stronger. And with them, I'm stepping back to a more human way.

But by evening, I will discontinue the process begun on Monday. To carry it further would require going beyond water and fuel in my reliance on the land. Food would have come next, then, with winter closing in, shelter and warmer clothing. But these are the obvious concerns. Mundane upkeep like hair cutting and fingernail trimming would require attention. And countless other tasks I wouldn't even think of until I faced them.

Through it all, as time passed from a week, to a month, to a season, to a year, to a decade . . . the land would draw me in deeper and deeper. Each interval, in the full spectrum of intervals, would bring new levels of essential attentiveness, one of which would be increasing reliance on community. After all, though humans are capable of reflecting mountain lions, we are not mountain lions. Beyond a season, or perhaps a year, my chances of solitary survival would slip from slim to none. And the ability to thrive, as I have these six days, would be lost even earlier.

But, now, here on the road so close to my house, these levels of attentiveness are, like my wet clothes, beyond my concern. Or are they? With the global crises compounding daily and solutions remaining elusive, the most obvious possibility -- tracking contemporary and precedent examples of healthy human/landscape co-integration as far as possible, becomes ever more relevant. Over the modern mantra "we can't go back," the call, "we must go back," grows ever louder. The layers of contempt and assumption through which we would have to cut to reach the point where the call "we must go back" not only makes sense, but holds appeal, are thick and numerous. First among them is the difficult admission that we, children of civilization, do not, at

present, meaningfully inhabit the places where we live. We dwell in them. We reside in them. We occupy them. But we are not integrated into them. We do not inhabit them. And at base, inhabitation is the condition to which the statement "we must go back" ultimately refers. We must go back to living as inhabitants of the earth. It's the only way forward.

There is real reason for optimism in this. All humans, not so long ago in our 150,000 to 200,000 years as a species of Earth, were inhabitants of the places they lived -- the places we too live. Inhabitation is in our blood. And so the call remains.

The effort to heed it, to understand it, to find meaning in it, perhaps requires an approach we have not yet allowed ourselves to contemplate except at the most superficial level. A few hours, a few days, a few weeks at most, represent the limits of our immersion in the land, and then it is only partial. The prevailing rules of modernity override the requirements of full immersion, of "going back" to the degree to which even now, we are capable. In other words, there are places where humans could integrate into the landscape across more intervals of the inhabitation spectrum than we do. The Andrews Forest seems like one of those places.

Imagine if there was a program like the Long Term Ecological Reflections program, but instead of offering one-week residencies, it offered longer term "inhabitancies" devoted to learning just how far civilized humans can "go back?" Over time, the intervals of these inhabitancies could span ever longer durations as the cumulative knowledge gathered through the reflections and experiences of previous participants helped inform those who came later.

In other words, by *knowing more* at the outset, successive participants would *need less* to be present in the land for longer periods of time.

Ideally, as inhabitancy durations lengthened, prospective participants would apply not as individuals, but as groups, intent on living in community with each other in the land for the

duration specified in their inhabitancy proposal. Two requirements would serve as the foundation on which all proposals would be based.

The first, travel within the study area for the duration of the inhabitancy would be done on foot. This requirement alone would, as the durations of the inhabitancies increased, necessitate deriving more and more life-needs from the landscape. The second requirement would be to meet those needs without causing the degradation (defined most simply as consumption rates in excess of natural renewal cycles) of any landscape feature -- water quality, forest cover, animal and plant diversity etc. The indefinite maintenance of the full spectrum of ecological integrity across the landscape would be the prime directive. Who knows, over time, human participation in local ecological cycles might even yield a net benefit to overall landscape health through the positive qualities we seem uniquely capable of adding to an eco-system: story, art, poetry, song, dance, empathy, sympathy, compassion. Culture.

We find ourselves in the unprecedented position of being able to glean inspiration from both the wisdom and mistakes of the whole world across the full sweep of human time, and beyond. On top of that, the Andrews is perhaps unique in the world in terms of the breadth and depth of ecological understanding available with regard to seeing and relating to the local landscape as a whole. The moment seems ripe for us to make use of that knowledge for learning, on the one hand, how the forest might serve as an encompassing human Body-Mind the way it serves as the downy feathers of owls. And on the other hand, how we, in our own way, might draw the landscape to a point like the mountain lion.

In short, the greater the duration of inhabitancy, the more articles of inhabitation we could learn and through them, restore to significance our long-marginalized sense of belonging in the land.

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I remember little of the half-mile walk from the clear cut to Highway 126. My mind has been following its flight of fancy into the inhabitancy idea and I have not dissuaded the flight. As unfeasible it may seem at present, the time might very well come, sometime between now and the twenty-third century, when it makes sense. Once circumstance has inspired us to peel away sufficient layers of preconception, and millennia of accumulated bias against presence in favor of progress, we'll begin to see the appeal of inhabitation and pursue it to the very deepest levels of the human heart. Our heart in the land.

In a way, the past six days of foot-rate reflection have felt like the beginning of that pursuit. The question is how to keep it going? Already, at the highway, the sound of the McKenzie River on the other side of the pavement is almost totally drowned out by the intervening engine roar, tire hum and wind whoosh of passing cars and trucks. The buffeting I take causes my tension level to creep up. Presence fades into future longings with every vehicle that races by. I walk as fast as I can toward McKenzie River Drive where I will turn off and so escape the space-time warping conduit of the highway.

The race with the sun also adds to my tension and haste. After twenty minutes of walking, when I look back, I can still see the turn-off to the 15 road behind me. If I were driving, I'd be home already. I focus forward.

An oak and meadow-covered hill I know to be directly across from the turn-off to Aufderheide Forest Drive along the South Fork comes into view. Seeing it gives me the impression that I'm making good time. But reaching it takes over half an hour.

And the highway margins lack moss. My feet start to ache again. Not good since I still have a long way to go. All on asphalt.

To offset the plod, I set mini-goals. After the Aufderheide turn-off comes McKenzie River Drive where I depart the highway, then the Belknap Covered Bridge, the Upper McKenzie Community Center, the bus stop near Harbick's Country Store, the drive way to my friend Dixie Monkhouse's riverside cabin, her monkabin as she calls it. Dixie celebrated her 100th birthday last month -- half the intended span of the Long Term Ecological Reflections program. The key to her longevity in my view is her uncanny ability to remain present. She does not dwell in her far-reaching memories, but is here, now, fully engaged and excited about most everything. And so she's ageless. Her body seems to know it and functions accordingly.

A rainbow appears over the river to my right. I smile.

McKenzie River Drive comes to an end, forcing me back onto the highway. I hurry to Hall Road, which takes me into the town of McKenzie Bridge. From the end of Hall Road, North Bank Road is only a few paces away. Once I reach that junction, the circle of my six-day journey closes. Here, Gila and I walked north in the first hour of my trek. I will retrace our steps back to the house.

I glance north toward Lookout Mountain. Its summit is hidden in a dense shroud of shifting vapor.

I turn east and continue along the highway. The sun is low behind me now. Ahead, storm clouds, almost black, are stacked up against the Three Sisters. I offer silent thanks for the sunny dry weather I've enjoyed throughout most of my three and a half-hour walk from the clear cut.

The river races beneath me as a cross the bridge through town.

Horse Creek Road looks just as I remember it. Yet it is also somehow new to me. Turning onto it, I'm a mile from the house.

When I round Foley Ridge and look across the recent clear cut at the wind-battered western edge of the 3.9 acres Gila and I have called home for 13 years, it too feels different. Then I see the rainbow, faint but unmistakable, over the trees.

A flock of six geese -- one for each day of the trek -- flies out of the rainbow headed west, toward me. They fly in silence, the inverse of the unseen flock I heard above camp on the first night of the hike. And in this contrast, balance.

I turn beneath the avian chevron to follow its passage. The geese bank toward Castle Rock where the sun is setting behind the mountain's northern flank.

I made it. I'm home.

There is also the feeling that I never left home. In undertaking the journey on foot, the continuity of presence was never broken. Thus, instead of leaving home, I expanded it.

I turn down the driveway, see the lights glowing in the windows, the wood smoke trickling from the chimney into open air. Ascending the three porch steps is actually a struggle, but they don't slow me. I'm eager to see my family.

When I knock on the door, I hear Galen inside. "I wonder who's here this late?"

Gila opens the door.

"Surprise!"

Galen smiles. "I knew it was you!" he says.

I lean my stave by the threshold and, still wearing my pack, step in for hugs.

Then the stories begin . . .

Antecoda

October 25

Yesterday, the same day I completed the above transcription/revision of the journal I kept during my six days afoot in and around the Andrews Forest, the November/December issue of *Orion* Magazine arrived in the mail. Inside, I was surprised to find Scott Russell Sanders' essay "Mind in the Forest" which was inspired by his Andrews residency last October. Reading it struck me with the same force as the revelatory moment with the barred owl on Horse Creek Road in February. Particularly the following passage:

It is easy to feel nurtured among these ancient trees. I breathe the forest. I drink its waters. I take in the forest through all my senses. In order to survive here for any length of time, I would need to wear the forest, its fur and skin and fiber; I would need to draw my food from what lives here alongside me. I would need to burn its fallen branches for cooking and for keeping warm; I would need to frame my shelter with its wood and clay and stone. Above all, I would need to learn to think *like a forest, learn its patterns, obey its requirements, align myself with its flow.*

There are no boundaries between the forest and the cosmos, or between myself and the forest, and so the intelligence on display here is continuous with the intelligence manifest throughout the universe and with the mind I use to apprehend and speak of it.

The congruity in content -- in the subjects on which Sanders and I both focused during our time at the Andrews -- seems too pronounced to reflect mere thematic resonance. Could it be

that the forest was, through us, speaking with its human voice as, on that February day, it spoke with its owl voice? If, as Sanders suggests, the forest, the cosmos and myself -- not to mention owls and mountain lions -- all exist on the same continuum of consciousness, then the possibility becomes a tantalizing source of optimism.

When Sanders and I looked into the mirror of the same landscape, in the same season, but in different years, we saw the same reflection, the human reflection of the forest. We also saw how far we are from living in accord with the human form the forest would have us take so as to "align ourselves with its flow."

I can think of no other human practice of greater potential *significance* than one devoted to seeking that alignment. What if, instead of merely imagining what would have to happen to think like a forest, we deliberately tried to meet all the preconditions necessary to actually do it?

It seems the consciousness of the forest itself has made the overture. It is ready to flow through those who are open to immersion in its patterns, but the depth of immersion possible in a week of days is limited by that interval. To walk the next step, we must engage the next interval, and see where it leads. I have no doubt the forest will show us. It has already started doing so:

Should the old growth ecosystem endure, even if the spotted owl gives way to the barred, the forest will retemper the barred in form and spirit to fit the mood of the trees as the spotted owl now does. It will be a softening, a quieting, a recasting for a new role in a different play of life and light and ages.

Given time, the forest will do the same to inhabitant humans as befits our kind.