

Design

Three old poets on a wooden foot bridge. Admiring its pole construction. Its craftily fitted joints.

Pieces shaped and cut and assembled to span the creek rushing beneath. We cross.

The trail winds gently among the trunks of old growth Douglas fir. Cedar. Yew.

Standing. Fallen. Decomposing into duff. Spared the clear-cuts of the surrounding mountains, the millions of years go on. Refugia, Charles has written. The places where things go on.

He bends down and picks up a leaf of prehistoric lettuce. Hands me a piece. Lobaria, he says.

Ancient lichen, pockets and ridges like the landscape of another world. Now I see it in the canopy above us, scattered on the forest floor. Green and gray. Thriving and dying. A fungus and an algae hooked up with a bacterium, it can photosynthesize, fix nitrogen from the air, reproduce from spores or broken pieces of itself. Its decay feeds the forest with nitrogen. It goes on. He hands a piece to Clem.

He's more interested in the yew. A dense centuries-old branch his hand can reach around. The English long-bow. Battle of Agincourt, he says. Then adds: Henry V? Laughs at the French generals whining about the rules of war, this bright new tool of empire.

Then devil's club, Charles says, points to the spiny stalks thrust up around us through the forest floor. With wrapped burlap for a hand-hold, he says company goons beat the Wobblies when they ran them out of Everett and other mill towns. I touch one, its spines sharp as needles. Ingenious, I say. A moment of silent respect for the IWW.

At a wide spot in the trail three old poets looking up at a spider's web. Strung between yews on either side, an artful airy construct, its author in the middle of it. Pollen from the firs has dusted the spider and every strut and strand with gold. All that beauty. Useless now that it's visible. Poor guy, we all commiserate.

He'll never get dinner with that.

Lookout Creek, H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest