

Journal Excerpts

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Andrews Forest Writing Residency
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8 November, Descending Towards San Francisco

Out the left side window, the westering sun paints a tufted sea of clouds orange and pink, a molten brew of sunset. High-speed wisps of cirrus speed by, reverse our direction, above the dense mat of cloud that will follow us all the way to the ground.

10 November, First Night in the Andrews

A good mantra for the week: *writing as a verb, not a noun.*

Saul sent me these good words before I left home: “Good writing, sitting, watching, walking.... Enjoy the trees, my friend, keep the world close.”

Just back from nightwalk on the road. A bit of geographical bearings: I am just above Lookout Creek, roughly a quarter mile above its confluence with the Blue River, which, in turn, is about three miles from its confluence with the McKenzie. We’re about 1500 feet above sea level.

A bit of bearings on the light (and lack thereof). In the forest, in the dark, I at first had difficulty distinguishing what was positive, what negative: I reached my hand down to the pale patterns, wondering if somehow they were snow—to find the soft springiness of ferns. The moon was casting a diffuse light through clouds. This fuzzy circle was the closest thing to sun since my dropping in to this bioregion two days ago.

I feel like I’ve landed on another planet, albeit one I’ve visited before. The *light* is the single most striking difference—even more than the tall trees, or the wet earth. The lack of shadows, the lack of crisp definition, the narrower palette of colors—all this is so strikingly different.

11 November

The November rain has moved in with a sense of momentous purpose—ready to soak the humus, swell the rivers. The rain falling completely vertical—no deviation from the shortest route between cloud and soil. I sit on the front porch admiring the rain as others might enjoy sunrise over Cape Cod Bay. A cup of Yunnan tea perched on the railing, the light still dim enough I must squint to read the page—this though we are almost two hours past “sunrise.” Sun, sunrise, sunset—these become more conceptions, intellectualizations here. The last I actually *saw* the sun—the last I had to shield my eyes—was on the plane as we descended toward San Francisco three days ago.

Been thinking about love of place. I’m somewhere in the middle, I suppose, between someone who samples broadly across the globe and one who digs in very specifically and locally. My focus has been on North America, broadly defined, but also something like *serial monogamy*—when I dip into a place, I do so very wholeheartedly, with field guides blazing, attentiveness ripping, synapses open. But that spotlight has shined upon several different landscapes: Pacific Northwest forests, mountains and coasts (which are so interfingered I can’t separate them); the canyon country—sandstone land—of the Colorado Plateau; the Sonoran Desert, land of erect cacti and leguminous shrubs and trees; and the Gulf of California—rich miracle of a sea, bubbling (almost literally) with mammals and birds (the former bubbling upwards, the latter’s frothy entrance to the sea from above). As with human companions, the question arises: how many can we love at once? Is there an inherent limit to intimacy? How do we love both deeply and broadly?

The Rain of Patience [While walking on Forest Roads 130 and 134, in morning]

The first serious winter rains have arrived, and I walk headlong into them. Where I live, rain is a wild and tempestuous presence—rarely seen, but felt vividly, in all its slamming, swooping, stinging glory. But here—west side of central Oregon Cascades, 1500 ft. elevation—at the onset of winter.... The time when the rain steps into the room and dourly announces, “I’m here—get back in your seats; sit

down.” The rain is formless and ubiquitous, it’s everywhere at once: on the brim of my hat, in the spongy humus, in rivulets in the ruts along old logging roads, and in Lookout Creek, which I hear surging, somewhere down in the valley’s mists, far below.

You could fit twenty of these fine droplets into a single big, gaudy Arizona monsoon-season rain pellet.

But here, this is the rain of patience. The rain that knows it has all the time in the world, the rain that speaks in quiet, assured tones, saying “There’s no turning back. You’re mine.”

Like the rumble of a very gentle avalanche, a grouse leaps into low flight, from mossy roadbank into young Douglas-firs.

Madrones (*Arbutus menziesii*) mixed in under young Douglas-firs—one way this place differs from the North Cascades.

Where *Acer macrophyllum* has shed its leaves the rain’s voice speaks much louder, each note more distinct and with greater volume.

It took one hour and twenty-four minutes for my foot to become so wet that my sock is audibly squishing. But who’s counting?

If I was blind I would love the giant maple leaves flattened to the ground, for the crescendo of rain when I encounter their encounter. But then, aren’t we all a little blind? Couldn’t we all fine-tune our senses? All learn to listen more closely?

Two young Blacktail Deer, kneeling in matted roadside grass, in steady rain. Motionless but for swiveling jaws. Ears perched at 45 degree angles to the head. They saw me well before I saw them. The closer one (20 m away) never dropped its gaze, the second a bit more cavalier. I stood stock-still for five minutes. Fine. I took

one step forward and they quickly stood up, still watching. Just then, by odd coincidence, the only other humans in the valley came jumbling along in a long white truck. Deer gone.

[Afternoon walk: Down to gravel bar reflection plot, then down main road, to Lookout Creek overlook, to confluence Lookout Creek and Blue River, and, at dusk, into Mona Campground]

Just as the plants are immense, so is the “gravel” bigger here. In the Southwest this might well be called a “boulder bar” rather than a dainty gravel bar. Almost every chunk at least the size of a football, many several times larger. All smoothed by water—the water that flows to the right, but a dozen years ago to the left.

Keep my eyes and ears out for *Cinclus*—not only does this seem a perfect stream, but I’m quite sure I heard one yesterday while Fred was talking.

One striking thing about the soundscape here: animal sounds are almost absent. I have heard one bird [dipper] and seen another [grouse]. Heard one red squirrel chirp. That’s pretty much it. All sound is induced by water—raindrops striking need, broadleaf, rock, and moss each with a different note; the course of the stream as it surges past this terrace, built by this same stream when it was a dozen years younger. Humped gray rocks, all smoothed and rounded, all larger than footballs. The water in the stream is much more ancient than the rain that pours into it. The soul of this current has been hidden underground by the dense rotting heart of this massive forest. That which we call soil has squeezed it and stored it for decades, but it finally slips out, groundwater greeting the light once more.

In steady rain
I lean back against a massive fallen cedar,
its girth tall enough to palm my whole back.
When I stand up, there it is—
my Dipper, bobbing with all its heart,
on the last lone rock
at the very edge of all this surging power,

this irrepressible urge toward the sea.

He blares his rattled trumpeting
the only sound I've heard today
not induced by water

A voice I recognize, my distant cousin
who has grown up in the same culture of music,
the loving of rivers.

Volcanic ash, when smoothed by a stream
Looks almost like canyon sandstone
The drooping tresses of maidenhair ferns
Bounce in the river's light wind

Deer in the green rain make no sound (three this time, on gravel bar)

Madroño leaves also amplify sound

The current, a lean and rippling muscle

Confluence, Lookout & Blue

The bent log, probably twenty feet long, looks like the broken-off leg of an immense camel. The buoyancy of the huge bent log, and the playful way it is danced by the river—these are what surprise me. For half an hour I watch, and the giant cloven hoof cannot break free of the ever-cycling eddy.

The First Two Stages of Remembering How to Hike in Rain

- I. It took an hour and twenty-four minutes for my foot to become so wet that my sock is audibly squishing. But who's counting?
- II. Letting go into dampness. Such liberation to be wet.

At dusk
Thrushes drop like silent damp leaves
To the forest floor

Salamander!
Herk-jerking its way across the puddled road
Five minutes to go twenty feet:
Steady as she goes—no stopping, no speeding

12 November

Newts, *Taricha granulosa*, everywhere this morning in Mona CG—both sides of the oblong loop (nearer and farther from the river). I counted 23, but I surely missed some, maybe many. As evidence, I came within a centimeter of stepping on one when I wasn't looking for them. Another example of natural history filtering—affecting what we see by choosing what we look for. At one point I counted ten on the road over a stretch of about 200 meters, mostly solitary. They blend in so well with brown, rain-flattened maple leaves. Why are they all over the road? Or is this density typical of the forest floor?!

Ruffed Grouse in flight—silent.

All animals, including me, are silent. Water does the talking here. (I really have been silent here—all I've spoken in the last 48 hours: "That's OK," when an OSU truck came upon me while I had my eyes locked with a young deer. The deer bounded away; the driver buzzed down the window, said, "Sorry to interrupt your..." and waved his hand toward the disappeared animals.)

I'm having a great time, wandering around in a sodden stupor.

Five-hundred year old Douglas-firs reach into the clouds, which dump silent, steady rain.

[Lookout Creek Old Growth Trail]

Pseudotsuga, *Tsuga heterophylla*, *Thuja plicata* all present in large numbers—more equal than in North Cascades. Both the Doug-firs and cedars are *huge*.

Tiarella in flower

Rhododendron macrophyllum very prominent understory—very different than North Cascades.

Staring at giant Douglas-fir,
thrice wider than me
Pale green lichens cluster
in the bark's deep fissures,
furrows I can fit my fist in.

Lichens on bark
almost as old as the giant fir,
but for all that time
their growth can be measured in millimeters

Exercise equipment I need at home: fallen Doug-fir large enough that I can just barely straddle it. Moss to soften its seat. Perfect for thigh stretching. Legs forward, fold chest to log, arms outstretched.

Being mindful here of Impermanence

For a brief while today the *wind* spoke on trees, moving their tops. Other than this, it's all been about water.

13 November (full moon)

All this singing in the morning, this assertive creek that soon will merge with one larger (Blue River), and three miles later with yet another. Then, after a forty mile rumble down to the big valley, it merges with the Willamette, taking a 90 degree turn to the north. On to the Columbia, and finally towards the Pacific. This fresh

mountain water will maintain itself miles out to sea—the light fresh floating atop
the dense salt water.

Reading about mosses this morning.

Tea out of a real cup, here straddling the fallen log.

I'm reluctant to break the spell of my own silence. Thus, I've avoided going into the
headquarters office, even though everyone there is very friendly. I have spoken
but two words (“that’s okay”) since Monday afternoon—it’s now Thursday
morning. We are singers, we humans—always ready to tell a story, declare rights
and wrongs, laugh at someone’s joke, someone’s foolishness. But wrapping
ourselves in a cloak of our own silence happens so rarely as to be rather eerie.
The force of speaking, usually expelled without effort or thought, is kept inside.
The longer it’s preserved, the less I want to shatter it. I can see why Meher Baba,
once he got going, kept with silence for years. The irony of the moment is that
I’m keenly focused on words and language—but it’s all in writing, and thus far all
self-referential (ie, not shared).

I have not spoken for three days. From inside this crystal spore of silence—a turning
inward—comes an intensity of external focus.

I have forgotten how to speak,
Remembering how to listen.

Here they are: the first shadows I’ve seen all week. Ten forty-two A.M., Thursday.

[Blue River Ridge reflections plot—just a few hundred feet outside the Lookout Creek
Watershed, and thus Andrews Forest]

What else can we call “Disturbance-based Management”?—a question posed by Fred
Swanson

Per my conversation with Ed along the San Pedro River, March 2002—managing for
natural disturbance, having all natural disturbances in place, and not having too

many extras, is a key criterion of “ecological health.” “*Rejuvenation*-based management”? Almost any term can be manipulated, coopted.

What do I see here? A few huge Doug-firs, thick bark blackened by fire. Forty feet up from the ground, charred. Knee-high saplings amongst the stumps. Strangely, a few young hemlocks, out in the open. Lots of madroño, more than I’ve ever seen (I used to live just at the northern limit of its range, where it was rare and patchy—along railroad tracks near Chuckanut Bay, for example). What else? Blackberries, salal, some pretty bright-green broad-leaved grass I don’t recognize, Scotch broom, Oregon grape, *Ceanothus* (just a little, near road). Pale volcanic rock, scattered small chunks.

The crumbled heart of down trees provides a linear path through the jumble of shrubs and stumps. And mixed in with these wood fragments here and there, pellets of deer scat. From deer drawn here by the sunlight of open opportunity.

The sun emerged for the first time in 5 ½ days in Oregon, but even up here, in the chainsaw-induced opening, the light is dim. The cloudless portions of the sky are only faintly discernable as blue.

I fiddle with making charcoal drawings of blackened Douglas-firs, using charcoal from the same trees...

[Log Decomposition reflections plot]

Some sites are just naturally richer with metaphor.

I step onto a down log, completely cloaked in vivid green moss. It gives way beneath my foot—the progress of mycelia and bacteria has proceeded enough that cavities of air lurk within the log.

I come here, to the palace of rot, to consider the recent passing of my friend Cathy. She died when almost exactly one-tenth the age of these giant, still-alive trees. Here, “death” and “life” are virtually indistinguishable: the downed logs more full of critters than when they were standing trees. Bright green mosses covering every surface on the ground and reaching upwards into the trees. But the loss of Cathy’s life—unlike the more nebulous “death” of these trees--seems to leave only a void. Not a nurturing seed bed, not a nurse log. Everyone around her feels an emptiness, none feel enriched.

14 November

Tea on the front porch, after a just-getting-light walk down the road to peer at the drops in Lookout Creek. Some areas smooth as glass, others nothing but turbulence and white power.

Last night a full moon shone above Cougar Reservoir as I departed Terwilliger Hot Springs. I looked forward to walking here in moonlight. But the valley mists kept the sky hazy enough that the moon was just a milky shadow, not an illuminator.

So, all this talk of change, of forest ecosystem dynamics, of disturbance. Here’s a mundane example: I was driving up FS Rd. 1506, the main road that follows Lookout Creek, that goes to the Old Growth Trail, etc. I’m barreling along, when suddenly a white-barked alder is lying perpendicular across the road. I tried to move it but the best I could do was break a little branch. So, that’s that. No one’s heading up this road today. My plan had been to see how far I could make it up spur road 350, the road to Carpenter Mountain lookout (5000+ ft.). In part to enjoy the sunlight, but also to get a vantage of this watershed from above. So, I can either go up Lookout Ridge (the other side of Lookout Creek) or leave the Andrews altogether and head up to Santiam Pass.

I escaped up high—here to Santiam Pass—to get some perspective on what’s (literally) up. I’m in the middle of a large burn. Still standing trees: Mountain Hemlock, a fir (Noble?), and a two-needled pine. There’s a lot of grass, and abundant

beargrass (*Xerophyllum*, which closely resembles *nolina*). So it feels a bit like the Southwest.

To the south, Mt. Washington thrusts its spire, and one of the Sisters sticks up behind a ridge. Three-fingered Jack visible to the north, through fire snags.

The valleys I drove through—pretty much the McKenzie the whole way—were deep & dark, even on this sunny day. In shadow, mostly; roads wet. Here at the pass, roads are dry, and just a few little patches of snow—surely from this week's storms—linger.

[The Andrews Forest is.... is not....]

The Andrews Forest is enclosed, dark, occluded. Inside the forest (I was going to say “this forest”, but here I am on a sunny lava flow) tangles of branches, fallen logs are in all states of decay, of *melting*—so it appears—back into the soil. Almost every surface below 20-30 feet is draped with mosses (many spp.). This forest is the research site that spawned modern ecological study of “old growth”—so it's fair to say that it *is* what we think of as “Old Growth Forest.” Old Growth, thus, means about 500 years old, as that's what they've aged all the big old Doug-firs to be. The Andrews Forest is also a *watershed*—the complete watershed of Lookout Creek (which is part of the Blue River watershed, which is part of the McKenzie, which is part of the Willamette....Columbia).

The Andrews is *not*... sunny (very often), full of conspicuous animal life—I can count the birds I've seen in the past five days on a single hand. It's not a desert, that's sure. And it's not my home. But I am, indeed, grateful that it exists. Grateful that all these good folks are so into it. What kinds of places that I've come to love differ from this?: almost everywhere! The Sonoran Desert, the soaring slickrock walls along the Escalante River, seabird islands in the Gulf of California, alpine ridges in the North Cascades. As well as other places I've spent less time, but still hold close to my heart: Grand Canyon, Prince William Sound and the Chugach Mountains, the granite coast of Maine, tidy green farms of my boyhood Ohio. All these places have been teachers and mentors. Each of these places has a cast of characters that are conjured in my mind when I hear the place name.

In Escalante, for example, scarlet penstemons and giliae flowering on copper-sand terraces under cottonwoods and box-elders, while black-headed grosbeaks sing from hidden branches.

In the Cascades, the *smell* of soil just emerged from snow, yellow glacier lilies blooming just at the snowmelt edge, anxious for summer to begin. The sharp whistle of a hoary marmot piercing the stillness, then the high thin wind, bringing chill.

In the Sea of Cortez, the tingle on every single boat trip, for we know that in these waters live fully one third of all cetacean species in the world, and one of the richest concentrations of seabirds south of Alaska. Some sightings are givens--brown pelicans, cormorants, several species of gulls—while others are hoped for: gatherings of lunging, feeding fin whales in winter; Craveri's Murrelet, one of the least known birds in North America, silently slicing glassy waters offshore; tropicbirds swirling above their northernmost colony in the world; and—just once—the utterly humbling, transfixing experience of being joined for four hours by a pod of Orcas, even while they preyed on an enormous pod of dolphins.

What to make of all this richness?

One thing sure: during any one of these encounters my human companions were fixed with smiles. My jaw often aches at the end of a day of natural history—there's so much joy, so much laughter. Who among us can't be saved by this?

[Clearcut reflections plot; FS Rd. 1501]

The colors are lit, and all different from the greens of the real forest. Here the hillside is burnished with dried bracken ferns and bare shrubs. Ironically, walking into the clearcut is the first time all week I've been surrounded by the presence of birds—juncoes, golden-crowned sparrows, Stellar's jay. And underneath the avian yelps and shouts, a steady thrum of crickets higher up the hill. As it happens this opened hillside is just perfectly capturing the westering sun, so it feels particularly welcoming right now (probably true for birds, too). If one were to wear the bird mask, this would be the place.

15 November

Mindfulness

What we choose to look at, to listen to—these choices change the world. A society that expends its energies paying heed to the latest doings of the latest celebrity couple is fundamentally distinct from one that watches for the first arriving spring migrant birds, or takes a weekend to check out insects in a mountain stream (as an all-ages group of about thirty is doing nearby as I write), or looks inside flowers to admire the marvelous ingenuities involved in pollination. One tends to drag culture down to its lowest commonalities, the other lifts it up in a sense of unity with all life.

Old Growth Trail in sun this time. The shadows are occasionally broken by light, rather than being a shadowless monochrome.

Seeing this place in both rain and sun is like getting to be a parent of both a son and daughter. Both overwhelmingly beautiful and humbling, but in different ways.

All of us
loving rivers
That irrepressible urge
toward the sea

Bust me into the trans-rational

Side by side: *Tsuga* / *Symphoricarpos* / *Rhododendron*

Hemlock cones make a perfect trail surface—soft but firm

Downed Douglas-fir, four feet across (high, now that it's on its side), one hundred feet long. Along the entire length, the bark still intact on top (long since stripped from

sides and bottom), with a thick mat of mosses, lichens, and 1-2.5 ft. high hemlock seedlings. The furrowed bark—such a great substrate and seedbed!

In the Palace of Rot

Learned today of something so cool, so subversive
and literally subterranean:

Root Rot Mortality Patches.

Major forest gaps in coniferous old growth
caused by large-scale (dozens of feet across) underground patches of fungus that selects a
specific tree species—here, often Douglas-fir.

They rot out the roots of the Doug-firs within this circumference; the trees then fall
(in random directions—a key field mark—rather than aligned, as occurs from windthrow)
Also, one can often see sick trees (dead crowns, etc.) around the circle's perimeter.

The gap releases other spp—often Western Hemlock here, or Red Cedar—to go to town
(ie, to sky)

A major shaping force in forest communities,
yet invisible
and to most forest ecologists, even,
unknown

Jeff and Daphne Stone and I went first to Carpenter Mountain Lookout, the highest point
in the Andrews, along the eastern edge of the reserve. It was spectacular, in many
ways. The view, certainly. Snow-capped peaks (north to south): Mt. Hood, its
summit sticking up behind a ridge; Jefferson, very prominent; Three-fingered
Jack; Mt. Washington, a spire; and most impressively, the Three Sisters. But the
forest along the trail was also lovely, with a high tree diversity: some
Pseudotsuga, but also three species of *Abies* (*procera*, *amabilis*, and *lasiocarpa*),
and quite a lot of *Tsuga mertensiana*. Most surprising to me, a couple huge
Western White Pines. Also a lot of kinnickinnick, *Pachystima*, and *Xerophyllum*.
Among the many fungi Jeff IDed along the way (here and later in the lower mile
of the Old Growth Trail): *Gyromitra*, *Pholiota*, *Lacaria*, *Dacromyces* (witches'
butter).