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Some rambling/essay/prose, some poems, some memoir...fragments and whole pieces----by Andy

XX
April 5, 2012. Thursday

Drove out here today, 4/5, Thursday, after flying in from SoCal. Eugene—back in the northwest. Small town, rivers, fishing, organic foods, lots of wandering teens with not enough to do. I'm thrilled to be able to spend time at the H.J. Andrews Forest. Charles Goodrich and Kathy Keable have been great. I have my directions, I've packed my bags with everything I think I'll need.

And Eugene feels like the PacNW too. Smaller than Seattle, feels like a Richard Hugo town. It's cold and rainy. Maybe 50 tops. Gray, but some blue sky too. Distinguished clouds. Nothing boring. Tall, long, gray faced rain clouds. Rain spitting down here and there. Clouds so tall that as the sun set, they caught the light like a net, yellowish and bright against a gray sky behind. Even a rainbow.

Headed out to the 126, stopping in Springfield for food. Safeway. Then out. Rainbows under the clouds as the sun set west. The 126 runs along the MacKenzie and it is swollen, high water, too high for fishing. Impressive to have the water and the river so close to the road. It feels like trout here, or salmon. The fish are carved over mailboxes, on signs, everywhere. Fishing country. Cabins roadside and doublewides, farms and fenced pastures. Sheep, horses, goats. All below the steep hills of the foothills of the Willamette National Forest, this ridgeline of hills and mountains and woods I'm driving into.

Cell phone signal dies fast. Glad GPS is on satellite. Finally find the forest road. A short drive up it, past the Blue River Reservoir. Into a clearing, dark, night. Office to the right, buildings to the left. Several walks, things inside, I'm signed in, stuff inside the apartment. It's a privilege to be out here with the scientists.

I'd like to be the first writer out here to wade the length of Lookout Creek. Not sure I can do the whole thing. In fact, that's probably totally unrealistic right now. But to spend time with a closed creek, a forest stream totally unpressured, unfished. That's great. I want to hike through these woods. There's mountain lion. Likely bear too. Caution needed. I went to check the door lock late of my apartment in Roswell, and I opened the door to see two deer on the lawn in front of the building. Not sure who jumped more.

Deer act like guilty teens who've been caught. Skittish, waiting to see if you're going to yell at them for stealing your beer. As if they're bad animals for just standing in the dark on the lawn. I took a couple of pictures—not enough light.

I can't wait to see what things will look like tomorrow. I don't mind the rain or the cold. Writing projects will sort themselves out over the next few days. Hiking, solitude, drives as far in as I can go. Somehow I always seem to find myself at a residency out in some remote location—far from food, usually no cell phone. Here, I feel lucky to have electricity. This is actually really nice. Stocked kitchen, coffee ready for morning.

It's been awhile since I stood in the dark, surrounded by trees a couple hundred feet tall. Their tops, the leads are so irregular, splintered against the sky. It's pretty magnificent. Takes me back to camping as a child. It's humbling out in this forest. Not to mention thinking of all the work, the science that's going on here. I wandered through the office—they have a copy of Schumacher's book. And I almost brought my copy. Goals? Novel, poems, essay. An essay. Lots of walking. Several new poems, maybe a manu revision. And progress on the novel. Maybe some new memoir pieces. Gotta review that.

Tremendous day. 10 am meeting with Tim Fox. To see the sites, get a tour. Looking forward to it. And some coffee in the am. I forgot to bring any poetry. Forgot my Hugo, forgot Oliver, any of the other usual suspects. Wanted at least one Hugo. Ah well. We'll make do.

4/7/12

I'm wading Lookout Creek. Creek is a misnomer. It's early April, and the run-off is high. The creek is a river, flowing with the noise of a freeway and the force of a strong wind. Lookout Creek is one of the main rivers flowing through the H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest, a 25 square mile section of protected forest—mostly old growth—on the western slopes of the Willamette National Forest. The foothills of the Cascade Range. The Lookout Creek watershed is rich, verdant, and tall. I've got a wooden walking stick, an additional support in this fast moving river. There's no one around, and I forgot my radio, the walkie-talkie that's my lifeline. It's sunny, and I'm searching for giant trout.

but wading this freestone stream is harder than walking on sand.

4/8/12

Got up early—hiked northeast out the road that bisects the camp. Passed the Discovery trail. Got to the end of road, found the trail to the southeast, walked down to Lookout Creek. I feel dissipating my need to look over my shoulder, to keep my eyes out. There's an immense peace in the forest—and it's only an urban understanding that suggests that something—cougar? deer?—will at any moment appear. I can't even see a squirrel (there are no squirrels here?) and the few birds I hear are impossible to spot. They're generally high in the canopy, high even in the younger trees, and there's enough green leaf between me and them to spot a profile. People talk about the beauty of these woods, the old growth. finding rhythm in or with nature. There are many descriptors, often involving some kind of rapture. What I sense is the difference between our sense of time and the forests'. it's hard to comprehend a 300 year old tree. It

goes against most human nature, the nature that puts us at the forefront of everything. It's an alien pace. We're a short attention span creature. If we give in to that, it harms our being, our sense of self, our place in the world. To sit, to walk, to watch an old growth grove is to try to understand and assimilate a different cycle of time. The patience, the calm, the nothingness—that's what we feel. That while we sit, nothing will happen. Nothing at least that we can see. Water is moving, bugs are crawling, bacteria is feasting and reproducing, nitrogen is being transformed—but to us, humans, it's invisible.

We wait for a bird, a deer, an animal. Something we can see and judge and be awed by. 'Look, a deer!' We know how to classify its body, its movement, its needs, its cycle. It's similar to us, similar in time and space, even if it's so remarkably different. That then, is the key. A deer is close enough to be appreciated for its needs and vulnerabilities, and different enough to be fascinating.

A tree, on the other hand, is so alien to us, that most of us can't get that same feeling. The needs and cycles are so different. Beauty, sure. But we can't project ourselves onto a tree. We don't get that same sense of recognition we do when we see some animal in the wild. A squirrel, a tree. "Isn't it cute?" That's right, the squirrel. A tree isn't cute. I guess the whole point is that we can't feel the rhythm of the trees, of the woods. We say we can, but likely this some shift in our vascular system, a shift in our being when we sense the patience of the woods. Try to personify a tree. Try to anthropomorphize a tree. Ain't gonna happen. Only in the worst poetry.

Sure, in the old myths humans and gods became trees. Daphne escapes Apollo via a well-placed plea to the river, suddenly transforming into a less-appealing tree. Alas, the unsexual tree. Even here, this myth not only clarifies for us the inability of humans to attach to a tree (one imagines Apollo turning away in disgust and sadness—Darn it. She's a tree now. Ugh.)

But maybe it should be. Maybe trees should be cute, should be adorable. 'Oh my God, Look! A yew! It's adorable.' It's even named after a pronoun (you). Tough, tough to make that happen. Trees are bark and needles, thin leaves and tight buds. Trees are cold and hard. Sure, they're fine as a backrest here and there, something to lean against during a hike. But try to drape yourself over a branch, leopard-like, and take a nap. Try to ease your back into a nap in the crook of a Live Oak's lower limbs.

Humans are bad at liking trees. Even the good ones.

Old Growth

In dreams, my brother controls my visas,
my father, alive again
and allocating wilderness
and trespassing
to the control of my brother.

Six years younger, he's chieftain
somehow,
old growth sibling,

tribal leader,
staking out the trail ahead,

sending out roots and stamping
passports
at every forest border.

next

The tug of trout—a shock—the hidden grab
that throbs through fifty feet of floating line.
Forgive me, fish, my tricks, the nymph that dives,
masquerading as a swimming bit of shadowed
protein.

Kevin works on Forests. Jay works on owls. Pretty cool. Met them today. Might see if I can trek out to see an owl. Talk to Steve, Jay said. Both nice guys.

Saw the clear cut south of Blue River. Pretty gross stuff. I hadn't seen that coming in because of the dark. Maybe all loggers should have to shave their dogs. And think about that. I don't know the answers—who does?—but clear cut can't be it. The reason for this place.

What trees give us, when they're growing thickly, dense, old growth or mature, is secrets. Because you aren't bushwhacking in there. I mean, you can, but there's places you aren't going. Steep, thick, overgrown. More about the secrets of a thick impenetrable forest.

The impenetrability.

There is still snow at altitude. Only a few small white islands survive here and there in the Andrews. At least near headquarters. Up 1506 there is snow in the road.

Driving out toward any of the passes finds snow feet deep. Fish Lake is still frozen over. Roads are closed. Altitude and its vagrancies is impressive. April really is early in the year.

There have not been any cougar fatalities in Oregon state. There's enough territory for the population, says Tim Fox.

4/9/12

Algonquin (memoir piece)

My father taught me to fish; one of the earliest photos he took of me shows a young boy, tiny, skinny,

shorter than a fire hydrant, barely three or four, and clutching a rod, pier-side. My face in that photo is dead pan, looking off over the water, unexpectant, undemanding.

My father's patience was shorter than mine. I had no expectations for when to catch a fish. Now would be nice. But holding a line is ok, too. As my father got older—his MS increasingly getting worse—his patience got better. He waited hours for all kinds of things, day in and day out. Disease has a way of teaching patience.

As a child, I had no sense of his tolerance one way or the other. Before my brother was born, the three of us—my mother, father, and I—took a vacation to Algonquin Provincial Park, the oldest park in Canada. To me, Algonquin Park has all the mysterious qualities of a vague memory: it's a mythical place. A place of memory more than reality. A place to which my mother and father and I vacationed. But it's a very real park in Canada, it's been a park since 1893, and it's larger than the state of Delaware. It's Canada's Yosemite or Yellowstone, only bigger.

We took about three or four family vacations before travel for my father was only a dream. Disneyland in California when I was 5. Cape Cod when I was 7 or so. Prince Edward Island at some point, again before my brother was born. My memories of P.E.I. consist of a vague gray castle shimmering in the distance over a large green lawn. My father agreed with me that Prince Edward Island is badly named. The Mi'kmaq name, Epekwitk, which means roughly *Resting on the Waves*, is much better. Even pronounced the way the Europeans did: Abegweit. Martha's Vineyard is another badly named island. Places like these should retain native names like Ottawa, Seattle, Winnepesaukee. We agreed Nantucket wins the contest for best-named island, and even that's not the original name. Sorry, Prince Edward.

We didn't catch a single fish at Algonquin Park, a well-named park, and this represented a problem for both my father and I. I wanted to catch a fish. He wanted me to catch a fish. I'm sure if he hadn't caught a fish, my father would have been fine. But there were promises leading up to the vacation, and I'm sure this set up my father for disappointment when, nearing the end of our vacation, we hadn't landed even one baby perch.

I met another boy my age there and we spent time walking around, moving between cabins in the campground. I don't remember what we talked about but I'm sure it was mostly stories and lies and trying to make ourselves look good in each other's eyes. *I've got this basla wood airplane. Actually I have two. I made them. Sure, I've gone fishing. I've caught fish. All the time.* That kind of thing.

I came screaming back into our cottage one afternoon, just screaming the way kids scream, probably *Mom this, or Popsicle, that.* I blundered right in on my father being hypnotized by some guy. My father was sitting in a chair, eyes closed. The guy was talking to my father calmly, repeating hypnotizing language. My mother shushed me. One finger to lips. I was mortified. I'd clearly ruined the session, barging in with my screaming and thoughtlessness.

But no one did anything. My father's face gave a little twinge, but he didn't open his eyes. My mother ignored me, focusing on the hypnotist, trying to be polite. The hypnotist ignored me, too, focusing on my father. I listened intently, curious for the outcome (could he make my father cluck like a chicken?) but inside I really couldn't believe no one had stopped the whole shebang and said, *Well, now we need to start this all over again.*

That hypnosis could survive such an outburst from me was a sign that it was a real sham. I think I realized my father thought it was a sham, too, or he would have started it all over. I guessed this hypnotist was a neighboring camper who'd insisted they give him a shot. I guessed my father was

waiting for it to end. So his patience was already growing by then.

The night before we left Algonquin, my father had had enough. He baited the hook with a fat worm and cast the line out. He said we'd leave the bait out overnight. That was determination, patience, and impatience all in one. Also, my father, I think at that point, was desperate to be the hero and have me catch a fish. We weighted the rod down with a rock.

The next morning I was up early to check that rod. My father and I did it together. Sure enough, we caught a catfish. I don't remember reeling it in. I do remember us looking at that 6-inch black catfish, a fish that looked huge to me.

My father was the hero. The last day of our vacation had been our best. I'm sure my mother agreed. It wasn't even a full day: it was a morning, and we were checking out the minute that cat got slipped back into the lake. Most good transformations happen like this, far from lies or hypnosis. We had patience and a catfish caught with a rod we'd cast and left overnight: it had been a plan. We did this all in a very real well-named park called Algonquin.

4/10/12—Past couple days I've really realized how overwhelming the forest is. Here, elsewhere. Forest. It really is astounding—it's such a remarkable environment. I walk on these roads, I drove down to the clear cut reflection point, I drove out 1506 all the way to snow.

The reality is the whole forest, the whole H.J. Andrews Forest is a reflection point. I definitely don't feel restricted that way. The three points are great and I've been to each several times. But I'm getting stunned by the landscape wherever I go. Whether previous clear cut, mature forest, plantation or old growth. What's clearer is the differences—the hump and pit of the old growth for instance. Old growth is stunning. It's like Jurassic park. I keep expecting to see a dinosaur saunter into view. It makes sense the biodiversity, the bacteria, the weight of the lichen, the fungus, the content of the soil. It's rich and heavy and firm, the ground under these old growth trees. It's green: moss, lichens, fungi, hanging moss. Grape, salal (my favorite).

The big stumps from previous old growth cuts look like bears to me, especially the ones further off in mature forest. They're huge, rounded usually at soft edges, moss-covered. When I stare off into the woods and gaze, the stumps just seem like animals. Bears or other large lurching creatures.

Look: it is magic. I haven't figured out yet how to say it. All that stuff about not personifying. Abbey, etc. Not personifying nature. Letting nature be a thing as it is without assigning a people value, a comparison. That seems true. But I walk through these forests, and it's so majestic (it is majestic) that I get buzzy with adrenaline and I almost feel tears coming. Majesty. Elegance. Maybe those are my words.

The elegance of old growth. There's a feeling of vulnerability here. Stepping out. Into the cold, the terrain, the downed wood (sticks, twigs, branches, trunks (boles), limbs), the slopes, the shrubs. It's so vast. I feel miniscule. I feel lucky, and I feel amazed at the views, the sights, the smells. I also feel like a piece of dust, like a mayfly, a caddis. About to live my 24 hours and spin down the river.

I want to feel totally comfortable in this forest. I want to feel at home. I want to feel one with nature, so to speak. But I also feel out of my element. I feel vulnerable. I feel nervous, edgy. Not scared. I'm not scared or terrified. Not worried. Just aware and a little nervous. I find myself looking over my shoulder. What am I not seeing? What's sneaking up on me?

Cougar? Bear? Elk? Bigfoot? None of these likely would sneak up on me. But the forest offers this open fencing. So many boles like pales, fence posts disconnected. I peer through them.

The truth is I want to see things. I want to see an elk lumber from behind a trunk. I want to see it snuffle, browse, graze. Look around. Bellow. What is this about? I'm human, I think, I'm looking for that kind of action, that time frame---look a wild animal.

So I've been working on peace, on slowing down. Today at the clear cut reflection site, I looked down more than up. I looked at the soil. I looked up, too (about 8 vultures circling—more on that later) but I spent time looking down. That's where the action is here. The soil. It's rich soil, even in the mature forest. So rich, it's almost remarkable. It's thick and damp and aerated. It's ideal. It's wood decomposing. I've taken so many pictures, but here I took more than I ever have before of decomposing wood. Fascinating. From solid wood to chunks of soft airy stuff, to chips to powdery red debris finer than sawdust. This is insects and bacteria releasing nutrients back to the environment. This is fiber and cell structure being transformed to soil. This is the transformation of that 300 foot tree to soil.

I shortchange myself when I sit and wait for a bear to pop out. For a cougar to show up. For a deer to surprise me. Funny as a human how I want action. I want the zoo. I want foot prints, I want wildlife paths, coyote runs. I want to see a flicker eating ants. I want a bird I've never seen.

This is the work I'm doing. Trying to feel those trees, feel the age, the pace. It's meditative, it's work, it's focusing, it's not automatic. The age of the old growth, the size, the slowness of making a plant/tree that monumental.

I've seen a number of old growth boles and canopies that remind me of the Grizzly Giant at the south end of Yosemite, in the redwood grove. It's a similar profile. Tall tree, narrowing, wide bole (monstrously wide) and canopy/top that is columnar, with irregular edges, smaller than one might expect from a giant tree but still quite distinct. It's sort of a rectangular canopy. Maybe starting a third or a quarter from the top. Branches reaching out. Maybe fewer smaller, but a distinct columnar canopy.

Many old growth trees have a curve to them, a lean almost exactly like a parentheses punctuation mark. Add this to the list of nature like punctuation. Honestly, I realize how alien I am as a life form in this forest. I'm not sure if nature is embracing or rejecting me. Both? Neither? Does nature care? Well—I think the answer is no. The question possibly is wrong. Nature is a process, a machine, a movement of chemicals, a beautifully efficient system. It will integrate me in anyway it can. If I die on the forest floor, I'll disappear, slowly, and every bit will become soil—after being food for some animal at all levels of size and appetite. Carnivore to insect to bacteria.

If I visit, walk, live, engage, stare, scream, run in the forest. I am living as well as I can in it. Is the forest noticing? Well, of course not. 😊 Maybe it is?

Today I walked among the trees, and I whacked them with my walking stick. Just to hear the noises. Trees, I'm here! Bonk. The sound is warm, round, echoing if near a hill. No doubt it carries quite a way. I'm not sure the tree even noticed. But I gave boles a few raps. Bonk. Thwack. Hello tree! I see you. I respect you. I am amazed by what you do. So there you go. Just saying hello.

To the far side of the clear cut, there's an old road clearing up. It's still distinct, but grassing over. I hiked up there a bit. Found a carcass up it a ways. Some carnivore. I emailed Tim to come help me ID. It's got teeth, and had a tail. Not a deer, not a bear, I don't think. can't tell. Large coyote? Mountain lion? Dog? It's been picked clean but the rib cage, limbs, scapula, skull, vertebra: all there. And some hide still left. Still has aroma. Not totally dried out. I didn't poke it. Tried to get a good look at claws, but not clear. Well, I hope Tim can help me with this one. Totally curious, and I don't know if anyone wants/needs the skeleton. I recall seeing a memo on beavers with Tulameria. and to tell people if we saw dead animals. This one is certainly dead, and the vultures have done their job.

It was a surprise. There. I found something. My zoo craving brain got rewarded. I still haven't seen any monster trout in pools. I think the trout may be deep, deeper than I'll find them. There are deep pools, pools in places that are obscured by the white water crashing into the pool. There's more wading to do. It's fun hiking/wading the closed streams. These fish are lucky and don't know it. The fish in these streams now (likely all of them) have not known a hook. A fisherman at the end of an exhausting battle. It's great. We need more streams like this.

Since I've taken up fly fishing, part of me is dying to fish Mack Creek to find that Mack Creek cutthroat that Joe Tomelleri drew. He must have gone up with a team of scientists and shocked the creek to get a specimen to photograph, release, draw. It's gorgeous. He's done some of the best trout and fish drawings ever. I'll have to buy one. And to think about that cutthroat up there, the population that's unfished. Unpressured and wild.

That's enticing, it's exhilarating. And of course I can't/won't do it. Wouldn't do it for a second. Fish up there, I mean. Of course, it's simply illegal. But there's so much more to this than the easy morality of legal/illegal. Simple dichotomy. Knowing there's a population of trout surviving unpressured is great. It's amazing given what's happening in the world. That knowledge alone makes me happy. It turns me to a fisherman thrilled to simply hike, to hope to see one of the trout in a pool somewhere, to hunt them visually, to say, I see you! I see you cutthroat. Trout are amazing fish. To see a wild trout in the wild. More and more rare. To know no one will fish for that population. That's a gem. To be able to hike that creek and try to spot a protected Mack Creek cutthroat? That makes it all worthwhile. To even consider carrying a rod into that bush is not only unethical, it's simply foolish. It's foolish mentally. The joy is the knowing they're there. Cheering them on.

To cross that line—that's the violation of all things I value/we value. All the sacrifice needed to do things well and right in the world. Which is hard. It's so easy for humans to say "Just this once," or "If I do, it's ok." And 20,000 people do that, and whatever we were saving is gone. Hmm—we're hitting themes

from my novel---The older I get the more I value doing the hardest best thing. The right thing. I'm not sure I'll really have much effect—but we've got to believe small steps and the right thing is important.

I spent some time talking to Kevin today about his remote sensing project. Funny he's a coder with a past life in software. up my day-job alley. Very nice guy. Also met John the tech. Funny guy, could really talk to him all day. He invited me up tomorrow to go up Blue River and do some work with Mark. They're going to set up some precip stuff, take the snowcat. Really tempted to go. If I had more time I would. But no snow pants and it'll be a full day. I'm still tempted. But I want to write too. Maybe on a return visit. I'm having trouble juggling all the things. Which roads? Which trails? Which creeks?

Translation

What shifts in the tree's thick bole
when I swing my walking stick
and the sound of the collision
echoes back from the slope?

Thick drum, solid mass, wood
on wood. The sound is soft,
higher-pitched than I'd guess, song
of water and fiber and heart

wood. These old growth cylinders
wrap themselves with inches
of bark. What can I expect
from such minor impact?

What language makes sense
in this tall silent mass? I trudge
through the pits and the humps
as if a myth, moss under foot,

lichens beside and above. Wood,
so much wood, and a canopy
hundreds of feet from reach.
I feel like dust, like a breeze,

like a nymph with the half-life
of one setting sun, soon spinning
away on a creek's edgy flood.
I don't belong, and I can't,

but I try. What part of me
is tree? What part fungi?
I walk through the woods
and I swing with the stick.

This old tree walks across fire
and leans into storms.

4/11/12

The poem above is not done, but I gotta take a prose break. It's a gorgeous Wednesday. Gray, cool, rainy most of it. I love it. Doing laundry, said hi to Kathy, and she almost apologized, said well we're supposed to get some good weather, but I love this stuff, not necessary. This is great forest weather. Reminds me my heart is in Seattle. Right now it's coming down HARD. Noise, batting at windows, roves, gutters. Like a swarm. The windows are smeary now. The trees are a blur. The stagger of trees at sky goes dark green then gray as they dim in the clouds. I can see waves of rain, I can see deeper, thicker gray, I can see the texture of this downpour. Maybe I should leave SoCal back for Seattle. Redmond woods?

The life of a scientist at the Andrews forest seems to me to entail running up and down the stairs of Roswell dorm over and over, loading and unloading trucks. I say this with the best sense of humor. There's evening time when students are cooking. There's morning when it's quiet. There's daytime- which is quiet if folks are not here or are in the field. When folks are here, they're running up and down the stairs, removing gear, extracting gear, sorting gear, clearing trucks, cleaning trucks, prepping gear, you name it. I believe those stairs will wear out long before the rest of the building will.

I've been reading and flipping through Into the Wild. Krakauer's famous one. of many. One quote: "The bush is an unforgiving place, however, that cares nothing for hope or longing." page 4. And references to Jack London. Funny how easy it is to come to woods with that romance. Chris McCandless is an exception, an extreme, but perhaps only in action and execution. Which killed him. There's a lot of idealists out there. Who simply don't walk out to the Alaska wilderness. In their heads though, they think about getting those 40 acres and living in solitude. I'm one of them. And yet, the other plate in the balance holds that reality—that the woods and wilderness are pure pragmatism. There's no gift, there's

no easy route, there's no welcome. It's just nutrients being, equipped as trees, plants, and mammals are to use nutrients in extreme weather.

The human animal is relatively weak comparatively. Could I spend 2-3 days and nights in the woods without freezing? Perhaps, but it'd be pretty miserable. Our strength is our ability to plan and accommodate, and that leads us into the comfort of any room.

I'm trying to juggle and consider the bridge we reach across to access and enter these woods. What part of us desires the rush to the wilderness? What part resists? What part of me is tree? What part of me is salal? What part of me is rushing creek? What part of me is rain? Is cloud? Is fog? Is sun? What part of me is terribly sad to not be able to stay here longer? Is saddened to not be able to be part of the forest?

London's books, Harrison, the outdoor writers. Edward Abbey. I am using care as I spend my time in the woods. Today I thought of Craig Arnold, who so recently fell off a mountain in Japan. His poetry career had only just begun. He was likely a very cautious and aware guy, smart, out for a hike in Japan, completely in control and doing absolutely nothing stupid or risky. It's simply accidents. They happen—to anyone.

Well, perhaps no one needs me to tell them about risks in the forest. It's my thought process. My jealousy of the cougar. Could I be the cougar? Could I be part cougar? My kids laugh at me when I bring things home, pile them in the natural history museum of my workbench in the garage: four bird's nests (finch, towhee, two each). Two hummingbird nests. A whale vertebrae bone Maddie found on the beach (Crystal cove?), about four different bee hives—some wasp, some honey bee. One comb from the live oak that broke and nearly killed Jenny and I. Is that right? It nearly killed us? Well, we ran to avoid its collapse. We didn't get hurt at all besides shock. We were a few seconds away from being under the gigantic limb. 50 pounds per cubic foot, that live oak wood. So large it blocked the trail, and we were unable to around it back to the tree. So there's the accident. I've been in the woods and heard many a rock fall. I've never been challenged by a bear or a cougar. But I've almost been killed by a tree. Funny, that. Don't pitch your tent under a live oak.

It's the age and the size. The same thing we feel about elephants and whales. We are amazed by them, we are in awe. The real meaning of awesomeness, these beasts, for the redwood, the Doug fir are beasts.

4/13/12

Out in the woods today. Drove out the 1506 to the first bridge. Waded the creek there both up and down. Wading is not fast. Slow work, with walking stick. Care needed not to stumble. I didn't want to go in over my knees, so stuck to shallow water. I'm a conservative wader. No need to risk something foolish. Hoping to see a giant trout (or small trout)? or find a shed (antler) or some other neat thing. Obsidian arrowhead anyone? (Onyx?) Tim mentioned how in 19 years hiking up here he's only found one arrowhead. Finding things in the woods, and putting an object top of the list gives us a great reason

to get out there. It's mysterious. This follow-a-goal kind of thing. Waders are a great excuse to go stand in a river. I'd look down, polarized glasses on, staring at the bottom, the rocks, the freestone essence of it. The rushing water, the white caps, the riffles, the deep pools. The translucency of it. Amazingly clear water. Large downed boles in and across it. Cut banks, aspen and birch just sprouting and reaching for water. Buds swelling open, about to green. Some fresh beaver cuts in new **birch or aspen**. Saplings cut down, the remaining stump gnawed to a point. Fun to see, teeth marks like little chisels. The rocks in the stream bed—**many of them are lava**. Black and rust colored. Two different colors. Remarkable rocks. Porous, soft looking. Almost like a sponge. Some quite large. Some exceptionally round or oval, smoothed for years by the creek. Lookout creek this is.

I also got to McRae Creek too. Went up the (check this number) forest road just by the second bridge. Hiked in a bit, the nature trail, then bushwhacked down and into McRae. Only Mack Creek as the big tributary of Lookout will be out of reach for me this trip. Still too much snow to get to the end of 1506. It's ok, something to come back to next time.

Saw the rock fall on 1506 and when you look up you can see the root that extends the length of the whole section---where it grew and broke off the rock. Impressive.

Also found at the end of the trail, the solar panels and the **sound machine beeping. Dunno what that is**. Will have to ask someone, Tim maybe. Neat set up. Looks like doing something cool. If I didn't know I'd think it was some set up to reach out to aliens. Weather station more like it. 😊

I started putting my ballcap on trees and rocks to show size. It's a good prop, and shows size well. Found some roots upended just filled with rocks, rocks set in the wood, long ripped out from their place and still lodged in the mess of now smooth roots. And some maple seeds starting to bloom. The little wings sticking straight up in air, the first green leaf just about to push the wing off, the seed pod split, the root extending down, a first shoot pushing up. And a piece of Doug fir bark, old growth, on ground about the size of home plate. And four inches thick. Just stunning the scope of the bark produced by these trees.

I smacked a few more trees with my walking stick too. Just to say hello, see if they knew I was there. Hiked the rocky flat shoreline by the first bridge (1506). I wanted to hike up stream a ways, but it started well and then I got blocked. I was walking up the north side of Lookout, to the east of the bridge. It was pretty shallow there, doable. But then it deepened and there were a couple of pools, a deep fast run under a large downed log. the only way around it would have been to cross. I spent awhile trying to judge the water. It was deeper than comfortable, above shins, and fast. I tried it. Made a go. But I started to lose ground, each time I picked up my foot, it'd land further downstream. In seconds I realized I was not going straight across, and was heading for a larger pool just below me. Backtracked. I'm here to feel the river, and experience it, not fight it. Bushwhacked up shore a bit, but then headed to the other side of the bridge. Same there, waded, looked at rocks. Amid the lava, there's also lots of the stuff that's washed down from the quarry, or other spots like it. Greens, crystal, chalcedony or agate. Really fun to see these varied colors. I have to figure out what the green is. I keep thinking copper something but could be another rock (Malachite?) Hmm...amateur rockhound at work.

The river's driftwood is incredible. Better than what you'd find at the beach most days. I didn't pick up or keep any. I looked at a few pieces. Then put them back. Some smooth as skin, smoother. Like a bare smooth bone, actually. Speaking of that, found one little chip of bone. And the skeleton over by the clear cut is either coyote or a dog. Sad. Went over with Tim and Galen. Smaller than I remembered. And Tim pointed out a hole in the skull. And then by the tail, a nylon, collar-looking thing. Given the road, I'm guessing someone put down a dog and drove it out there for the buzzards. Too bad. Was hoping for mountain lion. ☺ Tim and Galen are great. Galen thought the skeleton was pretty interesting. His exact words. Tim's got me ready to jump into Loren Easley. There really is no better gift than an old book, a book someone gives you that says, I like this, check it out, you might like it, too. Cause I can learn so much more about the world, and also learn about my new friend at the same time.

When wading the river, there are a number of sounds that surprise. The deep thunk of shifting or knocking rocks is audible, and is deep enough to sound like something else, something in the forest, but when one notices, well, it becomes clear it can only be the rocks on the bottom adjusting in the river. And the trees creak with wind. There's that, too. Then the rushing of the water produces a quite loud white noise. I mean, it's really loud, it's not white noise, it's the loud sound of the rushing creek. The thing is when you're in it, close to it, your ears and brain play tricks on you. I hear the river, but I occasionally hear other things too. Voices, cries, shouts. Vague sounding sounds that one thinks one may have heard, but I realize that it's my ears and brain hearing sounds in sounds. I think this is a fairly common thing with us humans. ☺ Noted---it's fascinating to hear the sounds, and what the sounds create. **The forest is never silent.** Never. Rocks fall all the time. Every time I've been on a river, fishing or not, I usually hear and sometimes see (either directly or the aftermath, the rings) a rock fall from its wedged spot in the bank or shore, right into the water. Plop. It's erosion, it's shift, it's change.

I chuckle when I watch shows (as entertaining as they are) like BigFoot hunters or whatever on History Channel. Or Animal Planet? It's a brain break and I like seeing and thinking about those folks. But when these folks are in the woods, every noise they hear is suddenly and obviously a big foot. It's as if these folks have never been in a forest. Forests *never* stop making noise. If you want it to be a big foot, ok, but it's probably just something falling. A rock, a limb, a pile of dirt. Roots, ice, water---they all make things break. ☺

It's amusing—I've been thinking of the Bigfoot guys—cause this is such "bigfoot country" and as entertaining as it is, and I like watching people hunt for mysteries in the woods (if I didn't I wouldn't do that kind of thing myself—though I like searching for deer prints and antlers and trout, not lost mythical species) and one striking thing about them is both their lack of understanding of how forests are and sound, and then their immediate rush to attribute cause and effect incorrectly. I heard a sound → thus that's a bigfoot. It's almost humorous. I can't make a decision on bigfoot. Who am I to say? But I do know that if we know pretty inescapably what the range and location of a species like the grizzly bear is, even to almost knowing when there's a bear in any given wilderness area (for instance, the famous "last bear" that was shot in California) I feel pretty certain if there was some population of bigfeet out there, we'd have found something—corpse, a specimen, etc—I mean, even bears sneak into town to get food. Cougars are pretty elusive. But they get seen. I think it's more probable that an insect species goes

unnoticed, and that happens all the time. There's many many small species we don't know. Look at all the new discoveries that have happened here. But a large landroving animal? I'm guessing we'd know.

Wow, Andrews forest, how about getting me on the track of whether bigfoot exists and what the hunters of the bigfoot show have wrong with them.

I think it's easy to get out in the forest and think about what we think we're supposed to know about forests rather than what they are. What they really have to share and show. There's so much gorgeous flora and fauna. Sword ferns are like these little round area rugs. Green, bright, thick, and prolific! Mosses, lichens: the richest stuff. These huge old growth stumps. Some of it is depressing. I saw two stumps right next to each other, on the north shore of Lookout, just West of the first bridge on 1506. Two huge stumps, leaning out toward the river. I bushwhacked in and stood between them. Took some pictures. Looked, listened. They're both leaning out toward the river. Angled still probably similar to the angle they held when they were alive. The stumps are still here, but in a pretty good stage of rot. Not falling apart but starting to get soft. Did these trees really have to go? We really had to take a half hour or hour and blade through that wood? It's hard not to feel how shortsighted we are to cut old growth.

It's back to Schumacher's book, *Small is Beautiful* (I think?—I can never remember that title right) about how quick we are to use up the resources. He was writing as an economist only shortly after Leopold wrote *Sand Country*.

Where Schumacher takes things a step further is his linking it all to failed economics, to seeing that we're using the planets resources, our capital, as no business on earth would: spending it. We're using up the earth's capital and any business that does this fails. So the reason it's important that he links that idea to economics, is he basically claims that that's the exact flaw in all economic policy right now. That it's all based upon a business that's spending it's capital. It's a pretty big shorted sighted flaw in our system.

I'm reading Ed Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*, and back to the Chris McCandless book, *Into the Wild*. Both of them bring up the Glen Canyon dam. And Lake Powell. And Jenny just got me Wesley Powells' book about his canyon trip. Funny how this stuff layers and prods. Maybe that area is the next place I need to go. Nutshell: it's saddening to read about Ed Abbey taking that float trip down the Glen Canyon to see the river and gorgeous side canyons before they can get that dam built. And now it's all gone. And then in Krakauer's book, he talks about another young guy who went missing in there Reuss, and how this kid had carved the word Nemo near some Anasazi ruins. And now it's all disappeared under the water of Lake Powell. That sucks.

Humans can't ever say No we can't do this. Instead of "we need more power" how about, No we can't build a dam there. That's a dumb idea. We're not going to build that dam there. We'll do without that power. This is an Ed Abbey kind of thing, but it's me just realizing how much we plow forward----do do do. I'm actually sad that Lake Powell is sitting there. In just a couple of days I've read a number of things that make me wish I could see that canyon under that lake. I'll have to tell my kids about it. And have them read Abbey.

Lots of deer prints in sand by the water. When the deer slide or sink, their hooves can look larger or different. Like a moose (two deer hooves side by side, forelegs etc. in wet sand) or even like a cat, a cougar, if the print widens or slides one way.

I saw a few flickers today. And a squirrel. So Tim was right. Squirrels are here! That's it for now. Still journaling til I can sense what the right essay is to write. Maybe more than one. I'd like that. Water, land, trees, animals. Newts. What or how to steer this.

I'll get back to that poem. See if I can add a couple of lines and get it wrapped up. It's close.

Picked up a rock and found a stonefly too. Neat. Flicked him back into water. He'll do fine or a trout will find food. one or other. For such a well-armed, angry looking, devilish sort of animal, the stone fly larva is a pretty meek, nervous kind of bug. Runs fast, dives for cover.

4/15/12

Been working on a couple of writing projects. Little breakthroughs here and there. Yesterday, 4/14, Pacific Tree Climbing Institute got me up in a Doug fir. 80 feet up. Reflection point behind Roswell. Thanks Tim Fox for making that connection for me. Funny how amazing that is. I took lots of photos at all stages of going up. Probably a hundred? It really is an intense experience, and my head did a quick adjusting around these trees. It's impossible to come into the forest and spend time alone and not think about what it means to be human. How indifferent nature can be, how it just goes, all by itself, so smoothly, whatever weather or disturbances happen. I'd been feeling that, feeling that immensity that I'm not part of. Maybe that's what I've been considering the most here. I walk around and see where I fit, what's going on, trying to put pieces together.

Then, with Jason and Rob from PTCI, here I am roping in, a web seat, carribiner (sp) ascenders, etc. Suddenly I'm lifting myself up, shoving the ascenders up, suddenly I'm next to this tree, I'm in it. At every step up the trunk, I saw new things. At 50 feet or so the little fern growing out of the detritus on the limb/burl. Amazing. The lichens—up in the higher branches---I was looking down on them. The wiry green stuff is like fly fishing line, thick, coiled, sitting there on the hemlock branch.

It made me giddy. Seriously. Giddy. Rob and Jason left me up there for about half an hour, or 45 minutes, and I started just talking to the tree. Well hello there Doug fir of the old growth variety. Hemlock. Hem for short. Doug and Hem. My hand on the trunk of this Doug, how quick I was to name it, to talk to it, to be thrilled to be up there with it. Had anything changed? Only my altitude. Was that enough of a trick to make me feel like the tree? To approach it eye to eye? To gain some additional kind of understanding? It's an amazing trick. It works.

I got to be a bird and a tree. I could see off to the surrounding visible peaks and ridges of the forest. The sun was coming out, was bright. The day promised to be warm and light. The sky was blue. Off to the west was the center of the forest headquarters. I was looking out and down at all of this. I was looking down at perches that birds would love. Birds have so many options. What a playground up there.

It's amazing the weight those branches can take. Not just the Doug fir itself, the giant. It weighs tons and tons. But PTCI had looped ropes out from their anchors over a limb that suspended the ropes away from the trunk. So when we ascended we were away from the trunk. And that limb wasn't huge. A few inches thick? And not so alive looking. More dead looking. And it held my weight leveraging on that rope. Then it held about 8 or 10 folks at once—the group after me all going up at once.

I got to look down on alive lobaria. Not just the stuff on the ground, but the lettuce lung (lung lettuce) alive and attached to the branches of the hemlock, the doug. Then the stringy lichen, the mossy lichen (gotta look these up.) All of them helping the tree, fixing the nitrogen. We see so often "tree" as object and "lichen" as object, without realizing how much they become one organism. It would be like saying nerve and muscle are two organisms or "things" when in fact, they're inseparable. If you remove the nerve, the muscle dies. If you remove the muscle, the nerve is functionless.

I'm really starting to feel this connectedness between soil/mats/roots/tree/lichens. It's all one system flowing, nutrients moving/converting. What does that mean? Maybe it doesn't need to mean more than that. Maybe it simply needs to mean that respect for the old growth has to continue, to spread. That clear cuts have to be understood as a real disease on our wild land. The pesticide, the logging.

Even in the clear cut (reflection site) one thing that's impossible to notice (and I saw this in other cut sites) is the litter left behind by loggers. There's no mound of trash. It's not a trash pile. It's the lone paper coffee cup, the lone Dr. Pepper can, the stake left behind, the food wrapper. Litter is left behind—one can imagine exhausted loggers, doing hard labor, thinning, cutting, clearing, moving wood. They're doing the work of contractors and eating and drinking a lot. The litter is going to happen. Cigarette butts, food trash. It ain't all going to make it into the trash container. why should it? These folks are treating the woods like an object. They're acting on and dominating and taking things from these woods. Their actual function is to make these woods an object of their use. When we start to think of the world like that, we don't respect it. We throw down litter. We see space and land as things we can use, can do what we will with. I see this in smokers too. Smokers tend to disregard the world. It's the selfish act, the we're all going to hell, kind of thing, so who cares if I throw this butt out the window. Of course, I'm not generalizing to all smokers—but self destruction, objectification, killing, clearing. It's all the same sort of focus, of losing the longer vision. Why work to save things when I'm gonna die soon from these cigarettes? Life is hell, who cares. That kind of thing.

Rant rant. I am ranting---I know this work will focus itself in coming weeks. Essays to come. Fragments, poems will be revised. To anyone who's read this far, *thank you*. Hopefully some cleaner version of much of this, with more added, will get published in other ways. My long prose writing from Montana ended up in two separate essays both accepted for publication. It works! Writing works.

I sat down by Lookout creek today, the path off to the left, just near the end of the main headquarters road. In there it's beautiful. A long shot of creek, forest on both sides, and some huge boulders, some really cool rock formations, old glacier till I suppose, or basalt rock shoved up from underground, volcanic activity—check on this, and the creek takes a few interesting hops, whitecaps, rapids alternating with deep pools. Some amazing greens and blues. I ate lunch there on a rock, PB&J, some

cheese, a can of pears. A liter of water, and a coke. Guh, sugar poison. Have had virtually no junk food this week. I walked along the rocky beaches there, hiked over rocks, poked, lifted prodded. Found a number of stone fly larva under rocks at the shore. Again, stone fly larva are really scaredy cats. They must be light sensitive, cause the minute you turn over a rock, the scurry for the next groove to squirm into/under. The next rock, a crevice to get away from the light. Tempted to eat one. I'm sure they taste really gross. The trout must love em. Each to our own.

Vultures too, come to think of it. I think often—their taste buds. Must just be skewed so differently. hard to imagine. That dead smell, that rotting flesh, those bits attached to bone. Must taste and smell really great to a vulture. Wonder if trout have a stonefly larva in mouth long enough to actually taste it. Seems like they sip and swallow pretty fast. Not a lot of chewing I'd think.

I've taken photos of a lot of flora. Some I've ID'd already. Much to categorize when I get home. List it out, label photos. Rocks to look up. Lava? Basalt? Will send Tim more pics and questions. I've really not even begun to write down all the images and impressions that keep coming to mind. The above is some of it. More will come. Every few minutes, away from the desk, something comes to mind. How those clouds looked. What slipping down talus in those quarries was like. Elk scat. Scotch broom. Deer prints everywhere. Deer are heavy animals. Even slightly soft, moist turf gives me away. Heavy animal with small, thin hooves. They sink. It's handy.

The deer outside the bathroom window this am. 5 am? Quick grab of camera and pics out window. they'd heard me and moved already. Running outside to the main road, they're up by the maintenance shed. A few more pics and they hop off the road behind brush. Pretty cool. The Columbian Black-Tailed Deer. Subspecies of mule deer.

I would have loved to have found a shed. There should be recent sheds on the ground. Bucks—dropping them in winter? Jan-March kind of thing? So says Wikipedia. They're on the ground, but who knows which spots buck pick to knock them off. Lose them. Private. Embarrassing maybe for the buck. 😊 Or I didn't really go afield enough to roam. Roaming does it. How one finds thing.

I did see a grey squirrel. Finally. Also small brown bird, short tail, propped up. Two quick calls, tweet tweet. Gotta look that up. Break time---to get bird book.

Got a beer, too. That's the bird, a winter wren. The call, described by Sibley. On the ground, hopping around the log, the brush. The brown body, the tail pointed up. Nice. Sibley describes the call as chat chat. That's probably as good a description. Bird song—hard to put into English. I try to do it in my head, but it's never the same as Sibley or other.

Jason had offered to take me up 200 feet today. 11 am at a larger tree up 1506. But I didn't go to that one. Wrote instead. Drank coffee, wrote. The juggle—experience, hiking, wading, being out there—of writing and living....going up once was enough. I'll come back with family and help them go up trees too, do that again. A real thrill. Even better to know the techniques were pioneered here and that it led to such deep understanding of old growth canopies.

Spectator

And then the black-tailed deer are gone,
does done grazing with the twist of an ear,
a muscled neck lifted to listen
for what sound may
disturb.

The rain
raps down
and the clouds' gray layers
shade the firs that shingle the slope,
forest easing away from a vacant clearing.

Green April

Rain comes down, mosses dripping at shingle's edge.
Where the clearing is over-soaked, the drumming
in the standing pools applauds the scene.
Later, the creek will run high, madness
in the cresting rush, run-off
loud and urgently searching
for lower ground
as it must.

Much soil
holds what it can
in tangled mats of rot
and fungal growth, roots angled
toward the humming rush, wet cells
sponging and sloshing the water back up
the walls of the old growth boles, cold forest
deceptively quiet, rivers coursing still-life alive.

Title.....

The shed antler spears the rotten leaves,
smooth bone surface
like any new eucalyptus bark, weapon
left behind to decay
like a cold season.

The buck's neck
gains new freedom, twisting to listen
more easily in the dripping woods,
the muscled black-tailed deer free
from his blatant maleness,
limber and slipping under the needled firs'
knitted branches,

short-haired back shaking off water,
leaving does to graze. His cloven hooves
splay only slightly to grip
the slippery surface of rock and root
and wet undergrowth, soil
giving way to mark his trail

up the sodden incline,
soon cresting the ridge
to new freedom for one short season
of spring and growth and greening
shrubs, the rain washing scent
from every crevice,

runoff and silt free to wander,
descending again the easiest route
offered by the water's rush,
the forest's short offering

....

Four miles in on the forest road, there's snow,
impassable, a plowed-up mound
and feet deep after that.

Your truck won't top that slick stuff,
so you stop, park, wander
around the clearing

The pines rough ends frame the sky,
along the forest's highest ridge,
first through the gray of morning,
rain pelting any old thing,
water everywhere,
and everywhere wet,
and later, when the rain slows,
then ceases, the thickest depth
of cloud passes, and the evening sun
lights only the highest of the spines
of the great trees, all of whom cluster
to frame the wide blue sky
that slowly dims to gray then blackest
blue. Like this the winter day
in the great forest cycles

...

Wading Alone

Waders give a grand excuse for standing
in a river. The weight of the descending flow,
cold, heavy, dedicated to downstream,
confronts you while you stare for giant
cutthroat in the deepest pools.

No river ever forgives or compromises
in the slightest. The biggest boulders
thunder as they roll along the bottom.

There are gods in the woods: pounding
along. Swinging feet, immense weight of legs
as they lift and plunge from hole to hole.

Deep in the old growth, tell me you feel
not a god's last step, the deepest scent
left on rocks that mosses scratch and map.

A firm foot, a walking stick, prevents accidental
drowning. The tug of the river presses
its indifferent love like a rope. The tall gods
busy themselves elsewhere. The Doug fir
leans like the oldest, strictest teacher.

Exhausted, sleep calls.
Night, deep forest.
Outside, maybe deer?

Night: deep forest. Sleep
calls, fatigue. So much silence.
Outside, maybe deer?

Making beans, alone.
Rain raps the roof, a downpour.