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Afterword

A month after leaving the Andrews, I'm still savoring the sounds and sensations of the westslope Douglas-fir forest. As I expected, the most vivid memories are associated with the older, less-managed parts of the research area. Here in Utah, our forests have nothing like the stature or the evident complexity of the western Oregon woods. Not that they lack beauty or utility – far from it – but there's something compelling about the ancient evergreens and their spongy, dripping, mysterious environs that attracts a writer's attention.

My challenge was to make this visit count for more than a trip down memory lane. Two salient ideas remain with me: first, the great disparity in time scales between the managed and unmanaged forest, and second, the sense that the Andrews Forest is itself a “place out of time,” a quiet sanctuary embedded in a region that is still undergoing serious conflict over the use of natural resources. By time scale, I mean the overwhelming sense one gets in the older forest of events unfolding at a slow, measured pace -- a stately underlying rhythm, if one may call it that, punctuated at intervals by events of stark suddenness and magnitude, ranging from treefall to flood to volcanic eruption.

This sense of time brought for me a feeling of mild alienation, a distance between me as observer and the mostly unknowable life of the forest. In contrast, I felt more at home in the managed parts of the woods, where trees were growing under our supervision, as it were, and where nothing important could get out of hand. That's an illusion, of course, but I have to wonder if most humans share a kind of primeval dread (as well as a fascination) at being among large, unfathomable lifeforms. At times, especially at the log decomposition site, I felt like I was in some kind of Pleistocene woodland where very large, mysterious animals stood among the trees. It's an ancient archetype. Has anyone tried to draw parallels between the subject of *Moby Dick* and these forests?

The research at Andrews has shed a great deal of light on the workings of the old-growth forest, yet this body of knowledge has served only to deepen its mystery, to my mind at least. Good science tends to do that: witness astronomy and astrophysics, where each new image from Hubble or Chandra opens another hole in the cosmos. The religious need not worry so much; the mysteries only grow as we probe the universe.

What, then, of the stages of forest succession before full maturity and senescence? Recent studies have elevated “early seral” vegetation, once dismissed as mere brush, to a higher status. Natural disturbances such as fire make their own contribution to biodiversity, as I was seeing at Santiam Pass, where increased sunlight allowed new kinds of vegetation (and birds such as woodpeckers) to

flourish. But walking through that fairly recent burn, and sitting among the recent partial cuts and old clearcuts on the Andrews Forest, did not provoke a sense of mystery and complexity equal to that found in the ancient stands. I was a little surprised by this. Perhaps that's because I'm more comfortable in a human-scale landscape with fewer really big trees and less biomass sitting on the forest floor.

I don't know how common this attitude is, but it might be worth investigating. Still, to dismiss any forest environment simply because it doesn't fit our aesthetic notions would be dumb indeed. We need places that instill awe, fear and trepidation – the old idea of the sublime. I came to the Andrews Forest in part to experience this mystery, to reconnect with some deeper part of my psyche that needs the occasional jolt from nature's less friendly side. To sense once again that we are part of something unknowable, and hence ungovernable.

All of this is mere aesthetics, of little consequence to the big questions of protecting biodiversity or ensuring adequate supplies of wood products from the forest. I was never unconscious of these societal questions even as I luxuriated in the amazing beauty of the deep forest. As soon as I left the Andrews, moreover, the nature of management practices outside of the national forest became obvious. A virtually denuded mountain to the south of the McKenzie River, appropriately named Deathball Rock, served as the grinning skull in the corner of the study, a reminder of what's happening in the world at large.

Can our society abide such discontinuities in forest practice? Working on my Bitterroot book, I was made aware of the huge disparity in how private and public forests are managed today. If anything, the scrutiny given the national forests by environmentalists has worsened practices elsewhere. Back in the 1930s, progressive elements in forestry believed that private lands would have to be regulated before society could be assured of a continuous supply of timber. Bob Marshall wrote a book called *The People's Forests* calling for government purchase of private forest lands in order to place them under better long-term management. To advocate such an action today would about get you strung up. There's virtually no chance of passing even mildly restrictive legislation for private timber holdings, in the Northwest or anywhere else.

So do we go on tolerating the abuse of private lands even as we ratchet up protection of the public's forest estate? Go back and read Aldo Leopold for your answer. He understood that landscape health rose or fell as a body, not as separate ownerships.

Research at the Andrews Forest has certainly changed the national forest "issue environment," as Fred J. Swanson puts it, and for the better. I hope that our growing understanding of the complexity of *all* forests will some day improve how we treat private ownerships as well. Some small-tract landowners treat their forest as more than "embryonic sawdust" (as one clever writer put it), by allowing longer rotations and greater species diversity in their plantations. I think of Bud Moore, who retired from a career with the Forest Service in Region 1 to manage a few hundred acres of timberland in Montana's Swan Valley. Shortly before he died a few

years ago, he told me that he was looking at all the values of the landscape in devising management prescriptions for his little holdings. “We don’t cruise timber any more, we cruise ecosystems,” he said. “When you think about it, all those values that we cherish on the forest, they all connect together, you can’t have one without the other.”

The scientists at the H. J. Andrews Experimental Forest and other research centers have pointed the way toward a richer understanding of our forests. It will take many more Bud Moores to put that knowledge into practice. Therein lies the promise of forestry in this country.