

Where the Forests Breathe

In the Andrews Forests, Oregon

1

Before you enter the old-growth parts of the forest
leave your 21st century ethos behind;
rediscover the spirit you had before urgings to
embrace the ephemeral took over
and perpetual euphoria lurked and laughed,
beckoned round every street corner.

2

Stop a while. Stop wrestling
with all that bruises and batters.
Admit the presence of solace
that's not asking to be solitary.

Look up and let go. Down
come fluttering showers of leaves
that rustle and shuffle
when the forest breathes.

Now sort your convictions
into what's heartfelt or hurtful
and leave one behind you: remember
this place in other places.

3

Prayer

Let us intensify and extend
our voyages of Life on Planet Earth

and let us suspend all efforts
to get to Mars. Let us better learn

to care for the stars in the forests
and rivers and seas and lands

on which we, and other species
known and as yet unknown,

gladly depend. Give us and our
descendants empathy, insight,

strength and resolve to do what's
right for ever and a day, amen.

4

When what's invisible is sensed
it assumes a value
that may be priceless,
but that's of no concern

to the red and black-spotted ladybird
circling my bench,
or to the 'woolly-bears',
brown-banded tubby black caterpillars

frittering on the roadway
as I wove between them
on my bike today,
as far as I can tell.

5

You can hear them all over the place,
bellowing above the sounds
of songbirds and burbling water:

*That's all very nice, but what about jobs?
and, Theory's one thing, practice is another.*

One day, maybe, they'll see
that sound theories work in practice,
but I wouldn't bet on it.

6

In the forest there is

the old and the new,
the dead and the living,
the what we think we understand,
the what we don't,
and the don't that's bigger
than what we do.

7

In near silence you search
for utter silence.

listen, wander, wonder...
ask, Where does peace live

if it's not in a place
in which all is entirely

without sound? Which maybe
where the spirit goes

taking our every essence
when we are done.

8

The owls have specific acoustical
habitat requirements
which partly determine
where they can, or prefer, to live.

I too have some, plus a preference
for the chortling sounds of running water
over the hefty thud of a tree-trunk
hitting the ground, and the subsequent
shriek of a saw cutting 'cookies' for scientific
examination and analysis.

Owls, trees, us, then, we share
this neck of the woods with epiphytes,
fungi, vertebrates and invertebrates,
unaware of many of their rustic ruses
but not their need to relish sunshine and rain
and the age-old winds that talk, sough
and sometimes roar in the tops;
all the multifarious sounds
that make up the songs
of this one and only earth.

9

Nobody knows how little we know
about this forest. And nobody
knows how much time we have
to piece it all together either,

nor how many mistakes we can make
and survive. So best believe
the ineffable gives life to what we
can love and revere, as when

we revel in the vine maple's red riot
in new growth forest, and marvel
at the gleaming porcelain shine of
mushrooms piquant on mossy trails.

And here, then there, along
Lookout Creek, golden maple leaves
parachute down, their descent
a rhythmic, slow-motion dance.

10

In the forest
humility's our saviour,
shame vanishes
and respect asks why
it took us so long to call.

11

If you can say
This is where I want to be
you will have found
What you want to be.

12

*Below the First Road Bridge over Lookout Creek
On 1506*

I'm 67 now, closer to 68 than I care to be.
But, still, being's better than not.

The young and early middle-aged
see me as fairly old. Fairly is not fair.
So it goes.

Here, in the presence of the mostly
grave and consoling silence
of this old-growth forest, realism
prevails, and I think
it's hard enough to stand six feet tall
without falling over, so what must
it be like to reach 250 feet and more

into the serene sky?

I look up, crane
to see the tops of the biggest, widest,
hunkiest, dignified firs I'll ever encounter.
I detect a stoic glory in such long
habitation of a place, and in their resolve
and desire to live on.

By reading the messages of interdependence
in this secluded grove
we grow taller, stronger.

I have to love the whole idea of that.

13

I have a visit
from an employee
of the Umpqua Valley
A-1 Fire Service
who needs to check
the apartment's
extinguisher.

I think there's
a lot more
going on around us
that's on fire
right now,
but I don't say it.
Not here.

14

If the old Dougie seems docile
on a still, frosty morning,
don't be fooled. It just let go
that branch that hit the ground
close by. Ghosts in the trees?

15

Everythin' might once have been
up-to-date in Kansas City, and
maybe still is, and a lot's still damned

big in America and a whole heap
of other places, but when I bought
a dozen so-called *large* eggs

in a supermarket in Madras the other day,
and I lifted them, looked them over,
I said, 'Nope, New Zealand, home to

Maori and pakeha and a fair few
others, when it comes to eggs, we
got you there. God Save Kiwi hens.'

16

Maple Leaves, Carpenter Mountain

I'm speeding along on Mark's
old black Gary Fisher mountain bike
and rounding a corner
I ride over constellations of fallen stars.

17

Trail to Carpenter Mountain Fire Lookout

In a sunny clearing
on the eastern side
below the Lookout
hoppers spring
as if from trampolines
hidden in a field of
white asterisks,
the flowering plant
called pearly everlasting.

Ah well, hope too
springs eternal.

Shed rags of lichen
lie on the trail
where grilles of sunlight
flash between
the trunks of trees.

I climb steps
of fractured
rock
and take in
the view
from the Lookout
platform
of the hazy
blue-green

hills and valleys
of the Cascades.

From north- to southeast
Jefferson, Washington,
Three-finger Jack
and the Three Sisters
keep their distance,
await winter's snows
and not far below
Wolf Mountain slumbers
in the westering sun.

Then down I go,
scuffing, shuffling,
leaping, back to where
we're still learning
what best to do
and how to, and
to work out just
what we mean
when we say we
belong.

18
Grouse

A spruce grouse
explodes, climbs almost vertically
just before
we run over him.

So now I know
why they're called
Fool's Hens.

19

Getting older can be lonely.
Even dead trees live in the presence
of the living, help sustain.
That's a kind of giving to die for.

20

I shie away from those who say
My work is done,
I'd sooner keep on, maybe
go another way.

21

For a week

No phone calls
No TV
No stereo
No biscuits
No chocolate
No cat snivelling at the back door
No Mormons

Just the sounds of

The creek
The birds
The breeze

Is this the *real*
Real world?

Damn
Terry the maintenance man
Is just driving past
In his cart

22

Everything lives from day to day,
me included. Tries to.

I passed several Unidentified
and Identified Flattened Objects
today. For them there's
no more long ago.

23

I go into the forest,
start to learn to work out
who's talking to whom,
their accents, who's
awake at which hours,
who's pretending, or
not pretending to be
sleeping. Who makes
the biggest fuss, who's
surreptitious, who

prefers not to hog
the limelight. They
seem, most of them,
to have sorted out
how to get on. And I've
not been hearing
an awful lot about who's
done right, who wrong.

24

It's never going to be easy
to connect with eternity,
but having picked my way
through vines and ferns
and so much that's broken
as well as under repair,
I'm beginning to get
a feel for it.

Far above
blue sky with white rags
in it; look down and a
multitude's intent on
refuge, striving to recycle
the air we breathe
and, for the most part,
reach for the sky.

25

Incomprehension, calamity, catastrophe...
all already on us, guys. No more
pots of gold at the end of the rainbow.
Time to do the right thing for a change.
Bite the bullets, stop firing them.

An all too common whinge

What do you do when
 having done the best you can,
so you thought, you find out
it's not been good enough? Whistle?

No. Bide your time like a newt
 beneath a stone? Sorry, that
won't cut the mustard either.
Get of your arse, swallow your pride,

go see the woman, and hope and pray
 she doesn't think she's won again.

On Saturday 22 October, Frank Moore, a distinguished retired biologist and skilled outdoorsman – ardent rafter, drift-boat expert and devoted fisherman - drove me all the way to the Andrews from our camp a mile downstream of Troy beside the Grande Ronde river in northeast Oregon. As they say where I come from, what Frank doesn't know about salamanders and other amphibians, their brains, and the extent to which hormones govern behaviour – ours too – isn't worth knowing.

We drove up a so-called 'Primitive Road' out of the Grand Ronde's canyon, the sort of road that's dime a dozen and not half as daunting as many around my neck of the woods in New Zealand, past the ramshackly settlement of Flora, across the high rolling country and down to Enterprise, then on through the small towns – Lostine for instance with its Blue Banana café – over Deadman's Pass on the Blue Mountains, down and by Pendleton, and on and on. Infestations of wind turbines kept distracting company for mile upon mile on both sides of the Columbia river and its reservoirs filling the valley. Turned southwest at Rufus, through more small towns, eventually winding our way over McKenzie Pass just north of the Three Sisters. Stopped to look at the extensive, extraordinary rough black lava fields beside the road. By the time we got to the Andrews we'd been on the road for 10 hours. Frank was tired. Poor guy, he still had two hours to drive to get home to Corvallis.

Fred Swanson was waiting for us when we drove in to the H.J.Andrews Experimental Forest research centre sited in Lookout

Creek, a narrow valley close to its confluence with the Blue River about 50 miles east of Eugene. Fred's a geologist/geomorphologist. Long, limber and lean, he has ever-awake, alert eyes that reflect a mixture of anxiety, assurance and curiosity. As if sifting, reflecting, considering. At times he seems a little perplexed, but upon reflection, only momentarily. Listening to him talk you'd think he'd been here since Adam was a boy. Fred's involvement with developing the Andrews centre and its long-term ecological research project, goes back to near its beginnings, just over 40 years ago. Is there anyone alive with more knowledge of its slightly less than 16,000 acres – of who's been there, and done what?

After taking me to dinner at Mill Creek, on the McKenzie Highway about 5 miles away, we come back and have a quick look around the centre and a few of the adjacent trails. It's quiet; the stars are bright in the canopy above us as we stand beside some massive old-growth 'Dougies' as Fred calls them, affectionately. These firs grow up to 90 metres high and live for between 4 and 500 years. I know so little that I am unable to assess how much Fred doesn't know, but to me he seems to know a huge amount while implying there is an even huger amount that's still unknown.

Next day we visit a variety of sites, some close by the centre alongside Lookout Creek, others 3-4 miles up the valley, and one over twice that distance away up on the Blue River Ridge which divides the Blue from the Andrews catchment.

Fred identifies trees, shrubs, mosses, lichens, fungi, insects... nature's prolific inter-dependent kitty. He seems completely confident and at ease in these cool and sometimes cluttered cathedrals. I can't ever imagine him concurring with the views of Pilgrim William Bradford who thought his virgin New England forest 'hideous and desolate', or even the usually revered Henry David Thoreau who found all 'the decaying wood and the spongy mosses' that fed on it in the Maine woods as very off-putting indeed. Of course, today many of us are better able to enjoy home comforts and conditions that were far superior to those experienced, for the most part, by Bradford and Thoreau. Perspectives have altered and pampering is part of the expectations of considerable numbers of those who live in western countries especially. I confess: I like a *bit* of comfort myself.

As we stroll and wend our way along trails, small and broad leaf maples are shedding their leaves. In the hush of the forest, the semi-gloom and the sun-spangled glades and corridors, here and there golden maple leaves descend in parachute-like slow motion.

We stop to look at western redcedars whose wood and narrow strips of grey bark were used for canoes and totem poles by native Indians. Here and there multi-coloured mushrooms gather and flaunt a little. Some shine like polished porcelain, others have a piquancy that's touching given their size in the presence of such great trees. On more open ground, amidst new growth, and especially on east-facing slopes, birds are noisy and active. There are oaks and madrone redbeech trees and vine maples whose leaves are crimson this Fall. Along

roadsides opportunistic invaders reside – blackberry, Scotch broom and foxgloves among them. In parts slim red alders lean over the road as if satisfying innate curiosity.

I learn that there are scientists who study the composition of fallen, rotting logs, calculate their rate of decomposition, take carbon readings, and so on. These scientists are known as rotters and, yes, there is a Head Rotter. Sample slices cut out of logs and studied are called cookies.

We stand on the Blue Ridge and look in all directions, but especially north, east and south into what can seem like a blue-green infinity. White contrails from jets ripping over and high above us; a few tendrils of grey-white cloud around and trailing from the marquee peaks of Jefferson, Three-Finger Jack, Washington and the Three Sisters. Fred talks about clear-cutting in earlier days all over the Cascades, of more recent management practices: of 80 per cent clear-felling, 50 per cent, 10 per cent. Of politics, equivocation, and proselytising. He feels there is a place for good well-researched management of forests but that it's still too soon to know which system is acceptable in the long-term. As an aside, he says, 'blocks hit by lightning, how do you manage them?' Wily, he speaks of the 'vocabulary' related to management: of 'leave blocks', 'buffers', and 'sustainable management'. Here one can't but think of the smooze-speak that politicians and business managers in particular use to influence public opinion and mollify or gull. In reassurance mode they use words and phrases such as: resource; development; balanced and sustainable growth; progress; wise use; pristine; wasteland; locking up. It's hard to get people to agree on when 'enough is enough', to concede that it's time to leave well alone, in many cases, and that environmental protection is both a necessity and a benefit, not a cost to human societies.

I'm thinking of Bill McKibben who, in his *Wandering Home*, muses and talks of 'the surpassing glory of our right habitation of a place.' And two days later, up at the Fire Lookout on Carpenter Mountain, 5,349 feet in the glorious air of this lovely part of the earth, I think that there is too much turbulence everywhere in this increasingly frenetic world within a world that we have made for ourselves. I stood beside Fred feeling something as simple as a gratitude for being alive in such a setting. I felt as if much that I would never understand quietly flowed by me in the drifting air. I detected low humming sounds which sang in my heart. There was me and Fred, up high, sharing a moment in an uplifting place that I, with the sentience that most of the other creatures around us do not, as far as we know, have, would remember for as long as the mind allowed it in faraway New Zealand, in places dear to me. And I thought of Lawrence Durrell who said that he often felt that the mountains were saying they were watching him and asking if he could see himself in them.

If you want to find the 'right habitation of a place' you have to know your place, and the spirit in that place. It's an almost-quiet, which leads us to something akin to peace. A place where pace is not petty,

time moves at one's own preferred pace, and for precious moments we can feel happily unhurried. Humankind is too ardently and frantically seeking the impossible, perpetual euphoria. The 'Be Happy' insufferables are exhorting us to obtain more and more things which will enable us to enjoy continuing euphoria. Anything less and we will have failed in life's purpose, failed to seize our opportunities to 'get ahead' and 'make the most of life'. I looked at Fred; I said I was glad to be there. That being outdoors, in special places, slows me down, mostly quells anxiety.

Snyder reckoned that, 'To know the spirit of a place is to realize that you are a part of a part and the whole is made of parts, each of which is whole.

'You start with the part you are whole in.'

And for some reason I thought of the owls who live in these forested lands, the Barred, Great horned and Northern spotted, the last threatened in part by the presence and activities of the others. We could learn from them what not to do by way of anti-social competitive behaviour. One lives in hope.

I'm still finding more parts that allow me to, occasionally, feel as whole as I would prefer to be. It's a never-ending quest.

Forests evolve, we evolve. At what point, and for what reasons, do we intervene, and in what ways? What do we mean when we say we must do something in order to progress? It's time for present-day definitions of growth and progress to be continually subjected to examination in terms of context and motivation. One can argue that many individuals and corporations, and other businesses, have too regularly been allowed to pursue their own interests at nature's expense, and that, therefore, unenlightened self-interest has held sway in too many respects. Our natural capital everywhere is being used up and not replaced; nature is calling in its debt.

At the Andrews research centre, most would agree with that; and with the interdisciplinary approach they work under. It's about making connections, looking at how things interlink, say. About confirming the interdependence of all living things. Our 21st century societies, often, don't work that way. A minority of deluded and amoral humans preside over and exploit both other humans and nature in order, often, to increase their wealth. This is callous behaviour from some who could be seen as morally and ethically bereft. Until the majority of humans, distressingly many of whom are apathetic, bewildered or perverse – one might say masochistic in that they are willing to accept being exploited because they harbour a desire to one day, some way, become tycoons themselves – wake up and rise up, change to different ways of living with each other, and with nature, will not occur.

We have to find and agree on what makes us more whole. And agree on what and to whom we owe allegiance; what our duties are, and to whom or what we owe obligation. It isn't, and never ought to have been, all about US as individuals. None of us are islands entire unto

ourselves. Is anything? We are, too many of us, going to our graves broken, destitute physically, spiritually and morally.

I say first of all look after, care for and cherish what's local and regional. Proper, decent, loving growth starts there. In many ways what is happening in the Andrews represents, embodies that.

Just before lunch on the Sunday, Fred leaves to drive back to his home in Corvallis. I read some of the poems in Gary Snyder's 2004 collection *Danger on Peaks*. Surprise: Fred pops up early in the book in respect to parts of Washington State and the area around Mt St Helens. They go on a trip together. Snyder's life and work is not easily summarised or defined, so I won't try, and nor is Fred Swanson's is my impression after short acquaintance and reading a little about him. But with Snyder, I'd go to a fair degree with *The Bloomsbury Review* as quoted on the back flap of *Danger on Peaks*; 'Snyder is an elder statesman of the natural world and the tribal unions of poetry. He has a body of work as original as predecessors William Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens.'

In the afternoon I look at my scrappy notes and have a go at drafting a few poems. And into the evening I do some more reading: I dip into Jon R. Luoma's excellent, informative *The Hidden Forest: The Biography of an Ecosystem*. On the back cover we are told that, 'The tallest species of spruce, hemlock, fir, cedar, and pine trees' anywhere 'co-exist in the old growth of the H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest in Oregon's Cascade Range. Set aside as a living laboratory by the U. S. Forest Service in 1948, the 16,000 acres represent a vital scientific endeavour: the long-term, comprehensive, and interdisciplinary study of a single contained ecosystem. Here, for the first time, researchers from an enormous range of disciplines – forest scientists, botanists, entomologists, wildlife ecologists, soil biologists, and others – have assembled to examine the role of every working element in the life of a forest.'

In the Andrews I am already feeling as if I am privileged to bear witness to the evidence of such activity and to absorb some of the life and diversity of the place for myself. It's thrilling to know that for some 10 years or so, due especially to the efforts and enthusiasm of the writer and philosopher Kathleen Dean Moore, writers and others from the Humanities generally, have been welcomed here and provided with short residencies during which they observe, chat, question, reflect and write down some of their impressions.

Cheekily, perhaps, I wonder what some of the hardline physicists and chemists that have tended to dominate science for decades think of it all. And I don't care.

I also read a few of the essays in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, a stunning collection edited by J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson. The book 'addresses the pivotal environmental issues of the modern era' and looks at the 'varied constructions of "wilderness" ' in respect to 'recent controversies that surround those conceptions, and the gulf

between those who argue for wilderness preservation and those who argue for “wise use”.’

I’m struck by the similarities between the arguments run by the various sides in New Zealand and what pertains in the U. S. In New Zealand, the dominant (I emphasise ‘dominant’, for of course there are varying and different degrees running through the society) view among farmers, business folk, politicians and the majority of the country’s population as I’ve found it for as long as I can remember is, in Gary Snyder’s words, ‘that the natural world is primarily a building-supply yard for human projects.’ In New Zealand, too, we have ‘Savers’ and ‘Users’ aplenty. The ‘Users’ are for the most part made up of big business/large companies, the Federated Farmers body, and governments staffed by the sort of professionals whom Wendell Berry calls ‘hired itinerant vandals’. I agree with that assessment, and it’s just too bad for those who take offence. I’m reminded of Berry’s view – note he is a long-time farmer himself – that ‘All good farmers are conservationists, and all farmers ought to be.’ We might with good reason say that should apply to all business, and on down to the big majority of the citizenry in general.

Few anywhere, as far as I can discern, are willing to believe there are ‘limits to growth’. The ‘we are inventive and innovative, no matter what happens, we’ll find a way’ ethos/position is mightily pervasive. I don’t know how we change that unrealistically optimistic view. Oddly, precautionary principles don’t get much of a hearing when confronted by those who have tired and simplistic definitions of what is meant by ‘growth’, ‘progress’ and ‘modernisation’. Nature hasn’t been faring very well under the wretched poor stewardship of human beings since the discovery of fossil fuels. And we’re all complicit, guilty to varying degrees. The de-regulators and de-localizers have a lot to answer for. But before we will alter our ways we have to be willing to atone for our failings. How willingly are we prepared to do that?

So, as I see it, in New Zealand the society is still overloaded with too many anthropocentric, rapacious, growth-fixated economists, and people to whom any old buck-making activity is a good thing.

In the late afternoon Mark Schultz found some tools to raise the seat on a weird-looking red and white, heavy-weight ‘cruiser’ bike with tyres and wheels on it twice as thick as those I’ve seen on a sulky. The damned absurd-looking thing even had a chain guard. Five speed gearing that wasn’t working too well and daft splayed handlebars. It by most bike standards weighed a tonne. Made for drifting along on the flat on sealed roads and paths on calm days. Off I went wearing my polyprops, cycling shorts, possum mittens, windbreaker and other clothing. I went out of the centre, down the few hundred yards to the main road, turned left, rode over a bridge then left again up the sealed road along the true left bank of Lookout Creek. A steady climb that soon got steeper. On such a bike you can’t easily stand up off the saddle and rock it from side to side on a climb. And I couldn’t find low gear. I packed it in and turned back.

Later, Mark knocked on my door and said that if I wanted to go out riding the next day, I could borrow his very well-used Gary Fisher brand mountain bike. I thanked him. That couldn't help being better. On checking my messages I found one from Fred who said that 'Stan Gregory' was staying next-door to me for a couple of nights. He was 'a long-time Andrews worker and "fish-squeezer" '. I should introduce myself to a fellow fisherman, Fred said. And Kathy Moore emailed to say that Gregory was 'a prince'.

After I'd eaten dinner I knocked on Stan Gregory's door. He was there along with his technician, Randy, and a Ph D student Josh. Jay Sexton was there too. They invited me in. We chatted, drank pinot noir, compared stories of fishing trips and associated outdoor experiences, trawled through environmental politics here and in New Zealand, and laughed our heads off at times. Stan, a professor at Oregon State, is 62. He'd come to the west a long time back from Tennessee. There, he said, were 100 species of fish, maybe more. In Oregon, not quite so many, and in both states non-natives were becoming more prevalent. Take the catfish and bass and goldfish, for instance, in Oregon.

Stan greatly likes the native cutthroat trout and showed me a favourite artist's painting of one on the wall of their apartment.

Stan's done a great deal of fisheries work while studying the extensive catchment of the Willamette River that flows down the valley past Eugene and Corvallis and into the sea at Portland. And he's fished in the Amazon as a member of guided parties when on vacation. It's an 'amazing' place with some very large and dangerous fish. He told of one young doctoral student who lost a leg there. She was sitting on a small wharf dangling her legs over the side when a cayman tore her leg off. She survived and is back studying for her doctorate, artificial leg and all.

Jay Sexton, a technician for the past 28-30 years, offered to take me anywhere I wanted to go in the Andrews and drop me off as long as I was able to find my own way back. So I borrowed Mark's bike, got changed into polyprop long and cycling shorts I'd brought with me from New Zealand, put a two-way radio in my daypack, filled a water bottle, and met Jay.

'Where do you wanna go?'

'Up Carpenter Mountain.'

He put the bike in the back of his ute and off we went. Lovely calm sunny afternoon. Crossed the Lookout Creek a few miles up the valley, drove through thick carpets of broad-leafed maple leaves, twisted and turned, crossed McRae Creek, followed Longer Creek, crossed it at its head and then bounced and wound our way north along Frissell Ridge. It was there that we saw a spruce grouse which nearly didn't see us again.

Grouse

A spruce grouse
explodes, climbs almost vertically
just before
we run over him.

So now I know
why they're called
Fool's Hens.

Soon after we reached a turn-round point about 20-30 minutes walk below the Fire Lookout on top of Carpenter. There, after telling me I could either follow the road 'up to the lookout' or use the track that 'starts here', Jay said goodbye. I watched him quickly disappear, grabbed my bike and, alternately, pushed and rode it up the steep climb ahead. The way was littered with sharp and chunky rock pieces. After I'd been going 12-15 minutes the road came to an end. I failed to spot any track up to the Lookout, nor could I see it. Cursing, I turned round and rode back down to where I'd started. I left the bike down a bank, grabbed my pack and hustled. I was feeling a bit pissed off with myself, not having intended to make two 'attempts to reach the summit'. Twenty minutes later I was on top after sweating and puffing at times. I'd hurried because I wanted to spend time up there then dally a bit on the way down.

The hills to the south and east were a little fuzzy as the sun was lowering in the southwest. But there was hardly a breath of wind and the high mountains to the west were clear and in no way forbidding, partly because they rise out of surrounding forested lands rising to over 6,000 feet. Below me, on andesite rock a few feet away, a chipmunk captured my attention. Mark says it's rumoured that some firewatchers feed them, and that may have been why it turned up.

Wolf Mountain, a bare brown beast below and northeast of the lookout, was basking; no threat at all. I took out the digital camera that my friend Grahame Sydney had persuaded me to bring with me and pointed it in all directions. Sydney's a painter and photographer of the highest rank. He would not have been pleased to learn that I had forgotten the instructions he gave me so I'm certain only a few of the pictures will be in focus.

Looking around I could imagine timber workers and loggers back in New Zealand, on witnessing what I was seeing, saying, 'It wouldn't hurt to *harvest* a fair few of those trees, there's plenty there.' Is there? How would they know? Know when enough is enough?

It's the same with the dam and windfarm proponents: 'we've still got plenty of free-flowing rivers left, and lots of empty space in the middle of nowhere.' And, anyway, 'it's only a river; can't have all that water going to waste.' To such, including the engineers, such is essential if we are 'to progress'.

And farmers – not all, by a longshot, for there are many who understand what has been happening, and disapprove – and others are heard to state that ‘we’re not short of water in Otago, or Marlborough, or Canterbury; water’s flowing out of the place.’

Such talk is common the world over. The question is, What has to be said and done, and in what ways, in order to get people to change their views?

And why is it, so it’s said, that in the US, and in New Zealand, the percentage of people who don’t believe climate change is occurring, or don’t much care, seems to have been increasing?

I don’t know for sure. But in New Zealand a significant proportion of the people believe that the country’s population is so small relative to the overall world figure that no matter what policies we follow, or actions are taken, what we do won’t affect the outcome. There are others, a goodly proportion overall, who think we ought to be doing more to reduce carbon omissions and we need to do it urgently; then there’s the don’t know or don’t care; and lastly, there’s a fairly large percentage who think climate change scientists have ‘got it all wrong’ and worldwide it’s just another ‘cycle’, ice will come back, sun-spots are the problem, we’ll develop other forms of energy, and, of course, humans are such a clever lot that invention and innovation will save the day.

Meanwhile let’s drill for more oil and coal, sequester carbon from lignite, and get on ramping up food production to feed the starving millions.

Moral and ethical considerations don’t rank high among the majority’s concerns. Not enough of the children of Generations X and Y are rising up and revolting against ‘intergenerational theft’. Why? Could it be because they are imbued with the values and beliefs and senses of expectation and entitlement of the majority of their parents who are the people who must take a large part of the responsibility for exacerbating the problems we face? How many are willing to back calls to re-localize if that means restrictions on so-called ‘free trade’ and more regulation that would be deemed by many to be ‘unfairly restrictive’?

People who hold the sorts of views that I espouse are seldom electable – some would say, ‘And a damn good thing, too.’ The more so in countries that have proportional representation, perhaps, but not in places where first past the post systems apply. I have digressed.

After half an hour luxuriating in the sunshine and feasting my eyes on all before me, I had a few gulps of water and set out back down the mountain. Brushing through fern, in and out of the flicking shafts of sunlight among the trees, across the clearing I so relished on the way up, (see poem *Trail to Carpenter Mountain Fire Lookout*) and after dallying to look and listen at times, I emerged from the forest and found Mark’s bike.

Trail to Carpenter Mountain Fire Lookout

In a sunny clearing
on the eastern side
below the lookout
hoppers spring
as if from trampolines
hidden in a field of
white asterisks,
the flowering plant
called pearly everlasting.

Ah well, hope too
springs eternal.

Shed rags of lichen
lie on the trail
where grilles of sunlight
flash between
the trunks of trees.

I climb steps
of fractured
rock
and take in
the view
from the Lookout
platform
of the hazy
blue-green
hills and valleys
of the Cascades.

From north- to southwest
Jefferson, Washington,
Three-finger Jack
and the Three Sisters
keep their distance,
await winter's snows
and not far below
Wolf Mountain slumbers
in the westering sun.

Then down I go,
scuffing, shuffling,
leaping, back to where
we're still learning

what best to do
and how to, and
to work out just
what we mean
when we say we
belong.

One thing concerned me; the soft front tyre. I had forgotten to check the tyre pressures before leaving the Andrews centre. I would be keeping my fingers crossed, resolved to try to avoid as many of the bigger pieces of gravel and bare rock ribs as possible on the way down.

My blue backpack's strap tight around my waist, off I went, swinging the bike from side to side, bouncing, sliding and slewing a little entering and exiting corners. I hooted and hollered a couple of times, my hair fluffing under the helmet, and started to let her rip on the straighter sections. 'Careful, you reckless old bastard.' It was not only my voice speaking but my son's far away in London. It is true, sometimes, that absence makes the heart pound and ache more strongly, but not always. I was thinking of a woman who means and meant more to me than I wish to remember, and how futility and despair can easily invade and overrun such feelings. Which may be why I am irked by such phrases as 'Let go' and 'move on' and 'put it behind you'. One can't, often, because certain wounds never heal, all we can do is learn to live with and manage them.

It's a bit like that when I look around me at the world's wounds, and at the continuing wounding we inflict on ourselves and other species as a consequence. Wounds that would not be there if it were not for those who believe 'we can't afford to protect' x or y 'because it will be bad for the economy', and 'the people will suffer, jobs will be lost', and so on and on: if it were not for those who say, 'Don't worry, in time the land will recover', when justifying their vandalism. In whose time, one asks, and when? We fail in our moral duty when we refuse to rise up against the TINAs – the There is No Alternative, poverty of the imagination, brigade. I don't know how you alter the views of those who don't believe we have major obligations towards more than just the human species.

Often, I feel as if it is too late to do much about what is happening because we're past the point of no return, the long emergency is underway and contraction will be with us for a considerable time. Nonetheless, years ago I vowed – and I don't see myself as an especially significant and highly moral individual – that for as long as I was able I would do my best to advocate for different courses of action. Not only that but in order to curb some of my pessimism, I would retain as much as possible of the optimism of the spirit one needs to experience and enjoy one's life and contact with others. That means, too, being willing to front up to the real 'extremists' among us, the extractors, the so-called 'developers' (actually, more often

unprincipled exploiters and greedy users and usurers), and those who still believe continuing economic growth as we know it is possible in a finite world.

I'm with those who say we need to stop using GDP (Gross Domestic Product) as a measure of the economic and general health of a society and go to something like GPI (Genuine Progress Indicator); am one who believes we should stop referring to fish and birds and trees, for instance, as 'resources'; who thinks we should refuse to use 'develop' as a word for anything except that which doesn't result in despoliation or destruction; stop using 'pristine' for such doesn't exist anymore; stop using 'wasteland', period, and so on. Denis Glover, one of New Zealand's best mid-20th century poets invented a character called Harry who at one point says he 'was a fool' going away 'over the hill / leaving good land to moulder.' Harry was implying, if not saying outright, that land not being grazed or farmed was a crying shame. That view still prevails, big-time, today.

Critics of conservation on the grounds that is 'locking up' too much land often point to how much of the country is in parks or reserves while conveniently (or ignorantly) ignoring the percentage of that which wouldn't be 'usable' in their sense of the word anyway. Mountainous areas and Fiordland are examples in my country. Today New Zealand's wetlands are no more than 10 per cent of what existed in the 19th century, and something similar has happened to the formerly splendid upland tussock grasslands. All in the name of 'progress', of course, because 'there' was said to be 'no alternative'.

To many, parks and reserves are preferable to wilderness areas as they can offer more 'recreational opportunities' as well as nice scenery. They would not agree with, say, Reed Noss, who wrote that, 'Wilderness recovery... is the most important task of our generations.' There is, then, still strong strains of the colonial mentality where settlers set out to 'tame' the land, make it 'productive', not just out of necessity but because it was seen as a duty, the right thing to do. Man seeking and achieving domination over nature and all its creatures. What the Maori who had been living there for centuries before the mainly European settlers arrived believed and behaved was different, but not entirely different. That, though, is another story.

We need, more of us, to declare where we stand. Saying that, I offer this poem, 'Declaration', as a kind of exhortation. Perhaps it could be seen as something similar to the vows one makes on signal occasions. Perhaps I should call it, simply, 'Vow'. Perhaps...

Declaration

The bed of the river's
like a ransacked room
and the banks are cloaked
with lime-green willows

that toss and flail
in a summer gale

and you're convinced
that only what's sacred
and isn't wounded
stands between us
and oblivion, and
without reverence

for the world we inhabit
we will never come
to cherish the planet
we depend on
and have yet to learn
how to love and protect

for as long
as we all shall live.

Again, I have digressed. Too bad.

After a few miles of thrilling downhill riding, except for the scary instances of sun in the eyes when approaching some corners, the road flattened out a bit and I coasted, then pedalled freely along. Leaves, leaves, leaves; oh mellow fruitfulness. I crossed the bridge over McRae Creek, then the next, over Lookout. There, a couple of hundred yards below the bridge on the true left bank of the creek, are some of the oldest and tallest Douglas firs in the forest. Immense they are. One, dead and no longer growing, looked highest of them all. I craned, disbelieving how high it speared towards the thinner air. Sometimes, what speaks loudest makes the least noise.

I rode up the hill past the bridge as hard as I could, pedalling steadily at about 60rpm and more, fantasising that I was breaking away and leaving the struggling peloton of top professionals in one of the grand tours behind me, and commentator Phil Liggett on TV was yelling, telling a worldwide audience that this could be the break that won me the tour, that I had all the world's top climbers in *big trouble*.

I spurted over the top and began the 2-3 mile fastish descent to the Blue River highway, spinning at about 120 rpm. Ole. Back at the Andrews I looked at my watch: about 38 minutes from Carpenter Mountain.

I showered, got cleaned up, began preparing some dinner. In the half-light before dark Stan Gregory and his colleagues arrived in, down from the head of Mack Creek where they'd spent a long day in their chest waders and hats scrambling around checking their 'tagged' logs, seeing which had moved, and how far, assessing their decomposition, and other things a mystery to me. 'We've lost a few,' said Stan with a

slight smile. He'd taken a tumble or two, admitted this day he'd finally accepted he wasn't the man he used to be. I came to that view of myself several years ago. And nothing has changed there. C'est la vie.

There are dozens of permanent study plots, experimental and data gathering sites scattered throughout the Andrews. The forests (their make-up and management, log decomposition, carbon sequestration, insect ecology and much more) and streams (research into tracking fish populations, aquatic insects, examining ecosystem responses to forest harvest, floods, debris flows, and so on and on) are studied intently and results compared over long periods of time. And since the early 2000s the Forest Research programme has collaborated with Oregon State University's 'Spring Creek Project for Ideas, Nature, and the Written Word, bringing 'dozens of writers, philosophers, and religious scholars' to the Andrews 'to reflect on long-term ecological and human change in settings that include the 200-yr log decomposition experiment, a meandering stream, and a recent clearcut.' An extraordinary amount of rigorous and invaluable research has been done since such work began here over 50 years ago.

On my last night in the Andrews, I go and sit outside for a while in the area close to the camp set up for evening discussions/seminars held by the likes of Kathleen Dean Moore. There are benches and a table and a fireplace – a crackling good place to be on the sorts of clear starry nights that entrance Moore. There is, as is said, something wondrous about the heavens above. Glory be to our Earth Mothers for all that sparkles, sings and shines. But I hope that anyone or thing that's out there in the far-off regions of the universe doesn't get to come and see us for, as Margaret Atwood said, if they do they'll be so damned sophisticated and bright that they'd likely view us as little more than tasty 'ambulatory kebabs'.

It's exasperating and regularly irritating to be labelled 'one of those Greenies'. Exasperating because, in New Zealand, some still call Greenies 'weirdos', and likely to be 'bearded, sandal-wearing, mung bean munching loners,' 'extremists' who are 'backward-looking and against progress', who would 'have us back in the Dark Ages'. Such hostility is both laughable and perplexing, or would be if it weren't for the fact that... Aarh! When I was a young bloke a cousin, a fine hockey coach and mathematician, used to remind us, quite often, that 'it wasn't their ignorance that astounded, it was the extent of it.'

Another frost's starting to bite so I go inside and read one of Moore's recent blogposts. She writes,

'The Occupy Wall Street movement and climate action movements stand on the same moral ground: It's wrong to wreck the world.' The way we live today she says, 'is immoral' and much about our systems threatens to disrupt forever the great planetary cycles that support all the lives on Earth.'

Further, 'The Occupy Wall Street Movement is connecting the dots on a map of dysfunction and injustice. Climate change. Toxic neighborhoods. Financial recklessness. Jobs despair. Concentrated wealth. Pointless war.'

She insists that democracy as we devised it is mortally ill and large corporations in particular have acquired such power over unprincipled politicians that 'the government is fundamentally controlled by those who would risk or wreck the (name your favorite: economy, environment, our children's futures) for their own short-term gain.'

As Moore notes, 'Self-created environmental catastrophe has taken down many civilizations before ours. But this time, the self-inflicted catastrophe of climate change will take down also the hydrological cycles and relative climate stability that have allowed the evolution of the world as we know and love it. ...

'We are all in this together. The lines that connect climate change-jobs-environment-education-health-justice are strong and undeniable. The time has passed for an environmental movement. The time has passed for a climate change movement. The time has passed for isolated grassroots movements. We stand on ground that trembles with *tectonic* movement. Along the straining fault lines of our civilization, we feel the building forces for justice, sanity, and lasting ecological and cultural thriving. This, finally, is the Big One – the coming together of all of us who care about the future and do not want to gamble it away. The Big One will shake the world.'

Some will say this is pure unadulterated alarmist squawk. I don't think so. And I would love to think that she is right about what will follow on from the Occupy Wall Street demonstrations and sit-ins. Could it be that, at last, our children – Generation X – and some of theirs – Y – have and are waking up? And just, if not even more important, that my generation is too? Do I hope so? Do I ever.

Stan Gregory is back. He and Randy and Josh have finished early. They've accounted for all but a few of the logs they were looking for and at and he is heading back to Corvallis. Before he goes he gives me his 'favourite mushroom', white and as big as a monster cauliflower. 'Eat whatever you can' he says, 'it's lovely.'

In two days I fly off back to New Zealand. My place. But I shall not forget this place, this very special place and some especially talented and committed people. The US's problems and challenges are New Zealand's, and a whole lot of others' too. Like, the whole fevered and fraught world's. I'm not into measuring the grounds for hope; I'm for doing what one can to cajole, persuade, persist, insist. What else can we do?

