

**Working the Woods,
Working the Sea**

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Working the Woods, Working the Sea

An Anthology of Northwest Writings

Edited by Finn Wilcox and Jerry Gorsline



For Pat and for Beth

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INTRODUCTION

By Mike O'Connor

“The best poetry is out in the country –
farmers singing
rice-planting songs.”
—Basho (1644-1694)
(trans. by Robert Sund)

I.

In the late 1960s with American society under a dangerous and divisive strain of cultural revolution at home and a tragic war abroad, many young people of the counterculture were struggling to find alternative, less alienating ways of life.

They had been initiated into the dark nature of the war, racism and government-police repression, but they were divided themselves, politically and by lifestyle, and the casualties from drug misuse were growing. In time, many extricated themselves from the deepening social malaise, and they struck out on a more hopeful, if uncharted, course.

Where once there had been a flight from universities, the military draft and the provincialism of small-town America, there was soon to be an exodus from the cities, a “movement” known by its imperative: “Back to the land.”

The ideas galvanizing this movement had been in the air for some time. Their coalescence, however, suddenly presented a new landscape of possibilities. In the beginning, the movement could be characterized as a yearning to get closer to nature, to simplify one’s life and to escape undesirable urban and even suburban conditions. Except for certain advance communes, this was undertaken without much

direction or organization. It was as if particular young people were suddenly tuned to a frequency they alone could hear, and to which they responded.

Freeman House described them in an essay, "More than Numbers: Twelve or Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Watershed," reprinted in this collection. He wrote: "There were at the time in American history an extraordinary number of young people who had come all willy-nilly to resist the institutionalization of primary experiences of birth and death, and providing one's own food and shelter. I have no idea why so many people seemed spontaneously to develop the same actualization of this resistance. But like lemmings, tens of thousands of urban people moved 'back to the land' to test a faith unsupported by any evidence or personal experience that they could provide for themselves and each other and thus reclaim their confidence as humans."

For those heeding the call who read contemporary literature (and it was like scripture to many in those days; it did make things happen), the poetry and writings of Gary Snyder proved profoundly important, revelatory, a clue to new terrain whose bounds extended beyond the locus of existing political and cultural paradigms. In 1969, his free and widely distributed "Four Changes" poster-essay alone presented a concise outline of principles and values for those seeking a more spiritual, simple and natural way of life, and his poems, often springing from work in the woods or at sea, gave physical labor a fresh essential character.

Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, among the very first to awaken a younger generation to the authenticity and richness of their own milieu, put a host of young literary folks "on the road," then Snyder with "skillful means" drew them aside, and pointed out the trail. Once started on it, they joined an extended community of new and rediscovered "whole earth" writers, from Thoreau, John Muir and Aldo Leopold to Wendell Berry, Barry Commoner and E. F. Shumacher. In time, they added their own work and opened further terrain.

There were as many ways back to nature—to the countryside, woods or sea—as there were people making the exodus. My own path went first through seaman’s union halls and then to trail and firefighting crews of the U.S. Forest Service. Later, I settled on a small rented farm in the Dungeness River Valley on the Olympic Peninsula, Washington State. Early on, I and others realized what Jesse Miller explains in his interview “When You Plant a Tree, Where is the Buddha?” Namely, that to live independently in places close to nature removed from urban centers demanded some regimen of physical labor. To “groove on nature” may have been part of the movement’s early billing, but hard work would be much of the show. Most of these neo-pioneers accepted this, even welcomed it.

II.

The present Northwest-North Coast collection of writing from back-country-minded individuals working in the woods and at sea, was written largely during the ’70s and ’80s, but also more recently. Their descriptions of a variety of work conditions and experiences are drawn with clarity and straightforwardness—there is no art for art’s sake here. They are writing out of their direct experiences and not “out of their heads.” David Raffeld, reviewing the first edition of this anthology in *Whitney Museum Arts Magazine*, noted: “Water and land are not only the source of their livelihoods but are the resources of their writing.” He added that postmodernism has had no ostensible influence on this writing: “There is no division between body and mind, practice and theory. Their sights are on observable reality. The invisible is seen only through the visible”

Again the ancient, meaningless
Abstractions of the educated mind.
wet feet and the campfire out.
—Gary Snyder, “Logging”

Because these young people chose to live as simply as possible, without, in some cases, electricity, running water, a telephone or permanent shelter—many living in trucks, campers, vans, boats and neglected forest cabins—their Waldenesque subsistence living gave them flexible working hours, “dream time” and enough earnings to support personal endeavors. While there had been from the beginning a degree of anti-intellectualism in the movement, and although physical labor was a good antidote to over-education (the province of the abstract rational intellect), in time, physical work and intellectual or artistic work settled closer into balance.

The first existential phase—doing, and then later, finding out what we were doing—gave way to greater conceptual clarity. The evolving idea of bioregionalism, under which re-inhabitation, watershed consciousness and restoration, and the importance of “place” are subsumed, contributed to defining where the back-to-the-landers were and how they should best approach living there. Kirkpatrick Sales, in *Dwellers in the Land, The Bioregional Vision*, defines bioregionalism this way: “Bio is from the Greek word for forms of life, as is biology and biography, and region is from the Latin *regere*, territory to be ruled . . . a life-territory, a place defined by its life forms, its topography and biota, rather than by human dictates; a region governed by nature, not legislature.”

The work of the Planet Drum Foundation in bringing bio- and cultural diversity issues together in Peter Berg’s formulations of bioregionalism, and the work of Raymond Dasmann and Robert R. Curry, among others, also contributed to the movement’s expanding ecological consciousness. Much later, the ideas of bioregionalism began to be applied to cities, with emphasis on soft energy paths and more attention to human scale and wildlife habitat.

For those living on the Olympic Peninsula, the arrival of Jerry Gorsline, co-editor of this anthology, deepened our understanding of

ideas of place and enlarged our sense of nature. While he worked alongside us in the field, he also began informally teaching the interconnectedness of our work and the environment, or “human culture as a form of biological inter-relationship.” He and poet Tim McNulty organized and spearheaded a number of hard-fought and mostly successful efforts to defend old-growth forests and expand wilderness boundaries.

Gorsline’s trademark was a wooden box filled with books ranging from roadside geology, local botany, bird field guides, to publications such as *Co-Evolution Quarterly*, *Kuksu* and David Wilk’s *Truck Magazine*. The box rode on the floorboard on the passenger side of his van and contained a homemade filing system for environmental articles and reports. Soon, those working on crews with Jerry had assembled their own boxes of books and rudimentary files in their vehicles as well. The motorized camp libraries came later to include such accessories as field glasses and the “William Blake machine,” a magnifying lens for observing lichens (“cities of cups” in Lew Welch’s term) and for seeing what Blake called “eternity in a grain of sand.”

Work on the mountain slopes became part field work, part wage work. In “Treeplanter’s Journal,” Gorsline writes of “Blue grouse and mule deer on the units. A whole new array of plants and animals to know, and a new geology to unravel. Information that sinks into the daily work routine and enriches it.” Jerry also became well known for his declaration: “I’d rather live in a clearcut than anywhere in Los Angeles,” a pronouncement that would have endeared him to Piss-Fir Willie (see below).

Furthering this education in re-inhabitation were—and still are—the efforts of Freeman House and Tom Jay, both stalwarts in their commitment to watershed and salmon restoration, the focal work of Northwest re-inhabitation. Through their hands-on experience in salmon restoration and their knowledge of ecosystems, they, like Gorsline, continue to contribute importantly to watershed health and consciousness, showing by example, ways to respond to the nat-

ural cycles—specifically salmon migration and spawning—that are respectful, not exploitative, of the resource.

Another instance of the shift of work (and worker) from extractive to restorative is represented by an abridgment of Roger Risley’s “Field Journal.” While this record of bird surveying in the Olympic National Forest describes the watershed devastation of past forest mismanagement, the very existence of the survey program, implemented by the U.S. Forest Service, points to new ecosystem management practices based on the scientific investigations launched by Jerry Franklin and his U.S. Forest Service colleagues in the 1970s.

When the first edition of *Working the Woods*, *Working the Sea* was put together, the U.S. Forest Service was on a determined course to liquidate all of its old growth. Today, thanks to Franklin and the work of many conservation activists, the spotted owl crisis and the convening of the Forest Ecosystem Management Assessment Team, made up of top forest ecologists who defined the scientific basis for managing forest ecosystems, old-growth logging has been drastically reduced. Risley’s journal and Freeman House’s writings have been added to this new edition to reflect such progressive shifts in forest work and management.

Tree-planting

Of the many kinds of traditional woods work, including logging, trail work, lookout fire-spotting and timber cruising (or stand exams)—all represented in this volume—tree-planting enrolled the largest number of back-country participants and, from the months spent by planters in the wilds working the slopes and living in makeshift camps together, it forged lasting friendships. Co-editor Finn Wilcox in his poem “On My Tenth Anniversary as a Treeplanter,” thinks back with emotion on the labor of planting nearly a million (that’s right, a million!) trees: “No regrets though, / the friends that I love / still work by my side.”

In the Northwest, camaraderie, born of shared thought and experience and “the common work of the tribe,” spurred creation of tree-planting cooperatives, formed to compete with forest contractors and create economic independence for the band of planters. Food conspiracies and food co-ops took shape about the same time, and small Zendos and cooperative writers’ presses also blossomed—Discovery Bay Zendo and Empty Bowl, a writers’ co-op in Port Townsend, for instance. The fermenting mix of social-economic influences at the time included the commune, Marxist and Maoist politics, Luddites, the old IWW, Native Americans, transcendentalism, Buddhist economics, organic farming and the Amish—to name but a few. In the Puget Sound area, social radicalism wasn’t new. A long history of communitarianism in the form of cooperatives (the town of Port Angeles), communes (anarchists and nudists) and colonies (utopian) dates from before the late nineteenth century.

While tree-planting seemed “right work” to just about every idealist in the back-country, much of the industrial reforestation process, of which tree-planting was the “greening” phase, was actually a war on nature, black magic. Jerry Gorsline writes about it in “Treeplanter’s Journal”: “Violent patterns of resource management, implemented with war technology: helicopters, defoliants and napalm. One inspector tells me they have a 500-acre clearcut to burn and plant. Site preparation will consist of ‘brown and burn,’ i.e. spray with herbicides, then ‘mass ignition’ to burn all 500 acres in one long day (mass ignition: string the unit with primacord fuse, attach cans of napalm at intervals; ignition produces a fire storm which consumes slash) To prevent brush competition on the ‘Whitcom Creek’ unit, they’re going to apply 2,4-D bound in lignin with a clay bulk carrier over the entire unit, creating a long-duration, low-intensity, plant-toxic environment to ‘insure seedling survival.’”

If agreement could ever be reached quickly among a consensus-governed group of individualistic tree-planters, it was on just how hard

and all consuming tree-planting could be. Howard Horowitz, who is represented by several poems in this volume, ends his “Montana,” with these lines, “Ann when I came / and saw you: / a wild woman, changed in six weeks / your hair and eyes / your sunburnt face. // We lay down / in the hot tent / and cried.”

Julia Menard-Warwick’s poem, “Treeplanting at Sombrio Creek,” ends with the planter hoping new snowfall will shut down the planting (a not particularly wayward hope among tree-planters). “But it [the snow] has all melted by breakfast time, / and as we start up the slopes again in sunlight, / rivulets of water among the skunk cabbage, / all I can think of, not my debts / or future poverty, is throwing myself / off a log, spraining my ankle, / and going home.”

Chuck Easton, on the other hand, found a modicum of contentment in tree-planting, thanks to his “Plywood Palace,” an ingenious portable shack that he designed and built for cozy living on river and mountain planting sites. His Plywood Palace haiku were penned between practice sessions of jazz guitar.

Fred Miller (“Tale of a Word Planter”), another creative-minded planter, would have us believe that he worked also as a Word Planter, an avocation in which he planted seedlings in intentional patterns. When the trees grew to maturity, they would spell out from the air—like giant coniferous bumper stickers—such statements as THE PRESIDENT IS A LIAR.

Miller, the trickster, is also the romantic: “The work had a beautiful rhythm that intrinsically harmonized with mind, body and external world. I have done no other work before or since that has fulfilled me in the same total sense as tree-planting. It put me in direct touch with the universe. It tied me to our ancestors of the dim primeval past who first worked with nature to produce food and fuel.”

Colorful characters—crusty, frayed and immortal—abound in the lore of woods work and in these pages. Pineapple of Hal Gaskell’s story of that name and Dodge’s Piss-Fir Willie are just two of this cast.

“When I first met Pineapple in Estacada, Oregon, he had a dime in his ear,” begins Gaskell’s tale. While Dodge gives us the composite (“polymodal”) character Piss-Fir Willie. “Never live in a place where you can’t piss off the front porch.”

Thank you, Willie.

Logging

Richard White, in his essay “Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living,” notes that “both destructive work and constructive work bring a knowledge of nature, and sometimes work is destructive and restorative at the same time, as when we cut or burn a meadow to prevent the encroachment of forest.”

White, an academic historian whose essay provides a sharp perspective on the writing in this volume, argues that work is a “far more intense way to know nature than through play and recreation,” and he takes to task those environmentalists who look down on physical labor or see it as only destructive. He also criticizes those who romanticize archaic work and demonize modern machines and tools, and those who invest bioregionalism with a sense of moral superiority. Further, he reminds fellow environmentalists and writers who work in offices that their work only masks similar alterations of nature that they decry in the work of those who labor in nature. “The lights on this [computer] screen need electricity, and this particular electricity comes from dams on the Skagit or Columbia. These dams kill fish; they alter the rivers that come from the Rockies, Cascades, and Olympics”

John Daniel’s “Cuttings” portrays a logger who admits that clear-cutting isn’t pretty, “but it’s the only way to harvest these trees. It don’t pay to go in there just for a few.”

Daniel’s response to this is sympathetic: “The voice that spoke those words is my voice, too. It’s in all of us—the voice of practicality and common sense, the voice that understands that ugly things are

necessary. It's a voice that values getting a hard job done and making an honest living."

But Daniel isn't at ease finally with the logger's words. The reality of an ancient forest destroyed by clear-cutting is too overwhelming: "The trees are gone, the creatures are gone, and the very genius of these hills, that gathered rain and changing light for centuries, that grew and deepened as it brought forth a green and towering stillness—it too is leaving. It's washing down in gullies to a muddy stream."

Snyder's long poem "Logging" does not mask the destructive side of logging: "The ancient forests of China logged / and the hills slipped into the Yellow Sea." But he also catches the drama, the aliveness and zing of doing the dangerous work: "Stood straight / holding the choker high / As the Cat swung back the arch / piss-firs falling, / Limbs snapping on the tin hat / bright D caught on / Swinging butt-hooks / ringing against cold steel."

Lookout work, which engenders a good deal of meditation, is playfully recounted in a classic poem by Philip Whalen, "Sourdough Mountain Lookout," the same lookout occupied years later by Tim McNulty and whose poems in this book also sing that wild perch.

Work at Sea

There is a long and rich tradition of writers going to sea, to blue water, and the poets Gary Snyder, Clemens Starck and Richard Dankliff give us a very modern feel of it. Starck's "Ammo Ship" describes the predicament of some young people who shipped out during the Vietnam War and found themselves in morally ambiguous circumstances: "Mostly we hauled asphalt, / tens of thousands of drums of asphalt. / The master-plan / called for southeast Asia to be a parking lot. / If it wasn't asphalt, it was bombs. / The bombs were for the enemy."

Dankliff has four fine sea poems in this collection: “Cargo discharged, / we ride high in the water. / Off west, low sun daubs the clouds / blood red, break-glass-for-fireaxe red, . . .” (“Departure.”)

Snyder’s “Tanker Notes”—technically journal entries, abridged here—is in essence narrative poetry. Snyder weaves strands and snippets of observation, poetry, philosophy and amusing crew exchanges. Because he gives his mind over completely to the task at hand, Snyder can coax song from tending a ship’s engine: “Reaching through hot pipes to turn nuts—the burned arm—squiggle lines and tiny surprise silver tube running off somewhere to tweet a gauge—box wrench 13/16; eye beam you beam, bulkhead sweat—flange leak and valve drip—old gasket pounder—poke the big bolt through, seek nuts in pocket—whole ship twined about us, where do the pipes go? The engineer cursing and burning his unsteady hand—”

Salmon and Fishing

Holly J. Hughes, who has spent the last 26 summers working at sea in Alaska, is represented by four poems, including “Point Colpoys, Alaska: Tendering,” in which she considers a letter telling of theater in New York and wonders “what could be better than this, / watching the fog curtain rise”

In his prose piece “The Best Day,” Paul Thomas describes what it’s like to land a big king salmon: “You tug and wait ’til he presents his head, a recalcitrant prisoner full of fear and loathing but more noble in his hatred than you in your greed.”

Thomas recalls how fishing, like the woods work of his counterpart back-to-the-landers, created economic independence and community: “There must have been at least eight boats working that bight, all from our little hippy fleet of ‘dock-sixers’ as we called ourselves in those days in reference to the transient dock on Fishermen’s Terminal, Seattle, where most of us converged during the protest days of the late sixties. We had individually, as couples, and more or less as a

group, bootstrapped our way from dockside dreamers into full time entrepreneurs, cognizant of the bottom line, but still given over to the narrative.”

In her poem “Advice to Female Deckhands,” Erin Fristad, a seasoned fisher, gives us a candid look at the duties that inherently fall to the female on a fishing boat. And in “While You Were Sleeping,” she reveals what life without fish for fishers narrows down to, “You can’t imagine sitting at a desk”

Freeman House, a former commercial salmon fisherman, tells (in an excerpt from his book, *Totem Salmon*) how he came to realize that he and his crew were part of an extractive industrial economy and “could only allow ourselves to see the salmon as objects, as product, a product that we hoped would allow us to pay the rent.” There was no sense of sacrament in the taking of the fish.

House notes: “By denying ourselves the perception of our relation to the creatures dying on the deck we were in some essential way denying ourselves a wholeness of being.” For House, this understanding eventually led to his steadfast commitment to saving wild salmon runs on the Mattole River.

In “Lost & Found”—part diary within a memoir and part philosophic excursion into the theme of place—Mike Connelly speaks of House’s salmon restoration effort: “The ‘scheme’ they [House and friends] developed was to capture live wild salmon, females and males, on their way to the spawning beds. One of the main causes of salmon declines in the northwest has been the degradation or loss of spawning habitat, and this has also been the case on the Mattole.”

Connelly adds, “They reached out to everyone—hippies, ranchers, logging companies, fishermen, and everyone else—with respect and humility. They formed the Mattole River Salmon Group.”

Whether or not they have been successful is a question, as Connelly points out, that isn’t really the issue. What is, according to Connelly, is the realization “that treating the fish problem by itself—without

dealing with the “relationship between fish and people—would produce, at best, a temporary fix.”

The effort of the people of the Mattole is one of the most enduring developments within the bioregional movement. It’s a step beyond just working in nature to working in a healing way over a long period, and requiring strong commitment to place, to community. It’s also an example of the actualization of what Arne Naess, a Norwegian and the father of Deep Ecology, called biospherical egalitarianism, the regard for the “rights” of all species.

Tom Jay, inspired early by Freeman House, has long been involved in the grass-roots effort to restore health to watersheds, especially through the renewal and preservation of the wild salmon. For Jay and his wife, the artist Sara Mall Johani, this has included any number of artistic and educational programs to inform the community at large of the importance of salmon and ecological health. Jay, in his sacramental and lyrical essay, “Salmon of the Heart,” identifies salmon as “the soul in the body of the world,” and “the crown of the Northwest forest biome, the soul of the ecosystem. It is with cedar the paradigmatic expression of this place. If the forests and their waters are healthy, if the sea is clear and uncrowded, then wild salmon thrive.”

As will we.

I.

TREEPLANTING

TALES OF A WORD PLANTER

Fred Miller

There are words growing in the forests of the Pacific Northwest. Within several years they will be visible, emerging in a pattern far different than the orderly rows of trees growing in our renewable forests (plantations they are called), and quite likely to provoke some controversy.

Using Douglas fir seedlings as a living communications tool, I planted trees in a pattern to form letters that made up words which were part of phrases while I worked as a professional treeplanter.

I have been a Word Planter.

While perhaps not agreeing with the sentiments expressed, you might enjoy the principle involved. Bear with me while I explain.

Planting trees, reforestation as it is called, is a major step in the industrial process of wood production. While still in its infancy relative to other basic industrial processes, great progress has been made by manipulating seedlings as well as the micro-environment that affects their growth.

The techniques used, genetic sleight-of-hand, fungicides, herbicides, monoculture, slash burning, etc., have created enormous controversy and consequent widespread interest in forest management in general.

In any given year, a crew of professional treeplanters may work on several thousand acres of private and public forest land. Those acres may be spread among 100-200 different units in several states. (A unit refers to a designated number of acres from which merchantable trees have been cut and removed and the remaining vegetation and trees burned or otherwise killed.)

An individual worker, man or woman, on a crew may plant 100,000 to half a million seedlings in one season's work.

In the Pacific Northwest, where I worked, the weather was often rainy and cold; the harsh working conditions primitive, as are most types of work involved with extraction or regeneration of natural resources.

Treeplanters, their tree bags strapped to their waists, packed with 300-500 seedlings, tromp onto a unit looking like drab mutant birds with clumps of green feathers rising out of their rump.

Filled, the tree bag weighs 35-75 pounds depending on the size of the seedlings. West of the Cascade mountain range that runs like a backbone through Washington and Oregon, those seedlings are usually Douglas fir. In the drier areas East of the Cascades the seedlings could be different species of pine or other kinds of fir.

A tool called a Hoedad (for which our worker-owned company was named) is sunk into the ground in the manner of a pickaxe, a triangle-shaped slot opened in the soil into which a seedling is dropped, roots down. Soil is tamped to fill and firm the planted seedling. A steady worker will plant from 800-1,500 seedlings a day.

Seedlings are planted on a spacing grid (6' × 6', 8' × 8', 10' × 10', etc.) designed so each young tree is placed in relation to all other planted trees until the unit is covered as close as possible to the designated spacing requirement and the optimum number of trees fills the unit.

Other human beings (although some workers have been known to dispute this) are inspectors. They follow the workers, taking random plot samples to ascertain that there were no open spaces left by the treeplanters. Since amount of pay is based on how well (and how quickly) a contractor can cover the acreage, there are sometimes intense disputes about proper spacing.

The terrain in the Northwest has wide variability. Rock, multi-species vegetation, swamps, streams, clay, ashes, and tremendous piles of

forest debris left by the logging operation may be encountered on a typical unit. Finding planting spots is done by clambering over terra not so firma, scuttling sideways on steep mountain slopes while pecking at the ground. Sort of like scratching for grubs.

Treeplanting is among the most arduous types of work in the world. No doubt about it. A productive worker during the work day will swing a Hoedad 3,000-4,000 times, thudding it into the ground with arms, wrists, and upper torso absorbing the shock. Tendonitis and Carpal Tunnel Syndrome are frequent occupational hazards. He or she may bend over 2,000-3,000 times to plant seedlings. Back problems are frequent. Knees, ankles, and feet are continually stressed trying to get a grip on the precipitous slopes.

Sometimes units have been sprayed with herbicides a few hours or days before treeplanters work, creating short-term discomfort and potential longterm reproductive problems or cancers.

Many of the coordinated maneuvers needed to plant a unit in the most efficient manner reminded me of my Navy marching days. Complicated patterns are carried out with workers spread out over 200-300 yards and take a half hour or more to unfold.

Ahhhhh, but the work had a beautiful rhythm that intrinsically harmonized my mind, body, and external world. I have done no other work before or since that has fulfilled me in the same total sense as treeplanting. It put me in direct touch with the universe. It tied me to our ancestors of the dim primeval past who first worked with nature to produce food and fuel.

And, occasionally, when our whole crew happened to hit the same groove, the work became a beautiful dance of life, in stark contrast to the rotting remnants of the rapacious logging operation.

Often, however, like most jobs, it was hard and boring and I was certainly not in ecstatic communication with the natural order. My body went into drone-automatic and my mind drifted along, thinking about the things I like to think about.

It was in one of these periods of disinterest, plodding along, planting a tree here and there when the blinding flash hit me! I began to tingle! I whooped and hollered! I hopped around on one foot (crushing two seedlings in the process). I spiked myself with one of my caulk boots. Sheee-it, I was filled with joy.

Do you remember the feelings of pure excitement you got as a kid? Well, this was one of those times that adults so seldom experience. At that moment I became a WORD PLANTER.

That very next afternoon, after a feverish night of plotting on graph paper, in the achingly beautiful coastal mountains of Oregon, in 1976, I planted FUCK MORE, HATE LESS, in letters 40 feet tall. Now, this was not as odd as you might think sitting there reading this. My immediate condition at the time was quite the reverse. And this particular sentiment was dear to me. It came from two friends who, during the giddy year of 1969, hung a large banner with those immortal words emblazoned on it, over a San Diego freeway bridge for the enjoyment and rumination of the bleary-eyed morning commuters. These folks were rabid Wilhelm Reich fans at the time—early writings of course.

Damn! I felt wonderful as I sat on that slope contemplating my first completed work. I knew in 20 years or so a plane would fly over the mountain, a bored pilot glancing over at the slope, then sitting bolt upright, eyes popping out; “Jesus H. Keerist! What the hell is that?” Word will spread quickly. The U.S. Forest Service people will be quick to deny that they had any part in it. Other leaders of the Vox Populi will put in their two cents. Airlines will make detours to see it; charter helicopter rides will follow. Economic development for the depressed Central Oregon Coast will be built around FUCK MORE, HATE LESS. Laughter and revulsion will reign; investigations demanded; solutions to the “problem” will be suggested. “Well I think we should just clearcut every word, you know like a big eraser.”

The overriding question will be: “WHO DID THIS?”

And that is why I am writing this article. I am publicly confessing right now. I did it. I am proud of it. And that is not all.

I have planted many different words throughout the national forests in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, and California. I even snuck in a couple of words on private property, but I won't tell Georgia Pacific where I did it.

In Idaho's Panhandle, I planted STOP WAR. In Oregon's Siuslaw and Willamette forests, I planted NO MORE POISONS, referring to the tremendous amounts of herbicides sprayed on the forests. The Umpqua forest in Southern Oregon has REBEL AGAINST POISONS. The Six Rivers forest in California has the memorable HELLO OUT THERE! (my greeting to the possible lookers-in from other planets). In the Olympics in Washington, the cryptic BIRD LIVES marks my living tribute to the creative and soulful musician.

All in all I planted some 20 phrases, including: THE PRESIDENT IS A LIAR. (Each succeeding president has been worse than their predecessor. Ronald Reagan is by far the most adept liar in presidential history.)

DO RIGHT! (my advice to the living).

RACISM IS ROTTEN (this ideological sickness of white people permeates our society).

YOU ARE HERE NOW DUMMY (a spoof on mysticism).

HOEDADS ALIVE (my poem to our worker-owned company).

DON'T MOURN, ORGANIZE (more advice to the living from the Wobblies).

WORKERS PRODUCE WEALTH, DON'T FORGET IT! (a reminder to the corporate executives who curiously and erroneously believe they are somehow responsible for material abundance).

TREES ARE BEAUTIFUL (aren't trees wonderful?).

WE SHALL OVERCOME (my optimism about the future drawn from the examples of the past).

PEOPLE AND TREES ARE IMPORTANT (a message to timber corporations).

VENCEREMOS (a lasting appreciation for the examples of the Cuban people).

MEN, NO ABUSE OF WOMEN! (a fervent statement to men to protest violence against women).

TO BE OF USE (the inner drive of working people that my favorite poem by Marge Piercy so eloquently stated).

NEEDLES DROP, SILENT THE SOUND (the influence of Zen on me in the forests).

My most difficult work:

HONESTY, MODESTY, HARD WORK, LOVE, FUN, FORGOTTEN VIRTUES; TIME FOR CHANGES! THROW THE BUMS OUT! 2,500 seedlings, 2 days planting time, 2 acres with a 60% slope turned out to be my last. Soon after, I pulled some chest cartilage from my sternum (ouch), developed psoriasis from the stress of fighting herbicide use (yuck), and was partially hobbled by arthritis (moan). That effectively ended my 10-year reforestation career and my 5 years of sporadic word planting.

One of the neat things about this is the anticipation I have as my work slowly becomes revealed. A joy to grow old. I plan my first visits to the areas in 1989. I figure that the first words will emerge around 1993-95 for other people to recognize. I'll keep you posted.

So that is the story folks, Tales of a Word Planter. Perhaps there have been others out there planting their words, waiting as they grow. Perhaps someone will read this and go do a little woods writing. Who knows. It has been important to me to have secret chuckles. It is even better when they are shared with others. Socially responsible giggles are great.

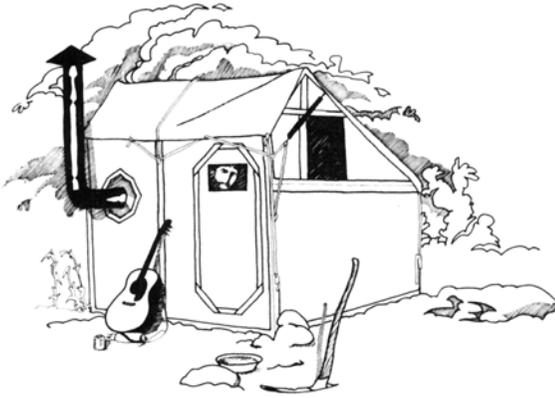
POEMS FROM THE PLYWOOD PALACE

Chuck Easton

Who says my poems are poems?
My poems are not poems.
After you know my poems are not poems,
Then we can begin to discuss poetry!
—Ryokan (trans. John Stevens)

A month or two every year we get a planting contract from another district. This means we all go on the road with various makeshift living arrangements. I live in the plywood palace, a small, portable house I designed and built that comes apart and travels on the roof of my car. It's built out of five 8' × 4' sheets of plywood reinforced with 1" × 2"s and has a plastic tarp roof. The (dirt) floor space is 8' × 7'. Two 8' × 4' sheets placed long side down form the sides, a 7' × 4' sheet with a small skylight forms the back. The front has two smaller panels, 5½' × 4' and 5½' × 3', an octagonal door with a window in one, a stovepipe hole in the other. A triangular piece with a large Plexiglas window rests on each 8' × 4' side and completes the basic form. The overall shape is saltbox. There's seven feet of headroom at the peak then the roof slopes steeply forward to the 5½' front and more gradually back to the 4' back panel. Inside, a small airtight woodstove and shelves are in the front, the string bed (a design from India) fills up the back. Assembly time is one and a half hours: it goes together with 2½" × ¼" eyebolts and wingnuts. The design requirements were standing headroom and a place to stay warm and dry. In its third season the plywood palace is doing its job admirably.

Just so there is room
for my bed and mats
—T'ao Ch'ien (trans. William Acker)



Nightfall after the first day of tree planting:
In my small plywood shack, I lean forward and blow out the lamp.
The full moon explodes in the glass.

*

Just after summer daybreak I lean back next to the stove
playing a Charlie Parker tune.
The rain roars on my plastic roof.

*

In the middle of a poem by Tu Fu
a mouse springs the trap.
As death quiets its shaking and rustling
I hear the sparrows sing again.

*

Too hot to stay inside, I go outside and lean against the wall
holding my guitar.
The sound of rock and roll and horseshoes drifts past.

*

The volcano turns white under fresh snow,
gray under falling ash.

*

Watching Koma Kulshan
the coffee beans grind themselves.

*

All day in the rain on summer solstice,
Wet hands, cold feet.
Finally, the hot tea I've been dreaming of for hours
is in my hand.

*

Light showers of rain block out all other sounds.
I drop off to sleep.
At midnight I awake to full moonlight streaming in my window.

TREEPLANTING AT SOMBRIO CREEK

Julia Menard-Warwick

The sea down burned slopes
was silent in its tumult
waves foaming against the rocks
too far away to be heard;
the seals I saw from the beach
too far away to be seen.

They have logged, and they have burned.
We come after, planting new trees:
cedar in the swamps with skunk cabbage,
fir on the dry knolls—
while whining chainsaws topple timber
at the edge of the clearing.

Cursing from the pain in my shoulder
where the weight of trees I plant
has worn a groove in the muscle,
I look out over the straits of Juan de Fuca
over the seals and boats and sea breezes
to the soft blue mountains of the Olympic Peninsula.
And bend again to stab with my shovel and plant.

At the end of the road, in Port Renfrew,
where after work we've driven through hail storms
to make phone calls on Friday night,
the hotel pub is full of women and loggers in party clothes

but every table is nearly silent
and the sandwiches are free.

The faller who died Thursday afternoon,
falling himself from the high rigging,
was only 21.

No one looks at us as we lean against
the wall in the corner, drink beer, and laugh.

I have nothing but respect
for those whose living it is
to drive their bodies like machines
day after day. I cannot
drive myself fast enough, I cannot
really care. I don't want money.
I want only to go home,
to Peter, waiting in Vancouver.

The three men who own land together in Greenwood
make pottery, play guitar,
and have children all the same age,
are sitting on stumps on the dirt floor
of the cookshack by lantern light,
talking softly and singing.
I cannot tell them I wish to leave.

In the morning we awake to snow,
on the mountains, on the clearcuts,
on the tents, in my tree bags.
The straits of Juan de Fuca are as smooth and light
as if snow has fallen there too.
I think, "Perhaps more will fall.

We will be snowed out.

I can go home.”

But it has all melted by breakfast time,
and as we start up the slopes again in sunlight,
rivulets of water among the skunk cabbage,
all I can think of, not my debts
or future poverty, is throwing myself
off a log, spraining my ankle,
and going home.

The end of the day, the pain in my shoulder
much worse, I sit on a huge stump
in the cold wind, looking out across the straits
to the mountains,
the lines of current on the water,
listening to the silence of the ocean.

PINEAPPLE

Hal Gaskell

When I first met Pineapple in Estacada, Oregon, he had a dime in his ear. I was a green treeplanter, anxious for another try at this good earthwork. I'd been laid off after a week in Florence. The boss said it was too tight of a contract and he'd give me another try when they moved to Idaho in a few weeks. The contractor always lost half his crew to the Burnside bars in Portland when they moved a long distance, got snowed out or had any other kind of delay that was long enough for the boys to get started on a bender. I got my call and was the first guy to get into the crummy parked in front of the Stockman Cafe. We'd leave when the crummy was full.

It was getting dark and I was trying to sleep in preparation for the all-night drive to Grangeville and hard day of work to follow.

Suddenly, I heard a ruckus and turned to see two rowdy fellows approaching the crummy. One seemed to be luring the other with a bottle in a brown bag. They were leap-frogging derelict parking meters along the sidewalk.

Jim Brockway had the wine. He was a macho young tramp of about 35. Blue denim with a hickory shirt under his jacket, forester's boots and an Engineer Bill cap. Jim's good looks had been marred by years of alcohol abuse and life on the "Lost Highway." The other man, a whole head shorter than Jim, had on khaki pants, a plain work shirt, Japanese gardener-type cap and lace-to-the-toe boots. He carried a cardboard box bound with twine. Jim carried nothing, save the bottle. Pineapple, Jim called him, was older (58, I found out later), dark skinned, built like a brick and had the hands of a much larger man. He was singing an old Nat King Cole song, "Pretend you're happy when

you're blue oo-ooHOO . . . !” And when he sang the “oo-ooHOO,” his squinted bloodshot eyes bulged and his mouth opened enough so that you could see his two yellow teeth, one on top and one on the bottom, both on opposite sides. He seemed reluctant to get in the crummy and after getting in and out several times and after much coaxing by Jim, he climbed back to the rear seat. As others filtered in from the cold night, the crummy filled, the doors closed, and Pineapple was shanghaied. Pointing at the old hoedads, dirty and rude looking, he asked loudly in pidgin Hawaiian, “What are dese tings? Is dis what you use to plant trees?” I thought, oh brother, I'm only 20 and I can hardly hack this work. What are they bringing along this old guy for? Charley, the owner, started the motor and with sober aloofness drove north in the night along the Columbia Gorge. Charley had a crewcut and I sensed that he despised these dregs of society he gathered from the gutters. He used them for his own profit and other than that he gave less than a damn about them.

Now that we were under way, Jim and Pineapple began to pass the bottle they had kept discreetly hidden from Charley, enticing others with it, and now, miraculously, other bottles began to appear. They were having a jolly time and we still had 500 miles to go. Jim was bragging about riding freight trains transcontinental seven times both ways, and telling how gorgeous his first and second old ladies had been and how one of them had been the reason for him smashing his Pimental guitar against a wall. He was playing flamenco on my old beater. Pineapple was singing, “One night the moon was so mellow, Rosita met young Manuelo-ooHOO!” I sat shotgun and could see that the rising noise level was getting to Charley. I was amused by the wild craziness of it all but dared not laugh. I needed this job. The others needed it too, just like they needed their next meal or next place to flop. The wine was luxury, and otherwise they seemed to need very little.

The miles rolled by. Somewhere between Pendleton and Lewiston now, the landscape was dark and deserted. It was around 3 a.m. and hatred was coming to a head in the boss. His jaw and lips tensed; the noise level steadily increased. His fists clenched the steering wheel. Suddenly, out there in the middle of nowhere, he screeched to a halt and began shouting that he'd had it and would dump everyone out here if they didn't shut up. Pineapple broke the moment of silence, which followed as he mumbled, "I don't give a shit." Charley ignored it. We got out for a stretch and a leak, then took off again.

I dozed until we arrived at the Spot Cafe in Grangeville where we met Richard, the ramrod foreman of Charley's company, Dangerous Don, the lead man, Dirty Kirk and Buffalo from the old crew in Florence, along with four or five others that they'd picked up along the way. They were finishing breakfast and getting ready to go to work. We had time for a coffee to go and then followed Richard's crummy up the mountain in Chief Joseph country. It was a crisp, beautiful Idaho morning as the sun rose. We drove far into the hills where snow lined the road, I heard Jim grumbling to Pineapple that all these young hotshots would probably leave them in the dust. Pineapple didn't say anything. He just looked bummed-out to be there. Richard took three guys who had not planted before aside and gave them instructions. He reviewed me to see if I still remembered the technique he'd taught me weeks earlier. He led us down the hill to where Pineapple was tamping a nice straight up-and-down 2-0 Doug fir. Richard told them so everyone could hear, "Now there is a perfect tree. That's exactly how everyone on Richard Wilson's crew is supposed to plant trees." By then Pineapple had planted two or three more perfect trees.

MONTANA

Howard Horowitz

The Potluck crummy
broke down
on the way to Montana
and on the way home.

Broke and down:
 pay for a food share
 pay for a crummy share
 pay for a love share
 even if you don't get one.
So few women
and so many men.

Jolie and Ann
tried a short-cut
and got lost.
They didn't need the search party
but that's what can happen
when you follow your heart
down a deer trail.

Hot
day after day, hot.
Sun-baked planters
scalp the ash
to mineral soil.

At night
stars and breeze

Red Stars party
Thumbs party
Potluck sulks.

Ann when I came
and saw you:
a wild woman,
changed in six weeks
your hair and eyes
your sunburnt face.

We lay down
in the hot tent
and cried.

IDAHO

It's great
to plant trees
in Idaho, when
snowmelt roars
in the Clearwater
& when frost crisps
the brushfields red
in the Bitterroots.

Steep ridges of shrub
and rock, young larch
and fir, bleached snags:
remember the great fire
of 1910, when Pulaski

forced his men into a
mineshaft, to survive;
when the train got away
from Wallace on flaming tracks.

Luck still touches some of us: remember
the crummy, upside-down in a pond (the con-
sequence of driving to camp without headlights
when the bar closed in Elk City). Good money
and good times on a Kelly Creek clearcut, in a
Pierce tavern, in the Grangeville Hotel. Remember
swimming holes on the Salmon, hot springs baths,
the log truck driver dancing with his daughter,
a bear with rose hips scat, a meteor shower in
Orion, the woman that night in Orofino. Remember
Idaho is too great to pass nonstop on the freeway.

HOEDADS, INC.:
BIRTH OF A COOPERATIVE, 1970-74:
A WORK IN PROGRESS

Hal Hartzell

The winter of '74 certainly put the Hoedads to the test. There was one incident, about the second time the Cougar Mountain crummy almost died on the unit, that characterized the winter experience. Cougar Mountain and the Cheap Thrills were working together, about six from each crew. Gerri Mackie, a Cheap Thrill, and me, a Cougar Mountain, collaborated on a true story, since we were both there:

We had worked hard all day. It became clear that with a little extra effort we could finish off the unit. The two crews worked together into the twilight and made it up to the landing in the dark; cold, wet, tired and hungry. More so than usual because of the final push.

Cougar Mountain's green crummy would not start, leaving 12 people in the grasp of the first stages of hypothermia. It was a few hundred feet up, out of the unit, before the road started down hill. It was against government regulations to give rides to treeplanters, so the inspector drove off. There was crankiness, yelling and then depression. But then the collective mind and body began to work.

Rust calmed everyone down, enough to start working together on the problem, which was his talent. While hands held a weak flashlight under the hood and tinkered, voices chanted mechanical deductions. Fire? Electricity? No, the battery was alive, the cables were tight, juice flowed to the dashboard and the lights. Fuel? It was coming through the line, making it to the carburetor. Better check the gas though. Another 20 minutes went by while people searched for a siphon hose or reasonable facsimile. None was found.

Next we disconnected the fuel line and let the gas pump squirt the gas into a jar; soon a quart of amorphous liquid was available for inspection. The problem was clear: the gas was murky. Scrambling for gas from suspicious suppliers in the embargo and too many weeks in the rain forest had produced a fuel mixture that was about one-third water. Knowing the problem and finding the solution were two different things.

Some crummies have a drain plug on the tank for this eventuality. Not this crummy. No siphon, no plug. The cold, dark and hunger dragged on. People shivered and complained, but the greater part of the crew organism was attuned to getting the hell out of there, no matter how stubborn the resistance. Even the stupid suggestions became worthy of consideration. The only way to get that water out of the tank is to punch a hole in the bottom of it with a screwdriver and a hammer; drain the gas and water into a container and then replug the hole. We did that with a sheet metal screw robbed from somewhere on the crummy. We separated the gas from the water, but still the starter motor ground and ground. . . . The fuel would not take. Assumptions were reexamined with anguished deliberation. One thing left to try. "If the gas won't get to the carburetor by itself, we'll get it there ourselves." It had been a dismal two hours up to this point.

A solution was found: fluid was pumped out a quart at a time, allowed to settle, and the nearly pure gas was extracted and set aside. Then it took everybody to get the crummy up the hill. One rode on the front fender and poured small amounts of gas straight into the carburetor, knowing full well that too much could flood the engine or worse. The hood was up and the battery was down, due to all the starting and pumping. The lights could not be used. Someone sat at the driver's seat to work the pedals. Another stood in the driver's door to look ahead and work the wheel. Others were stationed along the edge of the road to provide verbal guidance. The night was pitch black.

It worked. The crummy lurched up the hill, pint-by-pint and foot-by-foot. Another hour passed. We finally reached the top of the hill and another problem arose: the electrical system had drowned because of the open hood in the driving rain. Nothing to do but wait for it to dry out.

Just about then, Lew Melson showed up with gas and food. A couple of Cheap Thrills lumbered in in a housetruck. They had been worried back in camp some 30 miles away and had sent out a rescue party. Most rode freezing back to camp in the pickup. Some stayed in the housetruck. In the middle of the night the crummy's lights started up. Rust fired up the engine and drove the green crummy back to camp. It was waiting for the crew in the morning.

ON MY TENTH ANNIVERSARY
AS A TREEPLANTER

Finn Wilcox

Nearly a million trees older now
I remember when my children
Were shorter than me
And the hair on my head was
Thick as a stand of doghair hemlock.
No regrets though,
The friends that I love
Still work by my side.
But sometimes,
On cold rainy nights,
These stubborn knuckles
Click and hesitate
When I set down the wine.