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## Long Trail South to Cowles Cove Shelter

Parker Towle

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## Long Trail South to Cowles Cove Shelter

A nine hours' stride along  
this mountain ridge in clouds,  
patches of color over  
the rubble-boil in rain,  
poncho hopeless, hat  
a crumpled sponge, boots  
a-slosh in a trail of mud.

Night now, chill air  
pours across the path.  
Headlamp strapped over hat,  
string of white patch blazes—  
skiff in a gale,  
yawing and pitching,  
boulders like breakers  
looming to be climbed. The chill  
pounds the thermometer down,  
stabs skin, stiffens muscle,  
seeps into spine. The fog-blurred  
beam—then, there!

Shelter wall, flat  
touch, no mirage  
of tree trunks: a dark wet wall—  
shaggy, improbable, dream-like—

slant of roof, ecstasy of goose  
bumps, driving cloud at thirty-two  
hundred feet above sea level. Swells  
of water over the ridge, under the shelter's  
floor. Layers of clothing, cooking  
water warming on the stove.

*Parker Towle*

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PARKER TOWLE retired in 2014 after 53 years in the practice and teaching of neurology at Harvard and Dartmouth. His most recent book of poems is *World Spread Out* (Antrim House Books, 2015). He resides with his wife Phyllis in Franconia, New Hampshire.