

Appalachia

Volume 71
Number 2 *Summer/Fall 2020: Unusual Pioneers*

Article 27

2020

Long Trail South to Cowles Cove Shelter

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Recommended Citation

Towle, Parker (2020) "Long Trail South to Cowles Cove Shelter," *Appalachia*: Vol. 71 : No. 2 , Article 27.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.dartmouth.edu/appalachia/vol71/iss2/27>

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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

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.