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## So Begins the Lasting Silence

John Smelcer

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**So Begins the  
Lasting Silence**

There is no doubt  
I will be the last speaker  
of our dying language.

I will know  
that day has come  
when I call out  
across the frozen river  
to the far white mountain  
in my Native tongue  
and wait forever  
for an echo  
that will never return—

the far white mountain  
having forgotten its Indian name.

*John Smelcer*

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JOHN SMELCER is the last living member of the Ahtna tribe of Alaska who can read, write, and speak in the tribe's severely endangered language. He is the author of 50 books, including his poetry collection *Indian Giver* (Leapfrog, 2016).

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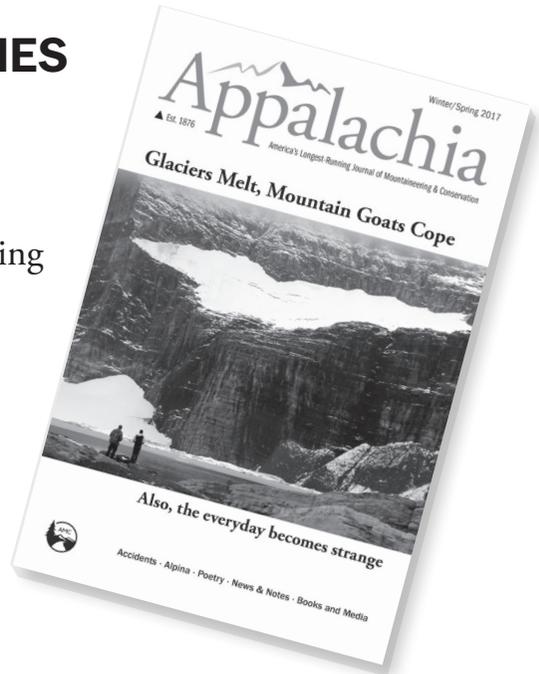
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