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So Begins the Lasting Silence

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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

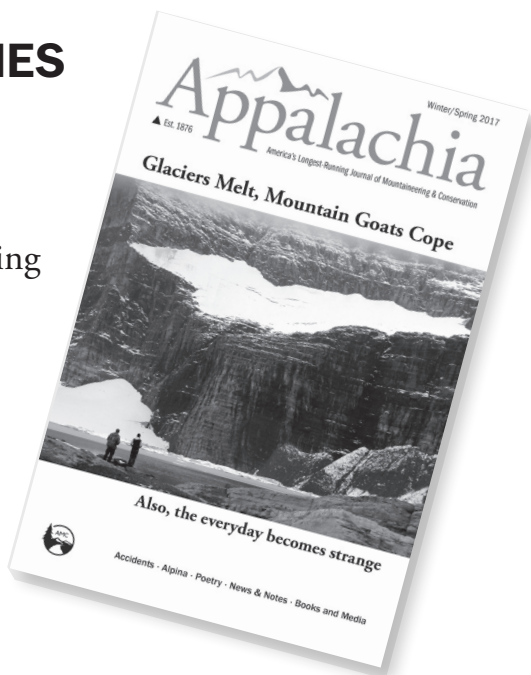
JOHN SMELCER is the last living member of the Ahtna tribe of Alaska who can read, write, and speak in the tribe's severely endangered language. He is the author of 50 books, including his poetry collection *Indian Giver* (Leapfrog, 2016).

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