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The Traveler: North of Katahdin

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The Traveler
North of Katahdin

No trail atop The Traveler, so
in hot sun and a sharp breeze
I bushwhack thick krummholz
of stunted spruce, stumbling
in tangles of small, crooked trees
that grab legs, scratch arms.

Reaching the gray scree slope
of fractured rhyolite, hardened
remains of a long dead volcano,
I tiptoe from rock
to rock, the knobby summit
a few hundred feet above.

To one side, a flash
of white, and I walk to a scattering
of bleached moose bones—
skull gone, but a dozen ribs,
a couple femurs, scapula, broken
mandible, glistening pelvic bone.

Why had a moose strayed
so high, so far from food
and shelter? Driven mad
by brainworm? Seeking relief
from heat and blackflies?
A broken leg? Disease?

And why did I struggle up a
mountain
of middling height without
peculiar features, rare views?
Skipping the peak, I kneel beside
the bones,
picturing the lumbering animal
picking its awkward way up.

Now, forty years on, a femur
on my shelf at home haunts
with questions. And what of the
old-time
woodsmen who named the
mountain
that traveled with them
as they chased logs downstream?

David K. Leff

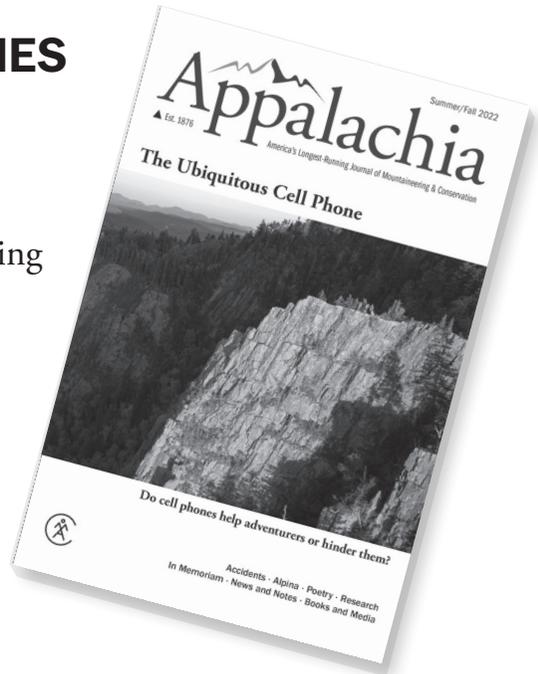
DAVID K. LEFF is the author of six nonfiction books, three volumes of poetry, and two novels in verse. He served as the 2016–2017 poet-in-residence for the New England National Scenic Trail. He is the poetry editor of *Connecticut Woodlands*, the quarterly magazine of the Connecticut Forest and Park Association. He is the former deputy commissioner of Connecticut's environmental department.

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