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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*

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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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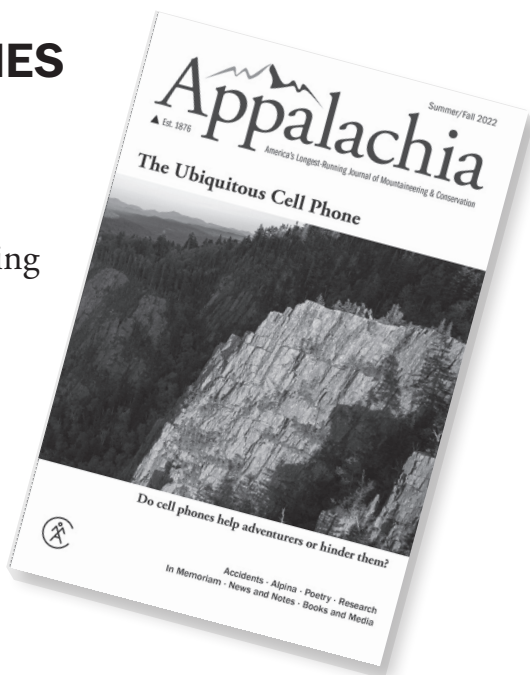
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