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Morning on the River

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Morning on the River

Shuffling downstream through mist,
boots stirring up nymphs and stoneflies.

Suddenly, a gulping swirl, a hard tug.
The fisherman sets the hook.

The green line tears the river surface
like the sound of paper ripping.

The rod tip bows to the brook,
heaves and swells.

A dragonfly alights on the taut line,
a raven watches from a sweeper.

The salmon swings across the current,
plows through a stretch of ripples,

trying to throw the stubborn hook—
silvery sides flashing in the porcelain light.

The old man leans back, smiles
as line peels from the whirring reel.

So early in the morning, there is no one else on the river,
no other sound—

only the gray fog rising, the raven's stoic gaze,
the river's babbling song.

John Smelcer

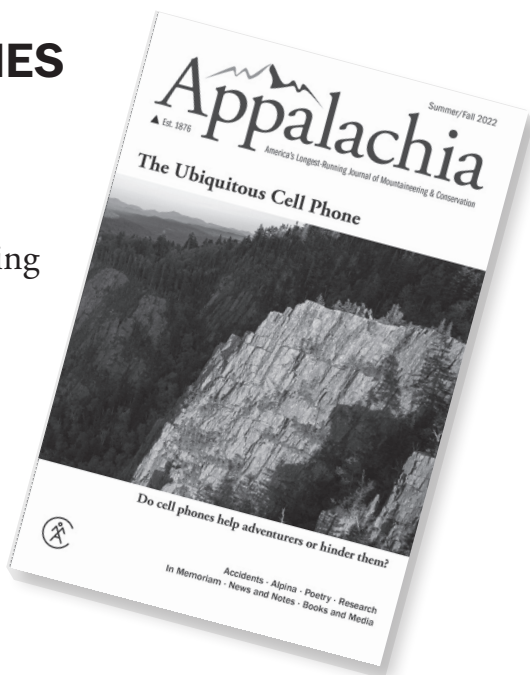
JOHN SMELCER's poems about the natural world have appeared in *Appalachia* for a decade. His poetry books include *Indian Giver* (Leapfrog Press, 2016) and *Raven* (Leapfrog, 2019). His fishing poems have appeared in *Gray's Sporting Journal* and *Yale Angler's Journal*.

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