

Appalachia

Volume 62
Number 2 *Summer/Fall 2011: Off the Turnpike*

Article 23

2011

Lay-Over Day

Robin Chapman

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Recommended Citation

Chapman, Robin (2011) "Lay-Over Day," *Appalachia*: Vol. 62: No. 2, Article 23.
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Lay-Over Day

We watch the Green River, only road here, rise three feet—it covers the rock that caught and held our friend Anka yesterday, as the water swept her away from shore—only a dip in the brown waves now, a spill of eddies below. Rolland and Will tossed her a rope, river mermaid, pulled her back to shore. Only afterward she saw how there would be no going back in the spring flood.

Fire-blackened logs, sticks, debris churn past, bobbing, rocking in the current's race. The honey-salt scent of tamarisk, its pink-white fronds of blossom wind-whisked, drifts. Wasps crawl through the Gambel oaks. Spiders string silk along all their rough bark. Swarms of gnats eddy about the deep-lobed green leaves. Brown river foam sparkles in the river's wake.

Across the river and behind our tents, Wingate sandstone towers for hundreds of feet, the lower talus slopes and scree in gray-green Chinle. All day, under the oaks, we read. Sound bounces back: the raven's croak, the scrape of a canoer's paddle against a gunwale long before he comes in sight. Joyce turns a page in the heat. Sand scatters as a spotted lizard, beige and rust, runs past the water can.

A hundred and five degrees in the shade. The lizard runs up the trunk of the oak, stares at our friend Jim as he waves a dry twig to catch its eye, slips his other hand behind the trunk to catch its tail. Working hardest is the parasitic wasp, digging sand trails, a hole, hauling black flies to its mouth, another generation to feed now. Wind rustles the leaves of the Gambel oaks.

A hiss, as John opens the lunch bucket, releases the sharp spice scent of sausage, our mouths suddenly wet. Descending trill of a canyon wren. Constant bee hum. Dry slither of a yellow-striped garter snake. Someone rises, moves a canvas camp chair back into the moving shade. On the walls of rock, deep red desert varnish traces the path of rain, spalls, and flakes to pink-orange face.

Evening; red and blue enter the river, repeat the rock and the sky.

Robin Chapman

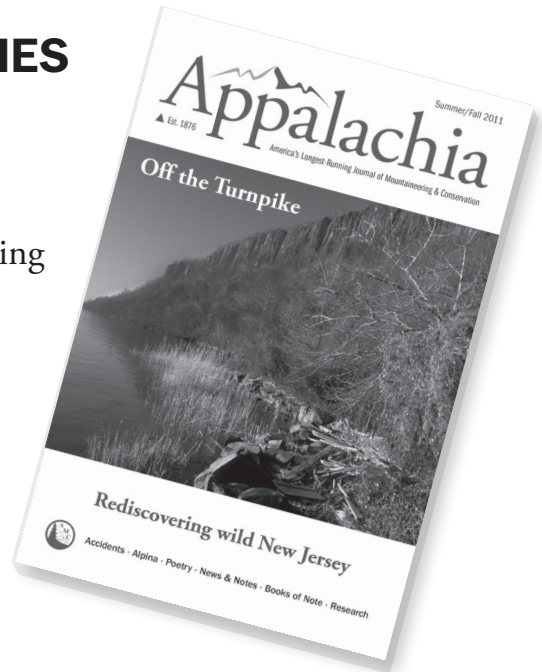
ROBIN CHAPMAN is the author of six poetry books, most recently *Abundance* (2009), which won the Cider Press Review Book Award. She is recipient of *Appalachia's* 2010 Poetry Prize.

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