

II.v: metonic summer

Here - at the staging point for my next wilderness adventure - challenge. My head's wobbly - the vertigo. Balance, sense of direction, sense of space - whacked. Was sure nice those few months when it abated. But the reality now is that, barring some miracle, my default state is this. I hate it - but I can't give up. And that's why I'm here rather than moping like a bitch in Davis.

Easy drive, if long: eight hours. Rode roads I've ridden now for many years, the first time in 2003 - just after I broke the second time. Escaped from Davis first to Clear Lake, then into the valley during a pounding, pouring rain - I hunkered down in a motel room for a few days during the deluge. Then back outdoors and into the mountains, east to Oroville and Sly Creek reservoirs, back down to I-5, north to the base of the Klamaths, west to Whiskeytown for a few nights, Trinity Reservoir for a few nights, then all the way to the Pacific at Eureka. Wormed my way down the coast then, stopping at Mendocino Reservoir, then, avoiding the big fuckin' freeways throttling all those people I could never be, I weaved along rural roads through Sonoma and Napa counties, halted for a spell at ol' Berryessa, and then, finally, finding myself back in my tiny four-walled room in Davis to begin the long haul of hauling myself out once again.

First day in the wilderness and - wonderful. I'm euphoric as I write this in a soft summer mountain evening. Up at dawn, on the trail, my left hip grumbling but not collapsing, my head stabilizing, and I reached a lovely, pure cirque lake with so much light left in the day, and that with frequently stopping to stuff my nose into wildflowers, to gaze at the furtive birds singing from the spruces and pines. After setting camp, I lizard-lounged on a towering rock at lake's shore, just loafing, something I feel guilty about at home, but not here. Rigged the rod, then one splashing, gaudy brook trout after another came to hand. Hunter's desire sated, I stripped and plunged from the towering rock into the pristine, cold water. Dove off shorter rocks, too, then let the sun and wind waft me dry. I felt so clean after. Then dinnertime, so I killed a few trout for the pan, and, with camp now clean, damn - well-lived today.

Better lived than in 2003 when I was up around here, desperately trying to run away, again, from me...or to me. I didn't know. But at least on that escape, I lived better than in 2000 when I nearly drank myself to death. I may have appeared aimless in 2003, just driving around, yet underneath rumbled some direction, a destination - I avoided cities, I gravitated to the mountains, to the conifers, north, to the reservoirs, the outdoors. Car-camped, except for those few days in the valley, usually warmed by campfire. Flung lures and caught many beautiful fishes, bursting with springtime blooming: pre-spawn bigs and spots in Clear and Oroville, respectively; a giant brown as the rain fell at Sly Creek; many wild rainbows and some big smalls at Trinity. The weather was refreshing - sloppy snow at Whiskeytown, which my old four-season tent shed with aplomb, towering, billowing cumulonimbus clouds building then falling as the rhythm of storm rose and winnowed for most of the escape, and, by the time I got to Mendocino Reservoir, a cleansed bluebird sky, a clean yellow sun. But in the tent, in the cold nights, I only buried my mind in fuckin' fishing magazines and crossword puzzles - anything to divert me from me. I couldn't handle me.

I'd pulled off the road into a shoulder, got out. To the west undulated mountain range after range, clothed in glittering green, with a soft baby-blue-and-grey horizon, and just beyond and out of sight, Mother Ocean. I lingered for a bit, gazing, hoping for some response to my unspoken question, but only silence and vastness answered. I didn't linger long, though - too afraid other people speeding by would wonder what that weirdo was lookin' at.

"Weirdo" - a common moniker for me in my yearbooks.

If I'd abandoned the car and dove into that forest ocean, I might've died, or I might've emerged a stronger man, but either way, I would've felt an answer.

I dove into it yesterday - er, rose to it a bit more accurate. Both actually. Dawn cracking, and I got cracking, hoofing up a trailless Wild towards the king of this range. Rose close to the sub-ridge stemming from my camp and then stayed with it as I closed on the head of the canyon where the main ridge I had to take lie - wanted to minimize the loss of the elevation I'd earned. Hit the main ridge, then gazed up at my goal - some goal. Only steep, crumbly mountain, some small snow fields still persisting, tough red firs and white pines striking roots deep down and bending crowns in deference to snow and wind, enlivening the Martian landscape. One part - and the peak itself was out of view - looked impossible, but it still lay a ways away, not bending accurately to perception.

I began. Up and up and up, on tawny rock amid the stout conifers, then to the scary part, but accuracy increased with intimacy, and though steep, I maneuvered my way through it rather easily. And then - the peak. Lunarscape charcoal fault-lined boulders and nearly vertical, ominous faces blocked the way to summit. I'd not much gas left in my tank - the vertigo. But I felt I could do it if I crabbed it, scaling and grabbing and crawling like the rock crabs that work above sea line on the Bodega jetties. Here, there, to the left, the right, across harrowingly steep slick rock, a pause, then a vertical loop and more crabbing, and my vertiginous ass made it, and with a flat stone to stand on, I rose on two feet as a man.

Some view. Mt. Shasta, the Trinity Alps where I'd also trekked, Buck Mountain in southeastern Oregon, and, to the west, Mother Ocean. A whitewater creek two canyons over, and a vast Wild, and I reveled in the reality before me that domesticity had not been able to gain a foothold here. Sure, miners and loggers come, but they nearly always go, suffering the boom and bust from raping the Wild.

Return. So high, so steep, I couldn't see the main ridge, so I was unsure the route down. Vertigo didn't help. Uneasily I began my descent, but then recalled a few landmarks intimating that I'd backed too far east, so I reversed and struck west, and quickly the main ridge came into view. Relief. Sun high now, and I dropped off the main ridge into the canyon head and began climbing the sub-ridge, regaining that which I lost, hands and feet pulling, pushing hard up the slope to gain the vantage to know where to come down, my half-naked body a flood of sweat, and then, early afternoon, when I summited the sub-ridge, the bejeweled lake comforted when revealed right below me. From there all downhill, steep and loose, and several times I half-slid down the slope. Finally back at my little temporary home, my little camp, and I slouched against a rock nearly incapable of movement. Pure exhaustion, well-earned.

When I'd regained a little strength, I bathed in the lake, rinsed my salty clothes, then lounged on a sun-warmed bleached log. Two children with their mother frolicked in the lake on the other side, and I smiled. Such perfect joy. Then two young fellers jumped from the precarious

cliff I jumped from the day previous. Lots of laughter. Bryan and I had similar days at little Lake Gregory, catching trout and black crappie in mild, early-summer dawn, then frolicking in the west bay during afternoon, teenage lust burning, and though mine was so conflicted, that still couldn't divert or diffuse my eyeing the pretty girls with genuine longing.

Misanthropic I am, I so often feel most comfortable alone, but damn - this lake, lakes, they're good for people, and together they better the world.

Evening falling, so I caught and killed a few brookies for dinner - delicious. Cracked a little whiskey bottle and watched us all sail away to somnambulance and then sleep. I'd done more that day than just look.

Then I was back in Davis - but where was I? I'd fallen from falling into the delusion again, that was clear, but what lay solid behind the smokescreen? Where was *me*? Stuck in my lonely little room so much, mired so deep in polluted mines of mind. Soft hands, tingling, supposedly a caressing, an intimacy, seemingly a levity, but the eye glimmering an evil glint. Mimicking and mocking those of love, those same hands then became hammers, to fear, to loathe, and all from what was supposed to be sanctuary. It gashed my weak soul. Trying to grapple with it, understand it, the hydra. Tough, anguishing admitting and accepting the reality - some things, I'd never escape, and some things, they'd never come. Disconnected and ignorant of the self, an oddly maladaptive strategy for self-protection, and thus searching for myself through art: music, films, books. Art - fitting place to search given it's the expression, reflection, understanding of emotion, feeling, and I'd become so numb I hardly knew how to feel anymore, save that ironic vacuum, that black-hole suction of nothingness that exceeds pain, and the unharnessed, all-consuming rage too often directed wrongly: at me. Art really was the only way - no one existed who was capable of understanding, of accepting, the pollution in the mines of mind.

Thank the fuck Satan for all that violent, vulgar, offensive art - without it, I may have exceeded misanthropy to psychopathy and done some real bad shit. So many stodgy motherfuckers, on the left, the right, right down the center, deride extreme art because they think it'll cause people to mimic it, and that's occasionally true. What they never see, however, is how many more fucked-up people get release and resonance with such art that then diffuses that move towards murder, rape, mayhem - and that benefit, as the sales of so many Slayer and Marilyn Manson and Geto Boys records and *ANSWER Me!* mags evidence, far outweighs the few nutcases that take extreme art as a behavioral template and kill or rape.

I tried many psychiatric remedies, and all failed miserably. They just made me feel worse - and the practitioners, subservient to the gods of pharmacology, their first and only action, really - shovel in these drugs. Uncanny how their efforts to make one feel better only make one feel worse. A reflection of the failure of mainstream Western medicine focusing too much on the anatomy of the brain and not enough on the mind, the heart, the soul, the body. And too much emphasis on smothering symptoms rather than understanding their environmental source - a smokescreen. And their business remains suspiciously brisk.

Man, wobbly this morning - more than at any other time this trek. World's just not distinct right now - fuzz - but it'll likely improve as the day progresses and the period I'm upright expands.

If I'd been an American Indian, "Bad Ears" would've been a fitting name.

Yesterday with the Devil, a divine cathedral. The Devil is so much better than that stiff, prim, boring God; a much better consort for Mother Earth. I bathed in the sapphire lake, ate snow water, lounged on a perfect sitting rock, washed by sun and wind, caught a few impressive rainbows, and the memories flooded, blended.

My mind weaved the path I've trod between those two years, 2003 and this one, 2022, the major achievements and failures, and how both were united. The 19 years, they contained four very pivotal events that changed my life forever - and ultimately for the better. First, the second breakdown, where I forced me to really come to terms with who I was, what my potential really was, and it wasn't one of a middle-class American dude - I was, it was, something different. No surprise that after, with a more-accurate sense of my capabilities, I quickly earned my bachelor's degree. Second, the longest relationship with a girl, one of the best accomplishments of my life, and its death, though agonizing, spurred me to better physical health through diet and exercise, improving me even more. Third, May 23, 2013, when my back ripped, which led to the discovery of my hip deformities, and the subsequent surgeries and the corollary further improvement of my body. Finally, the severing of the last blood tie, that fateful day in November 2017 when all I saw was emotional death and knew that it was gone.

The last day. Rolled out of the sack and tent just as dawn was cracking - had a long drive back, didn't want to return deep into night, and I did wanna stop in a few settlements along the North Coast that lay so much closer to my heart, my core, than sterile ol' fuckin' Davis, stocked with the goddamn smart-phone androids and the fragile, bitch-ass suburban collegiate aristocrats. People in those smaller settlements surrounded by such big life - the majestic trees, the careening ocean, the raucous rivers - such dynamism - they're just closer to the bone, more authentic, and I can relate to 'em more. And when I'm in wilderness for many days, just me and the birds and fishes and frothing plants, my misanthropy absolutely softens to where a little human contact - it don't hurt.

So - up, though my head - fuckin' vertigo, goddamn fucking fucked-up ears, wobbling all over the place - had to catch myself a few times from tumbling over. But I'd been there before, so just had to devote that much more focus to verify my hands and feet and body were all going where they needed to be. Broke camp quickly, stuffed the pack, then started out, another soft, inviting mountain morning. Strolled along a lush, gilded meadow, and my friendly bear that I'd watched from a soft fallen cedar the previous evening was still rummaging around there, totally unconcerned with the wobbly white guy banging rocks along the old, weathered road with his overpriced metal-tipped trekking poles. Left the meadow, began the rise back to the trailhead and my lonely little wagon, and had a tremor of trepidation that the left hip would start whining - it didn't. Thus an easy upgrade stomp, hit the apex with the sun now above the eastern horizon and shimmering the conifer-cloaked mountain shoulders and glittering off the remaining snowfields above treeline on the two big peaks, and then the short, easy descent to the baby-blue wagon, which, despite my paranoia that it was gonna be fucked up by a big mammal of some sort - bear or human - of course the car was just as I left it save a fresh layer of dust.

But the little dirt trailhead parking lot wasn't abandoned - lots of activity from a big search-and-rescue team's vanguard prepping for a deep dive into the spires of the wilderness for some dude lost the evening before. I'd heard about it - three cats angling down the trail by my camp the

previous evening asked if I'd cellphone service to call for emergency help for their missing chum. The guy'd disappeared up at the main peak - concerning since one sloppy step up there, and you could fuck yourself up real bad. Too, with the main ridge out of view when at the peak's top - very easy to take the wrong way out and have a Hell of a long way back to your start point. As I dropped my pack and stretched the final time and got the wagon loaded and started for the long drive back, two dudes, one on a motorbike, another an ATV, raced off on the search.

Apparently the dude had been with a big party - the three dudes I met the evening previous, and they told me five others were still up there, searching. Group of eight, and the three I saw, looked like really fit young men, strong. Leads me to believe the MIA guy was, too. And yet - MIA. And there I was, party of one, much older, in very good physical shape except for the wobbly-ass head and the twitchy left hip, and - I'd made it. No fall, no injury, no getting lost. The silver lining of the cloud - made me feel my skills as an outdoorsman, not too shabby.

Then the road back home, in a daze, largely paralleling the path I took back in that terrible year of 2003, also in a daze, but the cause of the daze this 19 years later - the opposite. In '03, I was in a self-interred daze of failure, my inability to live up to a fantastical ideal, a potential I simply didn't possess, but this time - my daze was one of euphoria, where I didn't fail, unlike both my much younger self and that poor man lost somewhere on that towering mountain, but succeeded - bagging the peak I wanted, lounging in the meadow I wanted, catching the fish I wanted - and exceeded, nearly doubling my mileage count and seeing another beautiful lake and more and more beautiful country. Sure, the vertigo contributed, too, but only a sliver.

Stopped at a greasy spoon in Hiouchi and had the motherfucker of farmer-boy breakfasts: big-ass fuckin' plate of biscuits and gravy with a fat slab of hashbrowns smothered with goopy ketchup, a liter of coffee, big-ass glass of orange juice and an additional plate of greasy-ass bacon. Warm milk-chocolate waitress took care of me well despite my stink - I emanated not the most pleasing cologne after six days in wilderness, despite several cleansing dips into freshening lakes. Many people in the joint, mostly American vacationers - gluttonous - although a lean young woman with beautiful, long milky legs caught my eye, she being accompanied by a man who looked friendly, jovial, albeit flabby and just...not very weathered. Seemed like they spent much time in cubicles or offices. Two others, an older man and his wife, possibly locals, and they were bigger, but, proving the point that nothing, such as above-average body weight always being bad, is absolute - looked good. They moved with a naturalness that betrayed vitality, and the way they spoke to the waitress was kindly, appreciative. And they certainly weren't doodied up like some of the RVers in the joint, what with that gross tanning-salon tangerine skin and overpriced *Top Gun* sunglasses and really overpriced and overused smart-phones and monstrous fuck-me giant shittily made American bro-dozers.

Then on the road again, heading south, and stopped in the biggest settlement - a bona fide city, though it'd only qualify as a town in this saturated valley - for a locally brewed cup of jove. Bright-faced hippie-punk young woman whipped up my brew, chuckling authentically when I mentioned with levity that I could write her a check for my little cup of firepower since she couldn't accept cash. Then down the road again, ensconced by a veiling, mysterious frothing forest nourished by the nearness of Mother Ocean, and Mother Ocean Herself, black-sand beaches, tan-sand beaches, big sable stacks, collapsing, foaming waves, and, on the landward side of sand spits, inviting lagoons, uncommon waterways that tempted me to return. Light rain even sprinkled on

my dusty wagon a few times, winnowing to nothing my dim desire to grab the rod, brave the cold, and try for a surfperch. Further south, further from Mother Ocean, the sky blued, the heat rose, and I made my final stop at a Bigfoot-themed tourist trap, pining, for some reason, for a green Bigfoot shirt. So Californian, I guess, and motherfuckin' Californian I am, for sure. No luck, however, though I frivolously bought a Bigfoot coffee mug. Many people thronged the joint, mostly touristy Americans again, of whom I felt ambivalent, as always - far from their potential, most of 'em, but so few really bad. I tripped out a younger woman and the older woman with her (I presume her mother), both wide-eyed and nearly gawking, with my wild look: long grey hair rising up like warrior-fury Cu Chulainn spikes, massive wolflike chops, the ol' Buddy Holly frames, and my languid lope, care of the week in the wilderness coupled with the vertigo. That was okay.

Then slowly back, heat rising, sun rising then beginning its descent, life retracting from the coastal luxuriance of redwoods and big-ass Doug firs to yellow pines and then to the last trace of the conifer family, the tough-as-nails grey pine, and the bare-baked earth of the inner North Coast Range. And then the domestication, the straight-arrow highways flanked by endless farm-field sprawl, and then, so close to home, the defiant insanity of the square, Ireland-green lawns in front of the excessively large houses stuck ass to head along the straight-arrow roads of famished Davis, where the fragile students buried in headphones and the fragile ruling class in all their sun-shrouding overpriced REI clothes ambled precariously on butter-smooth sidewalks. They'd probably trip on a twig.

Reached home in late evening, and, just like the wagon, despite my trepidation that my house would be vandalized or burglarized, when I unlocked the front door and stepped across the threshold - all was well. A much-needed shower and then, in my vertiginous and euphoric daze, lazed over to one of the better eateries in this monotonous town, where I ate surrounded by the cacophony of the fuckin' TV blaring commercialized corporate sports, of yapping grad-student types at the bar, of bustling people in and out and the clash and bash of glass and ceramic and plastic, all in the effort to feed and intoxicate. I heard so many there - but no one, save the bartender when filling my requests, heard me.

That was okay, too.