



From the Field

Poems & Sketches by Jon Charles Coe



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J. COE '75

Introduction:

I have always been interested in landscape, it runs in the family. While I make my living conceiving synthetic landscapes, my greatest interest is in the wild. In order to create landscapes, we must know the real thing. There are many ways of knowing. When I have the opportunity to visit a wild landscape, study a great tree, or observe wildlife, I learn from scientists – botanists, zoologists, geologists, ecologists. I learn Latin names. When I can, I learn a little from local people too. Masai people in Africa. Arrente people in Australia. I take scores of photographs and keep journals. Drawing with pencil or pen is also a way to know a place or thing so I sketch as often as possible. And writing poems is also a way to know, a bridge between science and emotion.

Usually the poems come unbidden. A line or two flashes into consciousness, quickly followed by entire verses as I sketch or later, on the long drives between places. I jot them down in the journal, rarely picking the subject, never knowing the ending. It is a spontaneous process with very little labor. Somewhere inside, powerful sensory and intellectual inputs are tumbled around and eventually burst forth in the form of nearly complete verse. This may occur in just moments or after months.

The field sketches presented here are not altered later; neither are the poems. For this reason, I call them “field poems.”

Those not up on their natural history may find these introductory notes useful:

African Savanna

1. **Ngorongoro** is an ancient crater ten miles wide and teeming with wildlife in Tanzania, East Africa. We begin on the crater rim, with its magnificent panoramic view, then descend into the crater for a closer look.
2. **Soit Ayai**, like **Ngorongoro**, is a Masai place name. Soit Ayai is a kopje, a great granite rock pile rising like an island in a sea of grass in Tanzania.
3. **Naabi Hill** is a prominent lookout point in an otherwise vast, flat region of the Serengeti Plain Game Reserve in Tanzania.
4. **The Mara River** traverses the celebrated Serengeti Plain Game Reserve in Kenya, East Africa.
5. **Nduto Lake** in Tanzania is known for its fat, clever lions.
6. **Lake Manyara** lies along the Great Rift escarpment in Tanzania.
7. **Baobab, Baobab’s Sister, Baobab’s Brothers**. Sometimes trees are more than just trees, rocks are more than rocks and elephants are seen in surprising places.
8. **Samburu Lions, Leopard in A Parking Lot and Samburu Impala** express the excitement and ambivalence of safari drives.
9. For some reason I was under-impressed by **Oldavi Gorge**.

African Rainforest

1. **Microberlina.** Giant redwoods are not the only ancient trees in the world. But since annual rings do not develop in the wood of many tropical trees, their ages may be impossible to determine.
2. **Orchid Fall.** This poem was written while studying the Microberlina and so they are given together.
3. **The Pool at Camp One** continues the celebration of small things with beautiful names.
4. **The Elephant Encounter** describes how the forest can be hypnotic, dulling the senses to danger.

Asia

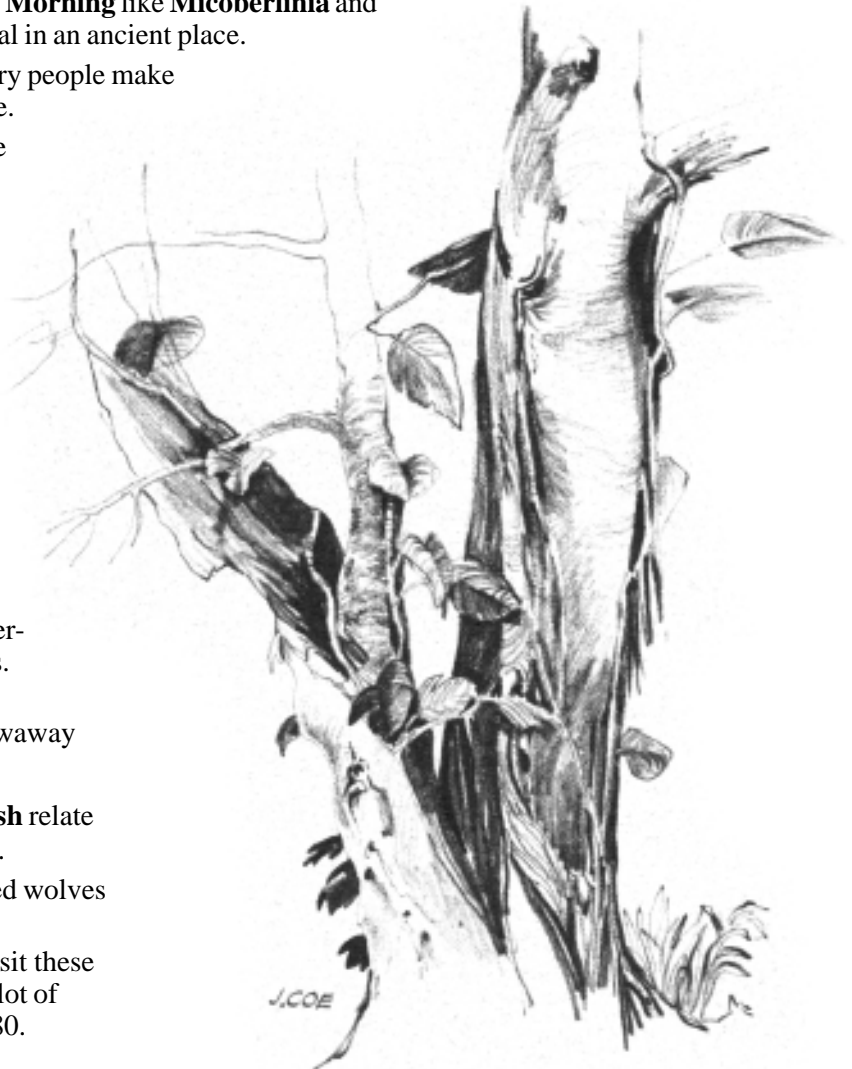
1. **Jewel of the Thai Forest.** Small things can be the most beautiful and memorable.
2. **Sumatran Rhino.** The conservationists dilemma
3. **Image of India – Orchids Passing.** People under the tropical sun can be beautiful.
4. **Chinese New Year**

Australia

1. I spent two weeks in the **Simpson Desert**, the “red heart” of Australia. I then flew over the same desert on my way home and got this perspective.
2. **Palm Valley Evening/Palm Valley Morning** like **Micoberlinia** and **Guanica**, this poem celebrates renewal in an ancient place.
3. **Berry Springs.** Sometimes ordinary people make remarkable accommodations to nature.
4. **Winter Tree/Summer Tree.** These trees tell of their habitats in remarkable beautiful ways.

The Americas

1. **Guanica** is a dry forest reserve on the southwest coast of Puerto Rico where the *Guayanan Centenario*, an ancient *Ligna vite* tree is found. *Sapo concho* is the local name for the rare crested toad also found there.
2. **Hybrid Rusti**, like **Sumatran Rhino**, expresses the ambiguity and ambivalence inherent in modern conservation and care of endangered species.
3. **A Wrack of Eagles** encapsulates a surprise encounter with our own throwaway society.
4. **Flooded Forest** and **Flooded Marsh** relate lessons from an Amazon River cruise.
5. **Santuário do Carasas** in Brazil, red wolves entertain tourists.
6. **FLT #140, Seat 24E.** You can't visit these wonderful places without spending a lot of time in airliners, like this flight in 1980.



African Savanna

Tanzania 1982

Ngorongoro Crater

Basket of the sky
woven of the beaten reeds and brown
sedges,
patterned in malachite, sienna and
opalescent pink,
its edges elaborated with *Euphorbia*,
Commiphora and *Convolvulus*.
Venations of tall rush and dots of brown buffalo
drain toward the slate blue lake,
white fringed and flamingo edged.
Tire tracks, like discarded threads
loop and cross below.

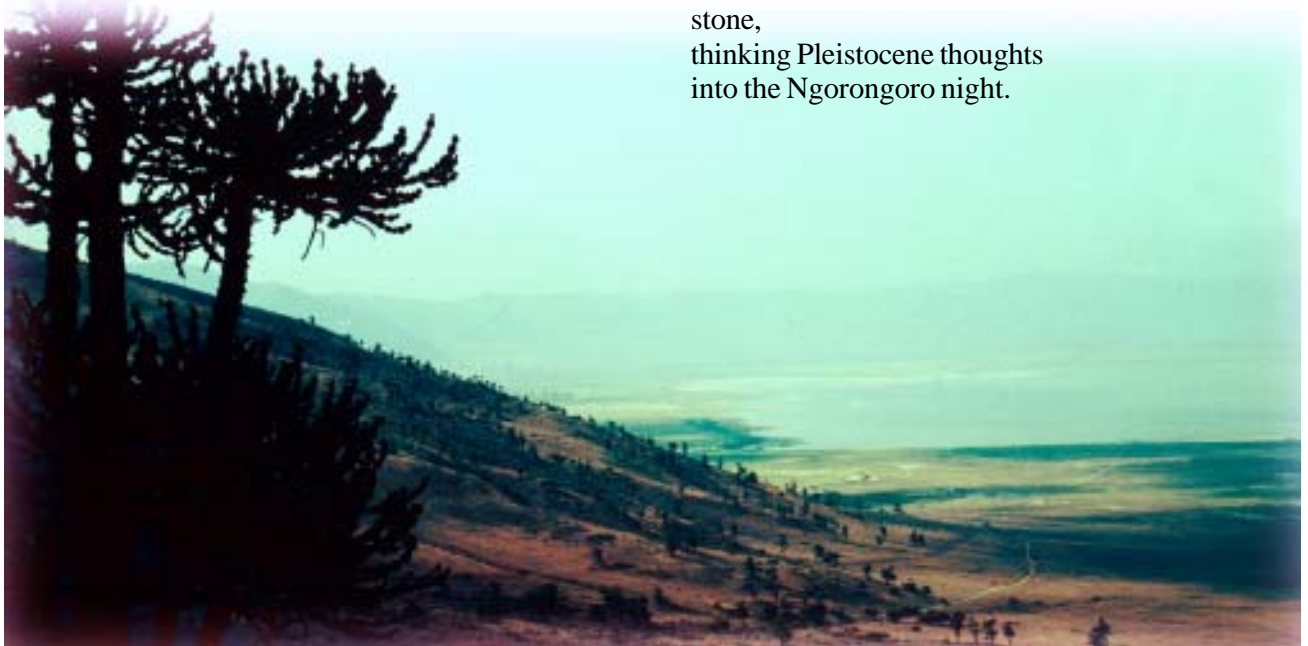
On the crater floor,
in a shallow swell of undulating
stargrass
a lion family,
nine cubs of three ages and two
lionesses,
loll beside the track,
squint away the flies
below hillsides speckled
with wildebeests, zebra, eland, and
gazelle.
Three spotted hyenas amble
towards a big bellied cow.
A steppe eagle guards a calf leg
while crowned cranes dance
beneath the cloud wreathed rim.

Beside Lake Makat
a golden jackal patrols
the feathered tide line
while flamingos, like pink pearls
on display pins
stretch black-paneled wings
numbering thousands.
A sound like swarming bees
permeates the myriad honks and clatters
of sweeping black bills.

Near camp, at Aliotoktok Springs,
small black widowbirds
with flowing tadpole tails
bounce in unison, as if on springs,
for their drab mates
and crane, egret and jacana
stalk the reed fens.

Not far distant
beside the valley wall
north of the fever tree grove
rushes reach to mid-flank
on nine old elephants
who move, with sweeping ivory
at a geological pace.
High rumps toss like grey ships on viridian seas.

On the empty steppe beyond
a lone rhino stands like vulcanized
stone,
thinking Pleistocene thoughts
into the Ngorongoro night.



Tanzania 1982

Soit Ayai

Kopje knobs surmount the plain,
some like skull caps,
some like tortoise shells,
some like Chinese puzzles falling apart,
some like neolithic strongholds
or councils of stone.

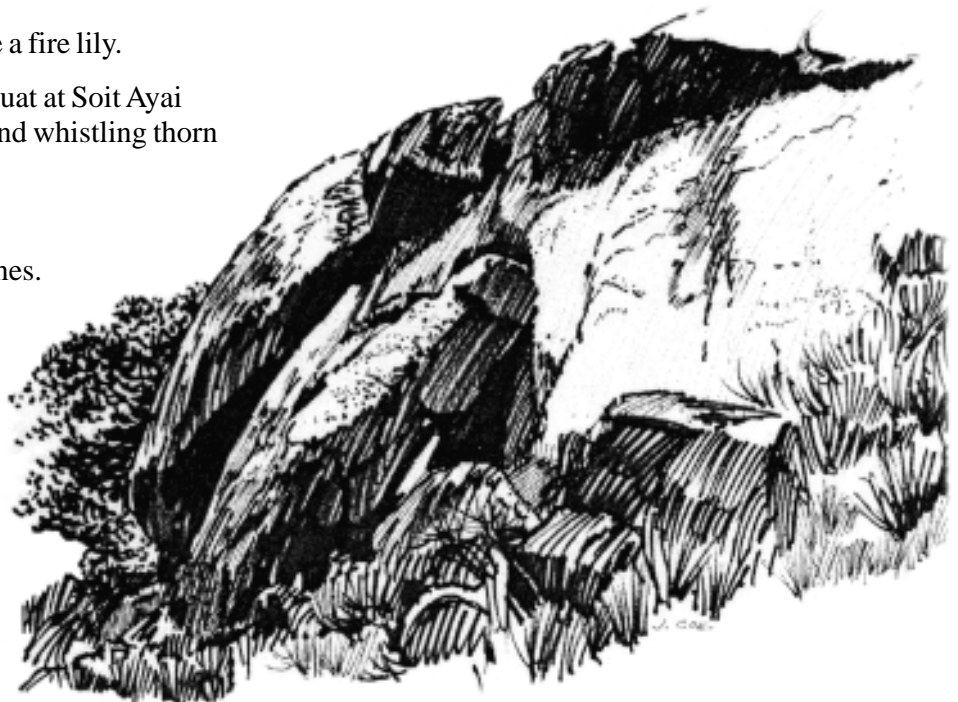
Kopjes are old.
Precambrian.
The basement of the sky.
The bone of Africa,
upon which rest the newcomers
Kilimanjaro and Ol Doinyo Lengai.

Kopjes collect the heat of the day
and glow in the evening light,
russet granite with grains of pink quartz,
sun stained and warm to touch,
etched, creased and solid.
Kopjes welcome life.
Lichen orange, white, yellow and black
adorn the mottled hide
like rough rouge and eye shadow.
Feathergrass, bamboo grass and red oat grass
prosper between the stony thighs.
Orchids and aloe adorn granite brows
and fig leaves wreath the smooth pate.

Hyrax and owls are found here.
Kilpspringer and lion too.
White hyena scats fertilize a fire lily.

A community of kopjes squat at Soit Ayai
between stargrass plains and whistling thorn
woodland.

We camp here two nights
out of the fifteen billion
that have passed these stones.



Tanzania 1982

Naabi Hill

Naabi Hill rises
from the patterned cloth of the plain,
clothed in soft acacia.
The sharp-faced Egyptian vulture
and its bland Nubian cousin
note our approach.

Tall Twiga*, in brown military camouflage,
stalk slowly through feather-branched trees
and watch.

The Land Rover rebounds from the rutted track,
indifferent to direction,
then slouches to a tilted stop.
Flat tire, left rear again, our 28th breakdown.

We stare into the dioramic distance.
A stipple of wildebeest swirls slowly,
rearranging itself into a lance head flowing east.

Binoculars focus on the stream of animals
stringing out in full flight
from the epicenter of catastrophe.
Now the line slows, curls back,
forms an arena of shaggy heads
to watch the single combat.

A brown feline form has a yearling calf
by the nose.
They tug back and forth, twisting,
legs braced.
They circle locked together.

“Let’s go!” We run to the Land Rover,
careen down the hill slope.

A brown impression in the grass
faced by three zebra
becomes a cheetah
resting beside his kill
among white trumpet flowers of *Datura* and
purple *Erlangia*.

The cheetah glances toward us
then back over his shoulder, downslope,
raises, then settles again.
Confusion, shrill shouts and whispered orders
from the cars.
The cheetah sits up, looks away again
then, taking a hind leg
turns over the crumpled carcass
and feeds on the warm loin.

* giraffe

Masai Mara 1990

The Mara River

The Mara flows brown
as old blood
over black shoals
of hippo and lava rock.

Jade crocodiles
sun on sandy banks
awaiting what the river provides

Wildebeest
in their thousands,
weaving sinuating lines,
march north along
the West Corridor from Serengeti
to dry season pastures
beyond the Mara.

We stand
on high sand banks.
Here martins nest
and forest trees,
greenheart and fig,
undercut by the river,
collapse into the flood.
Here generations of
hippos and elephants
have carved
gashing stairways
down the sand cliffs.

Here, right here,
the endless herds
will converge,
diving from high banks
or stampeding down
hippo paths
to storm the Mara ford.

Here the crocodiles wait.



Tanzania 1982

Nduto Lake

Wildebeest bones and skulls
crowd the beach
as if thrown up from
the creosote colored water.

A one-legged stilt stands motionless
in the foam

Beyond, a white and grey flamingo
wades warily before three Marabou storks
whose kind have tasted flamingo
but now await what the lions leave.

Three white Land Rovers approach,
in slanting sunlight
below a soft clay sky.
They twist and creep
between ruined acacias
cast about by a slow storm
of elephants.

Telephotos zoom toward stoic Marabous.
Macro-lenses examine hard dried carcasses.
The Nubian vultures are commented upon
and the Land Rovers depart.

Lions haunt the beach in twilight.
Rushing from beneath yellow fever trees,
they drive wildebeest into the lake
and suffocate them.



Salvadora persica during drought

Tanzania 1982

Lake Manyara

Pelicans,
pink and white by the hundreds
splash in the brown creek,
rinsing themselves of the soda
of Lake Manyara,
while ten times more
patrol the lake edge
or spiral in the raising sky.

Beyond, a flurry of terns
twist in allometric acrobatics.
Sun flashes instantaneously
on a thousand ivory wings
under a rainbow arch.

Below, ninety-five hippos belch,
tails spinning like rotors,
manuring their fellows,
half-submerged in pig piles
at midstream.

Along the shore
short sharp cormorants,
white-necked with sulfur chins,
dry their wings
in the shadow of Marabou storks.

And in the distance
dour palms and fever trees
on the coastal plain
are bent by spiked crowns
of yellow-billed storks.

Inland, the doums are joined
with wild dates and thorn thickets.
Impala and olive baboon mingle
in a clearing guarded
by a long muzzled monarch
on a termite castle.

A fiscal shrike,
in formal black and white,
whistles alarm as a marital eagle
lands and feeds.

Unconcerned, a butterfly, the frilled sailor,
brown with white wing spots,
beats the air lightly
in search of acacia flowers.



Baobab

Baobab on the desert skyline,
a granite tree
arching over boulders and dry brush,
soaring, timeless, separate.

People call it M' mbuyu,
upside down tree,
tree where man was born.

From beneath,
the arching limbs
like the limbs of elephants,
voluminous and fair,
seem to float.
Leafless twigs, and
pendant fruit,
are soft against the sky.

The baobab bark,
like molten lead
with a
lavender sheen,
is wrinkled and fleshy
like the elephant,
almost animate,
even anthropomorphic,
hermaphroditic.

Pits and pockmarks,
fissures like crotches,
pubic crests and scrota;
cavities nurture barbets,
bats, bushbabies and bees
and are home to nesting hornbills.

Batelier eagles build
their chaotic platform
among the upper branches.
A community of weavers build
there too,
under the batelier's protection.

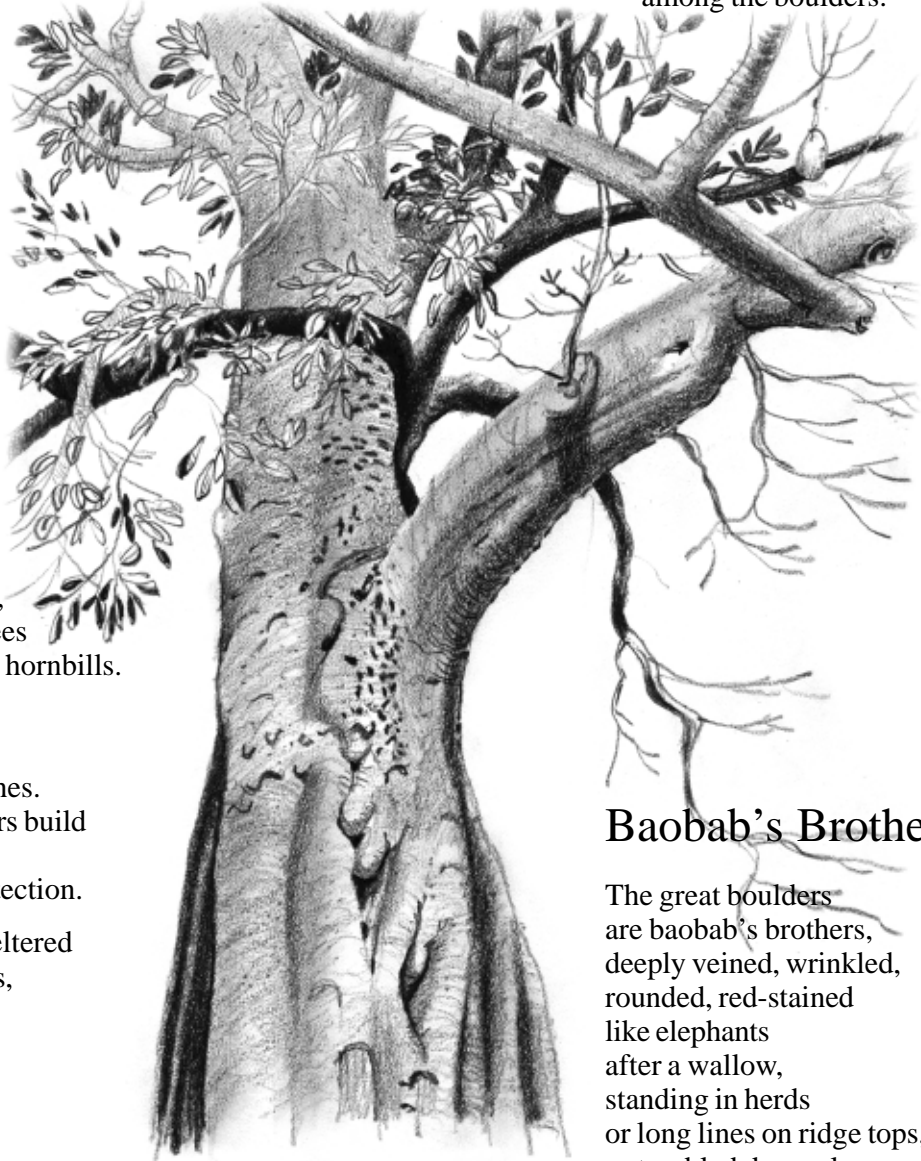
This old baobab has sheltered
generations of elephants,
split boulders,
suckled from stone.
The world moves
the baobab remains.

Baobab's Sister

Baobab's sister
the elephant
is both enemy and benefactor.
Thrusting her tusk
under the fleshy bark,
she tears away broad ribbons
of the baobab's hide
as high as she can reach
and eats them.

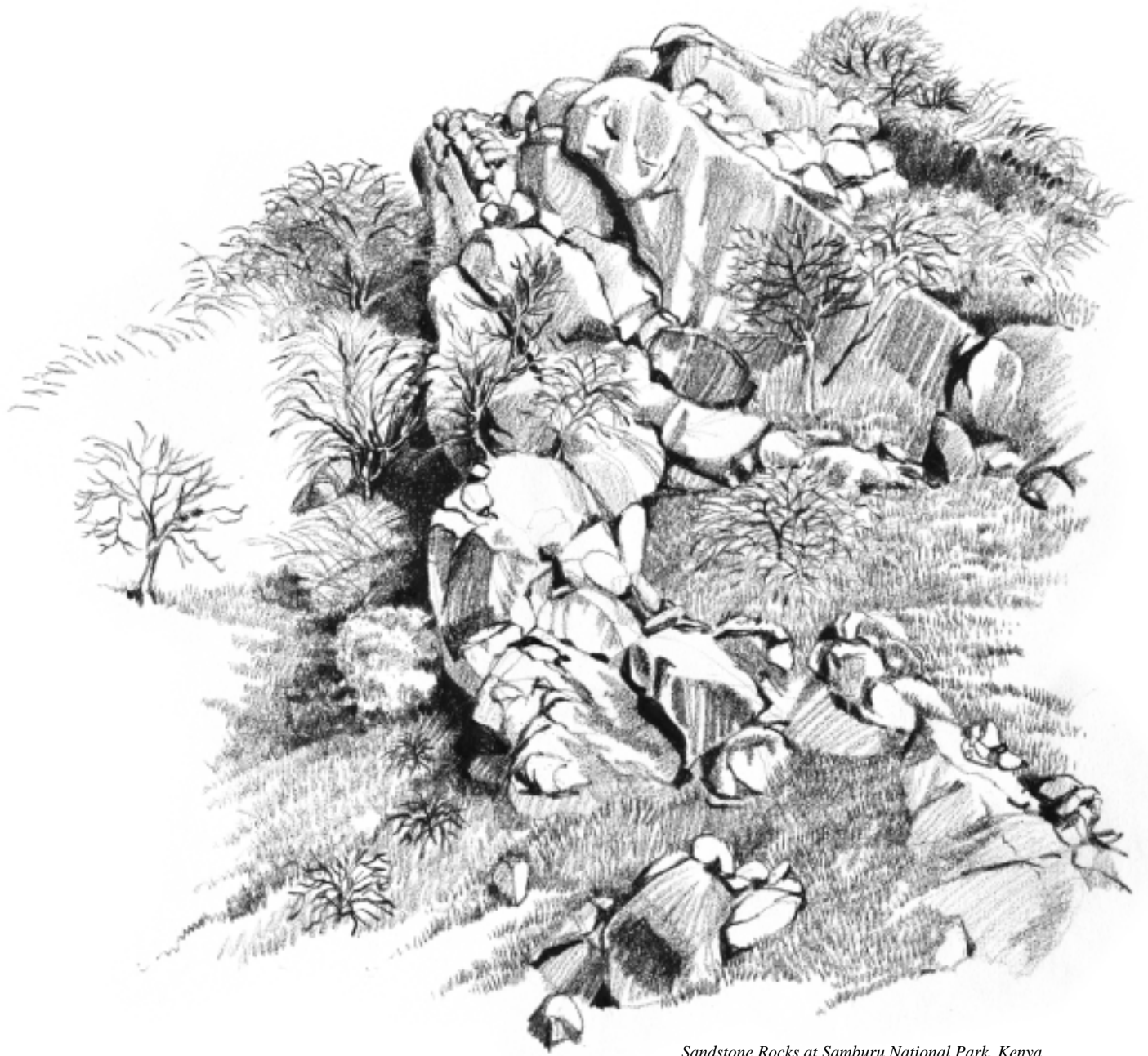
During drought she chisels
deep
into the moist pulp flesh,
extracting water,
gauging an arched cavity
almost as large
as she is.

In return the elephant eats
the pithy fruit
and deposits the seeds
prefertilized
among the boulders.



Baobab's Brothers

The great boulders
are baobab's brothers,
deeply veined, wrinkled,
rounded, red-stained
like elephants
after a wallow,
standing in herds
or long lines on ridge tops,
or tumbled down slopes
half buried
among the baobab.



Sandstone Rocks at Samburu National Park, Kenya

Samburu National Park, Kenya 1990

Samburu Lions

We start the game drive early,
yawning, trying to focus
in the dim light,
willing the eye to see,
searching shadows,
noting the dik dik and
spurfowl,
the doves in the road dust.
I'm unready when the spot is made.

Lions!

Through a gap in thornbush
four buckskin-colored forms
march parallel to our track,
in the opposite direction.
We turn and follow,
snapping long-shots
in inadequate light.

There!

A young female and three yearling
cubs, nearly gawn,
emerge twenty yards ahead
coming straight toward us.
Two lionesses pass,
but a young male and female
stay to nuzzle
and rub tawny cheeks.

An explosion of dust,
a shriek of fear and pain.
Lion limbs flash and twist.
The male sprints away,
something small and brown
hanging from its jaws.

The two lead lionesses,
hearing the blood-cry,
blur past in full pursuit,
spraying sand as they cut
around our fender.

We reposition the Range Rover
for a better view.
All four lions,
shoulders tensed, legs braced,
crouch over the kill,
snarling and tearing,
crowding and ripping,
under a twisted tree.
They wrestle away pieces
and race off to consume
their portions uncontested.

This is small fare
for big lions,
this meal of opportunity
and they resume the march.
Blood on fore limb and brisket
glows in the growing light.





Cola semicarpophyllum

Leopard in a Parking Lot

Thirteen vans,
Prestige Safaris,
Born Free Safaris,
A & K,
Academic, and
eighty-three clients
contend for views
among sand mounds,
thornbush and diesel exhaust.

We wait, blocked in
like cars at a drive-in movie.
I strain for a slot-view
through the dusty windshield
between white vans
of the small spotted form.

Leopard! Leopard!
the whisper-shout.
Tourist heads and torsos
in safari hats, bandanas,
dark glasses and suntans
protrude through roof ports,
aim bazooka-like telephotos,
acquire and engage the target,
ka-chuck, ka-chuck, ka-chuck
motor drives power automatic shutters
in Canons, Nikons and Minoltas.

The leopard, lithe and supple
in my viewfinder,
sprawls on an arching limb
unconcerned, remote,
tail and limbs dangling.

The drivers call back and forth
in Swahili,
but no one moves.
The leopard stands, stretches
descends.

Vans come to life,
leave to take up the chase.
We pull forward onto the road
hoping the leopard will reappear
to cross the road ahead of us.

There it is!
Small and close in the
red dust haze.
I snap off a quick shot,
pray for focus,
as a van cuts us off.

The leopard is gone.

Samburu National Park, Kenya 1990

Samburu Impala

Red-brown waves of impala
browse acacia,
step carefully among tawny
needlegrass, flinty stone
and spiny shrubs,
unafraid of our safari jeep.

The does alternately watch
and feed,
white tails tucked tightly
against smooth rumps,
coats glow in late slanting light.
Large soft eyes and mobile ears with black tips
are full frame in my Nikon.

Downslope, towards Samburu Lodge,
impala snort sharply.
The alarm call is repeated nearby
and sounds across the hillside.

Supple necks swing,
tight-strung bodies orient downslope,
all heads are up and level,
eyes fixed, converged
on the enemy.

The leopard, tail curled
over back,
wends through shoulder-high
oatgrass,
golden and spotted,
leading a caravan
of white safari vans
in the early sunset.





Samburu River Camp

Tanzania 1982

Oldavi Gorge

Wild sisal grows at Oldavi.
The Masai named this hole for it.
The canyon walls, red, brown and buff,
look charred like a waste heap.
They flicker through heat rays
and may flame again spontaneously.
Masai live here now, as other did before.
The Leakeys call them Austopithieciens,
the southern people,
and *Homo habilis*, the handyman,
left his footprints in the ashes nearby
three million years ago.
You still see handymen at junk yards.



African Rainforest

Korup National Park, Cameroon 1987

Microberlina

Microberlina trees stand
like hilltop fortresses,
with brown buttress roots, taller than a
man.

Raising from granite boulders,
the basement of Africa,
they twist into curved ramparts
circling the base.

A spiraling labyrinth leads upwards
to the massive scaly boles
seven arm spans around.

Cabled lianes ascend
to the bright canopy
one hundred forty feet above.

How old?

Lesser trees crowd below,
wilt or perish.

It rains, it dries.

There is no season,
no time.

Only the great trees.



Orchid Fall

The heavy limb falls
thirty meters through hothouse air
shredding leaves and twigs.
It falls like a lifeboat sinks.
Communities of orchids cling
as it plunges, impacts and shatters
along the dry stream bank.
The strident cicada song ceases.
A mona monkey grunts and looks
down,
then continues to feed on scarlet *Xylopia* fruit.
The cicada chorus continues.

“What have we here?”
Dietrich ask, “*Bulbophyllum*?
I see both monopodal and sympodal.”
“Possibly, looks like *Polystachia* too.
Do you find an inflorescence?”
Duncan rips up pseudobulbs,
“Typical African orchids,
minuscule brown flowers.
You can see why they are not much
loved.”
He tosses specimens into a collecting
bag.

Shafts of equatorial sunlight wither
the scattered leaves, wrinkle the
pseudobulbs.
Black ants scavenge the wreckage.
White beetle larvae, molds and fungi
work within the wood.
Other leaves, green, brown and silver-
backed fall along the stream bank.
Probing tree roots, entwining tendrils
with fungi threads,
reach up hungrily into the moldering
manna.



The Pool at Camp One

Afromomum flowers, soft mauve trumpets,
produce scarlet fruit
shaped like the penis of some gaudy primate,
thrust upwards from the ground
beside the brandy-colored pool.

Beneath the mirrored surface
a freshwater crab, brown and small,
sidesteps among the water weeds.

Above, damselflies like red neon strobes
flash each other in gyrating flight
while others, florescent blue or black
perch on slender *Cyperus* stems.

Butterflies, large and fast and green or blue,
of the *Papilio* family
probe the mud,
while the scarlet Nymphallid darts
past a slow brown Satryid
between the spiraling *Costus* leaves.

A shrub of the Acanthus tribe
attracts me with glossy viridian leaves
and orange tubular flowers
shaped like upraised woodwinds.

A tiny tree frog, putty colored with rose feet,
presses against a *Phylobotryum*.
Beyond the bright pool, down the shadowed
path,
pale phallus-headed fungi
with veiled necks
smell like rotted flesh.





Kakum National Park, Ghana, January 1994

Elephant Encounter

Ghana has great forests
darkly layered, leaf on leaf,
impossible to photograph
with my weak flash.
Animal trails crisscross the forest
as tree roots
crisscross this path.
I'm falling behind our group.

Magnificent Diana monkeys
are somewhere above.
Forest antelope,
stately striped bongo and
dark duiker,
haunt the shadows, unseen.
The Gabon viper, leaf-patterned,
thicker than my forearm
could be anywhere
in the leaf litter.

I rejoin our line of hikers.
Architects, landscape architects,
conservationists, Ghanaian and American,
we're here to plan a visitor center
for Kakum National Park.
We are noisy, foreign, urban animals,
learned but out of place,
talking, sweat soaked, jet lagged,
bearing up.

We emerge in a somber clearing.
Elephants have dug mud wallows
among the shadows.
Fresh elephant boluses give a smell
of barnyards, but sharper,
like fear and vinegar.

Forest elephants, smaller
than their savannah cousins
are more dangerous
when people cross their path
unexpectedly.

The afternoon, the warmth,
the wetness, work on me.
Almost dream-walking,
immersed in cicada song,
nearly trusting the tripping roots,
I watch the infinite leaves
pass in procession.

Our two guides lead us
along a path so narrow
our shoulders brush leaves
on both sides.
Again the smell of barnyard.
I barely hear
a low rumble as if
the ground were speaking.

Suddenly from the front of the line
comes urgent whispers, running feet
and an elephant snort.
The guides run back along our line,
passing behind in panic.
A shadowed mass emerges above,
parting the leaves, trunk raised,
three heartbeats away.
I freeze, breathless.
The great head pivots away.
Silence.
No one moves.

Insect sounds return
along with the guides.
Profane exclamations
and anxious laughs
reclaim the moment.
We wait, hoping the elephant has left,
then continue.
The forest seals
behind us.





Asia

Kao Yai National Park, Thailand, April 1995

Jewel of the Thai Forest

Two gibbons call nearby.
I listen trying to balance
midstream on mossy stones.
Street shoes are all I have
on this unexpected side trip
to Kao Yai National Park
in the mountains
north of Bangkok.

Wet shoe tops
are covered with leeches.
I've put my pants legs inside my socks
and sprayed with insect repellent,
but the inch-long leeches,
like self-propelled strips of rubber bands,
slip through the shoelace holes.
The wet grass was alive with leeches,
converging like an army of inchworms,
from all directions.

My Thai guide,
an off-duty park ranger
wearing shorts and sandals,
awaits without expression
as I splash ashore
and scramble up the muddy bank.

The agitated gibbons swing
from vine to branch
forty feet above.
Seeking the best vantage point,
we duck low through understory shrubs,
still gazing up.

Glancing down,
a viridian flash
shocks my attention.
There, just above the somber ground,
balancing on two branches,
the iridescent green tree viper
is coiled to strike.

The guide is one step away
looking up
when I push him hard aside.
He sprawls with a grunt
in the mud and dead leaves.
Then, seeing where I point,
he slowly smiles.



Jakarta, Indonesia 1988

Sumatran Rhino at the Jakarta Zoo

The rhino stands rooted, earthen,
only the head sways
side to side
to catch my scent.

It is not large, not awesome.
Uncomplicated.
Part-sculpted from a block
of soft red clay.

I move upwind,
call softly,
approach the green steel corral.

Fleshly nostrils expel
as if underwater.
Plates of sienna mud
cling to russet flank hair.
Mud hangs from long lashes
over the clouded eye.
Eyelids are the only
soft leather in
the truck tire face.

It smells me.
The head heavy as a boulder
catapults up and sideways
as if to throw me.



The rhino advances,
inserts its long muzzle
between steel rails,
quests with its
prehensile lip.

The liphide feels dense
but malleable,
like a ripe cantaloupe.
Two horns, like
scuffed door knobs
erupt below the
furrowed forehead,
a rubber doormat
stretched over granite.

This zoolithic beast
of Miocene swamps,
innocent as clay,
and forty kin,
last of the nation,
are cursed.
Extinction.
Death to all.
Mud to mud.

Are we helpless?
Will the red rhino
be saved in
reliquary zoos?
Is the green forest lost?

Faced by its persecutors
the rhino leans forward
to have its muzzle rubbed.





Coimbatore, India

Images of India – Orchids Passing

A river of orchids,
flowing multi-colors,
lilac, lavender and rose,
silk saris swirling,
school girls pass
on their way to class.

Orchid-colored saris
some muted by use
others vibrant
as young eyes
are the school uniforms
at the Girls College
in Coimbatore,
Southwest India.

I have been meeting
the college President,
the Professor of Botany,
Grand Dames.
But now,
walking the college gardens
in noontime heat
I am the only man,
only Westerner,
only mossy grey beard
among the orchids.

Broad leaves of trees,
luminescent chartreuse,
flash lantern-bright
against a liquid sky
of deepest cobalt.
To the right
a deep architectural grid
four stories high
of whitewashed concrete sunscreens
projects geometric shadows
of palest blue.

Orchid, lavender, lilac,
chartreuse and cobalt,
vehement hues
saturated, and compressed
under equatorial sunlight
return now
unbidden, undiminished
to my closed eyes
after seven years.

Wolong Nature Reserve, China, 19 February 2007

CHINESE NEW YEAR

Wolong; Crouching Dragon,
mountains of mist and legend,
cascade and abyss,
where golden eagles
hunt golden monkeys.

Living masterpieces of Chinese watercolour,
they enchanted Victorian botanist E. H. Wilson,
priest-zoologist Pere David
and modern scientists
George Schaller and Hu Jinchu.

Tibetan farmers grow cabbages
on stone-walled terraces;
hauling rocks, dirt, compost and cabbages
up steep fields of boulders
cast carelessly down
by the Crouching Dragons above.

Round Tibetan faces
stare down from farmhouses
of wood and stone;
from woods that once
sheltered mythical beasts:
giant panda, red panda,
blond takin, golden monkey
and iridescent pheasant;
woods of fir, cryptomeria, maple,
rhododendron and bamboo;
especially umbrella bamboo,
panda's main meal.

Children in windows
wave in new coats
of bright pink, orange,
yellow and lavender.
Calls of "Xinnian Kuaile!"
come from the faces,
"Happy New Year!"

An old woman
with a black turban
and cloudy eyes
and a man
with a sketchy moustache
and solid smile
Give me peanut brittle candy.
"Xinnian Kuaile!"

Giant pandas,
big bamboo-eating bears,
ranged across southern
and western China,
in mountain snows
and subtropical forests.
People came much later.

Today pandas survive
only in inaccessible mountain forests,
doomed by wood cutting,
bamboo die-back and
genetic isolation.

Government,
aided by international experts,
developed a panda breeding center
at Wolong,
banned logging,
and seeks jobs
for farmers and woodcutters
using panda power.

Wild pandas have round faces too,
but aren't social.
These laconic beasts
with iconic faces,
the ad man's dream,
are world-class logos
for wildlife conservation
and Chinese tourism;
the Nation's treasure,
perhaps someday
replacing Mao
with "Da Xiongmao",
"giant panda".

Wolong Panda Base is bursting.
Doungkoucao,
with its farms, terraces, streams
and boulder fields,
will become a panda-based attraction,
replacing logging
with eco-tourism
replacing low-profit cabbages
with high-profit pandas.

Not a zoo,
it will become
a panda's fantasy forest,
where thirty baby pandas play
and forty big pandas
crunch endless canes of bamboo,
sleep, breed, and feed again
in panda paradise;
winning adulation, protection and prosperity
from millions of Chinese
and international
eco-tourists.

In the farmhouses
Tibetan farmers smile
because they're Tibetan
and because they expect
to get good prices
for their farms
and good jobs
growing pandas and tourists
instead of cutting wood
on lonely mountainsides
or replacing stones
with cabbages.

"Xinnian Kuaile!"



Australia

Aerial View of the Simpson Desert

Australian Airlines flight 059
Ayres Rock and Alice Springs
to Sydney.

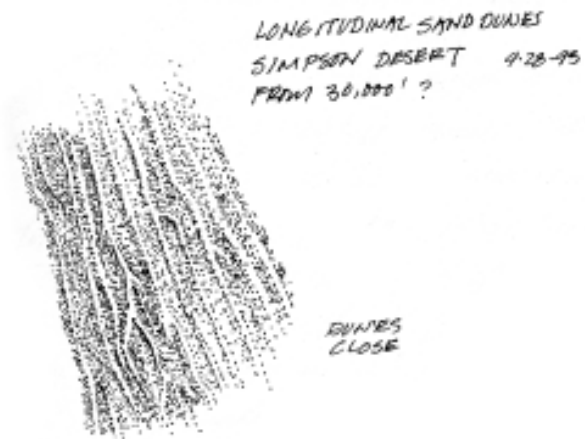
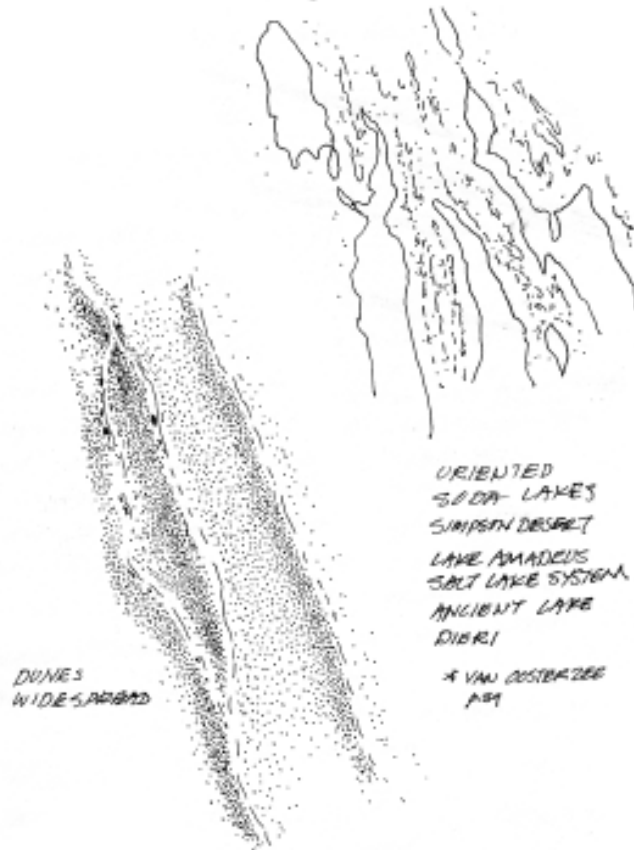
Tired tourists watch light comedy
or play cards
at thirty thousand feet
while the open red heart
of the oldest land
slips past below.

Simpson Desert dune fields
bedeviled the Sturt expedition.
Stoney gibber plains crippled camels
but, like heavenly beings,
safe and air-conditioned,
we see the dunes below
as rills of rust
or sandblasted grain
in discarded lumber.

The veined dunes fork
like the branching of the mulga bush,
even and attenuate
or swirling like burlwood;
perhaps they are fine roots
left to dry by Aboriginal herbalists
yet they join horizon to horizon.

Brown ridges thrust
where the grain erupts
or amber sap congeals
and spalls in the sun.

Glitter of siliceous schist
and crystalline quartzite
is dulled by distance.
You look hard to see
grey-green dots,
lichen spoor on barn boards
or the dot painting
of the Arrente people,
in tops of coolbah trees
in flood plains
or mulga on deep red-earth.



Central Australia, 1993

Palm Valley Evening

Palm trees,
thrust from russet sandstone,
reflect in dark water
with river red gums and paper
melaleuca.
The sun sets up-canyon.
Cliffs of senna
fall into shadow.

The palms, *Livistona mariae*
live only here, these few,
only in these valleys,
only now.
Among endemic cycads and ferns,
stranded for over five million years,
lost tribes,
time refugees,
relics.

The palms lift shaggy heads
on slender, twisted necks,
into the last radiance of evening.



Central Australia, 1993

Palm Valley Morning

Red palm seedlings
sparkle in the morning,
bathe in ephemeral pools
between bars and boulders
dry *Aristida* grass and red-green
Rumex,
under arching river red gum and
tumbled sandstone cliffs.

We climb above the pools,
above cycad and ghost gum
to higher ledges
where rock figs cling.
We seek the ancient nest of
stick nest rats
beneath exfoliating overhangs and
varnished crevices.

We find only black amber rat.
Congealed on boulder edges
like hardened tar,
the petrified urine of
stick nest rats contains,
as if in amber,
the pollen and bones
of extinct life,
extinguished
like the stick nest rat itself.

The palms below,
rooted in sand
between drought and deluge
greet another morning.

Berry Springs

Step carefully on soft city feet
down stained steps
between stone banks
and buttressed fig tree roots.
White bodies in multicolored bathing suits
call to each other below,
bright against dark water
in shafts of sunset light.

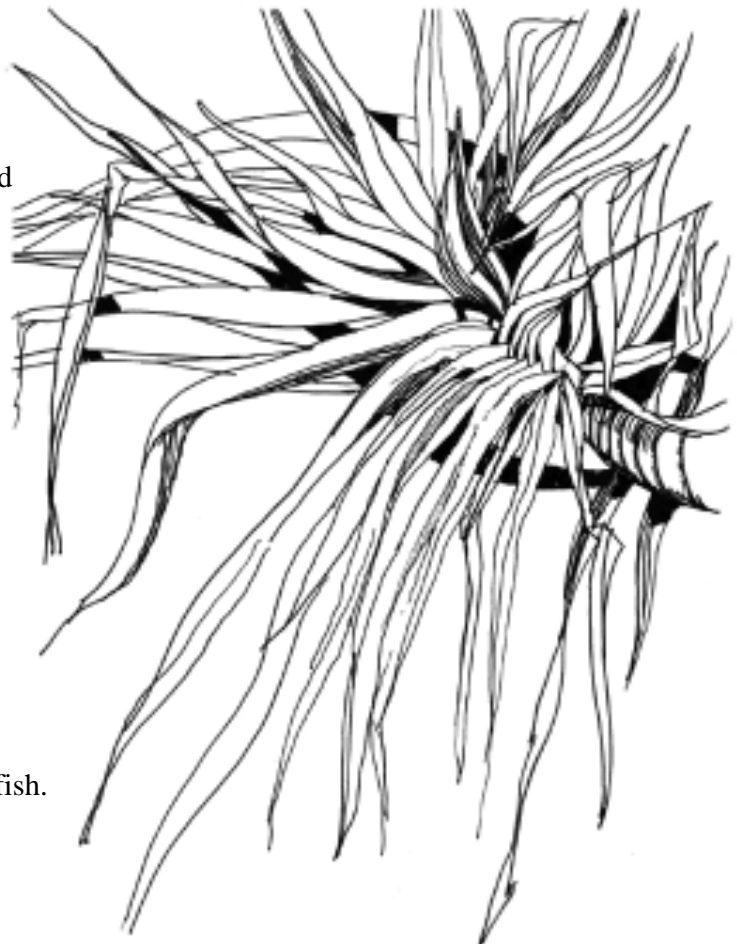
Two teenage boys
slowly scale the cascade
around the source
where springs gush
beneath ancient stone
and explore upstream as far
as the rusty croc fence.
Five teen girls, one wearing hiking shorts and
goggles
dip and dive nearby.

Ease chest deep into cool water
among submerged boulders.
Children's laughter is drowned
in the roaring cascade.
Duck quickly under, turn and wedge
back and feet against slippery rocks.
Resist the crushing water beating head and
shoulders,
until it drives you back
blind and gasping, tasting algae,
into the crowded pool.

Dive like the girls among boulders,
fig roots and small striped archer fish.
Avoid dark passages leading deep
into pandanus thickets.
Surface facing the sky
encircled by trees.
Drift like floating leaves
through pandanus narrows.
Whistling kites, brown hawk-like birds
cry above.
Gem-like kingfishers flash
from bough to water,
leave bright circles and return with small fish.

A blond woman in white swim wear
nurses her infant on the steps
of the lower pool.
Two young couples court.
A circle of solid citizens
sun themselves on the steps,
white legs and feet
in the dark water.

Berry Springs first became
a popular retreat from tropical heat
during World War II,
when barracks for American and
Australian soldiers and airmen
were built nearby.
Before that it belonged to crocodiles.
Crocs still come upstream from the mangroves.
Croc patrols scan the pandanus and set traps.
Several big mugger crocs
are hauled out each year.



*Mt. Kosciuszko National Park, New South Wales,
Australia 1999*

Winter Trees

Eucalyptus niphophila, snow-gum trees,
cloud-trees, storm-trees.
Curved white limbs,
fair and hard as bleached antlers,
spread and spiral among
boulder fields and tors,
somber etched granite,
raising from wind-rippled heather
below summer snowfields.

Small scimitar leaves,
pendants of summer, flash sage, lime and bronze,
flutter from fine red petioles.
Supple sweeping stems converge.
Every curved length
of every twisting limb
flows like the limbs of dancers.
Motion in stillness.

Swirling strips of peeling bark
reveal in leather rainbows
layer upon layer of exfoliating skin
in colors of slate, ivory, buckskin and wine,
now glowing in slanting sunlight
under gathering storm clouds.

Muscular multi-color limbs join.
Hard round wrinkles form
around thighs and knee joints.
Massive boles lie along ledges,
bulge from crevices,
merge with granite.

The day darkens and we,
wind chilled, teeth clattering,
retreat to warm valleys.
The snow-gums, squall-tossed
celebrate the brief mountain summer.

*Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park
Sydney, Australia 1999*

Summer Trees

Angophora costata, coastal apple.
Tree of sun, sea cliff and sandstone,
sheltered among rippled fissures
in Permian canyons and cliffs.
Stubby lumpy limbs twist and rise,
a symphony of elevated elbows
below the wind sheared canopy.

Spring leaves erupt bright red-bronze.
Chartreuse and citronella flash
in bright sunlight,
backed by bolts of cobalt sky.

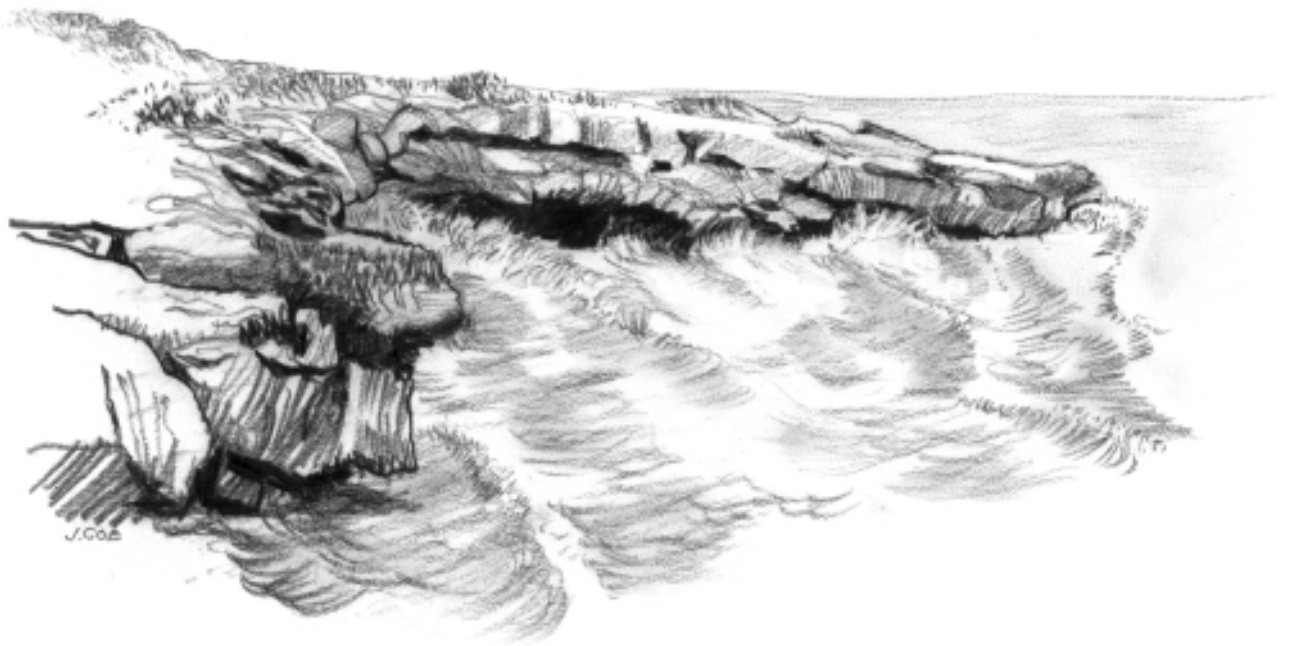
Fat curved limbs and twisting trunks
shed paper streamers
of last year's bark.
Old leeward surfaces retain
skin like dark Cordovan leather,
highlights of pewter, plum,
red-purple.

New windward surfaces expose
pitted platings of yellow gold,
saffron and copper, etched with
fine waves and ripples,
like the sandstone;
stained with dark gum,
like the sandstone.

Sandstone diminishes
century by century.
Summer trees prosper.
Like *Gumbo limbo* and *Ligna vite*,
trees of the Caribbean,
Arbutus trees of Oregon,
Angophora makes gold, saffron and crimson
from stone, sand and sea spray.



The Americas



Coastal Puerto Rico

Guanica, The Desert Forest of Puerto Rico

The Guayacan Centenario, *Ligna vite*, was two hundred years old when Christopher Columbus, on his second voyage, passed it by and returned to Spain with a worthless load of Gumbo Limbo.

Today Guayacan estivates, half-reclining, above the parched floodway, wedged into raw limestone, roots mining veins of sanguine soil. The patterned bark, with marbled russet swirls, is home to frill-like spiders and pseudoscorpions. Its umber resin cures cholera.

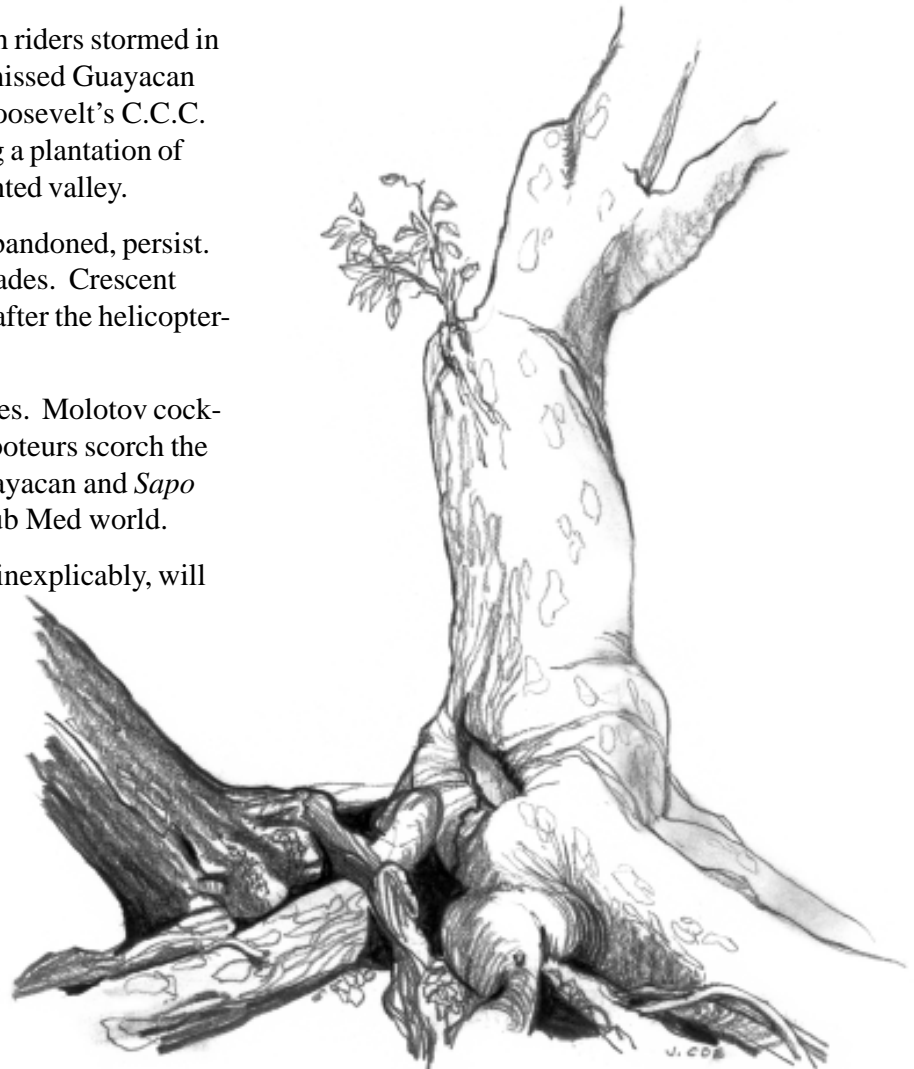
Sapo concho, the crested frog, also estivates like Guayacan, wedged deep in a limestone fissure. He has waited eighteen months for the rain to call him to his long march across the desert forest to the ephemeral lagoon at Tamarindo, the only place on earth his kind can multiply.

Teddy Roosevelt and his rough riders stormed in from the sea at Guanica, but missed Guayacan and *Sapo concho*. Franklin Roosevelt's C.C.C. inmates ignored them, blasting a plantation of mahogany trees into the cemented valley.

The runty mahoganies, long abandoned, persist. Their fruits are like hand grenades. Crescent casings litter the desert shade after the helicopter-seeds are deployed.

The Battle of Guanica continues. Molotov cocktails hurled by vandals and saboteurs scorch the toes of the dry woodland. Guayacan and *Sapo concho* are in the way of a Club Med world.

But the dry forest of Guanica, inexplicably, will not burn.





Puerto Rico

Honolulu 1997

Hybrid Rusti

Rusti Orangutan slowly duck-walks
on short, bent legs,
foot-hands curled under,
dragging his great flowing coat
and pendant flesh,
a great red dust mop.

He stoops beneath
his magnificent hair,
abundant and shaggy
as a buffalo robe
of fine copper wire.

Behind the leather mask face,
like a deflated basketball,
all pads and pouches,
bright eyes miss nothing.
Rusti waits in there.

Rusti Orangutan is a half-breed hybrid.
Orangutans from the island of Sumatra
are considered a race apart
from the orangutans of Borneo.
Hybrid Rusti comes from both stocks.
Hybrid genes are not wanted
in pedigree conscious genetic conservation.
Rusti takes up space.
Rusti has to go.

Rusti Orangutan, half-breed hybrid.
Wild orangutans hide in trees,
hang from foot-hands and
care nothing for ground people.
Rusti grew up on concrete floors
with leaf-painted concrete walls
under a burlap head rag
at the Seattle Zoo.

Rusti played with people,
learned people ways,
loved people,
didn't learn orangutan ways.
Half-breed hybrid, orangutan-person.

Rusti Orangutan ignores me
at the Honolulu Zoo.
Rescued from a half-buried cage
in New Jersey,
Rusti awaits sanctuary
on the Big Island.
No, not Sumatra. Not Borneo.
A hybrid island, Hawaii.

Nature made Rusti orangutan.
People made him almost human.
Can he soon live
a high hybrid life
with arboreal friends,
ape and human,
a life part forest,
part playroom,
neither nature's wild
nor peoples' pet?

Which life would Rusti choose?



SARGOL MAPLE
LYNDHOLD, GANN. 5-25-79
J. COB

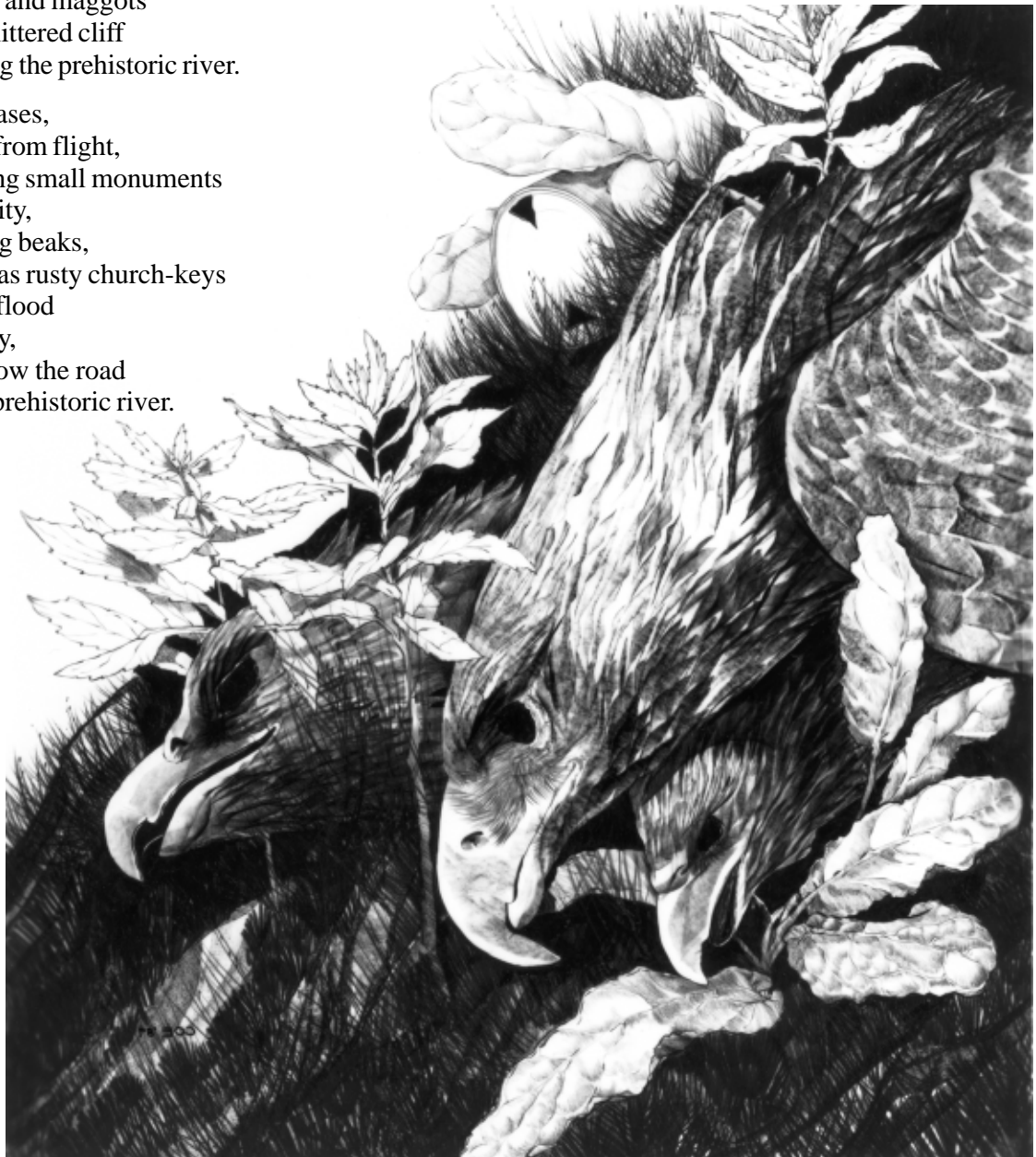
Oregon 1979

A Wrack of Eagles

A wrack of eagles washed up
among rotting refrigerators
and tattered trousers
outside Bend, Oregon,
on Highway 20,
before Horse Pass,
beneath the sign describing
a prehistoric river.

Three eagles rot
in a twisted heap
among the Schlitz,
Magnavox and maggots
on a bone-littered cliff
overlooking the prehistoric river.

Great carcasses,
wrenched from flight,
flung among small monuments
of mediocrity,
with tearing beaks,
powerless as rusty church-keys
before the flood
of humanity,
sprawl below the road
above the prehistoric river.



The Amazon Flooded Forest

Aboard the Zodiac “Charles Darwin”,
powered by a 50hp Yamaha,
we explore the backwater igapó.
Black water mirrors
a Maxwell Parrish landscape
of golden light
on clean-limbed, giant fig trees,
forming baroque avenues
through the flooded forest.

Two scarlet macaws,
red tails streaming,
join a celebration
of short-tailed parrots
foraging through a
domelike fig tree.

Gliding beneath
trailing aerial roots
we see,
rising from dark waters,
stilt roots and limbs
merging overhead to form
gothic arches and buttresses,
flooded halls decorated with
feather-like ferns,
sword-leaved aroids,
scarlet-spiked bromeliads,
all guarded by ant garrisons.

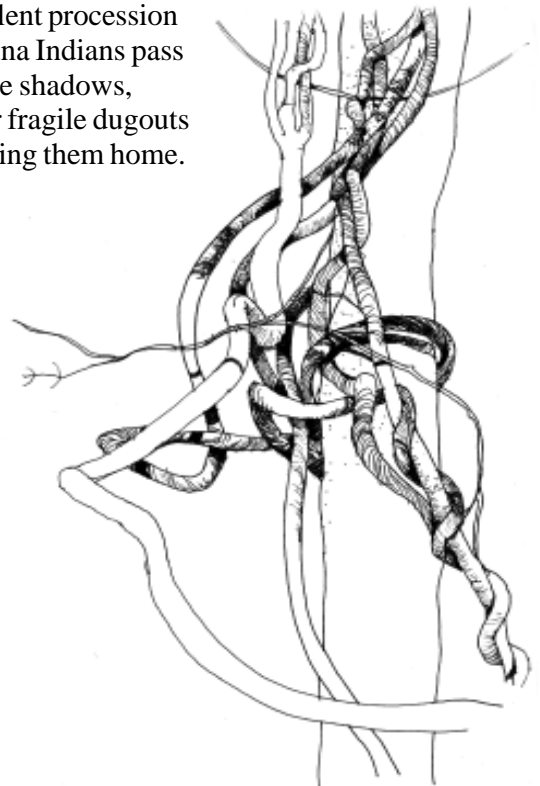
A broad-leaved *Clusia*
anchored in an arboreal
termite town,
quests for light.
Long-billed woodcreepers call
in descending flute notes
beyond the parrot cacophony.

Swept back in sunlight
we note
white-throated toucans,
inspect seductive pink petals
of *Clitoria*,
blue-violet *Vitex*,
red-violet *Dalbergia*.
In deep shadow
flaming passion flowers glow.
Gustavia flowers,
pink-fringed white petals
with golden stamen-filled centers,
fragrant as *Magnolia*
await the bats and moths
of midnight.

In nutrient-poor blackwater
carnivorous bladderwort mats
trap tiny aquatic animals
and digest them.

A flight of chestnut-fronted macaws
pass overhead
in the gathering sunset
as we retreat towards
the M.S. “Explorer”
our time machine and travel center.

In silent procession
Ticuna Indians pass
in the shadows,
their fragile dugouts
bearing them home.



The Amazon Flooded Marsh

Whitewater várzea,
side channels of the
seasonal Amazon flood,
receive the nutritious silt
of distant Andean outwash.

The equatorial sun,
hot on our backs,
powers a solar factory
of *Echinochloa* grasses.
Rooted twenty feet below us
in the flooded marsh,
they bob in our wake,
spiky heads alive
with feathered seed eaters.
Horned screamers,
black wings spread,
alight and disappear
in the floating grass mats.

Sunlight also powers
graceful rice plants
and blue-flowered
water hyacinth.
The fabled giant water lily
Victoria amazonica
spreads its six foot
solar collector leaves,
pumps air
to oxygen-starved roots
twenty feet below
in the rich Amazonian mud.

Minas Gerais, Brazil, 15 May 2002

Santuário do Carasas

The wolf steps among us.
Shaggy copper hair.
Stilt legs.
Long black toes
placed silently
on tile pavement.
Wedge head slung low
between pointed shoulders
face-high as we sit,
backs to baroque balustrades,
encircling the ecclesiastical forecourt.

Large cupped ears, white inside, black outside,
tall triangles
swivel as head rotates
looking left, right, and back.
Then, drawing up its short back
and long hocks,
the wolf strides forward,
gently picks meat
from the tile floor,
and retreats down
rococo steps
into darkness.

For thirty years
Fathers of the Santurario
Nossa Senhora Maes dos Homens
fed three generations of
maned wolves, *Chrysocyon brachyurus*,
on the old terrace
before their church portal.
Built three hundred years ago
against granite peaks
of Serra Caraça,
the monastery and school
now share rooms
with eco-tourists and
children from the capitol,
Belo Horizonte.

Tourists on the terrace are
loud, gay, commanding.
Flash cameras and spotlights.
Human eyes can't see
what the wolf sees.
Human ears, filled with exclamations,
laughter and surprise, can't hear
what the wolf hears.
Tourists, and the Church itself,
are unaware of their foreignness.
Three minutes or three millennia –
all the same to the red granite serra,
grey green cerrada.

The wolf waits on the stairs again,
an apparition under
weak terrace lights.
Plop... plop. Meat thrown on pavement
signals the wolf. Come... come.

The wolf comes in his own time,
silent, fragile, bold.
People say less, see more.
Long copper coat,
white tail tip,
body all angles
hinged at neck and waist.
Red back and flanks
slope to high, rolling rump.

It pauses, ambles forward,
lifts meat delicately with lips and teeth,
retreats with a flash of tail,
shadow into shadows,
to eat in peace.
The wolf, unaware celebrity is salvation,
enjoys chicken fillet from the terrace.

Is this the world zoo,
service in eco-entertainment
for survival?
Maned wolves,
more innocent than Balinese dancers
or posing Masai warriors,
perform for the same reason:
easy meat.

FLT #140 24E

Eat cold quiche
with arms crossed
from ivory melmac
with a real cloth napkin.

“Orange juice or champagne?”

“Both please, and coffee.”

“Coffee will be on the next cart, sir.”

“Folks, we’re presently over
Great Falls, Montana.”
The two on my left have bad colds.
His air vent blows towards me.
His breath is bad.
His elbow is over the line.

“Coffee sir?
Cream and sugar?”
Roller Derby Queen.

“Nothing.”
The medallion of beef has a nickel center,
freezer burn and lampblack seasonings.

“Lewis and Clark spent seven days
at the confluence of the Missouri
and Judith Rivers.”
Four seats to my left,
four seats to my right.
Wingtips in empty ports.

“Lewis named the Judith River
for a teenage girl he’d met
just before leaving St. Louis.
Upon returning he married Judith Hancocks.”

The girl in 17b is spectacular.
Miss Teen America.
Massaging her Dentine,
she idly rubs her left hand
inside her blouse.

Seven seats ahead,
eight seats behind,
one hundred and fifty folks
in the middle section.

“Well now on the left is Bismarck
and on the right,
behind that little puff of clouds
is Holbridge, South Dakota.”

“More coffee?”

Miss Dale Carnegie.

“Sacajawea was buried by that bridge
outside Ft. Mannet in 1814.”

“Cream and sugar?”

“Sitting Bull was buried there too.”

“Nothing.”

Tiny painted fingernails explore
back from seat 23E.
Her sister cries.
The headset pounds the song
“...it hurts so bad”
for the third time.
LAVATORY OCCUPIED.

Wide World of Sports.
Skydiving on a DC-10.
Windsurfing the Sahara.
“We will be closing the bar cart
in five minutes. White sox caps
will be raffled to the kiddies.”

Climb over your neighbors
and retreat down the aisle.
Duck into a closet to pee.
Gold rattan wallpaper
and a damp seat.
Blue flush.

One the mirror a captive fly
flies the friendly skies.