



flowering dogwood

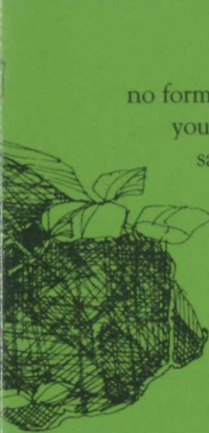
Other clues to human occupancy lie or stand farther out. Large black walnut trees furnished nuts for the family, squirrel-bait for the marksman, and dye-stuff for clothing. Spicebushes have overgrown the yard. Their twigs, chopped up and boiled, made a handy tea when the old cow went dry. Beyond the house hundreds of young poplar trees and dozens of rock piles betray the location of pasture and field.

9 cold, clear spring

Beside the trail is the pride and joy of many a mountain farm: a walled up, cold, clear spring. Incidentally, the water may be unsafe now. To the average hillside dweller, a trip "abroad" included "bad water from down in the settlements," along with other evils. A long drink from your own spring and you knew you were home again.

10 rock garden

Every place on earth has its own texture. The individual particles of that piece of the earth's surface are arranged in various forms, or perhaps



no form at all. Your eyes and feet can tell you quickly where you are, from the hot sandy beaches to the cool deep clay of the prairie. A few strides barefoot here and you'll quickly notice the rocks.

Rocks typify mountain country, for the hills themselves are simply huge piles of them. Pushed up by geological uplift, tugged by gravity, split and tumbled by erosion, they lie here at your feet—not precious rubied or oil-bearing shale, but mere "garden variety" rocks. Angular and jagged, they are not yet as smooth as their water-worn brethren, or as large as half a mountainside. Yet they were the one, and will become the other. They are in transit, on a journey of millions of years.

Hard and inanimate, these stones have a role in the life and beauty of this place. At this moment they are host to the mosses growing on them and to the small creatures living under them. They account for the sounds of the creek, the intimate little coves and mounds along this trail, and the mountains themselves.

11 stumphouse

Live in a leaky old house of rotten timber? Certainly, if you happen to be a spider, beetle, nightcrawler, slug, or some micro-organism too small for man to see. It's an ideal home for minute beings who eat decayed wood, or who live on other creatures that do.



Though appearing lifeless and vacant, this stumphouse is not. Were you to slice through it vertically and view it under a microscope, you'd find it as populous and busy as an urban office building. Once completely returned to the soil, it will no longer house its present occupants. Yet the stump will still contribute to the life of the forest. In death, its nutrients mixing with the soil around it, will be drawn into the body of a living plant. Something, or someone, may eat the plant. In a sense, this stump is immortal.

This is the last stop; the rest is up to you. From here the trail leads back through the shady ravine, across the water, and out to whatever kind of place you wish to go. This place will remain unchanged for a long, long time. Return to it whenever you will.

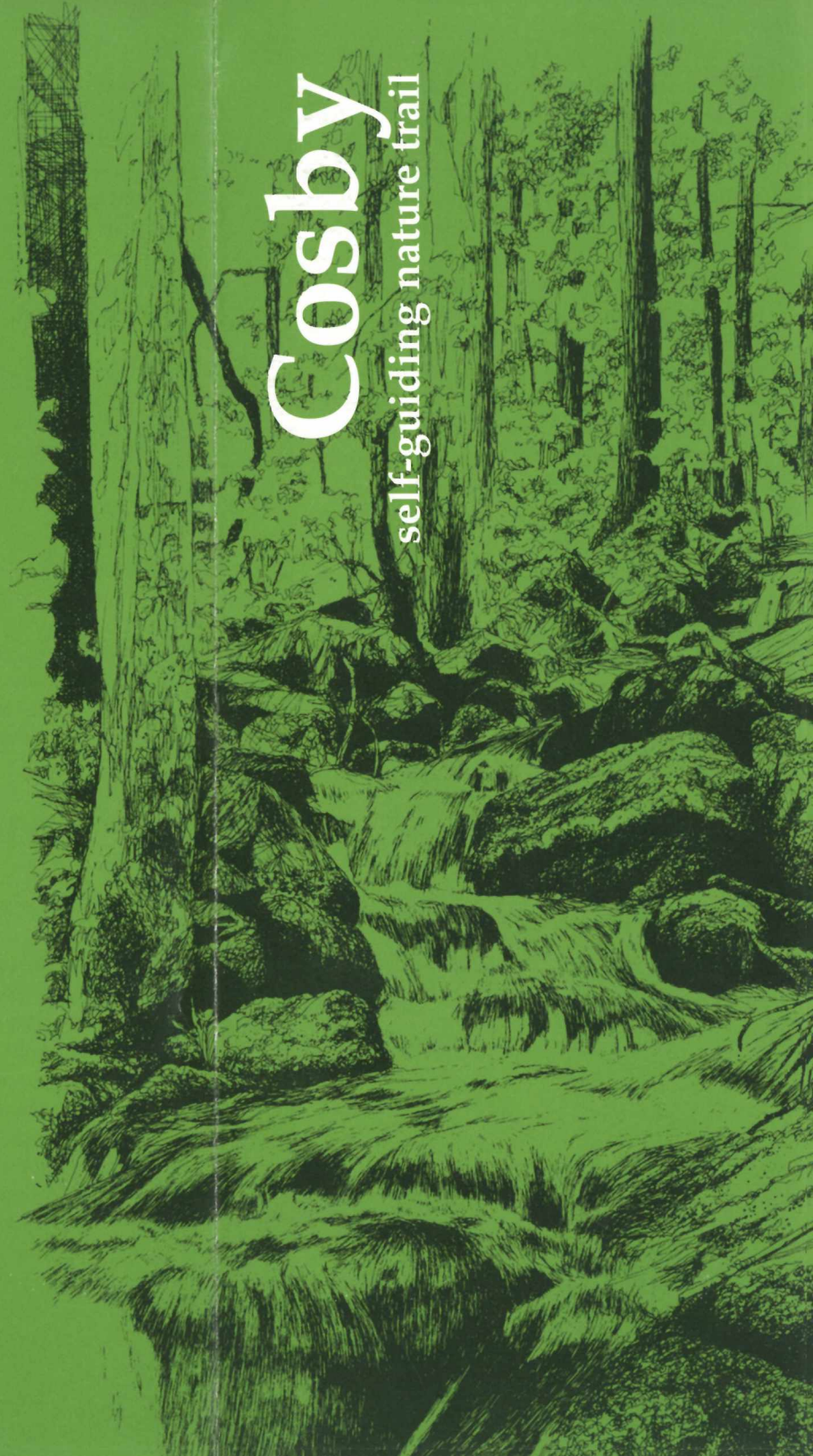
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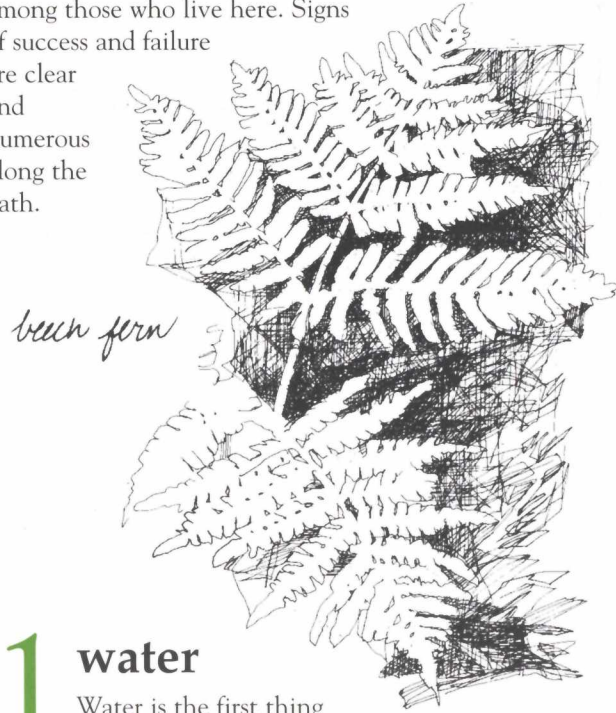
Cosby
self-guiding nature trail



The trail ahead wanders through a patch of woods as different from the camping area as night and day. How? Why? Three words sum it up... wet, green, shade. In walking the trail it is difficult not to notice abrupt changes in natural patterns, terrain, sounds, and even the mood of the place, as modern intrusions fade behind.

The old road at the beginning, and then the trail, descend into a green ravine. Light is softened, sounds are muted, coolness brushes the skin, and fragrances drift across the path. This outdoor sanctuary recalls its architectural counterpart, the cathedral. Countless hemlock pillars rise from the stony floor, to support the green ceiling overhead. Random shafts of sunlight pierce the canopy, ricochet, and scatter their life-giving brightness amid the undergrowth.

A pleasant stroll awaits you, the transient, but there is a quiet competition for survival among those who live here. Signs of success and failure are clear and numerous along the path.



beech fern

1 water

Water is the first thing you hear on entering the trail. It greets you, accompanies you, and influences everything you will see. It takes many forms and many paths, roaring

down the open courses, trickling and whispering in the smaller brooks, and darting in and out of the ground among the rocks. Without its fluid abundance most of the plants would not be here. Hemlock, rhododendron, fern, toothwort, and feather moss need this moist world to live in. Farther along, you will be completely surrounded by water as the streams scatter themselves everywhere, seemingly losing their sense of direction.

2 shade

Shade is more subtle than water. It says nothing, but is always present and powerful. Shade is life to those plants who like it, and death to those who don't. Nearly every single hemlock trunk bristles with broken, rotted limb stubs. Not wasting itself in the futility of maintaining shaded lower limbs, the tree concentrates its energy at the uppermost growing tip. Continually stretching for its piece of the sun, it overreaches and shades out the competition... maples, oaks, basswood, and others. At your feet, the mosses and their neighbors green the floor where daisies and sunflowers can't grow.

3 tenacity

Living here is not easy for some of the taller residents. Strong winds try to topple them, and sometimes do. The soil is thin, a mere veneer that cloaks the underlying bedrock. Tree roots have little place to gain purchase. Haphazardly, yet persistently they seek out cracks in rocks, claw at other tree trunks, and entwine themselves about each other in a desperate network for stability. Floods carry the soil away and rocky anchors crumble until daylight often shows beneath the undercut stumps. Still, they stand.

The old grapevine takes a different approach. Rising from a simple trunk, it drapes, climbs, and leans, crutching itself on any available neighbor. Should one support collapse, it compensates by reaching for another.

Typically, nature accomplishes the same goal in

more than one way. Stubbornness and flexibility both happen to succeed here.

4 fragrances

Do you smell anything? Maybe, maybe not. Wilderness odors and fragrances vary with the weather, the season, and elements of their whole. Scoop up a pinch of forest litter and soil. Smell it. Crush one hemlock needle between your fingers and hold it to your nostrils. Familiar? It should be. They sell a lot of it on TV. Earth scents reach us all via after-shave lotions, perfumes, and body oils.

5 water music

No matter where you are on this trail, the sound of water is always present. At times there is only a periodic, solitary drip. At others, the sound becomes more purposeful, yet not harsh. The stream beneath this bridge nearly always moves with gusto and a roar. Sheer volume of water is not the only reason, for the Mississippi hardly makes a sound. Above and below you the stream flows over terrace and flat, and terrace and flat, bumping along toward the sea. The visual beauty of the many levels of rounded rocks is a bonus.

As you stare into the water, you are being stared at. From under the rocks, crayfish and salamanders keep watch for raccoons and other hazards. Water bugs skim the surface, ready to dodge the fish below or birds above.

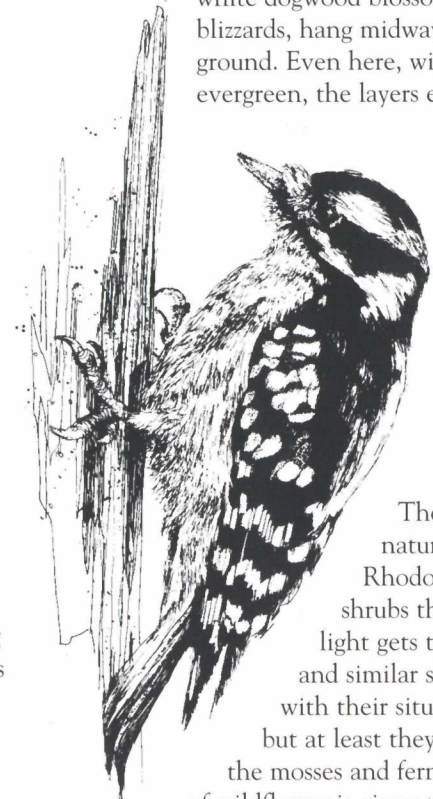
To all of those creatures, the water music is probably irrelevant, but the water itself is not.

6 woodpecker works

The days of this tree were numbered. It was old, sick, and structurally weakened. Insects and fungi attacked it long ago and miscellaneous invaders clogged the food-carrying channels under the bark. Woodpeckers became a serious threat. Drilling for insects, they undercut and weakened it. Finally the wind took it down.

7 layers and patterns

Everything has its place. In a forest the plants are usually arranged in layers from top to bottom. This is quite apparent when white dogwood blossoms, like still-life blizzards, hang midway between canopy and ground. Even here, with all of the evergreen, the layers exist.



downy woodpecker

The tree canopy, naturally, is on top.

Rhododendron and other shrubs thrive on whatever light gets to them. Dog-hobble and similar shrubs must be content with their situation near the ground; but at least they can look down on the mosses and ferns. Briefly, each species of wildflower is given the floor before fading into the green anonymity of the late summer.

8 house site

Someone lived here long ago. How do we know that?

The large squarish pile of stones was once a chimney, although it now assumes a more informal shape. Careful study reveals the fireplace, and which way the house faced. Beside the house stands a rectangular garden fence of stone. Far too prevalent a building material here, the farmer cleared his garden site and built a fence with it in one operation.