



# Limestone Lakes      Utaniki

*written by Fred Wah  
and  
designed by Peter Bartl*

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Limestone Lakes Utaniki

Poems

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*Fred Wah*

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Notes:

An earlier version of this utaniki was published in the Kootenay Karabiner in 1988 and in a limited edition by James Holroyd in 1988.

A Utaniki is a "poetic diary".

Probably the best-known Utaniki to western readers is Basho's *Journey to the North Provinces*.

# Limestone Lakes

# Utaniki

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# MONDAY

*From the camp we hike up about 1,000 ft. We'll have to do this most days to reach the range of rambling available.*

*I walk along a stunning grey and red limestone highway/arena, huge typonchronic wave-swirl of razor rock. Patches of cliff-clinging grass and flowers.*

*Pauline can't understand why I don't get into the names, like "something poisonous something" (Elegant Poisonous Camus) or Fringe Grass of Parnassus.*

*So as I walk along talking that one out to myself I figure out that naming is more than only counting, that it also works for me as a very particular image, like Nancy-Jean's "sorrel" up Kokanee, or I'm always looking for saxifrage on the edge of my eye, that one lonely flower (maybe "mist maiden" or "mountain aben")*

*she called me back up the scree to photograph in Anemone Pass last summer.*

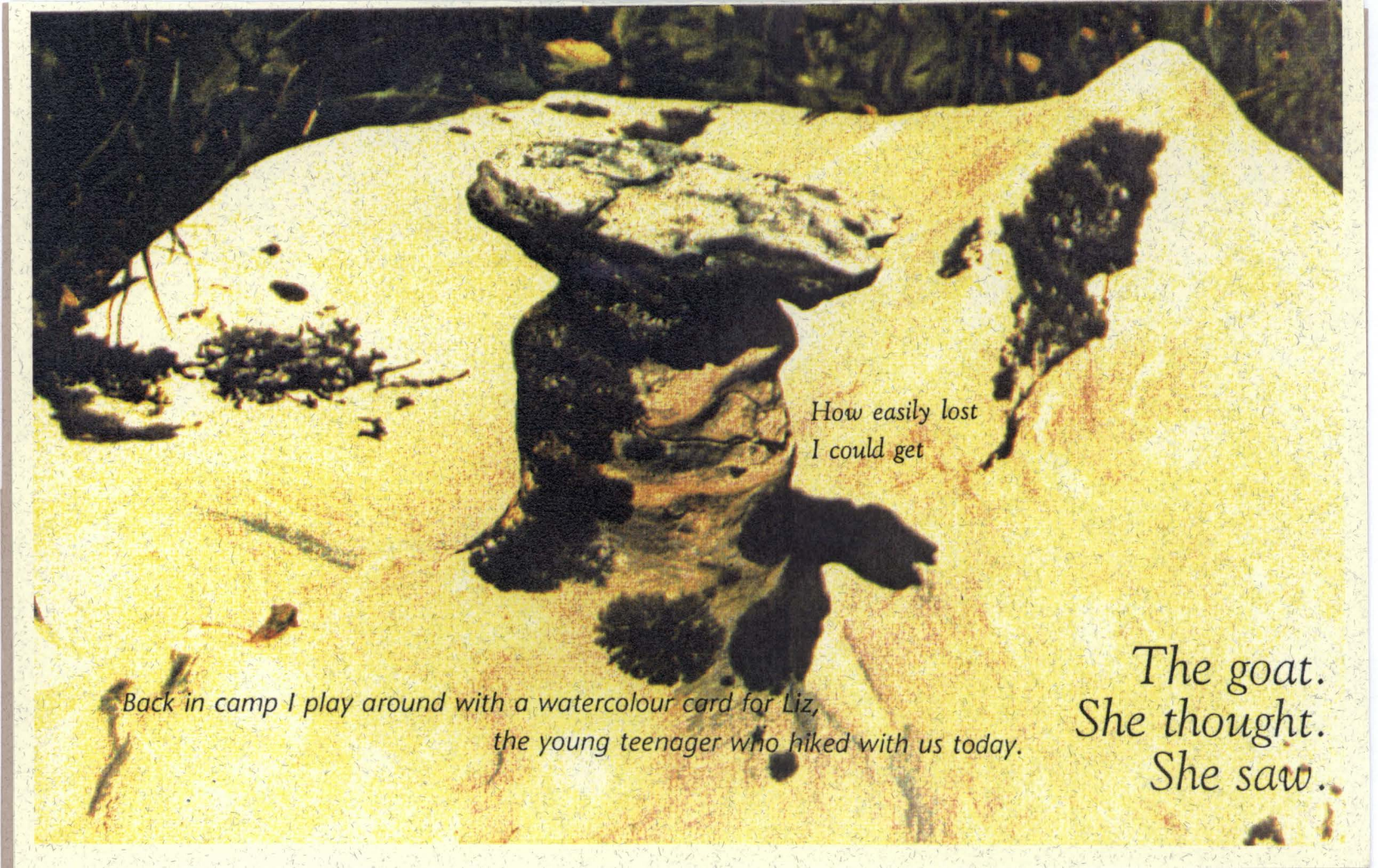
*Yet there is that surface of experience, say, just walking and breathing,*

*eg. tables of limestone today with little islands of schist sticking up into the vibram almost like velcro.*

*But the problem with naming is number,*

*you can't look at, let alone count, all of it.*

*Like right now after lunch someone yaps "get the maps" and I think of the maps folded up in my pack and how I never really use them for the specific, just an overview (imaginary mostly).*



*How easily lost  
I could get*

*Back in camp I play around with a watercolour card for Liz,  
the young teenager who hiked with us today.*

*The goat.  
She thought.  
She saw.*

# TUESDAY

Not lost  
Heart beats  
Alone  
All day  
Long  
Day all  
Alone  
Beats heart  
Lost not.



*I've spent all day chasing after  
but never finding the people I started hiking with.  
They were going around a ridge I hiked up over and I lost them.*

*Everywhere I look - no trace.      Disappeared.*

*I've scrambled up a couple of high hills,*

*yelled,*

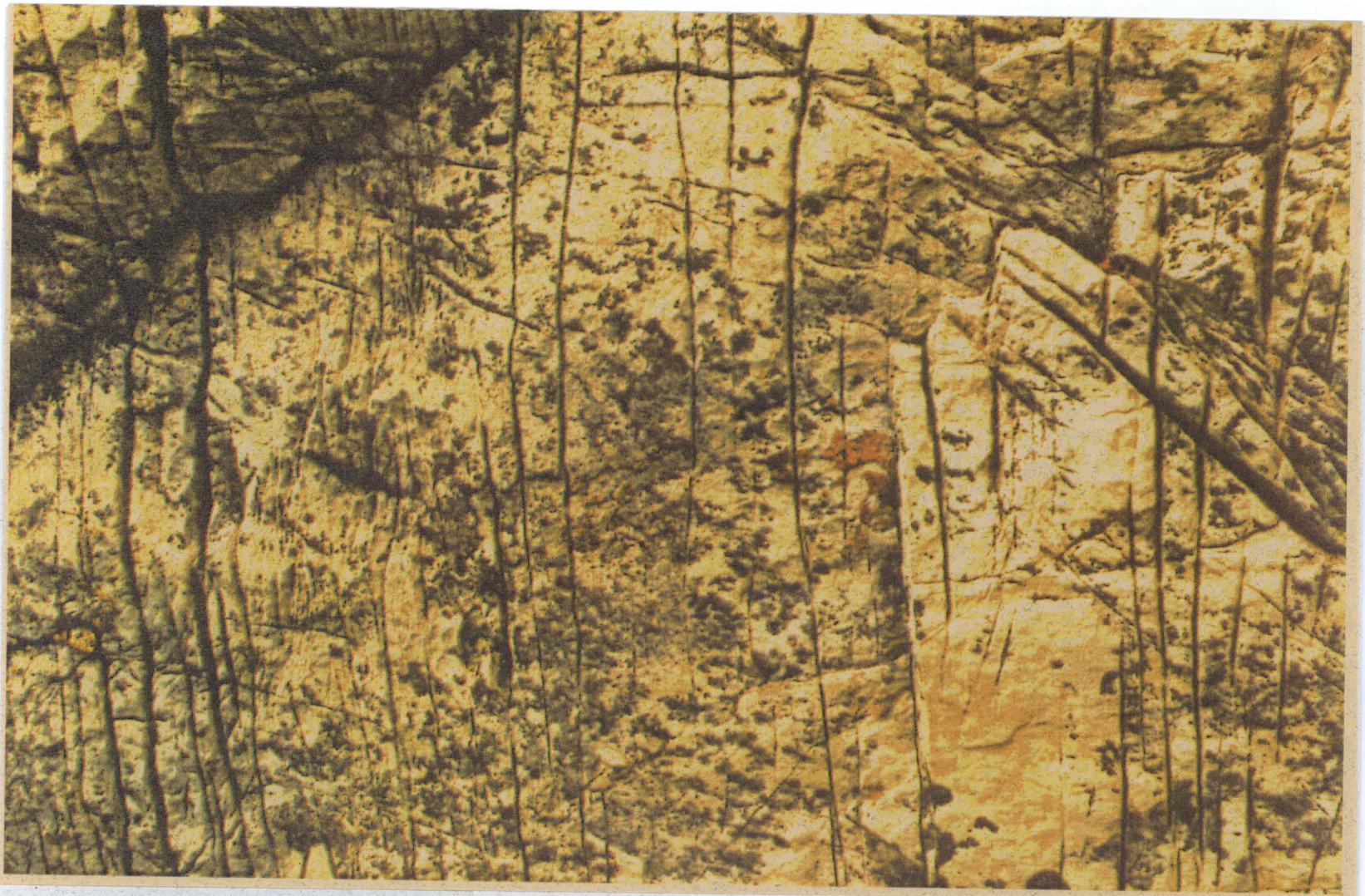
*yodelled,*

*scanned,*

*and listened to my nervous breath.*

*Now I've sort of given up, had a bath in the ice-cold lakes,*

*write about it.*



WED

WED

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*Fingers stiff and cold as I write this because a wet front moved through last night. Mist hackles hang and float so I decide to stay in camp for a few hours and fiddle around with a pin-hole camera.*

*Pauline, Liz, and I*

*amble off later on to Waterfall Lake just above us and then to Limestone Lakes where I photo and paint for an hour.*

*This is what I get:*

*A picture of shooting-star that primrose easy day connections in my body brush chromatic hills and mountains dilute gray those pigments glinted out the corner of cerulean blue above (no black or white) but Winsor green dark burnt umber raw sienna cadmium yellow watered yellow ochre for the lakes the limestone hills and wet blue paper for the sky left o.*



THURSDAY

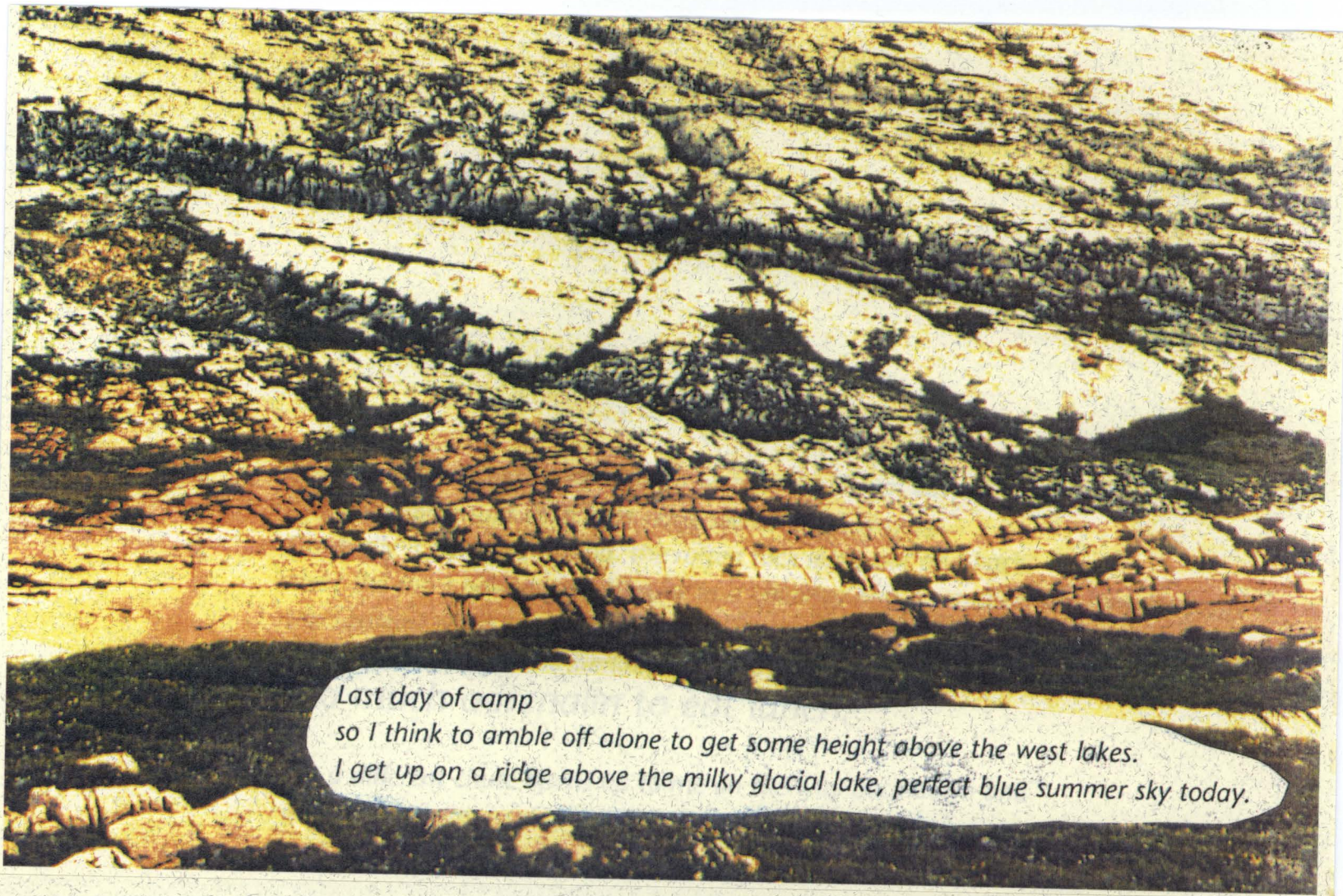


Today Pauline and I hike off alone down to Sylvan Pass roundabout  
but we overshoot height and there we are on a ridge above the pass so  
the day is really a trial until I realize on the way home  
we discover foot ramps of rock and grass down to and up from each wee lake  
and that *sidehilling* elk cut across to the ridge before Longview Peak  
gets us sheer height above  
what down below five foreign backpackers cut across the gray and red amphitheatre.  
From there we make plans for home.

Down on the limestone floor we sit on the lip of a huge sinkhole river rumbling  
hundreds of feet beneath and after that  
the trip back was a maze of diagonals along the arcades finally down to  
a lake to swim and bathe and

Ancient ochre valley  
hosts rock events  
but the elk find human trails around everything.

Trust those trails  
and we won't get anymore lost  
than all of us already are.



*Last day of camp  
so I think to amble off alone to get some height above the west lakes.  
I get up on a ridge above the milky glacial lake, perfect blue summer sky today.*

**F O U N D A W**

# FRIDAY

*So fear alone pummels itself inward to itself  
and becomes a fossil of another life*

*a piece of elk shit that lives siliconed rock hard under geomorphic seabeds*

*But then I get hooked into or onto what looks like an easy ridge to make.  
I keep climbing and each next ridge seems an ok way up.  
Gradually it becomes a cling, the rotten rock leans out and back.  
Near the top I have some difficulty in a chimney and remember that time long ago in  
the Lardeau when I couldn't go down and couldn't go back up.  
When I finally reach the summit it's mostly a worry about getting back down -  
too much adrenalin to eat lunch.*

*But a different chute opens up to me on the way back down and  
delivers me onto a safe-enough ledge where I breathe little sigh at last.*

**R O U N D A W**

# FRIDAY

*So fear alone pummels itself inward to itself  
and becomes a fossil of another life*

*a piece of elk shit that lives siliconed rock hard under geomorphic seabeds*

*a limestone sinkhole in the dark caverns of our falling stomachs*

*an unnameable saxifrage that cracks and breaks the rock face*

*the little avalanche of boulders that crackle out onto sheets of muddy ice and snow*

*the rotten Rockies rock that crumbles in the middle of a footstep or handhold*

*red-algaed snow-patch too steep and icy to use*

*razor edge of ice and the hidden gap under the feet*

*this black schist or flint in the gray limestone*

*that's where that fear is*

*held there for you*

*alone*

*alive.*



*I talk to myself this morning, on the long drive up the Columbia valley.  
I notice that, that  
I talk to myself more than to others, I say that to myself, that and where we're going,  
the fresh of the morning, the truck packed with hiking gear,  
that, and that.*

*Pauline and I meet the others at the Skookumchuk Cafe and then drive up the long  
gravel logging road valleys,  
people eyes ahead faces set on the next step, a chopper lift up to 8,000 ft. in the  
Rockies east of Invermere.*

*In it I find this poem I wrote in response to  
Pat Lively's tragic fall from a cliff during the first days of the camp.*



**SATURDAY**

*Here's a small encrusted stone for your cairn,  
home for you.*

*this wine-red nipple of the January mind  
your death fell from  
every day we face them  
those rock bluffs across the valley, a pine,*

*large alpine sky who arches over these slopes each night  
oh wonder of rock and water and earth*

*what alchemical lake we and this are*

*This then  
periodic counting  
not-forgotten alpine meadow winter sod  
under all this weight of place:*

*oh wind too  
flowers we've named, snow  
patches, ledges, creeks, lakes, marmots, eagles, clouds*

*and on to the face we glass each day  
that bluff between our eyes  
lake and the waterfall*

*striations  
of a life  
simple single  
gouge in rock*

*Hah!*

*have you become our pet cow-bird  
hop for mosquitoes at meal time?*

*is that you, then, already disappeared further south  
w/ the cariboo?*

*This garnet, such a little thing to move here for you,  
just because your death moves me.*

*But birds have that quick and darting look - they know  
winter's coming,*

*that  
they don't decide.*



*I talk to myself this morning, on the long drive up the Columbia valley.  
I notice that, that  
I talk to myself more than to others, I say that to myself, that and where we're going,  
the fresh of the morning, the truck packed with hiking gear,  
that, and that.*

*Pauline and I meet the others at the Skookumchuk Cafe and then drive up the long  
gravel logging road valleys,  
people eyes ahead faces set on the next step, a chopper lift up to 8,000 ft. in the  
Rockies east of Invermere.*

*But the weather socks in during the day so after I wrap the truck in chickenwire,  
mezmerize alone,*

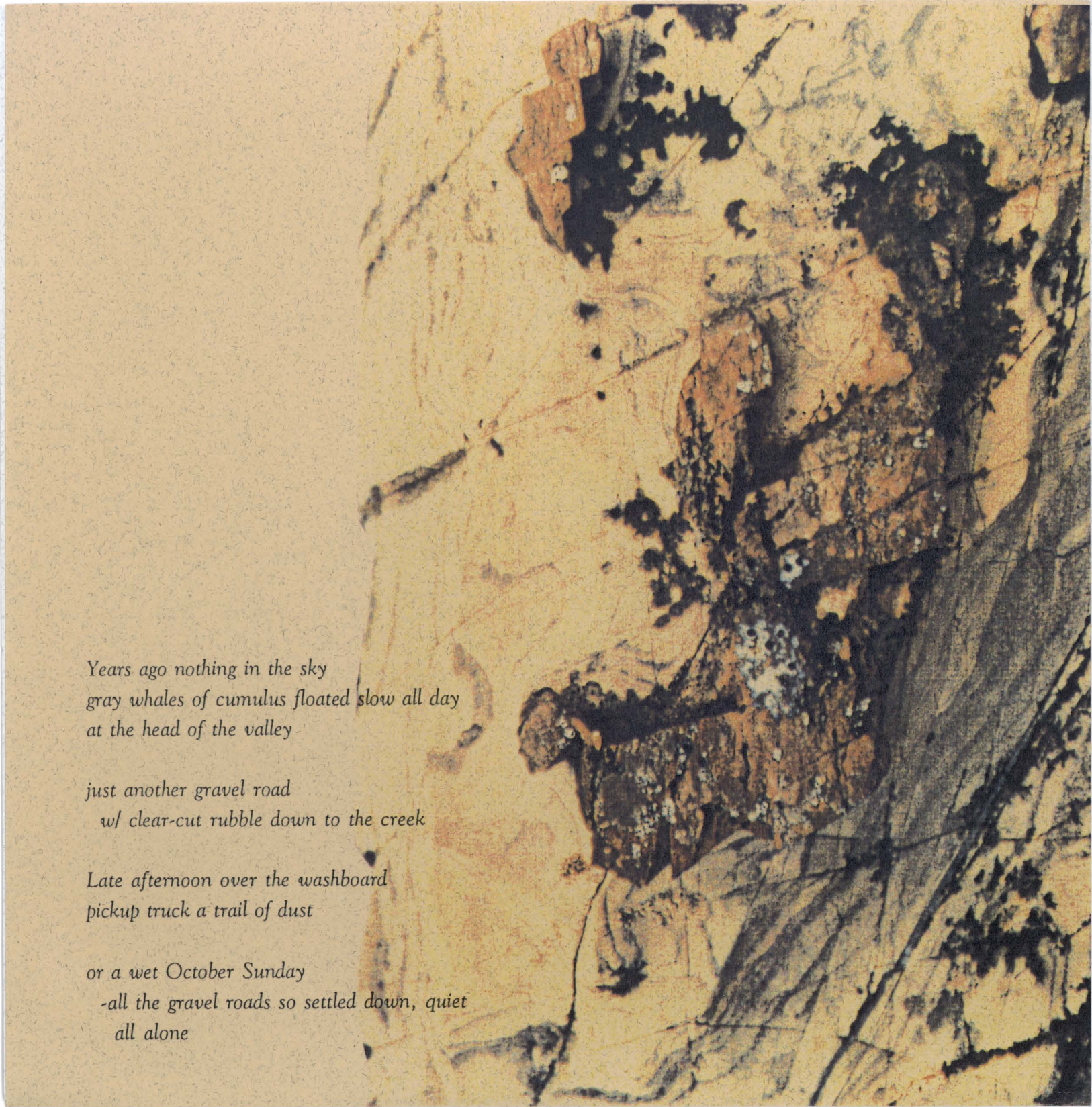
*lean on a log            long hours but no chopper,  
unwrap the car and spend the night there, strewn w/ cloud (I hope stars).*

*This afternoon I unzipped the pocket of my pack and  
found this journal, left or lost since last summer's hiking camp  
in Anemone Pass in the northern Selkirks.*

# SUN DAY

*This morning we still wait for the first sound of the chopper in the clouds.  
Gusty and raining a bit.*

*All day I either sit in the car and work with the words, talk to myself,  
or walk along the gravel road alone and taste the old work,  
summer timber cruising.*



*Years ago nothing in the sky  
gray whales of cumulus floated slow all day  
at the head of the valley*

*just another gravel road  
w/ clear-cut rubble down to the creek*

*Late afternoon over the washboard  
pickup truck a trail of dust*

*or a wet October Sunday  
-all the gravel roads so settled down, quiet  
all alone*

*Finally, in the late afternoon,  
the cloud ceiling lifts a bit  
and the chopper comes through.  
He gets us in before supper.  
Tents set up on a small pond-filled bench  
and we start to feel the spread of place,  
dewed grass, boots, flashlights,*

*bite of air in the nose.*