

A Fascicle from Shotpouch Creek

May 13 to 16, 2008

Eleanor and Richard Berry



A Fascicle from Shotpouch Creek

May 13 to 16, 2008



By Eleanor and Richard Berry
Lyons, Oregon



Our thanks to The Spring Creek Project, Department of Philosophy, Oregon State University, and to its Director, Kathleen Dean Moore, and Program Director, Charles Goodrich, for providing the Trillium Project residency that allowed us to produce this small collection of poetry and photography. We are also deeply indebted to Franz Dolp for the vision he had for his land at Shotpouch Creek and for the work he did to fulfill that vision. We are especially grateful that he made his cabin a place where others could stay, to observe and study the plant and animal kinds that his care enabled to thrive all around it.



So many thorny and spiny plants—
salmonberry, stinging nettle—
such tall, vigorous stands

border the meadow, crowd
the creekside trail, thicket
the lower slopes, it seems

this wild place
hedges itself
against intruders

So rank the growth
of stinging nettle, the very smell
repels, the stink

of formic acid
each brushed spine
secretes, which burns on touch



~

Robust, shoulder-high,
these larkspur on the brink
of bloom

dispel any notion
all spring wildflowers
are delicate

~

A bewilderment
of leaves, uncountably
many, each elaborately

cut, lobed, toothed—
waterleaf, mitrewort,
blanketing the ditchbank



~

Soaring alders
still let light reach
this forest floor

Until their crowns fill out
these steeps will stay
knee-deep in green

flocked with pale
tiny flowers—
sorrel, miner's lettuce, bleeding heart







~

As if by art, these
rhizomatous herbs
spread broad mats

gracefully butted and lapped
over the land's
hollows and slopes

Beneath the leaves'
jostle for sun, underground stems
thread with no shuttle

the gravelly soil, push
down from their nodes
anchoring roots, crisscross to weave

hidden nets—ever-expanding warp
for floral rugs more elaborate
than any artist could hook



~

Close up, intricate,
symmetrical forms appear
even in such

inconspicuous blooms
as these greenish and purplish
pendants no bigger than dewdrops

Along this stalk, each
is a dollhouse serving dish, delicacies
tidily ranged in a circlet,

on that, all tiny pitchers
tipped to pour—
forms so completely distinct

once they're seen
it's suddenly
easy to distinguish

species from kindred
species, mitrewort from
piggyback plant, however much like

their round-lobed leaves
and habit of growth
It's suddenly

easy to part
staminate from pistillate
flowers of meadowrue—

Lilliputians' fringed lampshades
from their fancy hats—
on otherwise identical separate plants

~

Small, three-lobed calyces,
purplish-brown, peer from under
the wild ginger's

mantling leaves,
repeat in modest miniature
the showy trilliums'

large, three-petalled corollas,
now, from age,
purpled, shrunk, and curled





~

Between the trillium
blossoms' withering
and the larkspurs'

budding out,
the season trembles,
then tumbles

almost into summer
Sun routs for now
the legions of cloud

Sky blazes blue
High in the canopy, new leaves
begin to patch a shade

~

Logged, logged again, then
a new plan—restore
the ancient forest

This, with red alder and big-leaf maple
the dominant species,
a stage on the way

to a climax of conifers
Bacteria living
in the roots of the alders

fix nitrogen, enrich
the soil for seedlings—
hemlock, redcedar, Douglas fir

~

Tyee Formation, the soil in which
this forest takes root—
sands and siltstones washed,

some forty million
years ago, from the ancient
Klamath Mountains down

into the Pacific, forming
a submarine fan, then
repeatedly dislodged and laid

down again by earthquake, making
new layerings—telltale
turbidites, fine grains atop coarse

Quake-prone still, this land
accreted to the continent
in the Eocene

as rugged Sichuan, even now shaken
by repeated shocks, steps
collapsing into rubble

~

In Sichuan now, botanists
monitor bamboo, fearful
it will not hold

steady to its slow cycle
of blooming only once
every seventy-odd years, but



flower and die en masse—
as swaths of it did three decades back
after the province's last

powerful quake—leaving
endangered giant pandas
scarce browse

~

Ten times older
than this Coast Range
creekside where it thrives,

the common horsetail—common
in wetlands worldwide,
species scarcely changed

from Carboniferous forests
where herbivorous dinosaurs
browsed its tree-size kin,





survivor of late-Cretaceous
meteor impacts that
killed off both

those giant breeds, along with most other
plant and animal kinds
then inhabiting Earth—

anachronism among
the angiosperms that now
hold sway among plants

the planet round, “living fossil”
some three hundred million
years old

~

Each hollow horsetail stem
petrified alive—
silica filling

the walls of its cells
Now, before the green
barren stems emerge,

sprouting in whorls
branches thin and pliant
as pine needles,

gaggles of whitish
fertile stalks
poke through the grass

club-like heads, ringed each one
with dots of stalked discs,
under each disc

a band of sporangia—microscopic
forms appearing
only in close-up, as

when boiling water is poured
into the glass teacup, the tiny
fascicle of tea-leaves

swells and releases,
like a miniature parachute,
its string-bound “flower”

~

How to see
plants conspicuous here,
their thorny thickets,

spiny stands—as
forbidding entry
or inviting study

Coastal tribes knew
even nettles vouchsafe
stalks palatable steamed

or steeped for spring tonic,
and fiber to weave
fishnets and snares,

knew salmonberry offers
early each spring
delectable green sprouts

to peel and eat raw,
magenta-petalled blossoms, brightening
brush still winter-drear,

and, best, amid persistent blooms,
earliest berries—welcome sweet
to garnish salmon and nourish

migrant thrushes—salmonberry birds,
whose song proclaims
berries are ripe



Shotpouch Flora

Species Seen 13-16 May 2008

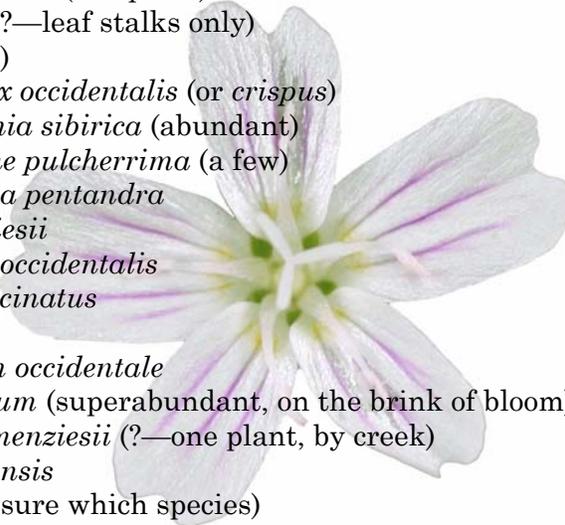
Trees & Shrubs

Douglas-fir, *Pseudotsuga menziesii*
Western redcedar, *Thuja plicata*
Red alder, *Alnus rubra*
Bigleaf maple, *Acer macrophyllum*
Red huckleberry, *Vaccinium parvifolium*
Red elderberry, *Sambucus racemosa*
Oceanspray, *Holodiscus discolor*
Indian-plum, *Oemleria cerasiformis*
Salmonberry, *Rubus spectabilis*
Himalayan blackberry, *Rubus discolor*
Trailing blackberry, *Rubus ursinus* (?)
Red-flowering currant (*Ribes sanguineum*)
Scouler's (or Sitka?) willow, *Salix scouleriana* (or *sitchensis*)
Vine maple, *Acer circinatum*
Dull Oregon-grape, *Mahonia nervosa*



Herbaceous Flowering Plants

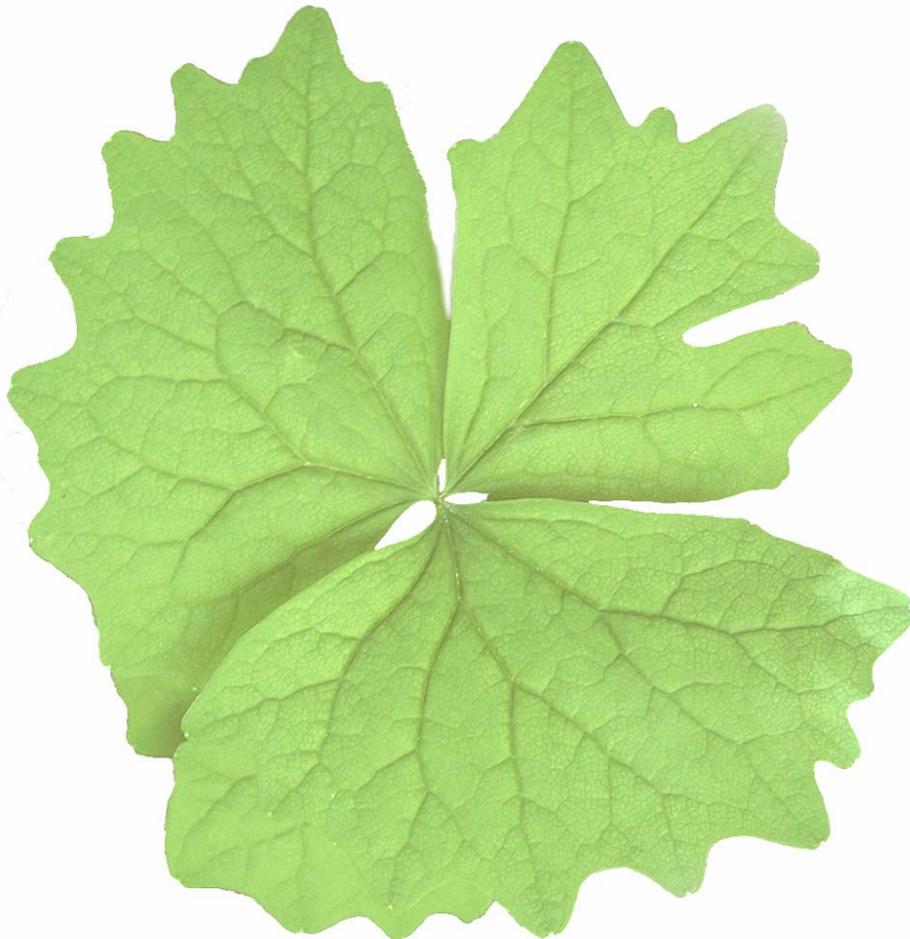
False Solomon's-seal, *Smilacina racemosa* (on the brink of bloom)
Star-flowered false Solomon's-seal, *Smilacina stellata*
Hooker's fairybells, *Disporum hookeri*
Western trillium, *Trillium ovatum* (last stages of bloom)
False lily-of-the-valley, *Maianthemum dilatatum* (not yet in bloom)
Common camas, *Camassia quamash* (one plant)
Tiger lily, *Lilium columbianum* (?—leaf stalks only)
Oregon iris, *Iris tenax* (one plant)
Western (or curled?) dock, *Rumex occidentalis* (or *crispus*)
Siberian miner's-lettuce, *Claytonia sibirica* (abundant)
Beautiful bitter-cress, *Cardamine pulcherrima* (a few)
Five-stamened mitrewort, *Mitella pentandra*
Piggy-back plant, *Tolmiea menziesii*
Western buttercup, *Ranunculus occidentalis*
Little buttercup, *Ranunculus uncinatus*
Baneberry, *Actaea rubra*
Western meadowrue, *Thalictrum occidentale*
Tall larkspur, *Delphinium glaucum* (superabundant, on the brink of bloom)
Menzies' larkspur, *Delphinium menziesii* (?—one plant, by creek)
Wild strawberry, *Fragaria chiloensis*
Lupine, *Lupinus* (leaves only, unsure which species)
Early blue violet, *Viola adunca*
Yellow wood violet, *Viola glabella*
Fendler's waterleaf, *Hydrophyllum fendleri*
Mint (two or more species in the family *Lamiaceae*)



Common foxglove, *Digitalis purpurea* (leaves)
California figwort, *Scrophularia californica*
Common dandelion, *Taraxacum officinale*
Yarrow, *Achillea millefolium* (leaves)
Pathfinder, *Adenocaulon bicolor* (leaves)
Stinging nettle, *Urtica dioica* (superabundant)
Vanilla leaf, *Achlys triphylla* (leaves)
Pacific bleeding heart, *Dicentra formosa* (superabundant)
Redwood sorrel, *Oxalis oregana*
Wild ginger, *Asarum caudatum*
Cleavers, *Galium aparine*
Skunk cabbage, *Lysichiton americanum*
Mountain hairgrass, *Vahlodea atropurpurea* (?)
Piper's wood-rush, *Luzula piperi* (?)

Ferns & Horsetails

Bracken fern, *Pteridium aquilinum*
Sword fern, *Polystichum munitum*
Lady fern, *Athyrium filix-femina*
Licorice fern, *Polypodium glycyrrhiza*
Maidenhair fern, *Adiantum pedatum*
Common horsetail, *Equisetum arvense*





About the photography . . .

For me, it's about light. Filtered through clouds, it surrounds leaves and reveals their surface topography; as direct sunlight, it burns through and x-rays their inner structures. Color shifts from the gray-green of cloud-light to the chartreuse green of translucence.

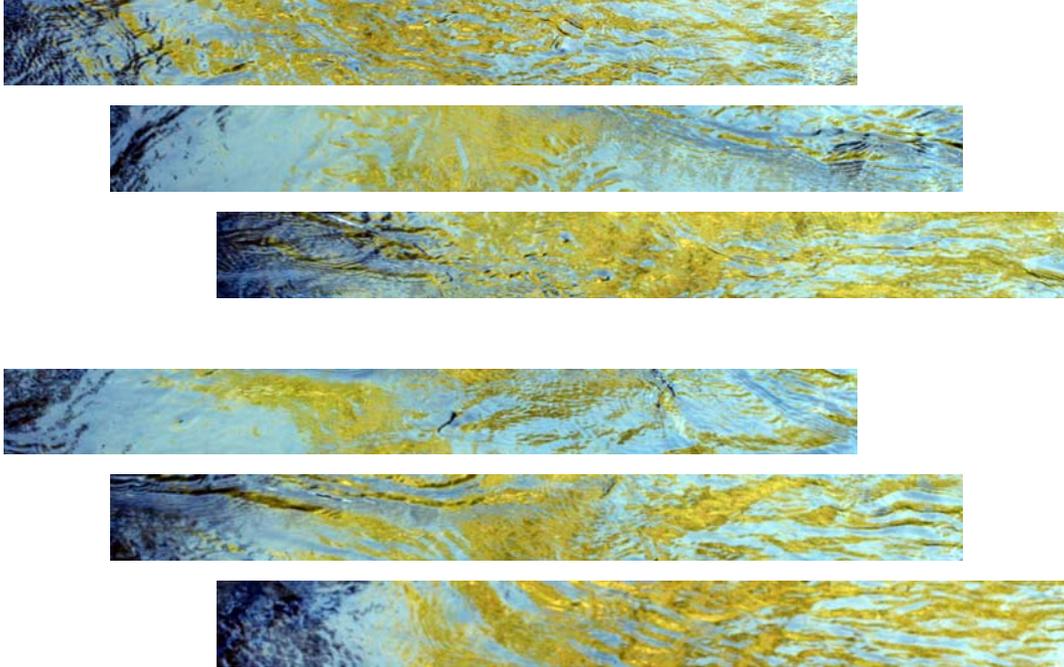
Tuesday we arrived late: solid cloud. Wednesday: the sky opened to deep blue with cumuli; Thursday: all day, that crazy blue of Oregon summer days. Our last morning: the sky hazing over to a dull white blue.

Our focus was on the flowers and flowering plants for a visual catalog of Shotpouch blooms in mid-May, but the light-filled space and changing sky above insisted on joining the flowers. With flowers, you think small. Down on hands and knees, you strain to capture form and detail. A cloud shadow passes, light intrudes, and the landscape around you blooms.

In this fascicle, those images now return to the cabin on Shotpouch Creek filled with the creamy white of elderberry blossoms, the blue of sky, the coppery light reflected from the flowing water of the creek.

—Richard Berry





About the poetry . . .

For me, the experience of a place is closely bound up with language. When I find myself in a new place, I need to discover a language that will help me to see it, to hear, touch, taste, and smell it. The kind of language that proves most helpful to me is often scientific language, but used rather differently from how it is used in scientific papers—employed instead with full attention to the sounds of its vowels and consonants, to the rhythms of its phrases.

Shotpouch Creek was not an entirely new place for me. It is only a couple hours' drive from the North Santiam Canyon, which I have come to know intimately in the 14 years since we moved there. Thus, I did not need to find a wholly new language. But this spot in the Coast Range was unfamiliar enough that it pushed me to extend my vocabulary.

The writing of poetry is the principal means through which I discover and deploy language to articulate place, first for myself, ultimately (I hope) for others. My impulse to poetry and my sense of its possible form derive not only from places themselves, but from various kinds of texts.

As I groped toward form for this poetry of Shotpouch Creek, I thought of the wonderful poetry of place left by Lorine Niedecker (1903-1970), who lived and wrote in rural central Wisconsin, connecting through correspondence with fellow experimental poets across the U.S. and abroad. I thought especially of her “Wintergreen Ridge,” a long poem that explores, in a broad intellectual context, a wild plant preserve that she had visited. That poem became a model for mine.

It seemed to me that “Wintergreen Ridge” was able to encompass such a range of concerns because of its use of stepped, three-line stanzas, which visually suggest a hesitant movement forward, a broken flowing. So I adapted that form—lengthening the lines, but keeping the format of stepped tercets—for my poem exploring the land and plants at Shotpouch Creek.

—*Eleanor Berry*



