

## **GARNERING AFAR & AFIELD**

### **Juxtapositions of culture:**

Midsummer of 2001 I was on a site, conducting a particularly difficult river analysis. I had determined bankfull, measured stream geometry in three transects, metered the velocity of flow in a dozen locations and estimated the extent of floodplain.

As I crossed the stream channel in my waders, I noticed a soft drink can wedged between tree roots on the bank. In more remote areas I always collect any random garbage and carry it out. So I bent over to pick up the discolored can. As I did I noticed below it, in the small hollow of the roots, another object. I set the can aside and pulled out a slender piece of stone. Brushing off the wet silt, I cradled a three inch Woodland Indian blade, the edges still nicely cut, the stone pristine. I swooshed it gently into the brook, careful to hold it by the notched end, and then raised it up to the light.

There it was: a glistening black, almost glass-like piece of beautifully crafted obsidian, probably imported by canoe into our area 1,000 to 4,000 years ago. Ancient river trade: Pennsylvania obsidian for conch shells and soft moccasins. Feeling vaguely light-headed, I sat on the bank and looked at the river with amazement. In another year, a half dozen houses would be cut from these quiet woods.

### **To carry or not carry a compass:**

Completed a 220-point wetland delineation in West Bolyston in late September. As many times as I have been out alone on similar sites (and as much as I believe I have a great sense of location), I got disoriented near the end of the walk. Classic error: I decided to walk down one last woods trail near what I thought was the southeast corner of the property, went far enough to satisfy myself that there was nothing of interest, and returned down the path. Hit a small intersection of trails and nothing looked familiar.

I looked up for the sun, but the sky was heavily overcast. Gambling, I then turned right and within minutes was in an area with stone walls I had never seen. Okay, I thought, that makes it easy; I returned to the first intersection and went left instead. Oddly, that path led me quickly to an area of immense ledge that I had not seen before. Reacting with amusement, I said to myself, "I'm lost!" then quietly listened.

Sure enough, cars were whirring in the distance. So, following the sound, I set off through the woods. Within 10 minutes I had bush-wacked my way back to the highway, chagrined that, once again, I had lost time because I'd left a \$6 compass at the office.

### **Parking at Walden Pond:**

Almost any sunny day, one can saunter westerly from the central parking area down to Walden Pond and find people swimming, hiking, fishing. A private walk is impossible. Turn northeasterly instead from the same parking area and a small trail leads through the hardwood down to nearby Goose Pond.

One treks along a narrow spine of land between two wide flats of water. The trail wanders along this rocky spit for 500 to 600 feet to its end where there's a large flat stone, perfect for contemplation or a short rest. Here there are never people.

I am convinced that the trail's hard-packed width is the result of small animals and deer, and that it was never beaten down by the restless boots of old Thoreau. In this wooded retreat, one rarely wonders about tropic stability, eutrophication or the nuances of public recreation. Aptly, the pond has scattered geese drifting in amorous pairs, and the water level rises and falls with the seasons. The sound of ducks beating their wings against the water plays against the stillness, and even in winter, barely hidden Goose Pond remains a surprise, and a sanctuary.

### **On the Mill River, Northampton**

On a Monday I stand on the banks of this mid-sized river, marveling at the density of birches and pin oak that straddle its sides. The water is slightly tannic, the color of ginger ale, yet utterly beautiful.

Later in the week, three of us sit in the office of a licensed site professional, reviewing soil logs from 21E testing conducted at the same location. The river's soils are riddled with arsenic and heavy metals. One of us, a local resident, asks, "My gosh--what about all the people who swim immediately down the river?" The LSP says, "Yeah, I see that too—"

We sit for a moment in silence, and then the LSP begins to discuss remediation strategies for the site. Afterwards, we all go out to lunch.