



Goat Rocks in winter. Image from SummitPost

Gary Mesick

Descent from Goat Rocks

Once we knew we would live,
Once we safely crossed those drastic,
Sloping snow fields calving shards of ice
Careening down the striations
Toward the teal pool below, and the field
Dissolved into shattered sheets of shale,

And the false trails among the scoured rocks
And rubble, then along the knife-point lava spines,
Failed to confound us, and we at last resigned ourselves
To the long climb over the crest of Old Snowy
To rejoin the trail on the glacier's far side,
The loose scree beneath our boots peeling away
To tumble recklessly down the moraine,

After the brutal winds had done their worst,

Driving snow and sleet up the face of the ridge
And deep into our necks, once we began our descent
Along what at last appeared to be the trail
We had spent the better part of the day
Trying to divine, we got our first whiff.

And as we dropped further and further into the valley,
We sensed its distinctive, acrid, peppery odor
Rising and growing stronger as we walked.
In time, we encountered a band of trekkers
Emerging from the fog. Two wore shorts.
One wore a poncho and a watch cap,
And each nursed a tentative beard.
They smiled, glassy eyed, at nothing in particular.

“The trail is Hell,” we warned their leader.
“Yes,” he said. “I am certain that it is.”
And we yielded the narrow trail to let them climb higher,
Not certain if the better part lay before us, or behind.

Gary Mesick's poems have appeared in *Confrontation*, *Grasslimb*, *Sugar House Review*,
Café Review, *Atlanta Review*, and elsewhere.