

HIKING THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL
by Brian Bell

I parked askew
at the trail head,
not intending more
than an idle pass,
empty handed,
empty headed.

An imperceptible breath met me
at the brink of sun and shade.

Heat weary,
dithering because I was
ill parked, because I
intended not to stay,
because this was not my path,
not today.

Then I stepped beneath the
canopy's shade where I could better
consider my distraction.
The cool air dripped
down the mossy rocks
of the hillside to sooth me.

And while here was not
there, it still was,
after all, here,
the very place that I was,
an invitation
I hadn't expected.

The way spoke
to my singularity,
to that which is
mine distinctly,
to the places forgotten,
to twitches of

sinew and rich marrow,
to the deer frisking
at wood's edge
upon the expanse of
wild grass, beholden
to no one for its leap.

The trail opened to me,
asked not for me,
but for the person
I never was.
I heard its promises as
I would want them.

I closed my mind
to the tracking sun,
knowing darkness
would take me,
the torment of
steps retraced.

I pursued my
necessity as the trees'
gold fringe rinsed from
their leaves.

Alone in the
darkness I paused
to consider advance or retreat.

There, I lost both trails,
and once again
the way was my own.