

BOOK ROCK

If all the used cooled blood gathered
in thick pools and became rock, organic
iron ore, and we mined it to forge steel,
girders and rolled plate would
buzz with dense anecdote like limestone
walls – warm stone, bonestone – inside,
a humming saunter still carrying on.

JOHN STEFFLER



NOTES ON BURNT CAPE

frost here causes the rock to boil – wedging ice into cracks, it splits stones smaller and smaller, then slips the melted wedges deeper in, spades the gravel up in rolling domes and rings

on the bare cape each erratic block has a wind shadow (pointing south-east) – pillow of tiny plants gripping an ancient silt loaf

trees in the form of mats or vegetation-spills grow their branches down among stones as though into air – double roots, sky and earth transposed



we become giant, must lie down to distinguish the parts
of trees – flowering crowns smaller than maple buds: the
botanists set magnifiers on legs over this world

giant, yet dwarfed – sea and sky stretching on to remote
horizons – your car, the road you followed, your
house, things you have to work to recall

sometimes braided into the muscle of wind are clear
ocean sounds – waves leisurely sloshing, thumping, gulls'
reedy pleas or high-pitched slow staccato – rolled past the
ear in an intact bubble

JOHN STEFFLER





CAPE NORMAN

bone turned to stone

prehuman Egypt, gods' jaws, lintels, upended stairs

shell grains in thin drifts

in a crevice, grass like a tuft of white

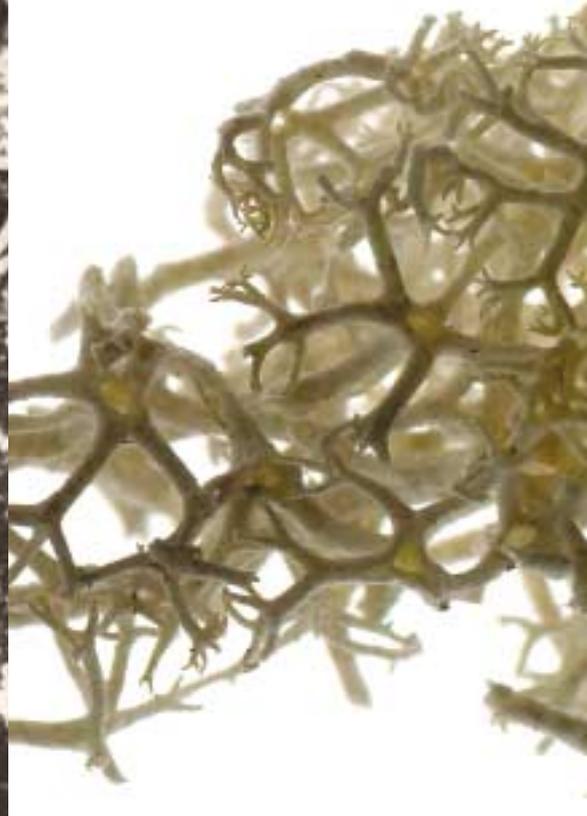
hairs, bobbing

pocked shards, corroded fists

worm script on the gods' grey chins

for five hundred million years every day *The Palaeozoic Times*
was delivered here, vast page piled on page, deaths, celebrities,
wealth, stratagems fused and fractured, I crawl on the lost
familiar text, nylon hood flapping my ear.

JOHN STEFFLER



BARRENS WILLOW

dumb giant, I have no words to fit what I find on Burnt Cape:
joints of a sprawled octopus-size tree, roots or
branches, lost in a moss-mound shrub, alder? bearberry?
its various kinds of leaves

or this end tree, the other shrub?

what looks like a driftwood stick – scrawny, barkless: I
reach to touch – is hard as a porcelain handle bolted down,
bone beads stuccoed into the somehow live grain

leaf puddle tree flush with the gravel it grows in, flayed
trunk shaved to a blade by wind

is the willow something the great gull of winter shat from
the sky? a splatter tree?



dry snake from a shadow opening leaves in the sun
or twisting away from wind behind a rock, filling
still space with green

follows philosophy rather than habit, needs
sun, water, nutrients, some way to anchor itself, adopts
any form to satisfy its requirements: trunk prone or upright,
tongue leaves or snipped rinds, limbs fountaining
or burrowing

flakes of their bodies blown across gravel
gather in drifts, beds where their own seeds
waken, feed

everything needs first of all something to hook to, a
seagull breast feather caught on a sedum stem, a father's
songs, a larch needle halts in the feather's lea, lichen
crumbs, moss dander sift in, a willow seed opens
a trunk of its mother's letters

THE ROLE OF CALCIUM
IN EVOLUTION

Sweet calcium we found we could live with,
stir into our cells' hubbub, tinker into
a trellis to carry our fierce red vine – its
eyeball blossoms, cunt orchids, cock orchids –
we could whittle it into stilts and paddles,
hooks, tongs, helmets, mallets, cleavers, awls,
rasps, rattles, tweezers, folding spokes,
but then, oh god the weight of all these contraptions!

just throw them out and be
light! while the old bone hardware clatters
down like Victorian claw-foot settees
settling in scrap heaps – the ear horns,



the spurs compressed in archaeological
files – we float careless as fruit flies
in an armoury, all the weight lifted, trala!
but the dark rock candy of history dissolves
in the rain, leaking the diatom's binary
code, the lobster's molecular gospel into
the water we drink. Sleepless we pour over
Things You Can Make with Calcium in cellular
Braille. As soon as you throw something away
you need the damn thing! Hinged pincers
down here somewhere under the catapults and
greaves. Tell me how else to deal with the world!

JOHN STEFFLER





WARM SHALLOW SEA

I am sifting down through shafts of light,
krill clouds glittering in the currents,
my smoothness, my hardness, my shield I have
dropped, opened my hand and let my money
fall, I am all smile, it is possible to be only
an open door, the whole sea running harmlessly,
genially through your eye holes, ear holes,
mouth, while the shield sinks down
and down, glinting, a turning silver
flake joining the deep litter, we can stretch
completely out in the long descent, pillowed
in glow, in the water's mouth, in the sweet
yellow intricate feathered moan

JOHN STEFFLER