

Preface

Among changes addressed in this revised edition are a shift in the scientific community away from believing only humans think and have feelings and growing disappointment that formal agreement failed to stop hydrocarbon pressures arising to bedevil the forest. Potentially powerful threats emerged in mid-2007, too late for examination in our book: Oil and gas promoters now suggest that the Pigeon's off-limits resources be exploited to provide inexpensive energy for environmentally friendly technologies like solar panels, which take much energy to make. Even though it would override protections long in place, the idea appealed to some in a state facing one of the most severe money crunches in the nation. "Every generation has to fight anew to protect the Pigeon and places like it," Ken Glasser, chairman of the Otsego County Board of Commissioners, said.

There are two new chapters, "Ecology" and "Animals and People," plus an afterword, "Presence." We solve the mystery of the dam spill. We describe how global warming will likely affect this forest. A richer understanding of life forms gives us a new perspective on why places like the Pigeon River Country are so special. We give additional emphasis to threats from overuse and how many of its qualities can be enjoyed in other natural settings.

This is not a book to stuff into your pocket for a trip to the woods. It's one to curl up with on a winter evening by the fire. Of course, some forest surroundings can enhance any book. The first time I saw Lewis Thomas's *Lives of a Cell* in a shop near my Philadelphia apartment, I dismissed it for some forgotten intellectual reason. After moving to the north woods, a friend sent me a copy, and I remember a wonderful afternoon spent leaning against a pine stump in the Pigeon River Country waiting with my camera for deer to step into a clearing and reading that the giant clam, if he had a mind to, might be dismayed that he has incorporated so much of the

plant world into his own complex clamhood while plant cells and algae might have tinges of conscience that it was they who had captured the clam on the most satisfying terms.

The forest is nearly a world apart from our normal experience. This book was first proposed as a guide to the Pigeon River Country but a more substantial concept soon emerged, reflecting a depth of affection for this forest impossible to ignore. The book is about Walter Babcock growing up in the Pigeon River Country and saying, “We took some schooling, missed a lot of it.” It is about Sam Titus and a herd of elk listening to Bach on her car radio. It is about spruces pointing into the sky and winterberries nestled in the snow.

In one sense, this is a regional history, full of colloquialisms and peculiarities of this precise place. In another sense, this book is about forests everywhere and about people going into them. It is a book of the heart, an examination of how the Pigeon River Country is meaningful.

A visit to the forest would be enriched by the use of field guides such as those listed in the bibliographic notes at the end of this book. A map is essential.

In 1995, Joe Jarecki, the Pigeon River Country unit manager, noted there was concern on the advisory council about the aesthetics of putting boardwalks where established pathways passed through sensitive wetlands. He cautioned that such concern for wild settings should not slip into making the Pigeon River Country “inaccessible to people, because people control the PRC’s destiny, and in our society, management strategies on public lands must ultimately be supported by the public, or they will eventually be overruled.” The aim, he said, must be to encourage uses that have the least impact possible and, at the same time, promote “a love and understanding of wild areas so there will be support to continue to manage the PRC as a wild area.” He said some access to wetlands, the most fragile places in the forest, is essential to providing people who are uncomfortable in wild areas the opportunity to experience them.

Inviting people to the remote forest has a certain irony since we run the risk of diminishing that which we would enjoy. We take the risk in the belief that what we encourage is a sensitivity that will, in turn, sustain and nurture our natural places.