

Wildcat Memories
(for Phil)

Two deer stop and stare
Then bound off white tails waving.
Down by the practice climb there's
Bear sign, purple with summer berries.
Orange newt with orange spots
Crosses the old dirt road,
Up on Wildcat two buzzards wheel,
Riding a fresh breeze on silent wings.

Here and there in the woods are strange structures:
Pole and rope, cord and cable, plank and cinder block
Are here to challenge youth, to teach teamwork.

As I wander these damp green woods
Memories flood back –
Jose in the trailer feeding crackers
To young raccoons.
Huddled by the winter fire with Vince, Alex and Paul,
Waiting for Phil to arrive,
The warm glow of kerosene tent heaters.

Dragging in the logs,
Learning the craft of shaping them
With adz and broad ax.
Making one match fires in the rain.
Billy cans and frying pans,
Snapper stew and pan bread.

Down by Beaufort Waters at dusk
To wait and watch the marsh hawk
Stoop to take her prey.

Students coming and going.
Load and unload the van.
Clean up, get ready for another group.
Young people learning – teachers too –
Tears and triumph, trauma and transcendence,
And laughter, always laughter.

Friends and lovers under the stars
At Wildcat Mountain.

Felice Pace
August 2005
At Wildcat Mountain Wilderness Center