

SANCTUARY

In memory of Henry Beetle Hough and Elizabeth Bowie Hough

You look up and the oak has spaces of blue between the cool leaves, and shadows from the leaves above, but unlike a landscape designer who might insist rooms, you see parcels expanding as the branches sway, spandrels of leaves touching the fields and receding, stirring still places you could attain, pure existences, drawn to the openings, the forms in motion, revealing a swaying sanctuary in the air, admiring what is pure, untouched. A mossy tree limb fastens the horizon.

Easy miles of trails, beach grass and highbush blueberry, sweet pepperbush, purple of the wild pea, meadows in fall, snow on a frozen field where a red-tail circles. From an ice pond and John Butler's mudhole, carpaths of pine needles, walkers in deep shade, under a sky coaxing hawkweed and daisies. Land holds us. Finding this mission, at the headland, a balance in the wind as rocks and water and shore collide and hold. Catbird on broken twigs A nuthatch sliding down a trunk.

It remains, it must remain, walking past aster and bluets, footbridge to silence, preserving entrances, release— an osprey surveys the salt marsh. Stings of exhilaration, a white-tailed deer crashing through huckleberry. Each achieved restriction an addition. Each gift a gift that moves through bending grasses, that moves through hollow logs, rain on the wild pear, lady's slippers. We breathe, we see, fifty years of protecting the wild from Isaiah Pease's meadow to Obed Daggett Rd.

Dense loam clinging to our hands, soul of the hills we travel, leaf and shell and bark purified, charged elements, ancient smell of kaolin and lichen, process through stalk and root, relentless push, a pure force through teeming soil, nature's surge of driven beauty.