# KOKORO

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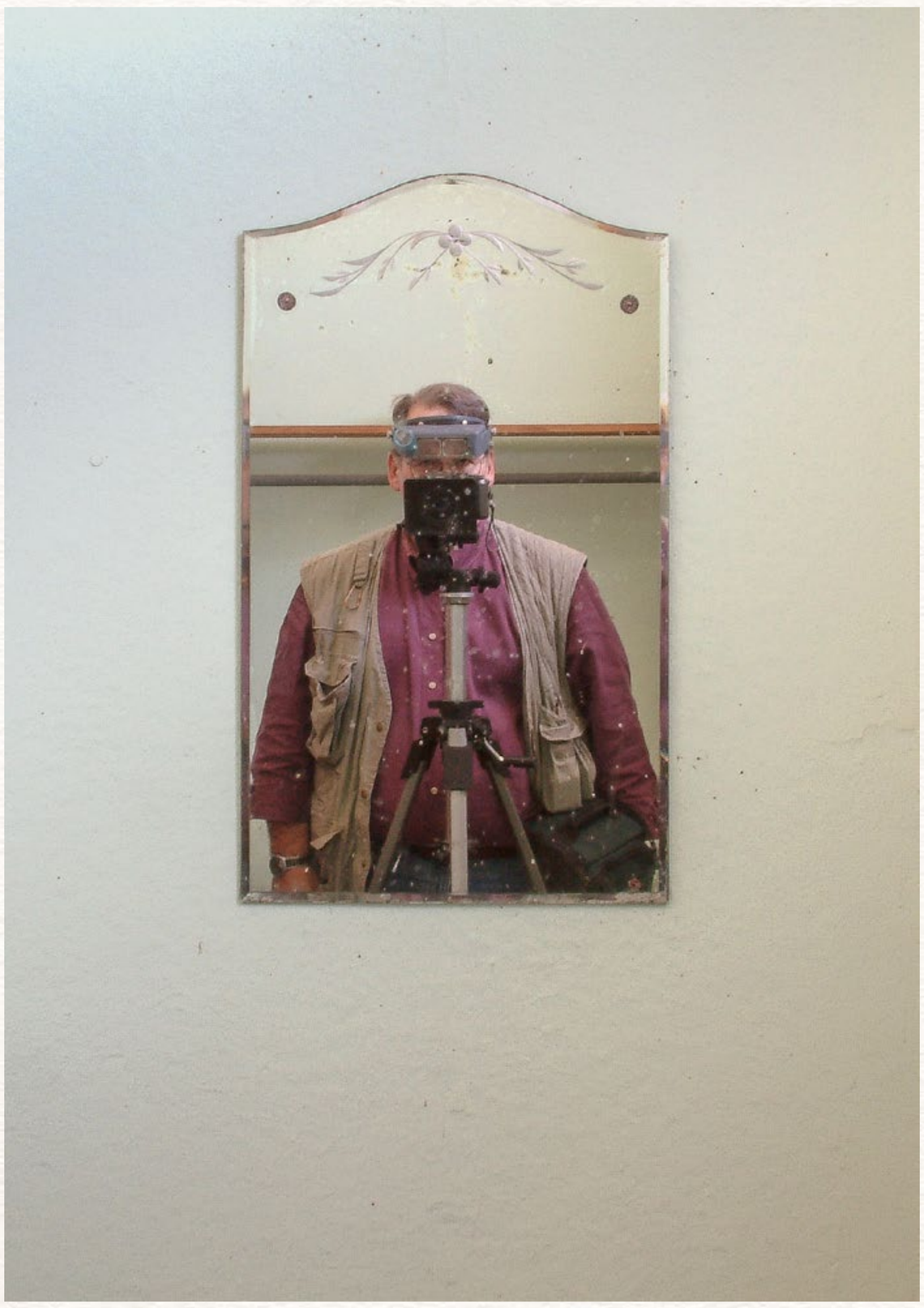
# KOKORO

## *Wandering Through a Photographic Life*

*An Image Journal*
*with Commentary, Meditation, Philosophy,*
*and Unanswered Questions*

*Brooks Jensen*



Perhaps Lafcadio Hearn will not protest too much if I paraphrase (almost word for word) from *Kokoro*, his 1895 book of Japanese life. He explains this important Japanese term far better than I ever could:

"The entries comprising this volume treat of the inner rather than the outer life, — for which reason they have been grouped under the title *Kokoro* (heart). Written with the above character, this word signifies also *mind*, in the emotional sense; *spirit; courage; resolve; sentiment; affection;* and *inner meaning*, — just as we say in English, 'the heart of things.'"

# *In This Issue*



Between a two-week family vacation, followed by a week ill with a viral infection, this month's *Kokoro* includes only these three chapters. Such is life.

# TENSLEEP

## *A Few Memories from My Youth*

J Brooks Jensen

*A Brooks Jensen Arts Publication*

The first photograph from my first ever roll of film. This is my maternal grandmother, Pauline Thompson, standing outside the log cabin in which she lived, in Tensleep, Wyoming. She was 59 years old; I was 10. I've been a photographer ever since, and it started this day, with this first roll of film.

**When I was a boy,** we used to visit my Grandma at her log cabin house in the little town of Tensleep at the base of the Big Horn Mountains in Wyoming. She told us Tensleep got its name when the Indians camped in the valley on their way to the Big Horn Mountains to hunt. This spot was "ten sleeps" away from their home.

**When I was a boy,** we'd visit my Grandma in Tensleep and I'd play for hours with her collection of salt and pepper shakers. She kept them behind big glass doors in a cabinet in the corner. I especially remember the miniature toaster set, where the white bread salt shaker and the brown bread pepper shaker would pop up just like real toast. I'd play with them for hours, fascinated by their mimicry of real life. She had dozens of shaker sets in that cabinet, but now the toast set is the only one I remember. There were five holes on the top of each piece of toast.

**When I was a boy,** we'd visit my Grandma in Tensleep where it was a thrill to walk to the corner store at the end the block. She'd give my brother and me a nickel and we'd spend it on a balsa wood airplane with a rubber band engine, a propeller, and wheels. We'd launch it off Grandma's side porch. A good flight would take off, gain speed, climb up over the yard and the fence, sail over the dirt road and land in the cow pasture on the other side of the road. Then we'd dare each other to see who would brave the cow with horns to retrieve it. If the cow was too close, we'd call Grandma and she would come out and rescue the plane for us.

**When I was a boy,** we'd visit my Grandma in Tensleep and I couldn't wait to wake up in the morning so I could

have breakfast. Grandma would make bacon and eggs, hash browns, and toast for older folks. But the kids' breakfast was waiting on the top of her refrigerator — the most wonderful, the most exquisite, the most fabulous breakfast a boy could ever want — pre-sweetened cereal. Even while I hugged her hello as we arrived, I'd look over her shoulder to the top of the refrigerator to see what she had there waiting for me. I ate Sugar Pops, Cocoa Puffs, Cocoa Rice Krispies, and Sugar Smacks — all the wonderful cereals my mother would never let me eat at home. Grandma would not only let me eat it, but she'd join us kids and have some, too, and laugh the loudest and call me "stick-in-the-mud."

**When I was a boy,** we'd visit my Grandma in Tensleep and eat chokecherry preserves until our tongues turned purple. We'd eat chokecherry jam and chokecherry jelly, and especially chokecherry syrup on our pancakes and home-made ice cream. Grandma made strawberry and blackberry and raspberry, too, but those I can buy in the store now. Only *she* made chokecherry. To this day, I'm not sure what a chokecherry is, but it's one of my favorite flavors in the world.

**When I was a boy,** we'd visit my Grandma in Tensleep and look forward to the Independence Day parade down main street. To me, the Fourth of July was not a patriotic event. It was an odor. It was horses and the fresh manure they'd deposit right on the hot asphalt of the only oiled road in town. It was burnt firecrackers and the smoke from firework "snakes" and sparklers. It was the odor of hot dogs and leather, dust and snow cones, sagebrush and hay, tractor exhaust and cotton-wood trees. My nose worked so much better then, than it does now.

**When I was a boy,** we'd visit my Grandma in Tensleep and blast tin cans forty feet into the air with a firecracker. We'd throw cherry bombs at cats and cars and, of course, at each other until Mom made Dad yell at us. Then he'd go inside and we'd start all over again. We played this game of parental discipline so many times there was no doubt Dad knew exactly what we were doing. He had to save face and make it look like he protested, but his eyes said he wished he could join us.

**When I was a boy,** we'd visit my Grandma in Tensleep and eventually they'd make me take a bath, usually on the night before we left for home. I'd lay in the hot water and smell Ivory soap and listen to the crickets under the house beneath the bathroom floor. I'd hear my parents, and my Aunt Etna and Uncle Lee out in the living room shuffle the cards for another round of pinochle and laugh and reminisce. Occasionally, during a lull in the conversation, I could hear the moths fly headlong into the front porch screen or the cow moo from across the street. Every so often my Mom would yell, "You OK in there, honey?" She was always afraid I'd drowned. I'd say, "Yeah, I'm just in here washing," but mostly I was just listening. I'd stay in there so long I'd come out all pruney.

**When I was a boy,** we'd visit my Grandma in Tensleep and for some reason, even though we opened and closed the screen door carefully, there'd always be a covey of moths flying around the house. Grandma called them "millers." They'd cluster around the light bulbs at night and blindly bang into them. Sometimes they'd hit the bulb too hard, burn, die, and fall to the floor. Everyone would go on talking like nothing

had happened. The dead body would lie there on its back, still and fuzzy and lifeless. This minute drama of life and death would play out right before me and I'd watch in complete amazement. In the morning, almost by magic, the dead bodies would be gone and no one would mention them.

**When I was a boy,** we'd visit my Grandma in Tensleep and before bed, she'd let me wind up the Big Ben alarm clock she kept by her bed in her room next to the bathroom. It would tick so loudly I could hear it in the back room where my brother and I slept next to the wood stove and the preserves. I'd listen to the clock tick and think of it there on the nightstand next to the glass containing her teeth. Then I'd shiver, thinking of them, and roll over and try desperately to go back to sleep, letting the clock and the crickets overpower me until I couldn't keep my eyes open.

**When I was a boy,** we'd visit my Grandma in Tensleep and sometimes she'd tell me stories. At the end of her bed was a free standing "closet" made of rough cut timber and a cloth curtain in place of a door. She kept round, flowered hat boxes in the space between the top of this closet and the ceiling. She never did wear a hat that I could remember, but inside these boxes she kept the most special treasures from her life. She'd pull down a hat box and open the lid slowly and deliberately. Then she'd bring out scraps of cloth or an odd glove, a newspaper clipping or an old coin and tell me a story about it. I can still hear the sound of her voice and see the faraway look in her eyes as she rubbed the treasure between her fingers as though the memories were in there and she had to rub to get them to come out.

**When I was a boy,** we'd visit my Grandma in Tensleep and she'd take us to the hardware store where she worked and let us look at the magical things there were for sale. She'd spread oil and sawdust on the wooden plank floor and then sweep up the mixture and make the air smell sweet and pine. While she worked, I'd fall entranced by a new cowboy hat, a rubber knife or tommyhawk, a wooden gun, or a yo-yo. I tried on the leather belts with Indian bead work forming the word "Tensleep" or "Cowboy" or "Indian" woven into the pattern with different colored beads. I learned greed in that store. I also learned the joy of finally getting something you'd longed desperately for — for as long as a week.

**When I was a boy,** we'd visit my Grandma in Tensleep and spend long afternoons exploring the wonders of nature. We were too young to be impressed with grand vistas, national parks, scenic viewpoints and all the things that were supposed to impress us. We'd look at weeds and seeds, snakes and frogs, and trees, especially the ones whose limbs were spaced just right for climbing. We loved turning over rocks in the river or scooping up jars of excitement and wonder from the ditch in front of Grandma's house. We were fascinated by grasshoppers and beetles. Potato bugs were a favorite and we wished we could roll up into a protective ball to hide from each other's squirt guns and foxtail darts. Centipedes, inch worms, caterpillars, or anything with slime would entertain us for hours. The more a creature looked like it couldn't exist, the more we were fascinated that it did.

**When I was a boy,** we'd visit my Grandma in Tensleep and go fishing in the creek on the far side of the cow field across the dirt road. If we didn't have a fishing pole, we'd find

a tree branch, tie on a line with a hook on the end and then roam the field, searching for bait. We would catch grasshoppers until our pockets were full of them. Fish just can't resist the taste of a fresh grasshopper. They were decidedly too crunchy for my taste. (It's difficult to resist a dare from one's older brother.) We'd tramp to the creek bank, cast in our squirmy grasshoppers, and have dinner within an hour. We'd mostly catch German browns and brook trout and even an occasional rainbow. Then we'd string them through the gills onto a y-shaped twig and march back triumphant and hungry.

**When I was a boy,** we'd visit my Grandma in Tensleep and watch the seeds from the cottonwood trees come down like a summer snow. They'd blanket the dirt road with a puff so thick we'd have to use our handkerchiefs to cover our mouths to avoid breathing them down into our throats as we ran through the downpour. We laughed so hard, and ran so hard, and threw rocks so hard, and played and lived so hard. We didn't know we were young. We didn't know we were lucky. But, we did know we were *alive*, and it felt great.

~


*Thanks, Grandma, for the wonderful memories.*

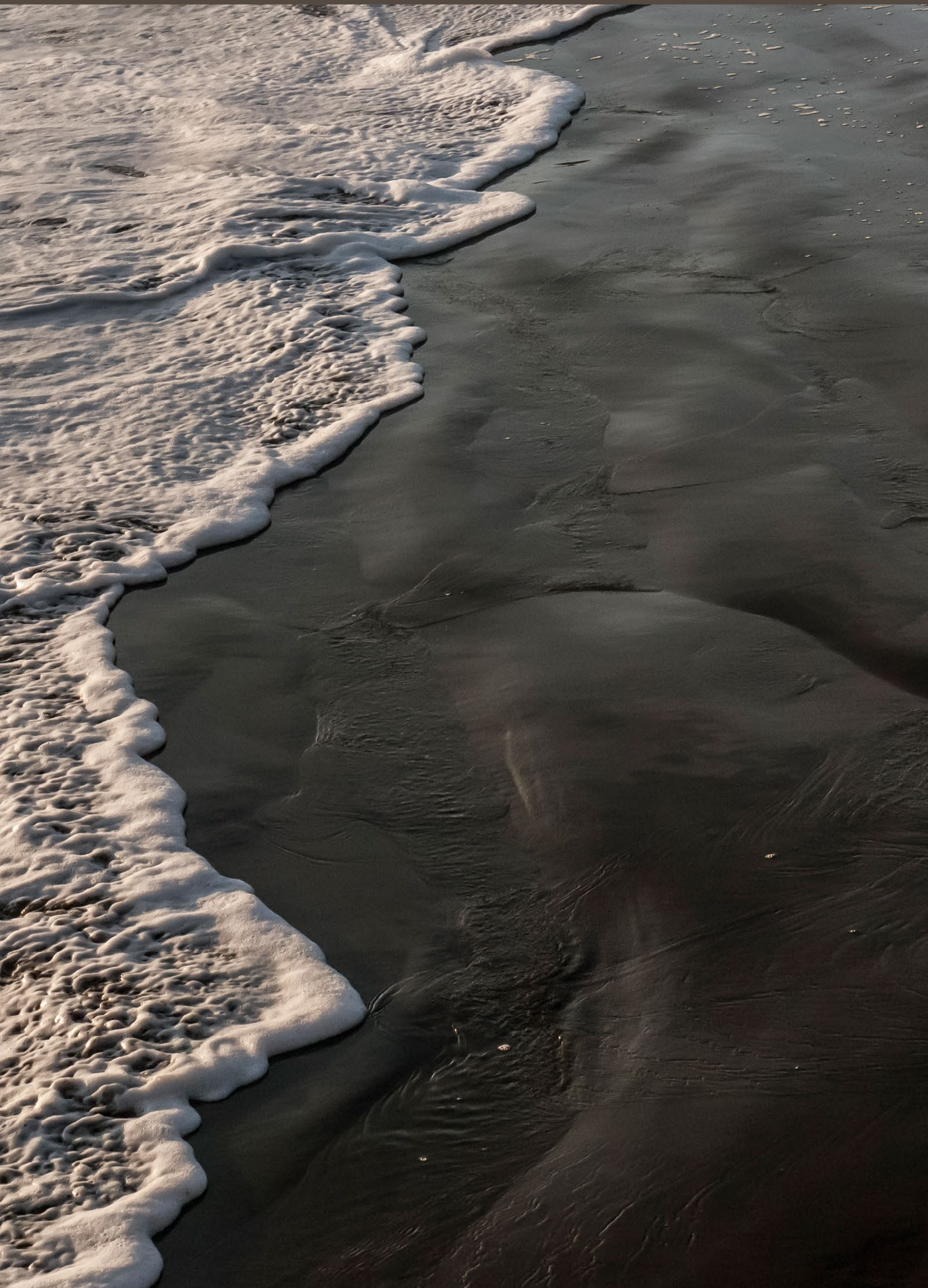
# The Water Planet

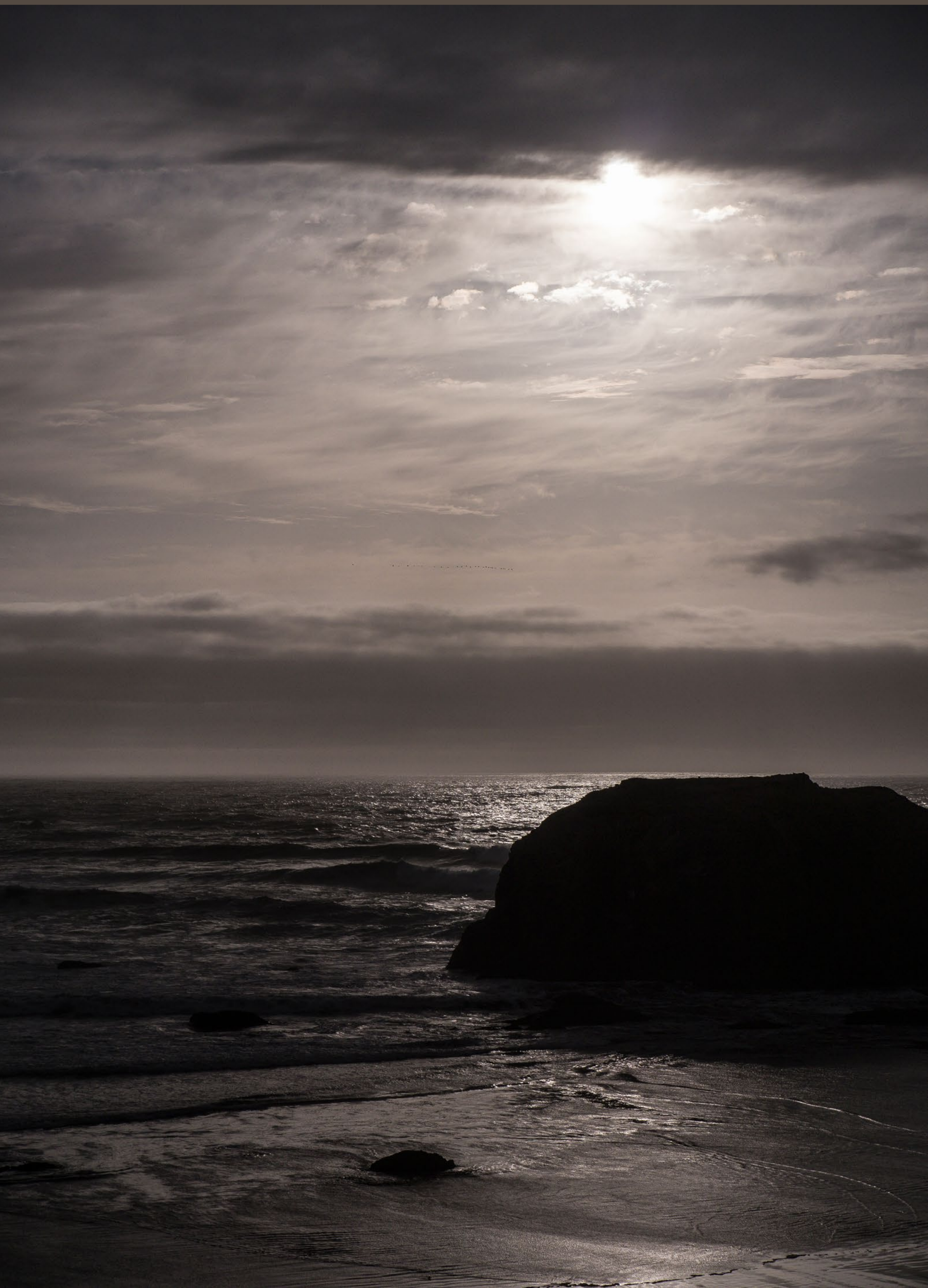
J Brooks Jensen

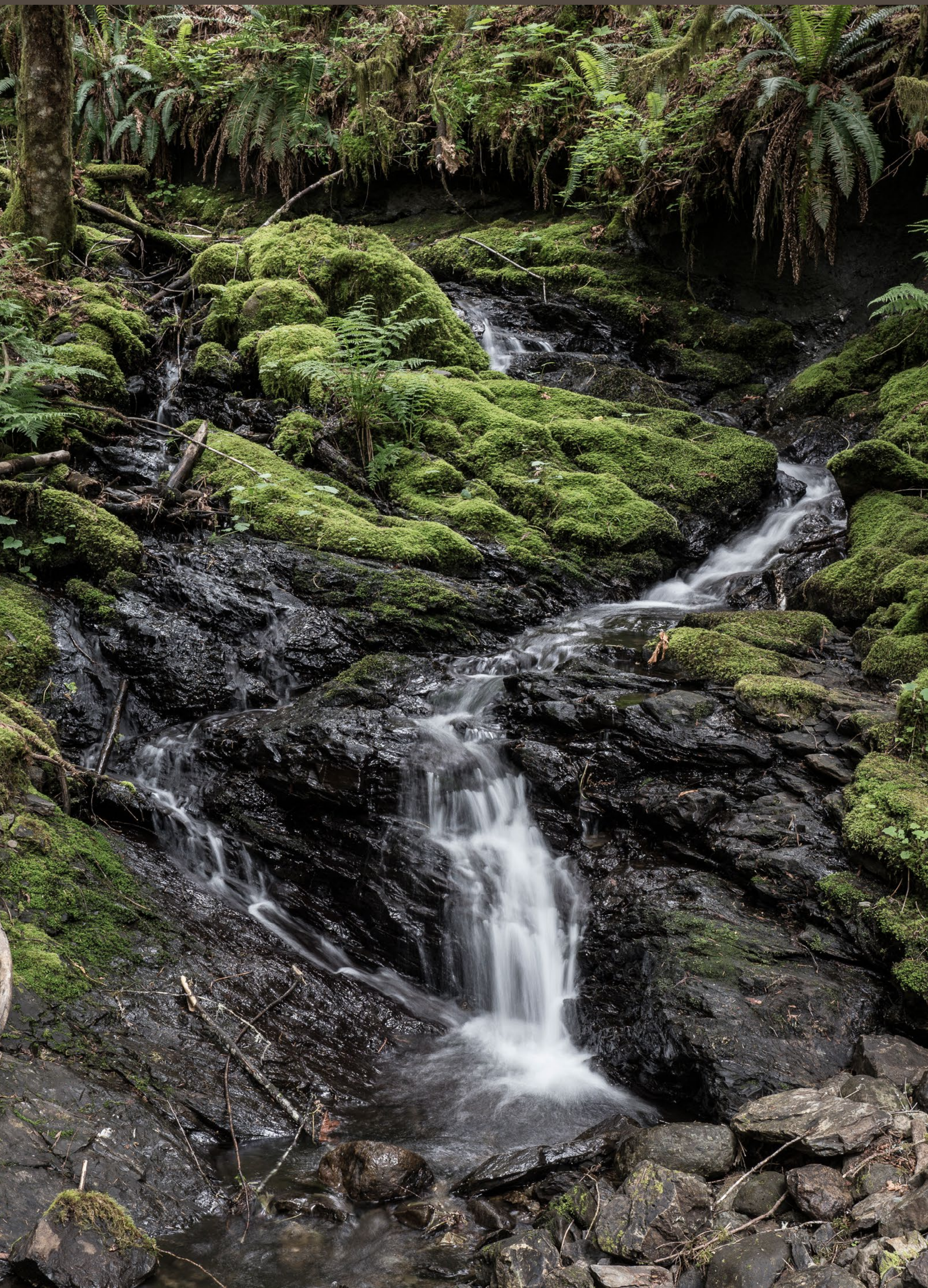
*A Brooks Jensen Arts Publication*

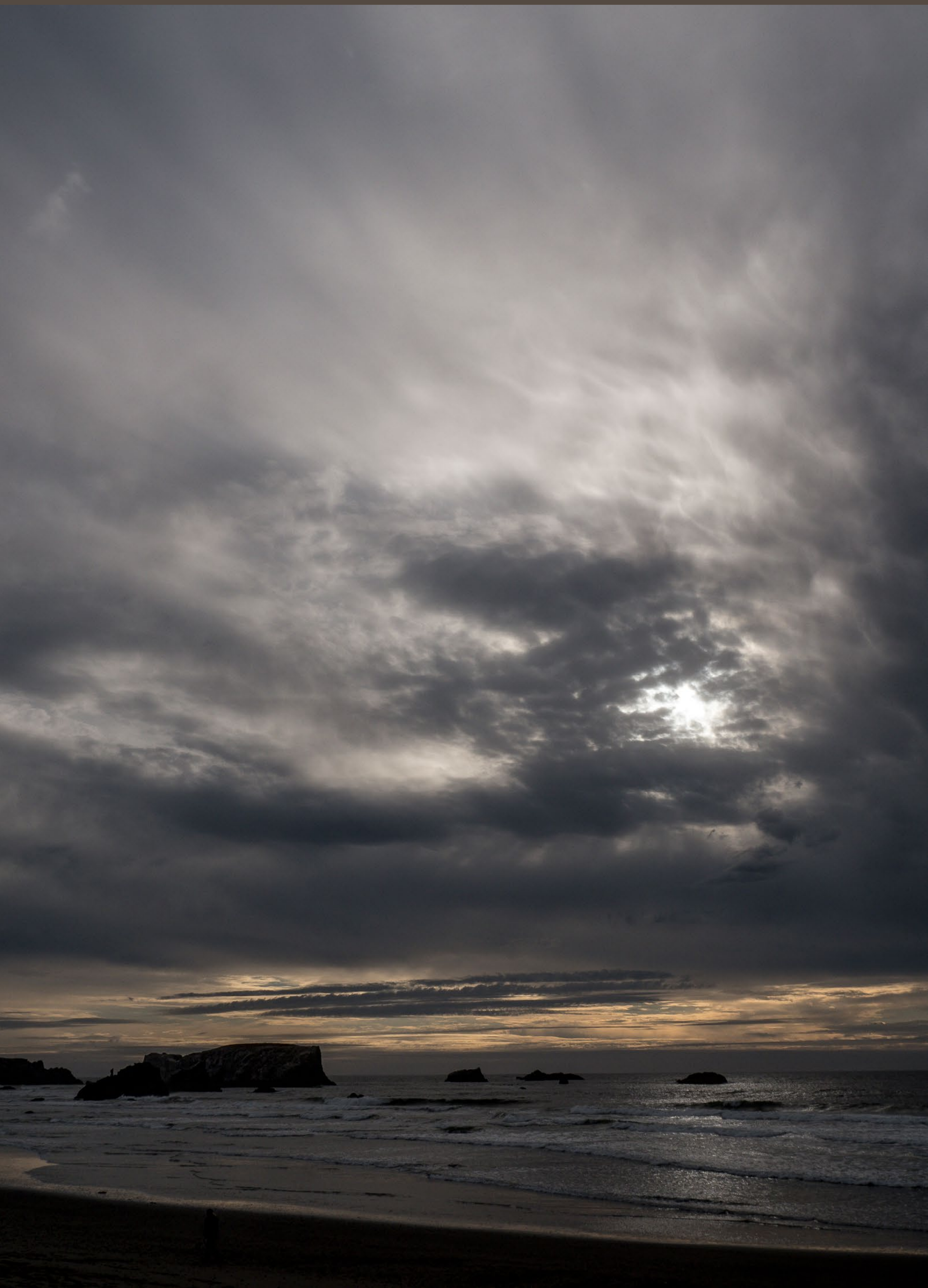
**There has** been much news of late from other worlds — Mars, Saturn, Mercury, Venus and the latest just this week from Pluto. Great scientific and technological accomplishments, indeed, but all of those worlds pale in comparison to our magnificent watery planet.

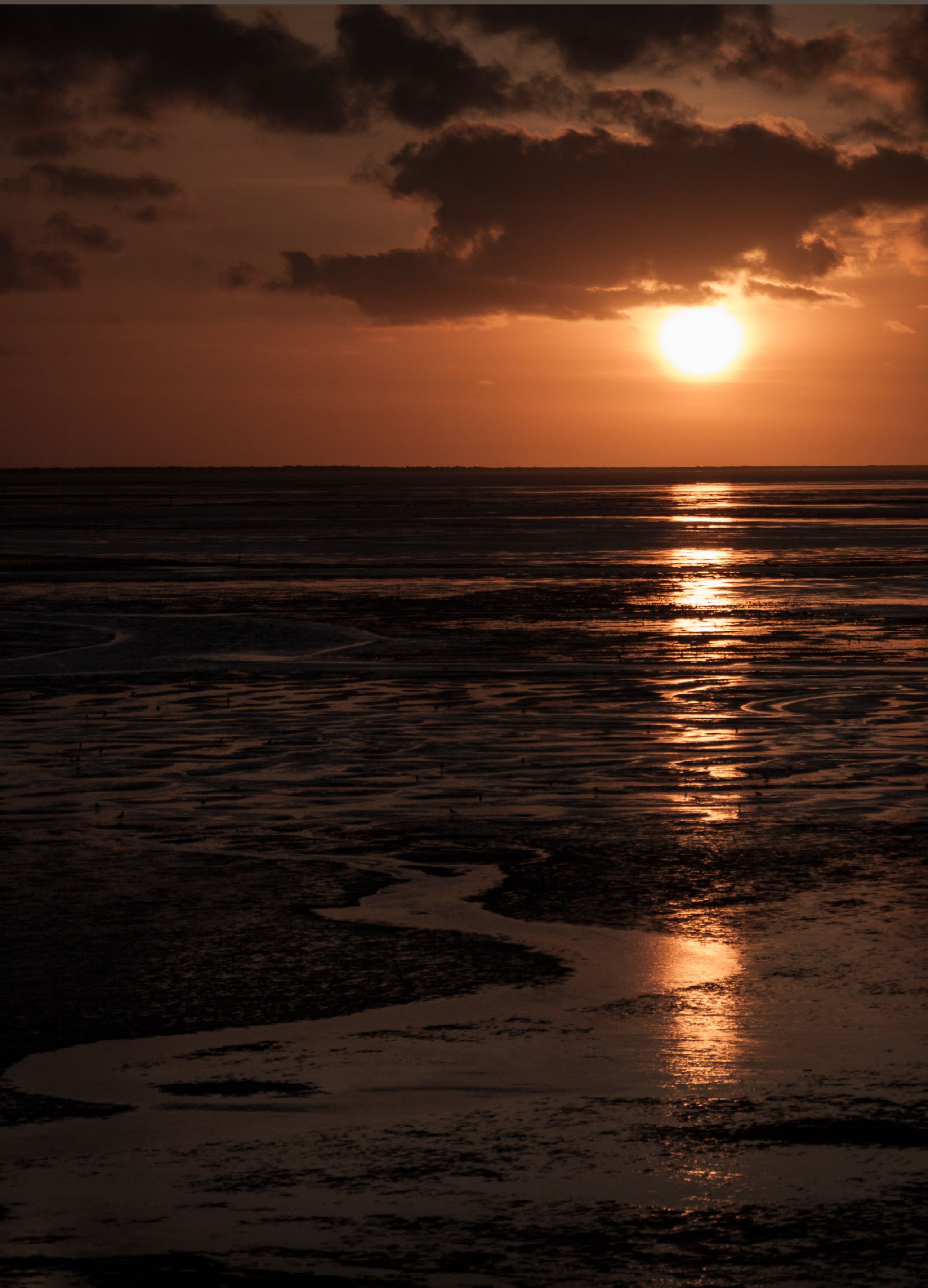
That simple molecule of oxygen and hydrogen that comprises some 71% of the Earth's surface and well over half of you and me. No wonder we are so powerfully compelled to the water's edge — the river, the pond, the seashore. Creek, lake, estuary, wetland, puddle, ocean — how many words we have for this watery world in which we live! Of course, being named "Brooks," I might be a bit prejudiced.

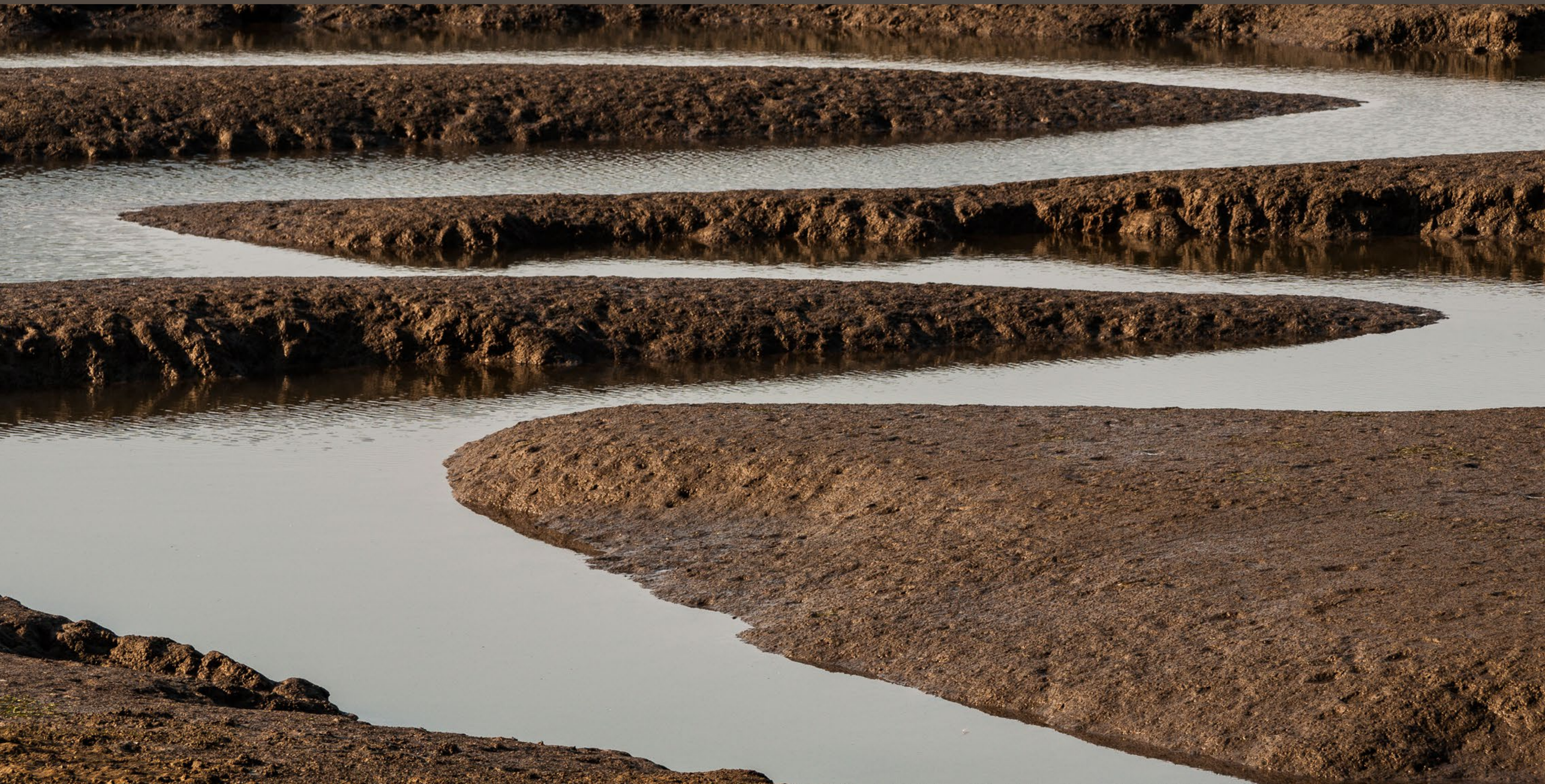


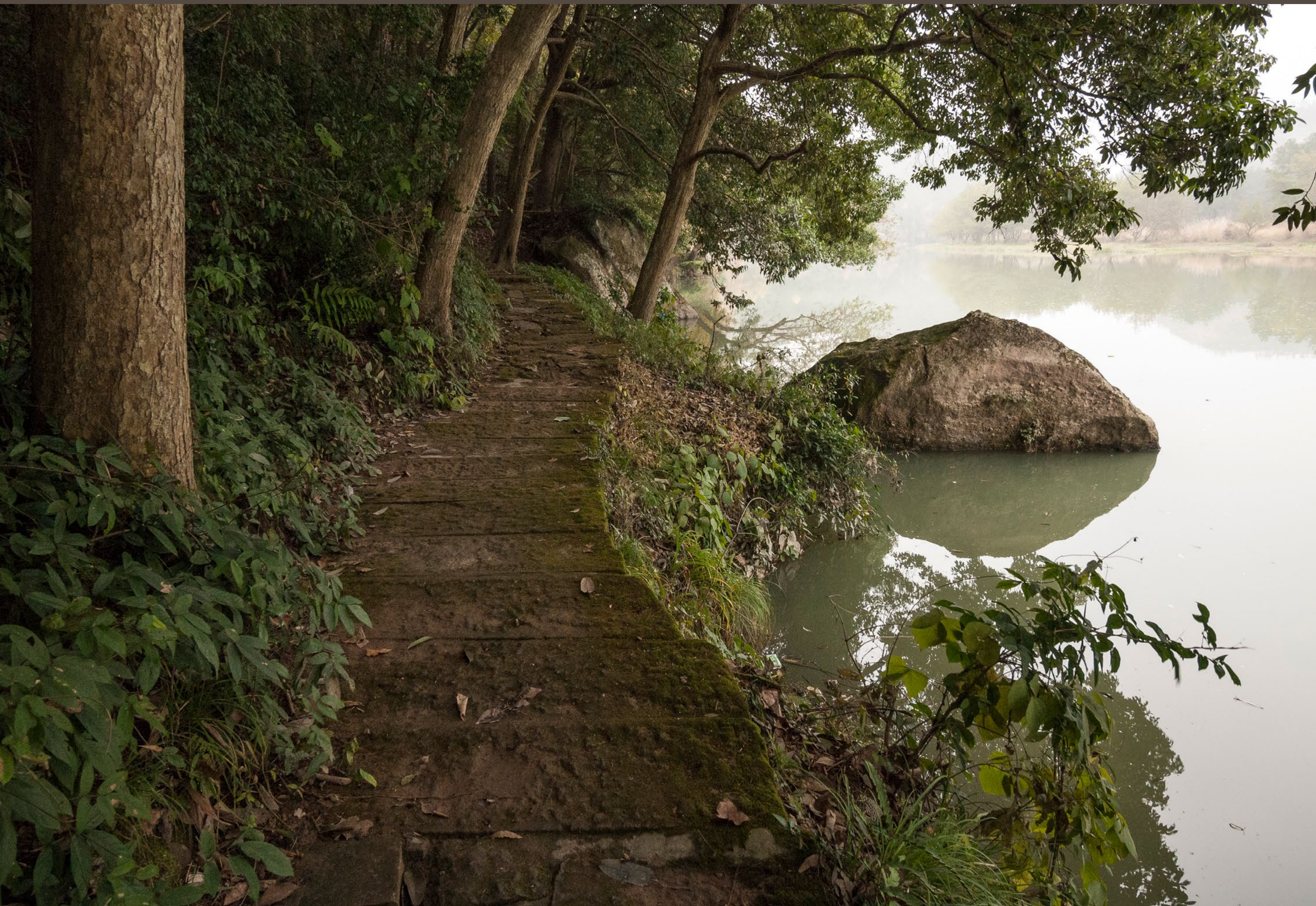


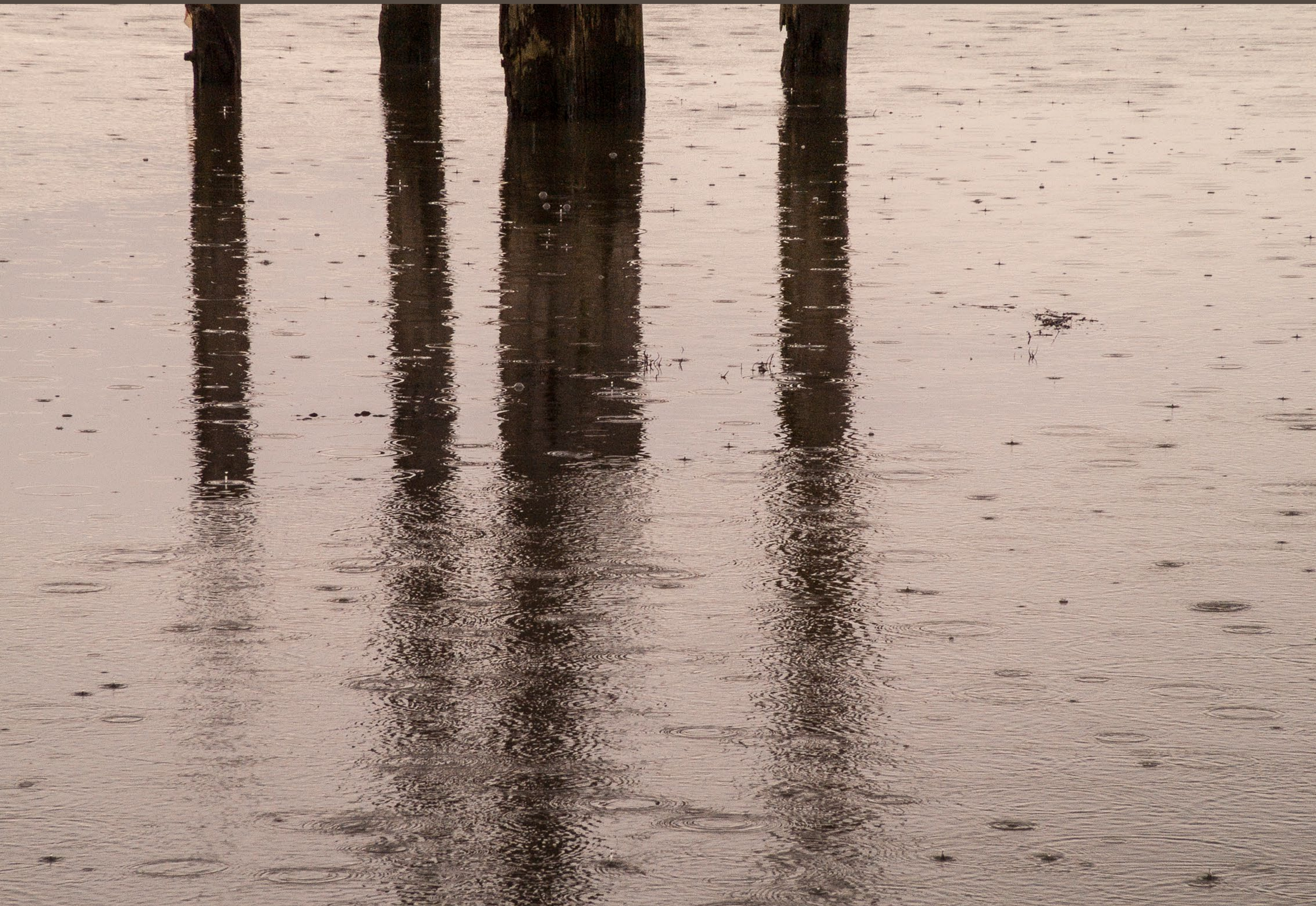


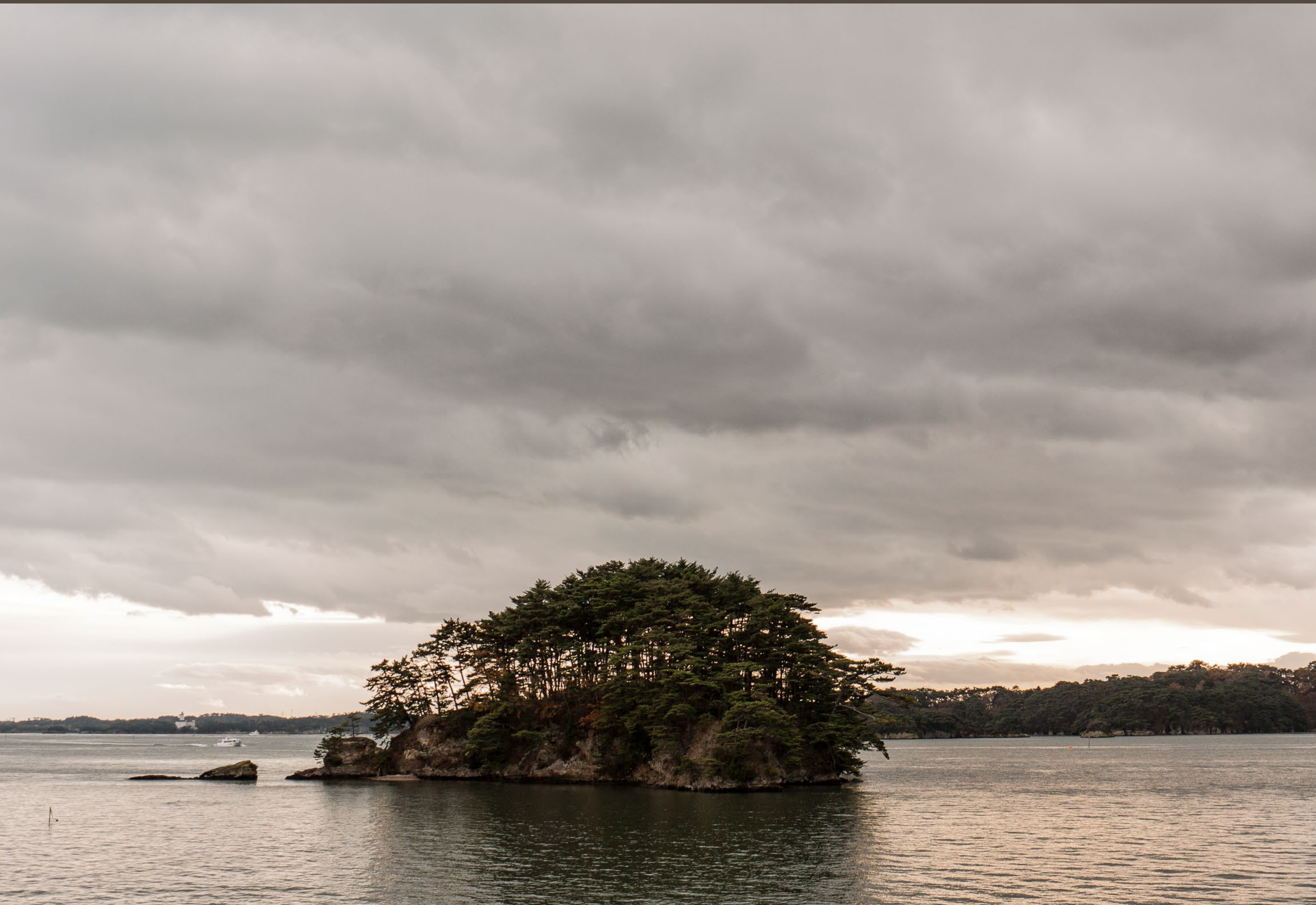


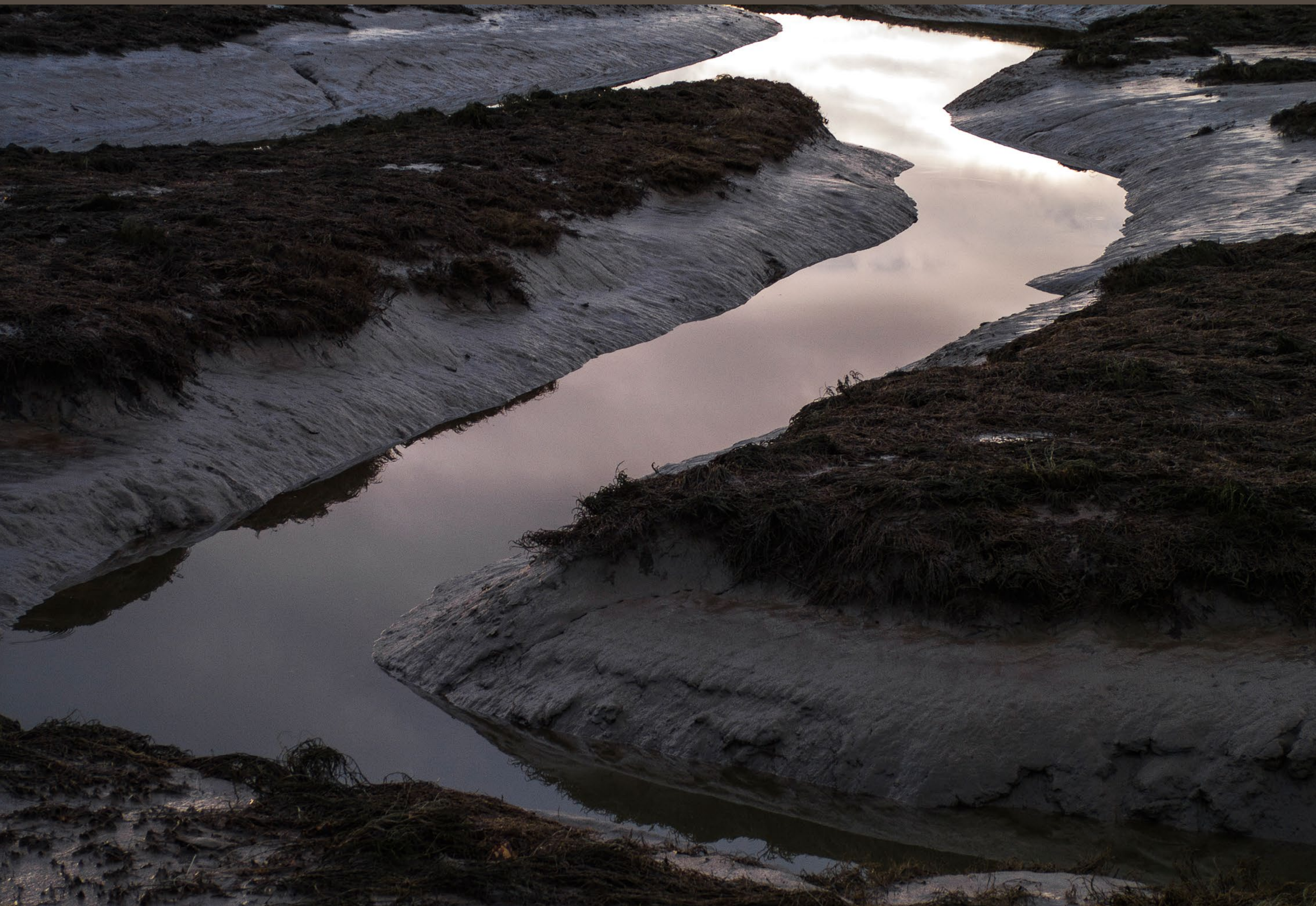


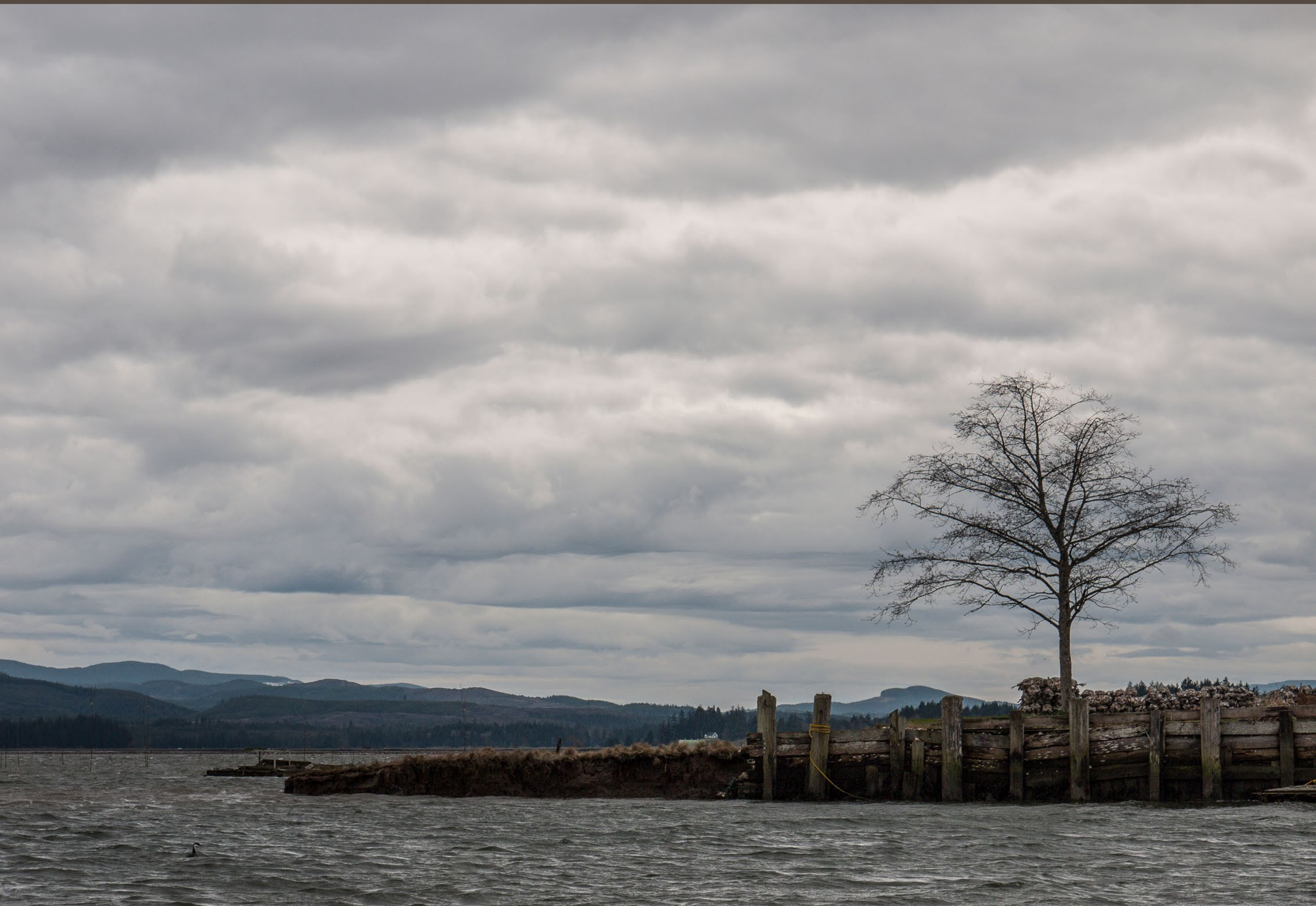


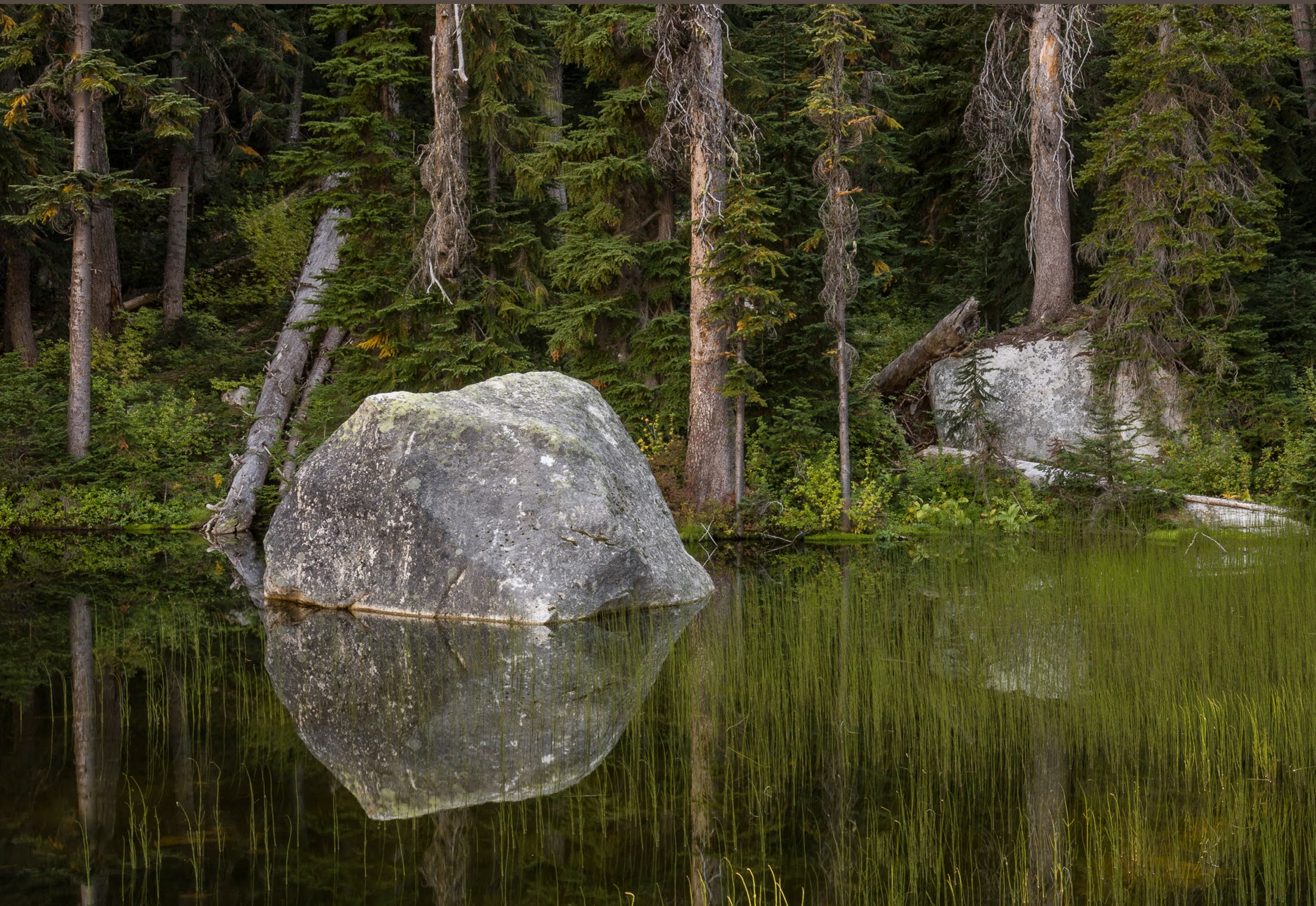




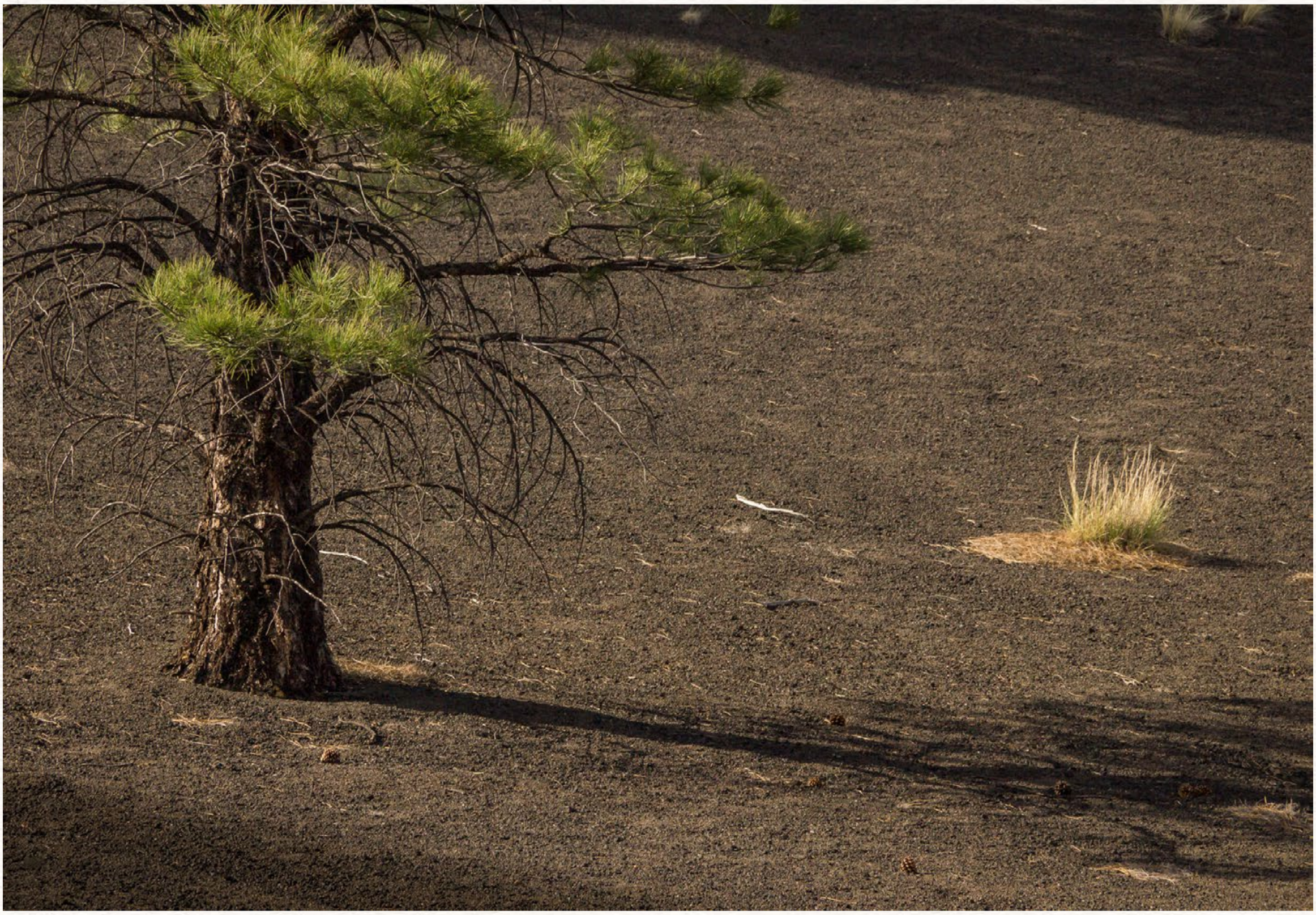






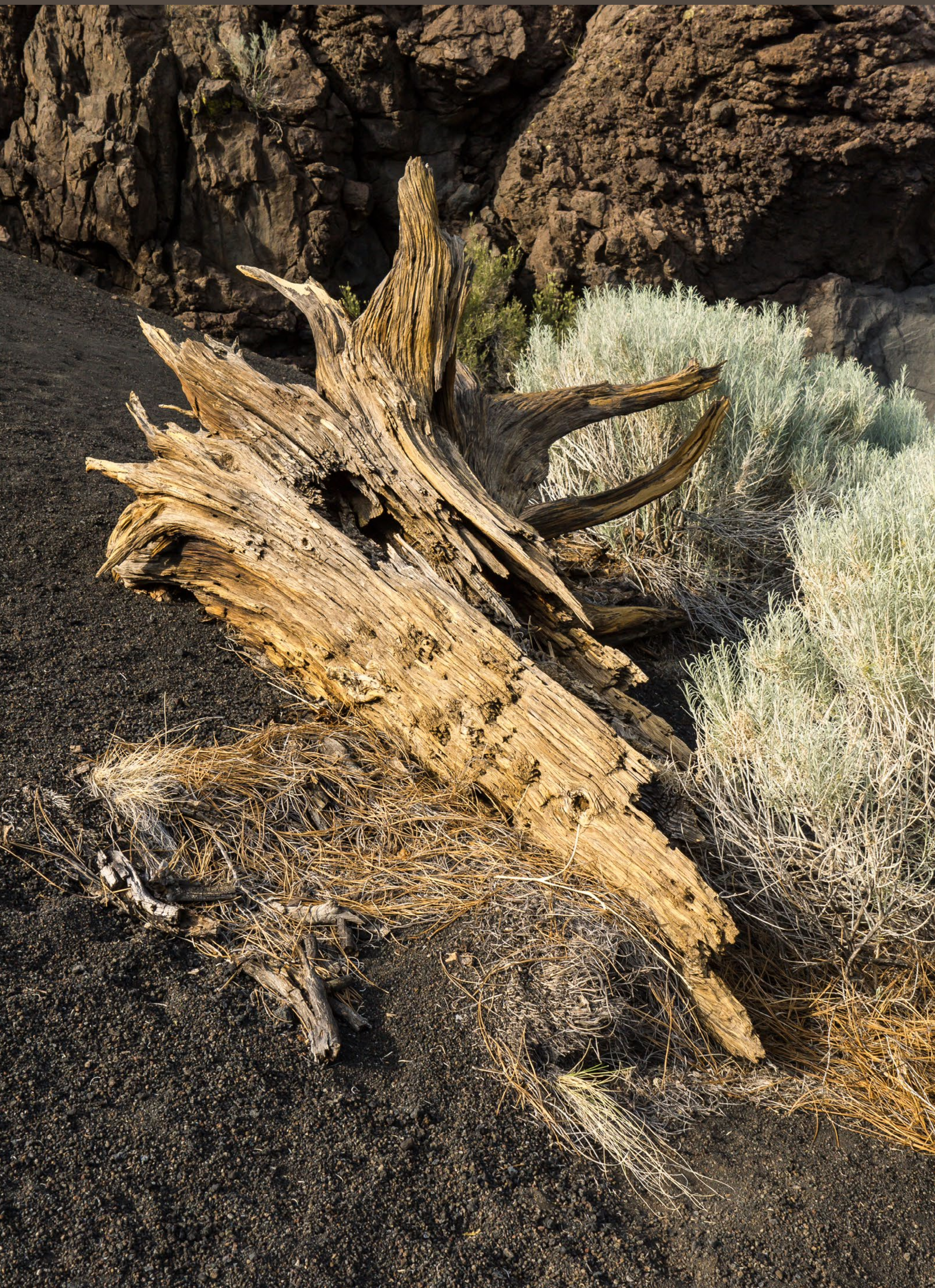


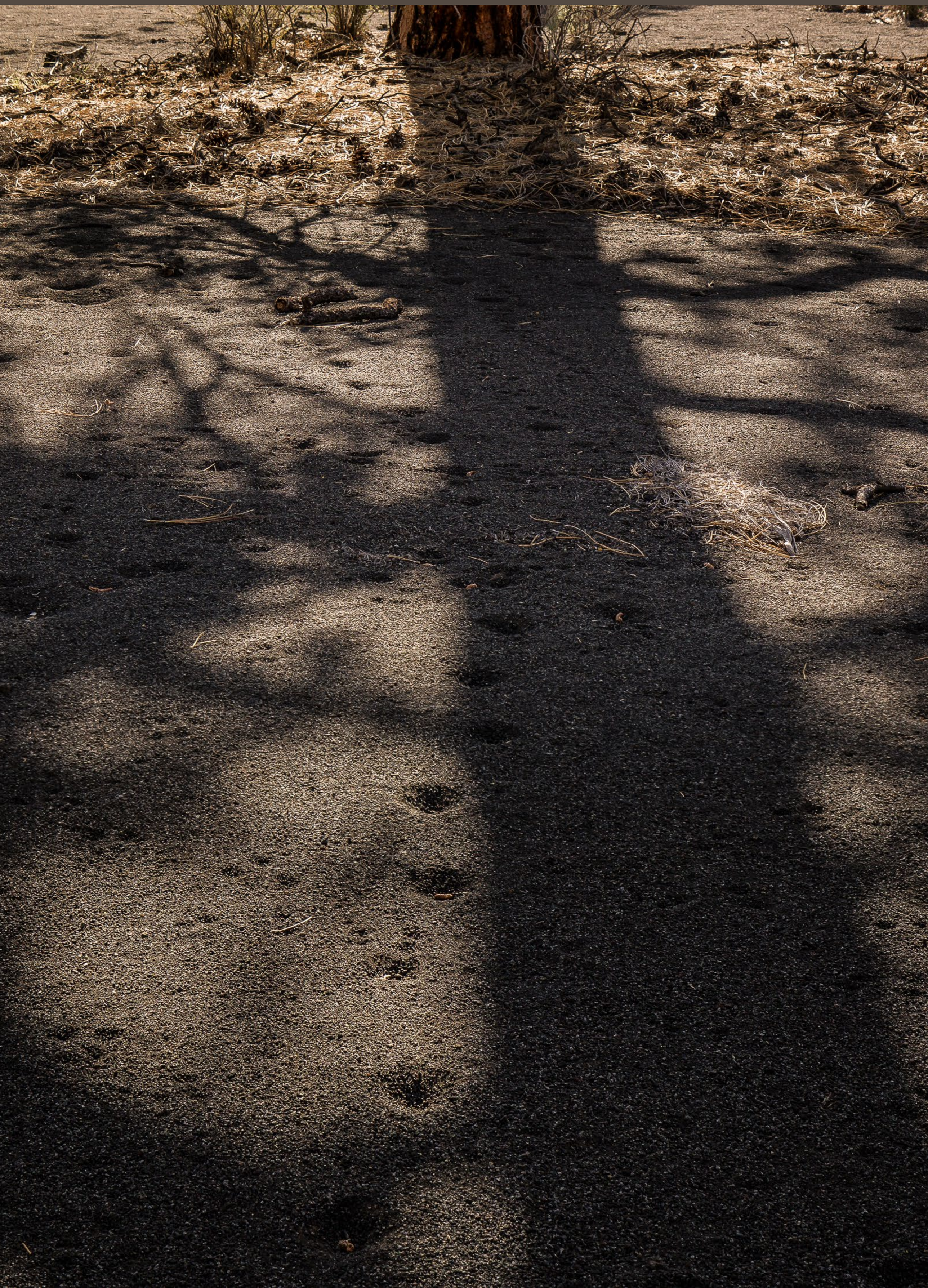
# CINDER & PINE

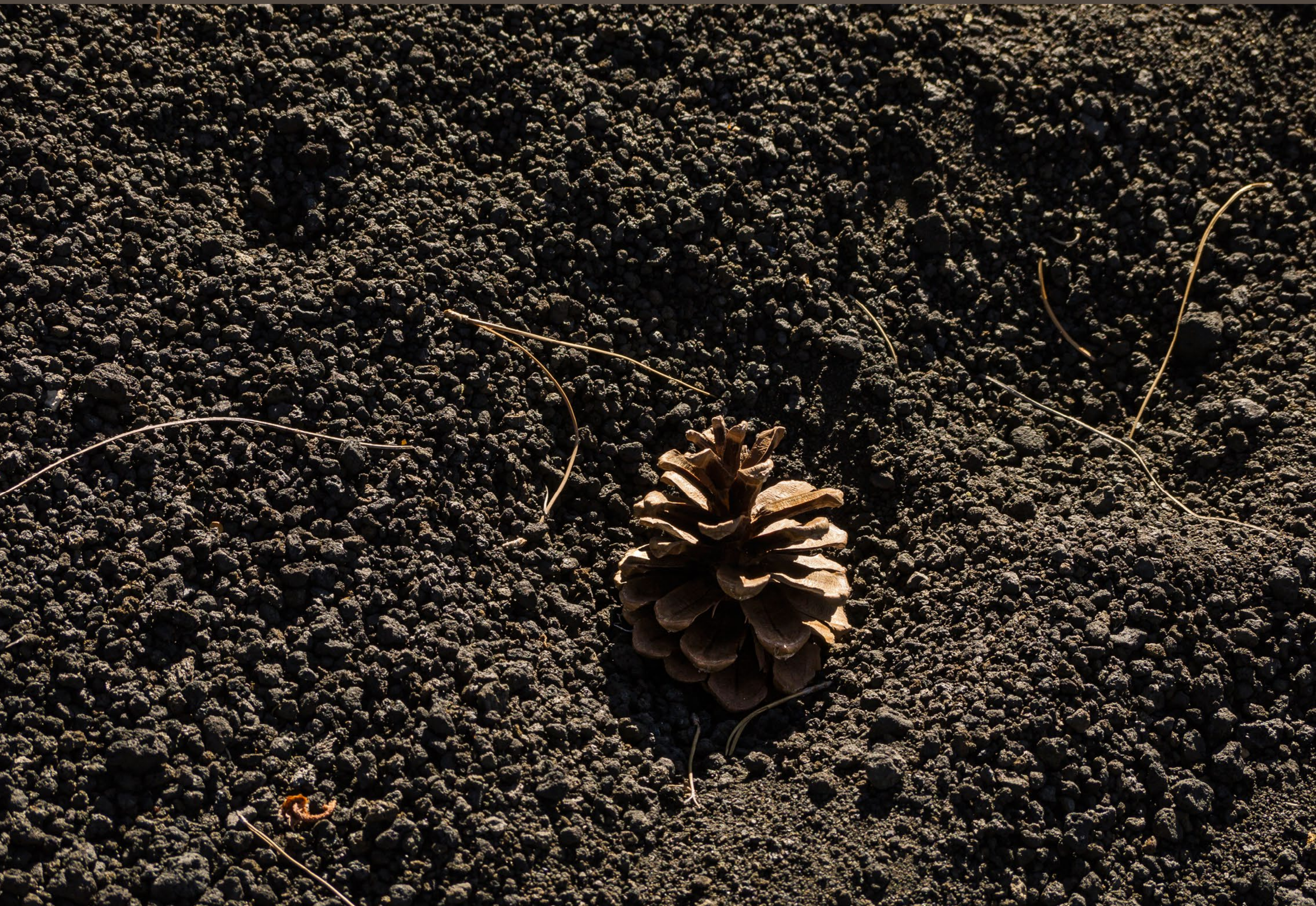


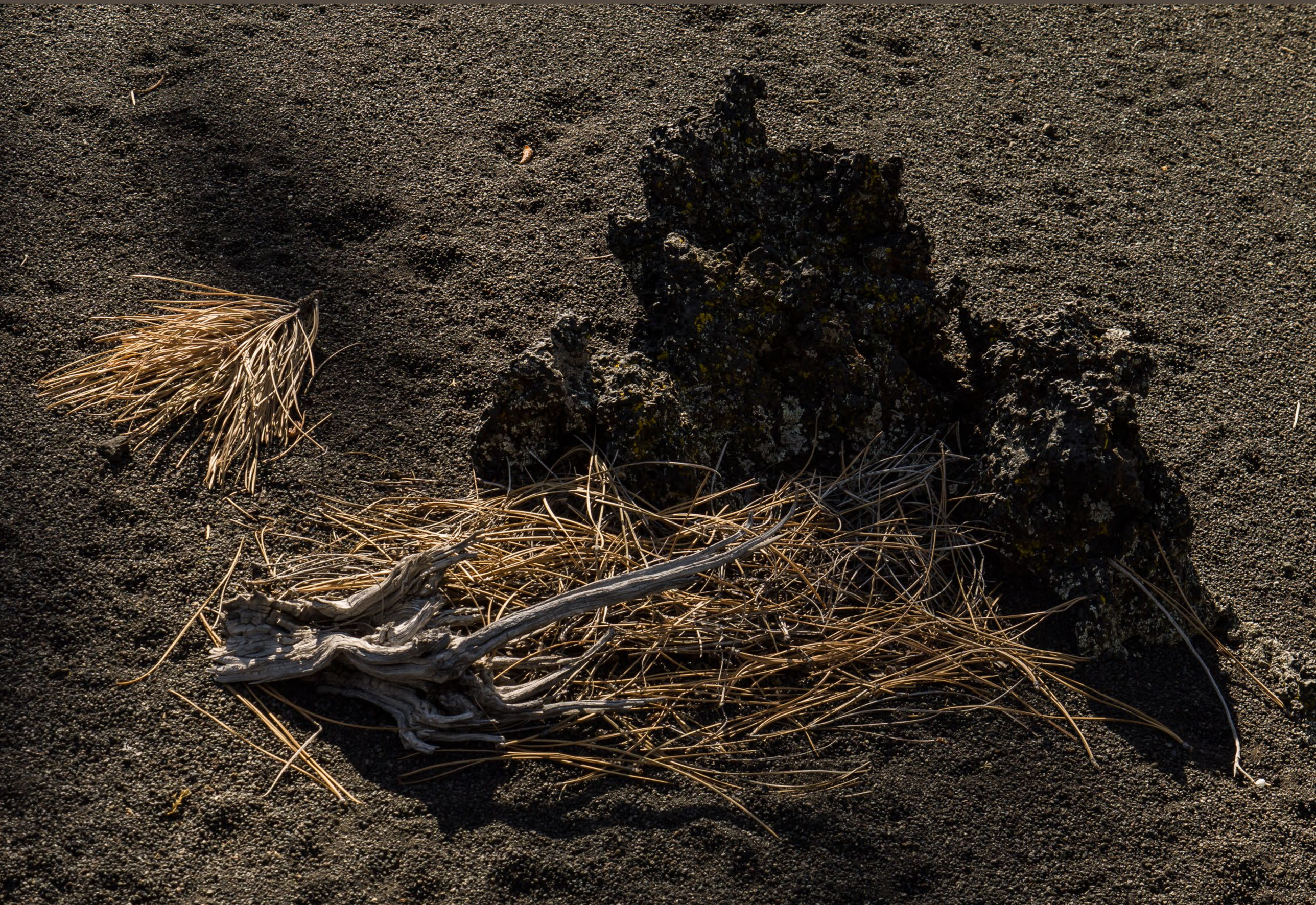
*A Brooks Jensen Arts Publication*

**Some things** just go together — peaches and cream. When I first saw the vast cinder cone of Sunset Crater, it seemed a perfect fit that it would be home to a pine tree, here and there. Cinder and pine, like waves on the ocean.









# Support the artist!

For over 30 years, Brooks has shared his photographic lessons, failures, inspiration, creative path — and more than a few laughs. If you've enjoyed his free *Kokoro* PDFs publications, or been a long-time listener to his free audio commentaries (his weekly podcast *On Photography and the Creative Life*, or his daily *Here's a Thought* commentaries), here is your chance to tell him how much you appreciate his efforts. Support the artist!

Choose whichever level of support fits your appreciation and pocketbook. We thank you, he thanks you, and here's looking forward to the exciting content that is yet to come in all our *LensWork* publications and media as Brooks continues exploring this creative life.

$15 Applause - Thanks!

$25 Standing Ovation - You'll receive a signed copy of *Dreams of Japan*

$50 Basic Support - You'll receive a thank you of a signed 6R (8-page, 6x8") chapbook, handmade and signed by the artist

$100 Essential Support - You'll receive a signed Full Quarto (16-page, 8x11") chapbook handmade and signed by the artist

$250 Sustaining Support - You'll receive a thank you of an original, signed print + wall hanger

$500 Friend of the Arts - You'll receive a thank you of a signed original print with wall hanger plus a Full Quarto chapbook

$1000 Patron of the Arts - You'll receive a special thank you of, well, you'll see!

You can donate to support Brooks' creative life using this link. Thanks!

**Brooks Jensen** is a fine-art photographer, publisher, workshop teacher, and writer. In his personal work he specializes in small prints, hand-made artist's books, and digital media publications.

He and his wife (Maureen Gallagher) are the owners, co-founders, editors, and publishers of the award winning *LensWork*, one of today's most respected and important periodicals in fine art photography. With subscribers in 73 countries, Brooks' impact on fine art photography is truly world-wide. His long-running podcasts on art and photography are heard over the Internet by thousands every day. All 900+ podcasts are available at *LensWork Online*, the LensWork membership website. LensWork Publishing is also at the leading edge in multimedia and digital media publishing with *LensWork Extended* — a PDF based, media-rich expanded version of the magazine.

Brooks is the author of seven best-selling books about photography and creativity: *Letting Go of the Camera* (2004); *The Creative Life in Photography* (2013); *Single Exposures* (4 books in a series, random observations on art, photography and creativity); and *Looking at Images* (2014); as well as a photography monograph, *Made of Steel* (2012). His next book will be *Those Who Inspire Me (And Why)*. A free monthly compilation of of this image journal, *Kokoro*, is available for download.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