

Flash Wk 4: Cartography

by Elisabeth Fairchild

The surveyor began at the mouth of the Klamath and worked his way toward the mining camp. He'd expected to find a trail, but for most of the way he hacked through dense underbrush. The river shrubs clambered into the water, just skimming its surface. There were mosquitos and spiders in the branches, and in the slow moving pools of the banks, water bugs stuck to the river like it was gelatin. He progressed eastward, taking care not to slip on the damp smooth stones beneath him. Eventually there was a trail and shortly, the old camp.

It had been uninhabited for more than 150 years but there were still gashes in the hillside, and the river slumped sideways, retaining an unnatural bend in its organism. And the riverbed was still carpeted with a gold dust so fine that even the flow of the river couldn't take it away.

The surveyor walked further upstream to where the camp's houses had been and he looked for artifacts. He looked for rusty pans and spoons, but besides waterlogged stone foundations (the ghosts of old shacks) all he found was more silty gold. He took measurements of the riverbed and camp, then sat on a downed tree and drew everything. In one final attempt to capture a real piece of the place, he dunked his handkerchief in the river; the particles of gold alluded him and left nothing on his cloth but water and algae.

