



UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON ARBORETUM
Steinhauer Trust Gallery • November/December 2010

Goose Lake – Wintering Over



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN RIGGS





Goose Lake_0872, 68 x 21"

Why I came to Goose Lake, and how long I was going to stay were questions I didn't ask myself at first. Everything had simply come tumbling down, all the well-built structures for security, survival, peace of mind, and comfort that I had fashioned over a lifetime had just collapsed.



Goose Lake_0856, 24 x 34"

This exhibit is dedicated to Jeff and Sheryl Spitzer-Resnick, whose kindness, generosity, friendship, and robust good humor helped me through a dark time, incidentally making this show possible by allowing me to winter over in their cabin on Goose Lake in Adams County, not far from Aldo Leopold's famous retreat in *A Sand County Almanac*. Thanks Jeff and Sheryl...

Goose Lake_0516, 12 x 7"

Be it by natural disaster, war, economic disruption, disease, character flaw, or some quirk of karmic law worming its way through our lives, life does seem to have a way of confronting our youthful conceit with invitations to a more mature humility. If we don't catch on, not to worry, we will be given another chance, and another, again and again until the message comes through. Some of us, rigid and proud to the last, simply break.



PHOTO BY LUCILLE MARCHAND



Goose Lake_0838, 94 x 20"

How then to remain standing in the midst of collapse and stay open to the instructions that the perception and experience of beauty can give us? This, without words for it then, is what I

sought in my refuge at Goose Lake. At the time, all I felt was the need to burrow in, huddle close to a wood fire for the winter, eat some wholesome food, reconnect with my sources, be alone for awhile with who I had become, and ponder *what next*.

Goose Lake_0757, 69 x 18"

The moment I got out of my car I could feel the silence of the wildness gather around me like thick goose down. Here was a place I could connect to, roam about in—a place where the wild critters would abide my presence and divine instructions could be received. Goose Lake took me in and folded her feral arms around me like a long lost grandmother. Winter and the storms of the world would rage without, but within this wild place I could fall back into a featherbed of warmth and safety, to regroup.





Goose Lake_0773, 23 x 63"

So I arrived here mid-November, barely time enough to lay in a winter's worth of firewood. I had serious doubts about cutting wood again. Like mountain climbing, I had thought my woodcutting days were long over. But if I could still find a way to get to 13,500 feet, maybe there was a way I could learn to cut wood again too. The unforgettable words of Tony Gundlach, my wise old bricklayer mentor came back to me from long ago. After working next to me up on the scaffold for several weeks he had told me: "you'll never be able to grow old at that pace. Slow it down, work smarter, not faster. Think the work, concentrate, and quit wasting all that energy. One of these days you're going to need it."

Goose Lake_0231, 23 x 63"

"Extreme dawdling" is what the mountain (and Tony) had taught me: slow it all down until every movement becomes a relaxed, conscious, and necessary flow, every step a consideration, nothing extraneous. If you never move fast enough to get tired, you can move forever. Woodcutting became an extended meditation on aging and efficiency. The splitting maul and chain saw did the same work they did forty years ago, but miraculously the exertion required from me was but a fraction. Watch old men and women work, and learn. To my delight and joy the woodpiles grew, and nothing hurt. Too much.



Goose Lake_0740, 19 x 13"

I persevered. The fall was bright, the air brisk, and it felt good to be outdoors in my old woodcutting boots again. I cut through the first week of December, at the end of which came the first blizzard of the season, ending my access to the woods except by ski and snowshoe. Supplemented by a few loads purchased from a neighbor, I had enough to see me through the winter with



plenty left over, I hoped, for my hosts to enjoy for some years to come. I sharpened the chainsaws one last time before putting them away and surveyed my neat stacks—now covered with snow—feeling a deep sense of satisfaction and readiness.

Goose Lake_1097, 50 x 25"

I have always treasured the approach of winter. Winter is a time on the farm when the intense, physical work of summer is over, when time opens up for reflection, for poetry. Soon there would be time to make music through the long, dark nights with friends, time to think, to make sense of it all. You put the tools in the barn and watch it snow, thankful there is nothing more that has to be done now for a long time. It is a time for love, to take the coziness of the wood fire into your heart and share its flickering intimacy with the one in your life around whom all meaning coalesces.





Goose Lake_1137, 68 x 21"

But at Goose Lake I was alone. I cherished the solitude of this winter, even as I prepared my soil for new love. I needed very much to slow it all down. Very much like climbing the mountain and cutting

firewood, I needed to examine the process of loving in the same way I'd had to relearn how to cut wood and climb a mountain. Everything had changed. When had this happened? I blinked, and thirty years passed, almost as if unlined, unnoticed.

Goose Lake_0042, 38 x 25"

This winter starts hard, with a few good storms early in December. Then it closes in quickly to the shortest days surrounding the equinox. My determination falters. Despair and self-pity lurk like mortal enemies in dark places, but I am determined to chase them down and expose them to the light of a winter's dawn, rendering them impotent. Breakfast and dinner are taken in the dark, and the few short hours of daylight are cherished and clung to like life itself. The quality of light is magical, whether the sun is reflecting off a million blinding ice crystals or covered by a lowering ceiling of gathering gloom. Then comes another two feet of new snow and it'll be days before the plow comes. I feel a quiet peace, and the world is very, very far away.

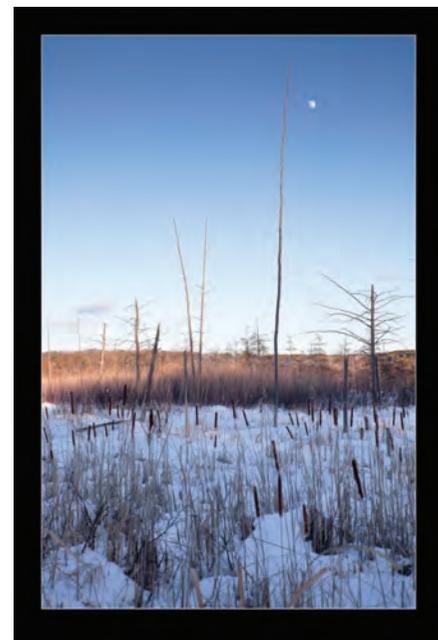


Goose Lake_0774, 24 x 36"

Once January is underway the light changes as the sun rises higher overhead, coming up a few minutes earlier and setting a few minutes later every day. It's time to consolidate my gains, gather into my heart the feelings of hardiness that have come as a result of enduring without distraction the longest and coldest nights. It's time to harness the energy that has been generated by the physical exercise of skiing in the midst of so many crystalline dawns, feeling comradeship with the pileated woodpeckers as they fly overhead across the frozen lake in the endless search for the perfect tree. The experience of beauty is so physical, so palpable, so pervasive and energizing, that it lifts my spirits. It's time to get to work again.

Goose Lake_0204, 24 x 28"

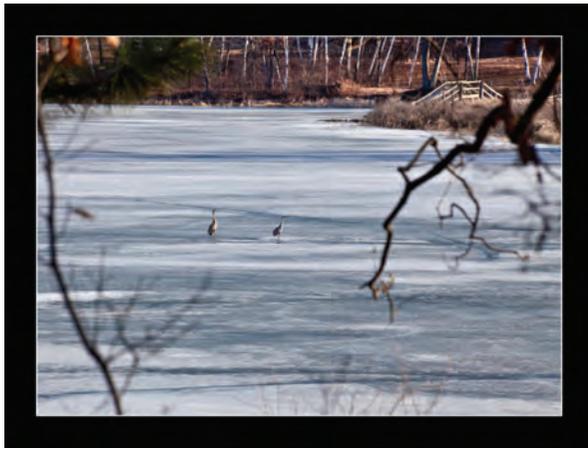
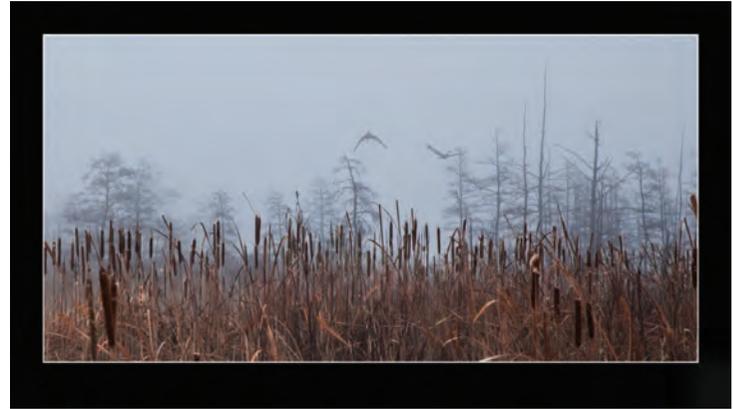
In six months there were three knocks on my door: one, a lost Mormon looking for someone to preach her gospel to, the second a lost census taker looking for someone to write down in his book of citizenry. The first two I turned away, but the third I invited in for coffee. He was a neighbor farmer who saw the smoke and took an interest in who might be wintering over in the cabin on the lake. A friendly man, he offered his services should I ever find myself in need. I didn't know a soul within sixty miles, and such isolation through a Wisconsin winter carries certain risks. Fortunately the winter passed without needing a tow, jump-start, or medevac, so I never saw him again. But his proximity was a comfort nevertheless.





Goose Lake_0026, 24 x 14"

Much sooner than I feel ready for it the first cranes reappear. As the days lengthen I have to arise earlier every day to beat the dawn out on the lake. I hear him before I see him in the eerie dawn light, from way across the lake—that indescribable, primitive squawking/wailing/rasping/rattling call that raises the hair on my back. He is alone, a scout, and I decide not to challenge him with my presence, not yet, and head back to the cabin through the deep snow across the center of the lake.

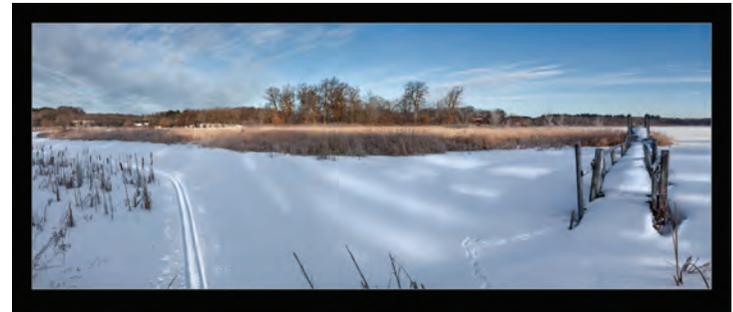


Goose Lake_1153, 26 x 20"

It isn't long before there are eight to twelve pair of sandhill cranes out on the deteriorating ice. I routinely ski past them, hardly noticed. From the kitchen window, while doing the dishes, I watch them dancing. It appears as a senseless walking in circles or apparently random patterns, but over the weeks a strange emotional meaning seems to emerge. It is a dance to music from another dimension, a dimension from a time so many thousands of generations ago that a modern mentality has no way to contain its parameters.

Goose Lake_0155, 56 x 25"

I focus on my morning and evening ski around the lake and become dedicated, as to a ritual. Awakening in the first light of pre-dawn, I stoke the fire, pull on ski boots and mask, step into my bindings while still in the inside warmth, then kick off the deck into the deep snow and down the hill to the lake. With camera, lenses, and tripod strapped across my back, not yet fully awake, the hill tries to send me head over heels into a briar patch. I bend my knees deeper, come to my senses quickly, and gain enough speed to glide far out onto the lake. Coming to a breathy stop in the effervescent half-light between night and day, I awaken fully to a crystalline purity, simplicity, and solitude spread out before me like the very first morning of the planet.



Goose Lake_0133, 36 x 25"

These are the moments I feel most alive. Rarely, I spot a wisp of smoke rising from a cabin chimney across the lake, from some other soul on retreat for a day or two. Otherwise, the lake, the brightening sky, the wispy winter fogs rising from the marshes, are all mine. As it adjusts to the coldest temperature yet, the thickening ice booms to the setting moon, interrupting the silence and my reverie. Giving thanks, I push off before the cold sets in.





Goose Lake_0208, 53 x 20"

Once I get going and the heat rises the urge to continue is strong. But so is the intensity of the connection I feel with these early morning winter mists hanging lightly over the marsh grasses and Tamarack swamp horizons. This connection creates the impulse to stop, to photograph. But to stop means that in about ninety seconds

I'll be cold to the bone again; my fingers, protected by only the silk liners of the heavy mittens that have to be removed, will be numb. But accompanying this connection comes a sense of having been blessed, and with that blessing a sense that I've been given a message to deliver. To deny or ignore that message—to "pass by"—would be nothing less than to shut down on life. My viewfinder freezes over instantly from my hot breath and I'm shooting blind again, on hope.



Goose Lake_0110, 44 x 20"

There are low points too, but I stay with them, let them be within me, then take them out skiing with me and submit them to the impersonal beauty of sub-zero dawns. As the sweat breaks out and my chest heaves with the exertion, they don't stand a chance. I set up my tripod and lose myself in the details of exposure in the changing light, composition, and how not to bump the tripod with my skis. And how in heaven's name to convert this moment of glory to a flat print in a frame

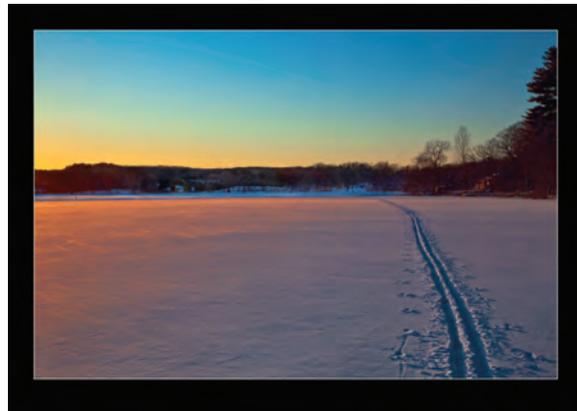
on a wall?! I understand the impossibility of fully communicating the events of the soul, but the effort—the process of delivering my personal message—takes me where I need and want to go. Photography for me is a primary survival tool.

Goose Lake_0144, 35 x 25"

The lone pair of ski tracks in the snow is emblematic not only of my winter at Goose Lake. It presents to me the notion of moving forward in the face of bleakness. Unexpectedly, beauty surges like hot magma from some molten center of our being, overflowing the landscape of our emotional pain. In spite of the certainty of death—and plentiful suffering along the way—or perhaps in some mysterious way because of it, triggered by it, I experience an ineffable joy, a need to move forward in my day

with a sense of well-being. Hard not to, on mornings like this one.

I'm warm and cozy at three below zero, moving fast. Life is good, and nothing hurts. Too much.



Goose Lake_1116, 25 x 38"

The days lengthen, and the ice softens to where I fear putting my weight on it. One morning as I watch, a lone unpaired male steps through the ice near shore. He struggles to regain his footing, flapping and splashing, breaking more and more slush around him, looking most foolish. When he finally regains his footing, he lowers his head and walks away from the others in a perfect posture of humiliation. I can't help myself and have a belly laugh at his expense, knowing how he feels. After a few minutes walking about alone, nursing his wound, he returns to the flock. They never appeared to notice. I prepare to pack my things...



JOHN RIGGS

Student

Attended Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio; L'Université Besancon, Besancon, France; and the Universities of Tübingen and Berlin in Germany before graduating from the University of Wisconsin, Madison with a BA in Comparative Literature in 1969.

Photographer

Held various Solo Photography shows in Chicago, UW Madison Memorial Union, and University of Minnesota Mankato Art Department Gallery 1967 thru 1974, plus hung in a dozen various juried exhibitions long forgotten. During this period specialized in large format black and white landscape, nudes, and candid portraiture in nature.

Community Organizer

Program Director of Community Organization Program Account of the Southwestern Wisconsin Community Action Program for three years. Organized Boscobel Marketing Cooperative for local farmers to Market their Organic Produce to Urban Markets.

Stone Mason

Finished masonry apprenticeship in 1975 and for six years built stone fireplaces, homes, and walls in Spring Green area—the landscape of Frank Lloyd Wright—building on his masonry tradition and aesthetic.

Engineer and Businessman

Hung up my camera and trowel in my thirties to go into the Engineering Business and raise a family, designing and building precision automation equipment and distributing machined parts to manufacturers. Founding member/partner in Isthmus Engineering and Manufacturing Cooperative in 1980, and in 1999 started my own business, SourceOne Solutions LLC.

Photographer

After some thirty years in the Engineering business, bought a Canon 5D and began exploring the brave new world of Digital Color, finally selling my business in December of 2007, returning full time to my original love, photography.

Recent Shows

- Solo exhibit entitled *Succession*, Steenbock Gallery in the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters, Jan/Feb 2009.
- Solo Exhibit, Mayor's Office & Conference Rooms, January through April 2009.
- CPM juried group show, Photo Midwest 2008, Pyle Center, October/November 2008.
- CoPA (Coalition for the Photographic Arts) juried Group show, PH Dye House, Milwaukee, WI April 17-25 2009.
- Duo show with StarLight Tews entitled *Landscapes/Mindscales*, Playhouse Gallery, Overture Center, Madison WI, July through September 2010.
- Solo show entitled *Goose Lake, Wintering Over* University Arboretum Steinhauer Trust Gallery, Madison WI. Nov/Dec 2010.
- Will open Tamarack Studio and Gallery mid-November 2010.

Future shows by JR to include

- *Tamarack*, an exploration of the Tamarack Tree and its native environment in Wisconsin.
- *Afterglow*, a study of the late evening western sky over Lake Mendota.
- *Tree Line*, an expanded exploration of Timber Line and above in Rocky Mountain National Park.
- *Outer Banks*, a study of the remote Outer Bank Barrier Islands of Southeastern North Carolina.
- *Succession*, an expanded study of the driftless area of western Iowa County.
- A retrospective, blending and contrasting work done in the sixties and seventies with today's work.



PHOTO BY LUCILLE MARCHAND



GOOSE LAKE—WINTERING OVER PRICE LIST

Goose Lake_0872
68 x 21" Blue Fog Tamarack Swamp \$800

Goose Lake_0856
24 x 34" Blue Fog Tamarack \$480

Goose Lake_0516
12 x 7" JR with Woodpile \$60

Goose Lake_0838
94 x 20"
Early AM Tamarack Bog Pan w/ Sky Tracks \$1140

Goose Lake_0757
69 x 18"
Cabin w/Tamarack Bog in Snowstorm @ Sunset \$740

Goose Lake_0773
23 x 63" Pileated Tamarack Totem Pole I \$680

Goose Lake_0231
23 x 63" Pileated Tamarack Totem Pole II \$680

Goose Lake_0740
19 x 13" Cabin with Firewood \$160

Goose Lake_1097
50 x 25" Marsh w/ Crane in Fog \$680

Goose Lake_1137
68 x 21" Tamarack Marsh in Fog Pan \$800

Goose Lake_0042
38 x 25" Tamaracks in Fog \$480

Goose Lake_0774
24 x 36" Tamarack w/ Moon @ Sunset \$420

Goose Lake_0204
24 x 28" Tamaracks in Snow Pan \$380

Goose Lake_0026
24 x 14" Cranes in Flight \$220

Goose Lake_1153
26 x 20" Cranes on Ice \$290

Goose Lake_0155
56 x 25" Bridge w/ Ski Tracks & Marsh \$780

Goose Lake_0133
36 x 25" Lake, Woods, & Ski Tracks \$460

Goose Lake_0208
53 x 20" Bridge & Island w/ Hoarfrost \$540

Goose Lake_0110
44 x 20" Snowfield w/ Ski Tracks @ Sunset \$500

Goose Lake_0144
35 x 25" Lake & Tacks @ Sunset \$460

Goose Lake_1116
25 x 38" Vertical Pan Dead Tamarack in Fog \$530

All images are sold as signed, numbered editions limited to one hundred prints. Prints are produced using the most archival sound materials available. Pricing includes mounting on 1/2" hardcore and framing under clear, cleanable, UV protection laminate over the printed surface for protection as seen in the exhibit. If you wish to purchase a print only, unmounted and unframed, reduce the above pricing by 15%. All pricing refers to images as sized in this exhibit. For other sizes please contact the artist for possibilities and cost.

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