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The Door in the Woods

by Keith Taylor

On state owned recreation land in the western part of the county, the Department of Natural Resources maintains several nature trails. They wind in and out of various habitats: swamps, a bog, a beech-maple forest, oak-hickory forests, old fields. The trail farthest from any of the roads ends at a large wooden barrier that blocks the path and extends for about fifty feet on either side. In the middle is a door, perhaps eight feet high, that looks as if it could have been used in old movies about lonely prairie forts in the middle of Indian country. There are no signs indicating what may be behind the door, and the barrier is not insurmountable. Although it would be difficult, any child or curious adult could figure out a way around it. But there are no irregular paths or trampled weeds showing that people have tried. It seems as if whoever walks this far gets to the door and just turns around.

About thirty years ago and a long way from here, out in a national park on the western edge of the country, a group of hikers discovered a high glacial cirque, a hidden basin that wasn't discussed in any of the guidebooks. It didn't appear on any of the maps. They thought they might be the first people to have found it. The basin had the expected clusters of subalpine firs, the scrubby little trees that grow slowly and almost miraculously up to the edge of timberline on many of the western mountains. A subalpine fir six inches wide may be more than a century old. But those hikers found the largest subalpine fir anyone had ever seen: one hundred and thirty feet tall with a circumference of more than seven feet at the base. When they walked around it, they found on the back a small but solidly attached and perfectly finished door.

