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Four Dimensions of Nature Writing

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Rocks beneath our Feet

Beneath our feet, scarred rocks punch their way through the hardened ground. Despite two hundred years of grazing, cutting, and replanting, the earth still pushes the stones up and up, through the well-worn land. They, rather than the newly planted prairies grasses and wild flowers, best reflect the landscape's character. The hand of man can never, will never, deface the area's geology. In fact, as wind and rain wear away at the rocks' jagged surface, these bumps in the ground better show the durability of this place.

There is not enough prairie left for Thoreau's imagination, and a sign of this shortage is the symbolism of these rocks. When we reach a point where we can only look to what is underground to know what should be above ground, something has gone wrong. "Where is the prairie that should sit atop this table of limestone?" someone may ask while looking across a panorama of muddy pasture. "What is this *asparagus* doing here?" a more inquisitive student shouts while kneeling in the dry dirt by the foreign plant. We might as well be in a museum, looking at pictures of Roman ruins and dinosaur fossils. The ancients and extinct dinosaurs stayed their due. Yet, it feels wrong to need a museum to remind us of the way things should be.

Time is running out, and with it, our reserves of uncharted wilderness do too. Thoreau requires that "that all thing be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be infinitely wild" (454), but now we depend on civilization to recreate these wild places in reserves and arboretums. Time is surely running out.