



## THE RED BARN AND THE BLACK DOG

When you come right down to it, directions, like politics, are local. In the end, you have to know where to stop and, more important, where to start.

*This, by the way, is a true story.*

Bill and I were seeking nothing less than the source of Lake Norman, that wide expanse of water that sprawls across the Piedmont on its long, convoluted journey to the sea. Our goal - Catawba Falls, the Catawba River's headwaters high in the North Carolina mountains.

When a local resident said we'd find the trail if we looked for a red barn and a black dog, we were skeptical. The trail begins, he continued, on the left side of the red barn where the road dead ends. This seemed too much like a fairy tale by the brothers Grimm. How about the wicked witch? Where was she?

He said the dog would be somewhere around the barn. He would guide us to the waterfall. A confusing mix of instructions including "keep the stream on your left" and "cross where the huge elm has fallen across the water" ended with: "Don't worry. Spot'll get you there."

I wonder if he works on Sunday? I whispered under my breath.

We found the red barn, parked on the gravel shoulder and took our hiking boots out of the trunk. When we turned around, there he was, patiently waiting for us - a mid-sized black lab with a collar indicating he was Spot. Nary a spot on him but, no matter, he was eager to go and so were we.

If ever there was a dog suited to his job, it was this one. Spot never complained, never whined, never even barked. He kept us on the trail, knew where we were apt to make a mistake and gently prodded us in the right direction.

We were slow, but he didn't rush us. He romped through the woods, amusing himself by treeing the occasional squirrel, but always kept an eye on our progress. Observing our careful negotiation of slippery stepping stones, he would then show us,



with surefooted joy, how it should be done - scrambling under downed trees and leaping great boulders in a single bound.

He would disappear for a time, then startle us by bolting from nowhere, streaking by us and plunging into the stream. He kept himself refreshed by taking leisurely soaks in conveniently placed pools. Upon emerging, he would shake himself vigorously - baptizing us with the waters of the Source.

We spent almost an hour photographing the many faceted cascades and basking in the ethereal beauty of the scene. The water tumbled in small torrents. Here and there, this effervescent tapestry revealed a delicate bridal veil.

Rhododendrons cast lavender blossoms, one by one, into the pool beneath the falls. The misty air and fertile soil fed a profusion of luxuriant plants. Without benefit of a landscape designer, Catawba Falls had become the perfect terrarium.

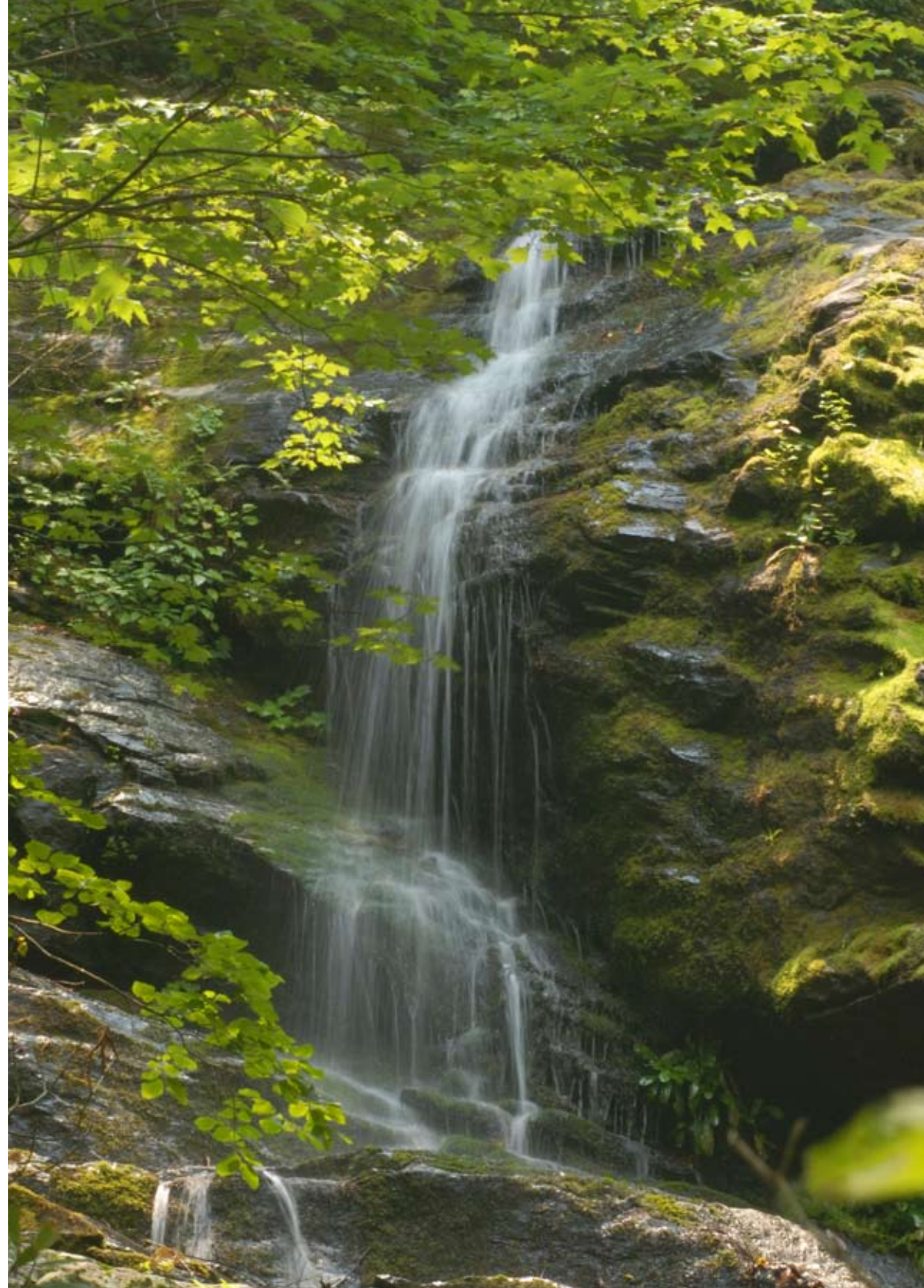
Spot found a patch of sunlight on a nearby rock and proceeded to take a nap, knowing we had been safely delivered to our destination.

We looked fondly at the sleeping dog. For that brief moment in time, we'd been a team. Our leader was Spot, an extroverted dog who knew Eden and was eager to share its blessings.

The Source turned out to be a fine place to launch our Catawba River saga and an essential element in understanding the vast reaches of Lake Norman. After all, every journey starts with a single step, every river with a drop of rain.

But let us give credit where due. We found Catawba Falls with the help of a black dog.

- Diana Gleasner



## CATAWBA DREAMS

*Before the dawn of dreams,  
Before its tale was told,  
Unheralded and free,  
These mountain springs of old.*

*Before the dawn of dreams,  
Before the Earth was tame,  
They came from deep within,  
Ran wild, without a name.*

*Hurling down the mountain,  
Destination sure.  
Rushing, racing seaward  
Running cold and pure.*

*Glimpses of the time  
When rivers grew from streams,  
When springs could birth a lake,  
And lakes were made of dreams.*

by Diana C. Gleasner