

Borrowdale

It's all here in the crags –
 the lava flows
 and the debris of explosions.

Ask the mountains their story
 and they'll tell you – slowly,
 with many pauses.

You guess at the gaps,
 feeling your way

 in the mists they wrap you in.
 They tell no lies
but things get muddled –
 the fires were so long ago.

 What they most remember
is the ice, its weight
 depressing them,
 carving the valley into their history.

We see what the ice has left,
 the steepness
 and the going nowhere,
 where trees twist
like a climber's limbs,
 and water misses its footings.

 Boots hammer the hills,
 speeding the work of ice
 and sliding water.
 The rocks are hard
and old and cold –
 their only way is down.

Barbara Cumbers, 2011