The Geographic North Pole

Laurie Anderson

The summer of 1974 was brutally hot in New York and I kept thin king about how nice and icy it must be at the North Pole. And t hen I though, â??Wait a second, why not go?â?? You know, like i n cartoons where they hang going to the North Pole on their doo r knobs and they just take off.
So I spent a couple of weeks preparing for the trip, getting a hatchet, a huge backpack, maps, knives, sleeping bags, lures an d a three month supply of Banic, a versatile high-protein paste that can be made into flat bread, biscuits or cereal.
Now I had decided to hitch hike and one day I just walked out o nto Austin Street, weighing down seventy pounds of gear, and st uck out my thumb.
â?? Going North? I asked the driver as I struggled into a stati on wagon.
After I got out of New York, most of the rides were trucks unti l I reached the Hudson Bay and began to hitch in small mail pla nes. The pilots were usually guys who'd gone to Canada to avoid the draft or else embittered Vietnam vets who never wanted to go home again. Either way they always wanted to show off a few of their stunts. We'd go swooping along the rivers doing loop d o loops and baby ###080152. And they'd drop me off at an airstr ip. â??There'll be another plane by here couple of weeks; see y a; good luck.â??
I never did make it all the way to the geographic pole; it turn ed out to be a restricted area and no one was allowed to fly in or even over it. I did get within a few miles of the magnetic pole though. So it wasn't really that disappointing. I entertai ned myself in the evenings, cooking or smoking, and watching th e blazing light of the huge Canadian sunsets as they turned the lake into fire.
Later I lay on by back, looking up at the Northern lights and i magining there'd been a nuclear holocaust and that I was the on ly human being left in all of North America and what would I do then.
And then, when these lights went out, I stretched out on the gr ound, watching the stars as they turned around and their enormo us silent ###080318.
I finally decided to turn back because of my hatchet. I'd been chopping some wood and the hatchet flew out of my hand on the u pswing. And I did what you should never do when this happens: I looked up to see where it had gone and it came down â?? fffooo â?? just missing my head and I thought, â??My God! I could be working around here with a hatchet embedded in my skull and I'm ten miles from the airstrip. And nobody in the whole world kno ws where I am.â??
Daddy Daddy, it was just like you said
Now that the living outnumber the dead
Where I come from it's a long thin thread

Across an ocean. Down a river of red
Now that the living outnumber the dead
Speak my language

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