

Nose to tail

The causeway is narrow. Slush refreezes under our feet. Prints of claws cover hooves and paws. We are nose to tail. Our heads hang, our ears droop or point back, depending on anatomy. None are perky.

The sky emptied of birds shortly after daybreak. The air is wide enough for all the flying things.

We can't see the far side, but we know the only way out is through. If our brains don't think like that, we know at least that we mustn't go back, or into the water.

We move at the pace of the slowest thing. The slowest thing we cannot step over or scurry under. Swimmers pass: dogs, deer, otters. The insects which hitched a ride are biting those of us who are carrying them. I'd be eating too, if I could.

I haven't seen any reptiles. Has anyone seen the reptiles? We have to hope the humans are bringing them, warm in boxes of hay.

Ahead, there's a fracas. Someone has slipped and strong, sharp-toothed pack animals are leaning in to pull them out by the scruff of the neck. The stopping ripples back down the line. Furry creatures rest. We take the chance to groom, scratch and nibble, lick ourselves. Grazers search the ice. A pair of foxes rub necks and I remember warm-blooded closeness in my own body, and shiver.

Now we move, ponderous, limited.

On the other side, we will chase and be chased again. For now, we are walking together.

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