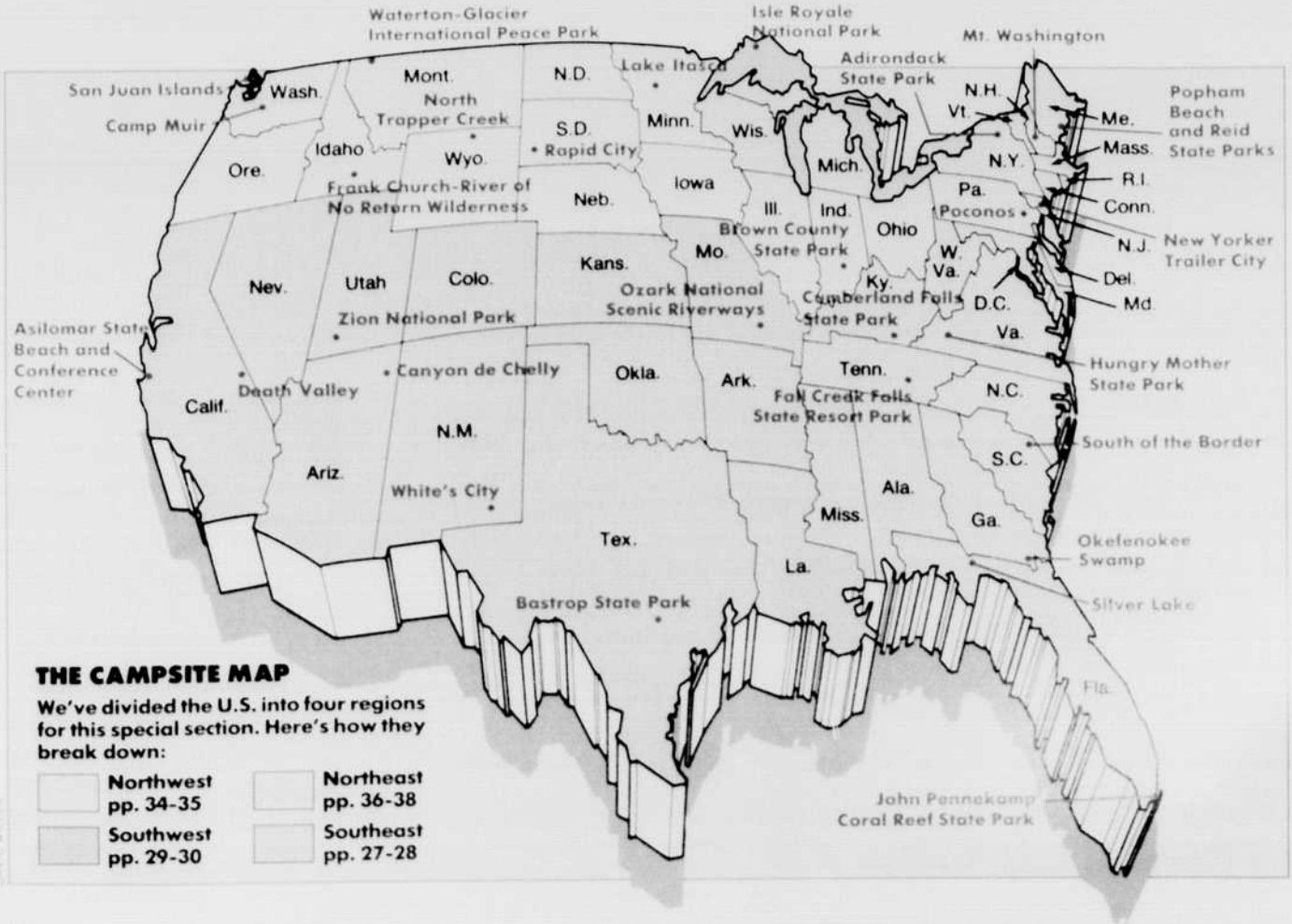
corridor of interstate highway to the next town, and it all blurs together. But head down any country road and away from franchised civilization, and any illusion of sameness vanishes.

I also travel a lot—but to places not serviced by Days Inn or Motel 6. Usually I'm looking for an unexplored cave, a buried art treasure, a mythical swamp beast, or something equally bizarre—sometimes, just a challenging hike or maybe a party. From necessity, I've slept outside in at least half of the 50 states over the last few years. Along the way I've learned more than lessons in geology and geography. America's mountains, valleys, deserts, and rivers are what give the land—and the people who still live close to it—personality.

You can't sit by a campfire without smelling the distinct aroma of the local woods and noting the color and clarity of the night sky. As you clear a spot for your tent, you move rocks of a certain color and hardness; you see roots of oak or maple or sequoia; you avoid cactus or nettles or fire ants. Even if you sleep in a luxury cabin, every camp is unique, from the gravel road that takes you there to the accent of the old-timer at the front desk.

To know the flavor and feel of Kentucky, for instance, or the Colorado Rockies, you could pull into the local McDonald's and compare the horse motif at one with the ski motif at the other—but camping is more fun. Whether I'm after solitude or a pig roast, a physical challenge or the perfect spot for romance, an escape from the mundane or merely a vantage point from which to laugh at it, I always head up country, where—as Canned Heat said in its classic song—the water really does taste like wine.

That's what this 11-page section is about: locating the perfect wilderness spot. Read over the key to campsites (previous page), look for the symbol that best fits your mood this weekend, look at the map below to find the region of the country that's closest to home, then turn to that section in the following pages to find a match.

MICHAEL RAY TAYLOR, *contributing editor to this magazine, is working on a* Deliverance-*type novel set in Jamaica.*