

TURN OVER A NEW LEAF

Natural World



SECTION I: WHAT IS THE NATURAL WORLD?

As young children, we spend the early years of life looking, listening, smelling, touching, tasting—using our senses to explore and learn about our environment. It’s fascinating to watch kids as they discover so much with their senses. As we grow older, we acquire the language necessary to relate words to things and events. We also begin to get more information by listening, questioning, and observing. We learn more, we seek more, and with the increasing power and popularity of the Internet, we become much more sophisticated in our quest for answers.

However, with our growing sophistication, it appears that our awareness and appreciation of the outdoors may be lost. Further compounding this is the observation that today’s world is becoming increasingly preoccupied with things that are artificial: things that tend to alienate us from the natural environment - and from each other as well. These things may include (and are certainly not limited to) things like watching television, playing video games, and partying too much. Why not go hiking, biking, or canoeing? Have a picnic with friends at a local park instead. Being in and a part of nature instills in you respect, reverence, and responsibility for it.

As a college student, you will find many new questions and opportunities for yourself. You will see things that you have seen for many years and may even ask new questions about them. You will challenge much of what you have previously seen and experienced. Related to the natural world, you can help nourish and keep alive your appreciation for the environment by engaging in a variety of meaningful experiences involving the outdoors - right here on campus.

This section suggests a variety of experiences that help you better appreciate and respect the incredible complexity, precision, and order of the natural world. It provides a



very modest stimulation to think about the role of the natural world in your life and the role of your life in the natural world. It is simple yet complex at the same time. It is both challenging and basic. Most of all, it's important to remember your unique role within the overall, larger context of the natural world.

HOW TO GET ENGAGED

Everyone has a natural inclination to connect with our natural world. When you think about it, you will find a variety of outdoor areas that can serve as ideal learning destinations for the activities described in this section. The challenge is to seek out these and other favorite locations, to engage in the activities as well as create your own activities.

For example, think of any of the following locations:

- A wooded section on campus
- A peaceful bench
- A pond, stream, fountain, or other body of water
- A field – whether used for athletics or not
- A multi-branched tree
- A nearby park
- A grassy hillside
- A freshly planted flower garden

Some of the activities will challenge you mentally and physically. Several activities will require a solitary and peaceful spot of your choice. Some will be enhanced by the silence of the day, the early morning dawn, the lights at night, the rays of a sunset, the mist following a rain, and more.

You will find that nature is a great teacher; however, you should take time to engage and reflect on your experiences – you should make this time for yourself.

As you set out to learn from nature, consider bringing the following:

- Day pack
- A journal, pencil, colored pens
- Water and healthy snacks
- Proper clothing for weather and terrain (including appropriate footwear)



- First aid kit
- Cell phone (fully charged)
- Activity directions
- Your sense of adventure

Here are three items that may be helpful for you:

1. ***Keep Memories in a Nature Journal:*** A personal nature journal is the best way to record your observations. You can recall sightings of birds or other wildlife, the changing of the seasons, and the wildflowers you've discovered. You can include field sketches or photographs along with written notes about your observations. You'll want to label and date each entry so you can refer back to your notes. Give your nature journal a personal touch by cutting out pictures, words, and illustrations from magazines that most relate to you. Cut them in different sizes and glue them on the front and back of a composition book, then adhere clear contact paper to waterproof and preserve your pictures.
2. ***Solo Sit:*** Do this activity on your own. Find a quiet, safe location by a pond or somewhere on or off campus. Sit for 20 to 30 minutes, quietly observing your natural surroundings, listen to the sounds around you and watch the wildlife (this may be birds, butterflies, insects, or more) or human interaction near your location.

Answer the following statements in your journal:

- When I think about my college experience, I....
 - The greatest joy in my life is....
 - The biggest decision I ever made was....
 - The three things I would like to change about the world are....
 - The most important environmental issue to me is....
 - My favorite place in the world is....
 - The best way I can give back to the environment is to....
 - I can make a difference with the natural world by....
3. ***Turnover Hike:*** Turn over rocks, logs, stumps, etc. to discover what is under them. Take the time to watch your discoveries. Record them in your journal. How do the critters interact in these habitats? How many different inhabitants are there? NOTE: Be sure to place the rock, log, and stump back into its original position; remember to leave their home as you found it.



4. **Photography Hike:** There are many opportunities to take pictures in the outdoors. Go to a natural setting and find objects to photograph. Once something is spotted, stop to consider it: What is the best angle or perspective? Is there a good background? How close or how far should you be from it to get a good picture? Should the picture be vertical or horizontal? Should the picture be framed with trees? Focus on the unique things in nature - a single flower, tree bark, a butterfly, a sunrise or sunset - that make very simple yet beautiful pictures.
5. **Texture/Design Hike:** As you walk along, watch specifically for interesting or beautiful designs and textures in nature - wild grass, tree bark, leaves. It is fun to make nature rubbings of the textures and designs in your nature journal. This list gives you an idea of how you can be part of the natural world, and how you can think about the natural world in a larger context than just "out there" or "taken for granted." Many people before you have done a lot to maintain the parks, outdoor spaces, and quality of life; there's much to appreciate and much to enjoy. Your opportunity is to identify ways of living within this world while experiencing much of what is around you. Enjoy!

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SECTION II: DISCOVER WHAT'S AROUND YOU

As a college student, your life revolves around academics. Days are filled with studying, reading, heading to class or lab, and then maybe some more studying. You may forget that the outside world does exist and that it is a great outlet for your mind. There are countless opportunities to explore the outdoors; take a walk down a new or different path or trail, rent or borrow a canoe to explore a local lake, buy a kite to fly; the list is endless. There are a number of opportunities for the amateur and the avid outdoor



enthusiast. Hopefully, these comments will open your eyes to the many ways to spend time outdoors.

Safety should always come first:

Here are a couple helpful reminders to check off before you leave for your adventure:

- Always remember to plan where you are going and tell a friend where you will be.
- Follow any rules or regulations of the park or location.
- Be sure to bring enough food and water for your adventure.
- HAVE FUN!

WAYS TO EXPLORE THE OUTDOORS

- **Take a bike ride:** Find a local bike shop that rents bikes and go explore. We are very fortunate to have many bike friendly trails and paths in the area. Travel on bicycle is a quick way to see many areas and new or different things. It is also a great way to get your mind off stressful matters. By being able to peddle away, feeling the wind on your face, one is able to clear their mind.

Keep the following pointers in mind:

- Find a bike rental shop that is close to a trail so that you have easy access and do not need to worry about transporting the bicycle.
 - Know where you are going; bring a map, and plot a route.
 - Bring enough water and food to help keep you energized.
 - Make sure to wear a helmet!
- **Frisbee Golf:** Frisbee golf, also known as disk golf is played by throwing a disk into a basket or at another target. It can be played as a team or individually. There is not much equipment needed, only a Frisbee or a disk. Playing Frisbee is a great way to get people together to enjoy the outdoors and breathe some fresh air.
 - **Camping/Backpacking:** Sleeping under the stars is an amazing feeling. Knowing that you can survive without the luxuries of daily life is also a great feeling. Imagine carrying all that you need on your back; your food, shelter and clothing. The feeling of accomplishment when you complete such a trip is incredible. While backpacking is not for everyone, there are less physically demanding ways to experience sleeping in the outdoors. This includes endless established campsites in the area. These campsites range in their amenities. Some conveniences to consider are; drinkable



water, toilets, showers, proximity to other outdoor recreation, location of nearby grocery stores, and the closest medical facility or hospital, etc.

- **Rental Gear:** Having the right gear is very important to having a fun and successful trip. While outdoor gear can be expensive, there are ways to acquire gear for much cheaper prices. Check the campus recreation offices or local retailers for rental services on items such as tents, stoves and sleeping bags.
- **Boating, Canoeing, Kayaking, or Fishing:** Having the opportunity to spend time on the water is a great experience. Taking a canoe or kayak out on the water, one is able to see things you may have never been able to see from land. Go explore a local lake or river and see how many different species of wildlife you can spot!
- **Running/Skating:** While running is not for everyone, those who enjoy getting out and stretching their legs have it made virtually anywhere. Consider parks and trails in the area that offer both paved roads and off-road trails for running, as well as, roads that are safe for street running and sidewalk jogs. When running or skating on city streets, it is to your advantage to incorporate a route with low traffic (and following the first tip on safety), obey all traffic laws. In addition, it is not uncommon to find skate parks in many cities for those avid skate boarders, inline skaters or BMX riders.
- **Hiking:** If running is not your cup of tea, try going for a hike on one of the many trails in the area. Pick a nice day and pack a lunch and head out for a day of fresh air. Remember to plan your route before you head out on the trail. Bring plenty of water along with your lunch and snacks.

CONCLUSION

Please remember that this section is just to get your minds thinking of options for activities to do in the great outdoors. There are countless other activities that have not been mentioned here. Be creative and take time to spend exploring the awesome natural world around you!

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