

Palouse Walk @ PCEI
1040 Rodeo Drive, Moscow ID

General Instructions

Bring with you:

Pen & Paper or device to write
Device with instructions or printed instructions
Water & Snacks
Small blanket for seated activities

Once at PCEI:

You do not have to check into the main office at PCEI to do this walk, but do consider stopping in to say hello and find out more about the facility and programs available.
Parking can be found up by the main building.
Much of the trail is wheelchair accessible.
There is a bathroom along the trail, a full-sized, plumbed and wheelchair accessible facility.
Begin where the brick trail begins just in front of the main building, and simply follow the trail.

How to Proceed:

For each station, follow the instructions and write your basic responses while at the station. When you are done with all of the stations, you may want to sit down at one of the many picnic tables and construct poems or reflective prose pieces for each of the stations or construct one larger poem or reflection that takes into account all the stations at once.

When you get Home:

Finish your reflective writing and post it to the [FORUM](#). The forum is moderated and only positive attractions to one another's posts are permissible. The point here is not to critique one another or to judge the quality of the writing. You will not be judged for your writing. After you have posted your reflection, scan through other people's reflections and leave brief notes were you feel attracted to do so. Let others know what resonates with you in their experience. If something does not resonate with you, feel free to consider within yourself why that might be, but please do not post to that person. Again, we are reaffirming our positive sensory attractions to more-than-human nature as well as human nature. This is not a place of judgement.

Station 1

Breathe at the First Bridge

When you arrive at the bridge, walk around a little until you feel you are in a good spot. A 'good spot' is one that feels comfortable to you, where you feel safe, where you feel like you are welcome.

Ask the surrounding area permission to be present with it. If you feel the area is agreeing to your presence, allow yourself 10 seconds to simply 'be' with the area. If after those 10 seconds, you still feel welcome, proceed with the activity. This is what it feels like to have permission from a natural area to engage with it. We often think to ask other humans permission to be with them (though each of us knows what it feels like when this permission is not asked or granted), but do not often think to ask more-than-human nature whether we are welcome. If you do feel unwelcome, via strong wind, bothersome insects or an overall sense of just not being at ease, walk along the trail in either direction until you find the right place to be and repeat the process of asking permission and sitting with this permission.

And now: BREATHE. Take several long, deep breaths, feeling your lungs expand with the amazing air around you. Notice what other particles of life come into you. Are you inhaling the scents of the wet grasses, the crisp air, or the sunshine? Does the woodpile in the grass feel different than the wood beneath your feet? Just take note, as you breathe, of the things that come into your awareness. EXHALE and consider how the earth is now breathing YOU in, the same way we share our carbon dioxide with plant life, every exhale is your breath being shared with the earth. Consider this idea. How does it make you feel to realize you are also intimately connected to this breathing, sharing paradigm?

Now, HOLD YOUR BREATH. Hold your breath for as long as you possibly can. Consider what happens to you as you do. Are the positive, connected feelings you had previously in sharing breath changing now as you forcefully prevent that sharing? The longer you hold your breath, the more your natural attraction to breath vies for your attention and asks you to breathe! *'We don't exclusively own our natural attraction web string senses and sensitivities. Rather, they are a voice that we share with every species and mineral...Every five to seven years every molecule in our body becomes part of the environment and is replaced by a similar molecular from the environment. We become it; it becomes us.'* (Cohen).

When you breathe again, how do you feel? What do you notice? Does the place you are standing or sitting look or feel any different after doing this activity?

Take notes on your experience. Consider two or three important concepts you learned. Consider what parts of yourself (past expectations, social constructs, the harsh critics of the mind) are being reeducated. Write one 'power sentence' to describe what you have gained from this experience or a poem to capture your process. Let your words and your senses really mingle together to bring the non-verbal experience into a verbal expression.

Before moving on, thank the area for being with you and participating in this activity with you.

Station 2

The Protection of the Plum Grove Tunnel

Many animals make their homes in the low-lying brush. The calls of pheasant, quail and grouse you might hear as you walk the trail come from their safe spaces within the tall wild grasses of the prairie. Think of rabbits

camouflaged in their brown summer coats and white winter coats. Consider the ways in which children often love to burrow into blankets, under beds, into the nooks of trees when they are allowed. This need for safe protective places is an inherent part of all life.

If you have the ability to walk and duck through the entire plum grove tunnel, go ahead and do so. If not, get as close as you comfortably can to the tunnel so you can feel the ways the overarching plum branches wrap the area in a safe and magical manner. Whether you walk the tunnel or stay at the opening, find the spot here that feels right and gives you permission (as you learned to ask with activity #1 so you will always ask with each place) to be.

Now, sit with your eyes closed and breathe. See if you can feel, rather than see, the way in which the tunnel provides sanctuary. Listen to the sounds around you. Does this place feel familiar? New? Safe? Unnerving? Pay attention to what you are noticing and if you ever feel overwhelmed, just open your eyes and take a good look around. Let the senses you know best inform your other senses as well. The same way a parent will turn on the light for a child who is scared in the dark and point out the rustling sounds of a curtain in the wind and shed light on the shadows so that the dark becomes familiar and safe once again, let yourself acclimate to this place until you can feel the way in which the tunnel creates a safe haven for you and many other living beings. If you cannot feel this sense, that is also ok. Consider what things are coming up for you. What other associations you are having that prevent that sense of safety? Just notice. There is no right or wrong way to feel or do this activity. The point is to be able to reflect on what you are feeling and why in relation to the space you are in. Perhaps, for your animal being, this is not, in fact, your safe sanctuary. If that is the case, walk out from the tunnel and walk around until you DO find the place that provides sanctuary. Ask permission to sit and be in that area instead.

Whether you find sanctuary in the Plum Grove Tunnel or find it in another place, contemplate how it feels to be held safely by nature. Think of other animals that might share this same sense of safety in space. Breathe in that sense of sanctuary until you feel full and whole and ready to write about your experience.

Station 3

Stump Jump

Doesn't this just call out to you to play?!

Kids need no instruction to figure out their own games here. Squirrels dart up and down and over and up the various stumps. Every part of nature has function. And taking life too seriously is certainly not something nature always demands. There is plenty of play in the natural world.

Have you ever seen sparrows flying in the rain, catching the drops on their wings, spiraling and diving and darting between drops?

Play is not only the way the young learn about the world, it is the way we release tensions and stress and find our way out of fight or flight and back into life. It is the root of creativity. Nature is constantly creating. Nature is constantly playing.

How does this environment call to you to interact with it? Do you want to jump between the stumps? Do you want to climb on one and just stand a foot higher? Do you use your hands like a drum? How does this environment speak to you? What is your immediate sense of this place? What is your sense of the place after you've engaged in some kind of 'play'?

Are there times in your life you were told to 'behave' or 'smarten up'? Times you were told to work harder and that play was no longer available to you? The messages we get from other people and sources necessarily become embedded in our own consciousness and self-talk and often, recede to the background so that we assume they are our own voices. Of course, they become our own critical voices, but with awareness, we can look at the origin of these ideas and reconsider whether we still believe or need to believe what they are telling us. There are so many examples of play in the natural world. If you are having troubles letting yourself play, contemplate the voices that told you play was problematic. Then, give yourself permission to think about the ways in which you have seen other animals play and perhaps try to emulate that; put yourself in the paws of another creature to expand your own sense of self and connection.

What do you notice? Which parts of you are re-educated by allowing for play? What wakes up inside of you with play? How do you want to bring this sense of play back into the world and share with others in everyday life? How can you bring the essence of play into the words you use to write about play in your reflections or poetry?

Station 4 Amphitheater

"Amphi" means 'on both sides'. This gives an interesting meaning here, where on one side are seats, made of the bodies of trees and on the other side, the trees themselves.

Find a comfortable space on one of the benches and consider the communal aspect of sitting in a round where trees are your neighbors. Give thanks for the place you sit, acknowledging this capacity is born of the gift of the tree for wood. As always, ask permission to be present with the trees.

If it is spring through mid-autumn, spend time breathing (respiring) with the trees. Exchange molecules together. Every time you breathe in, breathe the breath coming from the leaves. Every time you breath out, feel the leaves absorbing your breath. Let this exchange occur for several minutes just feeling that exchange and connection and the way in which the immediate exchange of particles inspires you quite literally.

What about the winter? With no leaves on the trees, they have slowed their rate of respiration and draw from the deep sources of sugar within their trunks. Can you let yourself imagine this for a moment? Can you feel the

slower rate of existence while still acknowledging these trees have an abundant source of fuel to get through the winter? How does this resonate with you? Do you slow down in the winter? Do you wish you could slow down in the winter? What happens, here and now if you let your own respiration take a slower rate like that of the trees. What other areas of your body do you draw resources from? How does it feel to let the trees teach you a slower, deeper rhythm for living? How does it feel to sit in circle, to sit in communion and exchange breath and wisdom both? What else do you feel/hear/sense the trees doing, saying, sharing, telling you about life on this earth? What do you decide to share with and tell them about?

Station 5

Pavilion Perspective

All beings require shifts in perspective. Eagles land on high rocks and swoop down for prey, ground hogs climb from within the womb of their earthen homes to stand sentinel. Thus far, the stations you have visited have been on the low ground, within the heart of PCEI, below the tops of trees.

What happens when you walk the trail beside the big garden and wind your way up to the Pavilion at the top of the hill? How does it feel to walk within the tall grasses themselves as you skirt the trail? What color is the sky today? What happens as you and the sky become closer together?

Are you a creature that likes to be out in the open or do you more prefer to stay hidden within the folds of the world? What are the sounds and sensations you are receiving from the natural world right now? Do you prefer to stay on the trail or to go up onto the patio of the pavilion? How would it be to live in a place such as this with this kind of perspective and protection? Does that appeal or not?

How do you see the world differently from here? Pick a place along the trail or at the Pavilion that allows you to experience this new perspective in a way that feels right to you. Ask permission to sit and engage with the environment and ask what new information it wants to give you; what new perspective does it have to offer? Does this allow you to connect more deeply with this area? With nature inside of you?

Station 6

The Pond

There are places along a bird's migration path that are essential to its journey; places where the bird rests, eats, gathers, and prepares for the next leg of the journey. Wetlands are essential environments that are naturally occurring as way stations for the birds and a year round home for the countless other species that generate the ecology of this rich area of aquatic biosphere.

What places in your life serve this function? What are your sanctuaries, your habitats that nourish and replenish and assure your safe journey forward into the world?

Find a place along the perimeter of the pond, or sitting on the bench and let the essence and necessity of this small habitat sink in. Feel it the way you feel your other indoor sanctuaries. What happens when we remove this critical habitat from the lives of its inhabitants? What happens when your sanctuaries are destroyed or made absent somehow? In our tendency towards rampant development, many of these vital habitats are destroyed. Have you ever had one of your vital habitats destroyed? Perhaps a house fire or a forced relocation. How did this impact your life? What was lost? What was gained? Moscow has several small wetland areas like this one which have been preserved. It is often, as a human species, that we perceive the need to remedy a situation AFTER the damage has been done. How could you, right now, sitting here, conceive of a different way to approach that equation? How would it be if we entered into dialogue with the land and its various inhabitants prior to making 'improvements' as we seen them as humans? Have you ever destroyed (knowingly or unwittingly) the habitat of other beings? Cutting down important wild grasses, flowers and 'weeds' that house a myriad of beings in order to manicure a lawn? Cutting down an acreage of trees for house placement? Whose needs get to come first in these dynamics?

Consider again how your sanctuaries feel to you and how it would be (or was) to have them forcefully removed from you. Extend this same sense to the birds, creatures and plants of this environment in front of you and imagine what it would be to remove this from them?

Write your poem or reflection based on these questions and the sensations/discoveries you make in putting yourself into the position of being the animal in the habitat that is threatened. How would it be different if the agent threatening your existence actually engaged in discussion with you about mutual need and benefit rather than deciding for you?

Walking Silent/Singing Meditation

At the metal buffalo, there is the choice to descend the trail, past the beehives back to the main building of the Palouse Clearwater Environmental Institute (PCEI) or to continue along the upper trail that winds along prairie grasses, continuing until it reaches the gravel drive by the bus stop further down towards the entrance to PCEI from the main road. The trail is thin and there are several wood plank 'bridges' that are not suitable for wheelchair travel.

If you choose to take this trail, consider doing it as a silent walking meditation. What that means is simply that you will walk without talking and, in fact, walk without the expectation of holding onto the words in your own mind. Words, ideas, thoughts will obviously come through. But in this walk, just let them come and go. You are not experiencing this walk in order to write about it. You do not have to hold onto anything. Let each footfall bring you a new breath, a sense of your own movement, of the movement of the grasses. Feel the open land here compared to the more enclosed spaces of the earlier parts of the trail. Let your sensory awareness continue to expand to include the sounds of the immediate area as well as the sounds of cars and movement in the adjacent roads of Moscow. Expand your senses as far as they are willing to go. Can you hear space stations traveling above the atmosphere? Let your connection to the earth through your feet be the connection to every

single aspect of existence. With each step, let yourself become more fully immersed in the unity of the entire universe. What kind of animal, plant or mineral are you in movement?

This activity is for you. You can write about it in the forum or keep it as your own sacred communion.

If you have young children wanting to do this activity and they are of the age that silence for this period of time is not supportive of their natural inclination to connect through sound, consider making this a singing meditation. Choose a song familiar to your children and have everyone in the group sing it together over and over as you walk the trail. Consider your connection to each other through song as you feel your connection to the earth through your feet. Consider singing this song 'to the earth' and see how your children feel? How do you feel in singing to the earth?

Anyone can make this a singing rather than silent meditation! Follow your natural inclinations. If you would rather sing and walk then by all means do so! Take the trail several times and over several weeks. Perhaps you take it in a different fashion each time. Perhaps you become different animals while you walk. Let this trail communicate its ideas to you and listen to how the trail responds when you communicate your own ideas in return.

ENJOY!!