

The Realm of Nature

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Through the ages, men and women, boys and girls, of every nation, in the country and city, have sought something in the woods, in the fields, on the seas, rivers and lakes, in the valleys, the mountains and on the plains. Each generation has produced those individuals whose intense interest in nature has led them to describe and explain it. These men such as Darwin, Thoreau, Audubon and Jacques enjoyed the warmth of communion with nature. Every decade brings millions into the "wilderness" to explore, to search, and to enjoy.

What is this eagerness, this strange attraction to nature? Is it inherent or is it a learned reaction? Why do people like the great outdoors? Some folks go for the peace that is there; the stillness of space and the soft, languid flow of water. Others seek the beauty—trees in blossom and the rich green of grass.

Others go to be soothed by the gentle swaying of leaves and the golden glow of sunset. Some return to dream of far-off hills and the fight of salmon upstream. Boys go to seek adventure—the adventure of being lost in the woods and sleeping on a bed of leaves, the thrill of stepping on a snake or just seeing one. Older folk go for sweet nostalgia—initials on a tree and swaying wagon ruts through the woods. Some people are just curious—the hexagonal cell of the beehive and a walking-stick in pose. Children like its freedom—to do heroic things, to catch a young rabbit and to throw stones into a pond. Finally, man goes back to nature for the order there—green sprouts every year, sulfur butterflies each spring.

Let us analyze it. Is the color green soothing, or do we just think it is? Does one *learn* to seek curious items of interest or is this tendency a *natural* one? Do most humans at one time or another seek the peace and quiet of nature or are they taught to rest and relax there? Are we innately adventurous or do we get this trait through experience, reading and imitation? What happens during the early life of an individual to create a love for the outdoors? Why do some take to it from childhood and others not until after middle age? Why do some miss it entirely or do they all return at some stage or another?

Many naturalists trace their first interest to a book, a teacher, a visit to the zoo, or to picking up an earthworm or beetle. Perhaps Lewis Carroll instills the urge when he writes

“Will you walk a little faster?”
 said a whiting to a snail,
 “There’s a porpoise close behind us,
 and he’s treading on my tail,”
 See how eagerly the lobsters and the
 turtles all advance!
 They are waiting on the shingle—
 will you come and join the dance?

The effect of nature on mind and body is seldom discussed. Nonetheless, the phenomenon of the outdoors is an important factor in the lives of untold millions. It must be crystallized. In this phenomenon, man acquires a greater view and understanding of life. In this phenomenon, man associates things, names things, recognizes things and predicts things. This is enjoyable. There is sheer pleasure in finding in May the expected May apples, of recognizing and calling a tree a spruce or hickory, and of predicting a rain storm from low clouds, no sun, and extreme whiteness all around. These things are in nature

and they enrich the lives of mankind—perhaps they give man a grasp on this earth.

Nature vexes us; it challenges us and offers untold possibilities. We are seekers of knowledge—we like to know things. What animal is that? Why the rings around the moon? Is that poisonous? What are we here for? We seek *big* answers in nature. We observe and study. Those who cannot arrive at these answers, those who are “too busy,” those too dull to try, those too far away from the soil, those too wound up in machines—these turn away from nature and align themselves with artificial pastimes, with civilized devices, and toys. However, the civilized man generally comes back—back to the old garden, the old woods, and the old hat. He comes back to the old swimming hole, to the Spring peepers and the old rod; back to the simple life, to the peace and security of Nature.

Making Field Trips Worthy

If the outburst of enthusiasm that follows the mere mention of a field trip in our classes assured its success the instructor’s problem would be simple. Unfortunately, to many students it means escape from schoolroom activity and uninhibited freedom of a sort that seldom results in satisfactory achievement. Because of the fifth of the class which are in this group administrators and parents sometimes frown upon using school time for field work. Other factors also have made it increasingly difficult to take groups out. City instructors, who need field trips particularly, find the time element, distance to desirable areas, and liability for students’ safety discouraging handicaps. Delays and routines often prohibit use of a trip

to meet exigencies of classroom work when it would be most beneficial.

Field trips require as much planning as a classroom recitation or laboratory period. Students should get more from them than an armful of specimens to carry back to the laboratory or a list of organisms identified. These are desirable concomitants. But in secondary schools emphasis must be placed on the social objectives of biology whenever possible. We must stress those which require interpretative thinking and have social significance. If we consistently seek these broader objectives it will overcome some of our current difficulties.

Like every other school activity the field trip should have a worthwhile purpose. Bright students at times, can