Birdsong Backcountry Retreat

Nature & Forest Therapy Trail Guide

*For relaxation, renewal and deepening our*

*Nature Connection*

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**GETTING AROUND ON OUR 85 ACRES**

**Day Parking for Nature Connection Events**

If you are attending a group Forest Bathing event, please park just after you enter the property in the area marked for parking on the left.

**Trail Map**

Please see map on back page of this guide.

**Restrooms**

A restroom facility will be provided near that location for guests not staying at retreat. Before starting your walk, please hydrate yourself and bring water with you.

**Dogs**

Quiet, non-aggressive and dogs are allowed on leash.

**Respect & Privacy for All**

For privacy reasons, please do not approach a cabin that you are not staying at.

**In Case of Emergency**

Emergency contact info is found at each trailhead. You are encouraged to take a whistle, or if available, one of the walkie talkies. There is no cell service in areas away from the cabins.

Thank you for your participation. For more info on Forest Therapy, please go to [https://www.natureandforesttherapy.org](https://www.natureandforesttherapy.org/)

For more info about Birdsong Retreat or Nature Connection Events, please visit [www.birdsongbackcountryretreat.com](http://www.birdsongbackcountryretreat.com)

Or contact Stacy Prater-Vigil at 760 580-2093 or Laurie Roberts at 619 818-9343

***“We are all woodland people. Like trees, we hold a genetic memory of the past because trees are parents to the child deep within us. We feel the majesty of nature calls to us in a voice beyond our imaginations. But even in those of us who haven’t encountered trees in months or even years, the connection to the natural world is there, waiting to be remembered.***

***In telling the story of my life and the leaves, roots, trunks, bark and stems that weave all through it, I hope to stir that memory. I want to remind you that the forest is far more than a source of timber. It is our collective medicine cabinet. It is our lungs. It is the regulatory system for our climate and our oceans. It is the mantle of our planet. It is the health and well-being of our children and grandchildren. It is our sacred home. It is our salvation.***

***Trees offer us the solution to nearly every problem facing humanity today, from defending against drug resistance to halting global temperature rise, and they are eager to share those answers. They do so even when we can’t or won’t hear them. We once knew how to listen. It is a skill we must remember.”***

***From “To Speak to the Trees” by Diana Beresford-Kroger***

**WELCOME TO BIRDSONG’S NATURE AND FOREST THERAPY TRAILS**

**What is Forest and Nature Therapy?**

Forest or Nature therapy is an interactive, sensory experience between you and the forest, where both are active participants. This is a two-way exchange and when practiced regularly, these walks can foster a deep and loving partnership beneficial to the well-being of each other. In Forest Therapy, what we sense can reflect parts of ourselves. We notice the trees, beautiful, imperfect, strong. The forest becomes a mirror or “therapist”, and the guided walk opens the door to see parts of ourselves that may be tucked away or hidden. Our hope is that you will hear the call of the forest on our trails, experience a deepening of your relationship with nature, and leave with a fuller heart.

**The intention of the “walk experience”**

Birdsong Backcountry Retreat’s mission is to help people recover their innate connection and love for nature, its flora, fauna and one another. Forest and Nature Therapy walks are based on a practice originating in Japan centuries ago, known as Shinrin-Yoku, a Japanese word that translates literally as “Forest Bathing”.

It is not a hike, but a very slow, mindful move through the natural environment. This slow walk calls all our senses into the present moment. At Birdsong, we have created 3 different ways to experience Forest and Nature Therapy which are based on scientifically proven methodologies of connecting participants to nature in a profound way. You can choose to be guided by a Certified Forest Therapy Guide by appointment/fee (the most powerful way to experience it), by a downloaded MP3 audio guide, or by a printed guide.

Another way that Forest Therapy walks are different from “normal” walks is the almost slow-motion pace, done about ¼ the speed of a normal walk. It is not about arriving at any destination. This wander into the forest is about being curious and noticing what you see, feel, hear, touch, smell, even taste and experiencing each moment as it arises. Let your imagination follow your senses and explore where that leads.

Noticing the sounds around you, we invite you to (If you are walking with others) please refrain from talking until you are prompted to share. This experience is between you and what is around you, your relationship to the forest and the “more than human” world.

Sometimes you may feel the call to go off the trail following your curiosity and senses, which is encouraged. Do practice awareness of where you step. We share the forest with other beings, including snakes, stickers and insects. If you have an encounter with one, simply leave the area.

**The Forest Trail Walk**

The “Forest Trail” starts at the trailhead shown on map and before proceeding take a moment calm your thoughts, breathe deeply and take in the beautiful surroundings. When you feel ready, slowly walk up the smaller trail just to the left of the “**Pleasures of Presence**” sign to the circle of trees.

**1.Invitation: Pleasures of Presence**

* **Prompt:** Find a spot in the tree circle where you feel comfortable sitting or standing. Take a few moments to look around and notice where you are. Close your eyes if it feels comfortable.

Take a few deep breaths and notice how your chest and ribcage expand when you inhale, and how they contract when you exhale. Notice your body and how it feels to be supported by the earth beneath you. I wonder how the sky holds you? Notice other living beings around you.

Turning your attention to your sense of touch, hold your hands up, with your palms facing forward. Keeping your eyes closed, let your hands be your sensors. What can your hands touch? What do you feel on your skin? What variety of sensations do you notice on your clothed or bare skin?

Now being to notice what sounds you hear around you. What is the sound that is farthest away from your body? And what is the sound that is closest? How do the sounds that are near and far interact with one another? I wonder if you can hear the music of this place. Now, begin to exaggerate your breathing so that you can hear your breath, as your breath joins the symphony of sounds. What does it feel like to add your own sound to this place and become part of the symphony around you?

Turning your attention to the sense of smell, take a deep breath in through your nose. What scents are being offered by the forest today? Feel free to move your head from side to side like a hound dog picking up a scent in the air. Do you smell more than one thing? Invite smells and scents into your awareness and notice the aromas around you.

Breathing in through your mouth, what does the forest air offer you? How does the air taste? Feel free to stick out your tongue and move your head side to side as you explore the taste and texture of the air. Take another deep breath in and notice how the air feels as it flows in and out of you. As you breathe out, think about how the forest receives your breath. Is there something you would like to offer the forest as you exhale?

Eyes still closed, slowly make your way to a standing position. Rest your hands by your sides. What do you feel with your body? Slowly turn in a circle, until you feel a tug to stop.

In a moment, but not just yet, I’ll ask you to open your eyes. When you do, I invite you to see what appears as if you’re seeing this place for the very first time. And consider that everything you are seeing is also seeing you. And now, I invite you to open your eyes. When you are ready, re-join the circle. Share what you are noticing with the person beside you. If you prefer you may also share with the land.

* **Sharing prompt at the end of the invitation:** What are you noticing? Take a few moments to share your experience with partner or the land. When you are complete, return to the main trail and continue to next invitation following green arrows.

2. **Invitation: What or Who is in Motion?**

* **Prompt:** Slowly and silently wander along the main trail and notice who or what is in motion. Do this for about 15 minutes just noticing what or who is in motion.
* **Sharing prompt:** Take a few moments to share your experience of **What’s In Motion** with partner or the land. When you are complete, continue wandering along the trail to next invitation following green arrows.

3. **Invitation: Earth Dreaming Chamber**

* **Prompt:** Find a comfortable place to stand, sit or lie down. Connect your body or a part of your body to the earth beneath you. Imagine that the earth is alive and dreaming just like we do. I wonder if, without any words, a dream might arise from the earth and move through your body. Take as much time as you need to explore your deepening connection with this land and the earth. Notice how your heart feels and what dreams may arise in you.
* **Sharing prompt:** Take a few moments to share what you’re noticing with a partner or with the land. When you are complete, continue wandering along the trail following the green arrows.

4. **Invitation: Treasure Hunt**

* **Prompt:** Imagine this land holds a treasure for you and only your heart can find it. Let your heart guide you to your treasure. This treasure may appear in your mind, your heart or even through something tangible in the natural world. I invite you to bring this treasure with you to the next invitation.
* **Sharing prompt:** Take a few moments to share your treasure with a partner or with the land. When you feel complete, find a home for your treasure, knowing it will always be here for you. When you are ready, you may continue wandering along the trail following green arrows.

**5. Invitation: Reciprocity Ceremony**

* **Prompt:** Find a way to bring your experience to a close. Is there anything you would like to reciprocate or offer to the land and the forest for all it has given to you? Perhaps you can sign a song or hum to the forest, recite your favorite nature poem or create a new one, simply witness all that is alive around you, or provide some other offering or gesture. Honor your intuition and do what feels right for you.

**The Dry Creek Trail Walk**

Dry Creek Trailhead starts at Birdsong Retreat’s entrance and before proceeding take a moment calm your thoughts, breath deeply and take in the surroundings. When you feel ready, slowly walk up the road just beyond the “Dry Creek Trail” sign to the first invitation sign “**Pleasures of Presence**” located at entrance to the large circle of Oaks on the right.

**1. Invitation: Pleasures of Presence**

* **Prompt:** You may be seated or stand for this invitation. Close your eyes if it feels comfortable. Take a few deep breaths. Just notice what it feels like to breathe.

Let’s imagine, by seeing roots coming down from the soles of your feet. Watch those roots grow deep into the soil of the earth, rooting you and grounding you like a strong tree. I wonder what these roots might be touching or how they are interacting with other beings? How does it feel to be supported by the earth beneath you?

Turning your attention to the sense of touch, begin to raise your hands in the air with your palms facing forward. Keeping your eyes closed, let your hands be your sensors. What variety of sensations do you notice on your clothed or bare skin?

Shifting your attention now to your sense of smell, I wonder what forest aromas you might notice? If it feels right, you can even pick up something from the earth around you and breathe it in. Where does that smell take you? Invite these aromas into your awareness. I wonder if any new scents arise for you?

Because your sense of smell is connected to our sense of taste, sip air into your mouth. I wonder what you may be tasting right now. Maybe it’s something salty or sweet that you tasted earlier in the day. I wonder what flavors you might taste in the air?

Tune into the sounds around you. What does this place sound like? What do you hear that is near? What do you hear that is far away? How do the sounds that are near and far interact with one another? Become aware of how the sounds around you represent life. Notice through sound, all of life that exists around you.

If you’re still seated, slowly come back to standing. Notice your body. Notice what if feels like to be in your body. Placing your hands over your heart, imagine that you have little strings coming from your heart space and these strings are being tugged by something in nature. Turn in a circle, until you are facing the direction or being that is tugging you. Honor your intuition. Keeping your eyes closed, explore the sensation of your connection to the direction or being to which you were drawn.

* **Prompt:** When you are ready, open your eyes and see what appears as if you are seeing it for the very first time.
* **Sharing prompt:** What are you noticing? Take a few moments to share your experience with partner or the land. When you are complete, return to the main trail and continue to next invitation following green arrows.

**2. Invitation: Who or What is in Motion**

This invitation starts just beyond the oak circle as you exit the same way you entered.

* **Prompt:** Walk slowly and silently notice what is in motion. Do this for about 15 minutes just noticing what or who is in motion.
* **Sharing prompt at the end of invitation:** Take a few moments to share your experience of What’s In Motion with a partner or the land. When you are complete, continue wandering along the trail following the green arrows.

**3. Invitation: Open-Hearted Wander**

Following the green and white trail marker arrows you will come to this next invitation.

* **Prompt:** When you’re ready, close your eyes and place your hands over your heart. Notice where your heart wants to go and if it pulls you in one direction. Is it pulling you to someone or something? Let your heart guide you as you wander out onto the land.
* **Sharing prompt :** When you feel complete, share what you’re noticing with a partner or the land. After you have shared, continue wandering along the trail following the green arrows.

**4. Invitation: Befriend a Tree**

* **Prompt:** Wander out to a tree that is calling out to you. Introduce yourself to the tree. Sit with the tree like you would sit and visit with a friend.
* Notice if the tree has anything to offer you. Listen and communicate with all of your senses.
* **Sharing prompt:** When you feel complete, continue along this trail following the green arrows towards the next invitation.

**5. Invitation: Reciprocity Ceremony**

Follow the green and white trail marker arrows to the final invitation.

* **Prompt:** Find a way to bring your experience to close. Is there anything you would like to reciprocate or offer to the land and the forest in exchange for all of the gifts you have received today? Perhaps you can sing or hum a song to the forest, recite your favorite nature poem or create a new one, simply witness all that is alive around you, or provide another offering or gesture. Honor your intuition and do what feels right for you.

**This space for personal reflections or drawings**

Map

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