

NATURE-ORIENTED PARENTING®

A guide for caregivers to teach children about the natural world

A Companion to the *Natural Inquirer*

...Be natural



The “**WILDERNESS 2.0**” monograph is all about a teen’s experience in the wilderness and how that experience influenced him. In a similar way below, a father and son duo has been exploring the great

outdoors together since the son was a baby. Both father and son reflect on their experience in wilderness areas and how that experience has affected them.

Reflecting on Wilderness

From Dave (father):

My son David and I have been exploring the outdoors together since before he could walk. I’d carry him around the yard and let him look at the leaves on the trees shimmering in the sunlight or at the spider webs covered in the morning dew. It was a learning experience for both of us— him seeing things for the first time and me seeing them through a child’s eyes as if for the first time.

As he grew, we wandered farther afield, walking down to see the neighbor’s horses. He was always thrilled when one was grazing close to the road. (Of course, we didn’t try to feed them or touch them.) As he got a bit older, we started exploring nearby parks and nature preserves. I’d do my best to put my fears aside as I watched him inch across a stream balanced on a log, gaining confidence with every step. Now, we occasionally leave the modern world behind for a few days at a time, exploring the mountains of Appalachia or the Atlantic barrier islands. Everything we need, we carry with us. If we forgot to pack it, we do without. If the weather turns unpleasant, we deal with it as best we can. If it’s going to get done, whether it’s fetching water or cooking dinner or hanging the food from a tree to keep it safe from raccoons while we sleep, one of us has to do it.

Sometimes I teach my son some important lessons, like how to light the stove safely. Sometimes he teaches me some important lessons, like just how much he can do for himself now that he’s 14 years old. Sometimes we spend long hours talking about all of those things we never take the time to talk about back home. Sometimes we hike in silence, each with our own thoughts. Sometimes we’re rewarded with the feeling of elation as we realize we’ve made it to our campsite. Sometimes we’re rewarded with the sight of wild horses grazing a few feet away. Always, we come home with a fresh perspective on things.



And from David (14-year-old son):

I have gone backpacking in wilderness twice with my dad, and both times it was a fun and awesome experience. I have seen many things that it is impossible to see in the concrete world of civilization, like 90-foot-high waterfalls in the Appalachian Mountains and wild horses just roaming freely on a wooded island in southeastern Georgia. Not only are there many things out there it is impossible to see without going deep into the backcountry, but backpacking and camping can provide a rewarding experience in that you can realize how strong you really are. It is also rewarding to see how it is possible to still go on living without television, computers, iPhones, and other modern technologies. Finally, the reward is in the nature around you while on the trip. Whether it is a bald eagle flying right above your head or a deer you see down the trail, nature never ceases to amaze any human who ventures into the backcountry.

The *Nature-Oriented Parenting* newsletter is designed for you to cut it out of the journal and take it home to share with your parents or other caregivers.



Did You Know?

The Appalachian National Scenic Trail passes through 25 different wilderness areas. The Continental Divide Trail passes through 26 different wilderness areas, including the Gila, which was the first wilderness area. The Gila Wilderness was established in 1924. For more interesting facts about wilderness areas, visit <http://www.wilderness.net>.

Wildlife Spotlight: Wildlife in Wilderness Areas



Wilderness is valuable for many reasons. One reason wilderness areas are valuable is that they help protect wildlife. Many birds use wilderness areas as places to rest during migration, grounds for wintering, and areas for nesting.

For example, the Gulf Island Wilderness in Mississippi provides a critical stopover site for migratory birds like the ruby-throated hummingbird and yellow-billed cuckoo. Many other animals need wilderness areas, too. For example, wolverines, moose, bear, and elk all need large, undisturbed areas to make their homes. Wilderness areas provide this type of space. For more information about wildlife in wilderness areas, visit <http://www.wilderness.net/NWPS/valuesEcological>.

Family Outdoor Activity: Make Your Own Miniwilderness!

In this activity, you and your family will create an undisturbed area in your yard that you can observe over the course of a year or even longer. Depending on the space you have available, you may make this area as small or as large as you would like. The important thing is that the area you choose must not be disturbed, so you will want to mark off this area so that everyone will know where it is. If you have a small area, you could use a hula hoop to mark the area you will observe. If you have a larger area, you could use stakes and a rope to designate the area, or you could tie a rope into a circle and place it on the ground to identify the area you will observe.

After you have decided where your miniwilderness will be and you have marked off the area, your next job is to observe it periodically throughout the year and note all the family's observations in a journal. The date and time should be recorded for each journal entry. You may want to have a section for each family member in the journal or you may just choose to all write your observations under the date listed and put initials by the observation. For example, what colors and shapes do you see, and how do the colors and shapes change throughout the seasons? What evidence of animals do you see? How does this evidence change over the seasons? What do you hear and smell? Do you see soil, rocks, or plants? What is the air temperature? What is

the weather like during your observations? Is it raining or has it recently rained?

As you and your family observe the area, you should not disturb it. For example, you should observe it from the edges and not climb across the area to observe it. Nothing should be added or removed from the area. You may want to bring a magnifying glass to help with your observations. You may also want to take pictures of the area you observe so that you can keep track of what it looks like over time. If you don't have access to a camera, you could also make a drawing of the area each time you make an observation. Take time to discuss with each other what you notice about the area and how it is changing over time.

This idea was derived from a book, *The Forest Unseen*, by David George Haskell.

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