

Medicine Walks

*Developed by Ann Linnea for PeerSpirit, Inc.
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A Medicine Walk is an important tool for preparing ourselves for a wilderness rite of passage.

The walk generally lasts an entire day, from sun-up to sundown, and consists of four elements: intention, dedication, guidance, and gratitude.

Intention is the core of a Medicine Walk. It is done alone, in silence, and in solitary connection with the natural world. The intention of the walk is to see, hear, smell, observe, and sense as much as possible. The walk places you in the care of your natural surroundings and opens you to subtle messages that can be interpreted to help you prepare for the Cascadia quest, or keep you grounded in your everyday life.

A Medicine Walk is not just a hike: it is a ceremony. It begins and ends with some kind of sacred marking, like stepping over a branch laid across the entry onto a path, or smudging with sage, or preparing a special thermos of tea. Ceremony focuses intention and attention and sets the tone for a different kind of journey. Fasting on the walk clears mind and body; but if you bring food, keep it simple and always be sure to bring enough water or tea.

Dedicating the walk to an intention. The time spent outdoors on these walks is for “medicine” which means defining some aspect in your life that would benefit from reflection and attention. Perhaps you need time and space to think about a relationship: it could be about loss, imbalance, or joy that you want to dedicate time to honoring. Perhaps you are struggling with an issue at home or work: dedicate the walk to seeking insight on that issue. Or maybe your intention is much broader: seeking deeper connection with nature, praying for right relationship to the earth, or praying for reconciliation around any one of the societal issues that impact us these days. “Medicine” means to walk slowly while paying attention to the tiny details in nature around us—really paying attention and asking for help.

A Medicine Walk is a journey to seek guidance. Going humbly into nature to seek guidance is a holy, radical act in this age of hyper-connectivity and busyness. To walk at the pace of guidance is an antidote to the usual pace of our lives.

The walk is, of course, more of an inner journey than an outward physical journey. *It is more a time for being than a time for doing.* Alternate between walking and resting. A Medicine Walk is not about going from Point A to Point B or walking so many miles or kilometers. Many times, people walk along making mental lists or thinking too much, or (when walking with others) filling the air space around them with so much conversation that nature is little more than a gym track.

Medicine walks invite you to pause, maybe even sit by a tree or on a spot of grass and rest in the quiet. Wait. Observe. Stay close to thoughts and feelings that seem to rise from the quieted core of yourself. Trust the inner voice—not the monkey mind, but intuitive guidance.

Bring a journal. When you pause to write, you may find yourself drawn to some natural object—a tree, a stump, a rock. By focusing, breathing more deeply, and beginning to write with a stream of consciousness, you may be given an insight that relates to your intention for the walk. Simple and sometimes even profound insights flow from the pen to the page within the container of ceremony.

The Medicine Walk is an opportunity to give back to the earth by offering appreciation and love. It is a tangible way to consciously notice the beauty of the world around you—to really notice. Part of your purpose is simply to appreciate nature. Appreciation is a powerful form of activism in this political world.

Pragmatics are always important in the wilderness. Always choose an area of relative safety where you will not get lost. Think about the day of the week or the time of the day you are walking to maximize opportunity to be mostly alone. When you do encounter other people, simply nod or keep conversation to a minimum. You are on a solo experience.

Make sure someone at home knows where you have gone and when you plan to return. Carry a day pack with extra clothing for weather changes.

The benefits are tangible. There is a Medicine Walk calm that comes from spending time alone in nature. The “to do” lists seem further away and at least temporarily less important. Your attention span will likely feel increased and, hopefully, you will feel more hopeful about life in general. From this place you are better able to be a good citizen, community and family member.

One Medicine Walk is helpful, more are even more helpful. Find time to experience several Medicine Walks before coming to Cascadia: perhaps one day a month or one morning a week. This time in nature will prepare you for your solo time, for being alone on the mountain for three days and nights. If you can't do sun-up to sundown for every walk, do at least one full day walk and several other shorter walks. Enjoy this powerful form of spiritual practice. Trust that you are welcomed into the wonder of wildness. Attune yourself. Trust the earth.