



Winter's Wallows

AN ANTHOLOGY OF JOURNAL ENTRIES

From the students of Take a Hike!

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INTRODUCTION

During this two-week Winter Term course, students spent time walking around the MICDS campus, to nearby parks (Rodes Park and Stacy Park), and through slightly farther parks (Creve Coeur, Powder Valley, River's Edge, and Castlewood). Each day, they interpreted an excerpt of *Walden*, and worked on noticing the nature around them. They were tasked with trying to view nature as would a transcendentalist. At the end of their experience, they encapsulated their experiences in the following journal entries.

Changes

Reina Banerjee

I admire the little bush, empty leaves-and yet heartwarming. Solely two berries and a dead leaf ornament the bush, but millions of bright red ornament berries nestle along the path before the bridge starts, each plank like chocolate shaped to perfection. However, the question truly is: what happens to the bush? Rachel Carson once said "the human race is challenged more than ever before to demonstrate our mastery, not over nature but of ourselves", for is this what happens to bushes as well?

As I gaze through the fields, I notice the snow is like a blanket covering the world; each snowflake being a small crystal to make the world shine. It touches the trees like a sprinkle of glitter, decorating and adorning them. I view many bare trees in the cold, dry, winter; however, the emptiness of them gave me fear of the dark trail. But when I pass the trees, I see a ray of sunshine and many beautiful, tan colored, plants, lighting the way to happiness. However, when I watch more bare trees reflect against the water, it made me think of secrets being revealed to the world, the parts of life you cannot trust.

I would want to live behind the river, on the flat patch of grass, secluded and yet included in nature. When I observe my bush now, I see it has not visibly changed. I still see just two berries and a single leaf, but inside-it changed. Undergoing snow, ice, hail-it changed, definitely, but solely on the inside. It must have fears and goals, challenges and competitors, for I am definite the bush changed, like myself in my experience of nature.

A New Light

Maddy Brooks

The art of noticing is a skill that takes most people their whole life to realize the importance of. This skill, the attention to small details and beauty, can be the most enriching source of happiness and progress in one's fleeting lifetime. I have never particularly considered my hometown of St. Louis, Missouri, to be exceedingly beautiful, especially in the still and dead mid-winter months. I have always considered the city-like atmosphere and lack of mountains or beach to be dull compared to my birthplace of northern California. Recently, my opinions of this have changed.

As I began the uphill hike at Castlewood State Park, a location only 20 minutes from my house that I never knew existed, I surveyed at first glance the steep and muddy trail that I was embarking on. When I walked forth on the crisp winter morning, an excited energy propelled my steps through the unknown trail. The rising sun filtered golden light onto a landscape made new by each possible path. What had been merely a backdrop now sparkled with hidden truth at every turn.

Pausing by a large fallen branch, I noticed the intricate artistry concealed by wet soil and varied leaves. This led me to wonder about the life of this fallen branch before its fate; How long has it sat there untouched? The feeling of the unknown pushed me to imagine. I imagined a time when this branch resided at the very top of a one-hundred-year-old sycamore tree, home to a family of sparrows. Nearby, a hawk flew through the air effortlessly. I envied the ease of the bird's flight, just as I imagined the many possible lives of the fallen branch and its endurance throughout the seasons. As I crested the hill, the sky's vastness shocked me as the horizons opened up a depth of possibility and abyss that I had not noticed before. The bird's eye view of the Meramec River gave me the sense that I was a falcon circling above. I realized that before I started the climb, I was standing right next to the same river, but did not pay attention to the glimmering waters or the vibrant rocks. I grasped a hidden insight, one that only is known to the birds above.

I believe that the freedom that lies within the art of noticing, wondering, and being present in the moment can provide me with an imperishable sense of truth and possibility. As I descended the post-snowfall, unevenly trod path, I felt restored, with a new openness to beauty in the future. My newfound ability to dive deeper into the details of my surroundings will undoubtedly make me more open to change and positivity about the environment that will surround me in the time ahead.

A Different Kind of Beauty

Lucas Cheng

As I set foot in the park, I didn't think too much about it. I simply just saw some tall trees, green grass, and the bright blue sky. But as I continued to stroll, I wondered, what was so unique about this place? Well, I began to see beauty within the lines of simple aspects of nature. I suddenly stopped to take a deeper look around, and suddenly, an array of leafless trees silently laying across the field appeared, with the vivid lime-green grass shimmering against the sunlight, and a gradient of blue stretching across the empty sky. I picked up a leaf from beneath my foot, and looked at it. It was just a leaf, I first thought. but as I looked closer, I began to see it differently. The leaf was brown, and covered in hundreds of little veins and black dots. But what made it special? What made this leaf different from the other ones? Well, it was crisply folded in half, with a long crease across it. Had the leaf naturally been folded over like that? Or did somebody fold it themselves? I began to wonder questions that I wouldn't typically think about. I put the leaf back where it was, and continued on my stroll. After I picked up that leaf, it opened up a new perspective of nature within me.

I continued to walk across the path, and came across this small area of land. Two massive trees towered over a series of vibrant red berry trees, shivering in the cold wind. Thousands of brown and yellow leaves lay on the dirt ground, with a patch of sparkling grass reflecting the sunlight. This might be a possible place I could build a home. The area lay next to a river stream, allowing easy access to water. I put some of my belongings on the ground, and decided that this would be my home base.

It began to snow. I entered a new unexplored area and noticed an array of tall majestic trees laying across the vast snowy lands, glistening against the plain gray sky. The simple beauty of the snow-filled white ground was especially appealing to me, for it being one of my first times seeing snow. I walked through some garden paths, as the remaining bodies of fallen flowers withered in the wind. More piles of gray and brown leaves lay under the branches, with their delicate placements being determined by only nature itself. A small pond was covered in a few lily pads scattered around the area, with a group of orange goldfish swimming peacefully in the shallow waters.

Once again, I stopped to observe the surrounding area. As I closed my eyes, I tasted the cold refreshing air against my tongue, heard the heavenly sounds of the birds singing, and smelled the freezing fresh air. I opened my eyes and picked up a large stick. It was hard and rough, but because it had snowed, the piece of wood was covered in white frosty snowflakes, and felt significantly colder than usual. A large glistening lake hid behind a series of naked trees. I took a hike up to the peak of a hill, and looked out. Train tracks stretched across the area, with the vibrant blue lake shining against the clouds. It was truly a sight of beauty, a sight to behold.

As I returned to homebase, some things had changed. The once green berry trees were now naked, with thousands of gray leaves underneath the place they had once grown. The river had slowed down due to the cold temperatures, with the water becoming ice. A new world had opened up to me, a world of natural beauty I had never seen before.

My final thoughts

Drew Danforth

When I first signed up for this class and walked in on the first day I thought that it would be sort of pointless, I thought we would just be hiking and not doing anything else. Then we were introduced to the journaling part of the class and I thought it would be really boring. Since it is the dead of winter I thought that none of the hikes would be pretty. When we took our first hike, I was looking around and there was nothing cool to see because there was no color on the trees and no green in the grass and all the leaves were on the ground and the sky was gray and it was cold. I honestly thought that it was kinda ugly.

The second day when we took our hike in Stacy Park, I started to take a little bit more notice of nature and look past the dead trees and the dead plants. I started to realize how the color contrasted with the sky and how it can be cool when all of the leaves are gone; I was starting to look to find the beautiful parts of it. Throughout all of the Hikes I would continue to notice the beauty: I noticed how the branches would move in the wind, I noticed after the hike in Chesterfield around the lake how the water moved in the direction of the wind. When we would hike, I would journal and think about how it looked before humans came and ruined it. I would think of where I would put my house. My favorite place to put my house would be the hike in Chesterfield. Putting my small cabin on the small lake, waking up and seeing the beautiful views of the water. In the winter seeing the trees glisten with snow and the sun hitting it at the right time, in the summer the warm air and the green leaves on the trees blowing in the wind. This new view that I came across on the second day at Stacy Park when we took our silent walk. That's when I started to notice the beauty in the ugly.

My Home in nature

Alexa Davis

The small candy wrapper that once resided here has gone. Having revisited the spot where the sticks poked up from the ground, where the tall grass blew in the wind, the proof of human residence here has vanished. I am able to imagine so much more about this small spot of land. The tall grass a space for small animals to hide from a predator, the sticks like a climbing gym for bugs. It is a peaceful place, once where Nature and humans collided, but now the wrapper, the evidence of human arrival at this spot has disappeared, now proving the homey place for other living creatures and plants. My home, which could really be anywhere will be the spot between the large trees, where the sunlight pokes through the branches in mid morning onto the soft, winter grass. My home is only here once I am able to appreciate the real beauty from it. It could really be in any area, like near the bubbling creek which I could use for fresh water. However, I am not an intruder, I am not invasive like the human who left the candy wrapper. I am a part of the nature, sharing my home with others who also appreciate its beauty, the small plants and animals surrounding me.

A small leaf is illuminated by the bright mid morning sunlight and I notice the veins poking through each section of the leaf, reminding me of when the summer weather begins to become chilly, as the life from the trees begins to let go, when the leaves shrivel and drop high above. Before my weeklong trip to the wilderness, I thought that Nature in winter symbolized death, with the trees and animals in hibernation, most of the other plants, once alive and thriving now also dead and browning. However, I realize now how Nature in winter symbolizes life. People may consider springtime real beauty, with all of those bright hues and greens. In winter, animals snuggle up warm with their loved ones, until late winter when the first leaf reappears, when Nature comes alive reminding me of growth and failure, even when falling a new leaf, or realization reappears even if it is far in the future. While it seemed dead and boring before, Nature has continued to remind me to chase my dreams, and to always look for new places for a real home.

A Walk Through Nature

Anna Dehlendorf

Rachel Carson believes that “the real wealth of the nation lies in the resources of the earth - soil, water, forests, and wildlife” and now I understand what she means. Prior to my journey through nature, I believed that it was near impossible to find beauty in the middle of winter, but I was surely mistaken. As I took my first step onto the rugged trail and felt the crisp air on my face, I knew that this was going to be a memorable experience. Walking through the woods was calming, but the silence spoke louder than any words could. I found a sense of belonging in the quietness of the earth that surrounded me, and I could see with my own eyes the beauty of the outdoors. Everything worked together in a surreal way to create the masterpiece that I was staring at. The stream, the birds, the trees, the dead leaves, as well as the dirt all had a role in this forest. As my thoughts became clearer, I couldn't stop thinking about my childhood. When I was little, my cousins and I loved the woods. It became our enchanted playground, where imagination flourished. Our laughter echoed throughout the forest, and sitting there today I felt like I could still hear that sound.

Although everything I saw had its own beauty, one spot in particular had a connection to me. On the edge of the MICDS garden, a captivating plant stands. The dark and elegant branches of this plant contain vibrant clusters of red berries that emerge like jewels. Each and every one of these berries seem like they have a story, a life, and possibly even a secret. As the sunlight hits these red orbs, it radiates a sense of warmth that goes against the mysterious darkness of the sticks. This plant is truly a masterpiece of the outdoors. I aspire to be like this flora, full of life and color, but also with edges and contrasts. I aim to be like the waterfalls, cool and always moving on. I dream of being like a tree, always changing and growing. Each aspect of nature contains something that I hope to see in myself. I pray that for the rest of my life, I remember that nature is far more than what first meets the eye.

How Nature Changed Me

Isaac George

Within the last week I have experienced a journey like no other. Each paradise we visited contains its own reward and holds a special place in my heart. These places have changed every facet of my life in unimaginable ways. Every object, animal, and view that I saw did its own part to change me as a person. This last week, venturing through nature and being one with it has pushed me to adapt and grow into a better person.

We ventured to a small plot of land and traveled through many dead trees just to find a hidden gem. When we got there my breath was immediately taken away from me. There were evergreen trees adding a breath of life to the scene. Rocks almost acting as the border of a canvas. And the star of the show was a quiet little pond. The sun shone against the pond painting intricate little patterns throughout it. As I looked into the pond I could see my reflection peering into my very soul, urging me to question my ideas and beliefs about nature. I would love to live here amongst the trees and the birds, but planting anything man made here would ruin the peace and delicate feeling of Stacy Park.

I wanted to stay forever but there was another experience to change me. So into the car we went as we drove to the lovely Creve Coeur Park. Right as I stepped outside of the car onto the rough path a gust of icy wind hit me in the face, it awoke me from the sleepy daze I was in the morning, and boy am I glad it did. If I was not fully awake I could not have truly experienced what was to come. About one hundred feet into the park all of my senses were hit with delight. I could smell the fresh air, hear the trickling of water, taste the icy breeze, feel the wind on my skin, and see the towering waterfall. The drops of water moved in slow motion as they slowly trickled down the steep waterfall. The water made me feel if I jumped in it I would feel true happiness and if I drank from it I would gain eternal life. As I saw the water fall from the mountain I felt warm even on such a cold day. I had to drag myself away step by step just to continue along the journey after seeing such a beautiful sight. The trek from the waterfall to the next clearing was beautiful in its own right as the trees encompassed you and you felt like you were walking through your own personal tunnel. But there was a light at the end of that tunnel as we burst into a bright clearing. When I first saw it I thought it was seeing things the lake looked like it was filled with glass. But on the double take I realized that the lake in fact was not filled with glass but instead a chill had set over the water giving the lake a glossy coat. The walk was long but the view of the lake made up for it tenfold. I would absolutely love to have a house on the edge of the lake and be able to view the park in every season.

This last week gave me time to stop, slow down and experience nature to the fullest.

Crisp Clear Air

Avery Henriksen

In the crisp embrace of winter, my footsteps rolled through the once silent woods of Castlewood Park. My peers' laughter and chatter echo throughout. The cold air, biting yet exhilarating, whispered tales of those who passed through here before me. While silently hiking, each step carried me deeper into a world of solitude, where the only companions were the branches above and the moist slimy mud beneath my shoes. Amidst the chill, my surroundings painted a serene canvas of greys, browns, and oranges as if the earth itself had surrendered to winter's welcome. The uphill of the bluff I aspired to reach sent chilling pains through my knees and a subtle spin inside my mind. One by one my classmates and I ascended up the bluff with no knowledge as to the beautiful view we would encounter at the top. My legs began moving for themselves without needing anymore motivation. Finally making it to the peak of our hike the air was as clear as can be. The distinct air and view sent me back to my late summers spent in the archipelagos of Sweden. The magic of seeing the foreshadowing of the frigid Swedish winters reminded me of my hikes during this period seeing the once vibrant bushes and trees this summer to being surrounded by a loss of life in our living world. The simplicity of these walks became profound, and what I once saw as something unimportant to me at the beginning of my time in nature, the serenity and hushed feeling allowed my thoughts to dance with the creatures around me. In these two weeks of remoteness, the cold and wilderness became a companion. A newfound curiosity of my surroundings has made me aware of the many opportunities to find tranquility that I have passed up on in my past.

What I Saw, and What I Thought of

Claire Kaiser

I began my adventures in a small field where I could see a small creek running through the green grass covered in brownish-orange leaves. The beautiful scenes taking place around me remind me of my favorite season of fall and the many leaf piles I used to make. While taking in the views I heard different birds chirping over each other. The sounds of this nature were cut through by the sounds of different cars and the screeches of their breaks. I smelt the fresh air around me filled with the scent of fallen leaves.

In the area in which I wished to remember my adventure, I placed a flag. In the area surrounding my flag, there was a small but steady tree that shot up at the sky in many different directions. Most of the leaves that once inhabited this form of life have withered away and now sit perfectly still on the mulch. The leaves still present hold on tightly to remain attached and display their beauty.

My next adventure was to a park completely new to me and it was a lot bigger than I envisioned it to be. This park was filled with a variety of plants and was home to a small pond that remained still while reflecting the sky above. The park had beautifully tall pine trees that soared into the sky. The trees' colors of deep greens were made more prominent when the light from the sun was allowed to strike their surfaces. A lot of the plants were dead which made me curious about what they would look like alive. The clouds above were still and let very little light through and the soil underneath my feet was firm and dry. The paths that I walked were lined by rocks that appeared to be placed there to direct new explorers.

On a new walk, I saw a family of deer in the distance and was able to appreciate their natural behavior. I was also able to appreciate the tall hills with rocks and fallen trees. While I was walking I heard the sounds of water trickling off of the tall rocks. Again I was surrounded by the sounds made by the various birds and their friends. My eyes took in all of the different sights ranging from the waterfalls to the lake, and the different forms of plants and trees. I wondered what other animals inhabited the area that I had not seen. I also wondered what my house would look like in the vast field of green.

At a new location, I saw skinny trees for a long while, dead grass covering the earth's cold surface, leaves scattered, and dead trees collapsed on the ground. I heard the birds chirping and a plane flew past while I took in the astonishing views. I saw brush on the edge of the tree line shooting up in every direction. The brush is different shades of brown with many twigs being dark and some light. The brush is prickly in my hands and the seeds growing off of this plant fell off into my palm.

These experiences forced me to look at nature through a new lens and I was able to grasp a deeper understanding of what's around me.

As I Hike Through Winter

James Karlake

As we walked together, some faster, and some slower, we had seen many things on the Walk of Life. Once was a ring of trees around a frosted lake. The soft radiant glow of the snow, as if the essence of winter was peeking through to brighten our day, if only a little. The rise and fall of the hills were like the crashing waves of a tempest sea. The trees on top of the hill rising to hold up the cold silver platter that was the sky. As I looked, I saw a place not far from the trail, I saw pale orange rocks, the size of roughly cut sand from the relentless cruelty of time. I stopped and watched, as the river on both sides of the lonely land mass continued to flow, cutting off all connection it once had. The only thing left on that sole island was a great tree, with its branches reaching out like a thousand eldritch arms seeking their freedom, as they waved in the soft harsh wind. I saw in one river along that island, jagged rocks of all shapes and sizes jutting out to create a bridge that promised pain to anyone to dared to cross, along with the crashing waves. In the other, plants grew in the calmer water. I breathed in the cold air, as it permeated by being, seeping into me, chilling me to the bone. But I still felt the comfort of the wild, as it grew around me. I could hear the birds chirping, and even the beating of their wings, as they flew overhead, its shadow a contrast to the pale light of winter beaming down from above. On the river would be beautiful, but it would be a lonely place to live and put a house. I truly pitied that tree, a life of forever solitude. After I took one final breath along that river, I moved on, and soon came along a downed branch, standing straight leaning against a different tree. The branch was a rich grey color, with some green along it. Halfway up the branch, some bark was starting to fall off, showing the truth underneath. It was as thick as my arm and almost twice as tall as me. I wondered how it got there, and from what tree it originally came from. I reached out for it, brushing aside the burs that I got from doing so, and taking it in my hands, I sized it down with a well-placed kick so that it was slightly smaller than me, a perfect size for a hiking staff. As I continued on, I looked closer and saw a little tiny blue fleck on it, and I took one last second to wonder if it had been used as a walking stick before, by someone else. Towards the top of the hill, there was a small concrete shelter with no entrances. I didn't know what it once was, as it was overtaken by nature, cloaking whatever it once had been. I was curious to look inside, so I attempted to climb it. I only got one good look inside before I fell. It was a deep hole inside, with two trunkless concrete pillars holding up an empty floor. More of our group tried to look inside, with varying levels of success. I picked up my companion, my trusty staff, and continued to hike onward. I wondered what it once was, that solitary monolith of concrete, and even how it once got there. Maybe it had once been a person's house, and maybe it could have been mine, but the true landlords of that house had come to take it back, claiming it back to nature. Finally, we reached the top. The rock ledge peered over where we once started, looking down upon the river as if to show how far we had gone. I looked, and as we had walked, the clouds above had shifted, and no longer hid the sun, as its dazzling light made the river below glow in luminescence. The cold that once burrowed deep into my bones, now felt a little bit warmer, as if winter was promising an end and a new beginning.

The Beauty of Detail

Michal Kenigsberg

I never thought about it until now; living in the remoteness of nature, hearing birds instead of cars in the morning. The house would have a sunroof and I would see the blue sky instead of a white ceiling. The bedroom leading to a balcony over the cliff. Imagine waking up to the river instead of the road, the tall trees instead of the skyscrapers, the prancing deers instead of the rushing people. Sometimes nature can hold more than what a city can.

I could already feel it; the freedom and the lack of burden. Standing on top of the hill or at the end of a lake. All of my problems disappeared. I was in the moment and I took it all in. If I could stay there I would. The cold wind on my face, while the comfort of the trees brought me warmth.

As I made my way through each park, I noticed a new detail in each. There was beauty in the view of the river. There was a sense of comfort in the wildlife. There was strength in the trial. Though Rhodes Park and Stacey Park were small, there was a sense of calmness in their ponds. Each detail had a meaning. Even those rocks and leaves had a story behind them just like each of us. Nature makes you realize what you don't have; the perspective of beauty and the attention to small details.

The Winter's Waters

Chloe Kolman

In the dead of winter the only thing that caught my eye was the water. The various streams and ponds were differentiated by the movement and in specific moments the water would be seen in a different light. When walking the trails I thought of “That it will never come again is what makes life sweet.” - Emily Dickinson. That quote was a reminder on how not to take advantage of and savor the simplest moments because they could never happen again. Implying that quote in my actions I noticed how the lake from a far would be glistening from the short break of glom as the sunlight would create the shine of a light yellow that was reflecting on to the water. In the reservoir the water would have slight ripples but was clear enough to allow me to see fish swimming. The ponds on a cold day would have a thin cast of ice hardening the usual blurry reflective images of the trees and surroundings. I was able to take in the water and observe more than seeing. Hearing the streams as the water ran through the pebbles and rocks. I could hear the fish moving through the water. The ice was crackling as rocks would break the thin beanery. Being able to take in more than just with the eyes has made me appreciate the water and its variety as it can be beautiful in many different forms. Experiencing these views makes me wonder how that water has shaped the area and wildlife.

The Beach

Mia Krahl

“The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction.” Quote by Rachel Carson. I had heard lots of talk going on about our winter term classes being released. I eagerly signed into my computer and opened up google calendar. As I started scrolling I saw the bar say take a hike. Initially I was very curious and didn't know what to expect. As the months passed by winter term was approaching and I was starting to get upset about winter break being over.

During this course we have gone to many different parks and each has brought different experiences. On one of the days we went to Rivers Edge Park. This was unfamiliar to me and I wasn't quite sure what to expect. As I hopped out of the warm air conditioned car the cool breeze instantly hit my face. I had bundled up with lots of layers knowing that it was going to be cold. I first noticed the trail didn't look too challenging. It was shaped as a rectangle with boardwalks to connect the two opposite sides of the trail. As we strolled down the path we came to one of the two boardwalks. We used our senses to connect with nature and be more present in the moment. Eventually we were given time to explore and wander around. I found my way to a beach. It wasn't the typical ocean beach yet it contained sand and water. Around me there were lots of dead trees and leaves. As I looked up I saw an eagle perched on a branch. It was very calm and looked peaceful. Time passed by and I sat and observed the water. It flooded my mind with memories of past vacations to Florida with my family. I missed the warm weather and the sound of seagulls on the beach. Yet I still was happy to be able to enjoy the moment and being able to be outside in the fresh air. As I made my way back to school I felt much better and I realized the quote earlier by Racheal Carson seemed to be true. If we focus our attention on the wonderful things we will be more untroubled and happy in life.

Isolation

Lexie Kummant

Enclosed within the towering trees and echoing whispers of nature, I have reached past my imagination within the twisting trails of self-discovery. The importance of silence has been a theme throughout my journeys. Ecstasy can only be found when one dials into their senses and becomes a part of nature. First arriving along the lakes edge an overwhelming feeling dread set in as the cold seemed to suffocate my body. The lake shore seemed never ending as we started off down its soft, pure sand .

As my sense of time started to drift, slowly my mind wandered past my 10th grade self and who I was at that moment. I pictured me and my small houseboat gently rocking with the waves of the lake. The nearest village would be miles away, isolating and encapturing me with the ever evolving nature scene. I suddenly ascend back into reality to observe the damp log I raged at for causing me to trip. But then, my feelings shifted from rage to curiosity. I picked up the log to understand its way of life. The brownish green glistened even on such a gray day.

The lake was set low, located in an opening from a heavily wooded area. As my feet sunk into the unadulterated sand it took me back to the coast of Argentina. Although positioned so far away, the two coasts that have no awareness of each other simultaneously have so much in common. The way the water soaks the sand to become moldable to one's personal desires. How every time the waves rush onto the shore a new gift is left on the damp sand. Throughout my time outside, I was transported outside my imagination to ponder how things came to be. With a new found sense of curiosity, I dedicated myself to learn more and expand my horizons on the outdoors.

Conclusion of Nature

Jesse Lobonc-Perry

I have exponentially changed and developed throughout this journey of exploring nature. I have learned countless valuable lessons about the beauty of nature. Throughout the trips to the many different parks I have learned to see past the simplicity of objects and look more closely to see the complexity of the many different objects.

On our trips to Castlewood Park I picked up a rock. This was a very normal and simple rock but I tried to look deeper into the rock to see the story behind it. The rock could have been there for decades or centuries and could have had an interesting story behind it. I looked past the simplicity of the rock to try and understand the complexity of things like simple objects like the rock.

During the hikes and many different trails taken throughout the week I thought about how nature can change someone's life and perspective on how they view certain things. I thought about what the guy said at the nature reserve about how it can give benefits to someone's health. I found that it helps clear someone's mind. I would like to put my house on top of the hill by Castlewood Park to see the nice view of the river.

My Escape

Charlotte Medler

From where I stood, looking into a vast valley of red and orange fallen leaves I found myself able to escape from the complexities of my daily life. I surveyed my surroundings, taking in the breathtaking views of quiet streams and rocky hills. Prior to this moment, I had never thought these views to be possible so close to the face-paced society which I was accustomed to. Regardless, I was standing, surrounded by trees in all directions. As I took in the environment, I noticed that the typical whirring of cars and chattering of people had been replaced by the sound of the wind whistling through the leaves. As I continued walking, the crunching of crisp, dried leaves filled my ears. Deeper in the woods, I again paused to take in the scenery. Upon first glance, the land looked colorless and barren, with leafless trees and muddy trails. However, the more I investigated, the more color and liveliness seemed to appear. Before long, it seemed impossible to ignore the vibrance of the fallen leaves, the white bark of the trees and the occasional green pines of evergreen trees. The wiry branches of trees thickened, banding together and blocking snow from reaching the blanket of leaves below. Outside the trees, a thin layer of snow covered the dried grass, turning the ground into a white carpet which glistened in the sun. As I continued to observe the area, I realized that my mind had ceased to wander to the complications of my daily routine. In that moment, I found that nature was serving as an escape from my busy lifestyle and daily dilemmas.

Final Journal

Cooper Myers

When going into this adventure, I was not sure what I would get out of it. I had experienced nature so much before this so when someone told me to look at possibly living in these locations I thought it was crazy. At first all I could notice was how this was filled with death and was miserably cold. On our first day, when we went to the creek on campus I picked up a leaf, a dirty orange color, so dry and fragile it started to crumble. I thought this experience was off to a bad start.

On the second day when we left campus I had a hard time imagining living there, all of the surroundings were dead, It wasn't until the trip to Powder Valley that I saw something I truly thought was beautiful. I had finally seen something alive, I was walking down a path, traveled by hundreds of people and I saw four squirrels, two downy woodpeckers, and a turkey. Although I thought at first the scenery around me was ugly and dead, it was truly alive and thriving, this was their home. A dead tree covered in wet moss might seem inhospitable to us but could be the only reason 100's of other creatures survival.

On our final trip I started off only finding the fun in disruptions and chaos my friends and I caused. Running ahead, throwing snowballs --Sorry, Claire I promise I was trying to hit Henry-- but after our first stop I looked up. The sight I was looking at was so powerful I completely tuned out Ms. Galluppi asking me to step back from the edge of a 100 foot plateau that reached over a blue river, contrasting the free growing trees, disrupted by the train tracks that add so much to the scene. As I looked out I noticed a tree about two feet in front of me.

That tree was housing one last leaf that survived the war of the first snow, the strength of its stem, holding on for dear life after a brutal gust of wind whistled by. As I finally come to my senses, I take a step back, I realize I was standing on a pile of leaves. I picked one up and to my complete surprise it was a relative to the leaf I saw on the first day. I was so intrigued. I looked at it so differently. Instead of thinking of it as dead, I looked at its beauty, its story, its purpose. That leaf made the scenery around me have color, it's gone through so much, what life it probably had, you can only wonder who it's shared a home with. I can truly say this experience changed my view on nature. I went from thinking it's stupid to live somewhere like where we were, but it would truly be an enjoyment.

The Winter Hike

Jonah Nacke

Throughout my expeditions and experiences of hiking in numerous parks, I have taken to heart that nature is far more than just the sights. During my adventures, I was able to take nature in, changing myself to realize that nature is also the sounds, feelings, smells, and even tastes. During these hikes, I was challenged with the task of finding a possible place to build a house. After these journeys which ranged from beautiful lakeside views with nothing but the sounds of birds singing glorious songs, smells of fresh water and pine trees in the distance, feelings of the cold wind blowing on my face, and even the tastes of crisp lake water, to stunning mountain ranges with towering cliffs 100 feet tall looking over valleys, gushing rivers ranging in color, and towering trees resembling skyscrapers touching the sky. I decided that I would build my house there, in the mountains at Castlewood State Park, where I felt like I was on top of the world. These mountains reminded me of a past hockey trip to Colorado, where I hiked up the Rockies and stood above everything else. These trips have now changed me into finding nature far more interesting than my past, “I was ready to carry it on: like Atlas, to take the world on my shoulders.” -Henry Thoreau

The Simple Things

Lucy Pickett

In life we do not often notice the little things, different leaf shapes, tree heights, nature's colors, and once in a lifetime views. The way that water flowed through the creek, so calm and peaceful, the shade of the trees above me. The creek, I knew I would never forget. How could something so simple be so beautiful? I watched as the water would go over or around the rocks that stood in its way. The grass around the creek was wet, as the snow from the night before was melting. The simplicity of the sound of the water, the shade of the trees, the snow still melting, I felt peace. Though the weather was cold, I felt comfort. Comfort like the kind of being protected, protected by the trees all around me. As I walked along the path, from a far distance I could still see that very creek. Some parts frozen, but still as beautiful as before.

As I walked that kept that goal, the goal I'd had since I started this journey. Though the journey felt long, I felt the comfort of nature all around. The trees overhead, the leaves down below me, all unique, all beautiful. "One way to open your eyes is to ask yourself 'What if I had never seen this before' 'What if I never see it again'", Rachel Carson. Making my way up to the top, I could still see that creek, though it was much smaller than I remember it was just as beautiful. I knew this would be like nothing I had ever seen. As I went through, I crossed bridges, went up the hills, hearing those birds, but most of all looked down at that creek. Remembering where I started, but keeping pace of where I was going. Then there it was.

The most stunning view. I could see for miles and miles, feeling like an eagle looking down on the world. The water was as blue as the sky, the trees filled everything with life, far away I could see the snow still sitting on some hills. Toward the other side I could see the water from the river, still going for more miles. As I turned all the way around, I could still see it, the small creek from where I started. I might not have been able to see all of those rocks, but the creek was still there. I didn't want to leave, I couldn't leave. My goal was met, the plan to stay there. I could now forever hear the birds, look at the view, the creek, that creek, I could look at those stunning trees.

Perseverance

Tyler Ray

When you take a walk in the park, you usually look at your phone or talk with someone the whole time. But when you are forced to stop and wonder how things are made in such a specific way you stop and think how this rock got here and how it may have impacted the animals living in that area. Or how this tree fell and how it may have hurt an animal's living situation. When you stop to think about the little things, that is when you can let your mind wander to unthinkable outcomes. Someone once said, "Nature is a painting for us, day after day, pictures of infinite beauty." This means that nature is often changing and that there is no indefinite picture of how nature is going to look so what you may imagine might be the truth.

When I first found out I was in this class I dreaded the thought of being on hikes in the cold atmosphere of winter. When the day finally came I still dreaded the thought of coming to this class, but when we started hiking I started to open my eyes to a new world. I used to think that nature was just a bunch of trees and plants with the occasional rabbit hopping across the grass. But I was very surprised that it was nothing like that, it was sad, wet, and looked like little to no life was anywhere. That would lead me to wonder how animals that don't hibernate get through such times with everything looking brown with many dead trees and dead plants with rivers that you wouldn't think about putting your hand in there. How do animals live in such situations like this? It made me see that birds couldn't even fly over such parks because it didn't look pleasing to them. In the first half of my experience hiking I thought that this was a waste of time and should've been anywhere else but here.

In the back half of my week, it started to improve significantly when the hints that wildlife was a thing in St. Louis was made more obvious. When we saw different types of animals in the nature center it made me think that there was some type of imagery that there could be sustainable life here. That you could keep a sustainable household in the wet and muddy forest. I would put my house next to the river in the Castlewood State Park. Where the beautiful view would help me wake up in the morning and the sound of the river flowing would help me sleep. I have learned through this experience that when something doesn't seem as bright as possible, you can make something out of nothing.

Observations

Henry Rohan

As I return to the same spot that I started from a week ago I realize the callous arrogance that I displayed from last week. I have learned to not just observe the main things that I see and to go beyond that to find the true meaning behind nature. The true essence of nature is not completely seen without understanding and analyzing what you are looking at. The area that I have been studying and observing was covered by lots of snow and cold weather, however the sun today was shining on the same spot. The pond glistened with the reflection of the sunlight and the trees and brush had a special look knowing how it looked under the clouds and through the inclement weather gave me a newfound appreciation.

The more we left the campus to go on our hikes the more I began to understand and learn about the true essence of nature and what Walden was talking about with his experiences. Our hike to Creve Coeur park was the most eye opening for me because it was the first big one we went to and all the different views opened up the doors to new perspectives on how I view nature. The vast forest that felt like it would have never ended complimented by its lake counterpart that was right next to it. I continued to think about everything that was there and how it ended up there and if there had been major changes in the past years to alter the landscape. I also tried to imagine what it could've been like without the effects of humans and how it would've been different. Would there have been more animals, more trees?, more plants. What could have changed and what could have been without humans interacting and interfering with nature.

Hiking

Emily Rotskoff

The drive to Rivers Edge park was not far but it seemed like we traveled for a long time because of the environment of trees and a beach. The walk around the path felt longer than it was because of the cold winter winds and the icy air making it hard to stay warm, all I could think about was the next time I could be inside. Throughout the time we were there from the start of the hike to the time we were set free after we visited the boardwalk, nothing really caught my eye but once I saw the lake at the beach, the walk became more interesting. All of a sudden the hike went from walking around and only being surrounded by dead trees and leaves on the ground, to walking around being surrounded, still by the dead trees and leaves, but also by the beach with the lake and sand.

Although the walk was very cold, being able to find the beauty in the environment around us is what makes the walk meaningful rather than just thinking of it as a walk through the woods. I could never even imagine what it would be like to live there because of the cold, especially not knowing what it's like during summer or spring.

Values of Nature

Alice Seddon

Taking in the large pond surrounded by sand with the concealing gray sky, that is all encompassed by tall and withering trees. I notice the winter air brushing past me as I walk along the compact beach, which contains fallen tree branches and small rocks. I listen to the laughter and voices of those surrounding me when I begin to observe birds chirping in the far distance as well as what seemed to be monstrous trees, rustling in the blowing wind. I feel the chill of the air that is brushing against that causes a ripple on the surface of the pond.

Beyond the sand path that I am left to stand on, there is a large patch of long grass that leads me uphill, to a gravel trail where I walk alongside the full, but bare forest. I can no longer see the view where I once stood on the sand. I now see a path that seems to have no end as the perimeter is covered by large trees and the sky is covered in clouds. I am then led back to where I once began, without having viewed the large pond when I observed my surroundings in a way, that I had not yet experienced in my lifetime. It allowed my perspective of nature to shift as I noticed the greater values and smaller details of the world's landscape.

A Connection with Nature

Lea Shamsham

In the cold winter season, I'm surrounded by plants and nature that have slowly stopped moving in the frigid air. Like humans, these plants cling to themselves to 'warm up.' I observed one of these plants over two days. Initially, I saw the plant's color faint in the cold, crisp air. Yet the plant was intact. It was bush-like, and the remaining leaves were shiny and thick. Compared to others, this plant was sustained well in the winter environment. As the temperature rose, I revisited the exact location and plant. The once dull plant was vibrant and thriving. I was able to glimpse the dark colors more clearly. I was catching hints of dark red, a red velvet color. And some areas were still dark green like they were in the fall. The plant had an ombre effect, making it beautiful in the morning sunlight. And as the wind blew, the leaves shook in the air. Seeing this sudden change made me realize that plants, like us, grow and change over time.

In the strong breeze of January, when the air was cold, and the water was still, the sky overcast of clouds had all the serenity of the morning. I imagined myself in this area where the leaves were still intact to the tree and had an orange color from the fall season. Yet the ground was filled with even more leaves, and the trail where I walked was rocky and hurt my feet every step. I visualized myself looking around the sides of the trail, seeing large trees guarding me inside like a cage. While walking, I heard a branch crack near me and turned to my right. I paused in my trail, trying to discover an animal hidden in the distant view. It was hard to catch the animal or animals at the moment because the radiant colors made it easy to camouflage. Yet, by wavering my head, I spotted two deers hiding behind a large tree. They were already staring back when I did not find them. They stared with large black eyes, not frightened but curious. They stared until they walked away in the low woods, where I could no longer see them. I realized how animals see this open environment as a home. They would drink from the lake nearby, eat what plants are on the ground, and roam free without being stopped.

I imagine my life as free, like the animals living around the park where I could walk and observe. The area I would live in was in a small cabin next to the lake further down the trail. Acting as a place to eat and sleep. Every morning was a cheerful invitation to make my life of equal simplicity and innocence with nature. I wish to live purposefully and connect with nature.

What I Learned Through Nature

Alejo Theodoro

As I strolled along the pebble filled path I noticed the tracks of what seemed like a small animal crossing the path heading into the brush of the forest. The cold air was brushing against my face as I continued on. Moments like these are what made my week so special. Throughout the hikes I learned that sometimes the big trees and the brown leaves take away from being able to see the tiny aspects of nature, such as the tiny paw prints of an animal. Moments like these continued to happen during my experience on the hikes. At Rivers Edge Park the frigid temperatures had created blocks of ice in the water, as I walked I noticed that as I got closer to the shore the more blocks of ice would appear. This moment made me realize how nature can change. One day the lake is full of warm water, and the next it can be frigid with blocks of ice floating in it. Experiencing change was a crucial part of the hiking trips and I think that immersing myself in nature made the trips even better.

If Nature were Still Beautiful

Jackson Vetter

Throughout this journey, I have been given the pleasure of experiencing nature in its purest form; I have heard the leaves rustling as I step through the forests, I have felt the sharp ends of the plants defending themselves from other wildlife, I have tasted the cold air and gusts of wind, and I have wondered what the forests would be like if I weren't there. Throughout my journey I have seen countless signs of other human life. Paved paths, wooden bridges, and ropes on mountains have jumped out at me; however, these industrialized creations were put there to make the beauty of the nature much easier to enjoy. My observations of the landscape, the leaves, the water, may not have been possible if not for a path paved by someone like me.

However, this is not to say that industrialization has not ruined the natural landscape. I look out from the top of a mountain I have ascended, and I imagine what I would have seen if I were here a century ago: the beautiful water, the sand, all seen from this beautiful lookout atop the tallest hill in sight. While the lookout still stands, I see a train, abandoned on train tracks that, when laid down, demolished a forest; I see houses, built on what were once beautiful fields; I see cars on roads that tore right through what was once called beauty.

From what I can recall, of all the times I paused on the path to take a look around me, I felt as though the beauty of the nature was impaired by our creations. I remember on my journey, I found myself in a park filled with all sorts of trees, surrounded by roads on three sides, all of which had heavy traffic. Again, I try to think about how I could have seen this park a century ago, but I cannot look past the noise pollution and asphalt roads and tall buildings.

I have realized one thing throughout my journey: nature is beautiful, but it only takes one person to ruin it. I look at where I live and its history, and at some point, it must have been just any other plot of land. Trees were cut down, and a farm was built, isolated in nature, but this farm and its buildings took away from the beauty of the nature. I have often questioned whether I would want to live in an area like one of the areas I visited, isolated in nature, but I realize that if I were to inhabit one of these areas, I would be taking away from its beauty, making it harder for someone to experience. We have created paths and parks to make nature easier to experience, but we have not overtaken nature. I say that I would never want to move my house to one of these parks, in the interest of protecting it, but thinking about it, I already have. Where I live now, a big neighborhood, which was once a single farm, which was once a field in a field of fields, no different from any other, but just as beautiful. The very concept of wanting to live somewhere has demolished fields, forests, landscapes, and beautiful lookouts like those I saw on my journey.

The Trails

Norah Wright

I had spent long amounts of time in the wilderness before. I have started many fires, built many shelters, and spent many nights far away from evidence of the human touch. Although it is not possible to live that way right now, I have always imagined that I would follow that inexplicable draw to the absence of interference, where nature is uninterrupted. As our class ventured out over the past week, I hardly thought that nature so close to roads, houses, and telephone poles was anything significant because of human interference. At the beginning, it was hard to connect with the rustling leaves when roaring engines and squealing brakes drowning them out. There was no possible way for nature and human life to walk alongside each other, at least not here. But as our hiking went on, I felt a groundbreaking sense of change within.

I found myself admiring the trails which humans have worn into the ground over the years. Rather than covering the imperfections of the natural world for the sake of human comfort, the trails were defined by where tree roots lay and where rocks provided footholds. My legs and my lungs burned while climbing up to the bluff overlooking the river, but the physical exertion felt good. The burn was evidence of the power Earth holds over us. We are merely operating on its allowance. Although as humans often do, I expected people to abuse the privilege of existing alongside the eternal beauty of nature. I expected humans to leave the mark of their power in the form of granola bar wrappers and plastic bags alongside the fallen leaves. To my surprise, the trails were clean. Not in the sense that they were pristine, they were far from it with the fallen leaves covering the ground. But rather in the sense that there was no trace of anything foreign. The only evidence of people being the thousands of footsteps which have worn down the Earth I am standing on right now.

There was something beautiful in the way humans and nature coexist here, how the mutual respect adds another layer of wonder to the hillside. Only when humans revere the Earth as is rightly so, can nature truly be beautiful in the shadowy existence of humans.

My Natural Home

Hiba Zamir

I pinned the location I was most fond of with a bright neon pink flag with my name marked on it. The location has plants that were attempting to grow. Unfortunately, these plants were not given a chance to grow. I noticed that each and every plant was chopped at a precise angle. This made each plant align perfectly. These once lively plants are now dead stubs surrounded by manmade structures. The structures looked like pipes, which provided water in the dry area. This dry area was covered with lifeless plants. Water keeps living things alive, so why chop the plants if water will make them grow once again?

The pure air blew leaves towards me at this particular park. The birds twittered loudly as the water gently trickled down the rocks. I felt welcomed with serenity. Here, I felt like I was at home. The bodies of water surrounding my soon-to-be house felt raw and natural. Each body of water blew a cool chilling breeze that felt refreshing. Something untouched by individuals feels pure and calming to me since the beauty of nature is preserved when it is not meddled with. This spot would be ideal for my home since the waterfall has a soothing tone and will assist me in snoozing beneath the starry canopy when it turns dusk. Water attracts various creatures since every living thing needs water to survive. This place would be definitive for sightseeing animals as they drink pure water from the comfort of my own home.

As I walked by the damp area near the river's edge, I stepped on a twig that snapped and caught my attention. I looked ahead and saw many other twigs scattered along the trail in an unorganized line. It almost felt as if an individual purposely scattered these twigs. The trail also had a damp walkboard that left its green color on my shoes. As I was walking across the walkboard I looked at the brown and green prints that I left behind. I followed the pathway with twigs and it led me to a gazebo. This gazebo was placed in an ideal location as it overlooked the enchanting beach that the river formed. I could imagine living here in this exact location. The sound of water sings of serenity with each ripple adding to a place of tranquility. I admired something new every minute from that location as it was too much to take in. Henry David Thoreau once said, "We can never have enough of nature" and I believe it to be true after these journeys. (Thoreau 306)

Works Cited

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*. Dover Publications, 1995