

AN INVITATION TO
PERSONAL REFLECTION
& WELL-BEING



 Comox Valley
Hospice Society

Introduction

Strolls for Wellness is part of the **Comox Valley Hospice Society Nature Walks Program** (CVHS). It is a self-care program designed to connect people who are journeying through loss, illness, or caregiver fatigue, with the healing powers and beauty of nature. Using the guidebook provided, you can take part in a self-led nature walk at your own pace, using the themed questions provided for personal reflection, and allow nature to be a therapeutic environment in which wellness can occur. By focusing on the present moment and experiencing the sights and sounds of nature, many find that a sense of wellbeing and calm reduces feelings of sadness, hopelessness, fear, anxiety and loneliness.

Along the guided nature walk will be rest or reflection points that have been chosen as places to pause and reflect related to the theme of **Aliveness**. These have been marked in your guidebook.



= rest/reflection point



= topic for reflection, journaling, drawing or some other form of creative expression

Please dress appropriately for the weather and bring along a journal, a pen, some water, and a cell phone (if you have one).

Welcome

Comox Valley Exhibition Grounds is located at 4839 Headquarters Road in Courtenay. There is ample free parking available in the first parking area as you enter off of Headquarters Road. The walk is approximately 2kms. It's easy walking, however, please be aware of possible muddy patches when wet and rainy, as well as uneven ground and root tripping hazards.

Be Alert to...

High wind events, river levels, dogs off-leash and the potential for wildlife encounters. (See pages 17 - 18 for more information.)

Reflections of Jim

"Jim enjoyed and took pleasure in his acute sensory awareness. He quite literally stopped to smell the flowers wherever he walked or picked up fresh fruit and vegetables at a stand ... or in a grocery store... and inhaled its fragrance. If he walked by any recognizable herbs he would pinch a small bit off, roll it in his fingers and then inhale fully. Then turning to me, would offer it as a gift for my nose and sense of smell. And while most turn their noses up at skunk cabbage, or dandelions on the lawn, Jim was quite fond of both, seeing the beauty in both form, colour and even in the case of the skunk cabbage, its strong pungent smell."

- An Excerpt from *Attending Sorrow* by Christy Linder

List of Stopping Points

- #1 The Grove
- #2 The Horse Jump
- #3 The Horse Field
- #4 The Wood Fence
- #5 The Big Tree
- #6 The Picnic Table
- #7 The Grove

Before you begin: Take a moment to check in with yourself: What is your mood like? How are you feeling? What bodily sensations are you noticing? What thoughts are running through your mind? Now, take a deep breath and let it go.

You will start and finish this nature walk at the same point. Start your walk via the main dirt road leading from the car park through a gate (Curling Rink to your right). The path runs straight towards the forest and the river. A fence runs alongside on your left, the Exhibition Grounds' washroom facilities and small barns are on your right. You will come to 3 yellow vehicle-blocking metal posts with an outdoor toilet unit to the right.



 **Start and Finish**



 **#1 Stop: The Grove**

Go straight down the path until you come to a junction of paths. There will be a grove of trees straight ahead as you enter the forest. Find a comfortable spot sitting or leaning against a tree in this grove.

 ***Reflection Points**

Tune into the trees in the grove and see if you can feel their aliveness. Now tune into yourself. How are you experiencing your own sense of aliveness today?



Return to the path; face the grove you just spent time in; take the path to the right, and stay right until you see the old, unused, horse jump.



#2 Stop: The Horse Jump

Find a comfortable place at the horse jump to sit or lean as you consider the following questions:

*Reflection Points

Observe the forest around you. Find a small area on which to focus your attention. Allow yourself to be drawn by your curiosity into the smaller world at your feet or looking at a particular tree in your vicinity. What aspects attract you the most: colors, smells, shapes, textures? Note or draw anything that captures your imagination.

Return to the trail and take the path on the right (as you face the horse jump). This is a fairly long winding trail. Enjoy the woods and ponder the following as you walk:

*Reflection Points

What's most alive for you on your walk today? Listen to the trees, the river, the plants, the forest, the animals, and your own breath. Take note of what feels alive in and around you.

When you come to a junction, take the path to the left and follow the path until you come alongside a fenced field to your right. Horses can often be found grazing there.





#3 Stop: Horse Field

Take a moment to pause by the fence and consider the following:

*Reflection Points

Imagine if this were your whole world. Who might you be and how might you see and experience the world from this vantage point? If there are animals in the field today, what does seeing them evoke in you? If there aren't any, what does this open space evoke for you?



Continue in the same direction around a sharp left bend. Keep left as the path winds slightly down and up again. Next, you'll pass between two posts, and then go past a green metal bridge on your right. You should now be coming toward a wooden fence on the right, with the river below. Pause when you see an open viewing area overlooking the river to your right. Note: lower areas of this part of the route can flood at times.

My Reflections



#4 Stop: Wood Fence

Stop at the wood rail fence. While viewing the river, consider this question:

*Reflection Points

As you observe the flow of the river, notice what stirs in you.

Stay on this path along the river for a fair distance; eventually, you will pass a metal A-frame with cables crossing the river. You know you have arrived when you see a big tree in the middle of the path, with a sandy slope running down to the pebble beach. The next reflection point is at the riverbed depending on the height and flow of the river.

Only go as far as you feel comfortable.



#5 Stop: Big Tree

If you can, wander down to the river. Find a comfortable spot to sit and reflect on these questions.

*Reflection Points

What is sparking your life force today? If you struggle to find something, recall a moment where you felt fully alive. Now close your eyes and feel yourself back into that moment. Notice what affect your conscious focus on a positive emotion has on your internal senses.

When you are ready, return to the path you were on, keeping the river to your right.

My Reflections



#6 Stop: Picnic Table

When you see the next big tree in the middle of the path, you will find a cement table with seating useful for resting and sitting to journal, draw, or create other forms of artwork. This is another open view of the river for contemplation.

***Reflection Points**

Tune into your inner senses and feel if you are drawn to a particular place, direction, or specific object. Follow your inner compass today.

My Reflections



#7 Stop: The Grove

To complete your reflective stroll, continue onwards, keep the river on your right, and then take the second path to your left. Keep left, and in a short time you will arrive at the grove of trees you paused at, at the start of your walk. Find a comfortable place to sit or stand under the trees, to complete your period of reflection.

*Reflection Points

As you observe the forest, can you detect movement around you? Can you feel movement or possibility in yourself? Is there a tree, a view, or plant you can get to know, become more intimate with, or have a conversation with today?

Exit the forest by the same path you entered - you will recognize the open area at the edge of the forest in front of you as you step out of the grove back onto the path.

Before returning to your car, take a last moment to reflect on what you have learned from this experience.

 ***Reflection Points**

Pay attention to your thoughts, feelings, moods and bodily sensations. What are you experiencing now? What is the same and what is different from when you started the nature walk?

Now, take a deep breath and let it out, offer thanks to yourself for taking this time to be present, mindful and caring for your whole being as you walk back to your car.



Reflections

“The more time you spend with nature, the deeper your understanding of life will be” - Nitin Namdeo

ALERTS

Stormy Weather and High Wind Events

Be cautious when walking on forested trails when the weather turns stormy and wet. Trails can be slippery and winds can dislodge branches, or cause unstable trees to fall, during, or shortly after a storm. Let others know where you are going and when you expect to be back.

Fluctuating River Heights

Seasonal rains and spring runoff can cause flooding in some low-lying areas around local rivers. Please maintain a safe distance when waterways are flowing high and fast; and only go as close as you feel safe to do so.

For the Puntledge River Walks, be aware that the Puntledge River Generating Station will sound a siren to indicate when the water level is about to change rapidly. Promptly move away from the river area when you hear the siren.



An Encounter with Wildlife is Always Possible

As the park is used by the public on a regular basis, and may produce garbage that attracts wildlife, it's recommended that you don't carry food and please dispose of any waste in the receptacles provided. Be mindful of dogs that may be loose. We have also included some tips from the provincial wildlife conservation website, to help minimize risk should you happen to encounter a black bear, cougar, or deer in nature.

If you see a black bear:

- Remain calm and use a quiet monotone voice
- Try to distance yourself from the bear by slowly backing away
- Keep your eye on the bear without making direct eye contact
- Ensure the bear is able to avoid you with a clear escape route
- Do not feed them or try to approach them
- Do not run, kneel, or try to climb a tree
- Continue only after the bear has left the area and you feel it is safe to do so.
- Ensure you are not carrying anything that would attract them

If you see a cougar:

- Keep the cougar in front of you at all times
- Do what you can to make yourself appear as large as possible
- Never run or turn your back as this may provoke an attack
- If it shows interest in you, respond aggressively by maintaining eye contact, show your teeth and make loud noises
- Arm yourself with rocks or sticks to fight back if necessary focusing on it's face and eyes
- Leave the area when it is safe to do so

If you see a deer:

- Keep your distance and do not approach it
- Allow the deer to have an escape route

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CVHS respectfully acknowledges that these nature walks take place on the unceded traditional territory of the K'òmok's First Nation.

We gratefully acknowledge the following organizations whose walking wellness programs were the inspiration for CVHS Nature Walks Program:

- Bloedel Reserve's "Stroll from Home Program"
- Missouri Botanical Garden's "Journey for Wellness"
- Morikami Museum and Japanese Garden's "Stroll for Well-Being"
- Niagara Hospice's "Mindful Hiking Group"

We also recognize and appreciate the dedication and hard work of the CVHS Nature Walks Development Team.

CVHS Nature Walks Program includes:

- Air Park Amble (under development)
- Puntledge River Transition Walk
- Puntledge River Sensory Walk
- Strolls for Wellness Journey Walk
- Strolls for Wellness Aliveness Walk
- Others (under development)

While we offer the Nature Walks Program without charge, please consider making a donation to fund CVHS programs, and/or offer a testimonial of your experience that we can share with others.

Visit our website comoxhospice.com or call 250-339-5533.

IN APPRECIATION FOR FUNDING



United Way
Central & Northern
Vancouver Island