

A Trail

A trail is a connector between humans and the environment, a path that interactively immerses people in the beauty of their surroundings. It has a diverse culture of exploration, walking, cycling, geocaching, fishing, climbing, and photography. However, a pathway can only be a journey for the people who have the courage to take it. We have to take that first critical step to open our eyes to the ecosystem surrounding us.

Three years ago, my family and I moved to a rural area south of Santa Fe. But just last year, we explored flora and fauna living within our community by making a trail through the sub-divisional plots of land in our neighborhood. The path follows the silty arroyo through a tall moss rock quarry where we spotted a long-eared owl. Then it goes past groves of coyote willow through thickets of Russian olive and black locust trees. In the winter, the snow covers the brown soils in a thin layer, creating ancient white scripture from the depressions in the sand. In warmer months, the paths will be dotted with dandelions, wild purple asters, golden crownbeard, and wild green grasses.

As Aldo Leopold states, “Land, then, is not merely soil; it is a fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals ... When a change occurs in one part of the circuit, many other parts must adjust themselves to it.” After the footpath was finished, we spotted deer, coyote, and occasionally raccoon tracks as they adapted to the new route. My opinion on the wilderness also transformed into love and respect by witnessing Mother Nature’s preparation processes for the transition of seasons.

The trail, like the friendships we formed, never ends. Instead, it twists and turns, winding into something rich, beautiful, and whole. Friends can be met anywhere, but when you meet someone outdoors, where you are both doing what you love, a stronger connection is formed. After meeting our neighbor Elenor last month, we decided to go on a walk together. On the high mountainous terrain, we were ornithologists studying the birds. When walking in the arroyo’s low valleys, we were geologists examining the rocks in the coarse sand.

Like the rogue pear tree we found growing in the depths of bushes, climate change can be hard to notice. During my life in the city, I did not go on walks very often. I knew climate change was happening but did not see how it affected New Mexico’s climate or ecosystem. All of this changed when we moved to an area that seemed to be barely touched by civilization. I was nervous about leaving behind the memories the house held, the garden, and our neighbors. Although, as we walk on the footpath and our communal relationships grow, I realize the impact that a simple path can have. I have made new memories and felt closer to the environment in our new home. Whether you are walking on a trail downtown or on the outskirts of the city, a connection is formed through the habitat around you.

Through my journey on this footpath, I have met a painter, a photographer, a lawyer, a toy executive, a doctor, a motorcyclist, and many other interesting people. This trail has created a community aware of climate change and open-minded to exploration. Even if we come from different backgrounds and have different passions and jobs, the one thing we will always have in common is our love of the natural habitat. Love is not always found immediately but rather an adventure that grows with every step.