



Soundscape Activity

Listening to Muir Woods After Dark

At Muir Woods National Monument, interpreters lead night walks through the forest each month during a full moon except in the winter. Each park ranger leads a different program, but the core messages are redwood ecology and early conservation history. This interpretive walk focuses on the natural soundscape of Muir Woods and the need to protect it. Although this activity is designed for interpreters at this park, other park interpreters and also teachers can adopt and customize these concepts to their areas. The walk takes approximately two hours.

In your introduction, advise the group that there are no guarantees of encountering wildlife or seeing the full moon in the forest, and that it would be a bonus if they did. With past walks, park visitors have encountered a family of baby skunks, a great horned owl, barred owl, and deer. One of the more profound encounters was the sound of a creaking redwood swaying in the wind. In the dark of night without flashlights on, the group was asked what this sounded like to them. Someone said it reminded her of a creaking mast on a sailing ship. Another person said it was a lonely sound, as if there was no one else in the world. On another night walk, the sound of wind was heard sweeping through the canopy like the ebb and flow of ocean waves. One time, the soft thud of a redwood seed falling on leathery Tanoak leaves multiplied a thousand-fold around the group during a time of seed fall. These sounds are interpreted differently by the individuals who experience them.

Interpreters can help people transition from the bustle of the major metropolitan Bay Area or other cities to the quietness of a primeval forest by gradually slowing the pace of the walk and talk. As you progress from visitor center to the back of the canyon, day transitions into night. Pause more frequently to listen to the natural sounds, linger longer at the bridges, and speak more quietly. By the time you get to the back of the canyon, visitors should be accustomed to listening as a group. Sit on a redwood log and not talk for about five minutes before heading back to the visitor center.

On the way back, invite the group to go on a solo walk and enjoy the night walk on their own, as a couple, or in a small group. Ask a volunteer to help you stagger the solo walk so that people feel like they're alone on their walk. Meanwhile, head back to the visitor center to say goodbye, answer questions, and gather flashlights.



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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