

## The Wild Way

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Alan R. Drengson

Alan Drengson is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy and Adjunct Professor of Graduate Studies at the University of Victoria in Canada. He works in Eastern philosophy, comparative religion, environmental philosophy, and cross cultural technology studies. He has taught and practices meditation disciplines related to harmony with Nature. He is the author of many articles and books (for example, *The Practice of Technology* and *Beyond Environmental Crisis*) and an unpublished manuscript called *Wild Way Home*. He is the founding editor of *The Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy and Ecoforestry*. This article has been published in *Coming of Age: The Evolving Field of Adventure Therapy*, edited by Scott Bandoroff and Sandra Newes, Boulder, CO: Association for Experiential Education, 2004. It is reproduced here with permission. Address correspondence to: [ecosophy@islandnet.com](mailto:ecosophy@islandnet.com). Visit [www.ecostery.org](http://www.ecostery.org) for more Wild Way information.

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### Abstract

The Wild Way is a learning and practice system that is a synthesis of several unifying disciplines or whole arts. Its design draws from many cultural models, for example, the martial arts of China and Japan, yoga forms of India, and shamanic practices of aboriginal cultures. Experiential journeying in wild nature has evolved into the Wild Way art. This article surveys the scope of the Wild Way by systematizing its features, techniques, and practices using journey, adventure, and healing narratives. The Wild Way has many levels of meaning grounded through adventure in wilderness areas. Its metaphoric and mythic journey narratives unite us communally and personally, from physical to spiritual, and theoretic to practical. Living the Wild Way gives us deep meaning as we reconnect with wild energies in wilderness and our home places.

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## Introduction

This paper explores the conceptual and practical features of wild journeying as a unifying discipline and whole art. It describes how four approaches (or ways) to harmony with Nature found in contemporary wild journeying are blended through the formal and practical articulation of a whole art called the Wild Way. These four ways are: (1) the unstructured ways of spontaneous spirituality, such as wilderness wandering and life in the free open air; (2) the ordered practices of primal spirituality found in shamanic journeying, trance dancing and Nature ceremonies; (3) the formal disciplines (or practice systems) of concentrated flowing movement exemplified by Tai Chi and Aikido; (4) the ways of organized wilderness journeying developed in North America under these and other influences. Some core values of these approaches are respect and nonviolence toward wild Nature in all its forms. The features of wild journeying are described here along with its practice as a spiritual discipline called the Wild Way.

Whole arts as spiritual disciplines use grounding and centring practices, such as body movement, focus on breath, and mindful sensitivity to attune us to the feelings and energies of particular mediums, beings, and places. When practiced by a group, they create community spirit, centred connection with the earth, and harmony with place and other beings. Their practice makes us more receptive and spontaneously open to new experience. The Wild Way integrates and unifies our fourfold self-nature of sense, emotion, intellect and spirit as embodied in a place. Its practices help us to create and nurture positive relationships with others based on mutual respect and consideration. It helps us to deeply know ourselves and others.

The Wild Way whole art system is distilled from the evolution and development of wild journeying as practiced in North America. It is drawn from personal perspectives and shared narrative experiences. There are important cross-cultural elements in this art, and it has a role in furthering ecological paradigms in industrial society. For purposes of exposition, this paper focuses mostly on wild journeying in Canada and the United States. The development of the Wild Way is contextualized through personal, communal, and local knowledge gained from wild journeys. This article explores how tradition and practice embellish and elaborate on basic spiritual themes that emerge from our spontaneous experience in wilderness places. It describes ways to integrate and unify ourselves through practicing harmony with wild beings and energies. It explores how, through wilderness wandering as a simple natural

practice, we spontaneously experience the unity of life to become more sensitive to diverse wild energies and beings.

Overall, the Wild Way is explored in depth by comparing it with other arts. The Wild Way can be practiced in many kinds of work, leadership, farming, forestry, relating to animals, and so on. One goal of this paper is to help others to find their personal Wild Way practice that is appropriate to their local place and community.

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## Whole Arts

“Art” here refers to the practical skills and knowledge forming a coherent unifying discipline. Fine arts can be considered whole arts when they are ways of life used to make daily value choices that cultivate the spiritual integration and growth of the artist. So are martial arts when they are practices for the unification of the whole person. Art in this sense transcends science, since science depends on the art of imagination to proceed. The dedicated practice of a whole art completes a person as a self-conscious being. Many whole arts can be done without tools or materials, for example, dancing, singing, and acting.

Whole arts, as spiritual disciplines, are ways to embrace the whole. Whole arts can be distilled into a *kata* or *koan*, and embodied in a person or tribe. Their practice creates a high quality of life, even with few material possessions, as we learn from wild journeying in wilderness using minimal gear. The metaphoric complexity of wild journeying reveals the holographic nature of whole art systems of practice. These arts perfect and improve the practitioners, and also have other products and benefits. Wilderness journeying as a whole art is an ordered system of physical and mental skills for living and traveling through the unsettled wild areas of our planet.

Creative imagination is a source of our dominant cultural myths and patterns of meaning. Science provides skills for finding out about aspects of the world not evident to our unaided senses. Science uses conventional modes of awareness, whereas arts are open to all modes of awareness. When we talk of the art of life (or art as a way of life), we refer to the fact that we can have a unified aesthetic approach that is a complete or whole way of life. In this sense, farming<sup>1</sup> can be a whole art. Life and farming are filled with creative possibilities, and wise farmers welcome these. In the Wild Way system, we are positive and

creative in response to the world as it is. We discover many ways to journey in daily life and also in the wilderness.

Wild journeys in progress embody the art in our actions and narratives. As a whole art the Wild Way is self-realizing and expansive. It orders our lives and gives them beauty and meaning. It is a recursive art. By doing it, we become better, and by doing it better we improve ourselves as whole persons, which enables us to practice ever more beautifully, and so on. In summary, whole arts are self-organizing and self-transcending ways of continuous learning and growth.

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### **In Quest of Wholeness**

Many years ago, it was my good fortune to teach basic mountaineering and wild journeying. At that time, I knew the value of wild journeying, but didn't fully appreciate its rich cultural and international connections. I loved the mountains, had mountaineering and wilderness skills, and a deep appreciation for the joys of wild mountain living. I wanted to share these treasures with others who had not experienced them. I acquired wilderness skills and knowledge with a neighbourhood tribe of teens led by a neighbour-elder-mentor. Our spirited group shared fun, adventure, and knowledge. When younger children joined the group, the more experienced helped them learn new skills and acquire knowledge. We shared our enthusiasm for the joys of wilderness hiking, which for us was a way to improve character and well-being. When I taught basic mountaineering, I appreciated the unifying effects of what we were doing. At that time, only a few people fully appreciated the deep integrated values learned through wild journeying and similar outdoor engagements.

While teaching this course, I also began to understand the role that serious play and outdoor activities can have on furthering personal competence and wholeness. Young people often came to the first classes with a lot of fear, lack of confidence, and little signs of leadership. As they participated in the course they often experienced a change in themselves through increased personal confidence and initiative.

As part of this, I relied on more experienced students, with practice in roped climbing, to share their skills with others. I taught new leaders to replace those who were leaving the college to work or study elsewhere. This participatory leadership process led to deep changes in those who stayed with the program for more than one season. They developed

greater self-esteem, not just in climbing, but also in other areas. Their increased integration and wholeness were obvious to others.

Through teaching this course, I came to see that wild journeying is a learning practice for life, and can be a way of life, that is, a unifying Way or *Tao*. A *Tao*<sup>2</sup> is a route, path, or way of holistic practice that is in harmony with Nature. Following or practicing a *way* expands our horizons and helps us to become well-integrated, whole persons. In other words, whole arts make us whole persons. Learning whole arts develops our intuitive and emotional intelligence, creative spontaneity, cognitive clarity and cultivates deep feelings and balance. Their practice integrates body and mind, reason and emotion, and generates spiritual strength, resilience, and kindness. Their practices give us values, skills, and spiritual communion through mindful actions together. When we are fully aware and at one with our activities, we transcend our small self-wilfulness in an authentic way. We communicate nonverbally through shared experiences. This is a realization in everyday life of compassionate awareness in our relationships.<sup>3</sup>

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## **Elements of the Wild Way in Practice, Mastery, and Metaphor**

People use wild journeying both literally and metaphorically. We can take a journey in the wilderness or we can journey within ourselves. For example, this symbolic use is implied when one says “be a wild journeyer in daily life,” knowing one works in the city. In both daily life and in wild journeying, we climb and descend many mountains and follow and cross many valleys, ridges, trails, and routes. In journeying we know a mountain through seeing and sensing it with all our capacities, from many perspectives and under a variety of conditions; so in daily life we come to understand the dynamics of love and hate, work and rest, roles and role models. Just as in wild journeying the routes can vary, some are difficult, some easy, some have no paths. So too with the routes open to us in daily life. Just as in wild journeying we learn the value of balance, pace, and attention to details, so in daily life we learn the value of balance between home and work, sustainable work pace, and care for details with a love for our places.

Wild journeying used descriptively refers to the outdoor activity of cross-country travel and trail hiking while living in wilderness or semi-wilderness practiced for days at a time. Its practice over time can lead

us to integrated unity as wild spontaneous persons, to abiding together in harmonious ways, sharing beautiful actions and stories.

Wild journeying as a form of mountain touring requires the skills of basic mountaineering. The first elements include the development of basic skills, such as use of the ice axe for self-arrest, belaying and step chopping; the selection and skilled use of appropriate alpine boots and personal equipment and the selection and use of climbing equipment, such as crampons, ropes, slings, carabiners and assorted anchors. Alpine journeyers must have a wide range of skills for outdoor living and travel. These include knowing how to find or set up shelter, select and use proper clothing, prepare sustaining provisions, plan trip itineraries, cook meals, and arrange transport. Other desirable skills are first aid, orienteering, stellar navigation, map reading, wilderness survival, route finding, glacier climbing, ridge climbing and descending, snow and glacier travel, basic rock climbing, and negotiating steep vegetated terrain. The wild journeyer must be able to handle a variety of situations such as storms, injuries, and personal conflicts within the group.

Journeyers next need the knowledge of wild animals and weather conditions. In winter and early spring they need to assess avalanche hazards. They need to know what to do if caught on a peak during a sudden lightning storm. They need to recognize the danger and symptoms of hypothermia, and know how to prevent and treat frostbite. They should know something about the area's trees and plants. Skills in photography, sketching, and describing mountain terrain are valuable to help further personal development and knowledge of whole landscapes and places. This list of skills gives us some idea of the wide range of knowledge in wild journeying.

People who achieve competence in these skills, along with their appropriate attitudes and values, can live outdoors in a self-sufficient capable way. Most people can master these skills. Masters of the whole art have an elegant simplicity in their actions and equipment. For them to journey is to dwell in authentic states of value. They journey safely, with playfulness, and are kind to wilderness, companions and self. Their mastery is a continuous learning process, not a fixed state. It is ongoing self-development. They know that sincere practice is more important than reaching an arbitrary level of flashy skill in techniques.

All whole arts are activities loved for their own sake. Learning continues, even at the highest levels of mastery and old age. Learning with increasing awareness is life with the highest quality. Through

mastery of the art, we better understand ourselves, each other, our place, and how we are in the natural world. We appreciate the world as a dynamic, changing, and creative process. We can ever expand and deepen our respect, insight, and love. Appreciation has no limits. Whole arts realizing this complete unification are called *spiritual disciplines*. Through their practice we actualize our indwelling spirit as we continue to learn more about ourselves and others. Mastery of wild journeying is like the mastery of a language and its dialects. With holistic unity, mastery of skills has coherence, depth, meaning, and insight. It is not like fragmented specialization.

The Wild Way's comprehensive themes and framework deal with subtle energies, attitudes and ultimate values. Its spiritual narratives are about ultimate purposes and meanings, and are means for perfecting ourselves and communities. The practices transform the negative elements in our awareness and life into positive feelings. The completion or fulfillment of the art is in the journeying process as an ongoing integrative practice, and hence as a transformative art. Finding footholds, skilfully moving in balance across a steep slope, or using a compass effectively, are part of a total activity that has a larger meaning in mastery of the whole art or way. At a high level of mastery, skills are just part of a natural unity in the flow of a meaningful whole life journey. They are like notes and voices in a whole choral symphony, or steps, poses, and movements in spirit dance or ballet. Each can be very informal and intuitive, or highly organized in stylized patterns with basic forms and explicit values. The essence of a whole art can be distilled into a single system and its significant gestalts symbolized through, for example, the mountain climbing or adventure story, or an outdoor adventure therapy program. (A whole story can encapsulate a whole art.)

Flexibility is a key feature of the Wild Way art. Mastery transcends the guide and instruction books, which are often written for beginners. Master wild journeyers understand the art as a whole. They internalize it as an organic reality. It is part of who they are. They identify with it and it shapes their identity. Detailed descriptions of methods call attention to aspects of the art for the purpose of learning, but eventually they are part of a fluid activity of creative improvisation, like jazz. At this level of mastery, we appreciate the significance of each act and its variations within a place and its larger context. Mastery opens unlimited possibilities for creativity; no two trips will be exactly the same. Most importantly, what we learn through this mastery is directly applicable to daily life in the city.

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## **Deep Lessons in Feeling and Knowing**

Let us explore some lessons gained through mature wild journeying experience. All of life is approached as an art like wild journeying. We develop a unifying story embodied in its practices. We see how its skills, values and practices are used in other contexts, such as sailing a boat or teaching school. Actions in daily life are part of the whole art as a way of life.

Wild journeying engenders unity in a wide range of personal and communal relations. It develops emotional, intellectual, and practical skills. Each of us is unique and lives in a specific place and ecosystem. The practice of the Wild Way helps us to become integrated, confident, whole persons who appreciate a wide range of values. We strive to live in harmony with others and Nature. Through wild journeying we create community with human and nonhuman beings in our home places.

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### **Active participation**

Wilderness education is a participatory process. The educator helps others to develop their capacities to engage in creative action, inquiry, and practical actions in co-operation with others. The educator guides others to discover their own native intelligence and creative freedom. They learn to examine their experiences for distorting theories, preconceptions, dysfunctional beliefs, conflicted emotions and crippling fears. The skills, techniques, and methods used to aid this process are not themselves the end or aim of education. Through their active fruition we gain a sense for human life as a whole, for our relations to all beings. We become attuned to the wild natural way, the way of no force, a way with heart. The Wild Way is deep in ecocentric values and involves learning as a way of life.

Wilderness learning makes a profound contribution to our first-hand experience of knowing the natural world and our deep ecological Self through time. The wild journeying art can be used as a model for education, since it furthers self-knowledge and deep understanding of our relationships in our whole context. It helps us to understand that we are part of the natural context and can decide how we shall contribute to it. It engages us from the physical to the spiritual. Wild journeying involves complete immersion in wild land, life-and-death situations. These places demand practical action rather than emotional withdrawal, disengaged speculation, or abstract theorizing. Thus, journeying carries risk, as does all genuine personal growth. The art of the Wild Way, like



the very nature of life, is dynamic, creative, and open-ended. It requires responding appropriately with all of our physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual energies as these are unified through practicing this art. Its values are woven together with action and meaningful themes oriented to Nature by means of a multi-purpose Wild Way narrative.

Wilderness experience deepens our spirited appreciation for all forms of life and for the sentient energies that pervade the natural world. Wilderness brings us into direct contact with this more than human conscious reality. It helps us to transcend doubt, fragmentation, alienation, and nihilism in our subjective lives. These conditions reflect our urban lifestyles, which cut us off from natural communities and our deeper ecological sensibilities and wild energies. In industrial society we tend to become personae filling stereotyped roles and specialized functions. In wilderness, we discover our larger personal resources and deeper spiritual connections. Modern industrial culture stresses competition, which undermines community spirit, whereas journeying together inspires cooperation and nurtures a cohesive community spirit.

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### **Spiritual depths in daily life**

Wild Way journeying as a spiritual practice leads to unity of self through deep appreciation for the wild aesthetic qualities of the natural world and natural selves. (This compares to Rasa Yoga, the way of beauty and aesthetics championed by Tagore.<sup>4</sup>) As we journey through the deep silence of wilderness, with its rich ecological diversity, we awaken to the creative source of life. The radiant starry night sky enhances the whispered sounds of a stream; on a dark night a bugling Elk serenades our camp in a high alpine basin. These, and so many other experiences, intensify our wonder at the mystery of all things. The sounds of falling water and rushing streams, the cycles of rain and snow, and the wind high in the trees are all part of the natural world's wild spontaneity. Abiding with them helps us to stop intellectualizing, worrying about the future, and painfully reliving the past. We know how to be fully in the present.

After many days of mountain journeying, we take on the rhythms of Nature's wild ways. When hungry, we eat; when sleepy, we sleep; when tired, we rest. When under way, we are intensely alive, totally involved in what we are doing. We are not divided as we so often are in the city. When at home, eating is often accompanied by tension, worry, and argument, watching TV, talking on the phone, or reading, but in the

mountains we just sit together and eat. This total involvement makes each experience intensely satisfying. It takes us out of the haste and tyranny of clock time and into the unlimited presence of wild time that is open and alive. Wild Way mountain journeying has mythic stature and universal symbolism. It joins the personal and the communal with affective adventure stories.

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### **Affinity with Other Practices and Simplicity**

The Wild Way has affinities with the Laung Gumpa walking of Tibet<sup>5</sup> and the marathon walking of the Japanese Buddhist monks of Mt. Hiei.<sup>6</sup> It gathers elements from Shamanic Journeying<sup>7</sup> to connect with the spirits of Nature. Its ceremonial journeying visits the lower and upper worlds of Nature spirits, ancestors, and gods. It resonates with the Aboriginal Australian walkabout, and North American vision quests.<sup>8</sup> Many have contributed to the visionary, practical and spiritual development of wild journeying as a whole art called the Wild Way.

The breathtaking beauty of the natural world, with all its unhurried cycles, has been a source of inspiration for all people, including sages and religious leaders. God spoke to Moses from a burning bush on a mountain. Jehovah appeared to Job in the form of a whirlwind. Jesus prayed and fasted in the wilderness for forty days and nights. Buddha meditated under the Bo-tree for several days and nights attaining enlightenment under the glowing morning star.

Wild journeying teaches us voluntary simplicity. For wilderness adventuring we simplify our lives, including our equipment and gear. We can't haul lots of stuff into the mountains. Wild journeyers reduce total weight and gear to a safe minimum. The elegant journeyer reduces gear primarily to necessities. The practical low limit to what we can carry on our backs helps us to realize how little we actually need, not merely to survive, but to thrive. Wild journeying, with just bare necessities, gives us some of our most rewarding and happy times. We gain valuable perspectives on vital human needs and on how quality of life can be very rich with few things. As a result, we are better able to create ecologically balanced lifestyles in the city.

Well-being and happiness don't require a huge number of possessions. Possessions are often a burden, and attachments can keep us in bondage. We get many other perspectives on the range of possibilities for a satisfying life in relation to material needs and natural limits. The

personal and cultural dimensions of the environmental crisis are more directly understood.

Simplifying and reducing possessions consistent with comfort, safety, and a manageable load helps us to compare our desires with real needs. While journeying, satisfying the simplest needs is so enjoyable that we have no desire for the cravings of a jaded palate. Cold mountain water quenches thirst and is more satisfying than exotic cocktails. Breathing clean mountain air is wonderful. We learn in journeying how desires can spawn other desires to become self-perpetuating and insatiable. Wild journeying helps us to appreciate the wisdom in the sacred teachings that fewness of desires is good. We see how to choose and practice voluntary simplicity at home.

Walking on trail teaches us valuable lessons to use in daily life. We learn how to set a sustainable pace, in balanced and rhythmic forms of unified movement of our whole self, our breath and heart. Our spiritual heart is warm and positive when we walk with enthusiasm. As we learn the art of efficient travel, we are sensitive to achieving balance by adjusting pace, posture, and breathing to the changing terrain. This balance and dynamic harmony puts us in touch with a larger, common life. We learn the wisdom of a slow, steady, sustainable pace, in contrast to making haste with frequent stopping. Passing through the “second wind” barrier, we open to flowing boundless energy.<sup>9</sup> We cultivate mindful pace and careful walking, whether on or off-trail. We are ever mindful with each step. Our energy and attention are focused in walking, but we also take in the larger view. The sensuous and visual aspects of wilderness nurture our being. We can put ourselves on “automatic pilot,” when the trail is even and well-maintained, and roam without being attached to anything. This is a meditation art or yoga. It is akin to the unifying group movements in Tai Chi and Aikido.

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## **Meditative Awareness and Narrative Communal Connections**

Meditation is awareness and total unity with whatever we are doing. We are relaxed, attentive and aware. Wild walking participates in this enlivening (zen) process. *We do not have to think to be.* We are aware, intelligent, perceptive, and responsive, even without the constant chatter of thought. We sit quietly without fidgeting or fantasizing. Our overly busy lives tend to lose contact with this spontaneous awareness and yet it is what we *are*, and it is inexhaustibly rich. Tensions and mental babbling create uneasy divisions within. Saturation in overly

stimulating urban print and electronic media separates and abstracts us from this vivid reality of spontaneous, original, primal experience of the world. Meditative walking with pace, balance, and mindfulness frees our minds of tensions and thoughts, and we find the universe in this emptiness. During the physical journey we sweat and then drink purifying water; a simple diet cleanses our bodies, and extended total breathing enlivens our spirit. Natural sensations cleanse our senses, while the journey cleanses our minds and feelings. We become whole and know what whole arts are. We have a sense for our place and its story.

Wild journeying increases our understanding in many communal ways. We have more intimate contacts with one another than we usually do in daily life, where we can fall into mindless, half-hearted interpersonal relations. We have so many sources of stimulation and so many demands placed on us that we tend to escape into the impersonal and make it a dominant feature of our everyday urban lives. This impersonal manner interferes with sympathy and acting from the heart. In wild journeying, we are together twenty-four hours a day in simple, intense, and incredibly beautiful non-distracting situations. We also might spend several hours a day alone with our thoughts and feelings, as our party climbs long alpine ridges or walks through silent forests. This movement, balanced between deep inwardness and intense connection with others and Nature, gives rise to non-verbal communion with one another and the natural world. This communion is the mutual feeling side of our journeying community. We enjoy natural serendipity together. We live in a communally conscious space. Conflicts are relatively few and experienced authentically, without the usual manipulations that can characterize the games that urbanites play. Competition strengthens ego, whereas co-operation helps us to forget ourselves by being with others in community. Thus, we emphasize co-operation, not competition.

As we journey, the physical effort enables us to be more and more relaxed. We have a playful attitude toward our minor aches and pains. Insect bites, skinned legs and elbows, sore muscles, and the cold hard ground are familiar friends. We learn the folly of too much resistance to gravity and other natural forces. Instead of fighting and resisting perceived hardships, we willingly accept and enjoy them as part of the natural contrasts in the whole trip. We have times of intense physical and mental demand, and times of profound relaxation and rest with no demands. We learn to see these not as opposites that are eternally separated, but as complementary aspects of a unified process and activity. They have their sense and significance in their interpenetration,

each enhancing the other within a larger narrative journeying context. There can be global and even cosmic narratives implied by and held within each adventure story about a wild journey.

We learn both from hardship and from easy-going parts of the journey. We know that just as the rain stops and the sun eventually emerges from the clouds, so too tears of sadness and the clouds of grief eventually dissipate, and lightness and joy return. Just as we need some basic orientation in daily life, so do we in the mountains. As we need meticulous preparation for extended wild journeying, so too for our life work. Our mistakes provide some of our deepest learning experiences, just as they do in daily life in the lowlands. Like life, the whole journey includes highs and lows, heights and valleys. Clearly, the benefits of wild journeying permeate our whole lives, as its practice subtly changes us. Mountains are mountains, but in our stories they are also metaphors and mythic figures. We are wild journeyers in daily life. We are the same at home as we are in the mountains, when we fully internalize the art and walk its way of being in the world.

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## Connecting with Earth and Other Beings

Wild journeying teaches us about environmental problems and how we can resolve them by working together in harmony with Nature. We realize from wild journeying the symmetries between human consciousness and the principles of ecology that pervade the human and natural world. We see that each of us *is* an ecosystem in miniature. We learn personal responsibility to our context, and an appreciation for the integrity of the Earth's ecosystems, with their many diverse ecological communities, how they sustain all living beings on the planet. Wild journeying makes us aware, in deep personal ways, of the whole natural world, the ecosphere we inhabit. We come to know it intimately and comprehensively. For balance, modern humans, to the degree that we live in isolation from these rhythms, need more daily contact with them. The less we have to do with natural processes directly, the less we appreciate them, and the more we lose contact with our own deep inner spontaneous nature. But wild journeying re-enlivens us and we can take this positive energy home. We return to the city with strength and optimism knowing anything is possible.

Through wild journeying we appreciate all the living beings with whom we share this Earth. We appreciate, in the silence of wilderness, that we all share and are part of the same creative life force, *Ki*.<sup>10</sup> We sense and are aware of the cycles of life and energy within the ecosphere. We

appreciate the interconnectedness of all life and how all things hang together. The natural world is neither hostile nor inimical to us. We are each part of its vast interconnected, ongoing, creative processes. The principles of community, friendship, and human flowering are embedded in the wild wholeness of ocean, sky, wind, flowers, forests, rivers, and mountains. In the Wild Way, we share their wisdom.

By practicing the Wild Way we can return to our home, to that vital centre in ourselves that is in harmony with the way of Nature and the Universe. Lao Tzu, M. Ueshiba, and others in Eastern traditions learned from Nature and taught this Way, as did teachers in our own wisdom and mystical traditions. These mystical qualities are not occult or weird: they are found at the centre of our ordinary daily experiences, once we learn to be aware and receptive. Through wild journeying we know that life sends us many gifts. We take joy in living. We make the most of every moment. With such blessings, we are good citizens of our place on the Earth.

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### **Features of the Wild Way in Systematic Summary**

The essential features of wild journeying can be described now using eight overlapping categories: spiritual, physical, narrative-metaphorical, historical, personal-social, ecological, practical, and educational.

1. The *spiritual* include realizing that life and its Source are sacred; a growing sense of wonder and awe; a realization that the ecosphere is not hostile but benign; a commitment to a life of increasing awareness and care; a respectful attitude toward life that leads to communion with other persons, life forms, and the world as a whole.
2. The *physical* elements include the fitness that results; the skills of balanced movement and the regulation of breath; activities that promote strength, endurance, coordination, flexibility, confidence, and body-mind integration.
3. As adventure *narrative and metaphor* the Wild Way represents life as a whole. Its narratives have an integrating and unifying power that brings understanding of natural processes to our daily lives, whether in human communities, with the complications of modern technology, or in simple, rich, natural settings.
4. The *historical* backgrounds of wild journeying reveal its evolution as the art of the Wild Way. The backgrounds to the Wild Way include

the spiritual practice of withdrawal from urban society to the wilderness, and the return; the primal vision quests; the tracking skills of the hunter-gatherers; Scandinavian *Friluftsliv* (that is, life in the free air<sup>11</sup>); the journeys of some mountain men; the skills, values, and spirit of Scouting; the craft of modern mountaineering; the survival skills and personal competence of Outward Bound; the healing processes of Wilderness Therapy and Rediscovery. The Wild Way connects the values realized in past tradition and unifies them within our present lives. Some symbolism in wild journeying has affinities with ancient alchemical traditions that focus on unification of body and spirit, the transmutation of base elements of the self to noble forms, for example, transforming the energy of greed into generosity, indifference to concern, hate into love, and so on.

5. The *personal-social*: Solo wilderness treks are intense and yield deep self-knowledge; in the group trip we learn about the nature of the self in its relational interconnections. This learning process gives us the opportunity to go beyond the small ego-self to encounter our larger ecological identification in a community. The practice of this art develops our four elements, spiritual, cognitive, affective, and physical, in balanced and integrated ways.

6. The *ecological* awareness of wild journeying is comprehensive and includes deep experiential knowledge of the principles of ecology. The trip as a creative expression is a ceremonial celebration of a unified vision embracing respect for the Earth and the Cosmos.

7. Wild journeying has many *practical* elements central to ongoing daily life, such as learning to pace ourselves in good work, how to create good services and products, to be attentive to detail, to be flexible, to improvise freely, to appreciate quality of relationships and actions, and to see life as a whole.

8. In *education*, the Wild Way art can be used to guide undertakings that develop the whole person, in body, feeling, mind, and spirit. Its practice unifies our capacities through an expansive, positive spirit. Education, in this sense, is not just job training or professional specialization. It leads to deep self-knowledge and understanding of the interconnected contexts of all life. It brings us back to our sacred wholeness that gets lost in industrial culture. It is practiced with humility, respect, and gratitude that will bless any project or endeavour. The ultimate aim of education is to be complete in ourselves. We can realize this by living in the Wild Way.

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## **The Whole Wild Way Learning System in Outline**

The Wild Way is a unified spiritual discipline using ceremonial activities and practices to live in harmony with our place in Nature here and now. The whole learning and practice system is outlined in the remarks below by focusing on the skills and practices that make up the art.

1. Local and ceremonial practices deepen personal knowledge of places, particulars, energy flows, natural signs, and so on.
2. Natural and mindful meditations are in rhythms suited to context, party, self, for example, as in pace, grade, and speed while walking.
3. Skilful means in use and care of equipment, for example, walking stick, ice axe, rope, pack, compass, and so on, are all used artfully.
4. Elegant actions and powerful techniques use wise forms and patterns of action with least force.
5. Sense of direction, destination, orientation as a sixth sense, route finding and map use, a sense for being at home while wild journeying.
6. Silence, non-doing, blending in, nonviolence, highly efficient and small energy use, becoming more alive.
7. Hiking and climbing skills for beautiful cross-country wilderness travel while living outdoors 24 hours a day, as the whole art is practiced.
8. Being ready for anything, weather, hazards, prevention of mishaps, relaxed and alert.
9. Shifting perspectives, inner and outer journeying, narrative journalizing, centred and being fully in the natural world in tune with the trees, streams, and stars.

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## **Concluding as Continuing On**

Once we are skilled in wild journeying practice, we can continue even in urban parks and gardens. It becomes a daily practice no matter where we are. By dwelling in wilderness places in the Wild Way, we learn how to let the wild come back into daily life. We bring this wild



wisdom home. We find the wild way home to spontaneous joy and natural harmony in daily life. This spontaneous creativeness (cosmogogenesis) is Nature's way. When we are whole, we fully participate in creating meaning and value in our places. We live in a rich meaningful context. Even in urban settings we can visit other levels of reality using such techniques as drumming, dance, and ceremony. This rejoins the urban-rural and tame-wild through the Wild Way. From this attuned wholeness, this diverse and ecologically wise place, specific communities and cultures emerge.

Through the Wild Way we complete ourselves and add to the total beauty and value of life on Earth, in our Solar System, in the Milky Way Galaxy. Life flows with deepening satisfaction, appreciation and joy. There is richness, beauty, and mystery in the wild world. The power of creative energy in spontaneous Nature is manifest in wild places and ourselves. To realize this and share it with others is to fulfill ourselves and reclaim our spiritual life. Our wild adventures become part of our personal and communal stories that are part of a larger and growing mythopoetic narrative context. New traditions emerge.

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### **Some Relevant Websites**

The official website of the International Federation of Aikido:  
[www.Aikido-international.org](http://www.Aikido-international.org)

Taoist philosophy and Tai Chi:  
[www.chenbucto.ns.ca/philosophy/taichi/taoism.htm](http://www.chenbucto.ns.ca/philosophy/taichi/taoism.htm)

A website based on respect for place, see articles section for wild way and friluftsliv: [www.ecostery.org](http://www.ecostery.org)

International Tai Chi Chuan Association website: [www.ITCCA.org](http://www.ITCCA.org)

Website devoted to George Leonard's Integral Transformative Practice: [www.itp.org](http://www.itp.org)

Website featuring Michael Harner's work: [www.shamanism.org](http://www.shamanism.org)

Canadian website devoted to all aspects of mountaineering: [www.bivouac.com](http://www.bivouac.com)

Website of the Seattle Mountaineers, rich with information: [www.mountaineers.org](http://www.mountaineers.org)

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Imhoff, D. 2003. *Farming with the Wild*. San Francisco: Sierra Books.

<sup>2</sup> Lao Tzu. 1971. *Tao Te Ching*. Baltimore and Middlesex: Penguin.

<sup>3</sup> Dalai Lama. 2001. *Open Heart: Practicing Compassion in Everyday Life*. Boston: Little, Brown.

<sup>4</sup> Tagore, R. 1971. *A Tagore Reader*. A. Chakravarty, ed.. Boston: Beacon Press.

<sup>5</sup> LaChapelle, D. 1978. *Earth Wisdom*. Silverton, CO: Finn Hill Arts.

<sup>6</sup> Stevens, J. 1988. *The Marathon Monks of Mount Hiei*. Boston: Shambhala.

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<sup>10</sup> Ueshiba, K. 1985. *The Spirit of Aikido*. Tokyo and New York: Kodansha.

<sup>11</sup> Dahle, B., ed. 1994. *Nature: The True Home of Culture*. Oslo: Norges Idrettshogskole.