



## Exploring a Sense of Place

# SEASONS

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## Take a Vacation in Your Bioregion

By Sarah Lundgren

A few months ago, my husband and I found ourselves in a dilemma. Spring Break was fast approaching and we were trying to figure out how to spend the week with our 3 children, Emma (10), Dean (8) and Nate (2). We didn't want to drive far (or at all) nor do a lot of planning. Recently, we had been inspired about the concept of Bioregionalism by a good friend. So we thought: Why not try to vacation locally and learn more about the area in which we live?

Our family lives in downtown Mountain View in the Stevens Creek watershed, part of the San Francisco Bay bioregion. We don't know much about the marshlands, the source of our water or where we get our local food, and thought we could learn about these things by spending time exploring them over a few days. One of our challenges was finding something everyone would enjoy. With kids ranging from toddler to pre-teen, and our middle son who is blind, we thought creeks, animal sounds and the out-of-doors would appeal to all of us and our many senses. Besides, we wanted an adventure that instilled a sense of place, a reverence for our beautiful planet and gave us time to be in wild places.

So...our adventure began. We spent our first day of our bioregional vacation biking on the Steven's Creek Trail to the marshlands. Our guide and neighbor has spent much time in the Baylands studying birds, the tides and native plants. We spent 2 hours exploring the estuaries and saw nesting swallows, egrets, ducks, river rats, night herons and more. The kids loved finding rocks to throw into the creek and muddy banks. My 10 year old daughter spent much time decorating her face with mud and rock paint which she'd learned about when studying Native Americans. It was so simple but so satisfying.



Sarah & Emma (with face paint)  
by Stevens Creek

The second day, we biked to Hidden Villa, a working farm in Los Altos Hills. We stayed for 2 nights and 3 days, exploring the creek, visiting newborn lambs, chasing chickens, and snorting at pigs. We hiked and explored the children's garden and had a picnic. The kids even constructed a tepee out of wood they found near the creek. Hidden Villa has a beautifully remodeled A-frame Youth Hostel with family bunk houses behind it. It was a perfect spot to cook our meals and lounge in the evenings.

Our vacation was simple to plan, close to home and full of interesting expeditions. We learned about our bioregion by simply BEING in it over a few days and following our children's lead in marveling at all that we discovered. The vacation was such a success that we hope to repeat it next year, adding a hunt for the water sources in our region and visiting another farm in the area.

## **A Sure Sign of Summer: Watching a Baby Hummingbird Grow Up**

*By Brigitte Fleeman, 2005-06 participant*



About 6 days old.

*Editor's note: Exploring a Sense of Place volunteer and past participant Brigitte Fleeman has spent the spring watching a baby hummingbird grow up in a nest just outside her window. She sent us this report on her experiences.*

We found the nest on Friday morning, May 11, the day after a painter had worked under the branch painting our doors for half the afternoon. We didn't know about the nest at that time! The nest is about the size of an espresso cup. We assume the hummingbird baby hatched around Saturday, May 12. We called it Hummy, as it is not possible to tell if it is female or male until later. Hummy stayed in the nest until June 4 (around 22 days of age.)

The nest was ideally built for viewing from my living room, right on a branch of a bush leaning on the side of the house at our porch glass door. In fact, I had a "dramatic" rescue on a windy day about 5 days after we discovered the nest. The wind had blown the branch away from the house and with all the blossoms at the tip, the branch was too heavy to hold itself up anymore and bent all the way down to the ground. When I discovered the problem, I rushed out the door, propped up the branch against the window and forgot in my panic to check that the little bird was still in there. At that point, Hummy was still too little to be seen over the rim of the nest and I checked on the ground for any signs of the baby. I sure wanted to know if the little bird was safe, so I took pictures with the digital camera to see if the little bird was still in there - and to my great surprise, it was. I

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have no idea how it hung in there while the branch had leaned on the ground. I think the hummingbird mom missed all the action as she was gone on a feeding trip.

The next shock was when I discovered on Tuesday, May 22, that the hummingbird mom was not sitting on the nest at night. We feared that she was hurt. The next morning, still no sight of the mother. At this time, the little bird was visible above the rim and we could see it sitting in the nest. Now we really started to worry. Luckily I found a great website describing the development and also the rescue of hummingbird babies, which informed us that the mother will stop sitting on the babies when they are about 10 days of age as the babies can keep their own body temperature.



Mom bringing food, about 14 days

The little "ugly" featherless baby developed within 3 weeks into a beautiful little hummingbird with a little shorter beak. It was fascinating to watch the fast change. The last three days, Hummy was looking like a grown hummingbird, just in miniature form. It was a privilege to have seen Hummy grow up. I tried not to be too intrusive although the hummingbirds are very tolerant (as the painter's close work showed). Hummy is still coming to our feeders and I do think it's a girl. I can only recognize her/him because the beak is still a little shorter, but not for long. Summer is here, and it's time for little birds to be out on their own!

## **A Sense Of Place Is Springing Up All Over**

A key part of our mission at Exploring a Sense of Place is to support the development of courses in other areas. There are many success stories. Below are stories of two organizations that have started courses in their own bioregions.

### **Close to Home: Oakland, CA**

Close to Home: Living with Wildlife in the East Bay began in 2003, a year after Exploring a Sense of Place. They graciously took the template of talks and field trips and adapted it to their locale. The east side of the San Francisco Bay has a huge amount of open space and an extravaganza of wildlife. Their fifth season that began in May includes a look at prehistoric life in the East Bay, wildlife today, followed by owls, reptiles, the language of songbirds, wild boar, salmon, coyotes, bees and cows. If you are interested, visit [www.close-to-home.org](http://www.close-to-home.org).

## **A Journey Down the San Dieguito River: San Diego, CA**

This new course will begin in October 2007, and explore the San Dieguito River Valley in all seasons. It is sponsored by The San Dieguito River Conservancy. Their goal is to spend one evening orientation and seven monthly Saturday field experiences walking the valley from crest to coast, learning about flora, fauna, geology, and history from local experts, and spending peaceful, creative time alone and with others listening to Nature, sensing the beauty and power of the place. There has been a great deal of interest in this course, and it has quickly filled.

## **Windy Hill**

*By Ann Teegardin, 2006-07 participant*

Wind swept grassy slope alive with swirling motion

Wind driven waves of meadow grass beckoning to us

Wind tethering a red-tailed hawk motionless high above

Breezes nodding grassy heads and swaying flowery heads

Currents of wind carrying melodious bird calls intertwined with distance carillon chimes

Soft wind of my breath taking it in; holding the wonder close to my heart.



Docent Leo Laporte at Windy Hill

## **A New Nature Writing Blog**

Anna Mills, a 2006-07 course participant, has turned her love of nature into a blog where she posts reviews of nature writing. Says Anna "I see it as a way to start discussions of the value and place and varieties of nature writing." The site includes reviews of David Gessner's *Sick of Nature* and Rebecca Solnit's *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, among others. Check it out for yourself today at <http://onnaturewriting.blogspot.com>.

### Upcoming events:

Saturday, July 7, 12-1:30 pm: Workshop at Common Ground, Palo Alto

Saturday, July 14, 9-3 pm: Lower Watershed & Riparian Environment, San Francisquito Creek

Saturday, August 11, 5-11 pm: Solar System & Cosmology, Russian Ridge

Saturday, September 8, 9-3 pm: Local, Seasonal, Organic Food, Hidden Villa

View the complete calendar at [www.exploringsenseofplace.org/site/?page\\_id=4](http://www.exploringsenseofplace.org/site/?page_id=4)