

Place, Purpose, Peace

**Discovering Self & Community at the
Huston-Brumbaugh Nature Center**



**UNIVERSITY OF
MOUNT UNION**
HUSTON-BRUMBAUGH
**NATURE
CENTER**

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About The Project

This booklet is the result of a summer 2018 project as part of the Brumbaugh Scholars Program, which fosters research and scholarly activities among students and faculty and provides financial support by the allocation of resources from the John T. Huston—Dr. John D. Brumbaugh Nature Center.

Ben Mullaly and Nat Engle completed the work under the supervision of Dr. Nicole Johnson, Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the University of Mount Union. The project began with extensive reading on the topics of place, purpose, and peace relating to nature. Many of those works are referenced in the meditations.

In this guide, trails or locations are assigned a meditation to encourage reflection while walking the Nature Center trails. The goal is to form a connection within oneself, to others, and to the wider world.

Whether you would like to do multiple trails at once or just one, each offers a unique experience and outlook on life.

Visitors Center

Outside the Visitors Center, find a seat on a bench.

Rest there for a moment in the peace and quiet.

Consider the role you have in the world.

Why are you important? Every person has a place in this world, just as every animal has a place in the forest's ecosystem or on the farm.

Reflect on how you can contribute to the world and those who live in it.

How can you make the world more peaceful or more equal?

"We live the given life, and not the planned" (*This Day*, Berry).

Nat Engle



Huston Farm Loop (1)

Start outside the Visitors Center. Sit and look around at the beauty of nature. Consider the diversity of the plants and animals you see.

Think about how all humans have different abilities. Think about the abilities you have. Seek gratitude for your capacities rather than focusing on what you do not have.

Now travel west from the Visitors Center toward the barnyard. Stop at the vernal pool. Do you see or hear any animals?

Think about the different animals and how they thrive here.

Huston Farm Loop (2)

Continue down the boardwalk and think about your connection to nature.

For some, the connection may be limited,
mostly experiencing nature through windows or a digital screen.

Or possibly, your connection is deeply rooted in who you are.

None of these lifestyles are greater than the others,
they are simply
different.

Appreciate your connection to nature. Feel the air against your skin and
your shoes against the ground. The sounds you make blend with those
from the forest. While you are here,
you are one with the forest,
and the forest
is one with
you.

Ben Mullaly

Huston Farm Loop (3)

As you emerge from the woods, notice the pasture, barn, and cabin.
Notice the drastic changes between the field and the forest.

Think of the effort it took to clear the forest to create space for these structures. Only as much of the forest that was needed was cleared.

We often overlook the amount of resources we consume in our lives, and unlike the farm, our society has reached an imbalance.

By being conscious of our actions and their consequences, together we can create a world with enough resources and natural beauty for everyone.

Retrace your steps to return to the Visitors Center or extend your walk on the Huston Farm Loop

Ben Mullaly

Pond Trail

From the Visitors Center, walk south toward the pond. You will reach the Huston Farm Loop and continue to head south toward the pond.

Breathe slowly and take in the smells around you. Notice what you smell: the rich and damp earth, decaying trees, possibly even the crispness of the air from the fallen snow.

Remain on the boardwalk and continue south on the Pond Trail.

Continue taking deep breaths and smelling the environment.

Continue along the boardwalk and you will encounter a pond. At the pond, rest at a bench.

Notice the sights and sounds. Do any sounds or smells blur together?

Retrace your steps to return to the Visitors Center or extend your walk on the Maple Trail

Nat Engle

Brumbaugh Woods Trail - South (1)

Head south from the Visitors Center on the boardwalk toward the pond. Cross the Huston Farm Loop and continue to head south. The boardwalk will start to curve and there you will take the Brumbaugh Woods Trail on the right.

Think about all of the people in your life who have connected you to something bigger: parents connecting you to life itself, or a friend connecting you to a job they thought you were suited for.

Think of how grateful you are for everyone in your life.

Each has contributed to you being you.

These people and every experience in your past and present contribute to making you *you*.

Nat Engle

Brumbaugh Woods Trail - South (2)

In *The Home Place*, author J. Drew Lanham talks about his grandmother and how she had been able to see all of the good and bad in humanity throughout her life.

Ultimately, she took in the simple things and lived her best life simply.

What does it look like for you to take in the simple things in your life, such as this moment right now?

Take in being outside in nature and listening to the sounds of daily life.

Everything in life has gotten you here. Appreciate it and know you can only keep going forward.

Extend your walk on the Brumbaugh Woods Trail or return to the Visitors Center on the Maple Trail or Tulip Trail

Nat Engle

Maple Trail (1)

Head east out of the Visitors Center and cross the driveway, entering the Spicebush Trail. Turn right onto the Huston Farm Loop and continue until you reach the Maple Trail.

Think about the different directions that your life has taken. Then think about the path you are on right now in your life.

Proceed down the Maple Trail through the meadow.

Stop at the end of the meadow and think about old plans you left behind.

What has changed you since making those plans?

Why did they change?

How has your life changed since leaving those behind?

Nat Engle

Maple Trail (2)

Look at the trail ahead of you. What do you have planned for the future? Is it something big, like graduating or changing jobs? Or is it something small, like your drive back home? Be ok with your plans changing. Do not worry about the future, but still expect it.

Dorothy Day says that today's future is tomorrow's present.

Continue south along the trail leaving all of your worries behind. Take in the nature surrounding you and observe how nature is not worried about the future or the past. Try to live into that example.

Live your day by appreciating the present.

At the end of the Maple Trail, turn left to extend your hike or turn around to retrace your steps to the Visitors Center

Spicebush Trail

Bear witness to the interconnectedness of the forest. The forest seems to engulf you. Each being in the forest enhances the beauty, but in a second it can also be taken away. Think about the displacement that would cause every dragonfly, chipmunk, bird, and every other creature should their home be taken. They are stewards of this forest as much as you are. While the bird leaves in its wake new berry bushes, so the chipmunk leaves new oak and walnut trees (adapted from *They Will Inherit the Earth*, John Dear).

Continue along your journey, with your relationship to this forest in mind. Look at the trail you walk; look at the trees and even the stones. They all have their place here, and so do you.

Do not let that place be spoiled for you.

Nat Engle

Brumbaugh Woods Trail - North (1)

Start near the parking lot and walk east past the Spicebush Trail. Notice that many of the trees are the same species: Tulip Poplar. They are the descendants of a single shade tree planted to offer shelter to horses and cattle, and now over a hundred years later, they provide shelter for you.

Nature connects us to the past and the future. Take a moment to appreciate the persistence of the forest through time and appreciate the sliver of time that you exist in it.

Eventually you will come to a clearing.

Not long ago, this was devastated by herbicide, but now, after replanting, it contains more healthy, helpful, native plants than before. As you admire the scenery around you, appreciate those who have helped to replant in your life. Appreciate your own strength in overcoming loss, and praise yourself for fighting through your struggles.

Ben Mullaly

Brumbaugh Woods Trail - North (2)

As you walk into the Old Woods, notice the differences around you. Pay attention to the sounds of the forest. Appreciate the breeze flowing through the leaves, the birds singing in the trees, or the soft silence of the winter air. Listen to your footsteps as they combine with the sounds of the forest. Notice the holes in the canopy left by larger trees that have fallen.

Do not be sad for the loss of these forest giants; they have served their purpose and now their absence allows sunlight to reach the younger plants on the ground.

As one part of our life ends, new opportunities for growth are presented to us. Be thankful for your new opportunities to succeed.

Ben Mullaly

Brumbaugh Woods Trail - East

Follow the Brumbaugh Woods Trail east, past Succession Trail, towards Hickory Trail. As you approach the bridge, pause there and take time to reflect. As you cross, enjoy the sound of the birds in the trees, the flowing stream, and the breeze as it rustles the leaves.

Now consider the worldview of Thich Nhat Hanh,
a Vietnamese Buddhist monk:

“True happiness is rooted in peace, freedom, and compassion, not in wealth or fame...”

Too often we prioritize work and material things over our most important relationships. Be mindful of times you have done this, forgive yourself, then feel the compassion and connection you share with someone dear to you. Allow your feelings of love and belonging to fill you and bring peace to your mind.

Ben Mullaly

East Meadow

Remain on Brumbaugh Woods Trail and walk uphill to the East Meadow.

“Anywhere we go, we will have our self with us; we cannot escape ourselves” (Thich Naht Hanh, *Being Peace*).

Though we try to escape ourselves through mindless entertainment, substance abuse, or even lying, we ultimately do so in vain. Instead of trying to change who we are to be different, perhaps we should try to change how we view our “negative” characteristics.

Think or say to yourself: “*I am worthy and deserving of my love.*” Now think of your favorite part of yourself and think or say “_____ *makes me proud to be who I am.*” Finally, think of a “negative” aspect and think or say “*Even though _____, I still love myself.*” Repeat these sayings to yourself several times, then thank yourself for appreciating you.

Ben Mullaly

East Pond

Remain on Brumbaugh Woods Trail to reach the East Pond.

Sit at one of the benches around the pond. Take this moment to rest your body before you continue your walk and rejuvenate your soul. Take time to appreciate the people in your life whom you hold dear. Think of your family, friends, a significant other, and feel the love you have for them. Be thankful for what they add to your life; be glad that you have them.

This moment and this life are fleeting, but moments of joy and love with those you care about last eternally.

When you're ready, stand and walk through the forest and life rejuvenated with the feelings of love and gratitude for those who are most important to you.

Ben Mullaly

Big Valley Trail

Travel west from the pond and enter the plank boardwalk of Big Valley Trail.

Walk down the boardwalk slowly and intentionally. Hear every footstep on the wood as it resonates quietly. Listen to and appreciate the silence. As you go, breathe deeply and appreciate the freshness of the air that has been filtered by the plants and trees around you.

Feel the warmth of the sun on your skin, or the nip of the cold against your cheeks.

If something around you catches your attention, pause and observe it.

No one is rushing you; you may take as long as you please. In this space, you can be blissfully at peace with the world around you.

Ben Mullaly





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