

THE DISPATCH BY FOLK REBELLION

# WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE.

DISCONNECTING,  
RECONNECTING, AND  
NATURE DEFICIT DISORDER

by Pippa Biddle



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ing from the floor of her apartment in Washington D.C. Soft fall light fills her living room with a warm glow and a large green plant peeks into the right of the frame. On the other side, a wall-mounted lamp, maybe a sculpture, appears to float in the air. The scene is lit with a clean, 80 Watt fall, her apartment, blurring the line between where the indoors ends, and the world of the outdoors begins.

Kelly's first dream towards the urban outdoors after she suffered an environmental illness caused by mold. The very walls that were supposed to keep her safe had invaded her, and she wanted anything but to be inside. Through this experience, her relationship with the outdoors deepened and she began questioning the perceived distance between what is outside and what is 'inside.' Society said that outside was what was right beyond her door. It was once we were stairwells and apartment hallways, streetlights and traffic cones. Nature was anonymous, seemingly unreachable in such an urban space. It wasn't accessible; it was something one must search for.

"We've convinced ourselves that beauty and the outdoors is a luxury," she reflects today, and so 'the outdoors' and 'nature' were intrinsically different from 'urban' and 'closeby.' Once she'd realized that nature was everywhere, and infinitely accessible, the question became, "how do we start to realize that these spaces are available for everyone?"

The pursuit of an answer led Kelley towards becoming a Certified Forest Therapy Guide. The certification process includes an eight-day training during which the participants are immersed in nature, and Kelley was nervous that she'd return home only to discover a newfound hatred for the urban D.C. life. While she says that she "was in shock for a bit," beyond the readjustment period was a realization that she truly does love her city, and a confirmation that she wants to help others in loving it—especially its green spaces.

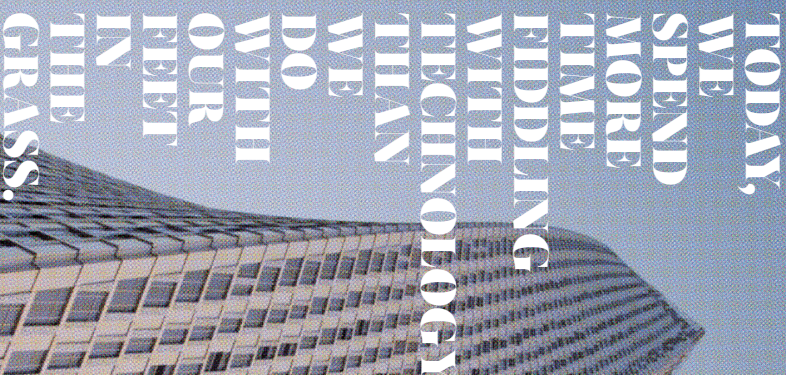
As time plugged-in has skyrocketed, time outdoors has plummeted. Today, we spend more time fiddling with or staring at technology than

we do with our feet in the grass, an average of more than 10 hours each day, according to a 2016 report by Nielsen. Experiencing nature has been replaced with watching it play out on television programs with grandiose titles like *Planet Earth*, *Life*, and *Wild Africa*. While such programs purport to bring the magic of the natural outdoors into spaces it has been exorcised from, there will always be something sterile about a screen. Time outside and in nature has been found to have positive impacts on our physical and mental health and decreased time has been linked to increases in depression and anxiety.

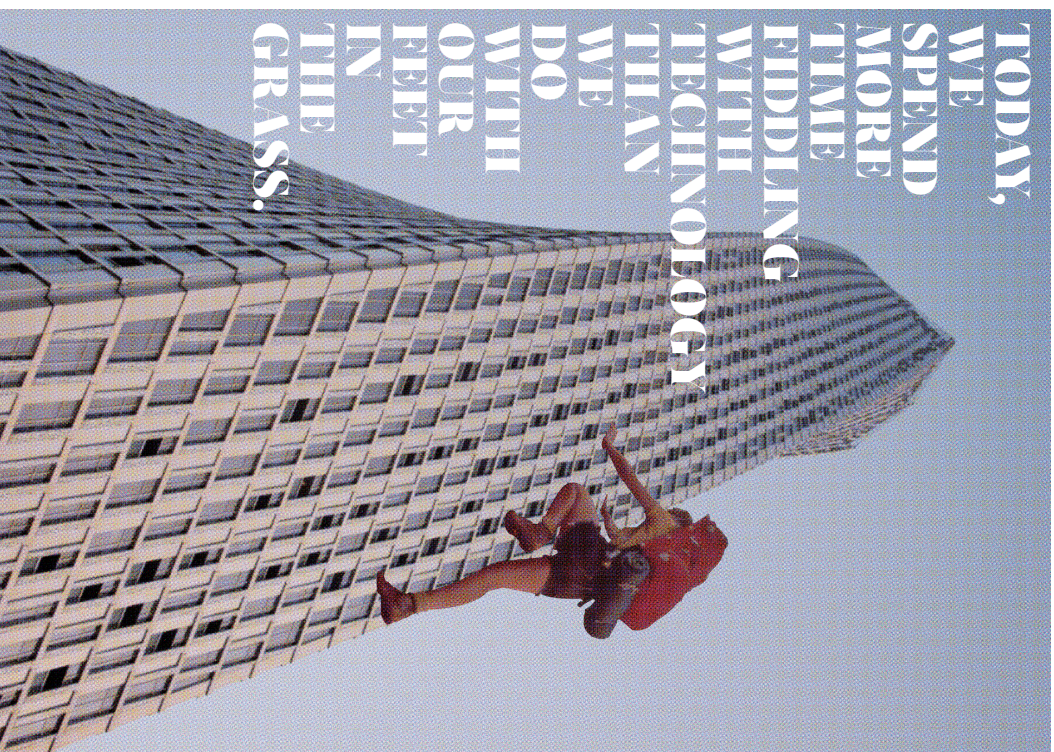
A 1991 study conducted by researchers at Texas A&M University and the University of Delaware, and published in the *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, found that exposure to "undistressing natural environments can have a stress-reducing or restorative influence." Exposure to urban environments, on the other hand, will hamper recuperation, following stressful situations (Ulrich et al.). The findings are powerful evidence of the benefits which even short periods of time in nature can provide. Despite this, the 2017 Outdoor Recreation Participation Report by the Outdoor Foundation found that only 48.8% of Americans participated in any outdoor activity in 2016.

At some point in time, and surely long before the first iPhone, telephone, or even train, a line was drawn between what is 'nature' and what is not, what is 'outdoors' and what is simply outside. As cities have grown, the tendency to encase urbanized environs in a hermetically sealed bubble has emerged alongside it. Wilderness is something separate and far away, and even parks are a commodity.

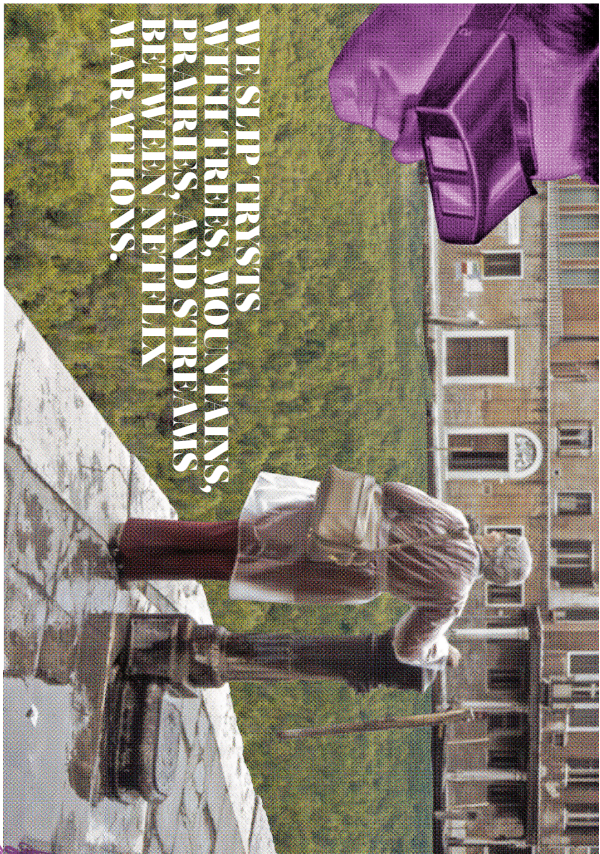
The ability to access what is classified as "nature" has become a privilege primarily available to those who can afford country homes, cars, train tickets, or even to live by a park that isn't coated in asphalt. Author Richard Louv coined the term Nature-Deficit Disorder in his 2005 book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder*. While Nature-Deficit Disorder is not a DSM-5 diagnosable disorder, it has gained traction as a catchall term for the adverse effects of being disconnected from green space. More than ten



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even after the publication of *Last Child in the Woods*, giving the problem a name hasn't diminished its pervasiveness. If anything, it's grown in prevalence.

The urban, and even suburban, human relationship with green space has come to revolve around finding feeding times for nature cravings. We slip trysts with trees, mountains, prairies, and streams between Netflix marathons. In New York City, walking the dog sometimes seems to be the only way to connect with nature. In other cities, smartphones in hand, people are pulled along by impatient pings. But is it even a walk if you can't hear the snow crunch beneath your feet? And is it time unplugged if phantom vibrations haunt you even when you do leave your phone at home?

However, initiatives around the United States are fighting to pay the human price of the connection with nature by welcoming that connection into the urban landscape. In 2012, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Conservation Congress affirmed that every child has a right to connect with nature. Recognition that time outdoors is both imperative for conservation and a human right is, Louw says, "progress," but it can't just be about getting people out into what we traditionally conceive of as nature. It also has to be about finding ways to make nature more accessible by bringing it into the urban landscape. The walks, Clara Kelley offers are designed to be self-organized therapeutic outings, an experience known in the United States as forest bathing that is based on the Japanese practice of *Shinrin-yoku*, a form of medicinal therapy that was developed in the 1980s and has been demonstrated to reduce stress, lower blood pressure, and improve participants' psychological well-being. Located in green spaces that are accessible for urban dwellers, such as West Creek Park, Kelley prices the walks on a

sliding scale so that no one is excluded based on their socioeconomic status. "For me," she says, "it's just not honorable to make the outdoors another place of exclusivity when it's the most inclusive place there is."

On the walks, Kelley leads participants in what she identifies as the most important part of the time spent outside: noticing. By creating liminal space where time is slower, Kelley invites those on her walks to tune into the world around them. Sometimes that even means accepting the background noise of the city as part of nature.

Rather than labeling the sound of a man yelling as an intrusion, Kelley works to accept the landscape as it is. That doesn't mean ignoring when a cosmetic disturbance, like a man yelling, could become a risk factor. Rather, it's a battle between accepting people for who they are, while recognizing that some behaviors may be harmful. That is, she acknowledges that the wilderness is not a safe space for everyone. "Through this process of tuning in, noticing, and acceptance," nature connection becomes culture repair."

City dwellers interested in such experiences can find Forest Therapy Guides in their area through the Association of Nature & Forest Therapy Guides & Programs' Worldwide Forest Therapy Guide Locator Map. The map lists guides in various locations, including San Francisco, Atlanta, Boston, and even far afield internationally. Tasmania. Many city parks also offer self-guided walks and tours that can be turned into forest bathing experiences through the application of the same mindful, receptive thoughtfulness that Kelley advocates for.

On Manhattan's East River, another type of forest bathing is taking place onboard a floating food forest called *Swale*. The idea behind *Swale*,

which is the brainchild of artist Mary Mattingly, came in part from a gap in legislation. While growing food for public consumption on public lands, like in a park, is illegal in New York City, it isn't illegal on the waterways that surround Manhattan. This is probably because legislators didn't expect anyone to build an edible garden atop a barge.

Lorray Gerfany, author of *The Catch*, the Rain and Swale's Sustainability Advisor and Project Manager, is a leading expert in rainwater harvesting and assists in steering *Swale*. He hopes that it will serve as a blueprint for large projects to come — both in acreage and impact. Open seasonally, *Swale* offers numerous free opportunities including open hours, cooking classes, workshops, and educational programming. All of the experiences are tactile and focus on nurturing a physical connection between visitors and the nearly 100 varieties of plants on board.

Impassioned opportunities for reconnecting with nature that are accessible and affordable for urban-dwellers can feel difficult to track down. Nevertheless, they are increasing in supply. After seeing how short-term opportunities can leave kids unable to process their experiences, Outside Perspectives Executive Director Nicola Wood, a Licensed Social Worker and seasoned outdoor program leader, committed herself to working with young people. Project Wild, a program that supports children's connection with nature during and after school hours, has been a success. Donor-based organization SOS Outreach provides thousands of at-risk youth with outdoor opportunities year-round that include skiing, rock climbing, and hiking.

And not all experiences need to be structured, or limited to the young. If you're in New Orleans, head to Obsolete Island, a small island in the middle of the Audubon Park lagoon, where hundreds of birds nest each year. The island is accessible by boat and is a popular spot for bird-watching, camps, and classes focused on the diverse ecosystems present in the city. Chicago's Nature Class program provides a similar array of opportunities that are searchable through the My Chi Parks app. The increased emphasis cities are putting on providing access to green space shows a shift towards what Louw calls, a "nature-rich city," crisscrossing the line between urban and outdoors.

Even so, a 2017 study in the UK found that the majority of interactions

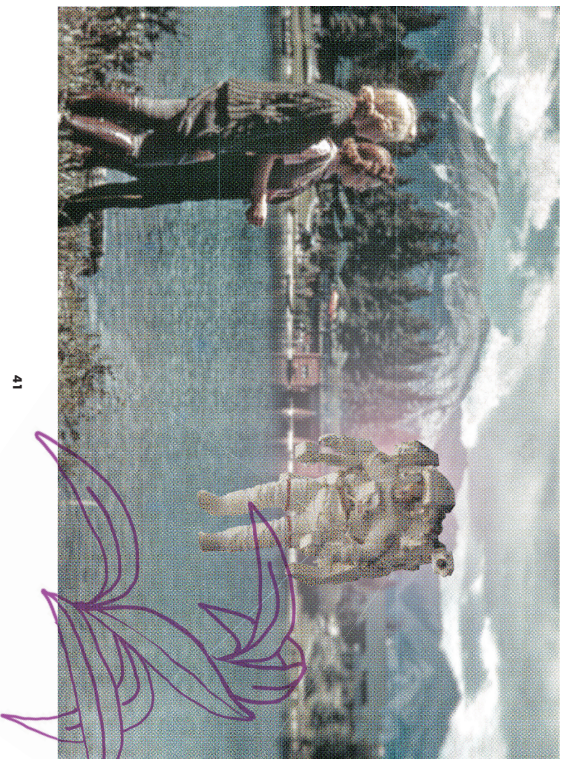
urban community members were having with nature were being experienced by only half of the population — so the number of 'interactions' didn't line up with the number of people actually taking part. Even fewer of the people who did report interacting with nature were doing so purposefully, with many reporting that their interactions were incidental (Cox et al. 2017). There was a lot of looking at trees through office windows, but sitting under those trees was far less common.

Windows aren't cutting it. "If we are going to have meaningful experiences with nature," Louw says, "we are going to have to rethink nature within cities," at a larger scale than is currently happening. For the time being, it's up to the people to take charge. Louw's newest book, *Vitamin N*, provides parents (or anyone looking to reconnect with nature) with 300 nature-based activities to try out. Even small actions do add up if they are thoughtfully proposed, and repeated.

On chilly days in Brooklyn, NY in late 2017, visitors walked into a cold white room at the Vectors - Mo art gallery, relinquished their phones, picked up a flashlight, and wandered into a dark forest. Guided by the narrow beams of light, they explored the tactile space. (The Ray Lee Project Vol. 1) NBD Immersion Room, an installation by artist Rachel Lee, is a dark, immersive space that uses light and sound to engage visitors to transport and to challenge. It succeeded at both. While some visitors settled down beside the crackling (simulated) campfire, others tilted for their phones.

"There is a constant power relationship between the visitors, and the surrender of technology," Hoyman says. "In silence, the scaled viewer becomes part of the semi-ritual with surrounding the campfire. Some visitors are more engaged than others. Some find it meditative. Through this, the visitor becomes as much of a piece of the work as the campfire — 'Without their response to it,' Hoyman says, "there is no reflection."

And the purpose of the piece is reflection. Reflection on self, reflection on nature, reflection on technology, and reflection on the relationship between the three. It is a project in desecration and reconstruction. You are not in nature, but it feels as if one day, you are stripped of your





Dear Folk Rebellion Community:

My name is Dave Romanelli (nickname Yeah Dave). I focus on asking people questions other than the same old boring ones like "What do you do for a living?" I prefer questions like "What is your message?" and "Why are you here?"

I love the mission at Folk Rebellion—to unplug and experience deeper feelings and clearer thoughts.

When we speak our message and live our purpose, each day is a sacred act.

To those seeking more clarity and a greater commitment to shifting attention away from technology and back toward nature...

Each year, I lead a 6 month program that culminates in an epic UNPLUGGED location. This year's journey is called INTO THE WILD and I will send you a daily audio guided meditation that gives you encouragement, inspiration, and sometimes a kick in the ass... to look away from all the phones, tablets, desktops and TVs...and look back to the wisdom of the skies, stars, seas and trees. You will conclude with a 5 day retreat to Alaska for the Summer Solstice.

It would be awesome to share a moment with you this summer in Alaska, watching bald eagles soar across the Midnight Sun...

You can start into the wild anytime. Visit [www.yeahdave.com](http://www.yeahdave.com) for the details

Love-- and Enjoy Your Journey

Dave Romanelli

yeah dave!



THERE WAS A LOT OF LOOKING AT TREES THOUGH OFFICE WINDOWS, BUT WINDOWS AREN'T CUTTING IT.

technology, but you're surrounded by it. You're immersed in an experience, but the world, like your phone, wants you outside.

Humanity's piece plays into the three senses that Kelley says can be developed through a stronger connection with nature. Proprioception, our sense of our physical place in the world, interoception, our sense of our internal operations, and intuition, the invisible guide to our inner world, are all senses that can be developed through a stronger connection with nature.

We need to imagine a future, "Lauri says, "in which our lives are immersed in nature every day, as much as they are in technology, and this alongside them.

\* **State Resources** About two hrs off Sand Point, the Alaska State and Civil Service, offering a variety of courses and retreats, in their own city.

\* **Unleashing** or Illinois' Snow Island Cultural Center, a 100-acre area, offering a variety of courses and retreats, in their own city.

\* **In Zion**, The Rockefeller Center, offering a variety of courses and retreats, in their own city.