



# The ANFT Way of Forest Therapy

M. Amos Clifford  
Ben Page

**After reading this  
booklet you are invited  
to share comments  
using the form linked  
on page 45.**



# The ANFT Way of Forest Therapy

M. Amos Clifford, Founder  
Ben "Crow" Page, ANFT Director of Training  
*(revised 5 August 2019)*



## **ANFT Leadership Team**

*M. Amos Clifford, Founder*

### **Executive Council**

Nadine Mazzola, Director of Practicum & Certification

Ben Page, Director of Training

Pamela Wirth, Director of Partnerships and Community

### **Staff**

Sara Ahmadi, Chief Operations Officer

Angela Gross, Admissions & Venue Coordinator

Michelle Hickey, Director of Membership & Social Media

Christy Thomson, Immersions Coordinator

Caitlin Williams, Mentor Training Project Manager

### **European Advisory Council 2019**

Amanda Bond (UK)

Katerina Cuk (Slovenia)

Silje Michaela Kvalheim (Norway)

Kat Novotna (Netherlands)

Geeta Stillwell (Portugal)

### **Canadian Advisory Council 2019**

Stana Luxford-Oddie

Andrea Prazmoski

Ronna Schneberger

**Contents**

Introduction: The Purpose of This Booklet . . . . .1

Chapter 1: Contrasting Some Emergent Theories in the Field of Forest Therapy . . .5

Chapter 2: The Core Premise . . . . .9

Chapter 3: Understanding the ANFT Approach to Forest Therapy . . . . .15

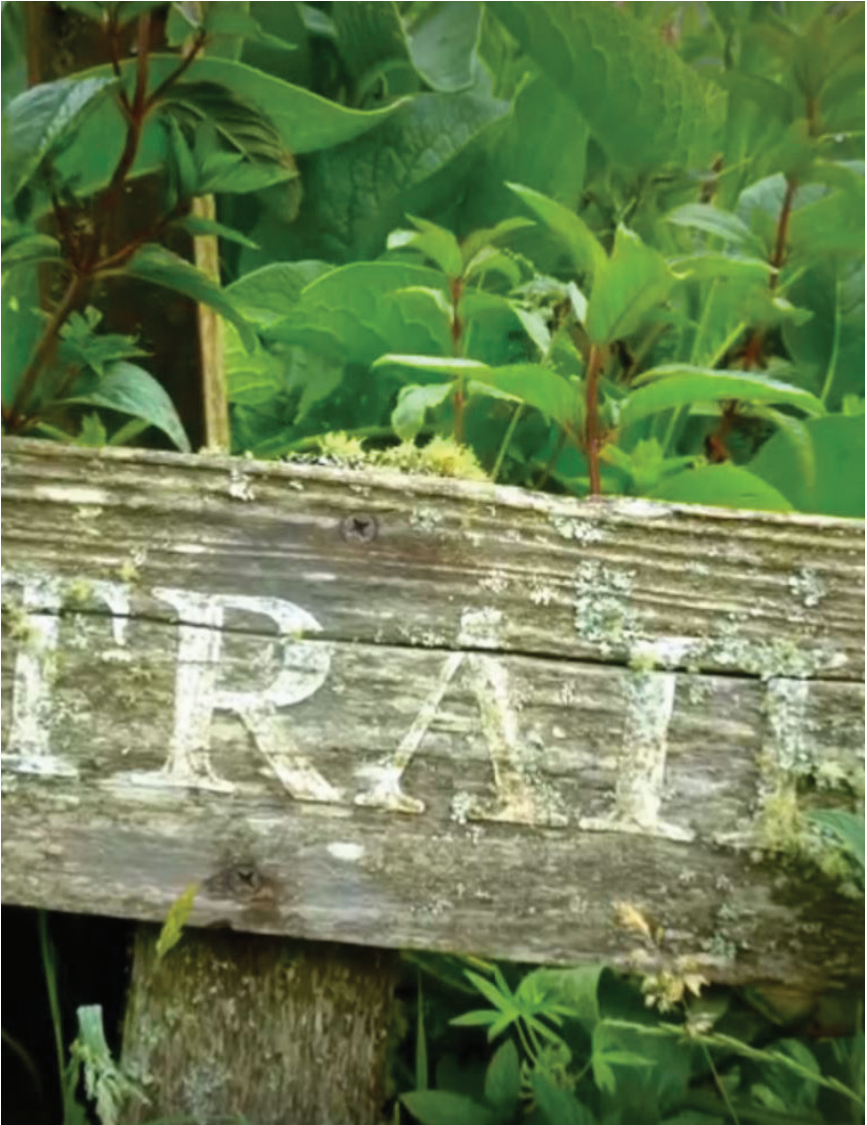
Chapter 4: Understanding the ANFT Way Through our Training Slogans . . . . .21

Chapter 5: The Business of Forest Therapy and the Aims of ANFT . . . . . 27

Chapter 6: Forest Therapy Guide Scope of Practice: The ANFT Definition . . . . .33

Chapter 7: Professional Standards and Competencies for Forest Therapy Guides . . 37

References . . . . .45



# Introduction: The Purpose of this Booklet

*M. Amos Clifford*

As Forest Therapy evolves into a movement spanning the globe, new forms are emerging. What do these forms have in common? How do they diverge from each other? And, ultimately, who gets to decide what is, and is not, forest therapy?

This booklet touches on these questions. It is written specifically for ANFT trained guides in Europe and for those organizations involved in bringing forest therapy to Europe. It should be helpful for any guide and of interest to anyone who is a part of the forest therapy movement.

Guides in Europe are currently facing several challenges that don't exist (yet) in North America. Foremost among these are efforts by several organizations and governments to narrowly define forest therapy, as a step toward regulating the practice. These efforts tend to focus on the word "therapy" in a way that may not align with how ANFT uses the word.

The ANFT way is to say that *the forest is the therapist*. The person who leads forest therapy walks is a guide. *It is essential to understand how the role of a guide is different than the role of a therapist*. Our training focus is on guiding and the skills of guiding, rather than on the skills of therapy.

A challenge to our approach is that the general cultural understanding of the word "therapist," held by academics, practitioners, patients, and regulatory agencies, is that it applies to humans who have completed a recognized, rigorous course of study and training. I have done so in California, where I'm trained and have practiced as a Marriage and Family Therapist. I'm very familiar with the business of psychotherapy. I've also taught graduate students in psychotherapy at a major university; I know why it is important the

therapists receive excellent training with appropriate oversight and accreditation.

But therapeutic effects—which is to say, healing—happen in many settings. I also have several decades of experience as a wilderness guide, leading groups on journeys of up to 21 days into deep wilderness. I've experienced many times the “three day effect;” we need only be away from the human-built world for a few days before an internal silence descends and we perceive the world anew. Many times I've witnessed healing in individuals and in groups spontaneously emerge from time in nature.

Forest therapy is a powerful healing method. When I guide a forest therapy walk, I do not act as a psychotherapist. Instead, I follow the Way of the Guide, which is quite different from the way of the psychotherapist. With the ANFT method there is a “three-hour effect” that emerges quite spontaneously. No further therapeutic intervention is needed, only the supportive witnessing of the guide and of our companions on the trail.

In the Way of the Guide, I view the forest itself as an active partner in my work. I hold the story that as a person comes into contact with the forest through their senses and awareness of their bodies and of the immediacy of the place they are in, a kind of sentience arises, a “knowing” that accomplishes the work we have traditionally (and perhaps mistakenly) ascribed to the skills of the human healer.

While this idea of the “knowing” and of the emergence of a sentience may sound mysterious, it need not be. Most of us are familiar with how the bond of relationship between two people makes possible growth that could not be accomplished by either on their own. It may simply be that when we come into a relationship with the forest or any other natural environment our own innate wisdom is amplified, along with our body's remarkable capacity for self-repair and maintaining well-being.

Consider for example the well-documented relationship of the breath of a human body to the presence of phytoncides; within that relationship, repair of the immune system is supported. No intervention from a human healer is needed. Thus, we can clearly see



how the forest is the therapist. Therapeutic effects occur when our bodies and minds are in a certain kind of relationship with nature. Facilitating the development of that “certain kind” of relationship is the rightful domain of the guide. Once the relationship emerges, the skillful guide knows how to keep their presence at a minimum, so as not to step on the toes of their partner, the forest.

In the ANFT way, we refer to the method used by the guide to nurture the healing relationships as the “Liminal Journey.” This is a concept rooted in depth psychology. The specific techniques we use are organized into a Standard Sequence, supported by skillful use of language, group process, and quality of attention given by the Guide to the participants on the walk, to the guide’s own inner process, and to the forest and its ways of being present. These are not explained in this booklet; they are the focus of our six-month guide training program.

It is my hope that this book will influence Europeans to consider ways in which “Forest Therapy Guide” can be embraced as a meaningful and legitimate title for people who are well-trained as guides, but who have not completed a traditional curriculum of training as a psychotherapist, physician, nurse, or in a related field. Please focus on the word “Guide,” remembering that the Therapy comes from the facilitated exposure to the forest and the relationships that are formed between person and the more-than-human world.

Expanding our awareness to include other-than-human beings and settings among our many relationships, including therapeutic relationships, is itself an essential part of our species’ journey toward wholeness.



# Chapter 1: Contrasting Some Emergent Theories in the Field of Forest Therapy

*Ben Page*

To understand the full promise of Forest Therapy and the different schools of thought that practice it, I find it helpful to think in terms of the problems that it addresses. These are big problems; it would be a grave mistake to think of them as anything less. These problems speak to the fundamental challenges that stand between humanity and mass extinction:

1. The first problem we may call **the degradation of human health**. We are experiencing a health epidemic that our medical system is unable to properly remedy and it is directly linked to our disconnection from nature. Hippocrates, the father of western medicine, identified that it is nature that is the source of health and the healer of disease. It should come as no surprise that our health is intricately connected to our exposure to elements such as clean air, sunlight, water, and plants. These natural elements not only heal disease, but they also maintain the strength of our immune systems, which keeps disease at bay.

On top of all the physiological ailments caused by our disconnection from nature, we are also seeing a rapid rise of mental health challenges around the world. Many experts agree that these health impacts are directly tied to digitalization, urbanization, overwork, stress, and loneliness. It is self-evident that we will not survive if we are not healthy.

2. The second problem we may call **the degradation of global ecology**. From small acts such as littering to macroscopic problems such as deforestation, we are seeing the devastating impacts of industrialization upon the Earth's biosphere. Such environmental degradation is not only a bioethical dilemma; it is also a threat to

our very existence. Without a diverse and healthy biosphere, human interests will rapidly become unsustainable.

3. The third problem we may call **the degradation of cultural values**. The root causes of almost all our most threatening problems are not economic, political, or ideological. The most pressing problems in our society are social, emotional and moral. I might broadly identify these as being in some way connected to the prevalence of apathy, greed, and selfishness in our culture. Our survival as a species cannot be promised without some form of cultural transformation that addresses these issues. At the core of this shift, we must learn to see the world differently, we must learn to think and perceive differently, so that we know how to fall in love in such a profound way that we will reflexively take good care of each other and all beings upon this Earth.

Forest Therapy is a complex idea in part because of the many ways it has been conceptualized. To varying degrees, different schools of thought may see its promise as more or less related to one of these problems over the others. In many parts of the world, the dominant schools of thought are hyper focused on the ways in which Forest Therapy might work to ameliorate the degradation of human health. In some respects, this is where the story of Forest Therapy began in Japan with the practice of Shinrin Yoku and Shinrin Ryoho. It was, after all, the efforts of the scientific community in Japan that first yielded the idea of ‘Forest Bathing’ as a complimentary health care practice. Today, we see many schools of thought evolving in East Asia and in Europe that are primarily asking the question of how do we engineer forest environments and forest therapy practices to be conducive to benefitting human health? Many of these practices follow a medical pattern of diagnosis and prescription in order to treat patients suffering from any number of physical or mental health issues.

The Japanese tradition of Shinrin Ryoho also incorporates some measure of ecological restoration, as some of the activities one might do during these sessions are designed to benefit the health of the forest. These activities might include planting trees, clearing weeds, and trimming plants in such a way as to promote healthy growth. In this way, some practitioners of Forest Therapy (particularly Dr. Iwao

Uehara) see the efforts of Forest Therapy as being simultaneously about promoting human health as well as the health of the forest.

The Association of Nature and Forest Therapy has designed a theoretical framework and a practice that seeks to address all three problems, but has a particular emphasis on the question of cultural values. In our view, the health benefits for both humans and the forest are collateral, or secondary, impacts of the restoration of healthy relationship between humans and the world. We aim to transform the ways in which people relate to forests and other natural spaces so that they feel deeply connected to those places. Beyond this, we also aim to transform the ways in which people relate to themselves, to others, and to the present moment in such a way that they feel deeply connected. Once such connections are generated, we believe that they act as gateways to pro-social and pro-environmental behavioral changes at a societal level. In this way, we understand the main purpose of Forest Therapy as being a vehicle for accelerating cultural change in the interest of community, reciprocity, and love.

If our health is the gift we may receive from Nature, and ecological renewal is our reciprocation, then we might consider our relationship as an act of devotion that ensures we may never forget our interconnectedness again. The highest promise of our work is not an outcome, it is a feeling of our being-ness and an appreciation for all things in this world. This feeling is in danger of being lost and forgotten, but it can be remembered and preserved. It is my hope that we will honor and cherish it, so that our work is in service to the generations of all beings yet to come in this world.

The methodology of Forest Therapy, as it is taught by ANFT, is oriented toward these goals: how Forest Therapy can help us to feel alive, fall in love, and take good care of the world in such a way that it benefits all beings.



# Chapter 2: The Core Premise

*M. Amos Clifford*

*Note: This chapter is adapted from the now out-of-print Little Handbook of Shinrin-Yoku, which I wrote in 2012 when launching the Association of Nature and Forest Therapy Guides and Programs.*

My work is based upon this core premise:

**All of our efforts to become an environmentally sustainable species must be rooted in deep relationship with nature; without this relationship, all our efforts toward sustainability will be subtly flawed in ways that will eventually be our undoing.**

That's the Core Premise. It's what gives me a sense of the urgency and importance of my work. I don't think we're going to solve global warming, population pressure, deforestation, desertification, depletion of fish and animal populations, accelerating extinction rates, or any of the rest of it unless we first get our relationships with the more-than-human world in order.

## **Shinrin-Yoku: Accessible Nature Connection**

Many times in my work I've observed that it can be very difficult to get people to participate in workshops or excursions that involve a significant amount of time in natural and wild places. A 12 day desert outing that incorporates a vision fast is a powerful experience that will definitely open anybody to a new depth in their relationship with the more-than-human world of nature. But perhaps .0001% of people will even consider it (that's one in ten thousand). A full-day "medicine walk"—a very abbreviated but still powerful version of a vision quest—is possible for many more people. But it still has difficulty competing with the myriad distractions and demands of the tamed world to which we have become accustomed.

The ANFT Way of forest therapy—in particular, the standard sequence—has been described as “four-day vision fast condensed into a three hour walk.” I think there is some truth to this. The model we have developed is based on a Jungian depth psychology and ecopsychology perspective that helps us understand the potential of each walk to be an experience of liminality—a time outside of normal time, in which the possibility of healing and growth is enhanced.

We hold the story that the world is sentient, and that it wants to be in right relationship with humans. The poet Mary Oliver speaks of this in her deeply inspiring poem “Wild Geese:”

*“the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the Wild Geese,  
harsh and exciting,  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.”<sup>1</sup>*

If these words ring true to you, if they open a door of inquiry or spark a sense of intuitive recognition, the ANFT way of Forest Therapy may be a good fit for you.

Our strategy as guides is based on the idea that our species evolved along with the plants and animals that cohabit our planet. Our bodies are adapted to breathing the air emitted by healthy forests. There is medicine in that air; by now most of us are familiar with the beneficial effects of that class of chemicals called phytoncides, the essential oils found in many types of woody plants, particularly conifers. One element of the healing power of forested areas is the natural aromatherapy from which we benefit by simply breathing the air beneath the canopy of trees.

In addition to the mechanism of aromatherapy, exposure to the forest environment bathes us in many other healing influences. The sounds of the wind moving through the trees; the background chatter of birds which may bring to us new and surprising ways of listening to the voice of the whole landscape; the changing weather and how it affects our sensing; the many textures of touch and of sight... all of these together provide a medicine that complements



and amplifies the effects of aromatic extracts. Forest and nature medicine researchers are linking health to wide variety of elements of nature. For example, exposure to the many shades of color that comprise the “green” we see in plants is itself calming and healing.

It makes sense that it should be so, for although we have recently in our history as a species learned to live more and more in cities and human-built environments, our DNA still recognizes the forest and wild areas as home. And as a home, the forest is a place of healing.

Our ancestors knew this well. They not only benefitted from the medicine freely offered by the wild, but also offered their own medicine back. Indigenous peoples maintained the vitality of their food larders, medicinal plant supplies, and sources of tools and fibers by “wild tending”—a type of constant gardening undertaken while walking along the trail. Pinch the top of the medicinal sage plant just so, and it branches out, providing more leaves while also increasing its capacity to gather sunlight and feed its roots.

The point here is that the land has grown up with us; it has evolved in way that benefits from our mutual relationship with it. The land wants to be in right relationship with us. And herein lies the very roots of our viability as a species: we must know what it means to be in right relationship. We humans have excelled at taming nature; but we must let this be a reciprocal process. We must let nature teach and tame us; thus, creating a viable human culture should be a joint project that includes the voices of the land and waters and sky and all who live there.

The land offers itself to us as a rich source of abundance of many kinds. But it is a mistake to think of nature solely in terms of “natural resources.” How well would any friendship with a person work out if we treated each other solely as resources? Relationship involves mutuality, an understanding that we are there for each other, instead of an attitude of “what have you done for me lately?”

The land needs us to listen to it, to sit with it in silence, to tend to it when it is ill, to cultivate its health and to act considerately toward it. The land needs us to love it.

### **What is Forest Therapy?**

As far as I can tell, there is no single practice that is officially “Forest Therapy,” although there is at least one company that is insisting that their way is the right way. When claims like this are made I don’t agree with either the claim or the dogmatic spirit in which it is made. Forest therapy is a dynamically developing practice based on the general principle that it is beneficial to spend time bathing in the atmosphere of the forest. There is a long tradition of this in cultures throughout the world. Currently there are multiple groups creating iterations of this ancient tradition. And, at least from my perspective, it’s not just about healing people; it includes healing for the forest (or river, or desert, or whatever environment you are in).

There are some general guidelines:

1. There is a specific intention to connect with nature in a healing way. This requires mindfully moving through the landscape in ways that cultivate presence, opening all the senses, and actively communicating with the land.
2. It is not something to rush through. Shinrin Yoku walks are not undertaken with the primary goal of physical exercise. I prefer to avoid the term “hiking” because of its implications of physical exertion. It’s more about being here, than it is about getting there.
3. Healing interactions require giving generously of our attention. When I guide these walks I encourage the spontaneous emergence of a natural state mindfulness through an ever-changing and evolving series of invitations. These invitations are all crafted to slow us down and open our senses. We begin to perceive more deeply the nuances of the constant stream of communications rampant in any natural setting. We learn to let the land and its messages penetrate into our minds more deeply.
4. It’s not a one-time event. Developing a meaningful relationship with nature occurs over time, and is deepened by returning again and again throughout the natural cycles of the seasons.

Forest therapy is best thought of as a practice, similar to yoga or exercise or daily walking.

5. It's not just about taking walks in the forest. The walks are important, but there are other core routines that we can do that will help in our deepening relationship with nature, and in the exchange of health benefits between humans and the more than human-world. Among these practices are sit spot, place tending, acquiring nature knowledge, and engaging the active imagination through play, creative expression, and imaginal dialogues with other-than-human beings such as animals, trees, stones, and rivers.

I think these five elements together provide a framework for Forest Therapy practice, one that probably every organization and school interested in forest therapy can agree upon. From this common foundation, we each develop our own way. The remainder of this booklet is about the particular approach to forest therapy pioneered by ANFT.



# Chapter 3: Understanding the ANFT Approach to Forest Therapy

*M. Amos Clifford*

The ANFT approach to forest therapy weaves together three major strands. One is Japanese Shinrin-Yoku, the practice of Forest Bathing developed in Japan in the 1980s that has since become an important element of Japanese approaches to wellness. A second strand is the emerging field of ecotherapy, specifically vision fasts. In this strand we see Carl Jung's depth psychology as a major source of the theory that is the basis for ANFT's Standard Sequence.

The third strand is the core premise at the beginning of this book. ANFT was founded as a response to global warming and environmental catastrophe. The aim was, from the beginning, to ignite and re-ignite love for the more-than-human world. Embedded in this approach to forest therapy is the hope that *people will experience nature as alive, sentient, and sacred*. This is an approach that releases grief, kindles hope, and makes possible bright moments of joy. It may provide our species with its last, best hope.

I think that this intention is probably also part of what motivated the Japanese innovators who gave us the gift of this practice, as well as many of those who are now, like we have done at ANFT, forming variations and training programs of their own. We can see the intention of healing environmental harms among the Japanese leadership in sources such as Michiko Imai's essay in *Forest Medicine* (ed. Qing Li). Ms. Imai writes:

*"The future of forests remains uncertain. The advancement of urbanization...has often cast forest environments as an obstacle in the path of development...More recently there have been periodic calls for the expansion of forests in order to prevent global warming...the power of forests to maintain and preserve our world's environments is not limited to carbon absorption and fixation..."*<sup>2</sup>

I am in full agreement with these statements. I also agree with Qing Li explanation of the goals for forest therapy:

1. Forests for medical care and welfare. For general care and nursing to help fight disease or lessen the effects of aging.
2. Forests for treatment and recuperation. For necessary treatment and assisting persons patient recuperation during convalescence;
3. Forests for lifestyle-related disease prevention. For promoting good health by preventing lifestyle-related illnesses.<sup>3</sup>

These are beautiful goals, and are quite inspiring. When they are fully achieved, they will likely also serve the purpose that is the driving force for ANFT: people who experience the healing power of forests will be more likely to *fall in love with* the more-than-human world. And, having fallen in love, they will be more curious about how to let that love shape their lives in a way that embodies the love, as well as the grief and joy that comes with it.

Love, grief, hope, joy... these are experiences of the heart. They are embodied energies. The work of love requires us to cultivate our awareness of the intelligence and wisdom of the heart and the body. We developed the ANFT approach to forest therapy with similar goals to those listed above, *and* we are also explicit about capacity of forest therapy to help others become aware of the intelligence of our hearts, and how this intelligence links us to a greater sentience. That greater sentience is in each tree, each forest, each mountain and river, and in our beautiful planet as a whole.

Humans have always known about the intelligence of the heart and its essential connectedness to the sentience of the world. But in modern times we have not found support for cultivating our awareness of these “knowings” to a level where they actively shape our lives. Disconnected from our hearts, we fall prey to the cleverness of our brains and the whole world suffers. Healthy forests are places of dynamic, creative, and regenerative balance; inside them, as we come into relationship with forests and other natural environments, those relationships act as field in which we remember how to rebalance the cleverness of our minds with the wisdom of our hearts. *The ANFT hypothesis is that this remembering and rebalancing*

*is absolutely essential to the survival of humanity. And we cannot speak of humanity apart from any of the other species to whom we are bound in sharing our planet.* It can be a foundation for recalibrating how we live in the world. Because of how we inhabit our place in the global ecosystem, our success in this recalibrating is essential for the survival of millions of other species. This is not just a lofty goal; it is a fundamental responsibility that comes with being human. And forest therapy has a powerful and perhaps essential place in this.

Thus, at ANFT we see forest therapy as healing for people, yes; but also as healing for many other species, for landscapes, for rivers and oceans; for the entire planet.

How beautiful is that? Thinking on this is where I pause and make nine deep bows to the Japanese creators of this practice.

If in the forests of the world, guided by competent forest therapy specialists, enough of us become skillful at listening to our hearts' intelligence, a global cultural transformation might follow. Perhaps we would have a great awakening; we would stop our incessant wounding of the systems of relationships that our sentient planet has evolved over the long and patient course of uncountable millennia.

Again; the ANFT perspective: This awakening requires as a its foundation bringing people into contact with their heart intelligence. The path to doing so is rooted in somatic awareness. I think of a college professor who came on a forest therapy walk I guided. At the end of the walk, as we were sipping tea brewed from some herbs gathered along the trail, she burst into tears. She took a breath and shared, that as a consequence of her long career living her in head as an academic, she had all but forgotten that she had a body. The forest therapy walk was a powerful reminder; she remembered. This is a beautiful and essential first step for her own life, but also for how the life she lives ripples among the rests of us and through the more-than-human world.

The road to embodiment begins with the senses. Qing Li describes how to enjoy forest bathing:

*“People can enjoy the forest through all five senses: the fragrance of the forest, green colors of the plants, the murmuring of streams and singing of birds, the eating of forest foods and the touching of trees.”<sup>4</sup>*

Beginning with the senses is an essential principle of the practice that my colleagues and I have been developing over the past seven years. We work with an expanded palette of senses, adding at least four to the “all five” list. And, because doing so supports moving from experience to relationship, we pay particular attention to the ways in which sensory experience can become sensual experience: the emotional content within sensing. We’ve discovered that it a good place to begin is by calling attention to the infinite ways in which forest offer us experiences of pleasure: the sounds, touches of breeze, sights, scents, and aesthetic experiences that simply feel good in our bodies and in our hearts.

### **Opportunity to Expand Focus of Research**

The research related to forest therapy is almost exclusively oriented to public health questions: what happens with cardiac health, with indicators of stress, with morbidity and mortality at different scales, and so on. The findings are very encouraging and unsurprising. They may be summarized thus: spending relaxed time in forests is generally good for people, provided risks (such as exposure to tick-borne disease) are mitigated through education and proper preventive measures, which are part of the job of the forest therapy guide.

The public health studies are important. But they do not investigate what ANFT predicts will be the emergent qualities that result from a regular practice of forest therapy. I would very much like to see research that investigates some of the additional dimensions of benefit. Our prediction—borne out anecdotally by the self-reported experiences of guide trainees and even of participants in single walks—is that as a result of forest therapy our sense of wholeness and authenticity will be enhanced as a direct correlate of elevating our awareness of, and confidence in, the wisdom embodied in our hearts. We will become more truly ourselves. And when we do, our capacity to love ourselves, other humans, other-than-human beings,



and the landscapes in which we live, will grow. Behaviorally, this will manifest as positive changes in how we spend our time, and who we spend our time with. We predict that forest therapy will energize us to find networks of relationships with others who share a commitment to the future not just of humanity, but of all species. Of people who are deeply in love with the world.

These are all hypotheses that can be measured by properly designed research. Another dimension of research would investigate what happens in the more-than-human world in areas where there is broad adoption of forest therapy, with a critical mass of regular practitioners and professional guides. Biologists, ecologists, and public health specialists could work together to see if there are measurable impacts on the health of the forest, such as increases in biodiversity and the return of native animal, insect, fish, and bird species that had disappeared from the forest. A good case study in Japan is AFAN Forest Trust, where C. W. “Nic” Nichols and his team have been working for over 30 years to restore a forest in Nagano province that had been reduced to a monoculture as a result of crop-oriented logging practices. Forest therapy, including equine-assisted forest therapy, has recently been integrated into AFAN’s works. This is reciprocity in action.

There are of course a great many more opportunities to expand our understanding of why forest therapy has the powerful impacts that we observe in those who we guide. I would like to challenge researchers to consider some of the outcomes described above, those related to authenticity and a sense of wholeness and purpose. I have met a few who are already doing so, and I’m sure that there are many more who are developing beautiful ways to expand our understanding. Meanwhile, practitioners in the field, myself included, continue to guide, observe, learn, and feel for ourselves the ways that our forest practices impact our lives on many levels.



# Chapter 4: Understanding the ANFT Way Through our Training Slogans

*M. Amos Clifford*

At ANFT, we've now (as of May 2019, when I am writing this) trained over 600 guides in 44 countries, and have accumulated a great deal of experience about how to train guides. One of the most useful tools in our training is a set of about a dozen slogans we use, brief phrases (mostly coined by me) to carry specific concepts that are important to our Way. Here are few of them.

## **SLOGAN 1: The forest is the therapist; the guide opens the doors.**

This work is healing, but as a forest therapy guides, we don't see ourselves as therapists. We are guides. ANFT trains people in the skills and perspectives that comprise what we call "The Way of the Guide." People who are also trained therapists or physicians can readily integrate the Way of the Guide with their work, creatively combining the archetypal work of healer and guide. Many therapists and physicians are a part of the global community of ANFT-trained guides; each is finding creative ways to incorporate guiding. But they received their training as therapists elsewhere.

We think of the work of the guide as an archetypal process, not widely understood, best approached through a neo-Jungian perspective.

The principle difference between a guide and a therapist or healer is that a guide does not diagnose, assess, prescribe, or monitor progress. Instead, a guide slows people down and calls attention to their experience of their body, of their senses, and of the place they are in. When this happens, without further effort a web of relationships grows. The healing happens in the relationships, not because of clever interventions by guides.

By noting our inner experience, we come into relationship with parts of ourselves that may have been long neglected.

The senses are our interface between inner and outer experience; when we sharpen our awareness of our senses we begin to notice sensuous experience also: how we enjoy the touches and sights and sounds and other gifts of the forest. The sensuous experience is the gateway to relationship, and it is in the relationship of the person and the forest that the healing occurs.

As guides, we avoid forming any ideas about what the person we are guiding should receive. We say that determining (or discovering) the desired outcome is between them and the forest. It is unique to each person, and for each person the outcome is unique to each forest therapy experience.

To avoid a misunderstanding that sometimes arises, please note that we are not advocating that people embody the way of the guide routinely in all areas of life. But it is important to do so *while guiding*.

**SLOGAN 2: All medicine is relational.**

What do we mean when we say that the therapy takes place in the relationship between the person and the forest? It is simply this: that all life is relational, that all things and beings exist within networks of relationships. It is in deepest architecture of who we are to be always and ever in relationship to other people, other beings, the land and the waters, this planet, and the entire cosmos.

If our relationships are healthy, we are more likely to be. I am not referring only to our relationships with other humans, although those are of great importance. I am referring to all relationships. Our cultures shape the way we view and inhabit our relationships, often to our detriment. In the forest we are embedded in exactly the kinds of relationships to which our bodies and minds are exquisitely tuned.

We teach that all people are carriers of seeds of medicine; that we are born out of the earth carrying these seeds. They represent our potential to become medicine ourselves. By this, we mean that in

the way we learn to live our lives we become sources of healing to others, to our cultures, to the landscapes that hold us.

In the ANFT way, “coming to our senses” and “slowing down” is the equivalent of the seed of medicine that we carry falling to the ground in a favorable place for growing. The invitations that guides give are the water the seed needs. The relationships that develop are like the sunlight. Finally, the flowing of energy, attention, and love within those relationships opens the new field of possibility. Our seeds take root and we begin to grow and blossom into the fullness of our authentic selves.

Carl Jung pointed out that those who fail to become their authentic selves are more likely to be plagued by neuroses and dis-ease. At ANFT we conceive of forest therapy as being exposure to all the health benefits that are demonstrated by many studies; *and* as a journey toward individuation and authenticity.

The powerful combination of the Standard Sequence and the Language of Invitation, both core features of the practice we have developed at ANFT, frequently support people in having experiences they characterize as “transformational.” Something sprouts. ANFT guides are trained to avoid trying to manipulate the experience, instead leaving it wide open so the unique seed carried by the person meets the unique moment of encounter in the forest, and the sprout that emerges is what is needed in the moment by that person and possibly by that forest. This powerful healing is an emergent property of relationship. All medicine flows from relationship.

**SLOGAN 3: Nature connection and culture repair arise together.**

I think this slogan comes from Jon Young, founder of the 8 Shields institute and an important teacher in the lineages of several ANFT trainers.

It has several layers of meaning. One meaning is that the health of the more-than-human world mirrors the health of human culture. When we see ecosystem disruption, it is a mirror of dysfunctional societies. A key criterion for measuring the wellness of cultures is

the wellness of the lands and waters, other-than-human-species, forests and atmospheres. When we see wounds in nature, they are images and symptoms of the wounds of humanity.

In order to succeed with healing nature, we must be willing to discover and embrace the medicine needed to heal our cultures. The two arise together. Start not with one or the other, but with both.

In the ANFT way of guiding we create moments of intact culture within the group being guided. The way we know the culture is intact is that participants share their experience without being judged, diagnosed, corrected, comforted, mocked, praised, or any of the myriad other ways in which we tell each other, “your experience is not valid, except as validated by me, the expert.” How to be supportive in this way is a central part of the ANFT guide training. We know when we are succeeding at creating moments of intact culture because we observe those who we are guiding having deep experiences of connection with the more-than-human world.

### **SLOGAN 4: It’s Zen until you say so.**

This is one that first appeared in a conversation I had with Ben Page. We have argued over who invented it. Our current compromise is that we both did. Although secretly I’m certain it was me, and he’s certain it was him.

In our approach, we refrain from suggesting to participants that forest therapy is a mindfulness or a meditation activity, even though of course it often turns out to be exactly that. The reason we don’t name it as such is that as soon as we do, we’ve introduced a concept that can get lodged in the mind in a way that gets between the person and their experience.

It’s easy to get caught up in trying to be mindful, or trying to create a meditation experience. If we don’t mention the concepts, people just naturally experience mindfulness and meditation. But as soon as we name it, they pop back out of it and return to trying to create something that was present all along. Of course it’s Zen, but as soon as you call it Zen it ceases to be so.

My suggestion to guide trainees is to leave concepts like mindfulness or meditation out of the practice unless you are a trained mindfulness or meditation instructor.

I think “It’s Zen until you say so” would make a lovely T-shirt or bumper sticker slogan.

**SLOGAN 5: You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.**

This is a line from Mary Oliver’s poem “The Wild Geese.” We often refer to it as “the core invitation.”

When we develop the capacity to notice what our body is asking of us, and to be guided by it, we begin to inhabit our lives in a new way. This way of living is powerfully healing. We suggest to guide trainees that they return to this line repeatedly, and let it be an invitation. What does it mean, right here and right now, to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves?

**SLOGAN 6: We don’t train you guide the way we do; we train you to guide the way you do.**

This is an essential ethic in the entire Standard Sequence and the theoretical roots of the Way of the Guide. Each of us is born with our unique personhood, and our own ways of carrying the medicine of who we are into the world. The ANFT way provides a framework (the standard sequence), a theory (the Way of the Guide), and a set of skills such as the language of invitation. To these each guide adds their own personality, gifts, and internal sense of guidance.





# Chapter 5: The Business of Forest Therapy and the Aims of ANFT

*M. Amos Clifford*

When I started ANFT in 2012, as far as I knew there were no other forest therapy training organizations outside of Korea and Japan. The first few years were marked by a struggle to gain recognition in the U.S., Canada, and Europe of the concepts of “forest bathing” and “forest therapy.” Since accomplishing that, forest therapy has taken root as a global movement with many advocates. Now there are at least a dozen organizations offering training in forest therapy. At least three of these have been started by people who received their guide training from ANFT. Two of those have been started by former ANFT trainers. I’m proud to say I invested a great deal in each of these people, helping them as best I could to develop their skills both as guides and as trainers.

A successful movement requires sound leadership, encompassing ethics, skills, and good business sense. For a movement to be sustainable, it must be operated with solid business practices. This is true if it is a for-profit organization like ANFT or a not-for-profit NGO. An essential part of building capacity to provide sustainable and high-quality services is that an organization must attract and retain skillful staff. Thus one of ANFT’s key business strategies is that all staff should make a living wage and should receive health benefits along with paid vacation, sick leave, and holidays. We have accomplished this at ANFT. This requirement, more than any other single factor, is what drives our decisions regarding tuition fees.

Effective leadership also requires humility and continuously tending to our curiosity and openness to learn, lest we fall into the trap observed by Eric Hoffer:

*“...All active mass movements strive, therefore, to interpose a fact-proof screen between the faithful and the realities of the world. ...by claiming that the ultimate and absolute truth is*

*already embodied in their doctrine and that there is no truth nor certitude outside it.”<sup>5</sup>*

### **Certification vs. Accreditation**

It's important to be clear about the difference between accreditation and certification. Training organizations like ANFT confer certification; all this means is that we certify that people have completed our course of training and we have a certain amount of confidence in their skills. **Accreditation occurs at a higher level, and requires a rigorously independent approach that allows training programs to be objectively evaluated as to their quality and adherence to standards agreed upon by a broad consensus of experts.** Development of an accreditation body is a multi-year process that inclusively involves many expert voices in authentic dialogue.

I don't think that we are field that has arrived a place where we can declare a doctrine of what is and is not forest therapy. We don't have a truly shared set of understandings; instead, we are in a time of learning and and exploration, a process that can be all the more potent when we engage in it together. International standards-based accreditation is premature (literally: before reaching maturity). To declare standards now would be to risk stifling innovation. However, it is probably essential that standards-based accreditation emerges eventually. One does not have to look far to see instances of untrained people leading forest therapy walks; I've known of several who started doing so after reading one of my books on the subject. I don't think reading a book is adequate preparation. There is also a type of confusion arising from clarity about defining the practice. For example, leading a mindfulness session in a forest is not forest therapy, although mindfulness techniques can be and often are incorporated into forest therapy. See the Scope of Practice later in this booklet for ideas on how forest therapy might be defined.

We must be cautions also to guard against the ethical problem of self-dealing. It is essential that any accreditation agency be truly independent of any training organization, and the process of determining accreditation criteria and processes includes all relevant voices.

My suggestion is this: accreditation is inevitable, and will be a great influence on the field if it evolves in a good way, at the right time, with input from a broadly representative and diverse group of leaders who come together as a “Working Group for Forest Therapy Standards and Accreditation.” My colleagues and I at ANFT have founded Forest Bathing International with the idea that it might become fully independent of ANFT and thus serve as an accreditation organization. However, we are also committed to looking for the solution that serves best and are curious about other organizations and collaborations and how they may be suited for this purpose.

I look forward to the day when we at ANFT can apply for accreditation from a credible international organization. As a contribution to the international conversation about accreditation, the ANFT Executive Council has decided to include our definitions and standards in this document (see next chapter). This is a significant step for us, because these are the product of creative labor and, even though we share them here, they remain our intellectual property. If you are involved in providing training and would like to incorporate our definitions, standards, slogans, and other ideas in this booklet, we are sincerely appreciative of the compliment. And we think that it will serve the ongoing development of the practice because, frankly, we think our standards are pretty good (although we are committed to evolving them as we learn more). If you use them, we simply ask that you first have a conversation with us about what you will be using and how you will be using it; and that you provide proper attribution.

### **The ethics of business competition**

It is essential that forest therapy becomes a viable way for guides to earn significant income. Approaching our work with a business-like attitude will support this. There is room for many training organizations in the world, and it is certain that more will appear. Forest therapy is itself a growing ecosystem with a diverse array of niches and organizations, researchers, and guides to fill them.

There is a significant caution that we as field must attend to. In order for this practice to be beautiful and life affirming, we who have

taken on the mantle of leadership must be aware that our behaviors make an imprint upon the practice itself. If we are guided by love and generosity, then the field will also have those characteristics. But if our behaviors toward each other are malicious and marked by jealousy and resentments, then we may undo our efforts before they are fully developed. There will be a disturbance in the emotional energy of the field in which our learning and practice is occurring, and if this happens it could introduce very unfortunate and damaging distortions.

Just as the consciousness of the guide is one of the key factors in shaping the experience of forest therapy, so is the consciousness of we who are leaders a major part of what gives defines the heart of this practice. We must remain firmly anchored in our commitments to behaving beautifully and to working for the benefit of all beings.

### **The ANFT leadership makes these commitments to the field:**

1. Our main strategy is continue to strive to be the best training organization in the world, with the high quality ongoing services to our member guides;
2. We will not defame other organizations and leaders, but will welcome them into the ecosystem in a spirit of friendship;
3. We will be inclusive by inviting other points of view to participate in our publications, conferences, and working groups;
4. When we have disagreements with other organizations, or if others feel they have been mistreated by us, we invite them into dialogue to explore what resolutions may be possible; and
5. While recognizing the depth of our experience and expertise, we also commit to “beginner’s mind,” a state of continually intellectual and spiritual inquiry that makes learning possible.

These guidelines are examples of what might appear in a set of accreditation standards, perhaps under a section titled “professional ethics in relationship to competitors and collaborators.”

It is my hope that we can learn to work together as a mutually supportive ecosystem, like a forest in which we each find our place, like trees that each provide our own habitat to those people who are drawn to us. Otherwise we may fall victim to another trap observed by Eric Hoffer:

*“Every great cause begins as a movement, becomes a business, and eventually degenerates into a racket.”*<sup>6</sup>

### **May we move forward beautifully**

My wish for all of us is this: may we be competent businesses, focused on skillfully and ethically supporting our beautiful movement. May we be self-aware enough to recognize how our own shadows may propel us in the direction of becoming a racket, and allow our own time in the forests to heal us and support our personal and professional growth.



## Chapter 6: Forest Therapy Guide Scope of Practice: The ANFT Definition

*The forest is the therapist. The guide opens the doors.*  
— M. Amos Clifford

### **Scope of Practice: What is a Forest Therapy Guide?**

*The primary goal of Forest Therapy is to support participants in their journeys to wholeness.* Forest Therapy enhances the wellness and health of participants through guided immersive experiences in forests and other natural settings. A Forest Therapy Guide facilitates safe gentle walks, providing instructions—referred to as “invitations”—for sensory opening activities along the way. These walks follow a standard sequence. They begin with guided sensory attention and embodiment activities that establish contact with the present moment and place. Next come a series of connective invitations, often improvised in the moment and in partnership with the land. The walks end with a ceremony of sharing tea made from foraged local plants.

*Guides are not therapists (although trained therapists can incorporate the methods of guiding in their practice).* Support for wellness, personal development, and perhaps healing comes to participants from their interaction with natural environments. Guided activities have as their sole aim creating and sustaining safe, meaningful, and relational contact between participants and nature. Guides do not diagnose participants, nor do they enter into agreements with participants about specific complaints and goals for wellness. Apart from simply helping people to connect with nature, *guides aim to be agenda-free. We view the healing contract, if any, as existing between the forest and the participant.* In this way, a forest therapy guide works in partnership with the land and does not supplant the forest as the source or director of any healing process.

Forest Therapy has the general goal of increasing well-being. This includes wellness and resilience of body, mind and spirit. Over time, those with regular Forest Therapy practices are likely to experience increased happiness, pleasure in life, sense of well-being, and improved relationships, including relationships with the more-than-human world that are characterized by a “kin-centric” sensibility.

*Guided walks are structured in three stages, known as connection, liminal space/time, and incorporation.* The first stage (connection) uses sensory connection to shift awareness away from ordinary preoccupations, primarily characterized by thinking. We use connective invitations that mobilize the power of the senses. Senses give a steady stream of input from here and now—the present moment and present place.

When participants become connected to present moment and place, they enter the second stage: liminal space and time. “Liminal” means “in-between,” specifically the span of time and experience that is in between the ordinary experience before and after the walk. This is typically characterized by a state that is comparable to walking mindfulness meditation. *In liminality, there is a heightened potency in the ways we are in communication with the world around and within us, and increased support for our capacity to grow into greater authenticity.*

The liminal stage of the experience persists until the incorporation phase is signaled by gathering as a group to share tea. *Completion of the tea ceremony marks departure from liminal time and re-entry into ordinary life.*

Over the course of a guided walk, invitations are given to continually return to the senses. *The practice of Forest Therapy clearly prioritizes sensory experience over intellectual experience.* From the beginning of the walk until the tea ceremony at its conclusion, guides are alert for, and work to prevent, shifting into discursive and intellectual forms of experience. Unlike more familiar approaches to nature education, Forest Therapy Guides are not primarily concerned with imparting naturalist knowledge.



However, as a matter of professional responsibility *Guides continuously cultivate their own knowledge about nature and about the bioregions and ecosystems in which they operate, and use this knowledge to enhance connective experiences as appropriate.* Nurturing curiosity and asking good questions is emphasized over imparting factual expertise.

Forest Therapy works within the satoyama zone, where people and nature meet (sato = “cultivated land”, yama = “mountain”). City parks, gardens, arboretums, and natural settings near cities are typical of the locations used. We operate within the philosophy of mindfulness practice. Walks often also include place tending (collecting trash, being aware of trampling etc.).

On Forest Therapy walks, people have a wide range of experiences, some of which they feel are significant, even profound. Guides are open to, and supportive of, participants’ descriptions of the experiences they have and the meanings they find in them. *It is outside the Guide’s Scope of Practice to evaluate if these experiences are valid*, right or wrong, or better or worse in comparison to the experience of others.

Guides are trained within *a pedagogical framework that is culturally neutral* but are encouraged to think of the practice itself as culturally adaptable. This means that guides are encouraged to adapt some of the techniques and nuances of the experience to make the walk culturally comfortable for those they are guiding. This does not mean, however, that guides should work outside the scope of practice taught in this manual.

*When guides have developed baseline proficiency in the practice of Forest Therapy, they may begin to integrate Forest Therapy practices with other professional skills sets.* For example, Forest Therapy can provide an excellent context for psychotherapy, professional coaching, expressive arts, mindfulness meditation, and many more fields of professional endeavor. Individual guides bring their creativity and experience to the design of new and/or modified invitations, and are encouraged to share these with other guides via the Facebook group maintained by the Association.



*Professionalism: Japanese sensei guide Kouriki-San, Nagano prefecture*

# Chapter 7:

## Professional Standards and Competencies for Forest Therapy Guides

*Guided Forest Therapy helps participants build their own skills.*

It helps them build their capacity for confidence, ease, and mindfulness in self-guided solo or group walks that support a healthy lifestyle and love of natural environments. Thus, we contribute to the movement to reconnect people with nature, for the sake of their own well-being as well as the well-being of the natural world.

### **Nomenclature**

The terms “Forest Therapy” and “Forest Therapist” are registered trademarks in Japan. The terms “Nature Therapy” and “Nature Therapist” are registered trademarks in Israel. Guides trained by the Association of Nature and Forest Therapy should be sensitive to the intellectual property rights of the organizations that own these trademarks. We advise guides to identify as “Forest Therapy Guide,” and to be explicit that the certification is from the Association of Nature and Forest Therapy Guides and Programs.

### **Japanese Perspectives**

The Japanese practice of Shinrin Yoku was one thread of inspiration for the Association’s practice of Forest Therapy, although the Japanese practices are quite distinct from our methodology.

Shinrin Yoku was developed in Japan during the 1980s, in response to a health crisis brought on by mass urbanization and a culture of extreme stress. Shinrin means ‘forest’ and yoku means ‘bath.’ Shinrin Yoku is a fairly loose term for a collection of activities that happen at certified forest therapy trails, of which there are now about 60 in Japan, mostly located outside densely populated urban centers. During a Shinrin Yoku experience, a guide leads a group into the forest and presents activities that engage the five major senses as a way of grounding and decreasing stress.

Shinrin Yoku then inspired a more clinical variant called Shinrin Ryoho (translated as ‘Forest Therapy’), in which licensed doctors and nurses, known as ‘Forest Therapists,’ may design and lead forest based programs in order to promote health and healing for handicapped persons, disabled persons, and persons suffering from illness, mental health ailments, or lifestyle diseases. Shinrin Ryoho is supported by a robust collection of physiological and neurochemical research focused on the impact of forest environments on human health coming out of Japan.

The following information is quoted from “An Introduction to the Forest Therapy Society of Japan, Forest Therapy<sup>®</sup>, and Forest Therapist<sup>®</sup>”, by Michiko Imai :

*“Users of a Forest Therapist’s services would be those who wish to add forest effects to existing medical treatments, or those who wish to improve their quality of life by alleviating mental and physical disorders and chronic diseases, lessening the effects of aging, or easing other injuries...however, no direct medical treatments are allowed by either Forest Guides or Forest Therapists without the guidance of a physician.”<sup>7</sup>*

The ANFT model focuses on developing relationships with the more-than-human world, and uses an expanded palette of senses and sensory connection activities to support this. ANFT fully identifies the forest as therapist and trains guides to faithfully abstain from any diagnostic or prescriptive behaviors.

The ANFT model of Forest Therapy draws less from the field of health science research (although we recognize its value and the inherent physiological benefits of time spent in nature) and is inspired more by the fields of deep ecology and Jungian psychology as an approach to holistic health, individuation, and pro-environmental consciousness.



## Professional Standards of Forest Therapy Guides

© 2019 Association of Nature and Forest Therapy Guides and Programs. Permission given for non-commercial use with attribution.

1. **Ethical:** Forest Therapy Guides are committed to high standards of ethics in their interactions with people and the more-than-human world.
2. **Connected to the Practice:** They choose this work because it is true to their calling. They are committed to developing their sense of authentic relationship to the work.
3. **Self Aware:** Significant experience with a mindfulness practice through which a sense of self awareness has been cultivated.
4. **Embodied:** Significant experience with a practice through which a sense of embodiment has been cultivated.
5. **People Connected:** Greets participants, sets them at ease, and is attentive to individual and group needs. Encourages cultivation of ease, connection and friendships among participants.
6. **Community Connected:** Guides operate within a network of respectful relationships with stakeholder groups in the community; including land use managers, other nature connection and education organizations, local businesses, educational institutions, health care organizations, philanthropic organizations, civic organizations, and local government. Community connection also includes participating in the community of forest therapy guides and leaders, and others who are working together to develop and expand the effectiveness of nature connection strategies in general.
7. **Working in Partnership with the land:** Guides in a way that allows the land and More Than Human World to be a full partner in the experience.
8. **Welcoming:** Guides offer a deep hospitality that honors the unique qualities of each person. They honor the fact that among participants there are many life paths and experiences, perspectives, ways of using language, ethnic and gender identities, levels of education, religious and spiritual orientations, income, political leanings, and so on. Within the bounds of what is safe and supportive of the group experience, this hospitality applies also to different levels of physical ability or disability, and to a spectrum of mental health conditions. Guides look for opportunities to include diverse perspectives as ways of enriching the experience of all participants. Guides work with communities they have the requisite skills to engage and feel connected to.
9. **Presentation:** Dresses, acts, and speaks in a manner becoming of a professional guide and ambassador for the practice of Forest Therapy.

10. **Grounded Approach to Business:** Guides operate within a legitimate for-profit business or not-for-profit organization framework including use of appropriate and required licensing, permitting, permissions, insurance requirements, contracting, accounting, and truthful advertising.
11. **Commitment to Continued Growth:** Stays current in developments in knowledge and skills related to forest therapy, through reading relevant books and professional journals, participating in ongoing continuing education, and cultivating dialogue and inquiry within the community of guides.
12. **Commitment to Safe Guiding Practices:** Maintains current WFA or equivalent safety training certificate for your country and commitment to practice all the Safe Guiding Practices listed in the Guide Competencies Self-Assessment.

## **Professional Forest Therapy Guide Competencies**

© 2019 Association of Nature and Forest Therapy Guides and Programs. Permission given for non-commercial use with attribution.

1. Understands and can facilitate the core functions of a Forest Therapy Guide, including; slowing down; calling attention to place; calling attention to embodiment; calling attention to senses; facilitating sharing; and bearing witness.
2. Understands and can explain the difference between ANFT's definition of Forest Therapy and other models of Forest Therapy, Forest Bathing or Shinrin-Yoku.
3. Understands and can explain the rationale for giving "invitations" instead of "assignments," "exercises," or other ways of naming what happens during guided walks.
4. Understands and can explain the archetype of the guide as defined by the ANFT.
5. Understands and can explain what it means to work in partnership with the more than human world.
6. Understands and can explain the concept of medicine as defined by the ANFT
7. Understands and can explain the concept of liminality and why it is important in the context of Forest Therapy.
8. Understands the concept of "edges."
9. Tracks participants' edges, and chooses or modifies forest bathing invitations that are the "right edge" for the circumstances.
10. Can identify his/her own edges and develop strategies for increasing headroom in those areas.
11. Understands and can define the Association's framework of "story," specifically as it relates to relationships between humans and the more-than-human-world, and to interspecies communication and sentience of non-humans.

12. Understands and can explain the Association's concept that 'nature connection and culture repair arise simultaneously.'
13. Can deliver an introduction speech before the walk that includes all necessary elements.
14. Can define the parts and explain the rationale for the Association's "Standard Sequence" for guided Forest Therapy walks.
15. Uses the framework of the Association's "Standard Sequence" for guided Forest Therapy walks.
16. Is aware of, and can recognize experiencing of, at least 10 of the 13 senses, as taught by ANFT.
17. Can create invitations that use the senses to connect directly with nature in a way that emphasizes embodiment, reciprocity, and communication, over acquisition of factual knowledge.
18. Can evaluate new invitations to determine if they meet the SOS criteria for Forest Therapy invitations as defined by ANFT.
19. Sequences invitations to steadily build trust, mutual support, and positive experience within the group.
20. Avoids embedding outcome-oriented agendas within invitations, trusting that the forest and the participant will together create the experience that is right for the participant.
21. Can improvise modifications to invitations, and create new invitations, in the present-moment.
22. Balances proportion of time spent directing invitations that help people establish connectedness, and making space for less-directed time in which people can explore and deepen connections on their own, in their own ways.
23. Knows how to evaluate and choose appropriate trails using the criteria established by ANFT on the Trail Assessment form.
24. Knows how to facilitate sharing circles, acting as both a witness and full participant.
25. Works within the boundaries of the Way of the Guide as taught by ANFT, embodying the motto, "The forest is the therapist, the guide opens the doors." This includes not offering coercive invitations, not desiring particular outcomes, and not judging the experience of participants.
26. Has a solid understanding of the research related to physiological and psychological health and other benefits of spending time in nature.
27. Can differentiate between benefits that are empirically established through scientific method, and benefits that are supported more by anecdotal or other forms of evidence.
28. Has written a brief statement on benefits of spending time in nature and related research to share with walk participants and the media.



29. Has compiled a short list of favorite resources on this topic including research, books and websites that can be given to participants and the media.
30. Understands and can explain the health science of relaxation and the effects of forest therapy on the human parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous system
31. Understands and can explain the connection between forest bathing, immunity, and phytoncides.
32. Understands and can explain Attention Restoration Theory
33. Has identified several threads of research related to the benefits of spending time in nature that are of personal interest and that intersect with other elements of personal practices and lifestyle.
34. Cultivates a consistent nature connection practice done during personal time.
35. Understands and can explain how cultivating a consistent nature connection practice relates to Way of the Guide and guiding in general.
36. Has cultivated relationships with and can accurately identify at least six plants that can be safely harvested along the trail or in the region and used with 110% confidence in tea ceremony.
37. Knows with absolute certainty local plant species that can be safely foraged for making tea, and how to brew and serve tea in a way that is safe for all participants.
38. Has acquired some basic knowledge of the history of the land where he/she guides including the history of local indigenous cultures as well as current tenders of the land.
39. Has created map a web of interbeing including at least 16 species or entities encountered through the practicum; includes self on the map as one of the beings in the web.
40. Has created a journal of awareness in their region.
41. Can identify hazardous species: mammal, insect, reptile; and inform participants of strategies to safely avoid or navigate around them.
42. Can identify and teach participants to recognize hazardous plants that may be encountered in the region where he/she guides.
43. Can effectively give sound advice on how to minimize risk of harmful contact with hazardous plant beings in their introduction.
44. Identifies potentially hazardous conditions along the trail(s) used, and strategies to safely avoid or navigate around them. Is aware of hazards posed by water and make invitations to interact with water only when and where it is safe to do so.
45. Uses a registration system and communicates clearly with participants about what they need to bring for comfort and safety and allows guide to contact participants in advance of the workshop if needed.
46. Has acquired all necessary gear for facilitating forest therapy including a first aid kit.

47. Carries a first aid kit while guiding; keeps kit stocked and promptly resupplies after using any contents.
48. Holds a current Wilderness First Aid (WFA), Wilderness First Responder (WFR) certificate or nearest equivalent; renews as needed to keep certificate valid without lapsing and regularly practices the knowledge acquired through it so as to not forget.
49. Takes steps to be informed about participant's allergies or health conditions that may affect walk. Know which participants carry EPI pens, nitroglycerine, or other critical fast-acting medications.
50. Manages activities to be responsive to the needs of participants.
51. Has mapped out plans for what to do if a participant gets hurt, including alternate routes of egress from the trails.
52. Has a knowledge of local weather patterns and checks the forecast in preparation for guiding. Is prepared to cancel a walk if dangerous weather conditions exist such as lightning or high winds, etc.
53. Exercises judgment and cancels or postpones events when hazardously adverse weather or other conditions exist.
54. Intervenes assertively and effectively when required to manage potentially hazardous situations and emergencies.
55. Modifies itinerary as needed to compensate for limitations in fitness and agility of participants. For example, chooses a shorter route for obese walkers, avoids tricky stream crossings (or provides adequate assistance) for elderly or disabled; provides folding chairs for persons, play/dirt time for children.
56. Familiar with trails and the areas in which they operate, including alternative routes of ingress/egress to use in emergency situations, and locations from which it is possible to communicate with emergency response providers.



# References

- 1 Oliver, Mary: The Wild Geese. Bloodaxe Books, 2004
- 2 Imai, Michiko: An Introduction to the Forest Therapy Society of Japan, Forest Therapy (r) and Forest Therapist (r). In: Qing Li (Editor): **Forest Medicine**. Nova Science Publishers 2013
- 3 Li, Qing: What is Forest Medicine? In: Qing Li (Editor): **Forest Medicine**. Nova Science Publishers 2013
- 4 Li, Qing: op. cit.
- 5 Hoffer Eric: The True Believer. Harper & Row, 1951
- 6 Hoffer, Eric: The Temper of our Time, Harper & Row, 1996
- 7 Imai, Michiko, op. cit.

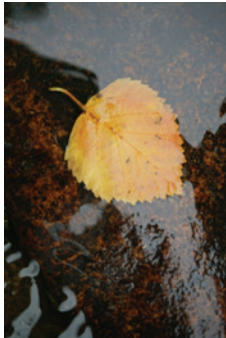
## Comments

Use the link below to submit comments, suggestions, or to propose collaborations such as participating in a working group to explore standards for international accreditation by an independent and objective third party.

**[Click here to comment.](#)**







ASSOCIATION OF  
Nature & Forest Therapy  
GUIDES & PROGRAMS

[natureandforesttherapy.org](http://natureandforesttherapy.org)