

From *The Key Room* at Headlands Center for the Arts by Carrie Hott

VEGETAL GENERATION(S)

NAVIGATION

PLANTS

SOIL

TIME

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1. SLEEPING SEEDS. Begin on the **new walkway** in front of the Main Building. Ground yourself. Settle your feet — flesh and bone — into the soles of your shoes, and the concrete surface below. Under the walkway lies a compacted layer of soil. What rests there, in the dark? Who decays, grows, persists, below this hard, smooth surface? The soil is living. In it lie dormant seeds, waiting for the right moment to risk growth into a plant. Some seeds can wait thousands of years. Humans have inhabited this land for about 10,000 years. Pause. Breathe. Tune into seed time.

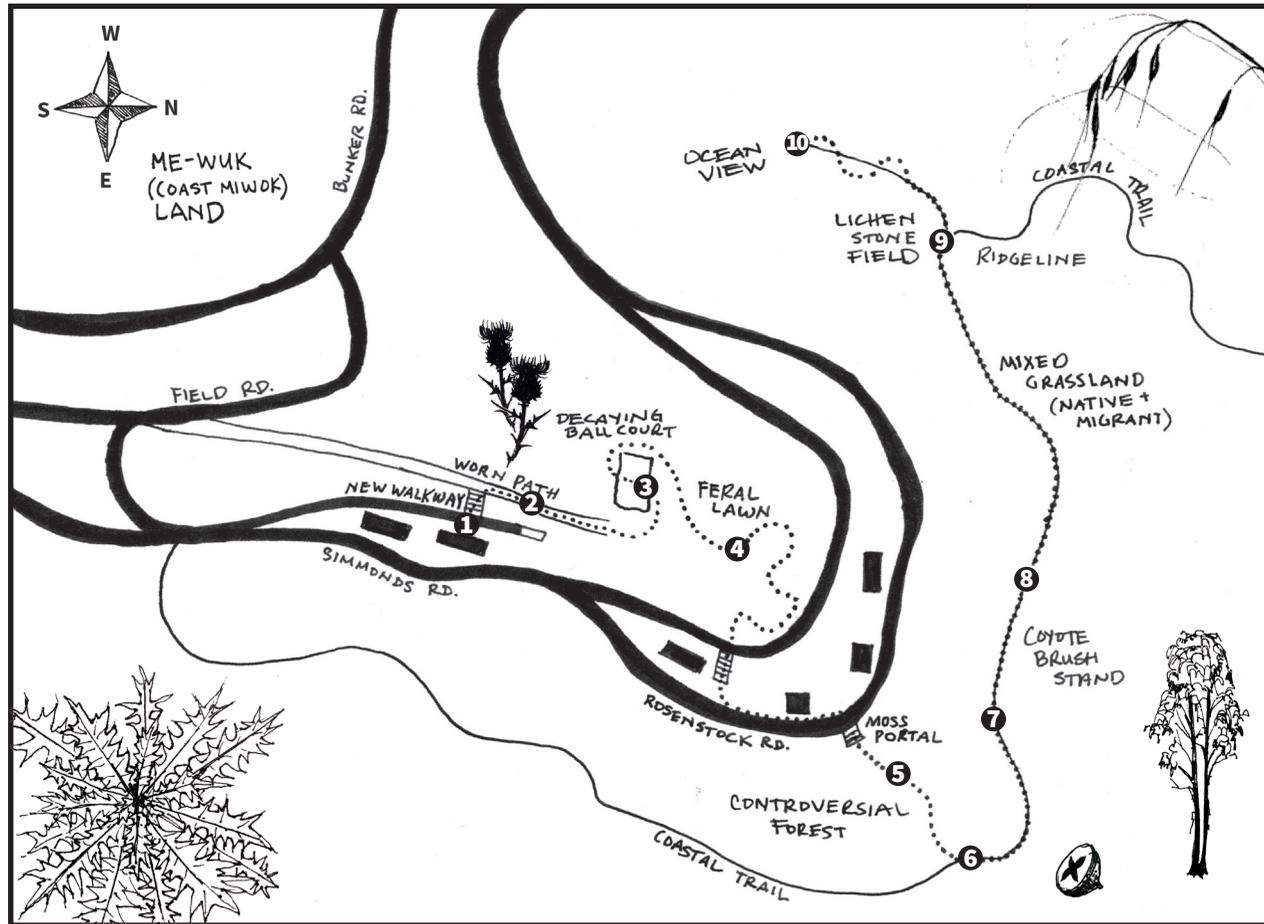
2. MANY FEET. Follow the stairs down to the **worn path**. Stomp your feet. Generations of humans, coyotes, rabbits, deer, moving between the lagoon and the hills, have compacted this soil to fine dust. It is hard for most plants to grow here, but some thrive on well-trodden land. Weave back and forth across the path as you move east towards the feral lawn and basketball court. Notice what plants survive along the edges of the path, and reach into its center. How long would it take these plants to erase this path, if we animals stopped walking it?

3. WEEDY RESISTANCE. As you leave the worn path, veer north towards the **decaying ball court**. Move in a counter clockwise direction around its edge, observing the crumbling boundary between asphalt and the soil. Look for long cracks in the asphalt that lead into the center of the court. When you find one that interests you, follow its path until it leads you to a plant that has rooted in the asphalt. Sit down next to the plant. Pause. Breathe. Sense their root structure below the asphalt, mirroring their aboveground body. As their seeds ripen and fall, where will they grow?

4. THORN SEEKER. Leave the decaying ball court and move into the **feral lawn**. This artificial meadow is grazed regularly by the blades of a mower, which keeps the coyote brush and berry vines at bay. Take a meandering path across the lawn. Scan for the ornate leaves of a thistle rosette, arrayed in a plate-sized green disc spread flat enough to avoid the mower's blades. You might even find a second year thistle stalk, standing out above the shorn grass, topped by a candelabra of vibrant pink blooms. If you find this, sit and watch until a pollinator visits. Pause. Breathe.

VEGETAL GENERATION(S)

SEEDS, WEEDS, AND OTHER PHYTOSOCIAL ENTANGLEMENTS ACROSS TIME



5. REVERED/REVEILED. Exit the lawn via the wooden stairs under the Monterey cypress trees. Cross Rosenstock Road to a set of 4 stone steps inhabited by moss. Step up into the **controversial forest**. Look down. The trail is padded with crescent-shaped leaves. Look up. Arching overhead is a canopy of Tasmanian blue gum eucalyptus, a migrant to this land. Search the leaf litter for a rough, dark, marble-sized pod with a cross on top. This seedpod holds the promise of a new tree. Hold it in your palm while you hold contradictions in your mind: Invasive menace? Venerable carbon sink? Both? Neither?

6. TREE GENERATIONS. Continue up the slope, until you meet the Coastal Trail. Pause. Turn around to face the controversial forest. Eucalyptus were brought here by European colonists in the 1870s. The trees you passed beneath are part of that first generation of migrants. No more than 150 years old, they are just reaching middle-age. In Australia, blue gums live an average of 300 years. Those living here are expected to meet or exceed that. What world will this forest experience in 2170, as the first elders turn 300? As you ask this question, mirror the reaching branches of the trees with your body. Breathe.

7. TRANSITION ZONE. Exit the forest and follow the Coastal Trail north through a **brush stand**. Scan for the silky white tassels of coyote brush, and the burgundy fruits of coffeeberry. Shrubs like these are common in the fluid edges between grasslands and forests. Paleoecology research suggests this land was coastal prairie for most of the past 500,000 years. Woody shrubs were kept at bay by now extinct megafauna, and later by indigenous burning practices. Shifting cultural & climactic pressures have caused the retreat of coastal prairie. We (me, perhaps you) are complicit. Pause. Breathe.

8. DEEP ROOTED. Farther up the trail are the remnants of a **mixed grassland**. Look for seed heads dangling from grass stalks. You might find purple needlegrass, a coastal prairie plant whose ancestors have lived here for nearly 100,000 years. A needlegrass plant can live as long as a long-lived human, and has roots that extend deep into the soil. You might also see recently arrived European grasses, who have shallow roots, and reproduce and die annually. Plant your feet and sway with the breeze. What might you learn, feel, or do with roots reaching twenty feet into the soil?

9. RIDGELINE BALANCE. As you move through the grassland the trail will bend upward, and a set of power lines will come into view. When you reach the ridge, the Coastal Trail will turn to the right. Pause here, in the **lichen stone field** and scan the landscape for outcrops of stone. You may see jade-colored serpentine. If you get close — squat down, bring your eyes level with the surface of the stone — an intricate landscape of milky green, gray, and black lichen will come into view. Part plant, lichens advance the passage of stone into soil. In 1 million years, this stone may be soil again.

10. CO-EVOLVED. Stand up and look into the distance to greet the Pacific Ocean. Meander along the ridge towards the water until you see a worn brick wall built into the hillside. Take a seat here, facing southwest. Down below, beyond the crowns of the cypress trees, is the building where you started your walk. As you sit, examine your legs, socks, the cuffs of your pants, the soles of your shoes. Have any seeds attached themselves to your body? If so, remove them and inspect them carefully. Ask them where they want to go. Can you take them there?