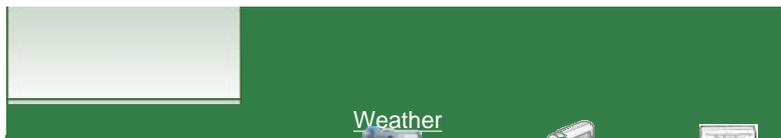


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## A sense of place implies connection



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By Jenny Blaker October 6, 2011 05:37 pm

Having a sense of place implies a feeling of belonging, of connection, of knowing where you are in the context of a landscape, with some understanding of how that location is itself connected to the larger landscape around it. It matters because it helps give meaning and a broader context to our lives – we're not just separated, isolated, but belong to and in a specific place, which we share with other people and other creatures, with a past and a future.

For example, everyone lives in a watershed. Do you know which watershed you live in, where the nearest creek or river is, which way the water flows, where it's coming from and going to? Do you know where your drinking water comes from, or where the water goes that you flush away down the drain?

Can you recognize and identify some of the plants, animals, birds, insects, that live around the same area, and do you know if they are natives to the area, species have been here for thousands of years, or whether they were brought in from somewhere else and if so, from where, why, and how?

Do you know where your food comes from, which way the wind most often blows, which stars are above you on a starry night, how soon the moon will be full, and how all of these interact around you to create the particular place where you live? It's harder if you live in a town with the land paved over by roads and malls and parking lots, but if you look carefully you will probably find some clues, around you or nearby, in a park or by a creek, or on a distant ridge on the horizon.

This weekend I was privileged to take part in a "Questing" workshop, when a number of people came together from across Sonoma and Marin counties to spend two days with Steve Glazer. He has taught these workshops around the world, to help people connect to their local places, whether this be a park, a watershed, a cemetery, a natural place or a place of mainly historical connections. We met together to learn about some of the basic principles of Questing, then went out to Ragle Park in Sebastopol, in the Atascadero-Green Valley watershed. We were encouraged to look at the landscape with

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questioning eyes, noticing the skyline and the ridges, the slopes and hills, the way the water flows, the plants around us in the wetlands, by the creek, on the grassy hillsides.

The idea of Questing is to create a kind of treasure trail, in prose and verse, through a landscape which will familiarize people to it in a new way, highlighting certain themes through questions and observations, engaging them in activities, so that they too get to fully experience the place, whether they're seeing it for the first time, or whether they have walked there a hundred times but can still see it from a fresh perspective.

Quests can be targeted at any age group, for children or adults or a mixture of both, on any theme that helps people to pay attention, to ask questions, to understand and to connect to the land.

We hope that the Quest we began to create this weekend will become a permanent feature of Ragle Park so that others can learn from and share our experiences and insights. We also hope that by having learned by doing, those who participated will be inspired to create their own Quests in other places, leading others to learn and explore them too. Perhaps those who are interested can get together to help create a Quest in the southern Laguna area around Cotati and Rohnert Park.

*Jenny Blaker is Outreach Coordinator of Cotati Creek Critters. For further information about Questing see [www.poeticsofplace.com](http://www.poeticsofplace.com).*

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