

Field Sketching Workshop



Stebbins Cold Canyon Reserve

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Why Field Sketching?

- Sharpen your senses and develop your powers of observation.
- Slow down and experience the world more fully.
- Record the changes you see over time.
- Improve your ability to accurately document your surroundings.



Materials

All you need is paper and a pencil. Drawing in the field is easier if the paper is in a pad or sketchbook or supported by a clipboard, and is of a size that allows you to draw comfortably standing up. Pencil will work reliably in the widest range of conditions. Add ink, colored pencil, paint, or any other media as desired.

Goals

- Connect your eyes directly to your hand and bypass your brain's preconceived ideas about how things should look.
- Focus on the process of observing, not on the results. Suspend judgment of your drawings.
- Take time to draw slowly and carefully. You do not need to draw all of something to have observed it carefully and drawing quickly can interfere with close observation.
- Make confident lines, even when you are not feeling confident.
- Do not erase: make corrections on top or start over, but keep the record of what you saw and drew.



References (a few to start with)

John Muir Laws, *The Laws Guide to Nature Drawing and Journaling*

Clare Walker Leslie, *The Art of Field Sketching*

Michael R. Canfield, *Field Notes on Science and Nature*

Chiura Obata, *Obata's Yosemite: The Art and Letters of Chiura Obata from His Trip to the High Sierra in 1927*

Exercise 1: Blind Contour

Find something nearby with a complex shape. Let your eyes follow the outline of the object and slowly draw as your eyes move along the contour. Your eyes stay on the object rather than the paper.

Exercise 2: Focus on Details

Spend time recording the fine details of something you can observe up close. Draw it from more than one angle.

Exercise 3: Landscape Thumbnails

Simplify landscape views into areas of light and dark. Look for larger-scale patterns: where are trees or shrubs growing on a hillside, how do shadows define ridges and valleys, how do dark and light change as you look even further into the distance?

Exercise 4: Things that Move

When drawing something in motion, watch it for as long as you can see it and only then pick up your pencil to draw it. Draw only the information you remember: basic shape, some notes about color or pattern.



Exercise 5: Color Notes

Look very closely and critically at the color in a near object and a distant scene. Try to define the colors as they really are, not as you expect them to be. Notice how the colors change in light and in shade, and how nearby colors can influence each other.

Exercise 6: Themes for an Outing

Some examples of ideas to focus your sketching trip:

- Draw things that have changed since you last visited (flowers blooming, insects about, etc.).
- Draw a map of your hike with landmarks and what you observed along the way.
- Leaf shapes.
- Associations between species: insects/plants, fungi/plants, etc.
- What do you see that surprises you?

