

The View from Idyllwild: The Natural World and Life as Art

Story and Photos by Dr. Jennifer Gee



There is art in nature. Like performance art, the natural world is a live performance that began before we were born and will continue long after we die. Natural beauty is the result of gradual but massive changes, such as the formation of the rugged mountains and canyons of California, as well as the state's more unique features, such as the Salton Sea. Beauty can also be found in the momentary and fleeting transformations of the natural world, such as the transition from day to night. At sun down along the Banning-Idyllwild Panoramic Highway, California State Route 243, the view to the west is breathtaking. The sky is never the same. The colors change across the mountains and hills, impossible to track but unforgettable.

In the San Jacinto and Santa Rosa Mountains, the mountain experience and its charm emanate from its communities as well as our natural surroundings. There is something constant and solid about "the hill," both the place and the people, that is **grounding** to visitors and residents alike. Though the hill serves as an unwavering anchor, mountain life is marked by wildly unpredictable change. Last year's dustings of late snowfall cannot tell us anything about what to expect next winter.

Nature is not just another item to cross off on the tourist bucket list, such as California's Redwood Forests, the Galapagos Islands or Himalayas Mountains. It's not a place to simply take in particular sights at 'vista points' along the scenic highways. Too often, visitors miss the true beauty by focusing only on the iconic features and viewing points, atop the Grand Canyon or Mt. Whitney. Once the visit has been documented with a selfie in front of those iconic vistas, the visit is over.

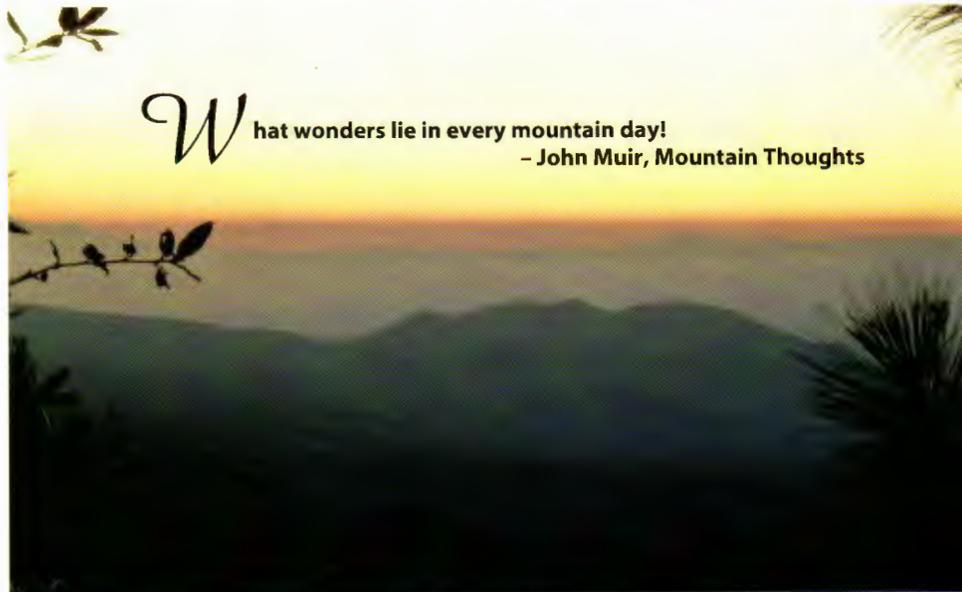
Nature is art that lives. It is full of delightful surprises, a close encounter with a hummingbird, a glimpse of a bobcat casually licking its paw like an overgrown housecat. To catch these vignettes, you have to lock away all your devices and tune in to your surroundings. Only then will you be able to see the splendor unfold around you from moment-to-moment, across the days, seasons and years. Like Monet who painted the ordinary—haystacks, cathedrals—from many angles and in changing light, you will only see this special dynamic beauty when you give it your attention. Look up at the sky and sink roots into the natural world. Stop and listen to the wind and the birds. Spend time taking it all in and you will understand why so many of us have made the hill our home.



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hat wonders lie in every mountain day!

- John Muir, Mountain Thoughts



Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while care will drop away from you like the leaves of Autumn.

- John Muir, The Mountains of California

