

Hand-picked stones

Cecelia Estrada Vaughan/iti kafi

The absence of a warning notice is an understatement. Over-grown foliage wildflowers weeds and disappearing graveled path. Braving the thicket suggests an end will lead to Nowhere. A periodic gate white washing coat indicates diligent care.

Inside the gate is a cross winds for predatory birds, songbirds, and nut gatherers. The soil is black earth from decades of composted dried leaves worms and moisture. A murmur of a nearby coursing brook sounds above stillness and quiet.

Spring equinox. Elder women conduct the lodge ceremony. They do not pass through the old white gate at the road. Ceremonial clearing space faces away from the thicket abutment. No outside noise penetrates. This is the Nowhere.

Placed nearby is the circle, upright logs, and benches, picnic tables lanterns and coolers for the social fire. Chopped wood is stacked. Hand-picked stones become community contributions for the lodge ceremony.

Elder men oversee younger males selecting willow lodge poles. Weeks before the first lodge, adolescent girls in sewing circles begin making tobacco prayer ties.

Onlookers from the road turn on crisp clear breezy nights, look up over through the thicket surrounding Nowhere, notice curls of wood smoke, of hot steamy stones imbued with cedar leaves.