



Wilderness Quest

Anne Stine leads women into the mountains to seek strength and meaning

By Jody Woodruff

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Anne Stine is an energetic woman of almost 70, an age when many women — and men — are starting to think their adventurous days are behind them. She is passionate about teaching women to connect to the natural world.

"It's a bridge to understanding the meaning of their lives," she says.

Through her company, Wilderness Rites, Stine takes women 50 and older on 10-day quests into California's Inyo Mountains to help them reconnect with inner reservoirs of strength and knowledge they may have forgotten.

"Another word for 'quest' is 'initiation,' meaning a change — a calling in of the new," says Stine, who has a counseling practice in Ashland. "Many people return from these quests with a shift in consciousness about their lives, the way they've been living or want to change. In our culture, elders have often been put aside, but our older years have tremendous value and can be a useful stage of life."



"Our journey began with a beautiful drive down the east side of the snow-capped Sierras, a wonderful transition to our site in the high desert," says Becky Orf, of Ashland.

"I went on the quest three years ago in my late 50s because I was making a career change and needed time to consider how I could best use my talents in a different direction — things I hoped for, looking for the clarity that I needed to move forward," says Orf, a former Jackson County Circuit Court judge who had decided not to seek reelection prior to going on the quest.

Going into the mountains and exploring how to reconnect with the Earth is what attracted Ashland artist Dale Muir.

"As a child, I was much more involved with nature, and I wanted that back," says Muir. "Also, turning 70 in the summer of 2010 began a new phase of my life. I needed to zero in on how I could make the most of my remaining years.

"Going with other women appealed to me, too. The youngest in our group was 51, the oldest 78, but we were all going in the same direction — how we would live the rest of our lives. We were all able to help each other."

When the women met in the base camp at 9,000 feet, the first three days were spent in preparation for the following three days of solitude, when they would camp alone at individual sites.

"We learned about the wildlife and plants of the area — what to take with us, how to deal with an emergency and preparation for fasting if we chose to do that," explains Muir.

"I found the ceremonies and rituals before we went out on the land quite meaningful. We all spoke about our intentions — what we wanted to leave behind, our hopes for the future — very useful in setting our goals for the solo days."

Most of the women attending Stine's quests have never experienced staying alone in the wilderness, and there are always some concerns about safety or being able to make it through three days of silence and fasting. Nevertheless, many report that the solo time was the most significant part of their journey.

Orf emphasizes that they were well-prepared and felt very safe. Assigned buddies checked on each other every 24 hours, she says.

After the solo time, the group came together to share their stories and insights. Orf and Muir rave about the experience of being with women from different

parts of the country, all looking at their elder years — all wanting to continue making a contribution and finding how they can best do that.

For women who cannot do the 10-day journey, Stine organizes shorter trips into the Cascade and Siskiyou mountains, including the Soda Mountain Wilderness. A Mono Basin quest in Southern California, exclusively for Rogue Valley residents, includes all ages.

It isn't necessary to do a wilderness quest to appreciate nature, says Stine. "Just walk out your door and look at the sky or a tree. Walk in a park and listen to the sounds of nature.

"Make yourself available because nature is always around us," she adds. Be open and receptive. Everyone can connect."

For more about Stine's programs and fees, see www.wildernessrites.com or call 541-488-4899.