

Rancho La Puerta's

Hiking

GUIDE





Mount Kuchumaa is special. Nestled along its eastern foothills, Rancho La Puerta honors its significance to the Kumeyaay people. Its rugged beauty has been treasured by our guests for over 80 years. As a guest aptly observed, “Everything starts with the mountain.”

Known as the “exalted high place” to the Kumeyaay, Kuchumaa was the womb of the world, the place from which creation sprang, the place in which only shamans were allowed to summit. It was a place of initiation for spiritual leaders, while the valleys and oak woodlands below were an important gathering place for the people.



All hikes on Mount Kuchumaa and its surrounding hills begin at the main lounge, where fruit and coffee are served, before heading to the trailhead. The short walk to the trailhead loosens you up for one of our sunrise hikes through the valleys and slopes surrounding the sacred mountain. The cool morning air greets you with the fresh scent of Mountain Sage and wildflowers as the sun crests the hills across the valley. For many guests, our hikes are the highlight of their stay at The Ranch and the reason they return year after year. We’ve created this holistic guide to inspire you up and down our trails. Whether you come for a mental reset or to challenge yourself physically, our trails can help you with both.



All you need are your trail shoes and water bottle to greet the day on one of our morning hikes. The following is an overview of our nine guided hikes so you can pick the right one to challenge yourself.

Dove Meditation Hike

Difficulty: Moderate
Distance: 1.2 miles
Elevation Gain: 400 feet
Duration: 45 minutes

This shorter mountain hike is done slowly and in silence. Hike to scenic overlooks and take a moment to sit and meditate—an excellent start to any day.

Woodlands Hike

Difficulty: Beginner
Distance: 2 miles
Elevation Gain: 200 feet
Duration: 30-45 minutes

The trail hugs the rolling hills as you loop through the lowlands and trees. Relax into this hike for a pleasant stroll, or get those feet moving for a moderate hike. This is a great hike to evaluate your hiking fitness and ability.

Quail Hikes One & Two

Difficulty: Beginner to Moderate
Distance: 2 or 2.5 miles
Elevation Gain: 200 feet
Duration: 30 to 60 minutes

This trail follows our rolling hills as you loop across the lowlands and cut back through the beautiful oak grove.

Organic Garden Hike

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate
Distance: 2 miles each way
Elevation Gain: 200 feet
Duration: 2.75 hours
(including breakfast and tour)

This moderately-paced walk with rolling hills is our most popular. Sign up in advance in the lounge, then get ready to walk the low rolling trails to our organic farm, Tres Estrellas. Once there, you’ll enjoy a farm-fresh breakfast and tour of the farm by our resident horticulturist.

7-Mile Breakfast Hike

Difficulty: Advanced
Distance: 7 miles
Elevation Gain: 500 feet
Duration: 3-3.5 hours

Alex’s Oak

Difficulty: Moderate
Distance: 2.5 miles
Elevation Gain: 300 feet
Duration: 40-65 minutes

Coyote Hike

Difficulty: Moderate to Advanced
Distance: 4 or 5 .5 miles
Elevation Gain: 600 to 1,000 feet
Duration: 1.25-1.75 hours

Pilgrim Hike

Difficulty: Advanced
Distance: 4.5 miles
Elevation Gain: 600 feet
Duration: 1.25-1.75 hours

Professor’s Hike

Difficulty: Moderate to Advanced
Distance: 3.5 miles
Elevation Gain: 600 feet
Duration: 1-1.5 hours

Details: Prerequisites for going on the hike include: Good hiking shoes, a strong mountain hiker, and completion of any of the shorter hikes during the week without difficulty. This beautiful hike is one of our longest. We’ll provide you with a backpack, water, and breakfast for this moderately-paced hike to a scenic view.

Hike up to the iconic Alex’s Oak on the ridgeline during this short but steep hike. Pause to take in the beauty of The Ranch at the top before hiking back down the trail switchbacks. Can you see your Casita while taking a break under the tree?

There are two options on this moderate to advanced hike - a 4 or a 5.5 mile loop. The 4 mile hike is steeper and climbs to the top of the hill, rewarding you with a great workout to start your day. The 5.5 mile hike has a gradual uphill if you decide you’d like to add a little more distance to your morning hike.

This loop starts with steep, switchback-climbs, five to be exact. Then the hike mellows into a more level trail for beautiful views off the backside of the mountain.

During this gradual hike with moderate climbs, you’ll wind through a few canyons before cresting the hills and walking past skull rock, a great selfie opportunity.

You’re ready to join us on the trails and wind your way up a mountain for comradery and a spectacular view. Here are a few tips from our friends and presenters, Tom and Donnie at Flahavan Coaching, to help keep you vertical on your ascent and descents.



ASCEND

On the uphill:

- A slight lean forward up the trail.
- The steeper the trail pitch, the steeper the lean.
- Steep trails, put your hands on your quads to keep your center of gravity forward
- Gradual climbs, walk with an arm swing to help pull you forward.
- Keep your legs limber, don’t stiffen them.
- A slight bend in the knees as you move forward will help keep you safe and comfortable.



Descend

On the downhill:

- Gravity is your friend. Let your momentum help you as you walk downhill.
- A short stride will help keep your gravity centered and help with better balance.
- For hiking, keep your center of gravity over your legs.
- Runners usually have a slight lean forward.
- A short stride will help keep your gravity centered and help with better balance.
- To keep your balance, engage your core and use your arms.

We have morning hikes every day and specialty trail running weeks.

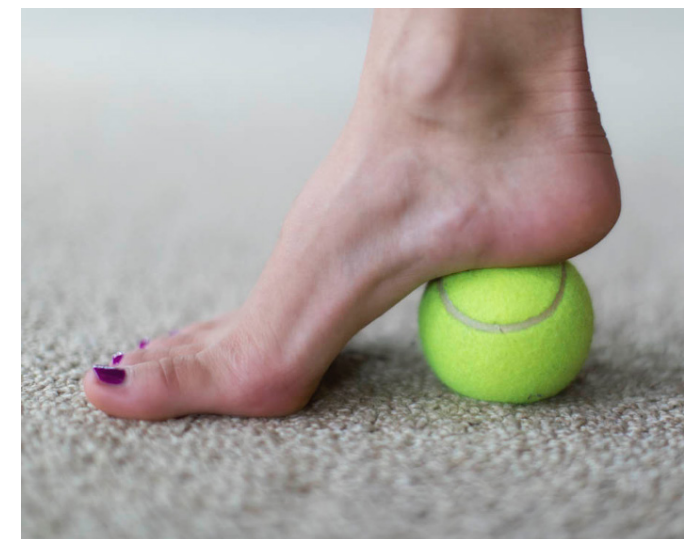
RELEASE AND *Mobilize*

Take a few steps to ease your plantar fascia and stay flexible using tennis balls for a quick foot massage. With 26 bones, 33 joints, and over 100 muscles, tendons and ligaments, there are a lot of moving parts working when your feet are active. The plantar fascia is the ligament that connects your heel to your toes and supports your arch. Walking the brick path of your favorite vacation destination, scampering down a trail, or firmly planted on a mat for a yoga stretch, the muscles in your feet are doing a lot of work. That can lead to a lot of impact, expansion, and contraction on your plantar fascia. Along with appropriate footwear, one of the best ways to keep your feet healthy and you happy is to stretch and massage your feet muscles.



In The Ranch's Release and Mobilize class, we teach a simple technique to help your feet stay healthy and loose. Think of a tennis ball as a portable and inexpensive foam roller for your feet. "The goal," says Maya Acosta, "isn't to dig deep into your muscles. The goal is to increase the circulation and oxygenation of the tissue while allowing the muscles to relax." Don't have a tennis ball? You can also use a golf ball, frozen water bottle or a rolling pin.

1. Start with introducing the feel and texture of the ball by gently rolling your foot across it for about 30 seconds. You can do this seated or standing.
2. Rest your toes on the ball and rock your foot from side to side and roll the ball under your toes. When you find a tender spot, proceed gingerly. Lightly roll the ball working around the spot. If it feels ok you can gently apply a little pressure. If it feels like your eyes might pop out of your head because of a sharp pain, then back off. This will be true for all areas of your foot as you proceed. Do this for 30 seconds.
3. Roll the ball down to the ball of your feet, between your arch and toes. Rock the ball from side to side and around the ball of your foot. Again, when you find a tender spot pause there for a few seconds applying slightly more pressure.
4. Move to your arch. Gently move the ball the length of your arch. This could be really tender so roll lightly at first. 30 seconds.
5. Move the ball under your heel and gently roll it around for around 30 seconds.
6. Repeat on the other foot.



TURN YOUR HOME INTO A SPA

A salt and essential oil filled bath is therapeutic and feels incredible after hiking. Run a hot bath filled with a heaping cup of Epsom salt and Eucalyptus, Lavender, Rosemary or Mountain Sage essential oils. Breathe deeply and relax in the tub for 20 to 30 minutes.

If you feel sore, La Puerta's Core Essentials Muscle Recovery Collection can help. This collection contains healing botanicals to help soothe muscle aches and pain from hikes, sports and other activities. It's like having a portable ice bath for aches and pains.



Perfect Peppermint Pedicure Plunge

You don't need to leave your home to experience the Perfect Peppermint Pedicure Plunge. This foot soak is ideal for feet that are tired from hiking. It's an invigorating way to start the day and can also be used as a mid-day refresher.

- 4 ounces finely ground oatmeal
- 4 ounces rice milk powder
- 4 drops peppermint essential oil
- 1 small muslin bag
- 1 foot basin
- Hot water

Combine four ounces of finely ground oatmeal, four ounces of rice milk powder, and four drops of peppermint essential oil in a small muslin bag and secure the top. Place the bag in a foot basin and pour hot water over it and let it steep for several minutes. Place your feet in the basin and add warm water to come up over the ankles. Soak the feet for 20 minutes.



HIKING + SORE MUSCLES

Robert Sallis, MD, FAAFP, FACSM, a Ranch Presenter and a family physician practicing at Kaiser Permanente Medical Center in Fontana, California, explains:

“Soreness after hiking is generally a good thing. It means you have challenged your muscle and the soreness you are feeling is a reminder not to keep pushing even harder and potentially cause serious injury. The soreness lets you know you should provide your muscle with a period of rest to allow it to recover. Generally, the soreness quickly gives way to a feeling of stiffness and this can be improved by gentle stretching and perhaps some icing when more severe. You should seek medical attention if the soreness worsens (or does not improve) after rest or you notice your urine looks very dark (like cola), even after hydrating. This could be a sign of more significant muscle damage that might affect your kidney function.”

SPA + HIKING = PURE BLISS

“The Spa is an integral part of a holistic hiking experience. After hiking the mountain, being out in nature, and immersed in the indigenous surroundings, the Spa completes the experience. It supports the holistic hiking experience by allowing the body time to rest, restore and reenergize to make the ascent the following day!”

- Regina Montalvo M.S., L.A.c.,
Rancho La Puerta's Spa and Holistic
Therapy Specialist and Acupuncturist



BEST HOLISTIC AND SPA THERAPIES FOR HIKERS

A spa or holistic treatment feels incredible after hiking. We recommend visiting massage and holistic practitioners regularly so that they can get to know your body’s needs. Here are some general tips about which types of therapies and specialists to find in your area:

- An overall circulatory massage, otherwise referred to as a Swedish Massage, is very healing.
- Shiatsu Massage boosts circulation and energy and relieves tension.
- Visit a practitioner who can perform a Sports Massage with stretching, deep tissue work and some trigger point work to focus on specific areas.
- Seek out a Chiropractor or Physical Therapist who practices Active Release Therapy (ART).
- Find a practitioner who specializes in Sports Acupuncture.

Going to The Ranch? We curated a list of heavenly Ranch spa experiences for hikers.

- **Infrared Sauna** **A Daily Experience**
This wood room is heated to a toasty range of 115°-130° F by infrared lights that penetrate the body and warm you from the inside. Lounge in the dry heat for 20-30 minutes.
- **Sports Recovery Massage** **Ideal for the Start and End of the Week**
The perfect treatment after a day of activities! This deep massage incorporates various massage techniques with some assisted stretching to release muscle tension, improve flexibility and range of motion. It also aids in the prevention of injuries.
- **Runner’s Reflexology** **A Daily Treatment**
Our therapist applies targeted pressure to points that will help soothe and revive your feet and legs. The Runner’s Reflexology releases energy blockages and stimulates circulation, which relieves stress and increases wellbeing in the entire body. Not recommended if you are pregnant.
- **Mountain Sage Hot Stone Massage** **A Midweek Delight**
Our therapist’s nurturing touch combined with warmed, smooth river stones renowned for their healing properties effectively release tense muscles, stressed emotions and help to calm an overactive mind. Our mountain sage oil is formulated to gently detoxify, calm, and ground your energy. *Heat from the stones may cause skin redness that lasts up to 24 hours.*
- **Ranch Remedy Herbal Wrap with Massage**
Relax in a cocoon of hot herb-soaked linens. This 30-minute wrap stimulates detoxification and ease muscle tension, making the massage that follows more therapeutically beneficial. Choose from our signature range of aromatic wellness oil blends. *Not recommended if you are pregnant.*

- **Ranch Classic Massage**
Our signature Classic Massage provides the many substantiated health benefits of massage, and it especially aims at releasing stress and tension in the body and mind. Depending on your preference, the rhythm of your massage can be slow and gentle, vigorous and firm, or deep pressure. Select from our signature wellness aromatherapy oils to enhance your treatment experience.
- **Intensive Release**
This treatment releases energy blockages and stimulates circulation, which relieves stress and increases wellbeing in the entire body. Trigger point, myofascial release, shiatsu, and neuromuscular are some of the techniques combined to address chronic muscle conditions. Body assessments are performed for best results. *This healing therapy does not include a full body massage. Not recommended if you are pregnant.*
- **Acupuncture**
Improve and maintain your health through the deeply therapeutic practice of acupuncture. Hair-thin needles are painlessly inserted into a network of energetic pathways called meridians or channels. Energy runs throughout the meridians, allowing for the body’s Qi (pronounced ‘chi’) or energetic life force, to flow without obstruction. Whether you seek treatment for an acute or chronic condition, or seek simply to achieve overall wellness, acupuncture treats the root cause of imbalances.





HIKING POLES

Hiking poles have evolved over the last few years. They used to be awkward to travel with and you didn't see too many hikers in the States using them on trails. But these days poles are lightweight, collapsible, and easy to pack in a suitcase. While the Transportation Security Administration says "no" to them being carried on your flight, you can put them in your checked luggage. If you don't need them while hiking for whatever reason, you can fold them up or collapse them down and stick them in your pack or hand carry them with ease.

Here are few quick benefits of using Hiking Poles from Rancho La Puerta's former nurse and teacher of proper technique, Barbara Abrahams:

1. Reduce stress and pressure. By properly using hiking poles you can lessen the stress on your knees and ankles while climbing and descending your favorite trail. Properly adjusting pole height helps stabilizes foot strike, and keeps your chest lifted while protecting your lower back.
2. Total body involvement. Using poles to help propel you up a trail engages and strengthens your arms and shoulders. Hiking is traditionally thought of as an exercise that uses only the lower body. With poles, you work the upper body too, allowing you to get full body workout.
3. Cardiovascular benefits. Increased energy expenditure leads to the strengthening of the cardiovascular system over time. Like most good cardio workouts, hiking with poles engages more of your body and keeps you more upright and helps build endurance.
4. Confidence builder and time outdoors. Poles may help you be a more confident hiker. With added stability and distributing the workload over more of your body, you may enjoy hiking longer. Who doesn't yearn for a little more time outdoors?



Hibiscus COOLER RECIPE

If you've ever been to La Cocina Que Canta, The Ranch's Cooking School, you know that the kitchen staff frequently welcome guests with icy glasses of hibiscus agua fresca. The floral, tart, and ruby red liquid has an invigorating effect after the Organic Breakfast Hike or before a hands-on-cooking class. It's bound to perk you up.

Hibiscus Cooler Recipe 1 gallon or 16 8 oz servings

1 ounce of dried hibiscus flowers*
1 cup of lime or lemon juice
Handful of fresh mint
1 gallon of purified water
Ice
Garnish: mint sprigs or lime slices

Bring four cups of water to a boil. Add the dried hibiscus flowers to the water and simmer for five minutes. Take off the heat, and let the water cool. Next, bring two cups of water to a boil. Add fresh mint leaves to the water and boil for three minutes. Take off the heat, and let the water cool. Strain the hibiscus and mint waters through a fine-mesh strainer set over a large bowl. Discard or compost the hibiscus flowers and mint sprigs. Pour the remaining liquid into a one-gallon drink dispenser. Add ice and purified water to fill to the top. Give the agua fresca a good stir. Serve in glasses filled with ice cubes and garnished with mint sprigs or lime slices.

*Dried hibiscus, or jamaica, can be found at tea and specialty stores.

POST HIKE Stretches

You can do these simple stretches after any physical activity to realign your posture and increase flexibility.

1. **Calf Stretch.** Holding onto a rail or barre, stand feet together and an arm's length away. With one leg take a step, or lunge, backward. Your front knee should be slightly bent and your back leg straight with your heels on the ground. Hold for 5-10 seconds or about four breathes. Switch legs and repeat.
2. **Hip Flexor Stretch.** Stand and hold the barre and slightly tuck your pelvis and lower your back knee toward the ground. Hold for 5-10 seconds or about four breathes. Switch legs and repeat.
3. **Hamstring Stretch.** Holding the barre, take a small step back with your heel on the ground with one leg and hold a slight bend while keeping your front leg slightly bent with your toes off the ground. Shift your weight into the back leg while hinging or bending slightly forward. Switch legs and repeat.
4. **Figure 4 Stretch.** Gripping the barre, bring your ankle across the opposite knee, and slowly bend your standing leg and shift your weight slightly back. Keep your standing leg bent but stacked over your ankle. Hold for 5-10 seconds or about four breathes. Switch legs and repeat.
5. **Back Stretch.** Stand with your feet under your hips and holding the barre. Shift your hips back and bend your knees to lengthen your spine. Slowly start to round your spine as you straighten to stand. The stretch should take 5-10 seconds or about four breathes.
6. **Chest and Shoulder Opener.** With your back to the barre and holding for balance, step one leg forward, draw abs in, gently lean forward to open your chest and bend your front knee. Avoid compressing or sinking your lower back. Hold for 5-10 seconds or about four breathes. Switch legs and repeat.



Guilt-Free HIKING BROWNIES

Makes 24 Small Bars | Jill Nussinow, MS, RDN, The Veggie Queen™

Yes, it's possible to have a nutritious brownie that you can eat for a snack. After all, these contain a variety of nutrient-dense foods for what you need after, or during, a hike; chickpeas (legumes), sweet potato (vegetable), omega-3 fatty acids from flax seeds and walnuts, soluble fiber from oats, plus hits of cacao, chocolate and cinnamon to even out blood sugar. These ingredients are all staples in my house. These brownies are gluten-free, dairy-free, and vegan. They are more decadent with coconut oil, but you don't need it to get a moist and tasty brownie.

The best part of vegan baking is that you can taste the batter right away without fear of foodborne illness. These will keep in the refrigerator for up to 5 days and up to 3 months, well wrapped, in the freezer.



1 cup cooked or canned chickpeas, if
canned, rinsed and dried

½ cup cooked sweet potato, about 1 small
potato

4 to 6 pitted dates to equal about ½ cup

1 tablespoon ground flax mixed with 3
tablespoons your favorite plant-based milk
and allow the mixture to sit for 10 minutes
before use

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

2 teaspoons apple vinegar

2 tablespoons maple syrup

⅓ cup cacao powder

⅓ cup almond flour

¼ cup walnuts, reserve a couple of
tablespoons for the top

⅔ cup rolled oats

1 teaspoon cinnamon

1 teaspoon baking powder

¼ teaspoon baking soda

2 tablespoons coconut oil, melted, optional

⅓ cup or more chocolate chips, the darker,
the better

1. Heat your oven to 350 degrees F.
2. In a food processor, combine the chickpeas and sweet potato and blend for 30 seconds.
3. Scrape down the sides of the processor and add the dates, flax mixture, vanilla extract, vinegar, and maple syrup. Blend for 30 seconds to 1 minute until smooth, and the dates are well combined.
4. Add the dry ingredients, minus the chocolate chips and some of the walnuts, plus the coconut oil, if using it. Blend for another 15 to 30 seconds. It will be thick.
5. Stir in most of the chocolate chips, leaving a few for decorating, along with the walnuts. Spread into an even layer in an 8" by 8" glass, or metal, baking dish, or a similar size.
6. Press the remaining chocolate chips and walnuts into the top of the brownies.
7. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes or until a toothpick inserted comes out clean.
8. Let the brownies cool in the pan for 10 minutes, then remove and let them cool on a rack or foil for up to an hour. Finally, cut into pieces and eat or store.

Note Use the remaining ½ cup chickpeas in your nightly salad or freeze for use another time. There are also several swaps that you can make in this recipe (although I have not tried them all). For example, instead of sweet potato, you can use canned pumpkin, mashed banana or applesauce. You can also use more dates and omit the maple syrup, adding a bit more plant milk, if necessary.

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Former Nurse-in-Residence at Rancho La Puerta, Barbara Abrahams, walked 790-kilometers along the Camino de Santiago, the Way of Saint James, in Northern Spain. This historical pilgrimage and epic walk is a Holy Grail amongst long-distance walkers and people looking for an intentional time for slowing down and reflection. Barbara says she was unknowingly preparing for the journey during her 25-year tenure at The Ranch.

- KATE ANAS:** When did you decide to go to Spain, and what prompted you to do it?
- BARBARA ABRAHAMS:** I honestly can't say that I decided to go. A few years before my trek, I met a woman here at The Ranch – a documentary filmmaker – who had walked the Camino de Santiago. Then, in early spring of 2013, I was out to dinner in Tecate with some friends from The Ranch. One of them turned to me and asked if I wanted to walk the Camino with her and her husband. I said 'yes, if things work out' —and they did!
- KA:** Have you ever taken a trip like this before?
- BA:** Never! I am not a backpacker, world traveler, or even particularly adventurous. However, I once climbed the Middle Sister in Oregon with girlfriends – many years ago.

- KA:** How did you prepare for the physical aspect of your trip?
- BA:** I feel like my time at The Ranch has been preparing me for the trip since I started working here 25 years ago. I really did no extra training for the trip.
- KA:** Can you describe your journey in Spain?
- BA:** The physical aspect turned out to be the easiest part of the experience for me. I needed lots of help preparing for the journey, which I could ask for and received from my friends. Once I was in Spain, many aspects of the daily journey became clear – walk, eat, bathe, sleep, wash clothes – I can do those things. In the beginning, it was challenging not to tip over when I turned with the pack on my back. It became easier. Eating food that was not as healthily prepared as I'm used to became easier too. Bathing in showers where there was nowhere to put your dirty or clean clothes, that became easier. You get the drift. Other pilgrims were, on the whole, very friendly and open about their reasons for, experiences on, and struggles with their Caminos.
- KA:** Did you encounter any surprises?
- BA:** Many surprises! Spain is a gorgeous country – the parts I walked through were uniformly clean and orderly. It seemed that every house had a beautiful garden (they must all have green thumbs). It impressed me that old buildings seemed to be retrofitted rather than torn down and a new one put in their place. The animals seemed so well taken care of everywhere. We pilgrims seemed to be graciously accepted wherever we went. The coffee bars for our morning Café con Lleche welcomed us, and the small restaurants where we ate our pilgrim menu were all friendly. The people welcomed us at the albergues, hostels, and hotels where we stayed.
- KA:** What lessons did you learn, and how have you incorporated them into your daily life?
- BA:** I told myself to take my Camino without expectations. I kept in touch with my sister along the way through WhatsApp on my phone. I told her I was wondering when my 'aha' moment was going to come to me. She wisely counseled that maybe it would come when I got home. I think that I've had some important insights since I returned. I am much more aware of how easily I slip into fear and distrust. I manifest this by staying with what is comfortable and staying in okay or only slightly okay situations because I'm afraid of what I don't know. That is not how I want to live my life. One eye-opening realization that I experienced on my Camino is part of the strength it gave me to retire three years ago.
- Also, to continue to be physically active - walking, riding my horses, feeding and cleaning up after them each day, volunteering with Fundación La Puerta in the Tecate community. What I learned on my pilgrimage in my 65th year has matured. I look TOWARD what is to come in my life with curiosity and a smile, not anxiety and fear. I find myself much more accepting of what is - not hesitating to give my opinion, of course - and wanting to be open to other ways of seeing things.

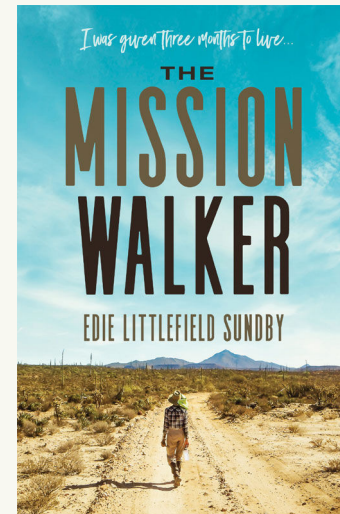
KA: Did your time at The Ranch prepare you in any way for the trip?

BA: Oh my gosh – let me count the ways! My past 25 years at The Ranch helped prepare me physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I have experienced risk-taking, transition, self-exploration, change, openness, courage, etc., with so many of our guests who are willing to share their experiences. Since they are so generous and real – so many women (and some men) of all ages – if they can, maybe I can.

KA: Do you have any recommendations for others wanting to take this journey?

BA: Simple – just do it! My Camino was a metaphor for my life and the way I live it. It allowed me to break the 790 kilometers into small steps and get where I was going. 790! That's so long – I'll never make it – one step at a time, one breath at a time – focusing on what was in front of me, I had an incredible once-in-a-lifetime experience that will stay with me for a long time. You asked about surprises along my Camino. I was really happy to return home to my life – my animals, house, and job. My Camino has given me increased gratitude for my daily life that I want to hold onto for a very long time.

Since then, I've walked across Baja with friends and the Big Sur 11 Miler. The thing I'm most happy about, though, is that I've kept walking and hiking since I retired. According to my smartwatch, I've walked 200-300 miles a month this past year. When asked if I'd walk the Camino again, my thoughts are that I'd prefer to walk a different path with the tools that I gathered. Perhaps the Camino Portugués or the Milford Track. Time will tell - I'm looking forward with much curiosity to what life will bring.



The quotes below are from:
The Mission Walker
(HarperCollins/Thomas Nelson)
by Edie Littlefield Sundby

MEDITATIONS ON Walking

Under siege from relentless stage 4 cancer and after losing her right lung, Edie Littlefield Sundby became the first person in history to walk the entire 1,600-mile El Camino Real de las Californias mission trail through the mountain wilderness of Baja California, Mexico – one of the hottest, driest deserts on earth – to Northern California. Her book, *The Mission Walker*, chronicles her journey through cancer, through the desert, and up the west coast into a deeper understanding of faith and what it means to be alive.

To walk a long distance is to experience so much of life, Edie will probably tell you. Movement is one key to a healthy life. Here are a handful of quotes from her book to motivate and inspire you.

“I knew this news was devastating, but I'd been a fighter my whole life. It was not time to lie down and die. It was time to gather forces. Surrender was not an option. I was not going out without a fight.”

“The day I started walking the mission trail, I didn't know how far or how long I would be able to walk. It was a walk of faith, taken one step at a time. It had connected me with God and grace, healed my body, empowered me emotionally, and cleansed my spirit. I was born anew.”

“Walking was a spiritual experience, a time to pray and connect with joy.”

“I became a walking prayer; each in-breath became ‘grace in,’ and each out-breath became ‘cancer out.’ A thousand steps became a thousand prayers.”

“On the old California Mission Trail, life was intense and vivid in a way I had never experienced before. My senses tingled with excitement. I breathed

in every color, sound, and smell as if each were my first. I felt transcendent. I wanted to walk forever.”

“It was absurd and ridiculous to think I could walk eight hundred miles a few months after lung surgery. The longest I had ever walked was four miles. But I believed I could do it. I could walk to each of the twenty-one missions lighting a candle of gratitude and thanking God at each one.”

“As a walker, I was the least important person on the road. Large trucks were number one, followed by cars, motorcycles, bicycles, horses, and last, walkers. At all times, I was attentive to traffic danger. The heightened awareness, rather than taking away from the pleasure of waking, actually enhanced it. I was walking in the now, in the moment, all my senses alert and awake.”

“I found myself overcome with gratitude. My dream was unfolding one joyous and painful step at a time and was everything I yearned for—to walk reverently and joyfully under God’s sky with friends and family sharing the adventure. Thank you, God. For life.”

“While I expected to miss the quiet wilderness, there was something invigorating about walking through cities bustling with life. There was beauty here, too, in a way, we as people have come together to build communities. It looked so different from the days of the Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries, but when we come together to help each other, the spirit of the padres is there.”

“I stopped, unable to go on. . . I pulled an old affirmation from the recesses of my brain. I can. I will. I’m going to. I kept walking, to the rhythm in my head. I can. I will. I’m going to”.

“I had learned that with a journey of this magnitude, you can’t look too far ahead, or you’d just get overwhelmed by how much is left to do. Instead, you focus on the now. Every step is always in the present, the next step is always in the future, and no one knows when there will be no more steps and the journey ends.”

“To walk purposely was to experience wide-eyed wonder, the magical kind that we left behind in childhood. Peace washed through me, stilling my mind.”

“I tuned out the no essentials, all the busyness that distracts us from the one thing that matters: our connection to God, to spirit, to the source of life. Instead, I flowed with nature’s more primal rhythm, one oblivious to hurry and rush.”



“On a long walk, people walk alone, together. After several hours and many miles, a person walks in silence. The walk becomes deeply personal, and each person a solitary walker.”

“The mission trail was a daily reminder that it’s not how fast we walk, it’s how far; it’s not how long a relationship is, it’s how deep.”

“Every long walk is a walk away from something, and I was walking away from cancer. I was motivated by fear . . . I lived with a constant, pressing awareness of death. I knew the best way to live with that fear was to keep on moving. Once I started to walk, I was not afraid anymore; all was well.”

“Some people say that a feeling of completeness is good. But I say a feeling of incompleteness is better. It means there is something left to do. For if we have done all we dreamed to do already, doesn’t that mean we are ready to die? Did I EVER really want my mission walk to be over?”

“Walking was a spiritual experience, a time to pray and connect with joy.”



Happy Hiking!



RANCHO LA PUERTA

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