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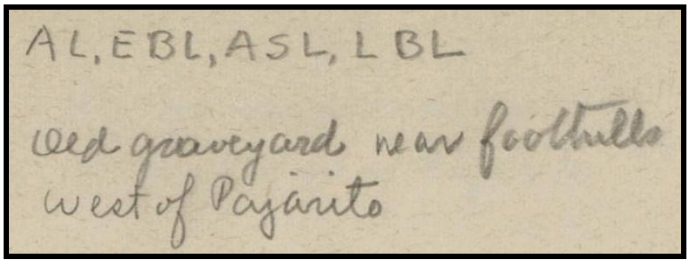
Exploration: Field Journaling

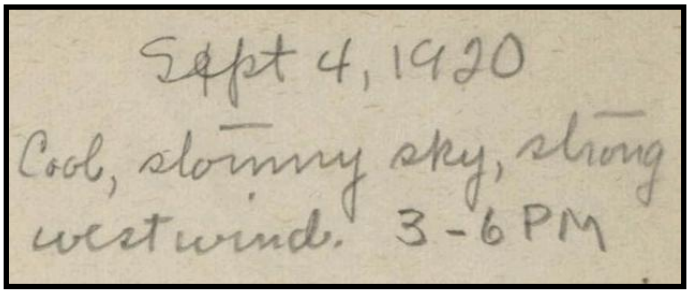
Field journals make nature the subject, and use observation, reflection, drawing, and writing as the process for learning.

Begin each journal entry by writing down these basics (as applicable) about your chosen site:

- site name/location
- group name, your name
- date
- time of day
- temperature
- weather conditions: for example: is it cloudy, sunny, windy, raining?
- wind conditions
- soil conditions: for example, is it moist or dry?
- elevation
- tide

Scientists do this all the time. Here are some examples from naturalist Aldo Leopold's journals:





Source: Aldo Leopold Journal Archives, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Digital Collections
Internet: http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/AldoLeopold

Record your observations in a discrete area for a discrete period of time.

Some things to consider recording are:

- amount of vegetation, vegetation characteristics (leaves, fruits, flowers, height, etc.)
- substrate (rock, soil, etc)
- plant-animal interactions
- animal-animal interactions
- behaviors
- smells, colors, textures
- human disturbances
- questions
- sketches
- things to look up

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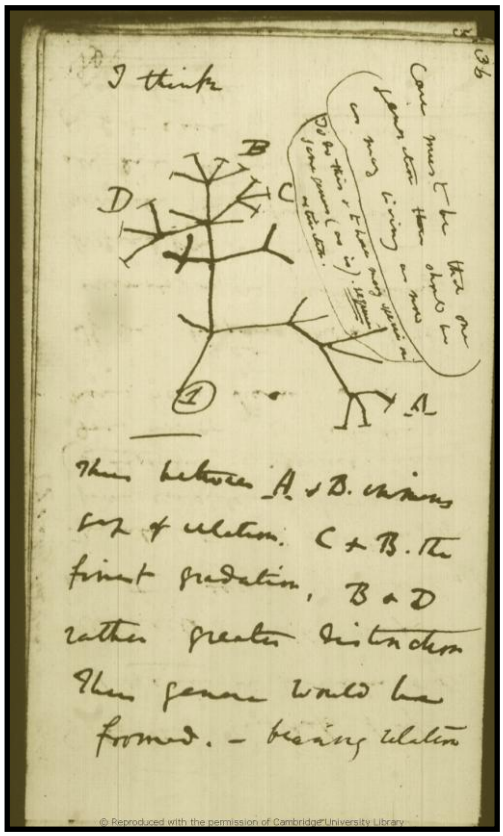
Sketches are particularly useful for recording observations (try to make drawings accurate and use color and labels to clearly describe your sketch). Here you can see one (famous) example of a sketch from Charles Darwin's notebook.

Source: The Complete Work of Charles Darwin Online
http://darwin-online.org.uk/



Field Journal Follow-Up

Field journaling allows you and your students to use both intellectual and sensory "ways of knowing" that can be both more immediate and deeper than "left-brain" data collection skills alone.

- Why should you encourage students to record a standard set of information when out in the field?
- How can you take field journaling a step further as a learning activity?
- Can you use field journals in the classroom if you can't go outside?