



ASSOCIATION OF
Nature and
Forest Therapies

WELCOME TO THE PRACTICE

WELCOME TO THE FOREST

An introduction to
Relational Forest Therapy

A field guide to the lineage, practice
and evolving ecosystem of ANFT.





The forest has always been waiting.

ANFT has been built for the person who feels called to do the work of rekindling nature connection. Our training provides a foundation of technically strong methodology that can be effective in a myriad of professional contexts. It also prioritizes cultivating a capacity for presence, becoming attuned to what the forest itself teaches.



An Ancient Practice, Newly Named

People have always found renewal in the company of trees. We are wired for this. For most of our history as a species, the forest was not a destination but a home - the ground of our becoming, the source of our food and shelter, the setting for our stories and ceremonies. The estrangement from that world is relatively recent. The longing to return is vivid.

In 1982, Japan gave a name to the practice of relaxing in forests for health and wellbeing: shinrin-yoku, loosely translated as forest bathing. Decades of research followed, documenting measurable effects on stress hormones, blood pressure, immune function, and mood. Science confirmed what people had always known in their bodies: the forest heals.

When these practices crossed to the West in the early 2010s, something more happened than a translation of Japanese methods. A new form of the practice emerged - one that went deeper than health benefits, into the territory of relationship. There evolved across the global ANFT initiative what is now called Relational Forest Therapy.

"The longing to return is vivid."



What Makes It Relational



We aim to avoid prolonging the human-centric extractive view of forests, to the detriment of the relational potentials. We are interested in the forest as teacher, as mirror, as the more-than-human community to which we have always belonged and from which modern life has estranged us. Guides trained in the ANFT tradition of Relational Forest Therapy learn, before anything else, to slow down enough to actually arrive.

The word relational carries the full weight of this distinction. In Relational Forest Therapy, the forest is understood not as a therapeutic setting but as a living presence - a community of beings with their own intelligence, their own communications, their own way of responding to those who attend to them with openness and care.

"The forest is not a therapeutic setting. It is a living presence."

Many approaches to forest therapy and forest bathing focus on the health outcomes of time in nature: reduced cortisol, improved mood, enhanced immune markers. These outcomes are real and well documented, and they matter. But ANFT was founded on a different type of question: what happens when we cultivate meaningful relationships with the forest? How are our lives affected? What happens within the forests?

There are many ways to interact with the forest for human benefit. ANFT recognizes the legitimate roles of forest as resource for wellness. But this is not our primary focus.

This is not metaphor. It reflects a growing body of scientific understanding about forest ecosystems: the mycorrhizal networks through which trees exchange nutrients and information, the chemical signals through which plants respond to stress and communicate with one another, the complex webs of interdependence that make a forest far more than the sum of its individual organisms. When we enter the forest with genuine attention, we are entering a conversation that was already underway.

"A conversation was already underway."



THE GUIDE OPENS THE DOORS

The ANFT guide's role in this conversation is precisely named in one of our founding principles. Our guides are not delivering an experience. They are tending the conditions in which an encounter becomes possible - between the participant and the living world, between the person and something in themselves that ordinary life rarely gives them time to hear.

*"The forest is the therapist.
The guide opens the doors."*

AMOS CLIFFORD



The Practice: Standard Sequence and Way of the Guide

ANFT's founder Amos Clifford spent several years in the early 2010s in deep inquiry - in wild places, in contemplative practice, in conversation with wilderness guides, healers, and teachers - before arriving at what became the Standard Sequence: a series of invitations that guide participants gently into deeper and deeper presence with the more-than-human world.

The Standard Sequence is not a script. It is a river with a direction - moving from the threshold of arrival through increasingly intimate forms of sensory attention, into encounters with specific places and beings, toward a council where participants share what the forest has offered them, and finally to a tea ceremony that honors the reciprocity at the heart of the practice. It has infinite variations, which skilled guides explore in a call-and-response as they observe the forest and the people and their interactions.



The Way of the Guide

"The guide is a fellow traveler whose primary competence is presence."

Alongside the Standard Sequence, ANFT developed the Way of the Guide - a set of orientations that distinguish the ANFT approach from facilitation, psychotherapy, or instruction. The guide in this tradition is not an expert delivering knowledge. They are a fellow traveler whose primary competence is presence: the ability to be genuinely, receptively, attentively here, in this forest, in this moment, with these people. That quality of presence, more than any technique, is what opens the doors.

The Standard Sequence has since been adopted and adapted by forest therapy training organizations around the world. It has become, in effect, the foundational grammar of the global field. Others may call it by a different name, perhaps tweak it to reflect their insights and circumstances, but it is still in their DNA. We call this "escaping into the wild" and we are glad the Standard Sequence has proven its capacity to roam.

What gives the Standard Sequence its depth is not intuition alone but a rigorous convergence of theoretical foundations drawn from across a century of Western thought - and from Indigenous wisdom traditions that have known these truths far longer. Depth psychology, in the lineage of Carl Jung, James Hillman, and Marie-Louise von Franz, provides the framework for understanding how encounters with the more-than-human world surface unconscious material and support the lifelong process of becoming whole. Phenomenological philosophy - particularly the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and David Abram - grounds the practice in embodied perception, revealing how consciousness transforms not through insight alone but through the body's lived engagement with the world. Ritual anthropology, drawing on Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, explains why the three-phase arc of the Standard Sequence works: separation, liminal encounter, and return enact the structure of genuine transformation that human communities have always recognized as the shape of meaningful change.

To these are added the person-centered orientation of Carl Rogers - trusting each participant's innate wisdom to find what they need - the imaginal philosophy of Henry Corbin, which validates non-ordinary encounters with the living world as genuine perception rather than fantasy, and the consciousness frameworks of contemporary philosopher Bernardo Kastrup, who provides theoretical grounding for understanding forest therapy not as symptom treatment but as the flexible reorganization of consciousness itself. The result is a practice that can be rigorously explained and also remains genuinely open to mystery - one that holds professional authority and deep humility in the same hand.



A Brief History and Global Reach

2012

ANFT FOUNDED

2014

GUIDE TRAINING BEGINS

3,000+

GUIDES TRAINED

75

COUNTRIES

22

BOOK TRANSLATIONS

Amos Clifford founded ANFT in 2012, growing from a vision born in the wilderness: that it was possible to build authentic relationships between people and the more-than-human world at scale, and that trained guides could serve as the living bridge for that connection.

Guide training began in 2014. What followed was growth that surprised even its founders. By 2026, ANFT had trained more than 3,000 guides across 75 countries - a global community of practitioners working in hospitals and hospices, schools and corporations, national parks and urban green spaces, contemplative communities and clinical settings.

Clifford's book *Your Guide to Forest Bathing*, published in 2018, introduced the practice to a broad popular audience and has since been translated into 22 languages - one of the most widely distributed works on the subject in any language. It remains a primary entry point for people finding their way to the practice for the first time.

ANFT's influence extends well beyond the boundaries of forest therapy as a field. Guides working in clinical psychology, education, medicine, organizational development, chaplaincy, and environmental advocacy have carried the relational orientation of the ANFT approach into their professional domains, weaving the practice into contexts its founders could not have anticipated.



Four Academies, One Living Ecosystem

ANFT's work has grown and deepened over more than a decade into four distinct but interconnected areas of practice, each organized as an academy within the larger organization. Together, they form a complete ecosystem - from the renewal of human relationship with the living world, to the discovery of one's deepest vocational calling, to the certification of the land itself, to the partnerships that carry this work into the broader world.

Relational Forest Therapy Academy

Opus Academy

Academy of Place

Academy of Applied Forest Therapy

Distinct in focus. Connected in lineage.



Relational Forest Therapy Academy

"The forest is the therapist. The guide opens the doors." - Amos Clifford

This is ANFT's founding work: training and certifying guides who lead people into genuine relationship with the more-than-human world. The six-month curriculum - built on the Standard Sequence, the Language of Invitation, and the Way of the Guide - is a powerful professional training, but is also more than that. It is a transformational journey that changes not only how participants guide others, but how they inhabit their own lives, their relationships with others, and relationships with the natural world.



*"A professional training. A
transformational journey."*

If you feel called to walk slowly into the forest and open that door for others, begin here.

EXPLORE GUIDE TRAINING



Opus Academy

"There is an emergence asking you to bring it forth - the co-emergence of your deepest truth and your work in the world."

AMOS CLIFFORD



The Opus Academy works at a deeper stratum: the co-emergence of self and opus - the unique work each person carries that is theirs alone to offer the world. We use a process and set of practices unique to ANFT: Alchimage. Alchimage (al-KIM-ij) is a portmanteau of four words collapsed into one: alchemy, pilgrimage, imaginal, and mage.

Alchemy gives us the transformative process - the understanding that consciousness and matter are not separate, that working with one transforms the other. The alchemists were explorers of transformation itself, using material operations as mirrors for inner work.

Pilgrimage gives us movement through landscape as spiritual practice. Not metaphorical journey but actual walking, actual terrain, actual encounter. The trail, the grove, the path are not backdrops for the work but participants in it.

Imaginal - Henry Corbin's term for the intermediate realm that is neither purely physical nor purely mental - gives us the territory where transformation actually happens. The images that arise in dreams, in vision, in the heart's knowing are not decorations on meaning but meaning itself in its native form.

ALCHIMAGE = ALCHEMY + PILGRIMAGE + IMAGINAL + MAGE



Alchimage: the co-emergence of self and opus

ALCHEMY

The transformative process: consciousness and matter are not separate; working with one transforms the other.

PILGRIMAGE

Movement through landscape as spiritual practice. The trail, grove and path are participants in the work.

IMAGINAL

The intermediate realm where transformation happens and images arrive as meaning in their native form.

MAGE

A practitioner whose sustained inner work and outer contribution have begun to ripen into a life of power, beauty and service.



Together these point toward a path in which the self is transformed through imaginal engagement with the living world, with the practitioner's unique life-work - their opus - emerging as both the vehicle and the fruit of transformation.

The alchemists called this the philosopher's stone. In the Alchimage framework, it is called co-emergence: the self and the opus arising together, each shaping and being shaped by the other. The work makes the worker, and the worker makes the work.

If you sense there is a work within you waiting to be born, and you are ready to meet it, [enter here](#)

EXPLORE OPUS ACADEMY



Academy of Applied Forest Therapy

"The organism has within itself the capacity for self-understanding and self-directed change."

CARL ROGERS

The Academy of Applied Forest Therapy is ANFT's home for advanced, field-specific application of Relational Forest Therapy - where guides and allied professionals learn to bring ANFT's core approach into healthcare, education, leadership, community, land-based, and other real-world settings with integrity, rigor, and depth. This is where the work meets the creative cornucopia of professionals doing allied work.



If you work in healthcare, education, or organizational life and sense that the forest has something to offer the people you serve, enter here.

[EXPLORE APPLIED FOREST THERAPY](#)



The Academy of Place



The Academy of Place works with parks, forests, gardens, hospitals, educational institutions, and land managers to certify trails, spaces, and places as Forest Therapy locations. This is not simply a designation. It is a process: of learning a site's particular qualities, enhancing what supports deep nature connection, and creating the conditions under which visitors can have meaningful encounters with the living world - even without a guide present.

Certified trails and places now exist on every inhabited continent, in settings ranging from ancient temperate rainforests to urban green spaces to hospital grounds. Each represents a commitment by a landowner or manager to hold their land in a particular way - as a place of encounter, of reciprocity, of relationship between the human and the more-than-human.

*"It is not a technique applied to nature.
It is a relationship entered into with
nature."*

Forest therapy, as ANFT practices and teaches it, is not a technique applied to nature. It is a relationship entered into with nature - one in which the forest is understood as a living presence capable of offering what no curriculum can manufacture. Our guides are trained not to deliver an experience but to tend the conditions in which an encounter becomes possible. This distinction is everything.

That same orientation - toward relationship rather than resource, toward tending rather than delivering - shapes ANFT's approach to the land itself through the Academy of Place.

Among the most recent and significant of these certifications is a trail at the Singapore Botanic Gardens - a UNESCO World Heritage Site - representing both the global reach of the ANFT approach and the growing recognition, in institutional contexts worldwide, that the relationship between people and the living world is not a luxury. It is a necessity.

*"A place of encounter. A place of
reciprocity."*



Four Academies: A Unified Whole

The four academies together form a complete arc. Each has a distinct focus; each strengthens the others.

RELATIONAL FOREST THERAPY

Builds relationships of reciprocity with the living world.

OPUS ACADEMY

Deepens the wisdom of transformative process and practice.

ACADEMY OF PLACE

Nurtures how we belong to land, trail and place.

APPLIED FOREST THERAPY

Carries the work into the contexts where people are called to serve.



One lineage. Four pathways. A living field of practice.



Why This Matters Now



We live in a moment of profound disconnection.

We live in a moment of profound disconnection. The consequences are visible everywhere, palpable in every life. The average person in the industrialized world spends the overwhelming majority of their time indoors, in mediated environments, surrounded by the products of human making. The more-than-human world - the community of beings with whom we evolved over millions of years - has become, for many people, a backdrop rather than a home.

The costs of this disconnection are increasingly legible: in mental health statistics, in the epidemics of anxiety and loneliness and purposelessness that characterize modern life, in the diminishment of ecological imagination that makes it possible for entire populations to watch the destruction of ecosystems without quite feeling it as loss.

Forest therapy, practiced in the relational mode that ANFT has developed, is not simply a wellness practice. It is a repair of something fundamental. The encounters that guides tend - between a person and a tree, between a participant and the light falling through leaves, between a human being and the vast intelligence of a living forest - are not supplemental to a good life. For many of those who experience them, they are among the most real things they have ever felt.

That is the work. That is why it matters. And that is why, more than a decade after its founding, the community of people who have found their way to this practice continues to grow - not because it is marketed well, but because something in the human heart recognizes, when it finally arrives at the forest's edge, that it has come home.

"It is a repair of something fundamental."



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THE FOREST IS WAITING.

The next step is not more information. It is an encounter.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Find your way into the work.

Explore guide training, certified trails, the four academies, and the full scope of ANFT's work.

[GUIDE TRAINING](#)

[CERTIFIED TRAILS](#)

[EXPLORE ANFT](#)