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Collaborative convergence

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By Alex Féthière



Paw paws at Sahale during the convergence prove that the tree fruits on the Peninsula. *(Alex Féthière)*

The 2021 Northwest Permaculture Convergence returned to the roots from whence it sprouted 14 years ago: Sahale, an intentional community in Tahuya that's part of the Goodenough intentional community project.

This prodigal youth's cape was festooned with the burrs of change blown by the chaotic winds aswirl since 2020. Unsure what would sprout from them, the convergence shook them off across several fields and spaces in Sahale - and they sprouted into the first cultivars of a decentralized convergence.

Convergences have always had workshops and presenters, who hold forth as authorities on their topics. Over the years, a network of standards has been constituted. Some of these usual suspects attended this year without expectation of a podium or pay, save the goodwill of all benefiting from their wisdom.

They also anticipated, often invited, interruption. A conscious effort was made by all to make the sharing horizontal; one person could seize and steer the entire conversation, as happened from the first

event on Friday night. The results were often spectacular, even when they hewed closer to the usual presenter-audience dynamic.

David Ahlgren is known for earthworks that slow, sink and spread rainwater, and for offering his advice gratis. "Anyone I've worked with, raise your hand if I've ever sent you a bill," he quips, and no one does.

He attended once more to read the movement of water beneath Sahale's undulating grasses. Inspiring a team of convergence attendees and young adults exploring permaculture during their gap year, he shaped the digging of a swale to harness runoff for a blueberry patch.

Shaelee Evans, outgoing president of the NWPCC, spoke with such authority on pruning and woodland shade-grown medicinal plants that I was surprised to hear she'd never done it before. Walking the grounds, she explained the commonalities of hardy kiwi and grape vines, how to prune apple and pear trees, and listed all kinds of perennials that will grow under tree canopies. Green tea, peonies and black cumin were all happy surprises for me.

Angeli, who left every social situation transformed that weekend, brought a special vial of ylang-ylang flower oil to opening circle on Saturday morning. As most of the attendees sat in a circle beneath brooding clouds, she placed a single drop in each person's hands, having instructed us to rub the oil into our palms and cup our hands over our faces to breathe it in.

What followed was an eruption of variegated emotion the likes of which I've never seen. People wept, laughed, sat back lost in reverie, told stories of childhood memories as Angeli turned to each in the circle and asked their experience. Several, including myself, had always hated the smell, but this beloved preparation evoked something real from everyone and lingered for hours.

Like the time that a group of meditating siddhas lowered the violent crime rate in Washington, D.C., by 23% over eight weeks, a few dozen aspirants to permaculture overwhelmed by a glimpse of original worlds caused the sun to emerge. Angeli had been discoursing on authenticity versus emptiness the night before - and here she showed and proved the ineffable to an unsuspecting crowd that briefly forgot itself.

Sahale's Kirsten Rohde told me she had been saving seedpods from a bigleaf lupine for me, but the rains had come and conjured their inner mold. So she handed me a shovel and bid me dig up some of her sprawling plants, which even as of this writing are flowering and seeding while other lupines continue to be dead. More on that later!

One more reason to be excited about this visit to Sahale was their paw paw tree. Perhaps 25 feet tall, this is the only paw paw I have seen planted outside of Oregon or my land. It was magnificently draped in autumnal gold, but the rarest part was depending from so many branches: tiny paw paws proliferating, proof of concept that our climate is hospitable not only to the tree but its fruit.

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