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**Mission:** Raven Hill provides a place that enhances hands-on and lifelong learning for all ages by connecting science, history & the arts.

## Walking Sticks

A walking stick is used help you walk on uneven ground, provide postural stability or support, or assist in maintaining a good posture, but some designs are used for self-defense. Walking sticks come in many shapes and sizes. Hikers use walking sticks, also known as trekking poles, pilgrim's staffs, hiking poles, or hiking sticks, for a wide variety of purposes: to clear spider webs or to part thick bushes or grass obscuring their trail; as a support when going uphill or as a brake when going downhill; as a balance point when crossing streams, swamps, or other rough terrain; to feel for obstacles in the path; to test mud and puddles for depth; to enhance the rhythm of striding, and as a defense against wild animals. They can be individually handcrafted from a number of woods and may be personalized in many ways. A collector of walking sticks is called a rabologist. My walking stick is in the Irish tradition and is made of ash. It is what is known as a scout staff, since I made it taller than me, so that I didn't have to worry about poking my eye out! I cut down a small ash tree that had grown up too close to the house. It is the perfect time of year for the bark to "slip". The sap runs on the surface of the wood, right under the bark and in five minutes my walking stick was de-barked. It is now drying and ready for the next step: decorating it! Some walking sticks have hidden compartments or handles have been made from many substances, both natural and manmade. Many are carved and decorated. To make your walking stick, go for a walk in the woods or along the edge of a woods. Get permission, if you are on someone else's property and don't take anything from parks or preserves without permission. Look for a rather straight young tree or branch of an older tree—young aspen work very well for temporary walking sticks and ash is excellent for long term ones. To protect your eyes, be sure to cut your walking stick so it is taller than you. Using pruners, cut your walking stick straight across (no diagonal cuts—on ground they are dangerous to step on later and are a place of infection on trunks and branches) and close to the ground or to the tree trunk or larger branch it is attached to. Cut off any side branches and the real narrow top part, still keeping walking stick taller than you. Remove bark and let dry (both optional). To decorate your walking stick, here are some suggestions, but you can really use any designs and colors that you want. If you have access to a wood burner, you can wood burn a design or use a jackknife (under supervision) to carve designs. Use your favorite color to write your name or initials in a band around your stick at waist height. Use another favorite color to add a stripe for each person in your family. Choose a color and make a solid dot for each year of your life (your age). Draw your favorite animal or make some tracks on your walking stick. (an oval with 4 or 5 dots above can look like a track). Draw and color a shape (triangle, rectangle, circle, square, etc). Draw and color another shape (same or different) on the opposite side of your walking stick. Make a spiraling line up your walking stick for 3 or 4 inches. Add other drawings of favorite things with favorite colors. Take a hike and use your walking stick to steady you.



1 Stick



2 Peel or slip bark



3 Sap makes peeling easy



4 One ash leaf



5 Peeled & drying



6 Decorated