



Bushcraft, Guide Training & Sustainability Immersion Programs Since 1999

Preparing For Your JMB Field School Course

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Our field school is in remote northern Maine. There are very few modern conveniences available on site, and limited options nearby.

READ the [student information packet](#) and the [Field School Background Information Page](#). Become familiar with what they say. We assume that you've done this.

1. Food, Meals And Cooking

On the Field School Background Information Page you can find a list of the foods that we provide. Foods not included on the list are your own responsibility and can be purchased in town.

Food storage. We don't have electricity, so refrigeration and freezing aren't an option during the warm months. Keep this in mind.

Plan ahead. Foods such as whole grains and beans are not convenience foods; they require lengthy periods of soaking and cooking. You'll need to be organized and plan ahead in order to eat. We have great tools for accomplishing this,

including solar ovens, insulated boxes, bean holes, etc., so while there isn't a lot of work involved, there is a significant amount of lead time.

Learn at home. If you've never cooked before, learn how to prepare such items as beans and grains at home before you arrive at the field school. Doing so will allow you to experiment where the variables are controllable, and will serve you well when you begin cooking over an open fire.

Be self reliant. No one is going to be cooking for you or making sure that you eat. If you wait to the last minute to prepare a meal like many do at home, you'll probably go hungry. You need to be responsible for your own well being and plan ahead.

Cooking takes place over the fire, in solar ovens, on a wood-fired cookstove, or with propane stoves.

The first few days we cook together as a group so that everyone knows our procedures for cooking, dish washing, etc.

2. Drinking Water

The field school does not have a well or town water. We get our drinking water by collecting rainwater and boiling water from a stream. Water boiled over a fire can have a smoky taste. Consider bringing a water filter if this is a problem for you.

3. Electricity

Our field school is off the grid. We have a small solar system for our needs, but it is not available for students to charge their cell phones, etc. If you need electricity, plan ahead. There are numerous small solar panels and hand-crank generators that will keep your devices charged.

Hand Crank:

<http://www.freeplayenergy.com/product/freecharge12v>

Portable Solar:

There are numerous options. Search for portable solar charger and see what you come up with.

4. Gear And Gear Lists

The less time you've spent camping and living outdoors, the more you should follow our gear lists to the letter. We've spent a lot of time and energy on them,

working to eliminate unnecessary items. If you have a lot of experience, you should still take a hard look at what we recommend. Gear is difficult to get in this part of Maine. Some items can be obtained in Ashland and Presque Isle, but it requires a trip to get there.

5. Sleeping Bags

The most vital piece of equipment you'll need is your sleeping bag. You need to bring enough sleeping bag to be warm. You don't want to get here and find out it isn't enough to keep you warm. If you don't sleep well, you won't learn well. Bring enough bag, or bring two bags.

But don't take our word for it. Here's a note from Sean, a semester course graduate in the fall of 2008:

"When I did the fall semester course of 2008 with Tim I made the cardinal mistake of bringing with me a sleeping bag of inferior quality. It was a crappy, old sleeping bag exclusively suitable for sleeping out in warm weather.

One night when the ambient temperature began to fall significantly below freezing I began to freeze also. I slept poorly and felt dog-rough the next day. It was then Tim taught me how to make a grass blanket. The first night I slept under a grass blanket I slept like a king – I was blissfully unaware of the cold.

Tim had mentioned to me that the sleeping bag is one of your most essential items to bring with you for living outdoors. He's dead right, so take heed of my mistake and bring a sleeping bag that is more than adequate for very cold temperatures. With all the extra physical demands of outdoor living it is important to sleep and recover well. Sleeping well, especially over a long period of time, is a huge factor in your enjoyment of the outdoors – so don't risk getting cold and miserable – get a high quality sleeping bag instead.

If you do bring a crappy sleeping bag then you better like making grass blankets! Believe me, grass blankets are great, but they are no fun to haul around for a road or canoe trip! "

6. Tents And Tarps

Your tent will be your home, so bring one you can live in. We won't be using them for backpacking. If we go backpacking, you can go ultra-light under a tarp. For a tent, then, feel free to bring as large of a tent as you want. Weight and size aren't an issue. We use canvas tents that weigh around 20 pounds.

Some people in the past have purchased a new tent and set it up for the first time at the field school, only to discover it leaks or has other undesirable aspects. To avoid this, set it up at home first, and if possible, leave it out in a rain storm. Only by doing this will you know if it will work. Don't trust the salesman or manufacturer - test it.

7. Bug Nets

A bug net is an essential item for summer programs. The bugs in northern Maine can be fierce. A bug net allows you to get needed rest at the end of the day, and allows you to sleep under a tarp with no tent. Most tents are equipped with bug netting.

Recommendations:

<http://www.bensbackwoods.com/servlet/Detail?no=422>

8. Fitness

Living outdoors is a physical process. If you want to get something done, your body is the engine that does it. As such, a basic level of physical fitness is a prerequisite for an enjoyable experience. You don't need to be a body builder or an ironman, but the more fit you are, the better you'll be able to adapt.

9. Tools

We have tools on the gear list. We don't keep extras around as there is limited storage at the field school. If you don't bring them, you'll have to make do with your axe, knife and saw.

10. Boats

We encourage you to bring your own boat and accessories (paddle, pfd, pole) to the field school. We even include deep discounts as an incentive for picking one up before you come. The reason for this is that it is better to learn on and use the boat you're going to have for years than have to switch between different models.

We recommend Old Town Trippers and Old Town Tripper XL's, as well as Nova Craft Prospectors (18') for canoes. If you have a kayak you should consider bringing it as well. There is a lot of flat water on the nearby rivers and lakes that is great for paddling, and they serve as a great platform for fishing.

11. Licenses

State licenses to fish and hunt are not included in the course tuition, and are your responsibility if you want to engage in those activities. You can purchase them online from IFW. We take the law very seriously and don't break it. If you don't have a fishing license, you won't be fishing on our course at all. No exceptions.

12. Fishing Equipment

If you want to fish while you're here, we think it's a good idea. 90% of the wild brook trout in the USA are within 30 miles of our field school and the fishing is great. As stated above, you'll need to get a license in order to fish.

The upper Aroostook watershed is designated fly fishing only. This means that the only legal means of fishing is with a fly rod.

If you're looking to buy one rod that will do it all, consider the Eagle Claw Trailmaster. It functions as both a fly rod and a spinning rod. You'll need to get two reels (fly and spin), but can switch between them as needed. Like most items that try to do multiple jobs, it doesn't do either extremely well, but it does both well enough.

If you want to go with just a fly rod, consider how many pieces it breaks down into. This directly effects how difficult it is to transport. We favor rods that break into 4 or 5 pieces, instead of 2, because they can ride in a backpack or pack basket. Line weights of 5, 6 or 7 are all good for this region, with 6 being the most versatile.

13. Bathing

We do not have running water at the field school. Bathing is accomplished by sponge baths, swims, sweats, and sunshowers. If you've never used a sunshower before, you might want to pick one up. They cost less than \$10. Try it at home first, then when you arrive here you'll know what to expect. We expect that you'll maintain a reasonable level of cleanliness during the course.

14. Gear Storage

Plan on storing all of your gear, books, etc. in your tent or shelter while you're here. Rigid plastic bins work great for this. You can also bring a tarp to cover gear outside your tent or shelter.

15. Food Storage

Personal food is stored away from tents and shelters to keep bears, raccoons, and other critters out of camp. We recommend plastic bins (such as rubbermaid, etc.) for this, and store them in a central location. If you bring a vehicle, you can store your items in it.

16. Pre-Course Reading

We use a humanure composting system in conjunction with our outhouse. Before arriving you should become familiar with the concepts in The Humanure Handbook, which can be read online or purchased through the usual suspects of book stores. Depending on the focus of your course, we may provide a list of other pre-course reading in order for you to get the most out of your time with us.

17. Course Hours

During the course there is down time in the evenings, early mornings, and on days off. This is personal time for students and instructors. It is a great time to study nature, explore the woods, read, work on projects, etc. During those times you'll be in charge of entertaining yourself. Plan ahead for this.

18. Extra Spending Money

We regularly get asked how much extra spending money people will need for a course. The answer depends on how many extras you will need to be comfortable. Consider what your needs are with regard to extra food, gear, licenses, etc.

A good exercise for food is to buy some of the staples we provide on courses while at home and use them for food for a week. Also keep track of the other items you eat, and how much they cost. You can use this figure to determine how much extra money you want to budget for groceries.

19. Motivation

Our job as instructors is to instruct. If you need someone to tell you what to do every second of the day, our programs are not for you. There is a tremendous opportunity for growth and learning on our programs, but we don't shove it down anyone's throat. You need to be self-motivated to get the most out of it.

Some people want to spend every unorganized moment sitting around the fire drinking coffee. This is OK with us, after all it's your tuition dollar. But a better

use of time would be to work on the things we cover so that you can gain experience and expertise with them.

Our programs are not for kids seeking a structured time in the woods. There are lots of those programs, this just isn't one. It's about learning and doing, not having your time managed for you.

