Jack Mountain Bushcraft Student Handbook

A Guide To Bushcraft, Nature, And Guide Training Studies

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Visit us on the web at www.JackMtn.com

Printed in the United States of America

First Printing: February 2008

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Introduction

Welcome to the study of bush lore, a combination of bushcraft and nature knowlege. We've put this book together from handouts and outlines we've been using for the last ten years as a resource to outline and document your work. Studying bushcraft and the natural world is the realm of lifelong learning, and we hope this serves you well. If you're taking a semester course, be sure to familiarize yourself with the ESSP student packet, available online at:

http://www.jackmtn.com/studentpacketESSP.html

We hope you find this to be a useful tool in your studies, and that you'll use it as part of a program of lifelong learning. We also invite you to join our online community where you can interact with our community of lifelong learners, ask question about this material in this book, network and plan trips. It's at:

jackmtn.ning.com

See you in the woods.

Tim Smith
Founder and Owner, Jack Mountain Bushcraft & Guide Service

Section 1

Educational Philosopy

Our Educational Philosophy

Knowledge is power, but knowledge is constructed, not received. It is built incrementally, over time. If teaching were simply telling, then anyone who excelled in a field would be an effective teacher of it. But this transmission model of teaching isn't effective for most learners. Standing in front of someone and telling them what they need to know isn't facilitating learning. Especially when you consider the differences between visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles. We subscribe to the learning model of teaching, where the role of the teacher is to create situations where learning takes place. Students build upon their knowledge daily, and by the end of the experience they've accumulated a storehouse of information and experiences. But the instructor must also make it relevant. It's easy to scoff at friction fire since matches and lighters are so readily available. But remove them from the equation and it's instantly relevant, and the desire to learn the subtleties of the hand drill takes on renewed importance. Our students are actively learning, immersing themselves in the curriculum by necessity. An example of this is how we teach shelter building. You can learn something about a shelter by making one. You can learn more about it by sleeping in it. But to truly know that specific shelter, you need to spend four consecutive nights in it. In this way you're forced to deal with the consequences of shoddy construction or not paying attention to details. Maybe the first night is rough, but it teaches you what you need to do before the second night in order to shore it up and get some sleep. The second night is spent learning some of the subtleties that would make it more comfortable. The third night is fine-tuning it to your specifications, and the fourth night is enjoying the fruits of your labor. If you were to build the same shelter again, you could eliminate the learning curve because you'd know what to do from the outset. That's experiential education.

"Experiential education is the process of actively engaging students in an authentic experience that will have benefits and consequences. Students make discoveries and experiment with knowledge themselves instead of hearing or reading about the experiences of others. Students also reflect on their experiences, thus developing new skills, new attitudes, and new theories or ways of thinking." (Kraft & Sakofs, 1988)

We live in the day of the internet expert. Where people have seen tv shows about every imaginable topic, and they know the buzzwords. Nowhere is this more true than with bushcraft and survival. But as people have gotten to know the terminology better over the last 15 years, they are generally less experienced than at any time in the past. So keep in mind that having done is more valuable than knowing how. An ounce of experience is worth 100 truckloads of theory.

In addition to passing on traditional skills, we focus on using them to foster critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, curiosity, and a concern with ethical issues.

If we were to sum it up in a single word, our educational philosophy is this: CAN.

Section 2

Assessment

Assessment: Logbook and Portfolio

There are no certifications in bushcraft, wilderness survival or primitive skills that are accepted universally. If any school offers a certification, it's likely a result of their marketing department and probably isn't transferable. We don't recognize any. I've crossed paths with numerous people who were "certified" in one thing or another, but in the real world were incompetent, incapable of completing some of the most basic tasks. Thus certified doesn't necessarily mean qualified or competent. Neither does how many courses you've attended, regardless of the school or instructor. What you've accomplished and the experience you've accumulated does. We don't want to certify people. Instead, we seek provide training and field experience and let what they accomplish speak for itself. The way we do that is through our logbook and portfolio assessment system. It records what a student has accomplished instead of placing them in competition with their peers. Students keep a daily logbook during the program to record what they've done. These, along with crafts they've made, projects they've worked on, photographs they've taken, and everything else they've done during the program, are assembled into individual student portfolios.

Your portfolio is a factual record what you've done. This way, if someone were to ask if you knew how to start a hand drill fire, instead of saying you took a course on how to do it you could volunteer your logbook and state that you've done it "X" number of times. If they wanted to know about your skill with a specific craft, you could show it to them, as well as photos or video of you making it. In this era of people being over-certified and under-qualified, this type of assessment system offers a route back to reality.

Portfolio

Your portfolio includes your logbook and nature study journal, as well as other writings, crafts, photographs, plant pressings, journals and anything else you do during the program. By viewing your portfolio anyone should be able to determine exactly what you've done and what your qualifications are.

Logbook

Your logbook is a public document that serves as a factual record of what you've accomplished which you can use as proof of your experience and accomplishments. The logbook is not a personal journal or diary where you record your deepest, darkest secrets. Nor is it a notebook where you record the how-to information and personal musings that arise when taking a course. These both detract from its usefulness, and would necessitate anyone reading through it to sift through the parts that don't belong. It can be viewed by anyone wishing to determine your level of skill and training.

In the past we used bound notebooks (the black and white compostion books) as logbooks, but we've transitioned to typing them on a computer for the ease of distribution and reproduction. We still use the composition notebooks on trips.

If you have an interest in teaching bushcraft or guiding, a well kept logbook is a great way to begin the marketing process. If you have an interest in being a teaching assistant or instructor with us, keeping an accurate and detailed logbook is a must.

The outline in section three will be the backbone of the skills listed in your logbook. As you

learn a skill, you document it in your logbook.

Frequency

Logbooks should be maintained daily during training. The experience of past students is that if the day's events are not recorded that evening or early the next morning, their memory soon becomes lost. Since our programs are intensive immersion experiences, every day is a busy, full day. So in order to have your logbook document the full scope of your experience, be sure to add to it daily - don't skip a week and try to recap everything at a later date.

What To Include In Your Logbook

A logbook entry should include the date, location, a summary of the day's activities, a list of accomplishments and observations, and any reflection on how the accomplishments and activities of the day relate to the course. Similarly, it is useful to devote a page in your logbook to keeping lists of different activities and how many times you've successfully completed them. An example of this is friction fire - it is useful to keep a list of how many bow-drill and hand drill coals (separate lists) you have gotten. Also shelters you have built and slept in, etc.

Instructor's Signature

To verify that the content of your logbook is accurate, an instructor should regularly sign off on it. This can be weekly, bi-weekly, or at the end of a course.

Sample Logbook Entry

Date: 10/17/2003

Location: Croque Brook Campsite, Allagash River, Maine

Summary: Today we poled and paddled from Back Channel campsite on Round Pond downriver to Croque Brook. We left Back Channel at 8 am after a breakfast of oatmeal. We stopped at the spring near the ranger's cabin on Round Pond to fill up water bottles on the way. While there we identified several plants. We traveled through Round Pond Rips, a challenging section of river at such low water levels. The trip downriver was uneventful except for one of the boats hitting a rock and spinning around - it needed to be lifted off the rock and it's occupants needed to step out to get it floating again. Once we arrived at Croque Brook we set up camp and had lunch, then poled across the river to get firewood. When we had enough, we brought it back to camp, sawed to length, then split the big pieces. We spent the remainder of the afternoon learning about lining canoes and tying lining bridles onto our boats. I started the cooking fire with a bowdrill, and with a dinner of chicken stew we baked sourdough biscuits in the reflector oven. After the dishes were cleaned, I took a swim and after dark we had a short lesson on celestial navigation.

Accomplishments And Observations:

1. I worked on snubbing (poling downstream), and my downstream ferrying with the pole became much stronger.
2. Got my 23rd bow drill coal to start the dinner fire.
3. Pressed a specimens of Viburnum trilubum and Eupatorium maculatum
4. Saw bull moose with a full rack in the river just downstream from Round Pond
5. Felled, limbed and sectioned several trees with my axe for firewood.
6. Carved feather sticks with my knife
7. Learned to tie a lining bridle onto a canoe and line through rapids
8. Mixed and baked sourdough biscuits in the reflector oven

Reflections: My snubbing vastly improved today, as did my ability to put the canoe exactly where I want it with the pole. I feel confident in shallow class 2 whitewater, and if I encounter water I'm not comfortable poling or paddling, I confident in my ability to line a canoe through it. My axe use has improved greatly on this trip as a result of using it every day. I was much more confident and felt safer using it.

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Section 4

Nature Knowledge
Building Your Own Field Guide Series

Nature Knowledge

"Start with the wonder, move to the order, which leads back to the wonder."

Nature Knowledge consists of knowing about: Plants, Fungi, Lichens, Animals and Their Tracks, Birds and Their Tracks, Fish, Mollusks, Insects, other Invertebrates, Amphibians, Reptiles, Rocks and Minerals, Soil, Water and Ice, Weather, the Sky and Celestial Bodies, and Ecology, the dynamic interaction amongst each other and man.

Nature knowledge can be learned but, in most cases, not taught. Observation and study are the keys and it's a lifetime endeavor. You can learn a lot by watching and listening to a knowledgeable person, but they cannot transfer their knowledge to you. You need to learn it and make it your knowledge. They can help you, though, by designing exercises that facilitate learning. Our approach is to use reference materials and first-hand knowledge to make your own set of field guides on Nature Knowledge.

This aspect of the program is designed to help you learn background knowledge on the natural world. It is broken down into different sections to facilitate learning, but it is important to remember that the different sections operate together in an organic manner.

Learning the language of nature is a lifelong endeavor. It is a process and a journey that will continue to teach you throughout your life. With that in mind, don't expect to learn it all in our brief time together. You can, however, learn the process, familiarize yourself with the tools, and absorb an incredible amount of information. Just not all of it.

Building Your Own Field Guide Series

The goal of Nature Knowledge is to use reference materials and first-hand knowledge to make your own set of field guides. Unlike those available at the library, this one will ride around in your head and be with you all the time.

Systems

There are a variety of ways to learn, but the best ones all operate as systems. There are a variety of systems available, with the common thread being that you write down your findings. The act of writing things down helps you to commit it to your long term memory. Some systems make outrageous claims about their superiority and how they were handed down from the natives over generations. Don't pay these any mind. It's important to have a system, but not so important what that system is. The following pages are the system we've been using for ten years and it has been useful for our students. We don't claim, however, that it is "the" system.

Your work and knowledge will progress much faster if you choose a system and stick with it. Bouncing around from system to system will cause you to spend most of your time on systems. A good system should, after a week of using it, become invisible. It's just a way to organize and record information, so you should learn it quickly and then focus on the information. Because it's the information, not the system, that's important.

Nature Study Journal

Your nature study journal is where you document the work you do in learning about the natural world. It consists of daily studies on the weather and plants, and weekly studies on mammals (and their tracks), constellations, fish, birds, and other critters and phenomenah. Like the logbook, it is not a place for your deepest darkest secrets or your notes. It should be easily read and understood by someone (such as the instructor) who wants to gauge the work you've accomplished.

Each entry should be dated and include your daily weather journal as well as the other information you're working on that day.

The point of the exercise is to get you to focus on one item at a time, research it in a variety of different resources, and record the information you discover. The act of recording it will help you remember it.

The Value of Silence

The natural world is a quiet place. Most animals go about their business quietly, and as such pay close attention to any noises they hear. Our human world is the exact opposite. It is loud, and our ears are constantly bombarded by TV, radio, and people's voices. Because we've grown accustomed to this, many of us have difficulty with silence. It can feel uncomfortable because it has become so foreign. But to learn about, and immerse ourselves in, the natural world, silence is a prerequisite. When in the woods, listen to the sounds you hear and the sounds you make. Try to make as little sound as you can.

The Sit Spot

In many native traditions the sit spot was an important learning tool. As the name describes, it is a place where you go, alone, and quietly observe the world around you. Over time the animals and birds become used to you, and will go about their business. You will be going to a sit spot each day for about ten minutes, usually first thing in the morning, and the experiences and observations will contribute greatly to your knowledge and understanding of the natural world. An important thing to keep in mind is that the knowledge gained through this experience is incremental; it builds upon itself little by little, adding bits and pieces that you may not put together for some time. With that in mind, don't expect the forest to reveal its secrets to you on the first day. Stick with it and make it a part of your daily routine. For a validation of the sit spot and what it can do, be sure to read Peter Frost's Journal from the 2004 winter ESSP at:

http://www.jackmtn.com/journals.html