Bushcraft and Earth Skills Education Bibliography

Compiled and Annotated by Tim Smith - A Work In Progress

Topics

1. Anthropological Studies
2. Awareness and Perception
3. Bears
4. Bow Making and Archery
5. Braintanning and Leatherwork
6. Bush Living Skills and Camping
7. Canoe and Kayak - Using and Building
8. Composting and Sanitation
9. Cooking, Nutrition, Preservation and Fasting
10. Cordage, Knots and Net-Making
11. Crafting and Specific Skills
12. Firearms
13. History and Human Development
14. Hunting, Fishing and Foraging
15. Mushrooms and Plants
16. Navigation and Astronomy
18. Outdoor Education and Leadership
19. Philosophy of Bushcraft
20. Primitive Living Skills
21. Science of Bushcraft
22. Shelter Design and Construction
23. Survival
24. Teaching Outdoor Skills to Children
25. Tracking
26. Trapping
27. True Stories and Memoirs - General
28. True Stories and Memoirs - Maine and New Hampshire
29. Weather Understanding and Forecasting
30. Wilderness Medicine
31. Winter Skills
32. Woodworking, Tools and Wood Heat
33. Miscellaneous Topics
34. The Twenty-One Most Important Books
1. Anthropological Studies


Cooper, John Montgomery. *Snares, Deadfalls, and Other Traps of the Northern Algonquians and Northern Athapaskans.* Washington: Catholic University, 1938.


*Netsilik Eskimo Film Series* - Documentary Films - [http://www.der.org/films/netsilik.html](http://www.der.org/films/netsilik.html)


2. Awareness and Perception

There are likely hundreds of books on the science of perception and sensory awareness, but these are the two that I've read that have do do with the outdoors and related endeavors.


3. Bears

Bears are often seen either as marauding killers or curious oafs. The truth, as it is with most subjects with opposing extremes, lies somewhere in the middle. If you're heading to bear country and are worried about storing your food, remember this; you don't need to manage your food, you need to manage your food smells. Bears are scent-driven. Manage the smell and you've taken care of the problem.

Herrero is a biologist from Alberta who writes with authority on bear attacks. Required reading if you live or camp in bear country.


Ben Kilham has raised several generations of bear cubs, and as such knows more about how bears live and think than likely anyone else in the world. His book isn’t about how to deal with problem bears, but rather his experiences with the bears he’s raised. Also see the film about him titled “Mother Bear Man”.

### 4. Bow Making and Archery


Comstock, Paul. *The Bent Stick*. Self Published, 19??.


Building Wood Bows Video

Primitive Bowmaking Video by McPherson

### 5. Braintanning and Leatherwork


A great book. Since I don’t tan with alkaline soaks as described in Matt Richards' book, I’m that much more enthusiastic about this one. Great chapter on using buckskin.


Everyone who has heard of braintanning in the last decade has heard of Matt Richards’ book, and for good reason. Clearly written, a simple process, and an easy writing style, with a large website and active message boards to answer any questions that might arise. Excellent.

Richards, Matt. *Deerskins Into Buckskins*. Instructional DVD.

Riggs, Jim. *Blue Mountain Buckskin*. Self Published 1979. P.O.Box 627, Wallowa, Oregon 97885.

Like many tanners from decades past, I started with Jim Riggs's book. I made my own scraping tools from a truck leaf spring and tanned my first hide while checking his book to make sure I wasn't screwing up. I haven't dry-scraped a hide in ten years, but the book is an old friend.


### 6. Bush Living Skills and Camping

There is considerable overlap between this section and the Primitive Living Skills section.


Dan Beard was the founder of the Boy Scouts of America.


Buzzacott, Francis H. *The Complete American & Canadian Sportsman's Encyclopedia of Valuable Instruction*. ?


Formerly published as "Keeping Warm With an Ax; A Woodcutter's Manual", this is the classic on axe use and lore from Mainer Dudley Cook.


Written for subsistence trappers and hunters, this has lots of information on things like building a dog sled, making snowshoes, and building a fish wheel, amongst other things. Outstanding.


Now available for free on the web, this was the text used by generations of British explorers and is filled with interesting nuggets of knowledge.


A classic on trapping and building your own traps, this is now available in a free online version. I searched through used bookstores for years before I found a copy, then a year later they reprinted it, and now you can get it on the web for free.


I've had two copies of this long out of print book. As a kid and teen it was my bible of woods lore, even though I was in New Hampshire and the author wrote from, and about, Australia. Now available in a free online edition.


This book is about the subsistence lifestyle in the Northwest Territories. Included is information on trapping, building snowshoes and spruce bark canoes, and shingling a house with flattened cans of white gas. A great book about living in the bush without much of the junk that comes when they're written by "guru" writers.


Great line drawings and diagrams on a variety of bush lore.


A classic outdoor text. Encyclopedic in its scope, a must read by all who spend significant amounts of time in the bush.


In my opinion, the most valuable book on bushcraft. Chapters on knife, axe, fire, shelter, saw, and bits on appropriate plants and animals. Kochanski is the grand old man of bushcraft. If you buy just one book, this would have to be it.

Kreps, E. Camp and Trail Methods. Columbus, Ohio: A.R. Harding Publisher.

Kreps, E. Woodcraft. Columbus, Ohio: A.R. Harding Publisher.


George Washington Sears wrote under the pen name Nessmuk about the Adirondacks and bush living in general. He would travel very light by birchbark canoe, and is revered for his knowledge, quotations, and knives.


Wescott studied the old camping texts to put together this compendium. Drawing on numerous resources, it catalogs the pithy quotations from older books, as well as photos. A great introduction to traditional camping.


Somewhat like a Foxfire book, but specific to Maine.


7. Canoe and Kayak - Using and Building


The history of Keewadin camp, the oldest canoe tripping camp in the US. Some great how-to information mixed in with the history and personnel profiles.


This was written for boys with little money, but a desire to make their own boat with the materials they had on hand.


The best information on poling a canoe I've seen. If you can't learn from a credible instructor, read the chapter on poling. Other chapters on lining, portaging, and canoeing in and around ice, as well as a section on the the author's ideal northwoods canoe, make this a great addition to the paddler's library. Written by a Maine Guide with years of experience.


Evans was a trip leader for the Keewadin camp. This shows some of their tested techniques.


This shows more of Keewadin's techniques, as well as the most significant discussion of the tump line I've seen.


Since reprinted as the "Outdoor Leader's Handbook", this is a great book on guiding a canoe trip written by a Guide with decades of experience.


This was Mason's opus on canoe camping, and lives up to the hype. While I don't share his love for the campfire tent, the book is highly recommended.


Probably the best of the general books available on canoeing. As Mason wasn't from the northeast there's very little on poling canoes, but other than this it's a great text and reference. It's a great complement to his videos on paddling.


8. Composting and Sanitation

Although there is some interesting information in this section, most of it is either ill-informed or superfluous if you've read Jenkins.


A great plan if you're a fisherman, as you'll have lots of worms for a trip to the pond or river.


The book on composting. We've been using the system for more than a decade. It works, it's simple, it's cheap, and it dispels common myths that are annoyingly spat off by people who don't know any better.


Minimum impact camping advice for environmentally sensitive areas.


I hated this book. It should be titled "how to transport your shit out of ecologically sensitive southwest canyons", as it has nothing to do with the woods. Written by a rafting guide in the southwest, its another example of the high-tech, sensitive ecology recreation crowd forcing their beliefs on everyone. If you read the book you'll notice she's not talking about the woods, as is describe in the title. Read Jenkins instead and learn how to sustainably manage human waste.

9. Cooking, Nutrition, Food Preservation and Fasting

This section has a variety of food related topics, from cooking to food preservation to fasting for both health and survival reasons.


Great cookbook on wild game, sourdough, cooking on woodstoves, preserving food, etc.


The story I heard was that Paul Bragg died at age 97 in a surfing accident. A great introduction to fasting for health, but valuable to the wilderness survivor in that they might have no other choice but to fast.


Traditional nutrition and food preparation, based on anthropological research of traditional cultures by the Weston Price Foundation. Highly recommended.


Great general book on campfire cooking. Chapters on dutch ovens, reflector ovens, etc.


Stefansson's anthropological treatise on diet. Includes his experience on the eskimo diet while living in New York City.


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### 10. Cordage, Knots, and Net-Making


The biggest book on knots. If you only get one, this is it.


Art of Castnet Throwing Video

Rope DVD by Karamat.com

Mors Kockanski Pocketbook

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### 11. Crafting and Specific Skills


This was given to me by a past student after I mentioned a rock in the woods that would be great by our fireplace. If you’re looking to learn how to move heavy things, this is your text.


I picked this book up for a quarter when our local library was getting rid of it. It's filled with lots of ideas for simple crafts you can do with both kids and adults, and was worth every cent I paid for it.

12. Firearms

There are countless books on firearms. These represent only the ones that I've read.


13. History and Human Development


14. Hunting, Fishing, and Foraging


Guide to foraging at the seacoast.


Introduction to ice fishing with an emphasis on modern, high-tech gear.


An interesting look at the culture of hunting. The book is broken up into three parts. In the first, the author is subsistence hunting with a native on the west coast of Greenland. In the second, he's with trophy hunters in Alaska. In the third, he's having a civilized discussion with the leader of an animal rights group. There is some interesting information on factory farm crop production, and the author makes a convincing
case that as an environmental advocate his eating of wild game that he hunts himself is better for the planet than a vegetarian diet based on mass-produced crops.


Common in used book stores and on the web, this now out-of-print encyclopedia of fishing has something about everything.


15. Mushrooms and Plants

This section omits the countless books on edible and medicinal uses of wild plants for the simple reason that there are hundreds, if not thousands of them. The books included represent knowledge that isn't covered in the rest of the literature.


The book on mushrooms. Big, expensive, and encyclopedic.


I learned to organize plants by botanical family in Boyd Shaffer’s "Field Botany of South Central Alaska" class at Kenai Peninsula College. It's a great way to learn plants. I had the first edition of Elpel's book, spiral bound, and I've had every edition since. I use it in all of my classes.


Thought provoking and good to keep in mind when you pass an Amanita muscaria on your travels.


The book on edible wild plants for Canada and the northern USA. Out of print and hard to find, it includes text by Nancy J. Turner and tables of plant nutrients.


This is a huge book that contains immense amounts of information.


Other books on poisonous plants say that a plant is toxic, or occasionally very toxic. This book talks about what the toxins are, how they affect people, and dosages that are dangerous.

16. Navigation and Astronomy


This book is the graduate level course on navigation without any tools. The premise of the book is that you just purchased a million-dollar yacht, you're sailing offshore, and you simultaneously get hit by lightning, get your maps swept overboard by a wave, and lose your compass (you decide how). David Burch
has advanced degrees in astrophysics, so the book contains some math and science, but if you can make it through them the payoff is it will be impossible to ever be lost on Earth again if you wear a wrist watch.


Burch turns his considerable knowledge to the topic of navigation for small, paddle-propulsion crafts in coastal waters.


Essential for the student of barehand navigation. Unlike Burch, this isn't technical but is clearly written and interesting to even the casual weekend navigator.


A survival and navigation manual that used to be included on life rafts.


The text for our map and compass workshops, and probably many other schools as well.


A coffee table-type book with lots of photos. Nothing special about this specific book, but such a volume is useful to have as they usually have simple explanations of solar lore as well as understandable diagrams.


Owendoff invented the shadow-stick method of navigation. This book features that and other methods of navigating without modern materials.


Clear, easily understood explanations and experiments. If you can find a copy it's highly recommended.


17. Northwoods Nature and Ecology


18. Outdoor Education and Leadership


Outlines and lesson plans on a variety of topics. Focused on modern, low-impact camping.


Gil Gilpatrick spent forty years guiding canoe trips on the Allagash, as well as other rivers. This book is a primer for the working guide. You won't find a discussion of Maslow's Heirarchy of Needs, but you will find advice for the camp cook, advice on gear, and lots of advice on how to manage people. We've used it as a text for our guide training courses since it was published. It was originally called "The Canoe Guide's Handbook", but has been expanded into the current volume.


19. Philosophy of Bushcraft


I learned about this book from Mors Kochanski. Often philosophy takes on a new age spiritual connotation, but not with this book. Common in used book stores and on the web, it chronicles a the author's journey through areas of non-industrialized people who adapt their lifestyle and building practices to their environment. A must read.


If you read it in school because you had to, you should read it again because you want to. Its implications for bushcraft and living by your wits are many.

20. Primitive Living Skills

There is a lot of overlap between this section and the one on Bush Living Skills and Camping.


A great book written by great people that I had the pleasure to study with.


Diagrams and notes on a variety of primitive living skills, highly recommended.


I made a copy of this while a student of Errett Callahan's Cliffside Workshops (highly recommended). It chronicles the experiment of some European people in a primitive living experience during the 1970s.
The McPherson's originally published a series of small booklets on primitive skills, eventually combining them into this volume and a second. This is one of my favorite books on primitive living skills. Their writing is a breath of fresh air in a genre dominated by professional writers who have no field experience with their topics. The McPhersons, in contrast, have less than polished writing skills, but like much of the information available on trapping, they write from their own experiences in the field. Well illustrated with numerous photos, this volume is a great introduction to primitive living skills as well as a great reference for people who have been at it for a decade. With chapters on braintanning, fire & cordage, bow & arrow making, traps and trapping, primitive cooking, processing deer, baskets, pottery, flintknapping and shelter building, it covers a wide variety of topics.
Watts is the president of the Society of Primitive Technology and a talented craftsman, and this is a great book with a focus on the southeastern US.
Wilbur has several books at our local store, and they're all fantastic. Amazing line drawings and solid research make them both enjoyable to read and useful to use.

21. Science of Bushcraft
Contrary to those who think bushcraft is the domain of uneducated bumpkins, in reality it is the joining of history and science. These books cover the science aspect.

22. Shelter Design and Construction

23. Survival
Next to losing weight, getting rich with no money down and making yourself more attractive to the opposite sex, there have probably been more books written on wilderness survival than on any other topic. But most of them are crap, written by people with no experience about which they're writing. And the
situation isn't improving. With every trip to the bookstore I find one or two new books, each having a writer with a more-groomed pedigree than its predecessors. But their books still suck, and surprisingly seem to be getting worse. Now there are hundreds of instructional videos available as well, with varying levels of quality. Survival is not living off of the land, it's living through a crisis. In my opinion the best two from this list that deal with actual survival, and they complement each other well, are Emdin and Lundin. If you're looking for a book with facts and trivia about a variety of situations, try Maniguet.


Emdin is a retired Canadian military survival instructor, and his book demonstrates the importance of having a plan and implementing it immediately. Not a lot of background material, but excellent for teaching you what you need to do in a survival situation. A great complement to Lundin's book.


Explains what it takes to keep the body alive, then goes into detail about the background information involved. Excellent book and a great complement to Emdin's book.


Robertson also wrote Survive the Savage Sea, based on his 37 days adrift in the Pacific in a life raft after his boat sank in 1972. This book is based on his experience and research.


24. Teaching Outdoor Skills to Children


25. Tracking

In my workshops I teach that tracking can't be taught without a knowledge of the animal and the habitat. Some of the authors here disagree. As such, my bias is for those that take biology and habitat into
account. In order, my top two are Elbroch and Rezendez. If your interests are academic, you should look at Liebenberg.


26. Trapping

More than any other field, trapping represents democracy in publishing. This contains less than 1% of the available literature on trapping, with much of it written by practitioners in the field (unlike most of the junk that passes for survival literature). I've seen a bunch of other trapping books at trapper's rendezvous. While some of it is written by people with a limited grasp of language and grammar, they're the one's out there trapping, and it hasn't been filtered through professional writers. This makes their information that much more valuable. Check out Fur-Fish-Game magazine for a bunch of information on self-published authors.

Cooper, John Montgomery. Snares, Deadfalls, and Other Traps of the Northern Algonquians and Northern Athapaskans. Washington: Catholic University, 1938.
Krause, Tom. Dynamite Snares and Snaring. Self-Published.

27. True Stories and Memoirs

I first read Dick Proenneke's book in the Kenai, Alaska library, when I was living in Sterling. It was an edition of Alaska Geographic, and I loved it. Some of my friends knew Dick, so I wrote him a letter. He wrote me back, and now his letter to me is my bookmark in his book. I was excited when his book was reprinted, and even more so when the video "Alone In the Wilderness" came out. It's the runner-up favorite of our students, second only to "Dead River Rough Cut". A great book.

Elliot Merrick graduated from Yale and had a short stint working in New York City, as documented in the first five pages of this book. He expresses his quiet desperation, then follows his passion. He moved to Labrador and taught school for a year. This book is the journal of his second year there, when he and his wife went into the interior of the province with the trappers for the winter. He documents his experiences poling up the Grand (since renamed the Churchill) river, snowshoeing, trapping, and living off the country. Well written and as good a story as you'll be able to find. For years it was out of print and hard to find, but has recently come back into print. Highly recommended.

Paul Provencher's memoirs.

An enjoyable read with great diagrams and drawings in the margins.

Snowshoes and Solitude DVD - Survivorman Les Stroud's first wilderness film and the story of he and his wife's year spent in the Wabakimi wilderness. I met Les at the Snow Walker's Rendezvous years ago, before he became a star, and he plays men's league hockey with a friend of mine from college. Great guy, great video.

28. True Stories and Memoirs - Maine and New Hampshire


Dead River Rough Cut DVD

This has been the favorite film of our students, year after year. It chronicles Bob Wagg and Walter Lane, two Maine trappers, over four seasons of their living in the bush. They philosophize, drink, swear, and do a bunch of other things that make this probably not fit for children. But they're also 100% real. And since most survival experts on TV these days are city people who spend a few weeks in the country each year, it's good to see them trapping, swearing, and not trying to look their best for the camera. Reality cinema long before it was cool.


Helen Hamlin was the wife of a game warden in northern Maine. The book’s subtitle is “Three Years in the Maine Woods.” Highly recommended.


Dorothy Boone Kidney lived at Lock Dam on Chamberlain Lake, on the Allagash Wilderness Waterway. I’ve been there many times guiding canoe trips, and her memoirs are fun to read both for me and my clients.


Joseph Knowles, in his 40s, stripped to his underwear at King and Bartlett Camps, then walked into the woods for 2 months of living off the land. It came out after he was done that he might not have done everything he said he did, but to anyone who has spent time living off the land his book is refreshingly written by a kindred spirit. His detractors, who said he spent some time at a friend's cabin, were unanimous in saying that he had the skills to have done that which he wrote about.


The wild west is often seen as the defining American experience, and has been lauded by Frederick Jackson Turner in his frontier thesis as our defining characteristic. But much of the history of the west was invented by historians and novelists. The wild northeast, characterized by the lumber camps and log drives, was not invented. Pike recounts the history and the characters of northern New England's lumbering past. The stories entertain and the characters are larger than life.

29. Weather Understanding and Forecasting


This has long been a text in our semester program. Excellent.

30. Wilderness Medicine: Modern and Traditional


Examines the effects of chronic dehydration and points to it as the causative factor in degenerative disease. Also promotes the solvent, as opposed to the solute, philosophy of medicine.


This book explores the science behind traditional medical practices such as those listed in the title.


These course notes are from the WEMT course I took with SOLO. Great course, if you can take one you won't regret it.


31. Winter Skills

Gilpatrick, Gil. Building Snowshoes. Self Published, 1991. P.O. Box 461, Skowhegan, Maine, 04976.
Macdonald, Craig. Self-Published information packets on traditional winter camping. R.R.#1, Dwight, Ontario, P0A 1H0 Canada. Telephone: 705-635-3416.

32. Woodworking, Woodworking Tools and Wood Heat

Filing Hand Saws DVD

33. Miscellaneous Skills and Topics


This is a great cross-cultural study of sweat baths. The author traveled the world and wrote about his experiences in them.


Written by a horse packer for horse packers.


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Jack Mountain Bushcraft & Guide Service | P.O. Box 61 | 267 Camp School Rd. | Wolfeboro Falls, NH 03896-0061
(603) 569-6150  tim@jackmtn.com  www.jackmtn.com
34. The Twenty-One Most Important Books

   
   In my opinion, the most valuable book on bushcraft, or living in wild places. Chapters on knife, axe, fire, shelter, saw, and bits on appropriate plants and animals. Kochanski is the grand old man of bushcraft. If you buy just one book, this would have to be it.

   
   Out of print, expensive if you can find it at all, but dense with information. Written by Stefansson at the request of the Army during the 1940s. Based on his years of experience as an anthropologist in the arctic, the premise is to include everything a downed pilot would need to know in order to survive by "going native".

   
   Provencher was a forester in the Quebec and Labrador country on the north shore of the St. Lawrence river. He traveled extensively with native guides who constantly demonstrated the techniques of living off the land, which he then wrote about in his books. All of his books are good, but if I had to choose just one, this would be it. Out of print and hard to find, if you do find a copy you'll be rewarded.

   
   This is volume 1 (of 2) of the first ten years of articles in the Journal of the Society of Primitive Technology. A variety of articles by a variety of authors. Thankfully in print and easy to obtain.

   
   This is volume 2 (of 2) of the first ten years of articles in the Journal of the Society of Primitive Technology.


   I've had two copies of this long out of print book. As a kid and teen it was my bible of woods lore, even though I was in New Hampshire and the author wrote from, and about, Australia. Now available in a free online edition.

   
   The McPherson's originally published a series of small booklets on primitive skills, eventually combining them into this volume and a second. This is one of my favorite books on primitive living skills. Their writing is a breath of fresh air in a genre dominated by professional writers who have no field experience with their topics. The McPhersons, in contrast, have less than polished writing skills, but like much of the information available on trapping, they write from their own experiences in the field. Well illustrated with numerous photos, this volume is a great introduction to primitive living skills as well as a great reference for people who have been at it for a decade. With chapters on braintanning, fire & cordage, bow & arrow making, traps and trapping, primitive cooking, processing deer, baskets, pottery, flintknapping and shelter building, it covers a wide variety of topics.


   Written by a teacher with easy to follow text and clear instructions. One of the best how-to manuals for making traditional crafts.

   Emdin is a retired Canadian military survival instructor, and his book demonstrates the importance of having a plan and implementing it immediately. Not a lot of background material, but excellent for teaching you what you need to do in a survival situation. A great complement to Lundin's book.


   Explains what it takes to keep the body alive, then goes into detail about the background information involved. Excellent book and a great complement to Emdin's book.


   A classic outdoor text. Encyclopedic in its scope, a must read by all who spend significant amounts of time in the bush.


   This book is the graduate level course on navigation without any tools. The premise of the book is that you just purchased a million-dollar yacht, you're sailing offshore, and you simultaneously get hit by lightning, get your maps swept overboard by a wave, and lose your compass (you decide how). David Burch has advanced degrees in astrophysics, so the book contains some math and science, but if you can make it through them the payoff is it will be impossible to ever be lost on Earth again if you wear a wrist watch.


   The book on composting and dealing with human manure. We've been using the system for more than a decade. It works, it's simple, it's cheap, and it dispels common myths that are annoyingly spouted off by people who don't know any better.


   This has been a text in our semester program since the beginning. Clear diagrams, easy to understand with out lots of jargon, and thankfully now back in print, this is the shortest route to understanding the weather.


   Unlocks the history of the forests of New England and helps the reader uncover the tracks of past generations.


   The book on tracking, loaded with clear photographs and diagrams.


   I consider this great book to sum up the philosophy of bushcraft and Earth skills education. Often philosophy takes on a new age or spiritual connotation in modern wilderness skills, but not with this book. It chronicles the author's journey through areas of non-industrialized people who adapt their lifestyle to their environment, and where the hero is the self-reliant craftsmen who is the prototypical bushcraft practitioner. Not directly about bushcraft or outdoor living, but a must read anyway.


   The theory and techniques of traditional, hot-tent winter camping. Great sections on tents, snowshoes, toboggans, footwear, and probably the best in any book on dressing to stay warm in the winter. Written by seasoned Maine Guides with years of experience.


   Probably the best of the general books available on canoeing. As Mason wasn't from the northeast there's very little on poling canoes, but other than this it's a great text and reference. It's a great complement to his videos on paddling.


   Bill Riviere was a Maine guide and wrote numerous books based on his experience outdoors. This book is a compendium of knowledge on a wide variety of topics, from choosing tents and sleeping bags to canoeing and reading the weather. Long out of print, it is common and inexpensive at used book stores.
21. Pocket Books by Mors Kochanski, sold by Karamat.com

Titles:

- The Compass
- Knife Sharpening
- Map Use
- Tools of Survival and Survival Training
- Basic Wilderness Survival in Cold Lacking Snow
- Basic Wilderness Survival in Deep Snow
- Top Seven Bush Knots and the Use of the Windlass
- Wilderness Steam Bath
- The Inuit Snow House
- The Night Sky
- Basic Netting
- The Two Kilogram Survival Kit Field Manual
- Survival Kit Ideas

These great little booklets are small and concise, yet are a fantastic resource. There are a few other titles available, but these are the ones I recommend for the northeastern US and Canada.