

Jack Mountain Fall Bushcraft Semester: 9 Weeks in the Woods

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Author Note

This paper was prepared for the extended studies program administered by Erica Boucher and Sarah Schmitz. The headings in this paper were predetermined by Western State College and were supposed to be: Objective #1: Leadership and Teaching Skills, Objective #2: Technical Skills, Objective #3: Communication and Team Building, Objective #4: Environmental Practices and Safety Awareness, and Objective#5: Self-Growth and Service. Minor changes were necessary to reflect the focus of the course and provide flow consistent with my writing style. Safety awareness is not covered as a separate topic in objective 4 because it is addressed in conjunction with specific skills as it was during the course. Service is not included in objective 5 as it was not a component of the course I attended.

Abstract

This paper summarizes my experiences during the Fall 2010 Bushcraft Semester Course at the Jack Mountain Bushcraft School. I will briefly describe the course curriculum and then touch on 5 objectives: Leadership and Teaching, Technical Skills, Communication and Team Building, Environmental Practices, and Self-Growth. I lived in what most people would describe as the outdoors, yet once we learned to build shelters, I was always well housed. The school is miles from even a small town, yet I was not alone, far from it. I spent more time in the company of, what began as, complete strangers than I normally do with my own family. There were few modern conveniences, but we did not experience hardship. In fact, we were usually very comfortable and there was a richness not present in modern life. The level of experiential learning was incomparable. Not only did I learn something new every day, I spent most of the day, every day, practicing new skills. These factors served to illuminate some significant aspects of life of which I was previously unaware and will endeavor to describe here.

The course I completed was the Fall Bushcraft Semester. The instructor for the course was Tim Smith, the founder of Jack Mountain Bushcraft School and Guide Service. The school is in a bucolic, heavily treed location on the Aroostook River near Masardis, Maine. There is one building on site. Some bushcraft aficionados might find that strange, but it was a logical addition to the camp as it housed a large library of books and provided a dry, well lit place to study during adverse weather. There are no commercial utilities at the school. The drinking water was rain water collected from the roof in barrels. We bathed in the river or carried water by hand to use in an outdoor solar shower. There is a simple sanitation system that employs composting as the disposal method. The negligible amount of electricity used is generated on site with a solar panel. Most of the cooking is done over a fire or in a solar powered oven. We lived in tents until we learned to build shelters and then we lived in those. Simplicity reigns at the school.

Our days were long. Early in the course when there was a lot of daylight, we began formal instruction at 8:00 a.m. and went until 5:00 p.m. As autumn set in and daylight waned, we adjusted by shaving an hour off of either end of the day. There was much to accomplish each morning before class. I especially enjoyed wandering out to my “sit spot.” I never saw much wildlife, but there was a meditative quality to just sitting there surrounded by the quiet splendor that made the whole day worthwhile. When I returned to camp, I wrote in my weather journal and log book. After that, it was time to gather wood and build a fire to make coffee and cook breakfast. Once class began, we were busy until the middle of the day when we had a short break to eat lunch. When the instruction ended for the day, it was time to think about the necessities of living: bathing, laundry, firewood, dinner, and dishes. It wasn't all work though, nor were the

evenings dull. After chores in the evening we gathered around a blazing fire for singing, storytelling and star gazing.

We learned many things. Most of them were encompassed by a subject called bushcraft. What is bushcraft? If you cataloged the accumulated knowledge of a society that lives close to the land, most of it would have to do with understanding the natural world and how it works; knowledge of plants and trees, animals, the weather and all the intricacies of the world around them. The rest of that knowledge would consist of how they interact with the land. We call that bushcraft.

So bushcraft is the active component of our interaction with the world around us. It's doing, building, making, and creating using the raw materials that Mother Nature provides. It's been called survival, wood craft, and many other names over the years. It's a new kind of outdoor education that when you think about it, is actually the oldest form of education there is (Smith, 2009)

and it includes all the skills and knowledge necessary to live comfortably in the outdoors without modern infrastructure. Every day of the course was filled to the brim with relevant information and experiences. There was a definite process in place. We learned how to use tools which we then used to make things. We then used these things that we had made in our daily life. The course was front loaded with the absolute basics of living like fire starting, campfire cooking, hygiene, and shelter building so that we were able to take care of our physical needs on our own from the start. The following paragraphs briefly discuss what was taught by topic:

- Skills. There was a hands-on approach to learning. We began most activities with a short discussion of the essential facts and then just did it. For example, the day we talked about the safe way to cut down a tree with an axe, each student cut down a tree using their own axe. Thereafter, when a tree was needed, a student cut one down. I am far from being expert at all that was taught, but I did it all—rather I lived it all for nine weeks. That was the way all the skills were presented. It was never theory only; there was always a practical component. While I was there, I practiced the following skills: fly fishing, navigation with a map and compass, bare handed navigation, canoeing, trip planning, trip outfitting, firearms safety, campfire cooking, safe axe use, safe knife use, knot tying, friction fire lighting, and percussion fire lighting.

- Journey. We took numerous trips away from the school as a group. We did some hiking at Baxter State Park, but mostly we traveled by canoe. We canoed on many of the local waterways: the Aroostook, Black Water and Big Machias Rivers; the St. Croix, Millnocket and Munsungan Streams; as well as Squapan Lake. We slept under the stars or a tarp several nights in the North Maine Woods at different sites including the Munsungan Branch and the Lapomkeag Stream campsites. Each of us also ventured out on our own for one solo night of camping.

- Craft. It seemed we were always making something or several things! Some of the things, like the ropes we made, we used repeatedly throughout the course. There is an unsurpassed feeling of pride that comes with using something you've made yourself. Our projects included: crooked knife, long bow, burned bowl, pot hook, water bottle holder, netting

needle, net, saw frame, pack basket, pack frame, natural cordage, numerous shelters and several types of animal traps.

- Nature. We studied plants, animals, fungi, fish, weather, stars, rocks, mollusks and insects. Sometimes it was planned, like our “weed walks” when we would go out and collect specimens to press. Other times it was spontaneous, like when we collected fresh water mussels and cattail roots from Squapan Lake and ate them for dinner.

- Culture. The local history and culture were a seamless part of the course I hadn't thought much about until I decided to borrow the subheadings from the “Jack Mountain Bushcraft School Student Training Handbook” and noticed that culture is one of the elements of the curriculum. Like the nature study, some of it was intentional and some of it was spontaneous. The Jack Mountain library has books and media, some fictional and some factual, describing the local landscape, history and inhabitants. A dedicated student would be well equipped to write a college level paper on the local culture using just these materials. A more spontaneous sort of person could walk away with a smattering of anecdotes to tell about the North Maine Woods, just by having spent time at the school, as there was a steady stream of local people visiting camp. Some came as day students, some came to work with us, and others just stopped by to visit; they all had a story to tell and they all added to the sense of community fostered at the school.

- Sustainability. The school is the epitome of sustainability; and plans are underway to make it more so in the future by raising food on site. While I was there, a one acre section was cleared and a green manure crop was planted to prepare it for the addition of a vegetable garden

and fruit orchard next summer. Wild foods are used whenever they are available. We enjoyed: berries, apples, salad, Jerusalem artichokes, mushrooms, mussels, cattails, and meat from the local landscape. They generate their own power, collect rain water, and compost all compostable waste. Cans and bottles are taken to the local recycling center. The sanitation system used is elegant in its simplicity and contributes to the fertility of the land by returning valuable nutrients to the soil.

- Self. This aspect of the curriculum was not some new age concept of spiritual self-awareness; we were encouraged to notice what we needed to be comfortable physically. We were often asked about our energy levels. It made me very aware of what tires me easily as opposed to what activities I can sustain for long periods without rest. We learned that it is important to avoid dehydration, sleep deprivation, and hypothermia and how to create a micro-climate that prevents all of these. It may seem overly simple, but these conditions can be difficult to attain in a survival situation, and likely won't be achieved without a solid plan conceived of before you run into trouble.

Leadership and Teaching Skills

Leadership

I thought about what I would write in this paper often while I was in Maine. One evening while sitting inside the school house near the end of the course reviewing the required objectives once again, I realized that we had not had "leader of the day," nor had it been discussed. I asked Tim about it and he said we weren't going to be doing it because our small class size would make the exercise too contrived. He also told me that a lot of what he does has more to do with managing people than it does with leadership. He also said that managing people is an important

skill to develop for successfully leading groups in the outdoors (personal communication, October 2010). He pulled a book he'd written off a nearby shelf and showed me a page titled "Leadership vs. Management" and I've included it here:

There's a difference between outdoor leadership and outdoor management. Management is when you ensure people carry out predetermined tasks leading to a defined outcome. Managers aren't looking for innovation. They're there to ensure things get done according to a preexisting plan. When we're cooking a group dinner over a campfire in a remote location, we often break up the tasks to spread the work among the participants. Specific people accomplish specific tasks. That's management.

Leaders empower their followers and give them input into the process, the goals remain, but every step of how to get there isn't mapped out, or if it is, it can be changed. To use the analogy of the campfire dinner, a leader might discuss what the available foods were and then decide as a group the best way to prepare them. Or maybe the leader would begin making the meal and then encourage the others to participate if they were interested. In this role the leader inspires others to try, experiment and innovate. Leadership has a strong connection to learning. Good teachers combine management and leadership because they challenge their students to solve problems and come up with solutions while working toward both specific and general goals. Much of what passes for outdoor leadership is actually

management of people in the outdoors. I think the difference is important to note.

(Smith, 2010)

Teaching

On the Jack Mountain website is a college paper that was written by another student from a semester length course. The author of the paper speaks so highly of Tim so often in his paper that I joked to Tim about what an apple polisher that student must have been. I also went on to say that my paper would not focus so much on the instructor, but rather the content of the course. Now that I am writing about my experiences in Maine, I find it impossible not to be every bit as complimentary as the other student was.

Tim strips complex tasks to their essential elements, so that they become easy to understand. Better than that, he taught me to do the same. I took a bushcraft course at another well known outdoor school a few years ago. The instructors at the school were all skilled practitioners of bushcraft who were also good at teaching, but all the material was presented in the same overly involved way you read about in outdoor books or see on all the survival television shows that have become so popular lately.

Nobody at the first school was trying to make the skills accessible. Looking back it seems that the person who designed their curriculum may have wanted it to be more difficult than necessary. Perhaps it was meant to solidify their position as the experts, or maybe they just wanted to be an indispensable part of my future in bushcraft for the economic benefit of the school. While I'm not sure of the motivation, I am now sure that

bushcraft doesn't need to be the ludicrously complex subject all the so called experts are pretending it is.

For instance, I made a bow drill fire lighting set at both schools. At the first school, we had to harvest a specific type of wood for each piece. They used a chart, from a book written by the school's proprietor, detailing which combinations of wood would work together for the construction of the drill and fireboard. The instructors there also tested the wood we selected for our bow by trying to break it over their knees. If it broke, you had to find another piece. At Jack Mountain we were taught that any dry, non-resinous wood you can make a mark in with a fingernail will make a good fireboard and drill. Thankfully, Tim did not try to break our bows over his knee, if it didn't break when we used it, it was deemed sufficient.

I also made feather sticks at both schools. Feather sticks are made to facilitate fire lighting in wet weather. They must be made from dry wood. According to both schools and any book on bushcraft I've ever read, you should harvest standing deadwood to make feather sticks as it stays dry on the inside, even in the rain. We never actually cut down any standing deadwood at the first school, nor did they show us how to identify it. I came to Jack Mountain not having the remotest idea of what standing deadwood looks like. Without that knowledge it doesn't matter how nice your feather sticks turn out because if you make them from wet wood they won't burn.

At Jack Mountain, we walked through the woods and Tim pointed out standing deadwood all the while telling us how he knew it was dry until he thought we got it. Then

we pointed out standing deadwood to him and explained how we knew it was standing deadwood until we thought we got it. Then we all cut down a piece of standing deadwood with our axes. Then Tim explained how we could double check the wood for dryness by touching it to our lips before we wasted time carving feather sticks out of wet wood.

At the first school, the feathers had to be beautiful and we were taught to lay them just so in a particular pattern. At Jack Mountain, they didn't have to be pretty so long as they worked. We were also taught to simply stand them up with the feathers facing inward. The biggest difference between these two methods becomes apparent when you are trying to light a fire in cold, wet weather. The simple way is significantly faster, which is not only good when you are cold and wet, but could (if you are wet, or the weather very cold) be the difference between life and death.

Tim made countless tasks easy to learn, but he's also honest. He said constantly during the course that real mastery of most of the skills would require practice and hard work. Wet weather fire lighting is a good example. Tim taught me how to choose dry wood and carve feather sticks. I can easily choose the right wood, but carving feather sticks efficiently requires real skill. I will only get better and faster at it if I make a lot of them.

Tim doesn't limit students with his ideas or expectations. The course is yours to do with what you will. He only facilitates. He explains things just enough to get you started and then creates a situation where you can learn the intricacies for yourself. There is no bad outcome at Jack Mountain. He is constantly joking, "If something goes wrong, blame the materials, blame

society, but most of all remember you are an innocent victim.” Another mantra of Tim’s is “Process not product.” He is patient. He will explain the same thing over and over without ever giving you the sense that he is bothered by the fact you didn’t get it the first ten times. It was freeing to be able to focus my efforts on getting what I wanted from the course without the pressure of what the instructor wanted. I realize he probably did have his own ideas about what I should learn or an opinion of what my limitations are, but he kept them well hidden.

Objective #2: Technical Skills

I enrolled in this course for the skills. I researched many schools and decided on Jack Mountain because I wanted to be an expert at the long list of skills that are taught in the semester course. In week three, when I realized I wasn’t going to be a bushcraft expert in nine easy weeks, I felt disappointed and angry. The Jack Mountain website doesn’t say you’ll be an expert by the end of the course, it simply lists the skills that are taught. So why did I make that leap in my mind? I’m still pondering that, but in the meantime I am working on mastering the skills I was introduced to while in Maine. A few of which I describe below (I chose in-depth coverage of a few instead of a superficial description of many):

Axecraft

Tim reminded us that the axe is the number one tool for survival in a boreal forest many times throughout the course. The more popular opinion that a knife is the most useful survival tool is just dogma. An axe can do anything a knife can do, but the reverse is not true (Smith, personal communication, 2010). I agree for the simple reason that cutting down a tree with a

knife is very labor intensive and not being able to cut down a tree could hinder the ability to create the micro-climate necessary for survival in the outdoors.

We were encouraged to purchase a quality axe for the course and I did. A good axe has a head forged from two pieces of steel with different tempers. The harder piece is used for the bit (blade) to help maintain a keen edge, while the softer piece is used for the eye. The best handle is made of maple and the grain should run front to back as you view the handle from the bottom. This allows stress from percussion to distribute the force evenly across the grain. Ideally the axe will be sized to the user with the handle being approximately arm's length. Keeping the blade sharp is imperative: we were taught to sharpen our axes using either a file or a round whetstone.

The following are general safety precautions we learned that apply to any situation when an axe would be used:

- Kneel to use your axe if you are inexperienced, tired, or it's dark.
- Never cut in your frontal zone.
- Always cut down, not up.
- Stay a handle's length back from the wood you are cutting.
- Never leave your axe lying on the ground.
- Always carry your axe at your side with the blade facing away from you, never on your shoulder (even on television).

We also learned the safe way for inexperienced axe users to fell, limb, and section trees; and how to split sections of wood. I will describe the proper way for inexperienced axe users to fell a tree here. Felling begins with selecting the correct tree. It needs to be a straight tree, whose

trunk you can encircle with one arm. It needs to be on flat ground and free from obstructions. Next, you should determine which way the tree will fall by seeing which way the tree is leaning, and plan an escape route that is at a forty five degree angle opposite from the tree's expected path. Begin your undercut in the direction the tree will fall. Then move to the opposite side of the tree and place the backcut slightly above the undercut to form a hinge. When the tree starts to fall, walk away using your escape route to avoid any potential hazards.

Shelter

We learned many things about shelter construction during the course like:

- Campsite selection
- Mechanisms of energy transfer
- Safe use of external and internal fires with shelter
- Basic concepts of shelter
- Design of specific shelters: open quad, hot coal bed, small hoop house, and improved

hoop house.

small hoop house. This was the first shelter we made. It consisted of a bed with a roof over the top. I found a clear area in the woods and checked the surrounding trees to make sure all were sound, living, and free from disease to prevent one of them falling over on me or my shelter. I selected a spot with a depression as this would allow the thin logs I chose as the foundation of my mattress to flex under my weight, thus adding to my comfort. I used logs that were already lying around and I did not bother to cut them to a uniform length, but did line them up so that one end was even. I planned to enter on this side and wanted an even "step," so I

wouldn't trip while climbing in at night. Then I cut a big bunch of fir limbs to make a springy mattress. The limbs are laid across the bed and need to be about a foot deep if it's going to be comfortable.

Now for the rafters, I cut eight alder saplings with my knife to form the hoops that give this shelter its name. The saplings are placed on either side down the length of the bed, one pair at a time, by sharpening the root ends and driving them into the ground like stakes. After each pair is fixed, the saplings are bent over the top of the bed and twisted together. The saplings' branches are woven over each other in as many different directions as possible to create the friction necessary to hold them together without any additional materials. Then a ridge pole, that is centered and runs the length of the bed, is fed through the center of the hoops for added stability. This process is repeated until you reach the end of the bed.

To finish, I draped plastic sheeting over the top of the shelter. It came down nearly to the ground on three sides with one left open for a door. To help keep the bugs out I draped a parachute over the doorway. I did not enjoy sleeping in this shelter because it was small and hot. I slept in it the minimum number of nights required.

large hoop house. (Figures 3-5) As above, a building site was chosen carefully for safety reasons. I chose a site with a depression, so that my bed would be high enough to sit on with my legs over the edge of it. I used eight logs arranged in a square with two on each side. The logs were layered up Lincoln log style with jam knots holding them in place. I laid thin logs across one side to make a bed, again choosing logs thin enough to flex, except for the one on the inside edge. I used a large one there so that I could sit on the edge of the bed without fear of breaking it.

I did saw them all to length this time, so that the walls of my shelter would be even. I made a mattress just like the one in my first hoop house.

Next came the roof, alder saplings were harvested and twisted together as before. I reused the plastic sheeting and parachute from the first house, but had to add an additional piece of plastic because the first one was not wide enough. I used duct tape for this and for patching the many holes that were in the second piece of (used) plastic. Lastly, I made a bracket down one side with space for storage on one end and a composting toilet on the other. I loved this shelter. I slept there most of the course and I felt more at home there than I do where I live now. I hope to build another home for myself in the future.

open quad pod. This was a simple shelter reminiscent of a tipi that has not been enclosed all the way around. We built these in a large clearing as we used them with a fire. I used four logs I found lying around. They were long enough to create a roof over a full length bed built on the ground. They were held together by a piece of string tied with a clove hitch knot. The cover was a parachute. The bed was made from thin logs and fir boughs just like the previous two beds, except that I used a thick log laid crossways at either end to raise my mattress off of the ground.

The big difference with this shelter was that it would be warmed by a fire. To reduce the amount of work and natural resources used, I built this shelter directly across from another student's so that we could share a fire. We were each two paces distance from the fire. We collected a lot of wood. We were told to get "twice as much as we needed, and then double that." (Smith, personal communication, Sept 2010) We stacked it close to our shelters so that we would not have to get up to add wood during the night.

When we went to bed that night, we lit a roaring fire the full length of the open sides of our shelters. Unfortunately, it was very windy that night. So many sparks were landing on me, that at first I was too nervous to go to sleep. It was not a restful night. I was sweating or freezing all night, although I guess I did sleep quite a bit because I only had to add wood to the fire twice—much less than the other student. This may sound lazy to the uninitiated, but among old time trappers in the North Maine Woods, adding wood to the fire during the night the least number of times is a point of pride.

hot coal bed. This is best on a clear night because there is no roof. A shallow trench, the length and width of the person who will sleep there, is dug in the ground. A fire large enough to fill the entire trench and burn for several hours is built. When the fire has burned down to embers, they are covered with the dirt that was removed earlier. Fir boughs are laid over this to provide cushion and to prevent burns. You sleep directly on the boughs with or without a blanket.

I tried building this shelter twice. The ground did not heat up sufficiently to allow me to sleep in the near freezing temperatures either time. It could not be determined whether this was due to evaporative heat loss (the ground was soaked due to weeks of rain) or whether the dirt at the site I chose was the wrong consistency.

Pack Basket

weaving the bottom. (Figure 6) To start us off, we were told the dimensions of the bottom of the molds we would use to make our baskets (mine was 11X7 inches). I made a template this size using a piece of scrap lumber. Next we measured and cut commercially

procured weavers (The length you use depends on the size of your mold). We marked the center of each one with a pencil. Then we weaved a “placemat” using a basic over-under weave. You could start with three vertical and one horizontal and add weavers working out to the edge of your template if you were unsure of how many weavers were needed to make a “placemat” the size of your template, but we were told to use seven down and five across. There was space in between the weavers, which means tiny items may drop out of the basket, but which makes it much easier to weave (Schneider, 1972). We were careful to line up the center marks we had made, so that the weavers were the same length coming out of each side of the “placemat.” Finally, we had to adjust it so that it was the same size as the template. Too small and the mold wouldn’t fit inside: too large and the basket wouldn’t have a pleasing shape.

affixing the basket stands. My basket stands atop two pieces of alder sapling. I carved them flat on one side, chamfered the ends, and carved two grooves about one inch from each end and about half an inch deep. (These grooves are to accommodate a harness, thus turning a basket into a pack basket.) Next, I cut lengths of wood for the inside of the basket. These lengths would be attached to the alder pieces with the basket sandwiched in between. Using a hand drill, hammer, slating nails and burrs (also called, roves) I riveted the pieces together.

weaving the sides. (Figure 7) Before the sides could be started, the mold had to be inserted. The pieces for the mold were assembled inside the basket. A strap was placed around the top piece so that it could be yanked out later to remove the mold. The pieces of the mold were screwed to a board to hold them together and the weavers were laced under a string tied around the top to make the job of weaving easier. I split one of the original weavers coming up

the side in two as an uneven number makes weaving the basket less complex. I cut a taper on one end of a weaver and soaked it a few minutes in warm water to soften it. Then the process really got going. Weave in and out in a simple over-under pattern, all the while pressing down on the horizontal weavers, while pressing in on the verticals to follow the shape of the mold till you get near the top.

finishing the top. The mold must be removed before the final inward curve of the basket. Once the mold is removed, the final few inches are woven. Then each row of weavers is pushed down. Next, cut every other weaver off with shears to create an even top. The last step before putting on the inner and outer rims is bending the weavers, left long in the previous step, over and tucking them inside the basket. My inner rim is a weaver and the outer rim is red osier dogwood twigs. I held them in place at the top of the basket with clamps while I whip-stitched the top with thin pieces of a weaver I split for that purpose. The stitches go over the rims and between the spokes. It is done twice, first in one direction and then in the other, to create an “X.” (Figure 8)

Objective #3: Communication and Team Building

The directions I received from Western State College about what to include in this paper state that “Good communication is essential for a successful course.” I agree, but I cannot as suggested, “describe my groups attempt to communicate well and become a team.” There were no false starts, everybody got along well from the first day to the last. I wondered about this often during the course. I am a military veteran and have a wealth of experience in being thrown into intimate living situations with complete strangers. There is usually a pattern these

relationships follow that consists of about three weeks of perfection during which people are on their best behavior followed by a period of readjustment when everyone reverts to their normal behavior. Once people start acting naturally, alliances shift and animosity can become a problem between some. None of this happened at Jack Mountain.

A variety of factors created this idyllic circumstance. The maturity level of the participants, their motivation to achieve the course objectives, a sincere desire to connect with other like minded individuals, and have fun all played a part in the group's easy cohesiveness. All of the participants were at least thirty years old. Everybody was well versed in what behaviors wear on other people from years of spending time with others in a way you just can't know when you're twenty years old. All of the students were genuinely interested in learning bushcraft and when questions arose we all helped each other as much as possible, knowing that when we needed help someone else would return the favor. It was a rare treat to spend time with others who enjoy the outdoors as much as I do. The other students all said that they have friends and family who enjoy aspects of the outdoors like canoeing, fishing, camping, and so forth, but none of them want to be immersed in the outdoors the way we were during the course. This brought us all closer together from the first. Lastly, we all tried to have fun: it is easy to get along with others when you're having a great time.

Objective #4: Environmental Practices

Bushcraft is not possible without sustainability. Even though the word "sustainability" has gained a lot of attention in the popular press lately, it is a very old concept. Civilizations that didn't adhere to it vanished from the landscape when local resources (food) ran out. We're just

lucky (if you can call it that) that we've stumbled upon fossil fuels. We are currently using millions of years of the sun's stored energy to fuel our existence. We have also taken over as a species, commandeering large tracts of land for modern mono-cropping. (Quinn, 1997)

As a society, we've come to understand that it can't last, but so far all of our so called solutions are just treating the symptoms, not the larger problem. What is the larger problem? We all learned it in Biology 101: when food is in abundance a population will peak, the food supply will be exhausted, and then the population will crash. This does apply to people. We will reach a point when we can no longer increase the food supply and then our population will plummet. (Quinn, 1997)

Why am I saying this? I'm going to discuss the "Leave No Trace" (LNT) ideology and criticize it. Then I'm going to discuss some of the environmental practices in use at Jack Mountain and praise them. I will praise the latter because the planet would be better tomorrow if everyone collected rain water and everyone composted their human waste instead of defecating in the water supply. The same can't be said for the former. However, things like collecting rainwater and composting are only of temporary advantage because any ecological savings always gets used to increase the human food supply. This is not a topic that I wish to oversimplify, but I must, because to do otherwise would be outside the scope of this paper.

A popular subject at the large outdoor schools and college recreation programs right now is LNT.

"To get us all on the same page, leave no trace camping was developed in reaction to a growing number of people recreating in our national parks and other public lands in order

to preserve the integrity of the land for future visitors. There are seven main points: plan ahead, travel on durable surfaces, dispose of waste properly, leave what you find, minimize campfire effects, respect wildlife, and be considerate to other visitors. All of these are good examples of conscientious backcountry behavior, and I want to express that I don't think LNT is wrong by any means, it is a useful tool; especially when teaching young kids how to act in a wilderness setting." (Sveum, n.d.)

The tenet "leave what you find" is the most problematic of the seven. In order to comply, you are forced to carry what you need with you and for most this means hauling modern gear. And while this is keeping our national parks looking better than they otherwise would, it's not doing any favors for the air and water near the factories where camping equipment is manufactured. And what about the non-renewable resources used to produce these goods? (Sveum, n.d.) By camping LNT style you may minimize the impact where you camped, but your presence is painfully realized somewhere else. (Conover and Conover, 1995) This dilemma can be largely avoided by spending time in areas that are not ecologically sensitive.

This describes the location of the field school perfectly. Far from being ecologically sensitive, there are resources in abundance. Fewer animals may use the land because of the presence of people, but they were neither intentionally excluded through deliberate action, nor were they unintentionally excluded by thoughtlessness. Plants are harvested carefully, with enough left behind to ensure some will always be available. The school may be *changing* the local landscape, but it is not *harming* it. The specifics are outlined below:

- Wood. There are lots of trees near the school. The deadwood, both standing and fallen is the primary source of fuel. We built fires to warm ourselves, cook our food, heat water, and forge metal. Wood both seasoned and green, formed the basis of most of the things we made: all of the shelters we built, bow drill sets, burned bowls, bows, crooked knife handles, and netting needles. I even took a tree home with me to make a canoe pole out of later.

- Water. All of our drinking water was collected using the roof of the school house and rain barrels. We also used this water to wash our dishes. Most of the time, we carried water from the river to bathe. This helped to conserve the rainwater, which can be drunk without boiling, thereby saving wood.

- Soil. The nutrient cycle is intact. (Figures 9 and 10) The toilets at the school use composting as the disposal method. Human waste is deposited in buckets that are housed in a box fitted with a toilet seat. Individual deposits are covered with leaves or leaf mould. This eliminates odor and visual unpleasantness as well as streamlining the composting process. When a bucket gets full, it is exchanged for an empty one and set aside until it is convenient to add it to the compost pile. You can wait as long as you like because when you layered in the cover material between deposits, you created a miniature compost pile right in the bucket. We usually emptied about seven at a time. It's as simple as pouring the contents of the buckets on top of the compost pile, cutting grass with a scythe to cover, and scrubbing the buckets with a brush. It takes about two years to create compost that is safe to use on food crops. (Jenkins, 2005)

- Sun. It was used in many ways. We used it to heat water for showers by filling plastic bags made for this purpose commercially. When the water got hot we hung the bag from a hook

inside a wooden enclosure and used it to shower. We also used the sun to cook food whenever possible. We did this with a solar oven, which is basically an enclosure (to trap heat) with a glass lid (allows sun's rays in, but changes their length so they cannot escape) fitted with a reflector (to direct more rays into box). The sun also generated all of the electrical power used at the school. There is a solar panel connected to a moderator (to reduce voltage) which is wired to three batteries (two 6 volt batteries connected in series, connected to a 12 volt battery wired in parallel). The batteries are connected to an inverter that converts the direct current to the alternating current needed to energize the lights and a power strip.

Objective #5: Self-Growth

“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.” (Thoreau) Unlike Thoreau, I did not go to the woods to learn what they had to teach. I went to the woods to learn some skills and only stumbled upon the important part by mistake when I got lost in the woods on a canoe trip during week four. While lost I discovered that I did not care whether or not I found my way out of the woods. I remember thinking, while I started collecting logs to make a bed, that once it turned dark and cold maybe my perspective would shift, but I'll never know because Tim found me early and I suffered nothing more than the extreme embarrassment of getting lost in the first place. The woods have been my salvation. Not long after they led me to question what was missing in my life, they gave it back to me.

I spent the first 31 years of my life with a very high IQ. I was never a person with any particular talent, like singing or drawing or writing: I was just smart and I enjoyed it immensely. That life came to an end eleven years ago when I suffered a traumatic brain injury. Since then I have struggled not only with the loss of some cognitive abilities, skills, and memories, but also a loss of confidence. On a good day, not knowing what you are capable of is like being sixteen again. On a bad day, and at first they were all bad, it's terrifying. I haven't been terrified by my disability in a while, but I have been bitter about it. This bitterness persisted until the last day of the course when it suddenly vanished and I became my old deeply flawed, but very confident self once again.

For eleven years, I had failed to separate my needs from my wants (Smith, 2010). Many have written about living simply in order to learn "what are the gross necessities of life and what methods have been taken to obtain them. . ." (Thoreau), but I didn't think it applied to me because I thought I knew the value of living simply. My mistake was in failing to apply the idea of needs versus wants to myself, not just to material goods. My time in the woods led me to understand that this concept applies to me as a person as well. I will never be as smart as I used to be, but that's okay. I have as much brain power as I *need*, even if it's not as much as I *want*. What I have needed is confidence and nine weeks of meeting all my "basic needs with no infrastructure" (Smith, 2010) has given me not just the confidence I need, but all the confidence I could ever want.

Now that I have returned home, I am living a modern, complex life and the feeling that I'm not smart enough does creep up on me all too often. My head hurts and I lose the ability to

think clearly too early each day. When I look at the log book I kept while living in the woods, I notice that my memory of that time has begun to fade already. In the past, these things would have devastated me, but not now. Now, I am better. Since returning home, I have done many unpleasant things that I normally struggle with and I have been fine. People treat you better when you're confident and it allows me to be more pleasant in return. I got so much from the course, but the confidence alone would have made it worthwhile.

While I am very pleased with myself, the same cannot be said for my life. Eleven years of doing the expected and pleasing others because I was afraid to do otherwise have taken a toll. The course is over and now the hard work must begin. I had already begun making the transition to a career in the outdoors before the course started and I will continue with that. I have wanted to buy a piece of property in the country and live more sustainably for a long time. Now that I've experienced how rewarding that way of life is first hand, I know I can't let anyone keep me from it any longer.

I once told a friend that I'd rather get an "F" in a class that I had enjoyed, than "A" in one that I hadn't (although I wouldn't mind enjoying a class and getting a good grade). I'm going to apply that principle to my life a lot more. I wanted this paper to include a Robert Service poem because my friends on the course read aloud a lot at night and both "The Men That Don't Fit In" and "The Remittance Man" were oft repeated. Unfortunately, there hasn't been a logical place to include either poem. According to APA formatting rules, I should place such things in an appendix. Except that I hate appendices and often don't get around to looking at

them, so I'm just going tack my favorite of the two on the end here where it won't be overlooked.

The Men That Don't Fit In

There's a race of men that don't fit in,

A race that can't stay still;

So they break the hearts of kith and kin,

And they roam the world at will.

They range the field and they rove the flood,

And they climb the mountain's crest;

Theirs is the curse of the gypsy blood,

And they don't know how to rest.

If they just went straight they might go far;

They are strong and brave and true;

But they're always tired of the things that are,

And they want the strange and new.

They say: "Could I find my proper groove,

What a deep mark I would make!"

So they chop and change, and each fresh move

Is only a fresh mistake.

And each forgets, as he strips and runs

With a brilliant, fitful pace,

It's the steady, quiet, plodding ones

Who win in the lifelong race.

And each forgets that his youth has fled,

Forgets that his prime is past,

Till he stands one day, with a hope that's dead,

In the glare of the truth at last.

He has failed, he has failed, he has missed his chance;

He has just done things by half.

Life's been a jolly good joke on him,

And now is the time to laugh.

Ha, ha! He is one of the Legion Lost;

He was never meant to win;

He's a rolling stone, and it's bred in the bone;

He's a man who won't fit in.

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Figure 3. Large Hoop House Frame. This picture shows the completed frame and the partially completed bed from my little house in the woods.



Figure 4. Large Hoop House Frame With Alder Rafters. This picture shows the completed frame, bed (without the bough mattress), and the alder saplings twisted together to form the arched rafters.



Figure 5. Home Sweet Home: Completed Hoop House. This shows my little house fully built.



Figure 6. A Pack Basket in the Earliest Stage of Development. Student weaving the “placemat” or bottom of a pack basket.



Figure 7. Weaving the Sides of a Pack Basket. In this picture you can see the mold inside the basket, the stand (very bottom of basket), and the first few rows of weaving up the side of the basket.



Figure 8. My Finished Pack Basket. The basket is done complete with beautiful red osier dogwood rim.

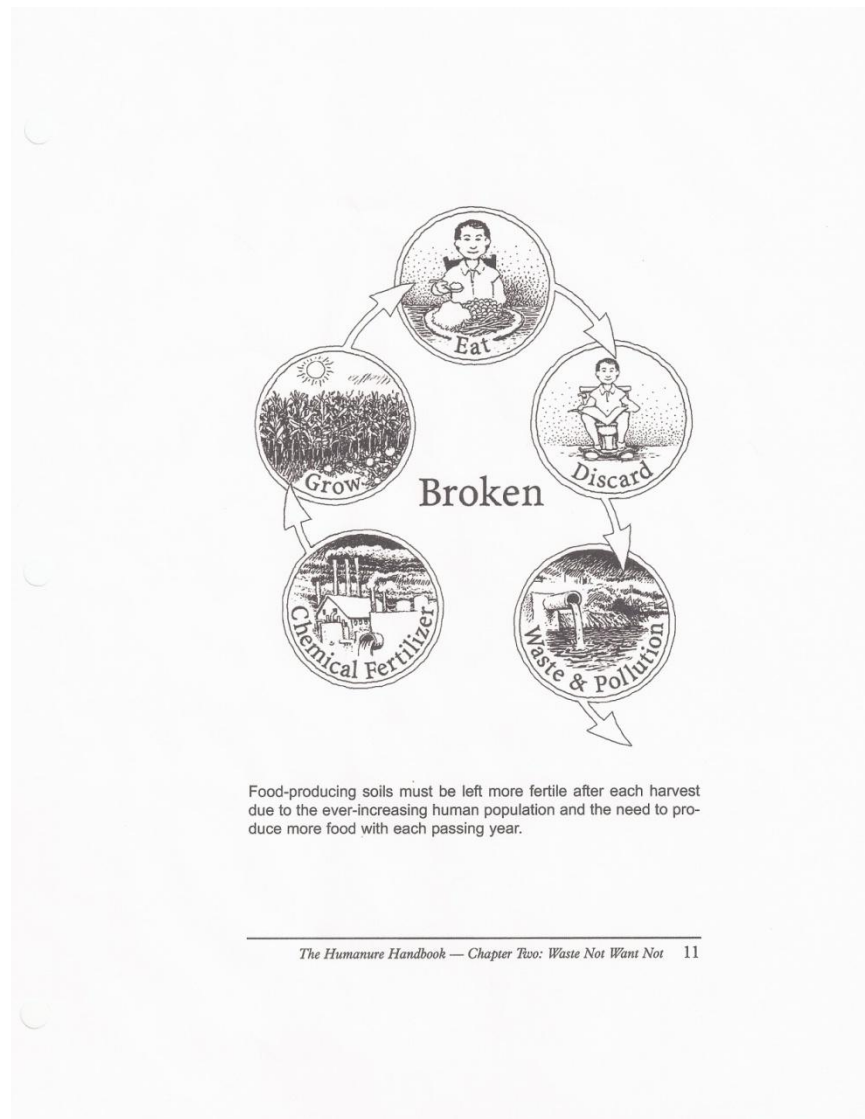


Figure 9. The Broken Soil Nutrient Cycle. This is what occurs every day around most of the developed world. Our drinking water is polluted, the soil is robbed of vital nutrients, and poisons are added to the cycle to “fertilize” our food. Reprinted from “The Humanure Handbook” by J. Jenkins, 2005, p. 11. Copyright 2005 by Joseph C. Jenkins.

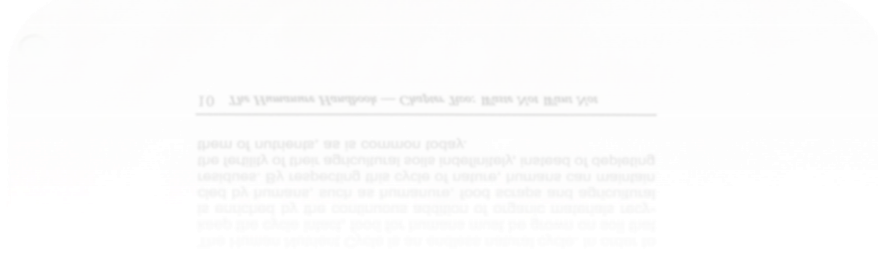
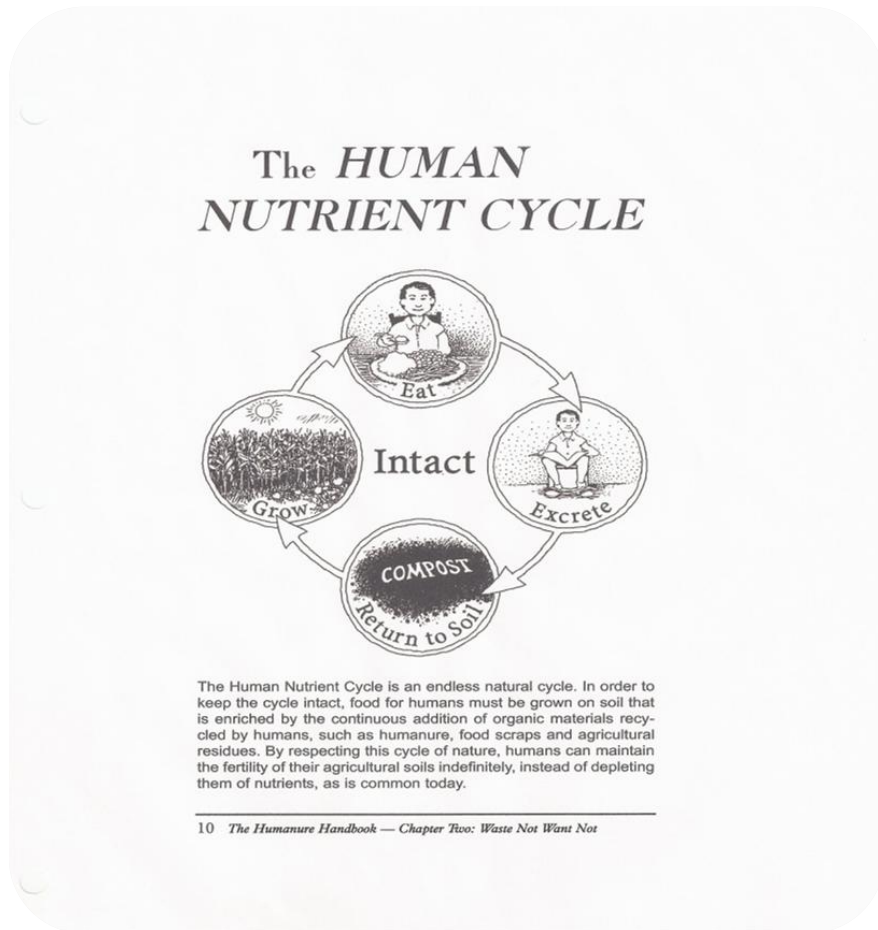


Figure 10. The Intact Nutrient Cycle. The energy stored by the sun in food is returned to the earth after we are finished using it. Reprinted from “The Humanure Handbook” by J. Jenkins, 2005, p. 11.

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