

# Defining Traditional Camping

*Compiled by David Wescott, 2016*

## Traditional Camping

*"When the skills of the Golden Age of Camping meet the 21st century."*

*"Traditional Camping moves through time."*

**Traditional Camping** is the adaptation of tools and techniques reminiscent of the classic style used to camp in a modern world.

### **Traditional Camping is:**

- romance with tradition that connects us to our heritage.
- skills and knowledge documented by the masters of the old style.
- a viable alternative to contemporary/emerging technologies.
- retention of skills and techniques over convenience and security.
- a reconnection of skills with place.
- a merging of past, present and future.

### **Traditional Camping**

**Stylish • Nostalgic • Idyllic**

### **Elements of a Traditional Camp.**

- **A healthy merging of classic style with emerging technologies.**
  - **Woodsy style mixed with a post-modern outdoor ethic\*.**
- **Preference for styles and materials reminiscent of the old style.**

### **TC-CC - Shared Sensibilities**

- **Carbon steel, wood, cast iron, cotton, wool and silk.**
  - **The golden glow of lamp light.**
  - **Preference for edged hand tools**
    - **Campfire and woodsmoke.**
- **Admiration for items labeled "handmade".**
- **Honest skepticism of trends and fads.**

*We define Classic Camping as recreational camping methods used between the 1870's and 1920's. After the American Civil War, people started to take to the woods such that by the turn of the century camping had gone from an occupational activity to an avocational passion. Camping had become a recreational pastime.*

Many of the recreational camping methods were influenced by occupational camping methods as may have been used by explorers, soldiers, or surveyors. These people were the product and gear testers of the day. And for these testers, their lives truly depended on the gear they chose. If they used an item it most likely performed well.

Nature awareness was integral to the experience of the early recreational campers. The explorers, surveyors or soldiers, who influenced recreational camping, lived with little gear and they relied quite heavily their knowledge of nature. Their nature awareness was quite keen. When you are aware of the gifts of nature, nature is no longer a place that is wild and feared but is place that comfortable and home. Nature awareness is also an integral part of Classic Camping. The studying of nature becomes a reason for camping and living comfortably in nature is a reason for studying nature. These two go hand in hand.

### **Classic Trail Camping**

Classic Trail Camping is inspired by the scouts, explorers and pioneers of the 1800's in the Americas. These people were able to carry simple and basic gear due to their knowledge of nature. Their knowledge allowed them to be comfortable and at home in nature with very little accoutrements. They knew more and carried less. After the Civil War, Americans began to camp for enjoyment rather than as part of an occupation. They camped for various reasons but primary among them was the belief that being in nature had positive benefits for the mind, body and soul.

Early authors of camping how-to books were interested in helping people reconnect with nature. They wrote of knife craft, fire craft, shelter craft, camp craft, pack craft and navigation. The books of the day provided wisdom for making simple kits for camping using resources of the day. Fabrics were made from plant or animal fiber, and a knife and ax were the main tools. Bedding was a blanket and some blanket pins. And a camp fire was the primary means of cooking. These simple ways continued up into the 60's and 70's. Books written in the 70's were still instructing campers on how to make their own gear. This is Classic Trail Camping.

Though trail camping gear has changed significantly in the last 30-40 years the reasons of being in nature – the positive benefits for the mind, body and soul – have not.

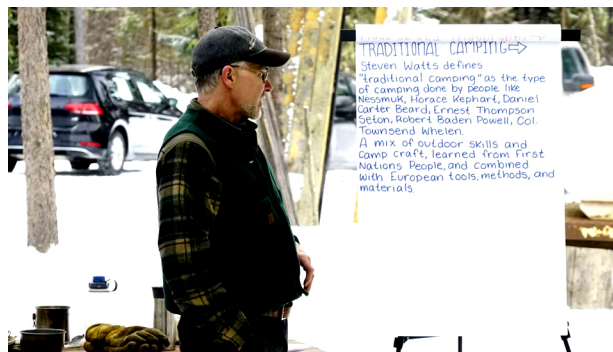
**Jeff Sanders - Welcome to the Desert DAWN Blog – 2012**

### **TRADITIONAL CAMPING – Dale Kiselyk**

Steve Watts defines “traditional camping” as the type of camping done by people like Nessmuk, Horace Kephart, Daniel Carter Beard, Ernest Thompson Seton, Robert baden-Powell, Col. Townsend Whelen.

A mix of outdoor skills and camp craft, learned from first nations people, and combined with European tools, methods, and materials.

Re-enactors likely fall into this category.



*I disagree with the last sentence – Classic Camping is the realm of the re-enactor. DW*

## Why Teach / Learn Traditional Camping - A Rationale - 5 Tenents

- I. Traditional Camping requires added skill and knowledge.
- II. Traditional Camping fosters a reconnection with Nature.
- III. Traditional Camping encourages awareness of local impact.
- IV. Traditional Camping builds a bridge to our past.
- V. Traditional Camping is a beautiful way to camp.

---

### I. Greater Skill Competence - The Created Anachronism

- Intervention vs Innovation
- Innovation for Extremes
- Tradition vs Fad
- Creativity
- The Thinking Man's Sport

### II. Reconnects Us To Nature - Meets the demands of a natural affinity

- X-Ray Art - Tipi/Laavu, Snowshoe/Canoe, Animals,
- Natural Materials - Beauty
- The Sublime

### III. Awareness of Impact - Directly related to and informed by PLACE

- *A working knowledge of the land*

### VI. Connects To Our Heritage - Bridges to The Past

*Anachronism* - a thing belonging or appropriate to a period other than that in which it exists, especially a thing that is conspicuously old-fashioned...not appropriate for our time.

- Where did these skills come from?
- Why did we lose them?
- How can we get them back?
- Is that appropriate/needed?

### V. Viable Alternative to Contemporary Ethics - "Style is Everything" -

- The more you know, the less you need.
- Style vs Ethics
- Hand Made - hands-on activity

### Why People Don't Use Traditional Camping Skills?

- Past Negative Experiences With Classic Gear
- Bias Through Hegemony
- No Frame of Reference For Judgment

# WHY TEACH TRADITIONAL CAMPING?

*David Wescott, 2017*

## *Traditional Camping Objectives*

### COGNITIVELY

- Define the field - What is Woodcraft, Classic/Traditional Camping
- Recognize the pioneers - both historic/contemporary
- Comprehend the history of our unique American camping tradition
- Establish a personal context - A Manifesto
- Re-define your learning with a post-modern view - Deconstruction

### AFFECTIVELY

- Appreciate the context that is the foundation of our camping heritage
- Respect those who were/are the pioneering leaders in the field
- Become confident in working with edged tools and natural/upcycled materials
- Develop a crafting ethic for each skill set and subset
- Cultivate a relationship with the wild-land handiwork of the Creator

### EXPERIENTIALLY

- Use a variety of edged camp tools to create projects
- Incorporate natural and upcycled materials into camp projects
- Make 1 practical item per skill set
- Create and live in a model camp using classic style and techniques
- Apply the skills learned in a field setting

2/2017

---

## **3 AXIOMS of Traditional Camping**

- Traditional Camping skills and knowledge are – with proper instruction and mitigation methods - a viable alternative to modern camping pursuits.
- Traditional Camping skills are a continuum of a uniquely American tradition – the Frontier Connection
- Traditional Camping is the adaptation of tools and techniques reminiscent of the classic style used to camp in a modern world.

## 4 Pillars of Traditional Camping

- *Campcraft*

*Skills used in camp and on trail to live safely and comfortably in the outdoors.*

- *Woodcraft - Bushcraft?*

*Skills and knowledge applied to live simply and harmoniously with the outdoors. A working knowledge of the land.*

- *Woodlore - Woodsmanship*

*Skills and techniques informed by the land.*

*Wisdom gained from “knowing” the land: mainly natural history coupled with practiced technique.*

- *Trailcraft - Fieldcraft*

*Skills for the moving camp. Includes both what is done in camp - campcraft - and the skills needed to negotiate the field in order to get to camp - Canoe - Tramp - Horse - Winter - 2 Wheel - 4 Wheel*

## 5 Key Skills-Sets

- *Toolcraft*

*The proper use and maintenance of common camp tools – primarily edged tools.*

- *Firecraft*

*The production, use and care of the open flame for cooking, heating and lighting.*

- *Cookcraft*

*The storage, preparation, serving and clean-up of a camp meal. Hearth Management.*

- *Bindcraft*

*The use of manufactured or field expedient fibers for practical camp & field applications.*

- *Sheltercraft*

*Mastery of items used for the comfort and safety of the human body in an outdoor setting.*

### **3 Skills Sub-Sets**

- **Campcraft/Woodcraft Skill Sub-Sets**
  - **Fieldcraft Sub-Sets**
  - **Trailcraft Sub-Sets**

## - Rustic Elegance - *Steve Watts*

The Woodcraft Camp style is defined not so much by a collection of hard-and-fast rules, but rather by a set of woodsy principles and preferences that lead us naturally to make certain choices in our gear and practices:

- **The woodcraft camper tends to prefer an open-face shelter over the closed-in environment of a wall tent, a wedge tent or pyramid.**

*“It admits of a bright fire in front, without which a forest camp is just no camp at all to me. I have suffered enough in close, dark, cheerless, damp tents... This is why I discard all close, canvas tents.”* Nessmuk, *Woodcraft*

The masters of Classic Camping in the Golden Age were comfortable and experienced with a variety of tents used in a variety of camping styles from tramping to campaigning. Yet, when camping in the Woodcraft Style they all had their favorite open-faced shelters: Nessmuk and his Shanty Tent, Warren Miller and his Forrester, Townsend Whelen and his Hunter’s Lean-to, Dan Beard and his Campfire Tent, and Horace Kephart with his George/Tarp Tent. Even Henry David Thoreau, the sage of Walden Pond, preferred “a shed-shaped tent...like a Yankee-baker” designed to “catch and reflect the heat” allowing “you to be drying while you are sleeping”.

- **The woodcraft camper looks to the open fire not only to warm his shelter, but prefers it to the camp stove for cooking.**

*“No matter where the old camper may be, no matter how long a time may have elapsed since last he slept in the open, no matter how high or low a social or official position he may now occupy, it takes but one whiff of the smoke of an open fire, or one whiff of the aroma of frying bacon, to send him back again to the lone trail... There is no use talking about it, there is no use arguing about it, there is witchcraft in the smell of the open fire, and all the mysteries and magic of the Arabian Nights dwell in the odor of frying bacon.”*

Dan Beard, 1920

He is the master of fire lays—the trapper’s fire, the reflector, the tipi, and the council fire. He can build a fire in the rain, the snow or the wind. He can start it with one match—or to draw himself more closely to the fires of the pioneer past, he might choose to light it with flint-and-steel .

- **The woodcraft camper’s kit might be lightweight if tramping, or middleweight if travelling by other means-- but never cumbersome or overbearing. There is a “just enough” and a “just right” quality about his gear—making for an efficient and comfortable, if somewhat Spartan, camp.**

*“An old campaigner is known by the simplicity and fitness of his equipment. He carries few ‘fixings’, but every article has been well tested and it is the best that his purse can afford. He has learned by hard experience how steep are the mountain trails and how tangled the undergrowth*

*and downwood in the primitive forest. He has learned too how to fashion on the spot many substitutes for 'boughten' things that we consider necessary at home...Ideal outfitting is to have what we want, when we want it, and not to be bothered with anything else."*

Horace Kephart, *Camping and Woodcraft*

He might carry a pot chain or a wire hook or two, but more often prefers to suspend his few simple tin or aluminum pots over the fire with handcrafted cranes, wooden hooks and dingle sticks. Leaving his cast iron at home, he prefers his bannock cooked in a frying pan and his biscuits baked in a folding reflector oven. Packs, pack baskets and a few wooden boxes carry his gear. Camp furniture may include a folding piece or two—or maybe just a handy log or stump. Camp light is by candle or kerosene, and the bed is most often at ground level—a browse bed, a stretcher bed or a couple of sheepskins.

- **The woodcraft camper's tool kit harkens back to pioneer days. The tomahawk, belt knife and clasp knife of the frontier scout are present in the hatchets, sheath knives and pocket folders commonly used by the masters of Classic Camping. To this kit the woodcraft camper might add a folding saw, a camp spade and a handful of tacks, nails and copper wire.**

*"The axe is the one necessary tool of the woodsmen; the axe occupies the same position to the wilderness man that the chest of tools does to the carpenter...the axe is almost a sacred tool..."*

Dan Beard, *The Book of Camp-Lore and Woodcraft*

With these simple tools the woodcraft camper can build and furnish a camp, cook his food and warm both body and soul. Demonstration of the proper use and maintenance of these tools is required for full initiation into the fraternity of the Woodcraft Camp.

.....

*"So from generations of wilderness men and women came the outdoor lore and wildwood wisdom of today...The jingle-jangle gadgets of some of our modern outdoorsmen would make our ancestral buckskin men turn in their graves. Their packs were light and their equipment meager, for these adventurous and picturesque wilderness men depended upon their skill and ingenuity in woodcraft rather than upon a lot of 'things'...Let us, then conjure up these wilderness men of the past...Let us ask them to sit with us in council around the campfire. And in the shifting ghostlike wreaths of the smoke we may catch glimpses of them in fringed buckskins with tomahawk and long rifle."*

Ellsworth Jaeger, *Wildwood Wisdom*

.....

***Welcome to Woodcraft Camp***