

# Traditional Camping

## A Syllabus of Readings and Assignments

By David Wescott, 2017©

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### Case Study #4 - The Importance of Traditional Woodcraft

*When I was a boy I hungered beyond expression for just such information as I have tried herein to impart. It would be a great joy to me if I could reach and help a considerable number of such heart-hungry boys tormented with an insatiate instinct for the woods, and if I fail of this, I shall at least have the lasting pleasures of having lived through these things myself and of having written about them.*

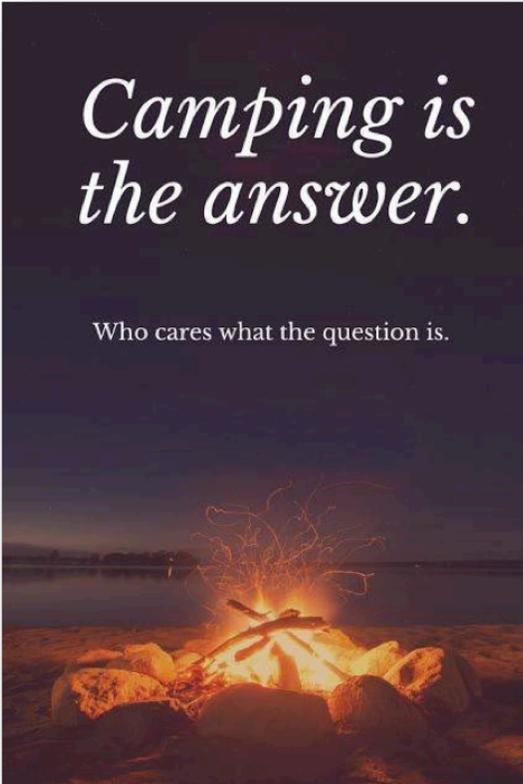
Ernest Thompson Seton, 1912

*Preconceived notions, especially when one is fairly brought up in their influence, are most difficult to shake off.*

Stewart Edward White, 1907

From 2002-2004 I had the opportunity to be a graduate advisor to my friend and former employee, Paul Van Horn. Paul was attending Prescott College and writing a Master's Degree thesis entitled *Woodcraft: A Traditional Outdoor Living Skills Curriculum*. It was a groundbreaking attempt to establish a rationale for the revival of traditional camping skills as an alternative to contemporary adventure education pedagogies. Over the 2 years I advised Paul as he created 5 study packets to support his thesis. The most refined packet was #5 titled *The Importance of Traditional Woodcraft Skills*.

Each packet required a critique and response from the advisor. I know I made Paul suffer, but he hit on one of my passions and a subject I had been researching for years. Reading the papers and then responding to them made me work as well. Each paper took about a week to read and respond to. Here is the introduction to my critique of Paul's "Importance" paper.



*Camping is  
the answer.*

Who cares what the question is.

*This was a great paper, but could lead you into the trap that I think needs to be avoided at all cost. The objective presentation of this material, well researched and fully supported with quotes and research, is vital. Like I said before, this is an issue that can be attacked on a number of fronts that would be roundly supported by the masses. They are well indoctrinated and are easily swayed when the issues are addressed with quick fix slogans and the PC idea of preservation...and especially if it can all be done without inconveniencing or disturbing their own way of doing things.*

- 1. My most important reaction to this paper is that it needs to be supportable and provable. You have made a number of seminal statements that stand alone without the evidence they need to support them.*
- 2. There is a critical need for supporting research or at least some type of supporting material that stands up to the LNT "mantra". What are the real costs of the "Leave No Trace" "ethic"? Are traditional tools, materials and techniques any worse/better? What are the foundations of thought/marketing that have gotten us where we are today?*
- 3. The concept of "Place-Based Education" has no better process for implementation than traditional woodcraft. You have addressed the idea, but it's a hot topic that needs to be addressed further. The sheer breadth of knowledge that can be gained, as well the structuring of experience that enhances the intrinsic motivations for the learner to continue learning (both depth and breadth) is served well through woodcraft. One way is to address the two fields that you have included, and by using words from their literature, show how woodcraft is a common ground for both.*
- 4. We need to keep this idea in the forefront, or we're looking for trouble - **Woodcraft is a viable alternative to vs. woodcraft is better than.** Don't get in a p-----g contest with the modern folks. Although there are innumerable arguments that can blow them out of the water, **the thesis needs to stop at - this is a viable alternative that needs to be recognized and celebrated.***

With this in mind, I approached the Recreation Management Department at BYU-I with the possibility of establishing such a curriculum. It was approved and now you are experiencing the results of the approval. After 7 years it is still a work in progress, but things are becoming clearer each semester it's offered.

*Camping In The Old Style*, which was first published in 2000, was also being revised and was reissued in 2015. It goes way beyond the initial premise of creating a curriculum that provided an alternative to contemporary adventure courses. *The Art of the Campaign* – the re-enacting side of the field – became a large part of the book because of the influence of Steve Watts. This class is an attempt to bring the argument back to safe ground.

**Start by reading pages 19-29 in *Camping In The Old Style*  
Read - *Lessons From Trees* By Mike Elrick (#2 in Resources file)**

## Why Should Woodcraft Be Taught In the Modern World of Outdoor Education

David Wescott, 2015

(Compare with Notes from Van Horn, 2002)

- I. Classic Camping requires skill and knowledge.
  - A. Survival skills
  - B. Campcraft, Woodcraft, Fieldcraft to Woodslore
  - C. Crafting
  - D. Gear construction
  - E. Soft skills: problem solving, creativity, improvising etc.
  
- II. Classic Camping fosters a reconnection with Nature.
  - A. Greater reliance on local resources
  - B. Greater awareness of local environment (i.e. weather, bugs, etc.)
  - C. Relates directly to specific location - place-based, bio-regional
  
- III. Classic Camping encourages awareness of local impact.
  - A. Localized impact
    1. opportunities to learn about, and improve local environment
    2. impacts are immediate and manageable
  - B. Reliance on renewable resources, simpler gear
    1. cotton, wool, leather
    2. simple, unprocessed foods
  - C. Less reliance on more/newer gear, far-off locales for recreation
  
- IV. Classic Camping builds a bridge to our past.
  - A. Part of our heritage
  - B. Insight into past lifeways and philosophies - context
  - C. Time tested - gear and techniques
  - D. Skills taught in sequence - bridges gap of Prim Tech and Tech-Rec
  
- V. Classic Camping is a beautiful way to camp.
  - A. Meets goals of contemporary AE pedagogy
  - B. A viable alternative to emerging technologies
  - C. Spans the distance between disciplines
  - D. Explores the world just beyond your doorstep
  - E. Meets the needs of the Revival Movement
  
- VI. Arguments against woodcraft include:
  - A. Creates impact
  - B. It's unnecessary - an anachronism

*Who hath smelt woodsmoke at twilight?  
Who hath heard the birch log burning?  
Who is quick to read the noises of the night?  
Let him follow with the others.  
For the young men's feet are turning,  
To the camps of proved desire and known delight.  
Rudyard Kipling*

**Optional Read - *The Importance of Traditional Woodcraft Skills*  
By Paul Van Horn**

<https://sites.google.com/site/wildernesssurvivalarts/the-importance-of-traditional-outdoor-skills>

- **Traditional Skills for the Modern Outdoorsman By Thomas Ray**  
<http://masterwoodsman.com/2014/traditional-skills-for-modern-outdoorsman/>

*It's not the gear, it's what the gear teaches.*

## **Excerpts from Van Horn**

- **Woodcraft offers greater skill, competence.**

*The woodcrafter, skilled in the use of simple equipment and improvisation, stands head and shoulders above his peers in terms of his ability to live in the wild.*

*Woodcraft gives one the opportunity to make their own equipment.*

*Crafting is another, related area in which woodcraft shines as an educational opportunity. Crafting toys, dolls, baskets, as well as the vital gear discussed in the preceding paragraphs not only increases skill levels, but also gives the crafter an intimate knowledge of the materials themselves.*

- **Woodcraft offers a greater sense of connection to nature.**

*As a means of connecting a camper to the immediate environment, woodcraft has no rival. ... Camping in this style also brings an acute awareness of the impact of one's actions.*

*Living close to the land provides an unparalleled opportunity to observe, and make conscious, thoughtful decisions about how to manage our impact on the land we use. Woodcraft teaches that we belong in the wild.*

- **Woodcraft increases awareness of impact.**

*Poorly executed woodcraft skills have undeniably created a vast amount of undesirable impact. But the impact is more a result of poor technique than of some inherent flaw in traditional equipment.... The point is simply that problems of environmental impact are not inherently rooted in traditional gear and techniques, but rather in the thoughtless actions of the camper, whether the year is 1950, or 2002. Poor technique is the culprit, and the answer is education, and constant reflection on technique in order to assure a balanced view of what constitutes truly sustainable impact.*

*Woodcraft, while perfectly suited for extended expeditions in remote areas, offers a world of excitement and learning close to home.... Most people know very little about their backyard. Woodcraft offers the key to new levels of learning that would change most people's perception of seemingly familiar places.*

- **Woodcraft provides an important connection to heritage.**

*Woodcraft offers insight into the lives and skills of past generations in a way that no textbook, lecture, or archeological dig ever could.*

*Woodcraft also offers important insight into the philosophies and lifeways of those who have come before. Crafting and wearing a pair of moccasins, for example, helps one understand how work was life, and life was work to the pre-industrial woodsman. The effort and skills that must be put into a deer hide to transform it into footwear are truly amazing, and the result is an extremely lightweight, flexible shoe admirably adapted to long-distance travel, and moving quietly and sure-footedly through the woods: Form and function match perfectly.*

*Traditional practices and gear offer a connection to the magic of a simpler time when life, work, spirituality and art merged seamlessly.*

- **Woodcraft meets goals adventure/environmental education.**

*Woodcraft must once again become the common language of all outdoor professionals. Woodcraft offers an incredibly empowering mode of interacting with the wild. Adventure and environmental educators would do well to master its lessons!*

*. Woodcraft may be seen as the bridge between the goals of adventure education (AE) and those of environmental education (EE).*

*In terms of the interpersonal goals of adventure education, the sense of empowerment, and self-efficacy that woodcraft offers is nothing short of life changing.*

*Finally, woodcraft skills offer a tremendous opportunity to bring people of different cultures together. Regardless of our cultural background, we all share common living skills.*

*Camping has two purposes: to make us acquainted with our own souls, and to renew our acquaintance with each other. To camp badly is to frustrate both.*

*Frank H. Cheley, 1933*

**Refer To: *Last Child In The Woods (2006)* and *The Nature Principle (2012)* By Richard Louv**

- **Shop Class As Soul Craft By Matthew Crawford, 2009**

- Heritage • Impact
- Competence • Connection
- Beauty • Accountability

## 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

## Rationale for teaching Traditional Camping at BYU-I

The graph on the following page will be discussed in class.

## WHY TEACH/LEARN TRADITIONAL CAMPING?

- Address the issues of babies and bath water -  
(I. Skill Competence)
  - Intervention vs Innovation      Innovation for Extremes
  - Tradition vs Fad Creativity - The Thinking Man's Sport
- Meets the demands of a natural affinity -  
(II. Connection)
  - X-Ray Art - Tipi/Laavu, Snowshoe/Canoe, Animals, Natural Materials - Beauty - The Sublime
- It is directly related to and informed by PLACE -  
(III. Awareness)
  - *Woodcraft is a working knowledge of the land* - Aldo Leopold
- Follows an evolutionary path -  
(VI. Heritage)
  - Prehistoric Training
  - Historic Foundations
  - Cultural Traditions
- "Style is Everything" -  
(V. Viable Alternative)  
The more you know, the less you need.

### Style vs Ethics

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

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

# Excerpts from Lessons From Trees

By Mike Elrick, 2003

From- Pathways: The Ontario Journal of Outdoor Education

*On the issue of pedagogical implications of traditional versus emerging equipment and techniques used in outdoor education, I present the following arguments:*

*1) **traditional techniques and gear** are better suited for comfortable extended wilderness trips with high school students;*

*2) **emerging technologies and techniques** based on low-impact camping and petroleum-based clothing are sending our students the wrong messages about ecological relatedness and sustainability; and,*

*3) traditional travel techniques and equipment create fantastic opportunities of experience enrichment through cultural and heritage connections.*

## Definitions - Traditional vs Emerging Technology

*What is the difference between “traditional” and “emerging” technologies ? How do they compare when used as a pedagogy ?*

*I recognize “**traditional**” as the equipment and techniques used by people who lived and traveled on a specific landscape prior to the use of motorized vehicles such as the motorboat or snowmobile.*

*The description of wilderness travel with “**emerging technology**” is much more complicated, but I will summarize several common elements. Cooking is mainly performed by gas cookstoves - food is often prepared from freeze-dried, pre-mixed packages - Clothing consists of mostly petroleum-based products such as nylon - Equipment is mostly plastic and aluminium-based - Packs are nylon - Sleeping is in nylon tents with aluminium or fiberglass poles*

### • **Traditional techniques and gear are better suited for comfortable extended wilderness trips than emerging technologies**

*This past winter, I honestly feel that without these methods and gear, with the clientele I have, leading a trip would have been unsafe... aluminum and neoprene snowshoe is the fastest selling new product on the market..I guarantee they would not have been functional on our Algonquin trip. The Algonquin-styled and shaped snowshoe, however, is perfectly adapted to all snow conditions in that landscape.*

*I remember hearing it said that, a long time ago, the canoe was created first, and then the land to have a perfect match. In my opinion, they should have included the snowshoe as well.*

- **Emerging technologies and techniques are sending the wrong messages about ecological relatedness and sustainability**

*Camping in the winter environment forces the reality of our reliance on and connection to the Earth's natural resources. Traditional winter camping demands that for each tent, seven live balsam trees must be cut for poles, green balsam boughs be used to cover the front of the tent and insulate the stove from the snow, and lots of firewood be gathered locally for the woodstove. It is "impact in your face." But the idea of leaving no traces by the use of a gas/propane stove is a lie. The ecological impact of fossil fuel extraction, refinement, packaging and delivery is far greater than using local sources of renewable wood.*

*What is critical, however, is to take those lessons back to our homes and our communities. Upon return from my wilderness trips my class begins assignments and a series of local field trips to explore our daily impacts of energy use and waste absorption. On average, 75% of my students, when asked, do not know what energy is used to heat their homes or where it comes from. We always make comparisons back to our winter camp. We look at renewable alternatives and energy conservation techniques that are sustainable. One of the most important lessons I feel we need to teach our students today is that we all have an impact on the Earth, but we have the opportunity to make choices about how much and where that impact occurs.... As educators, we need to forge the same relatedness with local, sustainable examples. We need to bring the lessons of wilderness relatedness home.*

- **Traditional travel techniques and equipment create enrichment through cultural and heritage connections.**

*I recently purchased a traditional anorak specifically designed for winter travel. When I put it on, a chill ran down my spine. I realized for the first time, I would be heading into Algonquin fully "biodegradable."*

*Skis and quinzhees were not of this land. No one has written about them from the past[but rather snowshoes and wood-heated tents].*

*Each succeeding generation takes up the work that is laid down by those who pass along, leaving behind them traditions and a standard of achievement that must be lived up to by those who would claim a membership in the Brotherhood and Sisterhood of the Keepers of the trail. (1931, pp. 25–26)*

*For me, these human links have forged a connection now not only with the land itself, but with people on the land.*

## **How Technology is Designed to Bring Out the Worst In Us**

Tristan Harris's company, Apture, was acquired by Google. Inside Google, he became unnerved by how the company worked. There was all this energy going into making the products better, more addicting, more delightful.

*I think the [traffic] metrics have created this whole illusion that what people are doing is what people want, when it's really just what works in the moment, in that situation... the products they make keep pushing us further toward distraction, toward busyness, to being always and constantly on call... We actually have to change the thing that we are exporting to the world, which is distraction, outrage, slot machine-style rewards, constant stimulation, social validation, making it harder for people to tell what's true... We're competing to go as fast as possible in domains where, given the impact, we ought to be going as slow as possible... everybody looking at how kids are interacting with this stuff sense that something is wrong. The main thing is to say it's not by accident. It's happening by design... there's a huge public health problem here.*

### **Six Declines of Modern Youth** **Kurt Hahn**

#### **Decline of Fitness**

due to modern methods of locomotion

#### **Decline of Initiative and Enterprise**

due to the widespread disease of spectatoritis

#### **Decline of Memory and Imagination**

due to the confused restlessness of modern life

#### **Decline of Skill and Care**

due to the weakened tradition of craftsmanship

#### **Decline of Self-discipline**

due to the ever-present availability of stimulants and tranquilizers

#### **Decline of Compassion**

due to the unseemly haste with which modern life is conducted  
or as William Temple called "spiritual death"

### **4 Antidotes**

- Fitness Training
- Expeditions
- Rescue Service
- Projects
- Manual Arts Training

**Camping and Wilderness are not synonymous. We need to  
teach people they can camp without "W"ilderness.  
Love It To Death - The Abbey Paradox**

**Traditional Camping is a viable Post-Modern Ethic.  
Traditional Camping is a resolution of the "frontier myth".  
Traditional Camping creates common ground.  
Classic Camping is a "radical" approach to life outdoors.**

**Refer to - Cliff Jacobson's *How Much Do You Know About Camping ?*  
Take the test and record you score. (#3 in Case #4 Resources)**

**rad' i kel 1.** of or pertaining to roots or origins; fundamental. Radical emphasizes the idea of going to the root of a matter, and this often *seems* immoderate in its thoroughness or completeness:  
*radical ideas; radical changes or reforms.*  
*Random House Collegiate Dictionary*