

Case Study #4 - Notes

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

Several days before my class and I departed for our five-night winter wilderness trip, a student asked “What are some of the advancements in this form of travel today?” “Well,” I began, “that’s a great question, one that I have been doing a lot of thinking about of late.” I went on to tell the story of the Boy Scouts Millennium celebration in Quebec where they hosted a huge winter camping gathering to celebrate the New Year. The Scouts had chosen to use large canvas tents with portable gas heaters. But it was so cold that the propane wouldn’t ignite. The kids became extremely cold, the celebration was abandoned, and the millennium was welcomed indoors rather than out. Thus, the word “advancement” raises some good questions.

We then departed on *our* winter trip and also met some extremely cold temperatures: two nights at -35°C and -40°C . Our tents were of a similar canvas, but our heaters were portable sheet metal woodstoves that got hauled in by toboggans and sleds. We had no problem starting those fires. And, oh, how those stoves glowed red with warmth while the trees popped in the Algonquin night. So are propane heaters a step forward or a step backward? All I know is that this question is one small snowflake in a winter’s storm of dialogue.

Mike Erlich – From *Lessons From Trees*

Do gear and practices impact program outcomes? If so; How?

Case Study Resources

- *Camping In The Old Style*, By David Wescott - Introduction pages 19-21
- *The Importance of Traditional Woodcraft Skills*, By Paul Van Horn
- *Lessons From Trees* By Mike Elrick
- *How Much Do You Know About Camping ?*
By Cliff Jacobson
- *How Technology is Designed to Bring Out the Worst In Us*, By Ezra Klein, 2018



* Text Questions to Consider:

1. The Introduction addresses 5 broad themes or reasons for why woodcraft skills should be taught. What are they ?

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

- I. Woodcraft offers greater skill, competence.
- II. Woodcraft offers a greater sense of connection to nature.
- III. Woodcraft increases awareness of impact.
- IV. Woodcraft provides an important connection to heritage.
- V. Woodcraft meets goals of adventure / environmental education.

2. Can the use of a certain type of equipment affect program outcomes ?

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.

3. What 3 arguments does Elrick cite as reasons for including traditional skills in a pedagogy ?

Therefore, 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.

4. What is the difference between "traditional" and "emerging" technologies ? 5. How do they compare when used as a pedagogy ?

First, some definitions: 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 such as the Coleman® 2-burner or Peak1®, or the more compact MSR® variety. Clothing consists of mostly petroleum-based products such as nylon, Goretex®, pile, and polypropylene. Equipment is mostly plastic and aluminium-based (such as ABS canoes and aluminium snowshoes). Packs are nylon with heavy-duty shoulder and waist straps. Sleeping is in nylon tents with aluminium or fiberglass poles, quinzhees or tarps, and food is often prepared from freeze-dried, pre-mixed packages. Summer travel is mainly by canoe or foot. Winter travel is by skis or snowshoes with backpacks.

These descriptions are by no means complete or totally accurate but one is able to develop a basic picture.

The idea of pedagogical implications of using traditional versus emerging equipment and techniques never truly came to be until I began to experience traditional winter travel.... I'm ready now for my first argument that traditional techniques and gear are better suited for comfortable extended wilderness trips.

6. What is "impact in your face?"

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.

7. How do traditional skills "bring the wilderness lesson home?"

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.

8. What are the main drawbacks to using woodcraft as a modern pedagogy ?

Many of their concerns have already been addressed in the preceding pages, but a few demand further elaboration. The first and foremost concern seems to be that of impact. It is important to realize that those at the vanguard of change to modern

techniques based their opinions on two things: Observations of heavily used areas, and observations of woodcraft tools and techniques used irresponsibly. Certainly, in heavily used areas such as national parks, recreation areas and campgrounds, and sensitive ecosystems, woodcraft techniques must be modified, and in some cases suspended.

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. Modern gear can be abused to even more devastating effect

9. How do these articles compare to the image of woodcraft portrayed in Turner's article in Case Study #1?

* Context Questions:

1. Who is Mors Kochanski ? *Northern Bushcraft*
2. What is a pedagogy ? *The method by which you teach*
3. Who proclaimed that "woodcraft is dead?" Is he right or wrong ?
Harvey Manning, 1972 Backpacking – One Step at a Time

Finally, I must directly address woodcraft's detractors. What of those who agree with Harvey Manning's assertion in 1972 that "woodcraft is dead" (Manning, 1972, p. 20)?

OPTIONAL READ: *The Importance of Traditional Woodcraft Skills*

By Paul Van Horn (#2 in Resources file)

- Traditional Skills for the Modern Outdoorsman By Thomas Ray

<http://masterwoodsman.com/2014/traditional-skills-for-modern-outdoorsman/>

Really Test Yourself: Extra Credit

2. Why is crafting mentioned so prominently in this paper?

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.

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.

Finally, woodcraft, while perfectly suited for extended expeditions in remote areas, offers a world of excitement and learning close to home.

The importance of the heritage that woodcraft represents must not be overlooked.

6. "Self-efficacy" is widely used in our field today. What does it mean?

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.

"interpersonal, and intrapersonel. Interpersonal relationships refer to how people get along in a group (two or more people). These include communication, cooperation, trust, conflict resolution, problem solving, leadership, influence, etc. Intrapersonal relationships refer to how an individual gets along with self. These include self-concept, spirituality, confidence, self-efficacy, etc."

Other Resources: We will discuss Kurt Hahn' *Six Declines* in Case Study #6. They are listed here as an example of what is being lost in our contemporary system of growing kids into adulthood. (#4 Resources file)

Elders Of The Tribe:

- Ernest Thompson Seton • Charles Eastman • William Hillcourt
- Dillon Wallace • Bradford Angier • Townsend Whelen
- Bob Henderson • Cliff Jacobson • Eric Sloane
- Elmer Kreps • Stewart Edward White • Andrew Bigelow Payne
- Frank Chelley • Phillip Fagans • Luis Henderson