

Primitive - Survival - Woodcraft - Bushcraft Skills: How They Compare

Compiled by David Wescott, 2005-2022

Primitive Skills and Bushcraft and survival and woodcraft and... etc are just labels...

EXACTLY!!!!

Bushcraft vs Primitive Skills

Surely bushcraft is primitive skills being re-hashed for the modern man. Yes it is easy to light fires it is also easy to have your tarp and hammock. You don't go out and find a cave or build a debris shelter every time, or do you. But I thought bushcraft was about honing skills of old, with modern back up. I for one want to learn how to make, and do old skills. But I still use paracord, I don't make cordage every time I need some.

From a [Buzardbushcraft.blogspot.com](http://buzardbushcraft.blogspot.com) discussion 2010

- *Bushcraft is using traditional and primitive skills, to live in harmony with nature.*
- *Bushcraft is both an amalgam of several disciplines and a "mindset."*
- *Where does a primitive skill blur into a modern skill, where does a primitive tool become a modern tool, its an evolution in most cases...I think primitive skills are preformed with primitive tools and that's what makes them primitive, bushcraft covers all skills both modern and primitive...*
- *Simply knowing how to use primitive skills is part of both bushcraft and survival, for times when you haven't got a ferro rod, or other modern equipment, handy.*
- *We all ended up having to agree to disagree as we really couldn't come to a unanimous conclusion.*

Bushcraft is an ethos not a skill-set. It borrows from a variety of skill genres and are recombines them in a variety of ways – thus making bushcraft hard to define. The common thread amongst UK bushcrafters is the look – forest green gear, Defenders – with skills ranging from traditional to modern, sedentary to journeying.

DW

Bushcraft vs Survival Skills

The term "bushcraft" is sometimes used synonymously with survival skills, but this definition does not encompass the full meaning of the word. Although there is considerable crossover, the idea of bushcraft is not just to survive but to live well, even thrive, in the wilderness through the use of traditional techniques from around the world.

[Bushcraftnorthwest.com](http://bushcraftnorthwest.com)

Ray Mears actually draws a pretty clear line between survival and bushcraft, even though they overlap a lot.

Survival

About coping with an emergency
 Short-term focus: staying alive until rescue or safety
 Driven by necessity and urgency

Bushcraft

About living well in the wild
 Long-term focus: thriving, not just surviving
 Driven by skill, knowledge, and enjoyment

Survival = getting through a bad situation.

Bushcraft = never getting into that situation in the first place.

BUSHCRAFT	SURVIVAL
Long Term Living	Overcoming Disaster
Use resources responsibly so there is some for tomorrow	Use whatever you can find to meet your immediate needs
Comfortable reliance on the resources available	Fight to make things do what you need them to do
Utilises	Manipulates
Focuses on natural resources	Tends to rely on man made equipment where possible
Works with	Fights against
Inspires awareness and creativity	Usually destructive due to desperation
Learns to live and cope with	Draws out extremes of character
It is built on Hope	It fights with fear
Ultimately sustainable	Ultimately non sustainable



Ten Cs of Survivability

Dave Canterbury – *Advanced Bushcraft*

As discussed in Bushcraft 101, the most basic kit items are based on the Five Cs of Survivability. For longer-term stays in the wilderness you can expand that checklist to Ten Cs:

- Cutting tools: knives, axes, saws
- Combustion devices: ferrocerium rod, lighter, magnifying lens
- Cover elements: seasonal clothing with outerwear, tarps, wool blankets, sleeping bag, emergency bivvy, hammock, small tent
- Containers: water bottles, canteens, nesting cook pots and pans
- Cordage: bankline, paracord, rope, webbing, mule tape

- Cotton materials: bandannas, shemagh, netting, cloth shards

- Cargo tape: duct tape (I prefer the Gorilla Tape brand)
- Candling devices: headlamps, candles, crank lights
- Compasses: your preferred brand along with a small backup like a quality button-style
- Canvas repair needle: wedge-style needle for repairing heavy materials

Do not forget to include any medications, including something to relieve an allergic reaction, and first-aid kit items.

WoodsmokeUK

Trailbreaker Bushcraft & Survival Course – 2 day - This two-day introduction to bushcraft and wilderness survival skills provides the perfect entry for developing your wilderness proficiency and knowledge of nature. Discover the necessary bush skills that enable you to strip down your kit to simple, rugged backwoods tools and equipment that, with knowledge and technique, can reveal the otherwise hidden possibilities in the landscape – for food, fire, shelter, and water. Develop the ‘tricks’ and master the secrets that open a doorway to nature’s larder, medicine cabinet, first aid kit, tool shed, and hearth. These skills begin an external journey in the self-sufficient style of rough-country travel and wild camping, and an inner journey of greater connection, awareness and understanding of the natural world.

Bushcraft vs Woodcraft Skills

Read - *Should Bushcraft and Woodcraft be Geographically Specific Terms?*
Masterwoodsman.com

Bushcraft Defined:

"Bushcraft is about surviving and thriving in the natural environment, and the acquisition of skills and knowledge to do so. Bushcraft skills include; firecraft, tracking, hunting, shelter building, the use of tools such as knives and axes, foraging, hand-carving wood, container construction from natural materials, rope and twine-making, and many others." - Bushcraft
- Wikipedia

Woodcraft — or Woodlore

"Denotes skills and experience in matters relating to living and thriving in the woods -- such as hunting, fishing, and camping -- whether on a short or long-term basis. Traditionally, woodcraft pertains to subsistence lifestyles, with implications of hunting-gathering. In more recent times, and in developed countries, it relates more to either outdoor recreationalism or survivalism." - Wikipedia.

Woodcraft first and foremost, encompasses "traditional" outdoor living skills: Skills that have historical roots in the indigenous, pioneer, and wilderness work cultures of North America. These skills by definition involve the crafting of a secure existence in the woods, and make use of simple, durable gear, and natural resources such as wood and stone to create the necessities (and luxuries) of life.... Woodcraft also implies a certain style rooted in the heritage of recreational camping that speaks of woodsmoke, buckskin, canvas and steel. This style means living with the

earth.... *The skills needed to provide for one's basic needs in the wild form the base of this knowledge.* **Paul Van Horn** *The Importance of Woodcraft 2000*

Where Definition Gets Complicated

Can the words listed in the skill-sets and sub-skills be used interchangeably? Yes. The beauty in defining them, however, is in the fact that mixed up language and confusion is now replaced with how the words relate to one another rather than how they replace one another.

Example – An iron crane and pot hangers are set up to cook over an open fire – *campcraft*. If you are in a mobile camp, you end up making a stick fire crane with pots hooks using a knife and local materials. This is an item of *campcraft* made in a *woodcraft* fashion – local materials and simple tools. The camp is influenced by the style of travel – *trailcraft* – requiring the use of local materials rather than transporting of a manufactured crane to camp. You would apply your skill in using edged tools – *toolcraft* - as well as your knowledge of local flora – *fieldcraft* or *woodsore* – to locate materials and craft the fire crane. DW

Confusing? Not once you learn the lingo. It's the same in any discipline. A skilled carpenter doesn't use a hammer to fix a plumbing problem. He is a carpenter, so he either calls a plumber or learns the plumber's trade and applies the right tools and techniques to get the job done. The duffer would simply bash the pipe with the hammer or cut it apart with a welding torch. It may do the trick, but lacks style.

Bushcraft and woodcraft are largely considered universally applicable skill sets rather than strictly geographically specific terms, though they have distinct historical and geographical origins. While the techniques themselves are often adapted to local environments, the core philosophy of thriving in nature remains consistent worldwide.

Geographical Origins

Bushcraft (UK/Australia): Historically associated with the Australian "bush," the term was popularized in the Northern Hemisphere by Ray Mears to describe thriving in natural environments using traditional skills.

Woodcraft (USA): Often used in North America to mean similar skills, woodcraft traditionally refers to skills specifically for living and thriving in woodland or forest environments.

Other Regions: Similar skills exist worldwide under different names, such as veldcraft (South Africa).

Conclusion

While the methods used must be geographically specific (e.g., using local plants and trees), the terminology of bushcraft and woodcraft should be viewed as broad disciplines of "knowing nature" that are applied regionally, rather than being restricted to a specific place.

ChatGPT

Brought To You By The Letter “B”

“Bushcraft is alive and kicking but it’s not necessarily going in the direction I would steer it,” admits Mears. “What I see a lot of is people wanting to show off with gimmicks and gizmos and tricks they’ve seen on YouTube, which isn’t nearly the same as hard-earned experience. I’d like to see more realism.” 1

“People who lived the old life had a knowledge built over generations of living on their landscape and environment and weather. They were cultures that valued elders’ wisdom, which is something that we’re not good at. It’s a very grown up pursuit.” 1

Referring to traditional cultures - “For a whole range of complex reasons it’s becoming more difficult to really see the detail of the older knowledge. You have to ask the right questions of the right people, and the right people are disappearing.”

Ray Mears, 2016

History is of value only to someone who takes seriously the notion that there are patterns in the past which may provide the present with nourishing traditions....a book is all history. Everything about it takes one back in time.....the book promotes a sense of a coherent and usable past. In a conversation of books, history, as Carlyle understood it, is not only a world but a living world. It is the present that is shadowy.....

We do not refuse to remember; neither do we find it exactly useless to remember. Rather, we are being rendered unfit to remember. ***For if remembering is to be something more than nostalgia, it requires a contextual basis – a theory, a vision, a metaphor – something within which facts can be organized and patterns discerned.*** Neil Postman

Traditional Bushcraft Modern Bushcraft Journey Bushcraft

The Militarization of Bushcraft

Conclusion

We are at a point in our outdoor world where a time for defining what we do and the rules for the game is needed more than ever. The Golden Age of Camping lasted well into the 1960s, but the demise of its skill-sets started way before that. With the explosion of interest and a return to the land ca.1924, nearly 20% of the US population was camping

The resulting impacts something had to be done. public lands in their first step to slowing the

As time went along, “educated” to a more enjoying the wild replaced skill and



in some form or another. were unsustainable, so A move to preserve natural state was the impacts of overuse. campers became sustainable way of outdoors – technology knowledge. The skills,

techniques and romance of the past became an anachronism and were labeled inappropriate. Much of the blame for that belief came from the improper and unbridled enthusiasm for the skills by untrained duffers, and was aimed at the skills themselves rather than their misapplication. With the convenience of the "New" mixed with the defamation of the "Old", the skills of the classic camper were lost to the masses in a very real and deliberate way.

Our contemporary appetite for reclaiming the old skills – under a variety of names – has reawakened many of the original fears – fears well entrenched with land managers, equipment manufacturers and a sensitized general public. The worry of some involved in the renaissance is that the spillover from pirates will eventually bring us back to a point where none of us will legally be able to use these old skills due to regulations limiting their use under any circumstances. *Define yourselves, lest ye be defined.* The above definitions are pretty clear as to what should constitute Classic and Traditional Camping, although they are open for improvement. Associated fields should make an effort to *clearly* define themselves.

The Pirates Guide to Bushcraft

With this in mind, the intention is not to limit creativity, free expression or ability to cross "academic lines." On the contrary, interdisciplinary activity is not only encouraged, it's necessary or a field becomes stagnant. The issue, is that without clearly defined disciplines, or recognizing that definitions exist, one behaves as if they are free to usurp whatever they want, from wherever or whomever they want with impunity. Some may call that "artistic license"; historically it's called artistic or intellectual theft or "plagiarism."

If Gypsy Jack were writing "*The Pirate's Guide To Campcraft*", he would be running under his own flag and owe allegiance to no man. At this point the crew is cheering and ready to plunder onward. What is frustrating about this exercise, is that while trying to make a case for discipline, it's hard not to recognize the fact that pirates are indeed needed as part of the process. The problem comes when pirates become the norm, rather than the exception: at that point everything starts to fall apart – we have anarchy.

The point here, is not to promote the idea that, by definition, a discipline invokes limitations. It does. However, we must feel free to cross disciplinary lines; mix and match at will. The important thing to realize is *that you have crossed a line* into another discipline, and you are now working within their rules of mastery - you are sailing in uncharted waters. At this point, you swear allegiance to the new captain, tread softly and stow your flag, or plunder and run with the wind in hopes your not caught and forced to walk the plank.

Lisa Fenton's Dissertation 2016 - DW Notes

p. 11 – this thesis examines the meaning and links between contemporary Western bushcraft and practices associated with “traditional indigenous knowledge.

p. 111 – The term “bushcraft” is problematic. It has its origins in the practice and language of colonialism and, although it has been **redefined and reclaimed** subsequently, it remains inevitably ‘post-colonial’. It resists a final authoritative definition, politically, culturally and linguistically. Bushcraft’s broadly coherent identity as a contemporary practice is fluid, accented differently according to its context, permeable to social, technological and cultural influences. It is a dynamic set of discussions and practices.

IK – Indigenous Knowledge

TEK - Traditional Ecological Knowledge p. 29

TIK – Traditional Indigenous Knowledge – distinguished from just IK

BC – Bushcraft

MBC – Modern BC – distinguished from CBC

CBC – Contemporary BC - higher order pursuit?

BYBC – Backyard Bushcraft – Playing Indian – safe/domestic

WBC – Wilderness Bushcraft - Journeying

PT – Primitive Technology

CC – Classic Camping

DEFINE BC–

11 – BC draws on experimental archaeology (PT), practices from colonized cultures, military survivalism, ecological conservation, traditional woodcraft, hunting and foraging, transcendentalism and romantic sensibilities (CC), humanistic therapies.

**** BC – the ability to move through or live with minimal resources in uncivilized areas.**

**** BC as a practice first emerges in response to a need to move into and through different ecologies with restricted technology. High levels of technique vs low-level technology.**

Bushmanship – the competence to interact meaningfully with newly encountered environments in the achievement of predetermined goals....the ability to live in, or move through, unfamiliar and unsettled, often inhospitable country with facility.

Themes in the contemporary bushcraft world: Basically the same as Van Horn

- Skilled practices and concepts of knowledge, craft, skill, tradition, and know-how p. 11
- Ethical Values
- Connection To Nature
- Transformative Experience
- Relationship between practitioner, craft engagement and landscape

1.1 SUMMARY -

- BC Springs from the European colonial project from 1500

- **Modern bushcraft** - emerged in the post-war era as a mixture of “Indianism,” military survivalism, Nature mysticism and ecologically-aware self-sufficiency.
- **Contemporary bushcraft** - leisure activity, commercial venture, educational practice, therapeutic intervention.
- References its practices to indigenous knowledge
- Draws on experimental archaeology (PT), practices from colonized cultures, military survivalism, ecological conservation, traditional woodcraft, hunting and foraging, transcendentalism and romantic sensibilities (CC), humanistic therapies.
- A personal discipline and connection to nature – personal practice and radical transformation. P. 12

1.4.2 COLONIALISM, IK AND TRAVELING KNOWLEDGE

PT travels in time and place – Traditional defined by DW

Stone Age has no fixed time frame or location

The whole argument is in an historic context – colonialism and theft, marginalization and hybridization - PT can avoid these charges – Bushcraft cannot.

P. 36 - The term bushcraft, therefore, explicitly conjoins perceptions of nature and wilderness to concepts of craft, skill, knowledge and know-how.

Here Comes The Bus

• Fenton tries to make a case for Bushcraft by throwing primitive technology under the bus as a cultural appropriated field steeped in colonialism. This review will address her argument with rebuttal. I would counter that exactly the opposite is true. DW

P. 104 – The word “PRIMITIVE” is problematic since using the word “primitive” carries all the implications of inferiority in the context of colonial gaze. It’s a conflation into a collective “other” - implies an ethically difficult relationship with all indigenous knowledge.

If Bushcraft can “redefine and reclaim” how words are defined, then PT has the same right. Bushcraft clearly has its roots in colonialism – there is no argument to that. What modern reinvention of the word tries to do is shed/sanitize this relationship by identifying its contemporary “community practice, literature, debate and adherents,” with a particular “worldview and **moral philosophy**” PT, on the other hand, can only be criticized by its use of the word “primitive.” Historically the term was used by the field of anthropology to describe people and things that were “less than.” Modern use of the word by today’s practitioners has nothing to do with people/culture, but rather explores the roots of technologies that were common to all mankind. This is a clear distinction from earlier interpretation and has nothing to do with a colonial past. DW