

Wilderness Adventure and Naturalist Skills

Overview

The goal of Wilderness Adventure and Naturalist Skills is to encourage members to develop a closer relationship with nature through learning naturalist skills. It will encourage members to view the natural world not only as a classroom, but as a playground, sanctuary, and home. Through the study of ‘hard skills’ – such as fire by friction, animal tracking, and shelter building – as well as ‘soft skills’ – such as sitting quietly in nature, practicing skills of awareness, and using intuition and tapping into innate wisdom – members will learn about the world of nature that is rapidly being destroyed, about themselves and their place in the world, and about the human communities within which we live. In addition to a strong focus on living in harmony with nature and her other children, the program will stress the importance of a close community, especially on such a large and diverse campus.

Most of us lose our innate connection with the earth early on in life, and as we speed into the new millennium it becomes ever harder to regain that vital part of who we are as humans. Because of this, we lose the ability to truly connect with each other and it becomes hard to even find ourselves. Most importantly, without a relationship to the natural world we are less passionate about fighting on her behalf. By reconnecting with nature, we can grow into our true selves and our relationships with one another will thrive, and we can become the advocates for the earth that she desperately needs.

The program welcomes any and all prospective members, regardless of previous experience or demographics, and only expects that members will be willing to share and learn from one another.

Learning Objectives

Members will gain a basic understanding of the core naturalist categories: plants, mammals, birds, trees, reptiles and amphibians, and insects, as well as weather and cosmology. By the end of the year, all students will be aware of which other beings share the land with us in the Burlington area, and will have a basic understanding of the night sky and weather patterns.

Action Steps

- Members will create one short species journal every two weeks and share it with the program. The journals will not be difficult, but will require some research; they will include basic information about a species that lives in this area (such as Latin name, size, identifying characteristics, coloring, uses (plants and trees), eating habits, and distribution) as well as an informal sketch. Each member will create two journals in the above six categories (excluding weather and cosmetology) over the course of the year, and together we will compile a community resource of Burlington’s wildlife.

- Members will participate in occasional night sky observation sessions, in which we will share our knowledge about the constellations, planets, and other celestial bodies. Members will be encouraged to do research prior to and after these informal gatherings, to make them more valuable.
- There will be three field trips and guest lectures throughout the year with local specialists in naturalist fields, including an herb walk with Annie McLeary (Wisdom of the Herbs School), a tracking session with Angella Gibbons (EarthWalk Vermont), and an introduction to bird language with bird enthusiast Bridget Butler.
- A copy of the Kamana Naturalist Training Program will be purchased for the program. Members will be encouraged to use this resource either as a guide and reference, or fully part-take in the intensive program.

*Kamana is an intensive naturalist program designed by the Wilderness Awareness School. Many universities offer credit for this program, and members would be encouraged to work with UVM to build this into their formal education if they choose.

Members will learn basic survival skills including (but not limited to) friction fire, shelter building techniques (summer and winter), water purification techniques, and ethical harvesting of wild foods. Members will be encouraged to push their skills and challenge themselves, but no part of the program will entail significant risk.

Action Steps

- I will lead a friction fire workshop, introducing both hand drill and bow drill, and will be available throughout the year to mentor members wishing to practice either skill. Materials will be on hand for members to make either type of primitive fire set. Other members with experience in fire-making will be encouraged to share their knowledge with the program. We will share our skills with the greater Living/Learning community with the presentation of our final projects late in the spring semester.
 - *Fires will never be made in nor around UVM buildings without direct permission from the director's office (in the case of a public bow drill demonstration, for example) and these skills will only be practiced in safe and legal environments.
- I will create a poster discussing various natural shelters and their construction. Members will be encouraged to try out some of these ideas in the Centennial Woods. We will hold a quinzee (snow shelter) building party if the snowfall permits, and any willing members will be encouraged to sleep in it.
- Resources will be provided for members to discover safe and easy ways of finding water in the wild that is safe to drink. These will include posters describing the process of rock-boiling water and finding springs, and information on purchasing water purifiers.
- We will end the year with an exploration of the wild edible plants that can be found growing near where we live. Each member will have investigated what wild edibles are to be found in the area and how to safely prepare them, and will have taken part in a discussion on ethical harvesting of plants. We do this for informational purposes only, and the program will not include sampling wild foods.

Each member of the program will develop a personal relationship with nature and with their intuition/inner wisdom in a way that is individually meaningful. Members will write a short reflection on this at the end of each semester, and will have the opportunity to share it with the program if they choose.

Action Steps

- Members will engage in a meaningful practice which will assist their personal growth and inner awareness. Ideas include practicing a meditation, adopting the age-old practice of sitting quietly alone in nature, tracking their dreams and seeking meaning from them, and learning yoga. This can be a continuation of a participant's existing spiritual practice, and this action step depends entirely on each member's comfort.
- Each member will be introduced to the core routines of awareness – including the sense meditation, fox walking (a meditative walk), and the practice of finding a secret spot – during the welcome meeting at the beginning of the semester. Members will be encouraged to make these a part of their regular life at UVM.

Members will study earth-based communities and consider their value for our society today.

Action Steps

- I will create a poster outlining the Peacemaker Principles, which the members will discuss at the beginning of the semester and on which the community structure will be based.
- Members will have access to books which model native communities which function in radically different ways from those we experience today. Members will be encouraged to add to this book-list library, and book groups will be held as appropriate.
- Members will experience living in a community, and will engage in discussions regarding how we interact with one another in peaceful ways, how our society fosters interactions which are antagonistic to community building, and which components of community we seek to embody in the course of our lives.

Action Step for all Learning Objectives

Each member will create a year-long (or two semester-long) project of their choosing, which in some way relates to one or more of the learning objectives. Projects can be research based or primarily experiential, and all must have at least a small writing component. Project ideas can range from an in-depth study of Burlington's wildflowers or researching the crafts of Native American communities in Vermont, to using 10 different types of wood to make hand-drill coals or making a flex bow. I will create a list of possible projects to inspire the program, and project ideas will be approved by the program members. There will be opportunities throughout the year to share projects with the program, and with the Living and Learning community at the end of the year. Projects should be designed to be enjoyable, without becoming overwhelming or conflicting with schoolwork, so members will not be expected to spend more than 5 hours a month working on them.

Community Service

Each member will organize a project to complete on/around Earth Day in April. Collaboration with other members and the greater UVM community will be encouraged. Projects can range from community education or trash drives to petitioning for double-sided printing in the computer labs, and will be expected to have a significant visible outcome.

One day per semester we will work with the Girl Scouts and/or Boy Scouts in Burlington. This may be in collaboration with SPROUTS – a group on campus that works with the Girl Scouts intermittently throughout the year. In the circumstance that collaborating with these more traditional nature education programs is not possible, we will work instead with the kids from UVM's children center and share our love for the earth with them.

Interaction With Other L/L Programs

I would like to work with other programs and organize outings for our members to enjoy together. These might include a fall hike up Camel's Hump, a winter snowshoe, or a giant snow-shelter building party.

I also will speak with the directors of No Boundaries: Redefining Culture and see if they would be willing to schedule discussions with us about community, society, and culture.

At the end of the year, we will present to the greater Living/Learning community some of the skills we have been working on. This open presentation could include bow-drill demonstrations, sharing research on a particular species, presenting crafts and tools we have made throughout the year, or inviting students over for Nettle tea and Dandelion salad.