

Wilderness Adventure and Naturalist Skills



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Overview of Proposed Program

The goal of the Wilderness Adventure and Naturalist Skills program is to foster a closer and more intimate relationship with nature. Today's fast paced society removes us further and further from the earth and many have forgotten how to connect to nature. We hope to break down the barrier that has been built between nature and us, and instead teach our members to view the natural world as a giant playground full of wonder, adventure, and learning. Our members will learn not only from professors in the classrooms, but also from the original teachers: plants, animals, and the earth, in the original classroom: nature. Members are taught to respect this natural classroom and encouraged to become nature's advocate against the destruction and abuse the environment suffers today.

The program will be divided into two areas of study, "hard" and "soft" skills. "Hard skills" are skills like primitive shelter building, fire by friction, animal tracking, stalking and silent movement, and wild edible gathering; "soft skills" are less concrete, but equally important. Group leadership and sitting quietly in nature are examples of soft skills. These skills teach members about how they are personally connected to the earth. Furthermore they can help instill confidence and a greater sense of self. In addition to learning about our own personal harmony with nature, the program will stress the importance of close community and our connection with each other, modeled after tribes of ancient times. This close base of support is important for emotional and social well being in such a large, and often overwhelming campus and city.

Today's society no longer requires us to build our own shelters, and find our own food; but we still believe a program that teaches these skills is relevant to our modern lifestyle. The preservation and passing down of ancient knowledge is important (and fun), but program members gain something more: they grow in their capability to understand nature, themselves, and others in a society that often impedes the ability to connect to world around us whether it be human or natural.

The program welcomes any and all prospective students, regardless of previous experience or demographics. All we ask is that members come with an open mind and open heart, passionate and willing to share and learn with one another.

African Proverb: "If you don't initiate the youth, they will burn down the village."

Learning Objectives and Action Steps

Overall Mission and Objective of the Program:

"In short, a land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow members and also respect for the community as such." ~Aldo Leopold

The WANS program seeks to foster and develop a community-based program that has a child-like love of the surrounding outdoors, while also encouraging self reliance in the wilderness through the passing on of primitive wilderness survival skills. As believers of the fact that people today are so removed from the raw outdoors, we strongly hope to bring our members back to an overall love for

the world in an excited and passionate way. Such a philosophy will enable us to hold a wide variety of workshops, whether it is simply playing games outside and reveling in the beauty of nature, or working on a specific survival skill. Our hope is that such a program will form members, who by the end of the year, are not only confident as survivalists, but also as “children of the earth” who will work to defend the natural world. While we will be teaching many specific survival skills, our first priority is to develop a “land ethic” within our members that allows their excitement, passion, and love for the natural world to bubble over into everything they do.

Learning Objective 1

Members will gain a basic understanding of the core naturalist categories: plants, trees, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds, and insects. By the end of the year, members will have a greater understanding of what other life forces share the land with us.

Action Steps

- 1) Members will participate in a wild edible walk, led by the program directors, as well as attend a tracking session with Mike Kessler, a professor of tracking at the University of Vermont.
- 2) Members will create two short journal entries on each of the categories listed above. These journal entries need not be long, but will involve some research, as they will be shared with the other members every two weeks during program meetings. Over the course of the year, the entries will be compiled into a binder that will serve as a learning resource for all members of the program.
- 3) Members will have access to field guides and will be encouraged to investigate anything that they are unfamiliar with. Such field guides include Tracking and the Art of Seeing, Sibley Guide to Birds, Tom Brown’s Guide to Wild Edible and Medicinal Plants, and Native American Hunting, Fighting and Survival Tools.
- 4) **The program hopes to co-ordinate with the Green Forestry Education Initiative (a group under the Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources), whose mission is “to integrate sustainable design, land ethics, and real-world learning in community-based forest conservation.” Eric has had classes with Brendan Weiner, the program co-coordinator of the GFEI, and has worked with him in the past to use Jericho Research forest for student activities. Brendan is easy to work with, very knowledgeable, and always willing to help get students out into the woods. The GFEI puts on education days at Jericho Research Forest on topics such as sustainable logging, wildlife tracking, and forest conservation. WANS will attend these programs as often as their topics fit into our mission goals.**

Learning Objective 2

Members will gain a basic understanding of the core skills of wilderness survival, in the “sacred order” of shelter, fire, water and food. They will also be exposed to less critical skills such as making tools and clothing out of the natural environment in hopes that they will one day feel confident in the wilderness

with nothing but the clothes on their back. Safety and wilderness first aid will be a focus throughout the year.

Action Steps

- 1) The group will come together to construct two different kinds of primitive *shelters* over the course of the year. The first kind, debris shelters, will be used in the fall when we spend a night at Jericho Research Forest learning primitive cooking and shelter methods. This lesson will include the discussion of how the shelters works, how to go about making one (size/body dimensions) and finally constructing one together. We will construct the second shelter out of snow on campus and spend a night sleeping in it.
- 2) Members will be introduced to the techniques of *fire by friction*. Our main focus will be on the bow-drill technique, and we will be teaching this technique at some of the open skills nights in the fall. Teaching this skill will include the discussion of the science behind friction fire, how to go about carving and making a bow-drill kit, and finally the art of making fire with a carved kit. However, no fires will be made without direct permission from the Director's Office and notification of the Fire Department of Burlington. If enough interest is presented, we will cover other techniques of fire by friction, including hand drill, mouth drill, and fire saw.
- 3) Primitive techniques of gathering, filtering, and purifying *water* will be taught to the members. This will include discussing natural places to gather water, especially paying close attention to water storing plants and making primitive water filters. Finally, we will investigate primitive ways of boiling water to purify water such as rock boiling and making watertight containers.
- 4) The art of *hunting* will be discussed in detail, including the philosophy behind taking a life in the more spiritual and philosophical sense. We will cover the basics of stalking and movement and give members a chance to try these skills out in a wilderness setting. The first weekend trip in particular will focus on "awareness" skills used in hunting such as stalking. A primitive trapping workshop will be held next, when the construction of "figure-4" deadfall traps and basic snare construction will be practiced and taught. Finally, a throwing stick workshop will be held, when throwing stick techniques will be practiced on targets. The use of bone to make hunting tools such as bone knives and arrowheads will also be covered in open skills nights. We will hold a wild edible and medicinal plant walk both in the spring and fall, culminating in a meal cooked with wild edible plants substitutes such as acorn flour pancakes or wild onion omelets.
- 5) We will cover the uses of deer hide (whether rawhide or tanned buckskin) in a weekend workshop. Last year, we made buckskin moccasins, but other projects such small bags, or even hunting weapons such as bolas can also be made out of rawhide.
- 6) We will hold "Open Skills Nights" once a week where the community can come together to work on projects of their choice. This time will encourage program members to take time out of their busy school schedule to relax and engage the creative part of their minds.
- 7) **We hope to host a weekend Wilderness First Aid class taught by the company SOLO that would be open to the UVM student body. SOLO's first aid classes are nationally accredited and, on top of being information that can save someone's life, are required for many jobs in wilderness settings.**

- 8) Other hard skills will be introduced and practiced if interest is shown and time permits. Ideas that we have discussed include making pack baskets (a traditional kind of backpack), building a wigwam in Jericho Research Forest, and inviting several guest instructors such as Kfir Mendel for a hide-tanning workshop and Andrew Hov for a flint knapping workshop. Most of all, we are excited to simply practice these skills as a group whenever we get the chance, simply enjoying adventures together.

Learning Objective 3

Members will learn ways to appreciate and connect to nature emotionally and intuitively. These sets of skills are known as soft skills. These are the quiet reflective skills that allow one to feel at home in nature because you are more aware of your surroundings. Our first weekend trip will focus on these skills and we will continue to practice them in the form of group games, sit spots and individual reflection throughout the year.

Action Steps:

- 1) Members will be introduced to the concept of the sit spot. This is a quiet individual activity in which members simply watch the changes in nature in a specific spot. This encourages hyper-awareness to minute changes in the natural world. Members are encouraged to go as often as possible, and every two weeks there will be an extra learning objective in the form of a “sit spot challenge” which will be posted on the community white board. Such learning objectives will include “sense meditations”, observing a track in their sit spot over a long period of time, and paying close attention to the “concentric rings” of nature.
- 2) Next members will be introduced to the fox-walk, which is a stalking, meditative walk that encourages stealth and silence while walking through nature. We will use games such as “fire sticks” to practice this skill in a fun way. In brief, the way that this game works is that a blind folded player in the center has sticks and the other players try to steal them. If the center person hears something they clap and point to where the sound came from, sending the noisemaker back to the start.
- 3) At their sit spot members will be encourage to listen to bird language to hone their listening skills. After silent observation and listening, we will quietly discuss what is happening in nature and members can share their experience immersing their senses into the natural world.
- 4) In order to teach members not to rely solely on sight we will hold a blind drum stalk. Members will be blindfolded and set at a start location. A drummer will begin to rhythmically beat a drum and the blind folded members will attempt to locate the drummer.
- 5) As a group we will use all our senses to observe how the birds and other animals react when you enter the woods with different intents in mind. One person will sit in a sit spot and members of the group will walk by in different ways. Different scenarios include entering the woods acting like you have a gun or intend to hunt, stalking, walking normally, walking in a large group/loudly, etc.

Learning Objective 4

Members will seek to grow together into a tribe-like community over the course of the year, as we grow to understand and learn more about why community was such a stressed value of native peoples.

Action Steps

- 1) Members will participate in bi-weekly group meetings, in which we will discuss our individual projects, upcoming events and new group project ideas. We will also culminate each meeting in the sharing of each person's "high" and "low" of the week and listing one thing they are thankful for. This will provide members insight into the lives of their fellow members and a greater understanding of one another.
- 2) We will begin the year with a weekend hike and campout up a nearby mountain to develop a sense of community and a chance to get to know one another in a natural setting. There, we will be able to get to know one another in a close and intimate way and provide a community ethic for the rest of the year.
- 3) Members will add their names to the racked deer hide at the beginning of the year. This deer hide will have the names of all of the past members of the WANS program. This deer hide will be displayed throughout the year as a sign of our community/tribe living. Each year the deer hide will be passed down to the next year's program and can continue to grace the wall of the suite, as a reminder of the hope and support of the programs that came before.
- 4) **We will end the year with a gift exchange where each member of the community will use what they have learned over the course of the year to make a gift for another member in the program.**

Learning Objective 5

Members in the program will practice an eco-friendly lifestyle to the best of their ability. This program relies on nature and practicing environmental awareness is a way to give back to the earth.

Action Steps

- 1) In all outings we will practice Leave No Trace Principles. These are nationally accepted standards for recreating in the outdoors.
- 2) As PDs we will maintain compost and recycling bins in each suite.
- 3) The concept of a Land Ethic as described by Aldo Leopold will be included in many of our outings and talks. The basic idea of this ethic is to develop a connection to the earth from which we get everything that we have. Without this connection there is no reason to protect and care for the earth.
- 4) As program leaders we will encourage members to attend local sustainability workshops and talks held through the Rubenstein School's solution seminar series.

Learning Objective 6

Members in the program will develop confidence in themselves, in their outdoor leadership skills, and in working well within various group dynamics. The ability to lead confidently is important in the “real world” outside of UVM. Such skills are not tangible and easily pinpointed, but often surface in experiences like working with a group to complete a difficult task.

Action Steps

- 1) Members will be encouraged to bring forward their own ideas for workshops and lead the group in those plans. This will encourage them to find confidence in themselves and their abilities in leading a small group.
- 2) We will introduce specific leadership skills such as ice-breaker games. Such skills will be emphasized also during our outings as a group. Our plan for an overnight winter hike also involves working on making a sound and careful decision as a group during a difficult or stressful situation.
- 3) Eric, as a newly admitted member of WILD (the outing club’s leadership program), will have the chance to learn leadership skills and pass them on to the members of the group next year.
- 4) Many of the blindfolded exercises we practice as part of awareness encourage self-reliance and confidence, as well as the ability to be a careful leader. For example: Leading a blindfolded friend through an obstacle course.

Learning Objective 7

Members will learn how to apply the skills they learn and practice throughout the year to mock survival scenarios. Such scenarios will include the use of basic orienteering and backcountry decision making. For example, if you find yourself off a marked trail, using a compass to find the most efficient and quickest way out. Specific attention will be paid to survival skills that are practical if you are ever stranded for a night in the wilderness. By mimicking such scenarios, we will instill in our members the importance of the skills we practice, and that they do have a very real purpose, as highlighted in Eric’s opening story, which involves the use of previously learned survival skills to save a friend’s life.

Action Steps:

- 1) *At least one mock scenario will be held each semester that will involve the members of the program working their way through a designed problem. They will be encouraged to treat it like a real-life problem and develop leadership, teamwork, and their survival skills to get everyone to safety. In designing these scenarios we will attempt to mock the feelings of anxiety, surprise and urgency that would occur in a real situation.*
- 2) *Members will write short journal entries following each mock scenario that capture the way that they felt in the situation. This will provide a record of what they have learned in the situation and also serve as a way to relieve the potential anxiety that can build up in such situations. Members will be encouraged to use journaling, and other methods, to cope with difficult emotions resulting from real life situations as well.*

When considering such scenarios, it is essential to remember that the skills we teach and practice over the course of the year will be taught in a very specific “sacred order.” When in a survival situation, the order (in most situations) is: shelter, fire, water and food. This is due to the fact that the human body needs these essential needs in this order. For example, during a cold winter storm, a person stranded in the wilderness could die within three hours without shelter/warmth, three days

with water, and three weeks without food. Thus, there is a very specific order in which these skills will be taught, in hopes that our members will be able to determine which skills will be most important to utilize during not only our mock scenarios, but also during real-life problems. Of course, the order is variable, according to the climate and particular situation, and this will be addressed while practicing skills.

Action Step for all Learning Objectives

Each member will develop and post two semester-long projects of their choosing, which in some way relates to one or more of the learning objectives. These can take a variety of forms and can be research based or experimental. The project ideas could range from a soft skill of greater awareness of the world around us through “sit spot” work, an in depth study of a particular native animal or plant around us, or a hard skill such as working on friction fire making with various kinds of wood or learning a new animal track each week. Students will be able to work on these projects during open skills nights and throughout the course of the semester. At the end of the semester members will present their projects in the fireplace lounge. This event will be open to the L/L community and hopefully inspire interest in the program from other UVM students. These goals are expected to inspire and be enjoyable, but should not interfere with any schoolwork or be overwhelming.

Community Service

As a group and community, we will plan a project/outreach project to complete during Earth Day in April as we did last year. This will be a great chance to show our passion for protecting the Earth and will also provide us with a chance to collaborate with the greater UVM community or other Living/Learning programs. We also have hopes of planning to share our love of nature with the children of the preschool in C-Building by simply playing with them outside, or hopefully even teaching them how to build a debris hut. We have discussed helping Mike Kessler and Brendan Weiner with any workshops that they run at Jericho Research Forest. In the past, Mike has run workshops on primitive skills such as tracking and friction fire, and we would certainly be interested in volunteering to help out at these programs. This could include setting up, cleaning up, organizing, and spreading the word.

Planning Timeline

See attached Planning Timeline for a detailed schedule of program activities

Program Advisor

John Abbot, the Assistant Director for Outdoor Programs at UVM, was our advisor for the 2010-2011 year. **However, we are excited to have Mike Kessler be our program advisor for the 2011-2012 year. Mike is extremely knowledgeable in the field of primitive wilderness survival and would be able to run workshops for the program, especially tracking workshops. He also has an extensive knowledge of Jericho Research Forest and would be able to take us on awesome hikes throughout the area.**

Special Facilities

We do not anticipate needing any special facilities for the Wilderness Adventure and Naturalist Skills program due to its’ outdoor nature.

Program Suite Request

We would like to request two suites, size does not matter, but we would like to have around 11 people in the program. All the suites will be co-ed.

Plans for Interactions with Other L/L Programs

Early in the year we would like to do a wild herbal tea workshop with the Exploring Culture through Tea suite. In the Art Initiative we are interested in working with Clay: Pottery, Sculpture as well as the Jewelry Making program. With the pottery program we would be interested in learning about traditional pottery making techniques as well as learning about naturally occurring clays with which pottery can be made. We would also like to collaborate with the Jewelry Making program to learn about jewelry from various primitive cultures and try our hand at making some ourselves. Both collaborations would result in artwork that could be displayed in the Living and Learning building. We intend to invite the Animalia program to do tracking workshops in different weather and seasons and learn about the wildlife in Vermont.

We plan to reach out to the general L/L Community (and the rest of campus) in a dynamic and fun way. We would love to set up an adventure race for the greater UVM community. This race might involve orienteering, hiking, and performing certain tasks such as splitting wood or boiling a cup of water as fast as possible. The program is also planning to open up certain open skills nights to the general L/L Community, inviting them to bring questions, excitement, and passion as we dive into a fun and relaxing evening of primitive skills.

Program Member Recruitment

Several members of the program this year would like to return next year and we have heard from several students who do not live in L/L who are interested applying next year. Mike Kessler is willing to publicize the program with his tracking students. If the program is accepted we will also utilize more traditional forms of advertising such as posting flyers around the UVM campus. Last year, put on a bow-drill fire making demonstration outside of the library to attract attention and prospective members. This worked well and we plan to do it again.

Wilderness Adventure and Naturalist Skills Budget

Gas and Food: 4 camping trips to nearby mountains and any possible trips to Jericho Forest: ~\$200

Wilderness First Aid Funding: ~\$75 per participating WANS member

Flint Knapping Workshop (with Andrew Hov): ~\$150

Hide Working Workshop, such as Moccasin Making (with Kfir Mendel): \$85/attending person + gas expenses

Frost Knives (for members lacking a good carving knife): \$13.95/knife

Open skills night supplies: \$40

Although many of these activities are dependent upon shown interest by members or by need (in the case of the knives), our tentative total budget would be somewhere around \$1300. Last year, members contributed \$25 each to the Moccasin Making Workshop, to prove that they were truly committed and interested in having the program, which also shaved off over \$200 from our expenses.