WFB013 Intro to Wildlife Tracking

Course Syllabus

Title WFB 013 – Intro to Wildlife Tracking

Credits 1

Instructor Michael Kessler

Meeting dates and times

Course meets 9:00 am to 4:30 pm on two consecutive Saturdays.

Location UVM Jericho Research Forest, 127 Tarbox Road, Jericho, Vermont, 05465

Course Description

This is an outdoor course designed to launch the student upon a lifelong journey of reading the stories written in the earth with each passing day. It is oriented to the student's immediate application of classroom knowledge in a wilderness setting. Students are afforded both time for individual contemplation and working together in small teams. Successive aspects of track formation and soil mechanics are introduced and reinforced by studying the varied wildlife inhabiting the Jericho Research Forest. The science and art of tracking incorporates elements of the natural sciences, life sciences, and humanities. Students receive tools to enhance their awareness of the presence of wildlife, to classify and identify tracks by genus and, in the process, learn about themselves as well as the landscape and creatures they are tracking.

Goals

1. Awareness of humanity's inherited capacity and disposition to track.
2. Understand how to apply our five senses for tracking.
3. Enhanced personal connection with the *earth*.

Learning Outcomes

1. Demonstrate critical thinking and creative problem solving to identify the presence of wildlife on the landscape, both recent and from more than a year ago.
2. Identify tracks by genus in varied substrates including deer, moose, bear, bobcat, fisher, and fox.
3. Observe the landscape as a continuum of dynamic (e.g. weather, animal locomotion etc.) and static (e.g. potential gravitational) forces to identify and interpret tracks.

General Course Information

Required readings (available online in Blackboard)

1. ***Human Origins: Contribution from Social Anthropology***, Vol. 2017, Chapter 9, 'Human Physiology, San Shamanic Healing and the Cognitive Revolution', Low, C., p. 224-244.
   - The author, Chris Low, a noted anthropologist of the South African San bushmen culture, particularly in regard to their healing ceremonies and practices, has been studying the role and relationship of tracking in human cognitive evolution. He has visited and observed our UVM tracking classes at the Jericho Research Forest.

2. ***A Deadly Wandering***, Richtel, M., Chapter 11, 'The Neuroscientists', p. 98-109.
   - Chosen as UVM's 2017 summer reading book. Chapter 11 introduces the science of attention which is all-important to wildlife tracking and nature observation.

3. ***Tracking the Evolution of Causal Cognition in Humans***, Marlize Lombard & Peter Gärdenfors, *Journal of Anthropological Sciences, Vol. 95 (2017), pp. 1-16.*

- This article in the Journal of Anthropological Science reflects upon our innate human capacity to track. This is essential to accepting that we were not 'born too late' to be great trackers with the potential of expanding the art and science of tracking, itself.
- Note: The first six pages do not speak directly to tracking, but form the necessary foundation upon which the authors propose their framework for tracking's role in the evolution of human causal cognition.

4. ***The Snowflake Man*****,** Blanchard, D. (1970). Weatherwise, p. 260-269.
   - Wilson Bentley (1865-1931) lived his entire life just two miles upstream from the Jericho Research Forest on Mill Brook where we will be tracking. His intense study of snowflakes is recognized to have been 50 years ahead of meteorological science. Some of his methods are still used today, for example, his process for measuring the size of rain drops.

5. ***Human Echolocation: Using tongue clicks to navigate the world***, William Kremer, BBC World Service, 2012, p. 1-5.
   - An example of the degree to which we can perceive our surroundings through our senses.

Course Policies

Prior experience – There are no prerequisites for this course and it does not assume nor require that the student have any background, experience, or education in tracking. Students are simply asked to exhibit an open mind, positive attitude, thirst for knowledge, and respect for others. Anyone can become a tracker.

Level of Instruction – This course is a general introduction to the study of tracks. However, the level of instruction will be varied to each person's level of skill. Both the beginner and the expert tracker will be fully engaged simply by varying the difficulty of soil type upon which one is instructed, for example soft mud as opposed to ice, pine needles or rock.

Preparation and Participation – One to two hour excursions from the onsite classroom will require hiking in the hills of the research forest in seasonable weather. Students are expected to dress accordingly and provide for their own specific needs, e.g. food, hydration etc. There are no breaks for cell phone use as one contiguous span of focused learning time is required.

Transportation – Students are responsible for their own transportation to and from the Jericho Research Forest and are strongly encouraged to share rides.

Instructor Communications – The UVM Blackboard online learning system and email are the modes of instructor communication for this course. Students are responsible for using the Blackboard system and also for receiving messages sent to their UVM email account and/or insuring that their UVM email account is setup to forward messages accordingly.

Intellectual Property Rights
Replication of ONLINE class (audio or video-picture-camera/phone, etc.) is PROHIBITED in ALL cases without explicit instructor approval.

Consistent with the University's policy on intellectual property rights, teaching and curricular materials (including but not limited to classroom lectures, class notes, exams, handouts, and presentations) are the property of the instructor(s). Therefore, electronic recordings and/or transmissions of classes or class notes are prohibited without the express written permission of the instructor. Such permission is to be considered unique to the needs of an individual student (e.g. ADA compliance), and not a license for permanent retention or electronic dissemination to others.

*** Videos, screencasts, and other instructor-generated content provided on Blackboard is intended for use by registered students as a private study aid and is not to be shared or published.

Attendance Expectations – Attendance is expected at all classes. Opportunities to makeup a missed class may be afforded, but are dependent upon instructor's availability. Observance of religious holidays is followed per the University's Policy as follows:

Students have the right to practice the religion of their choice. Each semester students should submit in writing to their instructors by the end of the second full week of classes their documented religious holiday schedule for the semester. Faculty must permit students who miss work for the purpose of religious observance to make up this work.

Because the course is scheduled differently than the regular 15-week semester course, please communicate known absence(s) to the instructor before the course begins.

UVM ACCESS Support – In keeping with University policy, any student with a documented disability interested in utilizing accommodations should contact ACCESS, the office of Disability Services on campus. ACCESS works with students and faculty in an interactive process to explore reasonable and appropriate accommodations via an accommodation letter to faculty with recommended accommodations as early as possible each semester. Contact ACCESS: A170 Living/Learning Center; 802-656-7753; access@uvm.edu; or www.uvm.edu/access.

Contributions in Class – Everyone is expected to participate in both the classroom and the field exercises and to provide for their individual comfort and care as weather dictates. As important, everyone is expected to be a respectful and engaged listener to their colleagues and instructor.

Academic Honesty & Professionalism – Everyone is expected to understand and follow all University of Vermont policies and regulations.

Electronic Submissions/Internet Use – The UVM Blackboard online learning system is used for all course announcements, access to course materials, and completion of assignments. (See "Instructor Communications" in Course Policies above.)

Student Evaluation/Assessment

Students are not expected to be proficient in tracking because it is an art form to be personally developed over time. Assessment is based upon the ability to observe and explore the landscape in a self-directed manner and to derive meaning from observations using valid forms of reasoning. Assessment of individual competency is not based upon the student's *level* of tracking (which takes time to develop), but rather on their *understanding* of how to perform and progress in tracking based upon what they have learned and how they have applied that knowledge in the field.

Grading – The overall class grade is a summation of the following [note: understanding and performing wildlife tracking represents a skill that requires active practice and participation, therefore, attendance is a key component to the achievement of learning outcomes.]:

25%	Pre-class reading assignment
25%	Attendance and contribution (individual and group)
25%	Field effort (individual and group)
25%	Final reflection
100%	

Format for Expected Work – Blackboard is used for all course material, course work and correspondence.

Scoring Rubrics – A (comprehensive) Blackboard rubric is offered as an aid to spur creative ideas, organize your thoughts, and structure your overall composition. Its categories include:

- Written Expression
- Reflection and Self-Assessment
- Transdisciplinary Constructs
- Connections to Experience
- Creative Thinking

Percentage Contribution of Each Assignment – See “Grading” above. No other graded assignments.