Course Syllabus

Title: WFB 013 – Intro to Wildlife Tracking

Credits: 1

Instructor: Michael Kessler

Meeting dates and times
Course meets on four ½ days on Saturdays during fall or spring semester; weekends or weeknights during summer session.

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

Course Description
This is an outdoor course oriented to the student’s immediate application of classroom knowledge in a wilderness setting. It is designed to launch the student upon a lifelong journey of reading the stories written in the earth with each passing day. 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 integrates multiple academic disciplines throughout the natural sciences, life sciences, and humanities. Students receive tools to enhance their awareness of the presence of wildlife through their tracks, to classify and identify tracks by genus and, in the process, learn as much about themselves as the landscape and creatures they are tracking.

Goals

1. Awareness and appreciation of the voluminous information that animal movements impart upon the landscape and how it can be identified and interpreted when seen as a ‘disturbance to a baseline’.
2. Expansion of the student’s awareness of the presence of wildlife and of their own disturbances when moving upon a landscape.
3. Enhancement of the student’s relationship with the earth and their connection to the global community.

Learning Outcomes

1. Demonstrate critical thinking and creative problem solving to identify the presence of wildlife on the landscape.
2. See and read the landscape as a continuum of dynamic and static forces—as a new page in a manuscript that is written upon each day.
3. Understand the physics and energy transfer that occurs as tracks are created in the earth.
4. Identify tracks by genus in varied soil types over time including deer, moose, bear, bobcat, fisher, and/or fox.

General Course Information

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.

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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. Assessment of individual competency is not based upon the student’s level of tracking success (which takes time to develop), but rather on the ability to progress based upon what they have learned and how they have applied that knowledge in the field.

Preparation and Participation – One to two hour excursions from the onsite heated 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

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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.

**Required and/or recommended readings**

**REQUIRED READING:**

All required reading and videos are online via Blackboard. These materials include academic and news articles, photos, poems, videos, and a documentary film.

**OPTIONAL recommended reading:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Animal Tracking Basics</strong>, by Jon Young and Tiffany Morgan</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pub. Date: February 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publisher: Stackpole Books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Format: Paperback, 304pp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Rank: 215,453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISBN: 0811733262</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Peterson Field Guide to Animal Tracks (Peterson Field Guides Series)</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mark Elbroch, Olaus J. Murie, Olaus J. Murie (Illustrator), Mark Elbroch (Illustrator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Format: Paperback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pub. Date: November 2005</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Tracking and the Art of Seeing: How to Read Animal Tracks and Sign</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paul Rezendes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISBN13: 9780062735249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISBN: 0062735241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BINC: 5701617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edition: Illustrated</td>
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Electronic Submissions/Internet Use:
The UVM Blackboard online learning system is used for all course announcements, access to course materials, and submissions of work, namely the student’s personal reflection journals. (See “Instructor Communications” in Course Policies above.)

Student Evaluation/Assessment

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, so attendance will be a key component to learning outcomes]:

- 10% Pre-class journal entry
- 20% Homework exercises (2)
- 20% Attendance and contribution
- 20% Field work
- 30% Final reflection
- 100%

Format for Expected Work
Blackboard tools. All other materials provided by instructor.

Scoring Rubrics
The following rubric is used to score these components of the students overall grade:

- Class participation
- Independent project
- Journal Reflections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vision &amp; Observation</td>
<td>No attempt to read landscape or see the natural baseline</td>
<td>Unable to see disturbances within the natural baseline</td>
<td>Able to see track disturbances to the baseline</td>
<td>Able to see track compression within the disturbances</td>
<td>Able to see track proper within the track compressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness &amp; Inquiry</td>
<td>No recording of observations</td>
<td>Observations made but no evidence of further inquiry</td>
<td>Observations sufficient to promote further inquiry and hypothesis</td>
<td>Observations lead to discovery of new knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of Tracks</td>
<td>No partial ID of track or track characteristics</td>
<td>Partial ID of track family characteristics</td>
<td>Positive ID of track family</td>
<td>Partial ID of track genus</td>
<td>Positive ID of track genus</td>
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Percentage Contribution of Each Assignment
See “Grading” above. No other graded assignments.

Instructional Sequence

1st Module – “The Eye of the Tracker”
Thoreau imparted that ‘the universe is wider than our view of it’. In this first session participants learn how to increasingly widen their view of the natural world. Increased awareness of all things and increased ability to see and sense both the majestic and the minute are the main objective, so that a ‘track’ is understood and seen as a ‘disturbance to a baseline’.

2nd Module – “The Mind of the Tracker”
The symbiotic processes of artistic creativity and scientific inquiry are applied to tracking. The power of ‘questioning’ is explored. A harmonic between the left- and right-brain is nurtured and integrated within the tracking process to enhance the student’s ability to ‘scan horizontally and probe vertically’.

3rd Module – “The Attitude of the Tracker”
What happens when the next track cannot be found? This is the tracker’s ‘wall’ and place of greatest potential learning. It is a place where personal choice defines both the journey and the tracker, themselves.

4th Module – “The Heart of the Tracker”
This module focuses on the student’s continued development where nature, herself, becomes their greatest teacher. The need to simultaneously track both their inner- and outer-landscapes becomes all important; where the student’s tracking is guided by their awareness and vice versa. It is here that the art of tracking emerges and becomes a true extension of self.