

# **Thesis**

## **Bushcraft 101**

The essence and art of Northern Bushcraft in promoting  
recreational outdoor participants' safety

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**Bachelor's degree in Adventure and Outdoor Education  
(210 ECTS)**

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis aims to explore how and why could the development of core bushcraft survival skills be used in promoting adult learner's outdoor safety skills. The methodology of this project was to devise and evaluate an introductory bushcraft programme that teaches fundamental core wilderness survival skills. The course was designed for the subscriber moln. Moln is a Scandinavian based adventure activity holiday provider owned and operated by Roope Roine.

The needs for this programmes development was based on moln's requirement to adapt to the new increased demands for domestic outdoor adventure holidays in Finland; due to the pandemic situation (Covid- 19, 2020-21) which placed restrictions on international travel. Further needs for this bushcraft course development were based on an emerging market for people who wish to connect with nature through undertake their own independent outdoor adventures and want to build their safety awareness and skills.

The course was designed using the ADDIE model. This instructional design methodology is built around the steps of analysis, design, development, implementation and evaluation. The research enquiry and development were supplemented by Interviews with Outdoor experts.

The programmes effectiveness in enhancing safety was to be evaluate its by means of running a trail course in the summer of 2020. However, due to the unique circumstances of 2020 caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and accompanied restrictions and regulation about events and gatherings adjustments had to be made so as to ensure safety and legal compliance.

The course was therefore evaluated using an expert focus group and a continuous feedback loop with moln's owner and head guide, Roope Roine. These combined methods provided valuable feedback for the development of the programme into a professional product which would meet the needs of the evolving adventure holiday market. Precise action points for improvements in the course were also identified using a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis. This was undertaken individually by adventure education experts from the focus group.

The bushcraft fundamentals course programme was designed to be delivered over a 2-night, 3-day, weekend (Friday-Sunday) A more advanced Bushcraft Journey programme was also developed which could also be delivered over 3 days. The outlined course programmes are attached as an appendix.

Building and evaluation of the bushcraft fundamentals course brought new knowledge to the field of adventure education in terms of validating bushcraft as a highly effective medium for learning more about outdoor safety. This was due to a number of factors and centers in the power of bushcraft in promoting a sense of reconnection to nature and cultivating a safe working relationship with oneself, others and the environment.

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Keywords: Safety , Bushcraft , Adventure, Outdoor Recreational, Activity. find 3 to 7 keywords from <https://finto.fi/yso/en/>

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. The Project

“The great thing about bushcraft is that wherever you go, the skills go with you”

Ray Mears (2001)

Whenever we venture into the great outdoors there is always an element of danger!

- How can we help ensure we and our companions come to no physical, mental or emotional harm?
- What do we need to know about the environment, our companions, ourselves?
- How should we be prepared? What are our priorities if something goes wrong?
- Will we be capable of doing the right things; making the right decisions and following through with the best actions?

Will we get back home safe and in time for tea!

As an avid outdoor adventurer and leader, safety is always an essential framework in all my outings.

In this vain, for this thesis I wanted to explore the contribution that bushcraft skills can play in promoting wilderness safety. This thesis provided an opportunity via the evolution of a brand-new bushcraft programme for the commissioner Moln, a Helsinki based adventure activity holiday provider. The development of this new course provided the perfect opportunity to assess the effectiveness of core Bushcraft survival skills in contributing to adult learners’ outdoor safety combined with building a new contemporary adventure holiday product.

Recreational Outdoor safety in Finland has become an especially important issue in the year 2020. The increase in domestic based adventure travel; due to the prevailing international travel restrictions, imposed because of Covid-19, has led to people spending much more time in the great outdoors. Google has published data that clearly shows the trend for spending time in the great outdoors; between 16 February and 29 March 2020 people in Finland have spent 48 percent more time in parks and in waterfront settings( Yle,2020).Increased enthusiasm for outdoor activities has meant

more inexperienced and less well-prepared individuals undertaking adventure activities in Finland. This phenomenon has been observed by outdoor Guides working in Lapland and was verified in my Lapland guides interviews. (Expert Interviews, 2020).

This trend of less experienced individuals and informal groups undertaking recreational outdoor activities in Finland has led to a record number of call outs for Finnish rescue teams in Lapland (Lapin Pelastuslaitos, 2020).). Therefore, the development of a Bushcraft programme aimed at promoting wilderness safety is very apt. Both in terms of, furthering outdoor safety in general and in producing a new product which has adapted to the changing market conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic.

### 1.2. The Commissioner

The Bushcraft course were developed for the commissioner Moln; which is owned and operated by Roope Roine. Moln is an independent Scandinavian based provider of adventure holidays established in 2008. Moln provides group tours, bespoke private guiding services and corporate events. Moln primarily provides trips for adult clients based in Scandinavia; but also collaborates with several British travel companies providing trips and guiding services for their clients.

Moln offer a range of year-round adventure holiday packages including hiking, backpacking, mountaineering, sea kayaking, canoeing and snowshoeing. Moln runs trips in Finland, Norway, Sweden, Spain, Greenland and Canada. Roope also provides wilderness first aid training and assessment courses. Roope is a highly qualified and experienced guide who has worked for over 25 years guiding in challenging mountain and sea environments.

### 1.3. Needs for the course development

At heart we are still hunter- gatherers and this lies at odds with our sedentary lifestyle in a high technology culture. Western society has increasingly been dominated by the desire for security and ease of living. Which is at odds with our instinct for adventure (Mortlock, 1984) and the ability to effectively take responsibility for our own individual

actions and safety management. Through practicing bushcraft skills, we can re-develop a sense of connection in nature and a renewed sense of vitality and purpose and a sense of safety (Canterbury, 2015). Bushcraft, within the scope of this study can be defined as the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to thrive in nature.

The technological revolution has resulted in people becoming increasingly disconnected from the natural environment. Increasingly people are rediscovering the joys of spending time in Nature and the many benefits it bestows on physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. These findings are supported by research into Outdoor learning (Institute of Outdoor learning, 2019). However, many adults lack the skills base to have effective risk management strategies for independent outdoor adventures having had limited direct experience engaged in adventure activities.

There are numerous reasons why Moln identified a need to develop a Bushcraft programme to add to their already extensive range of adventure holiday tours. Roope Roine captures the essence on his website when he says:

“The safety of my customers is always my foremost priority. Excitement and foolhardiness are two entirely different matters.” Roope Roine 2019.

Moln’s priority is always the safety of its clients. Bushcraft and wilderness living skills can hopefully help clients develop effective hazard management and risk assessment skills. This emergency preparedness combined with an understanding of the natural environment can help improve customers wellbeing and safety both during Moln led trips and in their own independent adventures.

Also, the need people have to reconnect with nature during their free time has led to an increased demand for nature experience which will help enable this connection. Bushcraft with its accompanying immersion and participation in the natural environment can play a significant role in this.

Moln as a company is very much about sustainability, respect and enjoyment of the natural environment. As Roope wisely notes on Moln’s website;

“Be considerate towards nature. There are evermore of us that head off into the unspoiled wilderness, which in turn means that all of us have a stake in preserving nature.” Roope Roine, 2019.



Moln has a philosophy of harmony and bushcraft helps us work alongside and with nature in a harmonious way. These bushcraft courses clearly demonstrate Moln's commitment to substantiable no trace harmonious wilderness enjoyment.

Acting in a sustainable way is a key characteristic of aboriginal and native people who are connected and dependent on natural resources through their bushcraft skills. Recent research has also supported the fact that connection with nature helps promote a sustainable and environmentally friendly lifestyle. (University of Exeter, 2020)

Furthermore, since the global corona virus epidemic and the accompanying restriction in travel and larger social gatherings more people than ever visited the country's national parks and have been increasingly pursuing activities in Nature (Yle,2020). The new challenges of international travel in the virus era have led to people increasingly looking for homeland-based adventure holidays and activities and Moln has experienced an increased demand for these trips.

Additionally, Moln enjoys a high rebooking rate from its existing customer base so it is prudent to offer a range of new course to satisfy this internal market. Also, Roope, alongside being a highly qualified guide, is an entrepreneur; therefore, he is used to carefully analyzing the current market demands and responding to them.

I had suggested to Roope various course developments which I might assist Moln with including open water swimming, canoeing and bushcraft. His choice was a Bushcraft course based, on the needs he perceived in the changing adventure holiday market and the idea of giving customers the tools and knowledge to safely discover the outdoors themselves. Roope was also aware that there are also very few, Finnish based companies offering professional high quality Bushcraft course (2020), so this is a chance to be ahead of the wave.

The goal of this study was to focus on the contribution that bushcraft skills can play in promoting wilderness safety for recreational outdoor users. The needs for this development are both from an external viewpoint, the evolution of western society and an internal prospective of an adventure company adapting to the demands of a changing market. The interaction of these mechanisms producing a demand for a new bushcraft

course development which caters for the increased desire to develop a deeper relationship and connection with our environment within a framework of safety.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter I shall investigate what are the key components of recreational outdoor safety. I will then examine what bushcraft encompasses and explore the Finnish concept of wilderness skills (*erätaidot* in Finnish). I shall also reconnoiter why bushcraft might be a suitable methodology for teaching wilderness safety with reference to experiential learning.

### 2.1. Safety in recreational outdoor activities

“A ship is safe in harbor, but that's not what ships are for.”

John A. Shedd, 1906.

In the context of this study recreational outdoor activities include hiking, canoeing, hunting, fishing, biking, kayaking, wild food gathering and snow sports. This study is focused on human powered physical activity conducted in the northern boreal forest environment. The main elements of safety that this study is focused on are those related to informal self-led adventures by individuals and groups.

Safety in recreational activities is of paramount importance. According to the dictionary definition, safety is the state of being safe; the condition of being protected from harm, or other non-desirable outcomes (Oxford, 2020). Safety is often regarded in terms of physical, mental and social safety. The main harmful incidents in outdoor recreation in the boreal forest include getting lost, physical or psychologically injured, being exposed to extreme temperature, inclement weather conditions, hazardous terrain, equipment failure and having insufficient skills or physical conditions to meet the level of adventure (Humak, 2019).

The famous adventurer and pioneering British outdoor educationalist Colin Mortlock outlines that whenever participants engage in recreational outdoor activities there is always an element of danger. (Mortlock, 1984) He believes that through adopting a realistic attitude to the inherent risk of the activity and taken appropriate measures to mitigate the risks most accidents can be avoided. Furthermore, Mortlock proposes that

though the desire to adventure may well be innate (Mortlock, 1984) we also all have a desire for safety too. Mortlock outlines the critical importance of maintaining an appropriate balance between the level of adventure in relation to the participant's skills and experience. Mortlock identifies the skill needed to remain safe as being in four broad categories: technical skills, fitness skills, human skills and environmental skills. He considers that the systematic application of these in progressively more demanding environments is a key safety aspect.

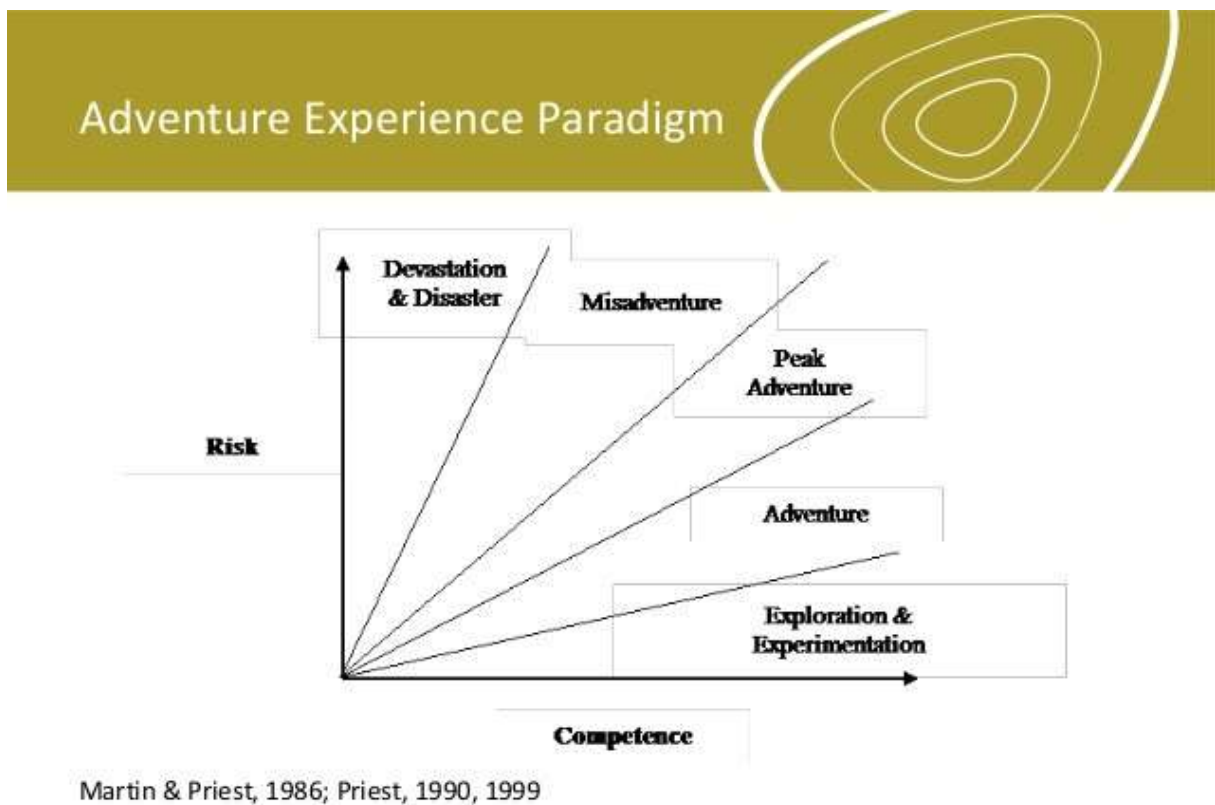


Figure 1: Colin Mortlock stages of adventure and danger diagram, 1984 adapted by Martin and Priest, 1986.

Humak adventure education departments identifies the factors effecting safety in adventure activities as surrounding, activities, individuals, group and leader (Humak, 2019). In this model the need to detect relevant risks and manage them effectively play a central role in creating a level of overall safety. It is important to note that this process

is based on analytical thinking and reasoned judgments related to identifying and managing risks. This model is therefore very focused on the reduce strategy as a major part of risk management.

The Risk Assessment and Safety Management model, RASM was developed by Rick Curtis in 1974 in order to promote outdoor safety in outdoor programs in the United States. The model looks at the interaction of -Equipment, Environment and Human factors on outdoor safety. These factors can overlap to a greater or lesser extent depending on the hazard and safety management. The greater the overlap the higher the accident potential. This model seeks to help adventures balance the hazard factors with safety factors. That means that managing risk can be accomplished by both reducing hazard factors and also by adding safety factors in the equation. This model places strong emphasis on risk management judgments and knowing when to *bail out*, change plans, if the risk level is too high.



Figure 2: The Risk Assessment and Safety Management model, Curtis 1974

Whatever the adventure there will always be an element of risk and the process of identify and managing risk is a cornerstone of recreational outdoor safety. Alongside this initial preparation and planning there needs to be a continuous process of observation and assessment and good decision making (Humak safety card ,2020).

Colin Mortlock strongly supports this view:

“The first law of the animal world is know where you are and what is around you. The first rule of safety, similarly, may be termed as awareness. The second rule may be termed appropriate action in the event of danger.”

Colin Mortlock, 1984.

Within the frame of reference in this study the Curtis (1974) Risk Assessment and Safety Management model, RASM, provides the best overall summary of promoting recreational outdoor safety. This is because it has the promotion of positive safety in its core structure. For example, how Equipment i.e. first aid, gear and gear use. Environment i.e. emergency access, phone reception and People i.e. training, experience, protocols can contribute to participant’s safety. This fit and supports the research question posed by this study most effectively. That is why this model will be used to define safety in the research.

## 2.2 Bushcraft

Bushcraft, within the scope of this study can be defined as the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to thrive in nature.

The core skills set that the term bushcraft encompasses in this project includes; avoidance and management of environmental hazards, everyman’s rights , first aid, bush hygiene , the use of cutting tools, shelter construction ,fire craft, water sourcing and purification, cordage and bind craft , tree and plant identification ,natural navigation equipment and clothing use and selection. The physiology and psychology of survival, safety protocols and leadership responsibilities and roles. Thus, we can see the term bushcraft encompasses a wide variety of knowledge about nature with a core root in self-reliance.

As Ray Mears says,

“In the study of Bushcraft we step beyond survival and learn the subtlety that makes outdoor life both certain and enjoyable.” Ray Mears 2002

The etymology of the term bushcraft comes from the amalgamation of the terms bush and craft. Bush is the anglicized Canadian and Australian, term for the back country, or the outback; Craft refers to the crafts used in every day bush living. The term Bushcraft was first popularized by the pioneering Canadian wilderness skills instructor and teacher, Mors Kochanski, in his outdoor skills and wilderness survival book intitled: Bushcraft (1988). Prior to this wilderness living skill set was often referred to as Woodcraft; Fieldcraft, or Campcraft.

The term bushcraft has become more widely used over the last 30 years, particularly in the UK, Central Europe the USA and Canada. This popularization has been the result of a range of television programmes, books, videos and websites which has generated a great deal of public interest. It is de rigueur now to offer this type of activity now in the UK (OutdoorJAC, 2020). Notable in this evolution is, Ray Mears, the famous English woods man, guide and television star, who has introduced Bushcraft to a large worldwide contemporary audience.

### 2.3 Erätaidot

The term Bushcraft is not in common use in Scandinavian, especially Finland. However, there is a great ritual and practice of the many wilderness skills (erätaidot) which it encompasses. The traditions of bushcraft and living as part of nature go back centuries in Finland. The indigenous aboriginal, Sami peoples, of northern Scandinavia relied on their knowledge, skills and understanding of nature as part of their everyday survival.

Several geopolitical factors have ensured that erätaidot have been historically prevalent in Finnish society. The right to roam, called "jokamiehenoikeus" in Finnish, combined with low population density and easy access to the countryside has resulted in that the general populous having a strong connection to nature and woodcraft skills. This relationship is for example evident in the traditions of berry and mushroom picking which are still robust seasonal practices amongst a large proportion of the population. According to a 2017 survey, 46 percent of Finns pick berries and 32 percent collect mushrooms (Cord, 2020).

Alongside this natural foraging, there has been a practice of spending time in nature at summer cabins, mökki in Finnish. Today there are still over one million summer cabins in Finland, one for every five residents. (Yle Uutiset ,2019). This time that many Finnish people have spent staying in simple summer accommodations, using an axe and simple tools, lighting and cooking on fires, using wood burning saunas, fishing, gathering wild berries and mushrooms has meant this aspect of wilderness living skills set has been traditionally robust and has been handed on from generation to generation.

Nevertheless, the growing trend of urbanization in the Finnish population, which has risen steeply since the 1990s, about 85% live in towns and cities, 2020(Finland in statistics,2020) and the increasing use of technology has led to a wilderness skills gap in the younger generation. Namely in the millennial and post millennial generations (a millennial is a person reaching young adulthood around the year 2000). This phenomenon has been observed in particular by the Finnish scouting association Partio. They have found that young scouts are now more familiar with a smartphone than an axe! (Luokkala,2018). This trend of a reduced skill level in traditional erätaidot is part of the extrinsic social need for the product development of a bushcraft course in this study,

For some, the Finnish term erätaidot refers to old-style wilderness camping skills associated with scouting and includes many of the skills which can be found in bushcraft. If a distinction needed to be identified it could be that; bushcraft references a wider skill set and learning across a range of environment and therefore has a deeper and wider knowledge base (Reference interview with expert Finnish wilderness guide, 2020). Whereas erätaidot purely refers to skills used in the northern boreal forest of Scandinavia.

In recent years an increasing number of Finnish owned outdoor companies have been offering bushcraft courses in Finland (five in 2020). There exists a small trend to use the terms bushcraft and erätaidot in a transposable manner (Kettunen, 2020). Accordingly, within the scope of this study it is deemed appropriate to use the terms erätaidot and bushcraft in an interchangeable way.



#### 2.4. The pedagogy of bushcraft in teaching recreational outdoor safety

“What could be more natural to walk in wild places able to recognize the wild things around us, confidently able to find food, shelter, fire and water.”  
Ray Mears 2002

Throughout human history people have needed to meet the basic human regiments for air, shelter, water, food and sleep (Sleight, 2017). Modern humans can be very detached from, the skills and knowledge to meet these basic needs. Whereas in many tribal community’s people carried this accumulated knowledge in their heads and in their hands had the skills of translating thought into action with great accomplishment. This sentiment was clearly expressed when I worked alongside a native Sami wilderness guide in Finnish Lapland;

"There is nothing here! (A tourist seeing Lapland wilderness for first-time).  
Here is everything (A native Sami who lives there)." Ellä ,2019

The concept of using bushcraft to teach recreational outdoor safety is founded in our ancestral human development and can be viewed as an individual journey of rediscovery and reconnection. Thus, we are plugging into not only nature awareness, but also the skills inherent in our nature. This makes bushcraft a truly unique and powerful medium for teaching wilderness safety.

Another key strength bushcraft has as a teaching medium is its practical experiential nature.

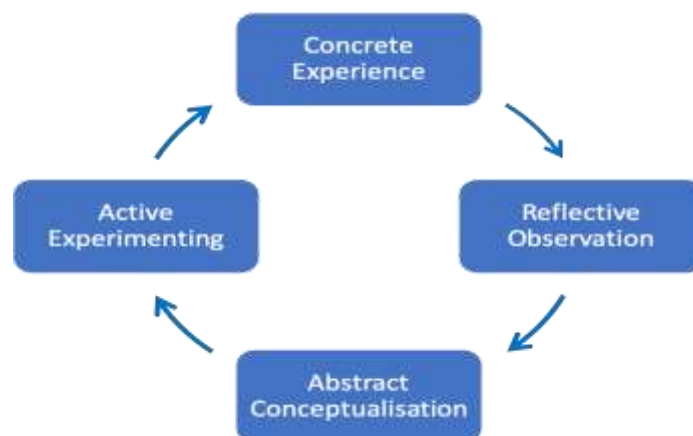


Figure 3 The experiential learning model (Kolb, 1974).

Psychologist David Kolb, thought that:

“Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 38)

The application of bushcraft teaching is always founded in concrete experience and thus provides great opportunities for learners to move through the stages of the learning cycle. Furthermore, experiential learning is widely recognized by academics and teachers as central in learning the ability to apply abstract concepts in a range of situations. This is obviously a fundamental skill in a wilderness survival scenario!

One of the leading bushcraft experts in the United states, David Canterbury (2015), endorses the fact that experience is the true teacher.

“The doctorate in woody knowledge can only be taught by mother nature in the classroom of the outdoors. many can train you but only experience can teach you.” Dave Canterbury 2015

Bushcraft consists of a having an inordinate understanding and knowledge about the environment and our relationship to it. This understanding and ability to make appropriate risk analysis and implement effective control methods is central to safety. As Colin Mortlock, author of his 1984 book *The Adventure Alternative* outlines appropriate risk-taking plays a fundamental role in Safety.

Mortlock proposes that the most important safety control is participants being able to make a distinction between subjective and objective danger. Subjective danger being that which is potentially under the control of the participants, such as route selection and equipment. Objective danger being that which the participants have little or no control such as extreme weather conditions or flash floods. He continues to emphasis the critical role of skills and experience in progressively moving from low-risk adventure environments with low objective danger to increasing unpredictable higher objective danger environments.

He summarizes a belief that although there is an inherent risk in all outdoor activities that most accidents in the outdoors are avoidable. As long the critical distinction is made between subjective and objective danger and an appropriate safety framework is put in place. This provides support of the methodology of using bushcraft in promoting outdoor wilderness safety as hazard awareness and risk management are foundation concepts in the practice of bushcraft.

Another key aspect in the use of bushcraft as a medium for outdoor safety is the emphasis bushcraft has on knowledge and learned competence, rather than purely having the right equipment. Of course, appropriate equipment selection and use is essential to outdoor safety, but there must always be a fail-safe for when equipment is lost or broken. In bushcraft it is not so much about the kit simply what you can do with what you have.

As Mors Kochanski says: "The more you know the less you carry"(1987).

### 3. DEVELOPMENT METHODOLOGY

The research question in this study was; how and why could the development of core bushcraft survival skills be used in promoting adult learner's outdoor safety skills? The goal of this chapter is to explore the applied research this development project involved. I will also clarify how I collected and analyzed data and explain the tools used including the rationale for their selection.

The use of bushcraft as a teaching medium for recreational outdoor safety is a theme of exploratory research so benchmark against existing courses was not possible. Therefore, this development was based on collecting primary data for the research through interviews and experiments and then using an expert focus group to evaluate the product. This study used qualitative research methods focusing on words and meanings. Additionally, the course was mainly developed due to literature review, desktop research and experimentation in the field. I also drew on my 35 plus years' experience as an outdoor education teacher and Instructor.

#### 3.1. Expert interviews

Semi structured expert interviews were conducted with five highly qualified and experienced bushcraft instructors. Three from Finland, one from the UK and one from Canada. This International sample was deemed appropriate for this research as bushcraft is still an emerging phenomenon in Finland and I felt it useful to draw on International experience.

These were purposive interviews with participants being selected on the basis of their demonstrated competence and experience in providing bushcraft and outdoor course. All the individuals selected had a least 5 years of experience of running their own recreational outdoor activity courses and hold a number of national governing body (N.G.B) awards in adventure activity provision. There are few nationally accredited awards for bushcraft, so I used the other N.G.B. awards as an additional guideline to individuals' competences and expertise. Also, it was important for experts to have experience in other adventure activities so they would have a broader perspective on outdoor safety.



Interviews were conducted online and lasted approximately 20 minutes. For this semi structured interviews, I used a set of questions as guidelines and recorded the key findings via notetaking. In line with good research practice I wanted to give participants the choice of having the conversation recorded or not. These interviews were not digital recorded as it was difficult to obtain permission as many of the individuals run their own companies, and have their own online podcasts so wanted to maintain a clear control of their own recorded inputs. Gathering the information via notetaking proved effective and I was able to take down an accurate documentation of the key components and concepts. The flexible nature of the semi structured interview enabled me to gather information on four key questions related to the role of bushcraft in promoting recreational outdoor safety.

The Expert Interview Questions were:

1. What are the key elements of outdoor safety?
2. How effective do you think bushcraft is as a medium for teaching outdoor safety? and why or why not is it effective?
3. What skills would you teach on a two-day bushcraft course to maximize learning about recreational outdoor safety?
4. What advice would you give Moln, regarding to this course development?

In some of the interviews, when participants had more time available, there was opportunity to explore new avenues of thought and gather more information along with ideas. These additional topics included the structure of the fundamental bushcraft course including time frame, the key content, order of teaching, how skills and learning might be most advantageously encouraged to improve participants safety awareness.

Overall, the expert bushcraft instructor interviews yielded a lot of qualitative information and ideas. Interviewing participants from different nations gave a wide range of perspective and thoughts. The size of the sample group was appropriate for the scope of this study. The data from the interviews was analyzed using thematic content analysis.

This methodology involved coding the information and finding common meaning and themes in the interview data by reading and highlighting the notes I had taken during the interviews.



### 3.2. The ADDIE Model

The ADDIE model is an Instructional Systems Design (ISD) model. The name is an acronym for the five phases it defines for building training and performance support.

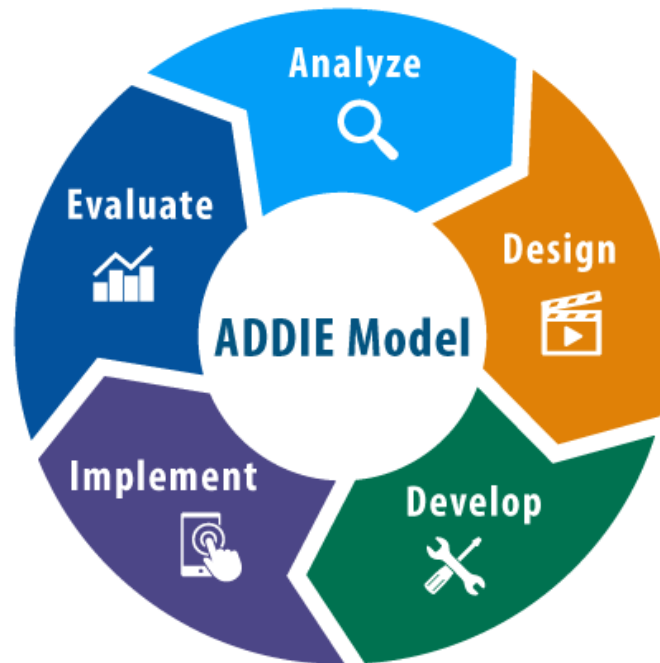


Figure 4: ADDIE Model

This model was used to ensure the bushcraft course development followed a systematic, step-by-step framework in its evolution. It is significant to note that the ADDIE Model was used as an approach to structure the design model itself, it was not a methodology for product evaluation.

The ADDIE model is basically a generic model, used by instructional designers, developers and trainers to ensure course development and learning does not occur in a haphazard, unstructured way. In the first phase, analysis, needs and objectives are established. In the design phase, learning objectives, session structure, resources are identified. During the development phase, content for the training session is completed. The implementation phase involves the preparation and delivery of training content. The evaluation phase is ongoing and ensures all stated goals of the learning process will meet the specified needs.



In terms of this course development the vital questions that needed to be asked at each stage of this product development were.

Analysis (What does Moln want to achieve with this course? Who is Moln's target group? What is the timeline to complete the project?)

Design (What are the specific learning goals of the course? Which pedagogical methods/ tools will be most effective? What will be the content of the course syllabus?)

Development (Can I do a pilot test group to gather ideas and information? Might I use interviews with Bushcraft experts to help get some development themes and ideas?)

Implementation (Could I run a course with a group of Moln's customers?)

Evaluation (How do I get clear feedback from the customers to help optimize the course goals?)

The unique circumstances of the 2020-21 meant that there had to be a continuous process of adaptation in all phases of this project development. In reality, it meant that the project implementation phase had to be delayed and I had to find a suitable alternative means to evaluate the project. This alternate method was having an expert focus group.

### 3.3. Focus group

As Charles Darwin wisely remarked,

“It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change” Charles Darwin

The programme's effectiveness in enhancing safety was to be evaluate its by means of running a trail course in the summer of 2020. The specially selected course participants would comprise a mixture of expert outdoor people and those with less experience to provide a range of perspectives and critical assessment. The aim of having participants with different skills levels was to provide feedback at different levels; namely from the potential customer perspective and also from the outdoor expert viewpoint.

These differing feedback viewpoints would give more data to help evaluate and improve the course. However, given the current pandemic situation (COVID 19, 2020-21) and the national Finnish fire restriction (summer 2020 Metsäpalovarotus) this form of course evaluation became unworkable.

Innovation lies at the heart of bushcraft! So, several changes had to be made to the original plan. The best course evaluation option became using an expert course focus group to appraise the course thus providing qualitative feedback from professional in the field of adventure education. A focus group is a common and well proved qualitative research technique.

The focus groups were comprised of a purposeful sample of five experienced outdoor educators with an in depth understanding of wilderness safety. The preselected centralized topic was recreational outdoor safety. The dialogue of the focus group was recorded and analysed and in addition a research assistant took notes throughout the 2-hour long presentation and discussion. At the end of the session the focus group members conducted their own individual SWOT analysis of the bushcraft course programme. Based on their heightened awareness of the course aims and objectives and internal and external development factors.

The selection of an expert focus group methodology in this study was the result of the interaction of a number of influences. Firstly, it was felt that since this is a new development with an embryonic knowledge base that the focus group would be appropriate in generating a cross pollination of ideas through the process of group interaction. Secondly, because focus groups generally enable members to express their real attitudes, feelings, and beliefs. Thirdly, the time framework of a focus group would enable the gathering of a lot of real-world information working under the constraints imposed by Covid regulations. Fourthly it was an effective technique which would provide immediate ideas for the improvement of the development and help identify the product requirements of the end-user. (Writing, 2019)

The scene setting for the focus group was a significant consideration. Acting on advice from a university professor I opted for a fireside setting. This would provide a natural setting which would help members feel safe comfortable and importantly tuned in to the subject area of bushcraft. The setting inside a wooden hut with a fireplace in the middle (A Finnish Kota), with focus group members sitting around a fire was truly authentic to the knowledge base of this study.

The structure of the focus group session also used outdoor acting and storytelling prior to the formal discussions to provide a strong sense of scene setting for focus group members. The acting involved a 15-minute woodland presentation using a narrator (myself) an actress and a range of soft toy animal characters. The aim of the session was to give a multimedia input about the proposed bushcraft course and was entitled, *Three days in fifteen minutes*. The play chartered the story of a character, whose profile was based on Moln's target group and her journey through the Bushcraft fundamentals course. The narrator provided the dialogue of activities and stories which were physically demonstrated by the actress and her accompanying animal companions. This theater-based approach was used for the introduction to the focus group as it was an effective way to demonstrate not only the contents of the bushcraft course but also something of the feel and flavor of the course. Via using theater focus group members were more easily able to see, think and feel what participation in the course would involve and then be more able to provide effective feedback. Drama has been demonstrated to be effective in promoting meaningful and reflective thinking. (Jjarrah,2019)

After the Theater presentation focus group members gathered around the fireside. I acted as moderator and initial gave an overview of the development. The group were then asked four prepared questions. Each topic was given 20 minutes with the moderator acting as timekeeper and asking appropriate open-ended questions if a topic needed to be explored in greater depth or required more clarity.

The Focus Group Questions were:

1. What do you think are the key elements of recreational outdoor safety?
2. How effective do you think bushcraft is as a medium for teaching Outdoor safety? and why or why not is it effective?
3. Do you think the content of the Moln bushcraft fundamental course program teaches you the things you need to know about safety?

#### 4. What advice would you give Moln, regarding to this course development?



Figure 5: Photo of focus group session.

The limitations of a focus group can be members are often more reluctant to express negative ideas in a face-to-face setting (Kokemuller,2020) Another potential drawback can be *group think* where more influential group members effect the expression of others in the group.

However, through effective moderation skills, creating a safe space and encouraging active and honest participation with free expression through no judgmental listening these factors were minimized.

After the focus group participants crated their own individual SWOT-analysis of the course. SWOT is an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. This included internal development factors, strengths and weaknesses and external

market factors opportunities and threats. Contributors were full briefed on the methodology of completing this analysis. The aim of the analysis is to help Moln identify the positive and negative factors both inside and outside the company which affects the success of the development of the bushcraft fundamentals course.

The incentive for focus group members was the invitation to attend a pilot version of the fundamentals bushcraft course when it is possible to safely run it ( hopefully spring 2021) .The more immediate incentive was the post focus group campfire coffee and freshly toasted croissants with homemade raspberry jam.

## 4. ANALYSIS

### 4.1. Expert Interviews Results

The expert interviews provide an opportunity to explore what Bushcraft experts believed to be the key elements of outdoor safety. How effective bushcraft is as a teaching medium and what they felt were the crucial contents for a course to be effective in teaching recreational outdoor safety.

The prime reacquiring themes were planning, equipment and environment.

The importance of prior preparation before embarking on any outdoor adventure was highlighted by all the interviewers. This included identifying and understanding the risks posed by the environment and putting the appropriate response in place. This common theme of risk assessment was best summed up by the interview who said:

“The important question is what are the real risks you’ll face and how will you manage them? The answer will be different depending on your destination, the duration of your trip, time of year and you and your buddies’ level of experience of that environment “. Bushcraft expert, 2020

The other central element that was mentioned by all interviewees was the need to put a backup safety framework in place. This had a few different interpretations, but the commonality was to have a base contact who knows your journey plans and estimated return time and knowing what to do if things do not go to plan. ie emergency procedure protocols.

Equipment was a recurring theme in the interviews in particular the need to always carry essential kit. There was broad agreement on the need to carry basic survival equipment defined as the Five Cs (Canterbury,2020). The Five Cs are: cutting tool, cover element, combustion devices, container and cordage. There was a broad consensus that these are the most important items to carry as they related directly to maintaining core body temperature and are the most difficult to reproduce from natural materials. Every one of the interviews also mentioned protection from the elements and the need to have adequate warm and waterproofs clothing.

An understanding of the environment and having knowledge about both the risks and the resources available was also mentioned by all the interviewees. Three interviewees stressed the importance of a positive mental attitude. And one pointed out that a positive mental attitude can be fostered by even an untrained individual. Four interviewees stressed the importance of understanding your body's physiological response to extreme temperatures and environmental hazards. One thought that understanding the mechanisms of heat loss and avoiding hypothermia was the number one safety aspect. All the expert interviewees endorsed bushcraft as an effective medium for teaching recreational outdoor safety. During one of the interviews the expert said:

“Many bushcraft skills are essential to surviving in the wild in an emergency.”

Another expert said that bushcraft was effective at teaching safety because of the transfer effect. In that bushcraft skills are directly related to the safety of individuals, the group and the environment and can be applied as an approach in a range of emergency situations. An alternative view was expressed by another expert who supposed the context of the skill defined whether it was a bushcraft or a survival skill.

#### 4.2. Results of focus group.

The focus group generated a wide variety of themes and ideas.

In terms of the key elements of safety there was an extensive variation in thoughts. The notions that safety was about relationships, procedures, accountability, technical skills, peer support and trust. The recurring points of agreement were; firstly, how important it is to know you own skills and capabilities. Secondly, your relationship to your environment and the people you are with.

In terms of the effectiveness of using bushcraft as a teaching medium for safety there was a high level of endorsement. As one focus group member said about bushcraft,

“Wonderful, it is achieving safety skills you are going to have with you always “

There was a general trend in agreement that bushcraft is an all-inclusive back up safety system of awareness, skills and knowledge. This option was notable in this statement by one of the focus group members discussing recreational outdoor safety;

“There are many modern tools to make it safer. But once those tools fail you do not have the skills actually to manage yourself. So, you are relying on something to get help. But bushcraft really goes to the essence of it. So, we can be prepared to situations”.

As regards the content of the Moln bushcraft fundamental course there were many observations. The focus group discussed if water or shelter was a more important survival priority, the importance of the inclusion of everyman’s rights, social safety, teaching model and developing intuition to help stay safe. The area of strong agreement was the content of the course programme was comprehensive and covered all that was needed. The detailed discussion was focused on the priorities of survival and the order and skills progression in the teaching plan.

One course member expressed the opinion that the content of the course was more important than the order. They said:

“I think it covers a lot; the order does not matter that much. I cannot think of anything that is excluded.”

With reference to the advice focus group members would give Moln regarding the course there was a general agreement that this development would be well received. There was discussion around the length of the course, with some expressing the opinion it could be longer and some thinking it might be shorter. The balance between costing, time and participant tiredness and skills fade were also discussed. Overall, there was consensus that three days and two nights was an effective course duration.



#### 4.3. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats Analysis Results

The individual SWOT analysis conducted by focus group members were studied to analyzing the performance and planning for further development of the Moln bushcraft course.

The significant agreement in the content internal analysis of the programmes strengths included; having a logical structure, a comprehensive content and a holistic multisensory learning approach. As one contributor noted:” multisensory learning equals learning for everybody”

The weaknesses (what the course could do better) included varied ideas about the duration of the course both in terms of concerns about skills fade and also financial accessibility. As one participant noted “Some people might need more time to succeed or feel like they have achieved what they wanted “

The external analysis of opportunities for the course included a general agreement that there is a growing interest in Outdoor actives and developing safety and bushcraft skills. This was noted by four of the contributors.

Threats, potential unfavorable conditions for the course development included; the current Covoid 19 pandemic and challenges related to getting insurance for this type of Bushcraft activities.

## 5. PRODUCT – PRIMAL SAFETY COURSE

Two Bushcraft courses were researched, developed and produced for the Scandinavian based activity provider Moln. This pilot course was due to be run in Finland during the summer of 2020 to provide a pilot study for feedback and programme improvement. As previously mentioned, this was not possible due to the forest fire ban and ongoing Covid 19 pandemic. The courses were both 2 Nights 3 days in duration and were based

The first weekend course was Bushcraft Fundamentals. This course was targeted at promoting participants basic understanding and skills in essential wilderness safety.

The course is based at a static camp in the boreal forest environment. The curriculum is focused on learning key wilderness survival skills, knowledge and values using practical experience based outdoor learning.

The programme emphasises the core abilities of; risk management, shelter, fire, use of tools, water collection and purification, tree and plant ID, natural navigation, equipment and clothing. Please see appendix 1 for full course programme details

The second weekend course developed for Moln is called Bushcraft Journey. This course concentrates on putting Bushcraft knowledge into practice on a short wilderness journey. This journey includes implementing and improving basic wilderness living safety skills through practice and application in varied settings. The course is based around the concept of a journey with participants embarking on a real wilderness journey and setting up mobile camps.

There is also an option to run both courses together to form a single package. Both Bushcraft wilderness safety courses will be marketed through Moln's website from 2021 onwards. Moln have reviewed the course and the feedback was very positive.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

“Knowledge is the key to survival, the real beauty of that is that it doesn't weigh anything. “Ray Mears, 1998.

### 6.1 Discussion

From the results of this study the data suggests that there is some evidence which supports the effectiveness of the development of core bushcraft survival skills in contributing to adult learner's outdoor safety skills.

The interviews of Bushcraft experts gave a lot of input into the datum that knowledge and understanding of the environment and your own skills and competencies is central to safe recreational adventure. This supports the existing theories of Outdoor recreational safety as expounded by Colin Mortlock (1984) and adapted by Martin and Priest, (1986).

There was also a significant agreement by the Bushcraft experts of the critical role of carrying the essential outdoor equipment's and being familiar with its use. There was broad agreement in terms of what equipment is essential. The Five Cs (Canterbury, 2020). The Five Cs are: cutting tool, cover element, combustion devices, container and cordage. This is supported by Curtis (1974) Risk Assessment and Safety Management model, RASM, which holds equipment selection and use as one of the core safety components.

There were some differing opinions amongst the Bushcraft experts about the skills which were most important in a survival situation. Notably one of the experts was of the opinion that friction fire making was an all-important skill; whereas the other four experts were more pragmatic. Believing the most important thing was to make sure you carried fire lighting gear with you. i.e. matches, a lighter and a fire steel. This may be to some extent explained by the different environments that the bushcraft experts are familiar to working in. (with friction fire being a much more viable option in more southern latitudes.)

Relating to the priorities of survival, which are reflected in the bushcraft programmes content, there was total agreement amongst the interviewees with the course being structured around one of the classic acronyms of survival: PLAN (Wiseman, 2009).

This signifies protection (clothing, shelter and fire), location (signaling and keeping watch), acquisition (sustenance, materials and tool making) and navigation (travel/getting help).

The practical implication of these results reflects the importance of the order of learning and curriculum of a Bushcraft course aimed at promoting recreational outdoor safety. The significance of natural progression, things building upon each other, from basic to complex appears important.

The results from the focus groups contribute to an understanding that the core constituents of what people think makes a situation safe have differing interpretation. The area of noteworthy agreement is that safety is fundamentally about our relationship to ourselves each other and the environment. This builds on the theories of Mortlock (1984) that our relationship to the natural world needs to be harmonious in order for us to journey in a safe harmonious way.

The other significant inference from the SWOT analysis undertaken by the focus group members is the inference that developing wilderness skills supports the development of participants safety when engaging in recreational outdoor activities. This is based on primary data. There is little secondary theory to compare this too, as there is very limited research on the concept of using bushcraft in developing recreational outdoor safety. However, there is some supporting evidence as a leading UK based survival Psychologist notes;

*“It has been shown many times that people who are properly briefed, trained, drilled and with a knowledge of what to expect in a survival situation will show a higher degree of effectiveness should a situation arise”.* – Dr John Leach 2018.

Unanticipated obstacles that emerged during the research process for this study included the lack of a field-based pilot course. This would have provided more direct feedback and observable measurable outcomes related to safety. Also, physical participation in the course programme would provide higher quality more informed feedback loop about the effect of the course content. From this standpoint this was a major limitation of this research.

Another limitation was also in the sample size of the expert interviews and focus groups within this study and this limits the generalizability of the results.

Also, the interpretation and analysis of the expert interviews was more complex as they were not recorded in the same way as the focus group was. The recording allowed more detailed analysis than working from notes taken during the interviews.

Further research is needed to establish the link between recreational outdoor safety and bushcraft skills. Ideally this would involve field-based implementation of a bushcraft course and the assessment of learning about safety. The ability to carefully record the findings of such a study might be enhanced by the ability to record and interview attendees at key instances throughout the course (a video diary would work well in this respect). Plus, a post course follow up to assess the overall longer-term development of recreational outdoor safety skills in course participants.

## 6.2 Conclusion

“In the school of the woods, there is no graduation day.”

Horace Kephart, 1906

The central research question of this study was; how and why could the development of core bushcraft survival skills be used in promoting adult learner's outdoor safety skills? Specifically, would attending Moln's fundamental bushcraft course improve adult learner's recreational outdoor safety?

YES! The evidence gathered, results obtained and analysed in this primary study would indicate that the development of core bushcraft survival skills can contribute to adult learner's outdoor safety.

We should bear in mind that most people are rescued within 72 hours. Therefore, having the basic competences in wilderness bushcraft skills provided by the Moln fundamentals bushcraft course programme will generally give you enough knowledge to survive this essential time frame. Further studies would be needed to verify this effect.

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## APPENDIX 1

Moln Bushcraft fundamentals course programme (Draft) 27.11.2020

Course Location: Finland Northern Boreal Forest

Course Duration: 3 Days -2 Nights

Course Time: 18:00 Friday till 15:00 Sunday

Course size: 10 persons max. Staff :1 lead Guide + 2 Assistance

Age range: 18 + Children over 7 years if accompanied by an adult.

Experience: No prior experience required to attend this course.

This course will introduce you to the exciting world of Bushcraft and Wilderness safety.

At heart we are still hunter- gatherers and this lies at odds with our sedentary lifestyle in a high technology culture. Through practicing Bushcraft skills, we can re- develop a sense of connection in nature and a renewed sense of vitality and purpose. We can also equip ourselves with the skills, knowledge, attitudes and values to promote our recreational outdoor safety.

The course aims to give you foundation skills and understanding in essential wilderness safety. The programme will focus on the core skills of; risk management, shelter, fire, use of tools, water collection and purification, tree and plant ID, natural navigation and survival equipment and clothing.

This course is designed for you to have a practical, hands-on outdoor learning experience, in a safe and fun weekend.

## Friday

18.00- 18.30 Course Introduction; Course programme, Health and safety, Goals, Questions.

18.30-18.45. Sit circle environmental awareness exercise.

18.45- 19.15 Safe use of tools, knife and saw. Participants craft project 1

19.00- 19.30. Break

19.30- 20.30 Shelter Intro. Safety, Location, Site selection, Setting up a tarp, knots.

21.00 Fireside storytelling and snacks.

Participants sleep under tarps they have set up or in own tent if preferred.

## Saturday

08.00 –09.00 Breakfast

09.00-09.30 The 5 C s of Survival. (cutting tool, cover, combustion, containers, cordage).

Equipment and emergency preparedness; STOP and PLAN.

09.30-09.45 Coffee break

09.45- 12.00 Plant and tree ID walk focusing on plants and trees which will help us survive. Fire, water, food and medicine (full details to be added depending on site location and species)

12.00-13.00 Fireside lunch

13.00 – 14.30 Fire lighting skills,

14.30 -14.45 Tea Break

15.00- 17.30 Building natural shelters.

18.00 – 19.30 Evening meal.

19.30 -20.30 Craft project.

21.00 Fireside storytelling.

Participants sleep in Natural shelters they have made, under tarps or in own tent if preferred.

Sunday

08.00- 09.00 Breakfast

09.00- 10.00 Water collection, filtration and sterilization.

10.00-10.15 Coffee break

10.15-12.00 Introduction to natural navigation.

12.00-13.30 Fireside lunch

13.30- 14.30 Making natural cordage.

14.30- 15.30 Try-out of basic skills in emergency response scenario.

15.30 -16.30 Course Reflection and Reviews.

## APPENDIX 2

Moln Bushcraft Journey course

Course Location: Finland (Location to be confirmed)

Course Duration: 3 Days

Course Time: 18:00 Friday till 15:00 Sunday

Course size: 8 persons max

Age range: 18 +.

Experience: No prior experience required to attend this course.

This bushcraft course will help you develop your fundamental wilderness survival skills in the context of a woodland journey. This journey will help you realize how you need to safely work with nature and adapt to your environment. It will also help you realize what equipment and skills are truly essential and the joy of being really connected with the natural world.

This course will focus on moving through the boreal forest environment and implementing wilderness skills along the way. The programme will focus on the core skills of; risk management, natural navigation, shelter, fire, water, tree and plant ID and will include a number of woodcraft projects such as spoon making.

This course is designed for you to experience firsthand the joy of travelling through the northern woods using bushcraft skills under expert guidance and helps you build a robust safety framework for your own adventures.

### Friday

18.00- 18.30 Course Introduction; Course programme, Health and safety, Goals, Questions.

18.30-19.00. Moving through nature exercise.

19.15- 20.00 3 km hike to Overnight camp spot.

20.00- 21.00 Establish group camp site using traps, tents or hammocks Safety, Location, Site selection, setting up a tarp as a group or individual,

2100- 22.00 Handcraft project 1 and fireside popcorn.

Participants sleep under tarps, in a hammock or in own tent if preferred

## Saturday

08.00 –09.00 Breakfast (participants take down tarps and tidy camp (Leave no trace principals))

09.00-09.30 The 10 C s of a Survival Journey.

09.30-09.45 Wild tea /Coffee break

10.00- 12.00 Woodland Journey

12.00-13.45 Fireside lunch including Handcraft project 2

13.45 – 16.00 Woodland Journey part 2.

16.00- 18.30 Building a group focused natural shelter.

18.30 – 19.30 Evening meal.

19.30 -20.30. Handcraft project 3

20.30 – 21.30 Evening walkabout including, tracking, route selection and map making.

21.30 Fireside storytelling and snacks

Participants sleep in Natural shelters they have made, under tarps or in own tent if preferred.

## Sunday

08.00- 09.00 Breakfast.

09.00- 10.00 Handcraft project 4

10.00-10.15 Wild tea /Coffee break

10.15 -12.00 Woodland journey- Part 3. Finding and purifying water? Finding Fire?

12.00-13.30 Fireside lunch including group friction fire lighting.

13.30- 14.30. Handcraft project 5 Review and reflection

14.30- 15.00 Walkout back to base.