

So, what exactly does the IOL Bushcraft Special Interest Group do?

by Nick Winder, IOL
Bushcraft SIG Treasurer

This was a common question asked of me at the IOL National Conference last autumn. This article is an attempt to answer this question for Horizon readers, and hopefully some potential new members of the SIG.

The SIG arose when concern was raised, within the growing bushcraft sector, that many people were leading sessions incorporating aspects of bushcraft such as fire lighting and shelter building, and there was no available measure of how competent these leaders were with these skills. There are schemes that teach people to be Bushcraft Instructors but these take a year or more and involve a level of skill far above that needed for a basic introductory session.

So the Bushcraft SIG was formed to develop a scheme that tested and recognised a person's ability in basic bushcraft skills. This scheme has evolved into The Foundational Bushcraft Competency Certificate (FBCC) and obtaining it involves a three day training course, followed by a practice and consolidation period, and then a two day assessment. To date there are over 70 holders of the certificate and about 15–20 people start the process each year. All the skills required to pass the assessment are taught but previous knowledge is an asset, as always.

To extend what the SIG offered beyond a page on the IOL website and the FBCC we began to run the now popular IOL bushcraft workshops. There are usually two of these a year, one in the midlands and the other in Oxfordshire, and this year we tried one in the northwest. The workshops run over two days and allow anyone to learn new bushcraft skills and techniques direct from the experts, providing lots of ideas to take away. The cost is heavily discounted for SIG members e.g Full price £100, IOL members £60, Bushcraft SIG members special rate of £40. So attending one workshop recoups your SIG membership.

Skills learned on the workshops extend the knowledge of people who are doing the FBCC, including skills such as tracking, carving a spoon, flint knapping, making your own stove from tins, making cordage (string) from plants, fire lighting techniques, wild foods, cooking on a fire, using a pole lathe, weaving basic baskets, axe skills, building camp furniture, and there are always new ideas being suggested. As bushcrafters know, the more you learn, the more you realise there is to learn.

Members of the SIG includes a range of folk including some of the SIG founders who are full time bushcraft professionals, but also many people who teach bushcraft but not as their main job, including those who use bushcraft skills in sessions and want to enrich them further and folks who just enjoy learning new skills and networking with like-minded people.

The SIG now has an executive who are elected annually and meet formally once or twice a year. They are responsible for monitoring the FBCC scheme and set the criteria and standards which approved providers who deliver the training courses have to work to. They also plan the workshops and innovate with new ideas such as a northern workshop which ran for the first time last year, improving the website with an active forum, possibly changing the name, contacting teaching organisations to increase awareness of the power of bushcraft in education, and keeping the finances in balance.

Overall, the Bushcraft SIG is a group of people who passionately believe in the power of connecting people with nature and real learning that occurs when you rediscover skills and knowledge that have been part of our human experience for thousands of years.

If you want to know more, or even join, take a look at the Bushcraft section of the IOL website, or drop a line to any of the executive committee. ■

Other Bushcraft FAQs

Q Is wearing green compulsory?

A No, but there is no denying that many of us wear natural colours – partly because it helps us blend into woods and partly because it is what people expect.

Q Do you have special dispensation to carry knives?

A No, we have to obey the law as anyone else does. We do know the law as it stands with regard to using and carrying our tools, including knives, in more detail than the general public.

Q What does it cost to join the SIG?

A £20 per annum.

This is in addition to IOL membership. You will get discounted access to all the workshops, a saving of at least £20 per event.

IOL BSSIG Web page: <http://www.outdoor-learning.org/Default.aspx?tabid=103>