

What's it all about at the IOL Bushcraft Special Events?

Bushcraft workshops

- a description of these well supported special events

A report from Nick Winder

The IOL Bushcraft SIG offers 2 day workshop events, 2 or 3 times a year at various locations around the UK, though so far only in England (various locations) and Scotland (once!)

The aim of these workshops is to teach practitioners skills that will empower them to use bushcraft in their programmes and sessions. Bushcraft is a vast subject and everyone has something to learn so the workshops also provide an opportunity for the sharing of ideas and the promotion of best practise.

The skills covered complement those that appear in the Bushcraft Competency Certificate.(BCC) Specifically those covered by the BCC are; fire by friction, fire by other means, safe knife and saw use, shelter building, producing safe water, basic tree and plant ID and basic all around knowledge. If you need to learn these skills you should attend one of the courses that are regularly advertised in Horizons and on the website.

The SIG offers these workshops at a very discounted rate to SIG members (£55), discounted rate to IOL members (£80), and a reasonable price to non members (£120). We see this as a way to give something to the membership and to increase the use of bushcraft, which we are all passion-ate about. All the SIG executive, who organise these events, and often instruct at them, believe in the power of learning in the wilds through the use of these ancient but relevant skills.

Who attends this events? Anyone who has an interest in bushcraft on any level, who wants to learn and network with like minded people. We get teachers, instructors, youth workers, students, bushcraft professionals, in short, anyone with a desire to discover new skills for their own interest or to empower their own instructional work..

The workshops run from 1100 on day 1 through to early afternoon of day 2. This allows six separate two hour workshops to be offered and the topics covered have been wide ranging, as befits such a massive subject area. Most topics are covered twice.

Workshop have included:

TRACKING - basic skills in animal and human tracking
SPOON CARVING - take a green stick and create a spoon
WILD FOODS - wild edible plants, fungi and fruits, and how to make tasty meals with them
CAMP FURNITURE - chairs and tables, all made from natural materials
BOW MAKING - make a serviceable bow and arrow from raw materials
CAMP BAKING - both damper breads and risen breads
CORDAGE MAKING - making string from a variety of wild materials
DUTCH ARROWS AND SPEAR THROWERS - make them and learn to use them
KNIFE SHARPENING - how to do it well and properly
USING POLE LATHES - a real traditional craft skill, lathe work without electricity
FLINT KNAPPING - making useable blades and tools from flint
TIN STOVES - wood cooking stoves can be made from cast off tins
PREPARING GAME - how to skin and prepare rabbits, birds, etc for cooking
PUMP DRILLS - how to build a drill that will bore through stone and wood accurately
THROWING STICKS AND BULL ROARERS - make them and use them
SPLITTING GREEN WOOD - how to do it well and use what you create
ALTERNATIVE FIRE MAKING - there are many ways of generating fire
MAKING WHISTLES FROM GREEN WOOD - can get noisy
WEAVING BASKETS - weaving willow or brambles etc to create baskets or trays
MAKING GRASS MATS - create a kneeling or sleeping mat
POT HANGERS - the kettle or pan needs to be suspended over the fire - how to
PREPARING FISH - descaling and gutting, and how to cook them
HAND DRILL - making fire with hands and sticks
..... and others!



The instructors are very experienced in their subjects and are chosen by the SIG exec. from those known to be able to deliver quality sessions, from the bushcraft industry or further afield, but we will bring in specialists when it is appropriate e.g. for flint knapping. The instructors will happily instruct those who have no knowledge of the topic and hope that they engender a desire to master and use the skills taught. We derive our greatest pleasure when we hear that a topic has been used to involve youngsters in outdoor skills, which has happened on several occasions when attendees return to later workshops, for example, we have been told about youngsters making and shooting with bows they made themselves over an hour or so, and gaining greatly from the concentration required, safe knife use, and satisfaction of success.

There will generally be about eight different topics covered during one event, with most topics covered more than once to allow people to attend what they want in case of clashes. We are very keen for people to request topics and will attempt to fulfil such when we get them. People sign up for the topics they want and change after each two hour session.

Food and drink arrangements. There is always a kettle on a fire to provide brews during the day, and while we provide water, everyone must provide their own food, which means mealtime can become a 'show and tell' session in its' own right! e.g., try my home made sausage etc. If people want to cook on modern stoves they are very welcome.

Toilet facilities vary from site to site, but are always of a reasonable standard. They are often variations on composting systems. If in doubt feel free to ask.

People sleep in tents or hammocks, or debris shelters, or bivvy sheets as they prefer and once it gets dark everyone shares tales around the fire over a few drinks. As soon as drinks come out, sharp tools are put away to avoid potential accidents. As with the food, many home-brews appear for people to try. The following morning follows a similar pattern of two hour topics, until mid afternoon when there is a short debrief and everyone departs, often with an assortment of new creations and skills.

We often combine a workshop with SIG meetings as they provide a chance to discuss things with the membership face to face. The Bushcraft SIG strives to do what its membership wants, and they regularly say they want more workshops, most recently up in Scotland where over 20 people attended and made the trip up worthwhile for all concerned. The membership is largely made up of outdoor professionals and teachers who do some bushcraft to augment their practise, and these are the people you would meet at a workshop.

I believe they offer superb value and achieve their aims and the feedback from members and attendees seems to corroborate this.

Once again, I have been filled with inspiration and re-energised. The whole thing was well organised and the instructors very knowledgeable and skilful. Even better than June! Well Done.



Thank you for a well thought out and planned weekend. I enjoyed every aspect. Look forward to doing it again

I was quite apprehensive before coming – not sure if I had enough experience- but everyone has made me feel most welcome and I have achieved so much with the help of all the tutors!

Set up, surroundings, tuition, banter excellent.

This is the first event of this type I have been to. I am a Forest School Leader and I will take away loads of great new ideas that I can use with my young participants.

Fantastic two days. Did not know what to expect but will go away with so many ideas. Please keep up the great work that you do.

Inspiring and enjoyable. Great to try things I have long been meaning to in a supportive and well taught format. A brilliant non threatening environment.

You can find out more, or book for events that are set, via the Bushcraft pages of the IOL website. Keep an eye on the website, in the newsletters and through invitations by email. ■



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