

## EDITOR'S CHOICE BOOK REVIEW

By Carol Hardin

This issue, we will be discussing the book: *THE BUSHCRAFT: TRAPPING, FORAGING & COOKING IN THE WILD* by Steven Wester (available through Amazon). The author starts the book by saying “The main thing that you need to know about bushcraft is the fact that, like any other craft, you get out of it what you put into it. It takes time, practice and repetition to be able to succeed at survival in the bush. While it may be true that everyone has their own unique way of doing things; even though there may be more than one way to get there; the end goal is the same: survival.”

He also noted that in engaging in bushcraft, you will be going back to the rudimentary survivalist tactics of our ancestors so understanding fundamental concepts about nature and manipulating our environment for our benefit is crucial.

First up is setting up camp, a safe place on the ground for an extended stay and setting up a shelter to protect you from the elements. He starts with the basic ridge tent, utilizing a cross pole that creates the ridge to prop up the roof of the tent. These can range from huge group shelters to a simple pup tent for one. He said you should always keep the ceiling of these tents very low as these are meant for a quick place to lay low in the rain and for sleeping. Usually made of nylon and a couple of aluminum poles, they are very light. If you need to have standing room, you can erect a dome tent using a flexible pole that creates the domed shape. A TIPI (I guess taken from teepee?) is simply constructed of three wooden sticks placed in a tripod shape to provide strength.

A unique approach to shelter is what he calls a “Squirrel’s Nest.” You just pile up as many dry pieces of plant material as you can, bark, leaves, pine cones, etcetera and then crawl into it. This is an emergency shelter and presents its own problems, including bugs. In the same manner, but a bit more utilitarian, is a simple thatched hut, made of a wide variety of bark strips vines, leaves, twigs, branches and other basic materials propped up with round sticks to serve as poles.

So, now you have shelter, you can move on to hunting or trapping as the bush provides the perfect place to hide and wait for small game animals such as rabbits, squirrels and birds. The author goes on to describe various kinds of traps and snares and how to make them. There is a section on bow hunting and explains that paying attention to your surroundings will give you knowledge of the routines of many animals so that you can have your bow ready.

Spearg fishing comes next...with a four-foot-long sharpened stick. Just start poking in the water until you hit a fish. He gives more instructions and tells you how to gut and clean the fish you catch and how to cook it.

He continues the hunt for food by discussing foraging for edibles such as mushrooms or berries or even leaves that you can eat if you know which ones. You can even make teas with some of them. He says that shamrocks are a great find as they are good to eat and good for you but not too many as they have high concentrations of oxalic acid which can cause kidney stones. He also tells how to find mustard seeds for seasoning your foraging finds. Some other suggestions: acorns, wild violets, and dandelions.

Next, he addresses campfire basics such as building a “hand drill” which is simply a stick vigorously rubbed against a flat piece of wood (the fireboard) which has a small indentation in the middle in which you put the end of a medium-sized stick and rub vigorously between your hands until the friction sparks a fire. Probably the most ancient means of starting a fire is using flint...just strike it against a hard surface and you get a spark to ignite your gathered leaves, sticks, etcetera, which is called tinder and this is also addressed. He next tells how to maintain your fire by building a fireplace, basically a circle of stones filled with tinder.

Now that you have a fire, you can cook! He tells you how to make meat and veggie kabobs and how to boil in a pot or pan. There is also a section on cooking with the sun and a magnifying glass. Another good method of cooking in the bush is the “hanging pole.” Find two forked sticks about the same height and plant them in the ground about 2 feet from each other. Then find a sturdy stick that will fit in the forked grooves and place it on top. Attach a standard hook (found at any hardware or tackle shop) and hang your cooking pot from this hook.

He describes a “Billy Bush” which comes from the Australian outback and seals itself up like a can. Excellent for cooking on a campfire. In the Bush, sometimes Stone Age technology works best. A Stone Cooking Slab consists of a circle of stones with wood and kindling in the middle of the circle and a large flat stone slab on top. When you light the kindling, the stone will become very hot and you can fry bacon on it and anything else you need to cook. Also, you can turn a hollow log into an oven, creating a deep roasted effect on your food. Just keep an eye on it so it doesn’t burn.

Wester gives a crash course in all the above, making your foray into the bush both successful and safe!