

# ***The Wilderness Guide Program***

Information Packet  
2022/2023



Teaching Drum Outdoor School  
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*Imagine what life was like for your primal ancestors, your wild and free kin. Do you yearn to experience their traditions, their skills, and their intimacy with the wilderness? What if you discovered a place where you can connect with your ancestral past and immerse yourself in that way of life? There to meet you are those who have walked this trail of rediscovery before you. They guide you for a full turn of the seasons as you heal from the numbness of domestic life, reawaken your senses, and explore what it means to be authentically human. Immersed in the wilderness, you remember how to walk honorably and respectfully on the Earth Mother—how to find shelter, forecast the weather, trap and fish, know your way without getting lost, and much more.*

### **What is the Wilderness Guide Program?**

The Wilderness Guide Program is a full turn-of-the-seasons wilderness immersion experience. This is a one-of-a-kind program; it has no generalized agenda, no books, lectures, recordings, or classrooms. The Wilderness Guide Program leads you back to the original way of learning – geared specifically to you, a complete living-learning experience in the wilderness.

This course takes you from where you are today to being Earth—rather than self—sufficient, from survival to living, from spectator to attuned immersion. You learn how to find safe drinking water, and, at times, you gather your own food. You make your own shelter, fire kits, pack frames, bowls, baskets, and more. You learn what to use for soap and shampoo, for cuts and intestinal cramps. You learn to stalk and walk silently, seeing more than you ever thought possible. You reawaken to the spiritual life of your ancestors. You remember from their direct teaching, the ways of Deer, Squirrel, Raven, the Elder Trees, and our other nonhuman relations.

### **NO PRIOR OUTDOOR EXPERIENCE IS REQUIRED!**

#### **Why Immersion?**

*“Here at the Teaching Drum Outdoor School, wilderness is the classroom because that is where we meet our teachers. Ancient voices speak through the Elder Pines, the winged, furred, leafed and all of nature’s relations. They know only how to live in balance. With their unwavering presence, they help us open our hearts and attune our senses to the experience of equilibrium they thrive in. Living among the gifts of their timeless wisdom, we have the opportunity to join them as fully aware and attuned relations in the Hoop of Life. The guide’s role is only to nudge us in the direction of the path when we lose our way.”*

*—Lety Seibel, Elder*

You've read about what it's like to live in the wilderness, you've heard it talked about, perhaps you've taken a course or two that teaches some of the skills you need to do it . . . but are you really out there? Can it really be learned without being there? Learning skills while living in the wilderness cannot be avoided. Skills are naturally built into the program through "need."

For many of us, to survive by our own wits off Earth's bounty has romantic appeal. Those who have actually done it will tell you it does live up to that expectation, but hardly in the ways initially envisioned. In reality, our survival depends on our ability to change our attitude toward such things as food, comfort, and need. Our perspective changes when we go from learning a skill in a protected, predictable environment to actually relying upon that skill to live.

You will be relearning skills you may already know, so that you can use them when you actually need them, even in adverse conditions. To learn the skill when it is necessary, in a variety of real, challenging situations, engages your creativity and adaptability. It involves your whole being, which encourages success and helps the skill to become second nature.

For example, if I were to learn fire-by-friction in a class setting only I could be handicapped in the field in three ways: I would have trouble determining when to use the skill, I would be unable to identify and prepare needed materials, and I would have difficulty executing the skill within the context of environmental variables.

Let's say I am cold and wet: My first thought may be to make a fire. However, jumping into a fire-making attempt could kill me. I would be better off to first determine my condition and location, read the weather and terrain, assess risk factors, then consider my options. If firemaking fits into one of them, I will then choose a location that will afford the following for both the fire and me: shelter, safety, accessibility to fuel and human needs, and visibility (or lack thereof, depending on the situation).

Next I will gather firemaking materials and wood for fuel. In order to do so I'll need to know the qualities of the various woods and fibrous plants in my area, in which season they are available, in what type of habitat I might find them, and where to find them dry. If there is snow, rain, or even damp ground, I have further challenge concerning site preparation and fire starting.

As you can see, the actual firemaking would be only one step within a range of skills needed to survive. To a large degree, these skills draw upon my more qualitative abilities of awareness and attunement – of mind and eye. These skills, which are a primary focus of this program, are often more complex and challenging than the hand skills (such as firemaking).

### **Outdoor Living Skills**

Skills that participants (Seekers) leave the program with include: fire by friction, bowl making, basket making, dead fall and snare trapping, direction finding, native walking, running, and stalking, a number of primitive cooking methods, plant identification and foraging, lodge building, hide tanning, buckskin clothing (making, wearing, and maintaining), comfortable ground sleeping, primitive first aid and hygiene, canoeing, fishing, tracking, cordage making, fat rendering, and more, too numerous to mention.

The level of mastery of these skills depends on each person's motivation and personal preferences. Together as a circle, the level of mastery accomplished during the program is impressive.

### **People Skills**

The other half of this course's focus — and just as important — is people skills. Our native ancestors lived honorably and respectfully with each other not only as a matter of principle but as a matter of necessity. In our regular lives we may go to work or school with one group of people, come home to a family, and socialize with yet another group of people. If we have problems with people at work, for example, we leave them behind when we go home, and vice versa.

Not so in the Old Way. We are sleeping and eating and working and playing and praying with the same people all day, all night, every day, every night. There's really nowhere to go, no diversions. Denial doesn't get us far; escape is short-lived. We can run away or sedate ourselves, but our problems are still there when we return.

In the Wilderness Guide Program, you learn the way of the Talking Circle, how to express your real, deeper needs and feelings, how to speak in sacred space, and the strengths and challenges of circle relationships as opposed to pyramid relationships.

These people skills are important for two reasons: Firstly, because we are social beings. We cannot survive alone. We have evolved to be interactive with our species, and to do that well makes the difference between existing and living, between subsisting and flourishing. Secondly, these skills apply to all aspects of life, all lifestyles and occupations. So whether our future calls us to live in the wilderness or not, our life and the lives of those we touch are enriched.

### **The Guides**

#### **ABEL BEAN *Senior Wilderness Guide***

Abel is a senior wilderness guide with twenty years of experience at Teaching Drum Outdoor School. Since completing his first year-long Wilderness Guide Program in 2001, Abel has received advanced training from Tamarack Song, working alongside him in guiding the Wilderness Guide and Wild Moon programs, and the Guardian Intensive Field trainings. He has extensive experience in guiding hunter-gatherer and personal development skills.

Abel's expertise puts him in the top tier of wilderness professionals. He excels in the areas of shelter building, friction fire making, hide tanning, wild foraging, primitive cooking, solo canoeing, orienteering, weather forecasting, dreamwork, and co-parenting. As a mentor, soccer coach, and former high school science teacher, Abel's leadership skills and compassion are living examples of the guiding way.

### **THE TEAM**

Our team of program guides has made it their life's mission to help others reconnect with nature, to their deepest selves, and to find balance within. Each guide has put in the "dirt" time,

having completed one or more Wilderness Guide Programs themselves, as well as many solo wilderness immersion experiences. Your guides won't play guru, nor will they hold your hand and lead you. Keeping a low profile, they sometimes watch from afar, then step forward at key times to offer guidance. As in native cultures, you are really your own teacher; self-motivation and follow through are key to developing a skill or awareness. In the Old Way it is not the guide's responsibility to teach, but the Seeker's responsibility to learn.

For more information, see <https://teachingdrum.org/our-staff/>.

### **How will the Wilderness Guide Program benefit me?**

*“Upon completion of your wilderness immersion experience, you'll again feel like the child of the Earth that you are. You will be ready to rejoin your people and walk in balance with all your human and nonhuman relations. You'll be functioning from your intrinsic self—that place of balance where senses, intuition, intellect, feelings, and spirit meet. Your commitment to the training will restore your ability to readily adapt to a variety of climates and environments. The ember of the Old Way that is already within you will be fanned to a glowing flame. This is the focus of the Wilderness Guide Program.”*

*—Tamarack Song, program founder*

Seekers return home from the Wilderness Guide Program with a new sense of self. A certain personal power is gained when you spend a year directly involved with the means and ends of your existence. Through the practice of dreamwork and circle consciousness, new awarenesses open to you. This self-knowing serves you as you re-engage with your family, your community, and all your relations.

Powerful shifts in thinking come about through living with your clan in the Circle Way. You gain a sense of belonging within a group and within the wider world. You acknowledge your own gifts, your shortcomings, and your interdependence. You intrinsically understand through your own experience the concepts of honor and respect, that giving is receiving, and that what you feed grows.

Our nonhuman relations serve as inspiration and instruction for living in balance. By living in harmony with the laws of nature, you can restore balance for yourself, your community, and your environment. You come home with a new sense of direction, as well as clarity around what fulfills you in relationship. That is what you're bringing back to your people.

Ask them: See <https://teachingdrum.org/wilderness-guide-program/> for Seeker testimonials.

## **Things to Consider**

This experience will be radically different for you — it will be like nothing you've known before. You will be spending long periods of time in the wilderness, without interruption. The wilderness will be your world for the entire year — urban life will be only a memory. An excursion to town is a breach of trust in your campmates and severely undermines the integrity of the experience. If you go, you may be asked to leave the program. You will not have access to anything you are accustomed to — family, loved ones, familiar foods, comforts, and recreational activities. Because of that, you will be tempted — severely at times — to call it quits.

Ask yourself:

- What will it be like to be away from my friends and loved ones for an extended period of time?
- How will I manage my properties and other personal responsibilities while away?
- Do I have any pets or other dependents that will need to be cared for?
- Will there be any events that I am not willing to miss, such as a close relative's wedding?
- How will I be able to pay for the program?
- Will I be able to make dietary changes, such as eating wild animal fat and meat?
- If English is not a proficient language for me, am I willing to learn to speak and understand English well enough to communicate with my campmates? (English is the primary language for participants during the program.)
- What travel arrangements will I need to make in order to participate in the program?
- If I am a foreign student, will I be eligible to apply for a visa to enter the United States? (All foreign students are strongly advised to talk to us before applying for a U.S. visa.)

## **What steps do I need to take in order to participate?**

Qualifications are stringent; they have to do with integrity and strength of will more so than with outdoor experience or wilderness skills knowledge.

## **Application Process**

- Introductory interview: Contact Abel at 715-546-2944 or [abel@teachingdrum.org](mailto:abel@teachingdrum.org) to schedule.
- Second interview: After two weeks, schedule a follow-up interview with Abel.
- Application: Request application from Abel, complete, and email to [wgp@teachingdrum.org](mailto:wgp@teachingdrum.org).
- \$2,000 Deposit: Once deposit is received, application is considered complete.

If accepted:

- Acceptance packet: Read, sign, and return to Teaching Drum.

- Join egroup: The 2022 Seekers egroup provides a platform for meeting your campmates, discussing your questions, and exploring topics to help prepare you for the wilderness immersion.
- Organize and purchase equipment.
- Participate in online training program.
- Set up a personal support group: A small group of important people in your life supports you during your experience, usually consisting of close family and friends.
- Make travel arrangements to arrive at Teaching Drum Outdoor School April 30th, 2022.

### **Wilderness Guide Program 2022 Tuition Policy**

Tuition: \$12,000 per adult

\$2,000 deposit due with application

In order to be fully present and not have financial distractions during the program, tuition must be paid in full by April 15, 2022.

Once the program begins, there is no tuition reimbursement, for these reasons:

- When people feel challenged beyond their comfort zones, the possibility of a tuition reimbursement can be a tempting excuse for dropping out rather than facing and learning from the issues that come up. This short-circuits the purpose for which you decided to participate in the Program.
- In a real wilderness experience, there is no “dropping out.” You cannot simply escape by hopping on a bus or plane. The WGP is designed to provide you with a real wilderness experience.
- Every individual is essential to the survival of the group, and our no-tuition refund policy supports that.
- Program overhead is set for the year, and the school must meet that commitment whether or not the student completes the course.

Other costs to consider:

- Cost of travel depends on where you are coming from and how you are traveling. We are in a semi-remote area of the United States and there are a limited number of travel options, mainly by airplane or bus, so budget accordingly.
- Equipment costs depend on what gear you already own.
- Personal needs costs outside of the program vary per individual.

- Lastly you will need to budget some money for your re-integration (travel expenses and personal expense needs) once you complete the program.

**And now for some sobering news!** by Tamarack Song

Many of you who are drawn to the Wilderness Guide Program have a deep yearning to become the native person you are intended to be. You might be radically frustrated with the state of civilization. Or you could have romantic notions about the beauty of primitive living. This is good – it shows you are coming alive.

It also breeds expectations, such as the one shown by this question, “After completing the course, will I be able to survive alone in the forest?” My answer is straightforward – there is no one who can teach you to survive in the wilderness in a one-year period, alone or otherwise. No native group would send a year-old child into the woods alone and expect him to survive, much less thrive. After a year in the woods, you will not be that much different than that native infant in wilderness living experience. In one year there is no way to become the proficient generalist that a native has to be, mastering flintknapping, hide tanning, bow making, trapping, foraging, hunting, lodge building, fire making, food storage, direction finding, etc., etc.

Even if you could learn these skills in the year, you could still eventually perish because skills are not the most vital to survival. If you can't live with yourself – if your mind drives you crazy, if your addictions keep driving you into town, if you can't get over your loneliness long enough to find fellowship with your plant and animal relations – it doesn't matter how many skills you know. If you can't forecast the weather, if you don't know how to combine wild foods for sustaining nourishment, if you can't become the Deer so you know her moods and passions, if you can't take care of your own cuts and infections, you will not last more than a season. These are the real skills that will allow you not only to survive, but to thrive and be happy. Only someone who has actually lived in the wilderness knows this and can teach this.

It has nothing to do with how many civilized accouterments you've gotten rid of. A plastic bucket, for example, can be easily replaced in the wilderness when there is the time to make a rawhide bucket. However, the critical skills you have not learned cannot be easily grasped when under stress, freezing, undernourished, or afire with fever from intestinal parasites.

For any and all reasons that draw you to the Old Ways, I encourage you to learn how to really live in the wilderness. If you settle for just learning some skills you will end up not knowing yourself, and if you try to live off of the land you will end up back in the city in a short while, disillusioned and depressed. You need to learn how to reawaken your senses, how to use your intuition, how to listen to the guiding voices around you, how to understand the language of the animals. You need to unlearn so much of what has been dumped upon you. And then you can start relearning the native ways of "being as a question" and giving in order that you can receive. After a year you will then be able to continue learning on your own so that you can fully gain all that you need. You will no longer be dependent on books and teachers. You will be self-motivated, self-confident, independent, and interdependent.



This is why here at the Teaching Drum our concern is not that you learn how to make every possible wilderness knick-knack or have bragging rights to lots of skills. We are here to facilitate your growth in awareness of yourself, your fellow humans, and all of our relations.

Words can barely begin to capture what you need to understand in order to bridge the gap between your civilized understanding of the Old Ways and what the Old Ways really are. When I was your age my elders would get frustrated with me because I was so cock-sure I had everything figured out. They let me fall on my face time and again, until I finally found the humility I needed to be able to listen. What they gave me – and what is also your birthright – needs to be felt, experienced and lived in order to be known. If you want to know what it is to be an Eagle, you have to spread your wings and fly.