

# ***The Wilderness Guide Program***

Information Packet

Year 2011



Teaching Drum Outdoor School  
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## **Greetings Prospective Seeker,**

Thank you for your interest in the Teaching Drum Outdoor School's Wilderness Guide Program. Following is information to help you better understand what the program is about, how it may be beneficial to you, and what you need to do if you want to participate. The Wilderness Guide Program is an 11-month-long wilderness immersion experience in which the participants experience the school's motto directly:

Where Wilderness is the classroom,  
Ancient Voices are the Teachers,  
knowing Self and Balance are the quests.

The following description by the program's founder and director, Tamarack Song illustrates the program's unique approach in bringing the Seeker (the endearing term we choose to call our students) back to knowing Self and Balance, the program's ultimate goal.

### **Imagine you are a Wolf**

Imagine you're a Wolf and have lived in a cage all your life. You have yearned to learn the natural ways of your ancestors, of your wild and free kin. Then one day the cage door is opened and there to meet you is a wise one of your kind who will guide you for the next turn of the seasons back to your Native ways. He will help you get in touch with your intrinsic wolfness and help you heal through the pain and numbness of your caged life. He'll show you how to walk honorably and respectfully on The Earth Mother – how to reattune your senses, hunt and find shelter, forecast the weather, know your way without getting lost, and so much more.

When it is time for your path and his to separate, you'll be the child of The Mother you were intended to be, ready to rejoin your pack and walk in Balance with all your nonhuman relations. You'll be functioning from your heart-of-hearts – that place of Balance where senses, intuition, intellect, feelings and spirit meet. His approach, his training, will leave you with the 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.

This course will take you from where you are to being Earth (not self) sufficient – from survival to living, from spectator to dwelling in attuned immersion. At times, you'll be gathering most of your food, and you'll learn how to find safe drinking water. You'll be making your own shelter, buckskin clothing, fire kits, pack frames, bowls, baskets, and more. You'll learn what to use for soap and shampoo, for cuts and intestinal cramps. You'll be stalking and snaring, you'll be walking silently and seeing more than you ever thought possible. You'll learn first-hand the spiritual life of the Native. You'll know, from their direct teaching, the ways of Wolf and Deer and Raven, of the elder trees and healing herbs and soothing clays. And you'll be gaining other skills and awarenesses that would not be appropriate to mention here.

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 surely does live up to that expectation, but hardly in the ways initially envisioned. Survival in reality – and much of its mystery and intrigue – lies in changing attitudes about such things as food, comfort and need. Perspective changes when we go from learning and practicing a skill to actually having to rely upon it to live.

You will be reinventing wheels, so-to-speak – relearning skills you may already know, so that you can use them reliably, when you actually need them. To learn an Earth skill in a simulated situation, isolated from its environmental context, is a simplistic and potentially dangerous approach; it can handicap you when you actually need to practice it. 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 to you.

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

Let's say I am cold and wet: My first task is not to make a fire, an option that many would first turn to. Doing so could kill me. I would 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 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 fuel stock. 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. I might also do well knowing my animal relations and having a well-developed intuitive sense, as a mouse nest, for example, makes an excellent, ready-made tinder bundle.

If there is snow, rain, or even damp ground, I have further challenge in terms of site preparation and fire starting.

As you can see from the above scenario, the actual firemaking would be a small part of what I need to do to survive – a final step that could be taken only if I can first execute a range of skills. 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 quite more complex and challenging than the hand skills (such as firemaking).

The other half of this course's focus — and just as important — is people skills. In the Old Way people live 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 diversion. Denial doesn't get us far, escape is short-lived. Run away or sedate ourselves and it's still there when we get back. Our Human circle of relationship either works or it doesn't. (And, interestingly, our ability to function in that relationship is directly related to our ability to function in our Earth relationship.)

You will 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 and healthily 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 is enriched.

In a typical course Tamarack can share, and a student can absorb, only a small fraction of what he has to give. Here he is able to demonstrate his true style – that of the Native Guide – to the fullest. He doesn't play guru or charismatic teacher, nor will he hold your hand and lead you. He deliberately keeps a low profile, sometimes watching from afar, then stepping forward at key times to offer guidance or share a skill. As in Native cultures, you are really your own teacher; you have to be self-motivated and follow through on what Tamarack gives you in order to develop the skill or awareness. In the Old Way it is not the Guide's responsibility to teach, but the Seeker's responsibility to learn.

This is a one-of-a-kind program; it has no generalized agenda, no books or tapes or workshops, no mail-order mentoring. This is the actual Native approach – one-on-one, geared specifically to you, a complete living-learning experience in the Wilderness.

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?

Qualifications are stringent; they have to do with integrity and strength of will more so than with how much outdoor experience you already have or how many skills you already know. Graduates earn Wilderness Native Certification – perhaps the only degree of its kind offered by a certified school.

## **Wilderness Guide Program “Hard Skills”**

As you can see, we greatly emphasize the soft (people) skills, at this point many people ask “what hard skills will I learn through this program experience?” Because you are living in the Wilderness, the hard skills are naturally built into the program through “need”.

Here is a list of skills that every seeker graduate leaves the program with. 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, healthy hygiene, canoeing, fishing, tracking, cordage making, fat rendering, and many 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.

## **And now for some sobering news!**

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?" I want to take a moment here to be frank -- 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, hidetanning, bowmaking, trapping, foraging, hunting, lodge and fire making, food storage, direction finding, etc., etc.

Even if you could learn these skills in the year, you would still eventually die because they are not the most important ones. 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.

Tamarack Song

## **Things to Consider**

This is an eleven month experience; we suggest that you take the time to consider the following:

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 these questions:

- What might it be like to be away from your friends and loved ones for an extended period of time?
- How will I manage my properties while away?
- Do I have any pets 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 finance the tuition and equipment cost? (see Program Expenses section)

## **Week-Long Visit**

Because words can only begin to describe this immersion experience, and because the program is easy to romanticize, a full one-week visit to actually participate in the Program is a prerequisite for applying to the program. During the week-long visit you will experience the realities of what the program will offer to you on a personal level and you will gain the perspective to help you make a solid decision. Considered a course in itself, you will learn basic skills right alongside the Seekers, skills such as cooking by fire, fire wood gathering, camp maintenance, foraging of wild foods, and many more, depending on what the Seekers are working on during the time of your visit.

Tuition for the week-long visit is \$250, which is non-refundable (with the exception of circumstances beyond your control), so please be clear about your desire to visit. We accept check, money order, and credit card (Visa and MasterCard). Detailed information about the week-visit is in the week-long application included in this packet.

## **WILDERNESS GUIDE PROGRAM TUITION POLICY Year 2011/2012**

Tuition: \$7,500  
(\$200 discount if paid by cash, check or money order)

- \$1,000 Deposit due with Application (includes \$100 processing fee).
- \$500 of the deposit will be reimbursed with cancellation after acceptance by both parties and before beginning of Program
- Half of balance (\$3,650) due April 1, 2011 and the remainder (\$3,650 or \$3,850) due April 15, 2011.

In order to be fully present and not have financial distractions during the Program, it is important that you meet tuition deadlines.  
If you have difficulties in this regard, please call us immediately.

### **Once the Program begins, there is no tuition reimbursement, for these reasons:**

- When the going gets tough, the possibility of a tuition reimbursement can be used as an incentive for dropping out, rather than facing and learning from the issues that come up. This short-circuits the purpose for which the seeker decided to participate in the Program.
- In a real wilderness experience, there is no dropping out, and the intent of the School is to provide you with a real wilderness experience.
- Every individual is essential to the survival of the group, and our no-dropout policy supports that.

### **Other costs to consider:**

- Cost of travel. This will depend on factors such as 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 to get here, mainly by airplane or bus, so budget accordingly.
- Cost of equipment – including canoe, clothing, tent, and sleeping bag. The cost of equipment will depend on how much you already own and how much you can borrow. If you are starting from scratch and you have to purchase all the equipment, you will need to budget approximately \$1,500.
- Lastly you will need to budget some money for your re-integration once you complete the program.

## **Week-Long Application**

If after reading up to this point you think you might participate in the WGP, or if you want to learn more about the program first-hand, the week-long visit is then the next step. You will experience first-hand what the Program might be like for you, and will gain perspective to help make a solid decision. In addition, your visit will allow us to get to know each other and begin our relationship.

It is essential that you experience **seven full days at Nishnajida**. For example, if you go out to camp on Monday afternoon, you will leave camp the following Monday afternoon. Please be aware that you will need an additional half day for check-in, orientation, tour of camp, and set-up. We'll be able to take you to camp on the day you arrive if you are here by noon, otherwise you'll go out the following morning. Please plan accordingly when making travel arrangements.

We have thoughtfully compiled this information packet to help you prepare for an extraordinary immersion experience in the Wilderness. For one week, you will leave the civilized world and most of what you are familiar with. Come as an empty bowl, so your experience may be as fresh as a newborn's. Leave behind preconceptions of Native lifeway, beliefs and practices such as yoga, martial arts, meditation, etc., as well as expectations of how your visit should be. The more you are open and receptive to see the world anew, the more you will be delighted and surprised

You will be expected to participate to the fullest in camp life and daily activities. To help you adjust to being outdoors, sleep cooler at night for three weeks before arriving. If you normally use 3 blankets, cut down to 2. This will stimulate your metabolism to function more efficiently, which will keep you more comfortable outdoors.

Wash all the clothes you intend to bring with you without detergent at least once before you leave, so you will attract fewer mosquitoes and other critters. For the same reason, do not use scented personal care products (aftershave/perfume, soap, deodorants, etc.). You will not be using any soap during your visit, instead you will be learning about natural hygiene methods used by the Seekers.

The Seekers eat a native diet, which is low on starch and sugar. To best prepare yourself, gradually cut down on your sugar and starch (bread, pasta, rice, potatoes and sweets) consumption. If you are a big eater, start eating less in general three weeks before arrival. Cook without spices and salt so you may enjoy the natural flavors of camp cooking.

Below are the common **ways to travel to the Teaching Drum**. Let us know which one you will use. Give us your itinerary as soon as possible, so we can expect you and/or schedule your pickup/drop-off. Also, **please confirm your arrival date/time the day before you get here and keep us informed of any changes that may happen while you are en route.**

- **Air.** The closest airport is Rhinelander, WI, which is 30 miles away. Two airlines serve Rhinelander---Delta and Midwest Express. We can pick you up from the airport for \$30 and drop you off for another \$30.



- **Bus.** The closest Greyhound bus stop is in Iron River, MI, 40 miles away (not to be confused with Iron River, WI). There is no bus terminal, just a street stop where you get dropped off in the early dawn (this is the only in-bound bus per day). There is only one out-bound bus a day, which leaves at 10 p.m. Pick-up and drop-off rates are \$40 each.
- **Auto from Three Lakes, Wisconsin:**
  1. Take Hwy 32/45 (the main drag) East to the edge of town.
  2. Immediately after Watercraft Sales on the left, turn left on Hwy 32 and set your trip meter to 0.
  3. To confirm that you've made the correct turn, you'll see the Three Lakes Evangelical Free Church immediately on the left.
  4. In 3 miles you'll pass a golf course on your left, after which you'll cross a bridge.
  5. Continue past the first road (Chicken in the Woods/ Colonel Heims) to the next road, at mile 4, which will be Military Rd. (to your left).
  6. Caution: blind corner-- come to a full stop and make sure there is no approaching traffic before turning onto Military Rd..
  7. In exactly 1 mile you'll see the Teaching Drum sign on the right.
  8. Check in at the office, which is in the log cabin to the right as you come in to the parking area.

Once you have reviewed the entire packet, please fill out the General Information form, sign the liability waiver/agreement form below, attach a self portrait picture where indicated, then include your payment and mail the completed forms to:

The Teaching Drum Outdoor School  
 7124 Military Road  
 Three Lakes WI 54562  
 715 546-2944  
[balance@teachingdrum.org](mailto:balance@teachingdrum.org)

After we receive your application we will send you a confirmation of the dates of your visit and the week-long preparation packet to help you prepare for your visit. Because of the interest in the Wilderness Guide Program, we sometimes have a waiting list of visitors, so we ask that you give a three-week cancellation notice if you will not be able to make your scheduled visit. Please contact us with any questions you might have.

Thank you for your interest in the Wilderness Guide Program. We look forward to welcoming you, and to our sharing.

The Year-long guides,

Chris, Matt, Lety, and Tamarack.

# **Week-Long Application Form**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

Social Security \_\_\_\_\_ DOB \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency contact info.

\_\_\_\_\_

Dates that you intend to visit: 1<sup>st</sup> Choice: \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
2<sup>nd</sup> Choice: \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_

Mode of transportation you intend to travel by: \_\_\_\_\_

Payment information: make check or money order payable to Teaching Drum Outdoor School

Visa \_\_\_\_\_ MasterCard \_\_\_\_\_ Card # \_\_\_\_\_ exp. \_\_\_\_\_

Name on card \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

How did you hear about us?

\_\_\_\_\_

Attach self portrait picture here:

## **Liability Waiver and Agreement**

I understand that the Teaching Drum Outdoor School does not provide health or liability insurance for its visitors.

In consideration of my acceptance as a visitor of the Teaching Drum Outdoor School, I, the undersigned, intending to be legally bound, hereby, for myself, my heirs, executors, and administrators, contractually waive and release any and all rights and claims for damages I may have against the Teaching Drum Outdoor School, Inc., its representatives, employees, successors, and assigns, the United States Forest Service, and any other legal entity with which the School has a contractual relationship, for any and all claims of damages suffered by me during my visit.

Further, I attest and verify that I am physically fit and have sufficient physical capacity to participate in ongoing activities, and a licensed medical doctor has verified such physical condition.

Further, I understand that alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and firearms are not compatible with the methodology of the Teaching Drum Outdoor School, and I will not harbor them during the period of my visit.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have carefully read and agree with the above liability waiver, and **state that I have read all of the enclosed materials** in this information packet. I agree to complete my full seven day visit and to abide by all stipulations for the duration.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date