

Awareness Quiz
by Tamarack Song

Now and again one looks back and realizes he has crawled out on a limb. This happens to be such a time for me – here are a couple of the comments I got on the two tracking questions I posed in the last Quiz column (see below):

“They’re too hard.”

“I don’t have the experience to answer them.”

“Thank you for allowing me to be skewered in public.”

My intent is to give you questions that will expand your perception and encourage you to question what you think you know. However, when I toss something too far out in left field and you can’t catch it, I defeat my purpose.

To make up for it, I’m giving you a pile of questions this time. However, they only need one-word answers, and they’ll be a good test of your knowledge of the outdoors and primitive skills. Some of the questions have more than one right answer, so get together with a friend and see how many you can get. Send me your answers (tamarack@teachingdrum.org or Quiz, c/o Teaching Drum Outdoor School, 7124 Military Rd, Three Lakes, WI 54562) and I’ll print them in the next issue.

New Questions:

1. How many eggs does a Robin normally lay?
2. What female insect eats her mate?
3. Is wet or dry wood hardest to carve?
4. What is the cactus with the widest North American distribution?
5. Which deer bone makes a natural arrowhead?
6. What is the smartest popular North American freshwater fish?
7. Which hide tans easiest, Beaver or Raccoon?
8. How many primary wing feathers do most birds have?
9. Which nut tree kills surrounding vegetation?
10. What is the only conifer tree to annually shed its needles?

Now let’s take a look at those left-field lobs. Fortunately there were a few people either gutsy or foolish enough to dive for them.

1. If you come upon an open valley in the Forest, would you walk down or across it in order to find the most animal tracks?

It depends on the width of the valley. Rides Alone says, “I’d follow down it since most animals will be cutting across it.” This is particularly true of narrow valleys. Glenn Helkenn states that he would walk across a wide valley, in order to intersect “game trails that often follow just inside the treeline or just under the bank of a stream or along the edge of a hilltop.”

Tamarack’s comment: Another factor is the animal, as many small ones rely on cover for protection, so are less likely to cross a wide valley than a narrow valley. Chris Bean mentions that scent hunters could go in any direction in looking for fresh scent.

2. Which way would you follow a set of tracks in order to learn the most about the animal, and perhaps even see him?

“It depends on the animal,” says Rides Alone. “Normally I'd travel in the direction the tracks are going...the animal's attention will be forward...therefore I will have an easier time spotting him first.” Chris Bean points out where that might not work: “Deer often feed going downwind so that they can smell anything coming up behind them.” He is concerned that if he were detected while following the Deer, their behavior would be altered. Glenn Helkenn calls the part about seeing the animal “a bit of a trick question.” He goes on, “obviously one would think he would have to follow the animal in order to have any chance of seeing her. However, many animals have limited territory and move in circular patterns within that territory, so backtracking could actually give me a good chance of coming upon the animal.” Andrew Empedocles adds that backtracking could take you to the animal's den or resting area.

Tamarack's comment: Nabbed again -- Glenn is right about this being a trick question. Unless the animal has an extensive range or is just passing through, I will backtrack. In doing so I am getting to know her – where she came from, what she is up to, whether or not she has young, and where she lives. Imagine someone backtracking you to your residence; all he'd have to do is sit and await your return, and in the meantime he'd learn all about you from the sign you left behind.

Thanks to Andrew, Chris, Glenn, and Rides Alone for saving me on this one! And all the rest of you, have fun with the new questions.