

Nature's Bounty

By JJ Murphy

Why Practice Wilderness Skills When Ultralite Gear is Available?



JJ Murphy

Why do I continue practicing wilderness skills, when lightweight camping gear makes life outdoors much easier?

In a word — RESPECT. If I understand how everything works, then if my gear fails, I have the choice to create what I need. If you understand fire by friction, you don't take that butane lighter for granted.

That attitude leads to action, which builds my confidence, which makes spending time outdoors fun.

Recently I made a commitment to fox walk during an entire afternoon excursion, which motivated me to study how my tracks compared to those made when I walk in my typical heel-slamming gait.

So what is fox walking?

It's placing your foot on the ground BEFORE you put your weight on it, so that your center of gravity is in your hips. It forces you to take shorter strides. In slow-motion you would:

1. Touch the outside edge of your foot to the ground.
2. Roll your foot inward until it is flat on the ground.
3. Before adding your weight, is there a sharp stone, a rounded branch or any other object that would make a noise or irritate your foot?
4. If so, reposition your foot.
5. Transfer your weight to your foot.
6. Repeat with your other foot.

What are the benefits of fox walking? Not only do you increase your chances of seeing and hearing birds and other wildlife, but your sense of smell and touch are greater. Like any other technique, it takes time to master. To get back on track, I practiced moving and saying *set foot down, roll, and transfer weight* with each step. Eventually the rhythm and pattern becomes second nature.

An added benefit is that distracting thoughts melt away; I notice details and subtleties that often fade into the background when hiking at warp speed. Some teachers consider this a form of meditation. In this tumultuous world, that's fine with me.

I thought about my visit long ago with a friend who shared a ribald tale about tracking her husband and remembered a long-ago lecture I presented about coffee cup tracking.

Later that evening I reviewed my 18-year-old tracking class notes. Tom Brown, who frustrated me to tears back then, provided valuable information that has withstood the test of time. Barry Keegan still wins the prize for wilderness skill mastery and teaching techniques. I have more notes from Barry's classes than any other teacher.

I'm getting older, stiffer and crankier, so I'm experimenting with *ultralite* gear to save my energy. One of the core rules in survival is to make judicious use of energy. That's why gathering branches and brush to make a debris shelter is wiser than using the same materials to make and sustain a fire.

I still have to field test the effectiveness of a silnylon tarp as a winter shelter over my hammock, which I hope provides four-season nature comfort. I can still build, crawl into and ultimately scatter a debris hut, but if I can save my energy by carrying lightweight gear, I can spend nature time on the move while comfortable and relaxed.

Skill building takes time. I have to build up my hand-drill calluses, concentrate on my fox-walking posture, clean the roots I dig, re-learn the basics of setting a deadfall trap, and spend more energy on the learning curve. But the payoff is worth the effort.

Wax Historical at the Shadowland



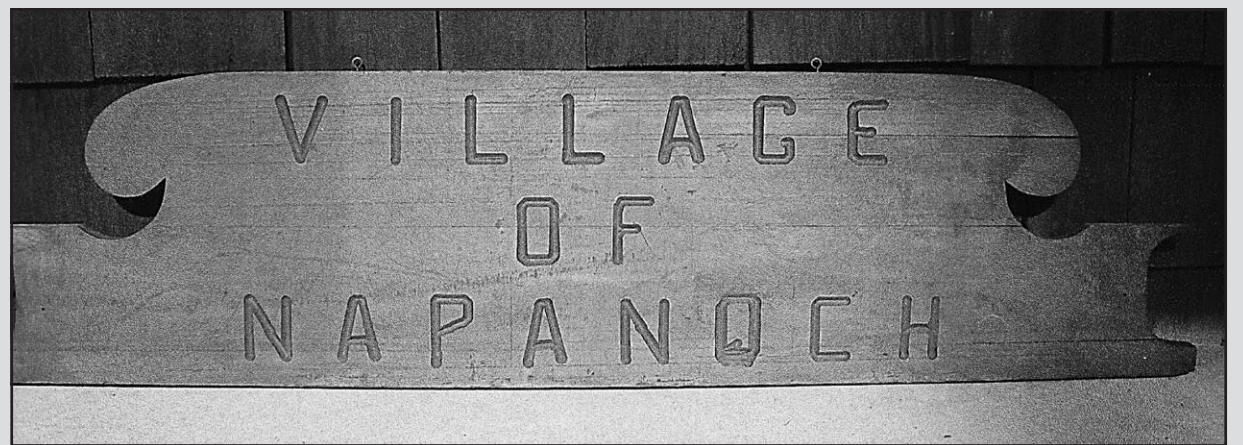
Photo by Joan Beck

The Shadowland Academy acting students are rehearsing for their performance of "Night at the Wax Museum" by Craig Sodaro, on Saturday, October 22,

at 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. at the Shadowland Theater. Cost is \$6.00. The show is directed by Andy Walter with Costumes by Holly Budd Lewis.

Our Town

Contributed by the Town of Wawarsing Historic Preservation Commission



This is a photo of an old carved wood sign, blue/green in color that could have had its origin from a bed headboard. It reads: Village of Napanoch. According to recorded history, Napanoch was never a village. Where did the sign hang? Who made it, and when? Anyone having information about it please contact Linda Geiselhart, Town of Wawarsing Historic Preservation Commission Public Relations Commissioner, at 647-5325. As more details are learned they will be shared with our readers.

The Town of Wawarsing Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), formed in 2010 with the objective of preserving local landmarks, will periodically submit photographs of properties and/or objects of historical interest to the Shawangunk Journal. The HPC's purpose is to enlighten residents of the Town of Wawarsing about the rich history of our area. In turn, the HPC invites readers to share their knowledge, thereby opening avenues of further study.

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