

The Great Outdoors

Learning the skills of energy descent

Sheet
0.1

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The problem with changing to a lower-resource pattern of living is that today we are immersed in a high resource lifestyle that makes it difficult to imagine how we could live with less, or see what skills we might require to live more simply. But there is an easy way that most people can get around the distractions of our everyday life in order to learn the skills of simplicity – go camping!

The Great Outdoors

The 'Great Outdoors' is an initiative from the Free Range Network to develop resources and information to allow people to organise themselves to go and live outside, and in the process develop their skills to live simply. It doesn't matter if it's learning to cook, to keep warm, to make light or to create our own entertainment. Living outdoors is a means to learning these skills because it enforces a simple regime upon our lives – if only because the luxuries that we take for granted at home are just not available.

"Camping" equals "Active Simplicity"

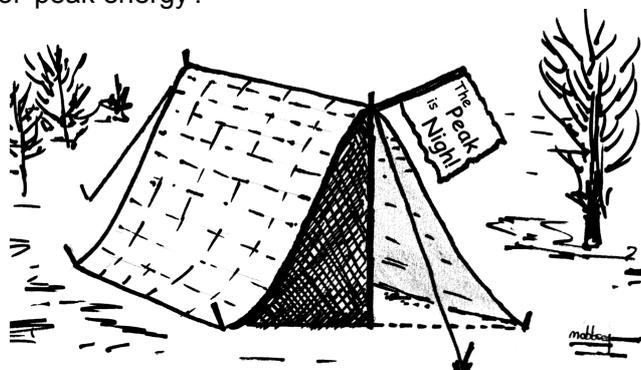
The problem with trying to use less energy and resources at home is that there are so many distractions. So much stuff to get in the way and routines that need to be followed. In reality what changes our life is not a set of actions but a number of judgments or decisions based upon a conviction borne of a new outlook. We change our mind and so our altered actions change the world around us to fit this new outlook. The problem is that in our everyday life the 'stuff' around us can obstruct this process of change by confusing or obscuring our choices.

Another, deeper problem relates to the process of being a consumer. The easily availability of "stuff" over the last fifty years has de-skilled us; we just don't have the skills to live simply that were common in the UK before the 1950s. So as well as changing our minds, we have to find a way to identify the gaps in our knowledge and then find ways to re-learn the essential life-skills that we have lost.

To solve this skills shortage we could go on courses (but they're expensive) or read books or watch TV programmes (but that's really just theoretical). Instead there's a cheap and simple solution that we can do to get out of our restrictive current pattern of living and find ways to live simply and identify the skills we lack to live simply – **we go camping!**

Many people have bad experiences of camping – *mostly cold, damp, bad food type experiences*. As is often said by some of the leading outdoor activity trainers, "*there's no such things as bad camping, just bad equipment*"; but I think we can add to this statement that a "lack of skills" is also pretty important. As with the other lost life-skills, most people have lost the ability to look after themselves outdoors. For example, people taking camping holidays fifty years ago would do so with much less equipment than

people do today. At the other extreme people fill their caravans or cars with large amounts of the latest outdoor paraphernalia – and so don't learn anything new in the process. Ultimately we hope that living simply as part of regular camping trips will enable you to learn the art of *active simplicity* – the skills to live with little – as a means to deal with the imminent problem of 'peak energy'.



The Great Outdoors Initiative

The initiative is based around a new web site – <http://www.fraw.org.uk/outdoors/> – and a new set of materials that is being developed to outline the ideas behind the project and practical skills we want to encourage people to learn. The information handouts planned for the initiative are:

1. **Introduction** – this sheet, which covers the basic principles and the law;
2. **Shelter** – tents, shelter building and bedding for different weather conditions/seasons;
3. **Heat and Fire** – an introduction to camp fires, stoves and cooking;
4. **Water** – this covers water sources and storage;
5. **Food** – outlines the basics of what foods to take/find and how to cook them;
6. **Waste** – how to deal with the waste, human and otherwise, produced whilst camping;
7. **Travelling Light** – how to fit your kit into a rucksack or bicycle panniers in order to get outdoors;
8. **Light and Power** – an introduction to small, camping-oriented renewable energy systems.

On the [web site](http://www.fraw.org.uk/outdoors/) we are also developing kit lists and activity ideas to help you get going. *These materials will gradually be released, as they are developed and tested, during 2009.*

Energy descent, camping and simplicity

Peak oil, peak gas, and the growing problems of producing the raw materials that make industrial society function, mean one thing – *we will all have to use less*. But as noted above, the problem is that getting by with less requires skills, and unfortunately for us over the last fifty years consumerism have been a deceptively simple, low-skill way of living since it offers benefits to anyone who is able to buy something, plug it into the wall and switch it on. We need to re-learn the skills we have lost, quickly!

Another problem is that as energy supplies become restricted the national power and gas grids will become less reliable. As is in many poorer countries we may go through periods when the supply of energy is regularly cut off. Also, as energy prices rise, we just won't be able to have so much stuff, or even heat our homes to the same extent, and so we will have to learn ways to get by with little because there will be no other viable option.

In either case, be it improving our skills or managing to get by with less when the lights go out, the practical skills we can learn from camping outdoors are directly relevant. When camping outdoors we learn to live on little, but you could also use these same skills to “camp” in you're own front room if there was a national energy crisis. From a consumption point of view we are taught that living comfortably involves possessing the “right kind of stuff”. The problem with this approach is that “stuff” can break, get stolen or run out of gas/electricity. We would say that living comfortably involved having the right kind of skills and experiences so that in any situation you can still find ways to eat, drink and be merry.

Perhaps the most important thing we can learn from camping is, for want of a better term, *the art of living in small spaces*. When you're in a confined space you can't just keep loading more and more junk into your life. You have to be selective; you have to attach value to the things you possess in order to devote space to them. As you become more involved in the art of camping, especially if you backpack trails across country, you begin to substitute the need to keep “lots of stuff” with adaptable skills that solve the same problem (as a backpacker you learn early on that *knowledge* is far lighter to carry than *equipment*).

All these experiences can contribute, if practised in your everyday life, to a gradual reduction in the resources you need to live. By learning to live simply under canvas, especially if (ideally!) you are carrying all your baggage on your back or on your bike rather than in a car, you learn to get by with less. If, on your return home, you can continue to practise these skills then you will go a long way to beginning your individual move to a lower energy and resource pattern of living.

Camping on sites

For beginners, the easiest option is probably to camp on a *formal* camp site. These will have facilities such as toilets, showers and a shop – but obviously if you're trying to develop your independence from the “consumer society” this may not be the most rewarding option – if only because many sites such

as this don't allow open fires (technically, “open” is anything not fossil fuel fired!) to cook your food on.

There are two options for camping sites:

- ◆ Firstly, a *licensed site*. Local authorities are required to license any camp site that's used for more than 42 days per year, and as part of this license the toilets and other facilities will have to meet certain standards. You can get a list of licensed sites from the tourist information centre in the area you're interested in visiting.
- ◆ Secondly, an *informal site*. Farmers can allow camping for up to 28 days a year without planning permission/42 days without a license, and many do, especially in tourist areas. However, there's no guarantee that the facilities will be up to any standard – *so obviously this is the preferred option if you're trying to develop your skills for low energy living!* Tourist information centres are less likely to have details of these sort of sites, and usually they're just advertised with a sign by the side of the road.

Another option is to get a one-off permission from a landowner to camp for a few days on their land. That requires that you know the owner, or someone who does, but if you can get permission it makes camping far easier – as outlined in the next section.

'Rough' or 'Wild' Camping

If you want to camp for nothing then you're going to have to find a piece of suitable land somewhere and just pitch-up. Legally that can be problematic, although in practice it rarely causes a problem.



Wild camping is not illegal – it's not a *criminal* offence. However if you camp without permission then that's an injury under *civil* law which, if the person takes you to court, could result in you having to pay damages. They

don't have to prove that you caused damage – trespass is an act of damage in itself because it's an offence against the privileges of private property [but in Scotland this isn't the case – see the box on the next page].

In reality legal problems will only occur if you go out of the way to make trouble. You might think that this created a legal grey area to permit wild camping, but it's very easy to turn a civil offence into a criminal one should the landowner call the police and the police officer used their discretion to try and move you on. If you use your common sense and blend into the countryside then in most cases no one notices, or cares. If you camp in a way where there is no trace that you were ever there, apart from the odd flattened patch of grass, then it's unlikely anyone will make a fuss. In any case this is the type of camping we should be practising – you should be living and using resources in such a way that when you leave there should be no waste or damage left behind.

Today many people's experience of camping resembles a military campaign; they load up their battle-wagons with large amounts of equipment;

Your legal rights to camp “wild” outdoors

If you don't want to spend a lot of money on camp sites then you will have to find other places to camp. There are various legal rights we have to access the countryside, but stopping overnight there is a completely different matter!

In Scotland, the *Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003* created a legal right for the public to wild camp in the countryside – as outlined in the *Scottish Outdoor Access Code* produced in 2004:

A summary of your access rights

1. Everyone, whatever their age or ability, has access rights established by the *Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003*. You only have access rights if you exercise them responsibly.

2. You can exercise these rights, provided you do so responsibly, over most land and inland water in Scotland, including mountains, moorland, woods and forests, grassland, margins of fields in which crops are growing, paths and tracks, rivers and lochs, the coast and most parks and open spaces. Access rights can be exercised at any time of the day or night.

3. You can exercise access rights for recreational purposes (such as pastimes, family and social activities, and more active pursuits like horse riding, cycling, **wild camping** and taking part in events), educational purposes (concerned with furthering a person's understanding of the natural and cultural heritage), some commercial purposes (where the activities are the same as those done by the general public) and for crossing over land or water.

4. Existing rights, including public rights of way and navigation, and rights on the foreshore, continue.

In England and Wales your rights to wild camp on any land without permission can be summed up in one word – **NONE**.

In England and Wales all land belongs to someone, and under English law those private rights are absolutely guaranteed. Even on the large ancient trackways that provide ample room to camp (such as the Ridgeway in Oxfordshire/ Berkshire or the Whiteway in Wiltshire/Hampshire) belong to someone, so whilst you have the legal right to walk and have a rest you don't have a right to camp. Other areas, such as the Malvern Hills, have complete legal prohibitions on camping.

If you go onto land using a public right of way you are protected, even if you sit down and cook lunch on a stove, but the moment that you 'reside' to camp you are committing *trespass*. Trespass is an ancient Common Law principle which means that if the owner (or their agent) finds you on the land they can ask you to leave straight away, and if you refuse they can use “reasonable force” (and “reasonable” depends upon the circumstances) to remove you from the land. Note also that whilst cyclists are allowed on bridleways and byways they're not allowed on footpaths or access land – take your bike there and that's also trespass.

As it's a 'civil wrong' the land owner can sue you for trespass, but unless you actually damage something of value they won't bother because it's not

worth the time. The exception would be if you regularly trespassed on the same piece of land. In this case the owner could get an injunction from the County Court, and if you breach that it's automatically a criminal offence for *contempt of court* – you might have to pay the costs of the injunction too.

The problem is that it's very easy in certain circumstances for a civil trespass to be turned into a criminal act of trespass:

- ◆ The law allows you to have a folding pen knife with a cutting edge of three inches or less – any more than that (like a kitchen knife or axe in your rucksack) without a “reasonable excuse” and you're committing the offence of *possession of a weapon on private land* contrary to section 8 of the *Criminal Law Act 1977*.
- ◆ If the land you are on belongs to the Crown, the Ministry of Defence, or is part of anything to do with the railways or other installations of 'national importance', then you might be committing an offence *trespass in a designated area* under the *Part 2 of the Serious and Organised Crime and Police Act 2005* and/or other legislation.
- ◆ If your camping is “interfering with a lawful activity” then that's an offence of *aggravated trespass* under section 68 of the *Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994*.
- ◆ If there are two or more persons there together with the intent of residing on the land for any period and you cause any damage, or bring road vehicles onto the land (if the land is not part of the verge of the road itself), then that's also *aggravated trespass* under section 61 of the *Criminal Justice and Public Order Act*.
- ◆ If at any time you use threatening or abusive language to the owner of the land (or their agent) then that's also *aggravated trespass* under section 61 of the *Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994*.

Landowners are well aware of these various provisions, and they are publicised by bodies such as the Countryside Agency in their guides to managing public access.

Further complications also arise with the introduction of the 'right to roam'. Article 1 of Schedule 2 of the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000* creates prohibitions beyond those that apply to land, meaning that you are then trespassing if you:

- (e) light or tend a fire or do any act which is likely to cause a fire,
- (i) bathe in any non-tidal water,
- (l) intentionally remove, damage or destroy any plant, shrub, tree or root or any part of a plant, shrub, tree or root,
- (s) engage in any organised games, **or in camping, hang-gliding or paragliding**

(if you are a forager, note that under point 1(l) above the CROW Act prevents you from “lawfully” foraging on any access land).

travel to a site which they occupy; and once there they raid the local shops and pubs for food and drink. It needn't be like this: if you camp in a way that seeks to minimise your expenditure then you will do more things, such as cooking, yourself; if you seek to avoid using mains electricity then you become more dependent up small renewable or wind-up devices; if you focus on minimising consumption then you take very little equipment but you learn the skills to manipulate that equipment in many different ways using the materials that are around you.

Collecting your 'kit'

In many ways the difference in emphasis between site camping and wild camping also represents the difference in emphasis between consumerism and simplicity. When wild camping you try and minimise what you take, and how much land you occupy, in order to create as little physical and visual impact as possible. With site camping there are no such restrictions on minimising equipment or generating waste – perhaps the most telling example of this being the hundred of tents left behind (discarded after a single use by their former occupants) at the end of large festivals like Glastonbury. It's for this reason that the 'Great Outdoors' units put more emphasis on wild camping – it's a way of living that, by its nature, encourages simplicity

Rather than camping being something unusual that we do on holiday, you should look upon wild camping as something that can be done at any moment, whenever the opportunity arises (when wild camping you don't worry about finding a camp site, you just need a suitably flat piece of ground with enough tree- or hedge-cover to keep out of sight).

In each of the units that follow we cover different aspects of camping simply. The central idea is that you develop a "kit" – quite literally collection of items kept in a box or rucksack – that you can pick-up and go off with at any moment. In this way you not only will get more chances to go camping, but you'll also have your kit together at any point in the future should the electricity go off or the gas is rationed!



To travel with your kit you need to put it into something that allows you to comfortably carry it, keep it safe and keep it dry. A large rucksack is one option (even if you travel by car, packing into a single rucksack rather than the boot makes you take less stuff) or if travelling by bike you'll need pannier bags. If you keep your kit in the bag(s) it's all together, you're less likely to lose it, and you're ready to go at a moments notice.

There's also a deeper, psychological reason for keeping you kit together. Once you're able to camp easily having your kit in a bag or box provides a visual contrast between what you need to survive (your kit bag) and what you have to live (the contents

of your home). Ideally, as part of this exercise of learning to live more simply, you should be seeking to narrow the gap between the volume of your kit bag and the volume of all the other stuff around your home! Of course your home and your kit bag are not the same thing – we don't need to live in our homes in a state of 'perpetual camping'. Instead what you need to focus on is the practical functionality and use of the things you keep in your kit bag. You then try and replicate those same values with the other items you keep in your home. In this way, you can avoid the superfluous 'kipple' that consumerism accretes to our everyday lives, and which is the driving force behind a lot of the waste and resource depletion that has developed over the last half-century.

Get in training

Once you've got your kit together you're "good to go!" Of course, walking off with a lot of kit on your back is hard going, and if you just went straight off you'd have a very bad, painful experience. For this reason you need to get into training for a few months in order to develop the fitness to travel with a load and camp. As noted in the *Travel* unit, you'll also need to get some decent footwear, and this requires a period of "walking in" so that when you go out in earnest you don't get blisters.

You should go out walking (or cycling) regularly carrying a rucksack with some 'dead weight' inside (such as a large, 2 to 5 litre bottle of water). At the same time if you're walking in the countryside you can also learn other skills, such as navigation/map reading (a dying skill since the advent of Sat-Nav!).

Better still, as you walk around your area you could take some books and learn the plant identification skills necessary to begin food foraging (there's a separate guide to [food foraging](#) in the Free Range Networks 'food and energy' series of briefings). By learning to forage you're not only able to extend your ability to camp with little, but you also develop a closer relationship and understanding of the patterns of nature. Food foraging is also another way that we can develop simplicity skills because not only can we find food, but we can also develop preparation and preserving skills required to turn that food into things like jam and blackberry & apple pie.

Finally: "Have fun"

Today, in order to enjoy ourselves, we have to burn a lot of energy. Wild camping is the opposite. By learning to live on little, and to slow down and just observe the world around you, you can draw pleasure from using very little. At this point taking pleasure ceases to be a physical, almost drug-like act of consumption; instead we seek to take pleasure from just being, and experiencing in each moment for what it is. Unfortunately whilst these units can tell you the basics of wild camping, they can't encompass the joy of "just being" – that's something you'll have to work on yourself.