



## Wilderness Teaching – Coyote Teaching

*“Young people today, being the adults of tomorrow, require nature in order to learn how to live and act responsibly. Adults today require nature as the basis for all things living; what is more, they need the young as a reminder that they carry the burden of responsibility for wildlife and the future.”*

### Environmental teaching at the Luxembourg Boy Scouts and Girl Guides

Teaching the natural environment has been one of the pillars of Luxembourg's Scouts and Guides for almost 100 years. Recently, Scout and Guide staff members have returned to environmental teaching back as their main focus with initiatives and mottos that actively and consistently dealt with this topic. Perhaps the most long-term project is our “Native Village”. What follows are some precisions and explanations.

Our pedagogical work at the Neihaischen center revolves around practical experience that induces knowledge on nature, ecological interconnections and native tribal life. Our Celtic congregation house, built according to original features, several tee-pees as well as a nearby forest area serve this purpose. The roadmap of our center's development plans to carry on with these accents over the coming years. Our method rests upon the concept of “learning by doing”. Interactive participation in games, workshops and crafts are supposed to increase the awareness of nature of children and teenagers aged 7 to 23 in order to get active in environmental protection.

Over the last years, several thousand children and teenagers took part in several projects and activities. Our experience has shown that young people are very keen on outdoor activities.

### Assessment phase 2011-????

In 2011, several staff members have started a critical examination of the program and concept that had been running since 2008.

The following possibilities for improvement have been pinned down by our analysis. We will work on their implementation over the following years and months.

- Improving the pedagogical concept and hence the programs
- Improving public relations (to show that we are not a Celtic re-enactment association)
- Increasing the influence of wilderness teaching/coyote teaching on the programs
- Increase the training offer for Scouting leaders



## Why wilderness teaching?

Over the last years, our activities with children and teenagers were based upon the scouting concepts of “learning by doing”, “learning through games and crafts” and “teamwork in small groups”. They consisted in their development of outdoor techniques and native skills inspired by Native Americans or Celts in order to raise participants’ awareness of the environment.

The teaching of skills used by several native tribes have been and will remain our core activities. However, after careful assessment we felt that the pedagogical accent was yet deficient.

Thanks to the training in wilderness teaching undegone by three of our staff members we were able to take off with the assessment process that we plan to conclude by 2014.

On the following pages I would like to explain the concept of wildlife teaching in detail.

### **Wilderness teaching: history**

The history of wilderness teaching is difficult to relate because it has never actually been written down. Knowledge must have been passed orally between generations. Origins are traceable approximately 160,000 years ago among all native tribes. Wildlife teaching as a modern concept reached Germany from the USA in the late 1990s. Among its founding fathers, Stalking Wolf, Tom Brown and Jon Young stand out. Stalking Wolf, a Lipan-Apache who grew up in northern Mexico, wandered across the American continent for over 60 years. He searched for similarities and founding principles of native tribes in terms of natural living, including all knowledge, skills and techniques that depend on this. He was a shaman and one of the last Native American scouts. When he was 80 years old, he started teaching Tom Brown, then aged 7. He did so for over ten years. He had practiced his knowledge in the Pine Barrens outback and put it to trial over and over again in the course of his wanderings. During that time, he secretly lived in Central Park, NY, for over half a years, because he felt that those principles and guidelines are only useful if they can be applied within civilization. In later years, he offered his tracking skills to the police and FBI in their search for missing people and in solving homicides. He closed his 600<sup>th</sup> case aged 17. Tom had a single disciple, Jon Young. He taught him everything in the way he had learned it himself from Stalking Wolf. In 1978, Brown founded the “New Jersey Tracking, Nature and Wildness Survival School”. All knowledge and experience taught within that institution rest upon Native American wisdom. Tom Brown and Jon Young brought this knowledge to Europe. Since 2000, several wildlife schools offer trainings in wilderness teaching. Wilderness teaching has developed from survival techniques to professional pedagogical practice that keeps up to date with scientific development and carries out invaluable work.



## The basics of wilderness teaching

### Native tribes:

Native wisdom is the basis of wilderness teaching. Native tribes continue living in close distance to nature.

Take the Aboriginies, or free Native American and African tribes, for example. Beyond them, however, other cultures have upheld a certain degree of knowledge in terms of living in the wild. In Europe, we find the wisdom of the Sami, Celts, Druids or Herborists. In China, there are the martial arts schools and Taoism. In America, this wisdom is being upheld even outside the reserves. A great deal of knowledge is equally held by our own grandparents. Ansient wisdom exists everywhere on our planet. It waits to be (re-)discovered and learned.

### Wilderness:

Wildeness means nature uncharted by man. This type of nature hardly exists in Europe any longer. Therefore, why wilderness teaching in Luxembourg?

Wilderness can equally mean a natural, original state of being. However, does a plant in Europe not grow naturally? Wouldn't that make a park or a meadow a small piece of wilderness?

Wilderness also means an attitude; our heritage of man as a creature in the wilderness. It is a commitment to our very own nature, the drive to be wild. The search for adventure to break out of every day life.

Wilderness teaching assumes that man carries everything that is necessary to life within himself from his childhood.

This inherent potential in people must be discovered and stimulated. Wilderness teaching offers man the possibility to develop his natural skills and ways of thinking and acting in a natural way. Of course, this doesn't happen spontaneously; in fact, it must be guided by an expert wilderness tutor. Wilderness teaching can be seen as a natural, original form of teaching.

### Teaching/pedagogy:

Pedagogy is a Greek word that means tutoring, teaching and guidance. We view pedagogy as purposeful action in order to tutor children, teenagers and adults. Teaching occurs on many levees in wilderness teaching. It can't be restricted to knowledge about nature and the wilderness.

It is, rather, a wholesome development of the individual on a spiritual, mental, physical and emotional level.

We do not intend to "pull" people into a particular direction. We rather intend to assist individuals in discovering and developing what they can do. We view people as individuals who act individually upon events.

Wilderness teaching supports people in finding their own answers. It will not promote any ready-made results. The outcome of wilderness teaching is determined by the individual who undergoes it himself; he alone decides what to accept and what to reject from it.



### **Experience:**

Experiences are a central element to wilderness teaching. We believe that true understanding can only be reached through personal experience.

Wilderness teaching can theoretically be viewed as a form of experimental pedagogy.

However, there is more to it than the learning process from experience. Rather than being a form of “kick and fun” method, wilderness teaching does not reach for ever higher, faster, further, but instead focuses on the depth of the natural experience by people. It’s also about slowing down, as well as about a sustainable, cross-generational development.

### **Adventure:**

We perceive the experience of adventures against the backdrop of a society where there is insurance for everything. That’s what makes wilderness teaching so important – people need adventure.

If they fail to experience adventure, they fall for substitutes such as drugs, alcohol or extreme sports. Wilderness teaching always consists of adventure, be it only natural life away from the armchair, the adventure of the unknown, or adventure stories around the fire. Wilderness teaching can be seen as an adventure-based teaching. However, other than other forms of adventure-based teaching, it is not about creating pseudo-adventures, but about real experiences.

Wilderness teaching touches upon adventure in every possible way: travelling to school or work, exploring one’s own personality – these can consist of adventures, too.

The professor of pedagogical science, Hans Thiersch, wrote the following:

*“An adventure is an event that breaks out of the regularity of life. It’s like an island within life. It has structure in its beginning and its ending. It is perceived as a whole, enclosed in itself. This wholeness reminds of a work of art or a dream – striking images like only phantasy constructs them. The tense character of an adventure means one’s focus on the present. There is no room for questions or reasons. The situation imposes itself, you must go through it. He who experiences it feels the moment almost naturally. The tense, conquering nature of the adventure challenges man as a whole: head, heart and hand. There are many possible forms and representations of adventure. There’s adventure within and adventure without. There’s experienced adventure and related adventure. Adventures in their various forms are central to the personal experience as part of the growing up process. Fairytales and myths often tell us about young men who leave home to meet trials and hazards in order to conquer the princess’ heart. If youth be the time where future grown-ups put themselves to trial in order to recognise themselves among others and the world, adventures become indispensable. Adventure, therefore, suits youth.” (Thiersch in: Runtsch, 1993)*

### **Coyote teaching:**

Coyote teaching is a specific practice of wildlife teaching. It is the way in which Tom Brown jr. was taught by Stalking Wolf. The coyote corresponds to the European image of the fox: it is cunning and reserved.

So is coyote teaching, which is what makes it so hard to describe. Coyote teaching stimulates the motivation to learn, it develops and uses the pupil’s interests and weaves them into the program. Coyote teaching requires a high degree of knowledge and experience by the tutor and is being questioned and re-shaped continuously. Therefore, it can be viewed as a lifelong learning process with nature as its permanent teacher.



There can be situations where wilderness and nature speak for themselves; the student understands from nature directly. Coyote teaching can thus be compared to a mix of systemic, impulsive and intuitive pedagogy.

### **General information:**

Wilderness used to be home to us all. Just like native tribes, hunters and gatherers, we used to be interwoven with nature in a very deep and complex manner, and thus we know all its aspects and appearances. Not just reason, but also emotion and instinct led us to feel at harmony with creation that surrounds us.

Civilization and progress have resulted in an estrangement from nature. We only know it in fragments, and wilderness scares us.

Our look upon our world as we experience it today is the result of a long story. Hunters and gatherers became car drivers. Looking at today's state of the world makes us wonder why we ever stopped hunting and gathering.

Today's living environment is marked by technological speed. We live in a state that favours the degeneracy of man's instincts. Saturated standards of life lead to the estrangement of man from nature within and without.

Wilderness teaching sees the environment not as "what surrounds us" but "what we're part in." This objective remains true for wilderness schools today. Environmental teaching reaches beyond rational knowledge about nature's workings. Nature, like man who belongs to it, has a soul.

Natural tribes experienced the natural circle of conscious learning through perception, sensual experience, attention, action, planning. The importance of perception was taken for granted in these societies. Their survival depended on how well they knew their environment. They knew animals and seasons, wildlife and flora, weather and tracking, as well as how all of these could be put to use in order to create fire, housing or canoes. There was, above all, a deep mental awareness how all of this interconnects.

This is not about what is called "survival training" today. It was not about knowing how to live comfortably outdoors. Tom Brown stated that survival as we mean it also means caring. The forest from which we take our material should become healthier thereby. Therefore, one should not reach for the prettiest branch to construct a bow, but one that stands in the way of other branches.

### **Conclusion:**

Wilderness teaching is not about teaching survival techniques. It is about raising ecological awareness, a worldview that promotes respect and care for nature through an earth-friendly way of life.

The wisdom and knowledge of native tribes, in combination with the scientific findings of our time, merge to lay the foundations of a wholesome learning process.