

Blindfold Walking

Blindfold walking was an exercise we did to gain awareness. It also helped us navigate the trails in the dark, which we would have to do from time to time. We each carried a bandana with us to use when ever we got the inkling to blindfold walk a section of trail. It was a lot of fun to do and it was interesting to watch. Every once in a while we would see someone coming into camp, hands held out, and slowly step step stepping with one foot then the other. Then they would take off their blind fold to find out where they ended up.

I walked into the main camp area on occasion, with a certain spot in mind where I wanted to end up. I would seek out certain trees to identify my position, but I didn't always find them. When this happened, I would start to feel like I was lost. Then, if I tried to reason my way out, I would get all turned around and end up in the bog, or tangled in the bushes. I would become so disoriented, that I would have to take my blindfold off to find my way out.

It was only necessary to walk short sections of trail to learn the lessons of blindfold walking. It was suggested that we walk the same section over and over, until we could do it without stumbling or getting turned around. If we picked a short section near camp, it would be easy to practice several times a day as we came and went from various activities.

The trail from the hearth to the parking area is 2414 'right foot' steps. I was curious, so I counted them. It seemed like a good challenge to blindfold walk the entire trail. So away I went, but I didn't stop at the parking area. I continued on down the road to the boat landing, which was at least a quarter mile further. Somehow, I needed to figure out how to find the turn off, or else I would end up going past the end of the lake, and toward the 'yellow gate'. I managed to find the corner by dragging a stick in the leaves along the side of the road. When I got to the bend, I was able to follow it around instead of passing by unaware.

The Main Trail and Some of its Lessons

The main trail to Nishnajida is a winding path that leads from the parking area, to the hearth at Wabanon. From what I hear, it was originally a deer path. It twists its way through the hard woods and

into a pine forest. After it bends around a couple bogs and over some log 'foot bridges', it snakes over two small hills and ends at the hearth.

We had names for various sections of the trail. A couple names seemed to be well established, but we made up others to help aid our description of certain areas. Starting from camp, there was the 'Sweat Lodge turnoff' followed by 'The Narrows', which was just above winter camp. Then there was the 'Strawberry Meadow' section. After that, there were the 'Grey Bog' bend, followed by the 'The Bridges', and 'Jim's Lean-to'. Further on was the 'Iris Bog'. Lastly, there was the 'Sweet Forest' section.

I don't know how many hundreds of times I walked that trail, but it was a lot. It was possible to become so familiar with it, that I could absentmindedly make my way down the trail, while missing the beauty that surrounded me. Basically, I was blindfold walking with my eyes wide open when I got in that state of mind. That was a precarious condition to be in. For, when I was in that state of unawareness, I was not being fully present. I also ran the risk of tripping, or missing some wondrous sight.

Occasionally, a tree or log would fall across the trail. If they weren't impeding our passage, they were left where they were. We just stepped over them and went on our way. It is not a civilized trail that is trimmed and paved. It is a wilderness trail that is what it is. The condition of the path kept us 'on our toes'. It was an awareness exercise to hike the trail without looking down. Besides, there were so many interesting things to see, other than a well trodden path.

I have a funny story about a time when I went out to clear a tree off the trail near the 'Iris Bog'. Ty said he was going to come out a little bit later and help remove the tree. In stead of waiting, I grabbed my tomahawk and headed out. I didn't know when Ty planned on coming, but he came sooner than I thought, for he was only about 15 to 20 feet behind me. He was matching my steps and blending any sounds he made with mine. He moved when I moved and stopped when I stopped. It was what we called 'shadowing'.

When I got to the tree, I paused to look around. When I turned, I caught the shape of a dark upright shadow behind me. My first thought was, 'A bear!' I flinched and Ty must have thought it was funny, for he had a good laugh. I told him it was dangerous to sneak upon a man with a tomahawk in his hand.

There was one little root knot on the trail that I repeatedly tripped over. It was no bigger than a walnut. There were many rocks, sticks,

logs, and uneven areas on the trail that could cause one to lose their footing, but that little bump got me more than all the rest combined. I named him 'Nubbin'. He taught me to be aware of the little things. One can see the big things a long way off, but the little stuff can sneak up and cause all kinds of grief. Sometimes, as I walked by, I would say 'Howdy' to 'Nubbin', and remembered the lesson.

Shadowing

Shadowing was something we learned about early in the year. If you have ever seen a child with their parent and they were mimicking everything the adult does; they were shadowing. That is one way kids learn. It is also an excellent way to learn about other people and be fully present.

There are three kinds of shadowing; shadow-talking, shadow-walking, and shadow-miming.

Shadow-talking is saying the words another person says as they say them. If it is done out loud, it is best if all parties understand what is going on. It is easy to understand how strange and distracting it might be. It can also be done silently to oneself. This allows a person to be fully present, and to hear what is being said. One can not shadow-talk and think of what they want to say at the same time.

Shadow-walking and shadow-miming are moving with another as if we were their shadow. It is a way to understand another by setting our selves aside. We are forced to pay attention to the other. It goes way beyond reaction. When one becomes a shadow, they move with the other, not after. The purpose of shadowing is to gain a greater awareness.

It was interesting to watch people at meetings. When one person made a gesture, several others would be making the same movements. We could also hear them saying the same words. When one becomes a shadow, they set their ego aside; self is no longer on center stage. The other is what matters. What they have to say or do becomes most important. Then, as the conversation shifts, the roles reverse and the other becomes the shadow. The result is clear communication and deeper understanding. It is most refreshing.

‘Do You Ever...?’, and ‘Do You Mind...?’

I learned a valuable lesson one day after asking a ‘Do you ever...’ question. I was thinking of a quote by Tom Brown Jr., which is, “The best way to go any place is without time or destination. If you can go without time or destination, you have won half the battle. If you can go without expectations, you have won the other half. So, the best way to travel is spontaneously with your heart, without time—without destination—without expectation. And when you get to where your heart says, get there without words.”

I was thinking mostly of the ‘without words’ portion when I asked Ty the following questions. “When you see something, do you automatically put a label it? When you see a tree, do you think spruce, or maple? When you observe anything for that matter, do you stick a name label on it?”

He said that he often did. Then I said that I didn’t, or at least I try not to label things with words. I try to see them for what they are and not limit them with a little ‘word box’ of my making.

This is when I learned my lesson. Ty said that he felt ‘set up’. He thought that I was trying to make myself look better than he. I told him that that wasn’t my intention. I wasn’t trying to do that at all.

Then we discussed how I might have constructed my statement in a way that relayed what I intended, before asking my question. One of the suggested statements was, “I try not to label things by sticking a word or name on them that may confine them. A thing is more than what we choose to call it. What do you think? How do you deal with the concept of limiting things with a name label?”

After we came to an understanding, the conversation went better. I learned it is good to think about my words before I speak, and to order them in such a way that the other person doesn’t feel put down or attacked. It is hard to establish a rapport with someone when they are put on the defensive. By remaining open, I am able to receive more insight and come to a greater understanding.

The “Do you mind...” statement got me to wondering also. How does one answer a question like that? What is the correct answer? One person might ask, “Do you mind if I sit down here?” The other might say, “No.” My thought is, ‘No, I don’t mind’ or ‘No, you can’t sit here.’ Another example: Person ‘A’ asks, “Do you mind if I use your knife?” Person ‘B’ responds, “Yes”. My thought on the answer to this

one is, 'Yes, I mind. You can't use my knife', or 'Yes. You may use it.' I feel the asker is inquiring about the person's opinion or feeling about a thing, not whether they may sit, or use a knife.

With 'truth speaking' in mind, it is better to ask or state ones intention, and let the other person respond as they see fit. I get the feeling from these types of questions that the asker is trying to be polite. However, a straight yes or no answer in the above examples may be confusing, and I think there is the possibility for a misunderstanding. If the asker states his intent more concisely, the response is more likely to be clear and understood.

At the beginning of the course, ten strangers came together to form a group. We had to get to know one another. We asked these types of questions, before getting to what we really wanted to ask. I heard these speech patterns quite often, people just talk like that. As we got better acquainted, it became easier to ask the intended question up front and not feel our way in.

If anyone knows how to beat around a bush, it's me. I often thought that I could beat around a bush hard enough to kill it. Then I would go off and run down some rabbit trail. It is because of this characteristic, that I sought a clearer and more decisive pattern to my communications. It is a continuing process, and I must be diligent about it. I should say that I am really enjoying the journey. And some people thought the TDOS was just at a "survival school".

Bob and Bill, Ben and Jerry

During the summer, there were several sparrows that hung around the hearth. Someone named them 'Bob' and 'Bill', although there were several, two names sufficed. We would often see them sitting off to the side, just minding their own business. When ever there was little or no activity around the hearth, they would come in and look for little morsels of food, or bits of nuts to eat. Sometimes they got bold and came hopping around while we were sitting there fixing our own food.

I enjoyed watching them as they leisurely hopped around looking for tidbits. When they discover a large piece, they would grab it and run lickety-split for cover. I thought it was funny how they looked as they ran away with their prize. I guess they didn't want someone to come along and take it from them.



Ty

Is it Bob or is it Bill? I don't know.

I think the sparrows migrated south for the winter, because I never saw them again after we moved to Winter Camp. The chickadees came and took over as 'hearth inspectors'. They were a bit cautious at first, but it didn't take long for them to become bold. I jokingly called them 'Ben and Jerry' for two reasons. One: the sparrows had names. Two: we liked a certain brand of ice cream. It all made perfect sense to me.

There was usually a flock of chickadees hanging around camp. They would take turns coming in to feed. Some would be up in the trees, while others were on the ground feeding. Then, once they got enough to eat, they would trade locations. It was amazing to watch these tiny little birds. They were not much bigger than my thumb, yet they thrived in some of the coldest weather.

They would often come right in and hop around us as we were sitting in the lean-to. They would even alight on us, especially if we were cracking nuts. They knew what they wanted, and we had it; food. All we needed to do was hold out a hand full of nuts and they would land on our hand, grab a nice chunk of walnut, and fly off to their perch and eat. Then another would come in and say 'Cheep cheep cheep.' which means 'I want a walnut. Where's my walnut?'

I was sitting by the hearth one morning, cracking a plate full of nuts for breakfast. I was almost done when a chickadee came along looking for some breakfast, too. The little bird perched on the edge of my plate to checkout the feast of nuts spread out before him. I put my hand down close, pointed at him and said, "Leave my nuts alone."

He then pecked the end of my finger. Since he asked so nicely, I gave him something to eat and he flew off to enjoy the treat.

In the summer, I washed my plate after every meal, but in the winter I didn't bother. The chickadees cleaned it for me. I had a string plate hanger tied between two trees. It was a handy place to keep my plate, so the mice wouldn't poop on it. The little birds didn't cause me that kind of grief. They would just perch on the string and peck away at any fat specks that remained from supper. I had an enamel plate, so with each peck there was a little ringing sound. I thought of it as the 'dinner bell'.



A chickadee dines in Dave's bowl, after taking care of my plate.
(Hopefully it didn't poop in it, too.)

The chickadees and several other winter birds made regular visits to our 'meat freezer'. We had a location near camp to cache a deer. We would skin and gut the carcass and leave it hanging in a tree. We didn't need to cut and pack the meat like we did in the summer, since it was below the freezing point. When we needed meat for supper, we would take our tomahawk and chop off a portion.

We wrapped a tarp around the deer to keep it covered, but sometimes there were exposed parts. There were also a few bones left lying around from previous deer. These must have looked like banquet tables for the little birds. They could clean off small specks of meat and fat that we couldn't. The tiny bits were nothing to us, but they were life saving meals to them.

One day, while I was getting meat, I saw a nuthatch pecking away at a bone. With his tiny beak, he could clean off portions of meat that I couldn't even see. He didn't seem afraid of me. He just kept eating, as if I wasn't there. I wondered if I could touch him, so I wrapped my fingers around his little body to see how close I could get. He didn't seem to mind at all. I guess he knew that I wasn't going to hurt him. It was a pleasure to be able to see he up close. The little guy was such beautiful bird.

What's That Noises?

I was out for a walk one day and was feeling rather care free. When I am in a happy mood, I like to whistle, sing silly songs. Then there are other times when I click my tongue to a tune. It's a silly habit, but what can I say? So there I was, clicking away as I walked down the road. I was near the parking area when I heard a click coming from the woods. I clicked once or twice. Then I heard one or two clicks in return. I listened. There was no more response. I started to leave, but before I got very far, there was another click. I responded and there was an exchange for a few moments, then nothing. This scenario repeated two more times.

Eventually, I started to wonder what was going on. Where was that sound coming from? I walked over to the edge of the woods and looked around. Then I saw the source. It was Ty. He was sitting under a tree, and had been there for quite some time. It was a drizzly day, so he thought he would just sit there and watch to see what went by. When I came along and he thought he would have some fun with me. He had me going for a while. I thought it was funny, too.

Life in a Tent

Our tents were our sleeping quarters for the first five moons of the course. I believe that one of the first things we did was pick a location and set up our tents. I chose the same site that I used when I was visiting. It was on top of the hill and off to the right, as one comes into summer camp off the main trail. Travis' tent was a stones throw down the slope, although I didn't throw any stones toward his tent. I'm just guessing. Ty picked a spot just across the trail from me, and Kai set up her tent about fifty feet beyond his. I don't remember where Chris

pitched his shelter. I don't think he was there long enough to flatten any foliage, because he was gone in about a week.

In a life style where there is no privacy and there are no secrets, we needed a place of refuge. Our tents, and our da'i spots, were our only private places. To the best of my knowledge, and most likely true, no one ever went in someone else's tent. They were treated like a sanctuary. There would be time later when we would get to share space in the wigwams. I guess it was necessary to take it one step at a time.

I was told to bring a tarp to use as a rain cover for my tent, but the one I brought turned out to be too small. So, a larger one was provided. A tent can deteriorate when it is set up for such a long period of time. The extra protection was necessary. Even so, my tent is no longer suitable for wet weather camping. Besides having a leaky roof, there are several burn marks in the floor from cheap matches that broke as soon as they were struck, sending hot embers flying. After that, I had a 'holey sanctuary'.

My tent was supposed to be big enough for three men, that would be true, if they were all about four feet tall, or if they had no gear, or if they slept in layers. Nevertheless, I was OK if I didn't stretch out all the time. I couldn't help but touch both sides. Even so, I managed. I only needed to have room to sleep and hang out once in a while. The whole outdoors was my living space. The little tent was just my hide-a-way.

My bed was lumpy at first. I had to add more leaves under the tent to help pad and cover any bumps on the ground. I then used some extra blankets to act as a mattress, but that didn't work very well either. Then I had an idea. I could use my other sleeping bag as a mattress bag. It was a canvas sack that one entered from the top. I couldn't use it, because it was only big enough for someone half my size. I would have known that, if I would have tested it before I brought it. I removed the liner and filled it with grass, boughs, moss, and leaves. I made what is commonly referred to as a duff bed. It worked very well. I just wondered if there were any spiders in it.

There was one night during the first week, when it dropped below the freezing point. I knew it was below 32 deg., but I had no idea how low it got. What is a number anyway? They are meaningless out in the woods. If it's cold, it's cold. It doesn't matter what number science puts on it. The same goes for calendar dates and clock time. They, too, are meaningless.

My feet suffered the most from the chill. I only had a summer weight bag, so I used blankets as liners. The trouble was, they moved around as I tossed and turned while I slept. The covering over my feet ended up being rather thin. I had a problem and I needed a solution. The answer; fold the blankets over and sew the end together. It worked quite well. My feet didn't poke out, and it turned my light sleeping bag into a heavy sleeping bag.

I discovered that I was not alone in my tent. There were intruders. The most abundant were mosquitos. They would follow me in and torment me at night. Very few of them ever got out, because I tormented them right back. The walls were covered with blood streaks. Oh, the carnage!

The other intruder had no wings, but it did have more legs. It was the dreaded spider. They never made it out alive either. I detected one as it crawled up my arm while I lay sleeping, or trying to sleep. I grabbed her and threw her out of my sleeping bag. In the morning I searched and found a second one lurking at the bottom of my bag. They were thick, black, and monstrous. Well, maybe they were $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch long. But still, I like to sleep alone, thank you very much.

These little crawly things were a concern for me when it came time to move to the wigwams, which was some time in the early fall. That was also the time of year when I have seen the biggest spiders. The largest one I saw at Nishnajida was three to four inches across. I tried not to think of them near bed time, because it kept me awake. I guess it was something I just had to deal with. There would be spiders in my lodge. There was no getting around it. Spiders are here to stay. I even had spiders in my snow lodge.

I have one quick little spider story to tell, even though it is slightly off topic. I was walking down the trail near winter camp during a light snow storm. I noticed a snow flake just hanging in the air, so I looked closer. It was stuck on a web that a spider was just starting to spin. I had never seen anything like it before. It was amazing.

