

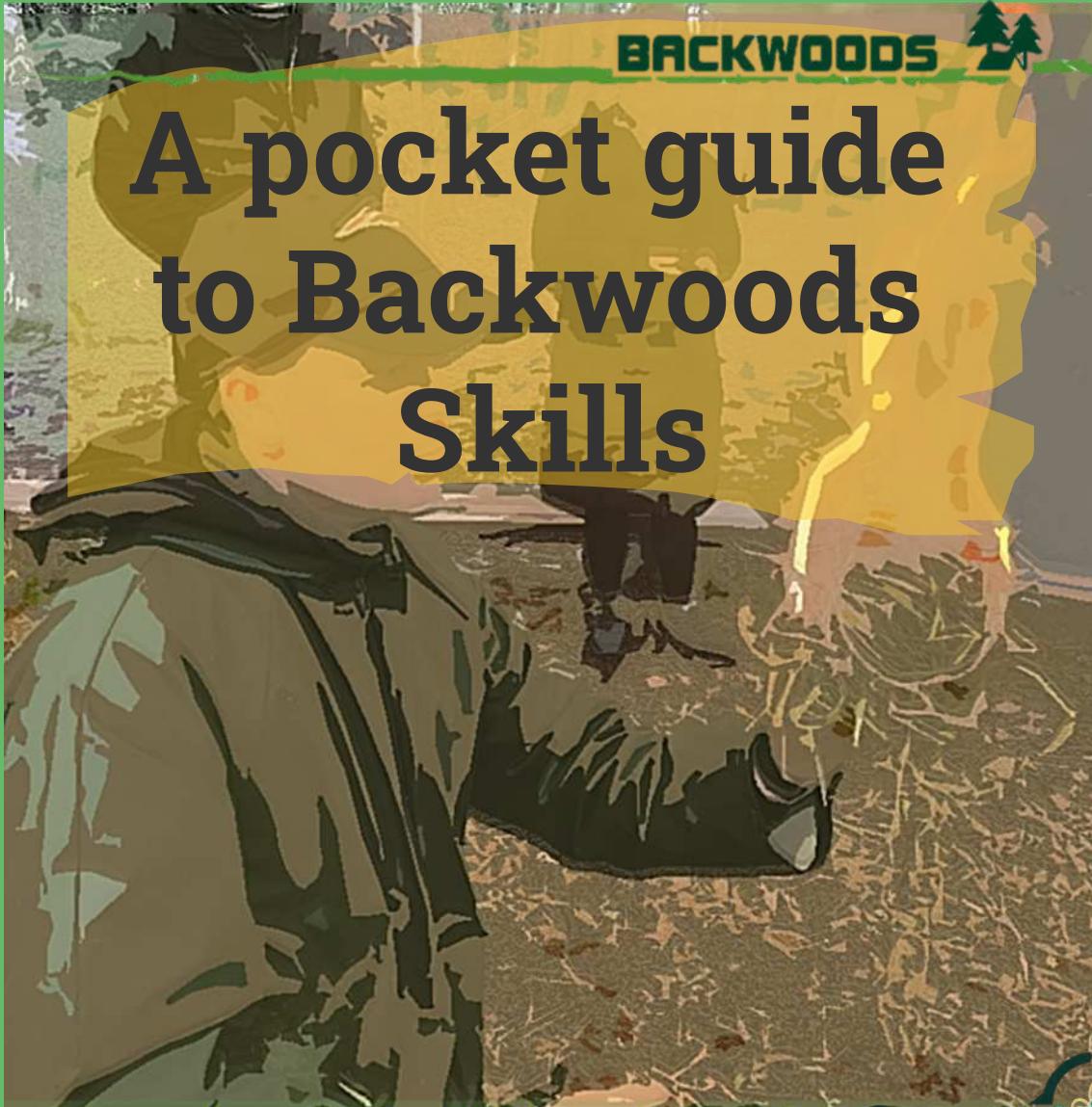


SCOUTING  
IRELAND

BACKWOODS



# A pocket guide to Backwoods Skills



Scout  
Foundation  
Northern Ireland





## Backwoods Living- An Introduction

In Scouting the term **Backwoods** describes somewhere away from towns or habitation. It can describe the forest and woodland areas found all around us, or refer to the lowland and upper grasslands of the hills and mountains across the country.

Through developing **Backwoods skills**, we equip ourselves with the ability to live in comfort and harmony with nature in these out of the way places. We learn how to live off the land, adapt to the environment around us and the ever changing seasons, thriving in areas others would not.

**Backwoods Living** encourages us to use the least amount of equipment possible, instead using what we can from the natural world to assist us in activities like lighting fires, cooking, building shelters and much much more.

This guide has been **designed in reference** to a range of Scouting Ireland resources, guides and books as well as a range of external sources, directly relating to Backwoods Skills learning.

This guide **IS NOT** a self contained or definitive resource for Backwoods skills. It has been designed to provide you with an introduction to the ideas and skills required to develop learning in Backwoods Skills and provide some broad tips and ideas for Backwoods learning.

This guide **DOES NOT** replace the required learning that you as a Scouter must undertake before beginning to work alongside your group in developing their knowledge. Any training that you wish to deliver should always follow the skills levels and requirements as indicated by **Scouting Ireland Adventure Skills** guides and in-line with **all relevant** Scouting Ireland **policy** and **directives**.

For **additional reading** and **resources** please visit [www.scouts.ie](http://www.scouts.ie) or [www.westernprovincescouts.ie](http://www.westernprovincescouts.ie)  
Recommended reading includes : **The Scouting Trail** (2003) by Colm Kavanagh.



## Backwoods Skills- Content

This guide is broken down into 6 sections:

- 1. Backwoods Kit/ Resources**
- 2. Shelter**
- 3. Fire**
- 4. Knife Skills**
- 5. Backwoods Cooking**
- 6. The Natural World**

Each section will provide an overview of some of the learning, methods and resources required to teach these skills to others. They are not exhaustive and as stated, any training you intend to undertake should be informed by internal Scouting Ireland process and policy and include a range of external resources and reading directly linked to Backwoods Living and learning.

The structure of this guide may also help inform the creation of a '**Backwoods programme**'. Through following each section in a linear way, you will be able to introduce key areas for learning to your group and help them develop skills so that they may complete a Backwoods adventure of their own.

**Scouting Ireland Western Province** offers a fantastic resource [#Scouts\\_Stepping\\_Out Adventure Skills Programme](#) that can be used to inform any programme that you wish to deliver:

[www.westernprovincescouts.ie/scoutssteppingup-adventure-skills](http://www.westernprovincescouts.ie/scoutssteppingup-adventure-skills)



# Backwoods Skills Kit

## Backwoods Kit- Gear/ Tools

A key theme that runs across this guide is '**preparation, preparation, preparation**'. Understanding how to plan ahead for any Backwoods activity or excursion and identifying what you will need, is vital to ensuring your safety, comfort and survival in the outside environment.

A good place to begin is to develop your knowledge and understanding around the type of kits and gear that will benefit your Backwoods experience.

In terms of gear, as a **Scouter** running a Backwoods activity it is useful to bring the following items as part of a '**Group kit**' for use by everyone attending.

- **Mora Knives + sharpening tools**- for carving and cooking
- **Hatchets and Axes**- primarily for fire prep
- **A trench spade or shovel**- to assist in camp set up
- **Large tarp, parachute or canvas**- to set up a dry group area
- **Rope**- various grades and lengths for shelter construction
- **A Kelly Kettle and Dutch Oven** - to assist in cooking.
- **A Map** of the site + emergency services contacts
- **Ferro Rod/ Flint + Steel/ Matches**- to start fires



It is also important to ensure that we bring the correct clothing along on the activity or Backwoods camp. Planning ahead, collecting weather forecasts and knowing the 'terrain' will ensure that the clothing that is worn is fit for purpose.

**'Dress like an onion'**- It is easier to '**peel**' off the layers of clothing we don't need if it is too warm or not necessary, it is harder to wear something you need if you don't have it!

## Backwoods Kit- Survival Kit(s)

At different levels of Backwoods skills you will be expected to know and be aware of the type of items you should carry with you.

**For example**, at **Levels 1+2** the more junior members of the group would be expected to be able to name, identify and show how to use the following items that should be brought on any Backwoods adventure:

- Mylar (foil) Blanket
- Whistle
- Torch
- Hand sanitiser
- Glucose sweets & Water purification tablets
- 3m paracord or rope

As Backwoods Skills and learning progresses, at **Level 3** and above your personal survival kit should also include:

- 3 things to start fire (eg. ferro rod, lighter, matches, cotton balls, Vaseline, birch bark, candle)
- 1 item to store water (eg. tin, pot, strong plastic bag)
- 1 x bag of sweets,
- 1x length of cordage (eg paracord)
- 1 item to help make shelter (eg survival bag or large heavy duty refuse bag).

### The 5 C's- A Scouter/ Scout & Venture Activity

As our learning and experience grows in Backwoods Skills, so too will our knowledge about what difficulties and challenges we may find on a Backwoods Adventure.

An activity to run is that of the **5 C's: Cutting/ Combustion/ Cordage/ Container/ Cover**.

The **5 C's** cover items that are **difficult to replicate** in nature and as such when asking older members to put together a **Backwoods survival kit** using personal and group items, they should ensure that the kit contains items that enable each of the **5 C's** is covered and attended to by what is carried in the kit.

## Backwoods Kit- First Aid Kit(s)

Personal First Aid kits are never a substitute for larger Emergency First Aid Kits that are required to be carried with the group at all times.

What Personal First Aid kits do is instil in us all the need to be mindful and prepared to attend to a medical emergency if it arises.

**Levels 1 + 2** require more junior members to carry a small kit sometimes referred to as 'Boo Boo' kits. The kit will deal with minor cuts and abrasions and include items such as:

- Plasters
- Anti-septic wipes
- Bandages
- Safety Pin
- Lip balm or chap-stick



**Levels 3 and above** kits should include:

- Compression bandage for sprains/strains
- Israeli bandage
- Two regular tubular bandages
- Assorted blister plasters
- Hand sanitiser and Antiseptic wipes
- Assorted plasters + Steri-strips
- Lip balm and chap-stick
- Small scissors and pins

### First Aid Activities

For junior members of groups beginning their Backwoods learning journey, they will be expected to be able to attend to a minor injury such as a scratch or cut. They should practice cleaning a wound and applying a suitable dressing or plaster.

**Ensure that any gloves, dressings or plasters are latex free.**

Older members, including **Scouters** should practice their bandage work, learning how to apply pressure and stop bleeding and how to support an injured body part through bandages, using splints or with 'make shift' crutches.

## Backwoods Kit- Is that everything?

As this guide will illustrate, Backwoods Learning will focus on how we use the resources found in nature to support and sustain us when we are on a Backwoods adventure, this being a key difference to say setting up and running a camp.

However, planning ahead and bringing with us additional resources and equipment, can act to help us develop our own and our groups experiences of Backwoods adventuring, and compliment the learning we develop.

### Kit, Kit, Kit

When we are preparing for a Backwoods activity, it may be a useful to frame the resources and equipment we should bring as belonging to a series of kit. Already detailed are the '**Survival + First Aid Kits**'; the following kit titles will also help to add focus on what else could be brought:

- **Hygiene kit** - Personal toiletries + cleansing items
- **Fire kit** - Items packed that will assist fire starting such as matches or flint + steel etc.
- **Dry Foods kit** - Food stuffs such as 'Cuppa Soups' or 'Noodle Pots' etc. + equipment to cook with.
- **Quick Shelters kit** - Emergency Shelter, Tarps, Ropes - Hammocks and Carabiners

### Hammock

As way of introducing Backwoods living to all groups, using a hammock to create a comfortable and relaxing space offers a quick and easy way to showcase a range of skills that will be used across learning.



Hammocks work well in conjunction with tarp shelters and can be easily fitted using carabiners, straps and guidelines, enabling skills learning in ropes & knots.

# Backwoods Skills

## Shelter

## Shelter- Using Tarps 1

Being able to live and be comfortable in the outside world is what makes Backwoods a key Adventure Skill for groups to learn about.

One of the first activities groups should learn is how to create a shelter that can provide a dry and warm place to use when outdoors.

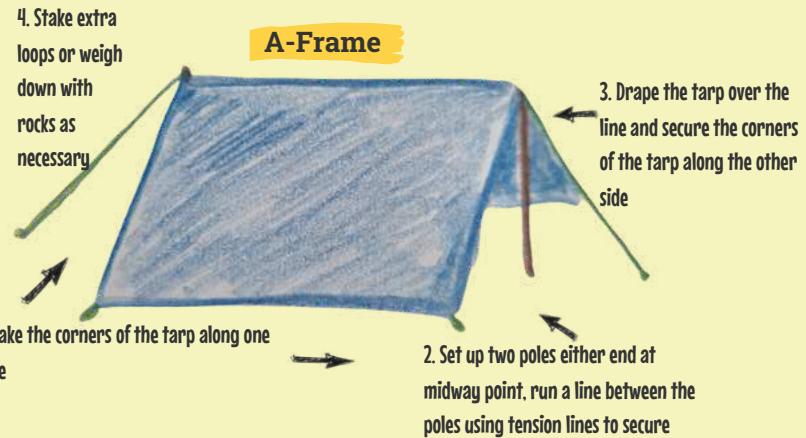
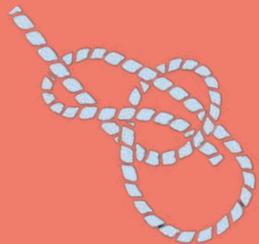
**Tarps** are a versatile resource to use, along with **sisal, flex chord and pegs**, all combining to create a range of differing shelters.

What follows is a brief overview of some easy to build shelters to teach to all Scouts no matter their age.

Knowing your knots is another important skill to learn and tarp shelter activities are a great way of introducing them.

### Useful Knots: The Bowline

Used for securing guidelines to tarps or trees



### Ridgeline A-Frame



## Shelter- Using Tarps 2

### Arrow Head

1. Lay the Tarp flat and stake in the middle



2. Use a log or pole to create tension and raise the tarp

4. Stake the back corners

3. Stake one side at the front and then with tension the opposite side

### Useful Knots: The Truckers Hitch

Used for securing and tensioning guidelines. It's made up of three parts a loop, a purchase, and two half hitches.

### C-Shape Fly

3. Run a guideline between the poles and hang the tarp

2. Place a pole and guidelines at either end of tarp

4. Use guidelines across the tarp to create tension

### Useful Knots: The Prusik

Allows you to easily adjust tension through sliding the hitch



Using tarp to create a range of shelter type will help to demonstrate shelter building and fire the imagination of the groups you are working with.

As these materials are light weight and readily available across your stores you can practice most of these builds both indoors and out.

1. Stake the four corners of the folded base



## Shelter- Natural Materials

Tarp shelter building is a great way to introduce the different types of shelter you can make. In terms of Backwoods skills, the next challenge is to build your shelter using only **natural materials** found within any woodland area.

### Group Activity- Natural Shelters

Building a natural shelter can be an activity **any** Scouting Section can take part in.

The age of those you are working with will determine the **type** and **level** of skills you are teaching. **For example** for Beavers and Cubs you might want to focus on collecting materials and creating frames. Working with older Cubs and Scouts you may wish to focus on the knots and building bigger structures.

#### Lean-to shelter



1. Create a simple frame using suitably sized materials, hitching this to a tree



2. Using smaller lengths of timber, build up the walls ensuring timber is tightly packed



3. Using dry moss, grasses, leaves and ferns, build up a roof using the framework made

#### Arrow Head shelter



1. Build a frame as pictured, using suitable knots to hold timber together



2. Use smaller timbers to create the walls of the shelter, packing them tightly



3. Use ferns and leaves, moss and grass for roofing materials



## **Shelter- Those useful knots**

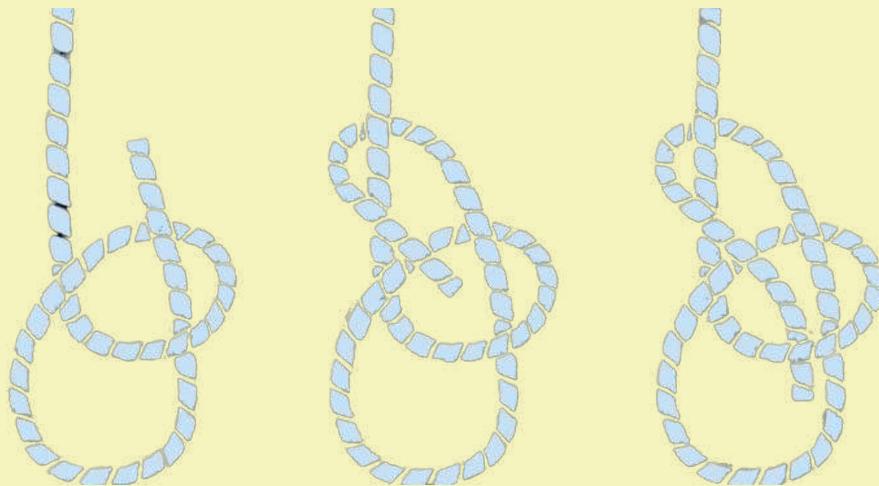
Developing Backwoods skills requires a broad range of knowledge regarding ropes and the knots that can be used to help tie together structures and shelters, hang ridge lines or hammocks, to creating fishing lines for helping sustain us, and much more.

Rope and knot skills and learning requires a much broader and deeper understanding than what is contained within this guide. The good news is that there are a range of resources available via the **Scouting Ireland website** and other sites easily found online.

However, below you will see a **visual guide** as to how to tie a Bow line. For more guidance on tying a range of knots both [www.animatedknots.com/](http://www.animatedknots.com/) and [www.netknots.com/rope\\_knots](http://www.netknots.com/rope_knots) provide useful visual instructions on tying a range of knot.

**Please note that SFNI have no control over third party sites and content**

### **The Bow line**



# Backwoods Skills

## Fire

## Fire- The basics

Fire lighting is one of the most basic and fundamental skills a Scout should learn.

A Scout should be able to set and light a fire using only natural materials and one match, and as part of Backwoods skills learning you can set a Scout on the path to mastering this activity.

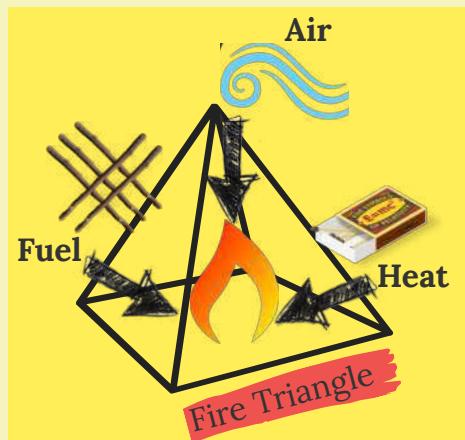
Introducing this topic to younger members in Beavers and Cubs can seem daunting, but this should not dissuade you, teaching these skills will encourage a healthy attitude and respect for fire use and safety.

### The Fire Triangle

Whether you are teaching Beavers or Cubs, Scouts or Ventures, introducing or revisiting how the Fire Triangle works is a great way to help groups identify the components needed to make fire and help discuss safety.

Identifying the components that make up the Fire Triangle will enable you to begin to discuss each element and what these look like.

For example when discussing **fuel**, you can begin to discuss tinder, kindling and wood. Similarly, when exploring **heat** you can introduce methods for lighting such as matches, ferro rod, flint & steel or even bow drills.



#### Activity idea

- Collect 3 good size sticks
- Decorate or label the sticks so that one of each represents **Fuel, Air + Heat**.
- Set the sticks up in a **pyramid** shape so they support one another to stand freely.
- **Remove** one of the sticks and allow the pyramid to **collapse**, demonstrating how removing one component will extinguish a fire.

## Fire- Preparing the fire

Preparing the materials for your fire will be key to making it a success.

**Match Stick, Pencil, Thumb** is a useful guide for you to use when grading the materials needed to start and maintain your fire. The aim is to collect wood the same thickness as a match stick, pencil and thumb

The **following rhymes** may help Beavers & Cubs to remember the grading of materials:

Match-stick, pen-cil, thumb, (X2)  
When we want to light a fire  
Its...Match-stick, pen-cil, thumb!

A hand-full of match-sticks,  
A hand-full of pens,  
A hand-full of fin-gers  
and we do it all again!

## Tinder, Kindling & Fuel

### Tinder

Used to help 'catch' the flame, **examples include**, wood shavings, crumbled rotten wood, dried grass, leaves, birch bark, and string or sisal.

### Kindling

Keeps the fire going once the flame is lit. **Small sticks** and **splinters** from the size of a match up to a pencil. Bigger than tinder but smaller than logs or large pieces of wood.

### Fuel

Builds up the fire and keeps it burning. Medium sized sticks or branches and logs **no thicker than your wrist** are the best fuel to use. Ensure they are dry or seasoned.

### Fire Safety Checklist

1. First Aid Kit + First Aider
2. Clear, flat area
3. Water/ sand bucket and fire blanket
4. Water source nearby
5. A space that allows for a metre radius around fire and minimum 4 metres above fire that is clear.
6. Group discussion and demonstration of safe fire practices.
7. Risk Assessments complete for all 'fire' related activities

## Fire- Starting Fires

### Fire Starters

A great activity, that also demonstrate the skills necessary for setting and lighting fires is identifying and making fire lighters that can be used along with tinder and kindling to start the fire.

#### Some ideas for making fire starters include:

- Toilet rolls stuffed with dried grass, + wood shavings with the ends pinched.
- Cotton wool balls smeared in petroleum jelly.
- Newspaper rolled into tube shapes or knotted toilet paper ties.
- Older Cubs/ Scouts & Ventures could make Feather sticks safely using their knife skills.



### Beaver & Cub Activity- 'Tin Fire'

Empty metal biscuit tins or food cans offer a great opportunity to teach fire prep and fire lighting skills.



It encourages groups to collect the correct materials and to think about the size of tinder, kindling and fuel needed.

**Begin** the activity by looking at **Fire safety** and discussing the **Fire Triangle**. **Next** send the group to **collect** the materials required and **grade** them accordingly using **Matchstick, Pencil, Thumb** as a guide .

**Whilst** this is being done, prepare the tin, a biscuit tin requires the lid to be removed, a food tin **requires a Scouter** to pierce a medium size hole just above the base.

**Set** the **tinder** inside and light, use **kindling** and then **fuel** to feed the fire.

### Fire Safety

• We don't play around fire, poke the fire, or come too near the fire

• We always follow the fire masters instructions

• We never throw anything on a fire, its always placed

• We use a site that is flat and is clear 1metre in radius and 4metres in height.

• We follow the Fire Checklist and can extinguish the fire if necessary

## Fire- Tepee fire Activity- Cubs, Scouts & Ventures

To **begin** this activity first identify a clear, flat area that allows for a 1 metre radius x 4 metre height clearance. Place your **fire blanket** and collect some good size 'dry' rocks and stones and form a circle on the blanket, dig up **clay/ sandy soil**, found around rivers or fallen tree roots and fill this into the centre and **compact it**- this will prevent the fire burning down into dry ground.

Next revisit **fire safety** and ensure that all elements of the **fire checklist** and safety rules are being followed.

Send the group out to collect tinder and wood materials, grade and organise in appropriate piles.

**Laying the fire-** Using **kindling** and **tinder** begin to pile the material in a 'raft' shape ensuring it is loose and allows air to flow through it. Set up 3 bigger sized pieces of wood in a tripod shape. (Fig. 1)

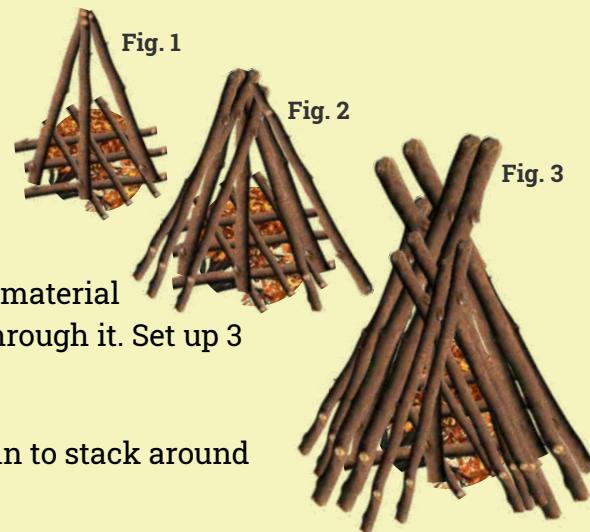
Using **pencil sized kindling**, along with **smaller sticks**, begin to stack around the tripod frame creating a cone. (Fig.2)

Place the **tinder** along with a home made **firelighter** (recommended) in the middle of the cone and light using a single match, ferro rod or flint and steel.

**Finally** begin stacking the wood collected for 'fuel' around the cone shape, carefully placing more around the outside as and when it is required. (Fig.3)

### Using a Ferro Rod

1. Hold the scraper at a 45-degree angle.
2. The end of the ferro rod needs to be right **next** to your tinder.
3. Pull the **ROD back**, not the scraper!
4. **Sparks** should rain down on your tinder and light it.





# Backwoods Skills

## Knife Skills

## Knife Skills- Safety first

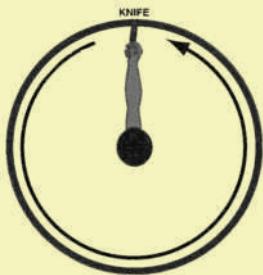
Mastering the safe use and practices related to knives is an important element of successfully achieving Backwoods Adventure Skills.

It is important that you as a leader are fully proficient and confident in using knives, and that you have achieved the **appropriate level** of skills training necessary to deliver training and sessions to others.

**REMEMBER-** You must never attempt to develop your own skills without proper supervision and training.

You must also NEVER attempt to train others without fully achieving the appropriate level of skills training required to do so and without adequate support and supervision available.

Across the next pages you will find some useful hints and tips to remember when working with knives.



### The 'Blood Circle'

- Position the group into a circle, ensuring everyone is at arms length of one another
- Everyone rotates 360° with knife in hand
- If knives touch this is an unsafe space
- Always be vigilant & alert

### Knife Handover technique

- Grip the knife handle with blade pointing upwards and away from body
- Lean knife backward between thumb and forefinger with butt of handle pointed outwards
- The person receiving says 'thankyou' to acknowledge that you should release.

### Knife Safety Check list:

1. First Aid kit + First Aider
2. Leader can see everyone (scouts sit in a semi-circle)
3. Use of the 'Blood Circle' method to position everyone
4. Use a ground sheet to catch chips'.
5. 'Never cut toward yourself'.
6. Leader must go through safe carving practices and get Scouts to demonstrate they know them every time.
7. The knives must be very sharp.



## Knife Skills- Cuts & Grips

There are a range of different knives and cut and grip techniques that you need to master for Backwoods Skills, what follows are three techniques useful for various activities.

Using the **push cut** ensures that all the force comes from the thumb of the hand holding the piece of wood.

The hand holding the knife controls the direction of the cut, helping ensure that the knife will not fly forward if it slips.

The **pivot cut** will let you complete finer and more controlled cuts and to work with awkward angles.

The thumb of the hand holding the wood stays still on the spine of the knife and acts as a fulcrum.

Pivoting the knife handle upwards makes the knife cut into the wood and gives you a more controlled hold when cutting.

The **chest lever grip** uses the upper chest and back to apply pressure and give strength to make the cut

Gripping the knife with the blade facing into the web of your hand, hold the blade high at the CPR point of the chest, doing the same with your other hand holding the wood.

Start the cut at the hilt and moving to the tip by pulling your hands apart while keeping your elbows tucked in, your arms will act as levers and your chest a fulcrum.



## Knife Skills- Activities for Beavers & Cubs

Introducing knives and knife skills to the age group in these sections will ensure that they begin to develop a healthy and respectful attitude toward the use of knives.

Using the right approaches and activities will ensure that you can engage the group safely with the skills area and create a controlled and safe learning environment for all.

**Always ensure that you have the appropriate skills level necessary to deliver training, adequate support staff and that you follow correct policy and guidelines.**

### Ice Lolly Knife

A simple activity that introduces blades to a younger age group.



Work the edge with sandpaper to make a blade

#### You will need:

- Lollipop sticks
- Sand Paper

#### Activity

- Introduce the topic of knives and their uses in Backwoods Skills.
- Discuss safety
- Using sand paper ask the group to create a rough or blade edge along part of one side.
- As confidence and ability grows more effort can be made to shape the blade and handle.



Shape the blade + handle

### Strip Bark

Another way to introduce knives and blades to younger sections is to use potato peelers to demonstrate their uses in a controlled and safe way.

Use the potato peeler to strip bark off sticks for whittling.

If the wood is too hard or the scout lacks the strength, then use a carrot or soap to grow skill and experience.

This is an important activity to do as it builds up experience in the motion of cutting away from yourself, a key safety aspect.



## Knife Skills- Activities for Scouts+

As young people progress through the knife skills levels they will be able to try new and more complex challenges. **Mora** provide a range of knives for varying levels of ability and it is highly recommended that you take the time to familiarise yourself with them all.

Before undertaking delivery of these next activities, ensure that the young person is competent to **Level 3 in knife skills** and that you follow all safety guidance, policy and procedure and that you as the leader are signed off to the correct level and that adequate support is available.

### Feather Sticks

A very useful resource to use when lighting fires, the feather stick allows the group to practice the intricacies of carving wood for a purpose.

Collecting **dry timber** is essential, next discuss **knife safety**, use the '**blood circle**' and revisit the '**push cut**' grip with the group and begin '**feathering**'.

**Remember** the object is to ensure the scout **pushes** the blade **away from the body** and that cuts are **shallow and long**.



### The 'One Stick' Challenge

This activity can be used to encourage groups to work together to achieve a shared goal, encourage safety and controlled cutting techniques as well enable you to introduce how knives and hatchets can cut timber.

**To start** the activity give groups a 5" diameter branch and challenge to start a fire using only this material.

**Using safe techniques** such as splitting wood using blade and wood mallets the group can begin splitting the branch into **halves, quarters and even eighths** to create kindling, tinder and even feather sticks.

# Backwoods Skills

## Backwoods

### Cooking



## Backwoods Cooking- What to know

Cooking in the outdoors will encompass a range of skills and techniques, including knife & carving skills, and as such should be developed level by level with those you are teaching and leading

What this guide will do is introduce some of the basic concepts, techniques and ideas to use to help develop the skills required to progress in this area.

### Hygiene

As with all types of cooking, be it in the kitchen, on a barbecue or in the case of Backwoods cooking, using an open fire; hygiene must be a top priority.

**A few key points to be aware of include:**

- **Hands** should be thoroughly **cleaned** using warm water and soap.
- **All food** should be **washed** before use and kept packaged or covered until ready for use.
- As in any kitchen, correct **preparation areas** and **chopping boards** are required to limit any cross contamination.
- **Backwoods cooking** traditionally uses **embers** rather than flame to cook foods, so take time to ensure that all food is cooked correctly. Cooking over a flame may lead to it being charred and cooked on the outside, but raw in the middle.
- **Clean up** the area after you are finished and dispose of food scraps properly so not to attract vermin.
- **Always wash your hands** when switching between prep and cooking, cooking and eating.

### Key hole Fire

Backwoods cooking should use very little in way of equipment and utensils (although feel free to use them) and as such traditional camp kitchen fires are not recommended. The '**key hole**' fire works to enable you to attend to a **tepee fire** and safely use its **embers** to facilitate Backwoods cooking.

## Backwoods Cooking- Types of cooking

There are a range of recipe ideas for use regardless of age that will encourage your group to try Backwoods cooking.

As ever careful planning and preparation will be key to making these activities a success. Follow all fire related guidance and activities, constructing and lighting them with care and due diligence.

Set up your cooking area, placing hygiene and safety at the core of all you are doing and ensure that if knives are used, correct and safe methods are followed.

### Skewer Cooking

Using skewers allows for a range of vegetables and meats to be easily cooked over embers.

If using meat ensure it is placed over embers for the correct length of time to cook.

Toasting Marshmallows is also a great way of demonstrating this method.

### Container Cooking

Cooking food within food is a great way to create a meal.

Cut an onion in half and scoop out the middle layers except for the remaining three outer layers.

Break an egg into the onion shell and place on the embers..

When cooked, eat the onion container as well as its contents, after removing the outer scorched layer.

### Camp Breads- Twists

Mix flour, water, and a pinch of salt together to form a thick dough, adding fruit gives more flavour.

Make a snake like roll of the dough and twist this, snake like fashion onto a skewer.

Hold it over glowing embers turning occasionally until the outside turns golden brown.

## Backwoods Cooking- Fish Challenge

As Scouts progress across their Backwoods Skills learning they will be presented with more complex challenges, for example, at **Stage 3** this includes **catching** and **cooking** a **fish** in the wild.

This challenge incorporates a range of activities, including using a knife to carve a hook, create a rod using natural materials and preparing and cooking the fish accordingly.

As with all activities, **plan** and **prepare**, ensure you as a leader have **completed the relevant skills** level to deliver the activity and follow all correct **guidance** and **policy** including **Risk Assessments**.

### Catching a fish: Making a hook

Find a sturdy branch and look for a 'V' section to make the hook.

To begin, strip and carve the smaller portion of the 'V'. Starting here ensures that the can use the main trunk to hold and grip the branch.



Having now stripped the remainder of the branch, make a small notch around the top to hold a sisal line and tie the knot so that it doesn't slip.

Secure to your line and place on the rod ready to use to fish.

### Cooking the fish

Fish can be cooked relatively simply using a variety of methods including broiling and by wrapping in **tinfoil** or **cabbage leaves**.

**You must make sure you prepare the fish correctly:**

- Washing it through in clean water
- Slice just below the gills and carefully pull the head off and remove innards.
- Slice open and clean and remove tail & fins.
- Wrap in foil or pinned cabbage leaf & cook for 15-20 minutes.

## Backwoods Cooking- Kelly Kettle

The Kelly Kettle™ or any other storm kettle, is a fantastic asset to bring along on any Backwoods, hike or camp activity as it not only provides you with hot water for tea, coffees and hot chocolate, but offers an opportunity for groups to learn about and develop a range of skills.

**Using a Kelly Kettle offers opportunities to teach skills around:**

- Fire Safety
- Preparing and Lighting Fires
- Camp Cooking
- Maintaining equipment

### How to use a Kelly kettle

**4.** Use the chimney to add additional kindling for burning. Never look down the chimney as this risks injury

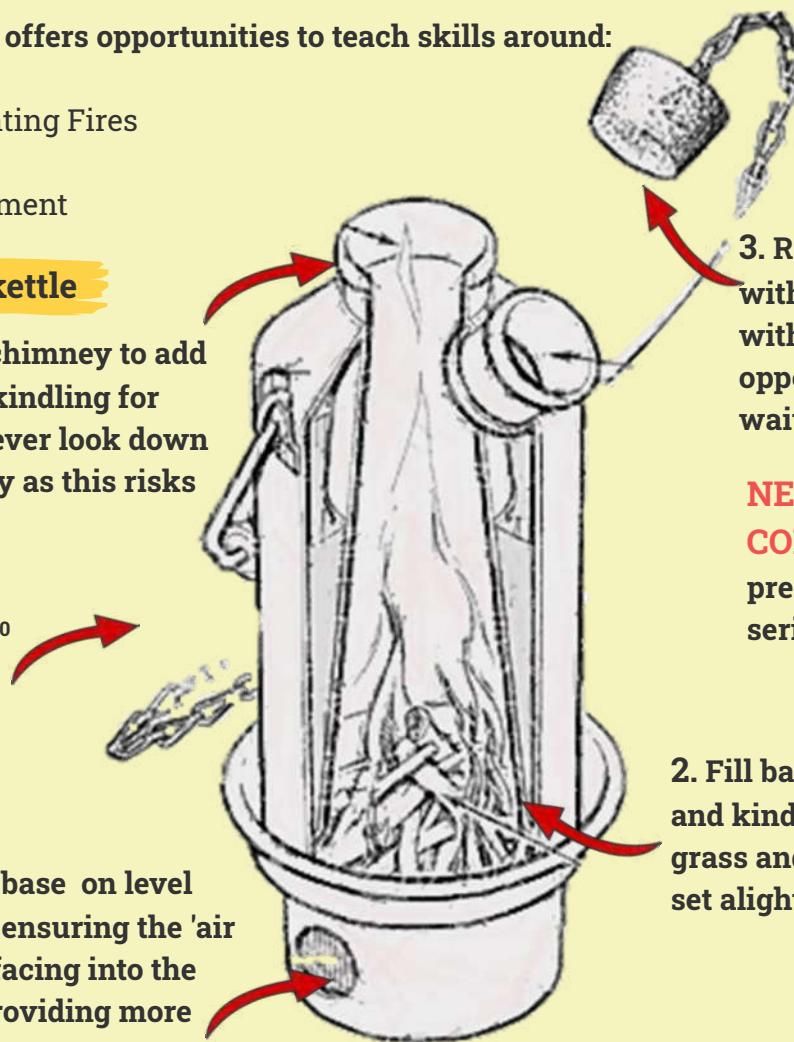
**5.** Lift the handle to a 90° angle and use chain to safely pour water from the kettle

**1.** Place base on level ground, ensuring the 'air hole' is facing into the wind, providing more oxygen

**3.** Remove cork and fill with water, set onto base with handle placed on opposite side of spout and wait for water to boil

**NEVER BOIL WITH CORK IN**- it can cause pressure to build, risking serious injury

**2.** Fill base with tinder and kindling such as dry grass and small twigs and set alight



# Backwoods Skills

## The Natural World

## The Natural World- Passing knowledge

Developing our knowledge of the world around us equips us with the ability to recognise the natural materials and resources that will support our ability to live comfortably and thrive in a Backwoods environment.

**For example:** if we know what a **Hazel** tree looks like, we have found the perfect material for making 'feather sticks'. Finding a **Willow** gives us the materials needed for making rope or weaving a basket. Identifying **Fir Pine** trees, provides us with sap for treating a wound.

Developing learning and understanding of the world around us is something we should strive to do as early as possible with groups. On nature trails and hikes we should be pointing out and discussing the trees and fauna we find, so to grow and reinforce this learning for ourselves and group. In Backwoods and Camp activities we need to discuss the types of wood we use for our fires and carving, and introduce the edible fruits and plant life that can be found all around us.

This guide will provide you with some **basic information** around identifying a small number of native and common trees and details about their use.

It will also explore a number of fruits and other fauna that may be used as a food source.

**However, this guide is in no way a definitive source of information and does not intend to be.**

**It is not a substitute for learning, it should be used to support your own knowledge and learning in this area.**

**In respect of foraging and finding other natural food resources, never undertake this activity unless you are confident that the learning you have is backed up by appropriate knowledge and experience.**



## The Natural World: Leaf Ident

There are many indicators and markers that can be used to identify trees, from shape and size, to branch positions, their fruit and seed, and of course the shape of their leaf, all can be used to determine what the tree is being identified as.

A good source to use to broaden your understanding of how to identify trees is the **Collins Complete Guide to British Trees**. The **Woodland Trust** also have a useful A-Z guide and Tree Finder App available via their website [www.woodlandtrust.org.uk](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk).

**Ash** can be identified as their leaf are grouped in pairs with a single leaflet at the end.

**Uses:** Ash wood burns very well, providing both coals for cooking and a great flame for campfires.

Its not ideal for carving, however anything less than 1/2 ft dia. can be used for tool handles such as axes and mallets.



**Hazel** leaves are broad and rounded at the stem. You will usually find a single jagged tooth at the end with smaller teeth found along the front edges.

**Uses:** Hazel provides great kindling wood and burns quickly.

It is easy to carve when its fresh and is used for making spoons and skewers.

In the Autumn it provides nuts for sustenance.



**Narrow Leaf Willow (Osier)**- grows in wet areas and tends to grow tall, straight and flexible rods, thick with long pointy leaves in clusters.

**Uses:** Willow shaves very well and is ideal for creating 'feather sticks'.

Its flexibility means it can be weaved to create frames and basket structures and bark can be processed to weave rope.



## The Natural World: Leaf Ident

**Oak** have one of the easiest recognisable leaves, with their long leaf and rounded lobes. It produces the acorn another indicator and tend to be large with huge straight bows and branches.

**Uses:** Growths found on branches called 'galls' can be used to make a black ink.

Its wood burns steadily, creating a heat ideal for frying, stewing and baking.



**Blackthorn** are common among the hedgerows across the countryside. Their leaves are small, dark green and tear drop shaped with fine teeth along their edges.

**Uses:** Can be used to make 'Gouge' fish hooks. Its wood has a charcoal quality so is great for cooking. Its fruit, sloes, is bitter but edible.

**Horse Chestnut** have broad, flat, tear dropped shaped leaves, in the Autumn it is easily distinguishable by its seed, the conker husk.

**Uses:** Its broad leaves can be collected and used to provide roofing for shelters. The leaf can also be crushed up and used as a soap.

**Conkers are poisonous and should never be eaten!!!**



**Fir trees** are evergreen and easily identifiable by its green needles and pine cones.

**Uses:** Not great wood for burning, it does however produce a sap that can be ignited and worked into a sticky substance that can be used to seal cuts.

For more guidance and support on tree identification visit The Woodland Trust website education area- [www.treetoolsforschools.org.uk/activitymenu/?cat=tree\\_id](http://www.treetoolsforschools.org.uk/activitymenu/?cat=tree_id)

## The Natural World: Edibles

**Stage 6** of Backwoods Skills requires the ability to identify safe food to eat. **Never eat anything you are NOT certain of** and carry **Edible foraging guides** as good practice. Always wash food first before eating.



**Blackberries** grow on brambles, surrounded in thorny crowns and vines, be careful when picking. Never eat red berries or those close to the ground.

**Wild Strawberries** are found across more upper woodland and hilly areas.

They grow low to the ground and send out runners with white flowers.

Bright red strawberries indicate that they are good to eat, but avoid if they are on the side of a busy path.



**Blackcurrant** are more common in domestic gardens, so when out and about keep an eye out and ask before picking them.

Easily identified by their broad leaves with toothed edges, they are ripe mid to late Summer.



**Wild Garlic** is found across the woodland floor. Easily identifiable with their tall upright leaves and white or purple coloured flowers and unmistakable scent of Garlic.



The whole plant is edible, the bulb sits just below the earth at the base of the stem and can be used for flavouring whilst cooking.

## Backwoods- Summing up

As highlighted by this guide, Backwoods Skills learning offers many different opportunities to develop and deliver a wide range of activities that will engage and develop Scouting skills for your young people.

An approach to delivering these skills is to breakdown each area into their component parts and to create training and activities that take your group step by step across each of the areas.

Running your Backwoods Skills programme as if you were planning and organising a Backwoods activity is another way of creating your programme-

**Plan**- What is the activity, what will you be doing, how will you do it, what things do you need to bring?

**Preparation**- What does your kit look like, making up your kit(s), knowing where you are going.

**Getting ready**- Knowing your tools, safety, how to craft, what to look for- knowing nature.

**On site**- Setting up shelter, making fire, camp cooking, Backwoods crafting.

**To finish**- Leave no trace, what learning are we taking away, celebrating the Backwoods experience.

Regardless of how you develop your programme, safety and expertise should always be at the core of your activities. Confident Scouters will create an atmosphere where Scouts feel that they are able to learn and pick up the skills on offer in Backwoods learning.

Please remember that this '**pocket guide**' is just that, a very small guide that can help shape your Backwoods journey and compliment and steer your wider learning. **Scouting Ireland** along with a wide range of other places offer some fantastic resources to assist you in your own training and learning. Each County also contains an abundance of expertise to help you learn these skills practically and support you in delivering them to others.



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