



YURT BUILDING WORKSHOPS: A WELL ROUNDED EXPERIENCE

WHAT IS A YURT?



Yurts are the traditional nomadic home from Central Asia. The yurt is a collapsible framework of wooden poles covered with felt and/or canvas. The design of these ancient shelters has been kept unchanged for over one thousand years. Having proven themselves over many centuries, they remain one of the oldest indigenous forms of shelter still in use today.

Today, yurts provide shelter for many people and can act as space for a wide number of educational and creative purposes.

WHO IS INVOLVED

Selene and Alex Cole from Little Foot Yurts have run highly successful educational programs and yurt building workshops throughout Nova Scotia (see end of document for examples).



YURT BUILDING WORKSHOPS



Building one's own shelter is incredibly empowering and takes the participant on an experiential education journey involving many aspects of traditional and natural building practices. Our yurt building workshops provide a thorough introduction to yurts and to the basics of yurt construction, including: coppice as a timber crop, Acadian forest species, making a greenwood working station, steam bending, using a drawknife, froe and other hand tools, planning and designing yurt walls, roof, wheel, and erecting

a yurt.

OUTLINE OF YURT BUILDING WORKSHOPS

Little Foot Yurts offer an intensive two-a-half-day Yurt Building Workshop on our property just outside Wolfville, NS. Your accommodation is in yurts which are equipped with wood stoves. We also have a yurt kitchen for dining and compost toilet is available.

The following section introduces the activities over the course of the workshop.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STRUCTURE AND ORIGINS OF THE YURT

Participants will become familiar with the cultural background and the origins of the yurt. An overview will be given of the yurt components, its structural strength and its regional variation. As a group we will discuss why the yurt is a sustainable shelter.

CREATING THE WALLS

The group will work together to measure, cut, drill and connect the poles needed to build the first component of a 12-foot yurt. This fun hands-on session will help to break down the complexities of yurt building as the group observes their wall section evolve. The task of building the wall gives the group an empowering sense of ownership of the project and adds to their satisfaction when they later erect a yurt using their own hand-built component.



ERECTING THE YURT

The group will be invited to use their own initiative to combine their hand built wall with the additional yurt components provided and erect the entire yurt frame. Once erected the group can test out the theories of the yurt's inherent strength and experience being inside their shelter.

COPPICE-AN IDEA FROM THE PAST

The group will explore current forestry practices used in Atlantic Canada and identify its effects on the health of forests and habitats. We will investigate the ancient silviculture technique of coppice (the practice of harvesting the re-growth of hardwood stumps) to provide round wood material for yurts and other applications.

GATHERING MATERIALS ON A WOODLAND WALK

Once the group has finished creating their own shelter, we take a walk in the woods to identify local tree species. We will discuss the best woods for yurt building and collect suitable wood for the yurt poles. We will learn how to identify a selection of trees and discuss their natural characteristics, for example, identifying hardwoods, which are ideal for steam bending and splitting. The poles will be brought to the group's workspace in preparation for building their green woodworking area the next day.

BUILDING A WOODLAND WORKSHOP AND INTRODUCTION TO HAND TOOLS

First, participants will be given diagrams of a shaving and riving break, a structure used to secure wood in order to remove bark, rive, and craft wood. The participants will then be asked to choose a site appropriate for a woodland workshop. In addition, they will collect materials from the surrounding area and use them to build the break. Then, they will be introduced to the proper use of hand tools such as the billhook, drawknife, maul, axe and froe. They will also learn proper sharpening techniques needed to maintain these tools.



DESIGNING YOUR DREAM YURT

This activity will help individuals clarify and develop the necessary information to start the virtual design stages of creating their own yurt. Everyone will have an opportunity to discuss their ideal yurt with a partner and share important ideas such as size, use, timeline for building, and resources needed. Their partner will present their colleague's ideas to the rest of the group. In doing this, participants will be able to reconsider any ideas they have had and make design alterations.



GEOMETRY OF YURT

Once participants have had a chance to envision and consider their ideal yurt, they will receive a copy of our Yurt Zine, which includes a five-page Yurt Findings Worksheet at the end. The Yurt Findings Worksheet is a step-by-step process, which allows participants to easily build up a structural design for their custom yurt. This process catalogues all the lengths and components for the individual yurt. The worksheet allows the user to understand the geometry of the overall

structure and apply simple trigonometric and mathematical calculations, whilst making the task relevant to the participant. At this stage, we will also showcase a variety of design ideas for the yurt wheel.

SPLITTING A TREE BY HAND

The group will utilize the power of lever and fulcrum to hand split an ash log. Using a froe, each participant help make two planks from the ash tree. This important and satisfying process is required for the most important part of the yurt-the crown wheel.



STEAM BENDING

We will steam the hand split ash plank in a steam box and together bend it around an old cartwheel!

SKILLS DEVELOPED THROUGH PARTICIPATIVE AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

- Tree identification
- Basic carpentry
- Greenwood working
- Geometry
- Forestry (traditional and ancient)
- Use, sharpening and maintenance of hand tools
- Rope work

OUTCOMES FOR PARTICIPANTS

- Empowering individuals to feel confident in erecting and building their own yurt
- Bringing participants together as a team
- Broadening the participants understanding of the structure, history, and cultural background of the yurt
- Expanding the participants understanding of sustainable development

YURT BUILDING WORKSHOP AGENDA: (TWO AND A HALF DAYS)

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| Evening 6-9pm | Welcome, introductions, history & trip to Kyrgyzstan talk |
| Day One | |
| 7:00-8:00am | Breakfast |
| 8:00-8:30am | Types of yurts, how a yurt works & introduction to wall building |
| 8:30-10:15pm | Build wall together |
| 10:15-10:30 | Snack |
| 10:30-12:30 | Continue building wall |
| 12:30-1:30 | Lunch |
| 1:30-2:30 | Erect the yurt & doorway design |
| 2:30-3:30 | Little Foot Yurts forestry, an discussion about coppicing with snack |
| 3:30-5:00 | Walk in the woods, including tree identification, best wood for yurts & collecting yurt poles |
| 5:00-6:00 | Dinner |
| Day Two | |
| 7:00-8:00 | Breakfast |
| 8:00-10:30 | Build a woodworking break, carve poles with a drawknife & learn to sharpen tools |
| 10:30-10:45 | Snack |
| 10:45-12:00 | Covering your yurt & yurt living activity |
| 12:00-12:30pm | Lunch |
| 12:30-1:00pm | Wheel designs & splitting ash with a froe |
| 1:00-2:00 | Part 1: Intro to Zine & yurt findings worksheet |
| 2:00-2:30 | Making the roof pole taper & fishing the ends |
| 2:30-3:00 | Part 2: Yurt findings worksheet |
| 3:00-4:00 | Steam bend ash plank & barn/textiles room tour |
| 4:00-5:00 | Snack, evaluations & closing circle |

WORKSHOP FEES

A workshop fee of \$360 plus tax includes accommodation, full catering for the weekend, and a yurt zine.

Note: To confirm your space at the workshop a non-refundable check of \$160 is required.

A SNAPSHOT OF OUR YURT BUILDING WORKSHOPS

Involved in any exciting projects this winter? Thinking of a unique gift for someone that is interested in natural building?

Join Little Foot Yurts; makers of traditional style yurts and learn how to build your own yurt – a low impact, affordable, shelter originating from Central Asia. Versatile and portable the yurt can be used for a cabin, studio, home or workshop space.

This two and a half day workshop will provide a thorough introduction to yurts, and the basics of yurt construction including: coppice as a timber crop, Acadian forest species, making a greenwood working station, steam bending, using a drawknife, froe and other hand tools, planning and designing your walls, roof, and wheel, and erecting a yurt. Open to all skill levels. Leave with the practical skills and resources to start building your own yurt. Families welcome.

When: Workshops generally occur the last two weekends of January.

Where: 1459 White Rock Rd, Wolfville, Nova Scotia

Cost: \$360 plus tax, includes workshop fee, yurt camping, gourmet vegetarian meals & snacks, and a yurt zine.

Accommodation: Sleep, eat, learn and share with others in comfortable yurts equipped with a log burner. Compost toilets and a warm yurt kitchen will be available for dining.

For more information please contact Selene Cole at 902 670-4556 (selene@lfy.ca) or visit www.lfy.ca

EXAMPLES OF LITTLE FOOT YURTS EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOPS

Residential Yurt Building Workshops, January 2006 and ongoing

Over two hundred people from all over Canada and the United States have participated in our residential yurt building workshops. People with various backgrounds, ages and experience come together to learn about yurt construction, yurt living and have formed a yurt building community to support each other.

The Booker School, February, 2017

Using a globe and pictures from our trip to Kyrgyzstan in 2010 we talked about the origin and history of yurts. We set up a 12ft yurt together and did two cultural activities about what it's like living in yurts. The class was doing a until on shelter around the world.

Canadian Adventure Therapy Symposium, October 17-19, 2014

Participants erected a yurt and learnt about yurt construction and the benefits of using natural building as a platform for working with groups.

Lawrencetown Education Centre, February, 2013

Class learn about green woodworking, using hand tools and built a break. A woodland walk introduced participants to Acadian tree species and ideal wood for yurt building. Group cut poles and built their own yurt walls.

Chester Recreation and Parks, April 13, 2013

Participants set up 17ft yurt and discussed the structure, history and cultural background of the yurt. Green woodworking techniques were explored and a woodland walk introduced locals species as a material resource for yurt construction.

Love Out Violence Nova Scotia, May 26, 2008

Youth participants erected a 17ft yurt and had a group discussion about symbolism, culture and the origins of yurts. We shared how we started a small business in rural Nova Scotia and how we gained start up support.

Halifax Regional Development Agency, Make Way for Youth, Jan 28th, 2007

Erected a yurt with the group and discussed opportunities for youth in rural Nova Scotia, using our business as a model.

Canadian Network for Environmental Education and Communication, Oct 19, 2006

Youth participants erected a 17ft yurt and explored yurt components, forestry, greenwood working, construction techniques and yurts as a sustainable shelter.

Laing House, July 10, 2006

Erected a 17ft yurt, discussed yurts as a sustainable resources, demonstrated tools using a shaving brake.

Atlantic Straw Builders Conference, May 20-22, 2006

Erected a 17ft yurt with conference participants. Emphasis was put on practical issues unique to yurt living, such as heating and insulation.

Halifax Independent School, May 9, 2006

Ran a one-hour workshop with 6-8 year olds for their Shelter and Geography class. Students learned about the origin and history of yurts and erected a 12ft yurt.

ReGeneration: A symposium on community youth development, March 25, 2006

Co-ran a three-hour workshop with Kim Thompson on natural building, and focused on integrating natural building projects into youth programs. Erected a 12ft yurt, discussed yurts as a sustainable resources, demonstrated tools using a shaving brake.

The Second International Conference on Gross National Happiness, June 2005

A youth team erected a yurt and discussed the history and origins of yurts and learned about the building processes involved. The group also created a natural build site showcasing various types of natural building, such as straw bale construction.

Dalhousie School of Architecture Free Lab, May 05 and Aug 2004

Students erected a yurt and shared information on the structural strengths of round wood construction, mandalas in architecture and coppice as a form of sustainable forestry. Participants learned about green woodworking basics in order to apply new knowledge to their practical projects.

Nova Scotia Youth for Positive Energy, Sierra Club of Canada, Nov 2004

Climate change youth conference showcased the yurt as a sustainable building and was used for a unique workshop space.

EcoTopia, The Roots Collective, July 2004

Atlantic youth-run weekend gathering used the yurt as a workshop space. Topics explored were the origins and history of the yurt, forestry, greenwood working, construction techniques and yurts as sustainable shelters.