Taft Times

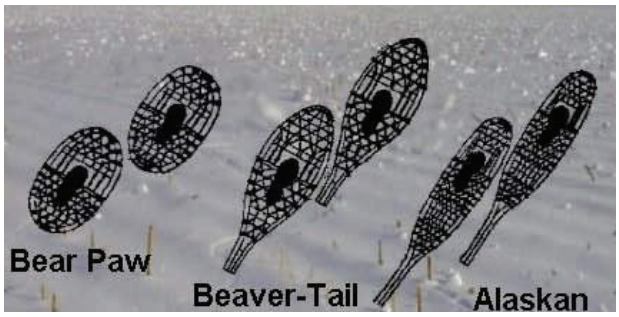
WINTER 2009 Northern Illinois University Lorado Taft Field Campus

Planes, Trains and Snowshoes?

Imagine you are walking down a narrow, forested trail with a fresh blanket of brilliantly white snow under your feet. As you are hiking, you are listening to the chorus of bird songs and squirrel chatter. An awkward newborn deer and its mother cross your path cautiously and you freeze in awe. Now picture yourself doing all of this in a pair of snowshoes. Nice right? Well this is a picture that can be dated back for centuries, and can be told as a survival story.

What is the history of snowshoes? Once the primary mode of transportation on snow, snowshoes have been around for centuries and continue to create recreational enjoyment for people of all ages. Snowshoes started out as no more than a modified piece of wood and has evolved into the high tech versions that we see today. But snowshoes were not always for fun and recreation. For centuries they were a source of survival for any person inhabiting an area dominated by snow. Starting as far back as 6,000 years ago in Asia, ancestors of Native Americans and the Inuit's used these slabs of wood for survival. Once they migrated to North America the snowshoes changed into a shoe with a frame made from white ash and rawhide lacing made from moose, deer, caribou. The Athaspascan Indians of the northwest coast and the Algonquin Indians of the St. Lawrence River Valley perfected the snowshoe. This look is a bit more typical of the snowshoe you are used to seeing today.

Anybody needing to travel in snow country owned a pair of snowshoes, and most made their own until about one hundred years ago. Hunters, trappers, farmers, surveyors, prospectors, explorers, soldiers, etc. used snowshoes as a means of survival.



What are the types of Snowshoes? They are generally divided into three different shapes, the Bear Paw, Alaskan (or Yukon) and the Beaver Tail. The Bear Paw is oval in shape with no tail. It works great in forested areas and has good maneuverability, but it is slower and not as good in deep snow. The Alaskan, or Yukon, is very long at 46+ inches and is ideal for deep, powder covered open areas. It offers speed and an ability to race, but lacks maneuverability. The Beaver Tail is a teardrop shape with an upturned toe and works well

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on trails and open woods. It is very versatile but can be awkward in woods or deep snow.

How do they work? Snowshoes work by distributing the weight of the person over a larger area so that the person's foot does not sink completely into the snow. They also allow people to roam through landscapes that are usually impassable with everyday footwear.

Why snowshoe? Snowshoeing allows for great balance even though walking over potentially difficult terrain. In turn, you are able to observe nature at your leisure without having to look down for rocks or rough areas. Snow shoeing is low impact and actually burns more calories than walking while maintaining your cardiovascular fitness. It is an easy activity for those of all ages and has become popular with marathon runners who wish to continue racing in the cold weather. If nothing else, snowshoeing is a historic pastime and should be continued for generations to come.

How does this apply to my outdoor education experience? Taft campus has snowshoes available for any school that may wish to snowshoe (cooperating snowfall is needed). If you would like to have your students try out this great sport, let your coordinator know.

http://www.snowshoeracing.com/history.htm
http://www.madehow.com/Volume-6/Snowshoe.html
http://www.walkaboutmag.com/14walkingonsnow.html
www.islandnet.com/.../snowshoetypes.jpg

Wildlife Phenology at Taft Campus

Just three years ago I could not identify many of the common birds residing in my neighborhood and nearby. Closing my eyes to imagine an American Robin or Blue Jay, I would not have been able to describe these birds' appearance's or behaviors to anyone. As a junior in college, I enrolled in two ornithology classes and they soon became my favorites. I was surprised and impressed with the amount of information my classmates and I were learning during mornings and afternoons of quiet hiking and observation. It started simple enough, and I was soon hooked! I noticed myself becoming more aware of my surroundings and sharing my observations with family and friends. Each class easily disguised itself as a nature treasure hunt as we recorded new birds and behaviors. It is difficult now to think I might have missed that osprey trying to snatch its prey from the lake!

Early into my second semester here at Taft Campus, I am very happy with the opportunity to share in moments of observing nature with visiting students. Spending time with nature seems to be the best way to start recognizing fellow residents; plants and animals. Many of our activities lead us into our outdoor classroom. While out, we may look and listen to get to know our local environment better. One area on campus encourages such moments of observation; the Poley birding porch, which invites teachers and students to watch and identify birds visiting the bird feeders. We have recently added a phenology chart to this area. The phenology chart allows all visitors and residents to record

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Cedar Waxwing

the birds they see during each of our four seasons.

Phenology is the study of plant and animal cycles. A cycle is an order of events that a plant or animal completes during its life; a cycle may be repeated. An animal's lifecycle may include the following individual cycles: feeding, molting, migrating, hibernating, nesting, and mating. Observing and recording the birds we see on campus, we hope to increase our awareness skills and learn about bird cycles in our area of Illinois. We also look forward to learning and teaching skills for identifying birds. Since the beginning of the school year, we have identified and recorded about 24 different bird species, including the Bald Eagle, Blue Jay, Northern Cardinal, and Cedar Waxwing. Our next step is to turn our phenology chart into a seasonal reference calendar for years to come!

Northern Cardinal

If interested in starting your own phenology chart at home, you may also wish to begin your study with birds; birds are common everywhere and we usually see them every day. We look forward to observing signs of other wildlife and plants in our area next year with a wildlife phenology chart. While learning in our outdoor classroom, we come across turkey, deer, skunk, and coyote tracks. By taking notice of tracks and other signs of activity including scat and communication, we will learn about the different wildlife cycles and behaviors here at Taft Campus.

2008 Phenology Calendar: Marking the Seasons Through Natural Events, Pheasant Branch Conservancy, Middleton, Wisconsin

Wisconsin Wildlife Phenology 2009 Calendar, Aldo Leopold Foundation, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service-Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin-Extension

Cold Weather Experiments

As you may recall, this January set some record lows, with frigid air closing many schools and the thought of going outside was quite ridiculous! But for those brave souls who wish to test out some cool (pun-intended) experiments keep on reading.

It is common knowledge that water freezes at 32 degrees Fahrenheit. But what happens at –15 degrees. Well, you can try it out for yourself by boiling some water and then carefully tossing it into the air. "The boiling water instantly turns into ice crystals and vanishes because the molecules of water are very close to evaporating anyway". It ends up looking like a big cloud of snow.

Another favorite of mine is the Bammer (Banana-hammer). If left out in temperatures below –10, the banana, made of about 75% water will freeze, and is then capable of hammering a nail into a piece of wood.

Last but not least is the bubble experiment. Bubble blowing is a favorite pastime for children on warm summer days, but what happens to those bubbles in extremely cold temperatures? You will see that they in fact freeze and then shatter! Pretty amazing if you ask me! So the next time the thermometer drops into the negative digits, head outside and try out these subzero experiments!

http://www.keyc.tv/
http://community.myfoxmilwaukee.com/blogs/Vince_Condella/2009/01/11/A_Classic_Cold_Weather_Experiment

IMPORTANT PLEASE READ!

Due to the continuing trend in "going green", the Taft Times Newsletter will soon be sent out in electronic form only! This is the second to last paper format you will receive and if you would like to receive the issue electronically please e-mail your name and e-mail address to mcostello@niu.edu. Thank you for your consideration in helping us GO Green!

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Zero Food Waste Hall Of Fame

Everyone who comes to Lorado Taft works hard to reduce their food waste. This semester, we would, once again, like to acknowledge those schools who have reached the promised land of zero ort.

Leland
St. Thomas of Villanova
Galena
Good Shepherd

Unfortunately, we do not have the space to recognize the many schools who make it into the "1 Pound Club" by achieving 1 pound of ort or less. Congratulations and keep working towards zero ort!

Congratulations Melanie!

Kate Lydia was born on December 18, 2008. We wish Melanie and her family the best!