

NO SPACE for Boredom!

■ By James Watson, Native Awareness



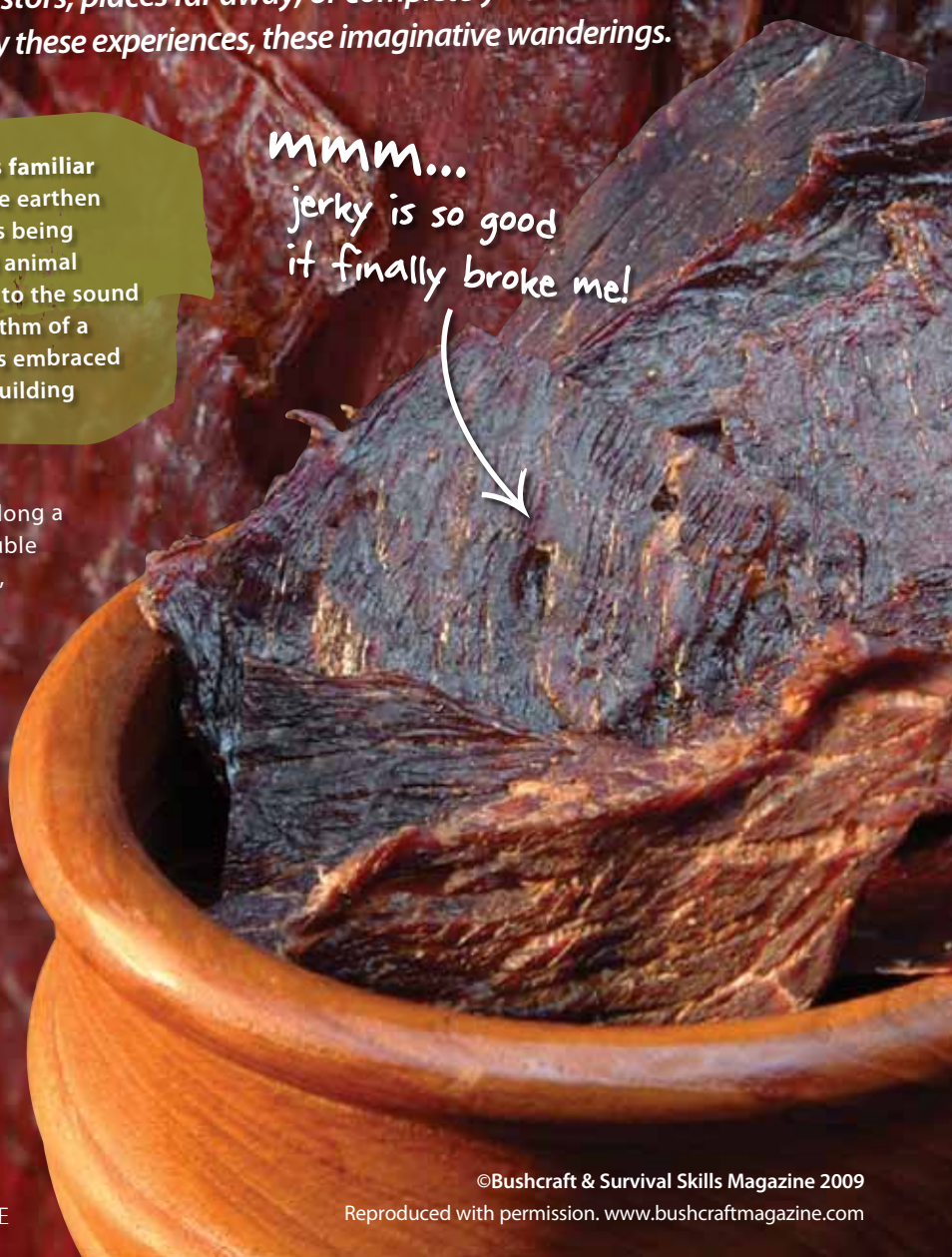
The power of the imagination is a great tool to develop, while learning the skills of survival and Earth living. I often find it takes me to a place where I can more fully understand the new skill that I am working on. I so enjoy the quiet times, to transport myself to different lands, where I imagine tracking wolves in the woods or taking a walk through tribal villages. I am not sure if these are the lands of my ancestors, places far away, or completely fictional. It doesn't matter. I learn so much by these experiences, these imaginative wanderings.

Whilst falling asleep, I like to visit a village that is familiar to me. In my imagination, I walk barefoot along the earthen paths, taking in the sights of fires burning, shelters being constructed from the woods around the camp and animal hides being strung up in frames. I am often drawn to the sound of flakes of stone being knapped or the gentle rhythm of a deer hide being softened. These sounds are always embraced by the gentle laughter of children and the camp-building songs of the women and old folk.

Using the vehicle of my imagination, I often take along a question about a skill or craft that I am having trouble with, which may be bow-making, baskets, tracking, etc. Many times, when I set out with the intention of trying to better understand a skill, I am often provided with the answer whilst in the camp or when I wake up in the morning. I find this form of learning fascinating. It means that you can be studying survival skills continuously, not just at weekends. There is absolutely no space for boredom in life. When I am in a queue at the bank or in a traffic jam, I can take a few flakes of flint off an arrowhead or stalk in the river for fish. I find wild foods a great way to transport yourself to a time of our ancestors, to consume the foods that were once so abundantly used.

Don't waste your time when the weather outside is dull! Let your imagination run away with you, and try this home-made jerky!

mmm...
jerky is so good
it finally broke me!





The only trouble is - you have to wait!

I was a vegetarian for many years and the meat that finally broke me, was jerky! When I put this most primal of meats into my mouth, I am suddenly in that camp helping rack the thinly sliced pieces of deer meat, for drying. I love jerky. I often have it in my pack. When in the towns and cities and the hustle and bustle of the modern world gets to me, I chew on a piece and I am back in my woods, barefoot, with the sun warming my face.



Not all of us have the luxury of erecting frames, with slow-burning fires underneath. So here's how you prepare jerky at home. You have to dry the meat slowly. In the woods, you can use the gentle warmth of the sun or a fire to warm the air around it. At home, I prefer to construct a dryer and one can be made in many different ways. In the past, I have used a cardboard box with a light bulb but with this issue's "How To", I am going to construct something a little bit more solid, but the materials will still be inexpensive and easy to obtain.

The dryer, in essence, is a box that has a rack for the meat at one end and a light bulb at the other. The light bulb acts as the heat source for the jerky. The idea is to gently warm the meat, rather like sunshine, but it is important not to cook it.

- Materials**
- 4 Sheets of hardboard 12" x 24"
 - 1 sheet of hardboard 18" x 18"
 - Wooden lath 10'
 - Ceiling light fitting
 - L bracket
 - Bamboo skewers
 - Meat
 - Baking tray



Step 1

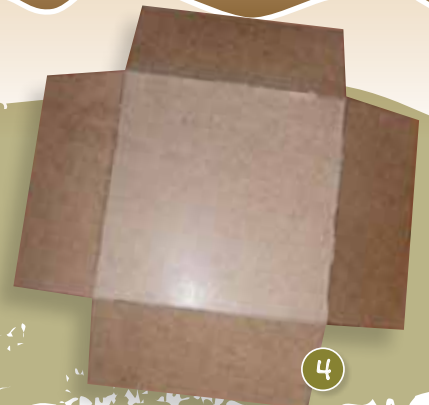
The construction of the box is relatively easy... Mark and cut the lath into four 24" lengths. Now, taking two of the four sheets of hardboard, either glue or tack the laths along the length of the board, allowing 2 inches of lath to protrude at one end, as these will act as legs for the dryer. Do this on both long edges of each board. Also, it is important to fix them with a slight gap between the lath and board edge. Cut to size the remainder of the lath and secure between the two lengths at the top of the board. (See photo 1.)

BUILD YOUR OWN DRYER

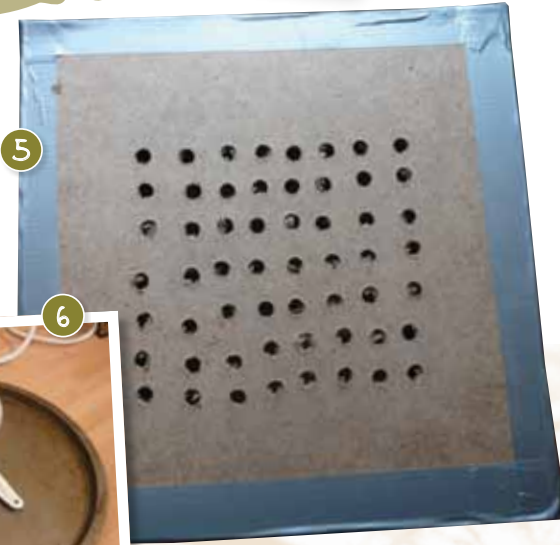




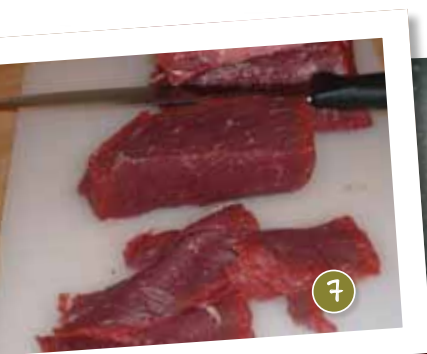
Take the other two boards and fix these to the laths on the previous boards. As a gap was left, the hardboard should fix together quite nicely. (See photo 2.) You should now have a box with two open ends.



For the lid, mark a pattern on the remaining sheet of hardboard. The internal square should be slightly larger than 12 inches. Cut away the four corner squares and score along the edges of the internal square, so that it can be folded into a lid. Secure the edges with gaffer tape. The dryer needs to have a vent. This is achieved by drilling holes in the lid. (See photos 3, 4, 5.)



To heat the box, all that is needed is to rig up a 100W light bulb. I have used a ceiling rose, taped to a shelving bracket. If you don't feel comfortable with the electrical side of the dryer's construction, please consult a qualified electrician. The bulb should be placed on a baking tray or a sheet of tin foil which will act as a drip tray. Place the box over the tray and bulb. (See photo 6.)



Venison is wonderful, but beef also makes a great jerky!

You need to slice the meat as thinly as possible. There are many recipes for jerky, marinades of soya sauce, spices, etc, but I often quite like to keep it simple. Add an even part of salt, black pepper and garlic powder. Mix the spices and place them into a salt shaker. Season both sides of the meat. (See photos 7, 8, 9.)

Skewer the meat, allowing a gap between each strip. Now place the skewers in the dryer, resting each end on the laths. To make jerky, switch the light bulb on with the dryer lid in place. The meat should be ready in one to three days, depending on the amount of jerky in the dryer as well as the thickness of the meat..

There are many ways to use the jerky. Eat it as it is, or rehydrate and add to stews. It's a great source of protein, especially necessary whilst spending time in the wild places. There are also lots of different spices and marinades that you can flavour your jerky with. I would love to hear other people's recipe ideas.

It's good to share the knowledge!

Send in your recipes via email to 'Letters to the editor'
letters@bushcraftmagazine.com