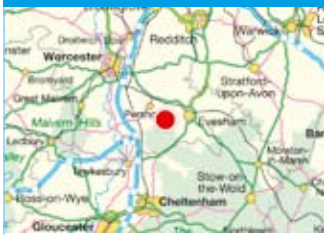


USEFUL INFO

Ordnance Survey mapping © Crown copyright 2011



HOW TO GET THERE

Native Awareness courses take place five miles south-west of Evesham, one mile west of Elmley Castle village and half a mile south of Great Comberton. The nearest train station is in Evesham and there are bus services to local villages.

FIND OUT MORE

NATIVE AWARENESS

4 The Cottage, Church Walk, Swinford LE17 6AY

Three-day course in Native Skills covers tracking, fire-making, primitive hunting, shelter and flint knapping and costs £200.

☎ 07917 881094

🌐 nativeawareness.co.uk

EAT

WORD OF MOUTH CAFÉ

19-20 Vine Street, Evesham WR11 4RL

☎ 01386 422259

🌐 foodallergyshop.co.uk

This tiny café in Evesham comes highly recommended. It also specialises in healthy food for people with food allergies.



STAY

EVESHAM HOTEL

Coopers Lane, Off Waterside, Evesham WR11 1DA

☎ 01386 765566

🌐 www.eveshamhotel.com

Small fun-loving Georgian hotel set in two acres of grounds, with quirky rooms and the oddest loo in Britain.



Flint knapping

Worcestershire

Countryfile presenter Jules Hudson rediscovers the skills of our prehistoric cousins on a course that teaches flint knapping, arrow making and fire starting

Pictures: Rob Scott



More about the adventure at: www.countryfile.com/podcasts

It's not everyday that I get the chance to cast off the trappings of the 21st-century and head off for a taste of prehistoric life. When the opportunity arose to take a course with James Watson – a man who grew up at the bottom of his garden and who lives by the teachings of a legendary Apache Indian – I knew I was in for a treat.

As an archaeologist, I've long been fascinated by prehistory: Avebury, Stonehenge and the great burial mounds of the Neolithic Ages offer tantalising glimpses into the beliefs of our ancestors. But to get a real sense and – quite literally – taste of what everyday life meant, you need to get down and dirty with the great outdoors.

Aside from the supposed rituals that accompanied prehistoric life, the day to day was all about survival. Yet very little survives to provide an insight into the domestic lives of our ancestors.

Before I met James, I thought that anthropology, the study of human culture and development, was one of the few ways to get to

grips with this forgotten lifestyle, which defined the human race for over 40,000 years. But, as I was about to find out, experimenting with prehistoric tools gives an insight you can't read in books.

NATURAL LIVING

James's passion for what he defines as native awareness started in childhood when he became captivated with the natural world. "As a child, I made shelters and tools from whatever I could find. My frustration at not knowing enough led me down a rich road that has immersed me in studying natural living. It's taken me from the fields where I grew up to North America and beyond."

Eventually, James contacted the author of *The Tracker*, Tom Brown who mentored him. But it was Tom's own experience learning from a North American Indian named Stalking Wolf that forms the basis of James's skills.

TOOLS FOR FREE

My one-day Native Skills course

started with a tantalizing overview of the huge range of tools that were available to our ancestors, all of them made by James and his students. As he pointed out, the beauty is that all these items are found naturally, and for free.

A deer carcass not only provided meat, but the antlers could be turned into tools for fine tuning flint; the hide could be tanned using the animal's brains, while the rich sinew in its tendons provided a strong binding for sewing or attaching flint to wooden handles. Now was my chance to try it all out for real – experimental archaeology at its most exciting.

KNAP TIME

We started with flint, the most basic of tools and material available. Many types of stone can be knocked, or 'knapped', into shape. Flint, of course, but also dacite, chert and obsidian – the latter once exploded from erupting volcanoes as molten silicon. It's therefore no surprise that workable stone has the same properties



1 Broiling fish over a roaring fire 2 and 3 ...after preparing them with Stone Age tools 4 A selection of hand axes and flint tools, all made by James and his students 5 Selecting a straight piece of Hazel is the first stage in making a perfect arrow 6 Flint knapping



1 Removing the bark of an arrow shaft 2 Securing the arrow head with deer sinew 3 Fletching the arrow 4 The result



STONE AGE FIRE MAKING

James Watson explains how to make fire (the Prehistoric way)

1. Find a piece of wood as thick as your little finger and as long as your forearm for the 'drill'. Pithy wood (mullein, bramble and rose) works best. Choose a board made from willow, lime or clematis, as thick as the drill.
2. Cut a depression 2-3cm from the edge of the board and place the end of the drill in it. Rotate the drill between the palms of your hands, adding downward pressure, until you burn a mark.
3. Cut a notch into the burnt depression. Place the drill back and rotate once more. Increase pressure and speed until you see see smoke and dust in the notch.
4. After a few moments the dust will smoke and create a 'coal'. Place this in a tinder bundle (a ball of dry bark, grass and seeds).
5. Gently blow on the coal until it starts to burn. Increase your breath until it bursts into flame.

of glass. But recent studies around the world have shown that obsidian can be up to 100 times sharper than a surgeon's scalpel. Medical engineers are now trialling it in new instruments, proving just how useful understanding ancient technologies can be. But make no mistake – it's not easy to create a stone tool until you know how.

James pointed out that some of these skills are intuitive: "Many of the people on our courses are, by their own admission, hopeless at DIY. What's remarkable is that after just a few hours, they develop (or recover) an understanding of how to work with natural materials. Native Awareness reconnects

people with the skills, I believe, we were once all born with."

It's a good point. The archaeological record demonstrates

that people across the globe were using the same methods despite being thousands of miles apart, a fact that reinforces my own growing awareness that what I'm learning isn't just practical history. There is a spiritual side to rediscovering these lost skills.

Having had a go at knapping, my next task was to make an arrow, which conveniently combines most of the skills in the prehistoric toolbox. Making a point with flint of course, but also coppicing

the arrow shaft from hazel or hawthorn, splitting apart feathers for the flights, and understanding how to attach it all together. I've often seen reconstructed examples in museums, but to have the chance to make one was great.

The arrowhead is set into the end of the shaft with a mixture of pine resin and charcoal. The resin, having been collected and dried, is left on a stone by the fire to melt. We then added some charcoal as a setting agent and voila – prehistoric superglue! The bindings were fibres stripped off tendons. Kept dry, they can be used whenever needed by chewing them, then tying them on. What's remarkable is that

saliva causes the sinew to stick to itself as it dries and contract around whatever you've tied it to. It's so

simple, I can't help but think we could all learn something from our ancestors.

SURVIVAL INSTINCTS

Lunch of fish (gutted with flint tools) cooked over an open fire gave me the chance to catch up with two of James' students, Greg and Darren, who were coming to the end of a years' course, which they said had transformed them. Both had confidence in their ability to survive what life throws at them.

They all agreed it shouldn't come as a surprise either as such skills are innate.

Embracing these talents isn't about training for the SAS. In their eyes it's a spiritual enlightenment. By reconnecting with an ancient way of life, they are employing their bodies in exactly the way humans have evolved to be. The need to hunt and survive has long since gone. But understanding how it was done, gives surprising insight into your own physical abilities.

PERFECT ISOLATION?

As our fire dwindled, I was presented with a lasting souvenir: my arrow, a fitting embodiment of ancient achievement.

I asked James one final question before I rejoined the modern world – if he was offered an island on which to live his prehistoric lifestyle, free from the trappings of modern life, would he take it? Typically, and in the spirit of his great inspiration Stalking Wolf, he said no: "Turning your back on the world isn't what I'm about. I'm here to pass my knowledge and passion on. The modern world has many benefits, and I hope that with a good understanding of native awareness thrown in, we might make the best of them."

We often say we should learn from the past. Maybe this is our chance.

Watch Jules on *Countryfile* every Sunday on BBC One

