

immersion

from mid-october to mid-november of 2013, a friend, neb, and i spent a month eating wild food and living in the the blue ridge mountains of western north carolina in wiki-ups (lil bit bigger debris shelter). we wanted to experience the diet and lifestyle of a hunter-gatherer-scavenger, learn about our immediate environment, and to continue the stewardship efforts of the previous five years.¹ we brought the calories we would need for the lunar cycle so we could concentrate on other skills. while we had a diverse, wild diet that included foods both harvested before and during the immersion (nuts, fruit, meat, fat, greens, roots, mushrooms), most of the caloric energy was from wild rice (harvested the summer before in minnesota), and deer/bear fat (collected from game processors who normally throw the fat out). we cooked everything on a fire started by friction.

other than cookin delicious and trying to decondition myself from them civilized ways, the focus was to set and maintain a trap-line that would provide us with fresh meat daily. it ended up being rodents mostly. the gear brought reflected my continuing journey of questioning "needs" and deepening connections to the natural world thru primitive/earth skills. so instead of a sleeping bag, a felted wool blanky and animal furs.....bow, arrows, flint knapping kit, fletching tools, clay pot, buckskin clothing, metal knife crafted from an ol' band-saw blade. not all the gear was paleolithic (unless you consider plastic buckets 'dinosaur hides') but we aim for nature immersion as a goal instead of an all-out stone-age project. the not-so stone-age project created space for people to visit and be inclusive and expansive, instead of needing to fit into a predetermined container.

community organization was centered around sharing two meals of wild harvested food that was cooked on a fire started by friction.

here follows some of my journal entries and neb nebbett's memories of folks trying to be in relation to a wild space, while also embracn' the aspects of ourselves that still make us products of westernism. neb's writing is in the other font (courier new) and refers to me as "burrito man", an ode to my belly. Dreams are demarcated by ***

¹ Friends of ours, including burrito man, had been camping/living primitively at this location on and off for the past five years, building shelters, and encouraging more edible plants to grow.

Key terms:

chipper = chipmunk

kenny = log, via Kenny Loggins

murpel surpel = maple syrup

simmons, richard = persimmons

whistle pig = groundhog

-white oak flats, it has begun. nothing is pressing for there is dry shelter in the rain and plenty of fat to go around and around. apple tree up here producin'. tomorrow we haul more food up the trail. hunting dog ran thru camp, making it difficult for me to want to set snares. find my mind wandering to the future and the what ifs and how will it fit, distracting myself from the moment to moment immersion excursion. part of the adjustment process no doubt, sometimes it takes me two weeks to turn my mind into that action-reaction interaction. think about my crushes and if they will all visit at the same time and if that will be weird. its best not to worry and just be open to however things fall into place and trust that all will unfold as it may. the best way to do that is to concentrate on something tangible. traps and getting them up and running. focus on short deadfalls cause snare-in' a dog would be disastrous, especially since they have gps collars.²

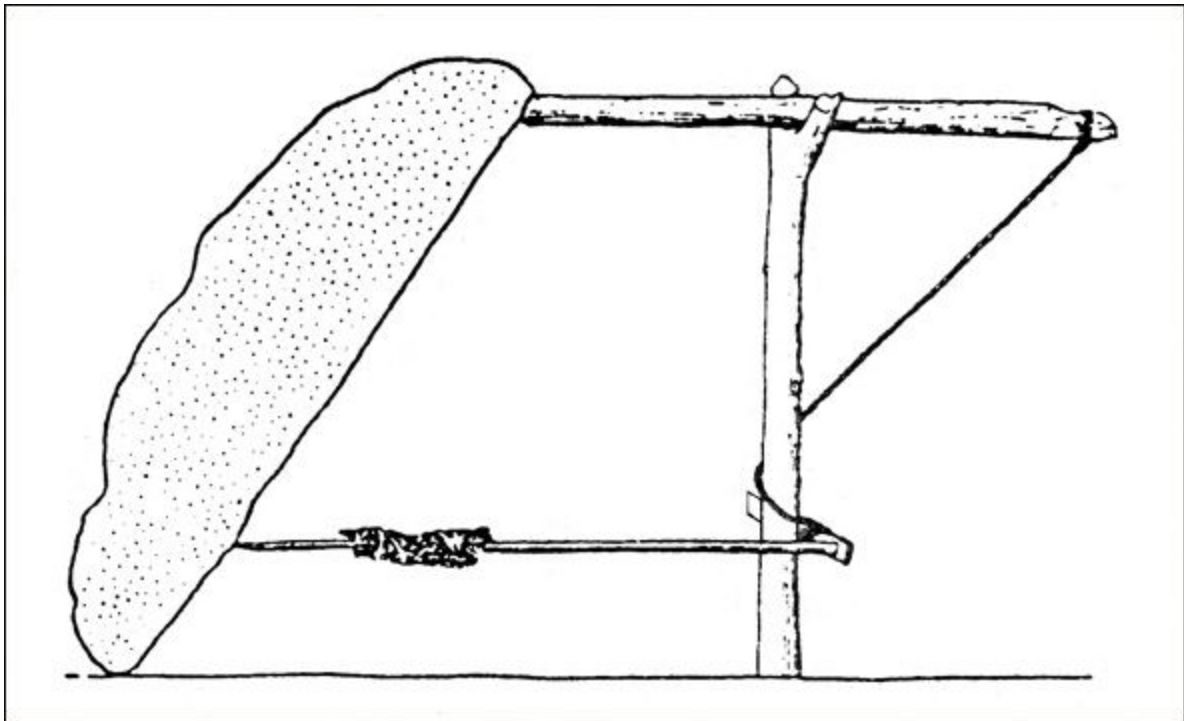
One morning I find one of my shoes filled with pecans. Both shoes had been outside overnight, sitting right next to each other. I assume Burrito Man had needed a temporary container to put nuts in, so I dump the pecans in a basket and put my shoes on without saying anything. Later, Burrito Man tells me he thought it was odd that I had filled my shoe with pecans. Since it was neither one of us, a rodent (probably a chipper) must have picked my shoe as a cache spot. These were moldy pecans that you wouldn't want to eat.

The next night laying in bed I feel something chipmunk-sized run across my head. I look around and find a moldy pecan next to my head that hadn't been there before. Later on we find a hickory nut stashed in Burrito Man's quiver.

² It is the time of year when bear hunters set their dogs loose in the forest for days at a time. The dogs have GPS collars that sense when the dogs have chased a bear up a tree, because their heads are pointed upwards, barking. The collar sends a signal to the hunter, who comes and shoots the bear out of the tree.

-cold it tis. not as prepared as i should be but that's when creation thrivingly happens, when you gotta. ***freakin out cause im late to the birth of my 1st child, mother unknown. my duty is to give her a shot in the eye. unsure why. i had fallin asleep in the yard and run into the social services office and they want to give me coffee and cream before the deed***

Burrito Man shows me how to make and set up the Paiute dead-fall trap. The first one I make I set up without much trouble near our fire/eating area. Within a couple days it catches a chipmunk (chipper monk), and that trap goes on to catch more chippers and mice. That was a new achievement for me, but a fleeting glory. With subsequent traps I make, I have so much trouble trying to set them, with the heavy rock falling on my hand so many times, that I break down and throw temper-tantrums.



-set up a bunch of rotten logs to shoot arrows at. leveled and squishified my sleeping area with leaves and boughs. wandered with neb and ran into bear hunters at the apple tree with fresh bear claw scars and broken branches. we all talked of hunting and survival skills and apples. the future and the past are still a distraction. we eat wilderness rices, oyster mushrooms, kelp, deer sausage, groundhog jerky, greens, and bear fat for dinner. breakfast was apples, pears, kelp, pecans, rices, fat, and murple surpel.

One night shortly before dusk, Burrito Man says, "rio grande man" in a slow, profound tone, as if he were channeling the words from the aether. Then he repeats it. Then I repeat it. We then continue for a long time saying, "riograndeman" in a variety of different voices and inflections, and singing "riograndeman" to the melody of different songs, including "Kumbaya" and "Amazing Grace." I also sing "riograndeman" in a guttural, hard rock/grunge voice.

-ran down the trail to fetch black walnuts and apples and dried simmons and some osha roots from nebs truck. took a cold ass dip. returned and sewed my blanky into a bag. aiming for these loud squirelles. set five Pauite deadfalls hope-in for something in the morn. its hard for me to set these traps cause I have so much food already and not really hungry cause we've already downed a quart of bear fat and are eating two substantial meals a day. neb found some chicken-o-woods today. shot arrows, trying to get consistent again. breaking lots of arrows.

****on an immersion excursion in the deserts of california by myself and really hungry. some lady lures me into her huge home with promises of food. fall asleep as soon as i enter and wake on the couch. shes excited and starts showing me her colored paper to get my opinion about painting the walls. "i need food", she gets angry and kicks me out the back without food. immediately im lost in a maze of houses, wanderlustingly i meet an all white horse who wants out of this maze as well and we wander together, me riding her, getting further lost. natalie arrives and offers a car ride out. as soon as i began to consider getting in the car the horse rears up and tries bucking me off, i hold fast, then dismount. the horse leaves with a yellow leash attached. sunny comes outta the bushes and goes after the horse. in the car with natalie and we become even more lost than before. we pick up two hitch hikers and find some jamaican food. a lady takes our order and says she loves our smell of dead animals. i get outta the car to examine a dying fig tree and the car leaves before the food comes, am alone. talk with the lady about reviving the fig tree. two skaters show up, give me awkward hugs and offer to smoke me out. decline. and move on before getting food. finding an abandoned truck with all these tools, i decide to park it somewhere in costa mesa where people display their sound-systems in the parking lot. my brother comes out of a garage with a full four baby stroller and is late for work. a woman emerges from the same place and squirts me with a gun filled with bleach. im pissed.****

There are various pop songs stuck in my head, which is unusual for me. Being away from media(which I didn't miss at all), my brain has some space to dump out some stuff. I don't remember song lyrics well, so songs surface as melodies with lyrics altered to fit whatever I am thinking about or doing at the time. I also sing them aloud, and they enter Burrito Man's head, and he further modifies the lyrics.



The most predominate song in my head is "My Boyfriend's Back" (The Angels - 1963). I know that the song was a kind of warning to the listener, who is accused of spreading rumors that the singer cheated on her boyfriend while he was out of town. Now that the boyfriend is back in town, the listener is warned that they are going to be beaten up by the boyfriend. I know the general theme of the song but not the exact lyrics, so I make up lyrics along that theme. Burrito Man came up with the line, "He drives a fast car and he's got big pectoral muscles."

Burrito Man keeps singing a rap song about ass. One line is, "Ass so fat, bitches' pussies be throbbin'." Another is, "Build a house upon that ass - that's an ass-tate [estate]." The chorus is "ass, ass, ass, ass, ass, ass, ass, ass...". These are some of the jams people were bumping in Minnesota where Burrito Man was dancing on wild rice. I wasn't familiar with the song, but Burrito Man's acapella version of it stuck hard in my head. Upon later research I found out that we were actually combining two songs: *Dance (Ass)* by Big Sean & Nicki Minaj, and *Mercy* by Kanye West featuring Big Sean, Pusha T, and 2 Chainz.





-a red squirrellie freezes upsidedown on the red oak, surprised to see me being still. if i had my bow or rabbit stick, i would have had an easy shot but my hands were empty. looking around with just my eyes i spot an ol 7up glass bottle and the squirrel is getting mad, chirping and clicking, trying to figure me as a friend or foe. as its moving around to the opposite, more protected side of the tree, i grab the bottle and wait for it to show itself again. after waiting a few minutes for it to show itself

again, i leave without throwing a glass bottle at the red, laughing at my ridiculousness and for not carrying a multi-tool (stick).

Logs are called "kennies". from Kenny Loggins. His last name contains the word "log". Occasionally "kenny" gets modified to "rogers" (from Kenny Rogers), and "rogers" can be



modified to "hammerstein", so "hammerstein" still means log. I have some vague recollection of a country song with the chorus, "throw another log on the fire." I'm not sure if it's a real song or not, but Burrito Man and I flesh it out into a pop-country love ballad: *Throw Another Kenny on the Fire*. The theme of the song is a romantic evening shared between a man and a woman. The singer (the man) urges that they throw another kenny on the fire in order to extend the evening and allow time for their physical encounter to develop: "Let's just give in to desire." We are making up the song as we are singing it, and Burrito Man and I simultaneously anticipate the climactic key-change (modulating up one whole tone), which is also when one of the band members starts clapping his hands on 2 and 4,

above his head, to signal to the audience that they should join in clapping on 2 and 4 and singing the chorus. In live concert the band would stop playing for several bars, letting only the audience sing the chorus for a while - in a reversal of the performer/audience relationship, and a



selfless act on behalf of the performers, temporarily giving up their control of the music to create a poignant moment of genuine togetherness, achieved only by the audience breaking out of its normal role as passive spectator, and becoming actively involved as co-performer of the song. Just now, an internet search revealed that there is a song called "Put Another Log on the Fire" performed by Waylon Jennings and Friends, but it has a much different melody, mood, and subject than *Throw Another Kenny on the Fire*.

-its been great to have neb's perspective. we don't necessarily always agree on the subjects we talk about, but i learn from his words-thoughts-theories, as well as experiencing my own reactions when they come up. we do pushups while waiting on rices to cook. neb goes super slow and breathes intentionally while i go fast and breathe erratically. i put up a pull up bar and have been balancing on most horizontal logs. go backward. this evening we ate whistle pig, lobster mushrooms, seaweeds, deer fat and cracklins.

I cut my finger pretty good. Nothing serious, but a really annoying knuckle cut that won't stop bleeding. At Burrito Man's recommendation, I wash it in the stream, put goldenseal root powder in the cut, put usnea over top, and wrap it with buckskin. It feels counterintuitive to put plant powder in a seemingly clean cut, because I know I will eventually need to get the plant matter out of the cut to let it heal. The next day the finger is tender and a little swollen. I wash the powder out and

put a bandage on it. After that it heals fine but leaves a scar. Now I think it would've been fine without the goldenseal, just letting it bleed to clean itself, then wrapping it, but who knows.

-im faced with my demons on these month longs. they come out as mental loops that cant seem to find a sense of resolution with. usually it involves me taking on a victimized state of mind and i cant shake the feeling that im being duped in my living situation. or issues surrounding food security. or me potentially having lymes disease. just found out lotsa people at rice camp this year got lymes in a note to me from my concerned hommies. the obsessing over all these things isn't helping me to fall asleep. caught a few mice over the last few days, it feels great to lift the rock and find a wee lil protein packet. ive been gutting, then boiling the mice for a while. drink the tea and eat yer three bites of meat.

We hike up to the Appalachian Trail. We get to a high lookout point where you can see far into forested mountains on one side of the ridge, and flat civilization on the other side. I made a fake pose for a fake photo, throwing up the peace fingers with a cheesy smile. Burrito Man whips out the artist's conk we found on the way up and starts drawing me in front of the mountain vista. Then we trade places and I draw him with his thumbs up. I still have this primmy polaroid.



kelly is our first visitor. glad to have a new perspective and interests and explorin buddy. we cut sourwood shoots, straight and without branches. shavin bark off 'em with the back of knife. straighten, bind up a bundle to dry. got the quickie nock down. observed kelly twisting two ply bear gut string, wonder how much weight it can take.

at night my fears and mind driftyness make it difficult to settle down for bed or fall back asleep. theres a feeling of unsettled conflict and in order to put my mind at ease, i need to make affirmations and agreements toandwith myself. its difficult for me to just feel a thing and move it thru, catharsis is definitely a physical thing for me. walking. moving. chopping. repetition and elevated heart rate pumping all that shit out me pores. reach that empty-mind. mindlessnlessly.

We decide to have a no-talking day. We communicate with gestures and nonverbal sounds. Cooking our morning meal, it takes me a long while to understand that Burrito Man's whistle followed by grunts meant *whistle-pig* (meaning "lets add groundhog jerky to the stew.")

-no talking day was super fun, tho i totally sucked at it. we went down to the lower elevation parking area to drop jars and ex-food bags off. we harvest greens and ol ramp bulbs and sochani and dandelion and plantain seeds. feels good to get all this green freshness in late-ish fall. neb fished with a wild-crafted red fishin pole abandoned in the rhododendron by some stranger next to my last weeks turd. even though it was sunny i was cold all day, maybe winter is at our hearths.



****Antonio Banderas is playing trumpet in a jazz combo on a stage. I'm seeing through the eyes of some voyeuristic person who is looking down from the ceiling. I see people backstage getting dressed. I see a man with a gun. He goes onto the stage and starts shooting down Antonio Banderas's jazz combo. The audience panics and starts running away. The person whose eyes I see through starts running for the exit, breathing hard. There is a mirror on the door, so I get to see the body that I'm looking out from - it's a very fat and very short man. He runs out the door and down the street until reaching a row of lockers*

on the side of a building. He unlocks and opens one the lockers. Several potato-shaped little men fall out the locker. They are about 3 ft tall,shaped like potatoes, and wearing detective clothes. Either they were totally crammed in the locker, or the locker is a portal to somewhere else - another dimension. The potato-shaped, inter-dimensional detectives are here to solve the mystery of the murder of Antonio Banderas's jazz combo.***



-caught a chipper. sunny and warm; moon on the half chub, showing its face during the day. the chippers keep showing up in the kitchen traps. this one was in a trap i thought i forgot to set, but sure enuf a chipmunk lies rigorly mortised. a pleasant surprise.

-the leaves have mostly dropped, all but the red oaks and the deep red of the sourwoods. two more days left here and then off to the wide world of concrete. more exploring is needed. getting a vehicle will change my life dramatically, maybe wont like it as much as i anticipate. my range will be much larger and I can be autonomous and carry tools and tons of food, instead of cramming it all into a pack.

I'm sleeping in a large debris-shelter/wiki-up that other people built a few years ago. Along with the usual maintenance of adding more sticks and leaves to the outside, and stuffing holes with leaves, I wall-off the section I sleep in, using woven sticks stuffed with leaves, and leaving a small doorway. Then I make a door to cover the doorway, also from woven sticks and leaves. It's pretty janky, so each time I move the door to go in or out, the weave loosens a little bit. On the very last night of the immersion it gets really cold. By this time, the door has almost completely fallen apart, so from inside the shelter, I pile the falling-apart door across the doorway and then stuff the holes with leaves. If I were to move it after that, it would completely fall apart. Since it is the last night of the immersion, and well below freezing outside, when I need to pee in the middle of the night I just use the dirt floor in the corner of the wiki-up.

i try to make plans in order to distract myself from the cold. where will i be this coming winter? how can I find a place to call home while simultaneously feeling empowered to pursue transience as a community building technique. lately in the early, early morn I cant sleep. i get bummed out about feeling unwanted and the cold magnifies it, i then get more bitter bout community, macro and micro. to help me feel warmer, i get in my body (chop wood, shoot bows, walkruntumble). to get outta my victimization patterns, i try to view power as something that cannot be taken from me. if i'm unhappy with my situation then i will create a change by giving to something more well suited to my gifts and needs.

-spent the last day knapping stone and shooting bows. we ate grasshoppers with bearfat and onions, pine nuts, and wallies. F-N delish. neb and I stayed up for hours discussing cognition, bio-centric thinking, awareness, zen'n it about. many idears to ponder into the future.

-got super cold, snowed a small amount. glad to be leaving in some ways, disappointed in other. a burrito is in my future, just over the horizon. a wood fire bath. warm shack at bald fork. first though I go to wild toots for the first time since i moved out. maybe it wont be so bad.

It is the day to leave. We wake up to a layer of snow on the ground, eat a quick breakfast, break down camp, store some things for future camps, and hike down the mountain to the truck. We visit wild toots, a primitivist community where we have both lived in the past. People there are busy processing bear fat with cold fingers. I'm impressed by what they have built since I was last there, including hand-carved wooden door-hinges, rocket stoves for cooking, and a blacksmithing forge, complete with handmade leather bellows (the leather was tanned there, too). I hear stories about adopting orphaned raccoons, and healing a deep machete gash in the ankle by letting minnows swim into the wound to eat the dead flesh. We are offered some dumpstered yogurt and pretzels, but decline, as we are planning on getting some post-immersion burritos. Food on the immersion has been plentiful, delicious, and thoroughly enjoyed. We drive into town and get burritos, which is much less exciting than I expected.

Foods we ate

| Harvested off site | Harvested on site |
|---|--|
| <p>wild rice wild amaranth seeds plantain seeds</p> <p>acorns black walnuts hickory nuts chestnuts pecans hazel nuts pine nuts bay nuts lotus nuts</p> <p>bear fat deer fat groundhog possum roadkill salted groundhog roadkill trout</p> <p>apples pears quinces serviceberries persimmons nannyberries currants maple syrup</p> <p>chicken of the woods oyster mushrooms lobster mushrooms honey mushrooms rock tripe</p> <p>burdock root solomon's seal rhizome dock root</p> <p>stinging nettles wood nettles sochan cleavers ramps dandelion greens dock greens chickweed sea weed (various types)</p> | <p>chicken of the woods honey mushrooms rock tripe</p> <p>chipmunks mice wrens grasshoppers</p> <p>ramps wild onions sochan plantain seeds</p> <p>apples</p> |

