

## **A Review of the Traditional Earth Skills of North America Presentation**

By Jack Wooldridge

When we arrived at the new Lower Mount Bethel Township Welcome center, which brand-spankingly new and shiny (it was environmentally friendly, with a nice metal roof), we were early and thus were able to say hello to Mr Fred Gast, the naturalist, and the presenter, Mr Mike Dennis. He showed us his wonderful collection of replica native North American tools and ornaments, most of which he had made himself.

After that, the presentation began. It started with Mr Gast talking about how, in this day and age, it is especially important to learn skills that allow us to live off the land. He pointed out that the Native Americans were an advanced culture in that, unlike the Europeans, they were able to live in harmony with their environment, never taking more than they needed to. In fact, that was probably why their technology didn't advance as quickly as the European's did. It didn't need to.

Then Mr Mike Dennis started talking, and told us many interesting things about how hard it was (compared to how easy it is today) to actually chop wood or do any other kind of chore with the tools the native North Americans had. Until the Europeans arrived with their fancy metal axes, the native Americans had to make do with stone axes that really weren't very easy to sharpen.

Funny story: When the white traders first brought the metal axes over from Europe, the native Americans had absolutely no idea what they were. Some of the old men used them as ornaments, by putting string through the hole in the back of the head and hanging it around their necks. It wasn't until later that some of the younger men figured out that they were axeheads!

While European technology certainly improved the native American's lives, they pretty much had it figured out before the English and other Europeans arrived. And their technology was adapting too, just at a slower rate. Their first tool, created with the mammoths roamed North America, was a simple spear, which was used for thousands of years. Then they created atlatls, spear-throwers that served them well for more thousands of years. Finally, in the woodland period, they started making bows and arrows.

We would have learned more, but unfortunately, we had to leave early. It was a really good presentation, and I wish we could have seen it to the end.