

A Review of the Planning for an Unplanned Night in the Woods Workshop

By Jack Wooldridge

We started the Planning for an Unplanned Night in the Woods Workshop by gathering under the big pavilion at the entrance to Martin's Creek Wildlife Preserve. Mr Fred Gast introduced himself and his dog, Quincy. They would be leading the workshop.

First Fred talked about Quincy, and how, when he was a puppy, he had managed to survive for about eighteen months on his own, as the shelter Mr Fred got him from reckoned. What did Quincy have that we don't, he asked us. There were several answers: Quincy had instincts, he learned, he could eat pretty much anything as his digestive system is different from ours, and his body kept heat in, whereas ours leak it out.

After that, we went into the does and don'ts of wilderness survival. Let's say we walked off the track, we were lost, it was getting dark, what do we do?! First thing is stop moving. Every step you take might be taking you further and further away from your starting point. Then, if it's time to settle down for the night where you are, think about Protection: protect yourself from animals and the elements; Rescue: let others know where you are; Water: you can go for four days without water; Food: you can go for four weeks without food.

Mr Fred also talked about how you shouldn't take unnecessary risks, and these risks are often what injure people. After that, we learned about starting a fire. We built a top down fire, using the biggest sticks on the bottom and tinder on the top, in the parking lot. It was a technique I hadn't see before, but it really worked! We each took turns learning to light tinder with two metal rods that could generate a spark.

After we had put the fire out, we learned about how you should carry your shelter with you, with sweaters for warmth and a great big trash bag for extra protection. We also learned about signaling, using a whistle, mirror and cell phone (if, of course, you have a signal in the woods!).

Lastly, we went on a very short hike and did a role playing exercise where we discussed what we would do if we were really caught in the woods. I think we would know do very well. I came away from the course ready for any unplanned nights in the woods, although it's always preferable to avoid those if you can. It was a great workshop.