

# One Amazing Workshop

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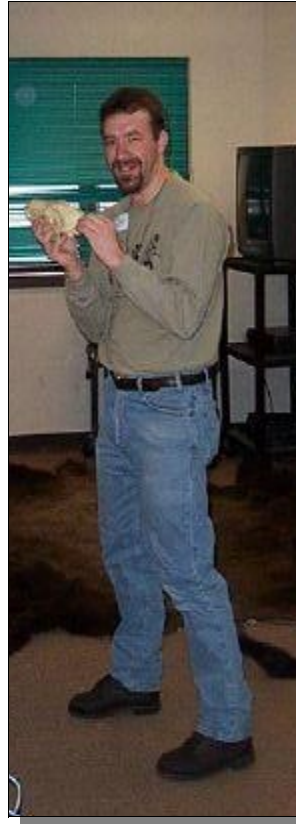
Tomahawk, WI – Workshop season is a favorite time of year for a handful of TWIN members. As fall approaches in the fall, we divvy up the responsibilities and try to recruit others to help out. Each year TWIN holds three workshops at Treehaven Field Station, in Tomahawk, WI. They run Friday night through Sunday lunch and are spread among the Northern Wisconsin winter months.

Each February, I sign up to teach with Pat Arndt, my former school teacher, mentor, and friend. We team up with the zaniest wolf tracker east of the Rockies, Dan Youngbauer. Often with the wisdom, quirkiness, and artistic talent of Paula Hanson, we entertain and educate an audience of eager workshop participants.

February 2002, will remain in my memories for a long time to come. Paula was finishing her last Master's class and couldn't join us. So Dan, Pat, and I set at it like any other year. Our audience this year was almost all high school kids. Now, Pat and I teach high school and usually like to get away from students on the weekends. However, these kids are truly a pleasure to be around.

For years Gina Vogt, from Brown Deer High School, has brought up outstanding groups of students. This year they were joined by Sara Dobish and her students from Oshkosh West High School. All of the students are eager to learn and full of enthusiasm.

As usual, Friday night we get to know each other and made plaster casts of wolf tracks. I was amazed that there was enough plaster for the casts, considering how much they got on them selves and the floor!



Saturday morning, Pat and I entertained and educated the group on wolf ecology, wolf research and the basics of tracking, while Dan set out to scout for sign for our afternoon in the field. Mid morning a light snow began to blanket the ground. It quickly grew to a heavy snow fall and then all of a sudden stopped like someone shut off the valve.

Although snow is desirable for tracking, its best if it comes a few days before a workshop. Fresh snow, like this one, covers any tracks from the past few days, and only gives you the opportunity to see tracks from the last few hours, if that.

Dan arrived back just before lunch and reported that despite the poor conditions he did find a some old tracks and sent markings. So after lunch we headed for the field and strapped on our snowshoes. Although the conditions were poor and the tracks were difficult to make out, it was a relaxing and enjoyable afternoon. Little did we know what was in store for the evening.



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Saturday evening we headed back into the field after an incredible dinner of Betty's fried chicken. With full bellies and exuberant hearts, it is often difficult to calm the students in preparation for howling. However, after we explain the seriousness of the activity and the need to collect data while we are out there, their respect kicks in.

Pat, Dan, and I have been teaching workshops together for the last six years. In all of those years we have shared the responsibility of howling to the wolves to elicit a response. Pat, having been involved in TWIN longer than Dan & I has had the pleasure of getting a response, Yet I never have. As a matter of fact, the last few years, we got not response at all in our February workshop.

Our first stop was at a place called Whisky Bill's Corner (named after a bootlegger who once took up residence there). The group went off in one direction, while Pat, Dan, and I traveled in the other. We took our turns, and the only response we heard was the wind in the trees.

We continued on to another location further down the road. Again we tried, with no luck. Having found sign nearby our first location earlier in the day, Dan suggested that we go back to our first stop and continue up the road in the other direction. Halfway to the intersection where we were planning to stop Pat decided that we should try from here. This time I was to go first.

During our wait time before howling it always amazes me how well we can hear the sounds of civilization from miles away. A train whistle sounded shortly before I was to begin. This is not necessarily a bad sign, since wolves and coyotes have been known to howl at them.

With hands pressed to my face, crunchy snow beneath my feet and wisps of breath visible to the eye, I send forth an imitating howl to echo among the trees and darkness. In return a lone howl of an adult and then three others, coming directly from where we first howled. They may have been there the entire time.

They only shared a response to that first howl, although Pat and Dan joined in to encourage more. We decided to leave having accomplished our task of locating and deciphering an approximate pack size based on their vocalizations.

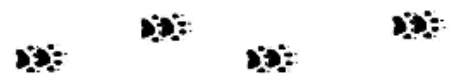
With the success of the evening fresh in our hearts, we had no idea that it would only get better. In our dorm room, we celebrated the response and found it difficult to calm the excitement and get much needed rest.

As we talked, two of the workshop participants began pounding on our door, yelling that they had heard the wolves just behind Treehaven. Now there have been numerous reports over the years of sign, sightings and howls, but a pack never established itself immediately behind Treehaven. However, this year, as we would soon confirm, the Hungry Hills Pack was staking its claim to portions of the Treehaven property.

We rushed outside to head an alpha bellowing a deep howl not more than a half mile away. Without any solicitation from humans, the entire pack joined in, in a frenzy of howls and yelps. It was obvious to the five of us that heard this, that they had probably killed something and they were announcing it to the forest.

Without solicitation by humans and without response when we answered their howls, these animals were asserting that the presence of humans in their ecosystem is not needed, nor is it essential for their lives to continue as they have since the time we intruded on their territory.

As the chill of the night and silence of the forest set back in after the heat of excitement subsided, Pat, Dan, and I decided that as long as no one is opposed, we would cancel the slide shows of Sunday morning and trade it for the possibility of finding a fresh kill.



Breakfast came too early for us, as we had stayed up until the early morning hours chatting. Most of the workshop participants had no idea of what had happened the night before just outside of their dorms, and we planned to announce it at breakfast. After the announcement, there wasn't one person who voted for the slide shows.

There was however, one person who didn't get to vote. One of the students somehow managed to get himself locked in his room with a broken doorknob. The daring rescue set us back momentarily, but we were soon seeking what we had dreamed of the night before, a fresh kill.



The excitement built as we entered the woods and began our expedition. The plan was to continue along the trails in Treehaven until we cut tracks crossing. At that point we would split up and one group would follow in the direction the wolves traveled and the other would backtrack. All the while maintaining contact via radios.

Shortly after crossing the power lines, we found our first set of tracks. They were definitely from the night before, as they did not experience the snow from the previous morning. Since this set of tracks was closer to Treehaven than we expected, we decided to all continue in the direction of travel. When the track split, Dan took one group and Pat and I took the others.



The paths these wolves took wound through the woods for less than a quarter of a mile when they converged near the creek. They traveled along the creek bottom to the south and then they vanished from our sight at the edge of the water. There they crossed over to the other side. If we were to continue, we too would have to cross.

At this point we are approximately half way through the Treehaven property. If we wanted to cross on a bridge we would have to hike out a half mile and back a half mile, all the while hoping that we could find where we left off. The only other option was to cross there.

How? You ask. Either we get wet feet in Wisconsin's cold February temperatures, or we build a bridge. Twenty five students with cold wet feet sounded like a lawsuit waiting to happen. As luck would have it the husband of one of the teacher's is a structural engineer for C.R. Myer! Not to mention the fact that Dan doesn't leave home without his hawk (throwing axe). We build a bridge.

With time pressing us closer to lunch and the end of the workshop, we quickly began collecting downed trees, cut to size with by the hawk. This was a sight to see...twenty five students and a hand full of adult participants chipping in to make it across the water.

As the students carried the trees to the water's edge, we attempted to throw them down so that they would span the creek. The first tossed log cracked in half and missed the mark. After we got mixed success with the second log, Pat decided to cross and help position the logs from the other side. He was the only one to get a wet foot!

Of course the first thing Pat does on the other side is to locate the tracks that crossed the river. He disappears over the hill on the other side and screams, "Here it is!" In excitement we quickly but carefully finished construction on our bridge. One at a time everyone crossed the river, all the while cheering on the others with words of encouragement and directions as to where to place their feet.

I was one of the first few people to cross to capture the scene with my camera before there were human tracks all over the place. The half eaten carcass of a freshly killed deer filled the air with the smell of death. The snow was riddled with fur and blood. It was all I imagined it to be!



After all had crossed over we began to inspect the scene and the remains of the deer. A customary procedure is to determine the age of the deer by inspecting the jaw. However, as you can tell from the pictures, the head was not there. It looked as if it had been chewed off and taken from the scene.

In order to tell the relative health of the animal, the bone marrow is checked for color and consistency. As this past winter was rather mild, this deer was in good health, prior to its demise. Since the wolves would probably be returning to feast on the remains that evening, we left much quicker than we arrived, and carried out our discussion over lunch.

For these students and adults this experience was a culmination of an educational experience, like no other. It is a rare treat to see the mysteries of wilderness unravel before your eyes. Rather than learning about the wolf's food web in the classroom, these students experienced it first hand.



For me this experience renewed a spirit and enthusiasm for studying nature. There is so little that we know and understand as humans, about the complex world that we live in. The system operates without our say or control. Yet, we often try to manage and put policies on things wild. The wolf did not read the sign that said that deer hunting was prohibited in Treehaven. The deer played its role in the food chain that day. What is our role as humans? Unlike all of the other species on this planet we are the only ones who can control the fate of all of them.





More pictures available online at:  
<http://www.timberwolfinformation.org/gallery/gallery.htm>