## "Primitive Skills" Offer Sustainable Model

Contributed by Rebecca Lerner 14 August 2009

Echoes In Time: A glimpse of the future?

Dale Coleman is a burly, bearded mountain man with buckskin shorts and a knife at his hip. His earlobes are pierced with spikes from a deer antler. Coleman, who prefers the moniker Blond Bear, could make it just fine in a peak oil situation. He is an ancestral skills enthusiast and a co-founder of

Echoes In Time, an annual gathering with workshops on hide tanning, basketry, herbal medicine and more.

"People call what we do 'wilderness survival.' But I like to think of it in terms of thriving, not surviving," said Kiliii Yu, an Echoes instructor who specializes in crafting animal-skin kayaks.

Earth-based technologies used by hunter-gatherers offer a historically viable model for living without money or oil. For instance, the wild plant horsetail can be used as a nail file; a tincture of Oregon Grape root is an effective antibiotic; and hides peeled from roadkill deer can become clothing. And those animal-skin kayaks?

"Kayaks are one of the few ways you can get around without oil. You can launch through the surf to get fish when a fishing boat can't go out. And you can survive much rougher waters than with a canoe," Yu said.

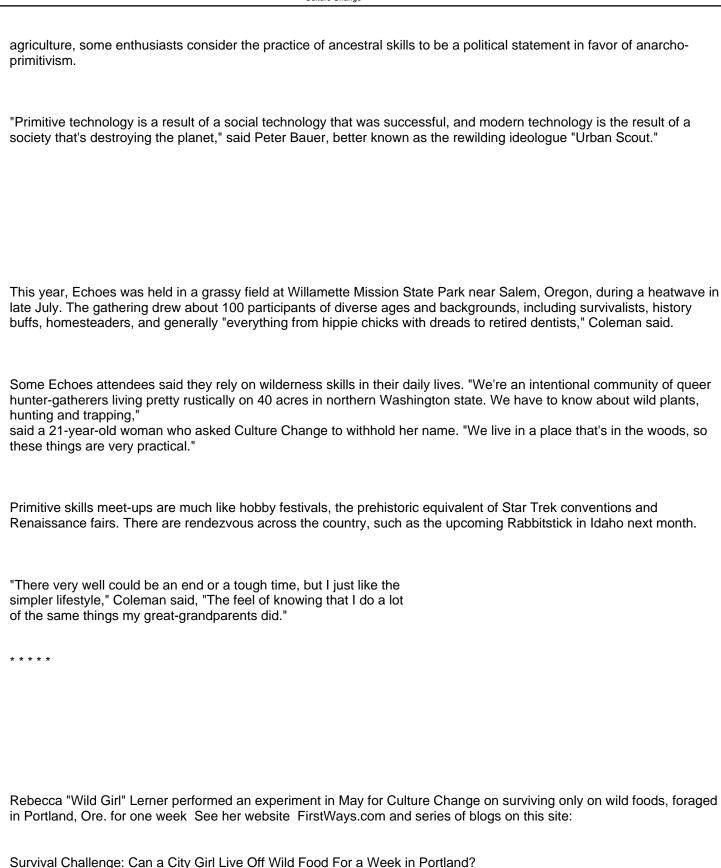
Pre-agricultural life ways are widely referred to as "primitive skills" by proponents, including wilderness schools and organization such as the Society of Primitive Technology, which publishes a seasonal bulletin with detailed how-to articles. But some do take issue with the term "primitive," because it conjures memory of the fallacious social evolution theories developed by Euro-centric thinkers in the 19th century.

" 'Primitive' is a derogatory term in my book. It has no meaning other than a comparative value of one culture against another," said Leland Gilson, a co-founder of Echoes and the former state archeologist of Oregon. "[Hunter-gatherers] were just as smart and clever as [post-industrialized people] today. They just used different materials."

Wilderness skills were once the province of Boy Scouts and backwoods survivalists, but mainstream interest has been booming in recent years, with full-time immersion programs and weekend retreats popping up across the United States. Much of the appeal may be driven by the desire for a kind of poverty insurance during uncertain times; it also acts as a counterbalance against society's increasing alienation from the natural world, which Pullitzer Prize winner Wallace Stegner famously called a "headlong drive into our technological termite-life, the Brave New World of a completely mancontrolled environment," in 1960's "The Wilderness Idea."

Because some historians argue that socio-economic stratification in human civilization can be traced to the advent of

https://www.culturechange.org/cms Powered by Joomla! Generated: 11 August, 2025, 14:34



Week of Wild Food - Day One

and

https://www.culturechange.org/cms Powered by Joomla! Generated: 11 August, 2025, 14:34