

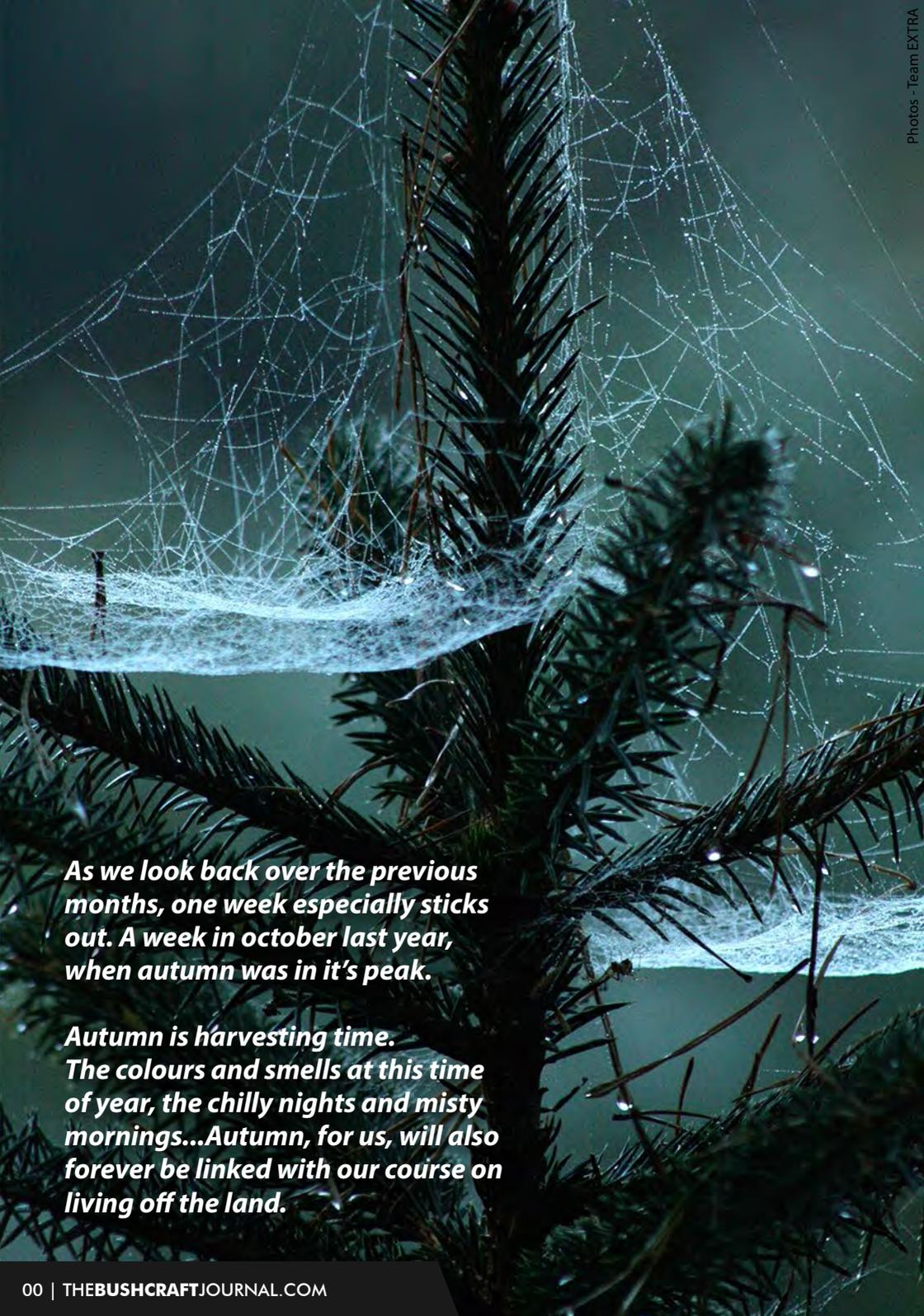
19 HAZELNUTS

A LOOK BACK TO AUTUMN



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Photos: Team-EXTRA



As we look back over the previous months, one week especially sticks out. A week in October last year, when autumn was in its peak.

Autumn is harvesting time. The colours and smells at this time of year, the chilly nights and misty mornings...Autumn, for us, will also forever be linked with our course on living off the land.

Last autumn was extra special, as we decided to organise a course for just our team. The plan was to head out into the woods and live off the land ourselves once again. We knew what we would be up against, as all of our team members

had already attended a course like this before. Will it make a difference? And what would it mean for three extra days, six in total? Can we profit from the fact that we have more routines and experiences?



Time to go!

It is October the 7th when six of us assemble in an almost ideal landscape with a tidal river, rocky shoreline, sandy beach, rough fields and meadows, plus mixed woodland.



Here are some highlights from these six intense days.

SHELTER

With six people, we planned to build (hey, surprise!) a six-person shelter, which was a new style and design to us. We didn't have the chance to experiment beforehand with it, so we just built this one as it is. The four-person shelter is one we have built many many times before. It is a very convenient shelter, not too difficult to construct and very economic. It is in fact a number of lean-to shelters facing one another. You can heat it with very little firewood.

This new model was a different story. With 'only' two extra people, it changed the whole set up of the shelter. We managed to build it with all the correct measurements and sizes, but it was still large in the end. Larger than we expected. The side effect was that it turned out to be difficult to heat in an easy way. Each bed was just a little too far from the fire, and above all, the chimney was wide, so a lot of warmth just disappeared in the air. We had to narrow this chimney with extra branches and cover it with bracken.



FIRE

For us, fire is a tool we need in the outdoors. On the first day we made fire by friction, collecting everything from the woods. In the night before, it had rained, so we had a special focus on finding dry tinder. We used spruce roots as cordage for our bowdrill, which worked really well.

Once lit, our fire burned non-stop for the entire six days. Sometimes we took the fire outside of our shelter. Just for convenience, with much more workspace around it.



On two days we took the fire along with us, transporting it to the shore. There we used it for cooking collected edibles like mussels, prawns, and we roasted some rabbit legs. Coming home at the end of the day, our covered fire in the shelter still had some coals for a re-start, although we still had our smouldering logs as a back up.

We used a lot of firewood! Every day a large amount was needed, I was sort of shocked by the impact this had on our surrounding woodland. What was this like in the past? Say, when a group of hunter-gatherers planned to stay in an area like this and live there for a few months? Combined with the impact on all edibles (especially roots, bulbs, etc), this must have been an issue. Something to think about!



FOOD



Nineteen hazelnuts is all we found! No acorns, sadly. We had found many while driving here, to the South West of Scotland. But no luck in the forest where we were. Many hazel bushes were empty as well, not even a single nut! In the end we were happy to find nineteen of them. Nineteen, still green, nuts. We roasted them and shared this treasure among our team.

One of our goals was of course a focus on proper food. Not a daily menu of boiled sloppy nettles in a pot, please! We had bad luck with burdock roots. Due to the warm weather from the last six weeks, the soil had turned into concrete and, in combination with the rocky ground, it was a useless effort to try and dig them up. We focussed on silverweed instead which is much easier to gather, growing in heaps of shells for instance. Their taste is really good.





As 'hunter-gatherers' we also found rosehip, hawthorn, wild radish, sloeberries, chickweed, and yes... we ate nettle as well! We were also very lucky with an overload of brambles. It has been a long time since I have seen so many. It meant regular doses of sugar, always a snack on the go and a great taste. The last is also an important (mental) issue when you are living off the land.

On our hunt for proteins we gathered prawns, crabs, limpets, mussels, and some cockles. In total we caught five good-sized dogfish plus some smaller fish which we used as bait. Besides that, we caught a few rabbits.

Not a lot of meat in the end, but enough on our plates on a regular basis. Prawn hunts are one of my favorites. Prawns themselves are very difficult to catch by hand, fast as lightning and time consuming. What we did was simply scoop out any rockpools where they were. Very easy to do, and you are sure of a result. The first time I tried this, years ago, was a real surprise, as on the bottom of the emptied pool were not only a handful of prawns, but also a number of small fish as well. Perfect bait for nightlines.





There is another great way of catching 'rockpool food'!

Use soapwort to stun all critters in the water. Make sure your pool is a reasonable size and collect a good handful of soapwort. Crush and squeeze the plant with water and soon soap will appear. If there is any, you could even use the barnacles on available rocks to rub the plant on. Mix your soap with more water, and stir it into the pool. If your mixture is powerful enough, soon the first prawns will appear on the surface, swimming belly-up. In my experience they won't be totally numb, but you'll see them swimming on their backs, trying to dive, and re-appearing again.

Now they are much easier to catch!

The first time I tried this method is still imprinted in my mind, I caught a handfull of prawns this way and used most of them as bait, leaving me with a dogfish the next low tide! That for me is a great example of bushcraft: using your knowledge from the land.

WATER

Our shelter location was a compromise between a good spot (i.e. lots of building materials nearby) and a practical spot. Best would be near a water source. In our situation it meant we were further away from water. There were a few small streams in the woods we were in, but also due to the dry period in the weeks before, they weren't the best spots to collect water from. So our best water source was a short walk away from our shelter. We were lucky with a large bucket we found. This way we had our own waterpool right outside our shelter.

The slight irritation with water is always the jiggle of the available billycans. Our rule is to always boil water for safety reasons. With just a small amount of billies, plus their need for cooking, as well as their use for collecting at the same time, there is always a shortage of cooking pots. But we knew all this beforehand. Therefore we didn't drink as much as we would really need per day, but managed at least to be organised in this. Mint that we found on one of our foraging trips was a great way to give our water a nice taste.



WEATHER

We have been lucky with the weather! Scotland has a bad image when it comes to weather, but through the years we have experienced otherwise. Yes, it can rain, but we have had many, many days with sun in all the years running courses there. But, in this specific week, it was raining as we got up, early morning on the first day. Not pouring with rain, but the forest was soaked and leaking with raindrops.



Only on one night I woke up from a shower, but our shelter was waterproof. For the rest of our days out we had great weather. Blue skies, sun, and wind, where the last is almost a certainty on the coast. For that reason we enclosed our fire on the shore into a small oven to make it more economic and practical; using a lot less firewood, plus all heat was concentrated in the chimney.

Photos - Team EXTRA

LOOKING BACK

It was great to be out again like this. To use and test all our skills in a self-made scenario. To experience those side effects linked with less sleep, just a little food and a minimum of water. We knew that it would be tough for those first two days. Working hard, walking around with 'legs, filled with sand'.

But we enjoyed it. Slowly we saw the results and were rewarded for all our efforts. It is always a team effort, and for us as team members it was extra special in that way. We've been very lucky with the weather, what would it have been like in *just* one day of heavy rain?



The last days of our team 'Over-Leven' [*'Survival' in Dutch*] trip were great. We had time to enjoy exploring the coast, sharing a mint tea, a mussel/fish soup and a handful of brambles. Not least to mention it all took place in a beautiful landscape. Being part of that scenery was an extra gift for us.

We felt at home in Nature, which for us, is Bushcraft in the end!

Photos - Team EXTRA

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Do take a look at a short movie we made during our days in the woods: <https://youtu.be/iUg8jqGHsQU>



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