



Moon



CRAFTY: Patrick prepares a dead rabbit, inspired by Jason, inset

A Bushtucker trial in Oxford

IF YOU go down to the woods today, you are in for a big surprise.

More than one, actually. On a Woodland Ways Bushcraft weekend in Oxfordshire, you'll learn skills you never knew you needed.

In our modern lives we have the world in the palm of our hands with smartphones and tablets.

But how often do we take a step back and breathe and spare a few minutes to take stock of our surroundings and what it means to actually be human?

Not often enough. So I packed my rucksack and headed off for a weekend of elite level instruction in bushcraft, the study of how humans have evolved and learned to survive using only the gifts which our environment provides.

Most of us have lost more knowledge about our beautiful habitat and our own skills in working with it than we can ever hope to recover.

But thanks to award-winning bushcraft expert Jason Ingamells and his Woodland Ways team, I was in for a hardcore refresher course.

And so was my beloved Staffordshire bull terrier Maggie.

Our instructors, founder Jason and his deputy Adam Logan, took little or no time to impress upon us the basics of human needs out in the open.

Shelter, water, fire and food. In that order. It's that simple. Or not, as it turned out...

A short walk into some pristine woodland to our communal camp area was like stepping back in time, in a good way.

by PATRICK LENNON

A briefing on what to expect, and what was expected of us, focused minds and took us back to basics.

We've all slumped it at a music festival these days. But what would you do if even tents were off the menu?

The first night of our crash course was spent under a "bash" or "bivvy", set up between two tree trunks. One wall, no roof and surrounded by the woods.

After that we were on our own. Jason and his team took us through building the basic homestead, wood and bracken, every piece of which we had to cut and assemble ourselves.

Then we learned about water. Finding a fresh and clean source of water is crucial.

At Woodland Ways you are taught the skill and technology of extracting every last drop from our planet.

All of us were looking forward to a nightcap by the fire.

We were treated to a masterclass in ancient technology. The pure joy of seeing fire created from simple natural tools, hands, wood and plants, is a rare thing.

When you are hungry, you go to your cupboard, Ronald McDonald or the Colonel, right?

Being handed a dead rabbit and told: "This is your dinner" really wakes you up.

I'm not sure I'd give up all my creature comforts.

But if they did get stripped away, at least now I'd have a fighting chance of survival.

FACT FILE

VISIT woodland-ways.com or call 01234 351006 for more information or to book a trip. Prices start from just £30 for a half-day course, and gift vouchers are available for Christmas.