

Boreal Field School Handbook

Welcome to Boreal Field School.

Over the years, it became obvious that some of our most meaningful experiences outdoors came from learning how to pay attention to a place.

A landscape is not simply something we travel through. It is something we can understand, participate in, and build a relationship with.

The most memorable moments often come from the connections we discover: the tree that becomes our fire, the plant that becomes a flavour, the animal that becomes a meal, and the gathering around the fire where those experiences are shared.

Boreal Field School was created to explore those connections.

Through hands-on learning, outdoor cooking, wild food, and practical field skills, we will explore how the boreal ecosystem can inform the way we live, eat, drink, and gather.

Our goal is that you leave with new skills, greater confidence, and a deeper appreciation for this remarkable landscape.

This guide will help you prepare so you can arrive comfortable, confident, and ready to participate.

Quick Reference

Location: Boreal Forest, Alberta

Basecamp: GPS coordinates provided approximately one week prior to program. The boreal access is dependent on seasonal conditions, including weather and logging road conditions. Participants should plan for the Whitecourt-Swan Hills region, with alternate locations possible near Athabasca.

Duration: Four days / three nights

Arrival Time: 1pm on Day 1

Departure Time: 1pm on Day 4

Group Size: Maximum six participants

Before arriving:

- ☐ Prepare personal camping gear and clothing
- ☐ Arrange transportation to the meeting location
- ☐ Complete Participant Profile on registration page (www.fromthewild.ca/bfsregister)
- ☐ Arrive rested and ready to participate

Program Overview

During Boreal Field School, we will:

- Explore the boreal ecosystem through plants, wildlife, fire, and seasonal rhythms
- Learn how the landscape influences food and beverage
- Develop practical fire and camp skills
- Explore the relationship between hunting, harvesting, and food
- Learn foundational wild game cookery
- Discover boreal ingredients and their applications in food and beverage
- Practice translating ecosystem into flavour through cooking and wild mixology
- Build confidence using outdoor tools and systems
- Work together as a small field team

Boreal Field School is designed around participation.

This is not a demonstration course where guests simply observe skills being performed. Participants will actively practice the skills being taught, contribute to camp life, prepare meals, and take part in creating the experience.

The Experience

The boreal forest is a landscape shaped by seasons, fire, weather, wildlife, and human interaction.

The goal of Boreal Field School is not simply to identify species or learn isolated outdoor skills, but to understand how the ecosystem connects together.

Throughout the program, we will explore the question:

How can the boreal landscape inform how we eat, drink, and come together around food?

We will explore how the forest can be translated into flavour, how traditional outdoor skills support modern cooking, and how deeper understanding of a place changes the way we experience it.

Throughout the program, we will explore four interconnected workflows:

The Workflow of Fire

Understanding the energy of the forest.

From tree identification and safe wood harvest to processing, storage, fire building, heat management, and cooking over flame.

Fire is one of the foundations of boreal life. It provides warmth, transforms ingredients, creates comfort, and becomes the gathering place where meals and stories are shared.

The Workflow of Meat

Understanding animals as part of the ecosystem and as food.

From responsible harvest and field knowledge to processing, preparation, and cooking techniques that respect wild game.

We will explore how different cuts require different approaches — from hot and fast cooking to slow transformation through braising — and how fire allows us to create meaningful meals from the landscape.

The Workflow of Wild Flavour

Understanding the boreal forest as a source of flavour, aroma, and inspiration.

Through seasonal plants, berries, fungi, trees, and other ingredients, we will explore how the character of a landscape can be translated into food and beverage.

From extraction techniques and preservation to cooking and wild mixology, the goal is not simply to identify ingredients, but to understand how they contribute to flavour, story, and connection to place.

The Workflow of Camp

Understanding how humans create comfort and community outdoors.

From shelter and organization to tools, systems, fire, food preparation, and daily rhythm, we will explore the foundations that allow people to spend meaningful time in wild places.

What We Provide

We provide the shared infrastructure required for the field experience.

Boreal Field School includes:

- Guided field instruction
- Communal campsite and gathering spaces
- Group cooking equipment and camp systems

- All program meals
- Wild ingredient exploration
- Fire and outdoor cooking instruction
- Hands-on practical skills training
- Wild food and beverage experiences

What You Need To Bring

Camping Gear

Participants are responsible for their own camping setup.

You will need:

- Tent or personal shelter system
- Sleeping bag suitable for cool fall boreal conditions
- Sleeping pad or mattress
- Camp clothing and personal gear

You are staying in a vehicle accessible backcountry bushcamp. Comfort and preparation make a significant difference.

A warm, dry sleeping system is one of the most important pieces of gear you will bring. If you're unsure whether your equipment is suitable, please reach out before the program.

Clothing & Weather

Fall in the boreal forest can bring changing conditions.

Expect:

- Cool mornings (likely frosty)
- Warm afternoons
- Rain or wet conditions (in the boreal this often means mud)
- Cold evenings
- Changing weather

Recommended:

- Warm insulating layers
- Wool clothing
- Warm hat or toque
- Work gloves
- Rugged outdoor footwear
- Extra dry clothing

Cotton is not recommended for extended outdoor conditions.

Food & Dietary Information

Food is central to Boreal Field School.

Meals will explore the relationship between the boreal ecosystem and the table.

You can expect:

- Wild game and seasonal ingredients
- Forest-to-table meals
- Cooking over fire
- Dutch oven cooking
- Wild beverages

- Ingredients gathered from the landscape
- Collaborative meal preparation

Participants will not simply observe meals being prepared. They will participate in the techniques and processes that create them.

Please communicate any dietary restrictions or allergies before arrival.

We are happy to accommodate reasonable dietary needs, but this program is built around exploring wild foods and seasonal ingredients.

Participant Expectations

Boreal Field School is a hands-on, team-based experience.

Participants are expected to:

- Participate actively in all learning activities
- Practice skills rather than simply observe
- Contribute to cooking, cleaning, and camp tasks
- Work collaboratively with the group
- Respect the landscape, wildlife, and other participants
- Bring curiosity, patience, and a willingness to learn

The experience works because everyone participates.

Whether processing wood, preparing food, managing a fire, exploring the landscape, or gathering around the camp, every participant contributes to the experience.

Safety & Conditions

Spending time outdoors involves changing weather, uneven terrain, sharp tools, fire, and natural conditions.

Throughout the program, activities may be adapted based on:

- Weather
- Group comfort and ability
- Field conditions
- Safety considerations

Our goal is not simply to complete activities, but to build confidence, awareness, and good judgment outdoors.

Camp Location

Our basecamp location will be provided prior to the program. The weather and resulting logging road access will be making decisions for us. Please plan to be in the Whitecourt - Swan Hills region. Alternatively, we may end up around Athabasca.

Participants will arrive with their personal gear and establish their own sleeping systems before the program begins.

The communal camp will include shared cooking areas, fire spaces, and gathering areas where learning, meals, and conversation take place.

Daily Rhythm

Day 1 — Arrival & Orientation

The first day begins at our boreal basecamp.

After arriving and setting up your personal sleeping system, we will orient ourselves to camp, the landscape, and the days ahead.

The afternoon includes:

- Introductions and group orientation
- Boreal ecosystem overview
- Camp systems and expectations
- Introduction to boreal flavours and ingredients
- Fire and cooking foundations

We will finish the day with a shared meal created around the fire.

Day 2 — The Workflow of Fire

We begin with one of the foundations of boreal living: fire.

Topics include:

- Understanding the forest
- Tree identification & selection
- Processing tool systems
- Storage
- Fire building
- Heat management
- Cooking over flame

The skills practiced today become the foundation for the meals and experiences that follow.

Day 3 — The Workflow of Meat & Wild Flavour

Today focuses on translating the boreal ecosystem into food and beverage.

Topics include:

- Firearms
- What lies beyond hunter training
- Wild ingredients
- Seasonal flavours
- Meat preparation
- Red meat cookery
- Dutch oven cooking
- Fire-based meal preparation
- Wild beverage creation

Participants will apply the skills developed throughout the program to create shared meals inspired by the landscape.

Day 4 — Integration & Closing

The final day brings the pieces together.

Working as a group, participants will apply the skills and ideas explored throughout the program to create a final shared meal and reflect on the experience.

The day includes:

- Applied cooking
- Integration of learned skills
- Group reflection

- Discussion around continuing skills at home
- Final debrief and farewell

The program concludes with a celebration of the skills, connections, and discoveries made during our time together.

Final Thoughts

Boreal Field School is an invitation to slow down, pay attention, and build a deeper relationship with place.

Come prepared to learn, participate, get your hands dirty, share meals, and experience the boreal forest through fire, food, flavour, and community.

We're looking forward to welcoming you in the boreal.