

“Scouting Helped Me Become a Full-Time Wilderness Instructor”

Sean Stratton, a former Beaver, Cub, Scout and Venturer from the 1st Vanier Group (St. John’s, NL), makes his living by teaching people from all over the world how to enjoy the wilderness. Starting as an instructor with Outward Bound, he now works for the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS).

“Scouting built the basic foundation of my leadership skills that I use every day now,” says Sean. “I really loved the Scouting program. It was a big part of my growing up.”

As a Beaver and Cub, Sean enjoyed the social parts of Scouting most of all. But in Scouts and Venturers, his primary interest shifted to the outings: camping, hiking and canoeing. “I just couldn’t get enough of the wilderness,” he says. “Scouting was my access to the wilderness. Our leaders willingly took us camping whenever we asked. This really wetted my appetite for more.”

Later, after attending university, Sean decided to make a career of outdoor education. It wasn’t long before he hooked up with the National Outdoor Leadership School.

“Generally, I work one-month courses in the remote wilderness: Baja, Alaska, Cascade Mountains, Himalayas, Wyoming, and Yukon.” Some of his courses last almost three months.

“We teach leadership skills through experiencing the wilderness. For example, I just returned from a 30-day backpacking trip in Mexico. During the trek, the instructors focused on four specific areas of instruction: outdoor skills, leadership, environmental studies, and safety and judgement (medicine).”

His trips, which include kayaking adventures, mountain climbing treks, and backpacking and canoeing expeditions, take him all over the world – from Alaskan forests and Wyoming deserts, to Patagonian mountains, and African jungles. And it all started with Scouting.



“Learn by doing. There’s not a better way to learn.”

Sean Stratton pauses for a photo while on one of his many outdoor treks.

Our courses touch on everything from wilderness cooking, diet, and hypothermia, to learning how to build emergency shelters, and how to protect your feet from blisters during multi-day hikes.

“Living in the wilderness is a great place to learn leadership,” says Sean. “It stretches your thinking and teaches you to anticipate problems before

they happen. Of course, these skills have a very practical application when our students return to their usual urban environments. They’re able to deal with challenges better, and get along with people.”

Outdoor Tips from an Expert

Sean offers some tips that will make any outing more enjoyable.

- ❑ If planning a long backpacking trek, make sure your boots are not too tight. Your boots should almost be loose enough that if you step into a deep pool of mud they will come off. (“That’s a bit of an exaggeration, but not much,” says Sean.)
- ❑ Socks are important. Put a pair of polypropylene socks against your skin, then a thicker pair of wool or synthetic socks over them.
- ❑ Don’t burst a blister. Let it pop on its own. Cut a “donut” shape piece of mole skin around it to protect the blister.

Learning By Doing: Vital

“Everything I do now focuses on experiential education – just like what Scouting emphasizes,” says Sean. So, next time you take your Scouts into the wilderness to enjoy a snowshoeing, skiing or hiking adventure, you might actually be laying the foundations for a future career. X

Photo: Courtesy of Sean Stratton