

## YURT BUILDING WORKSHOPS: A WELL ROUNDED EXPERIENCE

### WHAT IS A YURT?



Yurts are the traditional nomadic home from Central Asia. The yurt is a collapsible framework of wooden poles covered with felt and/or canvas. The design of these ancient shelters has been kept unchanged for over one thousand years. Having proven themselves over many centuries, they remain one of the oldest indigenous forms of shelter still in use today.

Today, yurts provide shelter for many people and can act as space for a wide number of educational and creative purposes.

### WHO IS INVOLVED

Selene and Alex Cole from Little Foot Yurts have run highly successful educational programs and yurt building workshops throughout Nova Scotia and the United Kingdom (see end of document for examples).



### YURT BUILDING WORKSHOPS



Building one's own shelter is incredibly empowering and takes the participant on an experiential education journey involving many aspects of traditional and natural building practices. Our Yurt Building Workshops provide a thorough introduction to yurts and to the basics of yurt construction, including: coppice as a timber crop, Acadian forest species, making a greenwood working station, using a drawknife, froe and other hand tools, planning and designing yurt walls, roof, wheel, and erecting a yurt.

### OUTLINE OF YURT BUILDING WORKSHOPS

Little Foot Yurts offer an intensive two-day Yurt Building Workshop. Different options can be created to suit your needs. The maximum group size recommended for our Yurt Building Workshops is 12 people. *The following section introduces the activities over the course of the workshop.*

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE STRUCTURE AND ORIGINS OF THE NOMADIC YURT**

Participants will become familiar with the cultural background and the origins of the yurt. An overview will be given of the yurt components, its structural strength and its regional variation. As a group we will discuss why the yurt is a sustainable shelter.

### **CREATING THE WALLS**

The group will work together to measure, cut, drill and connect the poles needed to build the first component of a 12-foot yurt. This fun hands-on session will help to break down the complexities of yurt building as the group observes their wall section evolve. The task of building the wall gives the group an empowering sense of ownership of the project and adds to their satisfaction when they later erect a yurt using their own hand-built component.



*Note: In preparation for the workshop, 30 poles are cut and the bark is removed. This process takes two people one day to complete. If your group prepares the poles before the workshop, the wall section will belong to the group.*



### **ERECTING THE YURT**

The group will be invited to use their own initiative to combine their hand built wall with the additional yurt components provided and erect the entire yurt frame. Once erected the group can test out the theories of the yurt's inherent strength and experience being inside their shelter.

### **COPPICE-AN IDEA FROM THE PAST**

The group will explore current forestry practices used in Atlantic Canada and identify its effects on the health of forests and habitats. We will investigate the ancient silviculture technique of coppice (the practice of harvesting the re-growth of hardwood stumps) to provide round wood material for yurts and other applications.

### **GATHERING MATERIALS ON A WOODLAND WALK**

Once the group has finished creating their own shelter, we take a walk in the woods to identify local tree species. We will discuss the best woods for yurt building and collect suitable wood for the yurt poles. We will learn how to identify a selection of trees and discuss their natural characteristics, for example, identifying hardwoods, which are ideal for steam bending and splitting. The poles will be brought to the group's workspace in preparation for building their green woodworking area the next day.

### **BUILDING A WOODLAND WORKSHOP AND INTRODUCTION TO HAND TOOLS**

First, participants will be given diagrams of a shaving and riving break, a structure used to secure wood in order to remove bark, rive, and craft wood. The participants will then be asked to choose a site appropriate for a woodland workshop. In addition, they will collect materials from the surrounding area and use them to build the break. Then, they will be introduced to the proper use of hand tools such as the billhook, drawknife, maul, axe and froe. They will also learn proper sharpening techniques needed to maintain these tools.



### **DESIGNING YOUR DREAM YURT**

This activity will help individuals clarify and develop the necessary information to start the virtual design stages of creating their own yurt. Everyone will have an opportunity to discuss their ideal yurt with a partner and share important ideas such as size, use, timeline for building, and resources needed. Their partner will present their colleague's ideas to the rest of the group. In doing this, participants will be able to reconsider any ideas they have had and make design alterations.



### **GEOMETRY OF YURT**

Once participants have had a chance to envision and consider their ideal yurt, they will receive a copy of our Yurt Zine, which includes a five-page Yurt Findings Worksheet at the end. The Yurt Findings Worksheet is a step-by-step process, which allows participants to easily build up a structural design for their custom yurt. This process catalogues all the lengths and components for the individual yurt. The worksheet allows the user to understand the geometry of the overall

structure and apply simple trigonometric and mathematical calculations, whilst making the task relevant to the participant. At this stage, we will also showcase a variety of design ideas for the yurt wheel.

### **SPLITTING A TREE BY HAND**

The group will utilize the power of lever and fulcrum to hand split a mature ash tree. Using a froe, each participant will have an opportunity to help make two planks from a solid tree. This important and satisfying process is required for the most important part of the yurt-the crown wheel. The group will discover how wood was fashioned before the advent of the water saw mill and realize the inherent strength of split wood over sawn wood.



### SKILLS DEVELOPED THROUGH PARTICIPATIVE AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

- Tree identification
- Basic carpentry
- Greenwood working
- Geometry
- Forestry (traditional and ancient)
- Use, sharpening and maintenance of hand tools
- Rope work

### OUTCOMES FOR PARTICIPANTS

- Empowering individuals to feel confident in erecting and building their own yurt
- Bringing participants together as a team
- Broadening the participants understanding of the structure, history, and cultural background of the yurt
- Expanding the participants understanding of sustainable development

### YURT BUILDING WORKSHOP AGENDA: (TWO DAYS)

<b>Day One</b>	
8-9am	Breakfast
9-10am	Welcome, discussion of the history and cultural background of yurts, how a yurt works, why are yurts sustainable, types of yurts
10-1pm	Build wall together
1-2pm	Lunch
2-3pm	Erect 12 ft yurt
3-4pm	Discuss conventional forestry/alternative forestry, discuss coppice
4-4:15pm	Break & Snack
4:15-5:30pm	Walk in the woods, tree identification, best wood for yurts
5:30-6:30pm	Dinner, Open Discussion
<b>Day Two</b>	
8-9am	Breakfast
9-11:15am	Build a woodworking break, try out different hand tools and de-bark coppice poles
11:15-11:30pm	Break & Snack
11:30-12:30pm	Yurt Living Activity
12:30-1:30pm	Lunch
1:30-3pm	Zine introduction & Yurt Findings Worksheet
3-3:15pm	Break & Snack
3:15-4:30	Group splitting of ash with a froe
4:30-5:30	Discussion about coverings options, additional questions, evaluation
5:30-6:30	Optional Dinner, home time

*Note: Catering is optional; please see catering section for fees.*

### YURT BUILDING WORKSHOP AGENDA: (TWO AND A HALF DAYS)

This agenda is the same as the two day Yurt Building Workshop, with the addition of the evening arrival and the screening of Mujaan.

The two and a half day workshop will begin with introductions and an opportunity for everyone to share personal stories about shelter. To set the stage for the rest of the workshop we will show a short film called Mujaan. This powerful and compelling documentary of a Mongolian craftsman demonstrates the construction of a traditional yurt with hand tools, as well as illustrating many interesting cultural and social aspects of nomadic life.

### WORKSHOP FEES

<b>Workshop Scenarios</b>	<b>Workshop Hrs</b>	<b>Cost (10 – 15 people)</b>
Yurt Building Workshop with evening introduction	Evening 1: 6pm-9pm (optional) Day 2: 8am-7pm Day 3: 8am-5:30pm	\$1475 (Subtract \$150 without evening introduction and screening of Mujaan)

### YURT ACCOMMODATION & WORKSHOP SPACE

Little Foot Yurts can provide 16-foot (200 square feet) yurt for sleeping or workshop space. One 16-foot yurt can accommodate 14 people for a workshop session or 8 people sleeping overnight. A second yurt can be rented to accommodate a total of 16 people sleeping overnight. Cushions, floors, lighting and power are included. Please see the rentals section of our website ([www.lfy.ca](http://www.lfy.ca)) for more information.

### YURT RENTAL FEES

1 yurt for 2 days: \$250 (add \$50 for an additional day)  
2 yurts for 2 days: \$500 (add \$100 for an additional day)

### TRAVEL COSTS

To promote local events we do not charge for travel costs within 50 kms from Wolfville. Our travel costs are \$50 for every 100 kms after this (round trip). Transportation costs for yurts are not included in the rental price.

Taxes are not included in the above prices.

*Note: To confirm your workshop a 25% non-refundable deposit is required for all bookings.*

## **CATERING PROVIDED BY LITTLE FOOT YURTS**

The minimum number of people required to provide catering is ten people. A fully equipped kitchen with stove, washing facilities, and dishes must be provided. We can provide a check list for you.

<b>Catered Workshop Scenario</b>	<b>Workshop Hrs</b>	<b>Meals included</b>	<b>Cost per person</b>
Yurt Building Workshop with evening introduction	Evening 1: 6pm-9pm Day 2: 8am-7pm Day 3: 8am-4:30pm	2 Breakfast, 2 Lunch, 1 Dinner, 5 snacks	\$72.50

Without evening introduction snack, subtract \$2.50 per person

For each dinner not needed, subtract \$14.00 per person

### **Prices include all-day coffee, tea and cold beverages.**

Menus are available on request. We are happy to cater for vegans, vegetarians and people with other dietary restrictions. At Little Foot Yurts we use local seasonal produce, whenever possible.

### **Breakdown of meal costs:**

<b>Meals</b>	<b>Price Per Head</b>
Breakfast	\$10
Lunch	\$13
Dinner	\$14
2 Snacks	\$5



### **EXAMPLES OF PAST LITTLE FOOT YURT EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOPS**

**Yurt Building Workshops**, Jan 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>, March 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>, March 23<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>, 2007

Workshops open to interested builders from all over Atlantic Canada

**Halifax Regional Development Agency, Make Way for Youth**, Jan 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007

Erected yurt with the group and discussed opportunities for youth in rural Nova Scotia, using our business as a model.

**Canadian Network for Environmental Education and Communication**, Oct 19, 2006

Youth participants erected a 16-ft yurt and explored yurt components, forestry, greenwood working, construction techniques and yurts as a sustainable shelter.

**Atlantic Straw Builders Conference**, May 20-22, 2006

Erected a 16-ft yurt with conference participants. Emphasis was put on practical issues unique to yurt living, such as heating and insulation

**Halifax Independent School**, May 9, 2006

Ran a one-hour workshop with 6-8 year olds for their Shelter and Geography class. Students learned about the origin and history of yurts and erected a 12-foot yurt.

**ReGeneration: A symposium on community youth development**, March 25, 2006

Co-ran a three-hour workshop with Kim Thompson on natural building, and focused on integrating natural building projects into youth programs. Erected a 12-foot yurt, discussed yurts as a sustainable resources, demonstrated tools using a shaving brake.

**The Second International Conference on Gross National Happiness**, June 2005

A youth team erected a yurt, discussed the history and origins of yurts and learned about the building processes involved. The group also created a natural build site showcasing various types of natural building, such as straw bale construction.

**Dalhousie School of Architecture Free Lab**, May 05 and Aug 2004

Students erected a yurt and shared information on the structural strengths of round wood construction, mandalas in architecture and coppice as a form of sustainable forestry. Participants learned about green woodworking basics in order to apply new knowledge to their practical projects.

**Nova Scotia Youth for Positive Energy**, Sierra Club of Canada, Nov 2004

Climate change youth conference showcased the yurt as a sustainable building and was used for a unique workshop space.

**EcoTopia, The Roots Collective, July 2004**

Atlantic youth-run weekend gathering used the yurt as a workshop space. Topics explored were the origins and history of the yurt, forestry, greenwood working, construction techniques and yurts as sustainable shelters.