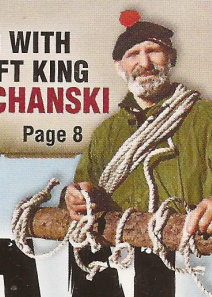


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**MORS KOCHANSKI**

Page 8



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# Meet The Practical & Profound WILDWOOD PROFESSOR

The internationally-followed, godfather of modern bushcraft—  
master woodsman Mors Kochanski!

BY CHRISTIAN NOBLE & JOE FLOWERS

**I**n the modern era, there are only a handful of men who have significantly contributed to the pursuit and furthering of research, education and scholarship of wilderness living skills and modern survival. Within that circle there exists a legendary savant, from whom many seek his wisdom. That man is Mors Kochanski, and his writings should be an essential part of your wilderness knowledge foundation.

For over 40 years, Mors Kochanski has been an outdoor educator and survival instructor. When you meet Mors for the first time, you are blindsided by the amount of information he possesses. And rightfully so, as Mors has obtained wisdom from a wide breadth of resources and time spent in the forest. Decades of field experience as an instructor and a personal library estimated at 300,000 books places Mors in a unique category as both an outdoor educator and wilderness living skills research pioneer.

However, like a great Tibetan sage nestled on a remote mountaintop, Mors stays out of the limelight, instead choosing his Alberta cabin in the woods. It was there, in that cozy, wood-heated living room surrounded by stacks of books, that we felt a reverence for Mors that naturally creeps up with every sentence of outdoor knowledge he avows.

## Meet The Master

The Kochanski family lived without electricity until Mors was 10 years of age. The closest town was a two-hour horse-drawn wagon



Here, Mors is instructing on another one of his accomplishments, the "super shelter."

ride away. Mors' emigrated Polish parents and his time spent in the woods taught him the strong pioneering traditions learned in his youth. Mors fondly recalls picking mushrooms with his mother and the many

miles traveled on the Canadian dirt roads to and from school, encountering everything from bears to wolves. In pursuit of spending money, the Kochanski brothers spent summers squirrel hunting and the winters trap-

ping weasel. Mors was the happy understudy skinning and stretching pelts, while his older brother was a belt-knife-wearing crack shot.

Early on, Mors was exposed to a modest library with less than 100 books. It was there that he began quenching his thirst for knowledge. While continuing to grow, a college-aged Mors dabbled in many things, from chemical engineering to working as a welfare officer. Along the way, he also obtained a pilot's license and hacked his way through the Canadian bush as a surveyor until finally settling

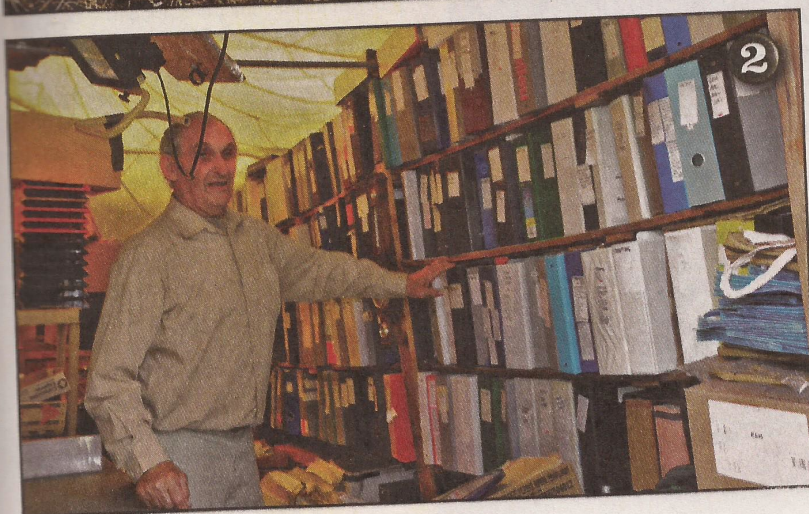
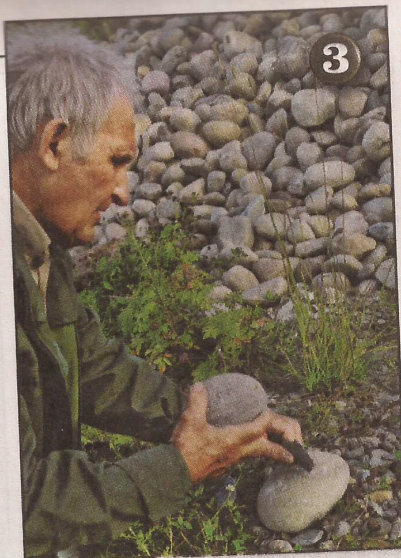
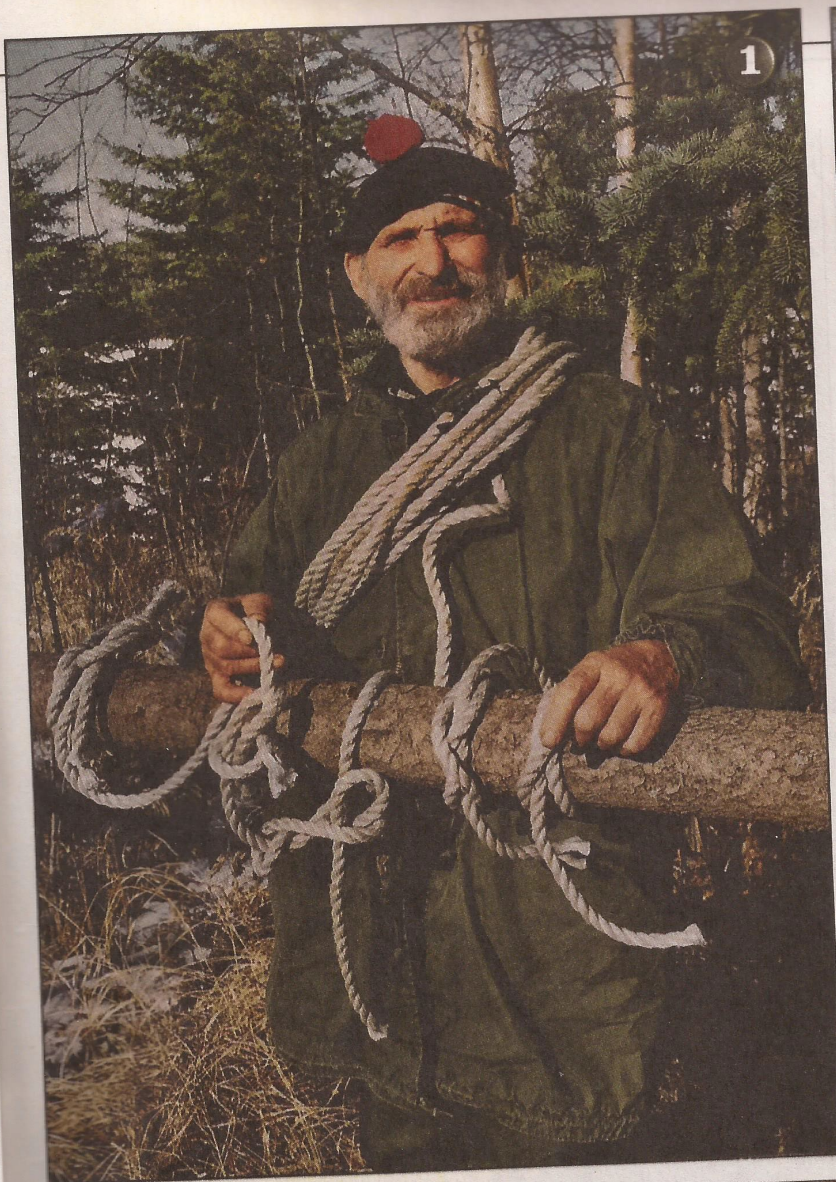
## SCANDI SURVIVAL BLADES

Arguably, Mors introduced the practicality of the Scandinavian-style knife to North America. Also known as the Mora knife, he is attributed with popularizing its neck carry, too, a skill he learned from nurses who carried their scissors around their neck for convenience in the far northern Canadian Bush.

The Scandinavian grind is a single bevel on a knife blade, making it very easy for sharpening. The large, meaty edge acts as a guide on the stone, and it works wood very well. This knife and others with a similar style are common among primitive skills experts and survival enthusiasts due to their affordability, use as an entry-level knife and their ergonomic, comfortable design.







1) Mors as he stands for a cover shot, presenting his Bush Knots DVD, showcasing the most common and useful knots based upon solid field experience. 2) An entire building is dedicated to Mors' copious notes, cataloging information and diagrams that he's found in books, periodicals and elsewhere. Each subject is clearly labeled, and it is common to find multiple notebooks and binders on a single subject. 3) Hanging out with Mors is an interesting experience, as he never misses a beat to teach something new. Here, he started hitting rocks together to show a way to split them, making an edge. 4) Using a sharp knife, it is easy to get to dry wood and make tinder thin enough to catch a flame, called feather sticks or fuzz sticks. Mors is very good at making these quickly.



## WILDWOOD PROFESSOR

into a career that would allow him to fulfill his love of the outdoors and teaching.

### Survival Savant

It was at 32 years of age when Mors' true passion was realized as a full-time outdoor instructor at the University of Alberta, where he spent more than 22 years as assistant professor, all the while taking full advantage of the massive library. He also continued to freelance, teaching wilderness living skills for high schools and other groups. Later in his career, he taught tens of thousands of schoolchildren, mostly kindergarten to sixth grade. However, there

is far more to Kochanski the field instructor, as he is truly a scholar of survival.

Those who know of Mors have likely heard the affinity he has for literature. For many years, books have lined the walls of almost every room in his house, quite literally adding thermal mass against the cold Alberta winters. It was incredible seeing the sheer volume of books in the survival section alone, as well as everything else he has collected and read over the years. As our feet crunched in the freshly laid snow heading towards his homestead's other buildings, it became apparent that this outdoor academic was in a league all his own. Building

## MORS KOCHANSKI AT A GLANCE

### Original Works, Inventions & Skills:

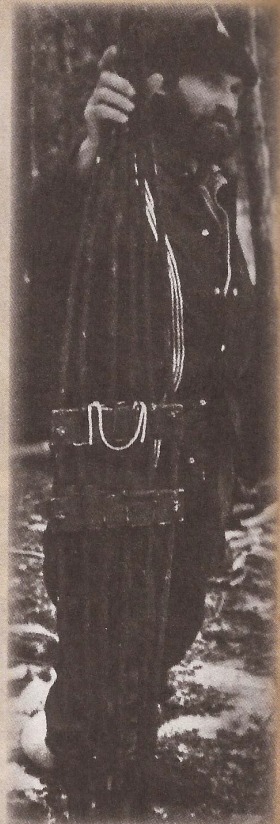
- The "super shelter" and its many forms
- The deluxe bush bed
- The flip-flop winch
- The parabolic single-hole method in a bow drill fire board
- The finger test for hypothermic incapacity

### Promoting & Developing Tom Roycraft's Work:

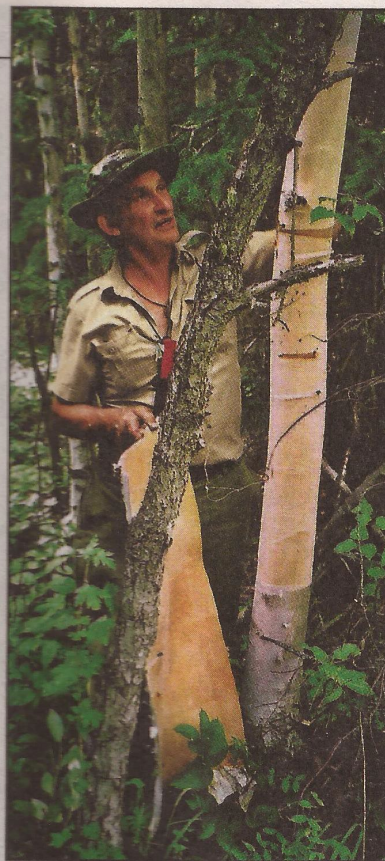
- Roycraft ski-shoe
- Roycraft pack frame
- Roycraft signal fire
- Roycraft survival scarf
- The jam-knot lash with paracord line
- The parachute conical shelter with an interior open fire

### Promoting & Defining:

- Scandinavian-type knife use and sharpening
- Proper survival clothing
- The importance of sleep in survival
- Firecraft: fire size, tinder and kindling defined
- The knots useful in survival, including the constrictor and the cowboy bowline
- Survival fasting
- The refinement of the construction and use of the open lean-to
- The use of the baton with knife operations
- Defining survival knives and saws
- The use of the try-stick in knife skills
- The use of rope-making hooks
- The bush-built bucksaw
- Safe axmanship



Mors finds snowshoes highly important for his neck of the woods. A variety of skills are needed in order to make your own.



A specialist in Boreal forest wilderness living skills, Mors is fond of teaching about tree and plant identification for everything from food to fire to medicine and even making shoes.

after building was overflowing with books, both shelved and stacked, each in distinct categories covering ecology, history, architecture, medicine, zoology and everything in between. The floors of one building had begun to sink due to the weight.

In yet another building, erected solely for the purpose of organizing information, hundreds of binders were spanning the length of the room in many rows on multiple shelves, each collated by specific outdoor subject. A closer examination showed photocopies, notes, clippings, pictures, newspaper articles and excerpts from magazines on every single point of outdoor knowledge one could think of, and then some. The cataloging of this information reflected decades of studious research to a degree that seems superhuman. It's no wonder you can get steamrolled by the amount of information from Mors.

Ask any of Kochanski's former adult students and they will attest to the inexhaustible fervor in which he teaches. Mors will spend an entire day and continue well



into the night enlightening his students with copious amounts of woods knowledge. But his knowledge is much more than the practical skills. From our hikes in the forest, our adventure into the Rocky Mountains and especially by delving into his library and writings, we experienced the art, science and spirit of the forest through Mors' philosophy of outdoor life.

### Sharing A Gift

Ask any good teacher and they will tell you who is their mentor. If they don't, proceed with caution. Mors met his mentor in 1968, a civilian survival instructor for the Royal Canadian Air Force by the name of Tom Roycraft. "I soon realized that Tom spoke of many things not found in the camping books of the day," Mors recalled. Shortly after, both Mors and Tom co-instructed on survival and wilderness skills for the Canadian Department of National Defense Survival School. Mors loved teaching, describing it as a way "to organize your knowledge and exercise your skill with constant repetition."

In addition to the accumulation of instructor experience, an insatiable appetite for books and endless hours of researching everything from primitive cultures to medicine, it wasn't long before Mors teamed up in

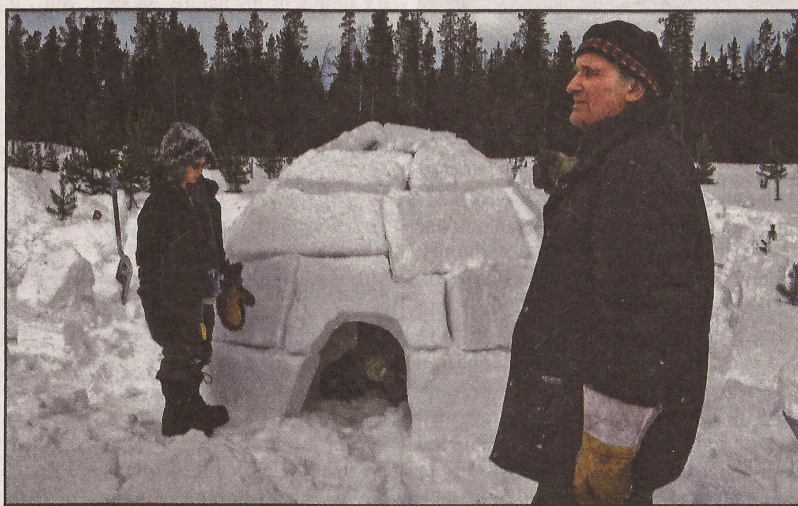
1976 with Don Bright to publish *Wilderness Arts and Recreation* magazine. Using Richard Graves' Australian book *Bushcraft* as an example, publisher Grant Kennedy asked Mors to compose an outdoor skills book for the north.

### TEACHING NEW TALENT

*"In 1991, near the beginning of my career as a survival instructor, I had the good fortune of spending three weeks training one on one with Mors Kochanski. In that short time he shaped my training context, my teaching methodology, my mindset, my career and my future. Being young, naïve and broke, my payment to him for this priceless gift was a case of tuna fish and a bundle of seep willow for fire-making. He accepted it graciously as if it were a chest of gold. Such is the heart of Mors. He is my Yoda, and I will forever be his biggest groupie."*

—Cody Lundin, survival instructor, author and television personality

In the middle of the Canadian backcountry, in a cold shack aptly named the "book factory" by his two children, a true author was born. It was here that *Northern Bushcraft*, one of the most highly regarded



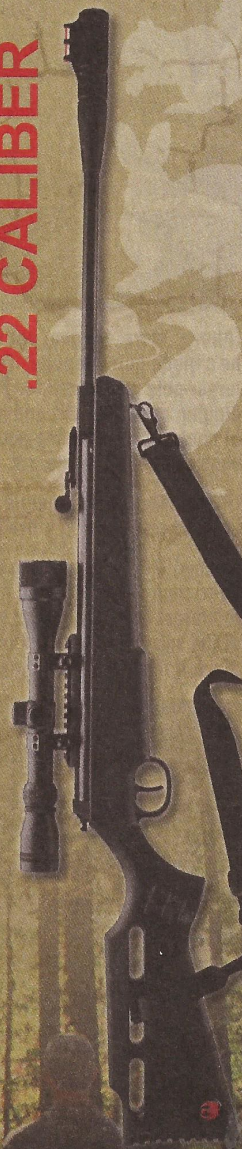
Here, Mors is instructing on how to make a proper igloo. Mors has instructed over 50,000 children in his 40 years of teaching.

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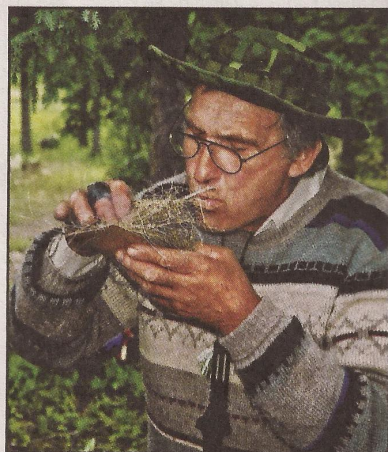
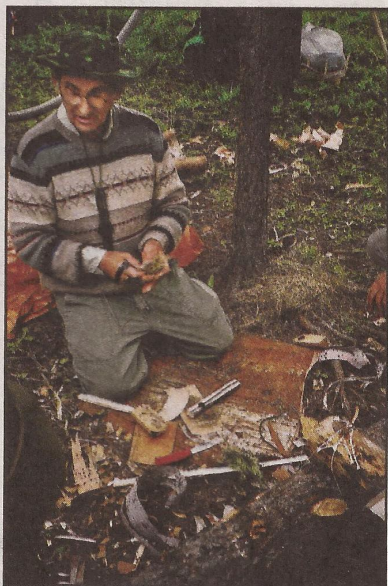
## WILDWOOD PROFESSOR



(Above) Mors' survival pot is another thing he's made quite popular. The use of these larger pots works well for boiling water, digging snow and dirt and holding most of one's gear inside the pot. Here, Mors shows Joe his favorite pot.

(Right) Mors, with a gentle touch, is shown blowing and coaxing a fire from a coal.

(Below) Mors preparing to teach a fire-by-friction class. He uses material from the forest around him and his knowledge of the science behind the process to teach it in a more expedient manner.



books on outdoor skills and wilderness survival, was penned. This was no easy task, as the book had to be fewer than 300 pages long, so only the absolute most fundamental skills and tools were presented.

While there are many books on outdoor skills and survival, *Northern Bushcraft* (now simply known as *Bushcraft*) was different. Many books simply "speak of" skills, but Mors' book showed why and how to do so in a safe manner. Tested and matter of fact, whole chapters were dedicated to firecraft, axecraft, knifecraft, sawcraft, bindcraft, sheltercraft and more. Readers were impressed with the copious yet succinct details of information on the most practical of skills an outdoorsman should know. *Northern Bushcraft* became an instant classic.

The book is but one of the many facets of Mors' success. He is also known for his earlier writings, booklets, appearances and mentoring of some well-known instructors. More recently, Mors has teamed up with Randy and Lori Breeuwsma, the owners/operators of Karamat Wilderness Ways, where he continues to teach a variety of survival classes that are respected on a global level. Also with Karamat (Karamat.com), Mors has produced a variety of skill DVDs, booklets and instructional videos for YouTube.

### Guiding Force

Today, if a course or instructor has a solid foundation in modern survival skills or bushcraft, the odds are they are teaching a skill or ideal that Mors had a heavy hand in influencing and/or developing, whether they know it or not. Very few can comprehend what 40-plus years of outdoor education experience in the field is like, and fewer still can add the exhaustive research Mors has added to that experience. We can tell you, however, when you spend time with Mors, you will know in your heart that his wild-wood wisdom is genuine and you will trust in his guidance.

Through all those years of experience and accumulated knowledge that Mors has, he will understand your aptitude for woodcraft and survival better than you know it yourself. Subsequently, this humble man can't help but to try to guide you towards what he believes is in your best interest; it's simply in his nature. As such, you will

“...we experienced  
the art, science and  
spirit of the forest  
through Mors’  
philosophy of  
outdoor life.”



be hard pressed to find a better teacher to inspire you in the right direction. A sage is a person of profound wisdom, and that is the absolute definition of Mors. For more on Mors, including additional achievements and videos, visit [masterwoodsmen.com](http://masterwoodsmen.com). ★



Chris Noble continued this article on his Master Woodsman site. Here is the link:

[American Frontiersman Article](#)