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Mors Kochanski, "Bushcraft" and his 16 Bushcraft pamphlets

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- Skills and guides - Library -



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Description :

Mors Kochanski's "Bushcraft, Outdoor Skills and Wilderness Survival" is an excellent text. However, there are wilderness skills that are not covered in this book. Kochanski, has produced sixteen, 32 page, pocket sized pamphlets that supplement his main text. This review will touch on these supplements.

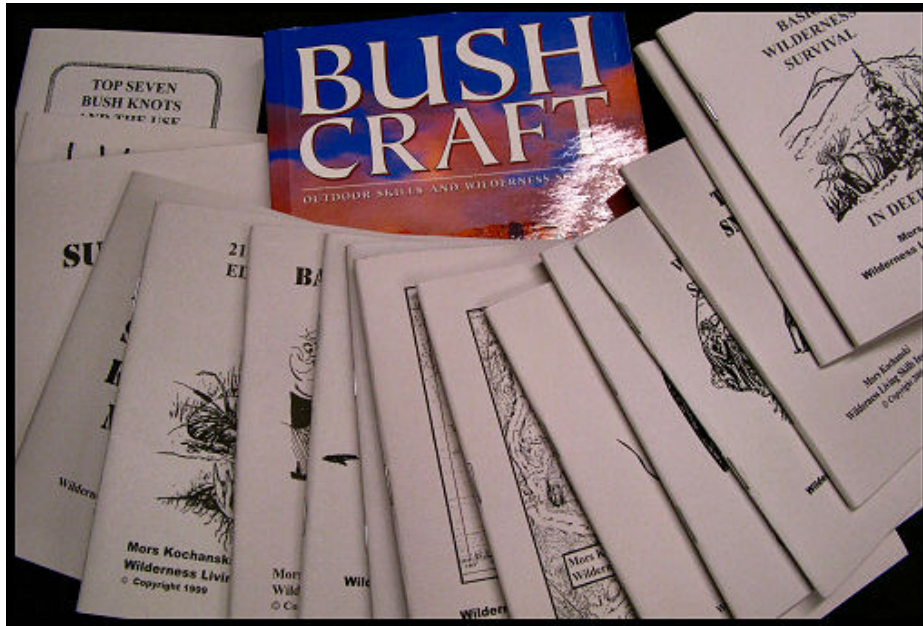
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James has a mini-review of [Bushcraft, Outdoor Skills and Wilderness Survival](#) on the magazine. And I have quoted out a portion of this text to illustrate the [Skookum Bush Tool](#), a knife made by Rod Garcia.

I think of all the bushcraft books I have read, Mors Kochanski has produced about the best book on the subject in his main text. I have always been curious about his series of small booklets that cover many areas where *Bushcraft* has either no coverage or minimal coverage. In a number of posts on various forums from folks who have taken courses with Mors, I have seen a number of skills discussed or illustrated that just are not covered in *Bushcraft*.

So I ordered the complete set of these pamphlets from Ben's Backwoods.



The titles are:

1. **Basic Wilderness Survival in Deep Snow**
2. **The Northern Night Sky**
3. **Wilderness Steam Bath**
4. **The Inuit Snow House**
5. **The Two Kilogram Survival Kit Field Manual**
6. **Survival Kit Ideas**
7. **Basic Netting**
8. **Top Seven Bush Knots and the Use of the Windlass**
9. **Tools of Survival and Survival Training**
10. **Knife Sharpening**
11. **Map Use**
12. **The Compass**
13. **Basic Wilderness Survival in Cold Lacking Snow**
14. **When You Meet a Black Bear**
15. **Basic Weather Knowledge**
16. **21 Native Wild Edible Plants**

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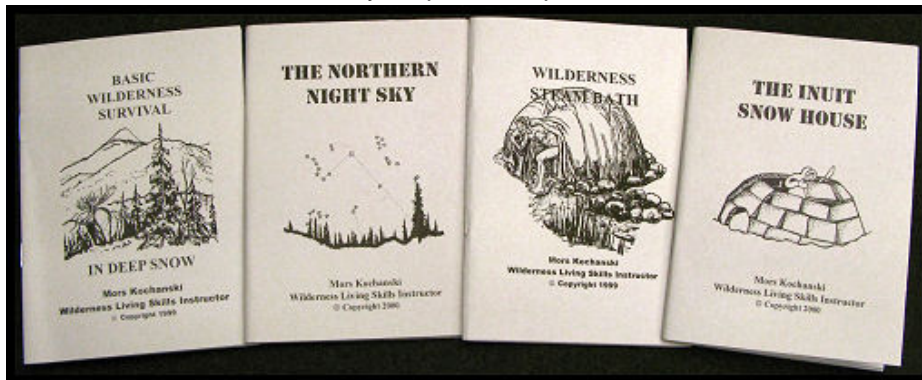
Of these booklets I find more than half of them are covering material not present in *Bushcraft*, this includes the survival kits, skills and training topics; snow house; steam bath; netting; map and compass; and black bear.

Bushcraft is mainly focused on detailed use of tools and skill development. Skills chapters cover: firecraft, axecraft, knifecraft, sawcraft, bindcraft, and sheltercraft. Information chapters cover: birches, conifers, willows, shrubs, moose and varying hare.

In each of these chapters very detailed skills are illustrated for these aspects of bushcraft. However you can see from this chapter list that a number of aspects of outdoor living/enjoyment are not covered. One of the wide open areas not covered is clothing. Navigation along with some very specific skills like snowshoe making are also not touched upon in *Bushcraft*.

So I am guessing that over the years that Mors has taught his outdoor skills classes, he has developed these series of small pamphlets to cover some of the 'missing' areas of *Bushcraft* or to introduce new tools and skills.

In this review I will very briefly touch on each of the booklets topics and, since the pamphlets are sized for pocket carry, provide my assessment of the booklets utility for pocket or pack.



***Basic Wilderness Survival in Deep Snow* 1999, revised 2006**

The booklet seems to be the introductory text for the survival topic. In *Bushcraft* it can be argued that Mors sort of skips over many specific aspects of survival, but that all the topics he does cover really contain, at the root level, survival skills. This booklet more specifically addresses clothing, (which is completely lacking in *Bushcraft*, and then reiterates snow shelters, introduces bush made snowshoes, and introduces some specific medical maladies associated with snow travel. This little booklet combines some skills found in *Bushcraft* with this specific focus:

Two objectives for survival. Can you make yourself comfortable enough to sleep at least eight hours out of the day by dressing adequately, using a warming fire and building a suitable shelter? Can you obtain enough water to meet your body's needs?

This booklet is an excellent supplement to *Bushcraft* as it addresses proper clothing along with shelter and fire as the basic tools necessary for enjoyment of the outdoors. A good booklet to carry, certainly a good booklet to read..

Note: this booklet is a companion to: *Basic Wilderness Survival in Cold Lacking Snow and Tools of Survival and Survival Training*.

***The Northern Night Sky* 2000, revised 2004**

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I don't know much about star gazing, but this text seems to at least spark an interest. I have to say this quote about star watching is pretty good:

There may be some merit in bringing a friend or date, especially when you know enough about the stars to make things interesting. For an exceptional date, study the heavens on the nights when meteor showers are predicted. When this booklet has done enough for you, you may wish to bone up on the stores behind the stars and the constellations to enhance the situation even more.

This booklet should be in the pocket of any budding lothario&.actually it is very interesting and worth having along on clear nights. Of all the titles in this series of 16, this one may just be the best for expansion of the mind&and romantic advancements.

Wilderness Steam Bath 1999

This is really a how-to to steam bath construction and use.

The wilderness steam bath or sweat lodge as used by the North American Plains Indians correctly done adds zest to every wilderness activity.

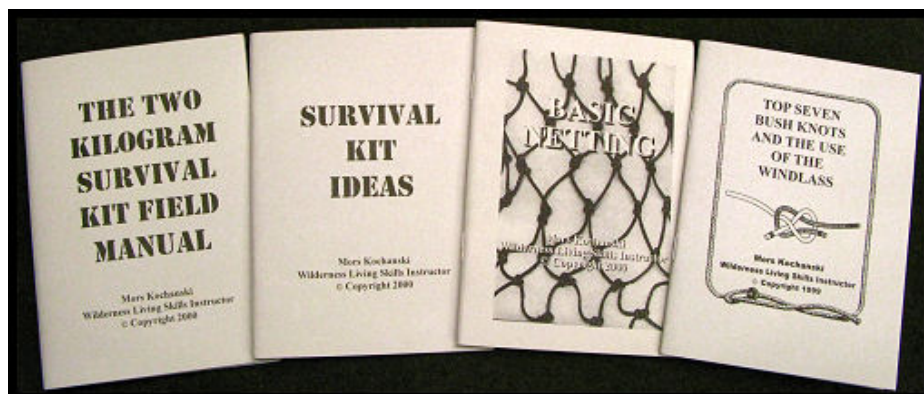
From using the right frame wood, heating the rocks, to the actual sweating, Mors seems to cover this well. Not likely a booklet I would ever carry or for that matter ever use, but an interesting topic none-the-less and seems to be covered quite well.

The Inuit Snow House 2000

This booklet greatly expands upon the snow shelters presented in *Bushcraft*. In *Bushcraft*, he only covers a Quinze and snow cave as snow based shelters.

The snow house meets most of the requirements of the ideal shelter. It is well insulated and easily warmed; it is sound proof, wind proof, and as dry as any shelter can be un the circumstances.

This booklet presents the process of building an igloo well, and carefully addresses the proper three-point contact of the blocks. I think this is likely one of the better discussion of making an igloo that I have ever seen. This would be a nice text to carry if igloo building was on the agenda, it makes for a good read and is a definite supplement to *Bushcraft*.



The Two Kilogram Survival Kit Field Manual 2000 revised 2004

This booklet seems to be the meat of the tools and skills presented in other titles in this series. This booklet covers several areas that I have seen discussed in on-line forums but not discussed as such in *Bushcraft*. The basics of his 2kg kit comprise 12 items ranging from a cooking container to nylon bivi sack. The majority of this booklet is spent on the Super Shelter concept which is more briefly touched upon in *Tools of Survival and Survival Training*. Snow surface fire, ski-shoes (stick snowshoes), and improvised frames for a saw and pack take up the rest of the pages. This booklet likely covers much of what he offers in student training. His emphasis is on some basic items used for purpose. This booklet is meant to be used in conjunction with 3 other booklets.

This manual pre-supposes that you are familiar with the knowledge contained in Basic Wilderness Survival in Deep Snow, Basic Wilderness Survival in Cold Lacking Snow, and Tools of Survival and Survival Training.

This title, along with the other three, seems to me to form the basis of Mors' Survival topic area. Some of the material in these four titles can be found in *Bushcraft* but this presentation pulls it all together.

Survival Kit Ideas 2000 revised 2004

This booklet is a more open ended discourse on survival kits in general rather than in specifics. He discusses kit suitability to the environment and various items that are or are not suitable for a kit to contain. For instance:

The effectiveness of a kit component should not be sacrificed in the name of compactness. Tool design and size is an important consideration. Some kits include a small cup taking the place of a pot and a wire saw as the main wood cutting implement. When you are hypothermic, tired, and hungry, garroting your wood is the last thing you need to do when the biggest, best designed Swede saw is barely adequate. How can a razor blade do the work of a sturdy knife?

This booklet has this sort of think and plan philosophy spread throughout it. He emphasizes taking a kit appropriate to the circumstances rather than a single kit likely not specifically designed for the expected environment. Other aspects of living outdoors are covered again using specific examples. Overall I rate this booklet high&it has an good solid eyeopener approach to survival kit ideas. He also introduces The Survival Scarf &.what is to a homemade nylon bivi sack. Not a carry booklet but a definite read and covering new territory (for Mors) and therefore a good supplement to *Bushcraft*.

Basic Netting 2000

This booklet is the primary reason I ordered all 16 of these. I have encountered a number of posts on various forums from students talking about making a netting needle and weaving a net with Mors. I recently found some net making texts at my local library, made a couple of needles and tried my hand at weaving a net. Mors does a very commendable job in this booklet. While the drawing are not quite as clear as Graumont and Wenstrom's *Fisherman's Knots and Nets* it is really pretty close. Net making is a skill that I have had a hard time understanding after several studies of methods posted on the internet, and I was only successful after trial and study of Graumont and Wenstrom's work, so I find this little booklet from Mors as being quite a good resource.

Netting is closely related to weaving, knitting, and plaiting. A net may be seen as a fabric where threads of the material are knotted to form a mesh. Some practical applications of knowing how to net are making and repairing of fish nets, landing nets, net bags, hammocks and scarves.

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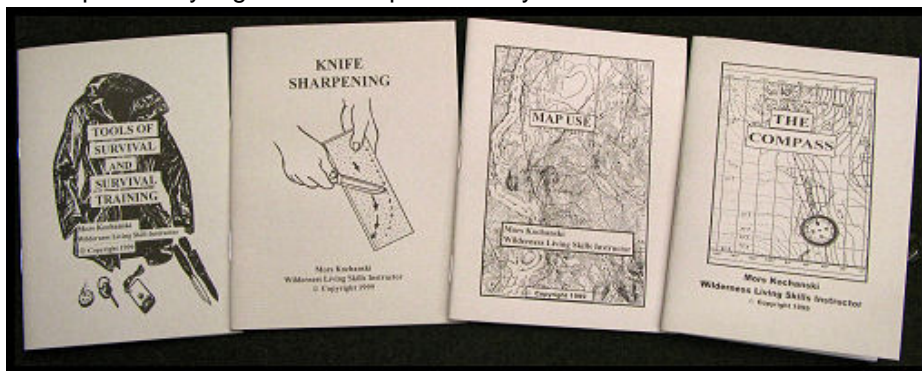
This pamphlet would definitely make my list for pocket carry should I ever want to try my hand at field making a net.

Top Seven Bush Knots and the Use of the Windlass 1999 reprinted 2006

This booklet again is a supplement to *Bushcraft*. Mors covers a nice selection of useful knots: jam, constrictor, clove, sheet bend, larks head, non-inverting bowline, reef, parbuckle, butterfly, prusik, taut-line hitch, three derivations of the windlass, and the Alberta rescue hitch & several more than 7 but I assume Mors classifies some of these as derivatives of each other.

A rope is useless unless there is at least one knot in it. Rope work, knots and cordage are an important skill in wilderness living skill and survival.

Overall this pamphlet has decent drawings and Mors presents potential use scenarios for the various knots quite well. A good booklet and potentially a good one for pocket carry.



Tools of Survival and Survival Training 1998 revised 2006

Of all the booklets this one seems to offer the most material for use as an emergency reference pocket book. He covers clothing, fire, knife, first aid kit, map and compass, sleeping bag and mat, cooking pot, shelter, signals, axe, saw, shovel, cordage and an improvised pack. The booklet seems to cover a few of the techniques I have read about from student of his courses. Batoning down a tree by pounding a knife into it repeatedly and constructing a super shelter (a bent bough frame shelter covered with polyethylene, parachute material with mylar reflective material blankets) both are skills that a number of students have referred to in on-line forums. Neither are covered in *Bushcraft*. Minor criticisms & Mors incorrectly refers to a ferrocerium firesteel as a zirconium rod, and his flint and steel technique using a knife as the steel shows a technique where the sparks are supposed to fall upon the char cloth. I have never been able to make this technique work as the sparks do not fall to the tinder but jump up and over the stone, and even if they did fall seem never to have enough heat after going that distance to the char to get a coal. I find holding the char on the stone is a more reliable method.

With a pot you can melt snow, boil and carry water and measure intake. A pot of seven cup capacity with a tight fitting lid is recommended.

Overall this is a good booklet for pocket carry, and much of the content is not covered in *Bushcraft*. Note: this booklet is a companion to: *Basic Wilderness Survival in Deep Snow* and *Basic Wilderness Survival in Cold Lacking Snow*

Knife Sharpening 1999 revised 2007

The booklet expands upon *Bushcraft*. I would estimate that about half of the contents are covered in *Bushcraft* and much of the rest is alluded to in the main text, but here very explicit advice and instruction on knife sharpening is covered in detail. The use of sandpaper boards is new to this discussion and definitely a good expansion to the sharpening presented in *Bushcraft*

A knife edge sharpened to shave wood well cuts anything but it take a lot of time and effort to achieve and maintain this type of edge. A razors edge can be attained very quickly by the use of sub-bevels, but these sub-bevels make this edge useless for shaving wood for feather sticks or slicing the bark off a pole or stick

A very good expansion to Mors work in *Bushcraft*, not a carry book for me but definitely an excellent companion to *Bushcraft*.

Map Use 1999 revised 2007

In contrast to my remarks concerning *The Compass* I find this small pocket pamphlet to likely be a very handy thing to have along in Canada. This text has a number of pages of basic terrain definitions followed by short discussion of the grid system of position description. Some basics of understanding contours and other map symbols follow. An overview of the survey systems in use in Alberta (sections) and some of the boundary marking monuments makes this text valuable in that area. Like *The Compass* below I would recommend Kals or Kjellström s texts over this for pure map reading and understanding, but this booklet does have some useful information, and particularly for Alberta.

Contours: The contour method of indicating relief denotes heights and slopes and represents gross land forms with some degree of mathematical exactitude. A close study of contours will allow you to interpolate many things that a map does not record.

This topic is not covered in *Bushcraft*. I would be unlikely to carry this outside of Alberta.

The Compass 1999 revised 2007

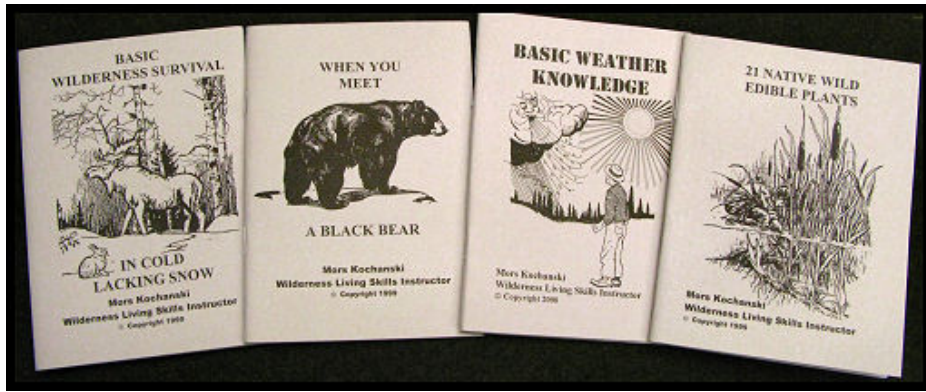
This booklet is probably the weakest of the series in my view. First off, Mors opens the text with a discussion of native ability to navigate and states that *Practically anyone could develop this sixth sense if they had the time* . While I think it is true that anyone spending enough time in a certain location develops navigation ability&.it is navigation ability for that area, not necessarily for any other area. The ability to observe nature s signs are a transferable ability, but again I do not think one just can have a sixth sense. That being said, Mors launches in to declination, the stars, and types of compasses and compass use. These areas of discussion are minimal but sound. The minimal aspect of this booklet is likely why I find it the hardest of the set to recommend. Proper map and compass use I think comes from practice and about the best text I know of that offers practice and very readable text is the classic Björn Kjellström, *Be Expert with Map and Compass*. This tiny pocket pamphlet cannot be that of course, but I do think this topic suffers from the minimal size. Some of the best parts of this from Mors is really once again about environmental awareness.

Look as far into the bush as possible. When you are amongst trees continually scan the distance where the ground becomes obscured from sight by trees. (The penetration distance). This is not done just for the one hundred eighty degrees in front of you but for the whole three hundred sixty degrees around you.

Due to this booklets limited size I would likely not carry it, but as a supplement to a good map and compass text, the

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bush observation skills alone make it a good read. This topic area is not covered in *Bushcraft*



Basic Wilderness Survival in Cold Lacking Snow 1999 revised 2006

This pamphlet primarily covers shelters and fires that allow one to survive in the cold. These aspects of this booklet are covered in detail in *Bushcraft*, but here are condensed to the basics. A collection of other topics are added to this one to round it out. Signal mirrors and fires, making a tin whistle, ground to air signals, hydration, living off the land, marking a trail, and basic cord making all topics minimally covered.

If you can make yourself comfortable enough to sleep about eight hours daily and if you drink enough water to meet your body's needs, you have it made

Overall this little booklet has a lot to offer. As part of a basic kit it has good advice and covers a multitude of basics from shelter to signaling. This is a pocket book that I may carry. While much of the shelter and firecraft aspects are covered in *Bushcraft* this one is really designed as a pocket reference guide.

Note: this booklet is a companion to: *Basic Wilderness Survival in Deep Snow and Tools of Survival and Survival Training*.

When You Meet a Black Bear 1999

This booklet covers many aspects of bear encounters and follows the advice generally given for the most part, proper storage of food and cooking procedures, watching the environment for bear sign, staying calm, no running, rolling up and protecting your neck, backing away, making some noise etc. It minimally covers defensive use of pepper spray, discusses The Bear Bat & a stout stick and a forceful blow to the bear's nose, shotgun, bear bangers and other deterrent measures. It may be one of the better discussions of bear habitat, foods and recognition of potential bear encounters. It ends with this:

With bears, the imagination tends to run wild.

This again is an area not covered in *Bushcraft*. I would likely not carry this booklet, but as pretrip reading it is seems a decent overview, particularly in the area of avoidance of an encounter by recognition of bear habitat or signs of one in the area.

Basic Weather Knowledge 2000 revised 2004

This booklet discusses weather patterns and phenomena that affect central and western Canada. The basics of air

movements and temperature affects are covered in a basic manner. I particularly like the inclusion of folk sayings and observations that have validity to prediction of weather.

Red sky at night, Sailors delight! Red sky in the morning, Sailors take warning! Mors states this is the most useful weather proverb you can learn.

When the dew is on the grass, Rain will never come to pass. When grass is dry at morning light, Look for rain before the night!

Many more of these are scattered through the text, and then explained in the context of Canadian weather patterns. Overall this booklet is quite enjoyable and while likely quite useful to the western central regions of Canada it seems to cover the conventional wisdom for the western US also. Once out of the temperate regions though its use would be limited. I would likely not carry this booklet but it would make good camp reading. This topic is not covered in *Bushcraft*.

21 Native Wild Edible Plants 1999 revised 2007

Native Wild Edible Plants of the Spruce-Moose Forest. In this booklet Mors discusses Living off the Land, Using Wild Edible Plants, Positive Identification, Dining and Acclimatization to Wild Plant foods in the first seven pages of the pamphlet. This is an area of outdoor pursuit that I have very little knowledge. His opening statement:

You will live longer by fasting if:

1. *You use up more energy in obtaining food than you get back in eating it*
2. *You cannot obtain at least 1,000 Calories daily*
3. *If you cannot find 500g of carbohydrate daily as well*

These seem like good rules on the surface&.but because they are very specific to Calories and grams of carbohydrate I think that the discussion of the 21 plants that can be used for food may want to have at least a general statement of just how many Calories and grams of carbs they may provide in a reasonably sized serving. Once Mors launches into the 21 plants I think he has done a good job in providing the ability to find, identify and utilize the food. The booklet has only B&W line drawings for identification which do limit its pocket usefulness without some sort of other knowledge. The plants covered are: cattail, bear root, wild roses, stinging nettle, marsh marigold, fireweed, cow parsnip, sedges, timothy, silver weed, aspen, lodgepole pine/jack pine, thistles, wild onions, coltsfoot, bulrush or tule, Labrador tea, violets, curly dock, mountain and sheep sorrel. Cautions are stated for several of these. I would likely not carry this book in my pocket, but it would make a nice companion to a color plant Identification book. This booklet supplements *Bushcraft*.

Resources

[Ben's Backwoods](#), a very nice site with a good selection of items ranging from knife blanks to books. He sells these booklets and Mors *Bushcraft* at good prices. I have seen these 32 page booklets listed on Amazon from resellers at huge prices....Ben sells 4-booklet sets at just under \$12 for the four. All 16 of these supplements to *Bushcraft* add up to more than the book itself, but their content for the most parts adds to Mors book and makes them worth the cost.

Ben is very fast at answering email queries; his shipping is very reasonable and free for orders over \$100.

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Let Ben know you are a member of JM's Outdoor-Magazine when you order....it will be worth it.

[Mors Kochanski's site](#). His booklets, some on-line articles in pdf format, other books and items of interest can be found here. Mors sells the booklets at \$3 each. He also has the 17th booklet in the series *The Simple Cattail Doll*, which I have not read.

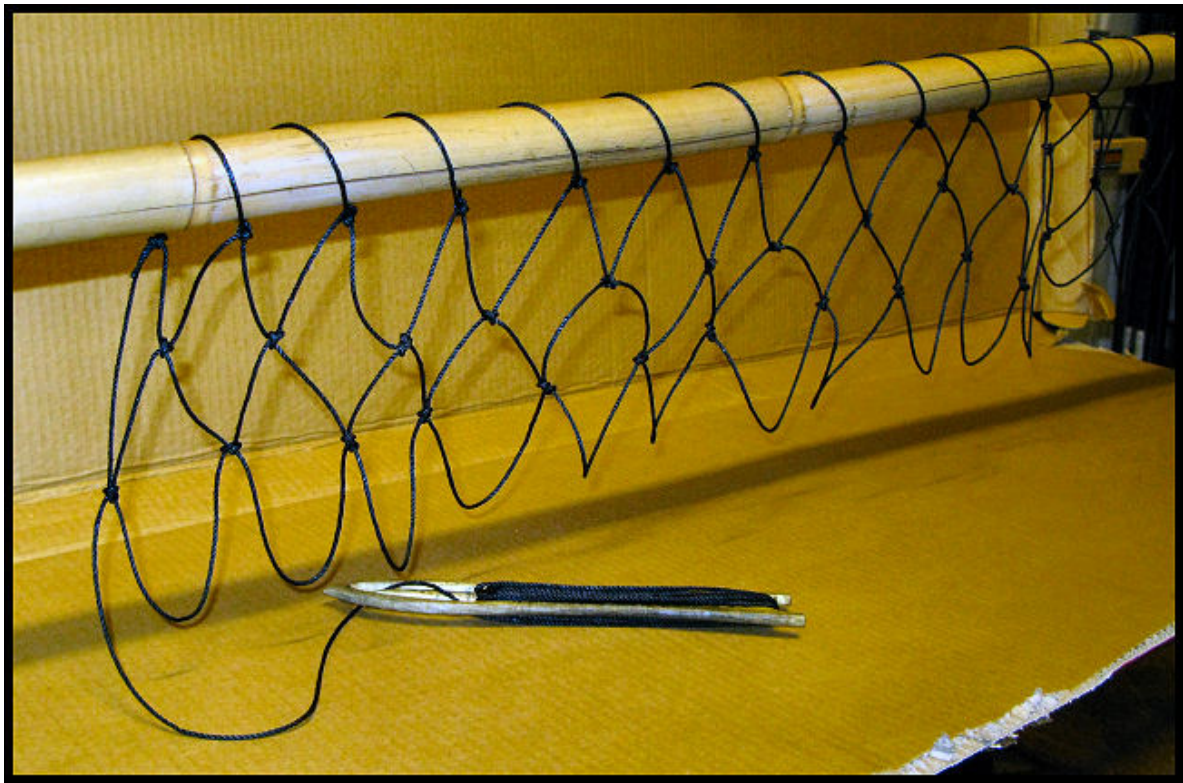
Other Recommended Books for skills presented in this series of Mors pamphlets

[Fisherman's Knots and Nets](#) by Raoul Graumont and Elmer Wenstrom, Cornell Maritime Press, 1948. This text illustrated net making in an easy and straightforward manner. A host of knots are also illustrated very well. This can be purchased from Amazon in paper for about \$9. Well worth the price even though Mors netmaking and knot booklets are quite good.

Here are my first attempts at net needle making and net weaving based on Graumont and Wenstrom's illustrations but inspired by Mors.



Mors Inspired net needle Skookum carver by Rod Garcia



First Attempts

And two navigation books that I think are much more complete compared to Mors tiny booklets. I have a [short review on the magazine](#) of these.

[Land Navigation Handbook: The Sierra Club Guide to Map, Compass and GPS](#) by WS Kals, Sierra Club Books, 2005. Probably one of my favorite navigation books that goes a bit beyond the basics.

[Be Expert with Map and Compass: The Complete Orienteering Handbook](#) by Björn Kjellström, Wiley, 1994. Certainly the gold standard for map and compass training. The starting place for all in my view.

Post-scriptum :

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Ver 1.5 03/04/2008 Fini