

Woodcraft

John Rhyder

Chris Eyles

Walking, camping, fishing, geocaching, investigating plants and animals and just wombling in the woods are all things you will find Chris Eyles doing whilst trying to pass his love of the outdoors on to his young son, who often proves better at them than his dad. Chris also aspires to write a book for children about the folklore of trees.



AUTHOR PROFILE

Founder and Head Instructor at Woodcraft School, John Rhyder is a specialist in wildlife tracking, natural history, ethnobotany and bushcraft. All of which is ably demonstrated in a great book.

Normally I am quite a fast reader, but I really found myself reading this book quite slowly as I sought to take in all the details. Added to which it's a weighty piece of work, coming in at just shy of four hundred pages, so it's substantial in every sense of the word.

I particularly enjoyed the first chapter on felling trees, which was detailed, but at the same time simply put, which is not an easy thing to achieve. The book continues in the same vein with chapters on how to choose, use and maintain tools, the number of which John deliberately keeps small – after all, who is going to have a bench saw when they are out in the woods?

From there it moves on how to use the various parts of trees, which trees are best for which purpose and such. As well as a large chapter on bow-making, which John is particularly expert at, it covers carving, uses of bark, roots and withies, glue, dye, ink and charcoal making and after a good chapter on tree identification and structure, rounded up with a section on ropes and knots.

Throughout, it is clear that John's knowledge is based on a good deal of practical experience and the book readily shares that "hands-on" learning. Alongside this advice there are plenty of personal anecdotes, sometimes serving as a warning, sometimes raising a laugh, sometimes even both.

I've learned from many teachers down the years and for me the best are those who despite vast knowledge, wear that knowledge lightly and do not take themselves too seriously. John, I'm sure falls into that category, being willing to laugh at himself and also freely admitting to not being perfect, for instance not keeping his tools in pristine condition.

This is a very practical book, written in a very engaging tone, with good photos to support the text and has a warmth that stops it feeling like a manual. The rear covers says the book is "suitable for the student of

woodcraft, the naturalist and the practitioner of bushcraft" and in that, if I can use an archery metaphor, it scores a bullseye.

