
Event review: 1st Annual Outdoors Without Limits (OWL) knap-in, Comer, Georgia, U.S.A.

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In June of 2014, Outdoors Without Limits (OWL), a national non-profit organization that promotes awareness and teamwork between disabled and non-disabled individuals, sponsored their first knap-in and primitive skills gathering. The event took place in the small town of Comer located in the northeast corner of the state of Georgia, USA. The Madison county fairgrounds provided the venue and ample space for the event. Experts in flintknapping, traditional bow making, flintlock firearms, primitive furniture, hide working, wood carving, ceramics, food processing, falconry, and blacksmithing were in attendance and demonstrated their skills. A small fee was charged for admission and all of the proceeds went towards OWL programs that provide outdoor opportunities to disabled sportsmen and veterans.

Flintknappers from Georgia and the surrounding states were invited to setup at the knap-in and asked to teach their skills to disabled veterans interested in learning the art of flintknapping. Well over twenty flintknappers attended the event and shared their knowledge, tools, and stone with the eager and interested veterans. Many brought their wares for show and sale while others attended with only their tools and flintknapping in mind.

The author had the pleasure of working with a young marine who came to the event specifically to learn about the manufacture of handaxes. He is currently enrolled in an anthropology program. For his class project, he chose to study how and if language played a role in the process of learning and making handaxes. The experimental archaeological methodology he developed was interesting and fitting for the project. While at the knap-in, he not only had access to experts, he was able to get the stone and tools he needed for the project. The author hopes that the experience and insight he gained from our lesson informs his study and inspires his work.

The people who attended the event heard about it from numerous sources; the local newspaper and radio stations both helped advertise the knap-in. The role that social media played also seemed to be a key factor in helping to get the word out about the event.

While the impetus of the event was education, a certain social outlet was also created by the knap-in. The knappers in attendance, for the most part, all knew each other via other events they attend throughout the year. The camaraderie between many of these individuals shows close friendships, trust, humour, and respect that tend to go hand in hand with primitive skills worldwide. The overlap between the various skillsets of the demonstrators made for interesting conversation and opportunities for experts to learn from each other.





Figure 1. Michael Miller (right) teaching handaxe manufacture. (Photo by Outdoors Without Limits.)



Figure 2. A selection of knapping material available for sale at the event. (Photo by Michael Miller.)