

Work Camp and Life

The Turtle Island Internship Program is best summed up by two words: Work Camp. This is a completely hands-on, get-dirty, team/community-oriented, you-do-work-for-experience trade. It's a volunteer position of servitude to help forward the vision of Eustace Conway's life work. It is a hard position. It is harder than what most people want to do. It takes a unique personality to want to give and put so much energy into such a steep growth curve of challenge. It is as similar to a passing rite as anything our culture has to offer, though the lifestyle, community, and organization here is certainly a counter-cultural type of experience.

The Turtle Island Internship is harder and more stressful than most internships. More will be asked of you than perhaps ever before in a foreign environment with potentially foreign ethics and all within a tiny community that forms your work, social, and familial network. We have values, standards, and a work ethic much like what was common 100 years ago, which is tremendously different from today's soft, spoiled, and ambiguous culture. The shock of going from normal, modern America into a serious, full-on work-camp is more than most people are ready for. If you decide to take on this challenge, we want you to succeed at it, and coming into it with a realistic, "on the same page" understanding instead of over-romanticized dreams is crucial to your/our success. We at Turtle Island can only assist you with the research to develop your understanding. It is your responsibility to get a realistic picture of what you are entering and committing yourself to.

Turtle Island is not Walden Pond, not some Crusoe-ian adventure, not Swiss Family Robinson, not *The Last American Man*, and certainly not the History Channel's *Mountain Men* TV show. Though we embrace, teach, and use primitive skills and tools, Turtle Island has and will continue to expand, evolve, and change. There are new buildings, new roads, motorized vehicles; there's modern machinery like chainsaws, backhoes, and heavy equipment; new technologies like micro-hydro electricity and solar panels. Some of the forest has given way to pasture and deliberate clearings for campsites, activities, and roads. We have a fleet of old farm trucks, as well as a "bone yard" where retired vehicles are parked and used for parts.

We grow some food, and the meat consumed here is often hunted, slaughtered, butchered, and processed on the preserve. Goats are milked on site, from which we make cheese and yogurt. In general, processed and pre-packaged foods are a rarity. However, we buy bulk goods and other amenities from stores in town, receive food donations from various organizations, and during camps, the greater part of our food is bought from a conventional grocery store.

Despite the changes, the vast majority of our time is spent outdoors. Our non-electrical Base Camp is where the interns live, visitors stay, and activities, classes, and workshops occur. Nacho Mamma's Café is our large outdoor kitchen where we gather and share meals, all of which are prepared in wood cook-stoves, open-fire hearths, or dutch ovens and are served in an all-you-can-eat, family-style setting. The taps and spigots in Base Camp deliver drinking water from our mountain well. We use kerosene lamps and candles for light, and fires for warmth, cooking, and heating water. Our visitors, interns, and residents stay in an assortment of shelters, usually without heat, though some have woodstoves. There are two main outhouses and a few bucket-style urinals. For bathing there is a wood-fired sauna next to the creek, as well as a showerhead in the woods that runs well water and is usually only used in summer. Interns go to town to use the internet, charge personal items (laptops, cell phones, and other devices using batteries), take hot showers, and to use a laundromat. Interns often walk, hitchhike, or rideshare if they do not come with their own vehicle.

As an intern, most of your time will be spent working for Eustace. This internship is not like a workshop or college where you pay a great sum of money to get catered to with a large amount of personal attention. This is a fourteen month, volunteer work-trade position, which means you are fed, housed, and given the attention of being led and directed through a barrage of work details on a daily basis. There are very few official classes taught by Eustace to the interns about primitive living, plant identification, or general sustainability. The classes, events, and programs described on our website are offered to our clients - people and organizations that pay tuition. You glean education from the doing of the day-to-day needs of the farm/homestead/education center. The diversity of tasks is endless, some very romantic, some very repetitive and mundane.

Usually the first three months of the internship are filled with the most menial work like picking up rocks and sticks. This time allows you to become in tune with Eustace's communication style and expectations, as well as to adjust to daily life at the preserve. Most young interns are impatient to be immediately involved in more complex tasks and be trusted with more responsibilities. You must be prepared for this three-month break-in period of developing knowledge, trust, and confidence. It is important to go slowly. Many things we do are dangerous. Our modern equipment can cost thousands of dollars to repair, and many of our antique tools are irreplaceable. An internship at Turtle Island necessitates a constant responsibility for expensive and one-of-a-kind equipment, as well as the safety of everyone around.

One young intern candidate was stocking firewood and trimming branches from trails. He had been doing this for over a week. He looked up at Eustace and said, "You are using me." He meant it in the most common, negative connotation as

in "I am not getting anything out of this. It is not fair." The fact is that Eustace's job *is* to 'use' the interns. Not in an abusive or unfair way, but as his workforce in the job of building and managing an education center, farm, and homestead on a nearly impossible budget. We need to get everything that we possibly can from every intern - yes, to 'use you.' You will be in a service position, volunteering for fourteen months to a small community and an impassioned, workaholic director/boss. It is his intention to push you beyond what you are familiar and comfortable with on a personal, mental, and physical level, to transform your awareness of what you and others are capable of, and, in the process, for the benefit of the team and the preserve, to get a lot done. Not everything will seem educational or romantic or fitting into the category of what you had pictured yourself busting your butt to learn. Some of it will not be interesting to you at all. But in the big picture, which is often hard for someone new to the preserve to see, it is all of educational benefit and usually helpful to everyone involved and beyond.

There is no such thing as a 'typical' work day. However, most days include animal care (horses, goats, chickens, ducks, dogs, cats), kitchen work (cooking, prepping, cleaning, dishwashing, wood chopping, preserving, butchering, sweeping, raking, composting, garden work, etc), as well as overall grounds-keeping (picking up rocks and sticks, road maintenance, auto repair, waste removal, recycling, sorting/organizing salvaged materials, stocking out-houses, repairing buildings/structures, clearing trails ... to name just a few). We do whatever needs to get done, working on one big project or on hundreds of smaller projects, depending on the weather, the time of year, and other continually changing factors. Most days we work from early in the morning until dark. Some days we work earlier in the morning until after dark. It is normal to work at least 12 hours a day. Many activities require hard physical labor and a close relationship with dirt, grease, oil, and grime. You will be filthy. You will be exhausted.

In the 'off-season' (not during camps) the workdays are usually broken into four days of focused labor, one day for rest, and two for personal interests, projects, and attention to individual needs. In most instances, Thursday-Sunday we work from about 7 a.m. until dark:thirty, taking a brief lunch and supper as a community. The days always begin and end with animal chores, for which interns are responsible on any and every day.

Monday is usually a day of rest. You will need it. Tuesday and Wednesday are often personal enrichment days where you have some free time to work on your own crafts or skills, making use of the facilities and resources at Turtle Island. Personal projects might include blacksmithing, woodworking, horseback riding, hunting, fiber arts, carpentry, woods lore, or any other of the many avenues available for study at Turtle Island. It is important to realize, however, that just because it is your 'day off,' there is no vacation from the necessities of managing a farm, homestead, and education center. Daily chores are indeed daily, and when extended camps come up, or we need to get hay in, or any other high-need time is designated by Eustace/administration, we will disregard the pattern of having Monday-Wednesday 'off.' Be aware and remember that even though you get familiar with the time off, it can be changed dependant upon need at any moment. Unlike a typical employment, overtime hours are not compensated if they are required.

During camp season (May-August), we mainly focus on the visitors and work for longer periods with camp activities. In this time, it is common to work 14 hours a day, 14 days straight, without time off. We also host many visiting groups outside of what is considered camp season. College groups, scouts, special interest clubs, school field trips, buggy riders, and workshop participants are a frequent occurrence throughout the year. The work for interns changes to accommodate our needs during these special events. Interns are employed according to their strengths, and though not everyone will work with the groups, outstanding role-modeling is expected of all.

You don't have to have much of a hard skill-base to succeed here, but you do need tenacious grit and inner strength of character to go on when you are tired and stressed. Soft skills like communication, ethics, accountability, and responsibility are fundamental to the health of our work force and community. Living and working, eating and interrelation within a small community all have social challenges to which most modern Americans are not privileged, and so the most important responsibility that you will have as an intern is to maintain and promote a positive attitude, for yourself and for others.

A willingness and ability to follow directions is another cornerstone. Eustace's job description concerning interns and his relation/responsibility to them is fairly simple. He is leader, coach, boss, and teacher. He provides information and a model on what to do and how to do it, and then the interns follow by doing the work. If you cannot hear, understand, retain, and perform the duty or task from directions, you will be severely handicapped and so will our team. Interns have the opportunity to learn from that experience, and many of the experiences build on each other to allow more advanced and complicated jobs/tasks/responsibilities.

Some folks feel that Eustace can be very difficult to work with. Warning: leave your ego at the door. He is direct in his communications, extreme in his expectations, and is aggressively fixated on consistent, hard labor. You will be micro-managed for hours at a time and often spoken to as if you know little to nothing about the subject at hand. Feedback will come in the form of criticism, which you will be expected to accept and integrate immediately, for time is a most-valued resource, and efficiency and effectiveness are mentalities that pervade everything we do. Most of today's youth are not

familiar with this style, and so they back off defensively. Eustace, however, stands by the resolve: "If you can't accept and honor this hierarchical relation, please be kind enough to stay out of the program altogether."

The respect and trust between Eustace as *the* authority figure and the interns as the volunteer work force is crucial, and, for most Americans today, unfamiliar. You will be entering into one of the oldest social relationships, that of student and elder, and as such your unquestioned trust will be expected. On the other hand, you will need to earn his trust in order to use and access many resources at Turtle Island. This can be slow, and for many interns tedious. However, for those who stick it out and demonstrate ability, the rewards are often great and unexpected. If you have not developed a strong personal positive attitude and the ability to trust your Turtle Island leaders, you are not ready for this program. The internship depends on these two elements just as surely as a railcar depends on the rails it travels on.

A trial-period visit to the Work Camp Internship is required of all applicants to examine its inner-workings, see if it suits your interests, determine if Eustace is willing to work with you, and to try your hand at this work-camp, small-community lifestyle before making a fourteen month-commitment. We are looking for task-oriented, self-motivated types that are enthusiastic, ready, and willing to rise to the needs of this farm at all times.

We have a strongly enforced policy of no illicit drug possession or use on or around Turtle Island. If you are 21, you may bring alcohol onto the preserve, but it needs to be discreetly contained in personal living quarters, as we host families and children for whom an environment of alcohol consumption is not appropriate. The use of tobacco products is discouraged, but permitted in designated areas.

To begin the application process for an internship at Turtle Island, please read and re-read all of the documents in the internship application packet. Complete the application packet and mail it to us. Be sure to include your resume and references, a photocopy of your current driver's license, the application fee, and notarized liability form. Once your materials have been received, someone from Turtle Island will contact you to discuss the possibility of setting up a phone interview. Only applicants with a serious interest and an available time commitment of fourteen months, with a resume and good professional references will be considered for a position. Please consider all of these details with depth and integrity. Call or send an email if you need further information prior to completing an application.