

# Paleo Solution - 294

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Robb Wolf:

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Hi, folks. Robb Wolf here, another edition of the PaleoSolution podcast. I'm super excited for today's guest. Billy Berger is great friend of mine. He's an author, a stuntman, an actor, a primitive skills expert. He has starred in such a now notorious Discovery Channel series as I, Caveman and the infamous Naked and Afraid, Lost, and the Bayou.

Billy, how are you doing, man?

Billy Berger:

I'm doing great, man. Great to talk to you again.

Robb Wolf: Oh, great to reconnect. It's been quite a while since we chatted with each other.

Billy Berger: It really has. I think the last time I met you was when you guys were here for the IDLife thing or something.

Robb Wolf: Yeah. Paleo FX, yeah.

Billy Berger: Paleo FX, yeah, yeah. So it's been awhile.

Robb Wolf: Yeah. So Billy, give folks a little bit of your bio. That was a pretty paltry introduction considering all the stuff that you do and have done, flesh some of that stuff out a little more.

Billy Berger: Okay. Well gosh I don't know how far back you want to go. I've been interested in primitive survival skills since I was about 10 years old. I was out deer hunting in Virginia with my dad and found a broken quartz arrowhead and just become fascinated by it. Because I'd go around in the woods with him and wanted to know how people back in ancient times actually survived because we had all this modern technology.

So I became fascinated with that and started to pursue of course learning how to make the stone tools because that was the only artifact I had. So I started with that dad fed the fire with books and videos that he would find then I went from to once I got to where I could make decent arrow points, I started tying them on to sticks and I said well how did they make the arrows? So I had to learn how to make the arrows and then how did they make the bows and then they carried all this stuff in a traditional quiver and they didn't have chemicals to tan the leather so how did they do that? And so just one skill led to another to another to another and then I just began broadening my horizons and trying to learn and master all the ancient skills that people used to survive back then. It's just been a really fascinating journey.

So after perfecting this stuff and learning some videography and getting a degree in it in college, I started a YouTube channel back in 2009 and just started posting videos up there trying to pass this knowledge on. I also was looking for work possibly working behind the camera because everybody is trying to get in front of the camera. Well lo and behold some talent searchers saw some of my videos and they were interested in having on a show called I, Caveman. So I flew to LA and interviewed with the producers, to make a long story short, I made the show. I had a

great time on it, met Robb Wolf which has become a great friend of mine and had a great time.

And then from there I guess that made an impression because people out there in LA remembered me and they wanted me to do when they were casting for Naked and Afraid the very first season they got in touch with me and wanted serious survivalists who knew their stuff to partake in this crazy survival challenge. I thought about it for a while. I said man, this is going to be the toughest thing I've ever done but I finally said I love a challenge so I did it and the rest is history I guess.

**[0:05:40]**

Robb Wolf:

So a little bit of a possibly backstory. Billy is a big dude like I'm 5' 9", 175 pounds. Billy is like 6' 2", 6' 3" about 240 pounds it looks like a good D1 linebacker from very well funded school. When I was doing my psychological analysis for the I, Caveman show, this dude walks into the room and they had us all separated. We couldn't talk and this big dude walks in and sits down and I just kind of pulled my iPhone out and snapped a picture. I send it to my wife and I'm like I think this guy is auditioning for the show and I'm pretty sure we're all going to starve and this guy is going to eat us all.

[Laughter]

Billy Berger:

You know I still got that picture too.

Robb Wolf:

I forwarded it to you, yeah.

Billy Berger:

Yeah. I loved it, man. That's great. That was great.

Robb Wolf:

So Billy you know with YouTube and all this stuff like is it easier now to kind of save some of these primitive skills? Like I've learned a lot of stuff via YouTube. I mean when you first started getting into this, reading books and may be going to occasional meetings where people were sharing these primitive skills I would imagine was kind of a few and far between thing. Like is this actually banking and archiving some of this knowledge that I think could've almost gone extinct at some point?

Billy Berger:

I think so. Back when I was doing this when I got into it was back in the mid 1980's and so I sound like an old man. Back in my day but we didn't have internet back then and a lot of the literature was incomplete. So I would read books and it would give partial information but then if ran into a problem, you were stuck at a dead end. And there were other people around the country who were doing this in obscurity and it just-- and they occasionally would have these primitive gatherings, these Nap-Ins they would call where guys get together and make arrowheads and

they were really small. Some of them where maybe 8, 10 people and that was it.

But every year, the numbers grew gradually and now they have these things all over the country. I do think that the YouTube has really made it possible for people all over the world to tap into this resource to learn from it and it spread out all over. For example I've got a four-part bow making series that I put on YouTube because I had a couple of people request it and lo and behold the thing blew up and it's been I don't know last time I checked on it it's been viewed I believe over three million times.

Robb Wolf: Wow.

Billy Berger: All over the world and people would send me messages. Hey, I watched the videos that you did, man, and I made a bow and it works great following your video. And so it the most popular bow making video series on YouTube that I've ever seen. So I really think there's a thirst for this knowledge. I think that in a way the economy collapsed a number of years ago put some people on alert that things can go south really quickly and it can be out of their control. Knowing at least the basics of some basic survival skills I think gives people peace of mind and confidence that if things would go to hell in a hand basket at least you'd have some skills to fall back on instead of being dropped out, not that you'd be dropped in the middle of Alaska but just having basic survival skills really empowers people and gives them confidence in a very--

Robb Wolf: A way more sketchy world than what most people give credit for.

Billy Berger: Yes. Yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah. I agree.

Robb Wolf: I had a separate political podcast called The Controversial Truth and Dave Duley and I who's also a Georgian like yourself, he and I talked about that kind of resiliency type mindset quite a lot. I don't talk about it as much on this show because people mainly want to hear about abs and how to get in their skinny jeans but I sneak a little bit under the radar.

Billy, if you were to order out some skills that you know everybody should put some time into developing, what would you think would be some stuff that everybody should spend some time like finding a local instructor? You know places like REI I know offer some introductory like survival skills. But you know I'm thinking like fire, you know being able to create fire with primitive tools, some shelter building, tracking down water. What do you think are the really important things to be aware of?

**[0:10:25]**

Billy Berger:

I think you just nailed those top three was the water, the shelter, and fire. And even if you're not master in them at least if you've got the basics down of how to start and maintain a fire, how to create a shelter even just a simple brush shelter and also finding and purifying water are the three things that are most important if you find yourself in a survival situation. I'd say if you wanted to master any of them, the one I would highly recommend is fire, is learning how to make fire in different environments, different weather conditions and that--I mean when I was in I, Caveman with you and then also in Naked and Afraid that was one of the most important skills that I found that I had. When we were on Naked and Afraid they didn't show it but we lost our fire four times due to storms that had come.

Robb Wolf:

Oh, wow.

Billy Berger:

And so every time lost our fire, after going out and collecting the correct materials, I normally had a fire. I did a fire going within 90 minutes after we lost it every single time some of them a little sooner than that. But definitely fire, water and shelter. I mean you can--You know there's a rule of 3's in survival. You can live 3 minutes without oxygen. You can live 3 days without water. You can live 3 weeks without food. And so that basically prioritizes you--you can live 3 hours exposed to bad weather. I think I may cover that.

Robb Wolf:

Okay.

Billy Berger:

So based on that you know as long as you got oxygen which most people do, you'll be all right. But the number one killer that most people don't realize is mother nature.

Robb Wolf:

Just exposure.

Billy Berger:

Yes, yes. Either to heat or to cold. And so being able to--they say if you can stay dry and you can stay hydrated that normally it's much more difficult for hypothermia or hyperthermia to set in.

Robb Wolf:

Which totally makes sense. I mean if you're in a hot environment and you have adequate hydration it may suck but you're going to sweat, you're going to get some sort of thermal regulation and then similarly even in a cold environments folks may not think about it but if you start becoming hypovolemic kind of losing your blood volume becoming dehydrated then you don't perfuse heat around your body as efficiently and then that can become a huge problem too.

Billy Berger: Exactly. Yeah, yeah. So fire and water and fire of course allows you to purify water too.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Billy Berger: Which is a big help. it also keeps you warm and you can use it to make tools and weapons, basic tools and weapons and cut wood even. If you've got a fire going you need to cut a piece of wood. You don't have an ax. You can burn that piece of wood in half.

Robb Wolf: Smart.

Billy Berger: It's a lot, lot longer but things like that I mean just the fire and the water and the shelter, definitely.

Robb Wolf: You know it was interesting with I, Caveman show--so they did some biometrics on us before and afterwards. They did some blood work. they had us do a hand grip strength indicator and I lift some weights. I'm not nearly the strapping specimen that you are but you know your way around 45 pound plates. I'm more of the 25 pound plate guy. But you know when I came out of that I, Caveman gig, everything on me was incredibly weak except my grip strength. My grip strength actually went up I think like 20 psi or something like that even though I had lost like 18 pounds of body weight.

It was stunning to me like some other survival shows were like okay we're going to build a shelter and they've got like a decently long metal knife and they just start like cleaving off branches and stuff like that. It was such an eye opener that the stone tools were really amazing in certain circumstances but you know like trying to pull branches off of these evergreen trees to make some basic shelter, they weren't super helpful. It still just came down to a lot of brute force and grip strength and my hands were just destroyed by the end of that show.

Billy Berger: Yeah. I noticed too that my grip strength did go up as well although I had lost--I'm trying to remember. I think it was about 15 or 20 pounds on that show. My grip strength did go up because you're using your hands for everything and that's one thing that people don't realize is that when you're out there how much work it takes and how much you're using your hands everything that you got to make and do out there requires your hands, requires some kind of manipulation or modification and having stone tools definitely does help but they certainly aren't as efficient as a steel ax.

**[0:15:35]**

Robb Wolf:

Right, right. Billy, on the physical preparation side, I found it kind of interesting that you know so things like CrossFit are very popular these days. There's lots of kind of high intensity training modalities. I found it interesting that from a practically standpoint and also from an injury awareness standpoint, I never really did much of anything maybe once or twice where I would say that I was glycolytic where it was like 800 meter sprint kind of gig. They were grinding levels of work that required like just some long-term stamina. There were some things required some decent strength. But I was kind of intrigued that you know a lot of the workout regimens that kind of may be cater to a paleo type crowd or whatnot, they look like super high intensity training where it struck me that most of the demands that we had were not super high intensity which is grinding levels of work that very, very rarely you would really pop up into a super intense level.

Billy Berger:

Yeah, I agree. I think that it wasn't high intensity running mountains, throwing big boulders around. It tended to be a moderate level of exercise, walking around, doing a lot of walking, exploring the area, hunting on foot and then you might have brief bursts of energy that you would expel a lot or spend a lot of calories. But for the most part it was just more of a long-term moderate exercise level.

Robb Wolf:

Billy, I want to go back to the bow making for just a brief moment. Walk people a little bit through that process because I don't know if folks fully wrapped their heads around this, what this whole process is of literally like felling you know looking at trees or branch, felling this thing and then processing it and then even you know like we like the sinew and the cordage and everything comes from to make the bow's string and that type of stuff.

Billy Berger:

You can go and look in a museum and you can see a bow and to most people it's just a bent stick and it doesn't look like it would be very effective. But once you start to try to learn to make these things, you really game a lot of perspective into what ancient people knew and how incredibly skilled they were.

There's a lot more to making a bow out of a tree than first meets the eye. For example the outside of the bow which is a side that's away from you when you shoot called the back has to stay within one growth ring and that is what gives the bow its resiliency and its strength. If you cut through that growth ring on the outside of the bow when you draw that bow, the bow is being subjected to tension and if you cut through that growth ring that will form a weak spot. It may not break immediately but

after continuous shooting and unstringing and stringing and shooting, it will weaken and it will cause the bow to break at that point.

Another thing is that that the wood--it's a long process. It's not just cut down a tree, shape it into a bow and shoot it in a week. The wood has to be thoroughly seasoned and dried and then once you make the bow or when you're making the bow another very tricky step is called tillering where you're getting each limb to bend evenly so where the handle is-- you have two limbs, one on either side. you have to have each limb bending in a nice smooth even arc with no thin spots or thick spots and what that does is that distributes the tension and compression forces of that bow over the proper length of the limbs. So that it can withstand that force when you draw it back and then snap back quickly and that takes a lot of practice to get good. Not only does each limb have to bend evenly but it has to in a sense match to other limb.

So while you're doing that and you're shaping the limbs and you're making sure that bends evenly, you're also are trying to slowly weaken the bow to the point where it reaches the desired draw weight. So if you'd say a bow pulls 50 pounds at 28 inches of draw that's essentially when you draw that string back 28 inches, you are holding 50 pounds of force.

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So there's a lot of little different things that you're doing when you're making a bow in order to create a weapon that's able to shoot an arrow effectively and accurately and with enough force to bring that animal down. And the more I get into this, the more learn about it the more I see when I go to a museum, I don't just see a piece of wood in there. I actually have a little bit of an insight into the person's mind who made that weapon and it's really cool. Because I've seen some weapons that had been made my native Americans that show an incredible level of skill and intellect that honestly I've not seen duplicated by modern bow makers today.

Robb Wolf: Wow, fascinating. Billy, have you done any type of laminated type bows like the Mongolian style of bows where they use some horn and some wood and some resins to get a laminated type of bow constructed?

Billy Berger: I have not. My brother and my dad a couple of years ago worked on a buffalo horn bow which had a wooden core and then it had buffalo horn on the belly that was glued on there to resist the compression and then it was sinewed back. So they would take the deer or the buffalo tendons, pound it down and then strip them out into thin threads and glue them onto the outside of the bow, the back of the bow and it makes basically a

natural fiberglass. And so that's the only horn bow they call them or composite bow that anybody in my family has made.

I tend to go with the simpler wooden just a wooden self bow which means it's by itself. There's nothing else on it, made out of hickory and elm and oak and hard woods like that. They're just simple. They work well. They require a minimal amount of work but in a survival situation that's what you would aim towards not the more high tech horse bows of the Mongolian archers although those are exceptional bows that take exceptional skill to make.

Robb Wolf: So you know from a maybe a little bit of a survival perspective, what's a reasonable thing? Like if you let's say there's some EMP pulse, electricity goes off, you live in a somewhat rural area but you never picked up a 22 rifle or anything like that and you're just kind of like okay I'm out of luck. What's the you know--and now YouTube is gone so they can't pull down your YouTube channel to figure out how to do this thing. What the basic way to get into this? I've seen some interesting things on again YouTube where folks will take like some PVC pipe and then run some sort of a dowel in it and some sort of cordage for the string and then construct kind of an arrow and that seems like kind of rough and ready way to tackle this. What would be a way for somebody in a legit kind of survival scenario, you've got some shoelaces, you got a pocket knife, you know MacGyver this thing.

Billy Berger: Yeah. I think honestly when for example when I was on Naked and Afraid, the bow and the arrow or making one of those things is actually a specialized weapon. It takes a lot of time and a lot work to make and in a true survival situation it is of limited effectiveness. The arrows take a lot of time to make and this is again not something that you make quickly if you do have some dowels or what not around. If you're not an expert and you don't know how to shoot a bow it's going to take you--you're going to starve trying to learn how to do this.

Robb Wolf: Before you do any of this, right.

Billy Berger: Yeah. For example when I was in Naked and Afraid, people said well Billy, you make all these bows why didn't you make a bow. Well because first of it was a 21-day experiment but again a bow had very limited effectiveness there. There were no animals to hunt. What you probably were better off was just catching what was available, small game, catching crawfish. We caught a bunch of crawdads out of the stream or out of the swamp which I don't think they showed but we catch turtles, slow moving animals that don't require a weapon in order to harvest. So

edible plants and things where were was not really were not available. There was very limited amount since it's early spring and most wild edible plants and stuff become available later on and then also in the summer and end of summers when you get the bounty with acorns and that kind of thing fall in.

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I would say if you really were hungry, the best thing you can do is traps. Traps are like a little hunter that never gets tired and never gets thirsty and never gets hungry, just sits there and waits. But you have to know where the animals are moving and you've got to be able to put those in areas where they're going to be of effectiveness. If you don't, then you're better off doing a large number of them. Again this is something that you don't want to learn when you're in the situation. You want to know how to do this stuff from the beginning so you have a course of action in terms of if you're put in the scenario where there was an EMP and you needed to get out and get some food or get some water. I mean people could almost practice that now just okay, I don't have any food or water, what would I do? Where would I go? What are some local resources around here where I could get this stuff?

Robb Wolf: Right, right. We're working towards just getting some solar panels and like the deep water batteries that you can run a house on and once we get all this stuff set up we're going to run some experiments where we basically need to figure out how to make the homestead work just off of whatever energy we can collect and deal with at that moment. So definitely you know the emergency situation isn't when you want to test a skill set for the very first time.

Billy Berger: Yeah. That's true.

Robb Wolf: Yeah, yeah. So Billy, we did a little bit of Paiute deadfall traps. We had no success with that one particular gig.

Billy Berger: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: What are some other things -- you know interestingly we did catch a couple of mice when I dug kind of a seep well.

Billy Berger: Yes.

Robb Wolf: Because the mice would go looking for the water and then they'd fall in and couldn't get out. What are some other really simple strategies that folks can do along that line?

Billy Berger: In terms of trapping, you mean?

Robb Wolf: Yeah, yeah.

Billy Berger: I really liked that Paiute deadfall. I found that that's very effective. It has high success rate if you set it right and if you know how to do it. Again it's a little bit touchy though. This is something you've got to practice, you got to mess with. I've made them large so that you can catch raccoon or a possum sized game and they have worked. They do work really well. But normally you have to sacrifice a little bit of food as bait in order to attract that animal so it's a bit of a trade off.

I've made a few snares, not many. I did have one time I made and it caught I believe it was a possum but it didn't catch the possum correctly and it was not made out of wire so the possum was able to chew the rope in half and got away. So snares do work but I think you got to know what game you're after and you've got to tailor them to that particular animal. Otherwise if you get them around the neck where they essentially strangle themselves, the animals going to be fighting and struggling and chances are pretty good it's going to escape.

Robb Wolf: Right, right. Billy, what type of hunting are you enjoying these days? Is it all big game? Are you gravitating more towards small game? Like what's lighting your fire that way?

Billy Berger: Well I love hunting anything that's legal, edible, and within range. So that's how I do it. I just got back from an almost two week trip up in Iowa. One of my favorite things to hunt is small game, squirrels and rabbits because there're a lot of them. They reproduce profusely and if you scare one away you're not shot for the rest of the day. I do enjoy deer hunting but it's not sitting on a blind or stand waiting there bored out of my skull for something to walk by. It's not really my idea of fun. I tend to get bored easily so I really like small game hunting, squirrel hunting especially where you're sneaking slowly in the woods and waiting and looking for these animals and that's actually how I've have the most success is just stalking all these animals and get them within range of my primitive bow.

Robb Wolf: Have you done any turkey or other bird hunting using the bow?

Billy Berger: I have. I've done some hunting out in Texas the last two years. I have not connected on a turkey but I did get shots at them both times. I put one video up on YouTube where I actually built a brush blind and I filmed myself in Texas doing it. And then at the very end I put in a turkey hunt where a gobbler came in and I shot at him and was using a special type of

head that I had made which basically had two cross pieces like a plus sign so what it would do is basically shock the turkey. If you hit him in the head or the neck, that's their Achilles heel.

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So I shot at him and that arrow was going right for him and the moment I released, I froze the frame and put a red dot on that where that turkey's head was and then I let it play again in slow motion and that arrow went right through that spot but the turkey has dodged his head, moved his head out of the way by the time the arrow reached it. So I have done some turkey hunting, not had any success yes but I'm not going to give up. That's one thing that I'm going to keep trying until I do succeed. I got a feeling I'm going to get one. It's just a matter of time.

Robb Wolf: We have a ton of geese around here and apparently when the goose season--so we just moved on to a two and a half, three acre bit of property and I just discovered that when the goose season pops up around here I can in fact do some bow hunting in my own property even though we're kind of within the city limits.

Billy Berger: Oh, cool.

Robb Wolf: So I'm going to do some long bow hunting. I have not gone out and carved out a piece of Osage orange or something else and made this thing. I've got a laminated fiberglass recurve but that's currently as far down the primitive skills things as I've gone.

Billy Berger: Well they'll do it. They'll certainly do it. you get good matched arrows to those things to your bow and they'll fly just as well and as accurately as any modern arrow you can buy in the store.

Robb Wolf: Right, right. Yeah. So Billy, what else do you have cooking? Are you doing any TV appearance upcoming and then where can folks find you on the inner webs?

Billy Berger: Okay. I'll plug in I guess my website first. I got a website called [primitivepathways.com](http://primitivepathways.com) and I sell some of my primitive wears and things. We got bows up there and stone hunting points and arrow materials and also some jewelry and some really neat knives that I make some stone knives and some videos too. So I got a DVD that I released a couple years ago and it's done really well. It's called Primitive Instinct Volume 1. So if anybody wants to go there and browse my stuff feel free. Even if you don't want to buy anything just check it out. It's cool. I got some primitive eye candy for anybody who's interested in that stuff.

Robb Wolf: Nice.

Billy Berger: I have not done any TV stuff likely. I have had some interest from some production companies. Nothing has solidified yet but I'm just keep trying to post new stuff on YouTube and keep my face out here so people won't forget me.

Robb Wolf: Awesome.

Billy Berger: it's seems like people have got a lot of--they got short memory attention spans out here. So that's been it so far.

Robb Wolf: And Billy, where can folks track you down on social media like Facebook and Twitter and all that?

Billy Berger: You can find me on Facebook, just look up Billy Berger, B-E-R-G-E-R. I'm on there. I'm on Twitter, @bigbad93 and also yeah I think that's it. I've got Facebook and Twitter and my YouTube channel is also Primitive Pathways. So if you want to check out some of my videos, that's where I am.

Robb Wolf: Awesome, man. Well we'll have links to all that in the show notes. Billy, it was great reconnecting with you, looking forward to seeing you in real life again at some point. We need to get out to Reno sometime and we'll do some desert stuff.

Billy Berger: Oh, I would love to. I had a friend of mine who just came back from there and he said, man, Nevada is really cool. I said, man, I want to go out there.

Robb Wolf: It's pretty legit like tracking water down is a serious bugger but it's pretty cool.

Well, awesome. Billy, its great connecting with you, glad everything is going well and I'll talk to you soon.

Billy Berger: Alright, man. Thank so much, Robb. Great talking to you too, buddy.

Robb Wolf: Okay. Take care.

Billy Berger: Alright. We'll see.

**[0:34:10] End of Audio**