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**Josh Bernstein**  
Adventurer, Wilderness Expert  
and Host of *Digging for the Truth*  
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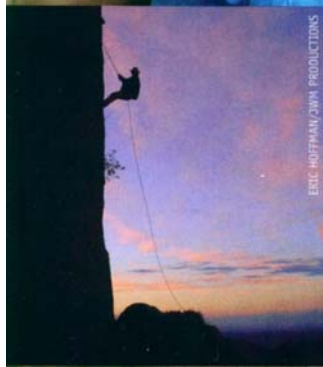
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COVERAGE [Faces of Experience Life]

# A Walk on the Wild Side

WHETHER HE'S TEACHING OUTDOOR SURVIVAL SKILLS OR HOSTING THE HISTORY CHANNEL'S *DIGGING FOR THE TRUTH*, JOSH BERNSTEIN SEIZES EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO PUT HIMSELF IN DIRECT CONTACT WITH NATURE'S WISDOM AND WILDERNESS.

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From left: Bernstein rappelling out of Montsegur Castle in southern France; building a quinzee (snow shelter) in the Austrian Alps, a glacier 10,000 feet above ground; riding a camel across the Giza Plateau on his way to the Great Pyramids of Giza; preparing to fly over the Anasazi ruins in a Powered Paraglider (PPG).



By LAINE BERGESON

For many camping enthusiasts, selecting and amassing all kinds of cool gear is half the fun. From high-tech water filtration systems to LED headlamps to portable stoves that rival the ones in our kitchens, keeping up with the latest outdoor equipment is a gadgethead's delight. And under certain extreme conditions, having top-notch equipment can be a real lifesaver.

But for outdoor survival expert Josh Bernstein, all that stuff also presents a distraction — and a potential barrier to an authentic outdoor experience. He believes that going without it once in a while can teach us a great many things — about the wilderness, and about ourselves.

"Humans thrived for a long time without many of these conveniences," says the 35-year-old president and chief executive officer of BOSS, the Boulder Outdoor Survival School, and, more recently, the host of The History Channel's hit show *Digging for the Truth*. Throughout his 18 years at BOSS, the oldest and largest wilderness survival school in the world, Bernstein has taught the value of experiencing the wilderness through technique instead of modern technology.

Indigenous cultures have relied on technique for thousands of years, Bernstein says. "Making fire without matches, for example. Or creating tools or knives from stone. When viewed through the longer lens of history, modern adaptations like tents and sleeping bags are very recent."

"I believe that there are certain great teachers in life — things that give a person wisdom," Bernstein says. "One is traveling the world. It's one of the best educations you can get."

While roughing it without tents or tools might, at first, seem more exhausting than invigorating, the experience offers unique joys and healthy rewards. "BOSS teaches people how to reconnect with those ancient, traditional skills. BOSS trips show people where we come from and teach how we can bring those ancient skills and primitive wisdom back into our modern world."

Travelers can also have a more meditative experience when they lug less gear, believes Bernstein. By necessity, you must focus deeply on the natural world around you — and on your own abilities and internal thoughts and feelings — as you navigate it. "These kinds of walks allow you a chance to reflect, to process or to create. It's a more inward process," says the New York City native. "After a BOSS course, you're a more confident, competent and capable person, and that has relevancy in everything you do, in a city or elsewhere."

Setting out deep into nature also helps you unplug from the constant beeping, paging and ringing of modern life. "Every year I make it a point to turn my cell phone off and walk away, even if it's just for a few days. I think it's important to disconnect from the constant feeling of attachment. I'm amazed how many people today are walking down the street talking on their cell phones. Compared to 10 years ago, this is a completely new reality — and I'm not sure being connected all the time is a totally healthy thing."

Bernstein knows all about being busy. In addition to the almost two decades he's spent at BOSS — first as a student,

later as an instructor, then as marketing director, and finally as president — he's taken his knowledge of wilderness survival to the airwaves. Having done on-camera work as a survival-training expert for various TV shows in recent years, the handsome, adventure-seeking Cornell University graduate signed on as the host of The History Channel's hit show *Digging for the Truth* in 2004.

His role as host has him crisscrossing the world and traveling to exotic locations — from Stonehenge in southern England to the Mayan pyramids in the Yucatán — to explore the mysteries of the ancient world. During production from May to January, Bernstein is constantly on the move. Traveling country to country can be exhausting, but the journeys have opened his eyes to new cultures and given him a wider perspective on the deep connectedness of people all across the world.

"I realized that humans are pretty much all the same," says Bernstein about his travels. "There may be some cultural difference here or there, but everyone's pretty much just trying to attend to their needs and perhaps create some comfort or convenience in their lives. Our skin color, our language and our clothing are just superficial adaptations over our underlying humanity."

Bernstein, who splits his time between Utah and New York City, still leads several BOSS trips each year, and even

while he's traveling for *Digging for the Truth* he's in contact with his BOSS team via email to oversee operations. He stays energized and healthy, despite his busy schedule, by working out regularly, avoiding processed foods and staying aware of his body's needs.

"I have a good sense of my energy level on a day-to-day basis, and my food and fitness are constantly adjusted to maximize that," he explains. "Honestly, that's probably my biggest contribution to the series — my ability to offer a consistently high amount of energy and passion, despite the jetlag, illnesses and rigors of TV production."

And when his schedule does slow down a bit, he still makes sure his body gets what it needs. "Even if I weren't on TV, I'd be in the gym or on the trail every day or two, making sure my body is balanced and fit so it can create or channel whatever energy it must."

That energy, after all, is the stuff that keeps him traveling, learning, educating his viewers and, perhaps most central to his life and health, getting outdoors.

"I believe that there are certain great teachers in life — things that give a person wisdom," Bernstein says. "One is traveling the world. It's one of the best educations you can get. Another is learning history; it's important to reflect and gain perspective. And a third is exploring the wilderness. Mother Nature is perhaps the greatest teacher of them all."

Laine Bergeson is a senior editor at *Experience Life*.