

No child left inside

Windham High School hosts Teens to Trails “At the Trailhead” Conference

By Andrew Colvin

Last Saturday, Windham High School was a flurry of outdoor activity — fly-fishermen made their casts, biathletes waxed skis and shot at targets, and adventurers hiked, kayaked and climbed. Fly casts, however, were made in the gym, target shooting was done with a laser simulator and the outdoor adventures were mostly in the imagination.

Bringing the great outdoors inside for the At the Trailhead conference was the work of the newly founded group Teens To Trails, which aims to encourage and support high school outing clubs across the state. The goals of the conference, organizers said, were to get the foundation’s name out there, give teens some hands-on outdoor skills and for existing and potential outing club advisors to network.

The conference was successful on all counts, said Carol Leone of Edgecomb, who created the group with her husband, Bob Leone, to honor their daughter Sara, who died in car accident in 2005. “We feel like we’re off to a good start,” she said. The group seeks to have an outing club in every high school in Maine, she said, arguing the importance of having kids reconnect to nature. “It gives them that foundation to grow on,” she said.

“The conference went very, very well,” said Windham High School teacher and outing club advisor Jeff Riddle, a Teens To Trails board member. With about 250 people, the turnout was good, Riddle said, and the workshop sessions were informative.

The conference had three hour-long workshops sessions, where participants could choose between 26 different topics. Many, like beginner fly-casting and rock climbing, exposed people to hands-on outdoor skills, while others were presentations on nature and outdoor trips. Some workshops, like Outing Club Risk Management, were focused to answer questions among advisors.

The presentations were interesting, and in some cases tasty. Windham High School teacher Emily Dolci taught Backcountry Chef, showing participants how to bake cinnamon rolls atop small camping stoves. “It gives you a leverage tool on the trail,” Dolci said, explaining that if you can bake in the backwoods you can get your fellow hikers to trade or do just about anything. In her class teens rolled out dough, sprinkled it with cinnamon and cut out rolls which were placed

in special lightweight pans. They went on top of backpacking stoves outside and a few minutes later, voila, the sticky treats looked like they came from a bakery, not the backcountry.

A class on cooking seemed appropriate since several workshops pounded it home that outdoor activities burn a lot of calories. “Just standing around you’re burning calories to keep yourself warm,” said Windham guide David Butler in his Winter Camping 101 workshop. He walked people through the proper clothing and gear needed for cold temperatures, as well as shelters that can be made in cold temperatures, like igloos, snow caves and quinzee huts.

Mike Yeo of the Maine Winter Sports Center spoke about another winter activity — biathlons, races where athletes cross-country ski long distances while stopping to shoot at targets with rifles they carry on their backs. Yeo demonstrated the process of waxing race skis and gave participants a shot, literally, with a biathlon rifle. After trying the simulator, Thomas Balch of Lincoln Academy said shooting the rifle was difficult enough without having to do it with your heart pumping hard in a race.

In Wilderness First Aid, instructor Eric Duffy of Wilderness Medical Associates discussed other ways you have to be conscious of your body in the outdoors. He covered ways to respond to emergencies in the backcountry, “because 911 might not be an option,” he said. Duffy said the first step is planning ahead. “If you plan for the worst, it can only get better,” he said. But if planning doesn’t work, he said, you then have to assess the situation — “Is the problem bad? Or wicked bad?” In either case, Duffy said there are ways to help, if you have the know-how.

While students flooded the hands-on classes, teachers were engaged in a different way — discussing problems and strategies of outing clubs with fellow advisors. In Outing Club 101: Do’s and Don’ts, participants talked about watching for food allergies, coordinating transportation and assessing risk. “Sometimes the risks aren’t in the backcountry, but in the trips to and from,” said Shawn Carlson of Boothbay Regional High School.

After the workshop, Carlson said the conference was a great opportunity to connect with other schools. Though networking is beneficial for outing clubs, Carlson said, it’s not always easy for them to connect.

Riddle agreed, saying a great part of the conference was the side conversations he participated in. A group from Presque Isle told him about an adventure triathlon his students might want to participate in; teachers from Scarborough want to start an outing club; and one person asked him about adding outdoors to school curriculum. “All that stuff was just my conversations,” Riddle said, guessing there were many more throughout the day.

The conference ended with a lecture by Everest climber Bill Yeo of Maine giving a presentation of his trip. See story, page ??

Teens to trails 1 (cover): Windham High School teacher Emily Dolci holds up a batch of cinnamon rolls, freshly baked on a backpacking stove. The At the Trailhead conference, held at WHS Saturday, offered nearly 30 workshops on outdoor skills, adventure trips and outing club management. Photo/Andrew Colvin

2: Windham High student David LeClaire hits a laser target as biathlon instructor Elizabeth Algeo of the Maine Winter Sports Center instructs. Photo/Andrew Colvin

3: Windham guide David Butler answers questions after his Winter Camping 101 workshop. Photo/Andrew Colvin

**4: Wilderness medical instructor Eric Duffy used theatrics and humor to get his points across. People need medical help when they show signs of the “umbles,” he said — stumblin’, mumblin’ and grumblin’.
Photo/Andrew Colvin**