What is ECOEE?

ECOEE stands for Environmental, Conservation, Outdoor Education Expedition. It’s a minor in the Recreation, Parks and Tourism Administration of Western Illinois University called Outdoor Leadership. For four months our group of 11 students, one graduate assistant and the ECOEE coordinator submerge themselves in outdoor living both in backcountry and front-country living. We live with only each other, learning outdoor skills and leadership. We also learn more about each other along the way. Each day we strive to grow individually and also as a group.

ECOEE 2014 Members

From left to right: (top) Anthony Killion, Kenny Bambini, John Wiegert, Curtis Stark, Josh Baughman, Jeff Tindall (ECOEE coordinator), Vickey Benhart, Tiffany White (Graduate Assistant), (bottom) Jillian Ross, Greg Strobel, Cassidy DePoy, Haley Brasile, Cheyenne Wilson.
Management of Outdoor Adventure Recreation 449 by Curtis Stark

The ECOEE program, which is one of a kind and unlike any other program in the nation, provides students with a wide variety of opportunities to develop skills necessary to become efficient leaders. Not only does it provide the medium in which the students learn and grow in but it also offers the chance to learn the skills necessary to become great leaders. However, the program is more geared towards the opportunity to learn rather than teaching students what to do in certain situations. This type of approach is known as experiential learning, or as our instructor likes to put it, getting the final exam before the lesson. This type of learning forces students to dig into their well of knowledge and understanding and pull out new understandings to solve the task at hand. An example of this would be putting 3 students in charge of handing all planning and logistics of the ECOEE program for one week at a time. This aspect of the ECOEE program is known as the Leaders of The Week or LOWs for short. The LOWs are responsible for keeping the group on task, informed, safe, and prepared for whatever lay ahead. Without being directly told how to do this, our instructor is teaching us to become leaders through experiential learning. As far as the specific class of RPTA 449 goes, students are expected to keep a record of their backcountry and front country experiences by answering the questions in the ECOEE daily journal. These prompted writing sections are meant to get the students thinking about the way they experienced leadership during the day and to reflect on how they or the LOWs lead the group. RPTA 449 also requires students to be fully engaged as a Leader of The Week and to meet with the instructor on a daily basis to keep ECOEE from straying too far from its overall goals for student development.
The first quarter of ECOEE has been packed with experiences for myself and the group that we'll always have to look back on and also to put to good use. RPTA 450, Travel Workshop course, allows for an opportunity for students to observe the operations of a variety of leisure service agencies and to discuss trends, problems, and techniques in the leisure service delivery. Throughout our expedition thus far we have travelled from Macomb, Illinois, passed through different parts of Michigan and into Ontario, Canada where we did our twenty-eight day backcountry experience. Upon our return we made stops in Michigan and Indiana for professional visits on the way back to Macomb to regroup before heading out west to continue our expedition. A day in front country consists of travelling to our next destination while fitting in professional visits along the way. That's just the big picture though. The little details behind that entail an early wake up, group breakfast prepared by the cooks of that specific day, camp take down by everyone who isn't in the kitchen, the vans and trailers packed up, a camp sweep, and hitting the road to be on time, because professionals are on time. A quick note about some of the duties I mentioned above is that ECOEE has a chore or job list; I prefer job over chore because we're all adults taking care of tasks and not young ones doing forced work. Also, this job list pertains to front country rather than backcountry because we have a whole different style of living when we're really out there. The job list consists of duties such as cooks and cleaners, both require three people per day. There is a tarp and shelter job, where someone is in charge of setting up the group tarp to keep the group comfortable in elements such as rain, wind, and sun. There is a fire and light position requiring a person to be in charge of setting the lanterns for camp at night and also the rare occurring camp fire if necessary. A water position for someone to fill the aquatainers so that we have water ready to drink or cook with in the trailer. A vans and trailer position for someone to keep them clean and organized so that everything is kept in order and not taken over by the ever famous 'ECOEE explosion'. With everyone taking care of their designated jobs there is no better method; it is efficient, fair, and smooth. Starting every front country day off with a routine like that allows us to follow through the day with that in mind. We make a visit at a professional agency with structure in mind. We're respectable, engaged, uniformed and of course, we look great. Travel Workshop is a step towards professionalism by allowing us to live the class. We take care of ourselves, the group, and our jobs, we travel to each destination, we then observe the agency, and we take what we learn and apply it to the next visit.

“Do not handicap your children by making their lives easy.”
Outdoor living isn’t all that much different from indoor living, one just has to take all of the
little processes from inside and put them outside. Feeling chilly? Sorry, no thermostat to
fiddle with, go put on another layer. Had a big breakfast and you need
to “pass some legislation?” I guess you’re reaching for the trowel and
preparing yourself for a seventy pace walk instead of taking a seat on
the porcelain throne.

ECOEE 2014 has just finished a twenty-eight day canoe trip on
the Missinaibi River. We began at Hawk Junction, paddled through
Hawk Lake, Hawk River, Manitowik Lake, Dog Lake, Crooked Lake,
Missinaibi Lake, and finally the Missinaibi River. This was a trip a long
while in the works. You can’t just decide you want to go on a twenty-
eight day expedition one day, and then go on it the next. There were
many things to think about from risk management to skills to leader-
ship.

Who in our group knew how to canoe? What were their skills like? What do we
do if somebody gets injured? Are there rapids ahead that we can’t canoe through? What’s
the plan if weather delays us? Where is out nearest or quickest “exit?” These are all things
that an outdoor leader must ask to manage risk on a trip like ours. Jeff routinely reminded
us of them, especially if we did something less than safe. Every time we got to a rapids, for
example, we scouted it to see where the best point of entry was, if there were any rocks
to paddle around, if there were haystacks to avoid, and which sides of the canoe we would
need to paddle on. Things as simple as that are what kept us safe.

But risk management doesn’t stand on its own in the backcountry as the only thing
that contributes to safety. One must also possess the necessary skills. I came in with a fairly
solid set of outdoor living skills. This gave me a unique perspective on the group. Our
first week I was consistently approached with simple questions like, "How do I tie this
tautline hitch?" or "What do I turn on the compass to take a bearing?" Those are fairly
basic skills necessary to live in the backcountry. By the end of the second week, the ques-
tions like that were not really being asked. The group members had figured them out and
their growth when it came to outdoor living was exponentially incredible. Any member of
our group can explain that a cat hole is supposed to be seven inches deep, or that a bear
bag really does need to be at least twelve feet off the ground. When those skills are cor-
rectly applied, living outdoors isn’t uncomfortable. It’s easy. And once they’re second
nature to you, you can really start to enjoy what’s around you.

The past twenty-eight days had their rough patches, to be sure. But we don’t re-
member the nice days or the days when things went well. We remember the days we had
freezing mist being blown in our faces, or the days white caps were rolling our canoes
across lakes. Those are the days that the skills we were taught were really imprinted into
our brains, and the days where the principles behind good planning and safety were evi-
dent. Without those experiences, we would not be able to lead others in the outdoors.
"What kind of noise does a mouse make? Squeak. What noise does an 800 pound mouse make? SQUUEEEAAAK!" I couldn't tell you the name of the gentleman who told us this joke. Mike, maybe. But I can tell you that he told us at Sarett Nature Center where there was also a butterfly house and a boardwalk through the forest canopy and animals inside and voyageur canoe learning experiences. That little joke snowballs into a wave of memories about that place. Which means that their outdoor education was effective, because it has stuck with me.

I've learned that that is the best outcome you can get from your outdoor education program--people remembering what you've told them, and not necessarily you. You're only a vehicle that gives them knowledge. And that knowledge needs to make them care about what you're teaching them. When they leave your facility or program, they should look around them and see what you've taught them, and care about it. So that they can then tell others about it and cause them to also care.

The programs people go to are often on a voluntary basis, so lecturing to them isn't effective. Our guide at Hartwick Pines was great at teaching people in a laid-back, informal manner. He was a funny, genuine person who would simply whip a dead owl out of his backpack to show you what a Saw-whet Owl is. People remember that sort of thing, especially when the educator gets down on his knees to be eye level with the kids and connect with them.

That is just about the biggest lesson I've learned from the outdoor educators that we have come across: being informal. If you come across as stuffy and above your audience, they turn you off. But, if you can identify with them, laugh with them, and tell stories with them, they will be receptive to what you have to tell them. And that is a win-win situation for all the parties involved.

And it's important, because we only have the one planet and the more people that care about it, its history, and its potential, the better off we will all be in the future. At its core, that is what outdoor education is doing.
ECOEE 2014 hit the road on August 20 with our sights set on the great Canadian Wilderness, our first big backcountry experience of the expedition. We couldn’t wait to get there, but, like so many things in life, ECOEE is far more about the journey than the destination. In this respect, we have not squandered our time. Every day on the road has been more than covering miles. We make frequent stops to discover more about outdoor recreation. Speaking with professionals, observing visitors and critiquing programs and facilities, we gain an understanding of this field far greater and more complete than we could ever hope to attain in the classroom.

One visit in particular sticks out in my mind: the Frederik Meijer Gardens. You may recognize Frederik Meijer from the chain of super stores that bear his name, but did you know he was also an avid sculpture collector? When the Horticulture Society approached him about creating a public garden on some property he owned in Grand Rapids, Meijer happily agreed to their proposal, but with one condition: that they find a way to incorporate his sculptures. This simple compromise of interests that occurred just under twenty years ago resulted in a unique marriage of art and horticulture that spans 200 acres, includes one of the finest collections of modern and contemporary art and is ranked at 97th in the world for museum attendance, attracting nearly 600,000 visitors a year.

As we toured the indoor portion, I was blown away by the beauty and attention to aesthetic details in the displays. The Chihuly glass chandelier in the atrium. The pillars designed to look like trees, complimented by the 1500 one-of-a-kind bronze castings in the floor that reflect natural features seen on the forest floor. The apples that covered every bare inch of soil in the seasonal display. As we moved outside, the Children’s Garden opened my eyes to a different aspect of the park. While still aesthetically pleasing, this area focused on education through interactive experiences. An activity cart that changes daily sat in the entrance to greet incoming guests. A storyteller garden full of bright colors and fun character sculptures inspired imagination. A sense garden allowed visitors to engage with the horticulture in a way that the other displays could not. Visitors could feel the softness of Lamb’s Ear, sniff the Popcorn Cassia that actually smells like movie theatre popcorn and taste the licorice flavor of fennel.

Upon our departure, I realized something else amazing about the Fredrik Meijer Gardens: the demographic of the visitors. There were art-lovers and plant lovers. There were older men and women taking a Tram Tour of the grounds, as well as younger families exploring the Children’s Garden. There were school groups and individuals. Whether they came to the Gardens for the wide variety of plant life, or the renowned art, or the hands-on experience of the Children’s Garden, or a musical concert in the Garden’s amphitheater, they were getting more from the experience than they anticipated upon arrival. To me, this is exactly what outdoor recreation is all about, drawing people in and providing them with more than they expected. The Meijer Gardens’ foundational idea of combining two unique components is a model outdoor recreation needs to embrace because it draws a much more diverse audience, allowing them greater influence and opportunity to promote their mission, ideas, values and knowledge.
This expedition has existed since 1976. Originally the Environmental Conservation Education Expedition was on a quarterly system as was Western Illinois University’s academic system. Originally ECOEE was only three months long as opposed to the current timespan of four months. In fact the expedition has evolved quite a bit since its foundation in ’76. Like a rough cut stone over the years ECOEE has become a fine shining stone. For several years there was a lot of time spent in the same place. A month spent in Wyoming and then a lot of time spent around the bordering states of Illinois. ECOEE’s of the past still visited Outdoor Education programs and places discussing Interpretation. Even ECOEE participants of the past would feel at home in the current curriculum.

The Wilderness Education Association has evolved right along with ECOEE. In fact ECOEE is the reason for the WEA existing. When the first expedition made it to Paul Petzolt in Wyoming Paul came to Western Illinois and founded the WEA along with three other men Doc Lupton, Chuck Gregory, and Bob Christie right at Western Hall in 1977. Ever since those four men founded the WEA, ECOEE has worked right along with their standards and lessons.

This year ECOEE has eleven students along with a graduate assistant lead by Jeff Tindall, ECOEE Coordinator. Earlier in 2014 each student chose a topic to hone in on and to teach this fall. Lessons range from Campsite Selection to Dump School! Most of the students have already written and given a lesson on the topic of their choice. However, almost all of the lessons will be taught again at some point while in the backcountry because no lesson is ever perfect and neither is ECOEE. ECOEE deals with people who are ever changing.

Outdoor Education 444 by Haley Brasile

Sometimes outdoor education can be taught by simply taking a hike, getting out in the outdoors. Outdoor education is becoming an expert in one example my topic is Trees. Outdoor education needs to be flexible and adaptable depending on the audience. Our first introduction for outdoor education was presented by Kenny on Birds. Throughout Canada we got familiar with the common loon. The second introduction to outdoor education was presented by Greg on Habitats and Homes, we became pretty familiar to the Beaver Lodge and how they are prepared. I presented Trees as the third introduction of outdoor education; the group was introduced to the Northern White cedar, the Balsam Fir, and the Tamarack. After our backcountry experience we started visiting sites like Fredrick Meijer Gardens where their outdoor education is catered to the audience. The children garden teaches through the five senses; touch, sound, sight, taste and smell. While walking through the garden guests can touch plants, get close enough to smell and even taste some of the flowers. Cheyenne and I ate a flower that made our mouth go numb. There was even a plant that smelled just like popcorn. Catching the attention of the audience is a big component of outdoor education. Bradford woods does guided hikes for fifth graders where they learn things like LNT (leave no trace). The children have lunch over a fire that the guide builds and afterwards hikes out with all the garbage that was made from eating lunch. Small things like this will start a foundation to proper use of the outdoors and how to keep it beautiful for future users. Outdoor education ranges significantly depending on the audience and your goals. We are increasing our awareness of the outdoors by our ECOEE experience so we can better educate others.
Learning is done best when there is a need to know. Planning and coordinating is done everyday and is crucial for a positive outcome, so you learn quickly. Going into the outdoor adventure recreation field you are going to be thrown curve balls everyday, leading you to be adaptable and flexible. There are many influences that can affect a positive outcome: weather, terrain, funding, equipment, location, training, hazards, etc. With the mix of these influences you also have the experience and physical abilities of 11 diverse students that affect the outcome all of the time. While all of us are on this Environmental, Conservation and Outdoor Education Expedition, we are here to develop and enhance our managing and planning skills for a group. Each week there are three new Leaders of the Week (LOW’s) that come together and are given the opportunity to experience the up’s and down’s of making decisions and leading individuals and groups in an outdoor setting. The LOW’s make decisions and plans to help the group accomplish tasks for the day/week and for the purpose of the expedition. With this derive risks, emotions and chaos. As we made our way up to Canada, talking to people and explaining what we are doing they always replied the same, “That sounds amazing and easy.” Ha-ha, if they only knew. With this being the most challenging aspect of the expedition, it is also the most rewarding. While being in the outdoors learning decision making and planning goals for the expedition it makes learning it come naturally. Not being in a classroom and not having everything so accessible gives you more opportunity to think, feel, and do. Being in a classroom it is hard to distinguish the way you would actually use your judgment and decision making process in the outdoors. Being in the backcountry of Canada these opportunities were at our fingertips. We had to take the information we already knew and use decision making, judgment, and risk perceptions to come up with the most knowledgeable answer. The biggest decision I can recall the LOW’s using all of those factors was the day we had our unwanted visitor. That day we had the decision to stay at the campsite that we were at or to push on, but there some high risks with either decision made, so the knowledge of our three LOW’s was put to the test to make the best judgment for the group. The risk of staying at the campsite another day was that a mother bear and her cub kept visiting our site and had already got into one person’s food bag. Also, we would risk being fatigued the next morning on the lake because we would have to have shifts throughout the evening and night for bear watch. The risk that was present for leaving the campsite was the high winds, which produce white caps in the lakes. If we were to leave the campsite we had to make a large crossing to get to the next closest site. We had previously made a large crossing with white caps, which was a poor judgment due to lack of experience. With that knowledge, the LOW’s didn’t want to put the group in danger. The LOW’s ended up making the decision to stay at the site.

Sometimes I wish I would have known the answers to the questions that I have learned through out the Canadian backcountry at the beginning of the trip. Those answers would have definitely made it easier being a LOW. There is not anything I would go back and change though, the decision or the mistakes, they shape my and the groups experience. These experiences have made the group and I stronger and wiser in every way.
While on ECOEE you will never stop learning. There is always something to be learned, making ECOEE one big learning experience. While participating in a recreational activity like paddling there are so many different benefits, when you are spending twenty-eight days disconnected from the outside world. It really takes a rare type of person to be willing to go paddling in the backcountry for 28 day going through windy lakes, rapids, and portage after portage. Most people would be okay with just a few miles of paddling on a small lake or river that lasts just over a few hours. This became our lives for 28 days.

While paddling on lakes during the beginning of our journey we faced many rainy, wet, and cold days. When crossing over from one side of a lake to the other there are a few important things you should look for. They include white caps, which are the caps on top of waves when they become very large and become a hazard for any paddler. The wind is very important it can take you in the wrong direction in the blink of an eye if you aren’t careful. On the rivers it’s the complete opposite you have to worry about rapids, and in rapids you have to worry about pillows, haystacks, and shallow waters. All of these can become a hazard when traveling down a rapid. Scouting is very important you can’t go with what books say about rapids. The water level a different from day to day and there might be things hidden that you can’t see. After scouting the rapids you want to look for a “v” shape shows the entrance while with the point going down the rapid. The front person is constantly directing the boat by drawing/ cross drawing and the Stearns person is directing the back of the boat down the rapid.

While paddling our group experienced a lot of land that only a few thousand of have gotten to experience. The Missinaibi provincial parks and trail were well maintained making it easier for us to find sites and portage trails. Sites were labeled by an orange triangle and portages were with a yellow triangle. On the provincial park maps they stressed to take care of the sites so other would get the same experience that we got while paddling down the river. When paddling as a group we experienced many different things that not many people can say they have ever done and experiences. When engaging in outdoor recreational activities you we see everything from a different perspective and the little thing are the thing you will cherish the most.
Interpretation of Cultural and Environmental Resources by Kenny Bambini

Over the course of ECOEE we have three classes in which we give lessons for the number of lessons we teach are determined by the grade we have contracted for with our instructor Jeff. For example someone contracting for an A needs to put together two twenty minute lessons with at least one lesson in Baja California. Across the spectrum someone going for a C, they only need to give one fifteen minute lesson in no specific location. You might be asking hey what are the three classes you are talking about. Well the answer is Outdoor Education, WEA which is the Wilderness Education Association, and finally Interpretation. Right now I am here to talk about interpretation. The point of interpretation is to tell a story. Our Interpretation throughout the semester should relate to the audience by displaying and revealing natural, environmental, and cultural references in a way that values environmental sustainability, social justice, and equity, and economic sustainability. One of the cool places we visited was an 18th-century French, and later British, fort and trading post called Fort Michilimackinac. The interpreters at the fort helped bring the history to life, with live demonstrations and reenactments, for example we saw a musket and cannon firing demonstration. Fort Michilimackinac has numerous reconstructed wooden structures that were created to give the fort a sort of eye into the past and see how traders lived amongst themselves and the natives of the area. One of the cool parts of Fort Michilimackinac was that there were interpreters inside the buildings such as women baking food and a blacksmith free to all of our questions which were very interesting.

“Must we always teach our children with books? Let them look at the stars and mountains above. Let them look at the waters and the trees and flowers on Earth. Then they will begin to think, and to think is the beginning of a real education.” - David Polis
Wilderness Leadership by Cassidy DePoy

Among other majors and minors that comprise the Recreation, Park and Tourism Administration department, ECOEE is unique in that is a combination of various curriculums taught throughout a semester-long expedition. The Wilderness Education Association (WEA) curriculum works hand in hand with our program preparing folks with the skills necessary to lead a professional expedition in a wilderness setting. As outdoor leaders, we are to fulfill requirements in the areas of Outdoor Living Skills, Planning and Logistics, Risk Management, and Leadership. All of these principles were touched on in our introductory courses in the spring, Expedition Planning and Adventure Education, where we saw behind-the-scenes in preparing for the expedition and group dynamics in progress. ECOEE is our chance to really test our ability to think on our toes and be flexible and adaptable. We are constantly experimenting with leadership styles, methods of communication, and conflict resolution in such an isolated environment. This essentially means we never stop thinking and never can stop thinking.

Each week provides an opportune time for three of our expedition members to do a little practicing. We call these three students our “Leaders of the Week” (or LOWs, as we like to call them). Our LOWs are responsible for creating an itinerary for the week, briefing and debriefing the group, managing group moral and dynamics, and making judgment calls and decisions as necessary. It gives Jeff a chance to take a step back from his role as teacher to watch us make mistake after mistake and then attempt to correct them. It also allows us to observe each other in various decision-making situations and working environments so that we may give and receive some feedback from people who really know how we operate. Being in a leadership position out here in the back country is something completely stressful and terrifying. You are dealing with actual life-threatening dangers, and you are responsible for twelve thriving lives. Every decision you make could ripple into a gigantic wave that if left unnoticed would take down an entire village in the blink of an eye. If that does not strike you as stressful, I don’t know what does.

Every day we keep a journal. We have a group journal where we take turns reflecting on the day, these then are placed on the ECOEE 2014 blog, and we have our personal, academic journals. These journals are where we jot down our noteworthy sightings, observations and notes on leadership, expedition behavior, and group dynamics, concerns, and personal reflections and feedback. Many entries are alike any you would record in a diary, however, we use the many principles of the WEA to direct the conversation and categorize our observations. I look forward to writing in my journal every night; it gives me an outlet to organize my thoughts about the group and look at the reasons behind actions and decision makings. When you make those connections between your group’s experiences and the principles you’re studying, everything falls into perspective.
The majority of the past month has been spent on land set aside by the Canadian government. Missinaibi Provincial Park is where most of our adventure took place. This land offers brilliant waterfalls, large and unique marshland, fish and game, and rapids of varying sizes to give novice and even professional paddlers a run for their money. But why is land like this important?

This is a prime example of what type of questions need to be answered by interpretation. Relating something physical and tangible to something that is intangible such as love, hope, peace, and happiness. So why does land matter to us? Land is a resource that cannot be created, land is something that is precious and eternal. However, when we look at a parking lot an average person will not feel anything remarkable. When that same person looks across the rolling rocky ridgelines of the Colorado Rockies they see not just mountains but a physical representation of beauty, of peace, and of the bitter cold on the mountain tops.

Once the hook is set, interpretation is designed to expand that hook to a broader more elaborate blanket of importance. When a topic such as land is given more information such as the culture of mountain climbing, or the Voyageurs that paddled across the Missinaibi waterways during the fur trade and how the fur trade was the biggest thing until the gold rush in North America. When a topic is given history and background an average person can relate to the topic and will typically begin to care more about the topic. When a relationship is built between the topic and the individual, interpretation has reached its purpose.

Travel Workshop 450 by Josh Baughman

This past month has been a hard one indeed. Never have I ever been put in such a situation that demanded so much of me all of the time. We spent all Spring semester getting to know each other, but this semester is where we really started to get to know each other. True character isn’t witnessed much in easy comfortable times, but when take people out of their comfort zones and subject them to all different types of stresses and at the same time it makes people realize things about their group as well as about themselves individually. With the right amount of cooperation, communication, and conflict resolution you can start to really develop a group and that is exactly what we’re on a mission to do. I had always thought I would be a good leader in the out of doors but this 28 day Missinaibi River trip really put things in perspective for me. It showed me that even if you are the best individual, it takes a lot more to be a great individual in a group. Even if you pack your pack faster than anyone else, there are still people who are trying to pack their packs and they could use a hand. Even harder than that though, was decision making on the fly. Sure you could have a solid game plan laid out in front of you for the week ahead but when you’re in the outdoors with twelve other people, weather happens, plans change, and new risks have to be weighed and assessed which all in turn ends up calling for a complete change of plans for the week ahead. So one thing that everyone can always be more of, is flexible, which is also a desired characteristic for those wanting to work at some of the places we visited such as the beautiful and vast Frederick Meijer Gardens in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and the ever universally accessible adventure and outdoor education grounds of Bradford Woods in Martinsville, Indiana.
“Life is serious, but not that serious.”

Environmentally Aware

We have the extraordinary opportunity to travel and experience a variety of outdoor leadership schools around America. So far on the expedition, there have been multiple professional visits including our adventures at Sarett Nature Center, Frederick Meijer Gardens, and Bradford Woods. All programs offered us incredible insight to our experience and gave us opposing views on how to involve outdoor education in others’ lives. From the children feeding the coy in the butterfly garden, to our eighty-year-old volunteer guiding us through the tropic rainforests of Africa—outdoor education can instill unimaginable values and viewpoints in a person’s life. We watched as our guides and instructors lead participants on a simple hike through the woods. You could see the light flicker in their eyes as the passion for the subject they taught rolled off their tongues. I found that each person who ever walks down this same path will leave with something that did not originate with them.

Outdoor education is funny that way. It is a hands-on experience that is different for each individual. As students, we try to focus on caring about the tangible and leading you to feel the same. One day on the Missinaibi River, we came across a red pine whose back was arched, being weighed down by a long-lived-in eagle nest. Eagles will travel back to the same nests, building their home more with each year they reside in it, raising their young. The constant additions cause the nest to get so heavy with sticks and branches that the tree holding it in place can snap and even die. The interpretations of the resource may be on opposite ends of the spectrum, but the important part is that somewhere someone cares about this eagle’s nest because I could tell them a little bit about it.

With each professional visit, we learn a little bit more about effective presentation and interpretation of outdoor education in an environmental setting. Being aware of the nature that surrounds us is just the beginning of our journey into the environmental integration of ECOEE. We have come so far already and must use our experience to create the interest in protecting the earth that is all around us. Soon we will be on our way to everyone’s heart, one leaf at a time.
Outdoor living skills are becoming second nature to us here on ECOEE. Twenty-eight days on the river only three days of those days were without rain. Nimbus clouds are dark, thick clouds at lower altitudes. They are heavy with moisture, unstable, and often extend across the horizon. We all recognize these clouds because of the rain we had. Not having a weather channel to watch before the day made us dependent on our outdoor weather skills to know what the weather might be like for the day. With that rain we became very efficient at setting up our tarps as soon as we got to camp. Before setting up the tarp we look for an area that is flat, sheltered, accessible and durable. Along with site selection we learned the knots needed for tarp set-up. The bowline knot is for attaching guy lines to grommets on the tarp. The taut-line hitch is for attaching guy lines to stakes and anchors. The Trucker’s hitch is for attaching guy lines to stakes and anchors.

Through Jeff’s experiences on the Missinaibi we knew what some of the campsites were going to be like. Occasionally the LOW’s would plan to reach a campsite that we knew little about. One campsite in particular had very steep, slippery, sharp rocks mixed with the rain increased the risk that the LOW’s needed to manage. Through experiences like arriving at this campsite; we got to practice the Risk Management model. The risk management model starts with preparation which included being aware of the risk at that campsite. The next part is situation assessment, using judgment to decide if the risk is reasonable and acceptable in light of the potential benefits. The course of action needs to be taken next and this is where risk modification would take place if possible. The last step is the follow-up which includes reflection, evaluations and changes.

“Simply, poor expedition behavior is a breakdown in human relations caused by selfishness, rationalizations, ignorance of personal faults, dodging blame or responsibility, physical weakness, and, in extreme cases, not being able to risk one’s own survival to insure that of a companion.” Paul Petzoldt. Interrelationships are strong challenges we are facing on ECOEE; individual to individual, individual to group, group to individual, and group to group are just some of the interrelationships that we are included in. Going with the flow and being patient with our LOW’s is very important. Plans change and decisions will be made that not everyone agrees with but it is important to respect one another’s decisions and support them.
Until next time,
as the Voyageurs would say...

**Bon Voyage**

and keep following us and our blog at:

ecoee2014.blogspot.com

*Take the Long Way Home*