

CAMP *from page 1A*

what it takes to make a healthy watershed.”

The camp is a tradition that goes back years, with some of the 48 campers celebrating seven years straight. Siuslaw School District science teacher McKenzie Perry, who has been a camp counselor for the past two years, visited the camp when she was in middle school.

“We’re going to be all over the place doing things, and it’s going to be a really fun week of camp,” she told the campers as they prepared to board the bus for the day’s activities.

The week ahead was filled with a wide variety of activities — Kayaking on lakes, hiking forest trails, sandboarding and swimming.

On the first day, the older kids visited Camp Baker, where they tackled the rope and climbing course, practiced archery, did service projects and learned about the study of geology, with campers’ favorite being a fossilized piece of turtle feces that the instructor put in her mouth.

“Oh, it’s just a rock,” she said with a smile.

But it was the younger kids that learned what it was like to live in a different era of the watershed. They gathered at Siltcoos Lake in a quiet open area near the Siltcoos River.

Mark Petrie and Ashley Russell, representatives from the Coos Tribe of the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians, stood above a picnic table covered in a wide variety of traditional tribal tools. The campers, more than 20, sat around Petrie as he regaled them with stories of the area and taught them the tools needed to hunt for survival.

“Our people have been living on these rivers for over 12,000 years,” he told the group. “Since we’ve been here a really long time, we’ve learned how to help us and other animals and plants, too. We’re going to teach you a little bit about those things. ... We’re going to talk first about the stuff on the table here.”

Petrie picked up a long spear that lead to a triangle with three sharp bones tied to it.

“The first thing we had was fish,” Petrie explained. “We had an abundance of fish, which we’re trying to bring back to the waters. Did you guys know that there were so many fish in the river, that you could look across and see salmon coming up to spawn? It’s like you could walk across their backs, there were so many fish.”

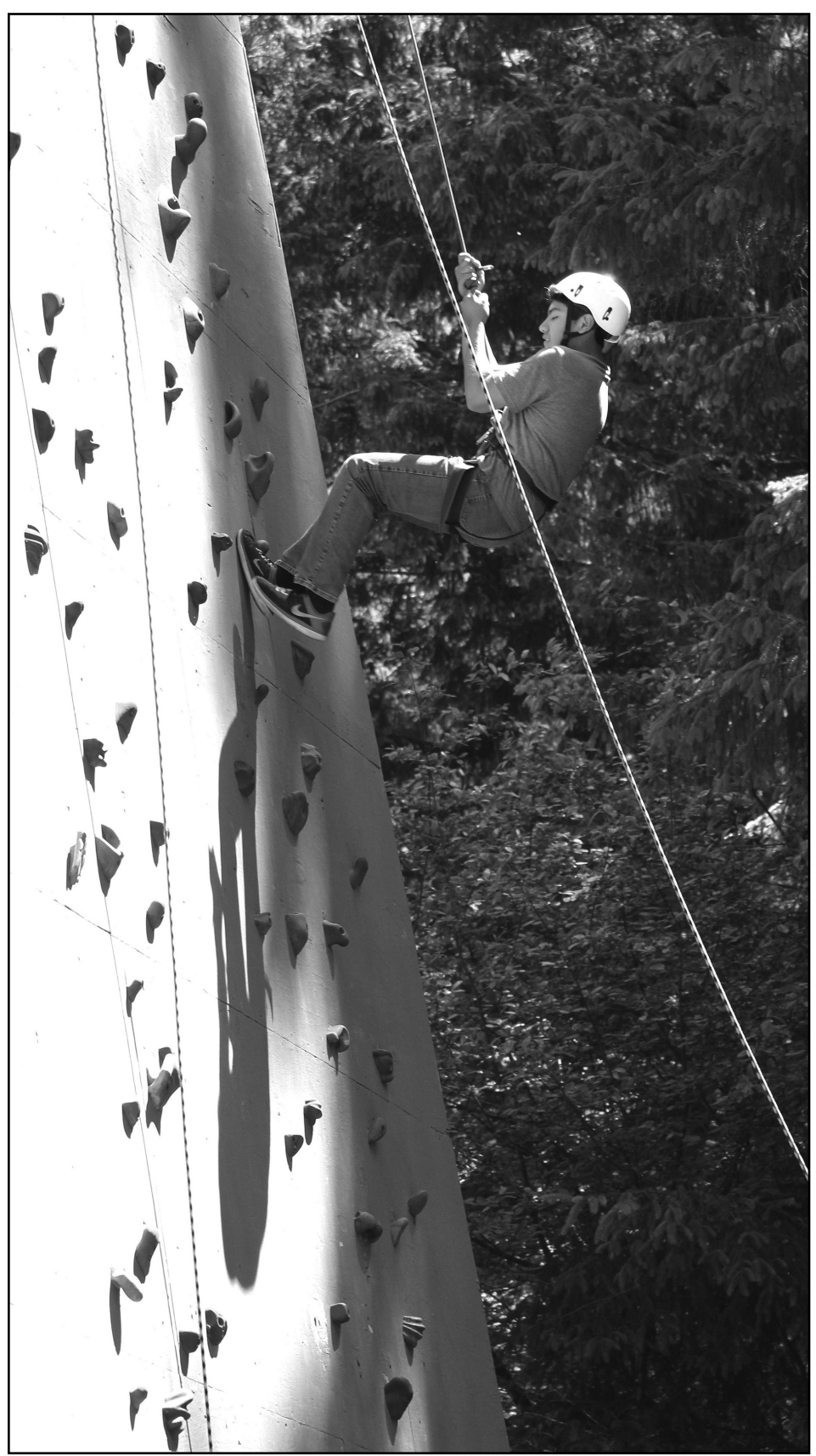
The kids were wrapped up in the history, and some gasped when Peitre said, “A long time ago, the fish used to be the size of you.”

Petrie picked up the spear, named a Leister.

“You can stand on the bank, either a natural rock platform, where you can see salmon coming up,” he said. “You actually have to aim for the fish. As soon as you spear the fish, it gets stuck.”

“Is the object to stab the fish, or get it stuck?” a camper asked.

“This barb right here, it’s going to kill the salmon,” Petrie said. “We also have a club, and we whack in on



PHOTOS BY JARED ANDERSON/SIUSLAW NEWS

The Siuslaw Watershed Exploration Camp teaches caring for the local watershed as well as providing confidence-building through activities such as rock-wall climbing, archery and hands-on skill building.

shore. Another tradition we have is that we don’t let animals suffer unnecessarily. When we’re harvesting it, we kill it right away?”

That led to a discussion on what the Leister barbs were made of — which is elk bone.

“When we harvest an elk, we try to use as much as possible,” he said. “We use the hide, the bones, every part that is useful. We’re honoring that animal in their lives. If we waste something, then it’s dishonoring that animal. It goes against our traditions. For the elk, you use all the parts of the animal. That’s our tradition.”

Petrie told the kids how to make the Lister from Vine Leaf Maple and Douglas Fir wood. The glue came from the pitch of a shore pine tree.

After going through the rest of the tools, including a large rake used the catch herring, it was time to weave the native plant called “tule.”

“They’ve been doing it for thousands of years,” said camp coordinator Kyle Terry. “You’ll see a lot of this tule on the lakes and rivers. It’s a really common aquatic grass. They harvest it, dry it for a while. It becomes malleable and then they weave with it. They make duck decoys for duck hunting. They make balls for games. This is a duck they would make to have competition duck races down the streams.”

He showed off his own duck that he made and smiled. “I’ve been wanting to do this for a year, and I can’t wait to have this on my

desk.” But camper Devon was having a difficult time making his duck. He held a long strand of tule, wrapping it in a circle. Just as he was about to wrap the end of the tule to make a tale, the whole thing became uncoiled. Devon let out a deep sigh, saying, “Oh fudge, I need help.”

He went to Terry for assistance, who held the tightly wrapped reed in his hand as Devon took the end of it and worked to push it through to make a tail.

“I got it!” Devon yelled as Kyle handed over the completed duck.

“We’ve made these for thousands of years,” Peitrie said to a group of kids who were huddled around him.

Other campers were down by the lake, which Devon headed to.

He placed the duck in the water as the other kids gathered around, watching. It floated perfectly as the kids stood and watched.

Lastly for the day, it was time to make tea from “ingredients like rose and elderberry that grow around here,” Terry said. “They will make a little tea, pack it and sample a little bit when they’re out there. At 2 p.m. or so, we’re going to get them on the sand dunes for a buggy ride,” he said with a laugh. “It’s a bit of a juxtaposition.”

But another day outdoors learning to appreciate a world untethered from electronics.




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