

Snow & cold set scene for sixth grade wilderness survival training



Fifty Heppner Elementary sixth graders left for school with unusual eagerness last Monday morning, knowing that they were bound for five days in the woods at the sixth annual Tupper Outdoor School.

Though definitely not a vacation, the outdoor school experience is considered a highlight of grade school years by alumni. It provides the youngsters with knowledge to appreciate a mountain environment and learn outdoor survival skills.

"We're living in one of the best outdoor settings you can find anywhere," Principal Don Cole commented. "The week at Tupper (40 miles south of Heppner) teaches the kids to appreciate not only their own little corner but the total ecological environment as different aspects interact with each other."

In their five days at the school, the youngsters were given instruction in seven basic areas, taught by exper-

enced resource persons: weather, instructed by Ken Lemley; Map and compass reading by Ron Jones and Rick Hardy; wildlife, by Glen Ward and Bob Krein; soil by Terry Lillybridge; plants by Bill Helphinstein; water by Adam Schumacher; and wilderness survival by Bob Jepson.

Even during recreation time, the youngsters were encouraged to learn more about outdoor living by participating in archery, riflery, bait casting, hiking or arts and crafts.

A high spot of the school is always survival training, and this year was no exception. Thursday, the sixth graders were taught how to start fires with a rock, a steel file and steel wool; to construct a shelter out of tree boughs; to fashion homemade fishing poles; and other skills to ensure survival in the forests.

Snow, sleet, rain and cold at the Bull Prairie campgrounds didn't dampen the young woodsmen's enthusiasm, and

instructor Jepson felt the elements aided his cause: "If the kids can build a fire in this weather, they can build one anywhere," he said.

"I wouldn't be afraid for any of the kids' lives if they were lost in the woods for two or three days if they retain most of the survival instruction," camp director Cole commented. "And if the day's training saves even one child's life in the future, this whole program will pay for itself ten times over."

Most of the cost of the outdoor school, incidentally, was paid for by the sixth graders themselves through selling tickets for a T.V. set prize drawing. Out of the \$20 required for each camper to cover expenses, \$14 was

raised through the class project, with the extra \$6 charged as tuition.

The youngsters were divided into three cabins at Tupper, two for the boys and one for the girls, supervised by 14 high school counselors, sixth grade teacher Nan Nelson, kindergarten teacher Mary Benedict, and Don Cole.

Cole said that the school is a good experience in social living for the students, with such things as table manners and responsibility for various duties part of day-to-day camp life.

Cook Ruby Steers, stolen from the Heppner High School kitchen for the week, was assisted by volunteer mothers to serve more than 1,000 meals at the school. Rotating groups

of student "mucka-mucks" were assigned to table-setting and clean-up details.

Campfires each night featured programs combining comedy skits and resident talent, with the counselors and the three cabins of students taking turns in the spotlight. Over 30 camp songs were learned by the students to punctuate each of the day's activities, from getting up at 7 a.m. to lights out at 9:15 p.m. Flag raising and lowering ceremonies were observed each day.

Tupper Outdoor School is an experience that every sixth grader looks forward to with eagerness each year, and one they are not likely to forget after their grade school years are far behind them.

Story & photo
by Elane Blanchet

Survival instructor Bob Jepson (above and below) directs his students in the construction of a wilderness shelter out of tree boughs at the Bull Prairie Campground last Thursday.



Susie Olson (l) and Michelle Saling try to raise a spark by striking a rock with a file. Steel wool serves as kindling.



Cord Adams (l) watches as his friend Eric Thompson fans a fragile blaze born of the rock-file-steel wool survival technique.



Two Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife employees from John Day, standing in the midst of a group of cold sixth graders, wrap up their instruction on forest water resources. The gadget on a pole at the top of the photo is a shocking device which netted the class a 24 inch trout to demonstrate fish tagging techniques used by the state department.