

# WINTER CAMPING 2010

*By: Joe Whitenight*

Some may say they enjoy the outdoors but this group of 4-H Outdoor Adventure Challenge members proved they do! One of the kids said, "I can't believe I stayed outside for 2 days in the middle of winter." If you ask these kids if they were cold, the resounding answer would be "NO."

We started our annual winter camping trip Friday, February 12<sup>th</sup> at noon. Members and leaders from Rimrock Acres and TNT teamed up for this outdoor adventure. After loading all of the needed equipment, snowshoes, sleds, backpacks, tents...etc...we drove to the Pigeon River State Forest and arrived about 5 p.m. Just northeast of Vanderbilt, Michigan we found 10 inches of snow! We met up with another group, Kingsley High School 4-H OAC Club with leaders Boone Scharp and Bill Slater. The Kingsley group already had shoveled spots for our tents, had a fire going and had collected a pile of firewood for the night. We thanked them for their hard work in helping us out! Our kids quickly set up their tents and gathered around the fire for processing. It was time to talk about what each person was looking forward to on this trip. On the top of the list the kids were looking forward to building quinzhees (snow shelters). This first night everyone would spend the night in a tent. But tomorrow they would have the opportunity to build a quinzhee and experience the insulating power of snow!

Once our processing was done it was time for bed. The next morning about 7 a.m. we pack up everything and hit the trail. Most of the members were wearing backpacks and pulling a sled. This allows each person to take a nice warm sleeping bag, lots of extra clothes and a bucket for sitting on. For most of the group this was the first time they had experience snowshoes as well.

It was nearly a three-mile hike into the Pigeon River Forest. After crossing the bridge on the Sturgeon River we took our loaded sleds down an incline along the river. The problem was if you didn't watch out the sled got going faster than the person and the sled would head right for the river. Maria found this out fast! Good thing for her strong legs and her strength pulling on that sled to get it up out of the river and up a three foot bank. She managed to stop it just in time with everyone cheering and yelling, "pull, pull, pull."

The entire group stopped to at the Green Timbers Cabin. This is a beautiful log cabin that was on this land when the land was donated to the State. The DNR removed on wall of the cabin to stop people from trying to live there, but it is still available as a camping shelter.

After a break at the cabin we were back on the trail. It wasn't long before we found a good spot to make our camp. We all got out our snow shovels and made a kitchen area and a fire pit area. *Man* those kids were like well oiled machines, shovel, shovel, shovel. In all we piled up eight snow piles large enough to build eight quinzhees. We had to let the snow settle for two hours. This gave us a chance to eat lunch...yummm, beefy burritos. Thanks, Kelly, they were delicious. After lunch it was time to haul wood. Alex Rickerman and some others did a great job getting the campfire going. D.J. and Jerry cut some fine wood poles for our tripod to suspend our pot over the fire for melting snow into water. This water is used for drinking, making hot cocoa, instant coffee, oatmeal, etc...

We re-use the poles for many years. By the time all of these camp chores were finished it was time for the kids to get busy hollowing out their shelters. Most donned raingear to protect their clothing from getting wet while working inside the quinzhee. It really is warm work and it would be easy to get completely soaked.

For most of the kids this was their first experience building a quinzhee. All of them did a great job. They had nice solid bedrooms for the night. When it was time to tear them down many found they could have

made the inside quite a bit bigger. Some left their walls up to three feet thick when they only needed to leave a 12-inch wall. But, that just gave them less space to heat up.

Once all of the quinzhee building was finished it was time for some extreme sledding. Then of course, it was time for dinner. Lindsey heated up a delicious beef stew made by Mrs. Whitenight along with some mashed potatoes. This stew hit the spot. Our tummies were full the fire was blazing and it was time to process. All of the members said they were tired and were looking forward to a great nights rest. It had been a fun day and now it was time to listen for the coyote's yelping in the night.

In the morning some of the members, Maria and Alyssa were up at their usual time 5:30 a.m. to repack for our trek back to the cars. They weren't a little anxious... When the fire was safely out, our quinzhees were torn down and all of the sleds were repacked it was our last chance to talk about our awesome weekend. Kim and Kathy, two adults who are being trained to be Challenge leaders, shared with the group how much fun they had on this phase of their training because there were kids along on the trip. All of their previous training trips had been only adults. They really enjoyed working with and along side the kids. This was their high for the weekend. Kim and Kathy will be great leaders. Now it was time to hike back to the car.

Once we reached the end of the trail the kids made a short video for Mrs. Whitenight. She was unable to attend the trip due to some treatments she is going through right now. The kids had fun making the video and Mrs. Whitenight loved seeing it upon our return home. Then it was time to load up the trailer and the vehicles. This is always the tricky part...getting it all back in. Once we had packed everything and closed the door on the trailer it was off to Ponderosa in Gaylord for the all you can eat buffet. Boy, can these guys and girls eat after being in the woods for a couple of days!

At the end of the weekend D. J. Eves was awarded the new club amulet. D. J. did an outstanding job all weekend. He worked hard on his own quinzhee, then helped build two other quinzhees, he hunted firewood and helped keep the fire going. D.J. was outgoing and helped the new members feel welcome. Wherever there was work to be done, D.J. was willing. He took care of himself, was very prepared for being in the outdoors. Congratulations D.J., you certainly made up proud!

Putting together a trip like this is a lot of work and it takes a lot of help from a lot of people. Our club certainly appreciates all the help we got from the trainees on the trip, Alex, Dave, Kim and Kathy. We also appreciate the hard work and help from Lee Brockdorff, Lindsey and Russell LaForte, and Kelby Harrington. Thank also Lee for driving. A special thank you to all of the OACC leaders, TNT leader Kelly Sampeer, Kingsley leaders Boone Scharp and Bill Slater. Thanks to OAC leader Lonnie Crowe and his daughter, Rebekah for joining us. It was nice having some friends from the middle of the State along! Finally, thanks to our friend in Gaylord, Sam Cornelius. He helped us make the arrangements for camping by getting the permits for us. He also kept us up to date on the snow conditions and did a little scouting for us. Thanks for your help, Sam!

A special thanks to my wife...even though she couldn't come along she helped us pack, kept us organized and made sure we had lots to eat. Thanks, Theresa.