

Saturday May 11, 2013

It was a late night preparing for this day. 14 students and 2 teachers were supposed to go up Burstall Pass, but the 100ish cm of snow at the trailhead had us rethinking this plan. We arrived at Porcupine Creek at 9am, prepared for a very full day traveling a whole 11km by days end.... 12 hours later!

Mountain skill numero uno, dead reckoning. It is imperative to be able to find your way out of the bush without any map/gear what-so-ever. So we learnt the topography of the land, and how to tell what direction we were going based on how the distant peaks changed position in the sky as we walked. Numero deux, find the UTM coordinates on our maps that shows exactly where we are standing. The lay of the land and contour lines on the map pointed to this sweet spot. Of course we did not have help from our teachers, finding it out on our own is really the only way to do it.

As we winded our way up the creek, skirting back and forth across the trickling water, the canyons grew steeper and steeper. We learnt about safe spacing distances between hikers to prevent slips, trips, and falls. We thought we had found a place to stop for lunch, but instead we were thigh deep in snow. We went on a little more and found a place at the bottom of a steep slope. Appropriately our teachers took this opportunity to educate the group on assessing for rockslides and avalanches, including the only evacuation route.... up the other side!!

Food and student presentation time! We stopped for lunch and gazed at the clouds; learning what we were looking at and what it meant for the weather in a few hours, and tomorrow...and it was right! We learnt about bugs that bite while we ate. We rocked the morning skills and lunchtime presentations and had time to continue up the creek and test out some scenarios on the unsuspecting students. Phil got the opportunity to handle "Casa Nova" over there, who became especially persistent with one fair lady when his hands were free. All jokes though, there wasn't much inappropriate touching. Janice took up control of the group when Princess Pam decided she was tired and could not possibly go one more step down this creek. We were all so concerned with winning Oscars for our scenario performances that before we knew it the sun was lower in the sky, and we had to pick up the pace back to the cars. Of course the creek had swelled with the snow melting all day, and boy did it ever swell up! Our trip back down Porcupine Creek proved to be difficult and in some cases, wet. But we learnt how to determine the safest route.

When we got to the cars we had been walking on the creek bed for 12 hours. We returned to our wonderful teachers home in Canmore, weary and grateful. We prepared them our massive potluck arrangement of burgers, fish, salads, pasta, dessert, and so much more! By 11pm the food was packed away and no one had trouble sleeping.

Written by; Lisa, Claudette, and Dion