

Outside 101

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By DANIEL CAUDILL/Correspondent

Wytheville Community College recently added outdoor education to its physical fitness curriculum. Four classes – backpacking, rock climbing, canoeing and kayaking – have all been part of WCC’s spring and summer agenda.

Along with providing students with subject information, these courses provide an opportunity to experience the outdoors and explore the surrounding area. Each class consists of a learning period followed by field experience and a final exam. The classes are taught by Rick Showalter, a lifelong outdoor enthusiast with years of experience and numerous certifications. This experience is what made Showalter the man for the job. “He was very informative,” said Meghan Hall-Schroeter. A Rural Retreat native, she was a student in WCC’s canoeing class. A full-time student at UVa-Wise, Hall-Schroeter used this summer session class to fulfill a general education requirement in physical education.

“I learned a lot from this experience,” said Hall-Schroeter who was new to canoeing. “It was also a great way to get out for the weekend and do something different.”

The students of the canoeing class spent their time on the water making their way down Big Walker Creek near Pearisburg. They were able to put their classroom knowledge to work as they practiced safety measures and different paddling strokes. Whitewater kayaking was the most recent class taught by Showalter. Outfitted by Montgomery County Parks and Recreation, the class had the opportunity to paddle several miles of the New River on a two-day outing for the weekend of July 11-12. During this time the students paddled a four-mile stretch of water flowing through McCoy Falls and another nine-mile venture passing along the Ripplemeade area near Bluff City. Also outfitted by Montgomery County Parks and Recreation, the rock climbing class traveled north to Bozoo, W.Va., for its field experience. Climbing the sandstone cliffs of Bluestone Lake State Park allowed for students, many for the first time, to experience rock climbing without the use of an artificial wall. For Sarah Green, backpacking was the class of choice. Showalter led students on an overnight trip into Grayson Highlands State Park. “The views were awesome,” said Green. Grayson Highlands State Park lays claim to the highest point in Virginia on top of Mount Rogers. Showalter is excited to be on board with WCC in offering students more than just a classroom experience. Taking advantage of the natural resources in the surrounding area is something he is happy to share with students.

“I love to teach people these lifetime activities,” he said, “and see students having fun while learning.”

WCC plans to keep outdoor education on its schedule, continuing in the fall. For more information contact WCC at 276-223-4700.

A Virginia Tech student, Daniel Caudill lives in Wytheville.

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