

Fun ... and Growing ... in the Wilderness

Anna Somers

Six teens. Five adults. Two 14-foot rafts. Eighty miles of river. Eleven months of planning. Four days of discipleship ... wilderness style.

And this could be only the beginning.

When Mark Overbeek invited a group of teens from Old Harbor, Alaska, to raft down three rivers (the Kennicott, Nizina and Chitina), it was a first in many respects. It was the first time InterAct had taken on a wilderness venture of this scale. It was the first time Mark had been on an overnight rafting trip. And for at least one teen from Mark's group, it was his first time leaving Kodiak Island.



InterAct's wilderness trip in late July was also the first time that Mark, a church planter in Old Harbor in southeastern Alaska, and Tim Zook, a youth leader in Fairbanks, worked together for a joint youth event.

Rafting wasn't in the initial plan. "We were thinking of camping or hiking," Mark explained, since he and Tim are both more experienced in those areas. Logistically speaking, however, a trip like that would have been more expensive and difficult to plan.

InterAct is actively seeking a full-time wilderness director to coordinate events such as the July rafting trip. But since that position has yet to be filled, Mark ended up doing most of the preparation himself.

"We've never done this kind of thing before," he stated. Nevertheless, the trip itself went very smoothly, thanks to months of planning and help from a Christian group called True North Xpeditions, who supplied guides and equipment.

Mark and his teens traveled from Old Harbor to Kodiak, where they took an overnight ferry to Homer. From there, they flew to Palmer and met Tim's team in Glennallen. That night they set up camp in McCarthy, and the next day they began their four-day journey beginning on the Kennicott River.

Days were spent floating (and sometimes cascading) down the river; evenings were spent playing Frisbee or beach football.



Mark and Tim held morning and evening “story times,” where the adult leaders, and even a couple of the teens, shared their testimonies.

“By the end of the trip,” Mark stated, “[the teens] really started to open up. They were asking more questions and really listening.”

The benefits of a trip like this cannot be overstated. Tim explained that it generally takes awhile to earn the trust of Native youth. “If you take someone [on a wilderness trip] that you don’t have a long history with, they will open up faster than they would at home.”

Another benefit of a wilderness trip came from taking the teens out of their comfort zones. “This tends to make them think more about spiritual things,” Tim continued.

Without the pressures of media, and (for some) negative home environments, reflect on the testimonies they heard from their leaders. It also gave the non-Christian youth a chance to see teens and adults who love the Lord and also know how to have fun.



Did I mention anything about fun?