

Lake Superior was a wilderness lab

By CARL STODDARD

For five days in late May, the wilderness region of the Lake Superior shoreline was the classroom for a group of 12 Southfield-Lathrup High School students.

Carrying 30-pound packs of food, clothing and other essentials on their backs, they roamed through knee-deep bogs, trudged up sand dunes, explored primeval forests and rappelled down the face of an 80-foot cliff.

The students are members of SLICE, a program developed three years ago at the high school for students needing an alternative to the regular school program. SLICE, which stands for Southfield-Lathrup Individualized Career Education, normally caters to students during three-hour daily sessions at the school.

This spring, counselors and teachers in the program wanted to offer the students something in addition to the regular fare. With the help of the Southfield-based Tamarack Hills Authority, a camping organization that supplies equipment and camping facilities, Southfield-Lathrup staffers arranged a special trip to Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore east of Munising.

For many students, it was their first encounter with untamed wilderness. And despite some blisters and

complaints, the teachers who accompanied the students say the trip accomplished more than several months in the classroom.

"IF THEY were at school, they would have walked away," said Charles Duggan, a SLICE teacher who accompanied the group. "Up there, there was no way to back out of it."

The students were joined by Duggan and fellow teacher Ronald DeCarlo. Two Camp Tamarack counselors, Robert Lipitz and Joan Rotenberg, both former Southfield High School students, served as guides.

The first day out, the guides took the entire group to a rugged cliff along the Lake Superior shoreline. There the students, including the three girls, jumped from the top and lowered themselves down a rope to the bottom. Some students hesitated at first, but peer pressure and the success of earlier classmates overcame their fears.

"Some of the most satisfying moments the kids had, they had there," DeCarlo said. "The first boy down immediately went to his notebook. We asked them to keep a journal during the trip and he started writing several pages of the things he felt at that time."

"From that point on, I knew the trip would be worthwhile."

Later that day, the group split into two smaller groups. One half drove to the far side of the national shoreline, some 40 miles away and began hiking west. The other group headed east toward where the van was parked.

THEY SLEPT in tents, cooked their own food over campfires, drank fresh water from streams and from Lake Superior, bathed in chilling wilderness lakes, and plotted their direction with a map and compass.

They saw areas devastated by forest fires and the results of early massive logging efforts. The guides explained the effects of pollution on Lake Superior and pointed out geological formations.

Parts of the trip had a definite effect on the students, Duggan said. Students put their litter in their pockets rather than tossing it on the ground and they began to realize the impact of pollution on fresh lakes and streams.

There was not, however, a complete transformation for most of the students.

"They were typical city kids," Duggan said. "The guides wanted them to look at trees, look at nature, but the kids were kicking it out. They'd run to the next rest stop so they could have a longer rest period. When they got there, they were exhausted. After a while, they learned there was another way to do things."

"They just began grasping things toward the end, just sitting in a spot and enjoying what was there."

Mother Nature cooperated during the entire trip and provided sunny days and clear skies. The nights, however, proved to be cold enough to freeze the water in the canteens.

NEW BOOTS some of the students purchased caused blisters and made walking difficult. A partial ban on cigarette smoking caused pangs of a different sort. More than once, DeCarlo said, students wanted to give up the entire trip and go home.

But they stuck it out and encouraged school officials to offer the trip again next year. Duggan said he would like nothing better.

"We found it an excellent opportunity for open, honest, one-on-one counseling," Duggan said. "Up there, there were no bells ringing, no place to go."

Next time around, Duggan and DeCarlo want to make the trip even more of a challenge. One possibility they are exploring is a true wilderness survival trip in which students would go into the forest armed with only their ingenuity and skills to live off the land.

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State wants Northwestern survey

By JUDITH BERNE

A study of where motorists traveling Northwestern Highway are going and where they've been has been requested by the State Highway Commission.

The commission last week asked John Woodford, director of the State Highway Department, for the origin and destination study as well as background data on:

• Twelve Mile and Northwestern intersection.

• Fourteen Mile and Orchard Lake roads intersection with Northwestern.

• Possible improvements to Orchard Lake Road and Maple, west of Orchard Lake Road.

COMMISSIONER WESTON VIVIAN proposed the study that he believes is necessary "regardless of what decision we make" on the hot issue of whether to extend Northwestern.

Jim Grasman, highway department spokesman, said although no formal vote was taken, "The commission has

asked us to look into this and we'll do it."

Sheila Oatley, representing a coalition of organizations working against the proposed 9.3-mile Northwestern extension, attended the commission meeting and publicly supported Vivian's requests.

She said members of the coalition "have always talked about an origin-destination study."

She said it was her understanding that Vivian's other proposals would bring forth ideas for a permanent solution to traffic at the Northwestern-Twelve Mile bottleneck and "a picture of what the Fourteen Mile-Orchard Lake Road area would look like if we didn't extend Northwestern."

He also wanted to know what could be done to bring Orchard Lake and West Maple up to par, Mrs. Oatley said.

GRASMAN REPORTED Vivian specifically asked whether Orchard Lake could become a state trunkline in-

stead of a county road.

"This would make it eligible for up-

grading by the state," Grasman said. This concept was also part of Oakland County Executive Daniel Murphy's plan for a lakes area parkway to take the place of M-275, cancelled by the highway commission earlier this year.

Murphy's plan does not mention extending Northwestern. A spokesman from his office recently said, "The plan assumes Northwestern will be extended but it stands alone."

Northwestern, which dead-ends at Orchard Lake Road, was scheduled to link up with M-275. When its terminus was cancelled, the state highway department recommended cancelling all work "on the Northwestern extension."

The highway commission is still deciding that question. A recent report said three commissioners, including Vivian, were considering voting to kill the extension.

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