



photo courtesy of Teresa Bezanson-Byatt

Jerry Antoine, left, and Tyler Lafferty of Fort Simpson along with George Tsetso of Nahanni Butte and Donovan Punch of Trout Lake, drum for handgames players during the Eco-Cultural Celebrations Camp that was held at Rabbitkettle Lake from July 9 to 15.

Park becomes open-air classroom

Camp participants learn about culture, science and safety

by **Roxanna Thompson**
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Rabbitkettle Lake,
Nahanni National Park Reserve

Fifteen students from the Deh Cho have returned from Rabbitkettle Lake after spending a week learning about science and Dene culture.

The students were participating in the Eco-Cultural Celebrations Camp that was offered through a partnership between the community of Nahanni Butte and the Nahanni National Park Reserve.

Students camped at Rabbitkettle

Lake from July 9 to 15 where they participated in daily sessions about a variety of topics that earned them a high school credit.

"It's the perfect classroom," said Teresa Bezanson-Byatt who acted as the teacher co-ordinator for the camp.

Science, culture and safety were the camp's three main components. During their hands-on science lessons students focused on water and the land as well as the ecology of the park.

Cultural topics included traditional medicine and food as well as the importance of different plants and

animals to Dene people. Handgames were also a popular evening activity, Bezanson-Byatt said.

Students had the chance to put the safety lessons they learned to work. One night while walking to the washroom, Donovan Punch of Trout Lake saw a black bear coming down the trail toward him.

Punch raised his arms to make himself look bigger and after the bear left, he alerted staff. Bear bangers were used to scare the bear away but there were other sightings during the camp.

Students also learned about safety in the bush and on the water. As an additional component, participants

had the chance to earn their pleasure craft operator card.

For Edmund Gargan of Fort Providence, cultural teachings were the best part of the camp.

"I learned stories about the land and how it was when people knew about the land, how to walk on it and how to respect it and how to take care of it," he said.

Gargan, 15, said he also learned more about safety including the fact that if you're in a motorized water vehicle you should always wear a life-jacket and carry supplies, including a paddle, a fire extinguisher, a throw bag and a bailer.

"I learned a lot from the

trip," he said.

For Mindy Tsetso of Nahanni Butte, meeting new people and having the opportunity to go to Rabbitkettle made the trip memorable.

"I would like to go there again in the future," she said.

Tsetso, 16, said she learned about the land and culture as well as the stories behind some of the lakes and rivers in the park.

The students were supervised and taught at the camp by 13 people including five cultural instructors, four Parks Canada staff and a representative of the Aboriginal Aquatic Oceans and Resource Management Program.

**COFFEE
Break**