

Paddling toward science

Canoe trip gives students first-hand knowledge about freshwater systems

by **Roxanna Thompson**
Northern News Services
**Deh Gah Got'ie Koe/
Fort Providence**

Students in Deh Gah School's Grade 11 experiential science course had the chance to study their environment firsthand, instead of simply reading about it in a textbook.

Eleven students in the class, along with their teacher Caley Bell and two community members, canoed the Mackenzie River from Fort Providence to Jean Marie River, from Sept. 12 to 16.

"The whole point is really for them to appreciate their backyard and their water systems," said Bell.

It's one thing to talk in a classroom about freshwater systems, but another to be on the water and see the tributaries and the animals that depend on them, she said. While on the river, the students were the first class in the territory to participate in an aquatic invertebrates study for the University of Prince Edward Island.

The study's researchers

believe there are invertebrates – animals lacking backbones – in the Mackenzie River that haven't been identified yet, said Bell. Students used dip nets to capture samples from the river to be sent to the university. If an unknown invertebrate is captured, the students will get to help name it.

COFFEE Break

While paddling, the students also studied the geological features of the river and collected rocks from the shoreline that were used when a geologist visited the class on Sept. 22. The class also planned to take water samples, but long days of paddling didn't leave them enough time.

The students covered between 40 to 50 km per day. After finishing breakfast at approximately 8:30 a.m. every day, the students paddled until 6:30 p.m.

"It was really a lot of paddling," said Bell.

The students, who are used to motorboats were amazed canoes were the traditional form of travel. It blew their minds, she said, to think of hunting a moose and then put-



photo courtesy of Caley Bell

Students in the Grade 11 experiential science course at Deh Gah School spent five days canoeing the Mackenzie River from Fort Providence to Jean Marie River. Participants included, back row from left, Shiana Sabourin, Adeline Landry, Jodie Bonnetrouge, Sidney Squirrel, Jordan Sabourin, Nadine Elleze and teacher Caley Bell; middle row, Kyle Canadian, left, and Jeremy Landry; front row, Roland Nadli. Missing from the photo are Aubrey Nadli, Roderick Lesage, Ricky Gargan and Jason Causa.

ting it in a canoe and paddling it back to their group, she said.

"It showed how dependent we were and still are on the Mackenzie," said Bell.

Sidney Squirrel, 17, didn't mind the paddling at all.

Squirrel, who likes camping, responded enthusiastically to the idea of going out on the river.

"I was like yeah, we should all go canoeing," he said.

Squirrel said he likes getting out of Fort Providence

and away from problems and just being with true friends.

"We all canoed together, just drifting along," he said. "We had a lot of laughs."

During the trip, Squirrel said he learned about new places to hunt and that water

from along the shore isn't good to drink because it's muddier.

Squirrel said he also enjoyed helping with the invertebrates study. He caught one sample with the net.

"It was pretty weird to look at it," he said.