

A Weekend to Remember

By Carol Hunter

I have had many people thank me for organizing the Wilderness First Aid courses and while I have gratefully accepted their acknowledgement, I must admit I did not organize the courses because others wanted them, I organized them for myself. I wanted to take a class so if someone was injured on a hiking trip I would know how to help them, but more importantly, I wanted others to take the class so if I was injured on a trip, they would know how to help me.

As much as I wanted to do this course, I have taken first aid classes before and found them long and boring. I remember sitting for extended periods hearing about a multitude of symptoms, injuries and treatments and when we got up, it was to endlessly pump on resuscitation Annie all the while counting... one and two and three.....and fearing that if I pumped too many times or too hard or not hard enough the doll would die and it would be my fault. I always passed my courses, but my confidence in my abilities was never very high, aware as I was that I was starting to forget all the minute details the second the class ended. I left the class hoping I would never have to practice what I had just learned.



Another reason I found the classes long and boring was you could pretty well guarantee that if I was stuck indoors taking a first aid course, the sun would inevitably be shining.

Well, Saturday morning the sun was not shining. Because I had been busy organizing the event I hadn't thought much about the course itself, but I did have hopes that it would be better than my past experiences. After all anything with "wilderness" in its name must be good. My only feelings on the drive to Comox Lake were gratitude that the day had finally arrived so no one else would be able to change their plans and a sense of distraction. Since the sun wasn't shining and since 40% of the course was to be taught outside and since we were meeting at the boat ramp, I was wondering where the 60% inside portion of the course would be taught.

Just before the 8:30 start time, Dave our instructor arrived. When he proceeded to carry his teaching materials to the picnic shelter I quickly caught on that there was no inside portion, that the entire course would be taught outside. I gave thanks for my long johns, dug out my toque, put on my extra fleece and hoped that the weekend didn't drag on forever. It wasn't long before the apprehension I was feeling drained away and I became immersed in the laughter, and the learning that was to be the essence of the weekend.



Looking back, I can say without a doubt that I just finished the best first aid course I have taken in my life. The course was relevant and taught in a manner that made learning fun and, for me at least, easy. Best of all, although I don't wish anyone any harm, I am no longer afraid I won't know what to do if they do get hurt.

First of all, the course was relevant. If I come across someone ill or injured in town or close to town, the ambulance is just a call away; I don't have to worry about the limits of my knowledge. I took this course because I wanted to know how to aid someone who might get a bleeding head injury on a trip to the Comox Glacier, or might dislocate a shoulder in a fall on Mt Elma and I wanted to know when to call Search and Rescue for support. (Sad to say my catalyst was the misfortune of others).

Because everyone in the class was there for the same reason, both the material and the scenarios focused on those injuries and conditions we were likely to come across on one of our trips. We spent more time on spinal injuries and heart attacks than on infant cpr and smoke inhalation. When it came to treating the victim/sufferer we used items from our packs and our surroundings

need a sling... use a shirt, need a splint..... pad a stick

with clothes and tie

it in place with a shoe lace. And best of all, we were outside learning in the same environment we would be using the knowledge in.



Furthermore, the course was taught using a variety of methods. We sat in chairs for maybe an hour at the start of the course, then it was out with sleeping pads and on to active learning. Working in pairs or sometimes small groups, Dave had us extracting key points from our books and sharing them with each other. Ever try explaining the definition and symptoms of asthma to a group with pictures that you had to draw? Patients and first aiders, we role played and practised.... hands on learning. We were never still long enough to daydream and the learning never became rote, new things were thrown in or problems were combined so a wider range of skills had to be practiced.

Sometimes we were given a task or activity to do before instruction took place, giving us a chance to discover and to demonstrate what we already knew so we could build on that knowledge and weren't bored listening to unnecessary instruction. For example, Sunday morning we began by building shelters; with a tarp and 4 lengths of rope we had to build a shelter that would have room for a patient and a first aider. We ended up with adequate examples of the three main types of shelters that would meet the criteria.



After critiquing them, Dave taught us some knots and a method of construction that would ensure future shelters could be quickly erected and would protect both parties from the elements, no matter the location or weather conditions.

Finally, frequent short breaks that gave us a chance to digest what we learned, instruction that focused on key points rather than every detail, and being outside when the sun finally came out all contributed to an excellent learning experience.

In the future if someone is injured, I am confident I can handle the situation. I may not be able to name the bone that is broken, or know if the internal bleeding is due to a ruptured spleen, but I will be able to provide the necessary first aid, make the decision about evacuation and deliver appropriate care until help arrives. I also know I don't need to worry that I will forget what I have learned because as part of our course fees, [Ridge Wilderness Adventures](#) has invited us to drop into a class anytime throughout the next three years to review and refresh our skills.

I would highly recommend this course to everyone. If there is enough interest expressed I will organize another class at a time that would suit the most people. Interest can be expressed by

voting in the new First Aid Polls found under Program polls on the club website.

