

## Putting the Fun Back into Winter Survival!

*Ever wondered what you'd do if you had a forced approach in winter...and weren't sure when help would come? Even when flying close to a highly populated area, it might be an uncomfortable night spent outdoors if pilot or passengers aren't ready for an unplanned winter camping trip. Every year the RAA, SFC, CASARA and University of Manitoba co-sponsor a winter survival course based on traditional Inuit techniques of 'thriving' in cold environments rather than 'surviving'.*



This year twenty-seven hardy souls met with the hopes of building an igloo, or due to the unseasonably warm weather and lack of snow on the Prairies, to at least get a first-hand view of how to cut and set a snow block. Leading up to the course date, Drs. Rick Riewe and Jill Oakes watched the few existing snow drifts shrink in the above normal temperatures, full sun, and lack of cloud cover. Then, miraculously, Thursday and Friday the temperatures dropped just enough to re-solidify the tiny bits of remaining snow drifts. Saturday morning, we tried cutting a few blocks and were really surprised to actually see the snow cooperating. Soon 27

enthusiastic folks were sawing blocks from whatever drift they could find. We piled the snow blocks onto a sled, harnessed some volunteers up to the sled and pulled the blocks carefully over to one igloo building site. It was highly doubtful that we would get the 30 blocks needed to produce one igloo; however everyone would have a chance to at least learn how to set a block. Collecting blocks from different drifts located all over the airport, we slowly began acquiring enough blocks to build at least one igloo! Rick and Jill quickly began teaching the basic steps needed to get the igloo's foundation started, still not sure if the temperature would soon climb above seasonal norms and make completing the igloo impossible. Around 2:30, the temperatures climbed too high to set blocks, so we left the igloos half-finished, baking in the strong southern sun, and went off to experience some skijoring - dog pulled skiing. When we returned a couple of hours later the sun was setting, temperatures were beginning to drop again and everyone got a chance to become competent at setting blocks. We finished the first igloo with the gorgeous lighting of a spectacular winter sunset warming the sky. It was about 6:00. Instead of going in for supper, everyone decided to build a 2nd igloo and then a 3rd igloo as competency levels improved and temperatures dropped to a beautiful -30 again. To all of our surprise, under starlight, we completed 3 igloos!



*Ameena Baje-Koulack, Sarah Freehorn, Lindsey Bylo, Samantha Fizzard, and Amy Wiebe after they stepped out of their warm igloo into the -30 (including wind chill) on Sunday morning.*

Sleeping in the igloos on a bed of caribou skins was the ultimate highlight. Here are a few comments from some of the participants: "It was fabulous" " ...the igloo was the most exciting and the caribou skins were soooo warm!" "Loved everything about the weekend." "I was most excited about the igloo building. I learned so much!!!" "I had a great time building igloos and learning how to build them. It was an experience I won't forget for sure!" "Sleeping in the igloo was cool, as were the Inuit games...building the igloos was fun too" "I can't believe I learned how to build an igloo!!!!!! You can never get the experience of building an igloo unless you build it yourself."

Keeping one's mind pre-occupied is often a significant problem for folks "stuck" overnight in a snow drift. Participants were introduced to a few ideas of ways to keep themselves entertained and to turn

an unplanned ordeal into another great winter camping trip. Suzie Strachan, President of Snow Motion, introduced us to the Nordic-based skijoring sport. Many participants had never seen this sport where the family dog actually pulls a skier along down the trail at quite a clip! This sport was first introduced to Manitoba about 15 years ago and it was enlightening to learn about the need for local parks to provide tracks that meet the needs of this relatively new sport. The dogs absolutely loved the chance to get out and run...great exercise for the dogs and the dog's owner!

The Manitoba Trappers Association member, Richard LePage discussed the fur industry in Manitoba and demonstrated how to skin a beaver. Participants had a chance to actually try skinning a beaver, using ancient techniques passed down from one generation to the next, as well as learned about the different fur species available in Manitoba. The beaver carcass was butchered and absolutely everyone raved about how delicious it was - there was none left and about 2 gallons of vegetable stew left uneaten!



Pilot Chuck Wilson and his team of Navigator and Spotters with Civil Search and Rescue Association (CASARA) led an awesome mirror signaling exercise. They were able to talk to us on an air-to-ground radio so we knew exactly which individuals truly were able to work the mirror signals effectively, which gave the others feedback needed for them to readjust their technique until everyone caught on. Pilot Wilson said the half dozen mirrors looked like a police car all lit up or strob lights. One of the spotters took aerial photos so the participants could actually see for themselves the signals they were sending to the search aircraft. Many participants

remarked "the mirror exercise was probably the most useful skill I've learned" and "this is a skill I'll never forget"...guess that is truly a life-long learning in the making.

This course is sponsored by the University of Manitoba, Recreational Aircraft Association (RAA), CASARA and Springfield Flying Club. If you are interested in registering for January or February 2013, email <jill\_oakes@umanitoba.ca> and pray for a few snow drifts and a bit of cold weather! You too will have the pleasure of camping without mosquitoes!



*Igloo building group in front of Chuck Wilson's Cessna used in the CASARA Mirror Signaling exercise.*