



HAWK CIRCLE WILDERNESS EDUCATION ACCOMPLISHMENTS, PROJECTS & PROGRAMS IN 2006

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RICARDO SIERRA'S SUMMARY OF 2006

WILDERNESS CAMPS EARTH SKILLS TRAINING SCHOOL PROGRAMS

RICARDO SIERRA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

BARRY KEEGAN
HEAD INSTRUCTOR

TRISTA HAGGERTY
COMMUNITY DIRECTOR

LUKE GAILLARD
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

P.O. Box 506

CHERRY VALLEY, NY 13320

PHONE: 607.264.3396

FAX: 607.264.3256

RICARDOJPS@AOL.COM

HAWKCIRCLE.COM

HAWK CIRCLE WILDERNESS EDUCATION IS A
PROGRAM OF THE EARTH MENTORING INSTITUTE, INC.

A 501 (c) 3 TAX EXEMPT

NOT-FOR-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

FEDERAL TAX-EXEMPT # 31182

FEDERAL ID # 16-1563526

The year 2006 was filled with new things here at Hawk Circle. Certainly, the flooding was intense and unexpected, but in addition to that, we also had gypsy and tent caterpillar infestations that ate 75% of all the green leaves of the trees on our hill. At times it looked like April, not June, until the caterpillars died and the trees began to recover! Walking in the forest, you could hear the sound of constant, falling caterpillar droppings and bits of half eaten leaves, almost like rain. If you stood or sat, you would soon become covered with the little things, and the feeling of invasion was strong at those times.

What happened at the end of their life cycle was interesting, though. At the time when they would usually build cocoons, it began to rain. It rained or was damp and wet, for almost two weeks. The caterpillars had no place to dry off, being in the forest, and with the warm temperatures, they become covered in mold. Most of them simply dissolved in a weird moldy goop. We don't believe they were able to lay more eggs, and are hoping for an invasion-free 2007.

Of course, all of this caterpillar demise was overshadowed by what else the rain did. It rained very hard, for two full days, and the sheer volume of water was intense. Every stream, spring, trickle or low spot on our land was full or overflowing with fresh rainwater. It was amazing and powerful and despite our having a group of campers here at the time, kind of exciting. We all did well in the rain, and were cheerful and positive. On the third day, it stopped raining, and we went down to the creek that runs under our bridge. We saw that that was no longer the case, and instead, it was running over our bridge now, as well as down our roads, and for hundreds of feet on either side. Our creek was a muddy torrent of chocolate milk, floating logs, grasses, silt, brush and leaves, moving and swirling across banks and amid trees.

By mid afternoon the water began to recede and we looked at what had happened. Deep ruts had been carved into our gravel road, and the bridge had been scoured clean on top. However, the true scope of the damage took several more days to be discovered. When the water was lower we saw that the current had done significant damage to the bottom of our bridge support system.

Our bridge is built with three large steel beams, and they are in turn, supported by concrete abutments and some old fuel tanks filled with concrete, as per acceptable building practice fifty years ago. Two of those tanks had been undercut by the current, with the gravel washed away underneath and the support straps also rusted out. They lay in the bottom of the creek, useless. The remaining concrete was strong enough to carry passenger cars and light trucks but needed to be supported soon to allow delivery trucks or fuel trucks to cross. We began to search for con-



tractors to give us repair estimates, and see what needed to be done.

We also notified many of our greater community about this situation through our e-Newsletter. The responses were immediate and generous and allowed us to move quickly to fix the road and bridge, which allowed us to continue teaching and mentoring throughout the summer and fall. Thank you all for your kind help and commitment to our work!

Throughout four different counties, bridges and culverts had been washed away, houses had been completely flooded and roads washed out as well. The needs were great everywhere, and our situation was considered by many to be low priority. Of course, when you need to get estimates in to FEMA or SEMA, it isn't low priority, especially with winter coming and all sorts of other issues being factored in (camp schedules, programs, etc.) A few contractors gave us estimates for a replacement bridge that would run about \$50K at a minimum, and much more to repair our long road, around \$25K.



The good news, when all is said and done, is that we ended up fixing the existing bridge, by pouring additional, reinforced concrete around the buttresses. We did this work with the help of our staff, (Ricardo, Barry) as well as volunteers Mark Kessler, Pierre Blin, Eli Martz, Ryan Smith, Tim Brown and Rashell Aunchman. Although the water rose with torrential rains as we poured concrete, our forms held and we were successful! The result is a strong, stable situation that will serve us for now, as we plan to replace the bridge with a larger, longer one.

We also ordered new decking wood, as well as wood for a new railing, and have been waiting to work on these final projects. The existing wood deck is solid and workable, but the new decking will greatly improve it for the coming 10-15 years. The old railing was removed to work on the bridge, and was too worn to put back up. The new wood has taken a long time to get because of the recent warm weather this winter, which has created wet, muddy conditions where local sawmills were unable to get deliveries of logs because the forests were shut down to logging to protect the habitat. It is only in the last few weeks that the ground has begun to freeze and make it possible again to get to the logs, so we are hopeful that we can get them soon.



Another project we worked on in 2006 is the road. The storm created damage and enhanced long standing problems, creating an opportunity to address those issues. Our search for a contractor who was willing and able to help us took many months, but in the end, we were able to start in smoothing, widening, sloping and building up our road surfaces. The weather turned too wet and cold to finish this project at the end of the year, but we look forward to finishing it in the spring of 2007.

A very special improvement project in this year was the realization of a dream that began in the summer of 2005, with a group of motivated, tireless Hawk Circle supporters in the Baltimore region. These parents organized a fundraising dinner in Baltimore in October, 2005, and raised almost \$9,000



for the building of the **Chesapeake Deck!** This project was needed because our campers, staff, students and participants had only a sloped area for eating outside, on picnic tables, and we needed a defined space where we could have meals, do crafts, gather and connect off of sometimes soggy grounds. We began construction in June and completed the project in time for most of the camps to enjoy and use. We still need to install the vertical railings made from saplings, but those take time to gather, cut, shape and install, so we are planning to get this done by early spring. The deck is amazing, made from red cedar and it just is a wonderful new space for all of our programs and community to enjoy. Our summer staff, caretakers, permanent staff and a host of volunteers worked on this project, in sometimes intense heat, rain, swarms of deer flies and bad camp singing, so we have to give them all a lot of credit for this perseverance and dedication!

Another important project was the improvements to the **camp path**, that crosses a wet, swampy areas near the farmhouse. Ryan Smith, who was here for the Fall, Winter and Spring Earth Skills Semesters, noticed that the



path on both sides of the small bridge were mushy, muddy and getting worse with all of the rain we had. He brought large and small rocks from the gravel pit areas, cleaned out the existing mud and woodchips that have been used to temporarily fix this area, and began a rock causeway. He also cleared up trenches in the wet area, to move water through more quickly and directly, and put down gravel and larger stones to keep everyone's feet relatively dry. This was wet, dirty, intense work, and Ryan made it happen. It might seem like nothing to someone walking up to the camp, but it is a vast change that has lasting effects in terms of our overall facility. We really appreciate it, Ryan!

Another nice addition, and very important also, was the rebuilding of the **stone retaining wall** at the entrance to our barn. This had fallen into disrepair and was a safety issue as well as an eyesore. Summer staffmember Tim Manney, who came to us through our relationship with many of the Warren Wilson College student community, not only removed metal, glass and other trash items from the soil around the old wall, but also built an amazing new wall that should last for many many years without need for maintenance and repair. It provides a place to socialize, work on new skills or just to sit and enjoy the afternoon sun. Many thanks to Tim, for his dedication to this project and improvement that will stand for years to come. Tim also worked on the stone ramp leading up to the new deck, and with collecting, peeling and cutting the railing logs as well as many other projects around Hawk Circle.



Barry Keegan spent much of 2006 working first in the upstairs of the barn, cleaning out old items and creating a safe space for storage of our supplies, program materials and tools. He also provided a constant effort in cleaning up the lower barn, which we were able to burn and clean up during the spring and summer. Barry helped make new benches around the fire circle where the **Earth Skills Semester students** fire their pottery, work with stone tools and make various crafts and out-



door meals. He helped build a **new deck for our hide shed**, allowing us to work with hides without getting ourselves or the hides as dirty or cold by being on the ground. We used wood scavenged from the barns and it is also another place to make crafts during the summer when we are not involved in extensive hide projects!

Another area where we improved our facility and grounds is in the organic garden. **Rashell Aunchman** spent many hours turning soil and mulching our plants, creating compost sites, digging out rocks and pulling weeds, all while also helping to involve caretakers and volunteers. She has created a great foundation from which our Biodynamic Garden can begin to grow and find life.

Barry also spent time this summer cutting and peeling bark from several large elm trees which were dying of Dutch Elm disease. Together with Mark Kessler, Tim Manney and other helpers, they peeled bark for lashing strips, peeled sheets of bark for a canoe and for a wickiup shelter, cut up firewood and made log benches. They also helped make an Algonquin Wigwam for the **Inwood Park Nature Center** in Manhattan, NY and worked on native shelters at the **Fenimore House Museum** in Cooperstown, NY, the **Woodland Hills Montessori School** in Rennselaer, NY, and the **Weinberg Nature Center** in the Hudson Valley. Barry's work in historical and native educational replicas developed as well, with projects including dugout canoes, stone knives, lacrosse sticks, wampum belt and hardwood hunting bows. These items will be used in educational programs to help students have a first hand, tactile connection to the types of items native peoples used to live close to the land, and allow them to hold real tools, instead of just looking at a display case from a distance. We are very excited about our work in this area.



Hawk Circle led many programs this past year, including our new summer camps in their one week format. We ran class trip programs for the Aurora Waldorf School Eighth Grade, the Kimberton Waldorf School Seventh Grade, the Baltimore Waldorf School Sixth Grade, Green Meadow Waldorf Fourth Grade and Rudolf Steiner School Sixth and Seventh Grades, with our curriculum focusing on connection to the earth, self, rites of passage, leadership, team-building and inner awareness. We also ran programs at various Shad Festivals and pow-wows along the Hudson River, demonstrated native American methods of processing Maple Sugar at the Farmer's Museum in Cooperstown and led activities for kids and adults at the Otsego Lake Festival, the Earth Day Festival in Milford, Vail's Gate magnet School and the Sanctuary at Crowfield Farm in Newark, NY. We participated in offering classes in the S.A.D.D. conference for Otsego County highschool students, in partnership with Otsego's CHOICE coalition against Underage Drinking. We led a Wilderness Leadership program for Leadership Otsego, a group of adult business leaders focusing on community building, networking and





creating strong skills of change and positive mentoring.

Our afterschool Adventure Programs continued in partnership with the LEAF Council on Alcohol and Addictions and the CROP program, and we worked in Laurens, Worcester, Cooperstown, Milford, Cherry Valley Springfield, Morris, Edmeston, Schenevus and Oneonta-Riverside Schools in Otsego County. We led over 108 programs at no cost to the students in the Hawk Circle Adventure Program and Little Hawk Program, and also were able to secure funding through the CROP organization to allow 13 campers to attend Hawk Circle Summer Camps for no cost. Our partnership with the Deepwater Foundation allowed several more campers to attend our camps, and we also were able to grant several Earth Skills Semester students some work study and student aid this year. We are grateful to our donors and partners for their unwavering commitment to our work and the value of helping students reconnect and build strong life skills through their participation in Hawk Circle programs.



several more campers to attend our camps, and we also were able to grant several Earth Skills Semester students some work study and student aid this year. We are grateful to our donors and partners for their unwavering commitment to our work and the value of helping students reconnect and build strong life skills through their participation in Hawk Circle programs.

Highlights from our Earth Skills Semesters and Intensives are the various baskets, crafts, elm bark canoe, tracking and survival expeditions. We gathered many things directly from the land, made beautiful tanned furred hides, soft buckskin, moccasins, bows, arrows, arrowheads, atl-atls, baskets, digging sticks, elderberry syrup, acorn flour and cattail shoots. We followed the tracks of fishers, foxes, coyotes, deer and mink, and saw the populations of woodchucks and eastern cottontail rabbits soar. The number of skills is too numerous to list, but we learned and grew and shared and connected, and it was a great year.

