

Blue River hosts first backcountry course for youth



Submitted Photo

Photo (from left to right): Neil Farren, Nyall Hawkins, Niels Graham, Jaime Fehr, Alex Byrd, Andy Aufschnaiter, Mitchell Graham, Alex McLean. The seven students and two instructors did rock climbing and rope skills over the course of the weekend course, sponsored by Mike Wiegele Helicopter Skiing and the Canadian Ski Guide Association.

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In an effort to train young adults in backcountry skills close to home, Mike Wiegele Helicopter Skiing hosted the first annual Junior Summer Glacier Course last weekend.

The course, designed by the Canadian Ski Guide Association as an introduction to rock and rope skills, gives a basis for future backcountry learning, says Wiegele media spokesperson Michelle Meerse, and contributes to a new generation of backcountry enthusiasts and guides.

Endorsing youth programs is something Mike Wiegele says he believes is essential in small communities. His company hosts several youth camps throughout the year.

“I have seen so many children grow up and leave their rural community in order to find work – why not provide them with the skills and experience to stay close to their friends and families?” says Mike Wiegele. “The fact that they have fun and get such an amazing experience is just the icing on the cake.”

Seven participants, aged 11-21, came from Blue River, Clearwater, and Kamloops and paid \$20 for the three-day course. They tutored under Mike Wiegele heli-ski guides Tim McLean and Andy Aufschnaiter.

After a day of learning the basics at the indoor climbing wall in Blue River, the group took to the snowy woods to learn various knots and applicable anchoring systems, testing their new skills along the bluffs by the Monashee Hut. The lucky participants spent the night at the hut and re-capped their day’s adventures over cups of steamy hot chocolate. The last day was spent back on the bluffs with challenging activities and games.

Organizers say the course was such a great success that the Canadian Ski Guide Association has already started planning a similar event for next summer.

All ski guides employed at Mike Wiegele Helicopter Skiing are certified by Canadian Ski Guide Association.