



OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

HeLa Ventures operates an Adventure Education Centre in central Alberta. The Centre offers curriculum based adventure education programs to school and community youth groups, and training programs to individuals working towards becoming guides/instructors. Our mandate is to deliver high quality instruction and experience to participants in a variety of outdoor activities with safety as a first priority. The following provides an overview of our safety goal and objectives, policies and procedures.

- A. SAFETY GOAL:** The goal of HeLa Ventures is to introduce a variety of outdoor, lifestyle activities to youth and adults in a safe and controlled manner.
- B. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:** The specific objectives of our safety policies are to:
 - a) provide basic safety knowledge and skills to participants in a variety of outdoor pursuits activities, including (but not limited to) lake and river canoeing, top-roped climbing, hiking, wilderness living skills and initiative tasks programming;
 - b) provide quality instruction of knowledge and skills necessary to participate safely in outdoor activities;
 - c) allow students to gain a positive experience in a new outdoor activity through challenging themselves to a level within their own comfort zone;
 - d) teach environmental education concepts to promote protection of the environment in all outdoor activities;
 - e) provide teacher training to ensure concepts taught to students during the program are re-introduced in class and allow students to connect their experience to real life situations.

C. RATIONALE FOR THE PROGRAM

Interest in outdoor pursuit activities is on an increase. Statistics indicate that tourism classified as “eco” or “adventure based” tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in today’s market. As outdoor educators, we observe this increase in interest in the outdoors as positive, but also observe the need for individuals to obtain knowledge and skills in outdoor activities in order to ensure safe participation in the activities. The program we offer to school groups is designed to provide training to students in outdoor activities that they may continue to do in the future as a component of a healthy lifestyle. Our educational programs will provide students with the basic skills and knowledge of safety precautions to participate *wisely* in the activities.

Our rationale for delivering our programs to school groups are based on the following assumptions:

- a) Introducing lifestyle activities is a part of the school curriculum. Our program follows curriculum, teaching skills, knowledge and safety considerations through an experiential education framework.
- b) Most accidents in the outdoors are a result of a lack of knowledge, skills, and proper preparation to participate in the activity. We spend considerable time in the outdoors and are often concerned by the number of individuals we see participating unsafely in activities. We view this observation as a rationale for teaching individuals how to enjoy outdoor pursuits safely. School based programs provide an excellent medium to teach safety skills and knowledge and to hopefully reduce the potential for serious accidents resulting from ignorance.
- c) Protecting the environment is also a primary focus of our programs. We incorporate environmental education concepts into each of the activities with the goal of assisting young people to gain a relationship with the environment and an understanding of the importance of environmental stewardship.

D. PROGRAM SPECIFICS

All programs meet or exceed safety standards and ratios outlined in the *Safety Guidelines for Physical Activity in Alberta Schools* (2008). Each of our programs are designed and delivered from a **critical situation framework**. This means that for each activity our staff ensures a) preparation for the activity; b) risk reduction; and c) ensuring safety through appropriate emergency response procedures. The following outlines our steps in the Critical Situation Framework including:

- a) Preparation: An overview of staff qualifications and training;
- b) Risk Reduction: A description of the safety policies followed for each activity we provide; and
- c) Ensuring safety through appropriate emergency response procedures: An outline of our Emergency Response Manual.

H. THE CRITICAL SITUATION FRAMEWORK

a) Preparation

- i) Staff Qualifications: All lead staff are certified with an Advanced Wilderness First Responder (80 hour). This is industry standard for all guides working in a wilderness context. The course provides training for individuals working in wilderness areas to stabilize an ill or injured person until EMS arrives. This program also provides CPR and epinephrine administration certification. As a company, HeLa Ventures also has “medical direction” which means that our staff have been trained to perform specific medical protocols under the direction of a Medical Doctor. These protocols may save lives in the backcountry.
- ii) Junior Staff and Trainee Qualifications: We have trainees that assist with the delivery of programs. The first aid certification required for junior staff is a minimum Basic Wilderness First Aid (32 – 40 hours). Lead staff accompany junior staff or trainees at all times.
- iii) Training: Most staff have participated in a 4 month training program the season prior to being hired as a paid/lead guide. This ensures the quality and training of our staff. In addition, we provide an initial 4-day staff-training program every

season for both new and returning staff. In the odd occasion, a staff that has the required qualifications may be hired but must go through a minimum one-month training program before becoming a lead guide.

- b) **Risk Reduction:** The following outlines our specific safety policies for each of the activities we provide.
- i) **Canoeing:** Preparation and risk reduction considerations include:
- Certified and experienced instructors lead the activities. Certifications include: minimum Paddle Canada (PC) Flatwater Instructors for the lake; PC Moving Water I or Paddle Alberta (PA) Waterfront Instructors and/or PA River Tripping Leaders Certification or equivalent for the river; at least one staff certified with a Swift Water Rescue Technician (SRT I) Certification. For tandem canoeing, a 1:8 (or better) instructor to student ratio is followed.
 - Quality equipment – ABS canoes that are properly outfitted and of high quality; high quality paddles and PFD'S (DOT approved); wetsuits are provided; helmets are required for the river; rescue equipment in good condition and required at each activity site.
 - Students are well trained on the lake prior to entering river – they are able to hold a straight line and maneuver the canoe safely.
 - A Voyageur Canoe or raft is used for groups who do not demonstrate strong skills during the lake session (Voyageur canoes are controlled by a qualified guide).
 - The river section we run has a safe, flat stretch around each set of rapids, allowing for easy avoidance of the rapids if desired. The rivers are a maximum Grade II classification with maximum Class II rapid (gentle and easily maneuvered by an open Canadian Canoe).
 - Students participate in a “river safety session” the night prior to their river trip. Here they are taught river morphology, safety procedures and self-rescue skills. These concepts are reviewed prior to departure on the river.
 - Float plans are left with additional staff at base camp and emergency procedures are established.
 - Although our staff are well trained to deal with emergencies and emergency response procedures are well established, we have not yet had to implement them – we have not had a canoeing accident in our 22 years of operation.
- ii) **TOP-ROPED CLIMBING:** Preparation and risk reduction include:
- Qualified and experienced staffs deliver the climbing program that includes teaching about equipment, knots, skills and safety considerations, and managing the climbs through belaying and tying in.
 - All staff have taken a “Top Rope Site Management” program sponsored by an ACMG full rock guide or High and Low Ropes Rescue Instructors. While this is not yet a certification program, it is the highest level of training available in Alberta for staff leading introductory rock climbing programs.
 - Our set up systems have been reviewed and approved by an ACMG Rock Guide.

- A 1:1 ratio exists between student and staff when they are bouldering, climbing, or rappelling.
- Equipment is of highest quality and is maintained and regularly checked to ensure it meets safety standards.
- Safety lines and boundaries are set up and students are supervised closely.
- One staff is designated as “supervisor “, and has the responsibility of double checking all belayers before the belay is on, and monitoring back up systems.
- All climbs and rappels are backed up three times in a manner which is appropriate to the situation (using proper anchor, equalization, knots, webbing and caribeaner systems);
- Students are ALWAYS belayed by a qualified and experienced staff member;
- The rock face we use is a well established climbing area. There are no large loose boulders, and the rock face is firm. The hike to the top of the climb is led by a qualified staff and is gentle.
- While emergency response procedures are well established, we have never had the need to implement them, as we have not had a climbing accident in the 18 years we have had climbing as a part of our program.

a) HIKING: Preparation and Risk Reduction considerations include:

- All staff are experienced in leading hikes.
- At least one staff has led the particular hike previously.
- A maximum 1:10 ratio is implemented on hikes – a usual ratio is 1:8.
- Lead, sweep and floating positions for staff are well established. Students must stay in between the lead and sweep guide.
- The hike chosen is dependent on the fitness level, skill level, size and motivation of the group.
- Hikes are weather dependent and are only lead under safe conditions.
- Students are never pushed to go beyond their comfort zone.
- Students are taught safe means of hiking various terrain.
- All staff are well equipped with proper trauma (first aid) kits, extra clothing, emergency pack.
- Students are prepared in advance with classroom training on packing and preparing for the hike. A “buddy system” is implemented on all hikes.
- Detailed hiking plans are left at base camp. Estimated return times and emergency procedures are well established.
- As with the rest of our programs, we have not had a serious accident on any of our hiking programs.

ii) **OTHER PROGRAMS**

- Qualified leaders lead all other programs (e.g. Wilderness Living Skills, Winter programs, Outdoor Fitness Activities, Challenge Programs, and Initiative Tasks Programming).
- As with all of our programs, preparation and risk reduction are our primary concerns. Emergency response procedures are well established but have not yet been required.

b) **EMERGENCY RESPONSE SPECIFICS: Should an accident occur, the steps outlined below will be taken by our staff.**

- i) Each staff carries an “Emergency Response Manual” that provides details on the specific action that must be taken at any location we use for our programs. Each of these “action plans” has been reviewed and practiced by staff during staff training.
- ii) The Emergency Response Manual contains emergency phone numbers that will be used at each specific site. The following are emergency contact numbers our staff are aware of and will utilize depending on their location.

Rocky Mountain House

Ambulance: 845-3002

Hospital: 845-3347

RCMP: 845-2881

24 Hour Emergency: 845-3220

Rocky Ranger Station: 845-8230

Search and Rescue: 845-4337

Contacts: Linda Ferdine 722-2538

Greg Mallo: (pager) 844-0023

Nordegg

Frontier Lodge: 721-2202

Fire Department: 721-2202

Ambulance: 721-2200

Nordegg Ranger Station: 721-3743

Poison Control Centre (Calgary) 1-800-332-1414

Forest Fire: 845-8272 or toll free 310-0000 ask for 780-427-FIRE

- iii) Emergency Transport: Most clients provide their own transportation for their participants. HeLa Ventures also provides an emergency vehicle at all sites.

I. ACCREDITATION: HeLa Ventures maintain accreditation by the Alberta Camping Association.

J. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

HeLa Ventures is proud of the safety standards implemented with each of our programs. We meet or exceed industry standard with our safety policies and procedures and with the quality of the staff we employ. We are committed to continue to provide training and experience to young people in outdoor pursuit activities in a very safe and controlled manner. We believe that providing safety education is the key to promoting outdoor pursuits as healthy and safe lifestyle activities. With the increase in interest in outdoor activities as lifestyle options, we believe that adventure education has lasting value and is a crucial part of a young person’s education.