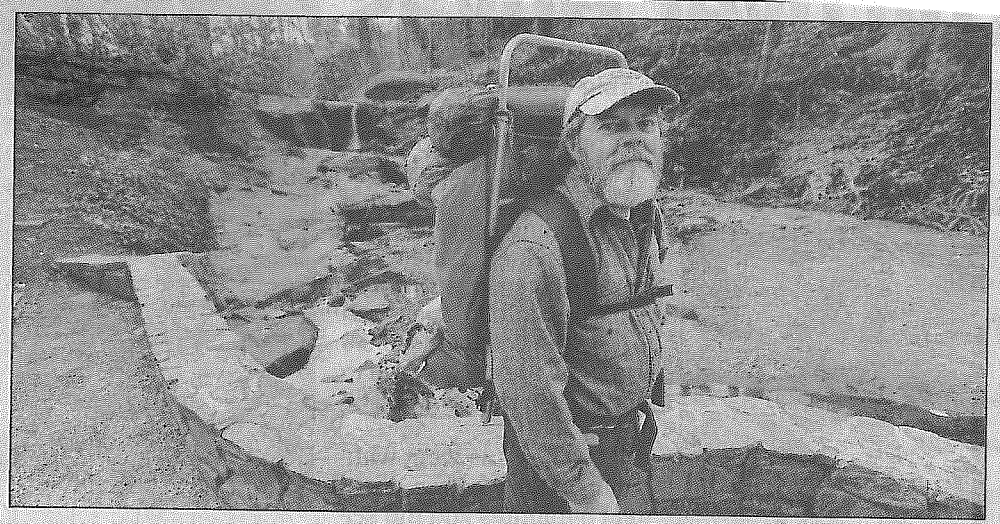


HEIDI HEILBRUNN / Staff

Dan Whitten will be teaching a backpacking class through the Glendale Outdoor Leadership School in April

Hit the backpacking trail with experts

By Mike Foley
STAFF WRITER
mfoley@greenvillenews.com

While there may be some noble knuckleheadedness about learning how to cope in the great outdoors through trial and error – probably lots and lots of errors – there is a better way.

Take the "Backpacking 101" course taught through the Glendale Outdoor Leadership School. It's a beginner's course that helps you avoid mistakes that might actually turn you off on the whole idea of being outdoors, said Cami Ruppe, the program director for the Palmetto Conservation Foundation.

"All you have to do is show up," Ruppe said. "This class takes the fear out of it."

The class introduces neophytes and those with some experience alike, to the nuances of backpacking. And it includes a hike and overnight backpacking trip so you can learn while doing.

Dan Whitten, a master naturalist, is the instructor. Whitten said he's a visual learned so he tries to teach by showing people how to find their own way.

"We like to have people discover what equipment works for them," he said. "Do you like wool or polar fleece? Do want to carry stuff to be comfortable or do you like to go ultra light?"

There is no single right way to do anything outdoors, but there are lots of wrong ways.

"You can talk about roughing it," Whitten said. "But I like for people to 'unrough' it. I like for them to be more comfortable, to eat well and sleep well.

"If they don't enjoy it, they'll never want to do it again."

The course covers a lot of basic information, Ruppe said, and helps people understand everything they need for an overnight trip in the woods.

"It's a lot of basics," she said. "How to read a map, read trail blazes, filter water."

Whitten said he'll also show how selecting a camp site can heighten enjoyment, and he'll show how to use a fire pit, pick a sleeping spot and more.

Even more, Whitten will use his extensive knowledge of the woods to talk about safety such as avoiding poison ivy, bears and snakes. He'll even discuss edible wild foods and maybe make some "pocket trash tea" from plants he collects along the trail.

"I've taken a lot of friends camping," he said, "and this will have that same sort of feel."

GET PACKING

The Palmetto Conservation Foundation and Glendale Outdoor Leadership School host "Backpacking 101: Hitting the Trail," on April 17-18. A second class is tentatively set for Sept. 18-19. Those 14 years and older can participate. The fee is $135 per person (using PCF-provided gear) or $100 per person (using your own gear).

Participants will hike an 8-mile (4 miles in and 4 miles out) portion of the Blue Ridge Co-Op section of the Palmetto Trail. The trail treats hikers to native flowers, wildlife and a waterfall. Hikers will carry all their own gear.

For information or to register online, visit: www.palmettoconservation.org or call: 803-771-0870.