



## AdironDoc

### Backcountry Health and Hygiene

# Babes in the Woods

**A**S I WRITE IN FEBRUARY I have just returned from an exciting week of teaching and learning at the annual meeting of the Wilderness Education Association. Wilderness medicine and search and rescue ("SAR") are becoming frequent topics at this meeting, which brings together outdoor educators and backcountry guides from all over North America. There have been some exciting new developments in training for and execution of SAR recently, and it was certainly fascinating to learn about these from experts.

On the other hand, regular readers will not be surprised to learn that I have mixed feelings about such developments. I have long maintained that the best wilderness first aid or search and rescue is that which is never needed. Discussions of wilderness medicine are frequently heavy on "high-tech" interventions, to the detriment of simple practices that might well avoid the need for them. It was for that reason that I was particularly interested in some advice from the National Association for SAR (NASAR) on taking young children into the wilderness.

Taking children hiking or camping safely is certainly an effort that combines my dual interests in pediatrics and outdoor education. Several considerations are involved in deciding if a child is really ready for a backcountry trek, and these will be the subject of a subsequent article. Similarly, this will not be the place to discuss health concerns specific to children on camping trips. Instead, I will concentrate on some "rules" to keep children from becoming lost when accompanying their parents on treks.

**Use an adult-child "buddy system."** A backcountry hike with children requires *at least* one adult for each child. Each child must have a specific, designated adult who

agrees to take on the responsibility of being *continuously in visual contact* with him or her. If the adult needs to leave the area for even a moment, another adult must assume this responsibility for the duration of the absence. Many tragic losses of children in wilderness settings could have been averted if this rule were followed compulsively.

**Wear bright clothing.** Some people urge that we all move toward more "earthy" tones for our clothing, tents, packs, etc. In this case, however, safety trumps aesthetics. Children hiking in the woods must be attired in bright, easy-to-spot clothing.

**Carry survival gear.** Every child heading out on even a day hike must carry a daypack. If the child is unable or unwilling to do so, parents should have second thoughts about the entire trip. This pack should contain a few simple items: warm clothing, rain gear, a favorite toy, some snack foods (cereal bars, for example), a water bottle, a flashlight, and a whistle. Take a few moments before setting out on the hike to go over the contents of this daypack with the child, and discuss the importance of each item.

**Teach some basic survival skills** before heading into the woods. Obviously, one does not want to frighten a child needlessly. Yet, some basic instruction in safe conduct is always appropriate. Of all of these, the most important by far is to stop, sit, and wait if ever separated from the rest of the family. The use of the whistle for signaling, as well as the importance of listening for someone else's whistle, should also be stressed. Children must be taught respect for wildlife and to keep their distance. If they hear noises while separated from the group, they should be encouraged

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St. Regis Mountain. CARL HEILMAN

to shout or blow their whistle; animals will be frightened away, while humans will locate the child.

**Be sensitive to the child's comfort.** In our understandable enthusiasm to introduce our children to an activity we love, there is a chance that we may push them to the limits of their physical abilities. A child

**Safety Reminders for  
Hiking with Children from  
ADK's book *Kids on the Trail!***

- Hike within your capabilities
- Turn back short of your goal when necessary
- Allow enough time to hike
- Take plenty of water to drink
- Tell someone where you're going
- Sign in at the trail register
- Dress in layers; anticipate changing conditions
- Wear synthetic or wool fabrics
- Keep to the trail
- Use common sense

For more information:

<[www.northnet.org/northwind/kids.htm](http://www.northnet.org/northwind/kids.htm)>, or <[www.adk.org](http://www.adk.org)>.

who is tired, cold, thirsty, or hungry will not enjoy the hiking experience. In the long run, this might well turn him or her off to later wilderness pursuits. In the short term, such an uncomfortable child may be more likely to disregard rules, wander, and not think clearly when separated from the adults. Never hesitate to terminate a trip early; there will always be another day!

—Thomas R. Welch, M.D.

For information about this or other backcountry topics, visit Dr. Welch on the Web at

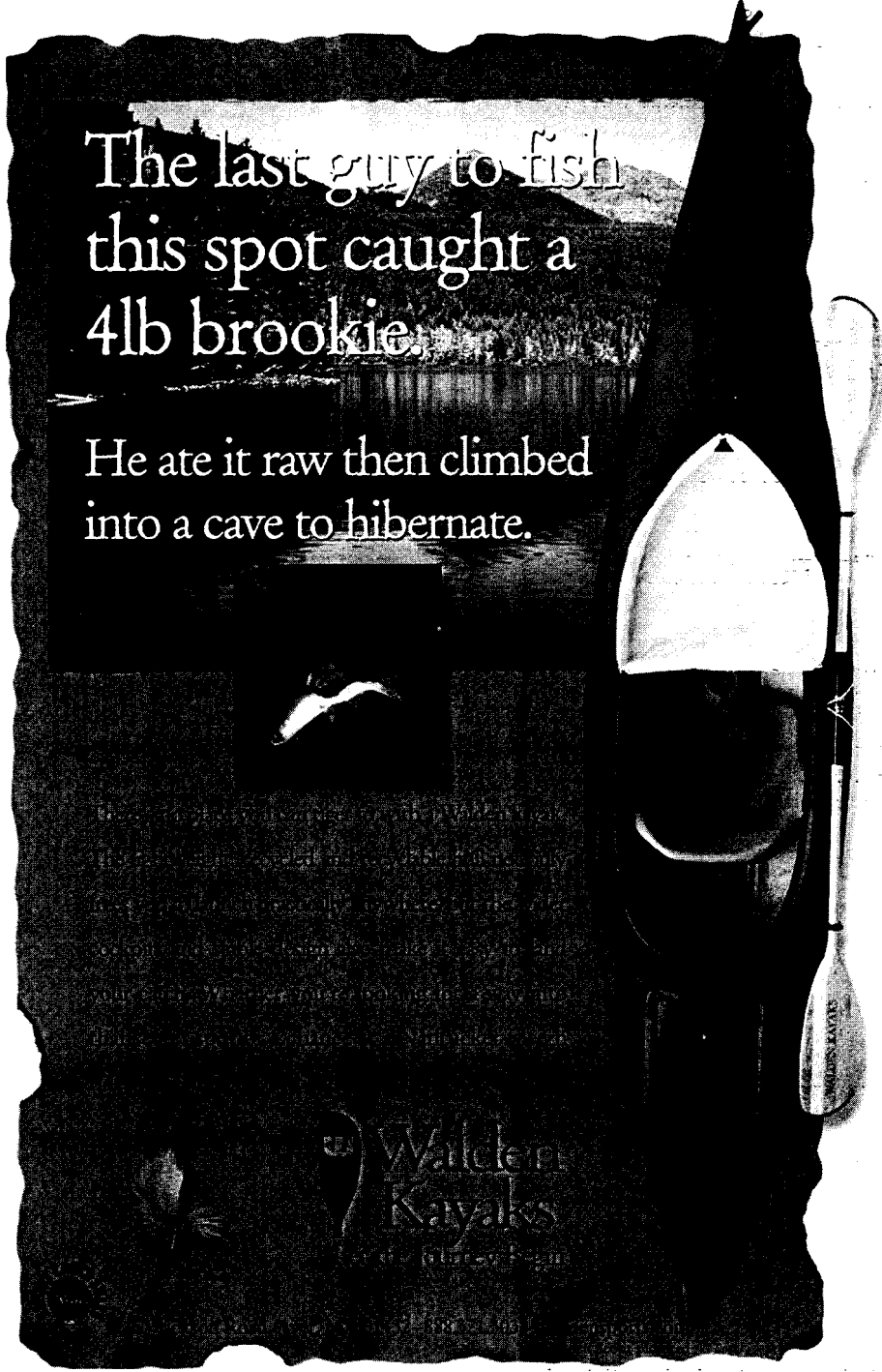
<[www.adirondoc.com](http://www.adirondoc.com)>, or contact him at [info@adirondoc.com](mailto:info@adirondoc.com).

Information about upcoming courses he will be teaching in Alaska is also available through this site.

**Kids on the Trail! Challenge**

Children who complete at least two hikes from each section of the Adirondacks, for a total of 16 hikes, are eligible to receive a Challenge patch. The hikes featured in the Challenge are described in the ADK book *Kids on the Trail! Hiking With Children in the Adirondacks*, authored by Rose Rivezzi and David Trithart. For more information and to obtain a Challenge form, contact ADK or visit the Web site at <[www.adk.org](http://www.adk.org)>.

*Kids on the Trail! Challenge* is presented by the Laurentian Chapter of ADK.



The last guy to fish  
this spot caught a  
4lb brookie.

He ate it raw then climbed  
into a cave to hibernate.

Walden  
Kayaks  
1000 State Street  
Adirondack Park  
New York 12980

Adirondack prints, posters and videos by photographer Carl Heilman II

PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOP & EVENTS CALENDAR

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