Idea Sheet

CROSS-COUNTRY SKI CLINIC FOR 4-H FAMILIES

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SITUATION:

Three of the major program area thrusts of 4-H in the 80's are "Strengthening the Family," "Health and Wellness," and "Environment." The Sawyer County 4-H, Youth and Agricultural Agent identified a need to find a means of implementing these thrusts in a manner that would be readily acceptable to 4-H leaders, members and parents.

In addition, attendance at past project training meetings and some county-wide activities was low. This led the Sawyer County 4-H leader’s association to identify a need for new county-wide activities.

Finally, 4-H clubs, families and individuals alike face the need to learn new, low-cost forms of entertainment due to inflation, increasing transportation costs and low fuel supplies. Therefore, a recreational activity in which the entire family could participate without having to travel great distances or spend large amounts of money was sought.

Why Cross-Country Skiing?

The adaptability of cross-country skiing allows it to be used for a local 4-H activity, county-wide 4-H activity or family outing. People of all ages and abilities can learn to ski and enjoy it. Cross-country skiing can be done in a large backyard, a golf course, across a frozen lake, on forest trails or in any open lot with an adequate snow cover. Many public and privately-owned cross-country ski trails have been built in Wisconsin, many of which charge only a small fee or no fee at all for use of the trail. After the initial investment of buying ski equipment is made, one faces only very small subsequent expenses. These usually involve fees for using private trails and ski wax. For those who choose not to buy equipment, many ski and sporting goods shops now offer rental equipment at reasonable rates.

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Acting on the "Health and Wellness" theme, cross-country skiing is a relaxing and enjoyable way to get exercise during the winter which is often a period of reduced physical activity. Muscles in the arms, upper body and legs are utilized in the skiing motion. Lungs and heart will become better developed with regular skiing.

By serving as an activity for weekend or afternoon family outings, cross-country skiing can bring family members together for periods of exercise, relaxation and fellowship. This can help 4-H programs achieve the goal of "Strengthening the Family."

Since cross-country skiing is done outdoors, it can be used as a device for getting people out to observe their environment. An environmental awareness or nature study program can be incorporated into a 4-H club ski outing by having the leader stop at various points of interest along the ski route and identify places or objects for observation and discussion. These could be tree species, wildlife habitats, landmarks or historical points of interest, for example.

OBJECTIVES:

Ideas and suggestions from 4-H club general leaders and the 4-H Youth and Agricultural Agent were combined into the "Cross-Country Ski Clinic for 4-H Families." The following objectives were set forth for this program:

1. To hold a county-wide "learn to ski" clinic to introduce 4-H members and leaders to cross-country skiing and its use as a possible 4-H club activity.

2. To introduce 4-H parents to a possible family outing activity which has potential to promote family togetherness.

3. To introduce 4-H members to a form of recreation that can serve as an avenue for getting exercise and keeping fit during the winter season.

4. To promote the county 4-H program.

METHOD:

The plan for the "Cross-Country Ski Clinic for 4-H Families" was to have a qualified instructor conduct a group ski lesson followed by leisurely skiing along the trails of the selected ski area.

Arrangements for an instructor were made with a local ski shop. In addition to donating an instructor, this particular shop offered rental equipment at a discount rate to 4-H families who signed up for the clinic.

A privately owned cross-country ski area, complete with groomed trails, was selected as the site for the clinic. Upon learning that the clinic was a 4-H program, the owner donated the use of his ski area to our group free of charge. The regular weekend admission fee was $2.00 per person.

Publicity included news releases, radio spots and the 4-H newsletter.
CONCLUSIONS:

The first "Cross-Country Ski Clinic for 4-H Families" had 31 4-H family members and guests in attendance. Participants assembled in the ski area parking lot for a group lesson conducted by the volunteer instructor. Beginning with the basic fundamentals of cross-country skiing, the instructor took the participants through a step-by-step process by which the basic motions of skiing were taught and then practiced. The group lesson was followed by leisurely skiing along the trails of the ski area. During this time, the instructor would stop and give assistance to those who were having problems on an individual basis.

About two hours into the session, everyone took a break to warm up, make hot chocolate and roast marshmallows and hot dogs over a roaring fire. After this break, the instructor was available for individual help and instruction on waxing and care of equipment. Those who wished could practice skiing.

An evaluation form was later sent to each family that participated. "It was fun," "Yes, I learned how to ski," and "It was nice to do something new" were comments reported to the 4-H, Youth and Agricultural Agent. One family reported that they took up cross-country skiing as a result of the clinic. And, a 13-year-old girl joined 4-H after attending the clinic as a guest of a 4-H family.

After the success of the first "Cross-Country Ski Clinic for 4-H Families," the Sawyer County Older Members Organization (4-H members in grade 8 and older) had a cross-country ski outing as their first activity of 1980. They also held a cookout midway through their outing.

IMPLICATIONS:

Cross-country skiing can be utilized in a county 4-H program in at least three ways:

-- as a club activity
-- as a county-wide 4-H activity
-- as a family activity

The increasing popularity of cross-country skiing makes it an alternative to the more expensive and often crowded downhill ski resorts, which may be a great distance away. Cross-country skiing is an activity that is tailor made to fit several of the program area thrusts of 4-H in the 80's.

After receiving an introduction to cross-country skiing, local 4-H clubs can appoint committees to work with general leaders or activity leaders in planning, organizing and evaluating cross-country ski outings as a club activity.

In the future, 4-H cross-country ski competition can be held in the county as fun events. These might include speed and distance races. Skiing for exercise, recreation and personal satisfaction can be stressed rather than awards for winning competitions. If such an event is held, however, the sponsor should bear in mind that some insurance policies commonly used in county 4-H programs do not cover any injuries incurred while skiing, tobogganning or bobsledding.

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