

Wilderness first aid course prepares



Wilderness First Aid instructor Mike Webster demonstrates on Scott Green the proper procedures for cleaning and treating a wound in remote situations.

By Reg Clayton
for The Enterprise

Tragedy strikes the group of canoeists in the form of a bolt of lightning. One moment they're paddling for shore seeking shelter from an approaching storm. An instant later an explosive flash transforms their world into one of confusion, panic and pain. Fortunately, help is nearby and teams of First Aid responders arrive at the scene. They quickly assess the victims, administer first aid and prepare the most severe cases for evacuation.

The noisy spectacle is convincing enough that passing boaters are compelled to alter course and offer assistance. But it's educational theatre, the wailing victims do their best to act the part of the injured while their classmates put their advanced first aid skills to the test.

Instructor Mike Webster moves among the different groups asking the students questions regard-

ing their diagnosis and treatment of the disaster victims. He records their answers on video for playback later during his critique of their emergency response. Along with the theatrical make-up, fake blood and gruesome prosthetic wounds, the camera lends an element of reality to an already stressful situation. It's unblinking presence forces the first aid responders to organize their thoughts, communicate their answers clearly and concisely. It also captures their uncertainty and indecision when faced with making potentially life or death decisions.

"Part of it's about judgment and critical thinking and part of it's about medical skill, patient assessment and response appropriate to the situation," Webster explained prior to the exercise.

Webster is well versed on the subject of advanced first aid. He is a paramedic, expedition guide and course conductor with Wilderness Medical Associates of

Hamilton. He travels across Canada and the United States teaching first aid responders on how to effectively treat the sick and injured in remote locations where distance is measured in hours or days away from medical help.

Sunday afternoon's disaster simulation was the final exercise in the Wilderness First Responders course held at Gun Lake Lodge in Minaki, Apr. 21-24. The four day course combined classroom instruction, first aid training and simulations towards the advanced first aid certification.

The majority of the students are enrolled in the Outdoor Recreation program at Lakehead University and require the certification as a course credit. There's also a school teacher, a prospector and a couple of canoe guides who are taking the advanced course to enhance their first aid skills.

"Most of these people will be in leadership positions on wilderness

expeditions," said Scott Green, who operates Green Adventures of Kenora and hosted the course. "They require advanced first aid skills to deal with accidents and injuries that may occur in a wilderness setting."

Jason Nirenberg, a recent graduate of the four year Outdoor Recreation program at Lakehead believes the training will better prepare him for his summer employment with Youth at Risk programs in Thunder Bay and as a sea kayak instructor on Vancouver Island.

"The course has given me confidence in protocols for severe first aid emergencies such as spinal injuries, cardio and respiratory as well as wounds and burns," he said.

"I need the course for school and I'll be out in the wilderness all summer leading seven to 10 day expeditions. With this training I feel better prepared to handle first aid situations," said Christine Hildred, a Lakehead stu-



Students enjoy the dining room amenities of the Gun Lake Lodge during lunch on the final day of the course.



Study partners Brooke Carere and Jessica Kemp prepare for Sunday's final written exam.

dent and guide with Northern Tier Wilderness Canoe Tours out of Atikokan.

"I've wanted to take the course for a long time but it's hard to find one close by," said Jessica Bjorkman. A prospector, Bjorkman has followed her father and several siblings into the family trade. In addition to searching the Canadian Shield for valuable minerals, eventually she wants to do some winter guiding; snowshoeing and perhaps dogsledding.

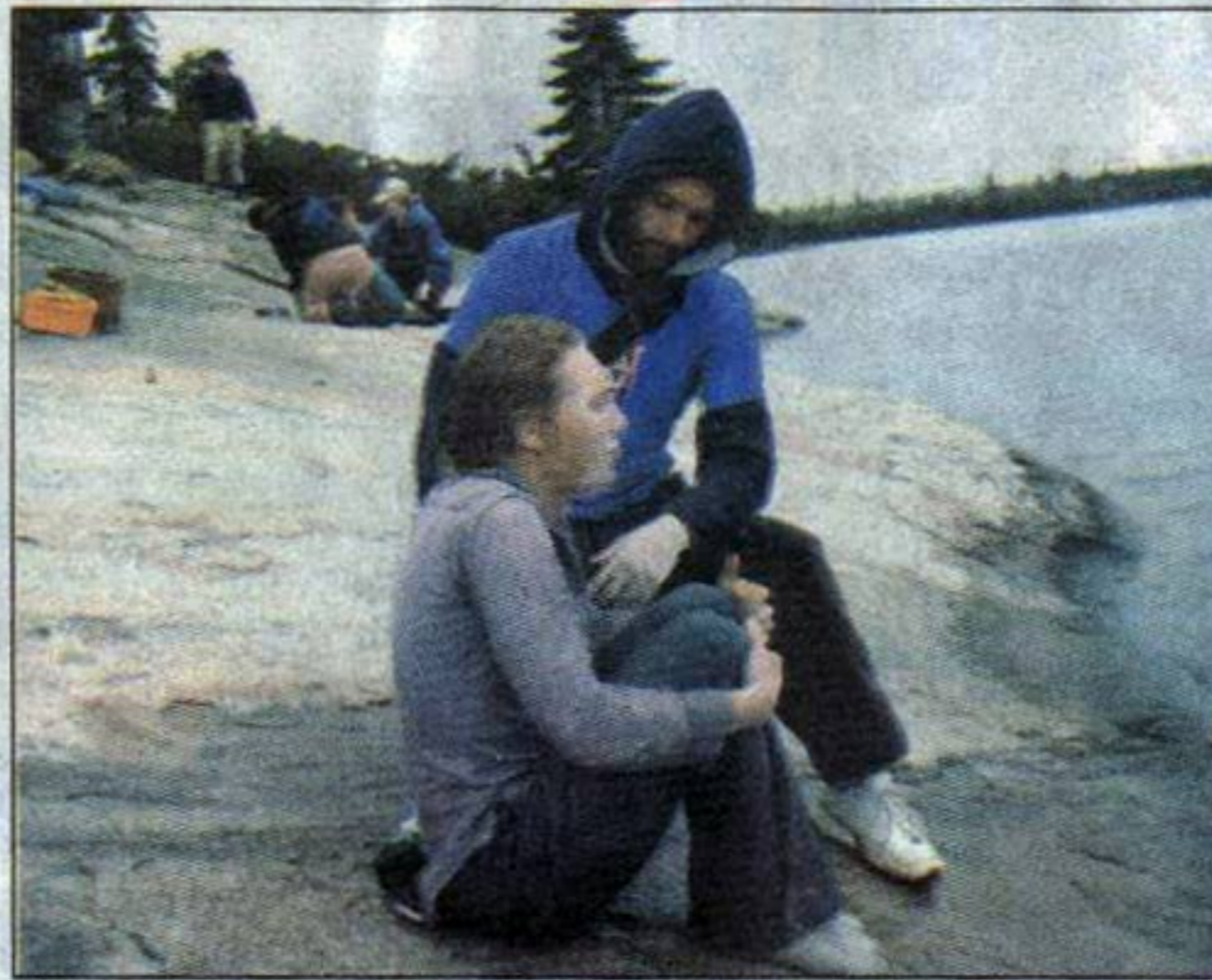
Gun Lake Lodge also proved to be an ideal venue for the course. The lakefront setting, comfortable accommodation and delicious meals prepared by proprietor Sally Kendall drew rave reviews from the students.

"It's the perfect location," said Emily Cain, a canoe guide and leadership trainer with Manitoba Pioneer Camp at Shoal Lake. "During the day we study, train and practice first aid but in the evening there's the sauna and kayaking on the lake."

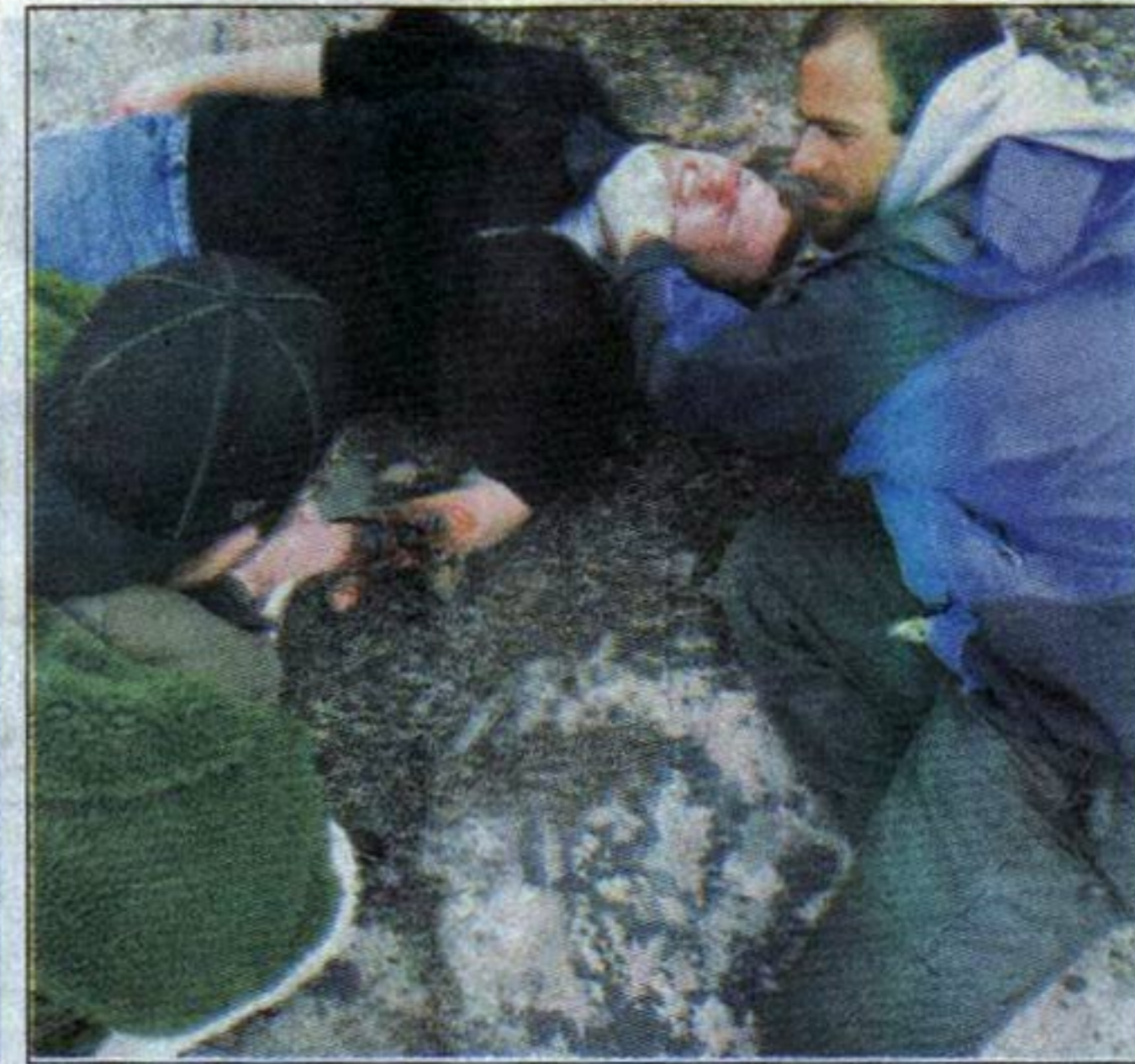
responders for medical emergencies



Instructor Mike Webster applies theatrical makeup to student John Finnis to simulate a puncture wound.



Steven Fleming assesses Jessica Bjorkman for hypothermia.



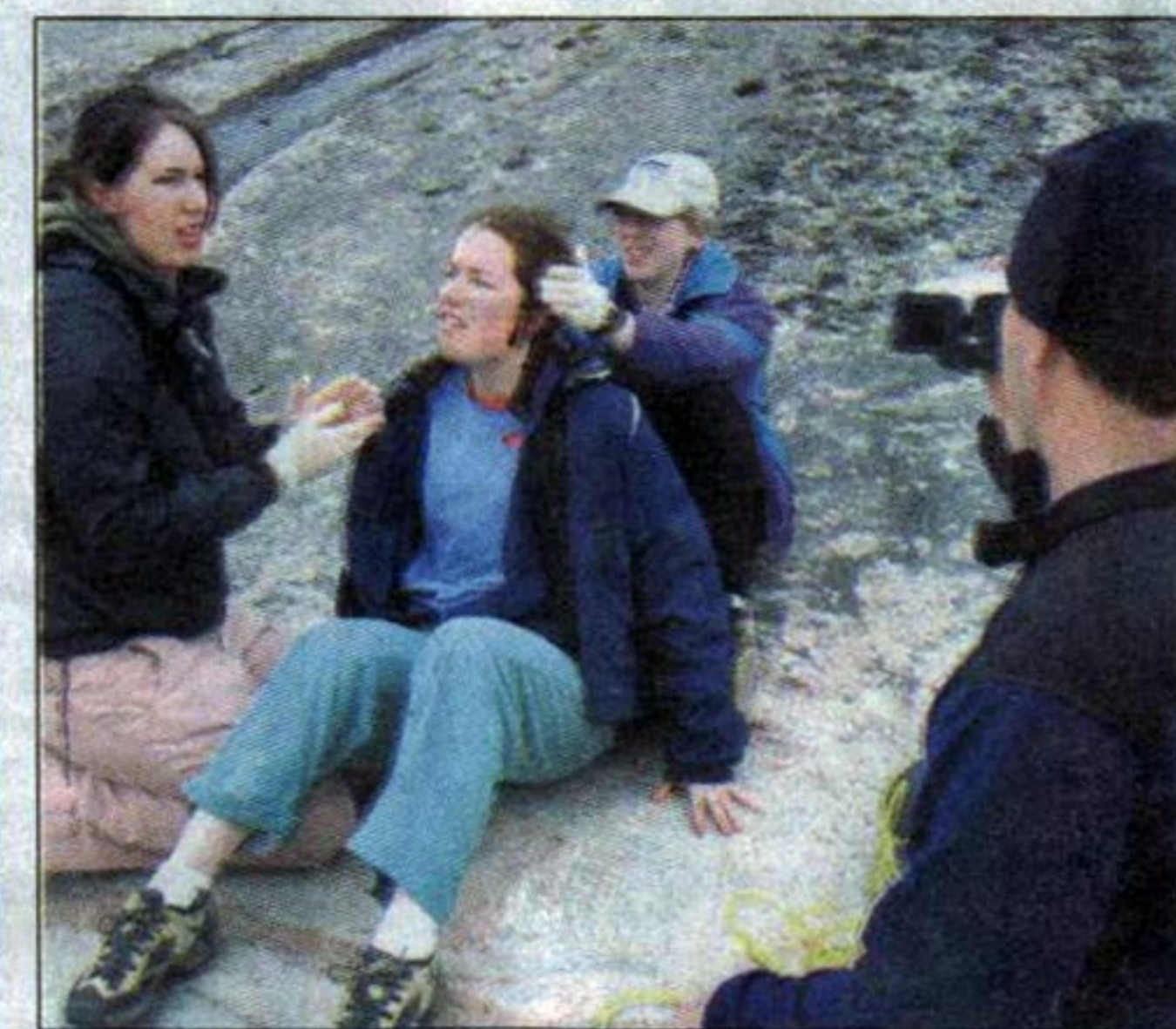
Scott Green (left) and Jason Nirenberg stabilize injury victim John Finnis



Theatrical makeup makes the simulation exercise more realistic and prepares First Aid responders for real life emergencies.



Trevor Ross performs CPR on an unconscious and unresponsive Jessica Kemp.



Instructor Mike Webster records student Emily Cain and Rebecca Rogge as they treat victim Cat Leonard who suffered ruptured ear drums.