**EARLY HISTORY - CENTRAL INDIANA WILDERNESS CLUB**

By Linda Elliott, Charter Member

The predecessor to CIWC was actually a for-profit organization called Hoosier Wilderness Adventure. HWA was a partnership between several outdoor shop owners in the mid 70’s, including Phil Barnes (TD Brooks), Steve Housefield (Wanderlust), Gary Knake (Wilderness IV), and Sitzmark (a Ski Shop) in Broad Ripple. They put together a semi business/club that individuals could join for a fee. Individuals payed $65, and couples $75. Then the shop owners led outdoor trips, including backpacks, canoe camps, ski trips, caving, diving, etc. Trips were very similar to those that CIWC now does. HWA had a van that provided transportation, and the gear was furnished. They regularly taught backpacking, canoeing, and cross country ski classes to educate the members and gain new ones. The only real difference between HWA and the current organization was that the shop owners / leaders paid themselves a daily fee of $75 for leading the trips, and of course most of us purchased our gear from those shops. Most of the members were not aware that the “club” we had joined was actually a for-profit business, or that the leaders were paid for their services.

In the late 70s, things began to change. Galyan’s, which had been one small business on the southwest side of Indianapolis, began to expand and build all around town. Because of their expanding size and volume of business, they were able to provide the same gear the shops were selling at a reduced cost. One by one, the individual HWA owners began to close up shop and move out of town. By 1980, the only one left was Steve Housefield. He was trying to keep his business open, do all the trip planning and leading for HWA, and dealing with personal issues as well. Many of the HWA trips were cancelled, mainly because Steve was not able to get away for long weekends to lead trips. Most of the money collected as trip deposits had been used to try to keep up with van payments, and several people had lost deposits as the money was not available for refunds.

The organization had monthly meetings in the downtown library. At the last HWA meeting in March, Steve announced that the business was closing. He could no longer keep it afloat, but suggested the members take it over as a club and take turns leading trips. We voted to give it a go, and elected officers. Steve Housefield offered to sell the van, camping equipment, and membership records to us for about $10,000, but we were unsure if the group could come up that amount of money. The newly elected officers were tasked with doing a cost analysis to determine if starting a new club would be feasible. Within 2 weeks, we were called to another group meeting. Two issues needed immediate attention.

* The day after the last HWA meeting, the van (with all the equipment and records inside) was repossessed by the bank for non-payment. A few of the newly elected officers and friends had pooled their money and purchased it back for about $6,000. They needed to know if there was enough commitment to get a new organization going and pay back those who had purchased the van, or if they just needed to put it on the market and sell it to retrieve their money.
* In looking over the records that were in the van, they had discovered that there were no tax records. Subsequent calls had determined that the for-profit business had never filed a tax return. So, if we were to carry on, the best course of action was to completely separate ourselves from the previous business and come up with a new name for the new organization. We came up with the new name: Central Indiana Wilderness Club

There had already been a schedule of outdoor trips planned for HWA that year, so we adopted that schedule and got volunteers to lead them. We decided to keep the dues the same amount that HWA had charged, and kept the trip prices the same as well. The only change we made in the general process was to allow the trip leaders to go free instead of paying them a daily fee. That evening, about 25 people joined the new organization, and we kept growing. In fact, within the next year, we were able to run all the trips left in the schedule and pay off all the donors for the van purchase. We also started the process to incorporate as a non-profit organization. We set up a trip billing process that allowed us to put money aside for a new van and equipment as needed. Within the next two years, CIWC incorporated, traded in the old HWA van for a new one, and reduced dues to $25 (single) and $35 (couple).

CIWC has continued to provide great outdoor experiences for over 35 years.