The areas in which I am going to be discussing this article includes the course of travel workshop. The main focus of this article will cover the 32 days within the backcountry and this amazing expedition. This will be a brief overview of mainly the specific skills that were gone over handedly on this wonderful expedition. From the day we reached Worthen Meadows until we were deep within the Wind River Mountains, from within myself this was going to be one great everlasting experience to remember forever.

The chief key elements even before we headed into the backcountry were to understand the essential skills of backcountry living which meant all of us ECOEE members had to know the basic technical skills of every day life and literal survival. This meant what were the key components to daily living, well what were they exactly you may ask? The main technical skills were understanding what to do in case of emergency’s and if lost in the backcountry, bear hangs, cooking, stove repair, water filtration and camp site selection. These areas may seem simple but they are more to the eye that what most would think. When you take into consideration the weather conditions daily, the times of arriving at camp, the group health and other factors; they are more tough hearted than anything else but they have to be done no matter the situation, time, or place. It is everyone’s responsibility especially my own to take upon myself to carry out these technical skills in order to maintain my own health and prevent risk within the group.

As we carried on the expedition the key technical skills areas reformed more precisely into our routines of repetition but more desired would have to bed the people and communication skills. The standards for people skills are based on goals of proper risk management, appropriate expedition behavior, group dynamics, to personal; hygiene. These are the true daily components that are the main emphasis of the 18-point WEA curriculum. After hiking the well over hundred of miles on trail we all were undergoing lessons from Jeff especially on leadership, decision making and judgment. This definitely corresponded with each of our responsibilities to being Leader of the Day. As leader of the day it was our task to set up the itinerary and schedule for the day and to sell that decision to the rest of the entire group. There were many choices made along the expedition, some good, some poorly made and some that were just down right wrong to make and I am talking about myself. This experience in the backcountry has made me realize how important it is to have proper group dynamic skills, and certain communication skills. Both of which are a struggle for me but I have improved and each day of this journey also made me realize how awesome mother nature truly is and how beautiful some places really are that most will never venture too see.

Ryan Schaible

Outdoor education has a lot of different meanings and definitions. In Jackson, Wyoming the Grand Teton Science School contributes a lot to the meaning of outdoor education and the facilitation. They Grand Teton Science School have the Jackson and Kelly campus where they are able to educate multitudes of people about the outdoors.

The kids who go to the Journey School on the Jackson campus are encouraged to build forts on the property, hike the hill on the campus, and play outside. They are learning to think for themselves and care about the environment. It is a unique and important learning opportunity for these kids; one I wish had. Their teachers are encouraged to make classes hands on. Their buildings are all green using solar panels and heated floors among other “new age” ideas. The kids are separated into classes;
first through third grade share a room and teachers. It continues on until the kids our seniors, and then each senior picks an internship. The internship is part of their class, and they have to teach and do projects for school revolving around their internship. One student went to South Africa for his internship. The teachers even play with their students during physical education and recess. Everyday the teachers and students are learning about the outdoors by being in the outdoors and learning to be consciences of how their actions affect the outdoors.

The Kelly campus takes groups of kids and schools for five days to teach them about fire ecology, snow science, and other outdoor topics. These kids and schools come from all over the country to study for one week. They are taught about the importance of the outdoors and the effects it has on every community. The graduate students who teach try and make it relatable to where the students are from. They want each student to be able to transfer what they learn at the Kelly campus to their own homes after they leave the Grand Teton Science School. The graduate students want to foster a knowledge base for these kids to build upon if they do not have one and encourage those who do have one.

Outdoor Education is about learning skills and the importance of the environment. The Grand Teton Science School has taken a great step towards teaching the youth of our country about the importance of the outdoors.

I learned teaching outdoor education is important. Without knowledge of the outdoors and the growth people get from learning in the outdoors, the U.S. wilderness areas would not exist nor would the parks. I realize now it is important to foster this type of learning and knowledge in others. Outdoor education is not just about learning technical skills; it is about learning about myself and where I fit in with the ecosystem. How my actions affect the environment and the things I can do to change my impact. Outdoor education teaches the skills and knowledge to make people aware of their actions and the affect it has.

The Final Expedition:

The culmination of a WEA NSP (National Standards Program course is the final expedition. Our students spent the better part of 27ish days learning what it truly takes to be an outdoor leader. They learned how to cook and bake, essentially take pride in making good meals for their fellow expedition members. They learned how to navigate with map and compass, orienting the map, and what is that D word again…declination. They also experienced expedition behavior and practiced teaching and facilitating debriefs. After this and much more the final expedition is a time where students go and do their own exploring. They take learning into their own hands by practicing teaching lessons like it is participants’ first time out in the woods. They put all their knowledge to use planning and executing their final expedition.

The night before we sent them off I wrote a poem that I would like to share with you all. I found myself frustrated and unable to express my thoughts with verbal words. This was written with expeditions in mind in general. I presented it to the group the next morning during a discussion on why they should go on final.

Lizardhead Peak Base Camp: A poem to current and future expeditioners:

On every expedition,
There usually are a few,
Who through competing and sympathy seeking
Hold us back from being true.

Why does it seem on every journey,
We claim to I know ourselves,
Yet the more we assess,
It turns out our true selves have just begun.

Why do we always push and pull,
And put each other down,
Claiming to be a family
It seems a dysfunctional one.

We teach we laugh,
We learn and we cry,
We yearn to be known
Yet construct great walls,
that prevent it from being shown.
We hike, we climb,
We cook, we bake,
We debrief and give feedback
Until very late.

Though truth after truth is revealed to us
We deny our capabilities,
And thus our true selves.

We want this experience,
They said it would help,
We want this challenge,
Does anyone else?

Then seize hold of this day,
Live it to the full,
For on expeditions,
No one can do it but you.

Through tears of sorrow and joy,
I exclaim: I know this is hard
A struggle for sure,
But on the other side,
Of these rugged mountains you climb,
You are sure to find
What you are searching for.

What are you searching for?

Off they went the next day to seize this experience and make it their own. As an instructor it is a defining moment to be able to proudly sit and watch your students hike off in the distance, onward and outward bound to find their own adventures. Putting all their wisdom to use they returned to us safely following their excursions.

~Rose Gochenaur (Graduate Assistant)

Real Wilderness

Living out in the backcountry takes a lot of work. It is not a vacation. It is a learning experience. The Pope Aggie Wilderness is inspiring in all its beauty and brutality of mountains, weather, and wildlife. Living in the wilderness made me reevaluate what was important in life and what life is.

Waking up everyday to squirrels chattering and birds chirping as the sun rose and slowly touched each peak and bathed the ground was real beauty. I couldn’t help but smile as I slipped out of my warm sleeping bag into the cold brisk air everyday. It was hard to pull myself out of my bag, but I was never disappointed even when the ground was painted with white, fluffy snow.
Our days started early with breakfast and packing up camp. Most of the time we were up before the sun was and were rewarded with purple and red tinges as the sun rose. Occasionally the moon would be hanging in the sky as the sun was announcing itself. Packing our packs was the hardest part of the day for me. Each day it was cramming my life and what I needed to survive into a bag. I loved knowing my life was in a backpack. I did not need a huge closet of fancy clothes or a bed and pillow; I just needed my food, water, sleeping bag, and Thermoses.

I learned surviving in the wilderness was real work. We had to take care to stay dry and warm; our equipment was useless if we could not fix it or was wet. Jeff said one day, “Emilie, you always have to be thinking.” In the wilderness, I did have to always think about the weather, the group, myself, and a million other risks and options available. We learned how to make decisions and had plenty of practice every day when we were picking routes to hike, what to eat, and where to set up camp.

Hiking was normally long and tiring. Using my body as a mode of transportation was very exhausting, however, after every hike I felt a sense of accomplishment for the group and me. It is not an easy task to carry 60 to 90 pounds up switchbacks while gaining or losing forty plus feet. We got lost while hiking a few times. Being lost was the best teacher. We could not get out our cell phones or GPS units to figure out our mistake; we had to use our maps, compasses, and each other.

Living together really taught me a lot. I learned to rely on other people, which was not easy since I had only known them intimately for a little over month. We had to depend on each other. If the attitude were every man for himself, we would never have succeeded or survived. Living with others in the wilderness means sacrifice. We had to make sure we took care of our group members and ourselves. Sometimes it meant calling each other out for not taking care of him, her, or the group. It is not easy to call people on their mistakes or shortcomings but it is something each one of us had to do.

Living in the wilderness taught me what real beauty is, what sacrifice is, and what life is about. It taught me to think for myself and to think. I am really lucky to have experienced the outdoors in the environment I did. I formed lifelong friendships, memories, and knowledge.

Jake Yard 10-14-08

Thirty-Two Days of Splendor and Experience

The name of the game is leadership. How do you obtain this status that title that is the goal in all of our horizons? Prior to our backcountry expedition experience I pondered this notion constantly. After the reintroduction of our group into society it is still a thought resonating ever constant in my brain. The backcountry changes you as an overall individual without a doubt. I will attempt to give a synopsis of how my experience in the wilderness has prepared me to be an effective and dynamic outdoor leader.

From the first day of our trip in the Wind River Mountain Range the eighteen points of our Wilderness Education Association curriculum had begun to be implemented. The topics vary from what you know, do, and like throughout each day. Those topics are further broken down into more specific reflections. I chose to focus the most on the analysis of other’s leadership decisions and group dynamics to build my own leadership abilities. Each day with it’s new chores, destinations, and obligations require a different outlook and style of being a leader. The leader must analyze an array of variables that correlate and culminated to complete the overall effectiveness of the leader’s day. The situations, effectiveness of the style implemented, relationship with the group, comfort level, conflict management, strengths, and after decision reflections all come together to assess the help yourself understand your progression as a future leader.

To go along with the decision-making aspect of the game just as many if not more variables have to be considered. The context, level of clarity, use of resources, pros and cons, individual responses, and reflection after the fact are some of the indicators that helps everyone understand the process.

These two aspects alone make up only a small part of the whole that is entailed in the eighteen-point curriculum. To get a hold on these two aspects however allows you not only to expand your understanding of the other points, but also helps you continue the leadership growth process. These notes of progression look all fine and dandy on paper yet the real challenge is yet to come. If you think keeping those straight is a challenge you have failed to look outside the box and realize that without transference these points of helpfulness are useless. Field application is where the real test lies.

In the wilderness you always have to be on your toes, ready to adapt at any moment to the situation. Is this stream more easily traversable down a couple hundred yards? Is my food bag really safe from a scavenging bear where I chose to hoist it aloft on a tree branch? If I fall on this precarious slope will I have enough time to react before I take another group member down the rocky path with me? If my group member breaks his or her leg right now will we be able to carry them twenty miles to our vehicle? Every moment is shrouded with uncertainty and this uncertainty must be accounted for. Sure physical injury is a
serious thing yet emotional, social, and mental problems are just as abundant and serious. How do you handle a disagreement on what trail to take as they diverge? This was prevalent at many times in our trip and most likely you were encountered with an opposing opinion. Sure we could just keep walking and not go through any decision process but would that be encountered with more uncertainty and take us further of course miles down the trail?

Many questions like these and many more are presented on a second to second basis in the vastness of the foreboding wild. Great short-term decisions can become consequentially bad ones and vise versa. The assessment of all the options up front can majorly ensure that a sound and safe choice is reached. In my opinion a good leader needs, over other skills, sound judgment at all times. Judgment most likely is not innately prevalent within an individual. The only way it can be obtained is through a combination of acquired knowledge through curriculum and first hand experience. This my newsletter follows is how great leaders emerge.

Yesterday I was lucky enough to add another prospect to my list of possibilities. This business, in my eyes has accommodated my aspirations of future employment better then any location has prior.

Organized in 1964 by the legendary outdoor leader Paul Petzoldt, The National Outdoor Leadership School of Lander Wyoming. It was a predecessor for many organizations to come due to the fact that a lack in outdoor recreation was lacking at this period. They have come a long way since these days and now own a gear outfitter in Lander along with operating locations in at least seventeen other countries. The worldwide progression of this non-profit organization is attributed to ever-prevalent aspirations for expansion and love of spreading respect and knowledge of the great outdoors. In our tour through both facilities we were able to get a great overview operating process of main branches that make up the NOLS tree. Along our voyage of the day we conversed with Kevin Bergstrum who was affluent with permits and the overall operation of the headquarters. He assured us that all of the coordination was a group effort, which was nothing new to our group. We toured the building as he gave us a synopsis of different operations on daily basis and who carries these tasks out.

Next we met with Claudia Pearson, the infamous lady who is the author of cookbooks that we relied upon in during the unique cooking days of the backcountry. She explained that she bears minimal nutrition knowledge yet was in charge of overseeing the hiring of the portion experts. She further explained her day-to-day obligations of packaging portions for various backpacking groups that she supplies. She also told of the seasonal challenges and the ever-frustrating days were groups actually come in and divide their own portions out in a hectic scramble. Claudia told of her struggles with ever-rising food costs and finding the best bargains between her constantly rotating suppliers. She was very question oriented in her presentation and stated as she started that was the way she wanted to run her interpretive speech on her job. One of the questions that I found most impressive and surprising was on the context of public distribution. Gauging by her humble backroom studio I would not have guessed that it was open to the public, yet I was sorely mistaken. Since the origin of her title she has come a long way in building her efficiency and contacts, in my opinion, to make ration distribution at NOLS what it is today.

Before meeting with our final speaker we briefly conversed with another Kevin who ran the public outfitter for NOLS Rocky Mountain branch. He took us into the storeroom along with the behind the scenes room where the real magic happened. This room was used not only for repairs but also provided area for new shipments and storage for returning backpacking groups as a transitional proving ground. He was very up beat and had an optimistic attitude for his branch of the company and it’s future. He made it clear that their goal was to provide the customer with the opportunity to enter naked and leave ready to tackle what ever the outdoors had in store for them. Going through quality distributors is the only sure way in Kevin’s eyes to make a profit while still providing the customer with top of the line gear.

Lastly, but never lastly we returned to the NOLS headquarters to witness a great presentation by the Director of Admissions and Marketing, Bruce Palmer. Starting with an eye appealing slideshow of NOLS history, it was blatantly obvious that Bruce knew how to draw in his audience. Followed right after with an intern carrying an arm full of pizzas, free of charge. “Darn Bruce, don’t threaten us with a good time!” It might have been a subtle way of enticing us to be more engaging in the speech but it was not needed; yet surely appreciated. Nonetheless Bruce’s history explained how the outdoor recreation field and more specifically NOLS changed the culture of the area and eventually meeting a worldwide renowned status. It was evident
throughout the speak that the company withholds a strong ethical outlook when it comes to the environment and it’s protection. Natural resources whether it be the temperate mountain ranges of New Zealand or the vast inlets of Scandinavia for sea kayaking, none are neglected. Just as it is the goal for much other outdoor/adventure recreation the pursuit of the organization to respect and preserve the wilderness so that it can be enjoyed by generations to come.

Overall the interpretation of my visit with NOLS makes you realize that this organization has serious interest in the outdoors it’s resources and the preservation of it to come.

Interpretation of Native American Culture at Dickson Mounds Museum

Horn Field Campus got all of us prepared for our trip by teaching us about the classes we are taking over the course of the semester. All of us learned what the classes were, what topics the classes included, and how to properly present those topics for each class. We all had to give lessons on subjects while at HORN, but it was not until after we witnessed how a professional in the field does their job that we were truly able to see how we should present our topics.

The first place we visited on our trip was Dickson Mounds Museum. Dickson Mounds is a place in Illinois where native Americans thrived for thousands of years. We got an amazing tour of the museum and an interpretive talk by the director there. His name is Mike Wiant and he did an excellent job of giving the entire group an example of how to properly give an interpretive lesson.

Before any words are even said, the impression of a presenter can be effected by how they are dressed. He was in nice khakis and a polo shirt and looked very professional. He began by introducing himself to put us at a comfortable level with himself. Next, Mike asked us questions about our trip and his interest in what we were doing as a group for the semester made us that much more comfortable. He also explained his background in the field, which quickly showed his vast array of knowledge in the field. This did a great job of building his credibility as a presenter.

We then moved on to his interpretive presentation. The first thing he did was survey us as an audience to see how much we knew about the native culture in the area of the mounds. He said this is important because after knowing the base knowledge of your audience, a presenter knows which subjects can be skipped or skimmed and which areas of the topic should be focused on more intensively.

After engaging us as an audience, Mike was great at holding our attention throughout the entirety of his interpretation. This was made easier because he never made us stay in one spot too long; he allowed us to use all five of our senses to learn; he even made it very clear to ask him any question any time we wanted. Beyond us asking questions, he also asked us a lot of questions too. All of his questions were open ended and he explained that almost no answer is wrong. That is actually the point of interpretation. Even though he has many years of experience dealing with the native culture, he allowed all of us to draw our own interpretation of what the ancient society might have been like.

Mike explained that this can be a downfall of presenters that are learning how to give interpretive talks. Instead of saying this is what happened in these times, he allowed us to use our imagination and would ask us to think about what we thought it would have looked like back then. Also, even when making a valid point he would not say this IS what happened; he would say that evidence suggests this is what happened. Mike is a masterful user of proper wording so that he does not offend the opinion of any visitor. After all, no two visitors share the same opinion about every aspect of an interpretation.

Mike Wiant not only allowed us to imagine what Illinois was like before the white settlers moved in, but he also gave us many tips on how to become better interpretive presenters. We are all using what he taught us throughout ECOEE and some of us will be using those tips for the rest of our lives in our professions after college. I will never forget his interpretation and was even inspired by him enough that I will be visiting the museum next summer to try and help them restore the land around the site to its natural state. Hopefully this will allow Mike to reach and inspire more people in the future and maybe make his job a little easier because less of an imagination will be needed to see what life was like for the natives of the Dickson Mounds area.

Stephen Gilbert

With a breakdown of what is expected of us at Horn Field Campus and a quick introduction of our new roles of being, cooks, cleaners, and leaders of the day it was time for our group to start our expedition. We left Illinois and headed to Nebraska, there in Nebraska we camped out at Ponca State Park and talked with Jeff, the superintendent, and how the park was being managed, their goals for the park, and what research is being done, and were the facility wants to go. Jeff gave great incite on how much trouble parks go through to get funding, land, and how difficult it can be to manage a facility.
Once our talk with Jeff was over with we soon ventured farther west and farther than anywhere I have ever ventured before. South Dakota was the next stop and we saw a beautiful sunset when we entered into the park. Our group spent two days in South Dakota and learned a lot about the land and even the skies. Larry Smith contributed to our better understandings of the world above and helped us realize how small our planet really is. Larry also set the bar very high for our next interpreters that we will soon visit on this expedition of ours.

The next couple of days were great for sight seeing. We went to Devils Tower were we camped out and had to watch for black widows and rattlesnakes. At Devils Tower we learned from Ranger Mitch about the geography, the spiritual significant, and the relationship that the tower has with all the people who got to it. After we left Devils Tower we went to Mount Rushmore and saw one of America’s most famous monuments. There Emilie gave an interpretation about the Lakota and a deep history about the Native American tribe and the history behind why the monument is there.

After leaving Mount Rushmore we headed to Yellowstone National Park. There we saw many things: numerous visitor centers, geysers, mud-volcanoes, geothermal springs and ponds with millions of microorganisms, bison, elk, wolves, and bears. We spent a week in Yellowstone and I wish we could have stayed more, the threat of bears coming into your campsite did not scare me enough to want to leave.

The group also heard some people management discussions about Yellowstone as well. We listened to Cindy Roberts discuss bears at Hayden Valley and how to identify the black bear apart from the grizzly bear. Cindy also gave great incite of the history of bears in Yellowstone and how Yellowstone has come to manage the relationship with the bear communities and humans in Yellowstone. Jeff even got involved and showed his true “Tindall bear” side to the ECOEE group.

School would not be school with out a classroom once in a while, so on Wednesday (3rd September) the group spent a few hours in a conference room listening to various management issues. Libby Williamson gave the first discussion about the reintroduction of the wolf in Yellowstone. Libby was a great speaker and explained the population dynamics of the wolf, behavior, and the wolf-prey relationship. Libby also gave some very interesting facts about the deaths and causes of the wolf. Wolf on wolf attack is the leading cause of death among wolves, followed by disease.

Mike Yokhum followed Libby with the discussion of the snowmobile in Yellowstone. This debate is very heated among park officials and all the small communities surrounding Yellowstone. The open free range of snowmobiles all the way up until the Clinton administration, the reopening of snowmobiles during the Bush administrations, to a limit of 950 a day, to 720 a day, and now only 540 snowmobiles in the park. These numbers along with all the snowmobile regulations that are being practiced (best available technology along with four stroke engines) makes this one of the most controversial issues in Yellowstone history.

Our last speaker of the day was one of my favorites; Nick Herring the Deputy Chief Ranger. Nick discussed all the procedures the park uses in determining when to put an animal down in the park, the uniqueness of the Yellowstone’s rangers (they are all certified in some emergency medical way and also law enforcement), and the way the Rangers manage and handle the visitors in the park. Nick explained that it is very hard to educate the exceedingly large amounts of people about there safety from animals and yet let them have a good time.

I cannot wait to see what else we, ECOEE members, get to see, but also learn from this expedition. I feel that I have learned much more in the past three weeks that I could of ever have in a classroom, but it probably helps that I am around an instructor 24/7. I still cannot wait until we are on the beaches of Baja California and sea kayaking in the Sea of Cortez!

The Simple Life in the Wilderness

Derek Hofeldt

Waking up early, it’s easy when I’m in a crowded tent anticipating the view that awaits us just by unzipping the rain-fly. Everyday another scenic view, most days I was up before the sun.

The first crucial decision of the day; breakfast. Start up the stove, throw on some water, and dig through my food bag hoping I can find something to please every body’s taste buds, or at least something they can tolerate. Cream of wheat, cocoa wheat, powdered eggs, hash browns, dried fruit with oatmeal, mmm, the options are nearly endless.
Fill our bellies, pack up camp, look over our maps one last time and we’re off to higher elevations and our next destination. Four, five, six miles a day with full packs. The views make every step worthwhile. The colors, smells and textures seem to electrify my senses, the sound of waterfalls and winds, and the silence of the snowfall was enough to take my breath away.

The wilderness is our classroom. We are all teaching one another, learning from one another thing like plant and animal species in different regions, mountainous weather systems, the history of the land and the technical skills needed for survival in the backcountry. Most importantly I am learning about myself. My physical and mental limits, my decision making and judgment skills and simply learning about what is going to allow me to survive happily in some of the most beautiful places on earth.

We were in the backcountry of the Wind Rivers (the Popo Agie Wilderness) from September 10 to October 11. We were, with out a doubt, blessed with amazing weather. Blue skies, sunshine, cool breeze, with a variety of breathtaking cloud formations. The group of three others and I hiked over thirty miles for our five day final expedition. On our first day we climbed over 2000 feet in elevation and then walked through waste deep snow for a couple miles. Quite the extreme experience for all of us. It didn’t actually snow on us though, until our third day. It didn’t stop snowing until we made it out on the 11th. We stuck together and plowed through the two feet of snow. I felt that we functioned as a small group just as well as we did in the big group.

We seemed to work better and smoother as the backcountry trip went on. I have noticed the group growing and becoming more efficient by the day. We all had a chance to be leader of the day several times. For me, each time I was the leader I gained more confidence in my decision making, route finding, and judgment of were people in the group are physically and mentally. Part of making sure the group is ready for a long hike is knowing that everyone is staying well fed and well hydrated.

Staying well nourished and hydrated is a huge part of preventing risk while hiking through the wilderness fifty plus miles from civilization. I had to be certain that I was getting a variety of foods making a well balanced diet for the energy needed each day. At these high elevations it is easy to become dehydrated. There were days when I would drink well over a gallon or two of water. It was key for me to have both my 32oz bottle and my half-gallon water bladder full for each hike.

The water bladder and bottle are just two of the essential pieces of equipment needed in the backcountry. My pack, without it the expedition would be impossible, is 6,650 cubic inches which gives me plenty of room for everything else. A light weight stove, gas bottle, sleeping pad and bag, shelter, clothes and shoes, books and notebooks and plenty of food was stuffed into my pack each day making it weigh anywhere from seventy to eighty five pounds. Taking care of the equipment is extremely crucial when in the woods far, far away from any store with spare parts. Taking care of all the equipment can simply mean keeping it dry and clean and being careful when stuffing it all into packs. Keeping the equipment working like new is another way to manage risk and preventing illness and injury. Staying organized is an easy way to keep equipment in good shape. Organization is also important for me to help me stay caught up with all the schoolwork. I’ve done more writing in the backcountry than I have in the last couple semesters of regular classes. We are surrounded by inspiration and motivation everywhere we go. These are the most incredible classrooms anyone will ever experience. No windows, no walls, no doors or offices. Only us and nature, the packs on our backs and a brilliant instructor. My ideal classroom and one that I wish to never leave. Although the scenic views are awe-inspiring we cannot take the terrain for granted.

I am reminded almost every day that I must always be thinking. The wilderness is a very dangerous place if one is careless. One must think of consequences and always be prepared for the good, the bad and the ugly. Thinking of ways to prevent emergencies is a key element in risk management.

Preventing risks go hand in hand with knowing the weather, staying well hydrated and well nourished and keeping the equipment in good shape. While keeping all this in mind and thinking all the time, I see myself progressing into a better outdoor leader each and every day.

For me, and others in the group, to reach the level of excellence as a wilderness leader I will need to continue to make good quality judgments about different things going on around me, be able to analyze and weigh out pros and cons, and also make and execute quality decisions in a timely manner.

Gaining all this knowledge and these skills is what it will take for anybody to live the simple life in the wilderness…
Decisions Decisions

By: Ryan Plunkett

Making decisions yes, no, maybe? Things are not always so easy when it comes into the backcountry decision-making process. Items that would seem to take no time like getting a glass of water or getting dry can become major situations in the backcountry environment. Our skills have been tested by Jeff and Rose since day one. One of Jeff’s key phrases is, “What do you think?” At first this phrase frustrated most of the group. Those who learned from this phrase have taken it and ran with it. This phrase pushes us to think outside the box and also to think critically about answers. It also takes the burden off the instructors from making our decisions. This advice came in handier than we could have imagined as we headed into the backcountry for shakedown. Shakedown, was the beginning of our backcountry experience, a time where the group gains foundational knowledge to help ourselves become independent from our reliance on the instructors. Decisions were still run by them for advise and to see what they thought but the brunt of this process fell onto us in hopes we would better ourselves as outdoor leaders. After coming out for re-supply we repacked, rejuvenated, and moved back in for main.

Main expedition led us to more complex decisions and further on the trail to being more self-reliant. One of the major decisions we were faced with was a forgotten pair of boots and how the group was going to handle this problem. Rose sat down and mediated this discussion. We went through many options, discussed, weighed the pros and cons, weighed again, discussed some more and finally made a decision. The group would head back up the trail we came down to Three Forks Meadow and four people would go back to the trailer from there. From this point we had a range of decisions to make where to go next, what about the weather, and how will the group overcome and move on from here.

After learning from the decisions made over the past few weeks the good bad and in between, we moved along again. This time fires were what was being learned from. Leave no trace of LNT was something we were all learning from. Multiple times the issue of fires came up and was quite the learning experience.

Weather was also a major concern that was popping up a few times the weather was a major concern. It turned the storms passed over us or just scared us more than anything else. On the last day at Bear Lake the groups left Jeff and Rose and bid them a farewell and told them we would see them in five days at 11:00 a.m. Jeff told us how stressful final expedition was for him, he reminded us again of Paul Petzoldt’s phrase, “Rules are for fools.” With this parting advise the group split to reconvened at Worthen Meadows in five days. Taking everything we learned from leaving HORN field campus until departing we walked through snow for a day and decided if the snow came over the tops of our boots we were leaving the wilderness that afternoon. Rather than just wait for the storm to pass and stay just a mile and a half away our group Team Good Hair day decided to head in.
Leaving the wilderness a day early was a tough thing to do for us. Our thought process was all about the snow. The only reasons we could figure out for staying would be Rose and Jeff would be upset with us. At that point it did not matter to us. The pros, not getting snowed in, being uncertain of how much it would snow, being able to help out the other group when they got out, and NOT BEING SNOWED IN!!! These were all our reasons for making the trek out early. When we did make it out the four of us Emilie, Courtney, Jake and I (Ooter) were all holding hands ready to take and defend whatever was thrown at us. We were all holding hands and were approaching the van with less than high hopes. When Jeff and Rose sprung from the van and came running toward us we were relieved. Their grins were bigger than ours, they were overjoyed we made the right decision to come out early. At first our concern was they would be upset for making this choice. But as Paul Petzoldt once said, “Rules are for fools!”
It is just a trudge … or is it?

We were headed down to re-supply. After descending over a thousand feet of steep terrain and we then had to climb 480 feet to Pinto Park to meet the horse packers. After getting our food we had to descend the 480 we just gained and another 600+ to our campsite. The ascent was just a trudge, and the final descent was more of a trudge… or was it? The next day we began mid-course evaluations and one of the students claimed for all that the previous day was just a trudge. No beauty, no distractions, just bad tempers showing because of the steepness of the climb and descent.

So my question became, “Is it just a trudge?” If it is, what is missing? We were in the mountains, going to get more food, and on the way to bigger and better things in the course. Pinto Park was a beautiful meadow- even with the grass browning and few wildflowers left. The lakes we passed on the way were colorful with the dwarf willow and blueberry in bright red and yellow, the green kinnickkinnick and lodge pole pine, the yellow gold of the aspen, and blue water and skies with the gray granite creating scenery to rival the fall color change of northern Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, New York, and the New England states.

I began reflecting on attitudes and other things and people and how the mountains were a part of their being. I wonder if John Muir ever felt as if his hikes in the Sierra’s were a trudge. I wonder how often Bob Marshall, with his 80 pound packs, and 40-mile days, thought he was trudging. Did Aldo Leopold take joy in his writing or was it a trudge? Did the loss of most of his first year’s tree planting seem like a trudge in after thought? How often did Paul Petzoldt think his hikes with students were a trudge? Didn’t all these men see the trails, climbs, descents, and mountaintops as part of the process to growth and enlightenment?

My own theology speaks of trials (steep trails, journals, schoolwork, expedition behaviors, stinky clothes and bodies, sharing unequally group gear and tasks, and etc.) bringing about perseverance then endurance then patience and character and finally hope. I believe that many of us get caught up in the present trial and forget about the views from the mountaintops or what we are really here to do. We forget that the classes are a means to developing us or preparing us to do and be what we really want to be. We get distracted by the trudge and become focused on the distractions (grumpiness, short tempers, steep trails, parties, sleep, and etc.) and entertainments and look for any way to relieve the trudge, instead of realizing the trudge is a means to the end.

It is only a trudge if we let it be. If we discipline our minds to see the end results, the trudge becomes a means of strength, endurance, and a better quality of life for us and those we will influence through our relationships and career.

I remember being in Paul’s home in Victor, ID and thinking there wasn’t any wall space because of the bookshelves full of books. I had to move books off the chairs in the kitchen and had to walk sideways down the hall to the bathroom because of bookshelves full of books. I hear stories of how Paul worked to get kids in trouble on courses because he knew the wilderness, instructor, and course would and could help that kid. It seems that learning and helping others was never a trudge for Paul. He may have grown weary on the trail, but he seemed to always have a view to the end result. May we be able to emulate that spirit and not see our own paths or trails as merely a trudge! We all have something to give to this world

Say Summit

By: Ryan Plunkett

After planning to summit Wind River Peak for the previous week, finding out we were going to miss this opportunity was more than a heartbreaker! Due to some extenuating circumstances the group headed back up to the trail through Gill’s park back to Three Forks Meadow for two days; four people had to go back to the trailer and recover some forgotten boots. After we had accomplished this task we were bound for Deep Creek Lakes, consequently, we happened to be in the right place to summit again. With the group tired and sort or unmotivated the peak so close looked out of reach again. After another a good meal and some talking with the LOS and ALOD we were back on the track again. The plan was to set out for the peak at 6:00 a.m. We all converged at the lakeside and set out from there. Confusion set in almost immediately when the scout followed by a few of the group headed in the wrong direction; this was quickly noticed and corrected by the rest of the group. Back on track yet again we saw the most amazing sunrise orange, red, pink and more, everyone paused in awe while the ball of light grew and light up the whole valley below.

Up, up, and away we continued toward the top. The vegetation thinned, the air grew crisp, and tempers rose. At one point it was asked, “Do you all really want to do this?” Not only did this take people off guard, it was a great motivator to get our butts in gear. Almost 500 feet from the top we heard, “were in the home stretch.” I found this humorous because it took us
another 45 minutes at least to make it to our summit. Jeff passed on his knowledge of snow moats, as well as, Paul Petzoldt infamous Rocky Mountain Rest Step. This made the climb easier and more enjoyable as we were able to talk and breath with more ease. After reaching the peak almost four hours after we started there was silence. The wind whipped past us and the most incredible views were seen from 13,192 feet. Everything we had come from could be seen, most of where we were going was also visible but words were at a loss. We found a bottle full of messages and everyone added their own touch to the message we left. Rose got out her camera and shot a video of us all, and myself being a photo-holic did not know where to stop. After we had our fill, if that is even possible, we gathered for a few more shots, this time as a group. The only proper thing to say at this point I felt was Summit. We took everything in for the last time and started our descent. We started descending at about the same pace as we climbed. One of the most shocking aspects of the day was it only took us forty five minutes less to descend that it did to ascend the peak. Chalk that one up to planning. After getting back to camp and seeing how wiped out we all were it was decided to stay one more night at the lakes and then more to our resupply location the next day rather than try to push it and make a stay out of the way. For us this day will not be forgotten and the memories we have will surely last a lifetime.

As we made the transition from backcountry mode to front country we had the opportunity to visit NOLS (National Outdoor Leadership School) both their National Headquarters and their local branch- Rocky Mountain. It was very interesting learning about the history of NOLS and how ECOEE is basically their younger sibling. There we talked to four people all from different departments and learned about their jobs and how NOLS handles all their students.

ECOEE is a lot like NOLS in many aspects (mostly because we were both founded by the same person, Paul Petzoldt).
Kevin Bergstrom was the first person to show us around. Kevin is in charge of getting the permits at the NOLS Rocky Mountain branch, he works with all the land management agencies and makes sure that they get the right permits for the right amount of people (making sure that they do not violate their permits). Kevin also has the tedious job of scheduling groups around these places and making sure that they do not run into each other. In the summer they could have as much as 40-45 different groups in the Wind Rivers at the same time, so as you can assume at times things might get a little hectic.

Claudia Pearson was our next speaker and she is in charge of food and rationing. Claudia is also the editor and writer of the NOLS cookbook, so it was a great honor to talk with the person who gave us notes and tips on how to cook our meals in the backcountry. Claudia described the logistics that she goes through with each instructor in deciding what food to pack for the out going group. They start the group off with standard rations and have the students customize the rest by checking off what else they want on a sheet. The amount of food per day is also discussed, whether it be 1.5 Lbs. Per day or 2.3 Lbs. Per day, the amount of pounds depends on the time of the season (in the summer you will not eat as much as you would in the winter).

Kevin McGowan, who is in charge of equipment, gave us a quick run down on how they handle, use, rent, and sell their equipment. With $700,000 with of equipment it is pretty important to care and maintain the equipment. Kevin could not stress enough that managing the equipment and organizing it is key. Every student has either a $700 equipment deposit or a $300 deposit, depending on whether it is summer or winter, so with students renting or buying it can be quite hectic at time in the equipment room. Kevin also explained the difficulties in renting the equipment. They usually have to rent things three to four times in order to make a their money back, but sometimes the equipment does not last the long because of the abuse (either by the renter or the weather).

Our last speaker worked in the NOLS headquarters, Bruce Palmer, he gave us a history, mission/goals, and the purpose of NOLS. Bruce stated that the mission of NOLS is to be the leading source and teacher of wilderness skills and leadership that serves people and the environment. This non-profit organization gets their funds from student tuitions, but also from contracts (they even have contracts with NASA and the U.S. Naval Academy). NOLS has many branches, nineteen total, not only in the United States but also across the world- this includes Brazil, Mexico, India, New Zealand, Patagonia, and Scandinavia. The last thing that Bruce covered was NOLS goals for the next five years.

It was really interesting and fun to learn about the National Outdoor Leadership School and how closely the curriculum is compared to ECOEE. I can say that I am glade to be on ECOEE compared to the cost of NOLS ($11,100 a semester). But both are a great opportunity to anyone who would like to be an outdoor leader and educator.

-Stephen Gilbert
The group visited the Teton Science School on October 16, 2008. Here we talked to four people (April, Julie, Melinda, and Steve) who gave us a tour of the two schools (Kelly campus and Jackson campus) and what is taught and how the facility operates. The Teton Science Schools is a non-profit organization that works with the local community as well as the U.S. Forest Service.

The Kelly Teton Science School does a weeklong study (5-7 days) with schools all across the United States. The age of the students varies from fifth graders all the way up to high school students. When the schools come to visit the children have the opportunity to learn about many different things. Some examples of what the students might learn are - the ecosystems around (aspen, sage brush, or coneiferisce), the geology, and animals (their scats, tracks, and behavior). Students may also get to the opportunity to learn about fire ecology and winter ecology, all depending on what time they arrive in the year.

The Teton Science School also has a summer program were kids sign up and are accepted in this summer “school.” This summer program is three to four weeks long and is divided into three parts. The first week is environmental knowledge where they teach the children what I mentioned earlier (animals, geology, and the different ecosystems). The second week is as a backpacking trip were students get the chance to compare and contrast these ecosystems, while the last week is a field study/research project. The students get to pick what they would like to do a project on. These projects could be the study of how many trees have been killed by beetles, scats and what are in them, but the most popular pick is studying animals and monitoring their behaviors.

The summer program is ran by a group of grad students who conglomerate and take turns teaching the groups of students. There curriculum is not set, what is taught all depends on what the students would like to learn.

The Science School in Jackson not only holds the entire fifth grade through high school students, but also is home to one of the only private schools in Wyoming that is not of religious background. This charter school, Journeys, started only eight years ago with thirty-four students, and now is educating 198 students. The school uses a variety of methods to teach their students. Journeys is not just your average go to class, sit down, take notes, and then go home school. Instead it is all hands on learning or based learning (it is close to home and something they can relate to) and by doing this the children seem to respond better to what is being taught. The children are encouraged to go out play in the dirt, look at rocks compare and contrast them, and stare at animals when they walk by the window.

Each classroom is a mixture of students from different grades (first graders are in classrooms with third graders). What makes this school even more outstanding is that seniors have internships! If a student is very interested in the medical field, they intern with the hospital, and then they come up with a senior project and present it at the end of the year.

It was kind of disappointing to know that there is a school out in the world like this that I didn’t attend when I was a little kid. The kids seem to love this form of education and do not hate going to school. With fun learning activities and a different approach to teaching this school has the right idea to keep students happy and involved with their education.

-Stephen Gilbert

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Turning Over a New Leaf

Sunny bright blue skies, surreal reflections of snow capped mountains in crystal clear lakes, flowing streambeds, clean air, wildlife, and the fresh scent of lodge pole pines were only part of the amazing experience I had in the backcountry of the Wind River Mountains. What a life. There is no better classroom than the wilderness, being completely away from the distractions of modern civilization while learning experientially. Each day I gained a new perspective of life, changing with each moment. Something we learned that I would always keep in mind is that every situation is different even if it happens in the same place, during the same time of day, with the same group of people, because people are constantly changing with each experience.

Throughout our time in the backcountry, we were being graded on the Wilderness Education Association’s eighteen-point curriculum, consisting of: decision-making and problem solving, leadership, expedition behavior and group dynamics, environmental ethics, basic camping skills, nutrition and ration planning, equipment and clothing selection and use, weather, health and sanitation, travel techniques, navigation, safety and risk management, wilderness emergency procedures and treatment, natural and cultural history, specialized travel/adventure activities, group processing and communication skills, trip planning, and teaching and transference. Each day presented us with a situation where we had to accomplish one or more of
these skills. The extent of how well we achieved these points was taken into consideration by our instructors and classmates, and we were critiqued each night during debrief.

Being the leader of the day was the time each of us received the most constructive feedback because it was our chance to show our instructors what kinds of leaders we were, and how we adapted our leadership style to each day’s events. As leader of the day, we had to decide what the group was going to do for the day, the time, location, necessities, etc., as well as informing the group about these important details. It was definitely a learning experience anytime I was in the position of a leader. One example was when I was scout during a cross-country hike. I was in charge of mapping the route to our destination and getting the group to that particular location safely. As the scout, the route I had chosen started off on the trail but eventually turned into the cross-country hike that was expected. When I ran my plan through with our instructors, they responded by saying, “No trails. Tomorrow you are required to hike cross-country.” Because of that statement, I figured that no meant no. Therefore, I lead the group through extremely rough and unsafe terrain just to avoid hiking on the trail. As a result, I put the group in serious danger even though my reasoning was illogical. That day I learned that although I may be breaking the rules, rules are for fools, and as long as I have proven that I have thoroughly thought through the decision-making process by brainstorming all of my options, choosing the best one is better than following the rules.

Because of the constructive criticism I received throughout the course, I went from being an inexperienced, quiet individual who never spoke up, to being more assertive, skilled, and outspoken. Don’t get me wrong, I still have a lot to work on, but I have improved my leadership skills tremendously. With time, I realized that the feedback was not an attack on my work ethic or personality, it was only meant to help me become a stronger and more respected outdoor leader. I could not be more thankful for that feedback because each day I strive to work on my weaknesses, and how I love that wonderful feeling seeing myself improve and change for the better on a daily basis. If I continue to work to my fullest potential and practice perseverance, someday I may be lucky enough to become an outdoor leader who is privileged to be a part of nature and experience its beauty while teaching and sharing amazing experiences with others who are excited to learn.

Courtney Mullin
I have been told that facilitators shouldn’t compare groups, so I won’t compare this group with any other ECOEE group. But I can compare events, itinerary’s, and even ECOEE’s!

As we are beginning our third week together there are some distinct differences between ECOEE 2008 and the others I have coordinated. The biggest is that I am missing half my brain as jennie will be missing a good deal of this ECOEE due to surgery on her Achilles tendon and subsequent physical therapy. I hurt for these students as they don’t have the benefit of jennie interpreting my words or intent!! They get the whole Tindallbear without jenn’s gentle way and calming smile!

I do have a great graduate assistant in one Rose Gochenaur. Rose has been able to step in and make up for the hole left by jennie. Rose has some great experience to draw on while working with the students and me. I probably shouldn’t mention that it helps that she has worked with juvenile delinquent’s as that would lead the reader to inaccurate conclusions!! Students have certainly taken to Rose as evidenced by the teasing they consistently throw her way. I wish her good fortune as we are only barely beginning!

In some ways this year’s expedition compares with ECOEE 2004- it seems that the weather soon changes after we arrive at a destination. We had a terrific thunderstorm our first night on the road at Ponca State Park in Nebraska. The temperature was considerably cooler than normal in the Badlands and at Devil’s Tower. And it snowed in the Beartooths and our first night in Yellowstone. The mountains across Yellowstone Lake are snow covered. That might be a good/bad omen for our five weeks in the Wind Rivers.

Other events that all ECOEE members can relate to that seem to be consistent across the years are the late night debriefs, early morning wake-ups and starts, “Has anyone seen my stuff vs. who’s s—t is this?”, gloppy, pasty meals that taste okay but don’t look anything like they are supposed to and are missing the texture they should have, late night homework sessions, LOD escapades and decision-making trials, and …. Need I remind you all what it was/is like? For our readers that haven’t been on ECOEE, there is really no way to adequately explain this process. Sorry about that for you all.

We have met some really great people this year that have contributed to our learning. It is only the second week on the road and I feel as if we have covered more than we do in a normal semester in the classroom- Don’t any of you readers pass this along to any of the students because they might get ideas about canning the idea of turning in any of their assignments from here on out! We still have a long ways to go and a lot more to learn.

One fairly unique thing that makes this ECOEE a bit less stressful in my tenure as ECOEE coordinator is the group size making a second vehicle unnecessary. We are all traveling in one 15-passenger van. This certainly makes coordinating vans and routes less difficult. I didn’t have to give driving tests to students before we left campus, and I don’t have to be grabbing the back of the seat in front of me in fear of an accident. I am doing a lot more driving and getting a lot less sleep- but who sleeps well in a van seat anyways?

Thank you all for contributing to our newsletter. Without your support and interest ECOEE wouldn’t be the success it has been through the years. We all love writing the articles and the growth we achieve in finding time to organize and publish each issue. We hope our articles contribute to your understanding of ECOEE and add a little humor to your life. Keep us in you thoughts- if not your prayers- through the semester.

The next mail pick-up for the ECOEE Group will be October 30. Here’s the address to send items to them:

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