ECOEE 2009: Heads South

The final leg of our journey included backpacking and sea-kayaking in Baja, California. The last major stop of the trip was at Grand Canyon National Park, before returning back to Macomb, Illinois.
Falling for the Grand Canyon  
Christine Lagattolla  

It is something like how the elephants make up a majority of what you expect to see when you visit the circus. But say you did not expect to come across a wide chasm on your exploratory expedition and just happened to stumble upon it one day. One might wonder if there are aliens flying through the sky at night and the Great Canyon may be used as a teleport. Or perhaps the veracity of adventure might interest you to follow the river through the unknown. The stories of the canyon are bound in ideas and inquisition.  
This visit to the National Park was my third although it was similar to all my previous visits and not uncommon to most others who have also spent it along the South Rim. If you have or ever do visit, you will indubitably see someone capturing themselves in a photograph. There they stand, with a wide smile and bright eyes. All the angles seem odd from behind as a photo lens can only capture a near sided view. The colors and shadows are to be left behind, in a wonder of its own depths. Than maybe there is a good reason for interpretation; there is a chance to discuss the brim facts and spark the curiosity to imagine its inhabitants.  

Geologically speaking, facts let us know that there are 40 different layers that create the gorgeous photo we admirably take. The stifling history of 1.7 billion years brings proposal to what the canyon may look like in double that age. Moreover for the future, I advise more concern for what the rest of the world will look like. The amazing features of the canyon exist below within the plethora of ecosystems and biodiversity that has found its place. The park is home to five life zones, a similar equivalence to all the ecosystems ECOEE 2009 has journeyed through from Canada to Mexico. Characteristically, I have found that interpretation’s various meanings can be brought out emphatically through story telling. Just as the canyon stories remain locale it also seems ECOEE’s moments and conversations may fall into the miles of the chasm with some stories shared amongst company. In the small time we were taken through a personal and meaningful experience it has also brought closure to a principle idea. The places we have traveled are now on exhibit in our memories like those in visitor centers. The pieces of what each of us knew before are now among what we have seen and heard firsthand. The goal hopefully is that by visiting we now better understand what exists and to protect what we have come to appreciate.

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Josh Boyer  
448 Article  

We made our way down to Joshua Tree National Park in the South East part of California. This was our third eco-system that we made in our itinerary to visit. I read up on some books that talked about the Native Americans here and how they used to live. I found out that there were four main Native American tribes that use to dwell in the Joshua Tree National Park area. They were the Serrano tribe, the Cahuilla tribe, Mojave tribe, and Chemehuevi tribe. These Native Americans use to live in camps with cone-shaped teepees all around. Most of the tribe’s lives are spent hanging out at the camps. The men maybe out collecting and hunting for food, the women may be back at camp weaving baskets and preparing meals for their family, but how about the children? There would’ve been a lot of free time for them but what could they do? This is why the children came up with games to play. Recreation was a really big part of their lives. One favorite game is called hoop and pole. This is when someone rolls a hoop and someone else tries to throw a poll through it. Another game they had played is to catch a ring on a stick. Another popular game that they played was called cats cradle. This game is played by simply having one person hold a string in the shape of a cradle with both hands and then they have to pass it to the next person with breaking the cradle. Native Americans played a lot of ball games as well. Some of these games included soccer and lacrosse. So when you watch and see these games playing today know that the Native Americans had come up with them. They also played a lot of indoor games especially when the weather was bad outside. These games included dice and other counting and betting games. I look at Native Americans as our founding fathers.
Jacob Boyer
RPTA 448 Interpretation

We traveled to an interpretive evening program while in our first night at the Grand Canyon. The program was titled, Horned Lizards and Gila Monsters. I knew a little bit about both these animals so I was eager to learn more about them. When I walked in to the room, Marker had a big screen in her background with a huge projector. Marker started her lesson off by telling us a story. The story was about a man who once worked at the Grand Canyon. This man walked down a path to the bottom of the canyon, which was very steep, and along his trail he saw a snake that he had never seen before. He then carried the snake back with him up the trail, then in his car to the Grand Canyon headquarters. The people at the headquarters were amazed at the sight of this snake, because it was found nowhere else in the world. They eventually called this snake the Grand Canyon Snake. After the interesting story, Marker went into how lizards adapted to the grueling weather conditions the Grand Canyon brings. So why they are cold blooded, meaning that they take in warmth from their surroundings, and they don’t need as much food consumption as a warm-blooded animal, such as a coyote. But something that is bad about being cold blooded is that some lizards aren’t too quick, so they are easy prey for their predators. Warm-blooded animals are disadvantaged from cold-blooded animals in the way that they have to eat to stay warm and alive, so they work from the inside out, and cold-blooded animals work from the outside in. An advantage that warm bloods have though is they are agile, quick, and ready for anything that crosses their path. Marker only talked about horned lizards and Gila monsters for a little bit in the lesson which I thought was weird, since that was her main title, but I enjoyed her charisma while teaching, and I learned a lot.

Leatherneck Recreation
By: Kimberly Janus

OO-RAH. The sounds of hard-edged Marines could be heard throughout the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in Twenty-nine Palms California. ECOEE was privileged to enter the base to interview a man named Skip Best. Best is the Director of the Morale Welfare Recreation Center and was one of the most gracious hosts’ we have encountered. He had filled our arms with t-shirts, first-aid kits, note pads, sweatshirts and hoodies. The Morale Welfare Recreation Center is a place for stationed Marines to recreate. The center offered sports teams, leagues, and tournaments for participants to get involved with. The MWR also offers fields, work out equipment, and a store to purchase equipment from. The store offered items such as snowboards, tents, coolers, and games that Marines and their families can rent during down time. The MWR is really concerned with giving an opportunity of recreation, sports, and games to the service men and women of this country. Many veterans who return from war struggle with symptoms of PTSD and the MWR encourages vets to participate in sports and games to keep them from engaging in destructive things such as drinking or drugs. The MWR is kind of like a campus recreation center at a University, it gives the soldiers something to do and aids in their physical, mental and emotional well-being. The MWR provides a little something for all of the men and women who sacrifice so much for our country by protecting it like my father, John Janus did in Vietnam and like our fellow ECOEE member, and Christine Lagattolla did in Iraq. They really are the few and the proud.
Volunteer Work in Baja, California
Cassi Lundeen

ECOEE was lucky enough to get the opportunity to see beautiful Baja California and do some service work in their community along the way. Our new friend Elizabeth who worked for the Comision Nacional De Areas Naturals Protegidas was nice enough to let us help out and show us around and tell us about some of the history of Bajia De Los Angeles. Our first day we had the opportunity to clean up one of the local beaches that had quite a bit of trash that had been washed up to the shore over time. The next day we had the chance to go to Elizabeth’s office and work on the sea turtle tanks that had had some damage from the hurricane. The fence and roof had been damaged as well. Well spent the morning repairing and fixing a part of the roof that had been damaged by the wind. The netting over the turtle tank was hanging down and we used what materials we had to try and fix this. She shared with us as well that the chain like fence damage was a result of somebody breaking into the facility and stealing the two sick sea turtles that were there. There were many exhibits of sea turtle shells and specimens to view as well. We got to change the formaldehyde out of the jars to keep the baby turtles and sharks preserved for the display. We mixed a huge jar of solution for her to use in the future when she needs to change over the next solution.

Mathew McCabe
RPTA 376 Perspectives

The United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USDA Forest Service) was officially created in 1905, although forest preservation had been a serious governmental concern since the 1870’s. Its establishment was based upon Gifford Pinchot’s utilitarian philosophy of doing the greatest good for the greatest number of people over the long term.

Today the National Forest System is broken up into nine Forest Service regions, 155 national forests, and 630 ranger districts. The five core management objectives for the Forest Service are: water sheds, natural resource extraction, multi-usage recreation, grazing, and timber.

In our meeting with the Gallatin district of the Forest Service we were able to spend a few hours with Todd Styles. One of the main themes of this discussion was comparing how the Forest Service management compares to the National Park Service. One key statement made was that in the National Forests the wilderness is free and open unless declared otherwise; while in the National Parks the wilderness is closed and regulated unless determined otherwise.

Basically that National Forest lands are generally free to the public, recreational use is less monitored, and camping is decentralized and less regulated. While the parks generally have fees, established campsites, and very limited recreational usage. Although today the Forest Service is establishing greater regulations in order to protect and preserve the nation’s natural resources for the long-term. Todd then mentioned that the National Parks are typically better funded, and also have more appropriate staffing and resource allocation then the Forest Service.

Todd’s Job as a level II Forest Service Ranger enables him to write citations but not to carry a firearm. His daily duties include granting permits for recreational usage, updating and monitoring leases, maintaining trails and campsites, and general travel management; or determining who can do what, where. However, in an emergency situation such as a fire, his role immediately changes to help manage the crisis. In total this relatively small branch only has nine employees to manage 30,000 acres; and only six of these employees are qualified to issue citations.

Another critical talking point from today’s meeting was the recent trend toward privatization within National Forest lands and National Parks. For instance the seven large established campsites in their district are managed on a day-to-day basis by private entities. The land is still owned by the Forest Service but is leased by private companies. These private companies then pay a percentage of their annual adjusted gross income back to the Forest Service to maintain and improve these campsites. The Forest Service has an active role in determining what changes and improvements will be made. Also they have a system in place to ensure that the private camp managers are following Forest Service policies and protocols. We also discussed some budgetary facts about the U.S. Forest Service. Specifically we talked about how many of the leases and permits that generate revenue for the U.S. Forest Service are actually paid to the Treasury in Washington D.C. Then, these funds are reallocated nation wide at the beginning of the following fiscal year. There are definitive pros and cons with this arrangement. The obvious negative perspective is that money generated right here Gallatin has to be funneled through the bureaucratic pyramid that is the federal government. Who knows what percentage of the money earned makes its way back here, to the Forest Service in general, or lost somewhere along the lines of red tape in Washington. The pros to this arrangement though are that the Forest Service Rangers do not have any motivation or incentive to charge unnecessary fees, to write unnecessary citations, or to practice unfair policies. Lastly Todd Styles told us that in the future the U.S. Forest Service needs to revitalize it’s image as the world leader in the conservation and preservation of natural resources. It needs to lead by example for a world that is facing climate change and resource depletion.
“Two-Headed Leadership”
-Shane Johnson

Ever since the departure from Canada the ECOEE group has longed to be in a backcountry setting once again away from civilization and on our own as a group. We new all through our front country itinerary that eventually we would be making our way to Baja California, Mexico and then partaking in a 5 day backpacking trip followed by a sea kayaking trip. Both of these trips would be facilitated by a new addition to our Wilderness Education Association instructional staff, Francisco Detrell. We were excited to meet him and learn what he would bring to the group with his own professional leadership style and boy were we pleased with what we saw out of his personal styles.

Francisco has a no nonsense approach to group behaviors and a big part of this approach is simply being a group on the performing level that holds each other accountable and always asks “What have I done to help the leader or group today?” He also brings an out of the box approach in his thought processes and if you pay attention to what he is really saying you can find yourself asking questions that you may or may not ever find the answer to. I personally was thrilled that he joined our group and I feel that he inspired that much more personal growth out of myself during that leg of ECOEE.

From the leadership of a group perspective for our class what I learned the most from Francisco was, as mentioned before, how a group is responsible for each other at all times whether the designated leader of the day or not. As talented as this years’ members of ECOEE are as leaders you will rarely find one person able to remember and think about every little detail that goes into a day, that is why delegation of responsibilities is a big curriculum point on our LOD sheets. With that being said if every group member takes a back seat on the day and leaves everything up to the leader of the day then things are bound to be done wrong, forgotten, or misplaced. So in order to perform as a group, the whole group needs to share responsibilities and help one another.

Peter Collins
Los Angeles County Outdoor Science School

Los Angeles County Outdoor Science School is in business to focus and specialize in high quality science education using a natural environment. They run week long courses for 5th and 6th graders using experiential education in the three different ecosystems that are around the campus. LACOSS tries to have a philosophy that resembles a school. One way that they do this is by the terminology that they use. They refer to the staff as outdoor science teachers rather than field instructors and they site that the learning takes place is known to the kids as campus rather than camp. They say that they cater to everybody but because of the financial times they are unable to receive grants that allow students from lower classes to come to their programs. Mostly now the clientele that they receive is from the middle to upper classes. The LACOSS markets to many 5th and 6th grade schools. They have a very long waiting list to get in and a lot of their marketing comes for free from word of mouth.

LACOSS is looking for employees that have a college degree in science and have at least one year of experience teaching before they come. If hired by LACOSS an employee can expect to make a higher salary when compared to other agencies with benefits included. Employees are allowed to live and eat onsite for free during the week but must pay for housing and meals on the weekends.

The cost is $293 per student for the week and it is up to the school to come up with the money. Schools will have fundraisers and a lot of the time they will have parents pay for a portion or all of the fees for the student. The staff is paid a set salary based on what level science teacher they are. There are 6 levels of outdoor science teachers with each one receiving a higher pay rate with the head naturalist receiving the highest pay.

Each day every student starts out with a fresh slate and when they do something that the outdoor science teacher doesn’t approve of they receive a point. If a student receives more than 5 points in a day he will be sent home without a refund.

If I took one thing away from this visit it would be that Working for this program definitely has its ups and downs. A very intriguing aspect of working for LACOSS is definitely the benefits that come with the job as well as the good pay.

Another reason that I would really enjoy working for them is because of the location that they are in being right on the ocean. Being on the ocean also has the downside too because I would never want to go to work and just sit on the beach and go surfing all day.
Grant Fleetwood  
RPTA 448

The Grand Canyon was an excellent place for us to visit as a part of not only ECOEE, but our class for Interpretation of the Natural and Cultural Environment. Every day during our stay, we had the opportunities to visit ranger led programs all across the south rim. We started the first night here off right by enjoying a night program called “Horned Toads and Gila Monsters”. This was all about how reptiles and amphibians live in the Grand Canyon ecosystem. We learned that there is a unique snake known as the Grand Canyon rattlesnake, that the horned toad squirts blood out of it’s eyes and that the chuckwalla puffs up inside of its hole to keep from being pulled out by predators. Also we learned that the most dangerous animal in the park is not the rattlesnake. It’s not a scorpion. In fact, it’s not even a predatory animal. It is the rock squirrel. Each of the programs about animals that we went to discussed this interesting fact. The rock squirrels in the park are dangerous and bite loads of people over the season because they have become accustomed to humans feeding them. They have lost all fear of humans and will even climb on us trying to find food. It was interesting to see the rangers using their informational programs to help protect both the visitors and the squirrels.

Another program that we went to involved the geology and formation of the canyon. The most interesting part about this to me was that there were several steps before the Colorado River was involved that brought about the formation of the canyon. First, the area of the American southwest was at one point a shallow sea. The ground in that area is full of limestone created from the remains of all the sea life. The next big step came after the sea receded and the Rocky Mountains were formed. As the tectonic plates collided, a large, flat area rose up, creating the Colorado Plateau. This is where the Grand Canyon lies today. After this, the Colorado River formed and began flowing and cutting deeper and deeper into the earth. Usually, rivers cut a deep, walled canyon slightly wider than the river itself. However, at some points the Grand Canyon is almost ten miles across! This is not because the Colorado River was ten miles wide; it is, in fact, due to erosion on the sides of the canyon, from flash floods, freezing and thawing, and wind. We were shown how we could look at the walls of the Grand Canyon and view the layers created by the deposition of sediments over time. Some layers are made of limestone, indicating seas; some layers are sandstone, indicating deserts. Another interesting fact that we were given was that the south rim, where we were, is actually a thousand feet lower in elevation than the north rim. However, because of an angled effect and the distance across the canyon, it looks like it is the same height. Each of these programs made sure to increase our knowledge and provided us with great examples on helping us give our own interpretive lessons.

Nathan Barr  
RPTA 448

While at the Grand Canyon I had the opportunity to go to several interpretive talks, walks and small museums. One of my favorite talks was at night and it was about the meteorology and weather of the G.C. It was presented by the ranger only known as Chris. He was an older gentleman, who had already retired from his being a junior high principal but has never retired from his true passion of weather.

His slide show had not worked so he had to adapt to using his summer slide show. He started talking about the basics of weather and where the grand canyon gets its weather. While he started to go through several of his slide I realized that if I had heard this one year prior that my interest in what he presented would not have been something that I would have attended. Now that I’m on ECOEE and have what he is talking about as one of my topics for Outdoor Education class. As he continued talking about my new favorite topic, he should some of the most beautiful pictures of this national park. There were some that had storms that fit right into the canyon; some that only touched one side and some that were even below the rim.

After the talk I had the chance to talk to him for a little bit. He told me that the park works very closely the national weather service. Apparently they switch places for about a week during the year so that each can get a different perspective on each others job. He encouraged me to contact them and even stop there some time in Oklahoma where their headquarters are.

One of my favorite part of ECOEE is having this topic of meteorology and climate and getting to learn about it as well as teach it. It was not something that I picked up very easy and it cost me several late nights rereading books that dealt with the basics and why the weather does what it does even though nobody seems to be able to know what it does next. This has been one thing for sure that I will apply and try to continue to learn it on a hobby level and maybe one day be talking about it at the Grand Canyon.