What We’ve Done Since Last Issue

- Backpacking trip to Mission Santa Maria in Baja California
- Sea Kayaking in Baja California
- Thanksgiving week in the Grand Canyon

What’s happening in ECOEE 2014

This 4th and last installment of ECOEE 2014’s newsletter covers the end portion of our expedition. We left off having just arrived at San Diego State University and about to depart on our final backcountry expedition in Baja California. Well we’re back and it was great! We also took advantage of the chance to spend Thanksgiving in the Grand Canyon, and even further to spend it in good company with a group from SDSU whom we had met while enjoying our stay at their facilities. Now we are back at Horn Field Campus, cleaning all our gear and doing final peer evaluations.

Disclaimer: ECOEE’s Publications and Promotions Committee is not responsible for any spelling or grammar errors in the students’ articles. All articles are included as submitted.
Adventures at SDSU by Vickey Benhart

Before departing for Baja California we had the opportunity to meet Jim Lustig with Aztec Adventures at San Diego State University. The program offers weekend program to students of San Diego State University. They have leaders who lead the trips. The student leaders are required to take leadership courses before they began leading trips. While we were visiting San Diego State University we were given the opportunity to meet with some of the trip leaders and talk about what it is like leading those trips for weekend and what would go into leading those trips. We talked with the SDSU program about what ECOEE is about and what we all have done throughout our experience. Most of them were in shock that there was a program like this, and wanted to find out how to do it. During this meeting we found out that SDSU is no longer allowed to take trips down to Baja California per the University rules. At this point Jeff told us we were one of the few university’s that takes trips down to Mexico. The University didn’t want us to pass up the opportunities that we had to learn when we were down in Baja California. I’m glad that was decided by the University; because it was one awesome experience I will never forget about. Our experiences of hiking to a pool of water 20 miles from civilization, or watching the sunsets over the ocean, and having the Whale Shark swim right under my kayak when we were paddling.
What We Travel For by Anthony Killion

The past 120 days have constituted one of the longest periods of my life. It has also been an incredibly short experience. We’ve covered close to 11,000 miles in our white vans and visited a number of outdoor education facilities and interpretive programs at our National Parks. Those visits have given us the opportunity to see different types of program, and different types of interpretation, from natural to cultural.

Our very first experience was Sarret Nature Center in Michigan. Soon after we got a different taste of outdoor education at Frederik Meijer Sculpture Garden where the staff there attempts to connect its visitors to the natural world through art and self-guided gardens.

In September we loaded up our vans and, like the pioneers of yesteryear, turned our sights west, to Yellowstone and interpretation. It was there that we experienced a few self-guided trails through some of the park’s thermal features, and some of us students gave our first interpretation presentations. I talked about John Colter and the mountain men, travelling west to empty the mountains of beaver, and how they survived the harsh conditions of the west.

It was when we journeyed south to Bryce Canyon that we actually got to see a ranger-led program. A man told us about the night sky and different elements of the universe. It wasn’t the best interpretation, which is great because it allowed us students to learn from this particular ranger’s shortcomings. After we got to see another ranger program at Joshua Tree, we students could start incorporating the hands-on, first-hand experience with interpretation into our own presentations.

This new experience and time to synthesize what we’ve learned culminated in our final interpretation presentations in Baja California. We had many presentations in the afternoon sun on beaches in the Gulf of California. These covered all sorts of topics from exploration to the pearl industry.

Apart from interpretation, we also finished our presentations on our outdoor education topics. We were able to learn from some of the best. We spent a week at Los Angeles Outdoor County Science School, where we worked as cabin leaders and followed the Outdoor Science School naturalists around. They had many lessons to teach us about education in the out of doors.

This has been one of the most unique aspects of ECOEE. We are able to travel around our country and visit these places, national parks and outdoor education agencies. We could take classes about outdoor education and interpretation at Currens. But what good does that do when we have the opportunity to visit and learn from these places first hand?

“It does not matter how slow you go as long as you do not stop”
“Ultimately, leadership is not about glorious crowning acts. It is about keeping your team focused on a goal and motivated to do their best to achieve it, especially when the stakes are high and the consequences really matter. It is about laying the groundwork for others’ success, and the standing back and letting them shine.” – Chris Hadfield. This quote reminds me of Jeff. It may not always feel like he is letting you shine, but he is definitely laying the groundwork for our success. In the quote when it says, “and the standing back”, this is his strongest teaching method. During our expedition Jeff steps back to let us use our judgment and decision making skills. Our judgment and decision making skills are not always as good as we think! We have definitely made our fair share of mistakes… we have made some major ones. When it comes to making those mistakes we learn to correct them and hopefully not make them ever again. None of us will ever make a mile long lake crossing with whitecaps in the cold, no one will ever leave their clothes out overnight in the rain and cold, and no one will ever make the mistake of not bringing enough food while backpacking through the desert.

We all learn through these experiences to become the leaders we strive to be. There are always bad decisions and good decisions being made and that is how a good leader is produced. Being an exceptional wilderness leader we learn to adapt to different situations effectively and efficiently, because you may put yourself or the group at risk. There are always the different factors that you cannot control, like the weather.

While being a wilderness leader you are not just leading the group you are taking care and looking out for your group. A leader has to think of any possible risk and think of their well-being. While you are leading you are always planning. You need to have a plan A, B, C, or even W, not matter what happens you need to be prepared. Each of this plans will intend for the best scenario and the worst scenario.

All of this can be frustrating to learn on your own while Jeff is standing back and answering our questions with, “Take your brain out of your back pocket”, “I’m not a LOW?”, or the famous quoted “What do you think”. He wasn’t just trying to be a butt, he was keeping us focused and laying our groundwork. Along our expedition we learned through experience, we experienced how to become a leader, and that is something that Jeff taught each of us.
What can most people say about their daily lives that goes beyond the ordinary routine of life in America? How many people can say that the hardest part of their day was when they flipped their canoe running a C1 tech rapid? Who do you know that wakes up in the morning and has breakfast and coffee at a frost covered picnic table with 10 of their closes companions? Well, you might know one person, and, I’m sure that person can tell you lots of stories about their life on the ECOEE experience. You may consider that person fortunate to have had those experiences. However much they may disagree with that opinion during much of the more difficult and frustrating times on ECOEE, you are right. And you yourself, the reader, are also lucky to have known one of these eleven individuals who went through the ECOEE experience considering that a very very select few people get to have it. Very few people in this world would ever sign up for four months of living with 10 other people in close quarters through some of the most stressful situation they will ever have to go through. Those of us who did make the decision to sign up for this all have their own reasons but all had to work together and form a bond deeper than anything you could get from sitting in a classroom for a semester. It’s wild to think that all of those hardships and conflicts and lessons learned were all the goals of a series of classes for school credit. Developing an understanding of each other and ourselves is not only necessary for ECOEE to be a successful expedition it is also written in a syllabus. The same thing you get at the beginning of a semester of sitting in a classroom. So all those miles of paddling, all those chilly nights, all those steps over rough terrain in the Sierra Mountains, all those bugs in Canada and at the Oasis in Mexico, and all those petty differences and unsavory attitudes towards one another were all the goals of a class. Whether we realized it or not we were at school with a heavy dose of the real world mixed in. And now that ECOEE is coming to a close it’s time for much personal reflection over this coming winter break. My hope is that with some quiet time, each member of ECOEE 2014 can come to conclusions on all the lessons learned on ECOEE and use them to grow into greater beings than they were when they started out in August.
Experience of a Lifetime by Victoria Benhart

After spending a semester on ECOEE I can honestly say that this was the correct decision. Sometimes during I have thought to myself what I have I gotten myself into. Never able to really have a clear answer of why I was here. Now at the end of the semester I have a clearer less mucky version of it. I have learned more about myself than I would have ever learned sitting in a classroom. Learning from making mistakes is just what I needed. On ECOEE there are real life consequences. I have extended my limits with what I am comfortable with, and now know when my limits have been reached and when to continue on and believe that I can do it. I have also learned the importance of not procrastinating on my homework, but I still continue to though I’m not as bad as I used to be. As the days come down to single digits that I am on ECOEE I am constantly looking back and remembering all of the memories that I will never forget. Like being freezing cold when in Canada, but then learning how to be prepared when it comes to all temperatures and any type of weather, because with the luck of ECOEE 2014 it will rain 25 of the 28 days while we are in canoeing, but we always would have positive attitudes and find some way to laugh about how wet or cold we happened to be at the time. Or in Baja California at El Pescador being land locked for 4 nights because of the wind. Along the way we have learned so much about ourselves and groups member we have become a family. In a few short day we will be heading back home, back to the real world, and some of us back to our jobs, telling family member, coworkers of all the memories that were made.

“If you never try, you’ll never know what you’re capable of.”
Adapting to Changes by Kenny Bambini

During the course of this journey we have learned about adaption and how important it is in nature to adapt to changes. In the last four months we have seen it all from the frigid Canadian snow to the sandy beaches of Baja California. We have had to adapt to each region we have journeyed to. Adapting is nothing to think about, it just naturally happens. From putting on a coat to stripping down to swim, we are always changing. It is something necessary to all living things to survive. But adapting to the cold frigid temperatures after not being in the cold has been one big slap in the face. Two and a half weeks ago I was laying on a remote beach on the Sea of Cortez lounging. Now I’m back in the polar tundra they like to call Illinois. With ECOEE coming to an end I am going to have to adapt again and switch gears and sleep in a room, I won’t be surrounded by the same people for 4 months it is something that has become hard to fathom this is my life now I must go on and be free.

Always Moving by Kenny Bambini

Outdoor Education is a never ending theme with us. We have had the opportunity to visit many outdoor Education centers during our fascinating journey across the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Outdoor Education to me is all about experiential learning in an outdoor setting and we have been living it the last hundred plus days. Something I have taken away from this is semester is that no matter what you teach it’s always a different experience. There are no walls, there’s no desks, or tables. Planet Earth is the classroom and from what I understand mother Earth is the biggest classroom in the universe at 57.51 million sq. miles. To me experiential learning is the best way to learn. For example it doesn’t just pertain to text book stuff, its more technical learning. For me I get to teach people about birds when one is around us, teaching people on the fly. Getting taught this way is a great way to learn we get to be in our comfort zone of the outdoors and enlighten people on the fading perspective of outdoors. Being a part of outdoor ed is something that really interests me. People nowadays are losing their touch with Mother Nature and the beauty of the natural world. You see kids see the world just as we see it, but they don’t appreciate it like elders do, kids can use there google machine and see anything they won’t. Outdoor ed is something where when the program is over the participants should leave where they may be and look around and be surrounded by what you taught them.
I can write about whatever I want. This is one of my assignments that I have had to complete over the course of the semester. This article is a great example of the leadership that is present on ECOEE. Since day one our instructor Jeff Tindall has left us to our own devices. At first I thought that it was a terrible way to teach a course. But really what Jeff has done is provide an environment where an individual can become much more flexible and where a leader has to grow. I started this course believing that I would be given guidelines on how to everything. Instead what happened was that I spent nearly a month trying to figure out what Jeff wanted us to do. Well I figured it out, Jeff wants me and the rest of the group to think for ourselves and be a leader. He wants us to step up and realize our potential.

The past two weeks I have been one of the “Leaders of the Week” (LOW’s). With the help of my other four leaders, over the course of the two weeks, we have planned out where we would go after our time at San Diego State University. Curtis, Vickey, and made several plans on how the first week would go. After changing plans three times we decided on going to the Grand Canyon and then the day after Thanksgiving we would begin our journey back to Macomb. We had to think on our feet and realize what was best for our group and we ended up staying in a motel one night instead of setting up tents at a random campground while it was twenty degrees outside. My next week brought us back Macomb where Josh, Cheyenne, and myself decided we would give the group a little under 48 hours to do homework and get away from everyone until Wednesday when we began the final evaluations.

So what I have really learned is that I can write whatever I want and I can do whatever I want but I always need to be thinking about consequences and benefits and how they will influence my group.

“Don’t watch the clock; do what it does, keep going.”

Freedom of Leadership by John Wiegert
After the three previous installments of our newsletter and daily journal entries on our blog, you have probably figured out that ECOEE is a pretty unique program. Of course, that is an understatement because in fact, ECOEE is the only university program of its kind in the nation. But, what makes it so unique?

The differentiating factor is that at its core ECOEE is a travel workshop. The other five courses that make up the ECOEE curriculum are offered on campus at Western Illinois University. Interpretation, Outdoor Education, Management of Adventure Recreation, Perspectives of Outdoor Recreation and Wilderness Leadership can all be taught in a traditional classroom. The skills acquired through the Travel Workshop course cannot.

The travel workshop model allows group skills to be taught. These skills include decision-making, problem-solving, cooperation, collaboration, conflict resolution, goal setting, communication and community living.

Now, these skills can be (and often are) discussed within a classroom. The terms often become buzz words, easy “right” answers to most questions. However, it isn’t until you are applying these skills to real situations in real time that you can truly understand and master them.

As one of the most extensive travel workshops in the nation, ECOEE provides a vast array of opportunities for students to practice these skills in real situations with real stakes and real consequences. There is no other college program that offers a semester long expedition. Even Outward Bound and NOLS don’t offer many courses above 90 days. The ECOEE expedition is 120 days, four months, an entire college semester. That’s 120 days of opportunities to develop those skills, which go beyond group skills, qualifying as life skills.

Arguably, these life skills could be learned anywhere. They certainly can be applied and practiced anywhere (hence, the term “life skills”). However, ECOEE does not only provide an environment to foster these skills. It also provides an academic framework through which to observe, discuss and evaluate one’s personal development in each area. In order to truly develop and master these skills, they must be recognized, analyzed and intentionally practiced. Life skills can be acquired anywhere, but ECOEE’s extensive travel workshop supplies the framework and opportunity to master them.

ECOEE is a one-of-a-kind experiential learning program. It offers an experience that you cannot get anywhere else, teaching invaluable life lessons in an academic environment that can only be achieved through its foundation as the most extensive travel workshop in the nation, a program in which students can practice and assess skills in real world situations with real world consequences. This is what differentiates ECOEE from other outdoor programs, what makes it great.
Tools for Success by Greg Strobel

Every expedition must start somewhere. Typically, that somewhere is basecamp, and beyond that it starts with someone who is in charge of a program. Our last backcountry experience started and ended at San Diego State University where the one of a kind Jim Lustig housed us at our basecamp in the Aztec Adventure equipment room in the recreation center. Aztec Adventure has been providing the SDSU community with leadership, education, adventure and culture since 1977. Their intention is to promote environmental preservation through safe, educational small group learning experiences in the outdoors. They believe that travelling in the outdoors by simple means and challenging self-perceived physical and mental limits is a healthy alternative to our normally technologically dependent lifestyles. Additionally, most of the programs are entry level and little experience is necessary. They embrace Leave No Trace principles and live by a mission summed up as: Eat good food, Be kind, Tell the truth, and Make a difference. We were fortunate enough to have a meeting with Jim, the outdoor programs coordinator, about how Aztec Adventure works and the details that make it successful. Throughout the meeting we learned that a successful program needs qualified employees, marketing, principles, and of course planning and preparation. Each Aztec Adventure employee has to have gone through leadership courses through the school and also courses with Jim as well. Marketing through their website and word of mouth is where most participants come from. Principles such as their mission are always followed and the basis of each trip. Expectations of participants are set before any trip hits the road so that everyone is on the same page. Planning and preparation between trip leaders is essential for success because they’re in charge of it all from start to finish. With a proper system, anything can be done.

“If you aim to be mediocre, you will be less; if you aim to be excellent, you’ll at least be mediocre”

Jeff Tindall
How Will You Become Connected by Haley Brasile

It is almost the end of ECOEE and it has been a journey that cannot be explained or expressed in words. I have learned facts, skills and a new way of interpretation my life. We were introduced to new perspectives through interpersonal relationships, new experiences and from interpretation programs. An interpretation program can be a guided walk or tour, visitor center or exhibit, talks, or a self-guided trail. The interpretive programs that our group went to were at the National Parks we visited, “National Park Service interpretation directly supports the preservation mission. Interpretation is driven by a philosophy that charges interpreters to help audiences care about park resources so they might support the care for park resources. Interpretation establishes the value of preserving park resources by helping audiences discover the meanings and significance associated with those resources” (National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior). From Monday, November the 24th to Friday, November the 28th we were visiting the Grand Canyon National park and most of what we did was go to interpretative programs. Preservation includes the topic of invasive and endangered species; the California condor is a species of the Grand Canyon that was endangered. We got to see Ranger Marina give her last interpretation of the California condor at the Grand Canyon. Part of the presentation is staging, staging includes making sure that the audience is comfortable. Noise pollution is something to watch out for during the staging part. If the audience cannot hear the presentation, how will the message get through to the user? Marina gave her interpretation right outside the lookout studio which happened to also be where two construction workers were using power tools. Before she started talking about the condors, Marina went over to the two workers and asked them to stop for about an hour. The staging part is crucial to an interpretive program, without good staging the introduction, body, and conclusion may not be effective. Spreading awareness about preservation of the parks is the only way they will still be around for the future.

“There is such dissociation between what the eyes see and what the mind envisions. The final thought is just a matter of interpretation, colored by our experiences.”
On the final leg of our expedition, ECOEE headed south of the border to Baja California. There we met our guide, Francisco. Francisco took us to the site of the Santa Maria Mission, one of the last missions established by the Jesuit priests before they were expelled from the peninsula. This 4 day backpacking trip included swimming in a beautiful desert oasis. After the backpacking trip, we headed to Bahia de los Angeles to a small house on the beach called Casa Azul. From Casa Azul, we began our 9 day sea kayaking experience on the Sea of Cortez (or the Gulf of California as our guide preferred to call it). This was definitely one of the highlights of our expedition.

Both of the amazing experiences we had in Baja California are offered through Francisco’s company, Ecotur. Ecotur strives to provide quality adventure experiences combined with cultural and environmental interpretation, and eco-friendly practices. Francisco Detrell is a well-known figure in Baja California as he has been guiding and leading trips for over 30 years. Not only that, but Francisco also works closely with the local communities to provide service opportunities, stimulate the economy and engage people in their natural world.

As we’ve travelled across the continent, ECOEE has visited several adventure recreation programs. Each of them had their own special niche in the field. Each of our professional visits was educational, inspiring and insightful. However, our time with Francisco Detrell was what really showed me the amazing potential for adventure recreation as a stepping stone to building a better future. I have seen (and been a part of) many adventure programs that promote personal development and leadership skills. I still think these programs are valuable, but Francisco’s expeditions go further. They connect you to the bigger picture by combining elements of body, mind and spirit. Francisco (and Ecotur) use the outdoors and adventure activities to teach the value of the intangible.
Los Animas Slot by Josh Baughman

Over the course of the semester we have come across many different outdoor recreation venues, facilities, parks, and backcountries. Having been to all of these places now and finding out which niche they fill in the recreation field, it’s clear to see that there are a handful of different views on how land should be dealt with and taken care of. Some agencies allow commercial businesses to exploit the land, though in a sustainable way, and some agencies want to only allow the public to come and enjoy them, some free and open, and some with guided trails that prohibit stepping off of them. The main idea is that for the most part all of these outdoor recreation agencies share the same ideas that they want their lands to be conserved, maintained, sustained, and unexploited for the wrong reasons. Our last backcountry expedition was spent in Baja California on the Gulf of California in the Sea of Cortez. While we were there we were under the new leadership of Francisco, or to us known as Tati. Tati cared a lot about taking care of the lands which he called home. He cared a lot about how the lands were being used and didn’t like the people who were exploiting them for selfish, personal, and destructive reasons. At Mission Santa Maria he expressed his disgust with the treasure hunters that followed theories of treasure being stored in the walls of the already severely eroded adobe structure that was Mission Santa Maria. The coolest thing in terms of land management that I experienced on this trip was our last night at Los Animas Slot when Tati, with the assistance of John, had us pick up all the trash brought into this beautiful beach by the hurricane and we burned all that trash, and we all felt good about being able to be stewards of that beach for that day.
“Nothing is impossible, the word itself says “I’m Possible”.”
- Audrey Hepburn

The Grand Interpretation by Josh Baughman

During this part of the expedition we obtained a new instructor to take Jeff’s place as lead instructor and let him step down to assistant instructor for a bit and see how Francisco or Tati (pronounced Tah-tee), as we know him, leads groups and what leadership styles he brings to the table. Tati not only was showing us different styles of leading but he also showed us how he presents interpretation by demonstrating one of his interpretations about the Mission we hiked to in Baja California called Mission Santa Maria. It was a subject that he was passionate, knowledgeable, and concerned about. Tati taught us more about what it means to connect the people to the resources which, after all, is what interpretation is all about. Our last but certainly not least destination on our trip was the Grand Canyon, and what a great place to have Thanksgiving, the food we made was good but certainly not as good as being at home.

While we were at the Grand Canyon we took the opportunity to visit a bunch of interpretation programs the park had to offer. The programs that we experienced in the Grand Canyon were the best interpretations we have seen yet on our travels across these great lands. The rangers were very vocal, engaged the kids, they were passionate about and had extensive knowledge on the subjects they were educating their audience about. Interpretation is all about finding why something is important, and then finding out how to make people care about that thing. If you can’t connect the resource to the people, most likely the people won’t ever care enough to take care of those resources, and if those resources aren’t taken care of they will be exploited for the wrong reasons by the wrong people, or they will simply disappear.
As we were entering the beautiful and immaculate Baja California our ECOEE group was entering their last chapter of the expedition. This also meant the group had to give the rest of their presentations, including our conclusion to our Outdoor Education topics. All throughout our journey we have given the introduction lesson to our topics and have been able to provide “teachable moments” for our peers. A teachable moment is when you see an unexpected opportunity to teach your peers about your topic. Some of us have taken better advantage of our time along the way more than others. While in Baja California we were to combine our introduction lesson with our teachable moments and any grasshopper lessons and give a cumulative conclusion lesson. During this lesson the group is reunited with earlier information and should learn and enjoy it at the same time.

Most of the lessons were much more knowledgeable and entertaining than the previous ones. It is insightful to see how we have all grown from the constructive feedback we receive from each other, Tiffany, and Jeff. The information that was presented to one other was resounding and relatable impact as we move back into our lives. Some students used a sleeping bag in a trash bag to draw on, some had us do an activity that was in some way related to their outdoor education topic, once had us search the tide pools for habitats, and others drew on the sleeping tarps to give us a visual.

As I mentioned before it was awesome to see the development of the group throughout the course of ECOEE and in the field of outdoor education. There were so many improvements that have been made since our first attempts at providing an educational experience to one another in Ontario, Canada. Baja California not only marked an ending to our lessons, but an ending to the most powerful, amazing experience in ECOEE.
Watching my mother plan trips for family vacation year after year did not prepare me for the depths of planning an outdoor adventure for 5th grade girl scouts. As a huge part of our minor, we have to plan a ten-day trip for a group out in the backcountry of the wilderness. This requires waivers, permits, and who knows what. A plan of not only logistics but of prospective behaviors, feelings, and disasters. There is so much planning and thought that needs to go into getting yourself and the group ready for such an outing. Organization is not something I am particularly strong in, and my procrastination over the semester is definitely not encouraging a whole lot of creative thought, at the moment. Procrastination has been my killer this semester, like all I suppose. I’d like to say that ECOEE has changed something in myself and I can grow and be a completely different student in the respect of school work, but I am afraid that some habits are harder to break than others. Possibly harder, the habit of biting my nails has thus increased due to the high levels of stress and ripple effect that has lead me to stay up late almost every night to complete my homework mediocrely. Regardless, I have found light at the end of my tunnel— even though it is just the string of Christmas lights hanging outside my cabin window. My homework and semester abroad is coming to a close. We have travelled several places, charted many miles, and have added countless knowledge to our brains. An expedition that seemed never ending is wrapping up before my eyes, and there is still planning and preparation to go. Needless to say, I would almost rather be taking five finals that have nothing to do with real life consequences, and would almost even take Fs if it meant I didn’t have to sit through nine hours each day evaluating my close friends and classmates. I guess that I can rest easy knowing this; even though the end is drawing near and it seems to just get more and more frustrating as we go, and even though with the trip plan I made, all the fifth-graders would probably die, I am a part of something bigger and an experience that I would never change.

“Try to be a rainbow in someone’s cloud.”

ProCassidyation by Cassidy Depoy
Our journey is coming to an end. Thank you for all your support! We hope you enjoyed following along as we...

**Took the Long Way Home!**

To see our final days
(or remember all our extraordinary adventures)
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