

Western Illinois University ECOEE Newsletter November 2008

Solo
By: Emilie Litow



Solo and it was not the singing kind. All of us separated and out on our own. We only had 50 yards or so to call home. Three days with two cups of trail mix and half a pound of cheese, the idea was to fast and reflect. We had our sleeping bags and Thermarests; no tents, we were sleeping under the night sky. The experience was different for each one of us.

Jeff and Rose briefed us on what we could expect. We would be hungry at some point in time and needed to look out for headaches, head rushes, and weak bodies. Jeff and Rose would be by to check in on us at least once a day, two times for me. We were to stay in the boundaries they set for each one of us, and climbing up the big rocks in my campsite was a no-no. They gave us activities we could do if were bored or out of things to journal

about. Some of us wrote letters to ourselves, epitaphs, ten things we like about ourselves, and/or goals. After briefing was over, we put on our blindfolds and waited to be lead to our designated area. One by one we were all lead away to spend the next 72 hours chilling by ourselves.

For some solo is a drag and a bore and for others it is just what they need to catch up on sleep. I can only speak for myself, had I not done solo my life may be different. After I was dropped off, I set up my camp and crawled into my sleeping bag. I laid there and thought about what I would do for the next few days. I drifted off to sleep and woke with the sun. I got up and moved into the sun; I realized there was nowhere to run. My thoughts just kept coming, and I started to journal. I could not hide from nor distract myself from the things I did want to think about. I finally gave in and let them come out. The next two days were the same as the first, but I was starting to see what others saw when they looked at me. I realized I do not have to be perfect as long as I do my best, and being thin is not important. People should like me for who I am and not what I look like. I am happy with the confidence I gained; I know myself better than I ever have. I was not just sitting all day long; I had few dance parties and sing-alongs. The last night I was out took the cake; I had coyote ten feet away watching over me. I felt close to Mother Nature and to myself, in that moment I never wanted to leave.

On the third day we met up again. Everyone shared a little about their solo experience and what they had seen. After sharing, we came back to camp. Jeff cooked us dinner! Life went back to front country normal, but I know I will never forget my 72 hours of solitude.

Fresh Air, Beautiful Views, and Interpretations
By: Emilie Litow



Wow, the Grand Canyon, beautiful views, fresh air, and interpretations? The Grand Canyon was full of history, geology, and wildlife. We learned all about the park by going to interpretations most days we were there. I saw some awesome rangers, and some rangers putting people to sleep. Each ranger had a different personality and presentation than the one before.

Ranger Keith Green was the first one I saw. He was a decent presenter, but his location could have been better. He did his talk in the visitor center and a 30-minute presentation turned into an hour. Courtney and I agreed the information was great, but the talk went on for way too long.

Ranger Mike was next, and he made us think about geological time and the making of the canyon. He was engaging and foreshadowed his walk. "Don't leave now or you'll miss the best part!" He assessed his audience well and kept our attention. The best part was the mini lesson on California Condors because someone thought they saw one, but it was a turkey vulture.

Ranger Cindy talked about California Condors. She was knowledgeable about her topic, but her enthusiasm just was not there. I sat through her talk thinking am I back in class? Not a good thing if the goal is to inspire change or a new way of thinking.

The best part of day one was the surprise Courtney and I got when we arrived at the Hopi House. Outside were Hopi tribe dancers doing a presentation of their hoop dance. It was the best interpretation of the day, and it was not even done by a ranger or the park.

Day two started with Ranger Jim and a walk about fossils in the Grand Canyon. He was energetic and goofy. He really loved Spongebob Squarepants, and it drew the younger audience in. One boy was inspired so much; he found more fossils than the rest of us. Jim pointed out sponges and how they had come to be in the Grand Canyon. He kept us engaged with dinosaur talk; we did not see any as he had said. We saw fossilized burrows instead.

The afternoon was a talk about raptors. She was not a ranger, but gave great talk. She had great handouts and visuals so when we left we could identify the birds she was talking about. Her presentation was short and sweet.

The night talk with Nicole was a hard one for me. I learned more about F.D.R. and Teddy than I did the park. Her presentation was organized and well put together. I knew her theme and topic and could pick out her staging process. As I sat there and listened I learned Teddy created the park and F.D.R. used the C.C.R. to make it better. She was energetic to the extreme; some thought it was a bit much.

The next day when I sat down to critique the talks and walks I had heard, I knew I had seen what it took to engage the audience and keep them hooked. The information was a key component, but so was the rangers' unique style and presentation of self. If an interpreter cannot hold a visitor's attention he or she is as well be talking to thin air.

The Grand Canyon was grand, but the talks and walk took the cake. Who knew learning could be so interesting, and it sure beat sitting in the classroom listening to Jeff, if he were to drone on about geology, history, and wildlife.

Camp Marston: An Awesome Game Day

By: Jake Yard

As we arrived in San Diego County it was evident that we had a good amount of fun activities ahead of us. One of these extremely fun events was our first day's obligation, a trip to the Y.M.C.A. Camp Marston. The camp was only a hop, skip, and a jump away from our state camp group site.

We arrived and ate breakfast with the campers and cabin leaders in the mess hall, which was a great experience all around. It was a time for reminiscing because I was a counselor in my hometown during the summer. They made us feel right at home as we were quickly engaged in the activities and made a family member. The rest of our day we were split into groups that taught four different outdoor educational topics. My favorite part about the day was not the lessons or not even getting to be with the kids, it was seeing recreation being transferred to learning and seeing the kids get a spark when they learned something.

The first group I was in got the pleasure to learn about the earth and its resources. The real fun part like I said was the activity that went along with the knowledge. We were split into groups that made up one water molecule each. We had two people in the center that represented rouge oxygen molecules. As we started each round it was fun to see the kids get into a mad scramble trying to find a free and new hydrogen pair to join up with. This activity based recreational learning, in my eyes, is a very good way of instilling fundamentals onto children that would otherwise be bored with your material.

The second lesson that I went to was a very interactive lesson on animals that was given by a guy named Jay. He had a very great way of becoming every kid's best friend with still keeping that distance and authority level. He had many games to play with the children during all aspects of his lesson. He also knew how to present his material in a way that was one the children's level. The kids gave him a hard time most of the time, but he just went with it and rolled with the punches.

In my opinion knowing your kids and knowing your material is vital to running an effective outdoor education program. Overall however I believe that applying recreation and finding transference is were the true magic lies.

Time to Reflect

Derek Hofeldt

We have a month left now, on our "expedition." We have seen a lot and done a lot. I have seen change and growth in everybody on this trip including myself. We all come from different backgrounds, however, we have formed everlasting friendships while

spending every day together for the last three months. We've been through the good, the bad, and the ugly. And now we have time to reflect.

We were sent out to the middle of the desert in Joshua Tree California for a three-day solo. We took no distractions with us. Only a pen, notebook, sleeping bag and plenty of water. Some of us utilized the option to fast for the three days, others took only two cups of gorp (homemade trail mix), and a half a pound of cheese. For me, hunger struck pretty quick. It was only the first day and all I could think about was a toasted chicken-bacon-ranch from subway, made by Courtney (on the trip with us, old roommate, used to work there), she always threw in that extra dash of love, and extra ranch of course. Who came up with this fasting nonsense, and why did I ever think it would be a good idea, crazy! Other than thinking about food for hours, which oddly enough was only the first day, I thought about the future, near and far, and what it has in store for a guy like me, if anything. For the near future, I have a summer job in Alaska. If I choose to go back I will get a decent promotion. Making money seems pretty important right now, it would make things easier like being better equipped for an internship. But there are also a few heavy cons that are irrelevant for this article. That brings me to my next thought. Internship? Where do I go? What do I do? Will I even graduate? What's the point? And I had three days all by myself to wander through all these seemingly important decisions.

On the third day I just stared into the desert. The Joshua trees in the foreground, the mountains in the background, the wind blowing, all the vegetation swaying in the breeze, the shadows of the rocks around me. I started to realize how lucky I am. Instead of thinking of the past or the future, I was instantly stuck on the present... right where I need to be.

The Night Sky

Josh Standard

Most of the articles in this issue will talk about what and where we have been seeing, visiting, and doing while out on ECOEE. Most of these articles cover what we have been seeing during the day, but there is something else we have been seeing, something different that can draw us all together even on the worst of days. Though it changes slower than the scenery, the night sky has been a big part of my trip.

I'm not sure where my fascination with the night sky came from. It could be the nights I spent looking at the stars with my dad, telling me what the constellations were just so I could forget them and he could tell me them again another night. Or it could be the many nights I've spent working at various camps out looking at them by myself. There is something almost magical about them and no matter how you choose to look at them or see a constellation, you cannot be wrong. There is not right or wrong, it is up to everyone to interpret them the way they choose. One thing I do know is that I couldn't be more excited to have astronomy as my Outdoor Ed topic.

For centuries the night sky has been pulling people together, whether it was the Romans and Greeks making up myths, or the Maya tracking Venus before sunrise and after sunset, our group is no different. They do a very special thing to our group. You see, we

have this problem; we're really bad at being quiet. However, after I finished giving an astronomy lesson about the Zodiac at Indian Cove Campground (Joshua Tree National Park) something happened to us that has never happened before, we were silent. Even on the worst of days, we can look at the stars and then go to bed happy.

While we've been out here we have been really lucky to escape a lot of the light pollution that is affecting the night sky in much of the nation, especially around major cities. For some members of the group this was their first chance to see the sky without that light pollution. For Steve, it was his first time to see the Milky Way, and the millions of stars that make up the cloudy region that runs from north to south.

From the start of our semester long journey we have all been looking at the sky. We've been seeing what our families have been seeing back at home (maybe a little brighter though). As we started the "summer triangle" was the dominate feature of the summer sky, with Cygnus, Lyra, and Aquila, it makes a beautiful view, right at the Zenith (the highest point in the sky). The sky that we can see right now is the same that would have been up at about two in the morning during the beginning of our journey, Orion now watches us go to bed each night, as a more familiar sky to me starts to come around earlier. With the help of a handy green laser I am able to do for the group what my dad did for me and point out familiar constellations and give a story behind them. I only hope they remember it the first time, unlike my younger self.

To our families at home, I would encourage you to not just read this short article, but get out there and experience the night sky for yourself. Remember, you can't be wrong! If you ever find yourself missing us at night, look up at the stars and know that we are seeing the same sky. As the stars pull our group together, they can also help to make you feel closer to us. Good night and happy stargazing.

Travel Workshop?...Yeah I'd Sure Say So-By: Ryan DeBoer

There's a reason there are 3 hours worth of travel workshop credits earned by the members of ECOEE. Most of the travel workshops provided at Western Illinois University are worth one credit hour, but are usually only a weekend trip. ECOEE is much different and much more involved than a weekend trip for some fun with some buddies. We all live with each other and sleep in tents with each other every day of the semester. Yes, ECOEE teaches us much more than some technical skills about one topic (such as canoeing) in one place.

We have been through Nebraska, South Dakota, Wyoming, a short stint in Montana, Utah, a short stint in Colorado, Arizona, and California. We will be heading down to Baja California in Mexico within a week from now. We have visited national parks such as Badlands, Yellowstone, Arches, Grand Teton, Capitol Reef, Bryce Canyon, Grand Canyon, and Joshua Tree. We've also seen national monuments such as Mt. Rushmore, Dinosaur, and Escalante Grand Staircase. We've been in too many national forests to shake a stick at and have had talks with workers and administrators from the UFS (Forest Service), NPS (National Park Service), and the BLM (Bureau of Land Management). We do not just visit these places; we learn how they are operated as well.

Putting aside differences is essential in making an expedition like ECOEE work out for the good of all its members. It's easy for a group of people to get along for a weekend while on a fun trip. It's another story when you have 9 college students living in tents with each other, cooking, cleaning, planning, setting up camp, tearing down camp, riding in a single van, all together 24 hours a day for the length of a semester and sharing computers to get 18 credit hours worth of homework done at the same time. We do not get the weekends off like other college students. We are constantly striving to become professionals and are constantly changing the area we are in.

The group has experienced mountains, moved into the Southwestern desert (even doing a 3 day solo there), and will soon be going into Baja California at the Bay of Angels in Mexico. The mode of travel has been focused on backpacking and mountaineering thus far. Both rafting and rock climbing fell through because not everything can be accomplished in a semester long trip and money is always an issue. We will be focusing on sea kayaking while in Mexico. It is there where we will enjoy fish tacos for our Thanksgiving dinner.

ECOEE is definitely more than a travel workshop. It is learning how to respect and live with each other 24 hours a day. It is learning how to be a professional. It is understanding how to comfortably live in multiple different ecosystems. It's an understanding of one's self and where one wants to go with the rest of their life. It's hard to put in words, but im certain ECOEE is worth way more than 3 credit hours of travel workshop. It's a lifetime worth of memories and skill development jammed into one semester of college. I know I now have an abundance of friendship and wisdom thanks to all the people we have talked to, the places we have visited, the experiences we've shared, and of course our instructors Jeff and Rose.

AORE- By: Ryan Plunkett

What happens when you get 400 recreation majors and professionals in the same place? AORE- the Association of Outdoor Recreation and Education Conference took place this year from October 30th - November 1st in sunny san Diego California. The 70-80 degree weather was a nice change from what usually is a cold fall back in Illinois. The conference started with a welcoming ceremony and an introduction of those who made this conference possible. After this ECOEE members parted ways to check out the massive variety of sessions offered during this year's conference. The sessions had a variety of themes and purposes; most of the time it was difficult top just pick one session to attend. Some of the ones that caught my attention were, "I'm not part of nature and neither are you" "Sustainability practices and protocols" "Young professionals entering the field" "Sustainable ecosystems: Baja, California" and "So your thinking of going to graduate school," as well as many more.

When we scrambled out to find a bite to eat, during this portion we were supposed to meet with professionals in the field. The one we were meeting with already had seven people crowded around her so Jake DeBoer and I decided to enjoy the meal in the mall and take the time to talk about the conference at hand. More sessions followed in the

afternoon and before we knew it, dinner was ready and we headed for the buffet. Dinner was beef tips, rice, shrimp salad, fruit, and a whole table solely devoted to desserts. This was more food than most of us could handle. After dinner we met with Jim Lustig again who took us to our new home for the next two days at San Diego State University. We stayed in a classroom outside the recreation center that blew Westerns out of the water. The group got our second bulk mail pick up, thanks mom everyone loved the sweets, sorry about the plug! We retired to do our homework and hit the sack for the evening.

The next morning we were off to more sessions, I found out a lot more than I thought about graduate school, and what it takes to be accepted into the university you are looking for. More food followed with lunch, this time provided by the conference. The food included cold cuts, salads, and soups. The keynote speaker wrote the book, “The Last Polar Bear.” He informed us of the need to take action now rather than down the road in our fight against global warming!!!! After another session in the afternoon we all headed for the Wavehouse that night, costumes in hand for a night of fun. Jeff asked, “Have you been to the ocean yet?” No I responded, why not he asked the oceans right there. Most of ECOEE was running out the door and heading for the ocean. After playing in the waves for a long while we decided to head back into the party we were missing. Derek, DeBoer, Josh and I had worked up enough courage by this point to ride the wave. We put on wetsuits and waited anxiously to ride the wave. The big wave turned off as we were standing in line so we sat in the hot tubs for a little bit before realizing that the other wave was still on. We made our way down to the other end to keep the fun going. I lasted about 2.5 seconds on the surfboard before biffing it hardcore. So I decided to stick to the boogie boarding instead. After all the fun we had we headed back to the campus and headed for the cycling room, our new bedroom for the night. Most of us settled in to do homework and were working hard away into the night. We all had lots to get done before our last day at AORE.

We had breakfast the next morning at the hotel and then one final session before heading off to day at the bay party. Josh DeBoer and I were all in a catamaran sailing on the bay for the afternoon. This was a great way to end our conference and time in San Diego. We again headed out to have another look at the Pacific Ocean before moving on. I left my green nalgene on Mission beach, so to the person who found it; please take care of it and enjoy it as much as I did; a small loss for an amazing time in San Diego.



Are You Hardcore?

By: Courtney Mullin

It was a bright, sunny morning and we were on our way to the outdoor education school in southern California known as Camp Cuyamaca. As we were pulling into the parking lot, I was already feeling the good vibes. I knew that we were in for a great day, especially after meeting one of Jeff's friends and an employee of the camp, Greg a.k.a. Wolf, who was extremely energetic and friendly. The group proceeded to head into the staff room to talk with the vice principal before getting paired up with our instructor and class for the day, as each staff member greeted us with a smile. It made me feel very welcome and eager to start the adventure we were preparing to embark upon; a day hike to a nearby waterfall.

After the group received a short introduction of the camp, we were each paired with an instructor and soon traveled our separate ways. My group, lead by Mark and Andrew, started off hiking the trail to our destination of the waterfall where we were all so anxious to arrive. The bunch of kids I followed, as well as the instructor, were a blast to hang out with all day. Everybody was in high spirits and we were all ecstatic to be in the moment, learning about the flora and fauna of the southwest area as we hiked along the trail. Mark was especially informative, chit-chatting away about Manzanita trees, health benefits of various plants and his job as an outdoor educator. He was so enthusiastic about life and his passion for the outdoors truly shined through the energy he was emitting while teaching the group. It was obvious that he loves his job and takes it very seriously, but still has time and sees the importance in having fun.

As we were hiking, we stopped beside the trail for a late afternoon snack of delicious green apples. Andrew explained to the group that he is officially part of the hardcore club, which means that he consumes the entire apple, leaving no waste. He invited all of us to become part of this club but we had to do the same in order to become fully initiated. I thought this was an exceptional learning technique that really taught the kids the importance of leaving no trace, packing less out than what was packed in, as well as feeling as though they were part of something special. Most of the kids loved it and willingly participated. I myself am also now included in the hardcore club and represent it as a proud member.

We quickly continued onward with our hike, stopping more along the way to learn about Colter Tree pinecones, poisonous snowberries and the crazy squirrels that were invading our picnic area. Finally, we made it to the beautiful waterfall and stream where the kids were able to let loose and jump in to cool off for the afternoon. They had a blast sliding down the rocks and discovering water creatures, as Mark continued to teach me more of his knowledge. In no way did I feel like I was being taught in a teacher-student relationship, but rather, more like I was having a meaningful and insightful conversation with another person; he treated me as though I were on his same level. Spending the day with Mark really inspired me to become a more engaging, fun and light-hearted outdoor educator, because his laid-back attitude proved that an outdoor leader can have fun and relax, while at the same time inform the group and take charge of that leader position.

Camp Cuyamaca was an amazing visit and a spectacular learning experience. The wonderful staff, positive attitudes and useful information we acquired made the trip well worth it. Furthermore, being a part of Camp Cuyamaca for a day was definitely one of the highlights of my entire ECOEE trip. Who knows, maybe someday I will be lucky enough to inspire someone as much as Mark inspired me today.





San Diego Spells Personal Growth:

BY: Jake Yard

After visiting two different outdoor education camps in San Diego County we were off, embarking on a few hour van ride to the Mecca for individuals wanting to further their understanding of the outdoor field. The A.O.R.E. conference in it's 22nd consecutive running year was impressive from the start. After checking in we went inside to the main display room where many outdoor outfitters and organizations had booths ranging from M.S.R., a company that markets many outdoor appliances, such as stoves that we were more than familiar with due to the backcountry experience, on through adventure schools. As you went around and inquired about the various organizations, the people were more than willing to give you a thorough overview and even entice you with a piece of candy or a sticker if you seem fairly intrigued.

This portion wrapped up as we retired to a generous dinner, one of which beckoned for seconds or thirds. Many of our group members were very disappointed to realize this! As the meal wrapped up we stayed around a while for awards, but we soon longed for sleep. Jim Lustig, a good friend of Jeff's, put us up at San Diego State University where we loitered a little while longer before bed, occupying our time with homework, showers, and various activities in their recreation center.

Bright and early we traveled back to the conference for a day of lectures. We had 4-5 sessions at varying times that we had a choice of, and around eight speakers to decide from at each session. I found some speakers to be mundane and not so informative, yet there were a select few over the course of the three days we were there that I was totally captivated with. I acquired through these speakers a new perspective on life in general, various technical knowledge, and the fact that graduate school is not for everyone. I will take much more of myself away from this conference than I went there with.

The second night was full of surprises and all out clean fun. The entire conference was invited to The Wave House, a beautiful establishment, set on the boardwalk. We all checked in just to run back out and play in the ocean for a while. Upon our exiting, Deboer and I were drying off and were encountered on the boardwalk by an astonished couple. Wide eyed they declared, "You aren't from around here are you?" Excited and caught off guard we responded, "No!" They continued to state that people that swim at this hour end up getting eaten. We stated thank you and returned to The Wave House uneasy, yet excited to be alive! The night was Halloween and was filled with costumes, great food, and simulated wave contests. They had professionals come in and quickly put everyone else to shame. Tired and wet we soon returned to S.D.S.U. As we exited the van we heard the campus booming with party atmosphere and noticed many scantily clad characters. Jim quickly ushered us into the building, proclaiming there was nothing to see here! One more day to go in great San Diego. After our lecture runs we were bused to "Day at the Bay." I was previously signed up to sail a four person catamaran with Deboer, Ooter, and Josh. It was my first experience sailing, but definitely not my last because it was no doubt a blast. After we were done we went off to the beach for one last good bye, and packed back into the stinky van, setting course for yet another amazing event. We are all tired of such crappy classrooms!

What the Wind Rivers has done to me!

By Stephen Gilber

After being out of the Wind Rivers for almost a month now I have a new perspective on that experience. When I first started the thirty-day backpacking I thought I would be learning new leadership skills, seeing beautiful landscapes, and learning new things that I never knew before (map and compass, trying knots, and stove repair).

What I didn't realize is that it did so much more. Being out of the backcountry and reflecting on my experience has shown me what I am capable of, what is important in life and who my friends really are.

While in the backcountry you have friends that can help you out, but the majority of the time one must rely heavily on oneself. With packing your own food, rationing your food, carrying your gear, and taking care of your gear can be quite the task. There is no grocery store you can pick up more food or a store that you can go to to replace broken gear. If you run out of food you had better hope that your friends are closer friends than you expected and if you break something you had better hope that you could fix it, or you have useless dead weight in your pack. One of the new skills, that I am very happy to pick up, is learning how to cook. The backcountry has introduced me to baking. I have learned to make bread, a thickener for soup, and calzones (my personal favorite).

The Wind Rivers has also taught me to appreciate the little things in life more. Watching the sunrise, sunset, or even stargazing is not only relaxing but is good for the soul. Looking up at the sky at night and being able to see thousands of stars without interference from light pollution is magical. Seeing all those stars in the sky makes you realize how small you are in this world. You don't need all the fancy gizmos that technology has to offer to make you happy, for me looking up at the sky and seeing the Milky Way is all I need to be happy. One of the best epiphany that I have had was waking up and seeing the sunrise and reminding me that today is a new day and with it new opportunities.

One of the weirdest experiences I had about the Wind Rivers was coming out- culture shock! Seeing all the people, cars, streetlights, buildings, sounds, and smells there were just so many things that would stimulate your senses. I was shocked to go to the grocery store and see a water fountain- "what! Water that you don't have to filter or boil?"

After coming out of the backcountry and discussing it with other group members we all feel like this was a real eye opener, an experience that can never be duplicated, and a test that shows you who real friends are. A real friend will give you a fresh pair of cotton socks, food, offer to carry something, and more importantly not kill you after being with you for twenty-four hours a day for thirty-two days.

I am glad that ECOEE has not only provided me with new skills, a new appreciation in life, but new friends. ECOEE has introduced me to the most relaxed people with a shared interest in the outdoors, and truly friends to the end.

