

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
PARKS AND RECREATION MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

The Tent Peg

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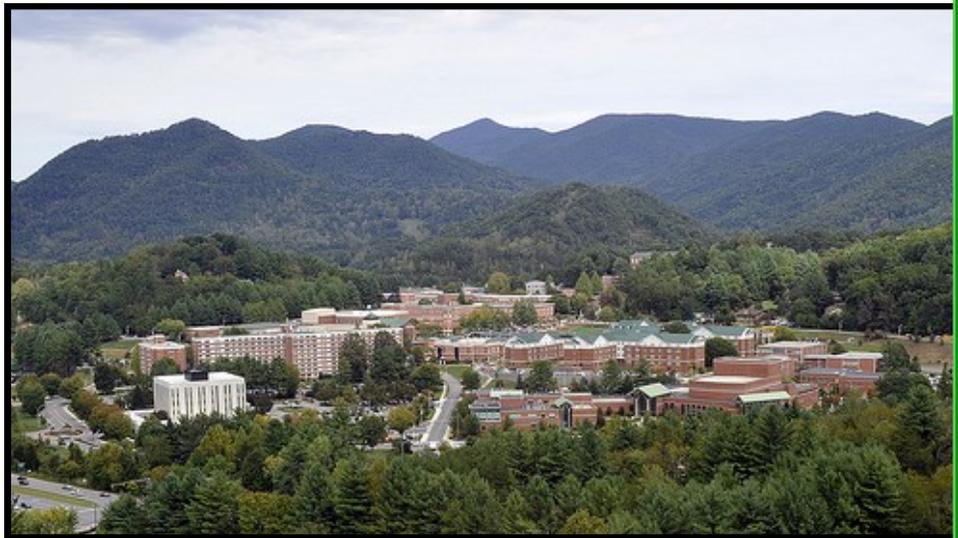
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A note from the Editor:

It is spring here at Western Carolina University, a time for changes and new possibilities. Just as temperatures are warming and life begins to return to the mountains, changes are on the horizon here at Western to expand and improve the Parks and Recreation Management program. With this exciting news, it is appropriate that the theme of many of the articles in this year's Tent Peg are those concerning experiences past and new directions taken. That said, it is my pleasure to invite you to explore these pages and share in the experiences of the students and faculty of the Parks and Recreation Management Program.

Sincerely,

Zedron Porter

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In Perspective

By: Cass Morgan

The past year has flown by incredibly quickly and it's hard to believe that my first year here at WCU is wrapping up. In the midst of my transition to WCU, it's been a bit difficult to carve out some good playtime, which I find a bit ironic given what I do for a living. Although some would say that I'm a work hard-play hard type of person, I'd say that I struggle to make time for that all-consuming, undistracted, type of play. Yet, I fully believe that it is this type of play that is essential to a healthy and



fulfilling (and fun!) life. During a weekend ski trip this February, I was given a good reminder of why fully immersing myself into a recreation experience is so important.

Over President's Day weekend, I headed to the Tetons for a weekend ski trip with my husband and some good friends. We rented a condo and spent all of our time skiing, cooking meals, eating together, playing board games, and laughing. A lot. Aside from the gift of being in my favorite place with some of my favorite people, an entirely unexpected gift came my way: No Internet access. The Internet was down and I made a decision to not pursue finding Internet access or to even get on my computer. Furthermore, the television never came on, and I think I was only on my phone once. Now I'm one of the first people to advocate going off the grid, but it's not very often that I am able to disconnect myself from a computer screen, phone,

emails, texts, random Internet surfing, etc. Even when I'm out on a trip, I often will pull out my phone, make a call, check messages or snap a picture, and then later post it to Facebook. Or, if I'm out in the backcountry and have no cell service or Wi-Fi, the first thing I do when I do get service is check my messages. I'm not at all saying that these things are bad, because they are, in fact, sometimes necessary, and can also be wonderful ways to connect to people. What I am saying, however, is that in the instant status updates of our society that we sometimes lose the opportunity to maximize all the restoration and rejuvenation recreation can offer and that we need. The constant bombardment and use of technology suppresses many of the inherent elements of good play, such as creativity, problem solving, and decision-making. Often when we're using technology, we're also doing other things, which cause our attention to constantly shift, making it difficult to fully focus on just one thing. This constant shift in our attention can exhaust and drain cognitive functioning. So, even though play can be relaxing, restorative, and fun, the reluctance to detach from technological devices makes it less than optimal.

So what did my short, two-day hiatus from technology do? It reminded me to not just play more, but to play better. I can honestly say that despite the 34 hours of traveling, 2 days of playing non-stop, and back to work the next day left me more refreshed than when I have had a week off, but I'm still connected to my phone and computer. I have a suspicion that this mostly has to do with the fact that I didn't look at my computer or television for two days. I not advocating that we throw out our phones or computers, but what I am advocating for is a little disconnect from technology. Think of it like a vitamin for the brain. As summer approaches, and perhaps fewer (or different) demands in place, I'm looking forward to focusing on having more undistracted play. Maybe take a few breaths before I rush to sift through and post pictures, respond to texts or emails. Better yet, maybe instead of thinking of some cool status update while I'm biking, rafting, or camping, dwell instead on the landscape around me, the night sky, or what's coming around the bend. I love what Bruno Hans Geba said of

In perspective continued

recreation, “The word recreation is really a very beautiful word. It is defined in the dictionary as ‘The process of giving new life to something, of refreshing something, of restoring something.’ This something, of course, is the whole person.” I’d argue that recreation does this best when we’re able to fully direct all of our attention to the playing at hand.

Sledding in WNC

By: Ben Kapity

So you live in Western North Carolina where it snows once a year, maybe. If you are like me and live on the side of a mountain, or you are a bored college student whose dorm is on a hill, you have no chance of getting out of your driveway even with all-wheel-drive. So what do you do? Go sledding of course; you live in the mountains that are covered in snow!

You don’t have a sled, you say? No problem, you don’t need a sled to go sledding. What can you use? College students are known for being poor, experimental and resourceful. There is a long history of ramen noodles and making grilled cheese sandwiches on irons in college dorm rooms. So what do you do? Look around your room and see what you have that is flat or smooth.

Well, you do have that kayak sitting over there... No, that costs too much to risk breaking on a tree (though that is what the last owner used my wife’s kayak for the past few years before we bought it from them). What else do you have? So many of you go tubing down the river during the summer, so pull out those tubes and take them down the hill. You only rent those tubes? No problem. You did eat pizza last night, and of course you still have the box. You could always stick that box in a trash bag and then sled with that. You sit in the box and hold the lid open in front of you. It keeps a pretty good angle so that the snow doesn’t build up in front and stop you. The trash bag keeps it from getting soggy and falling apart. About the best thing you can use is a round trashcan lid, or a lunch tray (just make sure you return it!). Those work just as well as any saucer type sleds.

So now that you know about some different things you can use instead of a sled on those snowy days being stuck on the side of a mountain, you have no excuse. Go out and have some fun!

Fun Times in the Low-Country

By: Stephen Parsons

Charleston, South Carolina; where the first shots of the Civil War were fired. With its beaches, historic district, lakes, rivers, and shopping outlets, Charleston is a top destination every year for tourists. Some of the best off-shore fishing is done here as well. Charleston is also where I spent my whole life before coming to Western. With all the great surroundings I had to use for my leisure, I never really took advantage of them until I grew up.

Coming to Western broadened my horizons about recreation. Activities like white water rafting and climbing were things I didn’t grow up with or experience before. I was raised in a sports family and sports were our lives when we were not in school. Every weekend was spent traveling to different destinations around the south for soccer games or tournaments. Traveling that varied from playing a home game in Charleston or to as far as Greenville for just one game. We never had family reunions, unless you count gathering around the TV for the World Cup or Super Bowl.

As I experienced a new kind of recreation here at Western, I decided to take advantage of what I could do back at home. During the summer, I worked at a summer camp at the Jackson County Recreation Center. Any chance I had to go home on the weekends I took full advantage of. I was able to camp and go off-shore fishing. A city boy finally getting out into some real recreation ought to be real interesting.

One weekend a couple of friends and I decided to go camping. Most of the camping areas were family camping areas which was basically car camping. We weren’t having any of that. Luckily, one of my friend’s dad has about 100 acres of land that we were able to make good use of. So on a Friday we decided to head out to his land and have a good

Fun Time in the Low-Country continued

time. We decided to go from Friday to Sunday. There was a pond located on his land so we decided to bring a few poles to see if we could catch anything. We set a few rules before we headed out. No cell phones allowed, and the only electronic device that was permitted would be a camera. That Friday we just camped out and built a fire and decided to hang out for the night. The next day we decided to try a little bit of fishing. One thing we did not think of was; what would we do if we did catch any fish. I guess we had low expectations of ourselves. After a few hours of fishing we decided to head back and relax. Luckily we didn't depend on catching our dinner that night because we would've been starving. We had the fire going when we got back and just relaxed for that day and night. Sunday we packed up and headed back to civilization. Although most of the time was spent sitting around and relaxing, the thought of being away from everything just seemed so relieving from a stressful busy life. Even though we had no clue what we were doing half the time, it was a good experience and a much needed getaway.

Later that summer, my brother was set to get married, so I was excited to get a few days off work but upset that I had to wear a tuxedo. A tuxedo in the middle of the summer in the middle of the day in Charleston called for heat stroke. My brother decided to do something different though. Instead of the usual bachelor party, the guys of the wedding party would spend a whole day out on his father-in-laws boat doing some off-shore fishing. From my fishing experience a month beforehand, I was determined to at least catch something. I was more excited that we were going off-shore instead of deep sea. Seasickness called my name the last time I went deep sea fishing. Sadly the water was really choppy that day so I had the mindset that I was going to get sick. We departed from a marsh in Daniel Island around 5AM and made it out to the Charleston Harbor about an hour after that. We fished and hung out till about 5 PM. The fishing on this trip went so much better than when I went camping. All I wanted was to catch at least one fish and luckily, I was the first person to actually catch something that day.

Before we decided to head back, we all casted for the last time. None of us even got a nibble except for my brother. He fought and fought with it forever. Finally, he got it above the water and my first reaction was, "why does this thing have teeth"? Those teeth belonged to a 3 foot shark who snapped the line as soon as it reached the surface. Once I saw that shark snap the line, I darted the opposite direction. I hate sharks! I had friends in high school who have been attacked by sharks, so I wasn't going to have any of that. Three feet or 30 feet, a shark is still a shark.

Being a Park and Recreation Major you get a lot of ridicule from other people in different majors. They claim that it is easy and a joke. There is no such thing as an easy major. A bachelor's degree is a bachelor's degree no matter what your major. We put in probably time then everyone else. One thing that the parks and recreation major benefits from is that Western has so many local resources to enhance our learning experience. Western is one of only a few universities that not only instructs and tests recreation, but encourages students to go out and experience it. This major has broadened my experiences over the last three years. So maybe when I do decide to go camping again, I can take what I learned here at Western and apply it to whatever I do in the wilderness.

The recreation major has showed me there is more to life than sports and big city life. Getting away for a few days can really change your perspective and allows some relaxation from all the stress we face on a daily basis. That's what these trips did for me. I got away from everyday life and enjoyed myself. That's what parks and recreation is all about.

Opportunities of an Internship

By: Kat Manasa

Working at the U.S. National Whitewater Center in Charlotte, NC has been a great way for me to be directly immersed in outdoor recreation and leadership. I never would have thought to apply there if the Parks and Recreation Management program at WCU did not require students to do internships.

Opportunities of an Internship continued

Requiring students to complete internships is a great way for us to get our foot in the door with a few outdoor companies. It is already difficult enough to find a job, but starting out as an intern while still in school makes it easier to start working full time after graduation



The U.S. National Whitewater Center (USNWC) has increased my communication and people skills which have improved my ability to work with the various guests visiting there. Many people who come to the center have done very little when it comes to outdoor recreation, so a place like USNWC is something unreal to them. They are usually very excited or very scared, which makes it difficult to get and keep their attention. Having worked at USNWC for about eight months now, I have gotten very good at getting people's attention and keeping it long enough to explain what to do at whichever station they're at. For example, to gear up at the zip line we do a quick briefing, show them how to put on each piece of gear, and then triple check everything. After a bit of practice, I finally figured out how to explain things in terms that are short and sweet, but still get the full message across.

The USNWC is open to people of all skill levels and abilities. One day over the summer there was a small

group of kids who were deaf and blind. My first thought was "How are we going to tell them how to put the gear on and what to do while going down the zip line?" This thought was quickly gone when the site lead that day stepped in and knew exactly what to do. Luckily, each person had an interpreter with them, so we had to explain to the interpreters what to do and they would explain it to the person who was deaf and blind. The process went much smoother than I had anticipated, and when I saw them going down the zip line you could tell by the expression on their faces that they were having a blast. Seeing kids with a disability participate in these types of activities was amazing and those of us who were working that day felt so lucky to be a part of it.

I have learned all sorts of practical skills working at the zip line, mega jump (40 foot tall free fall), and climbing walls. Skills like, tying knots, how to gear guests up in the proper equipment, and clipping and unclipping people from the zip line and mega jump properly. These skills will come in handy in my future job because I hope to be working in the outdoors using and teaching these skills to others.

Hunting: Not Your Ordinary Therapy

By: Jason Williamson

Growing up, I was naturally introduced into the hunting culture that has been a part of human history since the beginning of time. Many of us that participate in the sport of hunting learn some very important life skills. We enjoy it for the therapeutic purposes, spiritual purposes, and for the pure love of hunting.

For me it is primarily therapeutic and a very important part of my life since I was medically evacuated out of Iraq in 2008. Upon undergoing care and treatment at Fort Hood, I participated in various hunting trips for wounded soldiers and veteran across the state of Texas. It was at that time I realized how important hunting was to my life and healing process. It has become a sort of security blanket and escape from the stressors I go through daily.

Hunting: Not Your Ordinary Therapy Continued

In April 2010 I was retired out of the US Army and returned home to Bryson City, NC where I started going back to school. Since being back home, I am thankful to have been able to go to school in an area concentrated around the outdoors, but I have not been able to fill an empty void created by the lack of hunting available in this area.

In October 2012, this all changed thanks to a non-profit organization called America's Freedom Lodge. Based in Ohio, their purpose is to provide veterans a way to get back into the outdoors through hunting and camaraderie with other veterans. I was selected to participate in a deer hunt along with other veterans around the United States.

My time spent with this organization was one of the most memorable and touching experiences of my life. I have never been treated with such care and compassion from any group as I did that week. Every day was like a dream. All I had to do was wake up and go hunting for a week. However; I did have some times of broken heartedness while I was



there. On the first day of the hunt, I shot a nice 3 or 4 year old 10 point buck, but was unable to find the deer after a full day of tracking. The third day was heartbreak, as I shot a doe and was unable to retrieve her as well.

This was when I realized that my time there wasn't about shooting a deer. It was about spending time with friends that I did not even know a few days earlier and the fellowship among fellow veterans.

On the last and final morning of hunting, I was blessed to be accompanied by my brother and Kevin Rodeniser (AFL staff member and guide). The morning was already turning out to be quite memorable due to the tone of conversations between us. The laughter and fellowship shared will forever be a lifelong memory. Then out of nowhere, like God himself placed the deer in front of us, was a 3 year old 10 point Ohio whitetail. Shaking with what hunters know as "Buck Fever" I pulled up the crossbow and let the bolt fly. As we sat there waiting to hear the sound of the deer crashing in the brush, I became very unsettled wondering if I did everything I was supposed to do.

After an hour of waiting and vigorous prayer we set out to track the deer. Every step farther from the blind I became more and more unsettled that I was not going to find this animal just like the others that week. Then all of a sudden 60 to 70 yards from the place I shot the deer we found a trophy whitetail laying beside a fallen white oak.

My entire experience with the America's Freedom Lodge was a true blessing and is something all veterans should experience. Without organizations like these opportunities for disable sportsmen would never be possible.

Attending a NOLS Course

By: James Yates

A major factor that attracted me to a degree program in Parks and Recreation Management was my love of the outdoors. Like many PRM majors, I consider the ample outdoor opportunities in the area surrounding Western Carolina University to be a bonus to the excellent curriculum provided by the WCU program. When my schedule allows, I love spending time backpacking, climbing and fly-fishing.

This past summer I had the opportunity to expand both my outdoor recreation experience and my

Attending a NOLS Course Continued

outdoor education skills in a different outdoor settings by participating in the National Outdoor Leadership School's (NOLS) Rocky Mountain Outdoor Educator Course.

The NOLS Outdoor Educator course takes students on remote wilderness expeditions and teaches technical outdoor skills, leadership techniques, environmental ethics, and the facilitation methods to apply these skills. The Rocky Mountain course I enrolled in was 23 days of experiential learning that included backpacking and rock climbing in Montana's Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness.

My course began in Lander, Wyoming; the headquarters for NOLS worldwide operation since it was founded in 1965 by legendary mountaineer Paul Petzoldt. During those 23 days, we hiked about 70 miles in elevations that ranged from 8,000 feet to 12,000 feet. The course took place from July until early August and even though we experienced 90 degree heat as we began the trip, we were soon crossing snow fields at the higher elevations.

The first few days we travelled on a trail but, after that we relied on our map reading and orienteering skills by traveling off-trail, using point-to-point navigation. The first skills we learned were basic camping and travel techniques: cooking, camping, stove use, map reading, and "leave no trace" practices. We then learned the skills needed for traveling in grizzly bear habitat. Once we had the "basic" skills down, we moved on to specialized skills such as wilderness first aid, trout fishing, and rock climbing.

Throughout the course we discussed the activities we had participated in each day and the skills involved in teaching those skills to others. We were encouraged to observe and discuss different teaching styles and techniques. Everyone on the course had the chance to plan, lead, and teach an activity. I taught a lesson on fly-fishing, the different species of trout, and reading a river or stream to predict where fish are located. We traveled in small groups, joining back together at the end of each day. Everyone was expected to do their part in cooking, cleaning, and carrying the gear.

Those 23 days weren't all fun and games. There were days when it was miserably hot, and the elevation and effort of the hike made your lungs burn. We also had days when we traversed dangerously slippery and steep snow fields. Sometimes you just felt hungry, dirty, and tired.

All in all though, I look back and can say it was one of the best experiences of my life. The skills I learned, the experience of being in one of the most beautiful places I've ever been, and the creation of new friendships has made a tremendous difference in my life.

Completing the NOLS Rocky Mountain course meant more to me than just receiving an Outdoor Educator's certificate. Attending a NOLS course can be a life changing event. It gives you a sense of accomplishment, and prepares you for new adventures. NOLS courses are offered around the world for students of all ages. Scholarships are available to help with the cost. If you are interested in finding out more, all you have to do is visit their website at www.nols.edu. It's an experience I highly recommend!

Learning to Fly-Fish

By: Jordan Grant

The first time I held a fly rod was the summer of 2002. I was attending a 2 week summer camp session at the Green River Preserve, located a few miles south of Brevard, NC. There were tears shed when my mother first dropped me off, but within hours I was happy and enjoying my new friends. The camp is located on a 3,400-acre nature preserve. Rising 5th through 9th graders attend the camp.

The camp is geared around introducing younger people to nature and the things it has to offer. There are many different activities that go on at the camp, ranging from pottery, to canoeing, to hiking, all the way to fly-fishing. The latter of these was one that I immediately fell in love with. Sandy Schenck, the executive director of the camp, was the man who introduced me to my lifelong passion.

Learning how to Fly-Fish Continued

Our cabin groups had split up into smaller activity groups, and I had chosen to attend the fly-fishing activity. I'd never done it before, but seen pictures of fly-fishermen in *Field & Stream* magazine and decided to give it a try. Learning to cast was very easy for me. I seemed to naturally pick up on the fluid motions one must use in order to cast a fly line.

little trick he'd been using for years. He walked up to his house and returned with a pocketful of something. He reached down for the end of my leader, and changed flies for me. I looked on the end of the leader before casting it out and noticed a small pink puffball. At the time, I wasn't sure what it was, but I now know that it was an egg imitation pattern. I cast it out about 10 yards, and was told to not move the rod or line. Sandy then reached in his



The first day we only focused on casting. We didn't even have flies attached to the end of the lines. The next day, we split up into activity groups again, and I immediately walked over to the fly-fishing station. What I didn't realize the day before is that there were huge trout swimming around in the pond we'd been practicing casting in the day before. When I say huge trout, I don't mean 18 inchers, but trout averaging over 2 feet in length.

We tied on some large black woolly buggers, which are very common among trout fishermen in the Southeast. After casting for a few hours at these trout and receiving no bites, Sandy decided to try a

pocket and pulled out a small handful of trout chow. With a small smirk, he threw the chow all around my fly.

All of a sudden, the rod was almost pulled out of my hand. I held the rod tighter, and with a zing of the reel, my line headed for the far side of the pond. The fight lasted almost 20 minutes, and I almost lost the fish twice before finally getting it to my side of the pond. Sandy waded into the water about 4 feet, and grabbed the giant.

Although it wasn't caught in the most natural of ways, I was forever hooked to a feeling of happiness, pride and success. I wouldn't catch

My Other Hobby: That Doesn't Include Horses

By: Lindsey Newsom

Every person that I come into contact with learns very quickly that I love horses; they are a way of life for me. I ride, compete, and care for my own horses, and all of my previous and current jobs involve horses, whether it's caring for them, riding them, or staying at someone's house for a weekend to care for their horses 24/7. What people might not learn about me right away is that the other part of my life revolves around hunting and fishing.

I became an "outdoor sportsman" close to five years ago, when my boyfriend and his family introduced me to this enthusiastic way of life. Now, like them, my life seems to revolve around hunting seasons and fishing (when I am not riding), deer season in the fall, then rabbit season, coyote hunting, along with dove season, then turkey season in the spring, followed by fishing all summer. Raccoon hunting and boar hunting is thrown in sometimes too. I hope to one day go on an elk hunting trip in West Cliff, Colorado as well.

This past deer season was my first year bow hunting. I had always used a gun during previous years when deer hunting, a muzzle loader and a rifle, and I have finally worked my way up to learning to shoot a bow. As a Christmas gift in 2011, I received my own Bear Archery bow, and I spent all of this past spring and summer perfecting my shooting. When it came time to put my newly learned skills to the test in September of 2012, the first day of deer season I shot and killed a doe. I was so excited to have gotten a kill on my first day of bow hunting, the first day of the season! I surprised everyone, learning after my first bow kill that my boyfriend and his family did not have much faith in me and expected to be tracking deer for miles that I had wounded and not killed. Not only did I get my doe, but I continued to impress them by killing two more deer with my bow, both bucks, and one of which is the highlight of my hunting career; it is a nice 7 pointer! After I shot it, I considered that I was possibly having a heart attack in my tree stand at the time because I was so excited, shaking uncontrollably and talking in a very high pitched

squeal. That was a great and memorable day.

I never did kill a deer with a gun this past year, and after experiencing bow hunting, I've decided I love it so much more. It's more challenging, and I feel more accomplished when I get a kill with my bow. Hunting and fishing both, like horse riding, have become a way of life for me. I love being outdoors and getting to experience nature. While sitting in my tree stand waiting on a deer or being still as a statue hunting turkeys, I get to see the way animals truly act and behave instead of watching them run away when they are scared off. I do enjoy the hunt, but it's not just killing, it's the whole experience that makes hunting amazing, as well as educational. I also like that I have a family able to process my own meat. I know where the animal I am eating came from and how it got onto my plate. This way of life has truly changed me for the better, and it's a lifestyle that I will happily continue until my last days.

Fly Tying or Video Games

By: Clint Holcomb

What would you most likely end up doing on a nasty, rainy day here at Western Carolina University? A day where conditions were bad enough that any outdoor activity may seem unappealing. Suppose this was a question on a survey that was passed out on campus. It is safe to say, in this generation, that a large percentage of students would answer that question with staying inside and playing Xbox, Playstation, or some other form of video game.

While I know that many students would do something completely different from playing video games, I choose to turn up the music and tie flies. In an area as rich with fly fishing and full of anglers, tying flies can help pass the time and enrich an angler's knowledge on aquatic entomology. Now, I have personally never been the type to get glued to a video game. I have played some video games in my life time; it would be a lie for me to say that I have not. Although, I have never really been too interested in sitting in front of a television for hours on end to "save the queen or obtain all the gold". Tying flies would be considered my fix for a day where weather conditions prohibit me from

Fly Tying or Video Games Continued

participating in one of my many outdoor activities. In tying flies, I end up noticing sides of myself that I may not necessarily see otherwise. I am able to see how creative I can be when I am throwing materials together on a hook to form a fly of my own. I also see how well my imagination works when discovering new ways or methods to use certain materials to make a bug. One of the most important things I take from tying these flies is the feeling of self-accomplishment when a fish eats one of my creations out on the water. There is no better feeling than holding a fish in my hand after catching it with something that I can proudly say that I made.

I know that everyone may not have an interest in fly fishing, or even fishing at all. I also know that even if you are a fisherman, that you may have no desire to ever tie a fly. I am not saying that on every rainy day that I expect for every student on WCU's campus to be in their rooms tying flies. I am merely trying to promote participating in something other than playing a video game. While I know they are enjoyable at times and it can be a way to relax, I also know that the educational value that is to be taken away from playing Madden NFL or Need for Speed is very minimal. So if you were asked "What would you most likely end up doing on a nasty, rainy day here at Western Carolina University," how would you answer it?

Culture Shock

By: Grey Cook

In the summer of 2011, I went on a mission trip with my church down to El Salvador. Our plan was to go and assist some of the locals in building a Methodist church. It was a long flight down and after the time change we were all very tired. All we wanted to do was to go to the hotel, but it was hard not to notice just how friendly everybody was. Sure, we got a few strange looks and had people talking about us as we walked by, but even with them thinking we could not understand them, it didn't seem that anything bad was said about us or where we came from.

Through all of this, the first big culture shock was that people actually looked at you when you walked by. Here in the U.S., you can walk straight through a

crowd and almost everybody has their head down looking at their phone or they are too wrapped up in their own lives to acknowledge anyone else. The second big culture shock was the transportation in El Salvador. We did not walk out and get in cabs. We walked out and got on a huge bus full of all sorts of people headed all over the country.

The experience on the bus was almost like a party. There was American music playing, people singing along, and dancing just as if no one had a care in the world. We traveled about an hour or so to Ahuachapán, where we planned to stay at a local motel. When we woke up the first morning, we found that for no reason, the motel manager had cooked us all breakfast. Then we traveled to our work site and met up with our work crew.

These people were laughing and joking around all week but they were working harder than I had ever seen anybody work before. We found out they were donating their time to help the community and they had all gone to work every morning from 5 am to 1 pm and then come out to the site at 2 pm to help us.

At the end of the week, we all decided to go to the major supermarket area which was full of a lot of independent vendors playing really loud American music and having a great time. Everything that we find in our stores was hanging out to buy. From guns and machetes to women's lingerie, and every price was negotiable. None of the prices were set and the vendors would even trade for things. This is rarely done in the United States, as prices here are usually set and we just pay them.

As we were getting set to fly home, my whole group really started thinking about all the people we met during our trip. We had been treated as well as how they treated each other and we had worked together to better their community. The experience I gained from being in El Salvador and the memories I have about the people and places make the trip worthwhile. It is because of this that I am now more aware of what we really have here in the United States.

Becoming a National Ski Patroller

By: Nick Provost

Snowboarding is my great passion in life. My dream job would be to get paid to snowboard all I wanted on the sickest lines I could find. For the past five years, I have worked as a ski and snowboard instructor at our local hill, Cataloochee Ski Area.

Last season I took a big step for any instructor and received my AASI (American Association of Snowboard Instructors) Level 1 certification. This season, I took another big step and became certified as an Alpine Patroller with the National Ski Patrol. This job has already given me some great leadership experience and an additional piece of boiler plating that I can add to my resume as an outdoor professional.

The first step in becoming a ski patroller is to become certified in Outdoor Emergency Care (OEC). OEC is about the equivalent of a Wilderness First Responder or EMT Basic. Dr. Ben Tholkes has made this certification available at WCU through PRM 356: Outdoor First Aid. In this class I learned how to splint all different kinds of broken bones and dislocations, including c-spine stabilization and back boarding. I also learned how to check vital signs, administer oxygen, recognize and treat a number of different injuries and illnesses, and how to pass a patient on to higher care with a full report. I even learned how to help deliver a baby should the need ever arise.

After completing the medical certification, you are considered an OEC Candidate, and the on snow portion of your training begins. While at this point, you are allowed to be hands on with all patients, you are not however, qualified to transport them off the mountain in a sled and you do not wear a red jacket yet.

When the season started I was given a black jacket labeled "Cataloochee Candidate" and referred to as a "ninja" for the next three months of my training. Every weekend I was trained in the proper use of the sled and how to safely transport an injured patient off any section of the mountain. I was also tested on a number of different riding skills that were quite different from my usual style of free riding.

After three months of hard training, I was invited to take the "pretest" to see if I would be eligible to take the Ski and Toboggan (S&T) test. My hard work paid off and after a day of exercises transporting a 270-pound patient around the mountain, I was invited to take the S&T test the next week. I continued to train hard as much as I could throughout the week and make sure my skills were where my instructors told me they needed to be.

When the test day arrived, it was snowing at Cataloochee and I was feeling good about the task at hand. The instructors worked us hard all day, and had good news for us at the end of the session, we had all passed.

I have now been hired as a paid patroller (most work only as weekend volunteers) and have lead a number of different incidents including broken legs, various head injuries, other normal bumps and bruises and transported a number of patients off the mountain using a toboggan. Becoming a National Ski Patroller has given me first aid skills and leadership experience that will carry over into all aspects of my career as an outdoor professional. It has also exposed me to a totally new, highly professional aspect of the sport that I love most.

Western North Carolina: The Lost Frontier

By: Logan Gregory

Here at Western Carolina University, we as students in Parks and Recreation Management can say we are in geographical heaven. This is due to the fact that we find ourselves literally surrounded by different venues to practice and perfect the skills we learn in our classes. However, not all of the students at Western Carolina University are studying Parks and Recreation Management. Most students at Western Carolina University do not share the same passion for the outdoors, like Parks and Recreation Management majors.

One of the most popular things for Western students to do is to travel back home for the weekend. Most students will leave on Friday after their last class, and then return on Sunday to be back in time for Monday classes. The main complaint that

Western North Carolina... Continued

I've heard from my fellow Western Carolina students that aren't in the PRM program is "there is nothing to do here in Cullowhee!" or "It's boring here". When I hear complaints such as these, I find myself with a blank stare and an open mouth, wondering to myself how people can say things like this and live in an area that offers so much. This is such a terrible thing to me personally.

A great tool for planning weekend activities is available for the students and the public. This tool is called the Whee Adventure Guides, a collection of six brochures that are about a specific outdoor activity. The outdoor activities that the Whee Guides concentrate on are: Fly Fishing, Hiking, Mountain Biking, Skiing/Snowboarding, Waterfall Hiking, and Whitewater Paddling.

Once the students find the Whee Adventure Guides, and select a specific activity they would like to participate in, they can then find useful information inside. For example, the guide that focuses on Whitewater Paddling is cleverly entitled, Where Whee Paddle.

Upon opening the guide, the reader will find a list of six major whitewater paddling rivers, a map of the surrounding area with clearly marked rivers of interest (blue lines), and major highways (black lines), Required Gear List, Leave No Trace Information, Additional Paddling Resources, and Information about Base Camp Cullowhee.

With each river that is listed, there is a description including river difficulty/class, length of river trip, water level range (CFS), boat put-in and take out locations, and distance from WCU. This information is crucially important to know when planning a river trip.

So for those students who complain about having nothing to do here at Western Carolina University. Get out of your room and find something you're interested in. Get outside and enjoy your activity and time spent in this beautiful area of this great state.

Why I Want to be a Park Ranger

By: Matt Harshman

There are many reasons why someone might want to become a Park Ranger. Those reasons can range from wanting to work outside, a decent paycheck, the uniform, who knows. For a while I did not know what I wanted to be. Now I know I want to be a Park Ranger, and I now know why.

The main reason I want to be a Park Ranger is to pay back the woods for everything they have given me over the years. There is nothing better than the woods in my opinion. They give me space to stretch my legs, freedom to explore, and animals to hunt. It is the largest and best playground in the world and no one can possibly grow too old for it.

Nature provides tough terrain that makes me strong, fresh air, and sunsets that keep me healthy and sane. It is important to introduce others, young and old, to how they can use the woods responsibly, and to introduce new wonders of the woods as well as new skills.

The woods have given me everything throughout my life. Now it is my turn to help protect the woods from us. I must do what I can to make sure they are protected and preserved for the safety of myself, as well as the safety of everyone else. Without our wide-open spaces, we have nothing. Now the idea of working outside, the small paycheck, and uniform sounds good too.



From Middle Earth to Narnia with Sandflies

By: Debby Singleton

This past year, I decided it was time to do more “research” in adventure travel and dust off my international adventure planning skills for a chance to take my family to New Zealand for one month. After a thumbs up from our daughters’ principal and



an okay from WCU, we started purchasing plane tickets, booking trekking permits, and reserving a camper van for a month long tour of both the North and South Islands of New Zealand. Why New Zealand? Twenty years ago, my husband and I bicycle toured New Zealand for seven weeks and we had always said we wanted to go back. Also, our girls had read an article in Backpacker Magazine about hikes to film locations for the Lord of the Rings and Narnia movies in New Zealand, could we go there? Interest from our kids, permission, time off, money saved, and a fitness plan for hiking was established, we were ready to go.

The last time we toured New Zealand, we kept in touch via post cards and the occasional phone call home. This time we used technology by posting in our family blog and communicating via email. The one glitch to using technology was the continuous

hunt for internet service, which is not free or widespread in New Zealand. Yet, we did manage to post and upload photos every couple of days. Here is a link if you would like to read more:
<http://singletonfamilytravels.blogspot.com/>

How has adventure travel in New Zealand changed over twenty years? It is still a remarkable country with stunning scenery and more sheep than people, but now there are more international tourists in organized groups visiting “hot spots” such as Milford Sound, Abel Tasman National Park, Fox and Franz Joseph Glaciers, and the larger cities. There were more camper vans and less bicycle tourists. There were more packaged adventure tours that included sky diving, zip lining, rafting, bungee jumping, adventure parks, canyoneering, surfing, diving, snorkeling, kayaking, and more. These all catered to young international tourists traveling in groups. Twenty years ago we stayed in hostels instead of camping because after being outside all day on a bike in different types of weather and wind, a roof over our heads was a welcome change. Now there are double the amount of hostels in each town and region, some that look more like hotels than dorms that used to cater to the backpacking crowd. This time we stayed in holiday parks (campgrounds), which were also more abundant and better equipped than the past (full kitchens and hot showers). The last change we noticed was the exchange rate. The New Zealand dollar is now much stronger in the world economy, so it was almost an even exchange with the US dollar, but the price of everything is double what it is in the US. For example; gas was \$8.00 per gallon and a tube of sunscreen, get this, \$24.99!

Even with the changes, our trip was absolutely amazing. What an experience to spend one month with your family, 24/7, traveling around a country where you feel like you are walking through a Lord of the Rings movie set most of the time. There are so many highlights that it is difficult to put them all here (read our blog for more), yet if I was to poll each family member, the Milford Track would be near the top of the list. The girls would also put fish and chips, chocolate, fur seals, Coromandel Peninsula (Narnia location), and Hobbiton near the top. But the Milford Track was my favorite. The track is one of the Great Walks of New Zealand and

is carefully regulated to only allow 40 hikers per day to start on the track and you have to stay in the designated huts each night. The only way to get to the track is by boat and the only way to leave the track once you finish is by boat. The huts are spaced a day's walk apart, with the first day being the easiest, only a 5K. After that it gets longer between huts and the hike includes significant climbing and a treacherous downhill. Not to mention the sand fly, a pesky insect that leaves bites that welt, itch, and swell. But the scenery is unbelievable; solid granite cliffs, clear rivers with large brown trout, exotic looking fern trees, unique bird species, cascading waterfalls, 360 degree views from the pass, and a night sky full of southern hemisphere constellations and no light pollution. Just incredible.

It is my philosophy that if I am going to teach a subject, I need to know the material extremely well. With a month of international adventure travel in my teaching hip pocket, I now have even more stories and examples to share with my PRM students to help them plan their own adventures or work in the industry. Plus I did a little research on what it takes to get a job in the adventure guiding industry in New Zealand, if you are interested, let me know.

Now it is back to my normal, daily routine at Western, at least until the next adventure.



Paddling in Utah

By: Annabell Plush

The sun is shining; it has been all day. My shoulders are browning and warming, and I'm watching the clock anxiously. Any minute now my shift will be over, and then I will jump in the car with my husband and best friend and take off towards Georgia. We've been planning a Chattooga Section IV overnight trip over beers for the last week. Figuring out the logistics and schedules for all 3 of us has been tough, but we finally got a night that would work. They've been packing our gear and boat while I wait to get off work. At the magical 4 o'clock, they pick me up and we head off. An hour later we're at the put in, where we quickly drop our boats and gear and they head off to set shuttle while I pack the boats.

My interest in overnight paddle trips was sparked when my then boyfriend took me to Utah 2 years prior. We met up with some childhood friends of his and took a week long self support trip on the Green River. Helping plan logistics and final details was fun, and the smooth trip was a great reward. Being "unplugged" and away from society for a week was a new experience for me, and I was instantly hooked. Balancing school and a full time job give me little time to schedule in more backcountry trips, but I loved being able to squeeze in overnights. The boys get back from setting shuttle, and I lift my full boat up to my shoulder. My boat normally weighs 44 lbs, but I have about 15 lbs of gear stuffed in dry bags in the back. The walk to the river is a quarter mile trail, and we rush down it so we can beat the sunset. The first rapid is 7 foot, a slide boof where you paddle up on a rock and slide off, then throw a big boof stroke and soar onto the landing. Right above Stekoa Creek rapid, we find a nice spot where Stekoa Creek runs into the river. There's a sandy beach, a little bit of shrubbery, and a nice fire ring. My husbands boat had developed a 6 inch crack in the hull right above 7 foot, so we start out by building a roaring fire. We happen to have a good amount of duct tape, and I have experience in boat welding, so we cover the crack with a couple layers of tape, and I use a hot stick to melt the tape onto the hull.

After a good dinner, we spend a few hours swimming in the river under a clear, starry night. The next day we pack up camp, run the remaining section of the class IV run, and paddle the two mile lake out. It was already noon, but we still wanted breakfast so we stop at a Chinese buffet and pig out. The trip was quick and short in length, but the effort was well worth it. The rest of the week I felt refreshed and recharged. A good 24 hour break from the modern world of technology and time spent with good friends made the work week much more reasonable.

A Fishing Trip to Remember

By: Robert Owens

As I think about outdoor recreation, one of my favorite hobbies comes to mind. That hobby is fishing. I really like to go out on the water on a warm, spring or summer day or even a very cold winter day and just enjoy spending time fishing. One of my favorite fishing trips happened in December of 2010. I especially remember this particular winter fishing trip. This was the last outdoor trip that my friend Lucas and I shared because Lucas was killed in Iraq in July of 2011.

Lucas and I decided to drive to Virginia right before Christmas to enjoy a weekend of fishing. The weather was not very good, but we chose to go anyway. We drove Lucas's truck so that we could take the boat. By the time we got to Virginia it was already beginning to get pretty cold. We had driven for what seemed like hours, but finally made it to our favorite fishing spot on the James River. This particular spot was away from the roads and pretty isolated in the woods.

After finally getting there, we immediately took the boat from the truck and decided to go fishing. Even though the wind felt bitter cold through our coats and our feet and legs got wet from sitting in the boat so long, we had a great time. As soon as we started fishing I caught a catfish. We pulled it in the boat and I almost tipped over because the catfish was so big and heavy. I remember Lucas, grabbing the camera and taking a picture of me holding the catfish. I also remember him laughing at me because I was so thrilled over catching such a big fish. I was as excited as a kid on Christmas morning. I still have

A Fishing Trip to Remember Continued

the pictures of me and that huge fish. We threw that fish back, but were able to continue catching several fish even though none were as big as that one.

I guess it was kind of foolish for us to be out on the water in such cold weather, but the risk was worth the really good memories of spending an enjoyable time with a friend and doing something I really love, fishing. On that trip, I earned the nickname of "catfish". I will always remember that fun time I spent with Lucas and catching the big catfish. I still love to fish and like thinking about and sharing that story of winter fishing.

Mud Running

By: Jillian Jones

People have been running in organized races all over the world for years. There are races on just about every holiday, and races in memory of important people. These races are held every year for decades now, and have become tradition. Runners belonging to this culture have begun to venture out into the new craze of obstacle courses. This new breed of races also known as mud runs have taken many countries by storm.

Obstacle courses can consist of 3-12 miles of muddy trail with twenty or more obstacles to challenge runners. These races can be found throughout the year and have thousands of participants and spectators. The entry fee can be as little as \$30 to a hefty \$100 per person. Several of these obstacle courses can be run as a team, but others are exclusively individual. The liability waivers that participants must sign include pages of potential risks, yet people still want to run them.

These races attract people from all different backgrounds. Some are ultra runners, and others have never run a race in their life. The reasons why people run obstacle courses vary far and wide. Some participants enjoy the challenge, others do it to prove something, and then there are those who just want to have fun.

Some of the various obstacles that racers face include 8' walls, mud pits, cargo nets and many

types of military style obstructions. The obstacles on the course are specifically designed to challenge the participants and wear them down. Some obstacles require racers to help you achieve or overcome them. This adds a teamwork aspect to the race regardless of whether or not you run it with a team or by yourself.

I have participated in two mud runs and I have loved every second of each. Both races were filled with blood, sweat, and of course, mud. I ran the races because I wanted the challenge. As I remember the races that I ran, I feel like running another. Yea sure, you get beat up you'll be sore for days afterwards, but that's nothing compared to the great experience you'll have if you participate.

Cleaning up the Tuck

By: David Ludwig

In the spring of 2012, I participated in the Tuck River Clean up, and it was a great experience for me. I remember getting up Saturday morning on what looked like a very nice day to be on the river. I arrived on campus around 9 o'clock to stand in line with a few buddies from one of my classes to sign up. We all stood there waiting in line to get our equipment so we could get on busses that would take us to the river.

As we waited, it began to start raining on us. This was pretty discouraging as we did not want to be out on the river in the pouring rain. No one in our group was ready for this. Not giving up though, we decided to board the bus as it arrived. When we got to the put-in location we were briefed on what was going to happen and then told what to do if the weather got worse. Luckily, the weather leveled off and we were able to continue with the cleanup.

Once we left the put-in, we were very excited to be able to raft on the river. I think that was the best part by far. We did however know that the reason we were out there was because we wanted to help clean up the river. We would stop every so often as we spotted a piece of trash and throw it in the bright orange trash bags that we were supposed to fill up. As our group drifted further down the river, we began to see how full our bags were getting. We had found some very interesting things in the river

Cleaning up the Tuck Continued

including beer cans and even parts of old cars. Although we could not fit the old car parts into our trash bags, they were pretty interesting.

Towards the end of our trip down the river, we realized how drenched we were. We were having such a great time that we did not even realize it until then. The rain plus the water from the river had pretty much soaked us. At that point we really did not care about being wet anymore, but we did not have any more room for trash and decided to make our way to the exit. That was a pretty fun. We got to see how fast we could actually get the raft going now that we did not have to stop anymore for trash. It wasn't as easy as we thought because our group began to grow tired and then we decided to just let the river take us.

We made it to the exit and carried all our equipment to the designated spot. The first thing I did after that was empty the water out of my soaked boots and begin to dry my socks out. It was quite the day and it felt great to know that I had done a good deed to help the community. Everyone then loaded up on the bus and we headed back to campus feeling very accomplished.

Aware of the Bear

By: Brandon Phillips

Living in or near the Great Smokey Mountains National Park is a dream come true for many people across our nation. The mountains are filled with beautiful landscapes, animals, and scenic views. People travel across the country just to experience these majestic offerings given to us by Mother Nature. Though the Smokey Mountains offer people the chance to snap award winning photos, it comes with a price.

According to the National Park Service records, there are thought to be 1,700 to 1,800 black bears living throughout the Smokey Mountains. This averages out to be two black bear per square mile. Mixing this ratio of bears with the growing number of tourist that flock to the newly built Harrah's Casino, expecting to "experience" nature along the way creates a deadly combination of issues that park

rangers to have to address. Though bear attacks are rare, they still can occur if the right precautions are not taken.

The Oconaluftee Visitor Center is located at the base of the Smokey Mountains National Park on the Cherokee, NC side (US 441). The visitor center is a convenient and beautiful location for the travelers to make a rest stop or to enjoy a mid-day picnic. The visitor center features an active mountain Farm, museum, gift shop, and information center. Among all of the attractions that the center has to offer, the park rangers make sure to post bear warnings and emergency information to help insure the safety of nature seeking travelers. The key to avoiding a dangerous black bear encounter is to be aware of their presence and avoid giving the bears access to human food sources.

The park rangers who patrol our national parks strive to keep guests safe and provide opportunities for visitors to enjoy an experience of a lifetime. Though the rangers do an outstanding job, the majority of bear safety precautions start with the visitor themselves. Visitors must remember that black bears are wild animals and are very unpredictable. No matter the circumstance, visitors should not feed the bears. This is a very common circumstance when park visitors are trying to entice the bears to gain a better view. The National Park Service has posted signs throughout the park, stressing the warnings of not approaching black bears or allowing them to approach you.

The black bear population is growing steadily along with the numbers of National Park visitors. As the numbers grow, so do the chances of a dangerous encounter between the two. Park visitors must be aware that these animals, though beautiful and majestic, are still wild and very unpredictable. The enjoyment and admiration of these creatures can safely be done at a distance. In order to coexist with nature's gifts of life, people must keep a sense of respect for what dangers are present for both sides. When visiting the Great Smokey Mountain National Park, enjoy the majestic nature that the mountains have to offer, but remember to be aware of the bear.

Working with the Elk

By: Dr. Ben Tholkes

When the elk were reintroduced to Great Smoky Mountains National Park, I signed on to assist with the project in Cataloochee Valley. My son (Landon) and I spend out Sunday afternoons in the valley educating people about the elk, trying to keep the people and elk away from each other, and attempting to keep traffic flowing along the narrow valley roads. We loved working in the Cataloochee Valley, but the one problem we had was the drive from Cullowhee to Cataloochee. The last few miles into the valley are on a narrow, one-lane, gravel road. It can be a nice drive unless you meet someone coming from the other direction. Horse trailers and campers can be especially tricky. One evening when we were traveling out of the valley, a horse trailer and an SUV collided on a corner and traffic was tied up until they could be separated. After two summers of travel into Cataloochee Valley, we decided that the time spent with the elk was not worth the time on the road. Luckily, the elk decided to move closer to us.

About two or three years ago, the elk began to move out of Cataloochee Valley. This is both good news and bad news for the National Park Service. The good news is that the elk herd is growing and expanding into new areas of the park. The bad news is that elk can't read NPS boundary signs and they were wandering into private lands outside the park. Some of the elk eventually travelled as far as Cherokee and the Oconaluftee area of the park. This allowed more visitors to come in contact with the elk and also caused some problems for the park service and the residents of Cherokee. The park service decided that they needed help working with the elk that now seemed to be at home in the Oconaluftee area. I decided that Oconaluftee was an easier drive than Cataloochee, so I signed on to work with the elk at Oconaluftee.

This past summer was my first time working with the Oconaluftee elk program. Since Oconaluftee is located right on Highway 441 (Newfound Gap Road), it receives a great deal of traffic and more visitors than Cataloochee Valley. My duties included patrolling the Mountain Farm Museum and along the Oconaluftee River Trail, assisting during

busy times at the Oconaluftee Visitor Center, and watching for the elk. Even though the visitors thought we knew where and when the elk would appear, we did not have scheduled viewing times. Like the visitors, we would watch the meadows and the surrounding forests and wait for the elk to appear. For a very large animal, the elk could move very quickly and quietly through the woods. Suddenly, usually without warning, the elk would appear in the meadows. My first indication that the elk had arrived was traffic slowing and stopping along the highway. Unless we acted quickly, traffic would be completely stopped as visitors abandoned their vehicles and ran to take a picture. While the elk quietly grazed, our job consisted of keeping the visitors out of the meadow, trying to keep traffic moving along the highway and answering questions about the elk. I enjoyed working with the elk last summer and plan to continue working with them again this summer. I should begin working in May and last summer, I worked the late shift on Saturday nights. I always enjoy company, so just let me know if you would like to spend a Saturday night working with the elk.

Musings from Maurice

By: Dr. Maurice Phipps

My courses this semester involved some field trips including Balsam Mountain Preserve and The Cold Mountain three-day trip at the beginning of March. The highlight of the Balsam trip was the Harris Hawk being fed by the students (and the hawk flying for the food). The Cold Mountain trip was cold at night but for the first time ever we had three days of sun with no snow or rain. We enjoyed stories of the cold and Roberts Service's "The Creation of Sam McGee" poem around the fire, followed on the second night by a couple of hours of Jedi Mind Games. Navigation started off a little shaky but after the first hour, no one got lost and we hit the coordinates on the bush-push almost dead on. A classy potluck dinner with exotic meals made from scratch showed how well you can eat in the woods. A Tyrolean Traverse across the Tuck and a rappel off Cold Mountain rounded out the weekend.

New equipment – we are ditching the climbing ropes this semester for a new set and we have just purchased a Jackson Double Whitewater kayak. Last

Musings from Maurice Continued

year we bought some new canoes so we are staying on top of the equipment needs.

The Old Cullowhee River Park Committee is plugging away, currently looking at potential firms to complete a feasibility study. A grant was submitted to the Blue Ridge Foundation for an economic impact study of the proposed park and the river as a heritage corridor. We will know in May whether or not we were successful.

The university has just gone through a program prioritization process, where all programs were put into one of three categories, #1 being tagged for more resources, #2 being left as is, and #3 being tagged for possible cuts. PRM got into category #1 so we are pleased about that, as we have been doing so much with so few resources over the years.

Faculty and students have been busy with research, several students presenting at the Undergraduate Research Symposium, the ongoing Forest Service Research at Panthertown, faculty getting an article about the PRM Program in the NC State Recreation Journal, and completing the research for Duke Energy on the Upper Nantahala Release.

Summer is nearly upon as and Todd's kayak class is full. Many seniors are doing their Capstone Internships this summer so we should have some interesting visits. Have a relaxing summer and come back invigorated for the fall.

My Adventure Thus Far

By: Zedron Porter

Ask a group of people what their idea of adventure is and you will likely get a different answer from each. I like to think that every day is another small chapter in a series of adventures that comprise my life. I have experienced some remarkable things in the short span of my existence, but my latest adventure, nearly complete now, has been the most rewarding by far. A little less than three years ago, I left my career as a Chef and began working towards a degree in Parks and Recreation Management.

All I ask is that you to bear with me for a few minutes, and I promise to do my best to grant you with a worthwhile message born from my experiences.

I have spent a considerable amount of time developing a career, and generally attempting to live. The issue with attempting to live is that you haven't quite pinned down what living really is. So you spend a great deal of time assuring yourself that you certainly must be successful if you are moving up the corporate ladder, making more money, building this thing called life equity right? I would like to say that statement is totally wrong, but it's not. You probably want me to elaborate on that statement at this point, but that must come later. I must first build some semblance of structure into my story for any explanation of life equity to make sense.

I spent most of my childhood doing things outside, which is something that I have identified as an important part of my life now just as it was then. The idea of becoming an outdoor professional had not yet dawned on me. When I was younger, I felt like most people do as they consider a job, and prioritized a vocation that was little more than just an interesting method to earning a regular paycheck. The actual inspiration to change careers occurred as I was on vacation, and happened to visit Fort Macon on the North Carolina coast. I asked myself, who were these people wearing those snappy uniforms that seemed to know so much about everything? That quickly changed to the more important question, how do I go about getting a job like that? After spending about a year preparing, I found out.

In order to work in the outdoors as a park ranger, a person needs to come from one of two distinct fields. The first, and most likely to get you a job, is law enforcement. The other, which has been receiving budget cuts for years now, is Interpretation. With my background in managing the kitchens of upscale restaurants and training culinary interns, the interpretation approach seemed the best choice in spite of the funding issues. Unfortunately, possessing the necessary background is only part of the equation to finding employment as a ranger. In order to be noticed and to substitute for years of experience, it is suggestible to have an education

My Adventure Thus Far Continued

specializing in some form of outdoor management. This is inevitably what drew me to Western Carolina University to pursue my degree in Parks and Recreation Management.

So what is parks and recreation management anyway? In short, it is the founding history and principles associated to becoming an outdoor leader and scholar. Looking back, it is amazing to me how much there is to know in order to become a facilitator of leisure. Basic concepts of leadership, business management, and even recreation choices are elaborated on to the point where there seems no end to what can be known. What is known however; is the fact that building this foundation is critical in bringing knowledge, professionalism, creativity, and legitimacy to a field that has long been discounted as secondary in its importance to society. With graduation approaching, I am looking forward to assisting in the progression of this profession in the future.

Looking back, I can honestly say that at this point, the choices before me are clearer than any I can remember in the past. I believe that this is a direct result of excellent instruction from the professors at WCU and course material that can be applied in real world situations. The knowledge foundation to actually build a new career as an outdoor professional is in place, and the passion to bring the whole endeavor to fruition is intact. This brings me back to the life equity question from earlier. As much as I would like to report that chasing around a dream of success related to promotion and financial security is wrong, it still forms the basis for any career choice, parks and recreation included. What must be remembered is that sacrifices and struggle should be tempered with a sense of purpose to yourself and society, not the greed and selfishness that has become so pervasive in society today. To that end, I believe that parks and recreation management is my purpose.

Now, with graduation near, I am ready to move on to the next challenge in making that purpose a reality. I would like to be a park ranger, but with economic factors currently unfavorable, this endeavor may take some time to accomplish. In the

end, that is my message to you. Life is an adventure, so live to soak up the beauty, challenge, joy, and suffering around you each day. Adventures enrich our lives, making us better people, and so mine continues.



Parks and Recreation In Pictures







“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.”

Henry David Thoreau