

From cracking eggs to climbing peaks

The Outdoor Experiences program aims high and hits home

by Molly Hucklebridge

It didn't surprise me that a high school student who grew up in Los Angeles had never climbed a 12,000-foot peak. I was surprised, however, when a 12 year-old student in the Mono Lake Committee's Outdoor Experiences (OE) program claimed that he had never cracked an egg.

In the OE program, participants—predominantly high school students from inner city Los Angeles—come to the Mono Basin for five full days of hands-on education. Most students have never left the city routines of Southern California. Their outdoors is defined as a trip to the neighborhood park or the local basketball court. At Mono Lake students participate in hikes, canoe tours, trail restoration, watershed education, and nature activities.

But beyond the outdoor activities, there is also the OE program's experiential side. With today's schools pushing more academics and more testing, the OE program helps provide students with the opportunity to learn important lessons only found outside of the classroom environment.

Throughout their visit to the Mono Basin, students learn and practice everyday group-living skills. They stay at Cain Ranch, where they are expected to cook, clean, and work together as a team. Whether they are scrubbing the toilet (affectionately nicknamed "the throne") or discovering how cutting onions can make you cry, many students find the value and fun in performing household chores.

Students also learn that consideration and conservation go hand in hand. Each person is limited to one three-minute shower per day. This activity not only ensures every participant a warm shower, but it also demonstrates how water used wisely can protect places like Mono Lake.



Learning life skills including cleaning and cooking is one component of the Outdoor Experiences program.



Outdoor Experiences participants also learn outdoor skills and life lessons through physical and mental challenges on the trail.

Outside Cain Ranch and in the Mono Basin, life skills are taught and found "on the trail." During the all-day hike, students face and overcome physical challenges. Whether the group climbs a peak or scales a granite dome, the hike is a team effort and a sure confidence boost. Rather than considering their personal obstacles, participants encourage each other and complete the task as a team.

On the last night of their OE week, the students share accomplishments and reflections in a closing ceremony. They often mention that they enjoyed helping around the house and working with each other.

I remember one young woman saying she realized that she took her mother for granted. She was excited to help out more around the house and to tell her mom how much she appreciated her. Finding a balance between giving and taking was an important step for her to become a responsible adult.

In LA, most students spend their free time absorbed in homework, television, video games, and online. Hopefully, after their experiences in the Mono Basin they will remember to look outside this indoor bubble. Maybe they will take small

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South Tufa trail moves uphill

Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve staff instrumental in keeping trail open

by Greg Reis

Mono Lake's rapidly rising waters caused some last-minute trail changes at the South Tufa Area this past summer. Mono Lake rose over two feet between April 1 and August 1, 2006, inundating parts of the former trail through the South Tufa grove. At times the lake rose ¼ foot per week, setting a challenging pace for the trail movers.

Dave Marquart, Park Interpretive Specialist, and Jim Pence, Ranger with the Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve, rerouted portions of the trail four separate times. Each time, they uncovered the overgrown remnants of the trail used in 1999—the last time the lake was this high. Cutting greasewood, moving



The rerouted walking trail at South Tufa.

signs, and relocating pieces of boardwalk were all necessary to keep the loop trail open.

At times the State received assistance from the Forest Service, Mono Lake Committee, and volunteers, but many times Jim or Dave were out there alone keeping the trail open for visitors. This is another reminder of how essential the Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve and its excellent staff are for maintaining a high quality visitor experience in the Mono Basin.

Be sure to take a walk down at South Tufa during your next visit to the Mono Basin to try out the new trail and to see how far the lake has risen this year! ❖

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but significant steps such as helping to prepare more meals or taking shorter showers. Or perhaps these students will challenge their indoor lifestyle and surprise themselves with what they can accomplish. ❖

Molly Hucklebridge is one of two Outdoor Experiences Coordinators this summer and fall for the Mono Lake Committee's Outdoor Experiences program. In her spare time, she attempts to photograph every square inch of the Mono Basin with her new digital camera.

Outdoor Experiences wish list

The Outdoor Experiences program needs some help. Do you have any of these items to donate?

- Cast iron frying pans
- Warm clothes in young adult sizes
- Binoculars
- Books on nature and natural history

If you can donate any of the above—either in new or good used condition, please contact Santiago Escruceria (santiago@monolake.org) at (760) 647-6595. Many thanks to Stephanie Ann Blythe, Barb Cragan, Terry Farmer, Mary Hartman, Kathy Ritter, and Emilie Strauss for donating items on the wish list—we're putting them to good use!

Forest Service launches local lecture series

by Greg Reis

Every Saturday in July and August, the doors to the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area Visitor Center were open late. The building was empty except for the auditorium, which was filled with people interested in learning about a variety of topics: climate change, volcanism, Mono Lake's wetlands, Mono Lake's tributaries, vertebrate surveys in Yosemite, birds of the High Sierra, mountain meadow bugs, the California water situation, and the status of water worldwide.

Lecturers shared expertise on these topics during one-hour presentations in the Forest Service's auditorium facility. The final Saturday was a showing of the film, "Running Dry," a documentary that makes an urgent and compelling call for water conservation.

The Mono Lake Committee appreciates the Forest Service's efforts at making this first annual lecture series a success. Having this series in the research-rich Mono Basin complements lectures already ongoing at the White Mountain Research Station, Parson's Lodge, and the Sierra Nevada Aquatic Research Laboratory. The lectures provide residents and visitors a look at research occurring in the area, and a better understanding of natural ecosystems.