

## Fall 2017 Immersion team returns *After a successful three weeks in the woods*

By Jessica Wiegandt  
Arts and Life Editor

On Monday, Nov. 20, the fall 2017 Immersion team returned to the Brevard College campus, completing their 21-day expedition. The team of 10 upperclassmen and two instructors, Clyde Carter and David Lackey, left on Oct. 31 and over the course of the expedition went climbing, backpacking and canoeing.

"For the most part we stuck to our plans," Taylor Everard, the expedition plan leader, said, "The challenges we had with the weather and ecosystem weren't too bad. We weren't running from fires like other Immersion groups or anything, but there was a moment in time during our backpacking trip where we rerouted."

The reroute occurred because the original plan to sleep on top of a ridgeline was going to expose the team to cold and harsh weather. "A few people in the group had the foresight to not be

stuck on the ridgeline in such difficult weather, so they created an alternate plan," Everard said.

The team instead summited Mt. Mitchell as a day-hike and camp at a lower elevation instead of routing the trip up Mt. Mitchell and camp on a ridgeline, as the team had initially planned. The reroute during the backpacking trip was the only portion that changed in the route plan, however Everard said the most difficulty during the expedition came from handling group dynamic disputes.

"Other Immersions, from what I can perceive, their biggest challenges were external," Everard said, "And ours were more internal, which isn't a bad thing it was just how we worked together."

Everard said the biggest challenges were faced when the team was working on making a decision. "There was a lot of indecision, so it took a long time to come to a conclusion everyone was at least going to accept," Everard said.

There were three evacuations that occurred during the trip. The injuries were not serious but would heal faster at home instead of treating the injuries in the field.

"Being able to experience the Linville Gorge was a highlight," Everard said, "We got to do a multi-pitch [climb] there and it was just beautiful to look out at the top of the climb, several hundred feet in the air, in peak leaf season. You can't get that in a photograph."

After climbing, the team backpacked for 13 days, eight of which they didn't see the sun. Everard said it rained or was extremely cloudy for about a week straight while they were backpacking, which made it difficult to keep high spirits.

"Everything was damp and grungy but it was accomplishing," Everard said, "Some of the people in the group were challenged physically, some mentally, it was difficult for us all. It made me realize 'Wow, this is backpacking,' because we all had heavy packs on our back, all of us were being challenged and I thought it was really cool."

Now the team has been home for over a week and they each are adjusting to living away from the back country life.

"My sleep schedule is pretty hardwired. I find myself having difficulty to stay up past nine and I wake up at seven in the morning at the latest," Everard said. "On the day we came back, I went to the caf and that was pretty weird too. There was a lot of noise bouncing around and it was so loud, my senses all felt claustrophobic."

The team will spend the final two weeks of class debriefing the expedition, covering mountain biking for a couple days and taking a trip to the Congaree swamp.

"One thing I find really important during this semester is the emphasis on reflection," Everard said, "You spend this semester with these 10 people and you have focus a lot of energy on developing your leadership style in a positive way by reflecting on your time spent in the field and what you have done in your group."



Photo Courtesy of Taylor Everard

The Immersion team poses at the top of Mt. Mitchell on their 21-day excursion. Back row (from left): Cody Nelson, Casey Whitmire, Bryce Kinsey, Beau Owen, Peyton Mooney, Sam Munson, Michael Lowry. Front row (from left): Taylor Everard, Gabe Neckolaishen.