

# The Whetstone

Montreat College's Student Voice

## American Ecosystems: The Ultimate Field Trip

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Ever wonder what's so grand about the Grand Canyon? How clear glacial water really is? Ever hear about Crater Lake? Or wonder what makes the Badlands so bad? Just ask someone who has taken American Ecosystems and they will tell you anything you could possibly wonder about this trip. We had the chance to embark on a journey out west not only to "Experience America" but to rediscover ourselves.



The class itself is an opportunity for students to study the many different ecosystems of America and see just how unique they truly are. Each student taking the class is assigned a National Park to research, investigate, and plan a day of exploring in, so everyone can get a taste of what that park is all about. Starting with Saguaro National Park in Arizona we made a round-about trip and ended up finishing in the Badlands

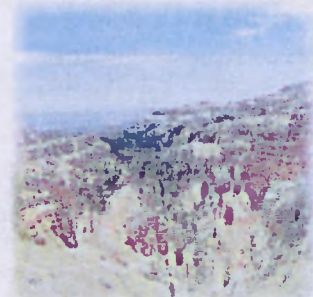
of South Dakota. We saw the Grand Canyon, known for its unbelievable geology, and the Hoodoos of Bryce Canyon on mule back. We then spent two days in Zion National Park, where some of us conquered angels landing, explored the hidden canyon, and visited the emerald pools. We drove into Nevada and saw the salt flats of Death Valley, the lowest, hottest, and driest place in America. A little dried out and in search of some moisture, we departed for California.

We were able to see the world's largest tree (by volume) in Sequoia and not long after that the tallest trees in the world in Redwoods National Park. After that excitement we discovered the mysterious Crater Lake in Oregon, one of the cleanest and purest lakes in the world. Another cool fact for Crater Lake is the freedom of fishing without a license or catch limit. My journal entry for that day, June 3rd, 2010, states that there was a least 7 or 8 feet of snow on the ground, but it was probably more like 15 feet. We later crossed over into Washington State to see the infamous Mt. St. Helens, but due to poor visibility we didn't actually see it. We were able to learn and see some of the damage that it caused

in 1980 and see how God used a disaster to create some beautiful and unique landscapes. Some of us saw a glacier for the first time as we hiked again over 20 feet of snow at Mt. Rainier. This volcano actually has a bad reputation for claiming people's lives every year.

We made it to the west coast of Washington to check out Olympic National Park, a temperate rainforest. I've never seen so many shades of green in one place... or so many massive slugs. After checking out the rainforest, we experienced the intertidal zones/tide pools where we were able to see star fish, sea anemones, and other astonishing creatures. We then ferried to the San Juan Islands and went sea kayaking, hoping to see orcas (we didn't, unfortunately). But by then we were saturated with the Pacific North West and we started our long journey back east.

We dried off and drove to Montana where we



entered the wilderness of Glacier National Park. We stopped in Wyoming more than once; in fact we stopped quite frequently in Yellowstone to check out the hot springs, artistic points, Old Faithful, and Grand Prismatic Spring. Just south of there we camped in the Grand Tetons with an early wakeup call from a pack of coyotes. I have to admit the Tetons were my favorite. There's just something about glacial moraines and faulted mountains that takes my breath away... of course, it always helps to see a friendly marmot and a gorgeous sunset!

On the eastern side of the state we witnessed The Devil's Tower and the significance it had to the native people, and the massive prairie dog village right next to it. On our way to the Black Hills in South Dakota, we stopped to see Mt Rushmore; they were crying as we left them out in the rain. It wasn't much of a drive to the Black Hills, which were formed by batholiths. A little further east and

we found ourselves in the Badlands. The Badlands get too much rain to be considered a desert, not enough rain to be considered a forest, and enough erosion to gradually change the landscape; it is slowly disappearing altogether.

So what does it all come down to? Truth be told, this class is more than just an epic field trip; it's the journey of a lifetime. It's more than just learning about ecosystems; it's learning to face challenges we never would have in our everyday life. It's seeing a world you never would have dreamed existed. It makes you wonder what else God created on this planet that we don't even know about. I guess there's only one way to find out!

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"Back in the Day"

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of the  
MONTH

"So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised."

Hebrews 10:35-36(NIV)