My GeoDESLA Experience

When you think of Montana, what comes to mind? An empty and barren wasteland? Well you’re both wrong and right there. It is definitely not a wasteland and depending on where you are, it is not empty either. When I went out to Montana, I went to a specific place called Big Horn Basin. It was just myself, teenage students, supervisors, and dinosaur fossils. Yes, REAL dinosaur fossils. Not only did I get to dig up these fascinating fossils, but I also got to go to the famous Yellowstone National Park! Let’s take a closer look into this once in a lifetime experience.

My trip started off at the Philadelphia Airport at 4:00 a.m. While at that airport, I met with another WINS girl, Cynthia To, and one of our many supervisors, Nick. We had to fly from Philadelphia to Minneapolis, Minnesota for a three-hour layover. If I’m being honest, it was quite boring. Fast forward to Billings Airport, we met the other GeoDESLA students. When most of the GeoDESLA students arrived at the airport we set off to Red Lodge, our campground. We played some bonding games and really got to know each other. We ended the night with the girl’s cabin choosing their bunks. I was fortunate enough to get a bottom bunk.

The day after the next was by far the best out of the eight days I spent there. We started off the day with a delicious breakfast and beautiful sunrise. After that, we took an hour drive to the Mother’s Day Quarry where we learned about dinosaur fossils and began our first dig. We were basically doing the work paleontologists do all the time. There we saw an abundance of sauropod dinosaur bones (long-neck dinosaurs) known as Diplodocus. I was assigned the task of digging around a fossil with a field jacket on it. Myself and another student were trying to dig enough rock to flip over that same jacket.

When it was lunch time, all the students hung out together and just talked. We got pretty close at that point and some interesting things happened. One of those interesting things was that I ended up with mud inside my nose. I’d rather not get into those details. Then came the night time.

During this time, I was paired up with another student and we had to write a blog for the GeoDESLA Facebook page. After we finished, we headed for the bonfire. We all sat around the bonfire and sang some songs. After that, we played a game where we had to say something that started with the letter “R” and I was paired up with a girl who ended up saying that she had been pregnant. Then we went back to our tents. I couldn’t help but get emotional. It was the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen. The night sky was filled with a plethora of stars that lit up the night. This was definitely something you couldn’t see in Philadelphia, something I won’t see for a while.

For the two days after, we continued to dig for dinosaur fossils. One of those days I ended up sitting on a cactus. The rest of the week was spent in...
The next day it was time to leave magnificent Montana. Cynthia and I didn’t leave Billings Airport until 4:30 p.m. after arriving at the airport at 10:00 a.m. On my way back, I couldn’t stop thinking about this marvelous experience. This was truly the best event of my entire life. I want to thank all the people that made this trip possible, as well as the students that were with me. From this trip, I made new friendships and confirmed what I want for my future, my future as a paleontologist.

Arianna Alfaro, WINS II

The Un-Intendent Impacts of WINS

Recently, Ms. Kim and I received the following email from one of our WINS alumna; it made us smile, and we’d like to share it with you.

To whom it may concern,

I have just realized that today at 4 am that WINS may have had a negative impact on my life. There was a bat in my living room and upon waking my mother and brothers for assistance, they were horrified and left me to handle it hiding behind the stairs claiming “Hanaa, aren’t you a WINS girl?” and “You should know how to catch it naturally.”

I automatically thought of you both and tried to recall our bat class but couldn’t. I thought it was hilarious how my family assumed WINS was some sort of animal control training course and it made me remember all of the crazy bat games we played while in WINS. Lol. I just had to share that during a bat attack in my living room, (a little dramatic) that I was thinking about you both.

Lots of love,
Hanaa Belgrave

Arianna Alfaro above in July 2017 as a WINS Explainer at the dig in the Academy. At left, vising the Academy in 2010 it seemed she was pre-destined to be a paleontologist.

WINS in Hurricane Island, Maine

As part of our continuing collaborations with UL and MAEE team, the WINS program was able to send a WINS participant on a scholarship to Hurricane Island in Maine, another UL Innovative Education Awardee!

There’s a planetarium in a nearby museum. For over a decade I looked up at the simulated night sky and thought that the brightness of the stars had to be exaggerated. Stargazing isn’t a popular pastime in Philadelphia.

Last Spring Ms. Kim told me about a marine biology program in Hurricane Island, Maine and right away I was interested. In my mind, Maine was an easy three or so hours away. Imagine my surprise when I started booking bus tickets and found out it would take fourteen hours!

So, there I was, two in the morning, sleeping bag in one hand, pink pillow in the other and on my back a duffel bag two thirds the size of my body, threatening to topple me over. As we inched our way further up the coast I started to have less and less reception on my phone so I unenthusiastically closed Netflix and searched for music in my library. The coastal scenery was my visual entertainment now.

When I got to Hurricane Island, immediately my phone was taken and locked away. In the moment, it felt like the end of the world, but looking back now I realize that disconnecting helped me to connect. It was so refreshing to be surrounded by people who were as enthusiastic as me, and in many cases even more enthusiastic, about learning and the environment.

Without giving too much away for the girls that (hopefully) will participate in the future, I will say that the program was like a two week long WINS class. Every day we were out and about, every day I was seeing and learning new things. Most of the work we did was on a mini research project based around the intertidal zone. Because of this, we became familiar with the organisms that lived here and some people in the group were even able to find sea stars and anemones.

In addition to working on the projects, there were also many activities lined up for us to do. We helped measure scallops from spat bags. We made chocolate pudding with the gelatin in Irish moss. On one day, we went rowing and during the middle of our trip a seal popped its head out of the water!

Everyday was so much fun, but by far the most fun I had was during all the team building we did. Our group leaders introduced us to a bunch of new games that everyone was into. There were many nights where intense Uno games went down in the bunkhouse. Some nights we spent knitting and embroidering and making friendship bracelets. Even doing the dishes turned into a party with us.

At the end of those two weeks I was dreading the bus ride back home. Not because I wouldn’t be able to watch Parks & Rec until we reached Boston, but because this time it was taking me away from a place I had grown to love and appreciate. I knew that it’d be a long time before I could look out of the window of my room and see the lobster people out on their boats. I wouldn’t have the opportunity to get stung by a Lion’s Mane jellyfish in a tide pool in Philly, let alone be in a body of water that isn’t polluted to the point that it’s not healthy to put your feet in.

In Maine, I learned that stars had the ability to light up the sky in a way that millions of planes and helicopters could never be able to do. There I learned that living sustainably isn’t unreasonable or out of reach. Above all else, this amazing island taught me that it’s time to start exploring new places.

Nayeli Perez, WINS II

PAGE 1

1st - Nayeli Perez

9th - Khalilah Bint-Hadi

11th - Elizabeth Escobar

12th - Sawitri Mawardy

17th - Jaelynn Robinson

1st - Kaiya Pedro-Nichols

18th - Meymey Seng

18th - India Cerdan

20th - Tatiana Villegas

25th - Lufolfe Li

26th - Zabana Salcedo

27th - Azeeemah Solomon

Thuy Le, in Two Ponds trail, writing down her thoughts on her PEEC experience as part of the last night’s journaling activity.

Hanaa Belgrave is currently studying Environmental Health at West Chester University.

Happy Birthday

To: 1st - Nayeli Perez

18th - Meymey Seng

18th - India Cerdan

20th - Tatiana Villegas

25th - Lufolfe Li

26th - Zabana Salcedo

27th - Azeeemah Solomon

From: 12th - Sedonia Hamilton

26th - Laysha Torres-Fernandez

31st - Thuy Le