

Learning in the Wilderness – Testimonial

The Anthropocene is the age of humans, and in wilderness, humans become the minority. There aren't a lot of humans in wilderness, whereas that's all that consumes cities and towns. In wilderness, you are able to realize the importance of all other beings. There are no distractions from commercialism; the only commodities become your senses and what's around you.

Take away a "modern" human's conveniences, and what does it become? Wilderness will tell you the answer: We are not as great as we think we are.

In the front country, humans and their machines are the majority. We think that we are the most powerful beings and can control and manipulate anything to our liking. Our brains are constantly bombarded with distractions and unnatural stimuli. All of our senses are thrown off, but we don't realize it because it's what we're used to. We think that modernization is good for us. Even having terms for the distinction of "front country" versus "back country" show how egotistic we, humans, are.

Humans are marginalized in the wilderness. Taylor Wilderness Research Station is located in the heart of what feels like sky-scraper mountains. The mountains must think we're ants compared to them. Forests of Douglas Fir and Ponderosa Pine populate the landscape. Deer, elk, big horn sheep, coyotes, wolves, wolverines, black bears, and cougars—this is their home. A modern human could not survive the way these other animals do in the wilderness. In a way, this is quite humbling. We are able to finally give credit to these majestic animals—all animals. Although we cannot survive in the way that they can, there are still many cognitive and physical benefits from living in this type of environment.

Walking around this fairly unfamiliar place, you realize how other organisms around you are more adapted to their surroundings and being in the wilderness. Whereas, you, as a human who has great strengths, could not live out there alone—especially if it's your first time. We relied on our group members and our group leaders. We needed each other to survive and flourish out there. This was something that Meg Gäg's Leadership class harkened on. She also helped us understand that there needed to be a balance for group time as well as alone time. The appreciation for solitude in this special place was something she highly suggested we all found.

An appreciation for solitude was also something that Adam Soward's Environmental History class expressed. Adam's class allowed us to choose our own topic to research and write about. My history paper is about the need for solitude and how wilderness allows for it, therefore, leading to the protection of wilderness in the 1964 Wilderness Act, in order for solitude to remain. This shows that the idea of solitude is not a new one, and this is something that Adam's class reinforced—these current issues are not new ones, and trying to look at the history of where they originated is really important in the understanding of why they are still here today and how they've changed or stayed the same.

This then relates to Pete Gäg's Ecology class which highlights the idea that everything is part of a system. Therefore, everything is connected in one way or another.

Jenn Ladino's Environmental Writing class taught us how to write about these complicated issues and systems that I speak of. But in order for anyone to want to read what we're saying, we had to captivate our audiences and write to specific audiences, which she helped us do with different writing techniques and styles. I also learned so much about other environmental issues and their specificities because of the readings we were privileged to read.

Learning about environmental issues, leads to the ways in which you could make changes and how to protect the wilderness. Ed Krumpé's Wilderness and Protected Area Management

class was important because we learned how and why it's necessary to leave no trace. He taught us about human interactions with wilderness: where to use the bathroom when you are near water; to make sure all of the wood you burn turns into white ash and then to scatter the ash when they're cooled and you're done; how to tell when a campsite or wilderness area is being overused; how to sustainably and minimally impact this wild place that should stay wild.

Something that stuck with me was a quote that Ed Krumpe ended all of his emails with, it stated: "Never does nature say one thing and wisdom another" and I think that this quote encapsulates everything that Taylor demonstrates to us. Ed Krumpe lives by this quote and reinforces this idea to us through his teachings and his friendship. I believe that this is something all humans should try to understand because maybe, those who don't appreciate nature, would.

Someone who appreciated nature in a way I had never seen before was Ed Galindo. He showed us how to be grateful and thankful for what life offers us. How to thank the plants that we step on every day and how to be forgiven for it. This was also humbling because we had to not only think about ourselves and other animals, but also all of the plants. We had to give "personhood" to the plants. Ed Galindo taught us how to have compassion. Compassion for everything in our lives. Compassion for everything in this world. Compassion to each other and to ourselves.

Our incredible teachers were not the only ones teaching us—nature was too. How "nature is our classroom" applies here. Every single second was a learning opportunity at Taylor. Being there made me want to learn more about it and about the environment. Being immersed in nature helps you want to keep it alive even more than you already do. Learning about the ways in which you could do this, plus learning about the environmental issues that are going on, while being in the wilderness, is a hands-on and all-encompassing way to learn. I want to go home and help my family live more sustainably. I want to make changes. I want to help fight for change. I am so grateful to have had this opportunity and I know that everyone else who has been privileged to experience this, has changed for the better as well. Wilderness today, in the Anthropocene, is not a luxury, but a necessity.