



youth in the outdoors

getting out to go within

Rite of Passage Journeys trips help young people discover themselves

More than 2,500 miles hiked, 44 youth participants, 13 mentors, and five little words that mean something much more than their size would imply: *Get out and go within*. All of these pieces worked together to create one unforgettable summer in the Northwest. As a new guide, but an avid hiker, I was drawn to a summer with Rite of Passage Journeys and I wasn't let down. I have no shortage of stories from my summer, but here are three of my most memorable.

Ages 8-12: Nature

Everything was silent. Our young group was playing a game to practice silence and stillness by blending into the natural surroundings. I was hiding also with one eye on the seeker, who stood in a small circle as he swept his searching eyes across the forest. He was looking for a sign of one of us—a movement, a flash of a colorful T-shirt, a giggle, anything. But we had somehow turned off all our noisy trail voices while disappearing into the woods. We were patient and quiet as bugs crawled across our pant legs, as birds chirped out their songs, and as small chipmunks scurried for food next to us.

Until we were all found we remained as still as we could, carefully and slowly adjusting a leg or a sleeping arm, for what seemed like an eternity. Then, simultaneously, every bit of pent-up conversation and laughter came pouring out of our mouths. We all excitedly shared stories about what we saw and where we had hidden. Disguised as a game, we had actually spent one entire hour watching nature and appreciating the small acts of wonder that were happening all around us.

Ages 12-14: Self

"Aw-OO-kah!"

The-call-and-response song ended with a strong drumbeat and our favorite new word, *aw-OO-kah*. We didn't know if this word had meant something to someone at one time, but for us it meant we were home for the night. Calling out our song announced to our coastal campsite that we had arrived and that we were going to stay for a while.

But on this particular night, this was the last word that we were going to speak to one another for over twenty-four hours. After we shouted our word, we sat down to our dinner in silence. We were preparing for the solo vigil

Emily Pease

Emily is program and marketing director for Rite of Passage Journeys.

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become a junior ranger

Looking for bugs under fallen logs. Searching for pine cones on a scavenger hunt. Exploring a tree while wearing a blindfold. These are the types of activities kids can experience on a Junior Ranger program at Mount Rainier. During the summer, rangers lead Junior Ranger programs several times a day at different locations in the park. The programs engage children in a series of activities to learn about nature in a fun way. And the children learn about natural concepts and national parks in general. Parents are also welcome on these programs. Last year more than 2,000 people attended Junior Ranger programs at Mount Rainier.

Because not everyone has time to attend a ranger program, the park also offers a Junior Ranger booklet filled with activities to complete while in the park. Kids who complete the booklet earn a Junior Ranger badge available at park visitor centers or by mail. The booklets and badges are free of charge.

More info at www.nps.gov/mora.



day, during which our youth would be spending a full day alone under the careful, but discreet, watch of their mentors. Beginning at dinner and continuing on for twenty-four hours, we were each entering into our individual journeys.

Even though the ocean waves washed out the sounds that each of us were sure to make during our time alone, I imagined that if I were to call "aw-OO-kah" to the wind, all the girls, having found home within themselves, would echo it back.

Ages 15-18: Community

Some journeyers have the opportunity to delve into the joys of wilderness adventures only once during their lifetime. Then there are others who are so touched by their first experience that they feel called to return. Our

alumni programs bring together these special young people. They already understand the importance of each individual, and the new community forms effortlessly. But being in a cohesive group rather than just individuals hiking together can be challenging when one member needs to leave unexpectedly.

When goodbyes were said to a friend on the trail last summer, the air felt thicker and our legs moved slower. As we took an extended break by a stunning river, I picked up a stone that I later presented to our group as we sat in our nightly talking circle. This special stone was undeniably marked with the numeral 7 and the member who had left that morning was decidedly "Participant Number 7." That evening, as our group felt smaller than usual, a stone sat in for our absent friend. Somehow it felt better to remember her seat in the circle than to pretend that our group never had a seventh participant.

To find out more about how to "get out and go within," visit the Rite of Passage Journeys website at www.riteofpassagejourneys.org. ♦

curing nature deficit disorder photographer Dudley Edmondson wants all kids outside

Outdoor photographer Dudley Edmondson is the author of *Black and Brown Faces in America's Wild Places* and a young person's version of the same book. He's dedicated much of his time to giving talks and promoting the outdoors among kids of all ethnic and economic backgrounds. We spoke with him over the phone from his home in Duluth, Minnesota:

Why is it important for kids to get outside?

To me, it's about physical and mental health. Kids are definitely more sedentary than when I was a kid. They're getting too much screen time, too many hours on the cell phone, the Wii, the Xbox.

What do you see when you take kids on outings?

Mostly that they don't want to go back home. In northern Ohio, we took kids to this cool gorge not far from the school and found frogs, mud puddles, edible mustard plants. They had a ton of fun and didn't want to leave.

The latest Outdoor Industry Association report says the number one reason kids give for not participating in outdoor activities is "not interested."

What's behind that?

I think they just haven't had

the opportunity. Also, our culture and media have convinced us that an unsupervised child is an accident waiting to happen. The media have created this sense of fear of sexual predators, and it has scared parents into over-supervising kids. In reality, abduction doesn't happen that often.

When I was a kid, you played outside for eight hours straight. Now kids just don't get that kind of unstructured play. It's ten minutes here, fifteen minutes there.

Your book, *A Youth's Look at Black and Brown Faces in America's Wild Places* is about role models. How important are role models to kids?

Very important. If all these professional athletes, movie stars and rappers weren't African American, would these kids identify with them? No. I think it's clear our role models need to change. If we put money into advertising mountaineers, whitewater kayakers, or trail runners—put them in Super Bowl ads, for instance—I think we'd make some headway.

I mean, Shaun White—the Olympic snowboarder—is a total inspiration to redheaded kids. They identify with him because he looks like they do. ♦

