

Summer Internship Report 2017

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Hometown: Lookout Mountain, Georgia



**Ecology Research Assistantship:
Environmental Impact of Recreational
Rock Climbing
Tennessee & Colorado**

Provide an overview of the organization/research project and a summary of your responsibilities, tasks, and/or projects.

Connor Peach and I are involved, along with other Sewanee students, in research that studies the impacts climbers have on the environment they use. Our supervisor, Professor Fielding, gave Connor and I the freedom to make the summer research on our own and allowed us to dive in head first. Our objective this summer was to collect information from the climbing community through interviews and observation. The goal for this aspect of our research was to gain a better understanding of climber's general attitude toward the impact they have on climbing areas. For example, what responsibility, if any, do they take on at climbing sites? Is a healthy ecosystem important to them at the areas they choose to climb at, etc.? We created a concise set of questions that we believed would deliver the best responses. Connor and I traveled to various popular climbing areas in the United States to conduct these interviews including; Little Rock City, The Obed, Clear Creek Canyon, and Rifle. We succeeded in finding a wide variety of opinions and answers throughout the climbing community.

During your internship, what did you accomplish or how did you make a difference? In what ways did you grow in your professional and technical skills?

I grew as an individual because of the freedom my professor allowed my partner and me to have with the project. It made me feel responsible for the outcome of the project keeping me engaged the entire process for example the drastic change in plans to relocate from KY to CO.

Describe a problem that you helped to solve at your internship. What skills or knowledge from your education at Sewanee helped you address the problem?

My internship was unlike most typical internships. I lived out of a car/tent for three weeks and climbing sites were my office. One problem that we ran into was getting my two-wheel-drive car stuck on a dirt road and having to walk 4 miles before finding help. We ended up towing my car out ourselves with the generosity of a park ranger's personal car!

In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?

Being with my research partner 24/7 really helped to build my teamwork skills because we were always a team and any decision made had to be made together. For example we changed the plan for our research drastically by deciding to conduct interviews in Colorado instead of Kentucky due to bad weather and poor climbing conditions.

How did your internship affect your career plans?

It has only confirmed my desire to be in the field and continuing to conduct research!

In what ways did your internship cause you to encounter people of different backgrounds from your own? What steps did you take to communicate effectively with such persons? What did you learn from such persons' perspectives?

Having to be assertive and walk up to strangers to ask if we can interview them definitely lead us to encounter people from all sorts of backgrounds whether that be, nationality, financial background, experience with the sport, etc. I had to learn how to best approach people about a serious subject in an casual manner as to not turn people away. I learned a lot of things! People had strong opinions that varied drastically from interviewee to interviewee which lead me to realize there aren't always right and wrong answers, just different opinions and perspectives.

Words of advice for future interns (housing, transportation, etc.)?

None! It's best to go in with no advice and figure it out yourself!

Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:

Thank you, thank you, thank you for allowing me to have this once in a lifetime opportunity! I will always look back on this experience fondly.