



olympic
national forest

what is WILDERNESS

Wilderness is Wonder

I start to recognize a pattern as I watch the kids reflect on their most memorable moments of their first ever wilderness experiences. The youth explain the same events but in slightly different ways...a beautiful view, a grueling stretch of trail, a chilling dip in a crystal clear lake; but this is not the pattern that stands out. Some of the young hikers describe how their time in the wilderness has forced them to disconnect from their phones, their tablets, or their video

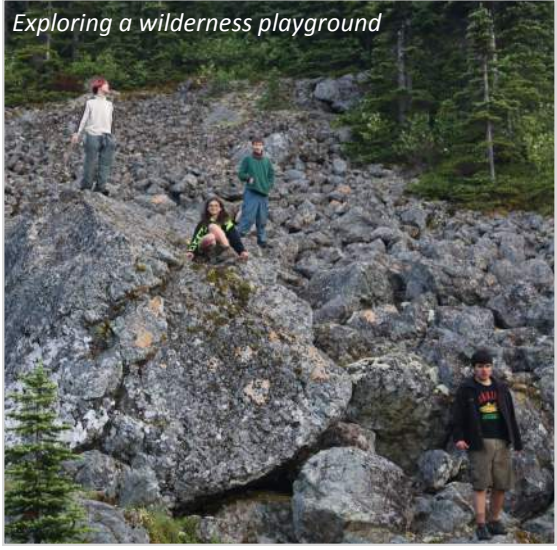


A much deserved rest break along the trail

games; allowing them to understand their dependencies and put them into perspective. This is interesting to note, but not shared among all participants. The pattern I am noticing is not explicitly stated, it is observed.

The kids are exhibiting wonder.

For wilderness to persist it must have stewards, supporters, advocates—people who value preserving these special places. Who will become those stewards—the biologists, environmental educators, adventurers, and explorers—if the younger generations are not exposed to these wild places? Recognizing the challenge presented by a generation increasingly detached from wilderness, the Olympic National Forest recently partnered with Jefferson County 4-H to give teens a taste of the wild. The group documented the kids’ first ever wilderness experiences with guides Marcelle Timyan and Andreas Neisen; the footage from the trip reveals the wonder experienced by the youth throughout their trek.



Exploring a wilderness playground

First time visitors to wilderness often describe it as a transformative moment. The varied beauty, vastness, drama, and serenity of wilderness tends to awe and humble. Marcelle Timyan, an environmental educator and wilderness guide for the 4-H trek, remembers her own transformative experience at the age of 14, when she visited the Enchanted Valley in Olympic National Park on a school trip, "That experience completely changed what I valued; it helped me realize where I fit in the big picture."



for the greatest good

Timyan feels honored to guide other young minds to experience similar realizations. She says the kids on the 4-H trek struggled during the first couple of days due to poor weather and inexperience, but an evening trip to view a spectacular sunset on a ridgeline above Silver Lake **completely transformed their attitudes**. Timyan describes the event:



"I was so privileged to get to witness the events at the ridge that evening. The kids were complaining 'Why are they dragging us up here? What are they taking us to see?' I don't think they had any idea that [what they saw on the ridge] was possible... they will carry that [image of the wilderness] in the fabric of their memories forever."



Enjoying sunset at Silver Lake, Buckhorn Wilderness

Timyan noted that the teenagers had more positive attitudes about their trip following that sunset hike. Rather than complaining about the difficulty of a hike, the kids began to compete for who would lead the group to their next destination. The group

also looked and acted more confident as they accomplished physical feats that they hadn't thought possible of themselves. "I walked like seven miles in one day, which is pretty good for me considering I don't get up and walk around all that often," stated Zach Allen, 13, one of the five kids who participated in the 5 day trek.

Timyan says that by the end of the trip, "the kids were in rhythm with the wilderness and their own capabilities." Rather than conversing about their electronic devices, they spoke with animated tones about their explorations of the Tull Canyon plane wreckage, or the huge view at Marmot Pass. Morgan Headley, 14, described it best: "Out here you are freed from some sort of technology force field."

It is clear that their time in the **wilderness had a profound effect** on the participants. Though their paths may not return them to wilderness anytime soon, there is no doubt the group exited wilderness with a **better understanding of their own capabilities, a fascination with the natural world, and a heightened sense of self**. The ability of wilderness to transform and inspire wonder is part of its **enduring legacy**. It is a gift that must be carried forward so future generations will have the opportunity to discover what is wild within each of them.

Guide Marcelle Timyan (right) with team of intrepid teens



What do our future land stewards look like? Find out for yourself by viewing the wonder experienced by the teenagers who were part of the 4-H wilderness trek. This [video](#) shares some of the highlights and transformative moments captured by the teens and their guides.



-Alex Weinberg, Recreation Specialist, Olympic National Forest
-Lisa Romano, Public Affairs Officer, Olympic National Forest