

REC 3240
Outdoor Leadership in
North Carolina

May 16 - June 10, 2015

(Selected excerpts)

May 17 – Day 1 in NC. Sarah and I have the same journal. Everything is awful.

Just kidding. Yesterday was quite exhausting. We arrived at the cages at 8 (well, most of us) and began with a run down of what to expect and a review of the syllabus. We then took our swim test—which was surprisingly unpleasant—before the shakedown, which was fine and dandy.

After lunch, Ben gave us a lesson on nutrition. We learned that protein is good, but not the most important. Carbs give you energy and if you blend them correctly you can make a complete protein with all the essential amino acids (that our bodies don't make for themselves). Fats are good because they keep us warm and taste good. Key backcountry foods: rice, beans, PB, tortillas.

Then, we rationed. *That* was actually awful. It took way longer than we expected and it was an incredibly inefficient process. If we had talked about it and orchestrated the event with the entire group instead of just our cook groups we could have been much more efficient. Having certain people at each station knowing how many groups of 2 and 3 and making the rations for each group for both sections of the trip probably would have gone a lot more quickly.

Otherwise, it was an interesting learning experience.

Today wasn't very eventful. Cameron didn't show up on time so we left without him, but he woke up and his roommate drove him! So that was good. The ride was calm and we mostly slept.

When we got to the site we set up our tents, mess shelter, and started cooking, which I think went pretty well. The shelter set-up was a bit of a mess but it will get better I guess.

19th- Day 1 of backpacking went well. The packs, unfortunately, weigh about 50 or 60 lbs with food and bear canisters, but we made it to camp.

This morning we were very purposeful and on top of things. Our leadership team really killed it last night with planning and preparing, mostly thanks to Jason.

We were pretty much functioning on the time schedule we had planned, and had time to get a good group stretch and interpretive dance, which was good.

The hike was alright. Not too hard or long, but with inexperience backpackers it was a little rough and we had issues with pacing but we made it.

Jason's biggest decision was our campsite. I like it, but it isn't ideal by any standards. He recognized, though, that it might be the best possible option with what we had to work with.

As far as I could tell, that didn't affect anything too dramatically. There was definitely some skepticism among the group but I never doubted him, especially considering I came along to scout.

Tomorrow may be a completely different story. Josh is LOD and we will be gaining 2100 ft in 4.5 miles. I'm navigator, which is crazy because I have very little knowledge with nav. and am doing what I can with what I have. I may ask Jason to help me with my compass.

We also have to squeeze in 3 teaching topics and they don't flow in as easily as today's did...

I am having fun. I love being in the backcountry with such an intelligent and diverse group of people. I am learning a lot but I will be relieved to be off the team so I can organize my thoughts for this journal. Nighty night.

20th- Hard day on the trail but a good day for the leadership team, I think.

This morning started really well. Everyone was really purposeful and got things done. I was kind of nervous to lead as navigator this morning but it ended up going really well. I got nervous when I saw what looked like another trail but Jason taught me how to orient my map and we decided it wasn't right, although it ended up just being a shortcut trail... oh well.

The trail was incredibly steep after we filled our drums and it was rough on everyone, and we didn't get to the Art Loeb Trail until 5. We ended up camping at the intersection of the Farlow Gap Trail and the Art Loeb trail in a really beautiful area just after we summited Shuck Ridge.

The decision to camp was probably the most important decision made by Josh today. The most important thing I learned, or that stood out the most to me, was making the decision to not complete our mileage. I was concerned about how that might impact subsequent days, but it ended up being the right decision based on the group. I think this was the most important learning point because it was my biggest concern for today, apparently unreasonably.

If it had not been for the decision to put the group before the mileage, I might not have learned the importance of contingency plans and flexibility. This was important to my learning process to help me let go of the itinerary and address needs of the group first.

ASLOD tomorrow. I think it will go well. Caleb is LOD.

21st- Day 3 of backpacking. We are camped along Flat Laurel Creek before Sam's Knob. Birds are chirping, the creek is flowing, and we are laughing and it was a rough day.

The morning started out just fine. We were worried about water so Sarah and I followed Bruce and Kay to what probably was a tiny water source that we couldn't find...

So we hiked. We hiked up Art Loeb Trail to the Blue Ridge Parkway, which wasn't that bad but right after was pretty intense... haha get it? But, yeah.

Then we were nearly out of water. We got to Chestnut Bald at 2:30 and there was still no water. We ended up hiking another couple miles to get here, which was the right choice on Caleb's part, and probably his biggest decision for the day.

I learned from this that there is always going to be water in the mountains and that dehydration is bad. I mean, quickly. I was barely dehydrated before we got to the creek but I was irritable and sad already.

To me it is more valuable than another lesson because it is important to prioritize for your basic necessities. If it hadn't been for learning how bad dehydration is I wouldn't have learned to look harder for water.

Now I am definitely going to keep water as a priority.

I am LOD tomorrow. We are taking a layover day and doing a day hike up to Sam's Knob, and covering 5 teaching topics. It should be a nice relaxing day.

22nd- I'm LOD, it is a layover day, and it is Caleb's birthday.

This morning started out really slowly. I let everyone sleep in for an hour and then we had an hour and a half to eat breakfast, put away bear bags, and pack for the day hike to Sam Knob but we were 25 minutes late. I take partial blame; I don't think I properly laid out my expectations for what needed to be done. But I also think the group didn't manage their time too well, although that could still be attributed to me.

It wasn't a huge deal though. We dove right in after my Tao on uncluttering your mind and did one lesson on maps and another compass, both of which were quite informative.

We started our hike to the knob around 12:40, also a bit later than I had hoped, and made it to the top by 1:35, which makes me optimistic about our descent time.

Currently we are in the midst of a 1 hr lunch/reflection/journal time and I am worried about the people still chatting. Should I be? I sort of made it optional but I was really hoping they would take advantage of it.

We have 3 lessons to give up here before we head back down and do dinner. I will write again after my debrief. I am going to go check on everyone and get eyes on them.

☺ I am happy. Today went really well minus a few flukes, but in my debrief everyone said I did an awesome job, especially for giving everyone a chance to unclutter, reflect, and journal.

***Note: I wish I would have written in my journal more specifics about feedback received, but I wrote it—and other LOD's feedback—in a different notebook during debriefs.*

25th- Today is course day 10, BP8: solo day. On BP6 Dan was LOD. Dan's biggest decision was our campsite, which tied in with the TCP that was off by two hours.

We arrived at Ivestor Gap at 2:30 that afternoon. The group had plenty of energy but, for reasons of which I am unaware, Dan chose to have us camp there. He decided on the big open field after Gillian and Jason came back from the grove of trees with word that there were definite signs of bear activity.

I learned from this decision that it is incredibly important to have a contingency plan in place if the TCP does not go as planned, because the site itself ended up being a good decision, we had just had a lot of weird lingering time that we didn't know what to do with, which I think caused Dan to lose some credibility with the group.

If it had not been for the lack of a contingency plan, I probably wouldn't have learned to always have one. This is an important learning point so that I always have a backup to my backup.

And then things got interesting. After dinner Jason and I went to hang the few bears bags we had left. We were casually strolling up the trail and chatting as a black bear was casually strolling towards us on the same trail. Both parties froze and

turned around. Jason and I were in awe and laughing as we ran back and then the madness began.

After the group essentially chased the bear up to the pile of food above which we had planned to hang our bags, we found a new spot in the wilderness area (Shining Rock) and saw another bear. We then formed a plan for a 1-hr shift nightlong bear watch. By this point, Bruce had taken command as Dan had completely fallen back into a participant role.

Gillian, Sarah and I had the 2nd shift; 45 minutes after the last sighting at 10:15. The rest of the night was uneventful although the watch itself was beautiful, exhilarating, and quick.

Yesterday Ben was LOD. It was a much less eventful day although my 2 plastic containers that I had put in the bear bag had both been bitten.

Ben's biggest decision—or indecision—was with our breaks and lunchtime. It seemed like we were waiting too long to rest and then taking too long of rests. They were in weird places at weird times and lunch was much too late. (2:15! And after a small breakfast!)

To me the most valuable thing I learned was to have realistic expectations for your group's mental and physical needs. It was going to be a long day with lots of views so multiple, short, packs-on breaks along the ridgeline were definitely in order. This is valuable because it is easy to forget one or the other when planning. If it had not been for this small gift I would not have learned to remember where you are hiking along with how much.

This was important to my process because now I will be sure to consider these things and plan break times accordingly.

Ben did an excellent job, especially for getting up at 6 with an hour and a half to plan with his team.

2nd- Yesterday Gillian was LOD and it was our smoothest day yet—it went so well.

We got up early—4:45 early—and busted a\$& to leave camp by 6:30. We got to our destination (Sheep Pen Cove) 6 miles away in 3 hours (9:45). Then I gave my TCP lesson, which mostly went well except as I was baking in the sun I forgot to have everyone share their practice TCPs, oops.

Gillian's biggest and best decision was our group activity. We had a follow-up to Dan's knot lesson and then did a knot relay. We all had a lot of fun and it really was nice group bonding.

From this decision I learned that it is important for groups to have activities and games to play together. Cliques form easily and it is important for everyone to be included in group time and to not feel excluded.

In the future I will definitely include time for group activities to help relieve every day stress and any tension that may be there.

Today has been interesting. Cam and I were the first sea kayaking CLOD duo and it was definitely a change of pace.

We struggled the most with communication—with each other and the group as a whole. I definitely regret the relationship he and I had as CLODs with the group.

One of the reasons we struggled was because we had different ideas for how things were going to go. I also wanted to talk to the group as a whole and that was a rare occurrence today. I prefer addressing an entire group at the same time—it is, in my opinion, the best way to ensure that everyone has the same information.

We definitely struggled a lot with navigation, but that will come with time. It was the overall lack of group management during travel that was disappointing to me. When Caleb brought it to my attention [that they were uncomfortable] I felt really bad for how poorly we handled it (which was not at all).

I wasn't a very vocal leader today, although I wasn't on my BP LOD day either. Cam's personality is much more vocal than mine so I fell into the background. I made a lot of decisions w/o the group being aware of it and conferred with Cam, then he would tell the group, which worked for me. Considering we are essentially at the same level of training, I didn't really feel the need to be more vocal. He probably even has more experience than me and I am uncomfortable overstepping when it may cause "fighting in front of the kids."

I do not want to be looked at as a 'female outdoor leader.' I just want to be an 'outdoor leader.' I see myself as a person with a personality, past and style. My gender does not define me or my leadership. I am situationally strong and incredibly aware of my limitations and qualifications. Gender is an important social conversation but I don't believe it is relevant—or doesn't need to be—in an outdoor leadership perspective, and it definitely wasn't relevant today. I understand that I am a role model and I am comfortable modeling modesty, awareness, confidence, competence and strength. I don't believe that to be a great 'female outdoor leader' I need to be more vocal. Even in Bruce's reading, the "leader who was seldom known" was the model. I am not sure if that role has become an accepted or respected one for women as it is for me, but I think that that is what I identify with.

Apologies for the rant. I think that I have the potential to be a role model for many girls—or boys—but I will do so on my own terms and probably for a small population *and that's okay*.

I'm disappointed in the apparent dishonesty that Cam displayed on multiple occasions, and the complete lack of authenticity I felt and have felt in all of our interactions.