

Published March 3rd, 2010

The Yosemite Institute

By Christina Kim



Adam Burns (local musician and YI instructor) explains the procedures and ramifications of water quality tests. Student data is an important component for the Upper Merced Watershed Council
Photo Jane Kelson

guides are all incredibly intelligent. It's fun to go out and learn while you're outside." The guides, or instructors, at the Yosemite Institute face stiff competition to gain those positions and are some of the best teachers and scientists available. The guides take groups of students on hikes throughout the National Park and conduct lectures while walking as well as lead students in scientific experiments such as testing the water quality of rivers.

The students, and Campolindo's teachers, emphasize that the Yosemite Institute is as much about personal growth as scientific inquiry. Since students must have taken at least two years of science to attend, the majority of the students that participate in the Yosemite Institute trip are seniors on the brink of leaving home for the first time. The trip serves as a precursor to the independence and growth that many will encounter when they leave to attend college.

Roxanna Jackman, a Campolindo Biology and Physiology teacher, also participates in the trip and agrees that the Yosemite Institute prepares students for the new challenges of adulthood. "Many of the students get physically and emotionally pushed out of their comfort zone, which is inevitably going to happen in college when they are away from friends and family," explains Jackman. Geology student and senior Jennifer Hardy says, "Everyday [at the Yosemite Institute] you get out of your comfort zone but each day it gets bigger."

The trip also serves to break down clique behavior and show students that everything from nature to people is interconnected. "They find out they have a lot in common with people who they never thought they would," states Kelson. Kenel agrees that the trip truly helps people come out of their shells and allows students to rekindle friendships from elementary school that may have faded over the years. He concludes, "The Yosemite Institute is something I will never forget, not just because of the surroundings but because of the community we all built while we were there."

In spite of the Acalanes High School District's recent financial problems, Campolindo's annual trip to the Yosemite Institute still took place this year due to support and funding from the Parent's Club and the Moraga Education Foundation (MEF). This year 40 science students attended the Yosemite Institute from January 31st to February 5th, 2010. The Yosemite Institute provides a structured educational program that is designed to teach students science in the field as well as imbue them with a sense of stewardship for the land. The ability to make direct connections between ecology, biology, geology, and chemistry in a natural setting makes scientific concepts more tangible and real.

Campolindo became affiliated with the Yosemite Institute in 1998, when Geology teacher Jane Kelson discovered the program and coordinated the first trip. "I wanted to give students the opportunity to take what they were learning in the classroom and apply it in a real setting," explains Kelson. Her enthusiasm for the extended field trip has not waned over the years and she continues to oversee and chaperone the program along with five other teachers. Kelson notes, "The students get very excited about science on this trip."

Kenton Kenel, a senior who participated this year, is one such enthusiastic student. "The instructors connect biology, geology, and ecology. The amount of knowledge that they have about everything was awe inspiring," explains Kenel. Senior Kelly McKay concurs, "The



Students perform a variety of water quality tests in small groups, collect data and read informational cards about the impact of varying levels. (Tests include, temperature of water/air, pH, dissolved oxygen, clarity & turbidity, ammonia/nitrogen, conductivity)
Photo Jane Kelson

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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