

APPEL SCRAPBOOK



MOUNTAIN MEN, DISPLACEMENT, & MINI CITIES

After reading a short article on them, I honestly considered that *if* I lived in the 1800s and I didn't want to live in the exponentially growing cities and industries, and of course *if* I was a white, male with enough money to travel freely, I would become a mountain [wo]man.

Pro of the title: Traveling and exploring wherever I please.

Con of the title: I'd contribute to the success of the colonizers...on second thought, maybe I don't wanna be one.

Yellowstone was taken over by white travelers with a thirst to find anything that would make them money. A couple hundred years later and this area becomes the first national park. At this point, many of the Native tribes have already been driven out. Forced out of their sacred home lands. Their culture and dignity stripped away from them. A recurring pattern in the history of these parks, but it all started here in Yellowstone. That's why I decided to include this writing here. Yes, those incoming settlers who fought to protect and preserve these lands were well-intentioned, but they were wrong to displace these people and build "historic-monuments" in these "new tourism-driven" spots. The rich will always take over and get away with what they want. The others are left marginalized and exposed, lacking the resources to secure and endorse their land and rights. The dark dots left behind in history were all connecting now to the present day. Now, tourists from all over the world stomp on "public land". The sickly feeling I got from this realization was almost enough to reflect on Yellowstone with utter disgust.



Welcome to Yellowstone National Park

Yellowstone is a special place, and very different from your home. Like any grand adventure, your Yellowstone journey will take you to impressive new locations and introduce you to new experiences. There are different risks here than you may have faced before. **You are responsible for your own safety.**

We need your help to preserve the wildlife, natural features, and cultural treasures that bring so many visitors to Yellowstone. **The park rules protect you and also protect the park.** Follow the park rules for a safe and enjoyable visit. Please be a positive part of the Yellowstone experience. More guidance is described inside and online at www.nps.gov/yell/planyourvisit/rules.htm.



How "faithful" is Old Faithful Geysers?

Since its first documentation in 1870, Old Faithful has been one of the more predictable geysers. Over time, the average interval between Old Faithful's eruptions has increased or decreased, due to changes in its plumbing from ongoing processes and earthquakes. The Hebgen Lake Earthquake (1959), caused an increase in the time between eruptions. The average interval between eruptions of Old Faithful Geysers, as of February 2019, is 98 minutes \pm 10 minutes, with intervals ranging from 79 to 109 minutes.





"In God's wilderness lies
the hope of the world -
the great unredempted wilderness. The
galling harness of
civilization drops off,
and wounds heal ere
we are aware."
- John Muir



Jehovah's Witness 2 Old Ladies

This interview was the first time I saw the true connection between religion and mother nature. These women sat in the middle of the picnic area, patiently waiting to be approached. I gave myself a pep talk as I walked over, worried that I might misspeak and offend them. I presented my most respectful self to them.

Their purpose at the park was "to reach people." They believed that "God created the earth and everything we see for our liking." Growing up with outdoorsy families in Montana, nature couldn't be avoided, especially when there was "no TV to entertain you". "Nature offers a lot of things we can't get else wise. [You] never see something twice, it's always changing." They said that with the help of nature they reach a meditative, mindful state: they feel at peace with life and God. Similar to the older couple I spoke to earlier. Even though in both cases I was worried of "saying the wrong thing", they both opened up about their elevated state of mind. I wondered if I would ever be able to understand what they are talking about.

Some limitations they've had to overcome are non-wheelchair-accessible places. One of them has a daughter in a wheelchair and explained how sometimes they have to pay extra for wheelchair accessible camping sites. However, they understand if a wide, paved trail were built it would overcompensate and destroy the delicate surroundings. Intervention has been one of our most influential abilities and destructive flaws. Even though these parks are harming the lands by carving roads and trails into them, we all had an understanding of how these places are meant to teach people how to protect and maintain these lands. That is why it's important to have designated places of wilderness, otherwise they would probably become a vacation getaway resort.

They ended with saying "there must be a balance [in nature]. God needs to intervene. Humans can't always achieve that themselves." The history of human's detrimental tendencies against the environment has resulted in dramatic alterations of certain landscapes. These women believed these actions were unnecessary and only God could be the true decision-maker when it comes to nature's best interest. Nature's everchanging state is a key example of how human intervention and their intentions can greatly differ from one person to another. It also manifests how someone doesn't have to be a god to know what is right and wrong.

These women taught me how you can utilize nature to reach others because it offers more than any man-made thing could give us. They also implanted a new idea into my mind: no one is truly qualified to make decisions for nature's best interest, which I couldn't argue with. Although we have coexisted with each other and other creatures for thousands of years, we still haven't managed to figure out how-to live-in peace. No one is ever satisfied and not everyone survives. It's a brutal truth, and it could bring about hopelessness. Luckily, the only thing we can count on



Black Family of 4

Out on a cross-country vacation, this Texas family decided to check Yellowstone off their bucket list. Since they don't consider themselves to be "outdoorsy at all", they only go to developed parks and stay in hotels, the whole wilderness concept isn't their thing. "We don't sleep under the stars...It gets itchy and sweaty... We visit high and low, but that's it. We drive to the point and move on." These were the first people that I spoke to that felt this way. Before them, everyone reacted to the outdoors the same way. The tree-hugger, Patagonia outfit w/hiking sticks kind of person. This person creates an illusion of exclusivity in the outdoor community, which further contributes to the lack of inclusivity in outdoor recreation. Not everyone can be the stereotypical outdoorsy person for whatever reason that may be. Therefore, it was refreshing to find people who experienced the outdoors differently and embodied an underrepresented group. I could tell they have a good time together as a family. However, they made a puzzling comment about how black people normally "don't do this stuff". They aren't as present in the outdoors, and they think it's either because 1) they don't care, 2) they're "stuck in their way of life", or 3) the culture. This was my first tangible example of how the "outdoors culture" isn't as inclusive as some of its participant's naïvely believe. It's sometimes difficult to explain how culture influences who comes to these places. One example could be that for some people, they are unable to escape cultural archetypes for whatever that reason may be. Some can almost feel caged inside this paradigm. However, by living in the United States many people have the freedom and privilege to choose who they are as an individual, and present themselves how they want to be identified. This family believed, "people need to get out on their own", outreach programs can be created, but they need to decide for themselves to go for it. The family's simple explanation disclosed how someone's lack of interest to go beyond that cage could be the singular reason why they don't go outside.

I encourage everyone that if you have the chance to step outside that cage, then take it. Through various frequencies, I have been able to step in and outside the cage whenever I please. If I want to display a certain identity in one setting, then I'll do it. If I want to suppress one because of safety or another reason, then I'll adapt to the new setting. It's okay to be a bit fluid, but never hold yourself back from having unique experiences.



LATE SUNSETS

It looks like dawn is coming upon us. The birds are still tweeting in sync. A steady chill comes over me as the sun's heat disappears. Surrounding campfires fill the sky with tunnels of smoke. Grey towers soaring and disappearing into the atmosphere. Light pinks and oranges envelop the west side of the park. A wolf howls in the distance. Night will come soon, and we shall sleep. Meanwhile others are just getting their days started. Hunting hour has begun. It is time for daytime creatures to seek refuge in their shelters. A chill races up my body, and goosebumps run down my legs. I have never experienced a sunset at 9:45PM. And there is nothing like it.

Asian American Young Woman, Interpretations Ranger

"Were you like, "OH! An Asian American ranger, I need to talk to her!"" I mean she wasn't wrong. It's not often that you see POC as park workers. When I saw her pass by us on the hike, my dad urged me to talk to her. I chased her up the trail and politely asked for an interview. She was ecstatic about the topic. I got lucky with being able to speak to her because I finally got a distinctive POC viewpoint of the NPS.

She went from working at an environmental consulting firm in California to becoming an interpretations ranger to educate people about Yellowstone. Although she highlighted her love for the outdoors, it wasn't always a priority in her family. "Coming from an immigrant household, and a community and culture where outdoors was not emphasized, my parents worked really hard to live in America and have a job. So why would they want me to live in a tent? It's a foreign concept [not a priority to others]." A first-generation American has another way of seeing the world. Even though I wasn't born in the U.S., I still consider myself to be a first-generation American because I came at such a young age and am experiencing everything other first-gen individuals go through. The struggle of not fitting in, not knowing English language as well, battling between your parent's expectations and society's expectations. I immediately found connection with this ranger.

She mentions how Yellowstone does try to hire bilingual rangers, for example she speaks Mandarin. However, even though the park seems to have the idea of diversity "drawn up, it's not a strong platform...Saying it is easier, but action is different." Looks like it is all talk, but no doing. How can an agency claim a mission without actually following through with all the facets that come with it? With many parks, all I hear are false assertions with no evidence to prove their implementations. They have the real power to institute change.

With visitors, she didn't know of any specific park programs, but was well aware of the cost and distance issue. A lesser known issue is the fact that some "POC don't know how to act in the outdoors. They don't understand certain rules or regulations, like don't blast music in the woods, or "leave no trace". If there's a lack of education, then you can't get mad at them if they didn't have that access [or knowledge]." Education would have to come alongside with increased access for some POC. She went on to list several viable solutions to reduce barriers for POC, all very attainable. It's just a matter of convincing those in power to establish those resources. This ranger is contributing to the outdoor social movement by managing a website that focuses on sustainable living, eco-conscious travel, and articles on outdoor people of color. She wants to combat commercialization and urbanization in wildlife areas and hopes to educate people about the importance of why we have national parks. Despite the frustration with the inadequate programs and resources available for certain communities, she gave me hope that changes are being made. It may be slow, but it is happening.



Hot Springs of my favorite color. These pools are everchanging due to the underground water system.



WHY DID THE REALIZATION COME SO RECENTLY?

This was the first place where I found people who truly understood my purpose, project, and questions. The diverse individuals I had the pleasure of speaking to made me realize that there's much more than just financial constraints. The LGBTQ community, people with disabilities, the workforce, and dark history are all examples that add up to the inequity found in the outdoors. What I didn't know was that this was only the beginning to more discoveries.



Old, White Couple (Woman Mostly Spoke)

This woman's rich stories were filled with nostalgia and admiration for the park. At 75 years old, this is the 65th year she visits Yellowstone, and its grandeur still brings joy to her heart.

Her dad was a sheep sharer and every June after he was finished with the farm, they'd head west of Missouri and spend the whole summer in Yellowstone. Although he had two daughters, he wanted to teach them how to hunt, fish, and camp. This reminded me of how my father, despite being a girl, still taught me all the "manly" tasks. He would ask me to help move and lift objects, fix little things, work outside, measure and use tools, etc. Maybe it was because I was the eldest and he knew my Ma wouldn't help. But now I realize that our fathers knew that in order for us to succeed, we had to know all the "how to" tricks in life. They didn't want us to be held down by society's gender norms.

The first issue she stated was how overcrowding has become an increasing concern at Yellowstone. She lived during a time where you could camp there all summer and you could walk straight up to the geysers and gaze into their insides. Now there's all types of limitations put into place in an effort to preserve the scenery. This ties into safety and wheelchair access as she recalls a time she needed to use one after a knee replacement. However, the parks "can't help it. They could redesign the walkways with minimum slope, but you have to destroy nature to accommodate, the bridges and elevators, it's a toss-up." Again, what is the best decision?

They were up front about the diversity questions and said, "We talk about it quite often because we've definitely noticed [the lack of diversity]. As white and English-speaking people we don't run into any of that, so it's hard to see the other side. Language barrier is the most likely reason. There's research that you can do prior to maneuver or overcome that barrier."

We talked for almost an hour, she spoke of simpler days where her and her sisters would eat sandwiches all lined up on a log. Four little girls happy to be outside, unscathed from the world's ills. She recalls how you'd hear the grizzlies roaming the campgrounds, and she can't count all the times she's heard people ask, "Are there tubes and pipes underground?" She shakes her head at this ridiculousness and jokes that "Yes, I turned on the eruption!" Funny and unforgettable stories where no one could stop her from exploration. Now, she says, "I do what I can do...nature overwhelms me with euphoria and memories." She gazes beyond the view and tears start running down her cheeks as emotions leave her daydreaming. The imprint this place has left on her heart has filled her with unimaginable consciousness and intimacy. I hope that by the time I reach her age, my love and memories of the outdoors are so deep that passionate emotions run throughout my body.

Her and I identified the same in one aspect, and she identified in others. As much as she'd like to understand, she had no way of explaining why certain groups do not visit national parks.

However, her knowledge and experience is invaluable to the understanding of Yellowstone's past and its progression. She realizes we have a while to go to reach the level of education and awareness for the irreplaceable outdoors, but in this life anything is possible.



"In every walk
with nature, one
receives for more
than he seeks."
- John Muir

Two Young Individuals from the LGBTQ community (*forgot to ask for pronouns, referred to as they/them/theirs)

To some, nature can be extremely freeing and allow one to be at one with thyself, with no distractions and no judgement. These two individuals learned autonomy and transparency with the nature's aid. They found freedom.

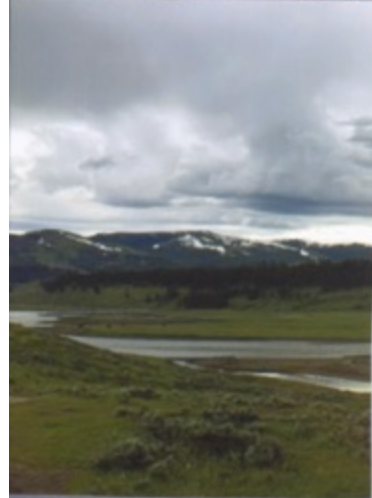
I was pumping gas at one of the Yellowstone gas stations when I heard them talking. I turn around as they were finishing up. Young people tend to be less restrictive with their words, and these two people looked like college intern. They were perfect interviewees.

One of them grew up in a small town and eventually moved to a big city, and always hated how far reached the outdoors was. The other person grew up in a South Dakota raised by the country/hunting type of parents, but they were always trying to figure their roots. Both of them were chasing their desire for adventure and change by working at the park for 6-months. But let's back track to when they realized the outdoors was a space for them.

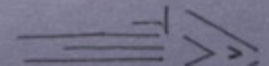
For the first person, at 14-years-old they realized nature was a "peaceful place to focus on myself and to get to be myself." Struggling with mental health while growing up, they found sunshine and fresh air as a way to cope. Very relatable. Besides completing my project, another purpose of this travel is to restore and cope with all the struggles I've gone through the past year. If you ever want to figure something out, the outdoors may be your answer.

For the other, they said "when I became comfortable with my identity." Nature gives them a feeling of euphoria and being grounded. The only thing that holds them back from fully immersing in it is the "masculine toxicity of this lifestyle and the outdoors." They said "there's a very manly perception that only those types of people can make it. Therefore, certain groups [that don't identify in that way] may be discouraged from participating." This is an explanation I have been waiting for. Cisgender women, trans individuals, gender binary individuals, and people of color are less commonly represented and seen in outdoor settings, and one of the many reasons is this aura of the ideal "outdoorsman". Certain groups feel unwelcomed and unwanted, the range is based on the level of acceptance they sense around them.

Many of these individual's ideas and insights could be considered controversial to some, but I thought they were well-intentioned. They were concerned their words weren't "allowed" to be said, since they did have federal jobs, but they knew the truth was more important to tell. These were some of their words: "In a modernized world, you can't take full advantage of nature's experience. You walk on paths, over bridges, no matter what you're gonna be using some form of human technology." They continued by implying that we are taking advantage of earth in a harmful way. "The environment that we destroyed by the Manifest Destiny and how god told us to come here isn't true." To them, national parks are a way to "make rich people to feel better about themselves, but they never dive into nature for real. They stay in hotel and walk on boardwalks. They aren't reminded of how small they are. It just gives them a reason to feel like they're not killing the earth." Even though "I grew up privileged for being white, I understand others don't have access. People in poverty don't feel like it's for them. They don't feel like they can enjoy it too." This I know too well. In the other end of the spectrum, the leisure activities that



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come with being outdoors is a luxury many cannot afford. Those who are under-resourced and under-represented would never in a million years think about planning a week-long trip to Yellowstone. I noticed for a lot of the people here, everything seems so easy, no barriers, just minor inconveniences along the way. Sure, they may still complain about prices, but they are never forced/obligated to deny themselves or their company certain commodities. They don't have to think twice about what they want to eat or where to get gas. They have that opulence, and they don't ask themselves basic survival questions.

Furthermore, they said the NPS workforce can be a little "isolating for people like us. Once you know everyone, that's it. There's no new feelings, thoughts, or perspectives." The LGBTQ community in the NPS workforce is very small, similar to the disproportional amount of POC workers. Although the NPS is inclusive with the hiring process, meaning anyone is allowed to apply, it lacks retainment and a welcoming feeling. They have to better "promote the message that everyone belongs" both in the workforce and visitation. It was incredibly interesting to gain a behind-the-scenes view, and a unique perception of a not so "national park ideal".

These two individuals emphasized the fact that "we are all humans, all capable [of something], we all have instincts". When people believe that they don't belong in these spaces is illogical considering that our ancestors lived in the outdoors. Likewise, gender and sexual orientation should not impact the visitation demographics of a national park. Everyone deserves the right to be there and should feel welcomed in that space. We are meant to be one with nature and technological developments have gradually influenced our ideas on the wild. The two individuals discussed how nowadays it's hard for anyone to think positively and be motivated about social change. "Our presidential leadership needs to change first," they said.



"I know our bodies were made to thrive only in pure air, and the scenes in which pure air is found."
-John Muir

High School Girl with Korean Family

You know how you have that one movie you can watch countless times and never get tired of it? This is what Yellowstone is for this Korean family. When I first approached them, 10 faces looked up at me mid-eating their sandwiches. It was a mix of middle-aged adults and children, who seemed more like cousins than siblings. As I gave my project blurb, most of the adults stared with half-empty faces. When I finished, no one said a word, rather they all pointed at a young girl at the end of the table. She obediently stood up and walked over to the neighboring table with me. She tells me she's in high school and that most of her family is from out of the country. I quickly understood and connected with her. She was the chosen translator of the family.

This was their third time in Yellowstone, and as Los Angeles residents, they've visited all the California national parks as well. A few years back, after visiting the Grand Canyon for the first time during the winter, she realized the outdoors was a space for her. The Canyon captivated her imagination and adventurer side. An important piece of her travels was her family. She always travels with them, and she is grateful for being in the United States where these places exist. "The other half of my family is still in Korea, [and] since we are here, we take advantage of these opportunities". Like other large families traveling to these remote parks, her family had trouble with organization and communication. I realize how this lack of communication is attributed physical detachment from external family members. Looks like we had more in common than I thought. They too came to the U.S. to strive for a better life filled with unimaginable opportunities, such as these parks. Another barrier was obviously cost. Bringing two cars wracks up the price tag for everything and finding the time where they're all free is difficult with working adults.

She believes that if "people can step out of comfort zones", then they can make a real "connection between [themselves] and the wild". Perhaps that will help them realize these amazing places are not worth ruining and must be preserved.

Even though she comes from a completely different background and culture from mine, our family values and traditions were very similar. Our families do everything together, and we emphasize and treasure that time with each other. The nature of being part of an immigrant family brings about responsibility that other people don't experience, such as being that designated speaker for the group.



Dominican Republic Gift Shop Worker, Young Man

A single photograph and a couple swaying stories were enough to convince this man to come work at Yellowstone National Park. Only a month had passed since first stepping foot on U.S. land. Out on his own, knowing little English (he preferred Spanish), he bought a plane ticket and started a new life. He was the definition of YOLO. He moved here to have new experiences and live differently from other's back home. "My favorite part about being in the outdoors is that I can connect/communicate differently than the rest of the people." He's been the only one in his family who's been interested in getting to know the outdoors. It's hard to access it living in the city, he says. The animals are his greatest fascination, and he wishes people would explore the unknown more often, because they won't know true beauty until they see it for themselves. Except convincing others of taking that physical step outside can be the hardest part about it. I understood where he was coming from, especially from a Latinx perspective. Often times, Latinx families are afraid to go beyond their known, comfortable world. They don't have as deep an understanding for nature, which could just be due to lack of knowledge. For example, in his country, "depending on your social class, people who don't study or less educated don't know importance or what nature is. ...My country is still developing so they don't know how to cherish it." Sometimes Latinx families will go out for a bit to have a picnic or have a short hike; and through small actions like recycling plastic bags and aluminum cans we find ways to save the environment and money. Despite having these connections to the outdoors, they don't see it in the same light. There is a point where it's deemed "strange" to completely immerse yourself in nature, for example, backpacking for a week. Families may say something like, "What if something happens to you? Why do you want to be out where it's cold, hot, dirty, and unsafe? There is no way you're going on your own!" Or they'll just flat out call you crazy for even thinking about doing something like it and try to find the source of those unsound thoughts. The idea of certain outdoor activities, such as extreme ones, aren't fully normalized in our culture. People fear what they don't know, and their worst fear is someone going off on their own. In my family, the rule is that if one person goes and does it, then everyone has to do it. He thought the best way to publicize was to target what people watch. For Latinx folk, he suggested telenovelas (soap operas) and movies. Definitely not a bad idea, especially telenovelas which are extremely popular in some households. I really appreciated his insights because he knew how nature can connect worlds and people that would've never otherwise.



"The wrongs done to trees,
wrongs of every sort, are
done in the darkness of
ignorance and unbelief,
for when the light comes,
the heart of the people
is always right."
- John Muir



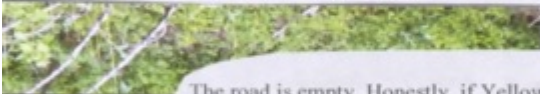
FIGHT NIGHT

Light shoves and pushes from bison can still be deathly powerful against the feeble human. These wild animals are a reminder to how physically disadvantaged we are compared to them. To them this is play fighting, but it is still dynamic movements. Their sporadic head movements and grunts are meant to intimidate the opponent, so all I really got to see what the pre-fight to the real fight. Although they calmly pass inches away from vehicles, their apparent tameness should not be misunderstood. These creatures, if provoked, will defend themselves, and it won't be pretty.



BEAR CUBS

alone, with it's mother probably nearby. The young cub freely explores its surroundings. Everyone keeps their distance, not wanting to startle it. One outcrop of mom would be running to defend her cub against any danger.



WYOMING

The road is empty. Honestly, if Yellowstone weren't here, I don't think anyone would really come to this state. I bet Yellowstone is their biggest recreation area and attention-grabber. It is the first U.S. national park. Wyoming has the first National Monument too, Devil's Tower. A state full of pristine nature left virtually unmarked. Cheyenne, their capital, is small as heck. The place didn't even have any buildings that were higher than 10 stories tall! Everything is so spread out. Infinite grass fields with gusty winds separate each town from another. I noticed these wooden walls all lined up the freeway. I guess it's to cut down the strong winds. The weather is pretty pleasant right now, but I can't imagine the windy winters. The tiny passerby towns appear every 80 miles or so, but the population numbers for most of them were lower than my small hometown of 11,000! Sorry Wyoming but you won't be in my top states to live in.



HOW TO HIDE THE GOODS FROM BEARS

Have you ever heard of a Bear Box? Almost sounds like a dating app for wild bears. Or a sequel to Bird Box. It could become a Hollywood movie idea. Pretty fear-inducing for some people, if you know what I mean. But anyways, a bear box is what Grand Teton National Park's Tent Village has to store any foods bears would try to get their hands on. Other parks have it too. Any trace of a tasty or edible smell attracts the bears. Anything from an expired Snickers bar to cologne smells like food to a bear. Manufactured to be "bear proof", these rust-colored steel boxes were built to block the scents and bear claws. The manager told us it is rare for bears to come, but you never know if you may wake up to a deadly surprise. AHAAH



"Between every two pine trees there is a door leading to a new way of life." - John Muir



SEA OF TREES

Just before the Canyon Village of Yellowstone, there was a sea. But it was no ordinary sea. This one took me aback, and I finally saw how the untouched wilderness was meant to be. Thousands of trees, both dead and alive standing before me. I stood a little closer to the edge of the overlook to catch the closest picture I can to capture this perfection, but no camera could ever do that. So, this is the best pic I got from it. These were more than just a bunch a trees in a normal looking wood. Each of them has a story and has endured unknown tragedies and hardships. I know I sound like a real tree-hugger when I say all this, but I can't say I am one compared to the level of commitment of other people. How could you look at such magnificence and not have any sense of bewilderment? If you just take a moment to notice and drift in wonder about the possible journey these trees have experienced, you are immersed in their world. Like I said, hundreds were burnt or dying from natural causes, but thousands more were growing strong. Hundreds of other organisms rely on these trees, and they too experience unique journeys. They are the circle of life in its purest form. For the newbies, their lifelong fight for survival is just beginning.

Old Black Couple

Celebrating their 50th anniversary, this couple had been engaging in the outdoors for years now. They've traveled to several other states and parks, enjoying the variety of scenery and the blatant change from everyday life. During the interview, everything seemed to be going okay, until the "implied" questions came along. When I started asking about diversity, they seemed to cut short their responses. Their answers ranging from 2-5 words. What was holding them back? Maybe they were suspicious of my questions and what they would ultimately lead to. Perhaps, they just wanted to stay as inclusive as possible, not wanting to turn everything into a racial issue, which is fair. Either way, I adapted the questions to be more "general", as in, refraining from the word "race". Eventually, they became more comfortable after realizing I didn't mean any offense. However, I couldn't help but wonder if in the back of their minds, there was more that they weren't telling me from their life experience. As a person of color (POC), I too have found myself frustrated with certain questions and issues that exist in the United States or abroad, or issues I didn't even know existed. History has a major impact on the way certain groups are treated today, and gaining an understanding of the past gives you only a snippet of the truth. I don't want to assume anything, but I can't help but wonder if this old couple was suppressing old thoughts and ideas and preferred to exert their time and energy on claiming more positive outlooks. For example, they believed anyone could be a hiker or be outdoorsy, it's just a matter if someone chooses to take that step. However, they did agree that many commercials are about gardening, amusement parks or other developed tourists' spots, but nothing about national parks, which could contribute to the lack of certain groups of people.

Furthermore, when they were visiting the Grand Canyon, they tried explaining greater sensations and thoughts the canyon allowed them to experience. "Words couldn't describe the beauty. We feel at peace in nature," they said. "If we live through resurrection, then I hope I have the perfect eyes to see [the canyon] again." I hung onto this for a second. If an afterlife existed, would nature have some sort of correlation or rendition in it? How could spiritual sensations be found in Mother Nature? What are the different ways to experience them? Personally, I do believe there is a "higher power" kind of feeling when experiencing magnificent or majestic surroundings, but could peace and resurrection actually be reached with nature's aid?

This couple taught me that just because I am a POC and someone else is a POC, doesn't automatically mean they'll be open about their experience. We all go through life differently and not all of us want to expose ourselves to the world, even if we find someone we may be able to relate to. For me, I am still learning how to share certain aspects about myself and my life. Others may feel this way as well, so it's a constant learning process that's dealt with in everyday life.



THE TENT

My brother thinks we are living in a prison tent. It almost looked like one, but it had all the necessities. Pads to sleep on and a stove inside, a picnic table and a fire pit outside. Some of the strings holding the tarp down were coming loose, so hopefully no wildlife (please no bears) come to pay us a visit. As we opened the creaky door, the dark room gradually got brighter until our eyes fully adjusted. The air was dank and dusty. We stood in silence for a few seconds, taking in the room. My dad turned to face me and his arms embraced me, and he cried into my shoulder in pure happiness. I've only seen him cry twice in my life and this was the third. Once when I had the greatest gymnastics competition of my life. The second was when I opened my college acceptance letter. For a moment to be worth tears means it was tremendously transformative. It means you've been waiting and working for so long to get there. It can't just be tears of happiness, there's gotta be a stronger word, a stronger emotion, but what is it?? How to describe it? This was yet another moment worth showing any sign of emotion from him. He had researched Yellowstone for years, and always dreamt of the day he'd go. He was tremendously grateful to come this far, and he thanked me for this opportunity. His eyes shined with pride: he was proud for how far I had taken him. We had anticipated and fantasized about coming to Yellowstone one day, and we were finally here. I hope it is everything we expected it to be and more. The sore backs the stiff bed pads will give us are only temporary. Our time here is highly cherished, and I want my Pa to enjoy it the most.



Campfires are allowed only in designated grills or rings in park campgrounds, some picnic areas, and specific backcountry campsites. Campfires must be extinguished before leaving them unattended.



CONQUERING FIRE

I couldn't even light up the first match. I don't even remember ever learning how to light a match. The second one barely caught the paper on fire and instead burned the tip of my thumb. The third quickly died off on a stick that only sustained a minute-long flame. Damn. I thought the third time was supposed to be the charm. I want my pa to help but he keeps telling me that I must learn to do it on my own. 15 minutes later and I was about ready to give up. But low-key aggression and natural instinct came over me. My inner cave-man emerged and I was stubbornly determined to create my only heat source. Almost a whole box of matches later, I got the fire to stay. LET THERE BE FIRE!

There are few times in life where we receive zero aid or advice from others, and in this moment the yearning to ask for help was at its peak. Unless you have absolutely no one to turn to, you have the privilege of asking for help. This could be helpful yet hurtful to one's development. If you can't learn to do something on your own, you'll forever become dependent on the thing that provides you with that aid. You won't learn anything for yourself. It all becomes an inevitable never-ending cycle of reliance and vulnerability. How do you expect to escape this cycle? How are you going to conquer the fire? It takes self-determination and will power to initiate the transition to independence.

That first match was my first failure, perhaps when I first attempted to walk instead of crawl. It was my instinct to continue trying even if I fell and got hurt (second match). The third time is when I tried braiding my hair, which was going ok until it eventually ended up in a tangled mess. Those 15 minutes of fire-starting attempts pass by and a childhood and teenage lifetime also passes. A small fire has been ignited. My parents are waving me off to college, and it's now my responsibility to maintain the fire. They helped nurture it but now only I can keep it from dying out.

I still conquered this feat of independent and interactive learning without a helping hand, but there is still much left to conquer. I ruminated on future learning possibilities and how self-reliance will be an indispensable skill.





"When one is alone at night
in the depths of these woods,
the stillness is at once
awful and sublime. Every
leaf seems to speak."
- John Muir



Columbian and Venezuelan Friends, w/Columbian Dad

This was the third interview I had to do in Spanish, but these were first Latinos that were non-Mexican. Coming from a completely different world, they came to Yellowstone to witness natural phenomenon: the geysers and wildlife. They came to explore part of the world that they're not sure will exist in the future. The infamous tale of earth's impending doom.

The Columbian woman's dad would always take the family on picnics near rivers and waterfalls back home. All of them sparked their outdoor awareness as kids. At 8-years-old, when visiting the San Andres island in Columbia, the woman recalls. The Venezuelan man remembers a time at the beach at 10 years old. In Tierra Caliente, the dad would always go to a nearby river as a 9-year-old boy and have big carne asada picnics with the whole family. It was interesting that they all associated their memories to family and a body of water, similar to how I was introduced to nature. Despite living the working life now, they still take time to go out and encourage others by recounting their adventures.

Despite language barriers and costly accommodations, they managed to make it to Yellowstone. Their senses absorb everything they can. Feeling the dirt beneath them. Touching the pure waters. Giving themselves the time to think and observe. They state how back home the people usually don't notice the beauty around them. In Columbia we have so much, we don't appreciate it until we go out, day to day life, essential to our growth, it's just there and we don't realize its importance." In comparison to parks in Columbia, "you can see the difference. The amount of people, security, signals, not as many bathrooms, different trails." The U.S. national parks are iconic and valued, they "make you feel small." Although they didn't explain this "smallness" kind of feeling, I knew exactly what they were talking about. Unlike the other "make you feel small" feeling which has a negative connotation behind it (meant to bring someone down), this one brings growth and reflection. There is perspective behind this feeling. It empowers you and embeds a "sense of purpose". You reflect on your past, present, and future and who you are. That's the ideal national park experience, and even international visitors understand the importance of parks.

This group of individuals brought a pragmatic approach to the outdoors, whether it was their awareness for climate change or their appreciation for nature's treasures, they gave me a sense of comfort and contemplation. They taught me gratitude and observation were an essential component to the outdoor experience. I must have reverence for nature because it provides life. Fully engaging in it will allow me to reach my highest potential in mental growth and development with my journey.

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO FEEL SMALL?

The national parks, gargantuan landmarks of nature older than any human footprint, transcend any sense of human scale. A common trend of vacationing and sight-seeing involves reveling at the glory of the immense and miraculous scale of nature's raw power. This phenomenon draws interest into the appeal of such ventures. "It makes you feel small." A thought-provoking statement which begs the question of the context surrounding the word "small." In class, a professor making you to feel "small" would cause nothing but negativity and embarrassment. Yet, people venture into the wilderness, for that same feeling brought on by the marvels of nature. When another person causes you to feel small, it hurts you. It is a belittling experience, meant to be personal and malicious. On the other hand, there is the case where appreciating nature can also make you feel "small." This experience is intensely unique, impersonal, and majestic. Standing in sight of lands older than the separation of continents forces upon you a sense of perspective. It is a first-class lesson in the power of wonders that have been here long before you and will be here long after you. It exposes your temporary worries, your momentary troubles, and your ephemeral desires. When standing in awe of million-year-old mountains and landscapes, the impermanent scope of life awakens within you a newfound sense of urgency and "carpe diem," a necessity to wake up and seize the day.

Yellowstone

REFLECTION

Honestly, I had overhyped the park so much all my life that it was a bit anti-climactic. Don't get me wrong it is an extraordinary place like no other in the world, but the geysers were its only special feature. I kept asking myself "have I become de-sensitized to the grandeur found in the place"? We've seen various documentaries and images of the park that we had our expectations so high. "The Serengeti of North America" they told us, then where are the wolves, the bears, the predators?? Maybe I am being too hard on the place.

The bison were everywhere to be found. We even had one come right next to our car. We rolled down the windows and the giant creature's eyes stared straight at ours. The bison almost towered over the car, it's massive body almost scraping the car door, one violent move and it would dent the car. The video we have now of this unforgettable moment is spectacular.

There was lots of international visitors, but also many from all over the states. Mostly Chinese or Indian for international visitors though I was told by a ranger. Yellowstone's popularity is definitely reflected by its visitor diversity and large workforce. It takes a lot of people to manage a park of this size. That's one part I wasn't really expecting. The sheer amount of people almost made the place less tranquil and special because you couldn't find your own space. It is a highly developed and industrialized place, and comparing it to other ones, it's practically its own city. All their main areas/points house a general store/gift shop, gas station, and eating place. It was crazy how there'd be mini urban areas next to natural geysers and mud springs. This is one aspect of Yellowstone I didn't like. Nothing really felt genuine and real because it was so advertised and commercialized. Guess it comes along with the burden to accommodate for millions of visitors a year.

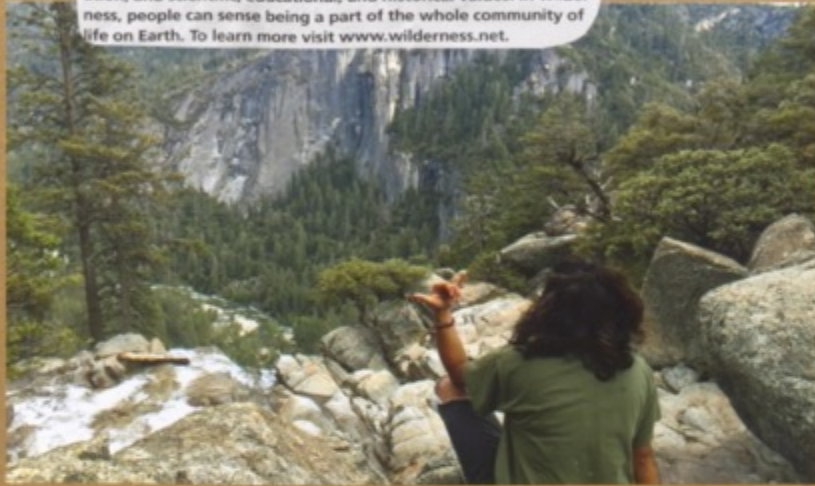
Out of all the parks, I had more religious conversations and encounters in Yellowstone. I can say spiritual connection has been most highlighted at Yellowstone so far.

Yellowstone allowed me to see the spectrum of diversity in various forms and touched on themes and conversations I could never dream of. The people I met here had such prized insights and perspectives and I am beyond grateful to have visited.



Wild Yosemite

Congress has designated over three million acres of the Sierra Nevada for protection in the National Wilderness Preservation System. This includes 95 percent of Yosemite National Park, as well as the Emigrant Wilderness in Stanislaus National Forest, the Hoover Wilderness in Humboldt-Toiyabe and Inyo national forests, and the Ansel Adams Wilderness in Sierra and Inyo national forests. Wilderness is meant to protect forever the land's natural conditions, opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation, and scientific, educational, and historical values. In wilderness, people can sense being a part of the whole community of life on Earth. To learn more visit www.wilderness.net.

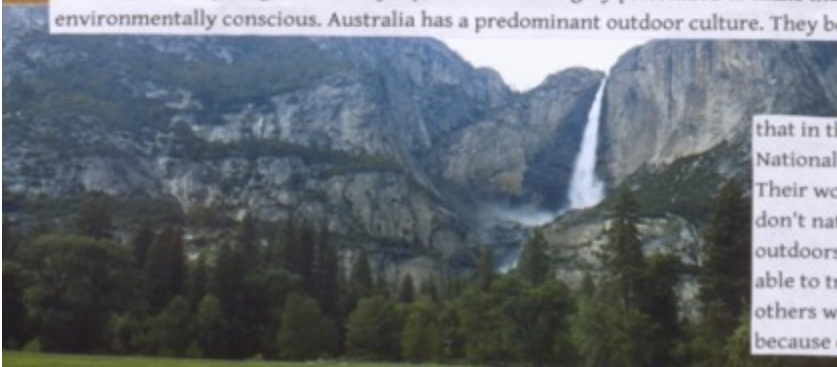


Two Young Women, One from Australia the Other from England (Both of Indian Descent)

On a large international tour group, these two women came to the United States seeking an adventurous opportunity. Many people had told tales of U.S. National Parks and they knew the parks were definitely places worth visiting. They were both very interactive and conscious with their responses, however, it wasn't until near the end of the interview where they realized a disappointing truth.

The woman from England grew up with non-outdoorsy parents. As a second-generation Indian immigrant, the first generation (her aunts and uncles) always had an appreciation for nature and advised her on where to go on this trip. "As a kid, we lived with a mountain behind us. There were little mountain dunes, dirt dunes, and hills. My brother and I would venture off in our adventure sandals and jump a wall to reach the dunes. [We came home] with red ant bites on our feet." Once they moved to London, it was a vastly differently story. "In the outskirts [of the city], there are parks with free entry, but if you want to hike you need money to go further, to go outside the city," so there's definitely restrictions in urbanized areas. The conversation started gaining earnestness as she explains why certain groups don't participate: "I think it's a cultural thing since back home didn't have surroundings to do that. [To some people it seems like] something stupid that poor people do. Why did we work our butts off so that we can afford housing, just so we would you go sleep in the back woods? There's a stigma [around it], as if it were a low status thing." I hadn't thought about that before, but she had a point. These stigmas can be applied to certain cultures more than others, and now her and I saw the truth. The Australian woman's family didn't really consider the outdoors as a recreation option. She'd take walks outside with her mom, but that was the extent of "hiking" in her childhood. "When I was younger, I wouldn't be up for camping because I thought it was dirty. Until I became a brownie (equivalent of girl scouts), it opened the door to see [the wild is] not as bad." She now realizes that lack of public transport and long job hours are primary restrictions for some people. She even realized that instead of encouraging people to join her, she "gravitates toward people who already do it." How do you expect to bring outside groups into this world if your circle only includes people already part of the group? It's almost like preaching to the choir. Then, she goes on have her greatest realization: "In Australia, I would never see anyone who is native doing hikes. There are only white people: they're not deterred. Maybe in someone's culture they haven't been brought up in a way that encourages that."

The whole trip was planned for them by the agency they booked it through. They experienced breathtaking serenity: "If you stand and stop and look at one place for long enough then it settles you, even if it is rushing water its calming." In both their home countries, nature is viewed positively. England has royal parks that are highly prioritized to make individual more environmentally conscious. Australia has a predominant outdoor culture. They both agreed



that in the two weeks they've been in the U.S. they haven't seen enough to conclude that National Parks are an accurate representation of the U.S.

Their words further promoted the idea of exclusivity often found in outdoor culture. Why don't natives come to the land that was once theirs? Who "can be welcomed" into the outdoors? These imaginary dogmas must be reformed and abolished. The fact that they are able to travel to the U.S. for two weeks already makes their situation rare and precious. Many others would never have that opportunity. I think I helped underline that fact for them because even after we stopped talking, they continued discussing these topics.

"Nature is, ever at work
building & pulling down,
creating & destroying.
Keeping everything whirling
and flowing, allowing no
rest but in rhythmical
motion, chasing everything
in endless song out of
one beautiful form
into another."
- John Muir



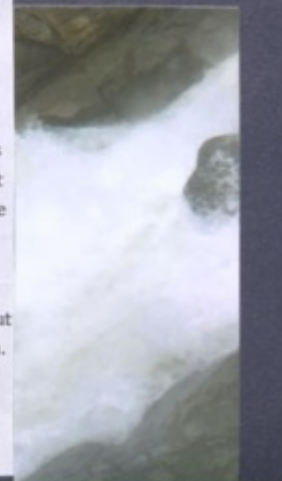
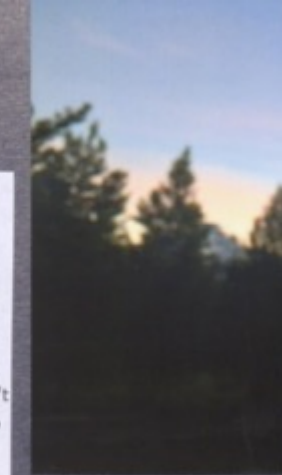
Young, White Woman

Working as a field researcher for "Leave No Trace", she too was at Yosemite searching for answers. She was there to raise awareness on recycling and outdoor ethics, something not commonly spoken about in certain communities. This is where our purpose in Yosemite differed. After placing a recycling sign on top of the trash and recycle bins, she would note who threw their trash in the recycling instead of the trash can. She was studying the simple action and if people bothered to read the sign or to recycle. Then one of her colleagues would approach the individual and "educate" them on environmentally friendly practices. Why don't people recycle correctly? Was probably her question. Meanwhile, I was there figuring out who exactly were the ones who knew how the outdoor culture worked. My question was more along the lines of, "Is there a certain group that isn't as familiar with recycling and all the terminology? And how can we better educate them without seeming overbearing about their lack of knowledge? It was about to be an interesting conversation.

Her passion for nature's perseverance was obvious from the start. Born and raised in Denver, she grew up backpacking with her mom and introduced her to an outdoor centered lifestyle. The absence of human technology and human interaction in nature gives her a "sense of solitude and appreciation for natural resources." Some people may think this is strange and intimidating, how are you going to be outdoors on your own? Is there something wrong? This type of outdoor experience is very different from family-oriented activities that some people seek. However, I understand the benefits of both sides. I seek nature's solitude when I want to wander in my thoughts, while family members or friends make it fun and interactive. Depending on what kind of experience one hopes for they usually need to choose between these two options.

Even though she was privileged growing up and with her current job, she realizes that the outdoors is "very white centered and politics have raced for us to be" the largest present group. She went on to explain a bit of exploiting history and reality. It first started with parks becoming "public lands after they were taken away from native people, and now they don't allow natives to use the land." Now, "socioeconomic factors...could define who can come." There is a "disconnect of understanding the natural environment... [I feel] a sense of responsibility to keep these places protected, and make sure people know how they should treat them. I feel an overarching responsibility to help people do good."

I understand this woman had the best intentions. Even at the end she asked "What can I do, as a white person, to be better?" I didn't know what to tell her. She was the first to ever ask. I felt like I wasn't one to speak as a representative for all POC. This is such a touchy subject for some people and her interest brought me relief and sorrow. On one side it's amazing that people want to learn how to contribute and "be better". On the other side I ask myself, why does the white man always feel the need to interfere with POC issues? Why do they always want to provide their "services"? She was here to teach people about best environmental practices, but was this the best approach? In reality, most groups wish to solve these problems on their own. They understand themselves best. So, why do outsiders need to come in to "fix" things? At times like these, I get a knotted feeling in my stomach due to frustration and confusion. Trust is the first step to allowing someone into your world. The thing is, what do you do when that trust is broken? Will it be too late for those people?





Sandy Hernandez

Park Ranger, Volunteer Program Assistant

Park Staff

"As a brown woman working for these parks, I love answering these types of questions." From the beginning of the phone call, until the end, Sandy was real with me about everything. Born and raised in Los Angeles to Guatemalan parents, at age 13 her family moved to Lancaster because they were worried that she "wanted to be a chola." After graduating from UC Irvine, with a bachelors in earth system science and minor in oceanography, she worked for an outreach program that promoted STEM in Latinx communities. Eventually through Facebook she found a seasonal position at Yosemite, which lead her to be a field leader. Now she's program assistant for interpretations at Yosemite. By coordinating volunteer groups and reaching out to underrepresented groups to do volunteer service, she has realized the "importance of having a POC that preached and taught a volunteer group."

Her everyday goal as one of the few POC workers at Yosemite is to "have more conversation." When "[you] first come to the park, you question whether you fit it. No leadership looks like you, your peers were raised differently than you," it's hard to get that sense of belonging others feel so easily. Sandy wanted these issues to stop being ignored and decided to speak up against the system. By sharing her personal experiences and stories she's been able to gain the attention of her colleagues and employers.

"I can be very vulnerable when I need to be. I'm not singing to the choir when the whole room doesn't look like me. [Sometimes] I ask myself "Are you feeling bad for me?" I've cried sometimes, but for me in the moment its more important that I say [the story] than me not saying it at all. It may be uncomfortable, but we have to have [these conversations]. The Park Service does not allow you to talk about politics, but I'd like to have a space where I can have that."

Disappointment is one of the first hand emotions Sandy feels in regard to the NPS's attempted emphasis on inclusion in the workforce. It's "great that they hire POC, but let's now focus on equity and retention. Having a conversation about diversity in the workforce is my main focus this year." Although the park service has some catching up to do, she agrees that there is definitely a movement happening outside of the parks. Outdoor retailers, diversity nonprofits/organizations, and park staff are "redefining what the outdoors experience is." Sandy is currently working on starting up a POC employee resource group and continues to speak out against structural and systemic barriers to these parks.



I think having such a strong character is much needed at other national parks. Having a face to connect with is all one needs sometimes to feel welcomed someplace. "Nature doesn't discriminate! Everyone should have this experience and feel that they can express themselves in the outdoors."



Chinese Family

A whole outdoor-loving family, and by the looks of the dad's fully-stocked backpack and the family's clothing, you could tell they were serious about it. Originally from Minnesota, they came to see the majestic waterfalls, fresh air, perfect weather, and become closer to nature. This isn't their first national park experience. They've been all the way to Denali in Alaska, and every year they journey to a new park. The dad chooses the next destination and mom always organizes and plans it out, while the two daughters gain knowledge on preparation and the park itself. This was very similar to my family dynamic. The eldest daughter just finished her freshman year at UC Berkeley and this was the summer family trip. We bonded over It feels weird to do this trip without a good portion of my family, but I hope something good comes out of it.

The family agreed that knowledge was the key to navigating these parks. "Someone needs to introduce you to it. [Teach] you what to do and how to go about it. We went to college and university, and there were resources to rent camping gear and they'd teach about it."

Although it can be "daunting" you eventually get the hang of it.

Their family in China often enjoys nature in similar ways. "They climb a lot of mountains. It's like a family tradition." The dad continued, "China is viewed as a very crowded place, with lots of cities. I grew up in a little village and was outdoors all the time. Everybody there enjoys nature." Even though China is the largest populated country, they still seek the wonderment of nature.

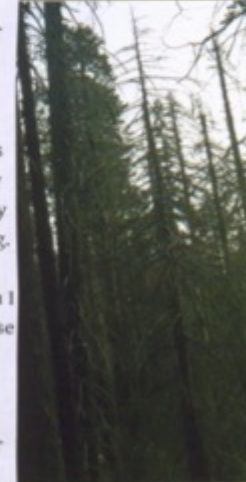


Group of Amish Young Women

Before approaching this group, I was uncertain on how they'd take my questions. I was afraid of misspeaking or seeming imprudent, but in the end, I think these girls were unsure about their words more than I was. They were coming from Lancaster, Pennsylvania and wore long loose dresses and tied their hair back in low buns. They belonged to an Amish community and had a unanimous opinion toward nature: "It brings us closer to God...it allows us to feel God's beauty." Their families are very outdoorsy, and they haven't faced any real barriers to access because it's in their culture. They often grow their own crops which connects them to the land. They had a great appreciation for what the earth can provide. I have helped out in farms a couple times before. The physical labor I went through is nowhere near how much farmers, ranchers, and farm laborers have to endure. These girls didn't really go into detail about their daily routine, but I can imagine the absence of technology, city life, and everyday luxuries have greatly shaped their outlook and perspectives. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to get a glimpse into their life. During most of the interview, their wide eyes stared at me patiently. One of the oldest ones answered the most, some of them didn't even say a word. It's as if I was more than a stranger. It seemed as if I was speaking gibberish. I was a foreigner to them. They didn't want to seem rude and they'd glance at each other after each of my questions, as if they were scared to speak first. I just kept smiling and looked at them expectantly, but still nothing. I wish I could've gotten them to say more.

Facing no traveling or financial difficulties, they seemed oblivious of possible obstacles. When I asked them about how to promote diversity, they all went silent. They didn't seem notice these issues. They had no idea what I was talking about. I told them "it's okay. Thank you guys so much and enjoy the rest of your day!"

It's a little upsetting to see that these issues aren't something that people are even aware about. Perhaps their community didn't teach or tell them about it, so in that case it's not their fault. If those topics and resources aren't available to them, how can I blame them for something they don't know exist? I need to understand the progressive-ness of my project and take a step back when someone doesn't know what I'm trying to get at. I can't further urge them to answer. At least I hope I was able to make them think for a bit and they can notice for themselves what I am referring to.



Two Teenage Boys, Half black, Half Pakistani (byothers)

Coming from the suburbs of Michigan these teens had never visited a national park. In fact, Yosemite was their first "wilderness" experience. Their parents are always too busy working and don't have time to think or spend money on "unnecessary things" such as traveling to outdoor spaces. These "are not priorities" in low-income families. Tell me about it. These boys weren't scared to say it how it is. Not sure if they would've done the same with anyone else or if their parents were there, but I was elated to have found two more people who "get it." As kids they used to go camping but stopped once they started fasting because of their Muslim religion. I had never thought of religion becoming a possible barrier until now. Their uncle, who's well off, flew them out to visit Yosemite with him. "If it wasn't for him, we wouldn't have enough money to come here." To someone who doesn't have the ability to often come to these places "time equals the means to do it... [and] our parents work a lot" so asking for time off is a privilege. Back home, the extent of outdoor adventure is going to the "local park to play basketball or riding bikes all day," no one really does anything else. On top of not having the financial means to go out, there aren't any existing places to be in nature's purity. It's all just streets and buildings. I understood the financial aspect of their accessibility difficulties, but I had the benefit of living in more rural areas with intact nature and well-developed parks and trails. I couldn't imagine growing up without these areas.

The definition of national parks to these guys was alarming, but it has some truth to it. "It's to make money. It's so expensive that it's more like a tourist attraction. It's not for the general people." Someone finally said it! They knew exactly what was going on. Their acumens shed light on the impurity of parks and how it takes a "certain type of person to come out here." This interview reminded me of the one in Yellowstone with the two individuals from the LGBTQ community. These people weren't afraid to speak their minds. By putting themselves in a vulnerable position, I was able to unleash some truth. Even though these guys say, "there are other things that I can do with money," they still are really grateful to be out there. Nature makes them feel at peace and away from everything. Away from the troubles of home.



"Nature is always lovely, invincible, glad, what ever is done and suffered by her creatures. All scars she heals, whether in rocks or water or sky or hearts."

-John Muir



(THE BIG BRAND NAMES, THE WILD VERSION)

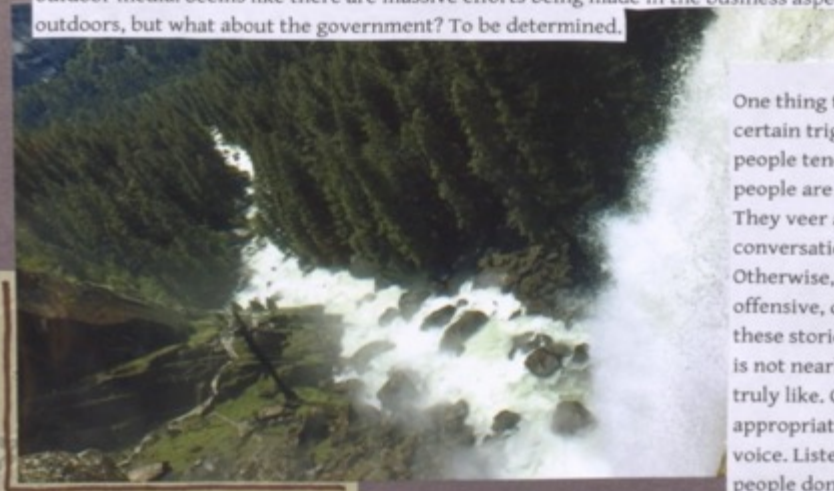
Driven by powerful "leaders" (in quotes because the definition of leader can vary from person to person, but anyways), the Big Outdoor Brands have been described as one of the greatest reflections of the national park visitor community. And you know what that means. Where are the POC? When the media fails to display and welcome those "not often seen" participants, you can bet money that those "not often seen" people will not be showing up to the party. These brands struggle with featuring and advertising different groups of people. But often the equal representation just isn't there. Some of them are trying to incorporate these ideals into their work force, but even they don't always reflect the people they are desperately trying to reach.

Ranger Sandy spoke about a big "Outdoor Retailer" event that happens twice a year. The biggest names and faces (REI, Patagonia, Columbia, The North Face, and basically every other outdoor gear place you can think of) gather to showcase a sneak peek of new gear. Now, that there's a diversify outdoor movement, organization leaders of minority groups are asking each booth what they're doing to move forward in equity and inclusion. The brands are becoming aware of who they show off in ads and media and asking themselves how they can better represent people in nature. A few articles have been released, their titles shining key words: "The Push for Diversity", ...and more. Their action steps include portraying more non-male, non-white, non-thin, non-cisgender individuals, those that have been so easily forgotten in the outdoor media. Seems like there are massive efforts being made in the business aspect of the outdoors, but what about the government? To be determined.



«« THE "DIVERSITY" TALK »»

One thing that I've noticed and something that others have also mentioned is that when certain trigger words like "minority", "race", and "difficulties" are all said in one sentence, people tend to freeze up. Especially those that have zero connection to those words. Some people are more afraid to discuss these topics for fear of misspeaking or offending someone. They veer away from any situation that puts them at risk. Makes sense, but also, I wish these conversations were more common, and I think these conversations NEED to be discussed. Otherwise, how are people supposed to learn what is right and wrong, inoffensive and offensive, discriminatory and unbiased? How else are you supposed to teach people about these stories, experiences, and perspectives? Attempting to "put yourself in someone's shoes" is not nearly enough to understand how someone's life from a vastly different background is truly like. One of the most effective solutions to prevent microaggressions, cultural appropriation, and marginalization is to LISTEN to those whose thoughts often don't have a voice. Listening is just the first step. What comes next is the most challenging step, and most people don't get to it, and that's CHANGE. What can you do? What will you do? How will you do it? Will it start NOW?



BEING TRAINED TO THINK IT'S AWESOME?

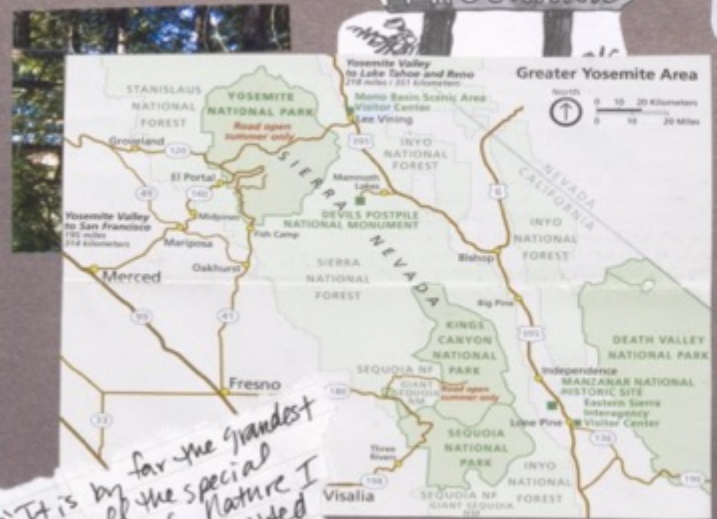
If you're the outdoorsy type, have you ever wondered that you only like and are amazed by the outdoors because that's all you've ever hear all your life? If you answered yes, you may wanna keep wondering. One visitor mentioned how she's possibly been "trained to think that outdoor spaces are awesome." After traveling alone with sister in Greece, all she thought about was how "blue and stunning" it was. Her sister, however, was another story. She didn't have that "sense of awesome" at really any jaw-dropping landscape. The visitor explained that although their mom isn't super outdoorsy, she'd at least take her on walks, but not her sister. "Maybe my thought-process is to always think it's amazing." Could this be true? It couldn't be true for all settings, I think. If you didn't think a natural geyser exploding boiling water 75 feet into the air isn't awesome, then you're missing out on the excitement.



PARK PROGRAMS

WHAT ARE THEY DOING? (quotes are from Sandy Hernandez's interview)
Yosemite has been one of the most, if not the most progressive in its views and actions towards diversity and inclusion. The employees seem to have much of the influence to kick-start these programs and conversations:

- "We are more" event: a workshop for ethnic and racial minorities to educate on outdoor recreation. Prominent leaders like Jose Gonzales (Founder and Executive Director of Latino Outdoors) and Teresa Baker (Founder of "The Pledge" and the African American National Park Event) were invited to this event. Different California communities come together to see the faces behind the D&I work in outdoors. People who "didn't see their place and are now looking for their voice", are now given the "opportunity to talk about their experiences." It is a weekend long full of mentorship for all staff, leaders, and visitors.
- Cultural fluency training: inclusive stories of a non-traditional outdoor experience. Stop LNT (Leave No Trace) shaming people, instead use spaces to educate people. Open to all Yosemite staff and park partners. Another one made specific to supervisors.
- Public Pilot Program: contract intern and ranger go to a beach or other aquatic areas to set up pop up educational opportunities about wildlife, food storage, and leave no trace. Usually have two Spanish speaking staff.



*"It is by far the grandest of all the special temples of Nature I was ever permitted to enter."
- John Muir*

REFLECTION

The first day there, I had to clean my glasses twice. Was I seeing this right? For the first time ever, there were SEVERAL minorities walking around the trails of Yosemite. I couldn't believe it. Yosemite became number one on my imaginary list of "Most Diverse National Parks". What brought all these people here? Well, the thing is, I didn't realize it was Father's Day until I got back to the hotel. That explains everything because the next day was a different story... A lot less people today than yesterday, which is understandable, it's a weekday and not a holiday. Maybe I should've done visitor interviews yesterday...it's okay though. Shelton was enough to make up for all the lost interviews.

Back to the first day. There was a mixture of thoughts going through me from the moment we arrived at the entrance gate. I came across a Latin family when I got out to take a picture with the Yosemite sign. My pa noticed that their gas was open and asked me to let them know. Immediately I go up to the window and warn them. At first, I was excited to see them but then when all they responded was "Okay", I was confused why they didn't say "Okay, thank you for letting us know". I didn't think too much of it though, it's not worth getting butthurt about that. I thought I had just gotten lucky for seeing a Latinx family first. Then, driving through the park to the main visitor's center, something felt different. So many of the license plates said California. I mean at Rocky Mountain several plates said Colorado, but here the state plate was the majority. When trying to find parking, we found people who were about to leave but I leaped out our car midway passing by this spot. I walked over to ask if they were leaving and the woman responded "Yeah... (then looks over at our car annoyed) if we can get out". I was like, ummm, huh?? Of course, we are going to move so you can get out, sorry just asking a simple question that didn't need your sass. I got a weird feeling about people's patience. Maybe it's just California people being California people.

There is so much to do in this place, and I think I've seen just about every type of person here. Especially the outdoorsy type. Everything from expert rock climber to beginner hiker to people that were just happy to drive by the elegant waterfalls. The diversity of activities in itself made Yosemite an ideal place for any level of adventurer.

