WORLD CLASS ACADEMY

FALL 2024 NEWSLETTER



ACADEMICS

Letter from the Principal
The College Essay
Student Blog
Teacher Features
Student Poetry

ATHLETICS

Quarter Destinations
Head Coach Feature
Junior Big Air Competition
Photo Gallery

CHARACTER

Paddle Tribal Waters
Program Director Feature
Student Spotlights
Meet the Admin Team

PC: Charles Baker (‘25)

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SHARING THE JOURNEY: WELCOME BACK WCA NEWSLETTER

The journey of learning and growth have many paths and while it is true that we alone choose the direction we walk, we share this experience with those around us. The people who we share this journey with will provide substance to our experiences. Have you ever felt like it is not what you do, but who you do it with that really dictates the outcome of our experiences? Places and people are the catalysts for our experiences, which spurs on personal and shared growth, which then turn into stories. These stories and shared experiences create community. The WCA newsletter is a place to capture and preserve the shared experiences of our WCA family. It is a place where we can weave stories, people, and places into a tapestry that is called the World Class Academy experience. It is a celebration of our community, but also those individuals that make up our community. After a few years hiatus, the WCA newsletter will once again be a catalyst for storytelling and an opportunity to build and celebrate World Class Academy. We welcome you to the journey.



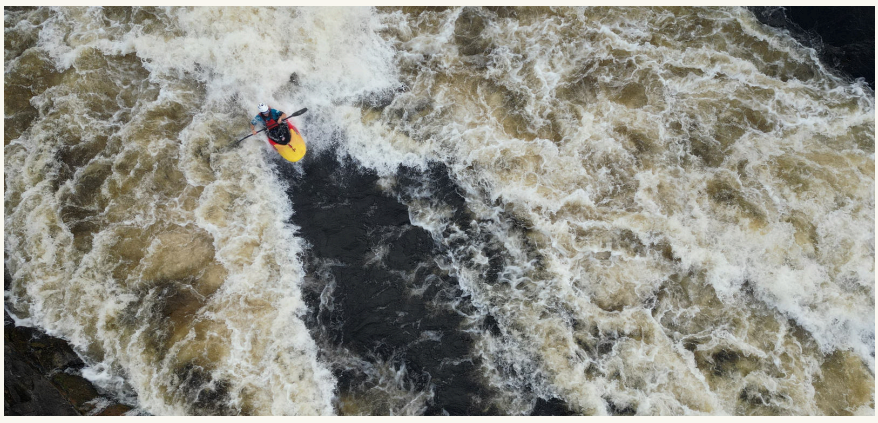
Aaron “Capo” Rettig

THE YEAR BEGAN IN . . .









British Columbia, Canada

Where the **bikers** gathered to keep the post crank works energy alive, ride world famous trails, enjoy lift access, competition opportunities, and a trip to the Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Center for Truth and Reconciliation day.

Rocklands, South Africa

Where the **climbers** practiced athletic moves in a world premier bouldering location, enjoying wildflowers, braaied meat, fish fries, and rooibos tea between classes and bouldering sessions.

North Coast, Brazil

Where the **kiters** enjoyed consistent winds in iconic kite spots, endless beaches, sunsets, acai and adoring hacienda hosts.

Eastern Canada

Where the **kayakers** paddled every style of river across Ontario and Québec in addition to an Ottawa City field trip, poutine, hockey games, fall colors, and a senior sunrise morning.

AND CONTINUED IN . . .

Zambia & Zimbabwe

Where the **kayakers** lived and learned on both sides of the mighty Zambezi River, enjoying warm bigwater, overnight river trips and a safari in Botswana.



Coastal Peru

Where the **kiters** enjoyed warm water freestyle kiting, wave riding, and surfing on non-windy days, while flying between destinations, Mancora and Paracas to experience Peruvian culture.



Eastern Spain

Where the **climbers** took advantage of a quintessential Climb Academy destination by sending big projects, spending city days in Barcelona, and cooking family-style meals in Uldemolins.



Northern Chile

Where the **bikers** travelled to remote destinations for desert riding, dirt jumps galore, asadas, and down time in the pool between classes and riding.



STUDENT WORK

THE FLIGHT (1ST PLACE)

"That's it, I'm going to die," I thought to myself, as my mother and sister were in tears next to me. I looked out the window of the tiny plane and thought I'd ask God. I'm not religious, but I didn't have many other options. "Go zen," my mom told me. That was impossible when all I could hear was the rain pummeling the metal wings like bullets. Then there was the wind, twisting and lurching. I felt so small. I didn't open my eyes until we finally rumbled to a stop. I think I'll take the ferry next year.

Sol Obregon, Kayak ('26)

END OF THE YEAR AND THE OPENING OF WOUNDS IT IS NEW YEAR'S EVE 2024

I'm standing outside the hotel on the parking lot, with my family and friends. They are casually greeting each other, the fireworks blasting in the sky. The biggest one dazzles, and at that moment, I notice her. Here we are, standing in front of each other. But now her face is emotionless. I try to stand still with tears running down my cheeks. Nothing happens. We briefly hug and then she walks away to her friends. I decide to head to the top of the Dolomites with my snowboard that night. Something feels different.

Oliwier Kania, Kite ('25)

100 WORD STORY CONTEST

ADAPTED FOR WCA FROM THE NYTIMES STORY CONTEST

SALT WATER VICTORY

I wiped the salt water from my eyes and stared at the sails, filled with wind, ready to burst. The rope strained tightly around the winch as I clung to it. If I pulled, the wind would yield; if I eased, it would push against me. My hands shook, my grip slipping as the rope slid out. Clouds zoomed above my head, I pulled the rope in with one last surge, determined. Drenched from head to toe, I finally felt the wind yield. "I won," I thought, breathless but undefeated.

Tommy Penman, Kite ('26)

Pink and Purple

Bahrain, age 3: Mickey Mouse on the tv. "Pink or purple?", my sister asks, nail polish in hand. "I'm the pink sister." I sass back. London, age 5: "Pink or purple?", my mother asks, shopping for wellies. "Pink! Maddie is the purple sister." I shout. Cabin John, Maryland, age 10: "Pink or purple?", my father asks, shopping for towels. "Pink! Maddie is the purple sister!" I rhapsodize. Seattle, Washington, age 16: News on the tv. "Pink or purple?" I think, deciding my nail color. Better get pink, even if she's thousands of miles away.

Jaqueline Kimmel, Kayak ('25)



Merle Mönster is an accomplished athlete and coach whose passion for kitesurfing began in her childhood in Hamburg, Germany. At 15, she started kitesurfing and quickly became captivated by the sport's endless opportunities for learning and progression, whether in freestyle, big-air, wave riding, or racing. By 17, Merle had set her sights on becoming a kiteboarding instructor, which led her to Australia for hands-on experience after graduating high school. This sparked her interest in sports science, and she returned to Austria to study how to develop the physical requirements for elite kiteboarding. Choosing a scientific background over a traditional PE degree, she specialized in coaching programs for elite sports and created a training concept for kitesurfers for her master thesis. Now, as Head Coach at World Class Academy, Merle combines her love for adventure sports with a deep understanding of athletic performance, guiding young athletes with a unique blend of scientific insight and practical expertise.

HEAD COACH MERLE MÖENSTER



Merle's competitive background in kitesurfing spans several years, with standout accomplishments including her 7th-place finish at the GKA Freestyle World Cup in Brazil in 2022. Competing in national events in Germany and Austria since 2018, she excelled in freestyle and big-air disciplines, developing a deep appreciation for the mental and strategic aspects of the sport. This perspective shapes her coaching philosophy at WCA. "A competitive background helps maintain motivation over the long term," Merle explains. "I love seeing students achieve personal milestones, whether it's landing a new trick or feeling more confident on the water."



Merle competing at the GKA World Cup in Taiba, Brazil

PC: Svetlana Romantsova

"EVERY TIME THE TEAM IS IN A SAFE, PASSIONATE TRAINING ENVIRONMENT TOGETHER, I KNOW I'M IN THE RIGHT PLACE .... I WANT THEM TO LEAVE THIS PROGRAM WITH CONFIDENCE, KNOWING HOW FAR THEY'VE COME AND WHAT THEY'RE CAPABLE OF."

At World Class Academy Kiteboarding, Merle takes a holistic approach to athlete development, focusing on three key pillars: kite training, physical preparation, and mental preparation. "Daily kite training on the water is central to what we do, but we also teach students to break down the biomechanics of tricks, understand the importance of repetition, and embrace kiteboarding as a team sport," she shares. Off the water, students engage in targeted workouts twice a week to build strength, balance, and flexibility tailored to kitesurfing demands. Recovery sessions after kiting focus on reducing fatigue, improving mobility, and fostering a sense of community.

The mental preparation component is equally vital. Through weekly goal meetings, video analysis, and group discussions on topics like emotion regulation and mindfulness, Merle helps students develop resilience and focus. She emphasizes the importance of sleep, nutrition, and hydration—factors often overlooked by young athletes but crucial for performance and injury prevention. "At this age, those fundamentals make a big difference," she notes.

Long-term athlete development is at the core of Merle's coaching strategy. Drawing from the six stages of athlete development outlined by sports science, she ensures students build a strong foundation while avoiding burnout. **Training sessions at WCA follow a structured progression: push, drill, and play. "We start by pushing limits with new tricks, then drill existing skills to improve style and consistency. Finally, we play and enjoy the moment, which is key to sustaining passion for the sport,"** Merle explains. Quarterly school competitions provide students with valuable experience in a safe, supportive environment.

To monitor the effectiveness of training, WCA's kiteboarding program incorporates fitness testing at the end of each quarter. Students track their progress in personal goal logs, breaking down tricks into key elements and using video analysis to refine techniques. "We don't compare students to each other," Merle emphasizes. "It's all about personal development and identifying areas to improve while staying injury-free."



Merle coaching in Augusta, WA
PC: Toni Leidel

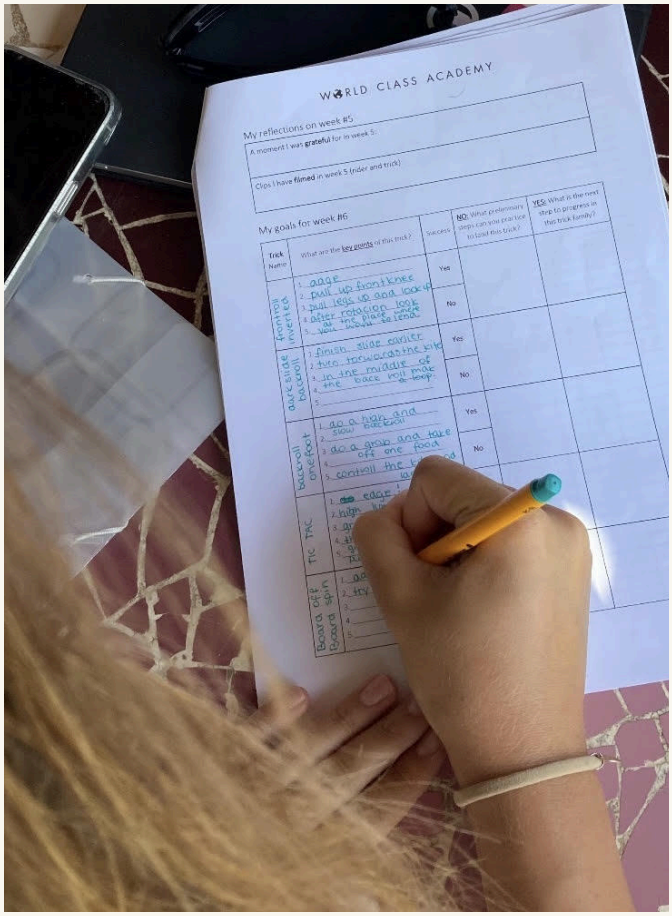
Adapting to diverse conditions is another skill Merle instills in her athletes. From strong or gusty winds to challenging water currents, she encourages students to embrace unpredictability and view it as an opportunity for growth. "Kitesurfing is about versatility—both on the water and in life," she says. "It's not just about landing a trick but developing the ability to ride in any situation."

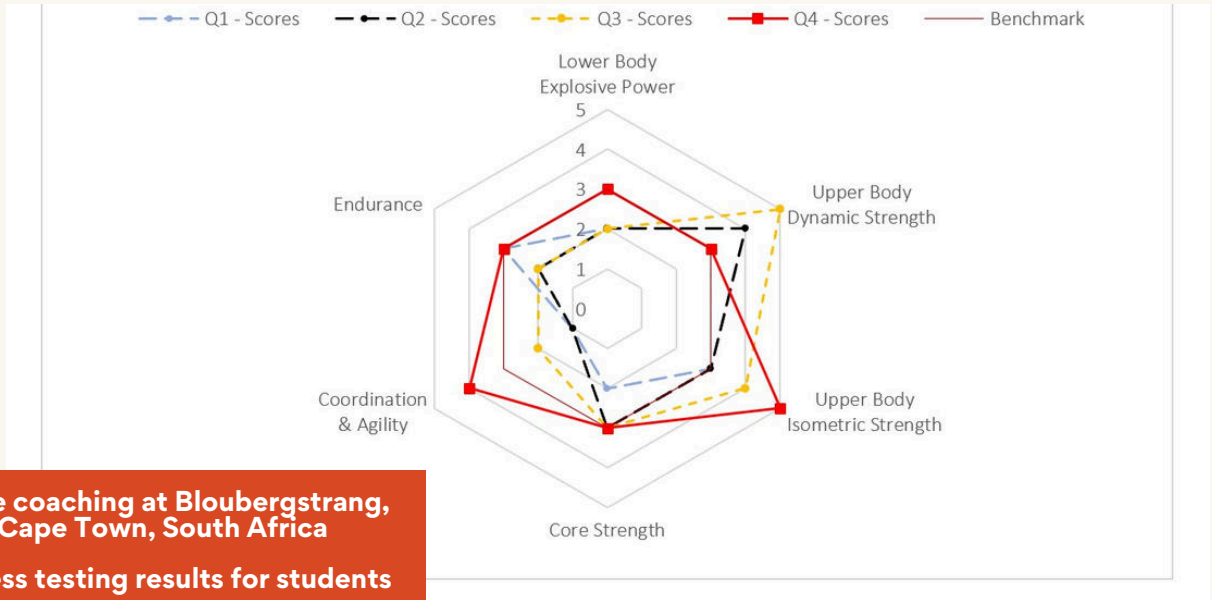
Traveling the world has also shaped Merle's coaching style. From Brazil's lagoons to Morocco's waves, she has experienced the global kitesurfing community firsthand and brings that perspective to WCA. **"We're lucky to ride some of the best spots in the world, but we always prioritize respect—whether it's for local riders, the environment, or each other."**

For Merle, the most rewarding part of coaching is seeing her students' transformation. "Every time the team is in a safe, passionate training environment together, I know I'm in the right place," she reflects. "I want them to leave this program with confidence, knowing how far they've come and what they're capable of." Her advice to students? "Think outside the box. It's not about landing a new trick every session—it's about challenging yourself, adapting to conditions, and becoming the most complete rider possible."



EACH WEEK, STUDENTS FILL OUT THEIR PERSONAL GOAL LOG. THEY ARE ASKED TO BREAK DOWN THE TRICKS THEY WANT TO LEARN INTO THEIR KEY ELEMENTS, AIMING TO AID THEIR VISUALIZATION PROCESS. AFTER THE SESSIONS, WE RUN VIDEO ANALYSIS TO REVIEW EXECUTION AND ELIMINATE MISTAKES.





Merle coaching at Bloubergstrang, Cape Town, South Africa

Fitness testing results for students

Students' personal goal logs



PADDLE TRIBAL WATERS ACADEMY

The Paddle Tribal Waters Academy combines whitewater kayak, river safety, and kayak instruction training, cultural reconnection, and environmental advocacy, while also offering a school education program. **Founded in collaboration between World Class Academy and Ríos to Rivers, PTWA empowers Indigenous youth by reconnecting them with their ancestral rivers and cultivating the next generation of environmental stewards and leaders.**

Ríos to Rivers, a nonprofit established in 2012, focuses on restoring rivers, revitalizing Indigenous cultural practices, and empowering Indigenous communities through river skills and stewardship training. By integrating traditional ecological knowledge with modern conservation techniques, Ríos to Rivers helps reconnect youth to their ancestral rivers and fosters environmental advocacy. The organization's programs blend teaching technical skills in kayaks, packrafts, and/ or rafts with cultural learning and river restoration to inspire sustainable, community-led leadership and environmental stewardship.







PHOTOS BY PAUL WILSON

Ríos to Rivers launched Paddle Tribal Waters (PTW) in 2022, initially as a two-and-a-half-week course for 15 Indigenous youth from the Klamath and nearby Pacific Northwest River Basins. The program rapidly expanded to include more communities and evolved into a comprehensive experience combining kayaking, cultural reconnection, cultural exchange, and river stewardship and restoration. PTW is closely tied to efforts to remove the dams on the Klamath River, a major cultural and ecological waterway that has been severely impacted by damming and water diversion. The program aims to have the students become the first to paddle the restored river from source to sea this upcoming June, symbolizing its revival after the largest dam removal in history was completed with the removal of the fourth dam on the Klamath this September. In many ways, the Paddle Tribal Waters descent of the Klamath will be just the beginning, as opportunities for returning salmon populations, revegetation of Native lands that were under water for almost a century with Native seeds, and continuing to support the cultivation of Native-led Paddle clubs that reconnect river communities with their waters is just starting. PTW blends cultural reclamation with environmental restoration, empowering Indigenous youth to advocate for the health of their rivers. It also works to provide ongoing trainings in technical river, safety, and instruction skills development and designs courses that invest in local-capacity building for future Native instructors in their home communities in order to have sustainable, long-term impact with the creation of Native-led paddle clubs. In order to remove barriers, Paddle Tribal Waters courses are cost-free to participants.

In January 2024, PTW entered a new phase with the launch of its five-month semester, the Paddle Tribal Waters Academy (PTWA), in Chile's Alto BioBío region. Thirteen students from the Klamath Basin and Pacific Northwest traveled to study an Indigenized curriculum while growing their kayaking skills from beginner to intermediate. The semester included time spent on Chilean rivers, learning about conservation and environmental advocacy, and gaining a global perspective on international threats and impacts of large-scale hydropower development and pollution, as well as river protection and restoration. The students also traveled throughout the Pacific Northwest as part of their preparations for the historic Native-led first white water descent of the Klamath River.

At the heart of PTWA is a commitment to reconnecting Indigenous youth with their rivers. Co-developed with Indigenous educators, the curriculum emphasizes river restoration, cultural heritage, and leadership development. Students not only gain kayaking skills, but also learn how to be powerful advocates for the health of their waterways and communities. The international exchange was an immersive experience, combining kayak and river safety training with academic study and cultural exchange. Students returned home equipped with the tools to advocate for their rivers and help restore the Klamath River for future generations. Entering its second year, PTWA continues to inspire and empower Indigenous youth. In April 2024, two PTWA students, Ruby Rain Williams and Keeya Wiki, spoke at the White House Water Summit, sharing their experiences and the importance of freshwater conservation in Indigenous communities.

Ruby, whose family has lived along the Klamath River for generations, spoke about the river's degradation and the loss of vital salmon populations. Keeya emphasized the river's historical significance and how the first descent will symbolize a return to a more helpful way of life.

PTWA's vision extends far beyond the academic year. The program aims to help students establish tribally led river courses and paddle clubs in their communities, continuing advocacy for environmental restoration and cultural preservation. PTWA not only empowers youth as environmental stewards but also restores cultural pride by reconnecting them with their rivers.

Paddle Tribal Waters Academy is a movement that bridges adventure with advocacy, connecting youth with their cultural roots and providing the tools to become leaders in river conservation and environmental stewardship. At World Class Academy, we are proud to support this transformative program and the next generation of leaders who will shape the future of their rivers and communities. Through PTWA, we are reminded that rivers are more than just bodies of water —they are the lifeblood of our communities, carrying stories, culture, and the potential for healing.

For a deeper look at the ongoing journey and the impact - check out Rios to Rivers website:

https://www.riostorivers.org/

BEING IN CHILE BUT NOT FEELING AT HOME

BY MAITE LUZ HERRERA (KAYAK '25)



Maite Luz Herrera and Lauren Lilly at the Futaleufú
PC: Sawyer Wolfe '24

WORDS AND PHOTOS FROM MAITE'S MEDIA CLASS BLOGPOST

At the end of January I was super excited at home counting the days until World Class starts. the day arrived, I was super nervous but at the same time happy, I had been waiting for that moment for months. The first day was uncomfortable, was I in my country speaking English? It felt strange, I didn't dare to talk so much because I was nervous and the words didn't come out. It was unbearable for me the first week not to be able to talk, obviously I wanted to introduce myself and meet people but everyone already knew each other, there was already history between them, I felt there, existing. Trying to adapt to the rhythm of World Class. The first few days I felt like a nuisance to the rest, a new girl who doesn't know all the rules and still hasn't gotten used to the schedule. I cried a couple of times, it was good to vent and expel all the emotions I felt those first days.

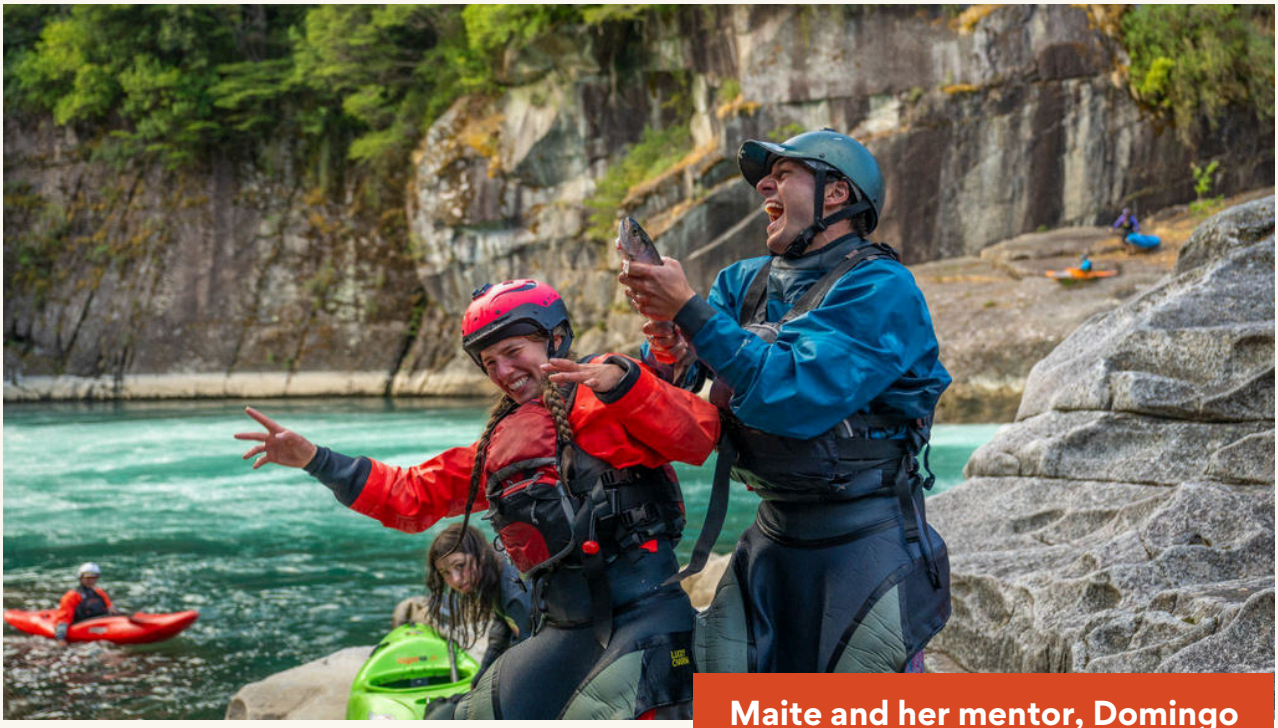
The first week had passed and I already felt a little more comfortable, people came a little closer to me to get to know me and talk but when everyone was in groups I felt a little isolated, I had to deal with that feeling of loneliness for a long time. During the second week I was able to vent with the first friends I had made, I remember perfectly what I told them; I'm tired of not being able to talk to everyone, I'm a very talkative person but I still don't feel comfortable speaking English and I spend all day silently listening and that makes me very depressed.

The days we spent in town were rare, I was in my country traveling through cities I had already visited but now I was part of a group of teenage kayakers obsessed with buying mate and Chilean sweets. It was fun to see my friends trying to ask the price of something or asking for directions. I felt that the Chileans considered me like just another gringa walking through the streets of Pucon, Chosuenco and Futa. It's fun to walk into a store speaking English with my friends and then suddenly change tone and start talking to the store cashier with Chilean idioms. **Sometimes they are left speechless, they tell me; Eri chilena? rusia con ojitos azule' pasai piola como gringa (you are Chilean? blonde with blue eyes, you look like a typical American girl). After the first two weeks I had already gotten used to being in my country but speaking in another language, it had already become part of my routine and I had assumed it.**



PC: Max Zuberbuhler & Mason Salsbury ('24)





Maite and her mentor, Domingo Sandoval on the Futaleufú. Domingo teaches Physics and Spanish, is also from Chile, and attended World Class as a student in 2015 before returning as a teacher in 2024!

PC: Max Zuberbuhler

Every opportunity I have to speak Spanish with a random Chilean I take advantage of it, I miss the Chilean humor and the hospitality that the people of my country have.

I'M A LITTLE MORE ACCUSTOMED TO THE RHYTHM OF THE WORLD CLASS AND AMERICANS HAVE BEEN VERY NICE TO ME, MY FRIENDS ALWAYS CARE ABOUT ME AND ALWAYS SUPPORT ME. SOMETHING I LOVE ABOUT WORLD CLASS IS THAT THE TEACHERS ARE VERY LOVING, FRIENDLY AND VERY GOOD KAYAKERS. SOMETHING THAT IS DIFFERENT AT MY SCHOOL IN CHILE, THE TEACHERS ARE BORING AND HAVE NEVER BEEN IN A KAYAK IN THEIR LIVES. NOW I REALLY APPRECIATED THIS EXPERIENCE THAT I AM HAVING AND I HOPE TO LEARN EVEN MORE IN THE NEXT QUARTER AND CREATE MEMORIES, LEARNINGS AND GOOD TIMES FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE.

THE COLLEGE ESSAY

ELIJAH SEVENSMA (CLIMB '25)

I happen to love rocks. In fact, I have spent 7 years and 10,000 hours trying to figure out how to get to the top of them. After climbing over 1,500 routes, I have learned that each location, rock formation and route is inherently unique. Every hold and movement used to get to the top is distinctive and individual. Because of this, there are infinite lessons to take away from each climb. **I have taken this abundance of new experiences that have drawn my love for rock climbing and applied them to my own life, shaping my joy for learning and growth.**

There is a lot of falling in the sport of rock climbing. In fact, if you don't fall, you never master the climb. On average, I fall 10 times for every climb I top, meaning I have fallen off climbs about 15,000 times. After falling so many times, I have learned to approach my climbs more strategically and visualize a sequence of moves that I will do.



Often, I am not strong enough to do a move and must train on different routes or in the rock climbing gym to develop the skills necessary. I often find myself applying these lessons from falling to everyday problems in school and life. I recognize failure is an opportunity for learning and improvement. It has taught me to appreciate the journey and seek out adventure.

In the sport of rock climbing, there are boulders that nobody has ever seen before, let alone climbed. These boulders are often hidden in a dense clump of trees or protected in unknown and unexplored corners of nature. Something that has always intrigued me about climbing is the search for that elusive boulder. I am a naturally curious person and often find myself looking through the woods trying to find and climb a new route. Even if I do not find a boulder, I learn a little more about the sprawling Appalachian mountains that are my backyard. This natural curiosity is the reason why I am open to learning new things.For instance, I have sought outdoor experiences that introduce me to new places and people. I have also developed an interest in photography to capture what resonates with me.

Over the years, rock climbing has taught me that this is not an individual sport. Climbing is most often shared with a group of close friends, all cheering each other on. We rely on one another for moral support, but most importantly, for safety. When climbing mountains or even smaller boulders, I rely on my partner to catch me when I fall. My life literally rests in their hands. This has taught me the value of communication and collaboration. I have learned how to listen carefully and work through arguments by hearing everyone's perspectives. Another important component of climbing together is the alternative angle. Because every climb is unique, not everybody climbs a route the exact same way and it is cool to watch the different methods. Here is where I recognize there are many solutions to problems and it is helpful to consider perspectives that are not my own.

Getting to the top of rocks has taught me many important lessons both in climbing and life. I have learned the value of falls and failures, and how to learn from them and move past them. My curiosity has helped me discover a love for adventure and exploration. My climbing community has shown me the value of others in the journey of life. The lessons from climbing shape who I am becoming and I have more to learn every day.

Elijah Is from North Carolina. His Favorite place to Climb is in Boone where he hopes to attend Appalachian State University



TEACHER FEATURE ALLY FALLER

Meet Ally Faller, a teacher at the Mountain Bike Academy whose interests and impact runs deep. Ally's breadth of academic expertise, interdisciplinary mountain bike experience, and commitment towards supporting her team has been shaping the Mountain Bike Academy since the beginning. She's also literally reshaping our school through her WCA logo redesign and upcoming website rebuild. Ally Faller can do anything!

Ally is a master of all trades. **In her four years at the Mountain Bike Academy, Ally has taught, AP Statistics, Literature of the Americas, AP Calc, Pre Calc, Comparative Literature, Algebra 2, Geometry, Media, Stats in R and Computer Science.** Ally attended college at the University of Boulder where she earned a dual degree in Creative Technology Design (an Engineering degree specializing in graphic design and computer sciences) and Creative Writing with a minor in Business. Ally's Renaissance approach to academics enriches each of her classes. Ally designed the WCA curriculums for Computer Science and Statistics in R.

While both courses do a really good job of teaching concrete coding skills and applications of statistics, Ally prefers to teach these classes in conjunction with Comparative Literature because of the way research methods in her STEM classes dovetail with the research paper students produce in Comp Lit as part of their Senior Capstone project. Applications across disciplines make Ally "very happy."

Dirt Jumps are another thing that makes Ally happy. Ally came to World Class with a history of strong finishes in collegiate mountain bike races including two National Championship titles in XC. Her wheels-on-the-ground endurance background was pretty at odds with The Mountain Bike Academy's thirst for downhill, jumps, freeride, drops, and enduro racing.

Ally describes feeling “way out of (her) depth” when she started at World Class. “I bought a bike for the job.” Ally shares, “it was a Yeti SB 140, which I thought would be tons of travel, but pretty much immediately realized I was wrong and that we were doing basically a different sport.” Luckily teachers make great students, and Ally’s inexperience in the gravity side of mountain biking means that she has been able to see amazing progression at World Class. “I’ve gone from basically never leaving the ground to becoming a dirt jumper, which it turns out I love” Ally shares with extreme modesty. **“The improvement,” Ally explains, “is one of the big reasons I keep coming back to this job.”**

It’s special to find a teacher who brings as much to the table as Ally. Ally's dedication and commitment to pouring everything into her work inspires those around her. When asked why she continues to work at World Class, Ally reflects, **“part of the reason that I have been here for as long as I have is that this job always changes my perspective. In each of my years I feel like I've learned something new about myself and about the world.”** At this point in her interview Ally explains that one of the things she learned at World Class is that “Portugal is not in South America ... when I went to Portugal I learned it is not in South America.”



Ally hitting the dirt jumps in San Esteban, Chile

PC: Riley Gardner

Jokes aside, one of the biggest takeaways for Ally is that she is far more capable than she thought. **“I've always been a person who pushes pretty hard academically and isn't necessarily great at managing the life side of things. This job is such a good balance for me. I am able to do the academic things well and feel strong as a teacher, as a mentor, and as a teammate for the faculty. And then it pushes me to do a lot of the life things that I find really, really scary.”** In addition to the personal growth Ally has found at World Class, she enjoys the long-stay format of travel. “This job has kind of ruined me for normal traveling, because if I'm ever staying in a place for less than three weeks now, I'm like, well, what's even the point?”

In addition to her contributions to The Mountain Bike team, Ally has been able to help usher World Class’ digital presence into the 21st century. Ally is currently redesigning the School’s website and is responsible for creating our new logo. Ally explains that the old WCA logo was “very formal looking, but in a way that doesn't necessarily fit the vibe of the school on the ground.” Ally wanted the new logo to look “formal and strong, but also welcoming.” Ally drew inspiration for the new logo from geometric humanist fonts and aimed to integrate “something that looked like a mountain, and something that looked like an arrow, and something that looked like a wave.” The new logo hits all these targets and goes is yet another testament to Ally’s exeptional ability to enhance everything she works on.



PC: Emmerson Sparks (‘24)

MEDIA CLASS PHOTO GALLERY



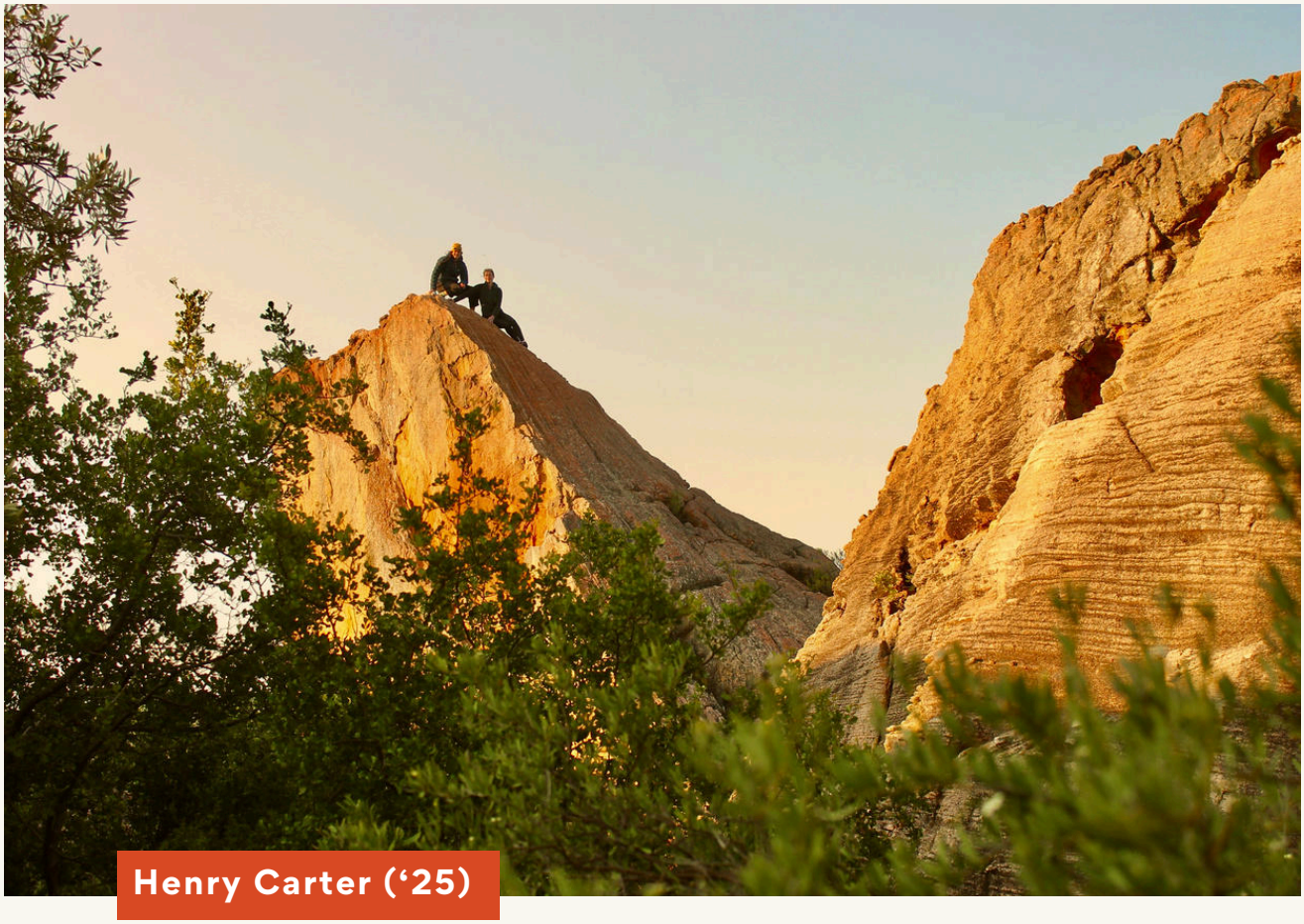
Rowan Frost (‘26)



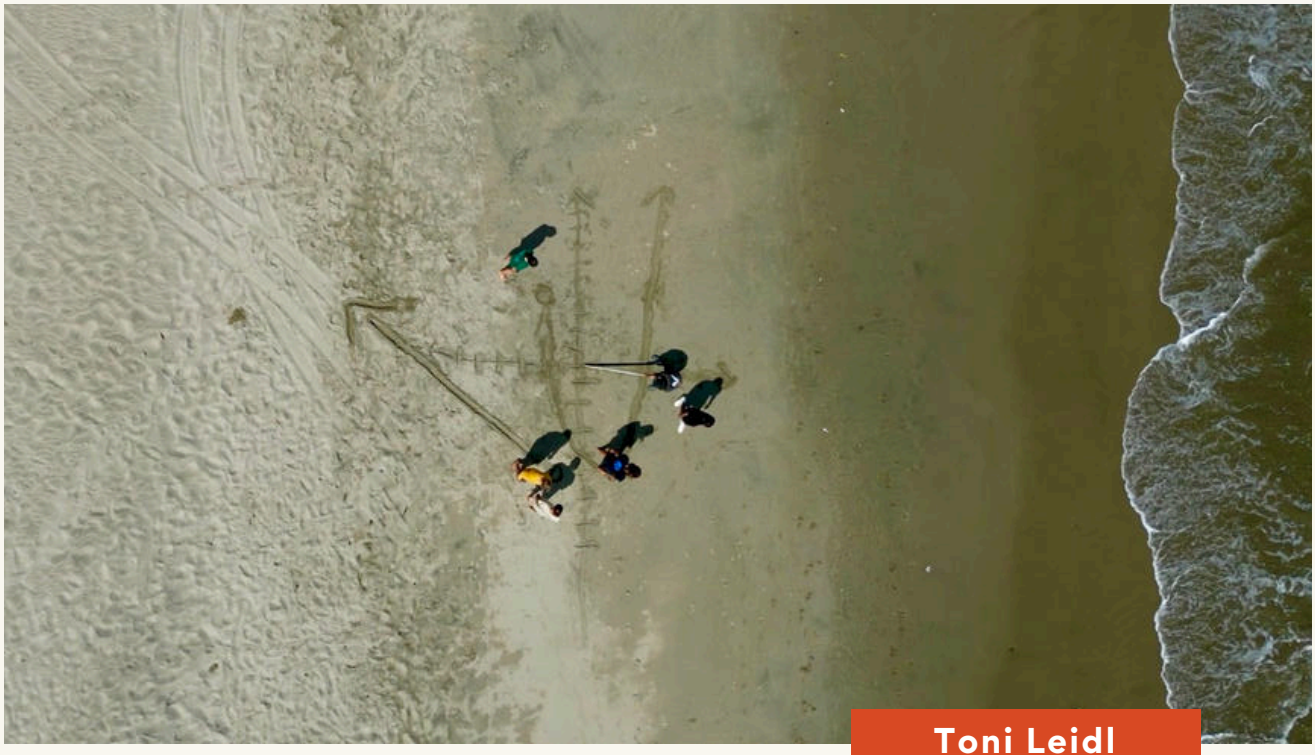
Jacqueline Kimmel (‘25)



Emmerson Sparks (‘25)



Henry Carter (‘25)



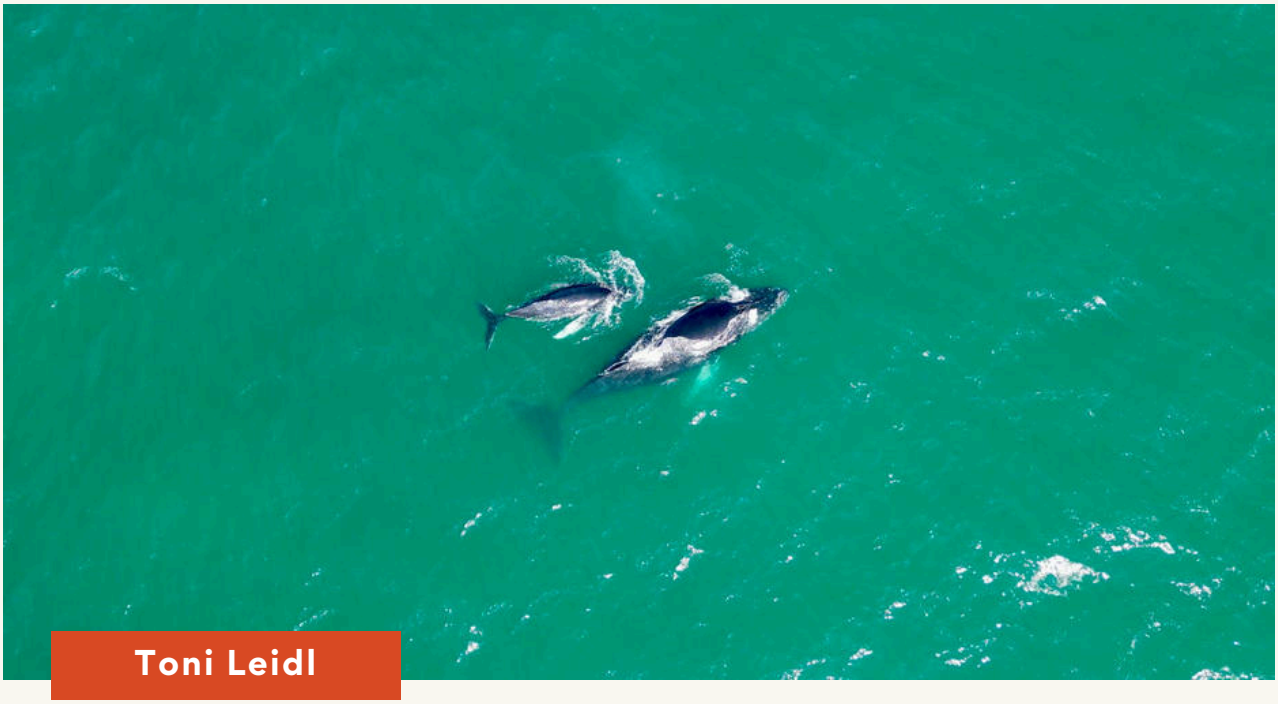
Toni Leidl



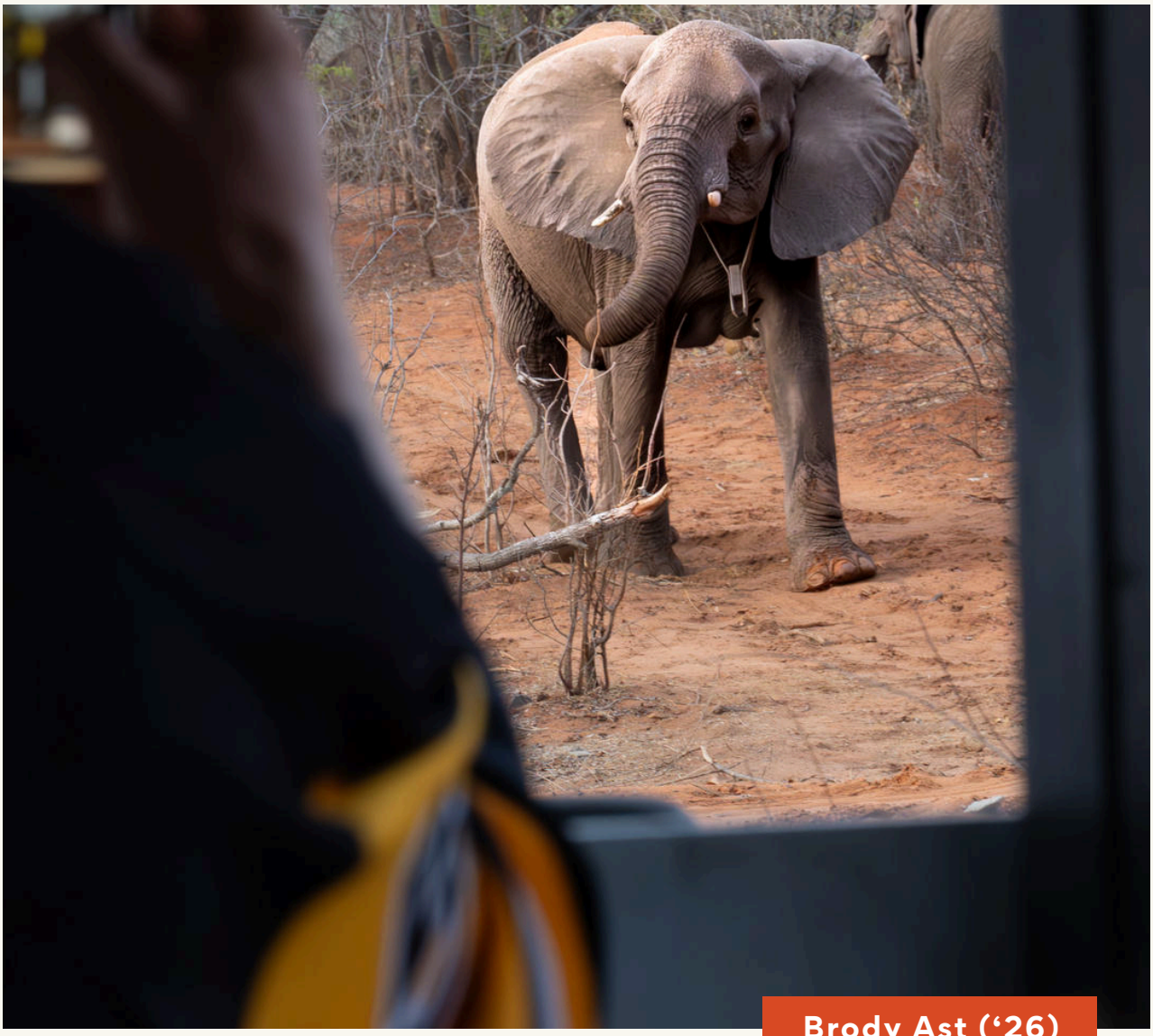
Henry Carter (‘25)



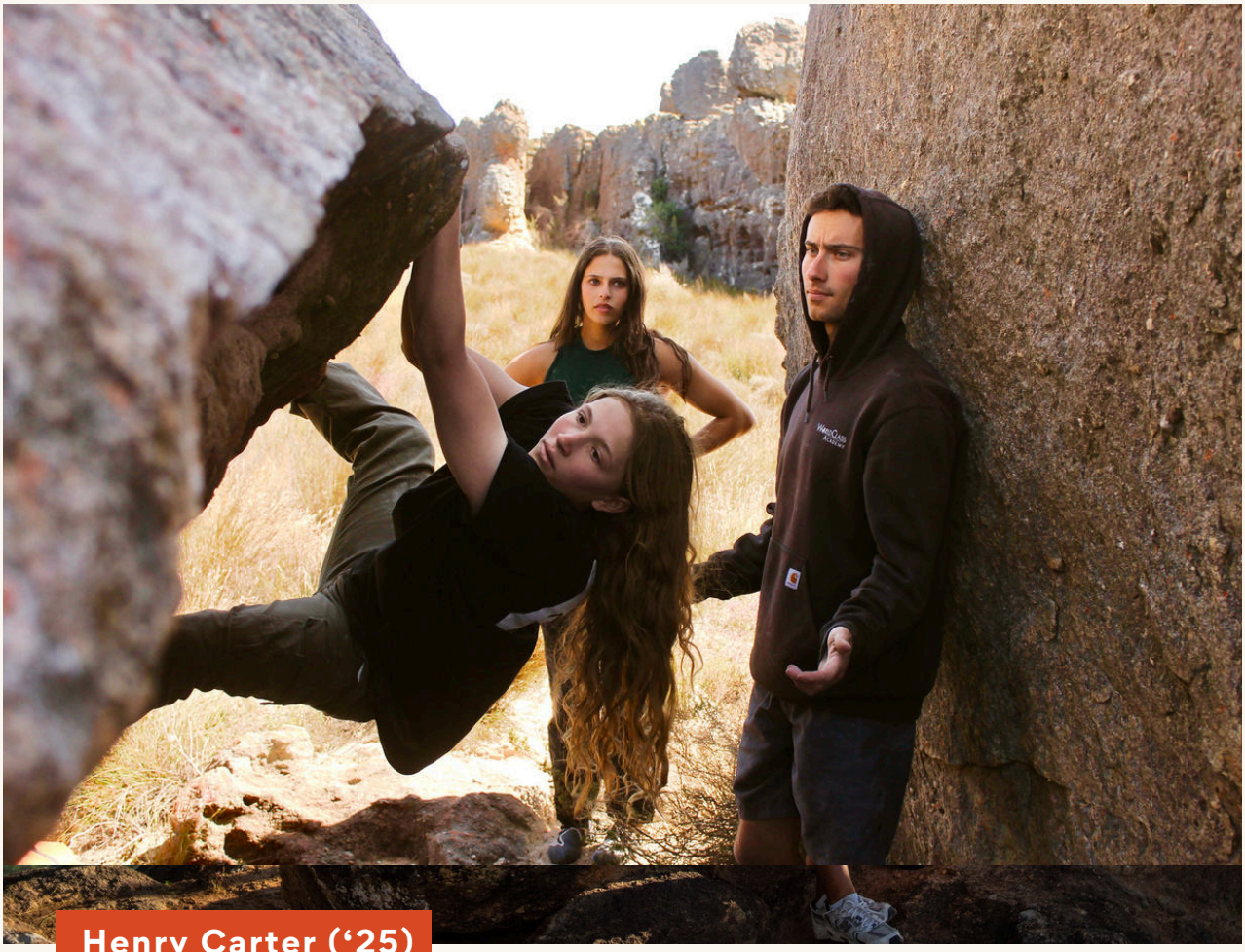
Sahsa Sachs (‘25)



Toni Leidl



Brody Ast (‘26)



Henry Carter (‘25)



Emmerson Sparks (‘25)



Zara with her mentor Bret
PC: Jack Salmon

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT
ZARA JONES

Meet Zara Jones, a 15 year old kiter who's taken her passion from the Caribbean seas to the winds of Peru. Originally from the UK, Zara grew up on the water in the British Virgin Islands, where kiting became a way of life thanks to her dad's early-morning lessons at age 10. "During the pandemic, we'd head out every morning at 6 a.m. to catch the best wind," Zara says. Now based in Jamaica, she keeps the stoke alive, hunting for the best spots and pushing her limits.

Zara first heard about World Class Kite Academy at the GKA Freestyle Youth competition in Tarifa. There, she crossed paths with the kite team's Head of School, Polly, and former student Aya, who were full of stories. Polly even shared some competition tips with Zara, who then went head-to-head with Aya in a tight battle—Aya came first, and Zara clinched second. The experience sparked something new, and in March 2024, Zara officially joined WCKA, excited to extend her kiting season beyond Jamaica's limited December to July window.

One of Zara's most epic moments this year happened at Brazil's Macapá Big Air competition. With a crew of WCKA students by her side, she and her friend Amber entered the freestyle event, both feeling the rush of adrenaline as they prepped their kites and warmed up. **Zara's commitment paid off—she earned second place, while Amber was close behind in third. Then came the Big Air event, where Zara threw down some serious moves, from a backroll kiteloop to an ambitious attempt at a boogie loop. "It was unreal to test these tricks in a competition setting!" she says.**



Since joining WCKA, Zara's riding has gone to the next level. "Practicing big air kite loops and experimenting with freestyle moves has been awesome," she says. Beyond that, Zara's been mastering trick visualization, breaking down complex moves in her head before taking them to the water, and analyzing videos to find every way to improve. And with Peru's unique wave conditions, she's mixing it up, blending freestyle with old-school moves.

Whether she's competing in Brazil, tackling waves in Peru, or discovering new kite spots, Zara's all in - living the kite life to the fullest, making friends worldwide, and pushing herself harder with every session.



POETRY BY ELLA EASTON

How it Feels to Fly

As eyes meet dirt and dirt meets sky
I listen to the soft wind blow
The only image in my eye
Is that of hard-packed dirt below

And all at once I feel earth tilt
But I do not feel afraid
For once my brain is calm and still,
A lake on winters day

I'm soaring through the air so quick
But somehow rest inert
Too absorbed to heed logic
Eyes trail back to dirt

My tyres glide to ground with ease
And keep on rolling true
Although, I know, there was no steeze
Satisfaction's seeping through

Now sky meets dirt and dirt meets me
As I settle down
Emotion rushes in, so free
And peace of mind is found

THE LEAF

A leaf falls slowly
Gently twirling, up and down
It goes where wind blows

TO BE KIND

Cruelness is simple
So why should we choose complex?
Kindness is layered

THE DINNER TABLE

The gentle hum of voices
unfold across the dinner
table,
A tenderness settles through
minds and hearts, allowing for
simple crystalline moments to
ensue.
Pause and listen to each
exchange, if you are able
Upon freezing in time, you
will in fact realize, that time
flew

No one at the table realizes
how precious this moment is,
Perhaps that is what makes it
so flawless.
Using the sudden joy like
emotional crutches
You are finally soaring high,
free, and lawless.

Smiles spill across faces and
flowers bloom in hearts,
Thoughts that form in minds
are brought to life through
words,
Sharing and listening are split
into equal parts,
In the moment you feel so
free you could fly among the
birds.

No need for worries,
struggles, or fears
When you're surrounded by
the joy of those at the table,
everything else simply...
disappears



Ella Is from Boulder, Colorado. Her favorite class is Comparative Literature because she believes words are powerful tools for communication

Ella's favorite part of WCA is the community of peers and staff. She misses her friends at home but feels like at WCA she can fully appreciate having a great group of people at home to support (her)."
Finally, Ella would love to share that she "has the coolest staff team ever. They are helpful and kind and (she) enjoys hanging out with them.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR MITCHELL LAMB

Meet Mitch Lamb, the Program Director for the Kayak Academy. Mitch's principled approach to sports and risk management combined with his playful nature and love of adrenaline make him an impactful leader and role model for the students at the Kayak Academy. Mitch comes to World Class from his current home in Okere Falls, New Zealand, home of the Kaituna River and homebase for many of the world's strongest kayakers.

Mitch Lamb grew up in Cambridge, New Zealand, away from the rivers. Towards the end of high school, an outdoors teacher introduced him to the sport of kayaking and helped him pursue an education in leadership at a Polytechnical Institute on the South Island of New Zealand. At school Mitch learned how to kayak, how to coach and most importantly what attributes he values in a leader. **Mitch explains that Polytech "promotes a very specific style of kayaking. It's very team-orientated which has affected how I like to paddle to this day and inspired me to be someone that is valuable to be on the water with, not just a good kayaker."**



Mitch with his Polytech class



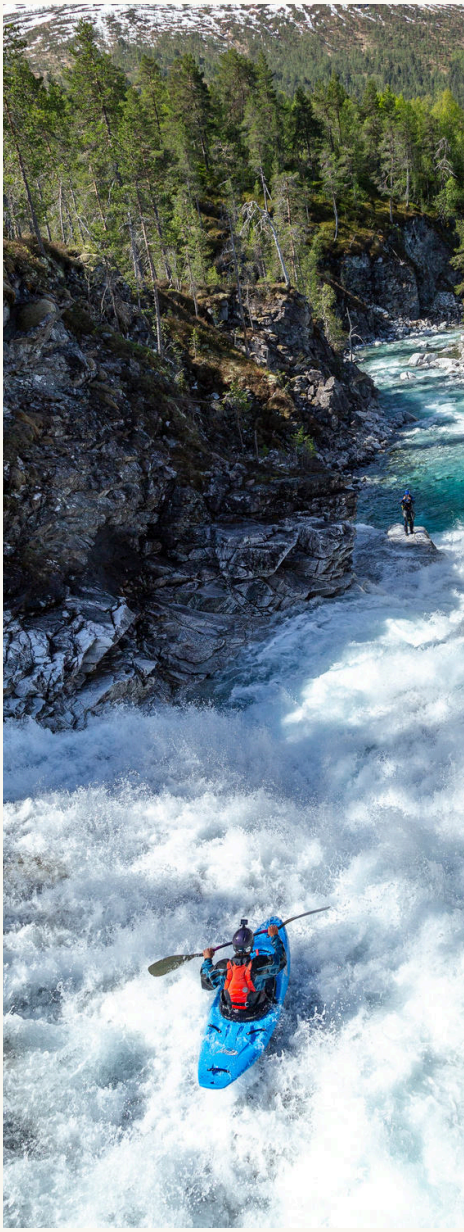
Photos are of Mitch and his WCA coworkers on a paddling trip in Norway



The idea that it's more important to be good to kayak with, rather than good at kayaking is Mitch's mantra on the river: "I like to think of (kayaking) as more of a group sport than an individual sport, because ultimately if you make a mistake, your team around you are the ones that are going to help." Mitch reflects, "I want to instill a sense of team into the World Class kids because they're going to be paddling with each other after they leave school, and I want them to be paddling partners their peers can rely on."

Mitch sees a lot of himself in the eagerness of the students at World Class. As a student at Polytech, Mitch was one of the stronger paddlers, but his teachers were consistently moderating his progression and even taking away his boat rental privileges. Mitch shares, "I just wanted to be a gung-ho rowdy class V kayaker, but my teachers were slowing me down a little bit to help instill values like safety and looking out for your friends." Mitch recognizes this process as one of the best parts of a kayaking school: **"One of the most influential parts of Polytech (and World Class) is the way that it pushes you outside of your comfort zone consistently. I think that's where the most growth happens. And at school you can push your comfort zone in safe environments and in safe ways."**

After graduating from Polytech, Mitch began traveling the world to paddle new rivers. Mitch worked in California and British Columbia, becoming a seasoned Class V kayaker and traveler. On personal trips Mitch has paddled world renowned rivers in India and Norway and visited five continents with the team at World Class. To prepare for his Beginner Spanish Class, Mitch also traveled to Central America to study Spanish in full immersion programs. Last summer Mitch took a break from kayaking and traveled to Costa Rica and Nicaragua to participate in homestays in both countries. Mitch would do four hours of class a day, and then stay with a host family in the evenings. Mitch developed a friendship with the teenaged son of his host family: “I think that's one of the parts of my trip that I look back on the most fondly: being able to develop a friendship with someone in a different language was a first and a very cool experience.”



Before he could speak Spanish, Mitch had to overcome the communication hurdles of being a Kiwi at an American school. When asked about his kiwi accent, Mitch jokingly shares, “the hardest thing for me was changing my language and trying to use words the kids could understand – like changing rubbish to trash or chilli bin to cooler.” In addition to language, Mitch also had to adjust to different grading systems and school curriculums, however Mitch reflects that these things aren’t as important in a school with such small class sizes. “At World Class the students learn in a much more effective way that doesn’t really fit any other model.”

Mitch closes out his interview by reflecting on the unique job he ended up in:

“IN WHAT OTHER WORLD DO YOU GET TO HANG OUT WITH A BUNCH OF CHILDREN AT A REALLY COOL AGE AND HELP DIRECT THEM ON A PATH OF LIFE AND HAVE INFLUENCE ON WHAT PATH THEY TAKE OR WHAT VALUES THEY HOLD CLOSE IN THE FUTURE. I JUST THINK THAT'S SUCH AN AWESOME OPPORTUNITY FOR US AS TEACHERS TO EXPERIENCE AND TO HAVE.”

MEET THE ADMIN TEAM


Evan


Lauren


Crista


Sarina

Aaron Capo Rettig
Principal

Capo has been the Principal and Executive Director of World Class Academy since 2010. Before Capo took over leadership of WCA, he was a teacher, board member, and student at World Class Academy. Capo was a member of WCA's first graduating class and went on to study Economics and Journalism at the University of Oregon.

Capo grew up in the small coast-range town of Summit, but his passion for whitewater and education has now taken him around the globe several times. Capo is the co-author of Colombia Whitewater, the first whitewater guidebook to Colombia's rivers where he was an early pioneer of the country's whitewater.

One place Capo would not have visited if not for WCA was Morocco. Capo visited the Kiteboard Academy in Morocco during the Spring Semester 2017. There he was enchanted by the energy and bustle of Marrakesh and transported into a world he had only read about in history books and adventure stories in his visit to Essaouira. Capo recommends, "go to Morocco with an open mind and you will leave with that mind filled to the brim."

Capo currently lives in Costa Rica where he practices all the World Class Academy sports in addition to surfing and enjoying the Pura Vida lifestyle.

Evan Smith
Vice Principal

Evan has been the Vice Principal at World Class since 2021. Evan grew up in Coloma, California where he kayaked from a young age. While earning his BS in Hydrological Sciences from UC Santa Barbara and MS in Water Resources Engineering at Humboldt State University, Evan was able to travel and kayak in countries around the world. While traveling, Evan met up with WCA in Chile, Canada, and the U.S.A, and seeing how unique the program was, he wanted to be a part of it.

Evan joined WCA as a Math and Economics teacher in 2015 and spent three years with the Kayak Academy taking on the roles of Program and Budget Director. Now residing in White Salmon, WA, Evan has expanded upon his passion for kayaking, and now divides his free time between kayaking, biking, kiteboarding and paragliding.

When Evan thinks about the impact traveling with WCA has had on him, he can't help but think about the places he visited that no longer exist. The school stayed on the Hairy Lemon Island in Uganda just one month before the island was deforested and covered by the backwaters of the Isimba Dam. Evan recalls the way that time seemed to stop on an island with "rich biodiversity, raw cultural experiences in the neighboring villages, and being fully cut off from the technological world."

Lauren Cooney
Academic Director

Lauren has been the Academic Director at World Class since the Spring of 2021. Lauren holds a BA from The University of Texas with a double major in Anthropology and English and an MA from University College London in Education, International Development and Health Promotion. Through the UTeach program, Lauren began teaching in 2010. At the time, she was just a couple years older than her students! Lauren has worked in Belize as a field archeologist, in Thailand as an Instructional Coach and at Austin High as their Director of Speech, Debate and Model UN. Fun fact: Lauren is moderately fluent in Thai and American Sign Language.

After braving the hybrid landscape of teaching in 2020, Lauren fatefully discovered WCA, bought an Airstream trailer and made the big move out West. Lauren now spends her weekends climbing at Smith Rock, however she's also been spotted kayaking on the White Salmon River.

Two memorable places Lauren traveled because of WCA include her visit to the Kite Academy in Drepano (Greece), and visiting with the Kayak team in the Quijos Valley (Ecuador). Lauren shares, "both equally standout as destinations that, as someone who predominantly travels to climb, I probably wouldn't ever have seen otherwise. I've loved gaining more exposure to places off the beaten track from my primary sport."

Crista Wiles
Dean of Students

Crista Wiles is World Class' Dean of Students and a former teacher for the Kayak Academy. In 2014 Crista joined the Kayak Academy with Bachelor's degrees in Education, Literature, and Biology. Crista's background in youth justice and her person-centered approach to education is the foundation on which she has built over a decade of invaluable experience as both a teacher and administrator across various independent education programs. Crista was thrilled to re-enter the experiential education model at WCA after years of experience and completing her Masters of Counselling. Part of Crista's position includes getting to know students as well as faculty and help implement solutions for team well-being.

Crista reflects on her time in the field as a teacher: "Colombia was a special experience for me as a teacher in 2015. The country's diverse geography, vibrant culture, and warm, welcoming people made it an unforgettable destination. One of the most rewarding aspects for me was being able to bring three multi-day river trips to life in one quarter and visiting places tied to our history and literature studies allowed me to be creative in the classroom in such unique ways."

Crista's unique perspective, shaped by her time as both a teacher and administrator, allows her to provide invaluable support to students and faculty as they navigate the dynamic challenges of a traveling school. When she's not in the office she can be found exploring the mountains and rivers around her home in the Sea to Sky, British Columbia.

Sarina Chalmers
Office Director

Sarina is filling the new role of Office Director at World Class. Sarina is a former teacher and Program Director for the Kayak Academy where she taught Comparative Literature and developed WCA's Fine Arts curriculum. Sarina came to World Class with a BA in Organismal Biology and Ecology from Colorado College where she currently sits on the advisory board for the Ritt Kellogg Expedition Grants Program.

At WCA, Sarina's passion for white water kayaking and mountain biking dovetail with her interest in non profit management and communications. Through the Office Director position Sarina is able to stay connected to the "most interesting organization imaginable" while living full time in her home in White Salmon, WA.

Sarina's favorite part of being in the field with World Class was the way she could tailor her class material to each destination. "Traveling to Zambia my second quarter with the school was special because it prompted me to develop an Afrofuturism course where students learned about the power of speculative fiction to create worlds where fantasy and sci-fi elements combat the injustices of colonialism." Sarina reflects, "from that moment on, every quarter became an opportunity for me (and my class) to explore the lessons entrenched in the history and culture of a new destination through literature."

Meet Avery Lauferrae, a 17-year-old kayaker from Bend, Oregon, who's spending his second year with World Class Kayak Academy.

Avery's love for the river runs deep—his dad owns a rafting company, so he's been around rapids most of his life. He started kayaking at around 12 or 13 but didn't initially fall for it. A couple of years ago, though, something changed: he gave kayaking another shot, and from that moment on, he was hooked. "After that, it was all I wanted to do," Avery shares.

For Avery, joining WCKA was a once-in-a-lifetime chance to kayak every day, get really good at the sport, and travel to places he'd never imagined. The program has been transformative, pushing him to grow not only as a kayaker but also as a student and person. "WCKA has made me more confident on and off the water, and it's taught me how to manage my time and make decisions about when to stay on top of schoolwork or take a day off," he says. With each new challenge, Avery's confidence has grown, and he feels he's been able to have more freedom and responsibility at home.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT AVERY LAUFERRAE



PC: Miles Vanderlinden

Avery's journey hasn't always been smooth paddling. When he joined WCKA, he was far from the best kayaker and admits he didn't even have a solid roll. "In my first two weeks, I swam almost every day and felt like I didn't belong," he recalls. But with the encouragement of his teachers and peers, Avery stuck it out, putting in hours on the water and pushing himself to improve. Today, he's progressed to a solid Class IV kayaker, confidently taking on bigger rapids and leading his friends down some intense lines. "In Canada, I was the first to run some of the bigger rapids". This quarter, Avery's with WCKA in Zambia, paddling the legendary Zambezi River.

“This year, I’m not just working to build confidence—I’m challenging myself with bigger rapids, surfing new holes, and exploring different lines,” he shares. The Zambezi’s powerful waters and technical lines are testing his limits, and he’s more excited than ever to keep progressing.

With a year of experience under his belt, Avery has become a key part of the WCKA community. He makes a point of including everyone and encouraging his teammates to push their own boundaries. “I try to be there for anyone who feels like they’re not good enough or is struggling with a rapid,” he says. Having been that person in his first year, he knows how valuable it can be to have someone who’s been through it on your side.

Avery says that WCKA has not only made him a better kayaker but also a better person. From learning about different cultures to making friends from all over the world, his time with WCKA has been nothing short of life-changing. “I’ve met lifelong friends I’ll visit all over the world,” he says. Through challenges, epic runs, and unforgettable experiences, Avery’s journey with WCKA is one he’ll carry with him for the rest of his life.





Avery kayaking on the Zambezi
PC: Sam Larson

Avery scouting #9, Zambezi
PC: Miles Vanderlinden



JUNIOR BIG AIR COMPETITION

BY FELIX STEINDORFER

The Junior Big Air Competition hosted by the World Class Kite Academy is the perfect event for young, talented riders from around the world to show what they can do. This event gives them an opportunity to test their skills and perform at their best on an international stage. Young riders around the world don't often get the chance to compete in Big Air competitions, making each opportunity incredibly special. These events are rare, and finding the right platform can be difficult. That's why the excitement and energy surrounding the Junior Big Air Competition are unmatched. It provides these young athletes with a unique stage to push themselves, gain valuable experience, and share their passion with fellow riders who understand the dedication and thrill of the sport. This competition is more than just an event; it's a celebration of their hard work and love for kiteboarding.







Last year, we held the competition in Sardinia, where 18 riders competed. It was a big success, full of exciting moments, emotions and awesome tricks. Everyone pushed their own limits. One standout performance came from Marten Koblischke, who won the event. His powerful kiteloops and creative tricks set him apart and inspired the crowds. The dedication and talent of all the young is something you should not miss out. Come by and watch them throwing down big loops with tones of style.

Next year, the competition will be held in Tarifa, one of the most famous kite spots in the world. Right after the Junior Big Air will be the GKA Youth World Cup - which means riders can compete in two competitions at the same spot. To perform their best, they need the right conditions. Thats why the World Class Kite Academy chose Tarifa - it's known for having wind all year round.

Tarifa gets over 300 windy days a year because of the Venturi effect, which happens when wind is pushed through the narrow space between Northern Africa and Spain. This creates two main wind directions. Poniente comes form the Atlantic Ocean, bringing steady, cool winds. Levante comes form the east and is stronger and warmer, adding an extra challenge for the riders.

This mix of wind conditions makes Tarifa a great spot for kiteboarding competitions, ensuring that the young athletes have the best stage to show what they can do.

We'll see you on the water.

Felix ('25) is from Zell am See, Austria.

Photos by Toni Leidl

TEACHER FEATURE
MARCOS FERNANDEZ

Meet Marcos, a teacher in the Climbing Academy who brings his passion for geology, a commitment to mentorship, and a love for the outdoors to his students. Originally from New York City and of Dominican heritage, Marcos brings a unique blend of life experiences to WCA, including his formative years in boarding school, where a life-changing mentor introduced him to the joys of Earth Science, climbing, skiing, and so much more. It was here, with a mentor named Larry, that Marcos discovered the power of education and mentorship—a connection so impactful that it's still shaping the way he approaches teaching and guiding students today. "Finding the right mentor is a powerful experience," he reflects. "For me, that happened in 8th grade. I feel like students choose their mentors, and it's a relationship that shapes who you become."

Now, Marcos wants to pass on that same passion and guidance to his students.

Marcos's path to WCA is rooted in his passion for teaching and his mission to create inclusive spaces in the outdoor industry. After graduating from North Country School and interning there, Marcos returned to co-teach Earth Science and lead various sports and outdoor programs. "Teaching there showed me that I wanted to develop myself as an educator," he says. He eventually earned a master's degree in Earth Science Teaching from the American Museum of Natural History, a place he had frequented as a child. The museum holds special meaning for him, representing the curiosity and wonder he now seeks to instill in his students. "It's one of my dreams to take students there and show them all the amazing rocks and exhibits."



While Marcos isn't currently teaching Earth Science as a course, he finds plenty of opportunities to engage with the natural world through the lens of a geologist. One moment from his first year stands out in particular: a day of climbing in Spain's renowned limestone cliffs. On the approach to the crag, Marcos noticed something unusual embedded in the rock—a pebble-like fragment that, upon closer examination with his hand lens, revealed a spiral structure. It turned out to be a fossil! Intrigued, he began looking around for more, only to find the crag was filled with them. After collecting a sample and bringing it back to campus, Marcos identified the fossil as a nummulite, a type of foraminifera and a valuable index fossil that once lived in the ancient Tethys Ocean. These fossils, he later learned, are common across the Mediterranean.

"Moments like this are why I love what I do," he shares. "It's about finding connections between the places we visit and the stories the Earth has to tell."

Even when he's not uncovering fossils, Marcos can often be found sharing the geologic history of the landscapes the team explores.

In the classroom, Marcos emphasizes collaborative learning, fostering a sense of camaraderie and shared success. Recently, his students played a spirited game of Jeopardy to prepare for an upcoming quiz. The teams worked together to answer challenging questions, with students explaining concepts and refining their understanding as a group. To encourage balance and peer mentoring, Marcos reshuffled the winning team from the previous game, pairing its members with other classmates. The result was a classroom filled with confident students supporting one another. "When students work together, they not only strengthen their understanding but also build a sense of shared accomplishment," he reflects. "When one of them succeeds, it feels like a victory for everyone."



Marcos with his American Museumm of Natural History students in the Hall of Gems and minerals



To check out more about the work Marcos does when he's not teaching at WCA check out: North Country School - Access Wild Places

This spirit of teamwork extends seamlessly from the classroom to the climbing crag. Marcos recently witnessed an inspiring chain of success among his students. Earlier this quarter, one student tackled a challenging 5.12d route with the guidance of a coach and peers who helped build their confidence. This success set off a ripple effect: another student, inspired by the accomplishment, began working on the route and eventually sent it. Most recently, yet another climber joined the legacy, climbing with unwavering determination and celebrating their achievement alongside the whole team.

"It's incredible to see the stoke and support pass from one climber to the next," Marcos shares. "When someone sends, it feels like everyone sends. That shared energy is what makes our community so special—whether in academic or outdoor pursuits."

He's also committed to making his classroom a space where students feel heard. For Marcos, this means admitting when he doesn't know an answer but promising to return with one after putting in the necessary work. "When I don't have an immediate answer, I'll table it, but I won't forget it. I want my students to know I'm invested in their learning, that I'm putting in the hours behind the scenes to support them."

Marcos's enthusiasm for geology is contagious. His fascination with Earth Science began with a teacher who made rocks and minerals feel like pieces of an epic, ancient story, and that excitement has never left him. Whether he's talking about rock formations, minerals, or landscapes, Marcos brings his passion to every lesson and outdoor adventure, tying the physical world students experience in climbing to the geology beneath them. "The earth has so many stories to tell, and I love showing students how it all connects to what we're climbing on and moving through."

FACULTY READING LIST



THE CELTS - Simon Jenkins

Josh Noble *Head Coach/History of the Americas/Media Productions* Bike Academy

A LIFE ON OUR PLANET - David Attenborough

Jack Salmon *Environmental Science/Pre-Calculus* Kite Academy

INTERMEZZO - Sally Rooney

Crista Wiles Dean of Students

HOMAGE TO CATALONIA - George Orwell

Miller Scott *Spanish/Government/Economics* Climbing Academy

MOONWALKING WITH EINSTEIN - Joshua Forr

Kalob Grady *Head of School* Kayak Academy

BABEL - RF Kuang

Sophie Pollack *Comparative Literature/Literature of the Americas* Climbing Academy

THE WAR BELOW - Ernest Schneyder

Marcos Fernandez *Geometry/Pre-Calculus* Climbing Academy

DAWN - Octavia Butler

Hannah Tay *Program Director/Literature of the Americas/Seminar* Bike Academy

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR: REACTION, REVOLUTION, AND REVENGE - Paul Preston

Aaron Capo Rettig *Principal*

HOW TO WIN FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE - Dale Carnegie

Cole Buller *Environmental Science/Pre-Calculus* Kite Academy

DOPAMINE NATION - Anna Lembke

Mitchell Lamb *Program Director/Spanish/Algebra II* Kayak Academy

TOMORROW AND TOMORROW AND TOMORROW - Gabrielle Zevin

Drew Lefkowith *Head of School* Climbing Academy

World Class Academy



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