WORLD CLASS ACADEMY

FALL 2025 NEWSLETTER



ACADEMICS

Letter from the Principal
The College Essay
Teacher Features
WCA Full Circle

ATHLETICS

Quarter Destinations
Student Spotlight
Outside Magazine
New Destinations

CHARACTER

Life Skills: Fueling Our School
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CAMPBELL KOWALCZYK

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LETTER FROM THE PRINCIPAL



Adventure is a proven catalyst for learning, and each of us can define adventure and learning on our own terms. At World Class Academy, those two ideas have become so tightly interlaced, so repeatedly patterned into our daily lives, that separating them now feels impossible. Adventure and learning have fused. And what happens when the two become indistinguishable?Life itself becomes an adventure.

This year the MTB Academy is traveling to Tasmania for the first time; the Kayak Academy completed a multi-day river expedition on the South Island; the Climbing Academy sent boulders in the Cape of South Africa; and our Kiteboard Academy stepped well outside their norm (and into wetsuits) during our first ever Q1 in Denmark, where cold but exceptional conditions delivered no shortage of adventure. These are only snapshots, highlights of the larger story and glimpses of the learning hidden inside each leap outside the familiar.

When I write about adventure, I hear my high school literature teacher behind me, the same one who guided me through the painful reading of Madame Bovary but knew how to slash a page red with precision, asking me to define adventure. So here is to you, Mr. Howell Cox (WCA faculty 2001–2003). I think adventure is anything that takes you out of your comfort zone. It can happen in cities, mountains, rivers, deserts, and oceans. It can happen at work or in relationships, through sport, art, or cooking. Adventure has no fixed location, no required skill set, and no timeline other than life itself. Step beyond comfort and you are adventuring. Step beyond comfort and you are learning.

As an ode to the adventures behind us and the ones waiting ahead, this newsletter captures the school's experiences, our shared story of learning through adventure, told in the voices of students, faculty, staff, and community. Come join us for a moment. However, my real call to action, after defining adventure and connecting it fully with learning, is simple:

Go find your adventure, whatever shape it takes.

Re-Think Education.



Aaron 'Capo' Rettig

THE YEAR BEGAN IN . . .



Rocklands, South Africa

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



British Columbia, Canada

Where the **mountain bikers** got to know each other by riding the ultimate Whistler trails in a classic destination designed to warm students up on the various styles of riding to come.



West Coast, Denmark

Where the **kiters** explored a new destination famous for big air prestige and cold water, the famous Cold Hawaii coastline combines traditional fishing and modern surf culture.



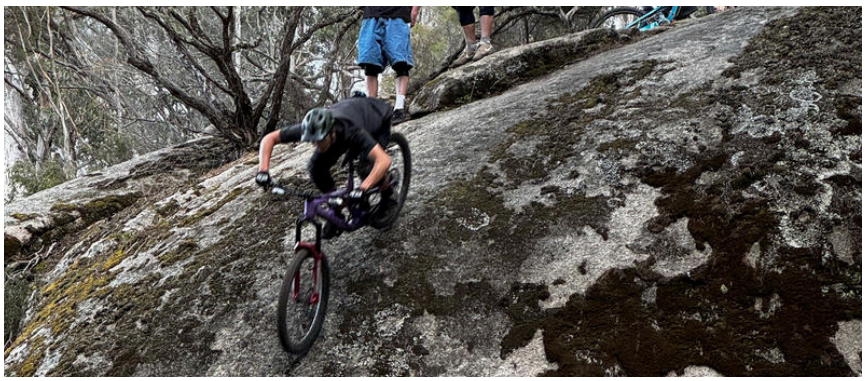
Eastern Canada

Where the **kayakers** paddled every style of river across Ontario and Québec, enjoying the Fall colors while developing a strong team dynamic to carry them through the school year.

AND CONTINUED IN...

Tasmania, Australia

Where the **mountain bikers** travelled to a new location, following the momentum of the Enduro World Series and finding almost as many epic trails as marsupials.



Leonidio, Greece

Where the **climbers** lived a Mediterranean lifestyle while climbing with ropes for the first time this year and building endurance for adventures to come.



West Coast, Brazil

Where the **kiters** enjoyed consistent winds in iconic kite spots, endless beaches, sunsets, acai and celebrated a return to warm water for the first time this year.



New Zealand

Where the **kayakers** visited the North and South Island, enjoying the classic Kaituna River, a remote overnight kayak trip, and a successful Tongariro Crossing.




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STUDENT SPOTLIGHT
LOLA WAIS

Meet Lola, a 17 year old Mountain Bike Academy student from Crested Butte, Colorado. Lola traded her hometown singletrack for some of the world's best freeride zones. Growing up in a mountain town of just two thousand people, Lola's life has always revolved around two things: skiing in the winter and biking in the summer. "There's not a lot to do here except ride your bike or ski," which means that Lola got her first bike when she was two, and it all took off from there.

For a while, Lola thought she'd chase racing. But that changed **when she discovered freeride events like Casey Brown's Dark Horse and Backyard Battle. "I saw those events and thought, wow - I want to do that instead of racing," she says. That shift set her on a new path, focused on creativity, style, and progression on the bike.**

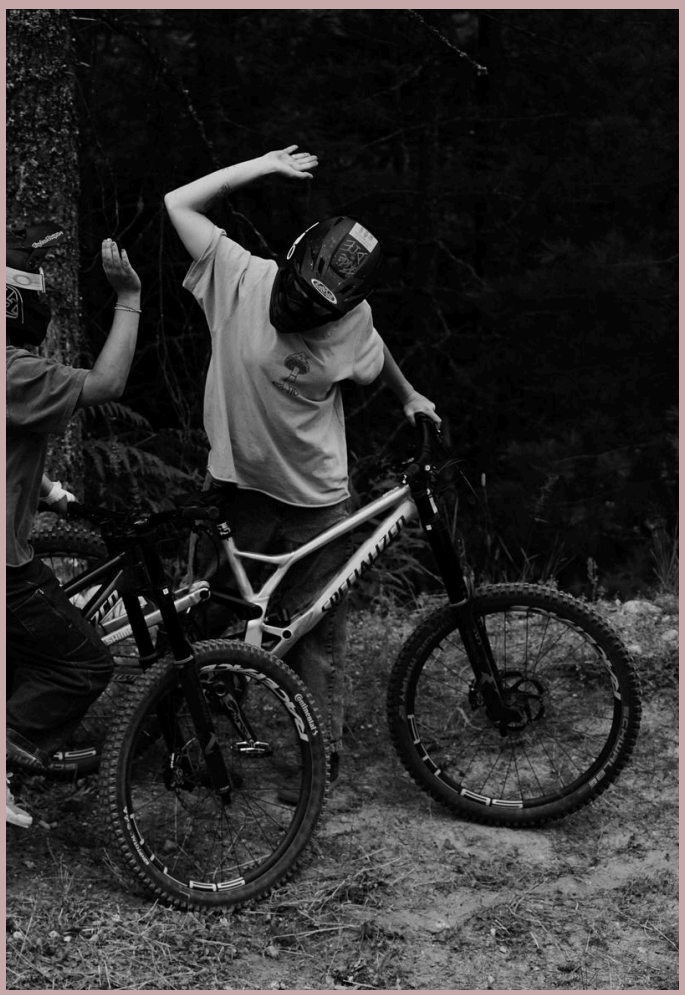
Lola first heard about World Class Academy through her childhood friend Ella Easton. "Our dads have been friends forever," she explains. "I reconnected with Ella during my sophomore year, saw what she was doing with World Class, and thought it was the coolest thing ever. I was super over public school and just knew I had to go." Getting her parents on board wasn't easy, but Lola made it happen. "I had to do some serious convincing that I'd still get an education," she laughs. "Then for my second year, I actually sold my car to go back."



This past year, Lola has been diving deeper into her passion for the media side of mountain biking, and her biggest achievement came at Red Bull Rampage, one of the premier events in action sports. She was selected as Janelle Soukup's videographer, producing vlogs and social clips for Janelle's team during build week and documenting the Rampage experience for a broad audience. It's been incredible to see how far Lola has come in media, connecting with filmmakers like Takaya Sage and Cole Nelson. "They've helped me so much," she says. "It's been awesome to learn how to film, edit, and tell stories through riding.

Since joining WCA, Lola's been immersed in the freeride world she once only admired from afar. "After New Zealand, I went to Natural Selection and got to see the behind the scenes of those kinds of events," she says. "I met girls I'd looked up to forever, and watching them ride was so inspiring. It made me realize that I could be part of that world too."

That realization led to some huge opportunities. "Trek actually paid for me to go to Casey Brown's Dark Horse this year, which was such a dream come true," she says. "I got to ride both the old and new courses, meet people like Casey Brown, Georgia Astle, and Vinny Armstrong, and just be surrounded by women who absolutely rip. It was unreal."





It's a whole new way to express yourself." Lola filmed at Rampage during her fall break and has continued working on new projects, including a short film at Coast Gravity Park in British Columbia and an upcoming project with Janelle Soukup set to release soon. Even better, this paid media work is helping fund Lola's upcoming travels, allowing her to keep pursuing her passion for action sports storytelling.

Like any committed athlete, Lola's faced her share of setbacks. She's broken her collarbone twice, her wrist twice, and taken more than a few hard falls along the way. "It's definitely tough being injured when your whole community is based around biking," she admits. "But it's also motivating. You're sitting there watching your friends ride, and all you can think is, I can't wait to get back out there. When you finally do, it makes riding that much sweeter." She credits her World Class crew for helping her stay positive through her own recovery. "You build such a tight crew here," she says. "When you're hurt, they're the ones who keep you stoked. Coming back from injury is way easier when you've got people who are just as hyped to see you back on your bike."

The WCA environment has pushed Lola's riding to new levels. "You're constantly surrounded by people who are better than you, and that's the best part," she says.



“It pushes you to try harder, hit bigger stuff, and ride outside your comfort zone. My progression has skyrocketed since joining World Class. It made me realize I could actually turn this into something real.”

One of Lola’s proudest moments came during her time in New Zealand, when she worked up to hitting a big line she’d been eyeing all quarter. “I finally hit it during the second to last week, and it was the best feeling ever,” she recalls. “Everyone was there, cheering.”

When asked what World Class means to her, Lola smiles. “It’s kind of like the raddest two month at a time experience with your friends - but it’s also school,” she says. “You go from not knowing anyone to having twenty best friends, and you’re riding in the coolest places ever. It’s absolutely amazing.”

At the heart of it all, Lola’s motivation comes from the people and stories that inspire her. “Nothing is ever original - it’s always a combination of everything you’ve been inspired by,” she says. “That’s what I love about freeride. You see what others are doing, you learn from it, and then you make it your own.” Wherever she rides next, one thing’s for sure, she’ll keep pushing limits, lifting others up, and creating her own line in the freeride world.

FEATURED INTERVIEW ARTICLE IN OUTSIDE ONLINE

WORLD CLASS ACADEMY X Outside MAGAZINE – TELEVISION – ONLINE

World Class Academy Prepares Students for Life Beyond the Classroom

This high school redefines education for adventurous athletes through global travel, elite coaching, and immersive learning.



What if high school included kayaking classic whitewater in Patagonia, climbing tufas in Greece, riding A-Line in Whistler, or kiting perfect wind in Brazil—while earning a diploma and applying to college? At World Class Academy (WCA), that's just a typical semester. For 25 years, WCA has combined rigorous academics with elite-level adventure sports, creating a totally unique high school experience. From the Andes to the Amazon to the Alps, students don't just learn—they live their education. Climbing Academy alumnus-turned-instructor Kieran Hadley, MTB Academy Head of School Riley Gardner, and Dean of Students Crista Wiles offer a behind-the-scenes look at how WCA is evolving, what makes its students stand out, and why this untraditional path leads to growth far beyond GPA or podiums.

Student Experience

Kieran Hadley, Alumnus and former Climbing Academy Program Director

Outside: What is the lasting impact of WCA for students?

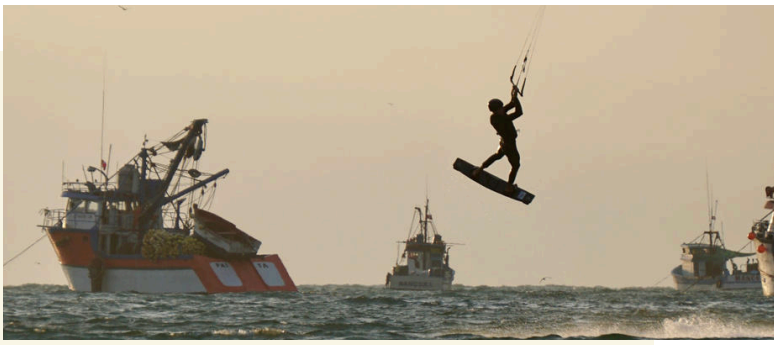
Kieran Hadley: The ability for WCA students to see the world through the lens of sport and learning is an unreal opportunity. In 2015, my senior year of high school, I climbed with my classmates and teachers in Maple Canyon, Ten Sleep, Joe's Canyon, Ulldemolins, Albarracín, Potrero Chico, El Salto, Bishop, and Las Vegas—all in one year!

As a WCA Climbing Academy graduate, I left our program equipped with life skills that others often aren't able to build in a traditional high school environment.

I learned to adapt to new environments and situations more quickly, be a more effective team member, and understand how to set and achieve goals. Most importantly, students in the WCA programs develop new perspectives and social connections that stick with them long after graduation.

After graduating from WCA, my classmates and I approached life in a new way, having gained appreciation for process over achievement and community over competition. I went into my WCA program as a competitive climber and came out of it with an even greater passion for outdoor climbing and a community of friends to share that with, many of whom I'm still in contact with today. I saw the same evolution in my students when I returned to teach at the school. The WCA alumni I know are the type of people who "get it"—who chase their goals humbly yet playfully, respect nature and the people around them, and pursue their sport at an elite level.

In what ways did your experience at WCA shape your career path or professional goals?
When I was a WCA student, one of my teachers read a piece of my writing and told me I should consider pursuing journalism. This recommendation from a trusted mentor planted a seed that followed me through my undergraduate education and pushed me to explore the field through internships and my own writing and photography. I eventually decided to go back to school to pursue a career in journalism, but I set that goal aside for a few years because I wanted to go back and teach at WCA, which was absolutely worth it. After teaching, I had saved enough for graduate school, and now I'm halfway through my master's in journalism. So it's sort of become a full circle that WCA both inspired and helped me to achieve.











Culture and Curriculum

Riley Gardner, WCA MTB Head of School

Outside: How is WCA evolving—what's available now, and what's coming next?
Riley Gardner: World Class has got to be one of the most unique high schools out there. What sets us apart is our dedication to the highest caliber of athletic destinations to promote passion for sport and learning in our students. We are constantly advancing our academic curriculum, improving coaching practices, and expanding our destinations. Our current student-to-teacher ratios are 3:1, with about 20 students per academy. Our four academies are: Whitewater kayaking, Kiteboarding, Rock climbing, and Mountain biking. In 2024 and 2025, we also offered the Paddle Tribal Waters Academy—a tuition-free version of the World Class Kayak Academy—specifically designed for Indigenous youth, in preparation for the first source-to-sea descent of the undammed Klamath River. Beginning in the 2026–2027 school year, we'll introduce our fifth program—surfing!

What do you consider when choosing academy destinations?
We operate our academies in some of the world's most inspiring locations, setting WCA apart from other academic institutions. The athletic caliber of a destination is at the core of our school.
For mountain biking, we are looking for trails and MTB scenes that are considered to be the best in the world. We choose destinations that stand out as a global hot spot for the sport. Next, we review the environmental and cultural aspects of the destination. We look for places that are exciting and engaging places that our students are fired up on, with good local food and a variety of experiences beyond mountain biking. Finally, we examine logistics. The right accommodation is essential—it must support classrooms, morning workouts, nutritious meals, and storage for the massive amount of gear we bring along.

Before finalizing a location, I always consider how it fits within the broader itinerary for the school year. I ask myself: How does this destination balance with the others? Does it make sense in the context of where else we're going? I want the yearlong itinerary to have a balance. I prefer to mix in classic WCA destinations like Whistler and Queenstown with more niche locales like Peru and Tasmania. Many factors go into choosing a location for WCA, but seeing it all come together—and watching students be blown away by a place—is one of the most rewarding parts of my role. The considerations I put into MTB destinations are reflected in our other academies, where the kayak, climb, and kite heads of schools are asking similar questions and putting together equally standout yearlong itineraries.



World-Class Education
Crista Wiles, WCA Dean of Students

Outside: Who are your students?
Crista Wiles: Students come to WCA to complete their high school education while traveling to participate in the sport they love—a dream-come-true opportunity. They have varying levels of athletic expertise, but they are all motivated to learn from their athletic heroes and teachers (which turns out to be a terrific motivator for academic performance), grow as global citizens, and challenge themselves in a dynamic and engaging environment. Whether they attend for a semester or their whole high school career, students in our program will explore the world, push their limits, and connect with peers who share similar interests.

What sets our student body apart is not just athletic skill but the rapid development of character. Students come to WCA eager to learn from our expert staff and pursue their individual goals. They leave with even more growth than they imagined: a deeper understanding of themselves and a clearer vision for how they want to engage with the world. Through personalized life skills lessons, hands-on experience, and the college seminar, students learn the college process, explore new interests, and envision their future.

By the time they leave WCA, they're not just prepared for the next step—they're ready for wherever life takes them next.

What personal growth do you witness in students as they move through the program?
For many students, this is their first extended time away from home, and that offers a powerful opportunity for personal growth. Students develop character through the day-to-day realities of group living, independently managing responsibilities, and adapting to new routines while traveling internationally. The unique structure of our academic program—small class sizes, personalized instruction, and deeply invested teachers—allows students to grow in confidence and capability in the classroom.

Athletically, they are immersed in their sport in some of the most iconic destinations in the world, with consistent training and meaningful coaching that fuels progress. They learn how to contribute to a team, navigate conflict, and hold themselves accountable.

Beyond these areas, I see students begin to explore who they want to be in the world. They gain independence, empathy, and self-awareness. WCA isn't just a school: It's a launchpad for the kind of growth that stays with students long after they leave.



PROGRAM DIRECTOR TONI LEIDL

For Toni Leidl, Program Director of the Kite Academy, kiting isn't just a sport - it's a way of approaching life. It's about adaptability, patience, and the ability to stay calm when the wind changes direction. Whether coaching on the water, navigating the logistics of a traveling school, or mentoring students through the ups and downs, Toni's goal remains the same: to help young athletes build confidence, independence, and joy that lasts long after they pack up their kites.



Raised in Passau, Germany, a small riverside town where both his parents were teachers, Toni grew up with movement as his default mode. "I tried every sport I could: basketball, soccer, gymnastics, skiing, snowboarding, climbing, biking, windsurfing.. I just wanted to be outside, always." That constant curiosity and physicality would eventually shape not just his career, but his outlook on life.

Before joining World Class Academy, Toni lived in Innsbruck, Austria, surrounded by mountains. He worked as a professional freestyle snowboard coach at a winter sports boarding school, coaching for the Austrian federation and traveling the world with his athletes. "Coaching snowboarding was never just about tricks," he says. "It was about living together, cooking together, training hard, and sharing everything - the wins, the setbacks, the process. It was a lifestyle."





hat same spirit of community is what drew Toni to kiting, and ultimately to WCA. “My partner introduced me to kiting,” he says. “She’s completely addicted to it - and she passed that on to me. I fell in love with the freedom of it, the constant learning, and the way it connects you to nature.” When his partner joined World Class Academy, Toni decided to take a leap too. He quit his job, hit the road, and one semester later, stepped into a teaching role at the Kite Academy.

“At first I was overwhelmed: new environment, new language, big responsibilities,” he admits. “But the WCA community had this energy I’d never experienced before. The students, the staff, the sense of purpose, I fell in love with it. The administrative team believed in me, pushed me out of my comfort zone, and helped me grow into leadership. I never imagined I’d end up running the program, but now I can’t imagine doing anything else.” As Program Director, Toni brings a balance of precision and play to his coaching. **“I like to guide through conversation,” he says. “I listen, ask questions, and make space for students to find their own path. Growth doesn’t come from being told what to do - it comes from discovering it together.”** He’s learned that the hardest part of the job isn’t the travel or the weather, it’s the responsibility. “It’s a constant dance between planning, reacting, and supporting,” he says. “Leading a team of students and staff means being flexible, patient, and keeping perspective. It’s taught me to slow down, take a breath, and respond instead of react.”

That mindset shows up in his coaching philosophy too. Toni doesn't measure success by podiums or rankings, but by the small shifts - the student who learns to self start in new conditions, who overcomes fear, or who helps a teammate rig their kite without being asked. "Those are the real wins," he says. "Kiting teaches humility. You can't control the wind, only how you respond to it."

Outside of WCA, Toni finds inspiration in simple living. Now based part time on the northwest coast of Denmark, he's drawn to the rhythm of life there. "People value community and time outdoors," he says. "They do what they love without overcomplicating it. That simplicity, it's grounding." His own adventures remain central to who he is: a first downwinder in Brazil with Polly and students, backcountry snowboard missions in Austria, and spontaneous kite sessions with Merle that stretch until sunset. "Those moments remind me why I do this," he says. "They keep me connected to the joy I want my students to feel."

Ask Toni what he hopes his students take away from their time in the Kite Academy, and his answer comes without hesitation. **"I want them to leave as confident, curious, and kind people - not just strong athletes. I want them to have each other's backs, think creatively, and enjoy the ride. To understand that growth takes patience, and that adventure isn't about perfection - it's about staying open to whatever the wind brings." And most importantly, he adds, "to never forget that life, just like kiting, is all about balance."**



PHOTOS BY MERLE MÖNSTER

CLASSROOM FEATURE:

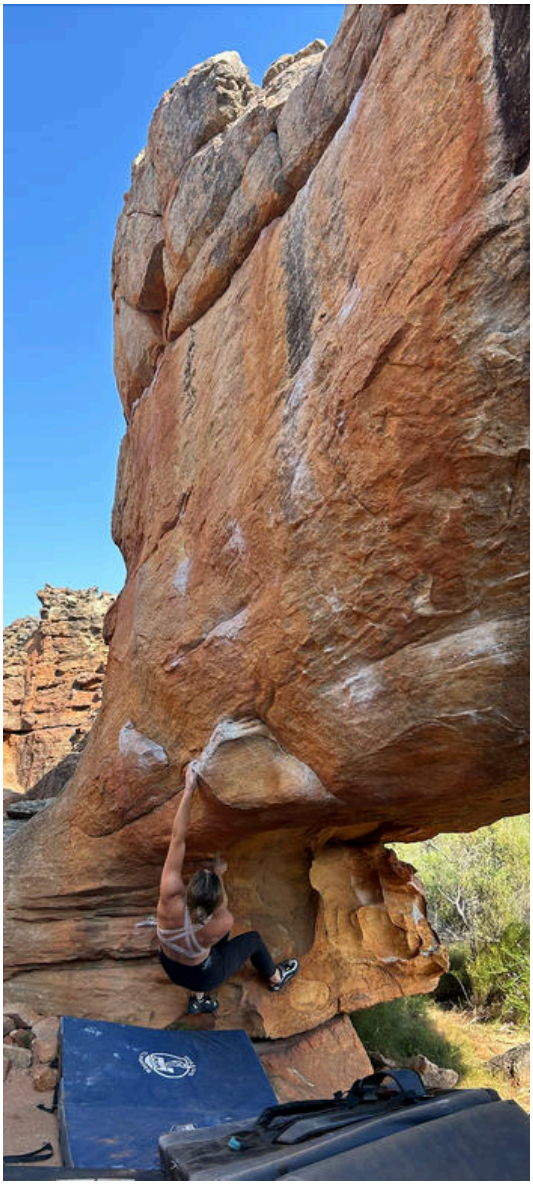
COMPARATIVE LITERATURE WITH SOPHIE POLLACK



On day one of Sophie Pollack's Comparative Literature class, students are asked to dig deep. At the start of each school year, Sophie assigns a personal nonfiction essay asking students a single question: "how do you live a meaningful life in the modern world." In addition to helping Sophie get to know her audience, this question is designed to jump-start students down the path of discovery and reflection they will follow all year.

Sophie's Comparative Literature class is built around questions of meaning in the modern era. **"I have the students share their initial answer on the first day of class," Sophie explains "and then we go through a chronological journey, exploring how different authors and movements have found meaning in the modern world. We ask, "how do the Romantics answer that question? How about Herman Hesse? The Existentialists? Sci-fi Authors? Radiohead?"** The list could go on and on. The point for Sophie is that the search for meaning is fundamental to the human experience and to literature in general.

Sophie is an interdisciplinary teacher and student through and through. A lover of books since before she could remember, Sophie currently runs two book clubs back home in LA through the bookstore where she works. During her Undergraduate studies at Yale University, Sophie majored in Humanities. She began her college career with a course called "Directed Studies" that takes students through the whole Western Canon in a single year. "It's basically a historical and political thought class, a philosophy class, and an English class all at once." Sophie shares, "that class really allowed me to consider literature, not as a singular lesson with each book, but rather as a study of the trajectory of intellectual history."



This year in Comparative Literature, Sophie's course will follow a similar arc of comparison across space and time. In quarter one, Sophie's class read a contemporary South African novel, *The Promise* by Damon Galgut paired with Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. The purpose of quarter one, Sophie explains, is to learn the practice of comparative literature by looking at two books that are different on the surface, and exploring what common lessons they may both hold and in what ways they view the world differently.

After quarter one, Sophie's class takes a more chronological approach to literature and its historical backdrop. In quarter two students study the romantic reaction to the enlightenment era's scientific revolution by reading Romantic Poetry and then compare those works to Herman Hesse's *Sidhartha*. In quarter three students jump ahead to works by Camus and Kafka indicative or the existentialist and nihilism movements, comparing them to a contemporary novel with related themes, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*. Finally, Sophie's Comparative Literature class ends like all do, with the Senior Capstone. The Senior Capstone (a formal research paper on a topic of each student's choosing) is a chance to turn the class's question back onto the students. After a full year of exploring how authors find and write about meaning, Sophie asks students to return to the question personally. "Through the Capstone, students explore something that is meaningful to them that they'd like to learn more about."

Reflecting on her overall vision for the course, Sophie shares, "I approach Comparative Literature through the angle of interdisciplinary learning through texts from different geographical regions, different languages, and different historical backdrops. But I also incorporate learning about other disciplines. For example, we will look at art history or specific visual art if it is relevant to a time period, or we will look at a philosophical treatise that is about that time period, or we'll listen to some music."

STUDENT POETRY
KITE ACADEMY

At the time of the 'I Speak but Not the Way I Used To' Poem assignment we were studying Hesse's *Siddhartha* and learning about western vs eastern philosophy in literature. My class analyzed the poem 'Search for my tongue' by Sumatra Bhatt and discussed how language can bias one's beliefs. As all the students in my class are bi or trilingual and going through a lot of growth and change in their lives, I thought why not make a poetry prompt where students can draw from their own experiences studying in a language which is not their mother tongue, or developing their own voices.

- Millie Aldridge, Comparative Literature

I speak, but not the way I used to.
My voice is softer now
I think before I talk.
I don't say everything I feel
I try to choose the right words
I speak, but my words are small
I want people to understand me
I don't shout and I don't rush
I wait and I listen
I ask questions when I don't know something
I speak, but I listen more
I hear people better
I notice things I didn't see before
I feel calm when I am quiet
I feel happy when someone listens to me.
I speak, but not the way I used to.
I speak slowly,
with my heart,
and with hope.
I want to learn and grow.
I want to speak the truth.

BY EMANUELE ROSSI





Ode to the Child Hidden Inside of Me
By Leah Dansereau

I speak, but not the way I used to.
Words who once were mine, now don't seem to find their place.
Ones who previously flowed freely, without a worry in the world,
were buried deep down in the bottom of my being.
I changed.
I am changing.
I'll change.
Constantly evolving.

Maybe I speak with greater wisdom or words,
but I lost parts of myself on the way.
My imagination slowly escaping from the sum of my existence.
Standardized knowledge taking its place.
Slowly, my self unconsciously tried to fit in with the crowd,
to the sake of my own ideas.

I speak, but not the way I used to.
The pureness of my innocence slowly fading away,
like the child in me fighting not to be erased completely.
Being pushed behind the newer thoughts consuming my soul,
Slipping through the grasp of my unawareness,
knowing it would be better to make it stay a little longer.

To the one I was before,
The world must have made me become who I am for a reason.
Right?
I've lost some parts of you,
but you are still inside of me.
Right?
I know I've forgotten about things you once cherished,
but you'll still be proud of what you've grown up to be.
Right?
...
Right?

BY LINA RICHTER

I speak, but not the way I used to.
My words have finally learned to move.
They now flow in a dance of voices.

English begins to shape my thoughts,
stories appear in English within my dreams,
while German hums softly beneath my
breath.

Sometimes I catch myself mixing them,
two different rhythms, two different dances.
A quiet step here, a sudden pirouette there,
like carrying a piece of home
into a new world I'm learning to call mine.

I still stumble in this dance,
tripping over unfamiliar steps,
hesitating between words,
like missing a beat in the music.
But every mistake is a rhythm of its own,
a lesson in movement,
a step closer to finding my own dance.

And in that dance,
I can call my own.
I find myself changing,
not losing my voice,
but creating my own dance,
woven from two languages,
two worlds,
one self.



BY ANTONIA SPITTEL



In another country, all alone
different language, traditions, greeting
standing in a line
office people ask what I'm doing

Too many people, too much around
broken words, broken sounds
Everyone staring at me like I'm an alien,
another living being

I speak, but not the way I used to
Too many thoughts in my mind
circling around and around like a tornado
Pulling me more and more down in a big black hole
I can't spell it out like I'm used to

My head hurts, my stomach is in pain
In my lung, a big rock
I can't speak, I can't breath
What is going on? I don't know.

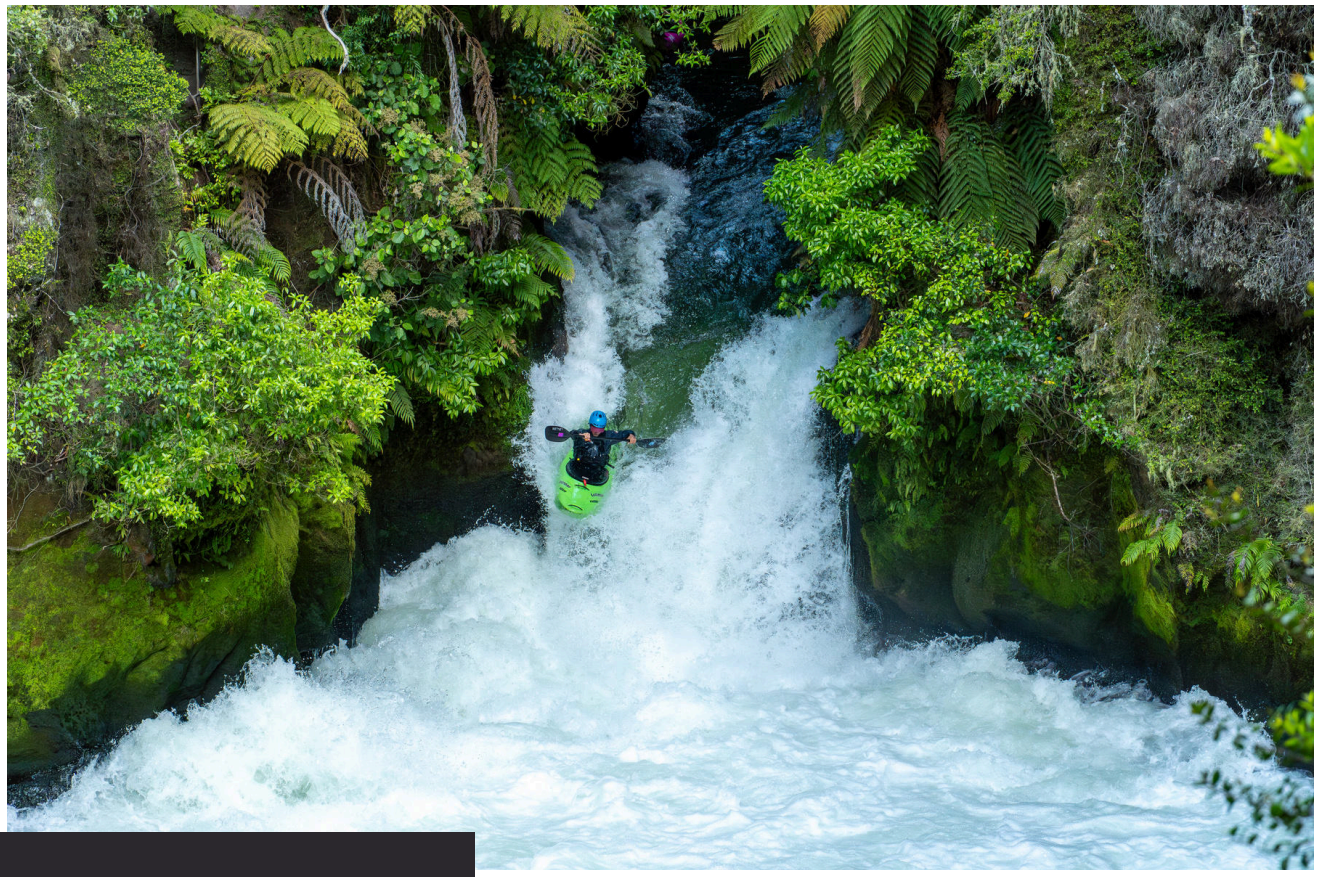
The communication I was used to
easy small talks
easy new connections with others
deep talks with friends
all gone, everything gone

Now I'm here, I'm a stranger
I'm not from here everyone knows
The way I speak with my home accent
all broken sentences
every word goes heavy in the air

Every one can smell and even taste it
It is not the right way
It feels like everyone can read me out
like a news paper

I speak, but not the way I used to
but I keep speaking
hoping just one person can understand
hoping one day everyone understands

I have to try, I have to give my best,
Every day one step forward
never a step back
Only looking forward
That is the way, that is my motto
One day I'll speak as if it the way I use to



ANABELLE CRUM-GROSS

SKY COUVREUX





TONI LEIDL

WILLIAM HEATHCOTE

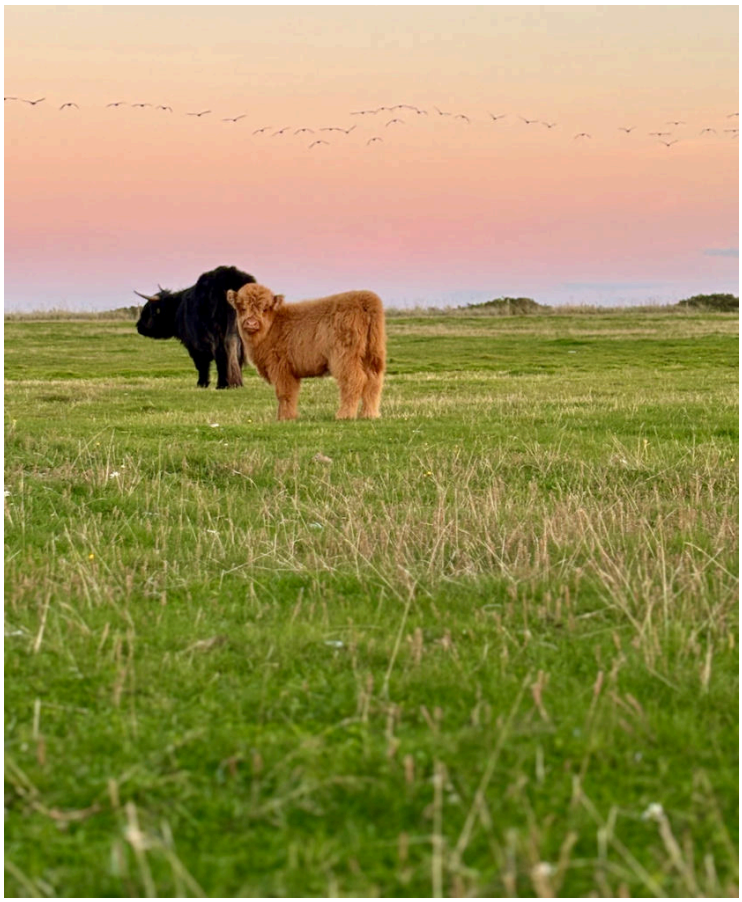




LEAH DANSEREAU

JAXON WHITE





LEAH DANSEREAU

BENJAMIN NIEDER





TEACHER FEATURE TASH HARVEY

For Tash Harvey the mountains have always been home. Growing up in Banff, Alberta she spent her childhood chasing summits in running shoes, crampons, or skis - anything that would get her higher, faster, and closer to the wild places she loved. A competitive nordic skier throughout high school, she spent much of her youth on the road racing, but what he loved most wasn't the competitions, it was the training. "The off-season was my favorite time, we spent our summers on big, type two fun missions in the mountains, and I completely fell in love with it." That love became the throughline of her life, guiding her choices: from cooking at heli-ski lodges to earning her teaching degree as close to the mountains as she could. Today, she calls Squamish home, when she's teaching at the Mountain Bike Academy.

Community is one of Tash's core values. "I don't feel truly at home unless I have a rooted sense of community," she explains. For her, biking has become the perfect medium to connect with people across backgrounds. In Squamish, where she calls home when she's not with the Mountain Bike Academy, **she coaches a girls' team aimed at keeping the spark of sport alive for teenage girls. "We see a lot of girls stop riding in their teens," she says. "Our goal is to keep it fun and to remind them why they started." She also coaches the Squamish Nation Youth Mountain Bike Team, a no-barriers program that provides Indigenous youth with bikes, gear, transportation, and coaching through support from the local trail association. "**Coaching this team has changed me as a person," Tash says. "Reciprocity is so deeply ingrained in Indigenous culture - even in the youngest kids. The care and kindness they show each other, and their resilience when it comes to learning this terrifying sport, inspires me constantly."

That same spirit of community and growth is what drew Tash to WCA. “When I heard someone describe it, I thought this is my dream”. But beyond the daily rides, it was the school’s approach to learning that resonated with her. “I believe education should be lived, not just taught. WCA has the potential to develop not only great students, but great people.” Her classes reflect that same curiosity and wonder. Teaching Environmental Science has sparked a new passion for understanding the landscapes they ride through. “I’ve become a sucker for fun facts,” she admits. “Every place we go, I’m learning more about the geology, the ecology, the little animals that make it unique. I’m building an arsenal of ‘secrets of the land.’” She lights up when students begin to notice these details too - the moss, the dirt, the trees. “I love when they step away from how cool their bikes are and into how cool this world is.” Her rides are filled with those moments of connection, **“my first ride in Australia, we saw wallabies, platypus, and paddymelons.” “The kids loved the jumps, but honestly, we all got the most excited about the animals and the smell of the eucalyptus. It felt like riding through a spa.”**

Tash’s classroom energy reflects the same joy and imagination she brings to the trail. Trained as an elementary teacher she jokes that it sometimes shows. “Elementary teachers have this sing-song love for spirit,” she says. “At my last school, I was overdressed for every theme day, organized a school-wide re-enactment of The Hunger Games, and took school cheers very seriously.”







At WCA, that creativity surfaces in “rock cycle yoga” and “biodiversity Jenga” - the kind of playful learning that might earn an eye roll, but also a smile. Tash, the most rewarding part of working with student-athletes is watching a community form around shared passion. “Despite different backgrounds, we’re all fluent in biking,” she says. She challenges students to consider the role they play in that community: “What kind of person do you want to be remembered as? The friend who pushed the hardest? Or the one who showed up for others when they needed it most? **The person you show up as - in the good times and the hard ones - is the truest reflection of your character.” If there’s one lesson she hopes her students carry forward, it’s this: “We cannot protect something we do not love, we cannot love what we do not know, and we cannot know what we do not see.”** Her advice is simple: “Get out and see as much as you can. Ask questions. The more thought you put into the question, the more interesting the answer will be. That’s what makes life meaningful.”



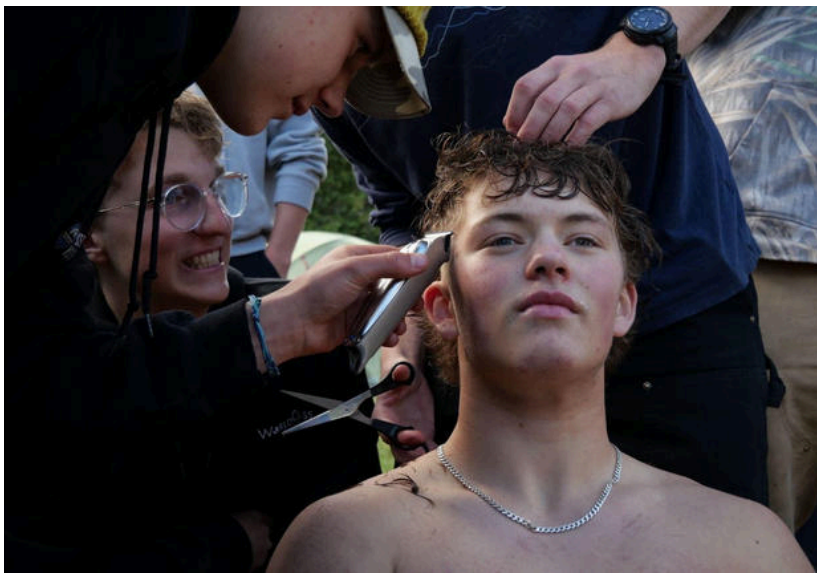
NOTES FROM THE FIELD: KAYAK ACADEMY MEDIA BLOGS

TUTEA FALLS
BRYCE BOENER



Life of a river Hobbit
We arrived in New Zealand on November 26th ready for 7 weeks full of adventures. Since then we have lost everyone's paddles, given out crummy hair cuts, discovered the curse that comes along with paddling a Skuxx and pretended we were Bilbow baggins climbing mount doom to destroy the ring.

-Ollie Goodell, Mea Minchin





Quarter two of World Class Kayak Academy takes place in New Zealand. A standout class this Quarter is Libby Clifton's Literature of the Americas class. This quarter, our main focus is learning about Transcendentalism. We are doing this by reading John Krakauer's *Into the Wild*. Our class is taking ideas from the book and applying them to our day-to-day class. This has us in a hands-on learning environment, taking us on many field trips around New Zealand. These short field trips are leading up to an overnight solo. Where each student will spend a solo night in the wilderness. This will be a very unique and cool experience for each kid in the class. While reading our nook, we annotate and write about these Transcendentalist ideas like intuition, nature, and individual experience, rather than society or institutions. So far, this class has been a highlight of our time at World Class. And all of the students in Libby's class are thankful for her hands-on and engaging class. This experience is nothing like an average high school English class.

-Max Lynch, Kane Halpin, Campbell Kowalczyk



Over the past 2 weeks it's safe to say we've had our fair share of fun, laughter and challenge. For the future we will both be staying engaged in all aspects that go into everyday living at world class.

-Gabe Pena Doll and Pascal Fels



Our first look of the Kaituna River came in the form of Lake Rotoiti, the water source for the Kaituna river. We shoved each other aside in our vans, competing to get the best view of the stunning lake. We walked the course on day one, eyes bulged at the powerful Trout Falls, Tutea Falls, Powerhouse falls, and the beautiful drops and boofs that scatter the river. On the first day of paddling we split into our three groups, slalom up top, the group under Tutea falls, and the group that went head first down the falls.

-Lyra Thevenin and Ian Esser

The kayaking has been truly out of this world, the scenic gorges of the Kaituna River are next level. Whether it be dialing your slalom moves, nailing your boofs, or taking speed laps down, every day never disappoints. The food at the camp has been extraordinary. Our host Mark has been working hard to prepare us with tasty and healthy meals everyday. The balance of nutrition and exercise helps to create a good base for us as athletes and growing teens.We did take a side quest to Tangariro Crossing, which is a beautiful 12 mile hike through the peaks of New Zealand.

-Gabe Pena Doll and Pascal Fels



On October 31, we departed early in the morning for the Tongariro Alpine Crossing, a 6-hour-long trail that spans through the North Island's mountains. The climb traverses through snow, next to hot springs, lakes that used to be burial grounds, and a forest. The walk up was so much fun as the altitude chills the air. Cold enough, in fact, to have a snowball fight. Atop the mountain is like a slice of heaven. One side faces Mount Ngauruhoe and steep drops into lava flows. While the other side is a grassy descent with steam coming off the mountainside. It's something out of a fairy tale. At the peak, everybody was sitting looking at the views while we enjoyed our lunches and each other. The way down, you could see further than the way up, as you could look at the waves of trees planted in lines for lumber. The day was exhausting, but once done, it was a fulfilling feeling getting to see more of New Zealand.

-Max Lynch, Kane Halpin, Campbell Kowalczyk

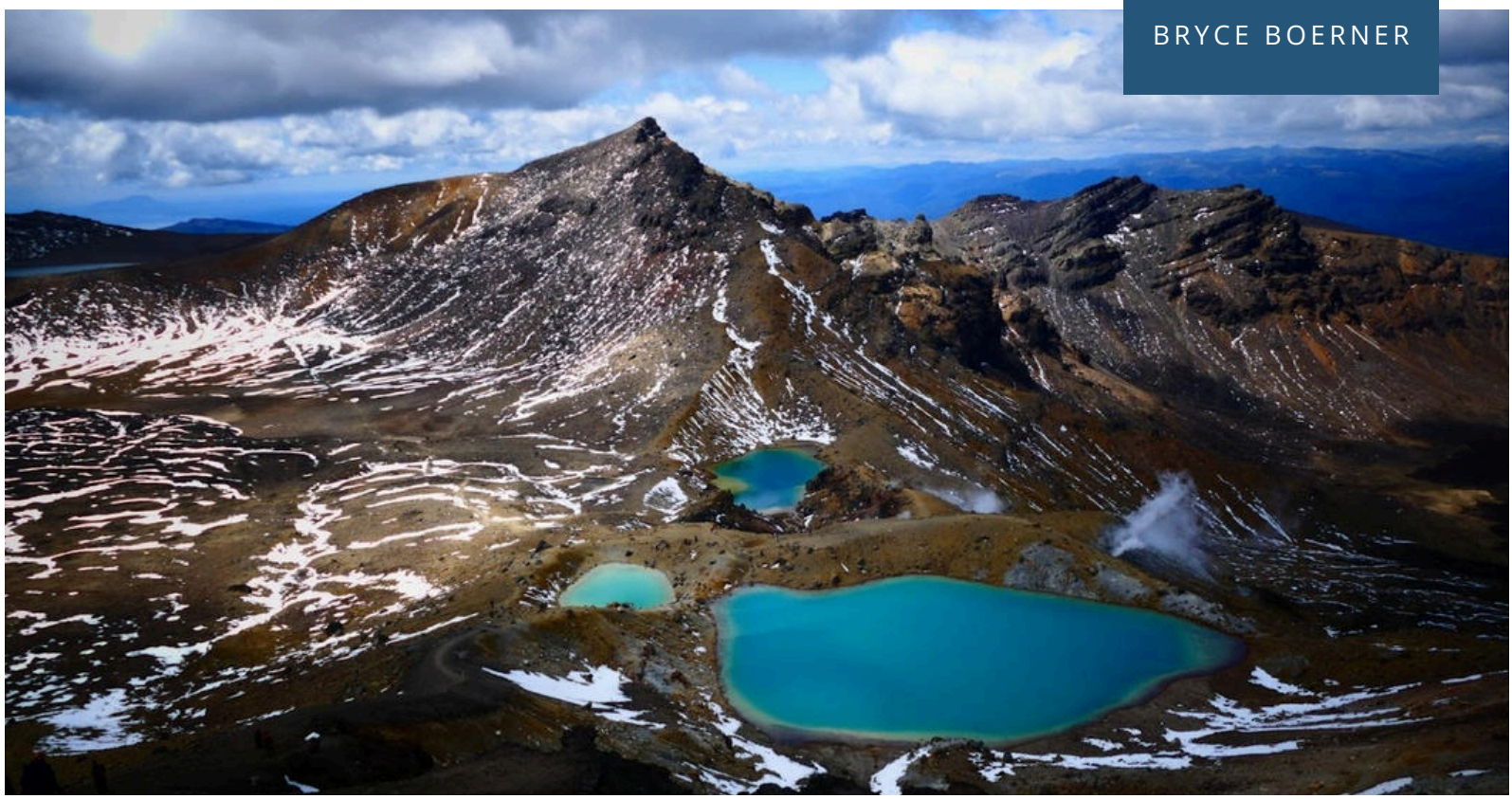


Even though the river is fun, the put-in is just as fun, we have a ramp at the put-in that you can slide down and throw tricks off of, but if you can't throw tricks, it is still super fun to just go down. It also helps with your boof and stomp, which is used for running waterfalls falls so you don't hurt your back or plug and get a beater and swim.

-Thadeus Williams and Bryce Boerner

PASCAL FELS

BRYCE BOERNER



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT **SUZANNAH BACON**



When Climbing Academy student Suzannah Bacon saw her article appear in Climbing Magazine this summer, it wasn't just a proud moment - it was a deeply personal one. Her article, *Burnout Hit Me Hard as an Elite Teen Climber* offered an honest look at the emotional toll of high performance climbing and the courage it takes to fall back in love with your sport.

Suzannah wrote the piece as part of a school project. What started as an academic assignment quickly grew into something much more, a reflection of her life so far. Originally from eastern Washington, Suzannah has been climbing for as long as she can remember. Between training, competitions, and travel, climbing became more than a sport - it became her identity. But as she describes in her article, that identity started to feel heavy.

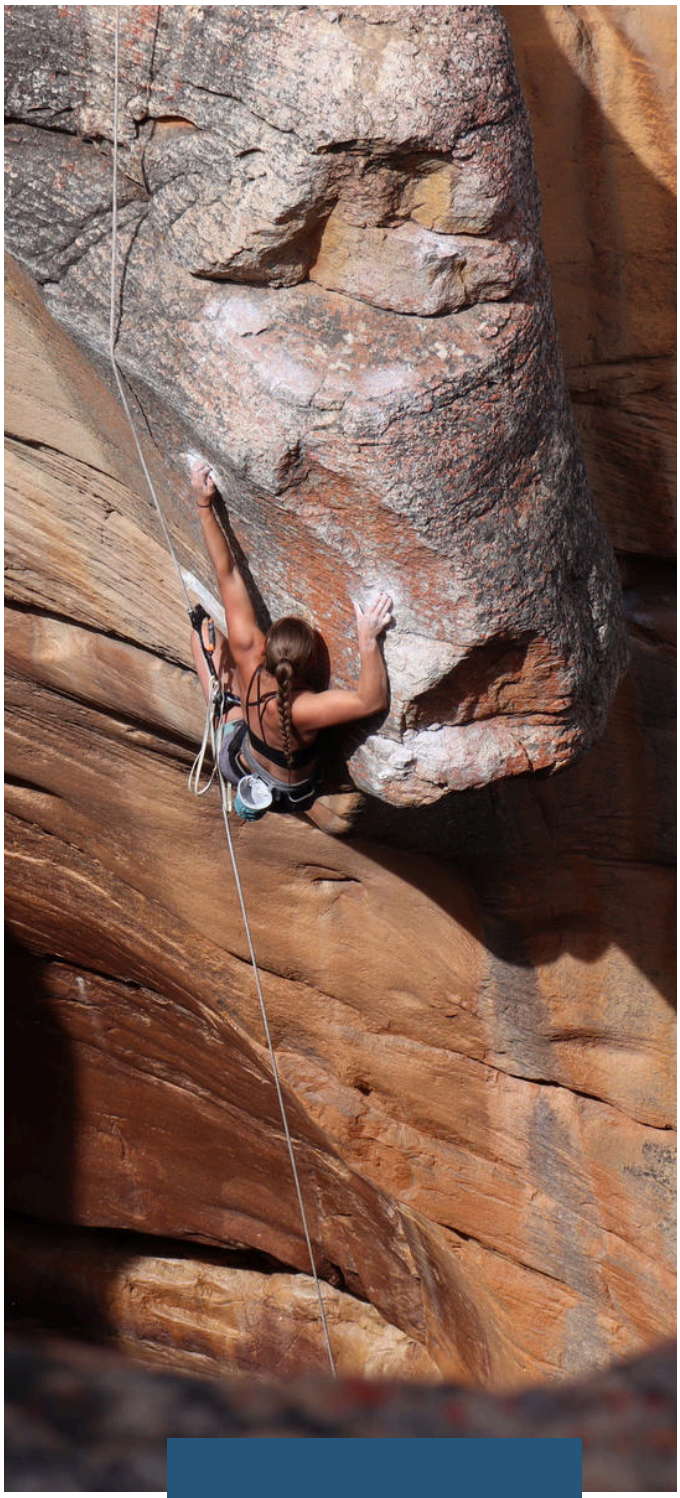
"Even as a teenager, I've already dedicated a large portion of my life to climbing, but 99 percent of the time, I'm was excited to train or climb," she wrote. "I procrastinated until the last minute, often coming up with an excuse to cut my training days short - all to get a reprieve from the constant pressure of expectations." For years, she pushed through, driven by ambition and the desire to meet her own high standards. But the cost was fatigue, stress, and a loss of joy. Writing about it became a way to untangle what was happening, and to start over.

Suzannah maps out the changes that helped her rebuild a healthy relationship with climbing. She outlines five strategies that are equal parts practical and emotional.

The first was finding balance. “For years, I put training before seeing friends,” she wrote. “Then I would wonder why I was feeling so unsatisfied.” So she created a few simple rules for herself: see friends outside of practice twice a week, don’t guilt herself over missing a lighter training day, and remember that “climbing doesn’t define or control my life.” It’s a mindset shift that’s made all the difference. “If I could have only made one change,” she wrote, “it would have been this one: reminding myself that I’m allowed to enjoy being a teenager.”

The second strategy was remembering why she climbs - leading with love for the sport rather than obligation. **“Do it because you love it. Do it because it brings you joy,” she wrote. Those “just for fun” days at the crag or gym became a reset button, reminding her what originally drew her to climbing: movement, connection, and flow.**

The rest of her strategies: switching up her setting, prioritizing earlier mornings, and finding a sustainable training schedule - show the maturity of someone learning to listen to herself. She describes cutting her training back to four days a week and discovering that she didn’t lose strength, she gained it. “While my progress has maybe slowed a small amount, the positive changes in my wellbeing and mental health have made training far more sustainable,” she wrote. “In the long run, this change has been unbelievably good for my climbing.”



KENYON BRUMBACH



MYLES BRUMBACH

Now, as she continues her journey with World Class Academy, Suzannah is putting those lessons into practice: balancing school, travel, climbing, and community. The tools she wrote about remain the same ones she relies on today: maintaining balance, leading with love for the sport, and embracing flexibility over rigidity.

“Being at TCA has helped me bring these ideals to life,” she shared. “It’s allowed me to balance school, climbing, and my social life all in one. The wonderful thing about being here is that community is built in - I’m surrounded by other students who love to climb, and that connection has been super important for me. I can’t express how grateful I am for this amazing community I’ve found at TCA.”

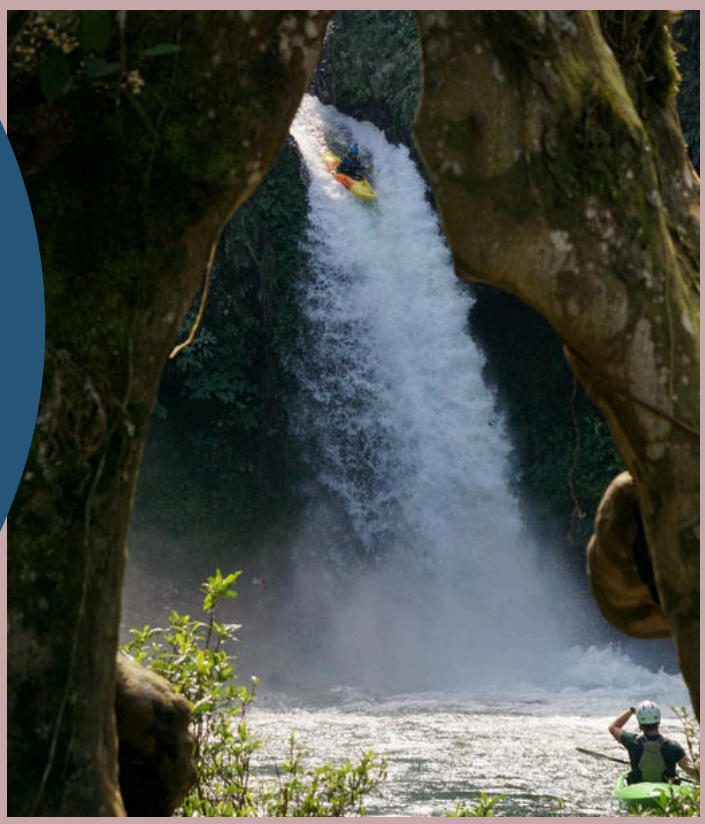
That balance has translated into real progress too. “I’m climbing harder outside than I ever have before, and I’m training less,” Suzannah said. “All of my social and academic needs are getting met. It’s really helping me keep that balance I talked about in the article.”

Her experience is a testament to the power of self awareness and the courage to redefine success on her own terms. As she wrote, “Nothing is concrete, and rigidity and guilt have done nothing for me as a climber, nor as a person learning to navigate the world.”

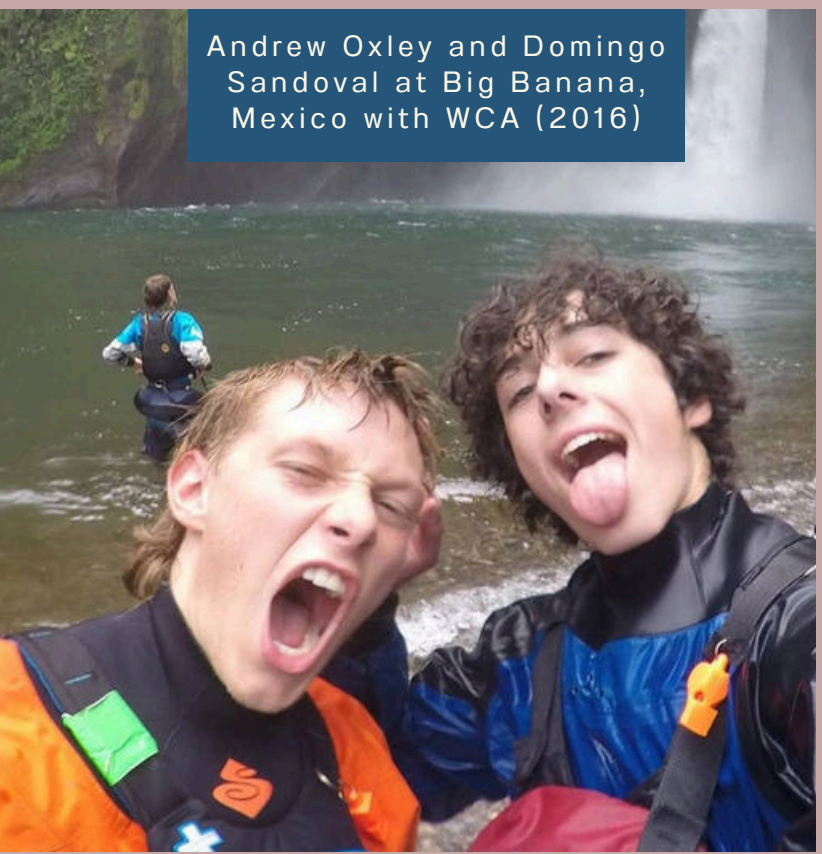
If you haven’t read Suzannah’s words in Climbing Magazine, we encourage you to check the article out.



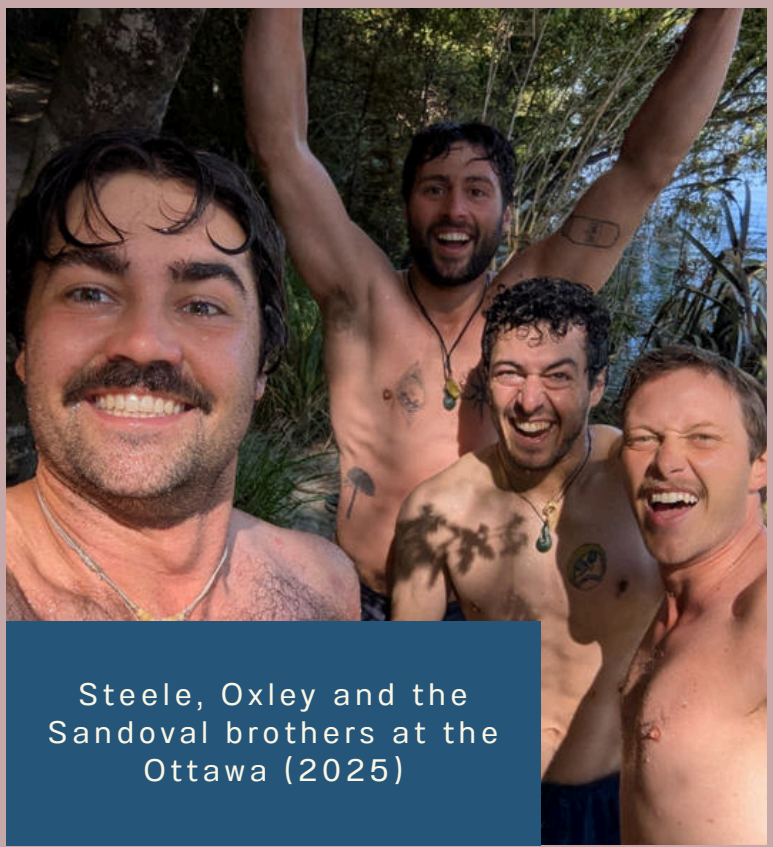
FULL CIRCLE: MEET THE KAYAK ALUMNI RETURNING AS TEACHERS



This September, Head Coach Domingo Sandoval, and Kayak Academy teachers Sam Steele, Santiago Sandoval and Andrew Oxley gathered in the Ottawa River Valley to reign in the new school year and welcome students to the first quarter of World Class Kayak Academy. For the Sandoval brothers, Steele, and Oxley. the excitement on the Keenerville campus when students arrive is a feeling they remember well. All four WCA teachers were once WCA students. After attending World Class and following their respective post-graduate journeys, the four men have returned with valuable lessons to teach, passions to share, nearly a century of combined river knowledge, and a love for the WCA education that inspired them all to dream of one day returning as teachers.



Andrew Oxley and Domingo Sandoval at Big Banana, Mexico with WCA (2016)



Steele, Oxley and the Sandoval brothers at the Ottawa (2025)



The Graduating Class of 2016 and their teachers including Evan Smith (VP) and his wife, Ali; and Crista Wiles (Dean of Students) and her husband, Brian. Both Administrators and their partners were teachers at the time that our current teachers were students!

Domingo Sandoval and his older brother Santiago (Santi) Sandoval attended WCA a year apart in 2016 and 2015. The Sandoval brothers grew up in Santiago, Chile, learned to paddle from their father, and now call Pucon, Chile home. Domingo began working at WCA in January of 2024 and will be stepping into the Head Coach role this Fall. Domingo brings a deep love of kayaking to the WCA team, but also a strong conviction that it's good to be well-rounded as an athlete and a human. Domingo earned his Bachelors in Physics from the Universidad Catolica in Santiago where he also competed for the Chilean National Gymnastics Team. Santiago is returning to WCA after teaching Spanish for the school in 2018 and 2019. Since attending WCA, Santi has been continuously pushing the sport of kayaking and kayak media production from the whitewater mecca that is Pucon, Chile.

The Sandoval brothers were joined this year by returning Math and Physics teacher Sam Steele (class of 2017) and Economics and AP Statistics teacher Andrew Oxley (class of 2016). For Steele, working at World Class has always been a dream. Steele glows when speaking about his experience as a student. He recalls his physics teacher, Nicole Mansfield, who inspired him to earn a degree in STEM at Montana State University: "(Nicole) taught me physics, which is just so happens to be a class that I am teaching now." Steele recalls how Nicole's classes were "super hands-on and really applied it to the sport of kayaking, which I truly appreciated." When asked about his path to teaching at WCA, Sam reflects, "I thought about (becoming a teacher) frequently as I was in the program, as well as pretty much the entire time I was in college. People would ask me what I wanted to do after university, and I always said, I'm going to apply to World Class, and hopefully I can be a teacher. So it's definitely a dream come true for me to work at this program."

For Oxley, who previously worked as an Accountant in Quebec City, returning to World Class as a teacher was about reconnecting with youth, nature, and adventure. Oxley's access to Eastern Canada's greatest creeks is stellar, but his 40 hour a week day job limits his ability to explore and paddle around the world. Two summers ago, Oxley recounts, "I reconnected with my WCA teachers at a wedding for Quinn Connell, my old Physics teacher and I thought maybe I can be for someone else who Quinn was for me if I work at WCA."

For all of our alumni-turn-teachers, the experience of returning to teach at WCA brings a lot of nostalgia. But our faculty also express amazement at the ways the school has changed in the last decade. "I think the students today are extremely caring and compassionate towards one another." Steele reflects, "they're really stoked to see everyone develop and grow. Not to say that the students in my year of world class weren't supportive of one another, but it definitely felt more competitive." The experience of being a student vs. teacher, Steele shares, "is really similar actually: "there is definitely a whole lot more responsibility and workload as a teacher. But it does feel like you almost get to step back into the role of, like, being a student at the school. You feel the magic every time you go to a different destination. It's just overall incredible, and surprisingly similar."

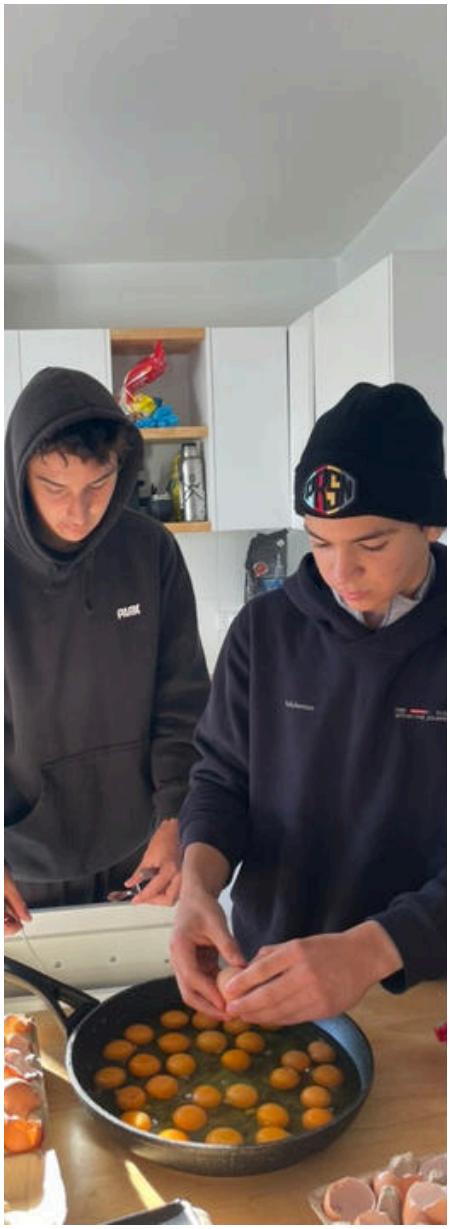
Santiago, who also worked for the school since 2019, notices a subtle shift in the students body's motivations for kayaking: "the whole kayaking world is changing a little bit. Growing up, everyone was seeking to be a Professional kayaker. Now people seem to be doing it more for the love of the sport. I see people kayaking more because they enjoy it, not because they want to push kayaking to the extreme all the time. I'm stoked to mix those two. You can be a professional kayaker, but also chase a career and and have a college degree and and take it as far as you want to take it." Overall, Sandoval reflects, "I think the school has changed a lot for the better, and I'm just really excited to be a part of the program."



'Dress Like Sam Steele' day in Zambia (2024)

FUELING OUR COMMUNITY

LIFE SKILLS AT WCA



At World Class Academy, education goes beyond academics and athletics. We believe the skills students need to thrive extend into everyday life, from teamwork to communication to making choices that impact their wellbeing. That's why, each quarter, we dedicate time to Life Skills, a 90 minute course designed to provide critical knowledge, spark meaningful conversations, and create a shared foundation for the group.

While Life Skills sessions are short by design, their impact lasts well beyond the classroom. They create shared vocabulary and frameworks that echo in mentor meetings, on long van rides, around the dinner table, and in the decisions our students make every day. Faculty bring their own creativity to each module, ensuring the sessions are interactive, relevant, and alive - often including games, group activities, or collaborative teaching.

This fall, we introduced a new Life Skills module designed for the unique challenges of our traveling athletes: Nutrition.



RADKA PIERDINOCK



MERLE MÖNSTER

Food is more than just fuel, it's the foundation of energy, recovery, mood, and performance. For young athletes who are constantly on the move, eating well can be both a challenge and a game changer. Poor nutrition can mean slower recovery, lower energy, and dips in mood and focus. Add the unpredictability of travel days and limited food options in remote places, and suddenly the importance of nutritional knowledge becomes clear: knowledge = power. Our goal was to give students the tools to make smart, science based food choices no matter where in the world they find themselves.

In this session, students explored practical and hands on topics that connect directly to their daily lives. They learned to identify the three main macronutrients: carbohydrates, protein, and fats - and how each supports energy, recovery, and overall health. Through interactive games and discussions, they discovered why carbs are essential before and after training, why protein plays a key role in muscle repair, and how healthy fats provide lasting energy and support brain function. Using the balanced plate model, students designed meals they could realistically prepare on the road, building breakfasts, lunches, and dinners that balance fuel with nutrition. Hydration was also a key theme, as students learned to spot signs of dehydration and adopted practical strategies like carrying reusable water bottles and choosing when sports drinks are actually useful.

Beyond fueling basics, the module emphasized giving students guiding principles grounded in science so they can make informed choices in any setting. While we recognize that everyone comes from different backgrounds, cultures, and beliefs around food, these shared principles empower students to make decisions that support both their performance and their wellbeing. This is especially valuable when they're cooking for the team, where their choices affect not only themselves but also their peers. To practice this, students worked in small groups to plan meals, cook with restricted equipment, or even shop for recovery snacks in a grocery stores in other countries.

Students also examined why calorie counting often misses the bigger picture. They discussed how not all calories are equal, why over focusing on numbers can harm mental health, and how mindful eating and balance are more effective approaches for athletes. A food label scavenger hunt rounded out the session, helping students sharpen their ability to read labels and gain a deeper understanding of micronutrients - the vitamins and minerals that support immunity, energy, and long term health.

By the end of the session, students had practiced the skill of making thoughtful, informed choices with limited options - an ability that will serve them well both at WCA and long after. At its core, Life Skills is about creating a shared starting point. When every student and faculty member shares the same knowledge, we can carry the conversation forward with consistency, care, and support. Nutrition is just one example of how Life Skills empowers our students to thrive in the real world. Whether the focus is on healthy relationships, media literacy, or sexual health, these sessions remind us that education is not just about excelling in academics or sports - it's about building lives of balance, resilience, and purpose.



ANABEL ERENS SARANGO



HANNAH TAY

HALLOWEEN CLIMBATHON
FINANCIAL AID FUNDRAISER

World Class Academy is on a mission to keep our program accessible. We believe deeply in the transformative power of education, travel, and adventure, and we are committed to supporting students who share in that vision. The World Class Scholarship Fund makes attendance possible for many of our students. Through the scholarship fund, we are able to extend financial aid to students whose passion, dedication, and curiosity embody what it means to be a World Class student athlete.

Once a year, each academy coalesces around a goal to raise funds for Financial Aid through an impressive athletic feat that requires dedication, stamina, and above all else, teamwork. This year the Kayak Academy will complete as many laps as possible on the Futaleufú River in Patagonia, The Kiteboard Academy will attempt to jump to a team total height equaling Mt. Everest in Australia, and the Mountain Bikers will compete to lap the McNearlyGnarly trail in Queenstown as many times as possible.

These fundraising events follow the Climbing Academy's Halloween Climb-a-thon which took place at the beginning of quarter two, successfully raising funds for financial aid and challenging students in the process.



The Climb-a-thon was simple in structure and massive in execution: climb as many meters as possible. Two crags, both within walking distance from the team's home base in Greece, offered a combined 100+ routes perfectly suited for sustained mileage. After six weeks of powerful, low-volume bouldering in South Africa, the Climbathon marked the beginning of a new training phase for the students who would begin building endurance to prepare for the rest of the year.

Groups dispersed across the cliffs just after sunrise. Many teams climbed nearly nonstop, moving from route to route with determination and shared purpose. Head Coach Jackson Wetherill noted that stand-out efforts came from Rowan Sisson and Myles Brumbach, who each surpassed 1,000 vertical meters (roughly the height of Yosemite's legendary El Capitan) and Lily Butler and Joryn Higgs who each neared the 800-meter mark. All together, the group climbed a remarkable 9,200 meters in a single day.

Beyond the numbers, the Climbathon represented something deeper: a collective effort to send the message that access matters and that our students are as committed to their collective team as they are to their personal goals.



DONATE TO FINANCIAL AID TODAY:

Make a Donation Online

Mail a check to the WCA Head Quarters

Made to:
World Class Academy

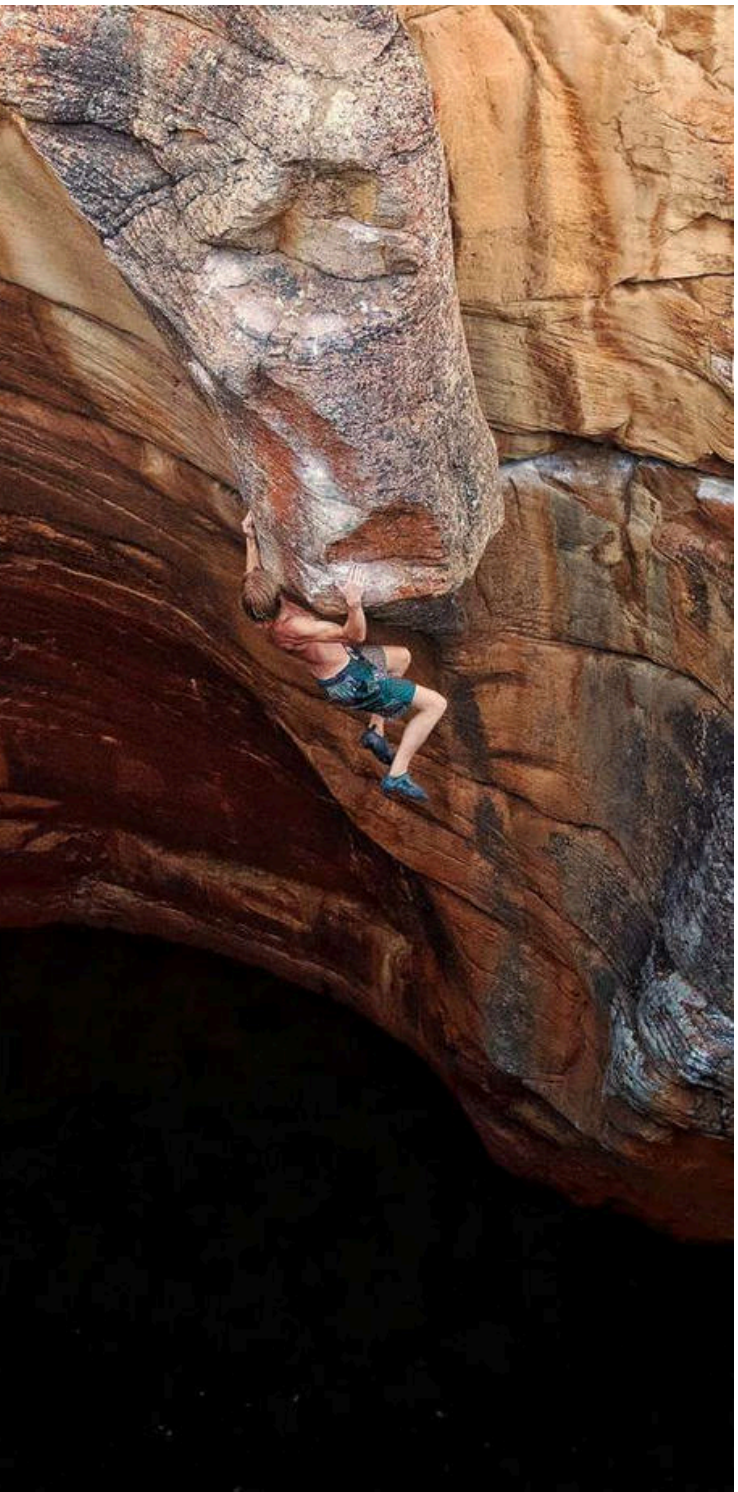
Memo:
WCA Scholarship Fund

World Class Academy
PO Box 1849
White Salmon, WA 98623

World Class Academy is a registered 501(c)(3) charitable organization in the State of Washington. All donations qualify for federal income tax deductions EIN: 45-0638073

THE COLLEGE ESSAY

ROWAN FROST (CLIMB ‘26)



This summer, I returned as a completely changed individual to a home that was much the same as I had left it. I got off the plane from Italy, my 4th country in 4 quarters, and the end of my first year at The Climbing Academy (TCA).

For as long as I can remember, I have struggled with being deeply discontent in situations where I can raise a direct comparison. So, I have spent the last four years of my life seeking new experiences and traveling to places where I have no preconceived notions.

When I returned to my home of 17 years last May, I was unable to see just how much I had changed and grown. I felt disconnected from my peers and the places I inhabited because I had changed, but the context surrounding them was the same. I would try to recall the last time I felt like I had lived in the moment, but I could not remember it. I realized I have lived in the world of futures and speculations instead of seeking presence and fulfillment in any given situation. I have lost the iteration of myself that's content in stagnation, and now I feel the itch to keep moving more than ever to attempt to evade the context that chases me.

The “First Rule of Fight Club” is a jutting piece of sandstone suspended over a 45-foot drop into icy water in rural South Africa. A year ago, my first year at TCA, I stood under it looking skyward as my teammates and friends ascended above me. I didn't reach the athletic benchmark required and was not allowed to climb it due to my lack of experience. I was bitter and sad and looked up with jealousy at the climb I did not get the opportunity to attempt.

Now, a year has passed, and I have returned to South Africa and had the opportunity to climb this piece of personal history. As I climbed the route, I remembered how a year ago I would have killed for this opportunity to even touch its holds. I was filled with gratitude for the chance and reflectiveness about the year that separated these two days.

I finished the climb and, as I stood at the pinnacle, about to plummet 50 feet into the freezing depths below, I had the revelation that even though I stood in a place that had so much meaning for me, I was still carving a new path. A different, unique path from the one I was on a year previously, or maybe just a continuation of it. I never escape my past and what I failed or succeeded in accomplishing then and there, but I can allow myself a new perspective and experience and not poison it with the old version of events.

I have only started to internalize this lesson. This second year at the Climbing Academy has proved to me that the metaphorical grass is always greener where I have not yet seen it. I continue to travel and forge myself with new experiences, but that does not mean I cannot return to the people and places that I have already seen. I often reflect on my experiences traveling through this quote: “No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man” (Heraclitus).

I have spent most of my semi-adult life chasing meaning in an ever-changing current where all I can do is step forward. I desire to be a great adventurer, completely free and flung to the winds with no single narrative having control over me. I wish to become someone who is an active part of this world, not someone who merely occupies it.

Rowan is from Flagstaff, Arizona and hopes to attend Montana State University when he graduates from WCA this Spring



PUSHING THE ENVELOPE WITH NEW DESTINATIONS

Since World Class' founding in 2001, our school has brought students to over 40 countries and experienced the best of what sport, culture, and travel have to offer. We know the classics as well as anyone. While we will always be a school that sends kayakers to Chile and climbers to Spain, what sets World Class apart is our commitment to adventure. We achieve our core value of adventure through consistently working to add new destinations to our roster. In our minds, there is no greater achievement than a school year that combines a mixture of tried and true classic destinations with a sprinkling of lesser known, more unique destinations that will be sure to offer their share of challenge and inspiration to our students. After all, outside of your comfort zone is where the most growth happens.

This year the Kiteboarding Academy and Mountain Bike Academy rosters feature new WCA destinations: Denmark in Kite and Tasmania in Bike. We sat down with the Heads of Schools for each academy, Polly Crathorne (Kite) and Riley Gardner (Mountain Bike) to learn more about how these destinations made it onto their lists and what it's like to plan a new destination for World Class Academy.

WCA: What is your process for identifying new destinations for the school and what drives you to do so?

Riley: The process usually starts with a place that's been rattling around in my head. Part of my job as Head of School is just to stay up to date on the sport of mountain biking. When I'm watching videos or checking race results from around the world. Destinations will pop up and I'll do what I call a deep dive: watching every clip I can find, reading articles, pouring over trail maps, and trying to move from just a name (like Tasmania) to a real sense of the zones, the trails, and what riding there actually feels like. Once I have that rough picture, I start thinking about feasibility. At the end of the day, what drives all of this is that going to new mountain bike places is one of the best parts of the school. It would be easy to repeat the same destinations, but you never know what you're missing unless you go. Some of our favorite spots started as total unknowns and ended up becoming regular stops for the mountain bike program.

Polly: The process is often kick started by hints from faculty, students, pro riders, friends in the kite industry or my travels. I filter destination ideas for the quality of their kiting conditions and if their wind season lines up with our school calendar. I seek out destinations that lend themselves to rich travel experiences, whether through an unfamiliar landscape, a different language or culture. Before I get too carried away, I research logistical considerations like flights, accommodation, ground transportation and how we will feed our athletes. Getting the spot beta from an experienced kiter that knows the area helps me refine the plan. Where we stay and what providers we use is important. Connecting with our hosts and the local community in meaningful ways makes a location extra special. We have made authentic long-lasting bonds with many different hosts over the years who have been so kind to us.







TONI LEIDL

JACK SALMON

WCA: What is the significance of this year's new destination to your sport?

Polly: The prevailing westerlies from the North Atlantic connect with the network of sand dunes and fjords that extend for miles along the Danish west coast to make an epic playground with stunning scenery. In recent years, the quiet corner of the Scandinavian peninsula known as 'Cold Hawaii' in North Jutland has gained recognition in the big air kiting scene because it hosts a Red Bull King of the Air qualifier. Back in 2017, WCKA ran a summer camp with Sam Light in Denmark which students raved about but Denmark as a Q1 destination was on our radar by our Head Coach, Merle and Program Director, Toni, who call North Jutland home.

Riley: Tasmania has blown up in the mountain bike world over the last five to ten years. It really got put on the map after hosting the 2018 Enduro World Series. Everyone in the biking world was suddenly praising the trails there, and a friend who'd worked in Tassy confirmed it was the real deal. As Tasmania grew in popularity, continued to host EWS and produced some really strong riders, it was clear that there were several world class mountain biking areas in the country. Then Red Bull Hardline held their first event in the southern hemisphere at Maydena Bike Park, solidly letting the MTB world know that Tasmania needs to be visited. Between Hobart, Derby and Maydena, we're literally going to the most popular on the island. Given how rugged Tasmania is, that's all the more impressive.





WCA: How did it go?

Riley: Our second quarter in Tasmania is not over yet, but it has been a huge hit so far! Hobart was a really cool blend of great trails and interesting city life. The team was able to check out museums and the Bonnorong Wildlife Center before heading off to remote places like Derby and Maydena (small “towns” with about 200 residents). The riding has been phenomenal and varied. Students have a hard time picking their favorite between Derby or Hobart, though I suspect Maydena will probably be the most popular for many. At the time of writing this, we have only been there a few days, but the trails have been absolutely unreal.

The weather has been unseasonably cold and wet, which has been unideal. Many locals have assured us that we came at the perfect time of year to ride, but this is the wettest spring they have ever experienced. While this is undesirable, it is certainly challenging to control the weather!

Besides the riding, the wildlife has been a huge component of the epicness of this destination! Which, to be honest, I did not expect. The crew has had daily wallaby and pademelon sightings. The elusive platypuses have been spotted. The team went to the Bonnorong Wildlife center, where they were able to feed Kangaroos, see Wombats, and Tasmanian Devils. Even on the scarier side of things, a few venomous snakes have been spotted from a safe distance. Tasmania has provided! I think Tasmania will almost certainly be a repeat destination.

Polly: The team raved about their quarter in Denmark for its varied and consistent kite conditions, the nature-focussed lifestyle and the kite exploration opportunities. Faculty and students marvelled about how they were often completely alone at spots with unreal conditions, they enjoyed some stormy 30+ knot days, throwing loops under rainbows in Feggeklit, behind the pier at Vørupor or the site of the Q1 school competition, Feggesund Havn. Another highlight was experiencing the nature-focussed lifestyle of the fishing towns of Hvide Sande and the smaller, Nørre Vorupør. We visited Strandet for a workshop, a local ocean conservation initiative where students learned the nuances of recycling beach plastics. The team spent a memorable day out in the Thy national park, swimming and a walk through the forest followed by chopping firewood, roasting freshly made dough and marshmallows and swapping stories around the fire.

WCA: What new destinations are you dreaming of?

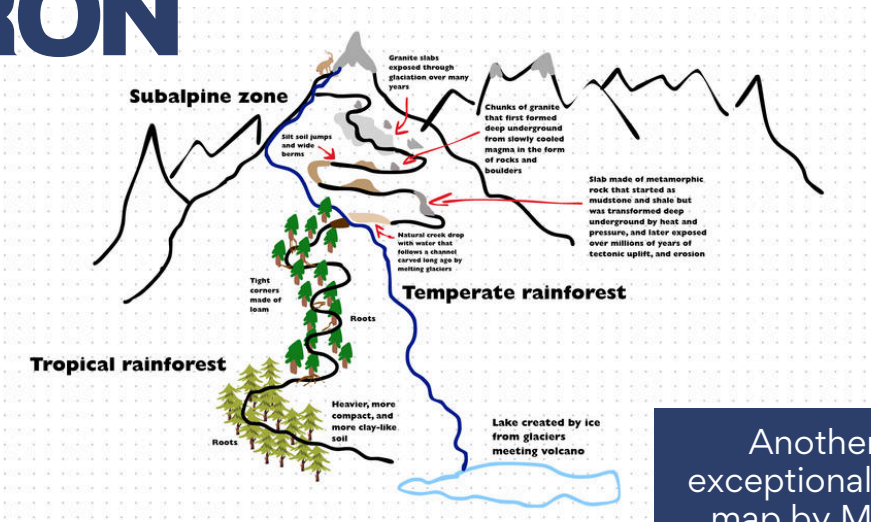
Polly: At the moment I keep dreaming of islands - Madagascar, Mauritius, New Caledonia are some on the list. I would love the kite school to head back to Asia, Vietnam or perhaps Sri Lanka. The quarter spent in the Philippines in 2019 went down in WCKA history as one of the most memorable destinations, alumni often bring it up in conversation. While competing on the Kite Tour Asia in 2013, I stayed in various kite spots in China, Hong Kong, Indo, Thailand and the Philippines for five months and I was struck by the reliable wind, vibrant food and warm hospitality.

Riley: Right now I've got so many destinations bouncing around in my head for the Mountain Bike school. Greece is a big one. Greece has amazing riding, awesome culture, and great food. I'd love to explore more of Central and Eastern Europe too. Slovakia, Poland, and the Czech Republic all have killer scenes and trails that work really well outside the middle of summer, which fits our schedule. South America is calling as well, especially Ecuador and Colombia. Asia is intriguing; I've spent some time looking at Thailand, and Japan is mostly a mystery still, but I'd love to get the mountain bikers somewhere there eventually. There are just so many incredible places to ride, and going back to favorites is always a highlight too.



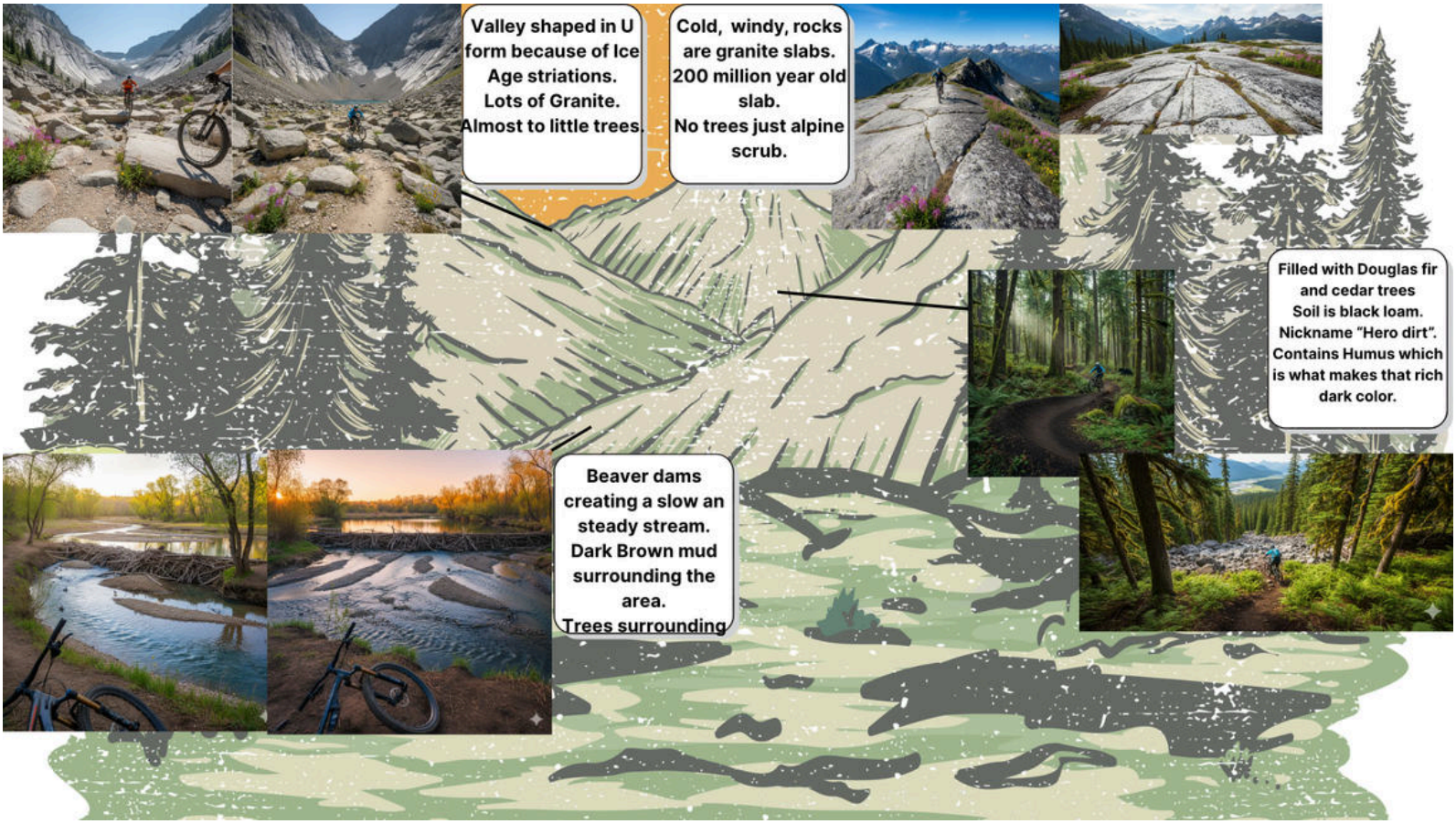
EL PATRON TRAIL

LEONARDO CASTRO HERNÁDEZ



Another exceptional trail map by MTB student Alina Oropeza

Tash Harvey's Environmental Science class completed a trail design project where students were asked to design their dream bike trail and describe the geologic and biologic forces that shaped it. The visual component of the assignment identifies features like tectonic shift, rock types, nutrients in the soil and biome identification.



My trail starts on a high alpine, cold, windy ridge. It starts in an exposed environment, with no trees surrounding the Trail. We can see a high density of alpine scrub surrounding the area. Fireweed and glacier lilies are scattered around the trail, only around the summer. The trail is filled with a hard granite rock, this rock is around 100 million years old.

This igneous rock was formed by hot magma being cooled slowly underground, this turned granite into a strong rock. Granite has white, black, and gray crystals that make the surfaces that make it rough and grippy, this is perfect for riding rock slabs. The soil here is very thin and very light brown, with only small lichens around the cracks. This place has little wilderness, no trees, it can feel like the bones of the mountains are showing.

The trail then suddenly changes into a wide valley shaped by glaciers during the Ice age, this was about 20,000 years ago. Here there used to be tons of ice in this area, this scraped and damaged part of the granite, this left lines called striations. When the ice melted, it left behind clay, gravel and big rocks, this is called glacial till. Now this section of the trail will be filled with rock gardens, but riders will jump from stone to stone all to avoid punctures.

When this section of the trail starts, we enter into a green temperate rainforest. It will be filled with tall cedar and douglas fir trees, with moss covering their trunks. On the ground there will be filled with ferns that spread all around. Also the soil will turn dark, filled rich with nitrogen, almost black. This soil is called loam, it was made from old volcanic ash and glacial deposits. Many riders call it “hero dirt” because it is soft, smooth, and perfect overall to make jumps, berms, and the perfect trail. Its surroundings make this section lively, filled with birds, deer, bears, and more animals.





ADMIN READING LIST

CAPO (PRINCIPAL)
THE SADDEST PLEASURE **- MORITZ THOMSON**

EVAN SMITH (VICE PINCIPAL)
A BRIEF HISTORY OF NEARLY EVERYTHING - BILL BRYSON

CRISTA WILES (DEAN OF STUDENTS)
WILD DARK SHORE **- CHARLOTTE MCCONGHY**

LAUREN COONEY (ACADEMY DIRECTOR)
COSMICOMICS **- ITALO CALVINO**

DREW LEFKOWITH (CLIMB HEAD OF SCHOOL)
THE GOD OF THE WOODS **- LIZ MOORE**

RILEY GARDNER (MTB HEAD OF SCHOOL)
THE RIP CURL STORY **- TIM BAKER**

KALOB GRADY (KAYAK HEAD OF SCHOOL)
THE BOMBER MAFIA **- MALCOLM GLADWELL**

POLLY CRATHORNE (KITE HEAD OF SCHOOL)
UNACCUSTOMED EARTH **- JHUMPA LAHIRI**

SARINA CHALMERS (OFFICE DIRECTOR)
MARTYR! **- KAVEH AKBAR**



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